



# THE ELECTROLIER

Newsletter of the St. Helena Historical Society, Fall 2007, Vol.5 No.4

## *“Spirits of St. Helena” Cemetery Tour* By Mariam Hansen

The Society presented its fifth annual “Spirits of St. Helena” Cemetery Discovery Walk at St. Helena Cemetery on November 3. It was a beautiful, warm fall day and over 50 people enjoyed the tour. The gravesites were closer together this year, making it easier to walk from one to another.

Former mayor Lowell Smith began the tour as Jules Millet, a nephew of Germain Crochat, partner in the Franco-Swiss Winery in Conn Valley. Both Millet and his murderer, John Murbach, lived and worked at the winery.

One day, photographer R.E. Wood came to take photos of the winery. While his equipment was untended, Murbach stole several photos and hid them. The theft was promptly noticed and Murbach was the only suspect. Incensed winery partner Fred Metzner extracted a confession, severely beat Murbach, fired him and ejected him from the property. Murbach returned a week later on November 26, 1882, with a gun, looking for Metzner and found the hapless Millet first. He shot Millet, who died soon after. At the trial Murbach was convicted of murder and sentenced to hang.

Historian Kathy Kernberger portrayed the aunt of Richard Fealy, who was in trouble for much of his life; misbehaving at Liberty School, being charged with assault and, finally, committing arson. In early 1915, Richard devised a plan for a “mysterious” fire to burn down the house of his mother-in-law, across the street from St. Gothard's Inn, now the Grandview. She did not want her valuable furniture to be destroyed, so he agreed to remove it from the house. Richard laid a trail of gasoline from a pile of rags to a burning candle. Then he, his wife, sons and mother-in-law went for a “picnic” in the dark. Unfortunately for Richard, the volunteer fire department was having a dinner at the Inn across the street. Seeing the candle, they went to investigate and found the incendiary device. He might have escaped, but he filed an insurance claim. Richard was convicted of arson and insurance fraud, serving six years at San Quentin Prison.

Bill Savidge portrayed Alfred Cook, who was shot by Jesse Walters, a former deputy sheriff, on January 8, 1899. On



Bill Savidge as Alfred Cook.

that day, when Sheriff Dunlap arrived at George McKenzie's livery stable, he found the deceased Cook lying on the floor with multiple gunshot wounds and holding a revolver with four empty chambers. The case took a sensational turn when the coroner's jury brought in a verdict charging Walters with the murder of Cook, six jurors adding a finding that McKenzie was an accessory after the fact. There had been bad blood between Cook and Walters for some time. Cook, known as a partying bartender, had been accused of forgery and other misdeeds. Walters had been heard threatening to kill Cook if he ever came back to Napa and he was true to his word. Cook's shot lodged in Walter's knee and got infected. Although Walter's leg was amputated while he was in jail, he eventually died. On his deathbed, he confessed to killing Cook.

Jeff Farmer portrayed George Clark, who murdered his brother on January 19, 1898. W.A. Clark was a railroad section hand who carried his lunch to work and found his coffee unduly bitter one day. He brought it to be analyzed by the druggist, who found it to contain 5 grams of strychnine. Clark purchased a new container for his coffee, but two weeks later had the same experience. Early on the fateful morning, Clark was preparing his breakfast when he heard a knock on the door. He opened it and was shot with a revolver. William Clark left a widow with seven children. William's brother George was suspected by Marshal Johnson and immediately arrested.

While in jail in Napa, George was visited by a reporter, who asked him to place his hand on the bible and swear that he did not kill his brother. Clark finally confessed that he had been in love with his brother's wife since he was a boy, that they'd had a love affair for the last 14 years and she promised to marry him if her husband ever died. At the trial, Mrs. Clark said she had known George since he was a child. She admitted to the intimacies between them. George was found guilty of first degree murder and executed at San Quentin. Thus ended the family triangle.

