Women shaped and reshaped the cultural, social, economic, and political fabric of Canby as it emerged from a collection of farms in the 1880s into a thriving community in the 20th century. On occasion, they broke gender norms to instigate change. More often, they embraced traditional roles to improve the circumstances of their community. In most cases, their efforts received limited recognition and/or were unrecorded. The nine women on this trail are representative of the hundreds of women who played a significant role in making Canby a better place.

The Canby Women’s Civic Club

For decades, the members of the Canby Women’s Civic Club (CWCC) campaigned for improvements and drove change in their town. At their first meeting on January 30, 1924, a small group met, voted for officers, and directed the secretary to send a notice inviting “All ladies interested in a better community” to join the organization. The response was impressive; 120 women paid dues and became charter members. The results of four decades of their efforts are still evident across Canby’s landscape. The city’s library exists because of the persistence of CWCC members. The campaign to establish a community swim center succeeded in part because of their support. The group’s legacy includes Canby’s street names and the tradition of permanent and seasonal plantings of trees, shrubs, and flowers in public spaces. As part of their dedication to community improvement, the club provided assistance to families in need, donated equipment to Canby schools, and sponsored annual city clean-ups. Their initiatives touched every aspect of the community and left an indelible mark.

The Canby Public Library

The women of Canby have supported the concept of a public library since 1875 when Anna Lee and Catherine Wait gathered books and delivered them to the newly constructed school house. In the 1880s, Cynthia Hosford maintained a small public library in her family’s store. Over the next 50 years, a make-shift collection of books moved from one business to another. In 1925, the CWCC committed their organization to supporting a library, first in the 1901 city hall, then at their clubhouse. In 1935, working with other community organizations, the CWCC voted to find a permanent home for a library and received funding from a New Deal program to pay the salary of a librarian. Portia Shewey and two other women went door-to-door, collecting books and funds. Despite resistance from some on the city council, Shewey convinced the group to establish a library in the new city hall council chamber. They instituted a library board and named Shewey to that body, where she served until her death in 1953.

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Photographs courtesy of The Canby Historical Society, the Jones Family of Michigan (Portia Shewey photograph).
Laura Thompson moved to Canby in 1920 and, with her husband, established and managed Fir Lane Poultry Farm. She was on the Canby School District Board, serving as its chairperson in 1932. Thompson volunteered for many years as the Poultry Department Supervisor at the county fair. She served on the Canby United Methodist Church Board of Trustees and maintained its history. In 1930, she organized Canby’s first Camp Fire Girls group and remained active in the organization, locally and regionally, for decades. The Wait family recognized her dedication to the organization with the donation of Triangle Park for the group’s use; Thompson made it the focal point of the Canby Camp Fire experience.

Hazel Phillips Vinyard oversaw the mobilization of Canby women during World War II to replace men going into the armed forces. Active in the Canby Women’s Civic Club, she held office many times. While serving as its last president, she convinced members to donate $2,000 to support the construction of a community pool, ensuring the success of that initiative. Vinyard also served the community as a member of Canby United Methodist Church, Laurel Eastern Star, Kirk Rebekah Lodge, and the Maplewood Grange.

Bertha Knight Lee was an active community volunteer as a member of the Canby Women’s Civic Club, Laurel Eastern Star, and Kirk Rebekah Lodge. Lee channeled most of her efforts into supporting the Canby United Methodist Church; arranging flowers, preparing meals, working on bazaar, recording its history, and teaching Sunday school. 1912 Canby United Methodist Church | 3222 NW 2nd Avenue

Myra Adcock Weston and her husband purchased the Canby Herald in 1947. Weston worked as reporter, editor, and columnist while her husband ran the print operation. Her passion for reporting led to her dedication to collecting and recording stories of Canby’s history. Weston also served as secretary of the Chamber of Commerce from 1971 to 1981, and for several years as the city treasurer. She led community drives to fund uniforms for the Canby High School Band, to refloat the Canby Ferry in 1953, and to change the city’s tax base in 1966.

