



Jan. 3.1, 2008 - Cameron Park co-founder Ruth Cameron dies

By Rosemary Revell | Democrat staff writer | January 30, 2008 15:57



Ruth Cameron

Ruth Cameron, a driving force in the development of Cameron Park, died Jan. 27. Born Jan. 11, 1911, Cameron had just passed her 97th birthday. Cameron co-founded the community of Cameron Park with her husband, the late Larry Cameron.

Cameron Park came to be partly because of a courtship that took place in 1935 during the Depression. Larry and Ruth both worked in Sacramento, and Larry owned a car. On weekends, the two used to pool their resources to purchase gas money to go on a picnic. They drove to an area made scenic by a stream and oak trees - now Cambridge Road and Highway 50. The two married in 1936.

Professionally, Larry worked first in insurance and then in a Pontiac dealership. He set up a cattle ranch on Winding Way in Sacramento, which ultimately he sold to the state of California to build American River College.

The couple relocated and reestablished their cattle ranch in Rescue.

During the 1950s, Ruth and Larry purchased seven ranches amounting to 3,000 acres. They had plans to develop the area with housing, golf course and country club and an air park with some homes having private access, a feature that was innovative at the time and is still not common. Ruth named the new community Cameron Park.

Good-bye for now

Ruth was active right up until she entered the hospital only one week before her death.

'I visited her when she was in the hospital. She mentioned to me that Larry had died in January 1992. She was thinking of that because it was January and she was in the hospital,' said Ruth's nephew Arthur Lichtman of Sacramento.

The couple was married for 56 years. They were love birds throughout the entire marriage, frequently holding hands even during the years Ruth was Larry's caretaker as well as his wife,

according to a family friend.

A Rotary acquaintance, Art Cort, 81, of Latrobe was shown a card sent to Ruth while she was in the hospital. 'It was from Ruth's cousin Grace Gaston. Grace had written, 'Ruth, you are our inspiration. Our lives are so much fuller because of your amazing spirit. You are amazing, loving, generous and fearless. Thank you for all the moments and memories. P.S. Good-bye for now.' Good-bye for now was one of Ruth's sayings. She always said that instead of just good-bye. She wanted people to know the good-bye was only temporary,' Cort said.

High style

Cameron was a woman with many facets. Charming and elegant, she had style and personified the words 'a real lady.'

Cameron grew up in Long Island, N.Y., where her mother engaged an English tutor for her studies. When Cameron entered the professional world, she chose a role for which she was well suited, the world of high fashion, modeling hats in France. While there, she learned to speak fluent French. Committed to retaining her expertise in French, Cameron was an avid member of the French Club in El Dorado County.

By the time Cameron arrived in Sacramento, she was working in cosmetics.

'She was well turned out. She enjoyed fashion her whole life,' Lichtman said.

Cameron was a crack tennis player as well as an Olympic quality fencer. She loved to swim. She adored opera and drove alone to and from San Francisco in one day to experience a performance.

Cameron drove her car until she was 94 years old - a big black Lincoln Continental. Hearsay has it that the car could occasionally be spotted going down the freeway at a right fast clip.

Cameron was a fighter who persevered against the odds.

'She recovered from intracranial (brain) surgery and worked herself back to health,' said David Becker of Becker, Runkle & Laurie in Placerville.

'She was always intent on the person to whom she was speaking. Very intense and interested. She was traveled, worldly and experienced. She was warm, charming, engaging, trusting and loyal with friends. She put causes before herself,' Becker said.

Causes and commitments

Cameron was very active in a number of causes and concerns which spanned a wide variety of interests and commitments.

During World War II, Cameron worked for the Red Cross.

She was a driving force in the Friends of Cameron Park Library. She worked on behalf of the Crippled Children's Society and Easter Seals. She served as a Pink Lady at Marshall Hospital, going the extra mile by driving people to their dialysis appointments. She assisted in the special education class at Schnell School.

'I've know Ruth Cameron for close to 30 years,' said Normadene Carpenter of Placerville.

'Ruth was active in the Marble Valley Regional Center for the Arts. She was also a member of the El Dorado County Community Concert Society,' Carpenter said.

This list mentions only some of Cameron's many contributions to the community.

'Ruth was a most gracious woman and a friend to all she met. I had the good fortune to sit at her table at our weekly Rotary meetings, and I always marveled at her wit and upbeat spirit. She has always been and always will be an inspiration to me,' said fellow Rotarian Mike Neal.

Awards and famous folk

The couple hobnobbed with the rich and famous. Arnold Palmer came up for the opening of the Cameron Park Country Club and Air Park. The couple was good friends with boxer Jack Dempsey, who also attended the opening. A host of photographs of Ruth and Larry with celebrities lined the walls of their home in Rescue.

In addition to sharing the limelight with Larry, Ruth garnered her own share of honors and recognition.

She was selected as El Dorado Rose in 1992. She was an honorary member of the Cameron Park Rotary Club and an honorary member of the Cameron Park Country Club. She was recognized by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and Cameron Park Sorooptimist Club. She received an award from Cameron Park Chamber of Commerce. The Larry Cameron Award for entrepreneurship was inspired by the work of both Larry and Ruth.

During the last few years, Dr. Norm Hedley, a retired physician, drove Cameron to and from Rotary meetings. 'She was honorary because she had distinguished herself as a special person,' Hedley said.

'She never had a bad word to say to anybody. She never complained. She was determined and forthright. She had seen a lot of changes. She knew people. She was very diplomatic. She knew just what to say, and she had a phenomenal memory,' Lichtman said.

The church connection

Cameron was a longtime member of Foothills United Methodist Church in Rescue. She and her husband donated the faceted glass windows for the church. Also, Cameron took a trip to Israel with a church group guided by her pastor at the time, the Rev. Larry George.

George said, 'Ruth will always be an inspiration to everyone who knew her. Ruth took a fall one Christmas Eve and was taken to the hospital by ambulance. When I got to the hospital, all she had to say was how beautiful the moonlight and stars in the sky were out the window of the ambulance.'

The Rev. Dave Bunje, 60, of Shingle Springs, current pastor of the church, said, 'Ruth was always very excited to talk about her connection to the church. Their house was built high up on a hill, and it overlooked the church. I used to think of Ruth and Larry as our angelic protectors.

'When the church was under construction in the 1980s, they came in to take a look and see the faceted glass windows. Words from Psalm 121 were inscribed on one of the windows: 'I lift my eyes to the hills.' I think the words gave them strength, support and inspiration. Look where they built their home.'

Ruth Cameron will be honored at a service to be held in March officiated by Bunje with George assisting. Details are forthcoming.

A memorial fund has been set up in honor of Cameron. Contributions can be sent to Fund for Cameron Park, El Dorado Community Foundation, PO Box 1388, Placerville 95667.

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