



ST. HELENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY THE ELECTROLIER Illuminating St. Helena's History

JANUARY 2023 • VOLUME 21 • ISSUE 1



- **Introduction:** BOD President Bonnie Thoreen
- The Susanne Salvestrin Memorial Lecture Series kicks off on Jan. 25 @ 4:00pm, with **The Chinese in St. Helena**, at the Heritage Center Museum, 1255 Oak Ave.
- **Our Hispanic Heritage:** Stephen Taplin interviews Ray and Bob Torres
- **A look back at a successful 2022:**
 - **Hilos Visible/Visible Threads:** Exhibit celebrating Hispanic culture runs through March at the Heritage Center Museum
 - **St. Helena Discovery Cemetery Walk** in October
 - **Nine lectures**, two exhibits

INTRO: SHHS BOD PRESIDENT BONNIE THOREEN

Dear Members, Supporters and Friends of the St. Helena Historical Society:

On behalf of our entire board, it is my sincere pleasure to thank each of you who responded to our year-end appeal. Signing the lease and taking over five classrooms in the vacant Catholic School was a financial risk. We have not met all of our goals, so your gifts are critical.

Our plan was to move our old library office into those classrooms and eventually have space to open our collections to our community and visitors.

The pandemic slowed us down, but we're making progress

Our office is in place, two of the classrooms have been combined and now house artifacts and photographs. We have secured museum-quality storage and a workroom for collections management. Our community room is available for public use and hosts our programs and events. Many of our members attended November's program featuring Stephen Taplin and Congressman Mike Thompson talking about what it was like growing up in St. Helena!

We continue to need your support. We remain committed to preserving our past and sharing our story. We're excited about the program calendar our hardworking team is still finalizing for the new year, and we encourage you to sign up for our newsletter so you won't miss these events--shstory.org.

In the meantime, **the Heritage Center Museum is open the first Saturday of each month from noon-4pm. Plan to visit the Visible Threads exhibit on February 4! We look forward to welcoming you.**

Bonnie Thoreen, Chairperson, Board of Directors.





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Join us on Wed, January 25 @ 4pm at the Heritage Center Museum

CHINESE IN NAPA VALLEY: THE FORGOTTEN COMMUNITY THAT BUILT NAPA VALLEY

The Chinese were an important labor force in the Napa Valley's vineyards, quicksilver mines, hop farms, leather tanneries and laundries.

Soon after the arrival of Chinese immigrants, the county's first Chinatown was established in the Napa Valley. It was built on a small spit of land bordered by the Napa River, Napa Creek, Soscol Avenue and First Street. More than 2000 residents lived here and started businesses to serve their community—there were boardinghouses, gambling houses, opium dens, brothels, two commercial gardens and at least one Chinese restaurant. Store owners also often doubled as employment agents or onsite crew bosses.

As more immigrants arrived, they carved out neighborhoods in towns throughout Napa Valley

The contributions to the economy and culture of Napa Valley did little to deter discrimination, and Anti-Chinese Leagues sprang up to harass and intimidate immigrants like Chan Wah Jack, who ran the successful Sang Lung store in Napa's Chinatown.

Join author John McCormick as he uncovers the forgotten contributions of the Chinese people in California's most famous wine region. John's new book, **Chinese in Napa Valley: The Forgotten Community that Built Napa Valley** is available through Arcadia Press starting January 2, 2023.



About the author, John McCormick

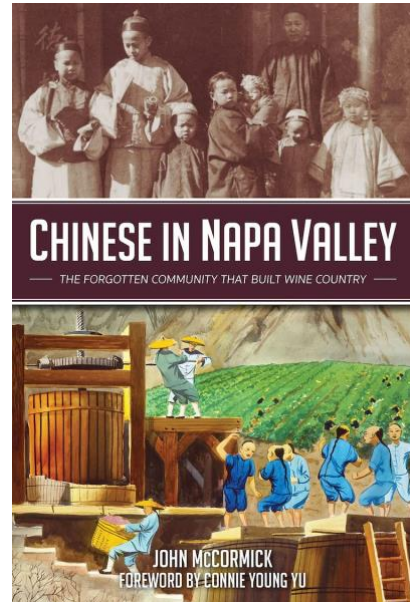
John McCormick grew up in Napa and is descended from five generations of Napa Valley residents. He received his bachelor's in engineering from the University of California, Berkeley and his master's in history from Harvard University.

