



# Woman of California

SUSANNA BRYANT DAKIN

*By* W. W. ROBINSON

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## *Preface*

In the winter of 1967, a series of annual lectures was established in memory of Susanna Bryant Dakin. These lectures, presented under the auspices of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, were instituted and funded by Mr. and Mrs. Jake Zeitlin of Los Angeles, as a token of their devotion to Susanna Dakin.

The first lecture was delivered in December, 1967, by W. W. Robinson of Los Angeles. Published by The Friends of The Bancroft Library, in collaboration with The California Arboretum Foundation, Inc., of Arcadia, California, it is sent to you as a friend of these organizations. Susanna Dakin's staunch interest in the two institutions is well-known, and their cooperation in this publication is a happy tribute to her generous involvement in both northern and southern California.



# WOMAN OF CALIFORNIA

## *Susanna Bryant Dakin*

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I am honored to be asked to talk or write about Susanna Bryant Dakin, greatly honored. This gently persuasive woman, who won the admiration and affection of so many of us, contributed her superior talents to all of California.

Everyone who knew Susanna Dakin was aware of her abilities, her cultural interests, her deep understanding, and the range of her activities. I met her in 1940, served on various committees with her—in both Southern and Northern California—followed with admiration many of her pursuits, and had brief glimpses of her home life in Pasadena, Belvedere, and San Francisco. That is perhaps why I am asked to attempt the portrayal of the woman so fittingly called “Susanna.”

Through Lindley Bynum I met Susanna. I had read her *Scotch Paisano*, so knew something of her interests and the quality of her writing. I had also read a book—*Adobe Days*—written by a cousin, Sarah Bixby Smith, so was somewhat aware of Susanna’s background. I was delighted when Lindley, then associated with the Huntington Library, told me that the two of us were invited to have lunch with Susanna Dakin at her Pasadena home. I remember the occasion well. The sherry, originating in the cellar of Henry E. Huntington—for Dr. Bryant, Susanna’s father, was a friend and the personal physician of the railroad tycoon. The excellent food—for Susanna had a very good cook. The agreeable conversation—stimulated by the vibrant hostess.

Until 1951 Susanna Dakin was strictly a Southern Californian, and her activities were mostly Southern Californian. It is true, she wrote, in 1949, *The Lives of William Hartnell*, largely based on manuscript material in the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, an important historical contribution devoted to a many-faceted Californian whose home was in Monterey. This was a follow-up to *Scotch Paisano*, which had been based on Huntington Library manuscripts. During these Southern Californian years she was a heavy participant in activities literary, artistic, historic, and educational.

The Dakin family moved from their home on Rockwood Road in Pasa-



dena to the Bay Area, favored by Richard Dakin, Susanna's husband. Their first home there was on Belvedere Island. From Belvedere, Susanna wrote to a Los Angeles friend in April of 1956:

After a long time of homesickness . . . I now feel cheerful and full of the joy of living. For one thing, I had gallstones, enormous ones, which were taken out and thrown over the Golden Gate Bridge, along with all psychosomatic complaints, not long ago. The doctor said they started to form . . . about four years before when we moved from Rockwood Road, where I really had planned to live and die. . . . Mr. Knowland (the Senator's father, and editor, for many years, of *The Oakland Tribune*) is president of the California Historical Society and recently he appointed me chairman of the Special Publications Committee. We have some money, in a publication fund, and are not restricted to the Society's possessions. Let me know if you have pertinent ideas.

That appointment apparently helped to spark Susanna Dakin's active participation in Northern California activities—an ever widening participation. It marked the end of a transitional period when she made so many north-south trips that some of her southern friends on the Arboretum committee hardly knew she had moved away from Pasadena. Seven years later she could write to the same Angeleno correspondent that she had sunk her roots in the Bay Area.

