They made

# Chula Vista History!

Hazel Goes Cook

## Hazel Goes Cook: an Extraordinary Businesswoman

Although she was born in a century when women rarely worked outside the home and didn't have the right to vote, Hazel Goes Cook was a leader in the citrus business in Chula Vista and was elected to serve on the elementary school board for 50 years.

**This portrait of Hazel Goes Cook was probably taken while she was serving on the board of the Chula Vista Elementary School District.**

Hazel Goes was born in Chicago, Illinois, on Dec. 14, 1884. Not too much is known about her early years, however it's likely that Hazel was a good student in school and came from a well-to-do family.

In the early 1900s, only a few men and even fewer women were lucky enough to go to college. Hazel attended and graduated from the prestigious Smith College in Massachusetts—a private women's school.

Two years after Hazel graduated from college she married Maxwell Cook. The couple lived in Chicago for a time before they decided to move west because of Maxwell's ill health. He had survived scarlet fever which left him with a weak heart. Scarlet fever was once a very deadly disease before the discovery of antibiotics.

In 1910, the couple originally headed out to Oregon. Instead they spent many months traveling south and ended up in Chula Vista. In 1911, the Cooks bought five acres of land that cost $25 an acre and started to build a house on the highest point which had views of both the ocean and the mountains. In the same year that Hazel and Maxwell Cook

**When Hazel Goes Cook moved to Chula Vista in 1910, it had a few orchard houses surrounded by hundreds of acres of lemon trees.**

arrived in Chula Vista, the community of only 550 residents had just voted to become an official city.

In these early years, Chula Vista was widely known as the "Lemon Capital of the World" so the Cooks also decided to go into the lemon ranching business. Unfortunately, a freeze had killed most of the young trees in the nurseries so it wasn't until 1914 that the first lemon trees were planted on the Cook land. While waiting for the trees to mature for the first harvest six years later, the Cooks bought more acreage and planted more trees. Luckily, Hazel was able to continue to live well because of money from an inheritance.

**In 1911, Hazel Goes Cook and her husband, Maxwell, purchased five acres and had this Cape Cod-style house constructed for them.**

**Ladders were used by the crews to pick thousand of lemons in Chula Vista including the ones grown on the Cook ranch. For many years, the city was known as the "Lemon Capital of the World."**

Eventually, the Cook Ranch grew to more than 55 acres and had a total of almost 1,400 lemon trees. Hazel was active in their ranching business even though at the time it was uncommon for a woman to be a boss in the male-dominated occupation.

While lemons in Chula Vista were grown on a number of different ranches, packing houses quickly became popular with Chula Vista's orchard owners. The packing houses did everything except grow the lemons. That included picking, hauling, washing, sorting, packing and shipping the crop.

Most of the packing houses in Chula Vista started out

**Hazel Goes Cook was president of the board of the M.O.D. citrus packing plant for many years. This photo shows M.O.D. before the large plant stopped running in 1960 and the building was torn down in 1965.**

small but over time grew to employ hundreds of employees in big buildings that included power machinery and refrigeration. The packing plants put the boxes of lemons on trains headed for the East Coast where they fetched the highest prices right before Fourth of July celebrations.

Originally, Hazel hired the Chula Vista Citrus Packing House. However, after a problem with the manager there, she took her business to the Chula Vista Mutual Lemon Association which partnered with M.O.D. (Mutual Orange Distributors). The M.O.D. plant was located on the property at Center and Landis streets adjacent to downtown Chula Vista. It took over a small operation that started more than 15 years earlier.

Hazel was an intelligent and respected businesswoman which earned her a seat on the all-male board of directors of the M.O.D. citrus packing house. She served as president for many years. M.O.D. was well-known for selling citrus under the "Pure Gold" logo.

After she and her husband divorced, Hazel ran the lemon ranch by herself . By the early 1960s, the lemon industry was no longer a money-maker. Hazel decided to subdivide her land and sell the lots for houses. She kept her

**Railroad tracks ran right up to a shipping dock outside of the M.O.D. packing plant. Trains were loaded with boxes of lemons headed across the U.S.**

white frame 12-room house on seven acres on Pepper Tree Lane, not far from Hilltop Drive.

When Hazel first came to California in 1911 women had just won the right to vote in the state. In 1920, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified making women throughout the United States eligible to vote in elections.

Only two years after the right to vote had been won, Hazel was elected to the school board of the Chula Vista Elementary School District. In 1922, the district only had one school and 250 students. Amazingly, Hazel continued to

**In the early 1900s, the lemon packing plants in Chula Vista employed both men and women.**

**Chula Vista's lemon packing plants used assembly lines to wash, sort and box the fruit for shipping. Employees—like these pictured in the 1920s—did most of the work by hand.**

serve on the board for 50 years. During her years of service on the board, the district grew to 26 schools with 17,000 students.

While on the school board, Hazel supported music, libraries, special education and gifted programs as well as basic education. She was instrumental in starting the hot lunch program and even landscaped several new schools.

When she retired from the board at the age of 87, Hazel was praised by school superintendents, fellow board members and community leaders. At the time she said, "so many things have been said about what I've done for the district. I just want you to know it's not a one-way street. There's a great deal more coming your way than you can possibly ever give."

In addition to running her business and doing volunteer work, exercise was an important part of Hazel's life. She exercised daily until near the end of her life. She loved playing tennis and had a tennis court at her house in Chula Vista.

When Hazel was about 70 years old, her doctor told her to give up tennis. She did stop playing tennis but took up swimming—replacing her tennis court with a swimming pool. She swam laps in the huge pool until she was 92 years old. Hazel died in 1978 at the age of 93.

During her long life, Hazel Goes Cook was one of the best-known women in Chula Vista. She received many awards and recognition. Her Cape Cod style orchard house remains as one of Chula Vista's historic sites and Hazel Goes Cook Elementary School was named in her honor.

**At one time the Cook property had many lemon trees and included a tennis court. By the time this photo was taken in the 1960s, Hazel Goes Cook had sold much of her land but kept her house and replaced the tennis court with a huge swimming pool.**

This booklet is one of five produced cooperatively by the Altrusa Club of Chula Vista Inc. Foundation; the Chula Vista Elementary School District; and the Chula Vista Public Library. Altrusa initiated the project and its Foundation printed the brochures as the club's contribution to the celebration of the City of Chula Vista's Centennial in 2011. The project leads were Altrusa member Jeri Gulbransen Gustafsson, who researched and wrote the brochures; CVESD Assistant Superintendent John Nelson, who edited the copy and coordinated use of the booklets with the third grade local history curriculum; and CVPL Librarian Donna Golden, who provided research materials and photographs from the library's Local History Collection. The graphic design was completed by Komin Design.