Wed., January 25, 2023 @ 4:00pm

The Heritage Center Museum will open at 3:30--get here in time to visit our new exhibit, Visible Threads.

THE CHINATOWNS OF NAPA VALLEY

Napa Valley is known for our vineyards and wine. But how we got here is a sometimes-painful story. The history of Napa Valley's settlement stretches from African American farmers to the women who owned the local brothels. A sometimes-surprising story is that the Napa Valley was once home to thousands of Chinese immigrants.





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Thanks to the jobs that came from building the railroads and working in the vineyards, small Chinatowns popped up all over Napa Valley. Anywhere from three hundred to two thousand residents owned businesses, private homes, boardinghouses, gambling houses, opium dens, brothels, two commercial gardens and Chinese restaurants.

Chinatowns maintained their cultural traditions

Work gangs passing through the area lived in boardinghouses and temporary encampments, but families and entrepreneurs established residential and business districts. Their traditions helped protect them from hostile Americans, because, in many cases, they were the only places where they were allowed to live. Sadly, part of the immigration story is that they encountered racism and discrimination.

Napa's first post office was located in one of these Chinatowns that also featured a temple. During Chinese New Year, the temples were filled with offerings of rice, meats, fruits and other Chinese delicacies. Industrious Chinatown residents built businesses to serve each other.

There were mercantile and grocery stores with Chinese specialties. Store owners also often doubled as employment agents or onsite-crew bosses for Chinese labor. The crew boss distributed wages, settled disputes and organized work schedules.



In St. Helena in the 1880s:

- Ung Ching Wah ran a store and a boardinghouse.
- Yung Him ran a Rutherford store that sold groceries, employment and laundry services.
- Bing Kee operated an employment office where he also sold women's underwear and other goods.

While once home to many Chinatowns, none remains

The St. Helena Chinatown was partially destroyed in 1884 by a fire. While the neighborhood was quickly rebuilt, owners soon sold the land over fears that there would be another fire. While the Chinese community resisted, on the grounds that they were legally allowed to live there, the property was sold to members of St. Helena's Anti-Chinese League. There were a few years of legal maneuvering, then more fires. Finally, nothing was left. A blaze in 1911 caused by a spark from a backyard fire destroyed what little was left of St. Helena's Chinatown.



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18th ANNUAL SPIRITS OF ST. HELENA CEMETERY DISCOVERY WALK



The St. Helena Historical Society partnered with the St. Helena High School Drama students to reenact scenes from the lives of Italian and Italian-Swiss settlers. Among those we were channeling are the Mondavi, Forni, and Pestoni families. These are some of the photos of the afternoon at the cemetery!





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HILOS VISIBLE/VISIBLE THREADS EXHIBIT: THROUGH MARCH

The Hispanic exhibit will be part of our permanent exhibit

This art and fabric project is part of a countywide celebration of Hispanic culture. Participants use quilt squares to tell their immigration stories or what it means to be Hispanic in Napa Valley. According to quilt artist Arlene Correa Valencia, the quilt squares are the invisible threads that tie us all together, making visible the individual stories of our community.

For Semaria, "Being here in the U.S. is "the biggest blessing of my life. I'm grateful to my mother for the sacrifices she made to come here. I just went to Disneyland with my daughter. I love the United States. There have been a lot of changes lately that give me promise of a brighter future."

Visit Visible Threads the first Saturday of every month at the Heritage Center Museum from noon-4pm. 1255 Oak Avenue.



FOCUS ON OUR HISPANIC COMMUNITY CONTINUES

A Conversation with Ray and Robert Torres

Stephen Taplin, M.D. interviewed father and son duo, Ray and Bob Torres. Ray grew up here in St. Helena, joined the Army, came home, joined the Teamsters Union and worked in construction for 35 years.

His son Bob graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in Architecture. He is now the Principal, Vice Chairman & Director of Trinchero Family Estates, the second largest family-owned winery in the country, with 50 labels in their portfolio. This is Stephen's conversation with Ray—a first generation St. Helenan.

Stephen: So what was it like growing up in St. Helena?

Ray: No cellphones or TV. We shared a radio and listened to music. We made up games. We made slingshots and went up into the hills and shot quail. We were curious about the caves—there were rumors that 30 Chinese were buried in the caves up there.





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Ray: I was born on Zinfandel Lane in St. Helena. Mr. Wheeler hired my dad and uncle because they were good workers. My dad became a vineyard foreman. I remember a green cabin. We cooked in one cabin, slept in another, and there was an outhouse and a community bath. That was up until I was about five.

