

## The Beginning of Soroptimist

### The Founders of the Alameda County Club



Third anniversary of the Founding Club in Oakland, 1924

While Stuart Morrow may have undertaken the original work to actually form a club of women from the professions and business in Alameda County, it was the women themselves who gave Morrow the idea, and who actually worked together with him to establish the first Soroptimist club in Alameda County, California. As the club moved through its establishment, this first club provided a template that many newly chartered clubs would later emulate. This is an introduction to some of the women who helped found the Soroptimist Club of Alameda County.

## Stuart Morrow and the Idea of Women's Service Clubs

A chance meeting at the Parker-Goddard Secretarial school with one of the school owners, Adelaide Goddard, was the spark that gave Stuart Morrow the idea to organize service clubs for women, a venture that quickly became "Soroptimist".



Adelaide Goddard, the woman who sparked the idea that became Soroptimist.

**SOROPTIMIST**

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

Stuart Morrow was an early Rotary member, and organized Rotary clubs beginning in 1905. He was a lawyer, originally from Ireland, and he later moved to the United States. He visited the Parker-Goddard Secretarial School in Oakland, CA, in the hopes of finding more men to join a service club; whether he was trying to form a Rotary club, or had moved his affiliations over to Optimist Clubs as some of the early Soroptimist members suggested in an oral history, is not known for certain.

However, he was surprised when he arrived and found that the school was owned by two women; Adelaide Goddard and Mabel Parker. Adelaide Goddard told Morrow that if men's service clubs ever opened membership to women, she would sign up. This gave Morrow the idea to organize service clubs for women. Both Mabel Parker and Adelaide Goddard became charter members of the first Soroptimist club.

## Morrow's Search for Professional Women



Stuart Morrow, the original owner of Soroptimist

May 1921:

- Morrow's initial meetings with professional women.
- The initial group invited more women to their meetings, building the club's eventual membership to 80 women.

**SOROPTIMIST**

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

From his years of organizing clubs, Stuart had connections with Rotary and the Chamber of Commerce. They were able to help Morrow find the first women that he met with, and many others who joined the charter through the Summer of 1921. The organizational meetings were held at the Venus Cafe in Oakland on Broadway Street.

Recruiting the first charter members was a collaboration between Morrow working his connections, and the growing number of women who became the early members reaching out in their networks. Each week, more local women would be invited as speakers to a meeting and if the group thought she would be a good fit, she would be invited to join the club.

## The First Nine Women of Soroptimist

The first women who met with Morrow in the initial meetings show how widespread the interest for a woman's club was across professions:

**Blanche Rollar-** Owner  
Corset & specialty shop

**Hattie Lehnardt-** Owner  
confectionary shop

**Sylvia Stenberg-** Owner  
Vogue Pleating and Button  
Company

**Sarah Hammond-** Owner  
Colonial Cafeteria



Gladys Barndollar

**Dr. Cassie C. Moreland-**  
Physician

**Sue Ballard-** Partner in men's  
clothing store

**Doris Tilton-** Beautician and  
scalp specialist

**Gladys Barndollar-** Owned a  
printing company

**Dr. Pauline Nusbaumer-** head  
of laboratory

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*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

Similar to Rotary, the new club looked for members working in a high-ranking position in their field, and gathered to learn about each other's professions and businesses, and be of a service to their fellow members and their community.

The original members worked in a variety of fields including; medicine, food service, clothing, personal care, and printing. A diverse membership would become something very important to Soroptimist as the original club was formed, and as they formed more clubs later. Gladys Barndollar was a major asset for Stuart Morrow. She used her connections as the owner of a local printing business to bring other interested women to the organizational meetings.

## Who Could Become a Soroptimist?

The Alameda County club set membership criteria

- Each member was from a different profession or vocation and held an “important rank”.

### Fees

Initiation fee/dues: \$15

Annual dues thereafter: \$18

1921-CHARTER MEMBERS  
APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP  
I hereby make application for Charter Membership in the OAKLAND SOROPTIMISTS CLUB, and agree to conform to the By-Laws of said Club as adopted. In case of rejection, fee will be returned.  
Firm Name: The Multigraph Letter Co. Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: 329-13th St - Oakland, Calif.  
Name of Representative (Miss or Mrs.): Mrs. Gladys A. Barndollar  
Classification: Multigraph Co. Recommended by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: 6-11-21  
Charter Membership Initiation Fee and one Year's Dues, \$15.00. Check for Initiation Fee must accompany application. Make Checks payable to STUART MONROE Managing Director.

