



# THE ELECTROLIER

Newsletter of the St. Helena Historical Society, Fall 2009, Vol.7 No.4

## SARAH CHASE BOURN 1829-1919

By Susanne Salvestrin

*(Editor's note: The seventh annual "Spirits of St. Helena" Cemetery Tour was held on Saturday, November 7. This year's theme, "Women Who Left Their Mark," featured newspaper publisher Lola Mackinder, winemaker Hannah Weinberger, jazz singer Claire Vance, civil war nurse Fanny Schneider, Napa Valley historian Ivy Loeber and—featured here—the matriarch of a historic family.)*

Sarah Chase Bourn, the eldest daughter of Captain George Chase, was born in Boston, Massachusetts on September 3, 1829. When she was 20 years old, her father left for the Pacific Coast, leaving his partner William Bourn to manage the family's business affairs. William had been courting Sarah for several years and they married on July 24, 1849 at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Brooklyn, New York.

The following year, William Bourn left Sarah with her married sister Georgina while he traveled west to help her father with his new shipping enterprise. William arrived in late 1850, shortly after California gained statehood. Although William had planned to return home in a year, he remained in California, finally sending for Sarah in 1854.

Sarah traveled to California by ship to Nicaragua, crossed the Isthmus and continued on to San Francisco by ship. She arrived on May 4, 1854 to a happy reunion with her husband, father and other family members who had come to California two years earlier.

William and Sarah lived with her family for a short time before moving to their own home in San Francisco. In addition to William's responsibilities with the shipping firm, he entered the commission brokerage business, resumed his banking interests and became a director and then president of the Farmer's Fund Insurance Company. He also traded on the Mercantile Stock Exchange and began to invest in diverse

mining ventures, including the Empire Mine in Grass Valley.

Over the next 12 years Sarah gave birth to 6 children: Mary (Maye) Champney Bourn, in 1855; William Bowers Bourn, Jr., in 1857; Sarah Frances Bourn, whom they called Zaidée, in 1859; Frank Washington Bourn in 1861; Ida Hoxie Bourn in 1864 and Maud Eloise Chase Bourn in 1867.

During this time, William, Sr., acquired controlling interest in the Empire Mine at Grass Valley. He was also a director and president of the Imperial Silver Mine of Virginia

City and the original Hidden Treasure Mine of White County, Nevada. From that time on, most of the family fortune came from mining.

In 1872, William presented Sarah with a country home at St. Helena in the Napa Valley. It was called Madroño and consisted of a main residence with barns and outbuildings, along with two comfortable farm houses, the "Red Cottage" and the "White Cottage". There were 60 acres of vineyards and within a short time, Bourn added another 60 acres which he purchased from Sam Brannan.

Sarah had the original Madroño home torn down and replaced with a palatial home which had large quantities of decorative stone and boasted two imposing towers in the Victorian style of the period.

After the death at age 11 of their son Frank, who fell from a high stone wall at their home on Taylor

Street in San Francisco, Mrs. Bourn and her daughters spent more time at Madroño. Mr. Bourn and their son William came up to Madroño when they had time, Mr. Bourn being busy with work and William at school.

The family loved being at Madroño and Sarah enjoyed experimenting with other crops and animals besides her vineyards. These included silkworms, Chinese pheasants, dairy cows and chickens. Her Madroño bred carriage horses became well known throughout the valley.



Sarah Simpson, great granddaughter of Sarah Chase Bourne, tells the cemetery tour audience about her family.

*(Continued on page 3)*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Dear Members,*

As 2009 draws to a close, the Historical Society can look back on a busy and productive year, and look forward to an even bigger year in 2010.

Mariam, Susanne and Kim have finished their work on the pictorial history of St. Helena and we look forward to publication of the Arcadia book next spring.

We are currently in discussions with the Napa County Red Cross about the possibility of expanding our operation into their space on Oak Avenue in St. Helena. While keeping our presence on the second floor of the library, sharing the Red Cross space would allow us some much needed additional storage space, as well as give us a more public presence.

The Red Cross needs somebody to staff their office for limited but regular hours each week – a function that we could provide in exchange for shared use of their space.

The balance sheet of the Society was improved recently by two donations. Last summer we applied for, and were awarded, a \$2500 grant from the Chamber of Commerce for the purpose of organizing a membership drive and starting a fundraising campaign. We are grateful for the Chamber's contribution and will put the money to good use.

Three years ago we met with Kathryn Hall of Hall Winery to discuss the history of the winery and the Halls' plans for development of the property. At the conclusion of our discussion, Ambassador Hall generously offered to contribute a portion of the sales price of the winery's Bergfeld brand Cabernet Sauvignon to the Historical Society. As a result, we were recently presented with a check for over \$12,000. Needless to say, we are extremely grateful and wish to effusively thank Ambassador Hall and the winery.

