

**100 YEARS OF MUSIC BY THE REDLANDS BOWL PERFORMING ARTS, AND THE MUSICAL TOWN
THAT HOSTED IT**

By Larry E. Burgess

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Paper Summary

Take a woman from Tennessee, place her in a small southern California town, Redlands, and watch how vision can be translated into reality. Grace Stewart Mullen had a passion for music and an unshakeable belief that it had to be shared freely with everyone. She envisioned providing quality entertainment for free. That entertainment was to be for residents of Redlands to hear beautiful music at the end of a hot summer day. Mullen believed that she must do something to promote peace, to help drive hate out of the world, to break down class distinction, and make people love and understand each other better. As a music lover she saw it as a universal leveler. "Music was for the rich?" "She would give it to the poor." The core concept of her large dream had already formed before her launch of music for Redlands, and the creation of the Redlands Bowl summer music festival.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Larry E. Burgess served as founding archivist of the historical collections at A.K. Smiley Public Library. In addition, he served as curator of the Lincoln Memorial Shrine. During his forty year career at the Smiley, he became Director in 1982 until his retirement in 2012.

As a speaker he has delivered more than 2,500 talks on various historical topics. He taught as an adjunct in the History Department at University of Redlands for 42 years, and as adjunct in the graduate history department at University of California, Riverside for 34 years.

He has written many articles, columns, and books on topics dealing with Redlands, Southern California and the West, as well as Lincoln and the Civil War.

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Imagine the 1923/24 years and the number of interesting and committed volunteers that Grace Mullen attracted to her musical dream. Each of the men and women holds a story, a tale of why their commitment to music unleashed their civic energy, as well as their civil wallets. Some were professional musicians, others were devoted to opera, and many shared Mullen's love of symphony and ballet. Their goal inspired by their vision focused on making music in the summer, in an outdoor setting, available to all including a large number of people for whom admission to such programs was prohibitive. Therefore: concerts must be free.

In order to understand how tens of thousands of people over the century came to Redlands for twice weekly concerts by professional musicians, the early beginnings of Redlands came with pioneers, many of whom carried musical notes either in their luggage, or in their head.

"Redlands has never hesitated to pioneer," observed Lawrence Nelson in his history *Only One Redlands*. He asserted this is especially true in music. One of the earliest bookings at the Academy of Music (originally the Meade Opera Houser) at Citrus and Orange presented a musical troupe featuring a lady cornetist, a lady elocutionist and singer, and a lady whistler. They entranced the audience. Nelson points out that Redlands band leader Martin Pierce, also whistled brilliantly, as well as conducted with aplomb. Established in 1888, the Redlands Band was the brainchild of hotelier H.L Sloan, who had played and sung with the Thomas orchestra in Chicago. Only those willing to practice long and hard were admitted to membership. The first concert had standing room only and surprised the locals by the musical expertise. His band would later win first prize in the Southern California band contest in 1895.

Sadly Sloan had died sixteen months after he founded the musical group. Band members noted that the larger cities were shocked by such professionalism, thinking that there was not much music "of any merit out here in the sagebrush." Although somebody in Los Angeles noticed the Redlands musical scene when the *Los Angeles Times* in December, 1899 wrote, "The people of Redlands have been accused of being self-sufficient; some say that they always address their neighbors in a patronizing tone of voice; and other that they are not aware of their neighbors at all." That long ago observation holds true into present day news and cultural coverage by the *Los Angeles Times* and many periodicals published about Southern California. The image of the so-called Inland Empire largely overlooked the Redlands cultural scene. Instances of crime, sensational homicides, air pollution, warehouses, and poverty routinely reflect news coverage of the Inland Empire. Redlands is often lumped into an amorphous, historically vague mass imagined by coastal residents, on Los Angeles's "Westside's," and east of Claremont. They confer a hauteur of dismissal for those who live in the "909," as Redlands continues its own way.

Margaret White, whose husband Howard had been a major engineer for developing the sewer system of New York City, called a meeting of other pianists in October, 1894 to her Redlands

home, "Casablanca Ranch." Initially, the plan centered on members playing concerts at monthly meetings offered by other members. They called the group the Spinet Club. By 1898 women musicians from vocalists to violinists and players of other instruments were admitted to full membership. The organization flourished. It later included faculty at the University of Redlands. The Club's success framed Redlands on the regional, national, and even international scale by bringing famous performers to town.