Gladys Barndollar's member application June 11, 1921

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The \$15 initiation fee and dues that members paid in 1921 is the equivalent to \$260 in 2020.

Membership could be lost if there were multiple absences from meetings (5 out of 9). Illnesses and business reasons were excused. Members were assigned as captains to help build bonds and rapport between members. If a member needed to be absent at any time, she would advise her captain.

## Finding “Soroptimist”

*“Soroptimist in its inception, in its very name has taken its foundation stone the wisdom of the ancients.” – Helena M. Gamble*

Loosely based on the Latin

“soror” = sister

“optima” = best

This led to the eventual translation of Soroptimist’s name as “Best for Women”.



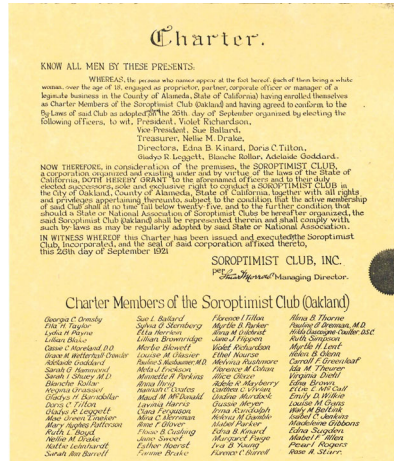
Alameda County Soroptimists in a parade float, 1924

**SOROPTIMIST**

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

The name for Soroptimist came about sometime in their initial meetings in the Summer of 1921 at the Venus Cafe. Some secondary sources in the Soroptimist archives credit Morrow with coming up the name, although it could have been a member who initially suggested the idea.

# Chartering the First Soroptimist Club



September 26, 1921 – Election of officers and board.

October 3, 1921 - “Founders Day” Installation dinner. 80 members meet in the Ivy Room of the Hotel Oakland.

Original charter, 1921

**SOROPTIMIST**

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

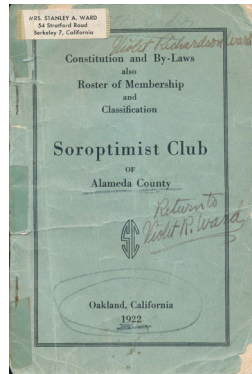
Morrow incorporated Soroptimist in California on August 21, 1921. The club charter was closed, and the club’s board of directors was elected about a month later on September 26.

Regular club meetings were held a week after the chartering dinner, beginning on October 10<sup>th</sup>.

Morrow had stated that he intended for the club (and subsequent clubs) to operate independently once it was organized. The agenda for the first meeting reflects this philosophy as that meeting was an open forum led by the President, Violet Richardson. They spoke about the aims and ideals of the club and what they stand for in their community.

These early Soroptimists were constrained by one of Morrow’s conditions, which would have been all too common for those times: members had to be white women. It is interesting that as we trace the history of Soroptimist, once Morrow was no longer involved in the organization, this condition was removed. In fact, a number of clubs repudiated the condition once they were chartered and operating independently from Morrow.

## The Elected Leadership 1921



Violet Richardson Ward's Roster and Constitution from 1922

### First Officers:

**Violet Richardson-** President  
**Sue L. Ballard-** Vice- President  
**Helena M. Gamble-** Secretary  
**Nellie M. Drake-** Treasurer

### Board Of Directors:

**Doris Tilton, Edna B. Kinard,**  
**Blanche Rollar, Louise M.**  
**Glasier, Gladys Leggett,**  
**Adelaide Goddard**

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*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

Violet Richardson was elected President after three rounds of voting. Violet said that “the caliber of the membership was such that any of those eighty women could well have been selected as president.”

Violet’s By-laws from 1922 show that there were five committees including; vocational education, publicity, programs, auditing, and hospitality.



## Constitution & By-Laws



Etching of Emily D. Wilkie, one of the women who helped draft the constitution and by-laws

**SOROPTIMIST**

- The first project was to draft the club's constitution and by-laws.
- Three members were tasked with creating this important legal framework: Emily D. Wilkie, Eloise B. Cushing, and Dr. Pauline Nusbaumer.
- The club's constitution and by-laws were approved on November 21, 1921.