We saw many of you at our booth at the Harvest Festival in October and we were also pleased by the turnout at our best ever cemetery tour, featuring St. Helena "Women Who Left Their Mark".

Don't forget to reserve a place at our annual Christmas gathering. This year it is being held on December 8 at Ranch Caymus Inn, look for more information on page 4 of this newsletter.

We continue to plan for the eventual building of a History Center next to the library and hope to make substantial progress in this area soon after the first of the year.

We also plan to have a role in the re-opening of the Carnegie Building which is due to occur in February or thereabouts. With all this increased activity we are always in need of volunteer help. If you have any spare time and would like to contribute, please call us at 967-5502 and leave us your contact information.

*Skip Lane*

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### Officers and Directors

Skip Lane, President  
Susanne Salvestrin, Vice President  
Mariam Hansen, Secretary  
John Sales, Treasurer  
Donn Black  
Kim Farmer  
Frank Harrison  
Helen Heibel Nelson  
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](mailto: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,  
[kfarmer@seedgrain.com](mailto:kfarmer@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 \_\_\_\_\_

### **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!



## HISTORICAL SOCIETY ACTIVITIES



Three women who left their mark on St. Helena. At left, Marielle Coeytaux, portraying jazz singer Claire Vance, delighted the crowd by singing a piece originally sung by Claire Vance. Above, Julie Dalrymple portrays Ivy Loeber, founder of the Napa County Historical Society. At the right, Elaine Christian portrays Fanny Pritchard Owens Schneider, who, before moving to the St. Helena area in late 1800s, was a nurse in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas during the civil war.

*Cont. from page 1*

Sarah shared her country estate with two of her sisters and her aging father, Captain Chase. Her sister Charlotte Starr, whose husband had abandoned her and their son George, lived in the Red Cottage. George was kept busy by Sarah who gave him odd jobs around the estate. Sarah's second sister, Caroline Chase Bowers and her two daughters, Manzanita and Edith, lived in the White Cottage where they cared for Captain Chase, who was badly crippled with arthritis.

Two tragedies struck in 1874. First, Sarah's sister Charlotte died, leaving George Starr to Sarah's care. Then in the summer, Sarah and her daughters were called back to San Francisco, to learn that William, Sr. had died, at age 61, from a gunshot wound. The coroner initially declared his death a suicide, but ordered an inquest. After review of the incident, a jury determined the death was accidental. William had recently begun delivering the payroll to the Empire mine and had purchased a gun to carry with him. Most likely, he had been trying to load the gun, not realizing there was a bullet in the firing position. The gun slipped from his hands, hit the floor and he was shot in the stomach.

Sarah, who was already busy educating and raising 5 children from age 7 to 19, plus her nephew George Starr, age 13, as well as overseeing the operations of the vineyard, now took charge of her husband's many ventures.

Sarah continued operations at the Empire Mine, relying heavily on her mine superintendent, Frank Nesmith. After William, Jr. returned from Cambridge University in the late 1870s, Sarah gave her son responsibility for overseeing the Empire Mine at Grass Valley and the vineyards at Madroño.

Sarah was then free to turn her attention to her daughters' education. In the early 1880s, she moved to New York for extended periods of time where she had enrolled her girls in Miss Webb's finishing school. In 1886-87, Sarah followed the accepted practice of wealthy families of adding the final touch to a girl's education with an extended tour of the major cultural centers of Europe.

On February 1, 1888, Madroño burned to the ground. Sarah began rebuilding it in 1895, at the same time William Jr. began to build Greystone, one of the largest and most expensively built structures in Napa Valley. Madroño was completed in 1904.

Sarah Chase Bourn died in April of 1919, at the age of 89, leaving her son William, daughters Ida, Maud, Maye, three grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

## CALENDAR

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

### December

**Dec 8:** Annual Christmas Potluck dinner, 6:30pm, Rancho Caymus Inn, 1140 Rutherford Rd. See details below.

**Dec 15:** Board of Directors meeting cancelled.

### January

**Jan 5:** Program: 4:00pm, a tour and history of St. Helena Hospital.

**Jan 19:** Board of Directors meeting, 5pm, Library Meeting Room. (Open to members.)

### February

**Feb 2:** Program: To Be Announced.

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

### March

**Mar 2:** Program: To Be Announced

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

**Mar 24:** Program: Wappo Basketry, a presentation at the St. Helena Library, 7:00pm

### April

**Apr 11:** Program: Tour of Pope Valley Store and lunch at Aetna Springs Clubhouse. More info to come.

### 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

Rancho Caymus Inn

1140 Rutherford Rd  
Rutherford

Tuesday, December 8  
6:30pm  
Potluck

Last names:

A-F bring Main Dish

G-N bring Appetizer

O-Z bring Salad/Vegetable

We provide desserts, water,  
plates, glasses and utensils.

Please bring a bottle of wine  
to share. Limited seating,

RSVP 963-3036

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