



THE ELECTROLIER

Newsletter of the St. Helena Historical Society, Winter 2004, Vol.2 No.1

My Memories of Aetna Springs Summer Resort

By Linda Struve

Aetna Springs was a resort for over fifty years before my parents, Ruth and George Heibel purchased the property in 1945. There have been numerous mentions of the resort early on in recorded histories of the area. I will concentrate this article on the years that my family owned and operated the resort property, which was between 1945 and 1972.

My parents acquired the property from Len D. Owens and moved their children, Helen, Mary and Dan, from San Francisco where they had begun their marriage and family. My brother, John, and I, were born after the move to Pope Valley. Mr. Owens owned the property for 54 years. He was the father of the actress/writer Francis Marion (for whom one of the cabins was named.)

During our tenure, we ran Aetna as an American plan summer resort. American plan meant that we provided three meals a day, which were included in the rates. We opened the resort to the public every Memorial Day weekend and closed, usually, after the Labor Day weekend. These two long weekends, in addition to the 4th of July, were usually our busiest times. July tended to be busier than June; August, busier than July.

The resort consisted of 17 cabins which could hold a varied number of families or individuals, a large dining hall, social hall/office, club house, and numerous other buildings for employee housing, and storage. There is a 100' by 25' unheated pool adjoining a building that housed the massage and mineral bath complex. We at one time kept a masseuse employed who would oversee the mineral baths that guests could enjoy.

The greatest number of guests came from throughout the Bay Area. We had some from southern and central California and a very few from out of state. Most of the guests consisted of families, but couples and occasionally single people would come and enjoy the resort.

Our employees ranged from a full time gardener (who usually stayed on all year), to housekeepers, waiter/waitresses, bartender, cooks, dishwashers, and other kitchen/dining room help. Our family filled in to work in the office, lifeguard the pool, wrangle the horses, oversee children's dinner/play hour, and whatever else needed attention.

Activities that were available to our guests were wide and varied including guided horse-back rides and once a week weenie roasts,

golf (both miniature and full size), a lighted tennis court, ping-pong, croquette, swimming, fishing, hunting, hiking, pool, shuffle-board, pinball machines, children's dinner and play hour. We had nightly rounds of bingo during the week with square and ballroom dancing available Saturday and sometimes Friday nights. (Our dance caller also became involved with square dance groups in Napa Valley and was a regular for years and years at both places.) On Wednesday evenings, after dinner, there was a weekly showing of a travelogue and

some home-owned cartoon movies, in the Social Hall. Every Sunday, my dad would have a barbecue dinner using a side of beef from our herd of beef cows. It was cooked and served at the clubhouse complex. Dad was a trained chef and had worked as such professionally for a number of years in both southern California and in San Francisco. He oft times was involved first hand in the food preparations at the resort, even though we always had a full time chef employed.

The landscaping, which covered approximately 10-20 acres, was always well manicured. It consisted of a wide variety of trees,

shrubs, perennials, annuals, and six acres of lawn. A full time gardener/handyman was a necessity. We had a garden center where we grew seedlings and kept the garden supplies.

During the off-season, my parents busied themselves by remodeling and repairing the different areas of the resort. My mother made new curtains, bedspreads, and lamps for the cabins several times through the years. My dad remodeled the insides of the cabins by replacing shower stalls with bath/shower combos, replacing flooring, and performing other needed maintenance. We also were busy with the farming and cattle production during the off-season. My parents were quite involved in the local community, holding positions on the school board and local political organizations, and so forth. However, the resort was definitely their focus throughout their tenure there.

Through the years some of the changes we made were: replacing a herd of Guernsey milk cows (which required a full time employee) with a herd of Hereford beef cows; converting the golf course from dry (oil/sand greens) to an irrigated grass greens course; eliminating the massages and masseuse due to lack of interest of guests; remodeling cabins to include more bath/shower combos; adding permanent pasture in addition to growing our own oat hay crops. (cont. p. 3)



Aetna Springs, early 20th Century

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This month we celebrate the second anniversary of the St. Helena Historical Society! The St. Helena Library board came up with the idea of forming a historical society. Board member Gwen Becker offered to help out. Library director Larry Hlavsa placed an announcement in the *St. Helena Star* for an exploratory meeting at the library. On February 5, 2002 the St. Helena Historical Society held its first meeting. Some of the same dedicated people who attended that meeting are working hard with the society today. Larry became president, I became vice president, Gwen Becker became secretary. Kim Farmer is still the treasurer and helped us with incorporation. Frank Harrison is the collections chairperson. Other Board of Directors members are Kathy Kernberger, Elaine Hudson, John Sales and Susanne Salvestrin.

