

# RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

Fall, 1987

Issue 33



Healdsburg Plaza, looking Northwest, 1892

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Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society  
P.O. Box 952 Healdsburg, CA 95448

## Editor's Desk

What is the heart of a city? There are probably as many answers to that question as there are cities. In Healdsburg, however, the answer is fairly obvious, even to the casual observer. It is the downtown Plaza.

Since its official christening in 1857 the Plaza - never called "the Park" or "the Square" - has gone from a muddy/dusty hitching ground for wagons to today's lushly landscaped park. In between it served as an outdoor funeral parlor, parade grounds, outdoor theater, and public speaking podium. A place to be seen, a place to perform, a place to speak out, a place to play, and occasionally a place to sleep it off, the Plaza remains the visual focus of Healdsburg.

This issue is dedicated to the 130 year old Healdsburg Plaza, an hospitable plot of land whose ever-changing costume has attracted generations of admirers.

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We would like to remind all of our readers about the Healdsburg Carnegie Library/New Museum Restoration Project and the fundraising that is now going on. (see pg. 8) You probably received a fundraising brochure in the mail that described the project and outlined the donation categories.

Please consider giving to this very worthwhile and timely project. Without a permanent home the future of the Museum will be less certain. If the Museum's future is less certain so is the "Russian River Recorder's". In every issue the "Recorder" makes use of the history that is preserved and recorded in the Museum. The Museum is the home of the priceless photographs that appear in every issue. Please make it your business to see that this project happens!

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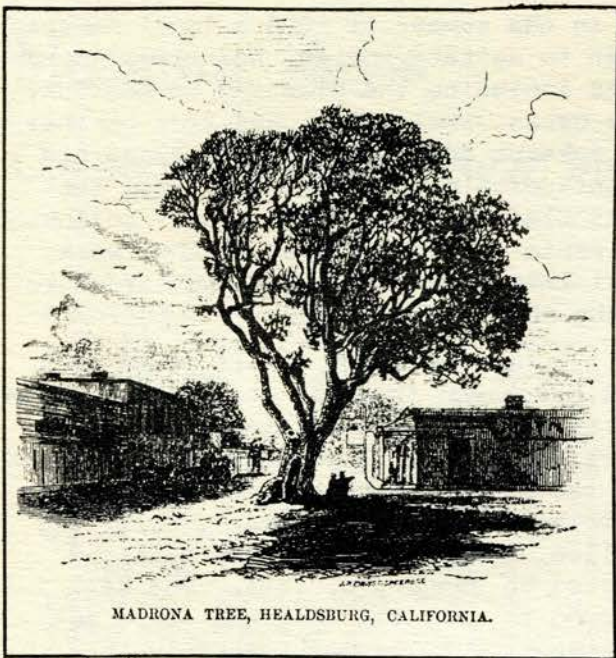
## The Healdsburg Plaza

Picture an oak and madrone forest, sunlight filtering through to make dappled patterns on the ground, near a small lake. On the banks of the lake are a few brush huts and the smoke from cooking fires spirals up along with the voices of playing children. A visitor to the site that we now call the Healdsburg Plaza might well have seen just this at the time that the American Constitution was being written, two hundred years ago.

The Pomo Indian village of "Kale" sat in the ancient groves that once covered a large part of the Russian River Valley. The lake, which once extended south from the present Matheson Street, may have given the village its name, which means "water-midst" in the dialect of that tribelet. Or the name could have referred to the village's location at the confluence of a creek named "Mihilakawna" (Dry Creek) and a river named "Ashokawna" (Russian River). Acorns from the many oaks, nuts from the black walnuts which were sometimes transplanted to village sites, seeds, berries, fish, and game were plentiful here, and life went on in traditional ways.

The occasional visits of the European sailing vessels on the California coast from the early 1500's to the early 1800's did not greatly effect life here. But the founding of Fort Ross by Russian colonists in 1812 and the establishment of Mission Delores in San Francisco in 1776 (and later Mission San Rafael and Mission San Francisco de Solano in Sonoma) by the Spanish and Mexicans did have a great effect on the native populations.

