



Lydia Comerford Fahey ~ Horse riding, gun carrying local kept railway surveyors honest



In an undated photo, Lydia Comerford Fahey poses with the rifle she used to get the attention of railroad surveyors on her family's land.

A biography by Jean Bartlett, March, 2021
(A Pacifica Historical Society Project)

COMERFORD FAHEY, ELIZABETH "LYDIA" (1883-1972)

Maybe if Lydia Comerford Fahey had never heard the story of how shady surveyors had tried to cheat her grandfather and other early Coastside settlers out of their hard-earned property, she wouldn't have taken to patrolling the family land on horseback with a shotgun. But she had heard it, and the very well-thought of and well-mannered, California-born-and-raised woman did not shrink from keeping people honest.

Lydia's land story begins in September of 1797, in County Louth, Ireland. That's the year and the place where her grandfather, Michael Joseph Comerford, was born.

Michael had an aptitude for working with gardens and so, when he was a young man, he headed to Dublin to attend Trinity College and study landscape architecture. (Both locations are on Ireland's east coast and in today's travel time, Trinity College is about an hour south from Michael's hometown by car.) Following his graduation, the landscape architect headed out into the world to make his fortune.

In January of 1840, the 42-year-old bachelor married Sarah Jordan, also of County Louth. By 1843, the couple was residing in England, which is the same year their first child, Margaret, was born. When their fifth child came along in 1851, the family had been settled six years or so in Parramatta, a suburb of Sydney, Australia. Their fifth child, Joseph Mauries Comerford, was Lydia's father.

Not long after Joseph's birth the family moved to California and in 1853, Michael and Sarah's sixth child was born in San Francisco. The appeal of moving to the newly-formed State of California—statehood became official on September 9, 1850—was not only due to the vast business prospects that followed the California Gold Rush, and the subsequent population boom in San Francisco, but also the opportunity to acquire, as a private citizen, specific property designated as U.S. government-owned, including land in San Mateo County.

Robert Sheldon Thornton, Israel Graham Knowles and Michael Comerford were among North San Mateo County's earliest settlers. They were a group of about 30 individuals who had been given patents to the land they homesteaded. Several years down the road, their land rights were challenged by a slippery group of surveyors who claimed their individual lands belonged to the Laguna Merced Rancho. It was then the individuals formed the North San Mateo Settlers' Union, and R. S. Thornton was chosen to represent the Union through legal battles beset by lies and trickery and falsified court documents – all courtesy of the surveyors. Court decisions were rendered against the Union and hired roughs were brought on board to push the settlers off the land they had successfully farmed for years. But in the end, with R. S. Thornton taking their case all the way to the United States District Court, justice prevailed. In an 1869 newspaper clipping, Michael Comerford's Laguna Alta, San Mateo County ranch is listed at 154 acres.

(In the June 5, 1863 clipping below, San Francisco's *Daily Alta* reports on one of the battles faced by these early county settlers.)

Twelfth District Court.
Robert Patten, James Wood, R. S. Thornton, Jeremiah Smith, S. S. White, Julius Levy, A. S. Easton, B. Green, Wm. Burley, J. Prince, H. L. White, H. B. Simmons, J. Davis, J. Gardner, I. G. Knowles, J. G. Cooper and M. Comerford, commenced suit against D. R. Mahoney and others to restrain, by injunction, any further proceedings under a writ of restitution issued in the ejection suit of Mahoney vs. the plaintiffs for a portion of the Laguna Merced Rancho. The plaintiffs aver that they and their tenants have growing crops worth \$100,000 on the land, and if the writ of restitution issue now, the crop will be lost to them. The complaint avers the owners of the rancho formerly gave it to be understood that their claim did not include the land now in dispute; and the outside land was surveyed by the U. S. Surveyor of public land, and was taken up by the plaintiffs as preëmptioners.

