



# RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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## RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

*The Official Publication of the Healdsburg  
Museum and Historical Society*

221 Matheson Street  
P. O. Box 952  
Healdsburg, CA 95448  
(707) 431-3325

## IN THIS ISSUE

Our curator, Marie Djordjevich, in the well researched and interesting article about our Recreation Park, tells us that from its beginning concerned citizens were involved in the use, the purchase and then the upkeep of the park. It's a fascinating account of the history of the park and the community's ongoing efforts to improve it. The article, she advises, "complements our summer display concerning Healdsburg's athletic history. The new exhibit will be opening in July.

Those of us who have been attending the Future Farmers Country Fair and Parade for many years remember that in the late 1950s we were especially honored to have participate in three parades the very professional and exciting 6th Army Band. In his article Milt gives us the why and wherefores of how such a visit came about.

In her own inimitable style June Maher Smith, continuing with her series on historic homes, tells the fascinating history of the Eli Bush House at 326 Matheson Street. Great reading.

One of Healdsburg's most respected and beloved citizens, Smith Robinson, is featured along with Healdsburg's adoption of the First Battalion in Korea, a major community effort, in Holly Hoods' accounting of how the community came to "adopt" the battalion. I recall, with pleasure, how Healdsburg "pitched in" to make the program so successful.

We hope you enjoy this Summer 1999 issue of the Recorder and look forward to your always welcome comments.

Arnold Santucci  
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Adopting the First Battalion in Korea was a major community effort.



## The Eli Bush House

*“He announced it was  
his intention to erect a  
beautiful house on  
Matheson Street.”*

*by June Maber Smith*



During their years in the home the Beesons combined the living room and parlor into one large room, converted the attic into a fifth bedroom, and enclosed the sun porch on the east side. The basement housed the furnace and shelves for Bera's jars

of canned foods. Perry had his workshop in the barn, where the family also stored fruit boxes for their West Dry Creek ranch. The grape arbor was a favorite place to “sleep out” in summer. Camellias enhanced the front yard. Perry remembers playing football and kickball with his friends in the middle of Matheson Street with no worries about traffic! The Wattles family was their neighbor on the east and Dr.H.J. Wright lived on the west.

Mary (Wattles) Brandt recalls playing in the “great old house” She says there were so many places to hide, but the dark, narrow back stairs were scary.

After the Beesons moved to their West Dry Creek ranch, the house was rented out for a while. Among the tenants were Rev. Harold Morehouse and his family and the Twilight family. The next owners of the home were Mr. and Mrs. Pollack. After Mr. Pollack died, his widow sold the house to the Nalley family in 1944.

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The stately home at 326 Matheson Street, now occupied by Dan and Laura Sooy, was built in 1903 by Eli Bush. Eli was born in Rockford, Illinois and came to Healdsburg as a young boy. At the age of 18 he started working at Wolf Rosenberg's dry goods store and by the early 1890s he was a partner in the firm. Many Healdsburg residents still remember the convenience of shopping at Rosenberg and Bush.

Eli married Alice Cullum in 1884, sold his home on Hayden Street in March of 1903, moved to Piper street, and announced it was his intention “to erect a beautiful home on the Matheson Street lot he owned”. An old house on the lot was moved to University Street and construction began. Eli and Alice lived in their beautiful home “surrounded by vines, flowers and lawn” from 1903 until 1918 when they decided they would like a smaller house. It was then that Lawrence Rosasco bought the property, after selling his ranch near the confluence of the Russian River and Dry Creek.

Eli was also responsible for another prominent building in Healdsburg. He and George W. Miller built the two story Masonic building at the corner of Center and Plaza Streets in 1914. The memorial window in the upstairs Masonic Temple was dedicated to Eli Bush in 1925, two years after his death at the age of 64 in a Livermore sanitarium. One of his last acts was to turn the Masonic building over to Sotoyome Lodge, F. & A. M., which had been renting the upper floor since 1919.

Dr. E.I. Beeson, Jr., local dentist and world champion high jumper, bought this Matheson Street home for his family from Rosasco in 1928. Dr. Beeson's father, a former cigar store and saloon owner and Healdsburg constable, papered and painted the interior of the house before Ed, his wife Bera, and their three children, Perry, Jeanette and Barbara moved in.