"I know three towns in America," remarked a famous European musician, "New York, San Francisco, and Redlands." Then, owing to the wealth and influence of the women, artists were sought to provide Spinet sponsored performances for private and public events held at the Wyatt Opera Theater built in 1904 at Colton and Orange streets. Famous opera singers, composers, and performers came to Redlands. Through the efforts of Marion Fisher, wife of a Pennsylvania oil magnate and co-founder of the Redlands Light and Power Company and later Southern California Edison, the Spinet enjoyed a wide reputation for the quality of its work. Praise for the musical programs came all the way from Chicago. After his wife's death in 1893, Henry Fisher married Marion Thomas, who happened to be the younger sister of the wife of his son, John "Fritz" Fisher, Jr. Possessed with charm, intelligence, talent, and energy the second Mrs. Fisher became the subject of many gossipy comments as locals discussed members of Redlands's social elite. Marion chaired and starred in many musical reviews that included talented singers and actors from the Redlands social set. Her soirees became the stuff of legend. Caterers, costume companies, floral designers, and couture's of Los Angeles elegantly gowned many of her guests. Her concern and organizational ability shown forth during World War I, and its aftermath, by aiding the plight of European orphans. She was honored by the Belgian government for her efforts.

Spinet Club members wielded much influence upon the social and cultural life of Redlands. To discuss but a few influential patrons of the arts: Lucretia Prendergast, who came to Redlands in 1880 and married Paul Moore, editor of the local newspaper, the *Redlands Daily Facts*. She had attended Wellesley College, and served as president of the Spinet in the late 1920s. She became a major figure in the annual concert series at the Wyatt Opera House. She booked artists, sold tickets, and managed performances. Julia Moseley, another Spinet member, was an accomplished pianist hailing from St. Louis, Missouri. A well-known vocalist, Ada Lattimer received her musical training at Vassar College, and became an accomplished concert performer. In 1900 she married Leland Stanford Stillman, a son of J.D.B. Stillman who had created had the large vineyard and winery now the University of Redlands site. She taught voice in New York before and after her marriage, and after wintering in Redlands for decades, she retired to Redlands in 1964 and died in 1972. A formidable patron of the arts, Stella Schnurmacher of St Louis moved to Redlands in 1917, the wife of William J. Rabe. She not only led Spinet as president in the early 1930s, but helped support the Hospital and Contemporary

Club. Among the Bostonians who settled in Redlands for their winters, Alice Burrage rivaled Marion Fisher for soirees and philanthropy. In 1904 as a memorial to her mother-in-law, Aurelia, she presented Trinity Episcopal Church with a new building. A descendant of colonists in Massachusetts, Alice glided through life in regal demeanor. Her benefactions were many, but for the few living Redlands residents who remember her or her family, it is the fabulous parties, including the 1916 Mardi Gras theme, that set a new standard for lavish entertaining.

Times “they-were-a-changin.” Defying the economically ruinous great freeze of January, 1913 when the thermometer plunged to 18 degrees, a performance of the Lambardi Grand Opera Company played “Madame Butterfly” at the Wyatt. Despite the crushing blow, sparkling jewels, old lace and beautiful fabric, along with black ties made a significant appearance among the audience. Redlands determined to uphold the sartorial splendor expected for grand opera. That next year recognizing the effects of the freeze caused a drop in audience attendance. The Spinet had to draw heavily on its reserves. “We trust Redlands will support us in our endeavor to uphold our city’s name for high standards,” it proclaimed. “Redlands did.” In the next decade change continued its inexorable musical march.

By the 1920s, the high society era began to evolve. The Roaring Twenties altered the way America passed its time. Season ticket sales faced a deficit and Spinet members were disheartened. In subsequent years, the Spinet partnered with the University of Redlands and its School of Music to bring a few symphonic programs to Redlands. They even accepted male members. When the Wyatt Theater was razed in 1929, amid an intense civic outcry, the new performance venue a decade later became the Memorial Chapel the University. The Depression of 1929 emptied wallets and morale, and concerts were few but appreciated. Then, World War II sapped the energy of local entertainment budgets with the shift to supporting the war effort. In 1950 University of Redlands professor Edward Tritt asked a group of local music lovers, faculty and students to consider creating a symphony orchestra. It succeeded admirably, continuing to this day known as the Redlands Symphony Orchestra. The Spinet could rest on its laurels, having paved the way for symphonic music, choral, and opera selections to continue in the 1960s through an innovative partnership between “town and gown.”

