

RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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California State Library photo

J. P. Walker: pioneer of pioneers

Healdsburg Museum and
Historical Society

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Editor's Desk

I waited and waited, and not a single elf came into the museum. As you may have noticed, our winter issue was "late". At Christmas-time I wrote a letter to Santa asking him to please send down the elves after the season rush to help with the "Recorder", as we were going to be busy putting up two complete museum exhibits in two months. I've finally given up, as you can see. Thanks a lot, Santa!

In this issue we are honored to present an article by a talented Press Democrat reporter, Rich Cartiere. Rich has done a great deal of research on the pioneer Walker family, who are buried in Oak Mound Cemetery. Further, Rich has surprised local historians by finding information that sheds new light on the discovery of an important local area.

Also in this issue is a tongue-in-cheek account of some of Healdsburg's early laws, as well as an "unsolved" mystery that occurred in Healdsburg in 1914.

The "Recorder" needs contributing writers, as well as any interested volunteers. You can't trust those elves!

EDITOR.....Hannah M. Clayborn

JOEL PICKENS WALKER - PIONEER of PIONEERS

by Rich Cartiere

Among a multitude of his first-time feats, it now appears that the man California historians call a "pioneer of pioneers" was also one of two men who discovered the Geysers fully five years before a Mark West rancher is traditionally credited with finding them.

Joel Pickens Walker and John Ransford apparently sought out and found the Geysers in 1842. William Elliot from the Mark West Creek area has for more than 140 years been credited with accidentally discovering them while bear hunting in 1847.

Wonderful Curiosity

According to a first-person account in 1878, Walker claimed to have gone with Ransford in search of the steaming wonder after hearing stories about it from the Lake County Indians.

With characteristic understatement, the former Indian fighter said that the two adventurers found them a "wonderful curiosity", after making an arduous journey from Lake County across the "exceedingly rough" Mayacama Mountain range.

At that time Walker was living in Napa, at what is now Yountville, and Ransford was living in the town of Sonoma.

Pioneer Puzzle

Northern Sonoma County historians are particularly intrigued by Walker because he, along with his wife, Mary Young Walker, and sister-in-law, Marthy Young (themselves two "adventuresome sisters" who were the first American women to cross the plains and the first to enter California), are mysteriously buried in Healdsburg's Oak Mound Cemetery.

The Walker family moved to Sonoma County in 1854, but there is no record of them ever living in Healdsburg, despite the fact that five members of the family were variously buried here between 1856 and 1879. There is suspicion among local historians that the family lived in the Healdsburg area between 1854 and 1860, when the U.S. census shows all but

Mary (who died four years previous) were living in Sebastopol on Joel Walker's son's ranch.

While searching for historical documents of the Walker family recently in an attempt to solve the pioneer puzzle, I ran across Joel's 1878 first-person account of his life in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. There, in a brief reference, Joel recounted to Santa Rosa historian Robert A. Thompson his discovery of the Geysers:

"In 1842 John Ransford and myself went to Lake County. On our way back the Indians told us about the Geysers, and we determined to see them, and thought them a wonderful curiosity."

Because of the exactness of Walker's narrative (he left California for Oregon in the spring of 1843 and did not return until 1848) and the uniqueness of the Geysers, it is unlikely Walker is mistaken about either the year of his discovery or the identity of what he saw.

Cheated Out of Honors

The Geysers discovery is not the only historical honor for which members of the Walker family should be credited with, but which are mistakenly given to others. In fact, it seems a flawed historical record (at least the one most often used) has cheated the Walker family out of several of its hard-earned historical honors.

Although two sisters, Mary Young Walker and Marthy Young, beat out by almost three weeks a Mrs. Benjamin Kelsey in getting to California, and by a full year in crossing the plains, the honor of being noted as the first American woman to do either is usually bestowed upon Mrs. Kelsey, whose brother-in-law, Andrew Kelsey, settled in Lake County and for which Kelseyville was named.

