



# THE ELECTROLIER

Newsletter of the St. Helena Historical Society, Winter 2006, Vol.4 No.1

## *Napa Valley and the 1906 Earthquake*

*By Kathleen Kernberger*

April 18th marks the 100th anniversary of the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, or "Great Fire," as it also came to be known. In truth, as much or more destruction was probably done by the fire as the quake itself on this day when the "earth shook and the sky roared." An inadequate water supply made fighting the fires difficult as wood frame buildings were quick to spread the flames. Initial estimates placed the death toll in San Francisco at 5,000, with an estimated loss to businesses and homes of over \$171,000,000.

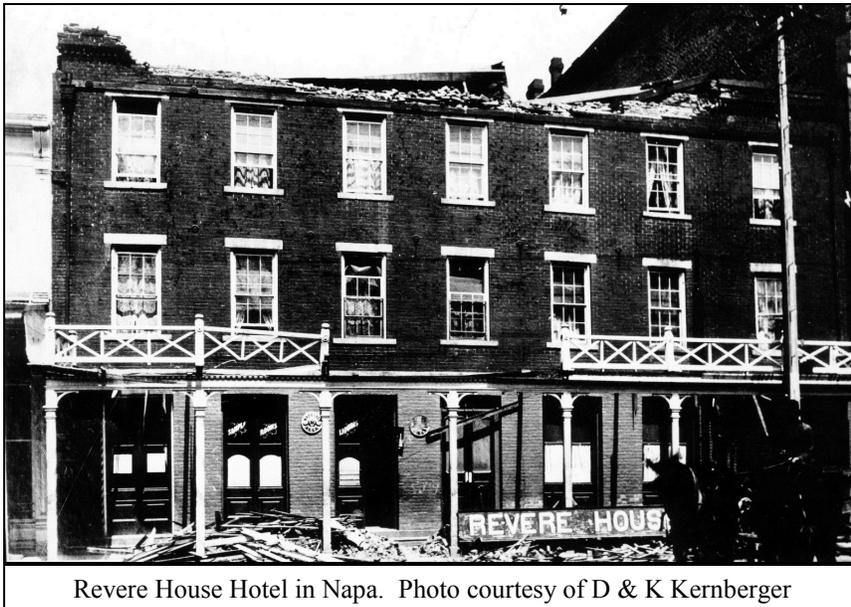
Napa County residents, too, felt the shock of the earthquake which occurred about 5:00 in the morning. The vibrations from this shock ran north and south through the downtown area in Napa causing major damage to over 20 houses and many commercial buildings. People felt themselves lucky that no lives were lost and no major fires broke out. Santa Rosa was especially hard hit by the quake. Reports by witnesses stated that the entire downtown business section was destroyed except for one small building on 4th street. As in San Francisco, fires raged throughout the area adding to the destruction. The Occidental Hotel completely collapsed, killing several people. Among those was W.H. Mallory, a local insurance agent well known to Napans. They were shocked to hear that he had been crushed by the falling bricks and debris of the hotel.

In Napa, the roof of the Revere House Hotel, and the porch in front of the building, collapsed. Bricks from the back wall fell into the room of F.W.Hughes from St. Helena. He made a narrow escape as the bricks completely covered the bed in which he had been sleeping. The sign for the hotel, which had been on the parapet, was thrown to the street. This hotel, dating from 1856, stood to the west of the Masonic Temple on

Second Street, across from the Courthouse. For some time before the earthquake, the owners had been troubled by the hotel bar selling liquor to minors and other offenses bringing the police to the hotel door. The earthquake damage, extensive as it was, was also a good excuse for tearing down the building and ridding themselves of the legal problems.

At the Court House, the chimney above Judge Gesford's chambers collapsed leaving a large hole about 8 feet in diameter in the ceiling. Judge Gesford, being a man of strong character, did not intend to let a mere earthquake stop his court proceedings. Court sessions continued, but had to be moved to the Napa Bank Block. Damage to the City Hall caused city offices to be moved into the bottom floor of the Goodman Library Building. The library on the second floor, however, had to be closed because of damage to the top part of the building. For probably the first time in its history, overdue book fines had to be forgiven until after the library could be repaired and reopened. Unlike library fines, city and county taxes were not forgiven. They were declared due and delinquent on the first day after the "bank holiday" declared April 20th by governor, George C. Pardee.

