Bertha Wright and Mabel Weed
Berkeley’s Early Nurse and Social Worker

By John Gino Aronovici

On April 6, 1907, a meeting was held in St. Marks vestry in the interests of associating the charities of Berkeley. Those present were representatives of The Women's Benevolent Society of Berkeley, The Federation of Churches, The Berkeley Relief Committee, and The College Settlement. The Rev. Edward L. Parsons was made the chairman and Rev. John H. Lathrop secretary. A committee to proceed with forming an association was formed.

[From the minutes in the Society's record book]
The Articles of Incorporation were written and signed on September 17, 1907. It stated that their purpose was as follows:

First: That the name of the incorporation is The Charity Organization Society of Berkeley.

Second: That the purpose for which it is formed is as follows, to-wit: To direct the general work of relieving and aiding poor and needy persons of the Town of Berkeley in any phases in which it may present itself. Doing its work as far as possible through existing charitable organizations, and others that may be formed, by introducing co-operation in the methods and work of relief, seeking co-operation with the Associated Charities of Oakland where institutional work is involved or the aid of existing organizations in Oakland needed, but having as a principle that so far as possible all cases shall be dealt with on the basis of friendly visiting and neighborhood relief rather than through official channels; for this purpose to receive gifts, devices and legacies and to acquire real and personal property, and to hold, administer

Bertha Wright, left, and Mabel Weed holding Philip, with friend in background at the Pan Pacific Exposition, San Francisco, ca 1915.

Fall 2007 Walking Tours


California Historical Radio Society and KRE Radio History led by Steve Kushman and Mike Adams, September 22: KRE was built in 1937 as one of the first in the Bay Area specifically designed for radio broadcasting. Learn why AM stations are located in wet areas, about the George Lucas connection with Wolfman Jack & Richard Dreyfuss scenes in American Graffiti, the "Doc" Herrold story, and CHRS, an educational non-profit to promote the importance of radio and broadcasting history. You will be given an inside tour of the former uses of the station.
President's report

Hello Berkeley History Center faithful . . .

Heading into Autumn, you'll find BHS volunteers organizing, scanning, archiving and preserving Berkeley history at the Center, and sharing Oral history and photo displays at outdoor festivals. You'll find us publishing books, planning displays and keeping community history alive. We have short- and long-term projects brewing in each BHS committee (Program, Walking Tours, Archive, Publications, Oral History and Newsletter) and we are also planning a little something something to celebrate BHS' 30th anniversary, and the City of Berkeley's 130th year, in April 2008. If you want to join the fun, please visit us during our office hours, Thurs.-Sat., 1 to 4 pm. We'd love to have your input.

The entire operation of the Berkeley History Center and Museum is run exclusively by volunteers. An all-volunteer staff and board staffs the Berkeley History Center and Museum, helps visitors with their research, and compiles, computes, and spiffs archives for the benefit of our community. Because archives arrive weekly, hands, eyes, and time are becoming our most valuable resource; so, if you have an extra hand, eye or minute, please consider loaning it to us.

Thank you, Berkeley History Center faithful, for your support, time and money. As we perfect our mission of preserving and sharing Berkeley history on Berkeley’s behalf, we strengthen the organization exponentially.

Lastly, we are celebrating John Stansfield’s life on Oct. 21 at the Berkeley History Center. You are invited to attend; please bring your stories. John was a BHS treasure of helpfulness and a delight to be with, and we will miss him.

Walking Tours
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The Maybeck Estates led by Paul Grunland and Bob Shaner (space limited), Sunday, October 6. A walk through a little known section of Alameda, led by one of the longest-term residents. Hear how the property owned by Bernard and Annie Maybeck was developed and how buyers were encouraged to build their own homes. Not wheelchair accessible.

Downtown Berkeley’s Transformation led by Austene Hall with Jennifer McDougall, UC Principal Planner, and Juliet Lamont, environmentalist, Sunday, October 20. Berkeley’s human-scale buildings, beautiful streetscapes, inviting pedestrian spaces (parks, yards, outdoor cafes, median strips, and the UC campus grounds are the result of Berkeley’s economics, culture, planning and preservation. The tour will focus on the area around Center and Shattuck and the old and the new built environment and how they came together.

