

A New Life in California

When slender blue-eyed Lou was ten years old, and Jean was two, Charles and Florence Henry moved to Whittier, California, hoping to improve Mrs. Henry's health. Charles continued in banking at Whittier, just as he had at Waterloo. Meanwhile, Lou and her father explored the hills by horseback and visited Pio Pico, the old adobe mansion of the last Mexican governor of California. Its thirty-three rooms, partially destroyed by floods in 1867, served to stimulate an interest in history and the Henrys were quick to help their daughter, Lou, to find books dealing with early California days.

It was at Whittier that Lou came to know the poems of the sturdy homespun Quaker—John Greenleaf Whittier. It was at Whittier, too, that Lou absorbed some of the Quaker teachings at an impressionable age. She found it easy to accept their simplicity of speech and dress and she remembered that women had absolute equality with men in all their meetings. Nevertheless, she remained an Episcopalian all her life.

After six years in Whittier, Charles Henry went to Monterey to help inaugurate another bank. He and his wife and two daughters moved

into the big frame house at 302 Pacific Avenue, which Lou called home until she was married.

Lou remembered how the bank started out as a one-room institution with a heavy iron safe. As soon as there were two rooms, her father, who enjoyed the human side of banking, always sat outside where he could talk to the people as they came in. "A banker must keep in touch with the public," he told Lou. "I sit out here in the open to explain what a letter of credit is to a professor beginning a sabbatical leave or outline what steps are involved in buying a house."

Lou went tramping and trailing and camping out with her father on countless adventure trips out of Monterey. Lithe and athletic, she learned how to find her way about the woods, to locate the points of the compass by day from the sun and by night from the stars, which was of great aid to her in later years of world-wide travel. She avidly absorbed her father's knowledge about the rocks, the birds, the trees, the animals and the vegetation on the hills. She learned all manner of woodcraft; how to build a fire with wood either wet or dry, how to pitch a tent, or how to enjoy sleeping on a blanket on the ground. She became expert in catching fish or shooting game and cooking over a campfire, skills which she later taught the Girl Scouts. There was an irresistible appeal for her in the freedom and exhilaration of the great out-of-doors and the beauty of the Monterey Peninsula.

Always the student, Lou loved to dig into the colorful history of Monterey. At school she read about how Sebastian Vizcaino (1550-1628) discovered beautiful Monterey Bay in 1602 and claimed California for Spain. She was impressed with the fact that her sleepy little town of 1700 people had housed the first established government in the western United States.

In 1893 Lou Henry attended the Normal School at San Jose, where her friends described her as having a peculiar mental and physical vitality. A bubbling over, tireless girl, she was usually found in the midst of a group.

During the school year Dr. John Casper Branner, head of the Department of Geology and Mines at Stanford University, gave a series of lectures on geology. An animated girl with smiling blue eyes under strongly marked eyebrows, Lou gave rapt attention to everything he said about the earth and its structure. After classes Lou told him about the pine-covered hills around Monterey Bay and her love of everything out-of-doors. "Do you think a woman could study geology at Stanford?" she asked him.

The following year Lou Henry entered Stanford University as a freshman, determined to study geology even though at that time it was very unusual for a girl to enter this field. Dr. Branner recalls Lou's spontaneity and the keen interest she brought to his classroom. She was always the

leading spirit in the many excursions made by Geology Department students into the foothills, led by young Herbert Hoover, assistant to Dr. Branner.

In his memoirs Herbert Hoover says of this period:

I felt it my duty to aid the young lady in her studies both in the laboratory and in the field. And this call to duty was stimulated by her whimsical mind, her blue eyes, and a broad grinnish smile that came from an Irish ancestor. After I left college she still had three years to complete her college work.

During the year, 1894, Lou Henry and Bert Hoover spent weekends and holidays together exploring the Stanford foothills for geological formations. Lou taught the busy financial manager of the student body how to dance and they attended campus parties together. They shared a great love of the out-of-doors, and intellectual interests, which included history and geology. After his graduation, letters soon were coming to Lou from Colorado, Nevada, Wyoming, Idaho, Arizona and New Mexico as the young assistant mining engineer moved from one project to another.

At age twenty-three, Bert Hoover wrote to Lou:

I'm growing impatient about waiting so long to marry a certain beautiful geology student but the London office is offering me a big opportunity in Australia where I'll be on my own in developing a mine.

Lou Henry graduated from Stanford in 1898 and started teaching school in Monterey. Letters from Bert Hoover were coming to her, postmarked Kalgoorlie, in the hot desert interior of Australia, where he was developing the Sons of Gwalia gold mine. One of these letters brought exciting information. "It is so hot here that I would go anywhere for a change and it looks as if it might be China." Soon Lou received a cable proposing marriage with a honeymoon trip to China.