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Postwar Patriotism: The Freedom Train of 1948

By Micheline Golden

In March of 1948 more than eight thousand Fresno residents lined up to see a train full of historic documents and memorabilia that celebrated the United States of America. The American Freedom Train chugged into town carrying three cars full of American history, including a copy of the Constitution, George Washington's copy of the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and a draft of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. In Fresno for just thirteen hours, the Freedom Train visit wrapped up a week of parades, speeches, sermons, and "rededications" that reminded the people of Fresno just what it meant to be an American. During the week's activities they joined the more than fifty million Americans who pledged to vote regularly, pay their taxes on time, and practice good citizenship in advance of the train's visit. On that warm March day, their patriotism was rewarded when they stepped into the Freedom Train to view treasures it carried.

The Freedom Train was the brainchild of the American Heritage Foundation (AHF), a group born of collaboration between philanthropists, business leaders, and advertising executives in partnership with the United States Archives. Starting in Philadelphia, the train traveled the country from September 1947 to October 1949. According to a retrospective produced by the U.S. Archives, the train "recreated an awareness of the American heritage." Historian Stuart J. Little called it the first post-World War II effort to define citizenship and return a sense of unity to the country.

According to newspaper clippings from the *Fresno Bee* in the Ben R. Walker Collection in the Fresno Historical Society Archives, Fresno was ready for that challenge. In order to secure a stop by the Freedom Train, the AHF required community support and involvement in the week leading up to each visit, with parades and ceremonies involving as many civic groups as possible. The citizens of Fresno held a parade every day for the week prior to the visit, with local high school bands providing music and each sponsoring group out in full force. Fresno Civic Day was March 4, School Day was March 5, Agriculture Day was March 6, Freedom Sunday was March 7, Retailers Day was March 8,



National Archives personnel working on installation of documents on the Freedom Train, October 5, 1948. (*National Archives Identifier 12167218*)



Freedom Train, November 23, 1950. (*National Archives Identifier 12167190*)

Veterans Day was March 9, and the week wrapped up with United Nations Day on March 10. The parades began at 11 a.m. every day in front of City Hall.

Each day was designed to celebrate a different segment of American society, and each parade featured different groups. Mayor Glenn M. DeVore presided over the Fresno Civic Day Parade, and the Maid of Cotton led the Agriculture Day celebration. The individual days were designed by the AHF to stress the commonalities of all Americans, rather than differences, and all centered on citizenship and American identity. The individual groups in each community put their own stamp on each day. Local 4-H clubs filled their floats with livestock for the Agriculture Day. For Retailers Day, Gottschalks took out a quarter page advertisement in the *Fresno Bee* featuring the patriotic Freedom Train theme, "Freedom is Everyone's Business," right next to an ad for the newest style in women's coats.

Newspaper articles indicate that Fresno residents embraced the activities with the same enthusiasm shown by thousands of other towns and cities nationwide. Mayor DeVore kicked off "Rededication Week" on Thursday, March 4, 1948, by reading a proclamation "Dedicating citizens of this area to reaffirmation of their faith in American principles and ideals" and overseeing the placement of a twenty-one foot replica of the Statue of Liberty on the front lawn of Fresno City Hall. While news stories do not record

the details of the principles and ideals listed in Mayor DeVore's proclamation, souvenir documents from the Freedom Train refer to the "Nine Promises of a Good Citizen." In addition to the aforementioned voting, tax-paying, and all-around good citizenship, the list included serving on a jury when called, obeying all laws, working for peace, and supporting public education. Just how these actions correlate with the visit from the Freedom Train is not addressed in the document or in the news coverage of Mayor DeVore's proclamation. However, merchant advertising for the Freedom Train gives some clues as to how the proclamation supported the goals of the Foundation.

The Santa Fe Railway Company's advertisement for the Freedom Train filled a full page of the *Fresno Bee* on

March 10, 1948, just one day before the train's arrival. Entitled "Scoreboard of Freedom," it featured a three-columned table with "Your Rights" running down the left-hand side of the page, followed by "As a U.S. Citizen," and "Under a Dictatorship" to the right. Each of the latter two columns had either the word "YES" or "NO" listed after each right. The list of sixteen rights included "Freedom of worship," "Freedom of speech and freedom of the press," "The right to keep and bear arms," "No private property may be taken for public use without just compensation and due process of law," and "Freedom of anyone to have his own business." Every right was marked "YES" in the "As a U.S. Citizen" column, and "NO" in the "Under a Dictatorship" column, with the exception of freedom of religion, which read "MAYBE" in the dictatorship column. While these rights differed from the Nine Promises, the intent was clearly for the reader to value what it meant to be an American.