Lower Codornices Creek led by Susan Schwartz with Drew Goetting of Restoration Design Group and Richard Register of Ecod City Builders, November 3: Explore lower Codornices Creek and its varied history, from early rails and industry to World War II worker housing and the shipyard railway to recent nature restoration. The 2.5-mile walk is level, except for a two-block trail which is not wheelchair-accessible.

Real, Envisioned and Vanished Parks led by Steve Finacom, November 17: Downtown Berkeley had fountains of light, grand boulevard plans, war memorial groves, playgrounds, spacious greenways and pocket parks. Martin Luther King Jr., Park evolved from a playground and was completed in the 1940s with a bond. There was a park on Shattuck Square and fountains ran down the middle of Shattuck Avenue. Visit all these sites, past and present, as well proposed open spaces that never were.

Bonus Tour: Hillside School led by Kay Dolt and Carolyn Adams, December 1: Built in 1925 from designs by Walter Ratcliff, Hillside School educated some of Berkeley’s youngest school children for almost 100 years. It was closed because of proximity to the Hayward Fault. Tour this picturesque school and its surroundings and hear the experiences and the philosophy of education that made Hillside such a special place.
John Stansfield passed away at the age of 79 due to complications of pneumonia. He was a volunteer extraordinary at the Berkeley History Center, the man to whom visitors and reporters alike would turn for the answers to their questions. His enthusiasm about Berkeley's history was absolutely contagious. He had a sharp sense of humor and he enjoyed being around all kinds of people. He was one of the kindest men we ever met. We will miss his twinkling eyes, his helpfulness, and all the knowledge he shared at the History Center.

When I was the Berkeley Historical Society president, he told me that he would only volunteer on the condition that he be allowed to work three days a week. Since we were open just three days a week, I told him that could be arranged! He was a tireless docent, who participated at the Center every week for years. He much preferred to work with the public than to stay at home. Alas, his health slowly caught up with him.

Sue Austin wrote an article about John Stansfield called “Man With a Mission” in the Spring 2005 BHS newsletter:

"John began his volunteer work by taking two courses on Bay Area history from local historian, Charles Wollenberg. In addition, he had the benefit of having taken a college course on California history years ago. And, of course, his post-graduate work in modern European history at Cal is what grounded him in history. John has had a life-long love of history, largely due to the influence of a Garfield Junior High School teacher.

"She started it," he recalled. "But also, as a young boy my parents took me to the missions as well as other significant historical locations throughout California. Even though I knew a lot about history, running a museum was out of my realm. But, if [docent and former president] Carl Wilson, with his background in forestry could do it, so could I." John has another unique advantage that adds to his value as a BHS volunteer. He was born and raised in Berkeley.

"I remember things," he said. "I remember growing up in this city and roaming around. I used to walk from one end of Codornices Creek to Live Oak Park through backyards and through long tunnels under the streets. These tunnels went through major intersections and along the creek. I would go through yards, even though I was told not to. Luckily I never got caught. However, my wet shoes and socks and the mud and dirt on my pants usually tipped off my mother. But, as a result of my wanderings and my growing up here, I can look at the old photos and make pretty good guesstimates on location.

"John likes to attribute the staying power of his BHS involvement to the people with whom he has worked. "I like teaching, and I like hearing visitors share their fabulous stories."

"John appreciated a well-written book on California or contemporary American history and books on politics. He was a dedicated collector of stamps, particularly from Hungary, having won several awards for his displays.

"He was also an avid postcard collector. I remember calling him with only moments to spare on an E-Bay postcard bid. He was able to identify what we had and didn't have in our collection based on a verbal description of the camera angle and objects in the scene. He told me to go for the Key System Terminal card, which I did. He loved to collect and trade old books to build the History Center collection. He knew all the films and videotapes and maps at the Center. He was also skilled at reading and explaining the intricacies of the Sanborn maps and the old block books."

