



EXACTLY OPPOSITE

The Newsletter of the Berkeley Historical Society

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SPRING 2019

New Exhibit:

People's Park – Fifty Years April 7 – September 28, 2019

Join us on Sunday, April 7, 2 to 4 pm, for the opening celebration with a talk by exhibit curator Steven Finacom (and our brief annual business meeting).



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Marion Johnson and Leela Craig Create Chaparral House on Strawberry Creek

By Fred Etzel



Left: Wallace and Marion Johnson toasting each other at the ground-breaking.

Right: Marion Johnson stands on the far left wearing a hardhat and holding a shovel. Standing on Marion's left is Dr. Craig. Wallace Johnson is standing behind Dr. Craig. The other persons in this photograph are unidentified.



In the 1960s, Berkeley resident Marion Johnson was active in civic affairs and volunteer work, including PTA and Alta Bates Hospital. She also served as President of the Berkeley Senior Housing Authority. Dr. Leela Stevens was a prominent Berkeley physician. Both were members of the Hillside Club. Through their community involvement and leadership, they met and became friends. Individual life experiences caused each woman to see the need for a new approach for providing eldercare for Berkeley's seniors. Together, they conceived an innovative model for providing this care in a residential, park-like setting where seniors would live as independently as each was able. Their vision reminded Marion of the independence she had experienced while attending summer camp at the first Girl Scout camp in the western United States, Camp Chaparral in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Marion Ruth Vidorini was born circa 1915 and grew up in Gonzales, Carmel, and Monterey, California. She attended Mills College and graduated in 1935. At Mills, Marion met Olive Johnson, the younger sister of Wallace (Wally) J. S. Johnson. Olive introduced Marion to her brother, and they were married in Monterey on September 9, 1935. Following their marriage, the Johnsons lived in Long Beach, San Francisco, Kensington and eventually Berkeley, where they settled in 1940-41, first at 1948 Campus Drive (where Wallace Johnson invented the portable aluminum scaffold) and then at 2 Wilson Circle.

Lela Margaret Stevens was born in Pasadena on May 5, 1905. When she was five her family moved to Inglewood, where she attended City School. During the 8th grade, she changed her name from Lela to Leela. In 1927 her family moved to Berkeley, where she graduated from UC Berkeley. She met Roderick Craig and they married on May 23, 1931. Leela graduated from UC San Francisco Medical School in 1932 and they moved to Berkeley, where they bought a house at 935 Oxford Street. Roderick (Rod) Craig was a professor of insect physiology at UC Berkeley and Dr. Craig commuted to UCSF, where she started the Thyroid Clinic at which she worked. From 1939 until sometime in the 1970s, Leela practiced medicine in her offices in various locations in Berkeley, including the Bank of America Building, 2305 Ashby Avenue, and finally a home office at 2507 Marin Avenue.

The innovative eldercare concept of Marion Johnson and Leela Craig preceded the adoption of relevant state regulations. They introduced a proposal for the realization of their concept to the Berkeley Senior Housing Association. Following a 1969 feasibility study financed by the Association, the Chaparral Foundation was formed as a California nonprofit corporation to build and operate an Intermediate Care facility. In 1971, with the financial assistance of

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Marion and Wally Johnson, the Chaparral Foundation purchased a 2.4-acre parcel of land in west Berkeley on the north bank of a year-round stream, Strawberry Creek, at 1309 Allston Way. Ground was broken on February 14, 1977. In a photograph of the groundbreaking in Figure 1, Marion Johnson stands on the far left wearing a hardhat and holding a shovel. Standing on Marion's left is Dr. Craig. Wallace Johnson is standing behind Dr. Craig. The other persons in this photograph are unidentified. Figure 2 shows Wallace and Marion Johnson toasting each other at the groundbreaking. On November 1, 1978, Chaparral House welcomed its first twelve residents. Marion Johnson assumed the role of community outreach and fundraiser and Dr. Leela Craig became the first medical director.

In 1996, in response to the need for a higher level of care for its residents, the Board of Directors upgraded Chaparral House from intermediate care to skilled nursing. At present, Chaparral House provides care for forty-nine residents in a vital Berkeley neighborhood that includes as neighbors Strawberry Creek Park, Berkeley Youth Alternatives, Berkeley Montessori School, artist lofts and studios, and the senior independent living center Strawberry Creek Lodge. Leela Craig died on April 16, 1989 at age 83 and Marion Johnson died on April 11, 1994.

Sources:

Johnson, W. A. Fresh Look at Patriotism, Chapter 7, pp. 52-56, 1976.

E-mails between Fred Etzel and Katrina Staten, Orinda, CA, daughter of Marion Johnson, August 6, 2017.

Materials provided by Steven B. Craig, son of Dr. Leela Craig and Treasurer of Chaparral House, to Fred Etzel in February 2019.

Rev. Dr. Charles S. Cole, ThD, Chaparral Foundation.