Although Joel's brother, Captain Joseph Redford Walker discovered Yosemite Valley in 1834 while trailblazing an overland path to California, that honor usually goes to James M. Hutchings, a journalist who 21 years later came searching the Sierra Nevada to find out if there was any truth to the "rumors" circulated by Walker and his men of domed granite giants and mile-high monoliths.

Joel Walker's son, John, built the first redwood house in the Santa Rosa Valley in 1850 (near what is now Sebastopol) and also opened the first general store and post office in



Healdsburg Museum Photo

Later explorers at Geyser Springs.

Sonoma County outside the town of Sonoma. He also opened the first hotel in Sacramento.

Hardly remembered is Joel's opening of the Missouri-Santa Fe mercantile trade, a prosperous business route once he cut the path to the Spanish outpost in 1822.

Joel was also likely among the first American men to see the counties of Mendocino and Lake in 1841 when John Sutter hired him to drive 900 head of sheep and several hundred cattle from the Russian's Fort Ross to Sacramento.

Adventurous Life

Joel's life before helping to establish the Santa Fe trade was just as adventuresome as that which came later. At age 17 he joined General Andrew Jackson's campaign in Alabama against the Indians. He was wounded in the thigh at the Battle of the Horseshoe, which ended the Indian uprising at the Tallaposa River.

Four years later he joined Jackson again for five months in fighting against the Seminole Indians in Florida.

But in his memoirs, it is his venture to Santa Fe that accounts for most of his most colorful exploits. It was also his

toughest. His band of explorers nearly perished from lack of water several times.

Just days after starting out in 1822, Walker came on a sight which amazed him and the pioneers who later followed.

"The plains were literally filled with buffalo," he recalled in 1878.

Naked Capture

Shortly after reaching the Southwest plains one of many disasters struck, one which he remembered as much for its humor as for what it meant to the band of explorers. His group of about 31 men and 50 horses and mules were attacked by Indians.

As is evident from the following passage, the group was caught unprepared. "I was bare-headed, barefooted and without clothes, but I ran about a quarter of a mile thinking some of the horses would stop."

Capturing about nine horses, while naked, Walker and some of his men then went back to the nearest settlement and returned three weeks later with new horses and mules. But soon after the party became lost. With supplies low and no water in sight, several of his men collapsed.

While Walker and some of the group wandered looking for water, they came upon a large band of wild-looking men on horses.

"I kept my eyes on them and saw as I supposed, an Indian with hair flying up and down," said Walker. It turned out to be his brother, trapper and fellow explorer, Joseph.

Buffalo Blood

The combined party, rather than finding its way out of the parched plains, soon became lost.

"The men suffered so much from want of water that they killed buffalo and drank the blood, and crawled into the dead animals for it."

Later, when one of his party was left on the plains until water could be found, Joel recounted a bizarre incident. Upon discovering the lost man, they found him to be delirious with thirst.

"He had killed a buffalo and was sucking the blood. When he saw us he inquired, 'Have you any water?' We gave him some and put him upon a mule when he said, 'I had better drink some more blood.'"

First Family

After reaching Santa Fe, Walker established a trade route that became prosperous for many Americans who followed Walker's trail from Independence, Missouri.

In 1840, Walker left with trappers for Oregon. Although there were certainly wagon wheel ruts in the mud before him, Walker's family was the first to come west. There were almost no difficulties on the trek, despite the fact that Walker's wife, Mary, was pregnant.

His daughter, Louisa, was the first white child born to American parents on the West Coast.

The family came to California and arrived at Sutter's Fort on either October 19, or October 22, 1841.

Joel was hired by Sutter and soon after went to the Russian fort on the Sonoma Coast and with several other men drove 900 head of sheep and numerous cattle and horses back to Sutter's Fort, apparently taking a northern route through Mendocino, Lake, and Yolo Counties.

In 1843 Walker and his family returned to Oregon, fighting Indians on the trip north. According to family lore, Mary Walker once saved her children during an Indian raid by tucking them under her arms and fording a stream under the protection of her husband's rifle. If the story is true, this trip is the one on which it was most likely to have occurred.