Generally, the Russians were on good terms with the Pomo, sometimes taking Pomo women as wives, and carrying on considerable trade with many of the villages. The encounters with the Missions were often less friendly, as the local Indians were sometimes kidnapped into labor. Armed retaliatory raids against the local tribelets also took their toll. The mere fact of contact with the Europeans and Americans brought foreign



Northwest corner of the Plaza  
1865

From: Richardson's Beyond the Mississippi

One huge and ancient madrone tree that once stood on the northwest corner of the Plaza was impressive enough to be sketched by writer and traveler, Albert Deane Richardson, author of Beyond the Mississippi, an account of his travels in the west from 1856 to 1867. Richardson wrote:

"In the afternoon we reached Healdsburg, an agreeable village, shaded with live-oaks and madronas, or mountain laurels. Here the live-oak attains perfection. I have seen no other tree so beautiful save the elm of the Connecticut valley. The madrona too, with its vivid green foliage, bright red stems and exquisite outline, is a marvel of grace and loveliness. One, in the principle street of the town, towering and spreading far above the highest buildings, is singularly picturesque and venerable. The boughs of all trees are richly festooned with great bunches of mistletoe."

It is interesting to note that no other small northern California town was so honored in his book, and the tree he drew in 1865 had actually been severely damaged by fire in 1859.

The town as it was laid out by Heald in 1857 was in the common "grid" pattern that was pervasive throughout the west, but the focus of its streets on a plaza/park was unusual for small northern California towns of that era. The Healdsburg Plaza evidently owed more to Mexican colonial town plans than to the New England square or commons, for it was never called anything but the "Plaza" by citizens from 1857 on.

The first attempt to fence and protect the Plaza trees, which were being used to hitch wagons, came as early as 1858, when a group of citizens surveyed the lot and made cost estimates before giving up the project. As the commercial center of the town grew many trees were cut to make way for construction, but the Plaza trees were left as they were.

It is difficult to tell how many trees were damaged by the heavy wagon traffic and removed between 1857 and

diseases to the villages, and by the 1840's these combined forces had wiped out the village of "Kale".

But the oak and madrone forests were still here in 1841 when this area became part of the the approximately 48,800 acre Rancho Sotoyome, granted to Captain Henry Delano Fitch. Town legend holds that Cyrus Alexander, who managed the cattle ranch for Fitch, used one very large madrone tree once on the Plaza site to hang the carcass of a bear he killed there in the early 1840's.

Harmon Heald picked a spot near the Plaza in 1851 when he built his first little "squatter's" cabin. He had been looking for a sunny, but shaded site out of the darkness of the redwoods in which to recover from the illnesses he had contracted on the journey across the plains. An early settler at "Heald's Store", as it was known in 1856, described the Plaza site as a "beautiful shady grove". When Harmon Heald's wife died in 1857 the funeral was held out-of-doors on the Plaza, a church having not yet been built. It was described at that time as being "covered with large oaks with but one or two madronnas".

Although it is impossible to identify all the species of trees near the Plaza before 1864, photographs from 1864 to 1873 suggest that the Plaza site was covered with Pacific Madrone, Black Oak, Valley Oak, Coast Live Oak, and Black Walnut. The latter species is thought to have been transplanted to village sites by the Indians.

1867, but by 1868 the local newspaper editor protested, "Many of the noble oaks on our plaza, which have long been the pride of citizens and the admiration of strangers, are dying for want of protection." Later that same year the editor declared, "It is a shame that these trees remain unfenced to have the life trampled out of them by the constant travel of the streets..." But the noble Plaza oaks had always been favored by the local press. The editor of one of the first town newspapers, A.J. Cox in "The Review" (1860 - 1863) penned the following verse on the occasion of some vandalism to a Plaza tree:

"Woodman, Woodman, spare that tree  
The glorious pride of Summer;  
That sheltered many an honest brow,  
And also many a bummer."

The Plaza fencing project was finally accomplished in 1873 at a cost of \$1,000. This first fence was built of redwood with carved pickets, 12" x 12" posts, gates in each corner and on the east and west sides. At the same time the ground was plowed and harrowed and filled with river bottom loam hauled from the Russian River. Ornamental shrubbery, most likely herbs, were planted among the native trees, along with at least one fruit tree.

