

Saved by the Saint: Late 1800's

Just before the turn of the century in 1892 when the present Cecilia Fund was founded, Santa Barbara was a rural village of 5,865 residents. The modernity of a sewer system and electrical lines, albeit haphazardly hung, had just been installed for the benefit of the area's permanent residents and the seasonal visitors seeking the healing waters of hot springs that bubbled from the ground. Storefronts were a jumbled potpourri of adobe, brick, and wood of shoddy construction and the unpaved streets were dusty in the heat and muddy during the rainy season. Originally the area was only accessible by water.



In 1876 the first luxury hotel opened its doors to visitors arriving by steamship at Stearn's Wharf. The Arlington Hotel with its plush accommodations became the focal point of tourism and was publicized as a luxury hotel with healthy air, healing hot springs, and beautiful coastal scenery. Before long visitors from the East Coast flocked to the area on Southern Pacific's newly constructed railroad. Santa Barbara soon became known as a 'fashionable' location and more and more tourists chose to make Santa Barbara their home.



Saved by the Saint: 1889-1892

Dr. Richard J. Hall and his wife Elise Boyer Coolidge, a cousin of the future President Calvin Coolidge, arrived in Santa Barbara in 1889 from Boston. Dr Hall opened an office and was to become a leading member of Cottage Hospital's founding medical staff. Elise enthusiastically joined the Cottage Hospital Society, formed to raise funds for the hospital's completion in 1891. Consequently Elise was elected vice president of the hospital's board and received accolades for her highly successful fund raising efforts. As a sideline, Elise spearheaded a musical group known as 'The Amateurs' with a violin, piano, and Elise playing her saxophone.



In April 1892 the Morning Press announced the official formation of the St. Cecilia Club as "... recently organized in this city for the purpose of supporting a free room in the hospital." The Amateurs had become a fund raising arm for Cottage Hospital in the name of the patron saint of music, also honored for providing help for the sick and downtrodden. Musicals were held on a regular basis to support the hospital room for the needy. As the St. Cecilia Club grew its members included prominent names such as de la Guerra, Hollister, Whitney, Winchester, Fernald, and Putnam.

Saved by the Saint: 1892-1925

The Cecilia Club embarked on an ambitious schedule of benefit concerts and events. The concerts served to attract members and was originally the primary source of funding. After a year the club added another benefit held at the luxurious Arlington Hotel. The event eventually became the annual St. Valentine's Day Tea and Fair, considered the society bash of the year in Santa Barbara. Attending guests could purchase teapots, tea cups and other fancy items, some hand made, as they socialized with one another, of course for the benefit of Cottage Hospital's St. Cecilia room. The Daily News reported, "The daintiest Valentines, some of them really works of art, were sold".

The St. Cecilia Club branched out to support the Spanish-American war wounded and in 1906 a cottage was funded in a neighboring sanitarium, a site that was later became St. Francis Hospital. In 1925 the disastrous 6.3 earthquake struck Santa Barbara and the beautiful Arlington Hotel was reduced to a pile of rubble. The Club, unsure of its role in Santa Barbara's restoration efforts disbanded 'to find out just how necessary the St. Cecilia is to the community'.



Saved by the Saint: 1926-1945

One year after the St. Cecilia Club disbanded it returned. Its Valentine Tea and Fair was moved to other venues, although none replaced the grandeur of the Arlington Hotel. With the stock market crash in 1929 the group sprang into full action. The desperation of the Great Depression rejuvenated the club and its fund raising efforts. The teas and fairs continued in full swing until the end of World War Two. As war descended on the country other charitable causes assumed a higher profile in the community such as the USO and service men's clubs. The 1940 closure of the Recreation Center of Santa Barbara forced the club to once again reevaluate.

The reevaluation process included the organization's the name. In a time of war term 'Club' appeared exclusive and outdated so the St. Cecilia Club officially became known as the St. Cecilia Society. After the war, in 1945, the organization also substituted an Annual Meeting and Tea for its high profile fundraising fairs. Memberships and donations were adequate to fund the Society's 1892 mission of medical support in the greater Santa Barbara community.



Saved by the Saint: 1945-2000

The St. Cecilia Society's mission continued to be passed down through generations of women and remained a dependable source of medical assistance into the New Millennium. The work of the board assumed a lower profile in the community after the fund raisers and fairs were eliminated. The St. Cecilia Society, despite its longevity, became known as 'the best kept secret in town'. Thanks to generous donors and legacy gifts over 50 years allowed the St. Cecilia Society to continue its mission and involvement in the community.

The Annual Meeting and Tea was held yearly in January and became the focal point of the organization's funding. The event eventually found a home at All Saint's Episcopal Church in Montecito. The meeting was held in the sanctuary of the church after which the guests were welcomed to tea in the Parish House. The small all volunteer board personally baked cookies and other finger foods as a thank you to the generosity of its members and donors. As a gesture to the past, the tea table was covered with a lace tablecloth that had been passed down through generations of St. Cecilia Society boards.



Saved by the Saint: 2000-2017

The mission of the St. Cecilia Society remained through the decades along with the Annual Meeting and Tea to celebrate the organization's accomplishments. The medical environment of the New Millennium however, had changed drastically. Medical costs skyrocketed and the burden of responsibility for Santa Barbara's most vulnerable population was placed upon doctors, hospitals, insurance companies, and charity. Requests for help came in droves, medical as well as dental, and the St. Cecilia Society board found themselves overwhelmed and underfunded.

Once again a reevaluation was needed to meet the medical demands of the new century. A series of long range planning meetings determined that the original mission statement of 1892 was especially relevant in the 2000's. The changes came in operations, organization, and fund raising. The St. Cecilia Society's name was changed to The Cecilia Fund to better reflect its secular philosophy. The Affaire of the Heart fundraiser was added to the group's annual calendar for donations alone were insufficient to meet community needs. The organization of the board was revamped to meet the current environment. Now in its 125th year The Cecilia Fund is positioned to remain true to the original mission and to pass the CF baton to the generations to come.