Sonoma County Settlers

The family returned by schooner to San Francisco in 1848 and settled until 1854 on a ranch one mile north of what is now the town of Napa.

John Walker, Joel's son, returned to California before them and became a gold miner



Healdsburg Museum Photo

"A wonderful curiosity". The Geysers (Geysers Hotel in background), circa 1890.

for a short period. He then opened the first hotel in Sacramento, the Missouri House. In 1850 he came to Sebastopol and homesteaded his ranch, which eventually grew to 4,000 acres. In the latter half of the 19th Century, John Walker was the largest land owner near Sebastopol. He reportedly was instrumental in bringing a branch of the railroad to town.

California Frijoles

In 1849 Joel Walker was elected as a delegate from the Sonoma County area to the Constitutional Convention in Monterey, where the State of California was born. The convention lasted six weeks, although no provisions had been made for such a long stay.

"We went to Monterey, taking our blankets along, being compelled to sleep where we could and eat just when we could get anything to eat."

He recalled that during a discussion of "freeholders", General Vallejo (also a delegate) thought conventioners were talking about "frijoles".

The name of Joel P. Walker appears as the second to last signature on the State Constitution.

Although the puzzle over why the pioneer family is buried in Healdsburg's cemetery remains unanswered, J.P. Walker's discovery of the Geysers and other first-time accomplishments make him one of the leading figures not only in local history, but in state and national history as well.

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The Nine Commandments of the Pioneer

Among the documents collected by descendants of the Walker family is what can only be called the nine commandments for explorers, the gospel according to Joel P. Walker, the "pioneer of pioneers".

Thus spake Walker:



1. Be careful never to camp in the timber, if it can be avoided.
2. Be careful never to let any Indians come amongst you.
3. Never let the Indians have any ammunition on any account.
4. Be careful to watch both day and night.
5. Never neglect camp guard on any account.
6. Never fire a gun after crossing the Umqua Mountains until you cross the Siskiew Mountains, perhaps a five day travel.
7. Keep yourselves as close as possible in traveling through the brush.
8. Never scatter after game or any other provision.
9. Keep your guns in the best firing condition.

What Is It?

HEALDSBURG TRIBUNE October 15, 1914

Tuesday morning about 10 o'clock groups of citizens could be seen in the streets of Healdsburg around the plaza looking toward the sky. Others were holding in their hands bits of a fine feathery substance which they had caught as it fell to the earth.

The substance was snow white and resembled more than anything else the shreds of some cotton article that had been torn into shreds.

Many had glasses inspecting the substance and many were the suggestions as to its nature and origin. It was certainly a peculiar phenomenon. Much of it was in floating strips from 6 in. to 3 ft. in length. It would wind itself around telephone wires and fall in bunches into the streets.

Some suggested that it was some of the debris from the German-Franko War; others that it was crude asbestos from the earth; still others thout it might be from the crater of Mt. Lassen. Some thought it might be the cotton from the cottonwood trees, on the river, but why there should be such a shower of it falling on Healdsburg remains a mystery. Julius [Alexander] was hard hearted enough to suggest that it was a soft bed for Johnson to fall on. While Mat Hughes, an unregenerate democrat, suggested that it was the "fuzz flying from the Bull Moose's hornes."

Doc Stone was sure that it was an omen of the white wings of peace and prosperity that will come to the state when Fredericks is made Governor.

[DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT WAS?? SEND YOUR GUESS, ALONG WITH YOUR 1985 MEMBERSHIP DUES, TO P.O. BOX 952, HEALDSBURG.]

There Ought to Be a Law!! (?)

AN IRREVERENT GLANCE

AT OLD CITY ORDINANCES

by Hannah M. Clayborn

Those of us who are continually perusing the literature in the museum's historic research library have found that one area of inquiry that can always raise a belly laugh (not to mention convulsions) is some of the old City of Healdsburg ordinances.

