



ST. HELENA
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

THE ELECTROLIER

April 2015, Volume 13, Number 2

ILLUMINATING ST. HELENA'S HISTORY

Go Fly . . . a Plane?

BY BONNIE THOREEN



In the late 1800s and early 1900s, nine children were born to Louis Walter and Anna Moos Paulson in St. Helena. There were four girls: Anita Maud, Luvina Matie, Lily Ethel, and Mabel Isabel. And there were five boys: Edwin Lauritz, Willard Everet, Ralph Peter "Jay," Louis Walter Jr., and Malcolm Dewey.

Mabel married Leslie M. Wright, and it is through the courtesy of their daughter, Dolores, and Luvina's daughter, Anita McCready, that the St. Helena Historical Society is receiving detailed information about the family history, as well as photographs and many interesting artifacts.

Many of the members of the extended Paulson family were privileged to go to college and become teachers. For example, Luvina taught at the one-room schoolhouse in Chiles Valley. Others were trained as secretaries, and one, Louis, became a pharmacist. Edwin, the first born, was the foreman for half a century at the *St. Helena Star*. He was also

the local weather man as an official of the US Weather Bureau, a position he held for more than 50 years. Dolores, who is known as Del Laine, was the mayor of South Lake Tahoe at the same time Greta Ericson was making history as the first female mayor in St. Helena.

This article, though, concentrates on a particular feat of Ralph Peter, known as "Jay." Some background: Jay was born in 1899 at the St. Helena Sanitarium and Hospital. He attended local schools. Jay was known for his piano skills and played in various dance bands throughout his life. He was a baseball player, and then a rancher, and for 35 years he was a volunteer fireman with the St. Helena Fire Department. He also helped his brother, Ed, operate St. Helena's weather station during the final five years of his life. (He died in 1970, just a few weeks short of his 71st birthday.)

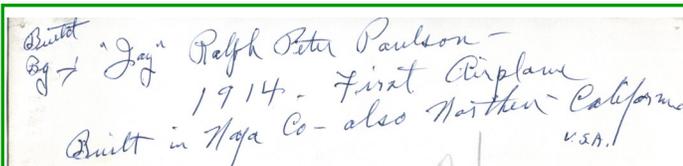
continued on page 2

Jay Paulson's Plane

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

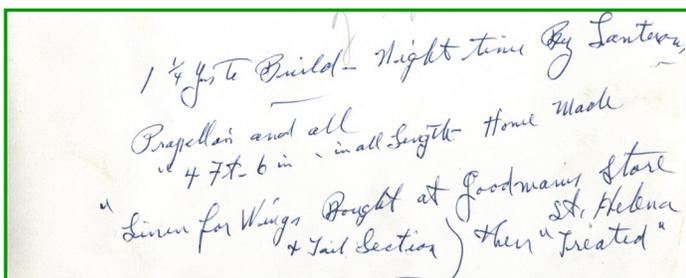
One of the more memorable legacies of Jay's life was his airplane. Only 12 years after the Wright brothers flew their first airplane at Kitty Hawk, Jay built his own plane in his yard. The year was 1914.

The plane was a biplane with no cockpit. The pilot sat in the front, exposed to the air. The propeller was carved from a block of wood by Frank Teping. Jay powered it with motorcycle engines and covered the wings with fabric from the Goodman store. His original design had one motorcycle engine, which proved too weak to power the plane. So he added a second engine. His plane was probably the first two-engine craft in the state at that time. Old motorcycle tires served as the landing gear.



After completing the plane, Jay took it for a spin. On takeoff the plane flew all right. However, he failed to clear a fence at a field near the high school, now Vintage Hall, and it was wrecked. Jay was not injured, but it was the end of his aviation career.

In spite of the crash, the plane was a proud moment in St. Helena history and was displayed in the 1915 Vintage Festival parade—pushed up Main Street by Fulton and Edgar Mather.



The writing here and above is from the back of the photo shown on page 1.

The tail section of Jay Paulson's plane is still intact and will be transported to the St. Helena Historical Society later this spring. In addition to the tailpiece, the Paulson family, through Del Laine, has donated over 100 photographs and many artifacts to the Historical Society's collection. Included are diplomas, pins and medals, a World War I helmet, discharge certificates, sheet music, marriage licenses, and more.