Reviewing Susanna's life, interests, and writings, divided between Southern and Northern California, we must describe her as a "California woman." Equally at home in all parts of the state, equally concerned with everything Californian, she was completely free from narrow regionalism. She led a life amazingly balanced between the areas dominated by San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Without attempting to do a Who's-Who biography or to set forth a bibliography, I want to touch upon some of the activities and interests that were part of Susanna's life, as well as give a closer look at the books she has written or made possible.

But first, what of her family background, very pertinent to the development of her own life! Her Canadian-born father, Dr. Ernest Bryant, went to Los Angeles in 1891 and became the city's Police Surgeon at the age of 22. From the first he felt at home in the City of the Angels, "where the warmth



and informality of daily life corresponded to qualities in his own nature.” (There I quote from Susanna’s own account of her father.) He learned to play golf and became a member of the Los Angeles Country Club where Los Angeles “Society” congregated. One afternoon he met a delightful young woman who was on a brief visit from San Francisco—Sue Bixby. Sue, destined to be Susanna’s mother, had vowed: “I’ll never live in Los Angeles. I’ll never marry a doctor, nor a fat man.” But when she married Ernest Albert Bryant, she did all three, except that Dr. Bryant was only slightly overweight from being somewhat of a gourmet and from being invited out to six- and seven-course dinners every night. Dr. Bryant met Henry E. Huntington at the peak of the latter’s wealth and power and became his personal physician. Later he served as Surgical Director of the Southern Pacific Railroad, Southern Division. It is interesting to note, in the light of the Dakin family’s later interests, that Dr. Bryant founded the Good Hope Clinic of the Hospital of the Good Samaritan in Los Angeles.

Susanna’s mother was Sue or Susanna Bixby—the little Sue of Sarah Bixby Smith’s fascinating *Adobe Days*, the daughter of John W. Bixby, one of the owners of Rancho Los Alamitos and the sister of Fred H. Bixby, later owner of the Alamitos. John Bixby came from Maine in 1870, many years after his cousins Jotham and Llewellyn had made that same migration. These earlier Bixbys, with their cousins Benjamin and Thomas Flint, had driven 2000 head of sheep from the Mississippi River to the West Coast in 1852. They first bought Rancho San Justo in Monterey County and had entered also the stage-coaching business. Presently, Southern California land tempted them, as it did other Northern Californians, for there were great bargains in ranchos available after the three-year drought of the 1860’s had bankrupted the Spanish-speaking rancheros. In time the Bixby name became associated in ownership of Ranchos Los Cerritos and Los Alamitos—the two comprising all of present-day Long Beach—along with the greater part of Rancho Los Palos Verdes. For a brief period in the early 1860’s the Bixbys and Flints had owned all of what is now the huge Irvine Ranch. The story of the Bixbys is the story of one of California’s great land-owning families of the early American period. Rancho days therefore were a part of the early experience of Sue Bixby and of course of her daughter Susanna, who was to write extensively of rancho living. Sue Bixby went to a “finishing” school in Boston, had a European



tour, and later—unwilling to live on Los Alamitos with an ever-grieving, widowed mother—she chose an apartment on Russian Hill in San Francisco. There she found Bohemian friends until Dr. Ernest Bryant entered her life, married her, and brought her back to Los Angeles.

Sue Bixby, it is well to remember, was a woman fond of books and paintings. The library she formed and that was finally given to Scripps College was broad in its coverage. Also, she had strong botanical interests and became the donor of the Santa Ana Botanical Garden for Native Plants, now in Claremont, foreshadowing the daughter's interest in the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum. She was also a backer of Theodore Payne, who developed an extensive nursery and seed business.

Susanna Bryant Dakin was born in Los Angeles on May 23, 1905. A few weeks before her death she asked me to read in typewritten form the memories of her girlhood, climaxing with her entering Marlborough School at the age of twelve. Perhaps she had in mind its publication, although it was primarily for the members of the family. This manuscript is frank, interesting, important, and done with Susanna's customary distinction. I had first thought, at starting the reading, that it would be the story of a "poor little rich girl." Actually it is the account of a rich little rich girl, even though there were moments of loneliness when she had to watch her playmates going off to public school, while she had always to be content with private tutors. Perhaps the highlight is the "Big Ride" of 1916, when, under Uncle Fred Bixby's leadership, she and her cousins rode horseback from Berkeley to Los Alamitos, a 522-mile trip.

