



ST. HELENA  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

ILLUMINATING ST. HELENA'S HISTORY

# THE ELECTROLIER

*April 2013, Volume 11, Number 2*

## Tour of Rutherford Gardens April 7, 2:00 pm



View historic farm equipment and the extensive gardens at Rutherford Gardens, owned by Long Meadow Ranch. Learn historical details about this site. Enjoy treats made by farm-to-table chef Tim Mosblech.

### RUTHERFORD GARDENS

1796 St. Helena Hwy, south of Mee Lane, St. Helena

Parking is limited; please carpool.

Admission \$5, SHHS members & students free

**Reservations required by April 5 (deadline extended!)**

E-mail: [shstory@shstory.org](mailto:shstory@shstory.org) - Phone: 967-5502

Please give us your name, the number attending, your phone number, and your e-mail address.



## Calvin Griffith, First Owner of Rutherford Gardens

*By Mariam Hansen*

The most historically illustrious person associated with the Rutherford Gardens site was Calvin Chesterfield Griffith, pioneer of California and member of the Bear Flag Revolt (*see page 2*). He was born in North Carolina in 1828 but grew up on a farm in Missouri. In 1845, at age 17, the family traveled West by ox-drawn wagons with the Grigsby-Ide

Party, along with John Grigsby, John York, and David Hudson. Arriving in November at George Yount's Rancho Caymus in Napa Valley, York and Hudson settled in St. Helena, while Calvin proceeded to work for Yount and his father.

These were fearful and exciting times. In April 1846, the Griffith family fled to Sonoma because of some mili-

tary activity in the area (the United States declared war against Mexico in April). That June, Calvin joined his father and other men at the Bale Grist Mill, gathering for the overnight raid of the Sonoma garrison from Mexican soldiers. After its successful capture, the Griffith, Grigsby, and Elliott families moved for a time into the adobe owned by Salvador Vallejo.

In August 1846, Calvin began serving in Fremont's California Battalion, Grigsby Company, which rescued Sutter's Fort from the Walla Walla Indians and then marched south to fight Mexican *Californios*.



*Calvin Griffith, probably taken when he was in his mid-30s.*

(continued on page 2)



Returning to Sonoma in April 1847, he worked for the Vallejo family until 1848 when he joined the hordes mining for gold. Returning with his fortune in 1849, he farmed in Sonoma County until 1871, when he bought 83 acres in Rancho Caymus, Rutherford.

An 1877 *St. Helena Star* article described the place as a “neat cottage and barn, with pasture, grain



and orchard.” The house has been remodeled and is still standing. Calvin sold the property in 1881.

From the time of his arrival, Calvin took an active part in the US settlement of the area, as a rebel, soldier, farmer, and family man. He died in 1907 at age 79.



*Lydia Sensibaugh arrived in Napa County in 1852 and married Calvin Griffith in September 1855 in St. Helena. They had ten children; some of their descendants still live in the area. She died*

*in 1913. The photo above left shows Lydia as a young woman. The photo at right was probably taken when the Griffiths were in their 70s.*

Here’s a synopsis of this important event in California history.

Army Major John C. Fremont arrived in the Mexican territory of Alta (northern) California in 1846, claiming to be on a scouting mission. But he had another motive: to encourage American settlers and *vaqueros* working at the many local *haciendas* to rebel against Mexico.

Many men from Napa Valley

of Alta California, prisoner. General Vallejo actually supported the American annexation of California; nevertheless, he was taken to Sacramento and held captive until the revolt was over.

The rebels proclaimed independence from Mexico but never formed a functioning government or exercised any authority. In fact, most residents of Alta California knew nothing about the revolt.