But by 1873 the attitude towards the old forest trees had inexplicably changed. Now the local editor was calling for the removal of the trees, thinned already by wagon traffic, as were a group of local citizens. They may have met with opposition, however, as one City Council order to remove the trees in April, 1873, was rescinded by the same body one month later. Finally, a citizen petition forced the Council to have the trees removed in March of 1874.

Local citizens were then invited to plant trees and shrubs, which they did at random, and by 1876 the Plaza was filled with tiny fir trees, cypress, bordered by Eucalyptus, and sported exotic palms in the very center. Although the firs were a native California touch, perhaps a remembrance of the journey over the Sierras, these plantings were in keeping with the taste for the exotic that flourished in California during that era, especially the pervasive Eucalyptus imported from Australia.

In the summer of 1878 a local newspaper began to agitate for further Plaza improvements including the planting of Kentucky Blue Grass, irrigation, and iron benches. The unkempt appearance of the Plaza had an unfavorable effect on visitors, the paper claimed. But "hard times" following the Panic of 1873 delayed further work until late 1880 when the first structure on the site was planned.

In December 1880 a 778½ pound bell was purchased from the Christian College in Santa Rosa. Immediately thereafter work began on a large enclosed belltower in the center of the Plaza. The nearly completed "City Fire Tower", as it was called, was fitted with the bell and tested on January 6, 1881. The bell served to call the volunteer fire department or to gather townsfolk in emergencies.

By 1888 the Plaza landscaping had matured. The Eucalyptus which had been planted around the perimeter were now higher than the surrounding two-story commercial buildings. The approximately 35 fir trees and cypress were in various stages of growth. By that year the Sotoyome Band was also well-established and was holding regular seasonal Saturday night band concerts on the Plaza. Townsfolk soon began to call for the building of a permanent bandstand for the Plaza, and a platform was soon built next to the high belltower.

But without regular maintenance the Plaza often looked unkempt. When the editor of the "Healdsburg Enterprise" newspaper called the Plaza an "eyesore" a movement to clean it up got underway which was repeated almost annually. Not all improvements were equally appreciated, however. In 1892 the high belltower was given a new coat of paint, apparently in very bright colors. The local paper reported that many citizens felt the colors were in poor taste, and that the majority would have preferred white.

To take advantage of the picturesque location and to draw more out-of-town trade, local businessmen organized a May Day Festival as early as 1877. This first festival featured a Knight-hood Tournament wherein mounted riders tried to spear brass rings with a lance while galloping at high speeds. By 1879 the event was drawing close to 5,000



Healdsburg Plaza, looking Northwest, in snow, 1887

people. The main event was always the parade of the Floral Queen and her attendants around the Plaza. By 1895 that festival was a three-day long event with a mile-long parade around the Plaza.

