Fornia Stella Fowler
By Cheryl Jensen

One of the signers of our Tent #22 charter was Fornia Stella Fowler. She is found in records under this name, but she also used Fornia S., F. Stella, and Stella. The name Fornia is so rare that no sources could give a background for the name as a given name, although as a surname it may come from the Italian.

Fornia was born in Dallas, Texas on June 5, 1880, to parents Frederick Stewart Fowler, a stone mason, and Louisa McNeill. Fornia's parents had lived in Kansas, but had re-located briefly to Dallas where Fornia was born. By 1885, the family was back in Kansas and they were found in the Kansas census of that year: Fred S. Fowler, L.S. Fowler and Stella Fowler, age 5. This was a second marriage for Frederick, and it too ended either in divorce or separation.

Frederick had previously married Sophia about 1865, and they had three children, Nellie, Paul and Willard. Sophia had filed for divorce in 1876 and sometime between that date and 1880, Frederick had re-married to Louisa McNeill.

According to an obituary found on Find a Grave,
"Fred S. Fowler, a veteran of the Civil War, died at the home of his daughter, Mrs. C.W. Clapp, (daughter from his first marriage) yesterday afternoon. He was 69 years old and his death resulted from pneumonia." His daughter had located him at a soldier's home in Illinois and brought him back to Kansas City, Missouri to live with her. He died three months later on April 19, 1889.

Private Frederick Stewart Fowler served as a bugler with the Kansas Co. I, 5th Volunteer Cavalry from February 1862 to November 1864. The company could be found in Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas where they engaged in skirmishes against Confederate Cavalry and guerrilla bands. He was mustered out on November 18, 1864 in Leavenworth, Kansas.

After the separation of Fornia's parents, and the death of her father, we find Fornia and her mother, Louisa, living in Memphis, Tennessee. In the 1900 census Fornia was using her middle name, Stella, and she was listed as a stenographer, while her mother, Louisa, was a teacher. Then in 1910, Fornia and her mother made a move to California, and were living in San Gabriel. F. Stella continued as a stenographer, while her mother, Louisa, under occupation, was listed as "has own money." There were no records to tell us what prompted the move to California, but the two women were adventurous.

Interestingly, the next record of Fornia was in the 1920 census. F. Stella Fowler, living at Alcatraz Precinct in Santa Barbara County, just west of Goleta. This record indicates that she was a stenographer for an oil company. Originally this was the site of the La Patera asphalt mine which had begun in the 1890s. Later the company was made part of the National Asphalt Trust. The company closed down, but by 1901 an oil gusher was found near Santa Maria and Alcatraz came alive again when it began sending oil through the existing pipelines. Alcatraz was a small town with stores, a post office and a school.

It was in March, 1921, that our DUV Tent #22 was formed. Fornia was a relative new comer to the Santa Barbara area at this time. I found no records about her involvement in the tent founding, but she was one of seventeen women who came together to found our tent.

We next find Stella Fowler, age 49, working as a clerk at the police court in the city of Santa Barbara, according to the 1930 census. Her mother was again living with her and she owned the home they lived in at 2124 Castillo Street, now the site of the Schott Center.

Fornia's mother, Louisa, died in 1938, but Fornia continued to live in Santa Barbara and continued as a clerk at the police court. She lived at 1036 W. Micheltorena Street. This house still stands today.

From Santa Barbara city directories, Fornia lived in the Santa Barbara area from 1920 to 1948. Fornia Stella Fowler likely retired just after 1948, and she was found in the Los Angeles census of 1950. In that census she had no occupation and stated she had never been married. Fornia Stella Fowler died February 24, 1970, age 89, in Tarzana and is buried in Whittier's Rose Hills Memorial Park.