For some strange reason nothing is more absurd than an obsolete law. Maybe it is the stilted legalistic language, or maybe it is the necessarily anxiety-provoking nature of the laws themselves (in Healdsburg you could have been put on a CHAIN GANG for violations).

At any rate, the early laws of a town give some interesting insights into the mood, morality, and concerns of that era. And you had better read some of these carefully, because they have never been officially repealed!!

Take that chain gang, for instance. In 1884 an ordinance went into effect that made it entirely possible that, should you violate any other city ordinance, you might be put on a chain gang and forced to sweat and shuffle-step your way through hard labor on the city "streets, alleys, squares, sewers, and plaza".

I respectfully suggest that we dust off this ordinance and put that gang of desperate criminals to work building that long-awaited hotel on the plaza.

As far as I know there's still a curfew in effect for boys under the age of 16 years, enacted in 1884. When the marshall tolled the bell in the old belltower in the plaza (8 p.m. in winter, 9 p.m. in summer) those boys had better beat it. Girls were apparently free to roam the streets at any age or time. (women's liberation must have gotten here early)

Here's a list of what you might be arrested for in 1884:

- being in a "bestly state of intoxication (Does fur on your tongue count?)
- using "obscene or vulgar language, loud threatening, or opprobrious (reproachful, shameful) language." (Watch out Healdsburg Tribune.)
- riding or driving more than 10 miles per hour. (You might run into a person in a bestly state of intoxication)
- throwing "brickbats" (small bits of brick) in a sling.
- hitching your horse to an ornamental or shade tree (a puzzlement)

Of course a few years later, in 1887, the City Trustees had just about enough of pigs running around the downtown plaza, and outlawed those charming fellows within the city limits. Any swine caught entering town might immediately be put on a chain gang.

In 1892 they finally laid down rules for getting on and off trains, specifically that people under 18 years of age could not get on or off a moving train. However, they did not outline how those over 18 years could safely accomplish that feat.

And let it be known that in 1900 all "bicycles, tricycles, velocipedes, or wagons" were banned on the city sidewalks. (further protection for swine and chain gang members)

Beginning in 1903 public health became a major topic of concern and so the following restrictions came about:

- no dead body was to be left in town for more than 48 hours (I should hope not).
- anyone having died of typhus, yellow fever, Asiatic cholera, glanders, leprosy, smallpox, or scarlet fever was not allowed a funeral (few would probably attend anyway).
- only pure and unspoiled offal, tallow, or lard could be boiled (pay attention, housewives), and watch out, it is unlawful to erect a factory making varnish or lampblack glue. (so that's what happened to all the lampblack glue factories!)



Healdsburg Museum Photo

Townfolk masked by law. Armistice parade, November 11, 1918. 300 block of West Street (Healdsburg Avenue).

- nobody could keep a horse, mule, cow, or goat within 15 feet of a bedroom window (oh, the wisdom of the city fathers).
- all privies had to be at least 8 feet deep and ten feet from a house (this law needed no enforcement).

Baseball became illegal in the downtown area or plaza in 1902, but it is interesting that there was one dissenting vote from baseball fan and City Trustee, John Favour (Atta way ta go, Johnny baby). In the same year it became unlawful to spit on streets or sidewalks. (Keep that spit on the ball, after all)

With World War I raging it became unlawful in 1918 to "utter or use seditious language or language, words, or epithets having a tendency to create a breach of the peace, within the hearing of one or more persons." Personally, I would like this one posted at all current City Council meetings.

Also in 1918 all citizens were required to wear a gauze mask not less than four layers thick at all times on public streets, or in

public buildings or places. Spanish influenza was the cause, of course, brought home by the returning dough boys.

In 1926 or 1927 those scandalous dens of iniquity and rough talk, barber shops, were shut down by law on Sundays.

And don't you wish that we still had an ordinance, as they did in 1929, prohibiting any minor under the age of 14 years from using "any slot or vending machine that shall not produce the same return in market value [as coin inserted] each and every time it is played"? Goodbye Space Invaders!!

After 1930 the city ordinances seem to become boringly necessary, correct, and obviously needed. But I will leave that final judgement, and enjoyment, for future archivists.

