



The outer appearance of the Brookdale Club hasn't changed that much in 75 years. This photo was taken in 1953.

Brookdale Club slipping quietly from Valley home of 75 years

By KAREN CLARK
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BROOKDALE — Like a grande dame slipping out of the mainstream of society, the 75-year-old Brookdale Club is suffering a quiet, solemn death.

The longtime bastion of Brookdale society, and one of the oldest organizations in the San Lorenzo Valley, may have its last meeting on Thursday, when members will vote whether to disband the women's club.

Whatever the outcome of that vote, it's too late to save the group's 69-year-old clubhouse, which was sold earlier this week to a neighbor who plans to live in it with his family.

"We kept trying and struggling, but we finally decided the time had come," said club President Jean DeVries, a Scotts Valley resident who has been club member for seven years. "You just don't get the younger women to come along and take over for the older ones."

'Everybody wanted to cry'

Ben Lomond resident Arliss Reames, who has belonged to the Brookdale Club for 32 years, said the decision to sell the clubhouse and possibly disband the group has been difficult.

"Everybody wanted to cry," said Reames. "It's a sad time, not that we're going to lose our friends, but we made so many friends throughout the times. ... There are a lot of good memories in that clubhouse."

Randy Wood, the Brookdale resident who, along with his wife, Christine, bought the 1,300-square-foot clubhouse, said its history and beautiful forest setting made the deal impossible to resist.

"The land's just so pretty, and there's so much of it," said Wood, who bought 4½ acres around the clubhouse, which is near the Brookdale Post Office by the bridge at Huckleberry Island. "It's been rundown for so long ... it will be kind of fun to take care of it again."

The club at its peak

Wood said he will be happy to leave the house he's been living in for eight years. It was badly knocked around in the 1989 earthquake and then damaged by fire in 1990. "It's great we're finally

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getting out of it."

At its peak, the Brookdale Club had 100 members, but that has dropped to about 22 today. There never were many more than 100 members, said Reames, because the club's bylaws precluded it.

Membership was by invitation only, and required a majority vote of the members. In the early days the club was mighty particular about its choices. "It was for the society women," said Reames.

Charter members included Oakland residents Josephine and H.C. Capwell, who were among the first people to build a summer home in Brookdale. The home included a nearby pavilion, where "much of the social life of many of the summer people was carried on," according to a club history written by early member Hazel Wapple.

A popular summer spot

Brookdale became a popular summer spot for Santa Cruz, Bay Area and San Jose residents. Lots sold briskly after 1902, when the village got a post office. The train made regular stops in Brookdale, making it a convenient destination for the wealthy summer regulars.

The notion of forming a club and building a clubhouse took root in the summer of 1916, according to Wapple. Those plans were derailed the following year by World War I. But in the summer of 1919, the idea was revived, and the Brookdale Club became offi-

cial in July 1920.

Club activities continued at the Capwell pavilion until the site near the San Lorenzo River was found. The clubhouse was built in the summer of 1926 with dues paid by 80 members.

Club members' children were able to swim in the pond created on the property by damming the San Lorenzo River with rocks each summer from mid-June to mid-September.

Wapple said women members and their guests met for social activities each Thursday, and there was a dance every Saturday night for young people. An orchestra for the dances arrived by train on Saturday, spent the night in the home of a club member, and returned on Sunday.

When the depression hit

The Great Depression hit the club hard, with membership dropping to 15. "But these members thought that the club was truly worthwhile and were determined to keep it going," said Wapple.

By pinching pennies, the club survived the Depression without any debt, and members rose again during the 1940s and 1950s. By the 1970s, there was a waiting list of women who wanted to become one of the Brookdale Club 100. Many of these women played bridge, and club members eventually spent much of their meeting time playing the game.

By 1989, however, members were thinking about selling the clubhouse. It was expensive to maintain, and even with the \$100 in yearly membership dues there simply wasn't enough money available to do it properly, said Reames.

"Looking to the future, we could see at the time that we couldn't get the younger people in," said Reames. "The younger people are working. They're more oriented to their families."

Club members initially asked the county parks department if it would be interested in buying the clubhouse, but that nibble wasn't successful. Finally, members put the clubhouse on the market several months ago.

"It's a heritage that now the younger women will miss out on," said Reames.