



THE ELECTROLIER

Newsletter of the St. Helena Historical Society, Summer 2004, Vol.2 No.3

The Vine and Fig Tree Farm, A brief history

by Nancy Lussier and Mariam Hansen

Earlier this summer, the St. Helena Historical Society hosted a Victorian High Tea at the Vine and Fig Tree Farm, home of Mrs. Elizabeth Peters. The home, dating from the 1860s, has a long and varied past.

In 1868, Charles Langley purchased a prime parcel of land along the western hills, in one of the choicest areas of St. Helena.

Earlier, Langley and his three brothers had come from England to California and started a drugstore, Langley & Michaels. An estate was built on the property as their weekend retreat. While San Francisco made him financially successful, it was St. Helena that helped him repair his failing health with its

“favorable” climate and multiple opportunities for hard work. Langley soon found his new home and grounds so appealing, he spent more and more time with his family in the country. The Langleys owned the estate for four years.

John Lewelling, an industrious businessman from San Lorenzo, bought the property in 1881. Lewelling, who had owned cherry orchards in San Lorenzo, moved to Napa Valley because of health concerns. After buying the estate, he planted a vineyard and began making home improvements. After the Lewellings sold the property, the house fell into disrepair. Over the years, transients, seek-

ing shelter from the winter rains, camped out in the living room.

In 1938, a U.C. San Francisco radiologist, Dr. Howard Ruggles and his wife, Marguerite, inspected the house as a possible weekend home. It was in such a dilapidated state, Mrs. Ruggles foot fell through the timbers as she walked along the front porch. Despite this, the Ruggles bought the property for \$10,000. In 1941, with wartime gas shortages making travel between San Francisco and St. Helena difficult, they sold the property. It was then bought by Mr. and Mrs. Brian Curtis who owned it until 1962.

In 1962, the house and its 735 acres of land, was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Evan Peters. Evan Peters was originally from Canada where he grew up on a ranch. Upon seeing this beautiful place, he thought of a Bible verse from Micah: “they shall beat their swords into ploughshares And sit under their vine and fig tree”.

From that time

on, the property was called the Vine & Fig Tree Farm. The Peters added a wrap around porch to the house and built a pool and pool house. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Peters sold all but 50 acres.

In recent years, she has contacted descendants of the Langley Family. She hosted a Langley family reunion and has kept in touch with the family. There are photos of the Langley family from the 1860s in the entry, along with the framed verse from Micah.



1870 drawing of Villa Arbutus, now The Vine and Fig Tree Farm

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The annual meeting of the St. Helena Historical Society Board of Directors was held on May 3, 2004 at the Silverado Brewing Company. The board welcomed new member Tricia Westbrook and regretfully accepted the resignation of Kathy Kernberger. The remainder of the board will serve for another year. The board adopted two new policies; The Code of Ethics and Responsibilities, and Ethics for Volunteers. The next board meeting is August 23, 4:15 pm at the Carnegie Building. All members are invited to attend.

At its monthly meetings, the Collections Committee is developing our collections policy. The policy should be completed in December. Topics addressed to date are: scope of collection, acquisitions, accessions, deaccessions, conservation and care, registration system, access to the collection by the public and reproduction rights.

Our monthly General Meeting format has changed! An exciting calendar of speakers at historically significant buildings has been arranged into 2005. For the remainder of this year, four meetings are planned. All begin at 4:00pm, unless otherwise noted.

Don't miss the meeting on September 7 at the American Legion Hall, at Madrona and Oak. Learn about the Veteran's Home Oral History Project, documenting the stories of soldiers who served our country. Learn about the surprising history of the Legion Hall.

"The Bear Flag Revolt in Napa County" will be the topic of our October 5 meeting at Sunny Acres, the historic home of Dr. George Crane. The beautiful estate, now owned and restored by the Salvestrins, is on the south side of St. Helena High School at 397 Main Street.

Visit St. Clement Winery on November 2 and learn about the entrepreneur who built it: Fritz Rosenbaum. This will be a chance to meet the members of the Jewish Historical Society of Napa Valley, who know all about Rosenbaum. The winery is north of St. Helena at 2867 St. Helena Hwy.

"Christmas with the Oddfellows" is on December 7 in their historic hall at 1352 Main Street. See the renovations which are bringing the 1885 structure back to its full glory. A July 22 article in the *St. Helena Star* explains the project. [This meeting begins at 6:00pm.](#)

COMING EVENTS:

October 16 watch for our booth at the St. Helena Harvest Festival. Volunteers are needed to staff the booth. For a good time meeting the locals and promoting the society call me at 963-5748.

November 6 is the date for the second annual St. Helena Cemetery Tour "Spirits of St. Helena". Learn about the founders of our wine industry who rest nearby. Meet some of the descendants of early St. Helena families.

Help is needed on all events; please contact me.

