

The Charity Ball

by

Mary Clark and Iris Engstrand

Lena Sefton Wakefield Clark, mother of the late Dallas Clark, chaired the first Charity Ball on November 30, 1909, at the Hotel Robinson on Fir Street between Third and Fourth Avenues. The ball started late in the evening, featured a midnight supper, and continued well into the night. Couples danced, played cards, and engaged in other diversions. Originally given to benefit the infirmary at the Children's Home, it provided seed money for the internationally recognized Children's Hospital founded in 1954 on twenty-five acres of land located by Dallas Clark on Kearny Mesa. It was renamed Rady Children's Hospital in recognition of a major gift made to the facility by Ernest and Evelyn Rady in 2006.

While most balls in San Diego have become simple dinner-dances, the Charity Ball retains certain distinctive features, including elite "box" seats arranged every year in the ballroom of the Hotel del Coronado. On February 9, 2008, long-established San Diego families along with newcomers attended the 99th anniversary Charity Ball that included an optional pre-ball dinner in the Crown Room, a grand procession through the lobby, and an evening of dancing. Mary Clark, charity box holder since 1947, attended the ball with many of the former chairs featured in the 1982 photograph.



Lena Sefton Wakefield Clark with her son, Dallas, and daughter-in-law, Mary, at the 1960 Charity Ball. Mary is wearing a dress originally made for her mother-in-law from her own Spanish shawl and worn for a ball at West Point in 1902. It was worn again by Lena Sefton Clark at the 1912 Charity Ball.

The silver and gray dresses worn by the Charity Ball Chairpersons in 1982 were made from fabrics provided by Burl Stiff, society columnist for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, who had collected the material during trips to London, Paris, and New York. He enlisted the help of Janet Moore who, in turn, recruited volunteers to sew the dresses into three different patterns. Each person added accessories and individualized the dresses. Chair of the 1982 Ball, Letitia Hunte Swortwood, whose mother Emily Fenton Hunte had been chair in 1967, worked behind the scenes to assist the women with their new gowns and to get them ready for the photo on the following page.



Bottom Row (left to right)

Georgia Coddington Borthwick (Mrs. Anderson), 1954; Norma McNeill James (Mrs. Oliver), 1975; Ruth Whitney Robinson (Mrs. James), 1965; Gerry Smith Wheeler (Mrs. Richard), 1978; Abbie Johnson Giddings (Mrs. Donald), 1966; Margaret Wood Bancroft (Mrs. Griffing), 1925; Emily Fenton Hunte (Mrs. Louis), 1967; Augusta Witherow Starkey (Mrs. Harold B.), 1948; Patricia Moore Carter (Mrs. Hugh C.*), 1977.

Middle Row (left to right)

Rosemary Berthois McInnis (Mrs. Wesley), 1949; Elzie Dauler Alison (Mrs. Jefferson), 1934; Carma Coppard Luce (Mrs. Edgar A., Jr.), 1947; Winifred Sullivan Broderick (Mrs. Walter**), 1958; Elizabeth McDonald Hogan (Mrs. John***), 1968; Marjorie Forward Lutes (Mrs. Fielder), 1970; Mary Hollis Clark (Mrs. J. Dallas), 1971; Sally Stevens Jones (Mrs. Evan), 1973; Alison Frost Gildred (Mrs. George), 1976; Gwendolyn Walsh Stephens (Mrs. William T.), 1969.

Top Row (left to right)

Betty Matthews Wohlford (Mrs. Burnet), 1972; Alice Klauber Miller (Mrs. David M.), 1963; Anne Ledford Evans (Mrs. William), 1974; Marian Freshour Jessop (Mrs. Arthur), 1955; Elinor Savage Oatman (Mrs. Jack), 1959; Mary Belcher Farrell (Mrs. Walter), 1956; Frances Hodenpyle Golden (Mrs. Kenneth), 1981; Betty Marshall Hubbard (Mrs. Leon), 1980; Karon Turnbow Luce (Mrs. Gordon C.), 1979.

*Formerly Mrs. Fred Rohr, Jr.

**later Mrs. Walter Deming

***later Mrs. Arthur Jessop