* * *

Back in the 1970s and 1980s, several Daly City historians, Samuel C. Chandler and Bunny Gillespie, wrote of Michael Comerford, and their knowledge is sourced here. They reported that he was a nurseryman and on his land east of Mussel Rock and to the south in parts of present-day Pacifica, he established tree farms and nurseries. At his nursery, in the Mussel Rock area, Michael grew seedlings of the southern blue gum Eucalyptus which is endemic to southeastern Australia. These seedlings were subsequently transplanted throughout both the Bay Area and California. In addition, Michael's nursery

started the seedlings of many of the Monterey Pines and Monterey Cypress planted by San Francisco horticulturist John McLaren in McLaren's newly-designed Golden Gate Park. Seedlings were sold at 15 cents apiece. (At the time it was unknown that the non-native Eucalyptus would create a number of local environmental problems, including soil toxicity for native species.)

* * *

Michael and Sarah had nine children. Their youngest, John Joseph was born in 1865. Twenty-nine years younger than her husband, in 1869 Sarah died at the family ranch, called "Salada Beach," in Laguna Alta. On November 12, 1870, Michael married his second wife, Alice English, of County Waterford, Ireland, in San Mateo County. Michael was widowed again when Alice died at the family ranch in February of 1877. Michael married his third wife, Catherine Mulvey, in September of 1878 in San Mateo County.

All of Michael and Sarah's children were well educated. Joseph, Lydia's father, graduated from St. Mary's College at its original location in San Francisco. A master carpenter, he began his career in San Francisco building small homes. With his construction business booming, in early December of 1874 he married Elizabeth "Eliza" Kellett in San Francisco. Eliza gave birth to 12 children, four of whom did not survive their earliest days. Of those eight children, Lydia and her two younger sisters, Jeanette "Nettie" and Irene, lived past the age of 80. Elizabeth Lydia "Lydia" Comerford was born to Joseph and Eliza Comerford in Colma on May 28, 1883.

In December of 1892, Lydia's Grandfather Michael died at the age of 95 in San Francisco at the residence of his daughter, Mary Scholastica Comerford Hill, of 335 Duncan Street. Sadly, seven years later Lydia's father died. Well-known in San Francisco, Joseph Comerford's death made all the local papers. The following story ran in the *San Francisco Examiner* on March 13, 1899.

BUILT MANY HOMES IN SAN FRANCISCO

Death of Joseph M. Comerford, Who Was Recognized as a Factor in the City's Growth

Joseph M. Comerford, a builder who was prominently identified with the growth of San Francisco, died Saturday at his late residence, 2736 Folsom Street. He was born in Sydney, Australia, and was forty-eight years of age.

He came to California in his boyhood days with his parents. They settled in this city and Comerford graduated from St. Mary's College. He learned the trade of a carpenter. After mastering his trade he started in business as a builder of homes for working people. He first began operations in the Mission district. He would purchase a block of land and cover the property with small homes. He disposed of the houses on such easy terms that he found ready buyers and the banks would carry the mortgages.

The major portion of Horner's Addition in that part of the Mission between Twenty-fifth and Thirtieth streets and west of Valencia was peopled through the enterprise of Comerford. The section got to be known as Comerfordville, being named after him by the people who settled there. He also built many houses in the Western Addition, Bernal Heights and other sections. It is said that he erected more houses than any other man in San Francisco. While the majority of the houses he built were cottages, he also constructed many houses of a more pretentious kind. He became wealthy through his real-estate operations. During the last few years the depreciation of his property and unprofitable investments caused him to lose considerable money. His widow, however, has valuable holdings in her own name. Comerford also had a large ranch in Southern California.

Author: Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

Pacifica Historical Society / Jean Bartlett ©2021.

Lydia Comerford Fahey ~ Horse riding, gun carrying local kept railway surveyors honest (page 4)

He leaves, besides a widow, four sons and four daughters. The funeral will take place this morning from St. Peter's Church.