Due to family and work constraints, Larry Hlavsa has stepped down as president. We owe him enormous gratitude for his leadership and vision these last two years. Larry remains on the Board of Directors and in charge of the Society's website.

Our second anniversary meeting took place on February 3 in a very special place: Vintage Hall. The St. Helena High School stone building was built in 1912 as the pride of the upper valley. In 1969 it was mothballed because it was deemed not earthquake safe. Today the building has been brought back to its former glory, but with 2003 technological improvements. We learned about the history of the building and viewed the 1912 time capsule contents. Welded in a tin box were business cards, photographs, autographs, a 1912 St. Helena Star, invoices from the craftsmen and more. Steve Bratt, facilities director, gave us a tour of the old and new features of the building, including original redwood timbers visible on the third floor.

"Discover Hidden Treasures of the Valley", our very own antiques roadshow, returns with a new silent auction and antiques sale. Invite all your friends, relatives and neighbors to bring in their heirlooms. Don't own any antiques? No problem, our experts will also have antiques for sale. Wine tasting and afternoon tea is included. Please call Nina at 963-4349 if you have an antique or collectible to donate for the silent auction.

On June 26 we will bring you a delightful Victorian High Tea at the estate of Mrs. Evan Peters. The Vine & Fig Tree Farm includes a stately manor house built in 1868. Members will receive a formal invitation in the mail in May. The general public will get the remaining tickets starting in June. Remember, HATS WILL BE WORN!

The long term goal of the society is to open a museum in St. Helena. The Carnegie Building has been vacated by the city council and planning commission, leaving a possible space. Others in our group feel we need a very visible presence on Main Street. Whatever we do, it will require a capital campaign and broad community support. I welcome the input of all members and citizens on the future of the St. Helena Museum. Please contact me at 963-5748 or wartuhi@comcast.net.

Mariam Hansen, President

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 _____

St. Helena Historical Society
P.O. Box 87
St. Helena, CA 94574
707-963-5244 ext. 187
www.shstory.org

Officers

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

Directors

Gwen Becker
Kim Farmer
Mariam Hansen
Frank Harrison
Larry Hlavsa
Elaine Hudson
Kathy Kernberger
John Sales
Susanne Salvestrin

Committee Notes:

The ***Collections Committee*** coordinates and manages the acquisitions of new materials. It meets the last Monday of the month at 4:30 in the library upstairs meeting room. Current chair of the committee is Frank Harrison. You can email him at jackiefrank@aol.com

The ***Fundraising Committee*** plans and produces events that teach the public about our local history and raise funds for the Society. The Committee is currently planning two events: an Antiques Appraisal event Feb 22, and Victorian High Tea, June 26. Please contact committee chair Mariam Hansen to volunteer. You may call her at 963-5748, or send email her to: wartuhi@comcast.com.

Questions? Comments?

Call or email the Newsletter editor,
Kim Farmer, at 963-0630,
ksfarmer@seedgrain.com

HISTORICAL SOCIETY ACTIVITY BRIEFS

Oral History Workshop

Have you ever wanted to save the voice and experiences of a love one? Perhaps you are hesitant because you are not sure how to conduct an oral history and wonder what is the best method of creating a permanent and appropriate oral history.

Here is your opportunity to learn how. The St. Helena Historical Society, under the auspices of the St. Helena Library, offers two opportunities to take an oral history workshop at the Library Community Room,

Saturday, February 28, 2004 from 10 am to 4 pm
and

Saturday, April 17, from 10 am to 4 pm

Class size is limited. To register and for more information, call Susanne Salvestrin at 963-2826. A \$10 fee for the class can be mailed to St. Helena Historical Society, P.O. Box 87, St. Helena, CA 94574

Please bring a tape recorder with batteries, a 60 minute-tape and a bag lunch. There will be a break around noon.

Movies at the Library

The St. Helena Library has begun showing "Movies at the Library." For the most recent film, "Pollyanna", shown on January 22, the historical society collected photographs from locals of the filming and presented a display at the library. Yolanda Pincus, Ken Taplin and Edna Johnson allowed us to copy their photos and newspaper clippings, which were then returned to them.

