



THE ELECTROLIER

Newsletter of the St. Helena Historical Society, Summer 2007, Vol.5 No.3

St. Helena's Vintage Festivals By Mariam Hansen

As harvest time approaches in Napa Valley, we begin to look forward to the St. Helena Hometown Harvest Festival on October 20.

Almost 100 years ago, the first Vintage Festival for California was held at Aetna Springs Resort in Pope Valley, on September 9, 1909 and planned to be an "annual affair authorized by the Governor." A committee composed of leading citizens Andrea Sbarboro, Charles Bunschu, Frank Coombs and Len Owens (owner of Aetna Springs) planned for a barn dance where guests would dress in costumes native to Schloss Johannesburg in Germany.

In February, 1912, at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce a Vintage Festival was proposed and a committee was appointed. The help of the Women's Improvement Club (predecessor of today's Federated Women) was enlisted. Citizens wrote 5,000 postcards to invite people to the festival. Events were held at Turner Hall located where Lyman Park is now.

In 1913, the 4 day festival was a grand success, bigger and better than before with something going on every minute. There was a Grand Floral & Industrial Parade, exhibits of industrial products (especially wine). To-Kalon Winery (today Robert Mondavi) displayed a pyramid of wine 12 feet high. A pergola of redwood limbs by Beaulieu Vineyards featured hanging baskets of grapes. Miss Montana Bohler, daughter of the affable owner of the Windsor Hotel (today Hotel St. Helena) was voted Queen and crowned at the Vintage Allegory, which showed the development of the wine industry, the threat from evil phylloxera personified and the triumph of resistant rootstock.

Planning began in May, 1914, for the Vintage Festival of that year, after debate in the Chamber of Commerce about whether to hold one. The two festivals of 1912 and 1913 had "placed St. Helena distinctly on the map" and the vintage allegory had been "talked about from one end of the state to the other." It was decided not to solicit exhibits or advertising until sponsors had been confirmed. The festival took place on September 4-7, 1914.

By August, 1915, preparations for the 4th annual Vintage Festival and Napa County Farm Bureau Fair were well under way. The chairman was W.F. Bornhorst, president of the Chamber of Commerce. John McCormick was grand marshal. Gardner deVeuve, principal of the elementary school, was director general of the Vintage Allegory. This drama with a large cast told the history of the vine, threat of phylloxera, and salvation by resistant vines. Actors portrayed a priest, vines, wines, grape juice, resistant vines, phylloxera, civilization, Uncle Sam and St. Helena. Two large tents featured exhibits by wineries and farm centers from Wooden Valley to Rutherford to Browns Valley and more. Farm stock, poultry, and farm equipment were displayed. Produce included grapes, peanuts, corn, apples and potatoes. The Napa Business College staged a contest

with a three month scholarship as a prize, which Theodore Mooney won. Events included concerts, a floral and industrial parade, a street dance and the crowning of Queen Bertha Harris at the Queen's ball. The whole 1915 affair was successful "beyond the fondest expectations of the committee".

War, hard times and prohibition caused several breaks, and the 8th Vintage Festival was not held until the fall of 1934. The event drew 40,000 attendees.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members,

Lazy summer days and musical picnics in Lyman Park are coming to a close, alas! Your events committee has been busy planning the calendar of programs to June 2008.

We start off with a visit to Heitz Winery on September 4, where we will learn about the history of the Spring Valley area. David Heitz will speak on the history of the family property. The former Taplin Dairy Ranch, now Joseph Phelps Vineyards, is still largely intact. Descendant and SHHS member Ken Taplin will fill us in on its history.

On October 14 at the Fire Station Open House there will be a ceremony replacing a commemorative plaque on a large bell, which hung in a very early fire house on Spring Street. At the Hometown Harvest festival on October 20 we will have our booth as always, with historical displays and book sales. Stop by!