There were also the family holdings along the Coastside, including the still very successful Comerford Nursery in the Mussel Rock area. That business, however, came to an abrupt end when the 1906, 7.9 San Francisco Earthquake buried the tree farm and nursery in a landslide. (The "traditional" magnitude of 8.3 listed for this earthquake was based on a Richter report in 1958 and has since been downgraded.) The family subsequently sold the parcel to Spring Valley Water Company. The family's second Coastside home, built in 1903, did survive the earthquake but shifted several inches on its foundation. Local contractors, however, were able to repair the damage.



This was the main home to Joseph's widow, Eliza, and their children. It also became the home of Frank Eugene Herbert, whom Eliza married in 1900. The size of the three-story home was six thousand square feet. Following the sale of the Comerford Nursery parcel, the Comerford land was listed at 120 acres. At that point in time, their Salada Beach ranch covered the area from what is today's Good Shepherd Catholic Church complex all the way down to the ocean. (The town of Salada Beach would later become known as Sharp Park in the 1930s. In November of 1957, Sharp Park would become a neighborhood of the newly incorporated City of Pacifica.) The Comerford mansion was located where the Pacific Skies Estates Mobile Home Park now stands.

It was in the late 1800s, well before the devastating earthquake, when Lydia Comerford raised her gun to railway surveyors who had breached the line of the Comerford family land.

Apparently as early as 1865, the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad Company had considered a Coastside railroad but dismissed it due to the rising cost of coastal land. In September of 1879, the San Francisco & Ocean Shore Railroad Company (1879-1887), laid out plans to build a narrow-gauge track from Larkin and Fulton Streets in San Francisco, down the coast to Half Moon Bay. When that company collapsed, the idea was picked up by the San Francisco & Santa Cruz Railroad in 1888, and then by the Pacific Railroad Company in 1889, and then by the San Francisco & West Shore Railway Company. Essentially several more companies would pick up the idea of an ocean shore railway, before the Ocean Shore Railway Company, created by a group of San Francisco businessmen, would stick. Their vision was a double-track, standard-gauge, high-speed electric railway, 80 miles in length, running from San Francisco to Santa Cruz. In 1905, surveying for the railway began.

Author: Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

Pacifica Historical Society / Jean Bartlett ©2021.

Lydia Comerford Fahey ~ Horse riding, gun carrying local kept railway surveyors honest (page 5)

There are a lot of stories that have been told about the lady with the pointed long-barrel firearm, but this one was told by Lydia herself in 1949 to her Sharp Park neighbors and friends, Bob and Emma Siebert, and the couple's 6-year-old daughter, Andrea. Interviewed in February of 2021, Andrea leaned into Lydia's tale. (While the railway company is not named, the surveyors were representing one of the coastal rail-dreaming companies. The event took place before the death of Lydia's father in March of 1899. It was previously thought to have taken place in 1905.)

"My parents were sharing a sack of walnuts and we sat beneath the trees, at a picnic table, shelling and eating them," Andrea recalled. "My dad said something that got my attention, 'You rode with a rifle?' 'Well yes of course,' she replied. 'I kept it across the saddle.' One day, in her teens, she'd been riding her Palomino around the property. She met three men who were surveying at the cliffs above the ocean. She rode up to them and asked what they were doing on her father's property. They claimed what they were measuring was railroad right-of-way for an Ocean Shore Railway yet to come. They were quite sure of their rectitude, but she persisted, saying that they were on her father's land and invited them up to the house. While she served tea and refreshments they pored over the maps her father presented. At length the one in charge of the survey party looked up at Mr. Comerford and stated, 'Why if it hadn't been for this young lady, we would have made a serious mistake! She has saved us from a terrible misunderstanding and possible lawsuit.' They all congratulated her."

In 1905, the Ocean Shore Railway began officially surveying coastal land for their high-speed electric railway. But that dream died in 1906, when the shock waves from the San Francisco Earthquake plunged rail equipment and 4,000 feet of coastal railroad track into the Great Pacific. Financial backing waned, the company changed its name and in 1908, the now single-track steam line Ocean Shore Railroad ran passengers and freight trains between San Francisco and Tunitas Glen, an area more than 25 miles north of Santa Cruz. However with the advent of the automobile, as well as farmers choosing trucks to transport produce over train cars, the Ocean Shore RR ceased operations of scheduled trains on August 28, 1920, and the once-imagined railroad was abandoned altogether on October 20, 1920.