Marilyn Coy portrayed Victorina Sasselli, who was murdered at the age of 17 on March 18, 1898. Victorina, the eldest daughter of Swiss-Italian immigrants Joseph and Frederica Sasselli, lived with her family on Sage Canyon Road, near the Anton and Caterina Nichelini family. Mr. Jules Bheud was a drifter who became obsessed with Victorina. Each time he went to her house and asked to court her, he was turned away by her parents.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Dear Members,*

This is my first opportunity to write this column as the newly-elected president of the Historical Society. I follow in the footsteps of Mariam Hansen, who did a wonderful job as president. Mariam will continue to be very actively involved in the Society – as secretary, chair of the Events Committee, member of the Collections Committee, and all-around, go-to reference historian. The Society owes her a huge debt of gratitude, and we look forward to her continuing contributions.

We are pleased to welcome two new members to our Board of Directors. Donn Black is a retired attorney and currently serves as a director of both the St. Helena Rotary Club and the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum. Donn has some public relations experience and we hope he will help us out in that area.

Mariana Olguin is our other new Director. She works as a Community Liaison and teacher for the St. Helena Unified School District. Mariana is a long-time St. Helena resident and expects to become involved in our oral history program.

We are very fortunate to have these two talented people on our Board and look forward to working with them.

We have begun having directors' meetings once a month because of increased business and our desire to move forward with planning for a St. Helena History Center. We are being offered historical artifacts by community members more and more frequently, and are in dire need of a place to properly store and display them. We know that if we actually had a History Center, even more artifacts would be forthcoming.

We are in need of volunteers to help out at one of our sponsored events, to participate in our oral history program and to help in our History Center planning. If you are interested and can spare a little time, please call me at 967-6210.

Best holiday wishes from all of us at the Historical Society. We expect 2008 to be our best year yet.

*Skip Lane*

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### 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 *Events Committee* plans and presents events to teach the public about our local history. Plans are underway for the Feb. Antiques Fair. Call Mariam Hansen, 963-5748 for more information.

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/Organizatoin \$150 Life \$500

*I would like to:* Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_ Make a donation to the Society \_\_\_\_\_

### ◆HELP WANTED◆

Volunteers are needed for  
the Antiques Fair,  
February 23, 2008.

Please call  
society voice mail  
at 967-5502  
to volunteer.

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

### CORNERSTONE SIGNED OUR PETITION YET?

As you know our first choice location for the new St. Helena History Center is on the Adams Street property. The central, but off-Main Street, location and the adjacency to the St. Helena Library are two of many reasons that this location is win-win for the Center and the community. The Center will utilize one acre of property at the most.

The site will accommodate a small outdoor exhibit area and a 10-15,000 square foot facility where our collections, exhibits, research stations, educational programming and events will be housed. The public programming spaces, such as a modular lecture hall that can be transformed into smaller class and meeting rooms will be available for use by other community organizations.

In our last newsletter we announced our petition drive. We need to let the St. Helena General Plan Committee, the City Counsel and the Planning Commission know how strong community support for the idea of locating the History Center next to the library is.



Susanne Salvestrin, Marie Oliver, and paper conservator, Antoinette Dwan display 1876 map of Napa County donated to society by Marie.

#### Have you had a chance to sign our petition yet?

To sign a petition, or for more information, please contact SHHS President, Skip Lane at 967-6210, or any other member of our Board.

The History Center is an idea whose time has come. Because the general plan update is underway we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build the Center in the most optimum location possible. Please help us make sure the wide-ranging support for this concept is heard by those who will make this important decision on behalf of the community.

We thank you, your grandchildren thank you!

Tricia Westbrook,  
Strategic Planning Committee Chair

### Cemetery Tour (Continued from Page 1)

On the fateful day Victorina and her father were returning from a shopping trip in St. Helena when they came upon Bheud, who made polite conversation and convinced them that he only wanted a short conversation with her and would bring her directly home. As they approached Horse Shoe Bend, Bheud pulled a revolver, pleading with Victorina to become his wife, saying he would kill himself if she refused. As she tried to reason with him, he suddenly turned the revolver toward her and shot her. He then shot himself, dying almost instantly. The horses raced up the road with Victorina lying on the floorboards of the rig, her life draining slowly away. As the horses approached the Nichelini family home, Caterina Nichelini raced out to stop them, knowing something was terribly wrong. Upon finding her, Caterina cradled Victorina in her arms as she took her last breath. Both Sasselli and Bheud are buried at St. Helena.

