

CPRS District II
Recreation, Park and Leisure

2009 Hall of Honor

Legacy Category

Effie Yeaw

May 5, 1900 – January 3, 1970

NATURE EDUCATOR

PIONEERING ACTIVIST FOR PRESERVATION OF THE AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY AND OAK TREES



- One of the founding members of the Save the American River Association.
- Member of the “Committee of Concern,” a public advocacy committee to establish the American River Parkway.
- Pioneered the nature study program in Deterding Woods (now called the Effie Yeaw Nature Area).
- Recipient of the American Motors Corporation Conservation Award, 1965.
- Author and illustrator of the first edition of the field guide, *The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region*, 1959.
- Contributor to *Oaks, Our Heritage Trees*, Indoor-Outdoor Natural Learning Experiences and Cultural Summer School Science Unit (k-3).

Hall of Honor – Legacy Category

Name of Nominee: **Effie Yeaw** May 5, 1900 – January 3, 1970

(The name Yeaw rhymes with “jaw” and is a name of Scottish origin.)

Name of Person Making Nomination: Marilee Flannery, Director, Effie Yeaw Nature Center

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Specific Projects or Programs candidate responsible for accomplishing:

Leadership Positions held:

As a member of the “Committee of Concern” Effie worked diligently to pressure the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors to establish the American River Parkway; she was also a founder and secretary of the all-volunteer Save the American River Association (SARA). SARA kept the newly formed County Department of Parks and Recreation focused on purchasing land for the Parkway.

Service to the Public:

She pioneered the nature study program in Deterding Woods (now called the Effie Yeaw Nature Area). Effie Yeaw took hundreds of children on their first nature hikes in these woods. She worked industriously to get the Board of Supervisors to adopt a tree control ordinance to protect native heritage oak trees; passed in 1957. She did her part to plant and protect many native trees.

Awards and Honors:

The only interpretive nature center in the American River Parkway and Sacramento County was named for Effie Yeaw. At Sacramento High School she was President of the Biological Honor Society. Her life and work were featured in many newspaper articles during the years she worked to teach children about the natural and cultural history of the American River. She was featured in a *Sunset Magazine* article in 1964 titled, *How the American River was “saved”*. In 1965 she received the American Motors Corporation Conservation Award.

Professional Publications:

Effie Yeaw wrote and illustrated the first edition of the popular field guide The Outdoor World of the Sacramento Region. Published for teachers in 1959 it has been revised and reprinted seven times, with thousands of copies sold. She also contributed to Oaks, Our Heritage Trees, Indoor-Outdoor Natural Learning Experiences and Cultural Summer School Science Unit (k-3).

Training and Education:

Effie Yeaw attended Sacramento High School and then went to the University of California at Berkeley where, in 1922, she received her Bachelor’s degree in Social Studies. In 1932 she received her Master’s Degree in Social Studies from the University of Hawaii.

Other Noteworthy Information:

Effie Yeaw was an elementary and junior high school teacher in Sacramento for seven years. She then moved to Hawaii where she taught junior high school for four years while earning her master's degree. She returned to Sacramento and married Mr. William Yeaw and lived in Carmichael on a 5 acre farm. She raised her three children and resumed her elementary teaching career in the Arden-Carmichael area in the early fifties. She retired in 1962 and began working full time to save the American River as a public parkway so that everyone would be able to enjoy this river jewel. In 1962 the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors adopted a plan for the development of an entire American River Parkway. The first Director of the County Parks Department said that Effie was, "very effective in a quiet, unassuming way" in gaining the support of the public and the Board of Supervisors.

November 13, 2008

Kelly Gonzalez, Recreation Superintendent
Consumnes Community Service District
8820 Elk Grove Boulevard, Suite 3
Elk Grove, CA 95624

Dear Kelly,

This letter represents my support for Effie Yeaw's induction into the District II Hall of Honor, Legacy Category, for the following reasons:

1. Effie, as a volunteer, developed the first interpretative tour guide program for Sacramento County Parks and Recreation Department in the mid 1960's. In addition, she trained and helped supervise staff for the program.
2. Effie contributed hundreds of volunteer hours giving interpretative tours to adults and children along the American River.
3. Effie helped write and provided illustrated drawings for the book entitled, "Natural History Guide for the Greater Sacramento Region". This guide brought together, in one book, comments and useful information concerning the natural history of our region.
4. Effie actively supported and contributed many hours for the development of Sacramento County's American River Parkway Master Plan.
5. She was the driving source behind the development of the tree control ordinance for Sacramento County. The primary purpose of this ordinance, which was adopted by County Board of Supervisors in 1957, was to preserve heritage oak trees in the county.
6. After many years of volunteer interpretive work, Effie was hired by the Sacramento County Parks and Recreation Department where she continued leading and supervising tours for thousands of school children at what is now called the "Effie Yeaw Nature Area" at Ancil Hoffman County Regional Park.

