



THE ELECTROLIER

Newsletter of the St. Helena Historical Society, Spring 2009, Vol.7 No.2

THE KIBBLER/DONALDSON BUILDING, 1422-28 MAIN STREET by Kathleen Kernberger

(Editor's note: Kathy Kernberger— local historian, former society board member and regular contributor to the newsletter— passed away in December. This was written several years ago, but not published at the time.)

The Kibbler building is located on the east side of Main Street, just north of Adams Street. Today it is the Eagle & Rose Inn, but recently was known as the Donaldson Building, as it was owned by that family for decades. It was built in 1886 by William T. Kibbler, a clerk in the Wonderful Drug Store. The contracting firm

for the building was Bassett Brothers Builders. Kibbler didn't stay long in small St. Helena and moved to San Francisco, where he owned a drugstore.

Among later owners, one of the best known was undertaker and businessman John Stewart Noble. Born in Glasgow, Scotland on August 12, 1857, he was the eldest of four sons of John and Margaret Noble. John Sr. was a tailor and expected his sons not only to help in the shop, but to learn and continue his trade as well. The family immigrated to the United States in 1869. In 1875, John Stewart decided to tour the U.S., using his tailoring skills to pay for the trip as he went. His travels took him to the Pacific Northwest and down the coast to San Diego. A

side trip took him to Napa Valley.

He had lived in Colfax, Washington, a farming area on the eastern side of the state. Farmers not needing many suits, the tailoring business was poor. Everyone, however, eventually needed a funeral. John S. Noble changed his occupation to undertaker. In 1887, he married his first wife, Minnie A. Wilman in Colfax; their daughter, Joy was born in 1888. The family moved to Spokane the following year, where Noble opened a funeral parlor.



Kibbler Donaldson Bldg circa. 1916. Photo courtesy of Dave Kernberger

A severe attack of blood poisoning, possibly from embalming chemicals, left him very weak. While recovering, he recalled his Napa Valley trip and decided to move to St. Helena. A man of quick action, he and his family relocated to St. Helena by August, 1891. Here, he purchased the furniture/undertaking

business of J. I. Logan as well as a house just north of St. Helena, known as Rockland. This beautiful home, which still exists today, was built by noted architect Albert Schroeffer, who also designed the Beringer Rhine House.

Business was good and, in 1903, he built the Noble building at 1200 Main Street, known today as the Galeron Building (where Peters Video, St. Helena Star and others are located). Unfortunately the grand opening on November 19, 1903 was during a heavy rainstorm. The weather kept many country residents from coming to town. The townspeople flocked in, liked what they saw and left many congratulations with Noble on his great success.

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

Your Historical Photos Wanted...

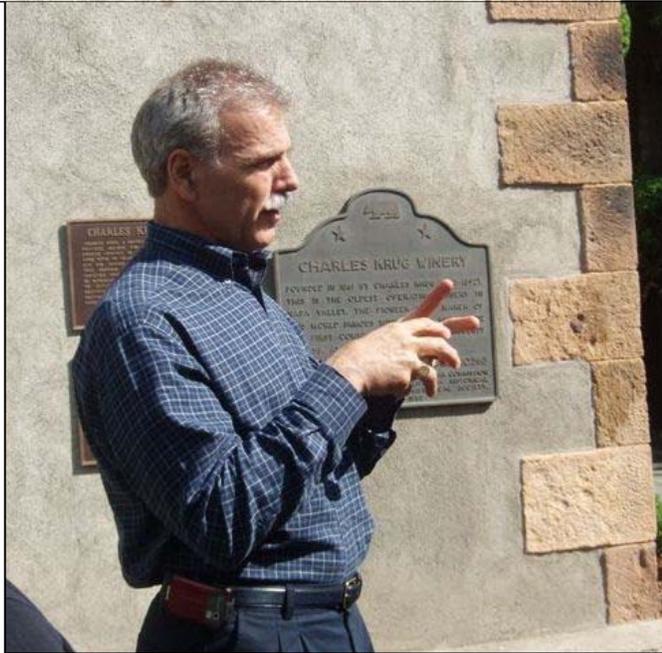
The St. Helena Historical Society is in the process of writing a history of St. Helena and the immediate surrounding area. The book will be published by Arcadia, a company that recently released books about Yountville and Calistoga.

The historical society book will be largely pictorial, with historical photographs accompanied by descriptive captions. The history will cover the period from 1860 to 1960.

We are most anxious to obtain as many photos as possible of this period in local history, and are asking community members who have old family or community pictures to contact us. We are looking for good quality original photos to scan – all originals would immediately be returned to the owners. Credit will be given in the book for the source of each photograph which is used.