Susanna went to Vassar College and received an A.B. degree in 1925. She also received significant direction in methods of historical research and writing from Margaret Bingham Stillwell, bibliographer, librarian, and writer. In 1930 she married a young engineer, Richard Y. Dakin, and in Pasadena raised a family—Roger, Susanna, Henry, Sara, and Mary. At the same period she was finding time for writing and for participation in various Southern California enterprises, such as Scripps College; a forerunner of the Pasadena Art Museum; and the Pasadena Chapter of the Red Cross Arts and Skills Corporation.

I have mentioned her *A Scotch Paisano—The Story of Hugo Reid*, which the University of California Press published in 1939. This was and is essentially a novelized biography, successfully handled and presented. As times goes on,



I believe it will continue to be thought of as one of California's most important literary products, as well as Susanna's best piece of sustained writing. Reid's Indian wife, Doña Victoria, was presented with such dignity that Susanna was pleased to be asked to serve as a consultant when the Indian Historical Society was organized. Had the author wished and had the author not become involved in so many public activities, she might well have become a novelist of distinction.

When the historic homesite of Rancho Santa Anita was bought by the State of California in 1947 and leased to Los Angeles County, plans were made to develop it as a state and county arboretum. Dr. Frits Went, the first president of the California Arboretum Foundation, appointed a Historical Committee. Since Rancho Santa Anita's first owner had been Hugo Reid and since the state-purchased site included the so-called Hugo Reid Adobe, as well as structures and plantings by later owners, notably E. J. (Lucky) Baldwin, it was natural to ask Susanna Dakin to become chairman. As worked out with Susanna's advice, the officers of the Historical Committee were Susanna Bryant Dakin and Georgina Hicks Mage as co-chairmen. Mrs. Mage was Susanna's long-time Pasadena friend. The co-secretaries were Lindley Bynum and W.W. Robinson. (Lindley allowed me to take the minutes.) Director of Restorations was Maurice Block, and Landscape Consultant was Edward Huntsman-Trout. Historical Curator was Dewey Nelson. Howard Miller was Treasurer.

Actually Susanna held loose reins on this committee which over the years had a continually changing group of members, persons concerned particularly with California history and architecture. Perhaps the most faithful attendants, other than the officers, were Ed Ainsworth of the *Los Angeles Times*, John Anson Ford, a sympathetic member of the Board of Supervisors, M. R. Harrington, Curator of the Southwest Museum, Architects Walter A. Walton and Burnett C. Turner, John C. Macfarland, an attorney, Jack Fawcett, an associate of Baldwin, Mrs. Forest Stanton, Mrs. Howard Cunningham, and Mrs. Alfred Murray. Dr. William S. Stewart, who became the Arboretum's director in 1955, and his wife, Maria, became frequent participants in meetings, as did other Arboretum staff members, and experts in various pertinent fields. The hard core of the male officers and members were called by Susanna—and most appropriately—her “old men's club.”

The aim of the Committee was the architectural restoration of the existing



historic buildings—the so-called Queen Anne Cottage and the Baldwin Carriage House of the Baldwin regime, together with the reconstruction of the Hugo Reid Adobe, each restoration or reconstruction to be further enhanced by appropriate furnishings, decoration, and plantings.

Meetings were held outdoors in the fairyland setting developed by various owners of Rancho Santa Anita and beneath the shade of towering eucalyptus trees or alongside Baldwin Lake. On one occasion we met at Rancho Los Alamitos in one of the State's most charming homes dating from Spanish days. There our hosts were Fred H. Bixby, whom I like to call "the last of the rancheros," and his wife, Florence Green Bixby. Fred H. Bixby, Susanna's "Uncle Fred," served his over-size Old-Fashioneds. In the discussion that followed he remarked that he didn't see where all the money was coming from to restore the Queen Anne Cottage—a remark that caused inner smiles from some of his guests who had the intimation, though not the certain knowledge, that The Family Fund of the Dakins was taking care of that substantial item. Committee meetings, under Susanna's deft manipulation, were extremely informal and were closed with food and drink. To keep us all on the ball, there were even cocktail parties at the home of Georgina Mage and at the Valley Hunt Club.