Millie Stansfield adds, "John retired from the California School for the Deaf after 25 years service, then worked another ten at Catholic Charities Hearing Impaired Program. Then he came to the Berkeley Historical Society, which, I believe, was his true love."

He leaves his devoted friend, Millie Stansfield, his son, John, and two grandchildren, Arianna, 7 1/2, and Jeanine, 6, as well as friends and community, who benefited greatly from his life of service. A memorial service will be held on Sunday, Oct. 21 at 2 p.m. at the Berkeley History Center, 1931 Center St.

Written by Linda Rosen and fellow BHS volunteers.
Wright, Weed
FROM PAGE 1

and dispose of the same, applying
the income and the proceeds there-
from to the purpose as foresaid, and
generally to do any and all things
usually appertaining to and done by
organizations of like character.

Third: That the place where its pri-
mary business is to be transacted
is the Town of Berkeley, County of
Alameda, State of California.

Fourth: That the term for which it is
to exist is fifty years from and after
the date of its incorporation.

Fifth: That the number of its direc-
tors or trustees is nine, and the
names and residence of those who
are appointed and elected for the
first year are as follows, To-wit E.
L. Parsons, Benjamin Ide Wheeler,
A.C. Miller, Anson S. Blake, F.M
Gibson, Mrs. C.H. Rieber, Dr. Emma
MacKaye, and Miss Jessica B. Peix-
otto. All residents of Berkeley.

The Society soon hired Bertha Wright as
its secretary, increased membership, and
set about "doing good" in Berkeley. The
Society was a kind of umbrella organiza-
tion with representatives from churches
and other organizations already in exis-
tence. Officers were elected with Dr.
MacKay, a physician, as the first Presi-
dent. The first Directors selected were:
Rev. E.L. Parsons, Rector of St. Marks
Episcopal Church; Rev. John H. Lath-
rup, Pastor of First Unitarian Church; Mr.
Frank Wilson, Vice President of First Na-
tional Bank; Benjamin Ide Wheeler, Pres-
ident of UC Berkeley; Dr. T.C. McCall,
physician; Prof. A.C. Miller, Professor of
political economy and commerce; Miss
Jessica Peixotto, first woman professor
at UC; Mrs. C.H. Rieber, wife of UC in-
structor; and Mr. August Vollmer, chief of
police.

The first office was at 2226 1/2 Tenth
Street, rented for $12 per month. Left-
over funds from the San Francisco earth-
quake relief fund were offered to the
Society, but raising money was a con-
stant problem. Some examples of help
extended were: Mrs. Comanorala, two
goats, $14; Mrs. Barrowman, roofing
for tent, $6.50; Mr. Rehr, coal and wood,
$5.00; Mr. Baddo, children's stockings
and underwear, $5.10. A typical monthly
report read: Number of visit made 102,

Visits received 861; Cases dealt with 24,
new cases 14, cases permanently re-
lieved 3.

The Society continued fund raising. They
started a yearly "Berkeley Charity Day"
with districts and teams setup with cap-
tains. The drive covered all the houses
in the city. In 1909 they raised several
thousand dollars. This continued into the
1920s.

Bertha Wright was born in 1876 in Pied-
mont, California, one of three children of
Horatio Nelson Wright and Francis Go-
odrich Wright. She attended the Califor-
nia Women's Hospital School of Nursing
in San Francisco in the late 1890s and
after graduation was employed there. At
the time of the 1906 earthquake, Ber-
tha Wright was working in the Nurses'
Settlement House, serving Russian im-
migrants in the Potrero district of San
Francisco. After the earthquake and fire,
she worked with immigrant refugees in
temporary tent camps. In 1907 she be-
gan working for the Charity Organization
Society.

At that time no public health or social
welfare existed; there was only charity.
Wright's philosophy was tackling prob-
lems as they appeared and concentra-
ing on what was immediately possible.
In her work at the Charity Organization
Society, she demonstrated her ability to
solve individual problems with social
solutions. Wright's special interest was
children, and an early model of her work
was the Berkeley Day Nursery, the first
subsidized childcare in California. At a
director's meeting in 1908, the Board
voted to start a day nursery at 2320 -
7th Street and that a board be formed
to regulate it. Wright also organized a
kindergarten with the nursery.