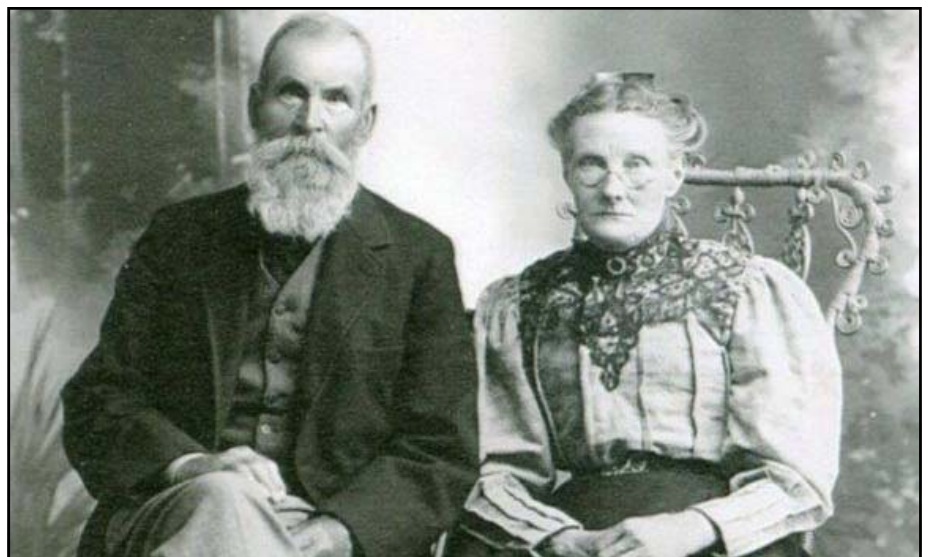


*A flag was designed for the revolt, bearing the words California Republic and featuring images of a star and a bear. The Bear Flag formed the basis for today’s California state flag. The original flag was destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906.*

joined the conspirators, including Calvin C. Griffith, John York, William Baldrige, David Hudson, and Joseph Chiles.

On June 14, 1846, a group of settlers captured the town of Sonoma and took General Mariano Vallejo, the commander

Unbeknownst to the Bear Flaggers, the United States had already declared war on Mexico. The revolt lasted 26 days, after which the US Army occupied the area (July 9). California became a US territory in February 1848 and a state in 1850.



## Cornerstone

By Skip Lane, President

In the early days of the St. Helena Historical Society, we developed an active oral history program and collected a number of transcripts of interviews. We had a list of old-timers with stories to tell about St. Helena and its environs. There was a substantial roster of interviewers who had been trained in the protocols a good oral history program requires. Taking oral histories is a fairly detailed and complex process; it also requires someone who can coordinate the program.

After a long hiatus, we are hopeful that the oral history program is about to undergo a rebirth. Long-time society member Bonnie Thoreen has volunteered to chair the revival, and we look forward to beginning interviews again soon.

We are currently updating our recording equipment as well as reviewing oral history procedures. We are compiling a new list of potential interviewees and getting in touch with members who helped out when the program was last active. We are also looking for new volunteers to interview, transcribe, and otherwise assist in this exciting project. Let us know if you would like to participate. We think that preserving oral histories from our citizens is one of the most important functions that the society can perform.



The society is collaborating with Perry and Carolyn Butler, owners of Napa Soul, in sharing the history of our town with the public. Vintage photos have been enlarged and mounted on Napa Soul's gallery wall. They are rarely seen with such magnification, revealing details not previously noticeable. Stop by anytime at 1111 Main Street next to Sunshine Foods.

## Items from the Beringer Collection

From the Desk of Kim Farmer, Collections Committee



The Collections Committee has been busy accessioning a large number of items. The accompanying photos show a few of the donations from Walt Raymond, a descendant of Jacob Beringer. The ceramic pitcher and cups (*above*) were some of many ceramic pieces hand-painted by Martha and Bertha Beringer, Jacob's daughters. The handsome Biedermeier secretary (*below*) was brought from Germany by Jacob Beringer and stood in the family home (Hudson House) for many years.



## Save the Date #1

SUNDAY, MAY 29, 11:00 AM:

### Consecration of Ner Tamid Jewish Cemetery

ST. HELENA CEMETERY

Join members of Ner Tamid (Eternal Flame) Jewish Cemetery Association in formally consecrating the newly established sacred Jewish ground within the St. Helena Cemetery. The section is being landscaped and decorated with artwork of significance.

## SAVE THE DATE #2

THURS., JUNE 19, 7:00 PM:

### Women in Wartime

HELD AT THE LIBRARY

Bob Winters will read from his biography of Iola Hitt's service in World War II, and Iola Hitt will be there too, along with other women veterans—with tales to tell. Women experienced and supported US wars and conflicts in many ways. This evening is a chance to share these memories.



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*On February 8, staff from the St. Helena Public house three stimulating some of their findings excavation that took place*



*Valley during 2008. The dig was required by the Napa Valley Flood Control Project. The speakers were (left to right) director John Holson, Dr. Tsim Schneider (archeologist), and Dr. Lori Hager (osteologist). The group brought some of the artifacts (over 9,000 recovered); photos of some of them, taken by Mark Salvestrin, were on display at the library during February. The 162 found remains (since reburied with the cooperation of the Mishewal Wappo Tribe) were primarily from the period 500 BC-AD 1500.*



*Pacific Legacy Inc came to Library and gave a packed slideshows and lectures on from the archeological in a section of Vineyard*



*On March 4, about 30 people sipped Markham wines and heard a talk by Greg Strange and Mariam Hansen about the history of Markham Winery, built and owned by Jean Laurent in 1879. The talk was followed by a tour.*