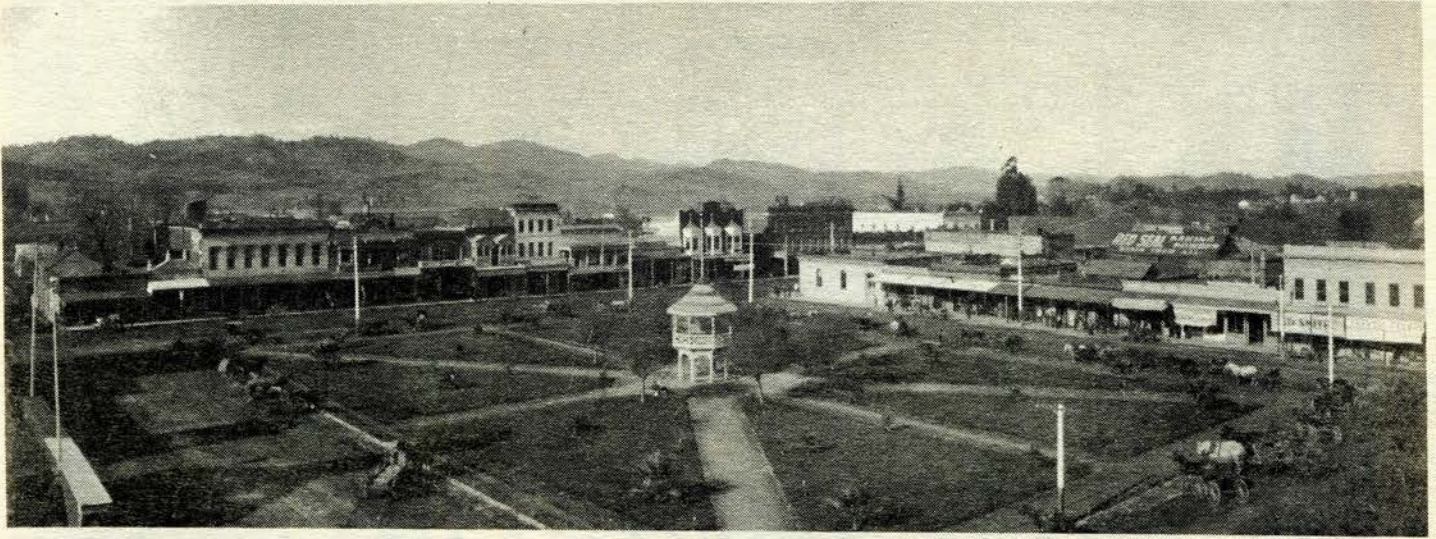
Fourth of July celebrations on the Plaza began at least as early as 1866 (the date of the oldest existing town newspapers). A reported crowd of 2,000 gathered in that year to hear orations, and poetry readings, to watch or join in the parade, and later to enjoy the evening pyrotechnics. After 1896 the Floral Festival was combined with the Independence celebration and the "Floral Queen" was replaced with the "Goddess of Liberty". And each year the Queen held court on the Plaza. Fourth of July celebrations tapered off about 1925, when a reported crowd of 15,000 gathered on the Plaza. The delayed economic effects of prohibition on this region was the probable cause of the discontinuation of the large festivals.

Landscaping fads periodically visited the Plaza. In the late 1880's the unruly Eucalyptus were removed along with the fir trees. The remaining cypress were meticulously trimmed to resemble small,

widely-spaced toadstools in an otherwise bare plot. This drastic change can perhaps be attributed to the popularity of sculptured, open, Italianate formal gardens in that era. This design change was accompanied by the removal of the redwood post fence and the installation of a wire mesh fence. This, once again, was done to achieve a more "open" atmosphere.

A concerted movement for civic improvement began in Healdsburg in 1895. This movement, which in other spheres of municipal endeavor resulted in a municipally-owned water and electric plant, had a drastic effect of the Plaza. Continuing agitation by the local newspaper and local citizens beginning in April, 1895, resulted in the destruction of old "Miss Bell Tower" in 1896. Barely 15 years old, she was now considered an "eyesore" by certain groups, and was accused of causing false fire alarms with her rickety frame in high winds.

In February, 1897, a new circular bandstand was built with a conical roof on the old belltower legs. But the spirit of improvement was so strong that even this structure was remodeled only two months later to include open banister work, brackets, cornices, and a "swaying" staircase. The gazebo-like bandstand became a favorite gathering place for much of the townsfolk,



Healdsburg Plaza, looking Northwest, 1899

but especially for the young single men and women of the county who would gather every warm evening after chores were done.

Perhaps because of the popularity of the bandstand for such socializing, that may have included the consumption of alcohol, a local progressive organization, the Ladies Improvement Club, had other plans for the Plaza. Following the lead of the Temperance Leagues throughout California, the L.I.C. received permission from the City Trustees to replace the bandstand with a central drinking fountain. Although a drinking fountain could have been placed elsewhere on the Plaza, the "Lady Imps" as they were often called, were set on the destruction of the bandstand, and even went so far as to have the structure hurriedly axed down when certain citizens began to circulate a petition for its salvation. This started a year-long, heated battle between community factions, fought out both on the Plaza and at City Trustee meetings.