Of greatest interest are pictures of celebrations, weddings, parades, kids at school, downtown St. Helena, people at work, historic buildings, and photos of the Rutherford, Oakville, and Pope Valley areas.

There is pressure to finish this book on a deadline, so we ask that anyone having appropriate photos call as soon as possible at 967-5502. Please leave a message and your phone number if you get voicemail.



Krug Winery Tour

On May 5, historical society members and guests toured Charles Krug Winery. Host Peter Mondavi, Jr. talked about the history of the winery which has been in his family since 1943. As we toured the Redwood Cellar and Carriage House, he described the extensive renovations completed recently to these historic buildings. The tour ended with a tasting in the beautifully renovated upper floor of the Carriage House.

June Program: Lecture and Book Signing

On Saturday, June 20, at 2:00pm in the St. Helena Library, Vivienne Sosnowski, author of "*When the Rivers Ran Red*" *Prohibition in Napa & Sonoma Counties* will present a lecture and sign her book, which will be available for purchase. The event includes a wine tasting.

Northern California's wine country is cherished by tourists and wine enthusiasts around the world. At a time when America's idyllic wine mecca produces freely and with continued pride, it is difficult to imagine a time when its luscious hills and valleys hung heavy with dread and the danger of illegality. In her book, Vivienne Sosnowski details the mighty battle that California's winemakers forged against Prohibition, and the passion imbued in the history of one of America's most beloved and romantic industries.

Ms. Sosnowski is the former Editorial Director of the Washington Examiner the San Francisco Examiner and the Baltimore Examiner.

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J. F. Helm came to St. Helena in 1906, also looking for a change of scenery. He talked John S. into trading Rockland, and the furniture/undertaking business and building for Helm's Hotel Bellevue in Chicago. According to Helm, it was a "choice property" with a long term lease and a monthly income of \$400.

When the Nobles moved to Chicago, however, they found they had been misled. The hotel was in a "poor" part of town, the lease was not as represented, and the monthly income was, at best, \$200. Lawsuits followed. Unfortunately, not only for Noble, but also for F. T. Mooney and Dr. Cornelius E. Davis, who had provided the bond, Helm won most of the suits.

Undaunted, Noble and his wife returned to St. Helena in 1910. Once again, John S. opened a furniture/undertaking business, this time in the Kibbler Building. The stress of those years in Chicago and the lawsuits may have been a large part of the reason for the Nobles' divorce in 1916. April 14, 1922 saw his second marriage, to Emma Mooney, widow of F. T. Mooney and daughter of Dr. Cornelius E. Davis, a St. Helena pioneer and dentist. This marriage was short lived, however. In December, 1922 John Stewart Noble was once again stricken with blood poisoning, this time fatally. He died at the St. Helena Sanitarium, January 16, 1923.

The building was owned for many years by the Donaldson family. They sold televisions, appliances, gifts and housewares. Later they owned a Radio Shack store. Recently restored, today the Kibbler Building is owned by Norman Alumbaugh, Inc. The bottom floor serves as space for several stores, while the Eagle and Rose Residence Inn is above.

CALENDAR

Call our voicemail to reserve a space: 707-967-5502.

May

May 30: Civil War Graveside Dedication, 1:00pm, St. Helena Cemetery. Civil War historians and re-enactors dressed in period costume will hold a public gravestone dedication ceremony at the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) cemetery plot. Program includes a talk by Dean Enderlin, a 21 gun salute by civil war style rifles and a bugler playing taps. No reservations necessary.

June

June 2: Program on the History of Rutherford, 4:00pm see below for details. No reservations necessary.

June 16: Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room. (Open to all members.)

June 20: Lecture and book signing, 2:00pm, St. Helena Library. See page 3 for details.

July

July 21: Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room. (Open to all members.)

August

Aug 18: Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room. (Open to all members.)

September

Sep: Program on the history of the Red Cross in Napa County. Details in the next newsletter

October

Oct 4: Program on Mining in Pope Valley— a talk, tour and picnic lunch. Details in the next newsletter.

November

Nov 7: at 1pm, Annual Cemetery Tour: Famous Women

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:

**Rutherford Retraced:
Pioneers, Perils and
Prosperity**

Tuesday, June 2
4:00 pm

Rutherford Grange
Hall, Hwy 29 at
Rutherford Cross

Join us for a presentation about Rutherford's history. Hear the story of Thomas Rutherford's marriage to George Yount's daughter, which brought about the formation of the town.

Speaker Rue Ziegler Phd, cultural anthropologist and historian, is an expert on the Rutherford area.

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