The Berkeley Day Nursery was founded
as a non-profit corporation in 1908. It
was a pioneer in nursery care for the
children of working class mothers. Subsi-
dized by the city of Berkeley, the Berkeley
Community Chest, and later, the United
Crusade, its operating funds were also
derived from income on a small endow-
ment, from gifts and bequests, and from
fees determined on a sliding scale by the
parents' ability to contribute. The nurs-
ery was managed by a Board of Direc-
tors consisting of 24 women who were
unpaid volunteers interested in commu-
ity service. The Berkeley Day Nursery
functioned for many years until increas-
ingly strict state requirements for per-

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sonnel and programs resulted in its closing in November 1965; the corporation was dissolved on December 11, 1969.

With the recognized need for a district nurse, the Charity Organization Society appointed Bertha Wright to that position in 1910. She worked with the Hygiene Committee of the Association of College-Alumni as a visiting nurse caring for the babies of the poor; this was the first public health nursing in Alameda County. Wright also worked part-time as the first school nurse for the Berkeley Public Schools. She was paid $50 a year for her horse and buggy.

Bertha Wright was committed to nursing. She was an active member of the Alameda County Nurses' Association and was a speaker at the 18th annual convention of the California Nurses' Association in 1921, and taught a program of public health nursing at the University of California in Berkeley. She was also co-founder of the Public Health Nurses' Association in Alameda County.

Mabel Weed was born in 1871 in Seattle, where her father served two terms as mayor. Her parents, Ada and Gideon Weed, were graduates of Russell T. Trall's Hygeio-Therapeutic College in New York City and practiced hydrotherapeutic medicine and promoted progressive social causes and radical ideas, such as equality and suffrage for women. The family moved to Berkeley where Mabel and her brother attended the University of California. Mabel Weed was in the first library science course there, and worked for many years as assistant librarian at the Berkeley Public Library.

In 1910, Mabel Weed started her social work as the secretary of the Charity Organization Society when Bertha Wright became district nurse. The next year, Weed was appointed to the Commission of Public Charities. She had a successful career in social work, with major local and state positions. In 1920, she became a member of the California State Board of Charities and Corrections, and served as director of the Division of Children's Work, and later as assistant director of the California Department of Social Welfare. She wrote several important social studies, and was identified with progressive movements.

The City of Berkeley formed a regulatory agency to supervise charity and fund raising. It issued a report for the year 1911-1912 which included reports from the Charity Organization Society, The Berkeley Dispensary, and the Berkeley Day Nursery. The District Nurse made several hundred home visits and 15 cases in juvenile court. A major health problem of typhoid cases was due to poor city sewage draining into creeks and wells. Mabel Weed became the "Investigator" for the city Commission of Public Charities. Bertha Wright continued as the District Nurse.

Both the Charity Organization Society and the City's Commission continued until about 1916. Charities were obligated to obtain the Commission's endorsement in order to solicit funds. The foresight commission even required every fundraiser to reveal he percentage of their intake that actually went into the charity. Schools and PTAs were not allowed to do any fundraising.

In 1914-15 the Commission and also able to find jobs for almost 3000 individuals, operated a lodging house, and a wood yard. The Berkeley Dispensary treated several thousand individuals per year and about 300 children per year attended the Berkeley Day Nursery.

The Commission investigated and endorsed the following agencies: Alameda County Society for Study and Prevention of TB, Baby Hospital Association, Berkeley Red Cross, Berkeley Day Nursery, Berkeley Dispensary, Chamber of Commerce, Belgian Relief Fund, Charity Organization of Berkeley, Children's Home Society, Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, Maud Ballington Booth Home for Children, Nazarene Rest Cottage, Overseas Relief Fund, Travelers Aid Society, the YMCA, and YWCA. Mabel Weed continued as Investigator until the early 1920s.

