



Larkmead

VINEYARDS

Larkmead Vineyards 'Firebelle' List

WHO WAS THE 'FIREBELLE'?

In 1851 a young girl called Lillie Hitchcock arrived with her parents in a burgeoning San Francisco. Her father was stationed there as a military doctor and Lillie immediately took to the city "all fire and action" much to her mother's dismay. It was to be a prophetic description because after being dramatically rescued from a fire by one of the volunteers from the Knickerbocker Five Fire Company she became a life long and passionate supporter of San Francisco firemen and continued to sign her name with the number '5' after it for the rest of her life. She was the only woman in America to be a member of a fire company, hence her nickname 'Firebelle Lil'. When she married she became Lillie Hitchcock Coit and after her death she left funds for the construction of Coit Tower in San Francisco which commemorates the city's early firemen.

Lillie was a force of nature whose wit, poise and charm in San Francisco society ensured a loyal following of admirers while at the same time she would challenge all the conventions of the day by drinking bourbon, smoking cigars, playing poker and driving a team of 6 horses. She was without doubt the most famous woman in America at that time. For many she represented the independent pioneer spirit of the early Californians.

In an effort to get her "to learn to quiet down" she was sent to the country by her parents. She built a home between St. Helena and Calistoga which she called 'Larkmead' after the meadow larks in the area. Lillie did plant vines on her property as she was selling fruit in 1887 for \$14 a ton to people like Schram, Bonner and Tubbs. In keeping with the times she planted "Muscat of Alexandria, Black Malvoisie, Zinfandel and Grey Reisling."

Being in Napa Valley did not dull her enthusiasm, however, and it was not long before there was a steady stream of visitors to the 'Salon at Larkmead' looking to share in the irrepressible zest for life and conviviality that Lillie embodied.



Time only allows us a glimpse of her true character, but her strength of spirit and connection to the Larkmead estate led us to name our wine club the 'Firebelle Society' in her honor. We hope that our Firebelle members will also embrace Lillie's love of this beautiful place as well as the pleasure she took in entertaining her family and friends with fine wines, good food, and great company.

Lillie H. Coit - 5 -
Larkmead July 1897.