According to Little, the advertising and activities that led up to the train's arrival were part of a very early Cold War consensus, designed to focus American citizens on a new post-war way of life. "Soundly anticommunist and antisubversive," says Little, "they emphasized an ideal common heritage for all American citizens." He notes that while the Freedom Train itself lacked "harsh anticommunist materials and rhetoric," the AHF openly acknowledged that their

campaign to promote the Freedom Train was built on creating a new American democracy that opposed communist influences.


While the rededication messages were carefully crafted to emphasize American freedoms and common ideals, at least one prominent Fresno resident clearly addressed issues that would shape the coming decades of Cold War rhetoric. Superior Court Justice Dan F. Conway, in a Rededication Week address to the Fresno Elks Club, urged members to vote wisely, choose representatives who would support peace, but be prepared for war. "The world is held in the grip of fear," said Conway, "because the nations distrust one another, because the people are in a panic frame of mind, seeing no security from another war." He went on to name the threat, something the Freedom Train advance materials and advertising carefully avoided. "Strangely enough, our problem is not making of peace with our enemies. It is the making of peace with what heretofore has been our greatest friend. Russia has always been a friend of the United States."

Most of the messages leading up to the Freedom Train visit took a subtler approach than the Santa Fe advertisement or Judge Conway's speech. Advertisements from Wasemiller's Dry Goods, Roos Brothers, and the Southern Pacific Railroad supported a *Fresno Bee* article that called the train "a collection of priceless papers." They listed the key American documents visitors should look for in the exhibit that exemplified freedom: a copy of the Bill of Rights, the Northwest Ordinance, the Treaty of Paris, an early draft of the U.S. Constitution, the Emancipation Proclamation, a rough draft of the Gettysburg Address, and the Tokyo Surrender. The front page of the *Fresno Bee* on March 7 went into even greater detail, listing every historic document and artifact presented on the train. The advertisements and article urged Fresno citizens to remember that these documents were the foundation of liberty and citizenship in America and that they represented a common heritage of freedom for all Americans.





An editorial from the day before the train's arrival indicates that Fresno may have interpreted the AHF's message differently than intended. The author notes that the Rededication Week message emphasizes equality and tolerance and says, "Hereabouts, without question, are more people of different nationalities and racial extractions than reside anywhere else in the United States." It goes on to compare Fresno to cities

in the southern United States who insisted on segregated viewings of the Freedom Train. "The answer here is tolerance which is prevalent here, despite an admixture of people of all colors and ancestry." This message of tolerance of ethnic difference was slightly different from the homogenizing unity against communism espoused by the AHF.

**THE FREEDOM TRAIN
ARRIVES TOMORROW!**



WHAT TO SEE ON THE TRAIN

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE —Our greatest American possession—Copy signed by Benjamin Franklin.		NORTHWEST ORDINANCE —Guaranteed religious freedom and other basic rights to the territories west of the Alleghenies.
BILL OF RIGHTS —The document that guarantees the liberties you enjoy.		EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION —The actual document that abolished slavery—signed by A. Lincoln.
U. S. CONSTITUTION —A rare early draft with corrections in Washington's handwriting.		GETTYSBURG ADDRESS —Rough draft of perhaps the world's greatest speech, in Lincoln's own handwriting.
TREATY OF PARIS, 1875 —In which the independence of the United States is recognized for the first time.		TOKYO SURRENDER —The signatures that ended the most terrible war in history.

... AND MANY, MANY MORE

This advertisement was prepared by The Advertising Council

FREEDOM IS EVERYBODY'S JOB!

Contributed to the public interest by

WASEMILLER'S

DRY GOODS

316 "C" STREET — FRESNO

OTHER STORES

AYENAL RIVERDALE CHOWCHILLA

Wasemiller's Dry Goods advertisement, *Fresno Bee*, March 10, 1948.



Visitors enjoy the Freedom Train Exhibit, October 20, 1948. (*National Archives Identifier 12167318*)



Visitors examine the Bill of Rights on the Freedom Train, October 20, 1948. (*National Archives Identifier 12167308*)

On March 11, 1948, a reported 8,275 people toured the Freedom Train during its thirteen-hour stopover in Fresno, most of them students. Local entertainers Al Radka and Elmer Tuschhoff coordinated high school bands, student speakers, and local musicians to keep visitors amused for three to four hours while they wound through the line and traversed the exhibit in the train. The League of Women Voters leveraged the promise to vote regularly by using the visit as an opportunity to register hundreds of people to vote. The last remaining lingerers from the crowd were dispersed by the Fresno Police Department at about 10 p.m., and the Freedom Train headed out for Modesto at 1:30 a.m. on March 12.