Functioning as the “first demiurge and impresario of the performing arts in the Southland,” author Kevin Starr writes of Lynden E. Behymer. He was instrumental in selecting the location of the Hollywood Bowl, furthered Los Angeles’s first major symphonic orchestra, and served as the founding manager of the Los Angeles philharmonic. Philanthropist William Andrews Clark, Jr. who founded and singlehandedly financed the Los Angeles philharmonic in 1919 chose Behymer because of his experience and European connections, “but he also wanted the impresario’s commitment to developing a local audience.”

In assessing the significance of Redlands's musical contribution to the culture of the Southland, Behymer the impresario declared, "There is a halo over this city whose people have always been able to distinguish the finest things in music and...willing to work hard for them." He also said, "The artists who came here were in awe of the Spinet which was one of the three authoritative clubs in California..." He praised the organization for being willing "to take a chance with young artists of promise and to help introduce the works of new composers. He added an account of his 1912 visit to Weimar, Germany where he was gratified to find that The Spinet's "musical center of about 12,000 which vied in patronage, as well as interest, with European centers of 35,000 population and American centers from 50,000 to 100,000 population." He added "practically all of the artists, in speaking of the various places in which they wished to appear in America mentioned Redlands, California and the Spinet Club."

Behymer concluded his analysis of The Spinet's influence upon the Southern California musical scene by stating that "in all of these [Redlands] homes, ... where many of the artists were guests for a day... at villas, or in public places, Redlands and its Spinet Club came up not only as a prospective point of visitation, but with many remembrances of past visits, the beauty of our little city, its flowers, and birds, its orange groves, its wonderful Smiley Heights, but more than anything else, its musical atmosphere and the fact that so small a city could bring such distinguished and expensive musical greats within its limits."

Music For Everyone

With the arrival of Grace Stewart Mullen, the idea of free music for the people of Redlands took on a dimension and reality that made and makes Redlands known throughout Southern California. Climate had much to do with her ultimate success as Redlands could host a summer-long series of musical programs "without fear of unseemly weather behavior." Just as Los Angeles, music in Redlands would be influenced by "fine weather and a dramatic outdoor setting."

Born in Sparta, Tennessee, a town of less than 500 people and one of a family of eleven children, Mullen's parents and relatives were educators. She grew up amidst books and learning, and where conversations were lively among the guests that frequented the house. Attending Peabody College in Nashville, she chose to be a school teacher. Los Angeles beckoned in 1902, where Grace had many relatives, and she secured a job at a small school in the heart of Fillmore citrus country. She journeyed home in 1904 to visit and to attend the St. Louis World's Fair. She met George Emmett Mullen, a member of a family that had been friends of her own family since before she was born. Returning to the South in 1905 she and George married. Retiring from active business in 1907, George and Grace elected to return to Los Angeles. She visited Redlands and "was enchanted with it. Nothing would do but I must move here immediately.

We had a location all picked out, but just as we were about to buy it, some Redlands people told us that everybody here had tuberculosis.”

Call it a paradox of the health seeker image of Southern California and Redlands role in it. Many but not all of those with tuberculosis and other lung diseases with enough money to live in comfort did often recover health and strength. Then, there were those who died. There had been from 1902 a 12 tent “hospital” on Alessandro Road at San Timoteo Canyon. Named “The Settlement” by its founders, Trinity Episcopal Church, it served people with no resources, most often families with little children. The few doctors in town gave them free care. The tent houses were set up with cots, drum stove, table, basin and pitcher, and food supplied costs for a week. Many Redlands people contributed to the cause. A sanitarium founded by a Roman Catholic nursing sisterhood later opened for tuberculosis patients in Mentone. The Settlement was abandoned but not without a little cemetery bearing witness to the severity of disease.

It took until 1916 for the Mullen family to move to Redlands. Becoming involved in various Redlands educational and charitable organizations did not solve Grace’s sense that she must do something more...“something to promote peace, to help drive hate out of the world, to break down class distinction and make people love and understand each other better.” As a music lover she saw it as a universal leveler. “Music was for the rich? She would give it to the poor.” The core concept of her large dream had already formed before her launch of music for Redlands.

A small news item appeared in 1904 noting that recent band concerts have led to a proposal: “to build a bandstand in Smiley Park between Eureka and Grant streets.” Nelson in his history comments, “Thus came the first premonitory whisper of the world-renowned Redlands Bowl and its program.” It took five years for something to happen. Mayor H.P.D. Kingsbury, a talented singer, actor and musical star in local performances at the Wyatt Theater, and Arthur Gregory, citrus man and business entrepreneur, rode into Los Angeles together. Gregory proposed that if he could acquire more rights to waste water irrigation from the city’s sewer system, he would increase his annual payments and build a bandstand. He got the water. The City got the bandstand. Placed in back of the Smiley Library in July, 1910 (now the site of the Lincoln Memorial Shrine), the first concert drew 3,000 people out of the 12,000 in town. There, under the light of a full moon, people sat on the park lawn in lieu of seats. By 1915 a new civic bandstand was built in Smiley Park to the west of Eureka Street, having eliminated the rare succulent garden. Concerts in 1916 drew capacity crowds of 2,000 people occupying and enjoying seats.