November 3 is the date of the annual "Spirits of St. Helena" tour of St. Helena Cemetery. This year's theme is "Crimes & Misdemeanors": and you thought nothing ever happened in St. Helena. Actors are needed to play in the vignettes at the six graves in the tour. Call Susanne Salvestrin at 963-3036 to volunteer.

The first Tuesday in December, the 4th, is our annual Christmas potluck dinner at the beautifully remodeled Star Building, now Caldwell Snyder Gallery.

Our member volunteer researchers have been busy answering inquiries. We are currently gathering information on Daniel Otis Hunt, Anton Rossi, high school grads 1940-1972, history of the chamber of commerce, vintage festivals and more. Each inquiry expands our knowledge and files on St. Helena's past. You are welcome to help with this research: please contact me at wartuhi@comcast.net.

The St. Helena Star published an article recently about the St. Helena Flood Control Project on the Napa River. Numerous archaeological artifacts were found from the Native American tribes which lived in our area. The city is considering where these important remnants of St. Helena history should be housed. They mentioned possibly donating them to a museum. We will be contacting the city to talk about keeping these artifacts in St. Helena and saving them for eventual inclusion in the core exhibit at the St. Helena History Center. It is very important that these artifacts not leave town permanently. While we wait for the Center, they could be on loan to a facility with proper storage, used in a careful, professional manner to tell the story to our community about the people who first claimed this land. I hope you agree and that you will express your desire for us to keep the artifacts in the community where they were found and showcase them in our new, local history center.

Have a great Fall,
Mariam Hansen

St. Helena Historical Society
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Email: shstory@shpl.org
Website: www.shstory.org

Officers and Directors

Mariam Hansen, President
Susanne Salvestrin, Vice President
Kim Farmer, Treasurer
Frank Harrison
Skip Lane
John Sales
Tricia Westbrook

Committee Notes:

The *Collections Committee* coordinates and manages the acquisition of new materials. It generally meets on the last Monday of the month at 9:30am in the library meeting room. Current chair of the committee is Susanne Salvestrin. Email her at Susanne@salvestrinwinery.com

The *Events Committee* plans and presents events to teach the public about our local history. Plans have already begun for the annual Cemetery Tour, Nov. 3. Call Mariam Hansen, 963-5748 for more information.

Questions? Comments?

Call or email the Newsletter editor, Kim Farmer, at 963-0630, ksfarmer@seedgrain.com

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

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Individual \$30 Family \$50

Business/Organizatoin \$150 Life \$500

I would like to: Volunteer _____ Make a donation to the Society _____

A Reminder...

Renewal letters were mailed in June. If you have not already done so, please renew your Historical Society membership today using the form in this newsletter.

Thank you!

HISTORICAL SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

CORNERSTONE The St. Helena History Center: It's About...LOCATION?

As we plan for a History Center that will be successful well into the future we look carefully at the factors that can assure that. The primary factor is the quality of the experience a visitor will have coming to the St. Helena History Center. Our planning will assure that the experience is grounded in our mission, reflects the program preferences of our community; is inviting, fun and dynamic in its ability to change and grow with the issues of the day and the interests of the local community.

After that, we will turn our attention to location. A good site for the History Center is a very important consideration for several reasons:

- A site that is convenient for visitors to attend will encourage early exploration and repeat use.
- A location close to shopping and other community amenities will allow visitors to combine History Center attendance with other activities.

A good site will contribute to revenue generation for the History Center, helping to secure the income necessary for the Center to meet its mission and maintain the highest standards of collection care, research and education to which it aspires.

When we shared our conceptual ideas for a St Helena History Center with our Charter Advisors, your advice on location was very specific. You said that the History Center must be convenient for St. Helenans of all ages to get to, close to other community serving amenities. The rationale for that was not just about the ease of getting to it but also about the ease with which collaborations could occur between adjacent organizations so that activities and facilities need not be duplicated.

If the St. Helena History Center could be constructed adjacent to the St. Helena Library the symbiotic relationship that exists between the two organizations now could be preserved and expanded in a way that would create a wonderful joint-amenity for the community.