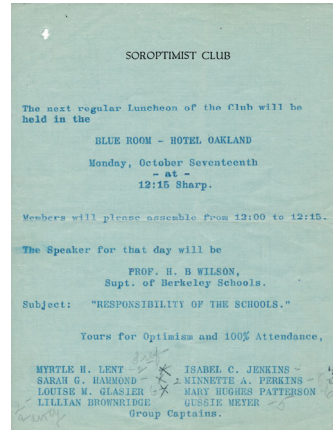
*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

Lawyer Eloise Cushing played a major role in drafting the Constitution and By-laws. As other clubs were chartered, she helped these clubs to prepare their own governing documents, using the Alameda County club documents as the framework.

Emily D. Wilkie also worked on the by-laws and was a valued member of Soroptimist. Violet Richardson Ward said that she "could have held any office in the club; but preferred helping others to function successfully. I believe Emily D. Wilkie assisted in many ways towards the success of our first federation magazine."

## Club Meetings

- Meetings were held weekly on Mondays at 12 pm in the Blue Room of the Hotel Oakland
- October 10, 1921—1<sup>st</sup> meeting one week after chartering
- Meetings typically featured invited speakers, member presentations, and club business



Agenda of October 17, 1921 meeting

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The club members decided they would be referred to by their first name as opposed to “Miss” or “Mrs.” or even “Dr.” and their surname. This tradition has continued down through Soroptimist history.

Violet Richardson’s first president’s report stated that, “We began and closed on time and have continued that practice throughout our charter year.” Timeliness was important to the women of the first club.

Many of the speakers were members because they believed it was important to educate the group on the work their fellow Soroptimists were doing. On November 14, 1921 Nellie Drake spoke about her profession, catering.

From the agenda you can see the first speaker was Professor H. B. Wilson who was a connection from Violet Richardson. He was the Superintendent of Berkeley Schools.

## Who were the members of the first Soroptimist Club?



Violet Richardson on a float

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*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

The women of the first club came from all different occupations and backgrounds, with many different interests and skills. Together they would form the blueprint of the earliest Soroptimist clubs. All members were required to be in active in the club in some manner, whether as officers or on the club's committees. Some of members would go on to serve in other clubs and helped to spread Soroptimist.

## Violet Richardson: A Fighter and a Leader



Etching of Violet Richardson

**SOROPTIMIST**

First President of the Alameda County Club

- went on strike three separate times at the University of California because she did not get paid as much as the male teachers
- later a physical education teacher with the Berkeley Public Schools
- only signed the charter after Stuart Morrow promised Soroptimist would become international

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

An unmarried professional woman at the time the Alameda County club was chartered, Violet was recommended for membership by the head of the California State Department of Physical Education, as an outstanding woman in the Health and Physical Education field. Violet saw a lot of barriers for professional women and remarked on how many people, even other women, did not want to hire women.

Her involvement in the community and accomplishments outside of Soroptimist were vast. She received B.A and M.A. in Education and Science from the University of California. She wrote large portions of the California State Manual on Physical Education, worked towards legislation for better physical education programs in schools, served on Executive board for Girls Scouts, and she served as president of Berkeley Teachers Association for two terms.

## Eloise Cushing: The Woman Behind the By-laws

Lawyer and law librarian

- legal knowledge essential to drafting the constitution and by-laws for many Soroptimist clubs
- served on the club's Vocational Education Committee, a major club program for helping young women find jobs
- later drafted the first federation by-laws



Etching of Eloise Cushing

**SOROPTIMIST**

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

Eloise Cushing was one of the first Soroptimist members who was not originally invited to the club. An invitation was sent to her co-worker who was not able to attend so she offered it to Eloise. After attending the meeting, she asked how much it was to join and paid on the spot.

Years later her expertise was essential to helping purchase the rights for Soroptimist from Stuart Morrow and put the ownership of the clubs in the hands of the women. Soon after, she was heavily involved in drafting the first federation bylaws.