Originally thought to be Lydia Comerford and William Fahey, this photo, located in the PHS Comerford Fahey file, has been identified by Dennis Holl as Mae and Joe Murphy in front of the Ocean Shore Railroad as it makes its way through Salada Beach, circa 1913. Both well acquainted with Lydia, one likes to think Lydia took the photo.

On June 12, 1913, two Salada Beach residents, William Fahey and Lydia Comerford, took out a marriage license in San Francisco. The groom was 32 and the bride was 30. William was the son of Walter and Julia Fahey. His father was a well-known farmer in Salada Beach and the Fahey farmhouse still stands at 685 Canyon Drive. The wedding of William and Lydia brought some real happiness to the Comerford family who lost their brother and son, 1880-born Joseph Howard Comerford, on September 6, 1912. The *San Francisco Call* ran the following article on Joseph's death on September 8, 1912. Joseph was 32.

TRAMP IDENTIFIED AS COLLEGE GRADUATE

Joseph Comerford

SANTA CRUZ, Sept. 7.—the soldering outfit, for mending tins, found beside the body of a man killed by a train here last night on a branch of the San Francisco main line, epitomized in more ways than one the story of a life that had been "side tracked." It was learned today that the man was Joseph Comerford, a university graduate and a man of brilliant attainments. Through misfortune he became an itinerant peddler and mender of pots and pans. He was a member of a well-known family of San Mateo County.

* * *

William and Lydia made their home at the Comerford mansion and as the months moved forward to 1914, the couple beamed over Lydia's pregnancy. But come the last days of 1913, the Comerford family tragically lost another son. It was reported in the *Coast Side Comet* on January 9, 1914. Raymond "Ray" was 18.

Electrocuted

Raymond J. Comerford of Salada Beach, while on his way to San Francisco New Year's Eve, his horse came in contact with a Pacific Gas & Electric Company's wire which was down and buried in the mud in the road in front of the old Coakley's Saloon, killing the horse instantly, throwing Mr. Comerford from his buggy and in falling he also came in contact with the same instrument of death. Raymond was a very promising young man of about nineteen years of age and has a host of relatives and friends to mourn his departure. It is claimed that the cause of this death was entirely due to the carelessness of the gas and electric company.

In May of 1914, the Comerford family had good news at last – as reported in the *Coast Side Comet*. "Mr. and Mrs. Wm Fahey welcomed the arrival of a bouncing boy on May 5, 1914. Both mother and little son are progressing nicely." On that same page it was also reported that: "A long-distance phone was installed in the Brighton Beach Grocery Store."

May 22, 1914, the *Coast Side Comet* followed the birth notice of William and Lydia's son with: "Wm. Fahey and wife of Salada Beach were in Colma Tuesday, where their newly arrived son was christened Wm. Fahey Jr., by Rev. Father Cooper."

Lydia's joy however, was not to be long-lived. On September 18, 1914, when little William was not yet four months old, the *Coast Side Comet* ran this heart-wrenching story.

SUDDEN DEATH

William Fahey, a well-known young farmer at Salada Beach, San Mateo County, passed out last Friday to the ravages of pneumonia. He attended a picnic at Tanforan Park on Labor Day, but complained that he was not well and went home. His death occurred four days later.

He is survived by a widow, Lydia Comerford Fahey, and one son, William Fahey Jr. He also leaves his father, Walter Fahey and four brothers and sister – John, Walter, Martin and Thomas Fahey, and Mrs. Mary Welton.

Mr. Fahey was a native of Salada Beach, thirty-three years old.

The funeral was held Monday morning at the Church of the Holy Angels, Colma. Interment took place at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery.