On April 12, 1900 it was reported in the "Healdsburg Tribune" that a group of young people had played a hoax on the "Lady Imps". At night they had erected a fake "marble" monument, constructed out of wood with muslin stretched over it, that was dedicated to the club. But the newspaper fumed over the "indecent" inscriptions that had been scrawled upon it. "The sentiments expressed on the monument were worthy of Barbary Coast

hoodlums," it wrote.

Three points of view were presented to the City Trustees during this battle. The young people wanted a bandstand, the local businessmen wanted an "electric" fountain modeled after an exhibit at the 1894 California Midwinter Exposition in San Francisco (large sprays of water lit by multi-colored electric lights), and the L.I.C. wanted that drinking fountain/monument. The "Lady Imps", with the help of an attorney, prevailed. The drinking fountain was dedicated on May 1, 1901. Not totally defeated, however, the rest of the community immediately erected a removeable bandstand next to the fountain. This temporary stand was replaced by a permanent structure donated by local businessmen in 1915.

The winds of change slowed on the Plaza after 1900, but it continued to figure ever more prominently in the social and political life of the area. The Plaza Saturday night band concerts, now an institution, continued to draw large crowds until the 1950's. The Plaza also served as a focus of state and regional politics. The Plaza was a strategic stopping place for soap box orators and campaigning politicians, drawing gubernatorial candidates or governors in 1898, 1902, 1910, 1917, and 1928. Large rallies or debates were held in the park in almost every state and national election year until the 1930's, when radio cut into the

public speaking market.

The Plaza landscaping evolved from the stiff formality of the Italianate period in the late 1880's to a more relaxed and naturalistic style. Near the end of the century businessmen and developers in southern California began to promote the state as a "tropical" paradise. Local citizens were probably emulating that movement in 1897 when they planted the Plaza with exotic Canary Island Date Palms, Washington Palms, orange and lemon trees, and a profusion of rose bushes.

Beginning perhaps as early as 1900, redwoods were planted on the Plaza. One of those redwoods is the rare deciduous variety from China called the "Dawn Redwood".

The Plaza remained essentially unchanged from 1901 until 1960. The marble drinking fountain, palms, and bandstand appear on postcard after postcard, decade after decade, changed only by the advancing height of the Palms and redwoods.

In 1960 another round of civic improvements began. The old City Hall was replaced in that year, and the Plaza was also redone. Long-time resident, Elmer J. Sandborn donated \$1000 for a public fountain. That granite drinking fountain/monument that had caused so much trouble in 1900 was demolished without controversy in 1960. The low-lying modernistic fountain that replaced it still stands.

At some earlier time the Washington Palms had been removed, and in 1960 a landscape planner, Burton Litton of Berkeley, was hired to rethink the park. His plan, along with the older Canary Island Date Palms and redwoods are what we now see in the Plaza.

In September, 1986, the "Plaza Pavilion" was dedicated. Designed by local architect Michael Rubenstein, its Post-modernist style faintly echoes the 1897 gazebo/bandstand.

In 1960 a Berkeley landscape planner, Burton Litton, was hired by the City to re-think the park. His plan, which retained the 1897 Canary Island Date Palms and the redwoods, included flowering shrubbery. The current Plaza is essentially as Litton planned it in 1960.

In September, 1986, the "Plaza Pavilion" was dedicated. So as not to disturb the 1960 central fountain the Pavilion was placed on the east side of the Plaza. Designed by local architect, Michael Rubenstein, its Post-modernist style faintly echoes the 1897 gazebo/bandstand.

Over its 130 year history the Plaza has reflected the tastes and morality of the community. But no matter what its dress, the Plaza in all of its various manifestations remains the focal point of Healdsburg, the highly visible hub of a rapidly changing wheel.

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## Healdsburg Enterprise Newspapers:

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3/23/1888 pg. 3:3&5; 3/30/1888 pg. 2:3; 4/6/1888 pg. 2:2; 9/12/1888 pg. 3:4;  
10/30/1888 pg. 3:4; 11/14/1888 pg. 1; 5/8/1889 pg. 3:3; 10/27/06 pg. 4:4;  
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3/29/00 pg. 1:2; 4/12/00 pg. 1:2; 4/19/00 pg. 1:3&6; 4/26/00 pg. 7;  
5/3/00 pg. 4:1; 5/10/00 pg. 1:1; 5/17/00 pg. 1:1; 5/24/00 pg. 1:2;  
9/20/00 pg. 1:4; 5/2/01 pg. 1:1; 5/17/01 pg. 1:1; 5/24/01 pg. 1:2;  
10/30/02 pg. 1:1; 11/2/10 pg. 1:3; 8/18/17 pg. 1:1; 11/1/28 pg. 1:1.