## Helena M. Gamble: Club Organizer & Historian



Political organizer and campaign manager

- served as a paid club secretary
- Morrow hired her to organize other Soroptimist Clubs
- saved many of the clubs' earliest documents and correspondence, was later appointed the official Federation Historian
- collected histories from many of the early Soroptimist clubs

Etching of Helena Gamble

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Helena Gamble served as the Secretary when the club was chartered and she was on the publicity committee. She was paid as the Secretary, which was controversial among some of the early members.

When Stuart Morrow left to organize other clubs outside California, he hired Helena to help him organize clubs in California. She helped to charter the Sacramento and Long Beach clubs.

“We are business women. Business comrades representing each a different calling and serving first of all to attain a shoulder to shoulder unit of spirit expressed in a loyal cooperation and mutual unselfish service.”- Helena Gamble

## Who else made up the First Club?

### Medical:

**Louise Glasier**- Dentist

**Mae Green Lineker**- Optometrist

**Sarah Shuey**- Physician

**Minnette A. Perkins**- Optician

### Clothing:

**Sue Ballard**- Co-owner men's hat store

**Madame Regina Grassel**- Costume proprietor

**Florence I. Tilton**- Cleaning and Dyeing

1921-CHARTER MEMBER  
APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP  
I hereby make application for Charter Membership in the GAYLARD SOROPTIMIST CLUB, and agree to conform to the By-Laws of said Club as adopted. In case of rejection, fee will be returned.  
First Name Madame Regina Grassel Dist 3768 Madame Grassel Regina Grassel  
Address  
Name of Representative (Miss or Mrs.) Who  
Classification Costumer Recommended by Regina Grassel  
Date June 12, 1921  
Charter Membership Initiation Fee and one Year's Dues, \$16.00. Check for Initiation Fee and accompany application. Make checks payable to  
SOROPTIMIST Managing Director.\*

Madame Regina Grassel's Application to Soroptimist

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Many other women made up the first Soroptimist club. Many segments of professional activities and businesses in the Alameda County area were represented in this new club.

Although women in medicine were not usual in the 1920s, there were a number of women in medicine that became members of the club. Sarah I. Shuey, M.D. served as the first woman president of the The Alameda-Contra Costa Medical Association (ACCMA) and, as near as can be determined from a nationwide survey of medical societies, was the first female president of any medical society in the United States.

## Professional Fields in First Club



Meta J. Erickson, Railroad president and member of Soroptimist. Photo from the Sante Fe Magazine

### The Arts:

**Lilian Blake-** Art dealer

**Anna Ihrig-** Needlework

**Myrtle B. Parker-** Music studio

**Ruth L. Boyd-** Portraits/photography

**Hanna C. Coates-** Poem and song publisher

### Transportation:

**Meta J. Erickson-** Railroad president

**SOROPTIMIST**

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The arts were an area that many women worked in, and this segment contributed members to the new club including the visual and performing arts. Helena Gamble kept a copy of one of the songs Hanna C. Coates published called “Song of the Bird” among her historical papers that are now in the Soroptimist Archives.

The club’s members also illustrated the depths to which women were engaged in all facets of business, including the intriguing inclusion of a railroad president among its members. Meta Erickson had served as the president of the Amador Central Railroad for nine years when she became a charter member of the Alameda Club. At the time, she was the only woman railroad president in the world.



## Professional Fields in the First Club

### Finance:

**Gladys Leggett-** Insurance broker

**Edna Brown-** Life insurance

### Education:

**Esther Hoerst-** Engineering college

**Mira C. Merriman-** Girl's school

**Georgia C. Ormsby-** School director

**Jane Sweet-** Dance teacher



Etching of Gladys Leggett

**SOROPTIMIST**

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

Women in the Alameda County area were also fully engaged in financial business, with two members working in different areas of insurance. And in addition to Violet Richardson, Adelaide Goddard and Mabel Parker, a number of members were engaged in various facets of secondary, vocational, and higher education.

## Professional Fields in the First Club



Etching of Hattie Lenhardt

**SOROPTIMIST**

### Food Service:

**Hattie Lenhardt**- Confectioner proprietor

**Nettie M. Miller**- Partner in Miller's Ice Cream Shop

**Gussie Meyer**- Sandwich shop owner

**Nellie M. Drake**- Caterer

### Home Furnishings & Repair/Contractors:

**Lavinia Harris**- Automatic Water Heaters

**Fanny Brake**- Ladies furnishings

**Maude M. McDonald**- Sheet metal

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

Given that women were traditionally identified with life revolving around the hearth (cooking) and home, it is no surprise that a number of Alameda County's charter members were engaged in food service businesses, as well as endeavors to both physically maintain and decorate homes.