Two weeks later, William's father Walter Fahey, a native of Ireland, died. He was 76. The *Comet* noted that: "Walter was held in high esteem by all who came in contact with him, both socially and in a business way. The *Comet* but voices the sentiment of the entire community in mourning his loss."

* * *

A devoted mother, Lydia was active in her community. When women won the right to vote in California, October 10, 1911, Lydia registered as a Republican and never missed the opportunity to represent her voice in an election. She also served on the school board, 1925-1931. In May of 1928, she made the news when she contested the election results for school trustees at San Pedro. In a recount with the opposition candidate, C. M. Chambers, Lydia was declared to have won over Chambers by three votes. "Election officials had previously given Chambers a plurality."

She additionally oversaw all the duties of her property, which included being extremely informed regarding the trees, plant species, flowers and vegetables that found a home there. This type of knowledge, and the enthusiasm for the knowledge, was passed down from her grandfather to his children, and in turn from his children to their children. Perhaps some of Grandfather Michael's descendants had more of a knack for it than others – as so, Lydia was an expert.

Lydia also followed in her father's footsteps in that she kept the family home open to the religious community of women serving Holy Angels Catholic Church in Colma. These nuns were educators and during the summer they taught parochial school to the children of the Coastside ranchers at the Comerford home. In addition, as her father had done, Lydia offered the use of her home as a place of rest and

relaxation to these good sisters. Lydia's Catholic faith sustained her through many heartaches – the hardest yet to come.

On July 13, 1927, Lydia's son William died. His death made all the local papers. William was thirteen. The following story ran in the *San Mateo Times* on July 14, 1927.

NO. 37

**SALADA BEACH
CHILDREN DIE
SWIMMING IN
BIG RESERVOIR**

**Bodies Recovered After Sev-
Hours Grappling By
Officials.**

THIRD CHILD SURVIVES

**Fifteen Year Old Rodney
Slagle Dies Attempting
Pal's Rescue.**

Rodney Allen Slagle, 15, son of Deputy Sheriff Edward Slagle of Salada Beach and William Fahey, 11, son of Mrs. Lydia Fahey, also of Salada Beach were drowned late yesterday afternoon when the older boy had plunged into a reservoir in a vain attempt to save his companion who had tumbled into the water.

The tragedy was witnessed by 14-year-old Romeo Lotte of San Francisco, who had accompanied the boys on a tramp to the reservoir. Romeo ran back to Salada Beach a distance of two miles and collapsed after having told the story.

Hero Is Lost

The Slagle boy, Romeo said, went to his death in a valiant effort to save the younger lad who had rolled down the steep bank of the reservoir and into the deep pool.

The three started into the hills on a jaunt arranged for Romeo, who had just arrived in Salada Beach. In a secluded spot, more than two miles from the Skyline Boulevard, they came to the reservoir. They decided to go for a swim, and the Fahey boy was first in the water. Almost immediately he screamed for help and sank. Then Slagle leaped in to rescue him.

Runs for Help

Romeo, from the bank, saw Slagle swim toward the drowning lad; saw him reach his side as he started to sink for the second time; saw the smaller boy clutch at his would-be rescuer, and grasped him in a death-grip.

After several hours of work, Constable S. A. Landini of Colma and his helpers drew the two bodies to the shore, where they were identified. They were taken to the Lasswell undertaking rooms in Daly City.

Educator and native San Franciscan Bob Siebert never forgot the days of his youth when he boarded the Ocean Shore Railroad and came down to the coast. When he and his wife Emma, née de la Fuente, moved to the town of Sharp Park and bought a house on County Road, now Palmetto Avenue, it was November of 1941. Bob, ineligible for the draft due to partial deafness in one ear, worked as a master painter for Matson Navigation in San Francisco. Several years after the birth of the couple's first daughter, Andrea, in 1943, Bob decided to return to school to become a teacher. He and Emma added two more daughters to their family and Bob became one of early Pacifica's most beloved teachers. (Read about Bob Siebert [here](#).)