Attending the showing were several local folks who had parts as extras in the film; Ken and Alice Taplin, and Petite Abruzzini, who, with husband Fred, were in car scenes in the movie. Also in the film were Bebe York, Edna Johnson and Billie Munk.

St. Helena scenes used as filming locations included Sulphur Creek railroad trestle, the train depot and tracks, the Napa river north of Zinfandel Bridge, Harold Bellus' field and cow.

Don't miss seeing the Elvis Presley movie filmed here in 1960: "Wild In the Country" on March 18. Get your free ticket at the library starting March 4. We will have pictures to see from Yolanda Pincus, Doug Wight and Craig Battuello of when Elvis came to town!

Aetna Springs (cont. from page 1)

A combination of factors led to my parents decision to sell the resort: International travel got easier and more popular; the old resort began showing obvious need for all new electrical and plumbing; liability issues began rising. My parents wanted to "slow down" and none of their children were stepping up to take over operation of the resort. Mom and Dad Heibel decided they had better sell the resort and settle in to retirement. The summer of 1972 was the last year that the resort was open for business and just happened to be the summer that I was lucky enough to have my wedding take place on the resort grounds.

My parents sold the resort between 1972 and 1973 to a southern California based development corporation, ESI (Environmental Systems, Inc.) The corporation tried to get some plans passed by the County to develop the property. However, fortunately, the County had the wisdom to deny the project. Unfortunately, that caused the corporation to put the property into bankruptcy, and that is when the NEDS division of the Unification Church acquired the property. Through those years of indecision and lack of management, the grounds and the buildings have fallen into a sad state of disrepair and neglect.



Aetna Springs, Mid 20th Century

WELCOME! NEW MEMBERS SINCE JULY

Linda Alioto
Nick & Marilyn Coy
Gina Dillon
Jack Fairchild
Marilynn Fanucci
Jans Gay
Lennis & Tom Giugni
Ellie Heffner
Carolyn Kelperis
Norman Krause & Diane Price

Lars Kronmark
John & Inna MacDougall
Chris Marchese
Fulton & Dink Mather
Cynthia Mein
Peter & Peggy Molinari
Harold & Shirley Morrison
Reg Oliver
Roberta Olwald
Debbie Perez

James & Sandra Learned Perry
Elizabeth Peters
Dorothy Shelley
Kathy Shuey
Frank Van Konynenburg
Ann von Germeten
Tricia Westbrook
Russ & Janice Wight (life members)

Calendar

February

- Feb 12:** "Grapes of Wrath" movie, 6 pm at the Library.
Feb 17: Antiques Event meeting, 2 pm, Library Community Rm.
Feb 22: Antiques Event at Native Sons Hall 1 to 4 pm, 1313 Spring St. (more info below, page 4).
Feb 23: Board of Directors Meeting, 4:30 pm, Carnegie Building.
Feb 28: Oral History Workshop 10 to 4 pm at St. Helena Library Community Room. (more info on page 3)

March

- Mar 2:** General Meeting, 4:30 pm, Library Community Room (see website, www.shstory.org for possible change in location)
Mar 18: "Wild in the Country" movie, 6 pm at the Library. Also see photos of Elvis Presley from movie filmed here in 1960.
Mar 29: Collections Committee Meeting, 4:30pm, Library upstairs meeting room.

April

- Apr 6:** General Meeting, 4:30 pm, Library Community Room (see website, www.shstory.org for possible change in location)
Apr 17: Oral History Workshop 10 to 4 pm at St. Helena Library Community Room. (more info on page 3)
Apr 26: Collections Committee Meeting, 4:30 pm, Library upstairs meeting room

May

- May 3:** Board of Directors Meeting, 4:30 pm, Carnegie Building.
May 4: General Meeting, 4:30 pm, Library Community Room (see website, www.shstory.org for possible change in location)
May 24: Collections Committee Meeting, 4:30 pm, Library upstairs meeting room

Be sure to visit the Society website at www.shstory.org for any changes or 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.

St. Helena Historical Society
presents

Discover Hidden Treasures of the Valley

Antique Sale & Show

**Sunday, February 22,
2004**

1-4pm

Native Sons Hall

1313 Spring, St. Helena

Antiques & Collectibles Silent Auction

Wine Tasting & Afternoon Tea

Antique Evaluations by Experts in Collectibles, Silver, American Furniture, Paintings, China, Maps, Estate Jewelry, Weapons and Guns. History display.

Bring historical photos to scan.

Tickets, \$20 for 3 appraisals and tasting, sold only at the event.

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