



# THE ELECTROLIER

Newsletter of the St. Helena Historical Society, Fall 2008, Vol.6 No.4

## JOHN HALL ALLISON 1827-1893

By Mariam Hansen

(Editor's note: The sixth annual "Spirits of St. Helena" Cemetery Tour was held November 1, 2008, during the first rain storm of the season. While the downpour forced the event to move inside to the Presbyterian Church hall, it did not "dampen spirits." The theme this year, "Streets of St. Helena," told the stories of six individuals after whom our local streets are named. Mariam Hansen's impeccable research was the background material for six actors who portrayed these individuals: Del Britton played Daniel Otis Hunt, George Watson was George Lincoln Pratt, Carroll Cotton portrayed John Cornelius Money, Lowell Smith played Edward Starr Baldwin, Mariam Hansen portrayed Marietta Voorhees and Jeff Farmer was John Hall Allison. Following is the story of John Hall Allison.)

John Hall Allison, for whom Allison Street is named, was born in Virginia on December 22, 1827 to a Scottish father and Irish mother. At a young age, the family moved to Missouri.

In 1851, John visited California and found he liked it. After returning to Bowling Green, Missouri, he married Susan Kincaid Kerr in 1852. They had three children: Louisa, born in 1856; James, 1858; and John Hiram, 1860.

The family traveled across the plains by wagon train in 1865 with the McPike party. John was in charge. The family moved to Napa Valley in 1873.

They became charter members of the Presbyterian Church when it was founded in 1874 by Rev. James Mitchell. John was very active in church affairs and served as session president.

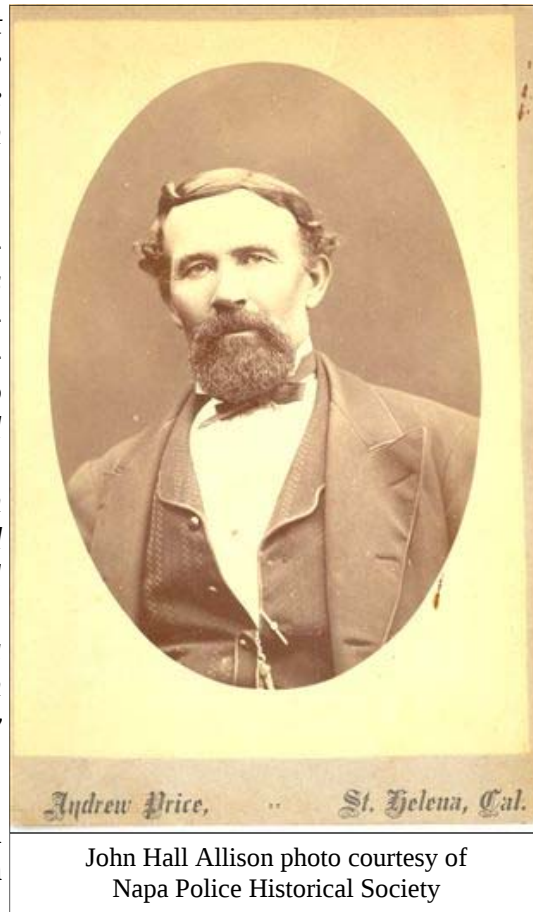
In St. Helena's first municipal election, 1876, John ran for election as a marshal and won. He was re-elected many times over the years. He was also named superintendent of streets, or roadmaster, and drove a water wagon to sprinkle Main Street to keep the dust down. The water came from Kettlewell's well. He supervised the building of the town's first jail (located near the Catholic Parish Hall) at a cost of \$158.

After being re-elected marshal in 1880, John returned to his former home in Missouri for a visit. He had not been there in 15 years.

The Allison home in St. Helena was on the south side of Pope Street, where John owned twenty acres of land just east of Bridge Street. He donated land to create the street which was later renamed Allison Street in his honor.

In 1881, he had 10 acres of producing grapevines, plus 7 acres newly planted. The *Star* noted with approval that he kept the thistles cut on Pope Street.

John belonged to many fraternal organizations. He was elected president of the AOUW, the Ancient Order of United Workmen. This organization, founded in Meadville, Pennsylvania, was the beginning of the American fraternal benefit. John was also elected Dictator of the Knights of Honor, a fraternal organization founded in 1873. Its principles differ little from those of other beneficent societies, the objects being to care for the sick and pay certain sums to the heirs of deceased members.



Cont. on page 3

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Dear Members,*

Like all California cities, St. Helena is required to update its General Plan periodically. Our city is currently in the process of fashioning such an update. A citizen's committee has been appointed to review the existing General Plan and make recommendations for revisions. The city has also hired the MIG consulting group to assist in the process.

There are a number of elements in the General Plan, and over the next couple of years each element will involve public hearings in order to solicit citizen input on the future plans for our town.