The aims of the Historical Committee were attained—even though it was occasionally accused of trying to make a saint out of Lucky Baldwin whose interests ran rather strongly to women and horses. Today the whole complex of the Arboretum at Arcadia is a place of botanical and historical fascination and importance. There have been two million visitors, with the Queen Anne Cottage drawing greatest interest. The reconstruction of the Hugo Reid Adobe as a ranch foreman's structure of the 1840's, was financed by the State—as a result of appeals made by Dr. Stewart and Mrs. Dakin in a personal appearance before the State's division of Beaches and Parks meeting in San Francisco.

I asked Dr. Stewart what was Susanna's greatest contribution to the development of the whole Arboretum. He thought I meant money and said that between 1950 and 1967 the Dakins' Family Fund had contributed—without the Committee's knowledge—substantial sums for use in the Historical Area. I said no, I didn't mean money. Then he said: "Susanna's greatest contribution was her 'attitude.' "



In the middle of all this Arboretum activity Susanna and her family moved to the Bay Area—to the distress of Southern Californians. However, it turned out that Susanna maintained a flexible, traveling schedule, caught airplanes with ease, and picked up rental cars at the Los Angeles International Airport with which she could drive quickly to Pasadena and to the home of Georgina Mage. There were letters, too, between San Francisco and Arcadia—such as this one to Dr. Stewart:

DEAR BILL, On the subject of *dust*, it was suggested that you—as director—write to Orville Johnson—a state authority for advice on ridding the Adobe and Coach Barn of this daily plague (he may answer that dust is authentic in early California dwellings, and even advise the introduction of fleas! . . .)

With her appointment by President Knowland to the Special Publications Committee of the California Historical Society, operating out of San Francisco, she took on new interests.

She named her new committee: Kenneth Bechtel, Lindley Bynum, Mrs. French Fogle, George Hammond, George Harding, Oscar Lewis, Aubrey Neasham, Mrs. Rogers Parratt, W.W. Robinson, Caroline Wenzel, and Carl Wheat. Later the “Special” committee became the “Publication Committee,” and Francis Farquhar, Mrs. Clement Hurd, and Mrs. Van Rensselaer Wilbur joined the group. Meetings were held in a top-floor room in the Mansion of the CHS, a place that perhaps did not have the romantic overtones of Lucky Baldwin’s menage. I recall, too, that we munched meagerly on sandwiches. On one occasion, though, joined by husbands and wives, we adjourned to Happy Valley in the Palace Hotel. Manuscripts were passed upon, books were published. I want to mention with particular pleasure the Christmas books that the Society published during Susanna’s chairmanship. They represent her enthusiasm, her special efforts, and bear her unmistakable stamp, whether or not she wrote a foreword. These little books, all printed by Lawton Kennedy, were delightful excursions into the world of early California. The first was *Christmas in California*, Part One being “Christmas at Sutter’s Fort in 1847” by John Bonner, Part Two “Christmas Before the Americans Came” by José Ramon Pico. It was followed by *Christmas at Rancho Los Alamitos*, written by Katharine Bixby Hotchkis (Susanna’s cousin), illustrated by Clement Hurd. The third was *Navidad and Pastorela*, the first by Don Arturo Bandini, the second by Gwladys Louise Williams.



I call attention to another attractive Society publication that appeared after Susanna had given up her chairmanship but which received her enthusiastic backing. This was Joseph A. Baird's *Times Wondrous Changes*, devoted to San Francisco's architectural story. It was rushed out, in 1962, to be ready for the meeting in San Francisco of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. A change in publishing policy by the Society called for approval of expenditures by the Finance Committee. Susanna had therefore to be asked to agree to underwrite the book's costs. She did, and the book was not only a delight but a sell-out—proving that she could pick a winner and that the Finance Committee was overly cautious.