Dear Fellow Members,

Mark these dates on your calendar for the Healdsburg Historical Society:

OCTOBER 18

NOVEMBER 12

DECEMBER 12

ZINFANDEL HOP Sunday, October 18 2:00-5:00p.m.

Dr. Marty Griffin, owner of Hop Kiln Winery and John Senkevich, President of Xcelsior Brewery got together and came up with a winning idea. Why not celebrate the history of beer in the area, the legacy of wine from the Dry Creek Valley and help restore an historical library? From these fertile minds came the "Zinfandel Hop" to be held at the Hop Kiln winery serving wonderful wine, great beer, lots of food, and a great band Ellis Island. All proceeds go to the Restoration Fund. We are delighted with the support of people like this. For a mere \$17.00 you can sip, taste, munch and dance plus take home a glass with a logo.

FALL POTLUCK Thursday, November 12 6:00p.m.

Time to elect new officers and what better time than at our Fall Potluck at the Senior Citizens Center November 12 at 6:00p.m. Our previous dinners have given us wonderful taste treats and good company. Help us spread the word about the Healdsburg Historical Society and invite a non-member to join you for supper.

ANTIQUUE TOY SHOW Saturday, December 12 1:00-4:00p.m.

Christmas of 1986 lost a little of its glitter when the Museum could not offer its Annual Christmas Toy Show. This year the toys are all coming back for us to enjoy. The show will run from December 1 to January 9. If you have a favorite antique toy, perhaps it could visit the Museum during this time. Madrona Manor will host a special one day show of "Toys of the Past" on Saturday, December 12 from 1:00-4:00p.m. Come get into the Christmas spirit.

The Museum brochure has reached many helping hands and we are all encouraged by peoples' generous responses. If you are a fellow procrastinator like me, promise to get money to the Carnegie Restoration Fund by the first of October. I promise.

We'll miss Hannah and John at some of these events. Weddings and honeymoons come but once in a lifetime. Many, many wishes of great joy and happiness to you both.



# Museum News

## Carnegie Library / New Museum Restoration Project

It has been a very hectic summer for the Healdsburg Museum, Edwin Langhart founder. Our fundraising campaign got underway in August, but it required a great deal of preparation. A fundraising brochure was mailed to about 4,000 households in early September, and that is PHASE I of the campaign. So far about \$19,000 has come in since we mailed that brochure.

That brings the total cash available for the Project to about \$206,000. We still have a long way to go to reach our projected goal of between \$350,000 and \$380,000 - but we're on our way!

PHASE II of the campaign has already begun. We will be making personal calls and visits to individuals during this phase. If we call you please think about helping us reach our goal of a permanent home for the Healdsburg Museum in the old Carnegie Library Building.

During the past month the Carnegie Library/New Museum Restoration Fund has received generous donations from the following:

Distinguished Founder (\$10,000)  
Founder (\$5,000 or more)  
Benefactor (\$1,000 or more)

Sponsor (\$100 or more)  
Donor (\$25 or more)

Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Turner  
Mrs. Rena Phillips  
Mrs. C. Leon Hendricks  
Bill and Gloria Merkle  
Lois A. Doran  
Mr. and Mrs. J. Lee Hoy  
Joelle K. Kornell, Elizabeth Howe,  
Gary and Martha Bannister, W.M.  
Burzycki, Marjorie Jaffrey, Dr. and Mrs.  
Daniel Rose, Pryor and Norma Passarino,  
F. Joseph Dunst and Shirley Anderson,  
Elinore Read, Dee Maciel, Willis and  
Joy Hiatt, an Christopher Graham.

