Women’s History Month 2020

Young Charmian Kittredge London Part 2

By Iris Jamahl Dunkle

One of the proudest moments in Charmian’s life at the time was the day she purchased her first horse, Belle, a sorrel trotting mare, from her Uncle Jay and Aunt Carrie’s ranch in Santa Clara. She brought the mare home on May 1, 1893. Photographs in the albums she assembled in later life show her first day sitting on a saddled Belle in front of her home in Berkeley and riding with her back to the photographer toward the freedom of the Berkeley Hills. Belle became Charmian’s closest companion. She rode her farther and farther away on jaunts to Marin and Sonoma County. In 1897, she went on one of the longest rides of her life, from Berkeley to Yosemite, where she joined Netta and a group of celebrated scientists, painters, photographers, political leaders, and founders of the Sierra Club, all members of the Overland Monthly set. It was a multiday ride, and the group stayed near a deserted farmhouse in Farmington on the way.

A leading geologist and professor at the University of Berkeley, Joseph Le Conte had joined forces with John Muir a decade earlier to encourage interest in preserving the wild and beautiful Yosemite Valley as a park, organizing visits and writing articles about it. On a visit in 1897 with members of the Overland Monthly crowd, Charmian met Le Conte, the landscape artist Henry “Harry” L. A. Culmer, the governor of California, James Herbert Budd, and the writer John Vance Cheney. Charmian spent much of the month in Yosemite with the 43-year-old Culmer, horseback riding, hiking, and swimming in the icy cold of the Merced River. Culmer, who was from Salt Lake City, had been invited to capture the beauty of the granite-faced valley in his plein-air painting. Charmian practiced her newly acquired photographic skills, which she
probably learned from Grace Hudson’s father, A.O. Carpenter, taking pictures of the breathtaking scenery.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\] While Netta may have been accompanied on the excursion by a lover, the significant feature of this trip is that Charmian and Netta were part of an artistic crowd of people associated with the Overland Monthly.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\] In photographs from this trip, Charmian is often pictured with Harry in the Yosemite photographs. She remained friends with Culmer until his death.

Photo is courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, Ca