

Farewell, Dolly Barba Bader

Paso Robles said farewell to a beloved pioneer in August, when Dolly Barba Bader passed away at the age of 101.

Dolly was a seventh-generation Californian when she was born in 1910 to the Barba family of Creston, with roots dating back to the first recorded exploration of California by Europeans, the 1769 Spanish expedition into territory Spain had claimed two hundred years earlier. One of Dolly's great-grandmothers was the great-great-granddaughter of Captain Jose Francisco de Ortega, the expedition's scout and later commander of Spain's settlements at San Diego, Monterey, and Santa Barbara.

Dolly spent her century of life making contributions to the North County community. Her education spanned from a one-room schoolhouse in Creston, where her parents raised grain and cattle, to graduation from San Jose Business College, and later in life it made Dolly an asset during 12 years' service on the Paso Robles School Board.

When Dolly came home from college in 1931, she was 21 years old and full of vigor on the brink of the Great Depression. She had a gift for getting things up and running, and her first order of business was to become a charter member of the newly formed Paso Robles Business and Professional Women.



Pictured here with husband Bill Bader in 1932 and 1982, Dolly treasured the Paso Robles way of life for over 100 years.

She also landed a job, with a produce buyer named Bill Bader. They married in January 1932, and within five years they were running a poultry and egg business that would sustain them, and their daughters Barbara and Susan, for the next 25 years.

When World War II erupted, soldiers at Camp Roberts dined on the Baders' poultry while Dolly spearheaded the local USO, organizing busloads of young women to keep the dances lively. She also joined the Red Cross Motor Corps and served as a Civil Defense airplane spotter.

In 1946, the state of California agreed to give the city of Paso Robles \$30,000 for a state fairgrounds if the citizens matched \$22,000, and the Baders stepped up with 21 other contributors to donate \$1,000 for what is now the California Mid-State Fair. Dolly found a niche there, supervising the floriculture division for 25 years.

Over the decades, Dolly immersed herself in North County life, raising a family, operating the family business, raising quarter horses, working for the school district's accounting division, and throwing her support into many community organizations.

Advancing age only made her eligible for service in a wider range of civic groups. In 1985, in her 70s, Dolly helped establish the Paso Robles Area Historical Society and then took up the duties of Queen for the city's Pioneer Day festivities, a tradition she'd been part of since the first parade in 1931.

And when the city itself called on her, Dolly served on its Senior Advisory Committee. In November 2009, when she was 99, the mayor and city council declared a Dolly Bader Day in recognition of her years of dedication and service to Paso Robles.

Dolly celebrated her centennial birthday at the historic Paso Robles Inn Ballroom, surrounded by children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and a host of friends. In her long, rich life, Dolly Barba Bader enriched the community that enjoyed her company for 101 years.

— Chris Weygandt Alba