After all, in an historic research library belly laughs can be few and far between.

A NEW HOME FOR THE MUSEUM

The next two years will be a very exciting time in the life of the museum - probably the most crucial turning point that the museum will ever face.

The Healdsburg Museum, Edwin Langhart founder, will be moving to the old Carnegie Library building in approximately two years. This move has been long-awaited, and much planned for.

Those of you who are familiar with the museum's current quarters adjoining the Community Center are aware of our present space limitations and the inadequacy of the facility for a museum. Although the museum's staff expends a great deal of effort to fully and efficiently utilize every centimeter of storage and display space it is an uphill battle, and getting steeper every day.

Now that real steps are finally being taken for the building of a new library and we can reasonably anticipate the actual move, it is time to set the wheels in motion.

The Carnegie Library building, built in 1911, is the last impressive civic structure left in Healdsburg, and it is fitting that it become the new home for the community's historical collections.

But creating a new museum will not be easy. It will require a great deal of money, careful planning, and the efforts of many individuals.

The Carnegie building will need a good deal of upgrading to bring it up to code. Many structural improvements, including handicap access, bathrooms, and a new roof, must be done. Although we can reasonably expect some assistance from the City, Redevelopment Agency, and possible grants for structural work, there will be much more involved in creating a first class museum facility.

Our artifact collection is already one of the best in the county. The size of that collection has more than doubled in the last five years alone. To store and display that collection adequately, as it deserves, will also require a great deal of money.

A first class museum does not necessarily require huge amounts of space. Too many local history museums resemble large, and neglected, warehouses.

But that space must be quality space, both for storage and displays. And that will require money, for cases, proper lighting, adequate shelving, all of those details that make such a difference in the completed product.

Right now we have a museum to be proud of. In new quarters we have a chance to become one of the best local history museums in California, and one of only a few that is city-owned.

Working together, with the welfare of the museum always in mind, we can make the dream of Edwin Langhart and curators everywhere come true - to have the best little museum anywhere.

The time has come. Help create the new Healdsburg Museum, Edwin Langhart founder.

A First Class Museum for Healdsburg



HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTES

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Historical Society is looking forward to a productive and active year. Our main goal this year will be fundraising in preparation for the relocation of the museum to the old Carnegie Library building. It is projected that the move will take place in about two years.

The Society will be the main community fundraising group and we will need your support.

June walking tour

We have planned a walking tour of historic homes in June complete with costumed speakers representing local historical figures.

This event is based on the recently completed book, Historic Homes of Healdsburg, published last year as a joint project between the Society and the City of Healdsburg. If you don't have a copy yet, it is on sale at the museum and City Hall.

other fundraisers

Tentatively planned are the printing and sale of historic photo postcards and posters. These will be selected from the museum's large photo collection. One of the posters will be a copy of an 1884 lithograph of Healdsburg, "A Bird's Eye View", suitable for framing. Hopefully these will be on sale in time for the Wine Festival, May 19th.

Be sure to drop by the Society's table at the Wine Festival to purchase these items, as they will be fast-sellers.

A baseball tournament, sponsored by the Society, is also planned and we hope it will be a success.

If you have any fundraising ideas please contact me or leave a message at the museum.

museum open house

The recent museum open house, sponsored by the society, was a great success. Tim Rued, a well-known Sonoma County musician, played fiddle for our guests, charming everyone with tunes from the 1850's. The museum's current show, "We Came to Healdsburg, Collections that Survived the Journey to California" is marvelous, and I urge you to see it.

newspaper microfilms

The Society has recently completed the microfilming of five more volumes of our fragile old newspapers and plans to send five more volumes out this year. This is one of the most important preservation projects funded by the Society.

help

The Society always needs help with its activities. The on-going indexing project, as always, could use more volunteers.

April McDonald
President

Memorial donations to the Society have been received in memory of:

DAVID L. NELSON
MILDRED STRONG

Patron memberships to the Society in the amount of \$250 have been received from:

ROSSALINE MAHER
DR. NICHOLAS GRACE
COL. W. F. DALLAM, ret.

