



Lucy Hicks Anderson

1886-1954

American socialite, chef, and prohibition-era entrepreneur. Growing up in Kentucky, she knew from a young age that she was a girl, and insisted on wearing dresses and going by the name Lucy when she started school. At a time when the word “transgender” didn’t exist, her parents sought advice from a local physician. Incredibly, the doctor recommended that they raise Lucy as a girl, and incredibly, they did.

At 15, Anderson left school and began doing domestic work. She met her first husband, Clarence Hicks, at 34, and together they moved to Oxnard, California where Anderson quickly proved herself vital to the local community. She worked as a nanny and chef, won awards for her cooking, and had a talent for preparing and hosting lavish dinner parties for the wealthy families of the town. She also threw welcome parties at the church for town visitors, going-away parties for enlisted soldiers, and gave generously to charity. When she saved up enough money, she purchased a boarding house where she ran a successful brothel and speakeasy.

Her good standing in the community made it easier to run her illegal businesses. On one occasion when she was arrested for selling liquor, she was bailed out by the town’s leading banker, who needed her for his dinner soiree that evening. She had divorced her first husband in 1929, and in 1944 she married Reuben Anderson, a retired soldier.

They had a happy life in Oxnard until the following year, when an outbreak of venereal disease in the Navy was traced back to Anderson’s brothel. The local doctor examined all the women working there, then insisted on examining Anderson herself, then aged 59. He went public with what he discovered. This led to charges of perjury for “lying” on her marriage license, and fraud for receiving money as the wife of a soldier.

Anderson became the first trans woman, let alone an African American trans woman, to defend her identity in court, saying “I defy any doctor in the world to prove that I am not a woman. I have lived, dressed, and acted just what I am—a woman.” She and her husband were both sentenced with jail time, while she was given an additional 10 years of probation and was prohibited from wearing women’s clothes.

When they were released from jail, the couple was told they could no longer live in Oxnard. They settled together in Los Angeles, where they led a quiet life until Lucy’s death in 1954.



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