As pertains to Lydia's story, Bob and Emma, and their girls Andrea, Frederica and Ramona were Lydia's neighbors – and Andrea and Lydia had a wonderful friendship, which all these years later is still a delight for Andrea to recall. A retired teacher, Andrea is a gifted writer and artist, and some of these recollections she shared are excerpts "from a book long in progress that simmers on my mental back burner."

"I was two years old when I met Lydia Fahey," Andrea writes. "I know because my younger sister was not yet lying with a propped bottle in the crib my father had made. So it was during 1945 when I walked beside him to the open horse stalls on her land. He picked me up so I could see beyond the broad dusty smelling haunches of the big horse as she munched. Her color matched reddish brown saddles. She was a Bay.

"What was left of the Comerford land grant and ranch was surrounded by a line of tall Monterey cypress, their raggedy heads black-green against the blue sky or plunged into the grey-stained cotton bolls of summer fog. A grape stake fence covered with lichen ran along beside the trees my father said to keep them from running away.

"Under the expansive porch roof a swing hung from the roof beams. It was the delight of my tiny self for it hung low to the worn grey porch floor, so it was easy to climb aboard and push back and forth with my feet. I had not yet learned the art of pumping my legs and soaring like the older children at the playground did.

It was hard, though not impossible, for Andrea to recognize Lydia in the earlier pictures shared in this story. When she knew Lydia, Lydia was older, though her constantly-worn rimless glasses could not hide a kindred spirit. Lydia was also known as "Lyde" by the Siebert family, as well by many others in the Comerford and Fahey clans.

"When I was tiny, she wore only dark navy blue coats, skirts, hats and gloves 'in town,'" Andrea said. "Her 'grandma' style shoes were black with laces and, as we were still recovering from wartime, she always wore lisle stockings. These gave way, eventually, to nylons in the 1950s and gradually blouses with tiny flowers or dots began to accompany her mid-calf length grey tweed skirts. But when she was gardening she wore overalls and old leather gloves with the fingers cut off at the tips. Dungarees and boots were needed only to pick blackberries!"

Andrea noted there were trees to the north of the Comerford home, along with picnic tables, where Andrea and her family enjoyed many visits with their neighbor. Sometimes Lydia's friends, Mr. and Mrs. Delessio, also joined them.

"Mrs. Delessio was 'famous' for her ability to make pesto. Then it was an arduous task accomplished with a knife. I can attest to it from many years of chopping parsley. Parsley was the main ingredient of this delicacy and we – my family, me, Mr. and Mrs. Delessio, and Mrs. Fahey – enjoyed it spread on soda crackers. On the coast parsley grew well, while basil was most difficult to raise, as it was very cold and the air damp and salty."

Author: Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

Pacifica Historical Society / Jean Bartlett ©2021.

Lydia Comerford Fahey ~ Horse riding, gun carrying local kept railway surveyors honest (page 10)

Andrea said on the western cliffside north of the house was a "crumpled sort of pine grove," where Italian immigrants had planted Portobello and cremini mushrooms.

"No one dared pick them without a knowledgeable farmer, or Mrs. Fahey there to make sure only the safe fungi were harvested," Andrea underscored. "The pines had been battered and shaped by the offshore winds into tunnels. Their many needles fell and rested in swaths until they made perfect little dens for growing mushrooms."

On the edge of Lydia's property, there was a "kind of cut in the cliff" that made it easy to access the beach. Andrea and her family often walked to the beach with Lydia and Lydia's dog, Petey, who was named after San Pedro Valley.



Lydia enjoying the sand, Sharp Park, circa 1920s.

Andrea loved that her family so often enjoyed the areas fresh vegetables and fruits, courtesy of Lydia leading the way.