We wish to express our regret for the following Society members who have passed away in recent months:

EDA J. McCLISH
LUCILLE AITCHISON
BYRON BENNETT, SR.

Welcome

to new Museum and Historical Society members:

BRETT MANSFIELD BENNETT, DIANE GASIEWICZ,
AUDREY HALES, HEALDSBURG LUMBER CO.,
DIANNE SCHMIDT JOHANNSEN, JOHN KEEGAN,
FRED LEONI, DIANA MCGOWAN, NANCY BROWN
MATHEWS, AGNES ROMOLIF, DONALD AND BETTY
REUKEMA, JOHN AND PATTI SAINI, CAROLYN
WESTON, DONALD AND LOVELLA WINSETT.

and to new Museum docents (volunteers):

NANCY BROWN MATHEWS VICKIE LATIMER
DIANA MCGOWAN LOVELLA WINSETT

MUSEUM NEWS

Now Showing

The museum has a new spring and summer exhibit, entitled, "We Came to Healdsburg, Collections that Survived the Journey to California".

Included in the new display are family collections that came to northern Sonoma County by wagon across the plains, and by ship around the Horn or through Panama in the 1850's. Also included are rare gold rush items used by the gold miners who later settled Healdsburg, antique firearms, utilitarian objects that were used on the way to California, and priceless quilts and centuries-old heirlooms.

Two outstanding items exhibited are the fabulously intricate Heald family quilt, made in 1839 by the sister of the town's founder, Harmon Heald, and a lovely English stoneware bowl that survived seven trips across the plains and one trip through Panama.

A life-size exhibit recreates the interior of a rustic settlement era cabin, and beside it a contrasting lush Victorian parlor interior which might have been lived in by those same settlers only a decade later.

A Pomo Indian camp scene gives a semblance of what this area looked like in the 1830's, before the white settlement era, and Pomo baskets and crafts are also shown.

Accompanying each exhibit are excerpts from the poignant diaries of some of the women who crossed the plains, their adventures, thoughts, and fears.

Pioneer family histories and photos give examples of the background and fate of those first American and European settlers.

The Museum is open weekdays, 12 to 5 p.m. and Saturdays 1 to 4 p.m. at 133 Matheson Street, Healdsburg. For more information call 433-4717.

Donations

Donations of artifacts to the museum have been received from:

Helen Giorgi	Emmet Sonnickson
Tom Citro	Rosemary Wells
Bill Barker	Lucille Taapken
Bob & June Jones	Elizabeth Knerr
Mrs. Pillsbury	Frank Gostiche
Pat Schmidt	C. Leon Hendricks
Dwight Richards	Charlie Scalione
Cecil Petray	Mabel Nardi
Adele Smith	Major Phillips
Clarisse Sullivan Estate	

We would like to extend a special note of appreciation to:

ALICE BURGETT

Who has donated over 500 items to the museum over the past year. It is people like Mrs. Burgett who make our museum one of the best in the county. THANK YOU ALICE!

even WE make mistakes

So, we aren't perfect. There have been some teensy-weensy little errors in past "Recorders" (like one typo that changed a date by 200 years!). So for those of you who save the "Recorder", please get out your red pencils and find all the mistakes you can (that means you, D.B.!). We will print all corrections in our next issue. Please send written corrections (preferred) to the museum at 133 Matheson St., Healdsburg, CA 95448, or call Hannah at 433-4717,

Also, while we're on the subject, we have a little problem at the museum. In the confusion of putting up the new exhibit, we mislaid the donor information that went with a Victorian parasol. Will the lady that donated that parasol recently please contact us? Unlike Agatha Christie, I HATE a mystery!

LAST CHANCE!

This is the last call for 1985 memberships. If you have not already paid your 1985 dues this is the last Russian River Recorder that you will receive.

The "Recorder" alone is worth it!!
[SEE COUPON ON BACK COVER THIS ISSUE]