Laura Knight Bair led Canby’s Red Cross Chapter during World War I, working in support of troops and civilians in Europe. She served as treasurer of the Canby Women’s Civic Club for decades and was instrumental in its tree planting initiative. As an active member of the Canby United Methodist Church, she served on its committees and volunteered for community projects. Bair also opened her home to community events, such as graduation parties and anniversary celebrations.

Elsie Egli Cutsforth’s long list of local and state awards for civic and business achievements spoke volumes about her impact on Canby. In partnership with her husband, she grew a small meat market into a successful grocery store. Not content to focus only on business, Cutsforth served on the Canby’s Planning Commission for 27 years. As a member of the Chamber of Commerce, Business and Professional Women’s Club, Laurel Eastern Star, and the Canby Athletic Booster Club she worked with others to support the community. On a personal level, the assistance she provided to those in the community ranged from supplying holiday meals for the elderly to opening her home to people in need.

Elizabeth White made her mark in Canby as a businesswoman at G. H. White Garage. She and her husband converted their livery stable into an automobile business in the 1910s, constructing a new building on 99E in 1921. White did everything from pumping gas to ordering supplies, selling parts, and maintaining the books. As a founding member of the Canby Women’s Civic Club, and the club’s president for decades, she oversaw the group’s ambitious community improvement agenda. During both world wars, White volunteered with Canby’s Red Cross.

Bertha Dedman holds the distinction of being Canby’s first woman mayor, serving from 1957 to 1959, when the city council was grappling with rapid growth. Under her leadership, the city initiated infrastructure improvement projects and constructed additional office space in the city hall basement. Dedman’s contributions extended beyond city governance. She taught elementary students in Canby and managed Dedman’s Drug Store after her husband’s death. As an active member of the Business and Professional Women’s Club and the Canby Women’s Civic Club she worked with other women to better their community.

Interior of Cutsforth Store, 1953

1937 Cutsforth’s Building | 248-266 NW 1st Ave

Elizabeth “Lizzie” White, 1935

White’s Garage, 1935

Elsie Egli Cutsforth, circa 1937

Holly Street City Hall, circa 1915

Laura Thompson

Bertha Knight Lee

Linda B. Knight

Myra Adcock Weston

Laura Knight Bair

Bertha Dedman

Bertha Knight Lee

Hazel Phillips Vinyard

Methodist Church, 1912

Labor Day, 1939

Girls who were among those carrying stones from the Molalla River for council fires in the park.

Vinyard also served the community as a member of Canby United Methodist Church, Laurel Eastern Star, Kirk Rebekah Lodge, and the Maplewood Grange.

Hazel Vinyard, 1914

Hazel Vinyard Home in 1952

Phillips/Vinyard Home 290 NW 5th Ave

Holly Street City Hall, circa 1945

1905 Canby United Methodist Church | 1522 NW 2nd Avenue

1912 Canby United Methodist Church | 5222 NW 2nd Avenue

Bair House | 875 NW 9th Ave

Myra Weston with telephone directories printed by the Canby Herald, 1959

The inset shows her, at age 26, in her uniform as a Camp Fire Girl.-remove the arrows

Girls who were among those carrying stones from the Molalla River for council fires in the park.

GV 048 CANBY CITY HALL presented this appearance before 1967 removal of large maple trees to allow paving of N. Holly Street. The Williamsburg-style building was erected in 1936-37 at a cost of under $13,000, office. The city’s fire siren wailed from the $495 hose tower beside city hall.

Holly Street City Hall, circa 1945

LM 036 THIS UNUSUAL ROCK in Canby’s Triangle Park at N.W. Knight’s Bridge Road and Holly Street is in memory of Laura (Mrs. W.H.) Thompson. Memorial rock photo by Donna Henderson.

Hazel Vinyard, 1914

Hazel Vinyard Home in 1952

Triangle Park: Inset: Laura Thompson (4th from the left)