President's Corner

BY SKIP LANE

The St. Helena Historical Society is bursting at the seams! In past issues of the *Electrolier*, we have highlighted some of the gifts and donations we have received, such as photographs and artifacts from the St. Helena Unified School District and the large bar from an old saloon. In this issue, we are featuring the gift of a propeller and tailpiece from a home-built airplane made by Jay Paulson in 1915.

Our office/workspace located in the upstairs of the library is a wonderful place to work and store some of our collection, and it is a generous and appreciated gift from the St. Helena Public Library. But is it large enough? No.

Many of you know that we store numerous things in various places in St. Helena. For example, a lovely desk is housed at the cemetery office, a large bar is on display at 1111 Main Street, farm equipment is crammed into people's trucks and garages, and many miscellaneous items are in a storage unit on Crane Avenue. As the society continues to grow its collection, we continue to seek more storage.

Ultimately, our goal is to build our own building, which would allow us to consolidate our collection in *continued on page 4*



Wanted: Missing Propeller

The airplane built by Jay Paulson in the early 1900s was built from elementary materials available at the time. The wings were covered with department store fabric, power was supplied by motorcycle engines, and the propeller was carved from a block of wood.

After the plane crashed in 1915, the remains were stored on the Paulson property in St. Helena. Intact pieces included the tail piece and the propeller. In the mid-1980s, or so the family recalls, someone paid a visit to the barn where the pieces were stored. Lo and behold, the propeller was gone!

One can only assume it was stolen. But when? And by whom? The propeller had disappeared without a clue about where it might have gone. Does anyone out there have any ideas?

Meet Nancy Caffo . . .

who recently joined our Board of Directors. Born in Berkeley, she was raised on the Peninsula (graduating with the second class



of Woodside High School). She graduated from UC Davis before getting a teaching credential from UC Berkeley.

After receiving her teaching degree, Nancy moved to Napa to teach at various primary schools in the Napa Valley Unified School District. Nancy enjoyed sharing her love—and her knowledge of—California history to students in the third, fourth, and fifth grades.

It was at one of these schools that she met fellow teacher Paul Caffo. In 1970, she and Paul bought property in St. Helena and built the home where they have lived ever since.

Nancy retired 3 years ago after enjoying a teaching career of 27 years over a span of 46 years. In between teaching she worked for Mel Varrelman and was a diligent volunteer: Girl Scouts and Cub Scouts, school site councils, and the St. Helena Junior Women's Club. She remains active in city and county politics.

Since joining the Historical Society's board, Nancy has become involved in the Collections Committee, evaluating and cataloging artifacts and photographs for our growing collection.

Meet Larry Merla . . .

one of the society's new board members. Larry is a St. Helena native whose grandparents arrived around the turn of the century with a number of other Italians from the little town of Angera near Ticino, in Switzerland.



Larry's father worked at the *St. Helena Star* during high school, before going off to serve in World War II with the National Guard platoon from St. Helena. Upon his return, he became a winery general manager, working for Charles Krug, the Napa Valley Co-op, and Beaulieu Vineyards.

Larry attended local schools and went on to study at UC Davis. He started his career at Beringer Winery. He and his wife left St. Helena in 1975, relocating to various towns and cities across the United States, as well as Switzerland. During this period he worked for Nestle Corporation and consulted for other food and beverage companies around the country.

Two years ago, after a 40-year absence, the Merlas returned to St. Helena, this time for good. They have enjoyed reconnecting with friends from his childhood, as well as making new friends.

Larry has already begun helping us sort out our computer issues and helping us with our website and Facebook presence.

Meet Catarina Sanchez . . .

who joins the board with a wealth of experience in the St. Helena community. With her son and daughter, she moved here from Paris in 2002.



She has been the property manager at Stonebridge Apartments since 2004 and has a record of leadership in planning

for capital improvements, water conservation, and compliance with state and federal regulations.

Catarina has served as a member of the Community Coalition of Nonprofits, Latina Women's Advisory Committee, and Napa Valley Farmworker Committee; she is a trustee of the St. Helena Library board and on the board of Rianda House Senior Activity Center. In addition, she was a founding member and chair of the St. Helena Housing Committee. She also served as chair of the City's Multicultural Committee and as a City Council member.