For her accomplishments in historical writing and for support of the Society's program Susanna Dakin was made a Fellow of the California Historical Society.

Susanna's forewords, prefaces, and introductions—appearing in various volumes—were of course labors of love—articulate and poetic tributes to friends or to specific achievements or to pleasant vistas in time. Such was her introduction to the published writings of Francis Farquhar, whose habit of praising others generously, but with discrimination, filled her with admiration. So, too, the tribute she paid in *The Perennial Adventure* to 95-year-old Alice Eastwood, retired Curator of Botany at the California Academy of Sciences. Miss Eastwood was not only a botanical authority on the Bay region but had had a long-time affiliation with the Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Garden founded by Susanna's mother. Both books appeared in 1954.

Probably the most pleasurable experience in research preceded that involved in Susanna's writing of an introduction to *YoSemite 1878 Adventures of N & C—Journal and Drawings by Carrie E. LeConte*. This appeared in the Malette Dean-printed volume which The Book Club of California so beautifully brought out in 1964. Here are presented the entertaining adventures of two high-spirited girls who took a camping trip to Yosemite in 1878. The journal and drawings reproduced were a part of the Le Conte Family Papers in the Bancroft Library.

Because of Susanna Dakin's gratitude for the memory of Dixon Wecter, she made it possible for an extraordinary collection of Mark Twain material to be added to the Twain collection in the University of California. Dixon Wecter had been Mark Twain's literary executor. The new papers included 500 letters and the files of the *Territorial Enterprise*.



While Susanna could say *no*—tactfully—she loved to help individuals who seemed likely to help themselves. She gave constructive assistance, sometimes at the crucial time. She found herself especially interested in people in “the arts” or with artistic potentialities. She did not worry if she supported a lost cause. To one young man whom she helped when he needed it the most she said: “I have contributed to many cultural causes but you happen to be a cultural cause that has gone on.” Painters, sculptors, writers, bookdealers, ceramists have reason to bless her name. For example, there was Susie Singer, a gifted artist-refugee from Austria whom Susanna took under her wing in the 1930’s. She got her a small house in Pasadena, adequate for her needs and that of her child, bought her a kiln, even sent her own children to her for art instruction. As usual, the help given this ceramist was a quiet, almost secret, act.

Susanna and members of her family found time for traveling, particularly in Europe. Let me quote from a letter written early this year by Jake Zeitlin to Susanna’s daughter, Sue Arp (Mrs. Halton Christian Arp), and having to do with a meeting of Josephine and Jake Zeitlin with the Dakins in England:

One of my most treasured memories shall always be of the days we spent together several years ago in England. We rode to Brighton in the second class coach together with two charwomen who explained the mysteries of English money to your mother and gave her an English tuppence. We wandered through the bewildering splendor of the Pavillion and the museum, strolled on the pier and rode back first class with tea and a nap to shorten the ride. The next day we took the excursion boat at Westminster Bridge and traveled to Greenwich. Dick was especially taken with the navigation instruments and collected printed matter and made notes to write about them to your husband. One afternoon I took your mother to visit the Director of the British Museum so that she might look at the library of Prince Henry, a favorite of her college studies. And finally we had a dinner at Green’s Hotel with London friends, full of good jokes, good talk and laughter. Your mother lost her usual shyness and as we stood in the street she kissed us all good night.

Susanna, brought up to be a participant in “Society”—spelled with a capital S—liked the pleasurable aspects of living, agreeable people, lighthearted fun, good food and good wine. She was knowledgeable in the matter of wine and admired that knowledgeability in her friends. She and her family loved to watch connoisseur Lindley Bynum’s ritual of approaching, savoring, and defining a glass of vintage wine.