One of the first topics to undergo the public hearing process is the future of the city- owned property on the corner of Adams Street and Library Lane. The Historical Society has long had its eye on a portion of this property as the ideal location for a St. Helena History Center. We are a natural partner of the library and in fact that is where our office is. Being located next door to the library would provide a synergy of use and make this location a cultural center and natural gathering spot for St Helenans. Our envisioned History Center would include facilities which could be used and enjoyed by many other organizations.

The first public hearing regarding the Adams Street property was held on November 10, and while it was not very well attended, the Historical Society was well represented. We listened to what community members thought we should do with this property, and we suggested the possibility that a History Center might be an appropriate civic addition to the parcel.

The general consensus of this first meeting seemed to be that this land should be used for the benefit of the entire community and should provide a space off Main Street for local citizens to enjoy. Or, as Tricia Westbrook described it, a "family room" for our town.

There will be a second public meeting about the use of this property on Monday, December 8. This meeting will be at the Primary School on the corner of Grayson and Crane at 6:00 PM. I would encourage all of you to attend and make your views known. The more that members of our community get involved now, the greater the chance that the city can move forward with a plan for this property that has wide public acceptance.

*Skip Lane*

St. Helena Historical Society  
P.O. Box 87  
St. Helena, CA 94574  
Voice mail: 707-967-5502  
Email: shstory@shpl.org  
Website: www.shstory.org

### Officers and Directors

Skip Lane, President  
Susanne Salvestrin, Vice President  
Mariam Hansen, Secretary  
Kim Farmer, Treasurer  
Donn Black  
Frank Harrison  
Mariana Olguin  
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 **Program Committee** plans and presents programs and events to teach the public about our local history. If you would like to volunteer or want more information, please call Mariam Hansen, 963-5748.

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/Organizaton \$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!

*Cont. from page 1*

John built a strong two-story barn in 1883 on his Pope Street land. In 1884, the *Star* reported "J.H.Allison has added another improvement to his beautiful home on Pope Street. This time it is a cement walk from his front gate to the house and around either side of the length of the porches. It is about 140 feet long and is the work of Mr. A Haskin, who makes a specialty of laying these patent walks." John was also elected commander of the American Legion.

The *Star* reported on September 18, 1885, "J. H. Allison had his buggy cover stolen and in his search for the property found it being used as a tent by some Chinese hop pickers camped on Dowdell's ranch. This morning he and his sons Johnny and James A. (the latter being constable of this township) proceeded to the Chinese camp to arrest the thieves and recover the stolen property. Johnny was struggling with the two Mongolians when he was attacked by the two others, one of whom was in the act of braining him with a heavy pole. His father came to his assistance to save him and shot the attacking Chinaman, seriously if not fatally wounding him. John immediately gave himself up to the law, but was released on bail. The case is clearly justifiable, as if the Chinaman had not been shot he would have killed Johnny."

John was elected director of the St. Helena Water Company in 1886. In 1888, he became president of the St. Helena Cemetery Association, an office he held until his death.

John was summoned from this life on May 29, 1893. His funeral was held at the Presbyterian Church with Rev. James Mitchell officiating. His Masonic brethren paid him full honors at his burial in St. Helena Cemetery.



John Allison and wife Susan  
Photo courtesy of the Napa Police Historical Society



Marshal Allison's badge on loan from Napa Police Historical Society. Photo by Mariam Hansen.

## CALENDAR

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

### December

**Dec 3:** Program at St. Helena Library, 7pm. "Celebrating the Repeal of Prohibition." Come early to get a seat.

**Dec 9:** Annual Christmas Potluck dinner, Presbyterian Church Hall, 6:30pm. See details below.

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

### January

**Jan 11:** Caldwell Snyder Gallery, 1328 Main St, 4pm. Unveiling & Fundraiser for the 1876 Map Restoration Project. No RSVP necessary.

**Jan 20:** Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room. (Open to all members.)

**Jan 27:** Collections Committee Meeting, 9:30am, Library Meeting Room

### February

**Feb 3:** Program at Rianda House, 1475 Main St. 4:30pm "Roosevelt's New Deal." Please RSVP.

**Feb 17:** Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room. (Open to all members.)

**Feb 23:** Collections Committee Meeting, 9:30am, Library Meeting Room

### March

**Mar 3:** Program at Silverado Museum, Library Lane, 4pm. "Robert Louis Stevenson & Napa Valley." Please RSVP.

**Mar 17:** Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room. (Open to all members.)

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

### 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.

### *Get in the Holiday Spirit*

St. Helena Historical  
Society's

Christmas Potluck  
Dinner

First Presbyterian  
Church  
1428 Spring Street  
Tuesday, December 9  
6:30pm  
Potluck

**Last names:**

**A-F bring Appetizer**

**G-N bring Salad/Vegetable**

**O-Z bring Main Dish**

**We provide desserts, water, plates, utensils. Please bring a bottle of wine to share. RSVP 967-5502**

St. Helena Historical Society  
P.O. Box 87  
St. Helena, CA 94574