Watch the website for meeting details and event information: www.shstory.org

Mariam Hansen, President

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Officers

President, Mariam Hansen
Vice President, Susanne Salvestrin
Secretary, Gwen Becker
Treasurer, Kim Farmer

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Gwen Becker
Kim Farmer
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Elaine Hudson
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Susanne Salvestrin
Tricia Westbrook

Committee Notes:

The **Collections Committee** coordinates and manages the acquisitions 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 jack-ielfrank@aol.com

The **Events Committee** plans and produces events that teach the public about our local history. These, and other events raise funds for the Society. The Committee is currently planning "Spirits of St. Helena," the second annual tour of St. Helena Cemetery, Saturday, November 6. To volunteer, contact Mariam Hansen at 963-5748 or email her at wartuhi@comcast.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

Star Negatives donated

On Friday, July 30, 2004, St. Helena Historical Society board members, Frank Harrison and Larry Hlavsa, collected an estimated 100,000 negatives (in 30 plus boxes) from the St. Helena STAR building. We believe that this donation may include all the negatives from photos published between 1979 and 2001 in the STAR and a great many more unpublished photos. We would like to thank Doug Ernst and the STAR for this important donation. This addition to our collection of historical materials will aid immensely in the preservation of St. Helena history. Susanne Salvestrin, the Society's vice president, has volunteered to work with the collection and has already begun the process of inventorying the materials.

Victorian High Tea at the Vine & Fig Tree Farm

On Saturday, June 26, members of the St. Helena Historical Society and more than fifty guests, enjoyed a Victorian High tea on the sweeping veranda of Mrs. Elizabeth Peters Vine and Fig Tree Farm. The home, a Victorian gem, dates from the 1860's. And it felt like the 19th century, as guests sipped tea from fine silver services and bone china while enjoying the lilting harp of Hollis Fennen. In the Victorian manner, all came wearing hats. Some guests dressed in period costumes, while volunteers, including Phoebe Ellsworth, Dorothy Mackay-Collins and Susanne Salvestrin, wore Victorian maids uniforms with long white organdy and lace aprons. Other volunteers donating their time and services included Jackie and Frank Harrison, as well as John Thoreen. Mariam Hansen was the Event/Program Chair. Roberta Oswald, a former tearoom owner, along with volunteers, provided the high tea sandwiches and sweets, including feather-light scones, devonshire cream and jams.

St. Helena Sentinel Newspaper Donation

The Historical Society is in the process of acquiring almost 500 issues of the St. Helena SENTINEL (issues dating from ca 1894 - 1913). The newspaper began publication about 1894. These issues are - as far as we can tell - the only existing copies of this newspaper title except for one issue owned by the California Historical Society. The papers are in fair to poor condition. The California Newspaper Project has expressed an interest filming the newspapers. The Historical Society is very excited about the donation of these historic materials. We will tell you more about this project in future newsletters.



The porch at the Vine and Fig Tree Farm. Volunteers Dorothy Mackay-Collins and Tricia Westbrook prepare table for the Victorian High Tea.

WELCOME! NEW MEMBERS SINCE MAY

Celia Cummings
Zoe Kahn

Mary and Ron Sproat
Ken and Alice Taplin (life members)

Jeffrey Warren
Rue Ziegler

CALENDAR

August

Aug 16: Fundraiser and Event Planning Committee Meeting, 4:00 pm, Library Community Room

Aug 23: Board of Directors Meeting, 4:15 pm, Carnegie Building

Aug 30: Collections Committee Meeting, 9-11:30 am, Library Community Room

September

Sept 7: General Meeting, 4:00 pm, American Legion Hall (corner Oak and Madrona) with guest speakers. Erika Wolf, director of the Yountville Veteran's Home Oral History Project will talk about project. Al Butala and Dave Curtin will lead discussion of American Legion Hall.

Sept 27: Collections Committee Meeting, 9-11:30 am, Library Community Room

October

Oct 5: General Meeting, 4:00 pm, Sunny Acres, 397 Main Street, with guest speaker Joe Calizo who will talk about the Bear Flag Revolt in Napa County.

Oct 16: St. Helena Harvest Festival. Historical Society will have information booth on Oak Avenue.

Oct 25: Collections Committee Meeting, 9-11:30 am, Library Community Room.

November

Nov 1: Board of Directors Meeting, 5:00 pm, Carnegie Building

Nov 2: General Meeting, 4:00 pm, St. Clement Winery, 2867 St. Helena Hwy. Members of the Jewish Historical Society of Napa Valley will talk about winery founder, Fritz Rosenbaum.

Nov 6: "Spirits of St. Helena," tour of St. Helena Cemetery, highlighting lives of SHViticultural Club founders of 1875.

Nov 29: Collections Committee Meeting, 9-11:30 am, Library Community Room.

Be sure to visit the Society website at www.shstory.org for possible changes and updates to events

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.

Mark your calendars
for

**Spirits
of St. Helena**
Second Annual
tour of
St. Helena Cemetery

Saturday, November 6
1:00 to 4:00 pm
\$10 admission

This event is a joint effort of the St. Helena Historical Society and the St. Helena Viticultural Club, originally founded in 1875. The tour will feature the lives of founding members of the Viticultural Club, many of whom were important leaders and founders of the California wine industry.

St. Helena Historical Society
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