Not only individuals but institutions were the beneficiaries of the Dakin family's interests. Susanna and Richard Dakin actively supported the Franklin Hospital, with Richard serving as president of the board of trustees since 1955 during the period in which the new hospital building was planned. Both worked with the American Friends Service Committee, in sympathy with its program, and as friends of various libraries in Southern and Northern California.

That brings us to the Friends of the Bancroft Library, with Susanna showing the same excited interest she had shown in Arboretum activities. Dr. George P. Hammond, the long-time director of the Bancroft Library, would probably have said—as did Dr. Stewart—he appreciated above all else Susanna's "attitude." She had been and was a constant user of the Library. As a member of the Friends, she served on the Council, and became Secretary of the organization. At the time of her death she was also editor of *Bancroftiana*. Published by the Friends in 1963 was her *Rose, or Rose Thorn?—Three Women of Spanish California*. Deftly handled, and based on extensive research, the quality of writing shown is again that of the novelist—reminding one of that shown in *Scotch Paisano*.

Another vital type of support for the Bancroft Library was that given by Susanna and her family to important acquisitions. In 1959 Warren R. Howell and Jake Zeitlin had an opportunity to go through the library of Martin Carrecedo in Mexico City and to purchase and bring back to the United States the entire collection. When George Hammond saw the important documents on California and the Spanish Southwest—including letters of Junípero Serra and of Father Kino—his imagination caught fire. The Friends were urged to obtain the rich assemblage of manuscripts. Susanna was one who appreciated the significance of the material. As a result of her and others' help, the collection became a part of the Library.

I want to emphasize another important assemblage that became the Bancroft's. That is the Robert B. Honeyman Collection of early Californian and Western pictorial material. Warren Howell had worked closely with Mr. Honeyman over the years in bringing it together. George Hammond got the Friends to raise the impressive sum involved in its purchase. The collection is described by Susanna Dakin as "comprising oils, watercolors, drawings, lithographs, engravings, etchings, woodcuts, early photographs, one of the finest



selections of 'letter sheets' . . . and a miscellany which includes manuscripts, maps, scrapbooks, nostalgic sheet music, children's games, colorful advertising cards and illustrated stock certificates." This description by Susanna Dakin appears in *GHP—An Informal Record of George P. Hammond And His Era in the Bancroft Library*, a volume beautifully printed by Lawton and Alfred Kennedy and issued in 1965 as a tribute to G.P.H. on his retirement as Director. The book was written by a group of his friends and associates. Susanna Dakin encouraged others to participate in the fund-raising, offering to help if they would help. She and her family "seeded the fund," as it were, spurred others on to assist, and the Bancroft Library obtained the Honeyman Collection.

As Dale Morgan phrased it, Susanna Dakin "had a deep affection for friends and rare insight into their qualities." Consider her comment on the death of Freda Kennedy, the wife of Lawton Kennedy. She almost succeeded in defeating death when she wrote in 1965 that "the valley of life is shadowed with death" and "death rims life with the beauty of transiency." The sad death of her own young daughter Sara in 1961 had made it necessary for Susanna to live with, understand and accept death. The death of her friend Lindley Bynum in 1965 inspired her to work with Josephine Bynum and the Bynum family in assembling and bringing out a group of Lindley's poems: *High Treasure, Songs of the Sierra*.

One last statement. Just before the Dakins left on their final flight, Susanna wrote this note on a Christmas card to Gertrude M. Woods of the Arboretum staff:

Our family is off to spend the holidays (December 20-29) by the Sea of Cortez—in Bahia de las Palmas . . . I'm all for the publication of the SBD pamphlet and will take a copy of the Summer '56 *Lasca Leaves* to look over and see what changes should be made." (She was referring to her *Place of Many Waters*, the history of the Arboretum area which was planned for republication.)

That note was received at the Arboretum on December 20, 1966—the day that the plane, which carried Susanna, Richard, and six other members of the Dakin family, fatally crashed into the sea.

Good works, good books—they live!





Robinson, W. W. (William Wilcox). 1968. "Woman of California: Susanna Bryant Dakin." *Lasca leaves* 18, 1–11.

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