While the intense shock of the quake was strongly felt throughout the county, lesser damage was done in St.Helena and Calistoga, most of that caused by falling chimneys. It was estimated that approximately 80% of the houses in St.Helena lost their chimneys. These ranged from the Beringer Rhine House on the north



Revere House Hotel in Napa. Photo courtesy of D & K Kernberger

end of town to the Schnoor home on Allyson Ave. on the south end. Interestingly, the Sarah Bourn house on Sulphur Springs Avenue, although made completely of stone, suffered no damage at all. Not even the plaster was cracked. Several buildings on Main Street were damaged, the most severely, the Hunt Building, at the corner of Hunt and Main. Both Beringer and Krug wineries suffered major cracks in the walls, which were also moved out of plumb. The Beringer distillery building had one wall collapse. Across the highway from Krug. (cont. on p. 3)

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

So many wonderful things are planned for 2006! On Sunday, February 19 we present "St. Helena Museum for a Day" from 11-4pm at the Native Sons Hall, 1313 Spring in St. Helena. The event brings to life the dream of building a museum for St. Helena's past, a place to bring family and guests to see the people and events that contributed to our wonderful community of today.

There will be narrated slide shows about historic St. Helena and Aetna Springs Resort. See historical items from the St. Helena Police and Fire departments, post office, antique medical equipment, St. Helena High Home arts artifacts and Steves Hardware. Some of the local families contributing their memories will be the Rojas, Maloney, Price, Varozza, and Palmer-Morgan clans.

Ken Pragg Paper Ephemera and Restoration Studios Fine Art Repair will show their wares. Special activity for kids in toy-making will be led by teacher Gwen Becker. Students are invited to contribute to the "Voices of St. Helena" oral history project.

Admission is \$10 for adults, kids under 12 admitted free. Afternoon tea and baked goodies will be served.

Anyone who has photos and artifacts of general interest is invited to have an exhibit. To participate, contact Susanne Salvestrin at 963-2826 or email [wartuhi@comcast.net](mailto:wartuhi@comcast.net) by February 16.

Through our website, we have received many interesting research inquiries. Recently a student at UCLA asked about the social life of the Germans who settled in the upper valley in the 1880s. There was a German social club "Turn Verein" at Lyman Park, German services from visiting preachers, even a request to have election materials in German. Father MacIlmoyl from the Episcopal Church asked us for background on the founders of his church in St. Helena. These people were the pillars of the community at the time and much is known about them. We have been working with the police department on a list of who has been the chief throughout the years, and also the fire department. Another project is to list all the officers of city government, such as the attorney and council members (called the board of trustees in the old days). Several volunteers have been working on research to further our knowledge.

In March we will be hosting a training workshop in the PastPerfect Museum Software we purchased 3 years ago. This software handles all the various departments in a museum: collections logging, registration and accessioning; new members, renewals and donations. Users from Northern California will converge here for 3 days, with logistics arranged by SHHS. In exchange we send 4 people to the training gratis. This furthers our goals of handling our historic collections according to American Association of Museums standards from the start.

*Mariam Hansen, President*

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### Officers and Directors

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### Committee Notes:

The **Collections Committee** coordinates and manages the acquisition of new materials. It meets the last Monday of the month at 9:00am in the library upstairs meeting room. Current chair of the committee is Frank Harrison. You can email him at [jackiefrank@aol.com](mailto:jackiefrank@aol.com)

The **Events Committee** plans and presents events to teach the public about our local history. The Committee is currently working on the Museum for a Day event which will take place February 19, 2006, at the Native Sons Hall. Call Mariam Hansen, 963-5748 for more information.

Questions? Comments?

Call or email the Newsletter editor,  
Kim Farmer, at 963-0630,  
[ksfarmer@seedgrain.com](mailto:ksfarmer@seedgrain.com)

### *I'd like to join the St. Helena Historical Society!*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Individual	\$20	Family	\$30
Business/Organizaton	\$100	Life	\$500

*I would like to:* Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ Make a donation to the Society \_\_\_\_\_



## HISTORICAL SOCIETY ACTIVITY BRIEFS

### *Christmas Cheer at Sutter Home*

by Betty Studebaker

What a great way to cap off the year! For our December meeting, a cheerful group of Society members and guests dined on a terrific potluck dinner at the historic John Thomann House. Dinner was followed by a very interesting history of the property told by winery historian and retired St. Helena High School teacher Walt Hampe. He told the group that John Thomann came to California in 1858, started his winery, became successful and built the house in 1884. He died in 1900 and the house was bought by the Sutter family in 1906 then sold to Trincheros in 1986. They had purchased the old winery in 1947. Mr. Hampe said he found records indicating that Mrs Leuenberger (Sutter) purchased the house, property and vineyard for \$10.00 gold.

Everyone enjoyed a delicious potluck dinner and after the talk by Mr. Hampe, took a tour of the Inn. We wish to thank the superb staff of the Sutter Home Inn for all their efforts to make this a fun evening for everyone.

### *Gathering of Charter Advisors for the St. Helena History Center New Date: Sunday, April 23rd, 2006, 3:00-5:30pm*

The historical society originated four years ago in order to collect, care for, interpret, exhibit and make available to the public the history of St. Helena. Community response has been overwhelmingly positive. As we have been reporting in our newsletter, that support has prompted us to set us on the path to building a dedicated history center for St. Helena by the year 2010.