Bertha Wright often spoke of establishing a children's hospital and had worked continually to get a "free bed" for children in one of the local hospitals. Her vision set a group of society and professional women into motion. As noted by the Berkeley Commission of Public Charities (1912): "Ever since Miss Wright has been in Berkeley she has [believed] that much of her effort has been wasted because of this lack of a proper place for sick children. The need of a hospital for the babies among whom we work is especially urgent because of the crowded home conditions, a certain ignorance on the part of the parents and their limited incomes, reasons which do not exist in the homes of those in more comfortable circumstances."

In response to an invitation sent by Mabel Weed, a small group of women met at the Town and Gown Club in Berkeley on September 4, 1912, to initiate plans for a baby hospital. The group included Jean McDuffie, wife of developer Duncan McDuffie, and Jessica Peixotto. Their activism included home visits, education, research, publications, political lobbying, and state policy and program development. Through hard work, the founders managed to raise $12,500 to purchase the 20 room McElrath Estate in Oakland. While repairs and modification were being done, Wright opened a clinic in the stable. In September 1914 the hospital opened with a board of 30 women. Doctors were against such a hospital as they

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Wright, Weed
FROM PAGE 6
felt it would cut into their medical practice, especially when the movement was by women.

During its first year of operation, the Baby Hospital charged $1 per day for ward beds and $2.50 for private rooms. Those who could not pay were treated for free. The average monthly cost of operation was $2,000, with about $800 covered by patient fees and funds from the city and county. The ladies went door-to-door, collecting donations to make up the deficit, and the hospital was able to grow and serve more children. No family was ever turned away for lack of ability to pay.

Miss Wright remained as Baby Hospital Administrator until 1924. Miss Weed remained with the Commission of Public Charities until about the same time. In the late 1920's the board of directors seized control of the hospital and relegated women to lesser roles.

Mabel Weed and Bertha Wright were lifelong companions. Miss Weed had adopted three infants: Phillip, about 1915, Barbara, and Jean in 1923. They also took in numerous foster children. Mabel worked and Bertha remained at home to care for the children.

Around 1930 Miss Wright and Miss Weed, their adopted and foster children moved to Woodside, then Palo Alto. Miss Weed took a job at the Duveneck's Peninsula School in Menlo Park as Business Manager. Later she opened a gift and bookshop in Palo Alto. After Miss Weed's death in 1957, Miss Wright continued caring for foster children for many years until her death in 1971.

Today only two people from this remarkable couple's lifelong work remain: Adopted daughter Jean Weed Bodding, age 84, who lives in a retirement home in Washington State and a temporary foster child for 5 years who lives in Berkeley, California: this author.

Some of the information in this article came from Case Study of Institution-Building by Nurse Bertha Wright and Colleagues, Journal of Nursing Scholarship, Author: Jeanette D. Nichols and Majorie S. Hammer.

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your annual donation supports the Berkeley Historical Society, an all-volunteer 501 (c)3 organization, to archive and promote Berkeley history. Your membership dues include a 1-year Newsletter, subscription and merchandise discounts at the Berkeley History Center. Thank you for your contribution.

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On behalf of Berkeley . . .
volunteers maintain the Berkeley History Center and serve on the board of directors. We serve to protect, share and preserve history. We have fun archiving, exhibiting, event planning, scanning photographs and staffing the History Center. We learn something new everyday and we are helping to keep Berkeley's history alive. We've even got projects involving as little as 4 hours a month. Need the particulars? Drop in and ask, Thursday-Saturday, 1-4 p.m. or call 848-0181. We especially need help with:

Filing archives Cataloguing photos
Preparing exhibits Staffing the Center
Organizing

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Here are some photos recently donated to the BHS from St. John’s Church: (From top left, clockwise) Officially recognized on June 18, 1907, the groundbreaking was at 2640 College Avenue. The buildings were designed by architect Julia Morgan and completed in 1910. They were later designated a State Historical Landmark; In 1910, Rev. Dr. George Elridge often drove children to and from Sunday school in a horse-drawn wagon; During World War II, the women members were involved with the Red Cross; In 1918, St. John’s members presented a car to missionaries; Construction of St. John’s Center, 2717 Garber Street, began in September 1963.
Calendar of Events

THROUGH SEPTEMBER 29 - EXHIBIT
Vanishing Victorians
BHS’ current exhibit is a photo display of Berkeley homes built in the architectural styles of the Victorian era curated by UC Architecture professor emeritus & boardmember Kenneth H. Cardwell. Open Thurs., Fri., & Sat., 1-4pm.