Kelly Gonzalez

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Effie Yeaw was a retired teacher, conservationist and guide in introducing thousands of children to the natural areas of the American River Parkway, and was a guiding spirit for developing interpretive programs throughout the greater Sacramento area.

It is with great honor that I also support Effie's induction into District II Hall of Honor.

Respectively submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patrick P. Fenwick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "P" and "F".

Patrick P. Fenwick
Retired Professional









THE SACRAMENTO BEE

LOCAL and SUPERIOR CALIFORNIA
NEWS; EDITORIALS; FEATURES

Effie Yeaw, Long A Protector Of Sacramento's Nature Heritage, Teaches Children To Appreciate Outdoors

By Peter Weisser

TOWERING above the new Carmichael postoffice is a majestic deodar cedar tree. It is a symbol of victory to those who fought—and defeated—a federal government building plan which would have torn it out three years ago this fall. It is also a living monument to the tenacious character of the woman who led the battle, Mrs. William H. Yeaw.

Mrs. Yeaw lives at 6001 Palm Drive, just across the street from the postoffice. When the government announced plans to grade the site and remove the tree, she rallied defenders, enlisted the aid of the contractor, William A. Campbell and, "with a little juggling," saved the cedar.

Mrs. Yeaw, known as Effie to a legion of admirers, characteristically is embarrassed when her role in the cedar fight is mentioned. But she delights in revealing that one government agency sent her a letter solemnly explaining why the tree had to go—after the postoffice was built. With tree.

Effie Yeaw is a quietly zealous lover of nature. Since that love first was kindled when she was a child picking wild flowers in the desert, she has awakened thousands of city children to an awareness of nature they

would have missed. She has carried a huge, unglamorous burden to secretarial and committee work in the cause of conservation.

And she has not hesitated to put aside modesty to plunge into controversy when she feels that Sacramento's natural heritage is threatened by the expansion of a civilization enchanted with progress.

Now a grandmother in her 60s and officially retired after a 26 year teaching career, Mrs. Yeaw is the acknowledged leader among Sacramento conservationists.

"The number one gal in conservation," is the tribute paid her by J. Martin Weber, a consultant in education to the county superintendent of schools.

Warner Marsh, a landscape architect, says, "We consider her very much the leader of the conservation movement here."

Dr. J. Harold Severaid, president of the Save The American River Association, believes that Mrs. Yeaw "epitomizes the philosophy of conservation."

C. M. Goethe, philanthropist and naturalist, wrote that, "I can recall no one who is quietly and unostentatiously accomplishing good more efficiently than Mrs. Yeaw. This, in a range of activities."

She was a moving force in founding the Save The American River Association and serves as its secretary.

She is chairman of the conservation committee of the Sacramento Audubon Society and doubles as secretary for the C. M. Goethe Arboretum Society and the Sacramento River Valley District of California Garden Clubs, Inc.

Natural History Handbook

This month a 200 page natural history handbook of the Sacramento region, which explores the flora and fauna, history and Indian background of the area, is being published by the county school district. It will be distributed free to all teachers in the county district and at cost to those in other districts.

"The germ of the idea for that book is Effie Yeaw's," says Dr. Severaid.

Effie contributed numerous sketches of plants and animals to the book.

She leads thousands of school children each year on nature walks into the 40 acre preserve in the Ancil Hoffman Park, a nature study area which owes its existence to her.

Now she is giving away oak seedlings in a one woman reforestation campaign to get wild, blue and native oaks planted on Sacramento schoolgrounds.

"We kid her about this," says Marsh. "She's really all hepped on oak trees."

Mrs. Yeaw freely admits she loves California's "heritage oaks." To keep them from extinction she has about 100 oak seedlings in gallon cans outside her garage in Carmichael, under an enormous 20 year old oak. She gives the seedling free to anyone who wants one.

Weber sees the effort as "spurring on a move here in the county to reforest the valley floor with the native oak, the blue oak and the live oak."

Annual Bird Census

Mrs. Yeaw takes part each winter in the annual nationwide bird census conducted by the Audubon Society the week after Christmas.

And she minsters to a menagerie of birds and animals in her home, including a lame winged crow named James Carlisle, two mockingbirds, a stellar jay, a skunk and a brewer's blackbird named Chuckie, who bathes in Effie's sink.

"Most women her age are sitting around feeling sorry for themselves," said Helen B. Norbont of 3206 St. Matthews Drive, a friend of Effie's.