The two organizations have already come to agreement on a seamless connection between their local history research resources. If the History Center were close by, our activities for children and programming for adults could be coordinated and public spaces and classrooms could be shared. The café that will be a part of the History Center could serve Library staff and patrons as well.

Imagine a fifth grader going to the library to research native American culture in California, then walking to the History Center to see a reconstructed Wappo Hut and an exhibit of the artifacts now being unearthed along our stretch of the Napa River.

The property adjacent to the library will be developed one way or another. The History Center is an ideal companion for both the Library and any other community serving development that might occur there. Now is the time to let the City Council, the Planning Commission and the General Plan Steering Committee know the magnitude of community sentiment supporting that.

We will soon be launching a petition drive to do just that. Watch for more information coming by email on how you can help.

Vintage Festivals (Continued from Page 1)

The next year the festival was held on Labor Day weekend. Mayor Walter Metzner issued a proclamation welcoming visitors, 50,000 were expected. A.G. Haskell was chairman. Three days of the festival included exhibits of wine, orchard, farm and flowers, plays, concerts, a Grand Floral & Industrial Parade with the Olympic Club, Mare Island and Scotch "Kiltic" bands, and a barrel rolling contest. Italian, Swiss and German song and dance groups performed. The "Ruby in the Vine" historic pageant was staged at Carpy Field with 200 actors. Elinor Smith was crowned queen.

The 10th Vintage Festival was a much toned down affair with a 3 hour program at Carpy Field, and 3,000 visitors in attendance. Many of them were railroad fans brought up by a special train and Navy personnel brought in buses. Beringer winery hosted a luncheon for the railroaders. It be-

gan with the blessing of the grapes by Father O'Connor. There was music, opera and dancing. This time there were three queens: Tosca Ferroni (queen of festival), Antoinette Espinoza (queen of St. Helena) and Mary Bianchi (queen of grapes). The St. Helena High School Band gave a "smooth performance." After the festivities, the volunteers, performers and Chamber of Commerce representatives enjoyed a supper at Country Manor, given by the Chamber. After the festivities, the volunteers, performers and Chamber of Commerce representatives enjoyed a supper at Country Manor, a favorite restaurant of the time.

So our modest Hometown Harvest Festival has a long legacy. While past festivals were meant to draw tourists to St. Helena, our present day fete is a small town street fair for locals.

CALENDAR

Call our voicemail to reserve a space: 707-967-5502. See our website: www.shstory.org

September

Sep 4: Heitz Winery & Spring Valley History, 4pm, 500 Taplin Road. See President's Message and below for details.

October

Oct 14: Fire Department Open House and Historical Plaque replacement, 11am to 3pm

Oct 20: Hometown Harvest Festival. Stop by Historical Society booth.

November

Nov 3: "Crimes and Misdemeanors" Annual Tour of St. Helena Cemetery

Nov 5: Board of Directors quarterly meeting, 5:00, Library Community Room.

December

Dec. 4: Potluck Dinner at the restored Star Building, Caldwell-Snyder Gallery 6pm

January

Jan 8: Atkinson House at St. Supery, *not confirmed*. More information in November newsletter.

February

Feb 4: Board of Directors quarterly meeting, 5:00, Library Community Room.

Feb 23: Discover Hidden Treasures Antique Show & Sale, St. Helena Parish Hall, Tainter & Oak Sts, 10-4pm

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.

ST. HELENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Presents

Heitz Winery
& Spring Valley
History

September 4, 2007
4:00 p.m.

Heitz Winery
500 Taplin Road, St. Helena

David Heitz will give historical overview of area, and Ken Taplin will talk about Taplin Dairy and Creamery.

Tour Space is limited- Reservations Required

Email shstory@shpl.org or call 967-5502----Leave Name, Number Attending, phone, Email address

St. Helena Historical Society
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