*Bush residence circa 1905. Mary E. Roberts, mother of Eli Bush, on the front porch.*

A.B. "Ned" Nalley, his wife Charlotte, and their two children, Andre and Barclay, enjoyed entertaining in their home. They also made some changes - they remodeled the kitchen and added a bathroom. Although Mrs. Bush had decorated much of the wood in the entry hall (staircase and front door) with graceful wood-burning designs, they had been painted over. Barclay restored them to their original beautiful, natural state.

On June 20, 1989, Dr. and Mrs. Dan Sooy moved into this historic home. Laura and Dan have beautifully restored it with lots of T.L.C. and great attention to details. Major projects included a new foundation and enlargement of the basement. While working on the basement they found a 1914 motor vehicle license. It isn't a plate, as we now know them; it is a small metal medalion to be attached to a vehicle. The kitchen grew to include the original breakfast room and back porch. The two floor-to-ceiling columns in the kitchen area match those on the front porch. The south wall of the kitchen is lined with French doors and transoms to let in lots of light and fresh air. The wainscotting and moldings throughout the home are either originals or match the originals. Even the cabinet doors are patterned after the ones installed over 90 years ago. The Tiffany window still sheds colorful light on the front staircase.

Dr Sooy redid the downstairs bathroom using the original fixtures. He discovered one of the old bathrooms was covered with Chinese writing and subsequently learned the Bushes employed a Chinese servant. The inscriptions were not removed; Dan replaced the new wall over them and they remain intact.

Outdoors, the Sooy's repaired the earthquake damaged swimming pool and added a vine-covered gazebo nearby. They changed the barn red exterior paint to soft gray and sparkling white. One of their next projects will be to restore the barn, which originally featured dormers matching the home's roofline.

The Sooy's and their teen-age daughter and son enjoy both the old time graciousness of this historic home and the newer touches they have added. Theirs is another of those great old homes that remind us of Healdsburg's interesting history. ♦ ♦ ♦

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*Eli Bush*



*Alice Cummin Bush*



*Left: Edward Beeson and Emma Logan Beeson, circa 1933 or 1934, parents of Edward I. Beeson in the backyard at 326 Matheson Street.*

## How Healdsburg Rated a Visit from the 6th Army Band

By Milt Brandt

Perhaps there are still a few "Parade Watchers" who remember back to the Future Farmers Country Fair parades of 1957-58-59 when Healdsburg was making local history by hosting the Presidio's 6th Army Band and Color Guard. During these parade years, this impressive, sharp band would bring you to your feet when they marched by with "Old Glory" flying. The question never seemed to be answered just how Healdsburg rated a visit from this Army Band for such a small, hometown event. I'll give you a first-hand accounting of what took place.

The parade chairman was a great community-spirited citizen of Healdsburg by the name of George Smith who owned and operated a dairy products business. Due to his business and popularity, he was referred to as "Sour Milk Smith." I believe George participated in every community event in Healdsburg.

In 1957 George asked me to join the Parade Committee. This was an offer I readily accepted because of my past interests with bands and parades. I was a drummer in the Healdsburg High Band, played with the Healdsburg Municipal Band under the leadership of Owen Sweeten, the Santa Rosa Junior College Marching Band for two football seasons, the Navy Air Training Center Band for a short three months in Norman, Oklahoma during World War II, until it was discontinued in the late 1940's. Consequently I was anxious to join with George's committee.

The committee agreed marching bands were the foundation of a successful parade, specially the years before canned music. A special invitation was sent to most Sonoma County schools that supported a music department. The response was tremendous. George also mentioned the possibility that he may have the Army Band. We thought this was wishful thinking; it turned out George was right.

I do not believe there were many parade watchers in Healdsburg who were ever aware how this came about. The irony to this story is, the Band Master himself didn't know. A few years ago my wife, Mary, and I attended an open house in Santa Cruz. The start of a new dental office by a young lady who was the daughter of friends of ours, a Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Buoye of Redlands, California. One of the first guests we met was a gentleman by the name of Lou Ferraro. When we were introduced as being from Healdsburg, his face lit up and I could see he had something on his mind. In the ensuing conversation he said he was retired from the Army and there was one question that always came to mind when Healdsburg was men-

tioned. He told us he was the band master of the 6th Army Band when it performed in Healdsburg. He had always questioned why the band accepted a booking in this quaint little town for a small Future Farmers Fair Parade.