## Current Exhibit

We were happy to be a part of the county-wide museum exhibit this summer, "From Here To There: The History of Transportation in Sonoma County". Our museum's segment of that display, "Pathfinders and Peddle Pushers: Hiking and Cycling in Sonoma County" was a great deal of fun to put on, and seems to have a great appeal to our visitors - especially all the cyclists!

Our part of the show will run through November 14, 1987. If you haven't seen it yet, please make it down before then.

Thanks to all those who loaned items for this great exhibit:

Steve Castelli Jr.  
Bill and Lucy Kortum  
Mr. and Mrs. Michael Herman  
Sonoma Depot Museum

Art Read  
Spoke Folk Cyclery  
Charles Scalione  
Sonoma County Museum

## Upcoming Exhibits

Our Eighth Annual Christmas Toy and Doll Exhibit is on its way! Scheduled to open on December 1, 1987, the exhibit will feature a wonderful selection of antique and collectible toys, dolls, and Christmas trimmings. It promises to be a spectacular Christmas season.

The Museum Christmas show will run through January 9, 1988. Admission will be free, and children of all ages are welcome to join in the fun. A special one-day toy exhibit will also be held at Madrona Manor this year on December.

If you have vintage toys or Christmas decorations that you would like to loan or donate to this year's show, please call Hannah at 431-3325. (Between October 3 and November 1, 1987: leave message with Vanessa).

## Donations

Since our last publication the following generous people have made donations of artifacts to the Museum:

Rena Phillips	Mrs. Leon Hendricks	Charlie Scalione
Ann McHugh	Addie Marie Meyer	Maude Cummings
John and Deborah Crevelli	Alice Burgett	Benny Gagliardo
Bob Jones	Patricia Schmidt	Mrs. Edward McConologue
Lewis Lambert	April McDonald	Lorraine Owen and
Mrs. Gridley Clement	Roy Lowe	Helen Meredith Tovani
Paul Trimble		

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The Historical Society has received the following memorial donations since our last publication:

Bernice Auradou.....for Olive Bacigalupi

April & Michael McDonald, Pat & Don Schmidt,  
Rosalie and Bob Hope.....for Tom Citro

Pat and Don Schmidt, M.W. Pickett,  
Floyd Kinzer, Mabel Strong, Susanne  
Marshall.....for Leon Hendricks

Marjorie and Henry Anderson.....for Alice and James Porter

Alice Dale Elledge.....for Evelyn and Edward Hyman

Pat and Don Schmidt.....for Ellen Snider Throop

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Life memberships to the Historical Society (\$250 donation) have been received from:

Herbert and Eladore (Langhart) Lynch

## In Memorium

We regretfully acknowledge the following Historical Society members who have passed away in recent months:

Olive Barigalupi  
Tom Citro

C. Leon Hendricks  
Louis Ruffini

Adele Smith

On March 14, 1987 a very good friend of the Museum and Historical Society, Tom Citro, passed away. Tom became involved with us at the museum a few years ago because of his generosity. He loaned many of his wonderful antique toys to one of our early Christmas exhibits. As time went by he became more and more helpful to us, donating not only his extensive collections, but his time and effort. Tom served as the chairman of the Museum Board of Trustees since 1983, as well as a director of the Healdsburg Historical Society.

Tom and his wife, Nancy, were involved in almost every Museum and Historical Society project since 1983. We came to depend very much on them both. I and the Museum Board of Trustees and the Historical Society will miss Tom's advice, support, and friendship very much.

## Annual Dues

Active Membership	\$10	regular membership category
Family Membership	\$20	a group membership for families of three or more.
Sustaining Membership	\$25	for those who wish to provide additional support.
Student/Reduced Income	\$3	for our young historians and senior historians with reduced income.
Patron (Life) Membership	\$250	our largest category of membership support - you never have to pay dues again!

Please mail your check today (or as soon as possible) to:

Treasurer  
Healdsburg Historical Society  
P.O. Box 952  
Healdsburg, CA 95448

The Society and the Museum have big things ahead! We need new ideas and help in organizing. The Historical Society is looking for new nominees to the Board of Directors. If you are interested contact Carol Muir at 433-4231.