Over the next few weeks, letters to the editor of the *Fresno Bee* spoke of line cutters and pushy matrons, the sense of pride engendered by seeing precious historic documents, and support for the train's perceived message of racial equality. What they did not address was the American Heritage Foundation's intended message of antisubversion and anticommunism. Only Judge Conway's remarks encompass the thoughts that would later become Cold War rhetoric. Instead, the legacy of the Freedom Train's 1948 visit to Fresno was pride, patriotism, and racial tolerance.

About the Author

Micheline Golden is a life-long Valley resident and a former journalist. Her past work includes a history of the City of Clovis for the Clovis Diamond Jubilee celebration. She received her B.A. in History from the University of California, Davis and is currently in the History M.A. program at Fresno State. She is employed as a Director of Development at Fresno State and lives with her family in Clovis and Shaver Lake.

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Faithful Correspondents: The Letters of the Harvey Women

By Jill Poulsen

William and Catherine Harvey immigrated to the United States from Weymouth, England. William Harvey, born on January 22, 1841, was an accountant by trade. The family first settled in Minnesota before coming to California in 1885. The Harvey family moved to Fresno County where they purchased forty acres of land and planted a vineyard in the Belmont district, later part of the City of Fresno. Mr. Harvey was a pioneer agricultural developer and real estate promoter and he established Washington Colony, just south of the city. Mr. Harvey's investments allowed him to retire just three years after his arrival in Fresno as he rode the wave of the real estate boom of 1887. By 1888, Harvey had made enough money to turn his attention to philanthropic work and civic concerns. He was involved with the Producers Raisin Association and its successor the California Raisin Growers' Association, as well as several local organizations. When a fire destroyed their ranch home on Lewis Avenue in 1890, the Harvey family moved into a home at 905 S Street in a prestigious Fresno neighborhood.

William and Catherine Harvey had eleven children; Fredrick, William Jr., Dalton, Sydney, Constance, Louise, Ada, Frances, Annie, Alice, and Robert. Frederick and Robert were killed in separate drowning accidents in 1895 and 1896, respectively. After William Harvey passed away on July 7, 1922, several in the large family dispersed throughout the country during the late 1920s and early 1930s. William Jr. and Ada followed their father into the real estate business and Ada was also an attorney, while Sydney worked as the manager for the Freight Division of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway in Seattle. Constance, the only one of the Harvey sisters to marry, moved to New Jersey and then to New York with her husband and their children. Louise was a legal secretary in San Francisco where Ada also worked. Mother Catherine and the remaining Harvey sisters, Frances, Annie and Alice, stayed at home on S Street.

The six sisters in the family remained in touch with each other and maintained close family ties through their correspondence. Letters as artifacts can be very revealing due to their personal nature, not only of the content, but

of the object itself. In *Epistolary Practices*, William Decker writes, "In eras when letters were always handwritten the bodily traces of a correspondent stood before one on the sheet." When one of the Harvey sisters in San Francisco opened a letter from her sister in New York and saw her sister's handwriting, their hearts would come together despite the miles between them.

There is no doubt Catherine Harvey had her hands full mediating between her many daughters. Her children spanned the nation and the vast distances between the Harvey sisters and their mother necessitated a resourceful and creative system of letter writing and forwarding. An interesting feature of the time period is evident in the Harvey women's correspondence. Their practice of letter forwarding allowed the second or third



William and Catherine Harvey on their 50th Wedding Anniversary, February 8, 1916. (*Fresno Historical Society Archives*)

reader to return letters to their original recipient with commentary. This tradition is demonstrated by multiple exchanges between mother and daughters. Louise writes, "I am returning Constance's letters," in a letter to her mother, dated May 31, 1927. In another, dated June 4, 1930, Louise wrote, "Thank you for sending Honor's [Constance's daughter] letter." Constance recognizes their web of communication in a letter to Frances, dated December 7, 1932, when she pens, "I write you (or rather perhaps I ought to say write Mother for all of you to learn) all about our family news." And then again, in a letter to Frances, Constance stated, "Tell mother I know she gets news of me thro [sic] you so I write for her too, thou [sic] addressed to you." Decker notes that, "Addresser and addressee need not be singular; particularly among family correspondences, letters are written in collaboration to addressees who often collaborate as readers." Once the letter had made its circuit, it would invariably be returned to the person to whom it was originally addressed to be saved, treasured, and reread.

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, community churches served an integral role in American culture. Women especially looked to their local churches for support, social interaction, and an opportunity for

self-improvement through service. The Fresno First Baptist Church was founded by seven charter members in 1882 and became a thriving center of social life in the young community. The Harvey's were active members of the church, and the Harvey women often discussed their faith and church events in their letters. Growing up, Constance and her siblings witnessed their mother Catherine's steady involvement in the Fresno First Baptist Church. Catherine Harvey was a devoted wife and mother and her faith was very important in her daily life; she acted as a Deaconess and served in multiple local volunteer organizations. Catherine's influence on her daughters is obvious when following their correspondence. The letters are laced with scriptural references and discuss topics ranging from Christian summer camps to orphanage donations.