Previously, Mullen continued keeping tabs on musical developments in Los Angeles. She became inspired when she met a woman of boundless energy, Artie Mason Carter, the dynamo who founded the Hollywood Bowl which opened in 1922. Mullen envisioned a similar outdoor

concert venue in the summer for Redlands residents. And, it already had a bowl. Unlike the Hollywood Bowl that aimed to bring the best of the fine arts to the masses for a low price, Mullen envisioned providing the same quality entertainment, but had decided that the concerts would be free. That such an idea inspired by a city of more than 600,000 might be feasible in a small city of 12,000 made her quest to many in Redlands appear illusory – and even, delusional.

It would not be an easy path to fulfillment. Many people of wealth said they would never sit beside their servants in unreserved bench seats and saw no reason for such a music series. Others acknowledged that they left Redlands in the summer for the mountains or the beach or abroad. Such feelings made Mullen more determined. Music should be for those who had to live in Redlands during the hot summers.

Mullen enlisted a board and gave it a name, the Redlands Community Music Association—changed in 2017 to Redlands Bowl Performing Arts. She envisioned a series of community sings based on the Hollywood Bowl model. She proposed to have an artist's series over time. A chance meeting in May of 1924 with mezzo-soprano Elinor Marlo of the San Francisco Opera led to arrangements for her to come to Redlands in August and sing in the amphitheater in Smiley Park. A few days later composer-pianist Charles Wakefield Cadman, who had founded the Hollywood Bowl orchestra, performed in Redlands. There was no turning back, only going forward. In 1924 the RCMA created a winter concert series held in the Wyatt Theater. When the Wyatt was condemned by the City, for reasons still wrapped in mystery, the winter concerts were threatened and eventually ran their course, but the summer programs received an infusion of much needed proportions: donors who said they would build a new amphitheater.

Clarence and Florence White proved to be the perfect couple to gift such a building with the proper aesthetic, but also with a practical design favorable for creating an effective performance venue. Florence, a trained artist and cultural leader, and Clarence, an heir to the White Motor and Sewing Machine fortune in Cleveland, Ohio, supported many Redlands charities. Dubbed the "Prosellis" (a combination of "pro" in Latin meaning "before" and "sellis" loosely meaning "before the seats"), this 1930 gift coming in the depths of the Great Depression demonstrated how serious Mullen's supporters were in advancing opera, symphonic music, dance, and performing arts for Redlands. The Whites initially donated \$35,000 that ultimately approached \$60,000. That gift amounted to an excess of a million dollars in today's money. Clarence White especially thought about the future and decided to up his philanthropy instructing architect Herbert Powell to create a site that would remain viable for decades, becoming a Redlands icon.

Added to their gift was a carved panel with Florence's White's poem of hope: "Work to keep us going. Joy to match the sorrow. Thought for a goodly sowing. Hope for a fair tomorrow." A second panel states: "A thank offering for all those who have made Redlands a good place to

live in. By Clarence and Florence White, 1930.” A large center panel above the stage carved by sculptor Merrill Gage hangs beneath the words “Without Vision, A People Parish.”

What is also noteworthy are the brief and poignant remarks White delivered in behalf of he and Florence at the dedication, later dubbed by locals “Redlands Gettysburg address:”

“We hope that each man, woman and child who has been impelled to do more for this community that he has been compelled to do will feel that he has contributed to the building of the Prosellis.

“No city lives by taxers alone. The nearer it comes to that condition, the more drab and monotonous its existence is.

“Many of us take for granted the immense amount of free personal service that goes into making a town like Redlands.

If this building emphasizes such service to you, and the need for all to help keep Redlands at its best, Mrs. White and I will remember this occasion with full hearts.

“What this building is good for is just what you and I make it good for.

“By itself it is only an ornament. If we citizens give it a meaning, it is a challenge and maybe a responsibility.

“We hope that such good citizens, if they have not received a full recognition of work well done, will feel that here is recognition, co-operation, and perhaps some reward.”

