



History Lesson

Newsletter

February 2021

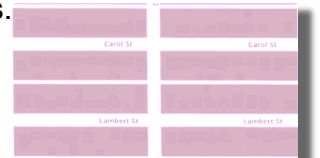
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February: the month of showing a special someone love. As we move closer to the end of a historical era, it is time for a moment of nostalgia and the telling of how one man permanently demonstrated his love for his sweetheart in Modesto. When World War II (1941-1945) came to an end, soldiers returned home uncertain how their futures would unfold. However, many of them returned to the woman they loved, the talisman for whom they fought. Thus, was the case for prominent Modesto Builder Lance Ellis.

Lance Ellis (1924-2002) has a legacy of more than 4,000 homes in Modesto, as well as many professional subdivisions including the shopping center at Tully Rd and Bowen Ave, "Gregory Gardens" named for his son. A native of Texas, the Ellis Family moved to Hughson, California when Lance was five. He would call Modesto home for 62 years. After being discharged from the Navy in April 1946, Lance returned home to work in his family orchards, and would marry the love of his life.

Carol Leone Lambert (1926-2015) was born in Iowa and came with her family to Southern California at the age of eight and settled in Modesto in the early 1940s. She worked at Hammond General Hospital, currently the location of Modesto Junior College's West Campus. She worked with Lance's sister, Freida DeSelms, who introduced Carol to her 6'4" "Little Brother" Lance. Only a week after their engagement, Lance and Carol married in Long Beach, California on September 14, 1947.

The couple returned to Modesto where Lance purchased peach and almond orchards. One particular parcel was located across Dry Creek from Old Oakdale Rd on El Vista Avenue prior to the bridge connecting the roads in the 1960s. The couple's first venture was a small hamburger and milkshake stand on Yosemite Boulevard named "Carol's Diner" with a clientele of cannery workers. One day, as Carol took orders, she noticed Lance let the food burn. She returned home and found him staring at the ceiling. He announced no more diner: he was on to bigger endeavors.



Map of Carol Manor Subdivision. Left: Carol Street Sign and Lance Ellis ad for Park Manor

It was soon after he demolished his orchard off of El Vista and Post-War Suburbia was built in Modesto. Ellis built some forty small affordable homes on two streets named "Carol" and "Lambert" after his wife. These modest homes sold for \$9,500. The name for the subdivision? Lance chose once again to honor his wife by naming it "Carol Manor." It was on Carol St near Colfax Ave where Lance and Carol initially raised their three children: Renee Suzanne, Gregory Lance, and Joni Faye. All of the children's first and middle names appear as the names of suburban streets in different areas of Modesto. Ada Street, south of Carol and Lambert was named for his wife's Grandmother. "Lance" and "Ellis" Streets appear on the La Loma side of El Vista. Lance Ellis only built a few of the homes in that subdivision, though the streets bear his name.

Lance Ellis ran "Gregory Development" and "Lance Ellis Real Estate." He constructed most of the subdivisions in the Tully Rd and Carver Rd area as well as several mobile home park and the "Frontier Town" Shopping Center on the corner of Tully Rd. and Standiford Ave. Lance Ellis left a permanent mark on the shaping of Modesto, and it all began with a lasting legacy to the woman he would love for 54 years.



Image: Carol and Lance Ellis (Used with permission of the Ellis family).

*Information taken from various "Modesto Bee" Articles and a January 26, 2021 phone interview with Renee Ellis



February is Black History Month. In February 2008 Modesto Educator Odessa Johnson, the first woman of color hired by Modesto High School in 1962, displayed a collection of articles and pictures which chronicled black contributions in Modesto at the McHenry Museum, titled "Footprints in the Sands of Time: A Modesto Black History Tribute."

Black History Month

Odessa Johnson

A Century Note



Bette Belle Smith

An organization like the McHenry Museum could not be sustained if not for our eager volunteers. It just so happens the most prolific volunteer for the City of Modesto, Bette Belle Smith would have been 100 years old on January 17, 2021. Bette Belle dressed as Mrs. Santa Claus for our Museum Christmas gatherings for many years, but that was not even a fraction of her contributions as a volunteer, as *The Modesto Bee* reported following her November 29, 2009 death, "She was just an amazing woman who never took no for an answer." Mrs. Smith's contributions to her community were too many to count: McHenry Museum Guild, Modesto Symphony Board of Directors, Gallo Center board of trustees, Modesto Junior College foundation board, Omega Nu, Salvation Army, International Festival, Interfaith Ministries ... the list goes on."

Updates

News

- The Museum still remains closed due to COVID-19, Follow the MM&HS on Instagram and Facebook for updates.
- Due to the pandemic, the position of Executive Director and all part-time employment are currently eliminated.
 - A mid-Spring *Stanislaus Stepping Stones* should be completed and sent to members.
- Over the next few months, we hope to complete a method of online sales of our historical books, and other Museum Store treasures.

Goals and High Hopes!

(note these are ideas, but have only been discussed)

- The completion and signing of our Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Modesto.
- The Digitization of the photographic archive of the McHenry Museum.
- The publication of a *Stanislaus Stepping Stones* on the 100th Anniversary of Modesto Junior College (mid-Summer).



Wednesday, February 14, 1979

Another gem will be a Hebrew love-note from the Song of Songs, which rings with romanticism: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, ardent love is firm as Sheal, her flames are the flames of fire, the lighting of Yah."
Rembrandt may have painted a likeness of his beloved Saskia with great feeling, but here is a Modestan's love message painted with feeling: "I have no yesterdays, time took them away; tomorrow may not be, but I have today."

Wishing you a Lovely February

During this continued difficult time, we as the directors of the McHenry Museum & Historical Society, express our love to our members and volunteers this Valentine's month.

(Enjoy this excerpt from *the Modesto Bee* February 14, 1979 on love, not a milestone anniversary of this excerpt, but a perfect sentiment).