

EVERYDAY HEROES FIGHT FIRES IN ROSS

The recent fires in Sonoma and Napa remind us that such disasters are a perennial concern here as well. Our terrain and climate demand vigilance and preparation. In the early history of Ross, citizens were often called upon to protect their own lives and property.

In one instance, a 1909 San Francisco Chronicle headline was “Society Women in Autos Fight Fire”. An odd title, but the story details the quick action of several Ross ladies, including Mesdames Armsby, Barber, Coffin, Griffith and Hale. More than bystanders, they brought what they could to help fight a house fire at Lagunitas Road and Glenwood until local fire departments arrived. The Chief praised the locals for helping avoid a larger disaster. In addition to fighting fire, the ladies followed their heroics by serving refreshments to the thankful firemen.

A 1914 fire destroyed several buildings in the Ross Common business district. Along with the valiant firefighters, the people of Ross did their part, with about three hundred residents helping to fight the flames. The brave volunteers included Allen Kittle and E. G. Schmiedell, both original Town Trustees. Once again, after the fire was subdued, citizens served hot coffee and sandwiches.

In 1929, a fire destroyed many homes in Mill Valley, just over the ridge from Ross. According to Roger Kent, he, his brothers, Upper Road resident Ben Dibblee and some Italian workers sprang into action. Working for hours, they set backfires to stop the inferno from further advance. They barely escaped burns themselves, but succeeded in keeping the fire at bay.

Of course, instead of heroics, we are warned to be careful and evacuate when notified today. Let's honor our local firefighters and first responders who are dedicated to protecting us and give them our thanks whenever possible.

Sources:

SOCIETY WOMEN IN AUTOS FIGHT FIRE: Help Subdue the Flames Then Serve Luncheon to Firemen, San Francisco Chronicle; Jul 27, 1909, pg. 4; ProQuest Historical Newspapers

Big Fire at Ross, The Marin Journal, July 23, 1914

Mill Valley Historical Review, Spring 2004, an issue dedicated to fire fighting.

Roger Kent Oral History, “Building the Democratic Party in California, 1954-1966, Regional Oral History Office, UC Berkeley.

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