John Ponte portrayed John Wright, who was lynched and hung from the York Creek Bridge on May 5, 1888. Robert M. "Budd" Vann, the son of a prominent St. Helena family, was a customer at the Pink Saloon, bar and brothel in St. Helena. Budd was said to be an overweight, overbearing barfly. He was attracted

to one of the "employees" of the saloon, who did not welcome his attention. One day, when he arrived loud and drunk, John Wright, brother of the lady, tried to prevent him from entering. He forced his way inside. Wright shot and killed him. Eighteen year old Wright, without a lawyer and barely speaking, appeared before Judge Elgin with the district attorney examining him. Twelve witnesses were called against him. Wright was locked in the jail by Constable McGee. Both the Constable and Night Watchman York tried to convince Judge Elgin that there would be trouble and that they should post extra guards. No one believed St. Helenans would break the law. Constable McGee gave the jail keys to the Judge, hoping he could keep them safe, but somehow Vann's friends knew. A group of 15-20 masked men went to Judge Elgin's home and demanded the keys. Later, Night Watchman York found the jail broken into and empty. In the morning, Mr. Beringer told them that the body was hanging from the York Creek Bridge. The incident was reported all over the state and internationally. Both Vann and Wright are buried in St. Helena cemetery.

The "Spirits of St. Helena" Cemetery Discovery Walk takes place the first Saturday in November of every year. Watch for it next year.

### NAPA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

#### Bitter Fruit: Crime & Punishment in Napa County

Get a glimpse of Napa County's dark side—from historic shoot-outs and stage-coach robberies to prohibition-era burglaries and the Zodiac killer. This exhibit of artifacts is on display at the Napa County Historical Society's Goodman Library Building, now through February, 2008. A murder mystery dinner fundraiser is scheduled in celebration of the exhibition on, Saturday, January 26 at the Goodman Library. For information or to make a reservation, contact Society Director, Kristie Sheppard at 224-1739, or email [director@napahistory.org](mailto:director@napahistory.org)

## CALENDAR

Call our voicemail to reserve a space: 707-967-5502. See our website: [www.shstory.org](http://www.shstory.org)

### December

**Dec 4:** Christmas Dinner Party, 6pm at restored Star Building, Caldwell-Snyder Gallery. (See below)

**Dec 20:** Board of Directors mtg, 4:30, Library Meeting Rm.

### January

**Jan 8:** Tour of Atkinson House, 4PM, St. Supery Winery, Rutherford.

**Jan 17:** Board of Directors mtg, 4:30, Library Meeting Rm.

**Jan 28:** Collections Committee mtg, 9:30am Library Meeting Rm

### February

**Feb 21:** Board of Directors mtg, 4:30, Library Meeting Rm

**Feb 23:** DISCOVER HIDDEN TREASURES Antiques Fair, 10—5pm, St. Helena Catholic School Gym.

**Feb 25:** Collections Committee, 9:30am, Library Meeting Rm

### March

**Mar 21:** Board of Directors mtg, 4:30, Library Meeting Rm

**Mar 31:** Collections Committee mtg, 9:30, Library Meeting Rm

### April

**Apr 17:** Board of Directors mtg, 4:30, Library Meeting Rm.

**Apr 28:** Collections Committee mtg, 9:30, Library Meeting Rm.

### May

**May 6:** Annual Meeting of the membership at Sunny Acres B&B, Salvestrin family home.

**May 15:** Board of Directors mtg, 4:30, Library Meeting Rm.

**May 18:** Museum for a Day, Native Sons Hall, 10—5pm.

**May 26:** Collections Committee mtg, 9:30, Library Meeting Rm.

### 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.

### ◆◆Please note important change to Christmas Party◆◆

In response to feedback from our members, **we are returning to our traditional Christmas Potluck Dinner** instead of the catered event as previously noted. The party will still be held on Tuesday, December 4, at 6:00pm at the Star Building, Home of Caldwell Snyder Gallery, 1328 Main Street, St. Helena.

Please bring your favorite potluck dish— main, salad, vegetable or side dishes are needed.

Desserts provided by Chef Susanne, Finest Wine & Beverage brought by You. Plates, napkins, and utensils provided.

**RSVP by Nov. 29** to Betty, 963-3274, to let her know what you'll bring. Or email [shstory@shpl.org](mailto:shstory@shpl.org)

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