We are at a place in our planning where **we need advice from you!** It is important that this work, which we do on behalf of citizens of St. Helena, past, present and future, reflects the scope of interest and priorities of the community.

On Sunday, April 23 we will launch our ideas for the **St. Helena History Center** to our members and a select group of community leaders. We are inviting you to come, hear about what we are doing now, what alternatives we are considering for the future and give us your opinions and ideas. This will be an informal gathering with wine and nibbles, interesting company, and good thinking about the place that will be the repository for our community history!

If you are a member of the Historical Society or receive our newsletter you will receive an invitation a few weeks before the event. For now, please save the date. Your counsel is important to us.



Beringer Distillery Building. Courtesy Beringer Family Collection

(cont. from p. 1) Greystone lost its tunnels, but, otherwise, had little damage. Much to the relief of the town, the new stone elementary school building survived relatively unscathed.

Even as local cleanup efforts were beginning, plans were being made to help earthquake victims in both San Francisco and Santa Rosa. Visitors already here from San Francisco, for the most part, had no homes to which to return, and quickly filled up hotels and inns. Refugees arriving by train and wagon, were "put up" with relatives and friends, who were happy to see them alive. Great relief was felt when the Carpy and Bourn families all arrived safely as well as sorrow at the news that Henry Sles had died in the fire that consumed his brother's home in "the City." Residents, such as F.L. Beringer and W.A. MacKinder who had been in San Francisco on business trips, returned to tell of the horrors they had seen. Refugees were

also housed at the "Sanitarium" where staff gave up their quarters, so that earthquake victims could have beds.

South of town, wineries such as the Wheeler and F.S. Ewer's had minor damage. Brun and Chaix, in Oakville was a different story. There, tanks were broken open, spilling over 100,000 gallons of wine. They quickly called the California Wine Association in St. Helena for help. Interestingly, so much wine was lost in San Francisco warehouses, over 15 million gallons, that the price of the remainder went up immediately. Grape growers looked forward to higher prices for the upcoming fall crop as well.

Relief committees were quickly formed throughout the county and food was collected which was sent to refugee camps in San Francisco and Santa Rosa. These donations were immediately followed by wagons filled with clothing and blankets. Especially appreciated were the baby clothes made by Pope Valley ladies for the "temporary" maternity hospitals in San Francisco. In addition, many groups and individuals contributed money to relief funds. One interesting sidelight was the telegram received by Napa Mayor Fuller from people in Los Angeles. They had gathered \$100,000 for "sufferers relief" and wanted to know how much Napa County needed. Mayor Fuller quickly responded that "assistance was not needed."

As relief work was going on, rebuilding local damaged structures began, and people resumed their daily activities. Eventually, the refugees left, both the living and those who had died here of their injuries. The relief committees were disbanded, and, perhaps the surest sign that the crisis was over, the bank "holiday" ended and bars resumed normal business hours. Memories of the San Francisco Earthquake or "Great Fire" grew dim. In fact, a 1950 California History book failed to even mention it.

## CALENDAR

Call our voicemail at St. Helena Library to reserve a space: 707-963-5244 x 187. See our website: [www.shstory.org](http://www.shstory.org)

### February

**Feb 19:** Museum for a Day: Life in St. Helena 1900—1915. Native Sons Hall, 1313 Spring Street, 11-4pm. (See Pres. Message for more info.)

**Feb 27:** Collections Committee Meeting, 9:30 am, Library Community Room.

### March

**Mar 7:** St. Helena's Post Office: History and bomb shelter tour, 4:00pm St. Helena Post Office, 1461 Main St. Reservations required.

**Mar 27:** Collections Committee Meeting, 9:30 am, Library Community Room.

### April

**Apr 4:** Keenan/Conradi Winery, Spring Mountain. 4 pm, at the Winery, 3660 Spring Mountain Rd, Reservations required.

**Apr 23:** Launch of St. Helena History Center, Oddfellows Hall, 1352 Main St., 3-5:30pm. See page 3 for more info.

### May

**May 2:** Behind the Scenes tour of the CIA, 4 pm, at the CIA, 2555 Main Street. Reservations required.

**May 22:** Collections Committee Meeting, 9:30 am, Library Community Room.

### June

**Jun 10:** Saturday, Pope Valley History Tour and Picnic. Look for more info in May newsletter.

### *Mission Statement*

The St. Helena Historical Society is a public educational organization. Its mission is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and provide access to historical materials of all kinds from our community as well as to promote public awareness and participation in the collection of such materials.

### Second Annual

## MUSEUM FOR A DAY

Sunday

February 19, 2006

11:00—4:00PM

Native Sons Hall  
1313 Spring Street  
St. Helena

Admission: \$10,  
Members, \$8

Children under 12, free

Featuring exhibits and activities related to the history of St. Helena between 1900 and 1915. Tea and baked goodies will be served. Historical items from Red Cross, post office, many families, and more.

St. Helena Historical Society  
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