"One of Lydia's favorite haunts was Phil's Gulch at berry picking time," Andrea said. "Below the old Hog Ranch route to Skyline, the gulch extended down to the sea. It is covered now by the freeway, the part that swings out over the ocean as you enter town. Before the natural contour of the earth was changed, it harbored blackberry vines that towered above my dad and taller men's heads. Lydia and my dad went berry picking there every August, checking for weeks in advance to see if they were ripe. When the best day came they went there armored with stout shoes, leather or other heavy jackets, and blue dungarees. They brought along clippers to remove the growth of the year that choked every path. No matter how I pled, I couldn't go until I was ten. My mother and sister and I stayed home and prepared the crusts for pies, and paraffin for jam jars and jelly glasses. At ten years old, my skin was deemed tough enough to go blackberry picking. I remember scrambling down to the steep sides of the gulch with the cleansed paint buckets my dad had supplied. The tight fitting lids were crucial for the rocky climb back to the top when the buckets were full. Mine was painted red outside and had my name painted on it too. The three of us fanned out into different tall cages of thorny brush, silently picking and picking, with only a now-and-then mouthful just for fun."

"When I got down to the creek that ran at the bottom of Phil's Gulch," Andrea pens in her simmering book, "I was dusty and a little tired. I set my buckets of berries down carefully and tamped down their lids. I found a place dry enough to sit on a large willow bough that dipped itself into the stream. Pulling off my shoes and socks and rolling up the protective jacket sleeves, I began to splash my hot feet in the cool water and to riffle the top of the stream with my berry stained hands. Then I sat quite still and looked up to the grey sky. Hawks circled there. I let the aroma and quiet of the leafy bowers fold themselves around me. There were subtle sounds of probable mice or moles, and louder, sudden rustles of small birds hidden in the leaves. Then I heard another sound – a soft and gentle stirring in the creek. I leaned forward around the wall of willows and saw downstream, another little cove where there sat Lydia, her blue dungarees rolled up above her ankles, bathing her bare feet in the creek. Like two conspirators we smiled."

There were also the artichoke harvesting days. They grew on the farmland where Ingrid B. Lacy Middle School now stands and were under the direction of tenant farmers. Andrea remembers walking beside her father as he cut the late heads from the artichoke plants. Lydia and Andrea's mother did the same. For Andrea it was also a time of sorrow. Songbirds and English sparrows lay dead beside each artichoke bush, the victims of insecticide. Andrea would fill her pinafore apron with as many corpses as her dad would allow her to take home and bury. (It wouldn't be until 1972 that the United States would ban the use of DDT.)

Andrea remembers meeting some of Lydia's family. One of her nephews, Mr. Fahey, came to visit often. He was in real estate. Lydia's sister Jeanette and her husband Herman "Dutch" Pierson also stopped by regularly. Jeanette and Dutch lived in Larkspur, and that was quite a travel event in those days to visit Sharp Park. (Dutch Pierson served on the Larkspur City Council for 25 years, 12 of those years as Mayor.) Her sister Irene C. Bracchi, who lived in San Francisco, and her family also enjoyed many visits with Lydia.

"My father and mother were sensitive to Lydia's life hardships. She had dearly loved her husband, my mother once explained, and was devastated by his death. Later her young son drowned up in the reservoir at the back of the rifle range—the erstwhile wartime detention center on the Fairway Park side below Sharp Park Road and the southern flank of Gypsy Hill. Will had been accustomed to swimming there with other young boys. My dad and I walked there with her once. I was perhaps five or six. Their adult confidential mutterings and remarks eluded me. I could see though that those tragedies left her deeply affected. She kept few pictures of her lost loves, but I believe there was one of her father in the front hall and a small one on a table, perhaps in her bedroom, of Will."

Lydia was a prolific walker. She could often be seen walking to Maude Pitsche's newspaper, the *Sharp Park Breakers*, which was located right across the street from the Siebert home at 1077 County Road. Lydia also walked to Landi's Market, which was further south along County Road, and Butch Bublak's Shop for Meat, in the small strip mall along the old highway between Carmel and Paloma. Andrea's dad always drove Lydia to the Catholic Church services offered in Rockaway Beach.