A highlight of Mullen’s life occurred in April 1940 when Eleanor Roosevelt held an audience in rapt attention at the University of Redlands Memorial Chapel. Her lecture delivered a message that Mullen and many Redlanders lived by: replace poor housing with good ones, removing many “sore spots” in community life, upgrade sanitation facilities, utilize schools and recreation, involving youth and older people in inter-generational interchange, supporting voluntary community service by young people, emphasizing the need to change manners and ways that local government serves its residents and the need to become educated in the changing world.

Roosevelt’s visit to Redlands came about because Mullen had learned of her impending visit to Southern California. She made contacts with White House trip coordinators and teamed with the University of Redlands president Elam J. Anderson, an admirer of Mrs. Roosevelt as a representative of “the new American womanhood.” When dodging a backing car at a local reception, Mullen fell and broke her hip. Roosevelt came to Mullen’s bedside as she lay

recuperating at the Wissahickon Inn. The two wasted no time in exchanging animated views about many issues of the day. Roosevelt came away “charmed.”

In her newspaper column “My Day” Roosevelt described her enjoyable ride to Redlands from Los Angeles, noting the view from the University President’s home “is one of the most beautiful mountain views I have seen anywhere.” She commented that Redlands people were “kind and cordial,” a good thing since she was in a Republican town. She expressed pleasure at visiting the Lincoln Memorial Shrine (to which her husband had contributed a rare volume on Lincoln) and concluded describing her visit with Mullen. “She had planned for the lecture...and lay unable to work or attend to any details. It was easy to see that she was a person whose influence inspired other people, for everyone thought of her and seemed to work eagerly to achieve the results which she had desired.” Shortly before Pearl Harbor Mullen was invited to the White House for a tea for seven and spent an hour in a half with Roosevelt who led her and other women guests on a tour of the presidential mansion.

Earlier I mentioned the diverse stories that could be written about who attend summer concerts. One hundred years ago, just as now, the underlying thought was that residents of Redlands and elsewhere, if surviving another hot summer day into the night, were entitled to the balm and surcease of beautiful music. Imagine the thoughts and the feelings, the experiences, and the occupations, the joys and the sorrows contained in the minds and hearts of those sitting quietly in the seats. I want to cite only one example of a woman I remember seeing at so many concerts, sitting there as just another patron.

This remarkable woman had a career that made her an international figure. When she died in 1983 at age 84, Frances E. Willis stood among the most distinguished of residents. Born in Illinois in 1899, she was only the third woman at the time to have entered the U.S Foreign Service in 1962. She became the first woman to be appointed Career Ambassador. A stamp in her honor was issued by the postal service in 2006. Her family moved to Redlands at the end of World War I and Frances attended the University of Redlands for one year before transferring to Stanford where she took her Ph.D in political science and taught at Goucher and Vassar colleges. She did not just wish to teach political science, “I wanted to be part of it.” As second secretary of the American Embassy in Brussels, Belgium when World War II broke out in May 1940, she demonstrated her competence and her diplomatic skill by calmly driving through the German lines and on to Paris. Henry Luce (founder of *Life and Time Magazine*) and his wife Clare Booth Luce (author, playwright, and later an appointed ambassador) respected Willis’ skills and intellect.

After a long and honored career she retired to Redlands in 1964, keeping busy with work on United Nations commissions and serving as chair of the University of Redlands’s Johnston College Overseers. A modest person, Willis always told Redlands locals to “just call me Frances.”

It worked only among her best friends; to everyone else in Redlands, she was “Miss Willis” or more commonly, “Ambassador.” At the Redlands Bowl, she was content to be just another member of the audience enjoying music.

The observations of Peter Yeats, grandson of Grace Mullen, make a fitting coda to my paper. His father, “Peter,” and his mother, “Frances Mullen (a concert pianist),” jointly initiated an important internationally known concert series in Los Angeles that still sustains as “Monday Evening Concerts,” a seven-time national winner of the ASCAP/Chamber Music American Award for Adventurous Programming. Grandson Peter allows that neither Grace nor his father were equipped in anyway to be the usual route in sustaining such accomplishment. Neither he suggests had significant grounding in their childhood years for detailed musical knowledge, nor could they “pursue their passion bolstered by their own financial resources.” His grandmother, Peter observes, was not a musical intellectual. Her esthetic was formed from classical music, primarily 19th Century and what was considered “good taste.” Writes Yeats, “Her passion and to this I can attest, was to make that music and dance available to people who would not in the ordinary course of events have access to culture.”

One hundred years later the passion remains the bedrock for a centennial that cleaves both to the old and cherished, as well as bringing the new and diverse under the banner “music for everyone.”