THROUGH NOVEMBER 17 - PHOTO EXHIBIT
Disability Rights
Curated by Kenneth Stein, exhibit is on Rasputin’s windows on Telegraph Ave.

ONGOING HISTORICAL - PHOTO EXHIBIT
Historic Berkeley
18 panels of photos in the Sather Gate garage’s passageway between Channing and Durant

SEPTEMBER 22, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
Oakland’s Walkways and Streetcar Heritage
For info, Oakland Heritage Alliance
(510) 763-9218

SEPTEMBER 22, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
California Historical Radio Society and KRE Radio History
For info, BHS (510) 848-0181

SEPTEMBER 23, 11AM-5PM - HOME TOUR
Alameda Legacy
For info, call (510) 523-5907

SEPTEMBER 23, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
Schilling Gardens, Snow Park and the Regillus
For info, Oakland H.A. (510) 763-9218

SEPTEMBER 27, 7:30PM - LECTURE
Bungalows—The Ultimate Arts & Crafts Home
Hillside Club, $20. For info, Berkeley Board of Realtors (510) 848-4288

SEPTEMBER 30 - PARADE & FESTIVAL
How Berkeley Can You Be
For info www.howberkeleycanyoube.org

OCTOBER 3, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
Kensington/North Berkeley
For info, www.berkeleypaths.org

WALKING TOUR: OCTOBER 6 - 10AM
The Maybeck Estates
For info, BHS (510) 848-0181

OCTOBER 14, 3PM - EXHIBIT OPENING
Berkeley in the 1930’s
For info, BHS (510) 848-0181

OCTOBER 20, 10AM - WALKING TOUR:
Fall Harvest Walk
For info, www.berkeleypaths.org

OCTOBER 20, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
Downtown Berkeley’s Transformation
For info, BHS (510) 848-0181

OCTOBER 28
House Tour of the San Antonio Neighborhood
For info, Oakland H.A. (510) 763-9218

NOVEMBER 3, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
Lower Codornices Creek
For info, BHS (510) 848-0181

NOVEMBER 7, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
Rescuing the Rocks
For info, www.berkeleypaths.org

NOVEMBER 17, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
Oakland Paths & Steps
For info, www.berkeleypaths.org

NOVEMBER 17, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
In Celebration of Berkeley’s Parks: Downtown Parks Real, Envisioned and Vanished
For info, BHS (510) 848-0181

DECEMBER 1, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
Upper Claremont
For info, www.berkeleypaths.org

DECEMBER 1, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
Hillside School
For info, BHS (510) 848-0181

DECEMBER 5, 10AM - WALKING TOUR
Carquinez Bridge/Crockett
For info, www.berkeleypaths.org

Special Membership Offer
Renew or start your membership in the Berkeley Historical Society with an annual $100 membership and receive a free hardcover copy of the postcard book “Picturing Berkeley” (retail value $50). See page 8 for details.

Berkeley Historical Society
1931 Center St.
Berkeley
CA 94701
(510) 848-0818

The StoryCorps Initiative
StoryCorps is a one-year initiative, funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, to collect interviews from at least 1,750 African Americans. The Initiative will place emphasis on the stories of World War II veterans and men and women involved in the Civil Rights struggle. It will help ensure that the voices, experiences, and life stories of African Americans will be preserved and presented with dignity. Interviewers are in Oakland until late September. Make an appointment by calling 800-850-4406 or by stopping by the booth in Frank Ogawa Plaza, 14th Street and Broadway, downtown Oakland. For more information, go to www.storycorps.net/griot/