

WOMEN UNDER THE RANGER HAT

THE FIRST WOMAN TO JOIN the state park ranger field force was Harriett “Petey” Weaver in 1930. She would work in the department for 20 years and retire from state park service in 1950 with “Deputy Ranger” badge #105.

Petey’s park career came about from a visit to the California Redwood Park in 1929. She recounted that the day she drove under the park entrance sign, “California Redwood Park — To be Preserved in a State Of Nature,” changed her life. Her arrival in the ranger work force a year later ended a 75 year tradition of male only rangers. Petey would work in four different parks over the next 20 years. An author of over 10 outdoor related books, she also chronicled her time in state parks in a booklet titled, *“Them Were the Days!”*

Additional women served shorter periods in the early ranger ranks. One was Clara B. Morrill who served three years at Marshall Gold Discovery State Park. Starting in 1932, she replaced her deceased husband who had been the Marshall ranger for 15 years. Several other women are listed in the Park Commission Minutes of the early 1930s as being designated as “police Officers for and in State Parks of California.” All were assigned to historical parks. These women included Laura Bride Powers at Monterey, Theoda D. Borie at Sonoma, Anna Bell Vance at Pio Pico, Mrs. Eugene Sage Abbott at Monterey Theater, and Mrs. W. H. Wirt. The 1938 Division of Parks roster lists additional women including Mrs. Isabel Hartigan at Monterey, Dolores Alvarado Connors at Pio Pico, Mrs. Pauline Hays at Sonoma Mission, Mary L. Greene at Monterey, Daisy V. Barbour at Sonoma, and Erema Armitage at Pio Pico Mansion.

The first curator at the Vallejo Home State Historic Monument was Luisa Vallejo Emparan who served from 1933 to 1943. Also working at Vallejo Home in the 1940’s was Madie D. Brown. Brown had been the first woman to be appointed to the State Park Commission in 1931 and was a Commission member for five years. Another early woman Park Commissioner was Mrs. Grace Richardson Butterfield. An activist and

former president of the California Federation of Women’s Clubs, Mrs. Butterfield was appointed to the Commission in 1936. In 1921, before the establishment of a statewide park commission, Mrs. Maude L. Dodge was appointed to the Mt. Diablo State Park Commission.

Following Petey Weaver’s retirement from state parks in 1950, there was a 19 year gap in the hiring of women into ranger work. The earlier women rangers in historical parks had been replaced by men or the positions reclassified as guides or curators. It was not until 1969 that women were again hired into ranger positions. About a dozen women were hired into part-time ranger jobs between 1969 and 1971. Two of these, Paula Pennington and Holly Huenemann, stayed on and pursued careers as state park rangers.

Paula Peterson became the first full-time modern woman ranger in 1972. Paula had a difficult task being the first, of what would be many, women to permanently enter the ranger ranks in modern times. Be it finding a proper uniform or just the idea of women in law enforcement, Paula and early women rangers had many problems and stereotypes to overcome. Even the public was a bit confused. Newspapers around the state came out with headlines like, “First Girl Ranger At Big Basin,” “Paula’s Pretty — And a Park Ranger” and “Perils of Paula, The Park Ranger.” Paula now serves as a chief ranger. Other early women rangers who have pursued park careers are Kate Foley, Kay Schmidt Robinson, Sherrin Grout and Mary Stokes.

From one permanent women ranger in 1972, there are now 91 women who serve in all levels within the ranger ranks. Women make up about 20% of the state park ranger service.



Top: Petey Weaver broke the 75 year all-male ranger tradition in 1930. Left: Ranger Holly Huenemann gives direction to a young OHV motorcyclist.