There's more: Catarina is active in the St. Helena Catholic Church, where she has served on the Pastoral Council and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. In April 2012 she helped organize a day-long event to honor the legacy of Cesar Chavez, "Living the Legacy: Si Se Puede." She is a graduate of the Leadership Napa Valley program. In her leisure time she enjoys travel, arts and crafts, and opera. Welcome, Catarina.

Dear SHHS Members. You are receiving this *Electrolier* as a valued member of SHHS. Your membership entitles you to four newsletters a year. Please let us know what you like or dislike about the publication. Would you like to write an article? Express your thoughts? Let us know!

Volunteers Needed. If you want to become a volunteer or have questions about volunteering, please send an e-mail to Bonnie Thoreen at the office e-mail or phone, or you can contact her at bthoreen@gmail.com. She'll tell you about the many fun and rewarding ways to help out.

From the President
continued from page 2

a safe environment. Just as importantly, it would allow people to see and use the many photographs and artifacts the society owns.

Another way to make our collection available is through a public access catalog. We are currently cataloging all of the photos and artifacts into a database that allows us to track and manage the materials. That is all well and good for the society, but at this point it is not helpful to you, our membership and community. So, over time, as we move toward having a permanent home, we are diligently working in the background to prepare our collection for public access and viewing.

Your contributions to our collection are always welcome: life stories, family photographs, tools and furnishings from earlier times, as well as family papers and genealogy. In this way, you can help us document as much of our past as we possibly can.

On another note, the face of the St. Helena Historical Society is changing. Our four new board members each brings a new perspective and talent to the organization. See brief biographies of three of them on page 3: Nancy Caffo, Larry Merla, and Catarina Sanchez. We were unable to reach Christopher Hill for this issue, but can report that he owns Christopher Hill Gallery on Main Street and brings to the board his knowledge of both the business and art worlds. We welcome this new energy and breadth of knowledge to our board.

Programs of Interest. Tuesdays, April 14 & 28, 5:00 pm: Jay Greene on Westward Expansion. Thursday, April 23, 7:00 pm, Music & Stories of the Old Days, Michael Waterson & Band. At the library.

Meet Jan Bradley

Jan Bardley has recently taken over the volunteer duties of taking care of membership matters. Here, she tells you a little about herself.



I was born in our nation's capital and lived in Virginia until I was seven when my dad was transferred to Anchorage, Alaska.

Five years later, we moved again when he was transferred to Hawaii.

After high school, I attended Beloit College in Wisconsin, where I participated in a summer seminar in Geneva, Switzerland, studying the UN agencies that are headquartered there. I had the rare privilege of hearing Soviet diplomats publicly praise the American astronauts who landed on the moon that summer.

After majoring in psychology, I was given an internship in a special education class in Concord, California. I loved it so much that I switched fields, and after graduate study in Denver and San Jose, I began my 38-year career in special education, as a teacher and speech therapist in both Concord and St. Helena and as an instructor in special education at Sonoma State University.

While in Concord, I met the love of my life: Larry, my husband of 42 years. My other two loves are my grown kids, James and Cristina (aka Jamie and Muffy). We moved to St. Helena in 1980, bought a fixer-upper farmhouse, and have spent the last 31 years fixing it up!



ABOUT US

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Skip Lane, *President*
Susanne Salvestrin,
Vice President
John Sales, *Treasurer*
Nancy Caffo
Frank Harrison
Christopher Hill
John Komes
Shannon Kuleto
Larry Merla
Helen Nelson
Catarina Sanchez

ADMINISTRATOR

Bonnie Thoreen

VOLUNTEER STAFF

Memberships
Jan Bradley
Research
Mariam Hansen
Collections & Acquisitions
Marilyn Coy
Nancy Caffo
Sue Clark
Kim Farmer
Helen Nelson
Susanne Salvestrin
Newsletter Editor
Robyn Orsini
Tech Support
Kim Farmer
Shannon Kuleto
Larry Merla

ST. HELENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 87

ST. HELENA, CA 94574

TELEPHONE: 707-967-5502

EMAIL: SHSTORY@SHSTORY.ORG

WEBSITE: WWW.SHSTORY.ORG

**FACEBOOK: ST. HELENA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**