I went to school in Rutherford. The bus driver was Smokey Grant. I used to watch him shift with his little finger. One day he said something to my teacher, Miss Gaylord, and she started crying. I found out later that he told her that President Roosevelt had died.

Stephen: How did your Dad get to the Napa Valley?

Ray: Dad and my Uncle John came to the U.S. from Guanajuato and ended up in the Roseville area. They worked on the railroad in the early 1920s. Dad met my mom, and my uncle met his wife there, and they all got married. They moved to Napa County in 1924 or so. Of seven siblings in my family, I'm the only one left.

My dad and Uncle John were vineyard foremen They were taught by the Qualias and the Pontes how to grow the grapes, how to graft and prune. They became the vineyard foremen and worked at BV, Beringer and Krug. They spoke Spanish so they could run the crews. Uncle John worked for BV for more than 40 years.

After graduating from high school, Ray joined the Army, trained at Ford Ord and was assigned to Germany, near the Rhine. This was during the cold war. It was an experience that helped me grow up—I'd never been out of the Valley. I'm glad that dad taught us how to work.

After I was discharged from the Army, I was home for a week and my brother Jess got me a job with Slinsen Construction, where I joined the Teamsters and worked for 35 years.

After I got home and settled, I met Vera Trinchero. I bought a '57 Chevy Bel Aire that impressed my future father-in-law, and we got married and had two sons, Tony and Bob. I worked hard during the week and washed bottles at the Trinchero Winery on the weekends. About that time, Sutter Home, part of the Trinchero wine portfolio, just exploded with the development of the white Zinfandel craze. Trinchero treated their employees so well, and they continue to grow.

Stephen: What do you see as challenges now, biggest decisions?

Ray: It was so simple in the old days. You worked hard and made a living. But now. All the technology. And the ups and downs of the economy. One of my biggest challenges was quitting smoking and drinking. Dr. Tate told me I was too young to die and I quit cold turkey.

I am so proud of my son Bob. My boys have been so good. They just take care of their dad. Just makes me feel good.



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VOLUNTEER FOCUS: ART CARR

Art Carr and the harnesses from Luigi Qualia's barn



Everybody knows Art Carr. He's a retired roofing contractor who drives around town in a pristine yellow 1956 truck. Art loves old stuff, and that's great news for the Historical Society.

Art has helped us in so many ways over the years

There have been countless trips to pick up large cumbersome items from someone's barn or storage facility. In May, for our History of Firefighting exhibit, it was Art who shared the St. Helena Fire Department's collection of artifacts, photos and memorabilia. Art is the curator who collects and researches these historical items. He was also the presenter for an afternoon event, sharing stories of the early days of building a functioning fire department.

But it's Art's latest effort that has earned our special thanks

These old, weathered harnesses belonged to Luigi Qualia. He used them to harness his horses to plow his fields. When Luigi bought a tractor, he retired his horses, and the harnesses hung in the barn. Art built this structure to display the harnesses, which are a wonderful addition to the Heritage Center's farm worker collection.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT? ANTIQUE FIRE EXTINGUISHERS!

Our hardworking Collections Team--Helen Nelson, Nancy Caffo, Marilyn Coy and Sandra Price--meet every week to log in the items that people contribute to the Heritage Center.

This item was donated by Sandra Price, who got them from her mother-in-law. We learned that this is a fire extinguisher! It's approximately 4" x 5", and it's filled with water and chemicals, probably toxic. It's meant to be used like a hand grenade--tossed into a fire to help extinguish the blaze. We have three of these, but of course we're donating one to Art Carr for his firefighting collection!



UPCOMING EVENTS

February 4: Visit the Heritage Center Museum, 12:00-4:00

January 25: Chinese In Napa Valley: The Forgotten Community That Built Napa Valley, with guest speaker John McCormick., 4:00pm, The Heritage Center Museum, 1255 Oak Avenue



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VOLUNTEER AT THE HERITAGE CENTER!

Open the First Saturday of the Month from Noon-4pm

We're looking for volunteers to help staff the Heritage Center on the first Saturday of the month. Noon-4pm shifts. Contact shstory@shstory.org, 1255 Oak Avenue, St. Helena, CA 94574



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On our [website](https://shstory.org) you can download a membership form or pay online. Membership is critical to the Historical Society's success! [Please join us!](https://shstory.org)

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