"This woman just doesn't have time. She's too busy." Right now Effie is spearheading a move to reactivate a county tree ordinance to provide, among other things, "a fair hearing before a tree can be condemned."

Mrs. Yeaw feels a committee should review each case. "The reviewing committee should include an attorney, a landscape architect, a construction engineer, and just plain citizens who have a wholesome respect for our heritage trees."

"Monetary values should be placed on trees since unfortunately dollars and cents are the only language some officials in high places understand."

Nature For Blind

She is busy firing out correspondence for conservation and garden groups, teaching on a substitute basis and now is exploring the idea of a special section in the Hoffman Park preserve exclusively for blind children. She bases the idea on a Please Touch The Flowers program in the Brooklyn Botanical Museum.

A clear eyed, bespectacled woman with a direct, unaffected manner and a gift for plain talk, Mrs. Yeaw is a far cry from the overbearing committee woman stereotype.

"She doesn't set the world on fire with a lot of noise," Mrs. Norbont observes. "But she sure gets things done."

She entered conservation work full time in the late 1940s when she joined the Audubon Society. From 1952 to 1955 she headed the Carmichael Conservation Center, a zoo project similar to the Sacramento Junior Museum, where her son, Edward, 23, is curator.

Herb E. Winterstein, then a school administrator in the Arden Carmichael district, said, "Effie was our curator. If we found a skunk or something, we'd take it over to Effie. She even had a deer there."

Children still bring her birds with broken wings or legs and Marsh observes, "It's amazing when you enter her house to find birds flying around."

The conservation center vanished after a park and school dispute, but Effie had hit on the idea of taking kids into nature, rather than exhibiting animals in cages. Weber said Effie was a local pioneer in "the use of the outdoors as an educational tool."

"She was one of the first to get the idea of teaching natural history in Deterding woods," recalls Winterstein. The idea ripened into the present nature preserve in Ancil Hoffman Park.

William B. Pond, Sacramento County Park and Recreation Director, recalls that she "started in 1957 or 1958 taking classes from the Arden Carmichael School District through the Deterding woods."

"From May through August of this year she has conducted 45 tours of youth groups totaling 1,528 youngsters through the nature area of Ancil Hoffman Park."

Take Children to Nature

Mrs. Yeaw contends the way "to keep modern children in touch with nature" is to take them out into it. She cites Arthur G. Etter of Michigan State University:

"The chief effect of our modern expansionism and materialism is to wall the child up in the city, suburb or TV room, to protect him from experience by transporting him by car and bus, to make his haunts inaccessible by barriers of traffic, to contaminate his swimming hole with waste, and to divert him with activities and the necessity for conforming."

She thinks a purely academic understanding of life is not enough and quotes Etter again:

"How much respect for life is taught today? In our feverish way, we incite students to go into science, and what do we teach them of life: How to dissect it, change it, kill it, use it—everything but how to appreciate it."

Her own appreciation was instilled on walks she took with her father in the Mojave desert near Barstow, where her parents, both teachers, had moved from Chico, Butte County, where she was born.

"Parental influence was important," she said and a zoology course in the University of California in Berkeley with "emphasis on field trips and study in the out of doors" intensified it.

But Effie majored in social studies and, following graduation in 1922, began teaching, first in Oakland, and then for seven years in Sacramento in the Harkness School and the Sutter Junior High School.

Taught In Hawaii

Then she moved to the Hawaiian Islands where she taught for four years in the Kalakawa Junior High School and studied at the University of Hawaii. She was awarded her master's degree there in 1932.

It took a persuasive young Western Pacific auditor, William H. Yeaw, to get Effie to come back to California to marry him, and he had to make a trip to Hawaii to do it.

Even so, Effie took a two year leave of absence rather than cut off her Hawaiian contract entirely.

"After the second baby was born," she recalls, "I thought I'd better cancel the leave of absence."

The Yeaws have three children, Galen, who works in the soil testing laboratory in the state division of highways; Ellen, who lives now in Sebastopol, Sonoma County, and Edward, the Junior Museum curator. The Yeaws have five grandchildren.

Effie taught intermittently during the war and returned to full time teaching when her children were grown, from 1948 until retirement two years ago. Then she plunged into the start of the Save The American River Association (SARA), a citizens group formed to back a county plan to preserve a 23 mile long area lining the banks of the American River as a wilderness park in the heart of the exploding metropolis.

5,000 Acre Parkway

The greenbelt parkway, which would enclose some 5,000 acres on both banks of the American from Nimbus Dam,

See Effie, Page B8.



A pet blackbird, held by Mrs. Yeaw, seems delighted as Kent Hammit and Karen Balkow feed it.



Absorbed youngsters get an eye level view of a skunk from Mrs. Yeaw's menagerie. Bee Photos by Harlin Smith