Up until 1914, Catholics on the coast headed to Holy Angels on San Pedro Road in Colma for Mass and the sacraments. But in 1914, the pastor of Holy Angels, Father Sorasio, was able to set up a mission in a home across the street from today's Fassler Boulevard, where he would hear confessions and celebrate Mass. This mission came into being due to the generous support of Mr. James Troglia, a resident of the Rockaway Beach community.

In October of 1951, a home on Brighton Road in Sharp Park was purchased to temporarily minister to the 300 families of the parish. Lydia and her Siebert family attended Mass there. In late June of 1953, Good Shepherd Catholic Church, where it still stands in Sharp Park, was completed. By then, Lydia was living in a small house on Lunetta Avenue between Brighton Road and Moana Way.



Lydia was in her late sixties when she sold her family home and land. It had become too much for her to manage. The man she sold the property to, promised her he would restore the mansion and save the trees, but there was a fortune to be had in development. And so after the papers were signed, he burned the house to the ground and chopped all the trees down – all that remains lives in the memory of those who once knew the grand old Comerford Fahey home.

As Andrea recalls her "Lyde," one can nearly see Mrs. Fahey through the painted words of Andrea's poetry and prose.

"We'd walk a block then scramble to the sand. She'd place her purse, her shoes, along with mine, my high white oxfords, in a neat straight line. And then the gesture I admired her for: no other grown-up lady that I knew did – would doff her good lisle stockings, in a manner both frank and discreet, and eagerly stride to the blue or grey edge where the waves gabbled over our feet."

Andrea remembered that Lyde's house smelled old, and her dog Petey had an old dog's growl, and "her house stood two tall stories high, the attic with its gables made a third. We'd pull the cord to ring, and hear the tinkling echo of the bell."

Andrea's father would fix Lyde's kitchen pump which poured iron-flavored water from her well.

"Mrs. Fahey used her 200-foot freshwater well, which was close to the ocean, to irrigate all her fields," Andrea's father Bob said in a 1985 interview filmed by videographer Steve Brown. "It was used by the people who rented the land from her for crops and it was an unfailing source of fresh water. Though it was the hardest water I ever came across, you couldn't get any lather from it!"

"She wore a hair net when she was at home," Andrea smiled in remembrance. "The platform rocker was her favorite chair. Its wooden arms were tooled and round – had pea-green velvet cushions with brass nails. It made a swishing, creaking sound and in it she sipped tea, her pale eyes seeming pleased. I never speculated on her smile. Years later it occurred to me that we had made her pleased."

* * *

In 1969, Lydia moved to Alameda. She was, by then, a member of the Third Order Lay Carmelites. Lay Carmelites wear the Brown Scapular—a Western Christian devotional garment—of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel as an external sign of dedication to Mary, and of trust in her protection. It is considered a vocation, a call to learn, and to live "a way of life that is dedicated to prayer, community and ministry." Lay Carmelites are men and women."

Author: Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

Pacifica Historical Society / Jean Bartlett ©2021.

Lydia Comerford Fahey ~ Horse riding, gun carrying local kept railway surveyors honest (page 13)

Donating a major portion of her estate to the Third Order Lay Carmelites, Lydia lived her last few years peacefully in an elder community/assisted living facility of the Carmelites in Alameda. She died at the age of 89 on July 9, 1972. She was survived by her sisters Jeanette and Irene, multiple nieces and nephews, and great nieces and nephews, and her Siebert family. A Requiem High Mass, for the repose of her soul, took place at Good Shepherd Church in Pacifica. She is buried at Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery in Colma alongside her husband, William Fahey, their son, William Fahey, Jr., and her mother, Elizabeth (Kellett) Comerford Herbert. The family is in Section L, the last section on the right side of the main drive as you head toward the Mausoleum – Row 15, Graves 7 and 8.



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. She is also a former Hallmark Card writer, a produced playwright and a published author.

(Copyright 2021. Pacifica Historical Society / Author: Jean Bartlett, City Biographer. Funded by the Sam Mazza Foundation. Available via the Pacifica Historical Society and on www.bartlettbiographies.com.)