## The First Year

*"Let us work together and with others toward the development of a better womanhood, a better manhood, and a better citizenship."* **–Violet Richardson**

In the first year:  
22 new members joined  
14 charter members resigned

Highlights of the first year:

- fashion show
- the "Berkeley Banquet"



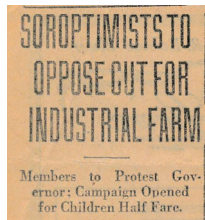
Charter members of the Alameda County Club

**SOROPTIMIST**

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

During its first year in existence, through 1922, there were 22 new members who joined the Alameda County club after the charter while 14 charter members resigned. Although the club did not delve deeply into service work until later in 1922, they did host a fashion show, and the Berkeley Banquet, where Soroptimists working in food service businesses showed off their culinary skills.

## Soroptimist Service & Advocacy



Newspaper clippings saved by Helena Gamble highlighting some service/advocacy endeavors

### Early service

- Vocational Guidance Program for young girls
- Heating plant for a rescue home
- Assistance to destitute families during the holidays
- 8 hour work-day bill
- "Save the Redwoods" campaign

**SOROPTIMIST**

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

Violet credits Mr. Monroe Deutsch, vice-president of the University of California for suggesting the club be more than a friendship and lunch club and also add a service component to their endeavors.

After the club was on sound footing the members turned their attentions to developing their service opportunities in 1922. One of their first women-focused projects was in collaboration with the YWCA. They established a vocational guidance bureau, interviewing young girls to help them figure out what job opportunities they could pursue. Eloise Cushing helped to head this committee. This bureau eventually became part of the California Employment Bureau. They also provide heating equipment to a local rescue home, and focused on providing relief to destitute families during the holiday season.

The club also started advocacy work they felt affected professional women. In 1923, they wrote letters to Governor who wanted to slash women's industrial farms budget and President Violet Richardson and other Soroptimists supported the 8-hour work-day bill. They also became involved in environmental advocacy to help save the ancient California Redwood forests.

These earliest projects would provide a template for other Soroptimist clubs as they were chartered to undertake service work that benefited women and girls, was focused on the

local community, as well as people and communities beyond Alameda County.

## Beyond the First Club

- New clubs chartered in San Francisco and Los Angeles in 1922
- Morrow moved East to charter clubs there
- Morrow left Soroptimist in hands of the club presidents and Helena Gamble began to charter more clubs in California.



Soroptimist Members at the White House during the 1928  
Soroptimist Founding Convention

**SOROPTIMIST**

*Bright Past, Brilliant Future*

Morrow always intended each club to be self-sufficient and independent. Morrow moved on to charter clubs in San Francisco and Los Angeles in 1922, and traveled East after that. When he left California, he granted general power to run the incorporated Soroptimist business in California to the presidents of the three California clubs: Violet Richardson, Fannie McG. William of the San Francisco Club, and Oda Faulconer of the Los Angeles Club.

Morrow also hired Helena Gamble to do additional chartering work. Some felt it wasn't right she was paid for this work, but in the end this made it easier for her to travel and set up clubs while the other members were tied to their local communities and their own jobs and businesses.

Eventually, in 1928, the Alameda County club changed its name to Oakland, when a new Soroptimist club, also in Alameda County, was chartered in Berkeley.

Through the efforts of an expanding band of Soroptimist members and Stuart Morrow, Soroptimist began to spread around North America, and Europe. In 1928, club delegates gathered in Washington, DC, to form an organization from all the independent Soroptimist clubs in North America and Europe, which became known as the Soroptimist International Association, and what we now know as Soroptimist International. The American Federation of Soroptimist Clubs, now called Soroptimist International of the Americas was

also formed at this meeting.

The work of these earliest founding members, coming from many different professions and businesses throughout Alameda County, set the stage for all the Soroptimist clubs that followed, through to the present day.



BRIGHT PAST  
BRILLIANT FUTURE