On opposite coasts, Constance and Louise made plain their strong religious feelings in their correspondence. Constance was a Sunday school teacher in New York and decided to attend courses that would qualify her to preach. Constance wrote about her intentions to her mother who then forwarded the letter to Louise. The news hit a chord with Louise when she received it in San Francisco where she worked as a legal secretary. Indignant with her sister's actions, Louise banged out a three-page letter on her typewriter to her mother in Fresno. When Louise returned her sister's letter to her mother with her own on May 31, 1927, she had some harsh judgment to share:

There is no need for her to preach just because she has the authority to do so from the denomination. The Apostle Paul said 'I suffer not a woman to teach' (1 Tim. 2 v. 12), and 'Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak' (1 Cor. 14, v. 34), and I must say I don't think much of the spirituality of people who claim the Apostle Paul was not inspired, and that such plain commands of scripture are not obligatory on them.

Despite her sister's opinions, Constance followed through with her studies. In a subsequent letter, she described her opportunity to preach in her local church in Brooklyn, New York, saying, "Mr. Trice expects to leave July 30th for a two week vacation and I am to take his place in the Church as acting Pastor until his return."

Another epistolary argument arose when Constance discussed the segregated churches in her New York neighborhood. Constance's letters are replete with references to both the white church and the "colored"

242 Patchen Avenue
Brooklyn New York.
Recd July 27th

Dear Mother,

Such a busy month has flown by. I wrote you how the boys moved me in and did it so nicely too. But my kitchen linenum is not yet down. Navell said he would do that when he came home from his vacation. I had a letter from him today. He traveled by Bus to the southern end of New Jersey and is out in the sunshine so much he wrote he looks like an Indian painted Red. He had also had one ride to Camden and enjoyed it greatly.

Conor is happy and busy in her school work. Contrary to her expectations she has a class for the summer in Pediatrics. She expected three months vacation from class work. Anyway they get three hours off daily and some days four as well as her class how so the duty

Letter from Constance Harvey Roberts, Brooklyn, New York, to her mother Catherine Harvey. Date unknown. (*Fresno Historical Society Archives*)



Harvey sister with typewriter, likely Ada or Louise, c. 1940s. (*Fresno Historical Society Archives*)



Harvey sisters on the porch of their home at 905 S Street in Fresno, c. 1950s. (*Fresno Historical Society Archives*)

church in which she taught Bible classes. In a letter to their mother on August 4, 1930, Louise quoted Constance, "I believe God wants it kept a white church. There is a colored one two blocks away on the same street, which is a member of the Nazarene Conference, too." And then Louise gives her opinion, remarking,

The Bible tells us that God is no respecter of persons; and our Lord prayed 'That they all may be one,' and can any true Christian believe that the Lord wants his own people divided in that way, blacks one place and whites another just two blocks away? I think attributing such thoughts to the God of all grace is simply shocking. Does she expect that in heaven there will be a section for the white people and another section for the colored people?

A careful study of the letters also reveals that some tension existed between the sisters over Constance's various church denominations. Louise mentions that Constance had switched from the Baptists to the Methodists and then the Nazarenes. This interchange conveys evidence of the cultural differences in the early-twentieth century between religious denominations. Interestingly, by modern standards, Louise seemed to think conservatively about women preaching but more progressively about racial segregation.

Catherine Harvey passed away on January 14, 1935. Her five unmarried daughters continued to live in the family home at 905 S Street in Fresno until Louise and Frances died within a week of each other in 1965. The

sisters' close bond was evident as Frances entered the hospital following Louise's funeral and passed away only seven days later. Dalton Harvey, the surviving Harvey brother, generously donated furniture and decor from the Harvey home to the Fresno Historical Society. Today, William Harvey's custom-made brass bed and a piano from the Harvey home can be seen in a bedroom of the Kearney Mansion Museum. The Fresno Historical Society is also fortunate to house, as a part of its permanent collection, the Harvey Family Papers. The collection consists of legal, financial, and medical records for William and Catherine Harvey, as well as diaries and correspondence for four of their six daughters. These documents are a valuable historical resource as they offer an intimate glimpse into the lives of one of Fresno's pioneer families.

About the Author

Jill Poulsen is a graduate student in History at California State University, Fresno. She and her family live in Clovis.

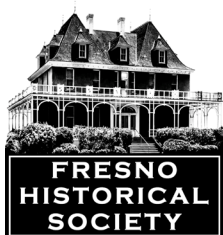
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