I proceeded to tell him I had served on the Parade committee the years the band attended and the chairman was George Smith. This immediately got his attention and he inquired if he could have been related to Gary Smith. I told him Gary was his son. He was quite elated with this news. Gary had been his 1st clarinetist and right arm for Band Protocol. He lost track of Gary and was happy to know that upon Gary's retirement, he returned to Healdsburg.

This ends the mystery of the 6th Army Band attending the FFCF Parade, but does not end the story of Gary Smith. Gary was a Healdsburg High School graduate in the class of 1952. He was a student of Healdsburg High School's music teacher, Charles McCord. What follows is why Healdsburg should be proud to claim Gary Smith.

Gary's music career took him to Santa Rosa Junior College on a Doyle Scholarship. He transferred to the University of California as a music major, played in the U.C. Symphony and symphonic band. Upon graduation from U.C. he served in the U. S. Army Band for three years (this explains the FFCF Parades). He then returned to U.C. on a master's program, and then taught at Castlemont High School.

This is where Gary met his wife-to-be, Faye. He later accepted a position at Ohlone College as head of the Music Department. He played with the Oakland Symphony for 25 years. During his tenure at Ohlone, he was awarded a National Humanities Foundation grant for doctoral studies at Stanford University to receive his doctorate in music. He continued to teach and became active in the planning and development of the new Performing Arts Facility at Ohlone College which opened October 21, 1995. This carries his name, the Gary Soren Smith Center for the Fine and Performing Arts, an \$18 million center of which Gary and Faye are extremely proud.

Faye Smith had an added claim to fame in the opening dedication of the Center, which was attended by 1,500 for the gala event. Faye's ex-student and friend, motion picture star, Tom Hanks, was one of the headliners to attend with good wishes to Faye, his former counselor at Skyline High in Oakland.

In closing, I can once again reiterate the fact that George "Sour Milk" Smith certainly contributed a lot to Healdsburg. Thanks, Gary, for returning to our little town. I know that your parents would be happy to know you still live in the family home on Tucker Street.

Thanks for your dedication to education of the young people in America. I will always think of George when attending the FFCF Parade each year. ♦ ♦ ♦

(Editor's Note: The majority of this article appeared as a feature in the May 26, 1998 issue of the *Healdsburg Tribune*).

# Sports and Healdsburg's Recreation Park

By Marie Djordjevich

## Background

The City of Healdsburg - Neil Smart, Director of Parks and Recreation - commissioned the Healdsburg Museum - Curator Marie Djordjevich and Assistant Curator Holly Hoods - to do a historic resource study of Recreation Park, Healdsburg. The purpose of the study was to compile a good historical perspective of Recreation Park in order to facilitate City of Healdsburg planning for the future of the property.

The following article is excerpted from research done for this report. It is offered in this *Russian River Recorder* to complement our summer display concerning Healdsburg athletic history.

## Introduction

In general, parks have a way of making a city more beautiful, more open to the community. They provide a playground for people of all ages, and can provide many opportunities for people to become involved with a larger neighborhood. Recreation Park is a community park. The history of Recreation Park cannot be separated from many things, including the growth of the town and community, and the growth of organized baseball.

From its beginnings concerned citizens were involved in the use, the purchase and then the upkeep of the park. Community involvement - from individuals, schools, businesses, and clubs - has been high. In down times there has always been a group of citizens that has rallied around the park to keep it going. For what it has given to the community, and for what the community has given to it, the relationship between Recreation Park and Healdsburg has been mutually beneficial, and Recreation Park can be called a true people's park.

## Sports and Other Activities

### Local Baseball

There are reports of Healdsburgers playing baseball as early as 1867. There were various fields around town that were used for play, such as land south of the railroad depot (which had had a baseball diamond), Seaman's Field near the cemetery, and Matheson Field on the east side of town at the foot of Fitch Mountain. As in other towns, various teams were formed by the citizens over the years to play each other, i.e.: mechanics vs. clerks (1889); professionals vs. businessmen (1889); juveniles vs. hayseeds (1891); saloon proprietors vs. bartenders (1903). Healdsburg had two teams, the Creepers

and Sotoyomes, that played not only each other, but for the town against other cities' teams. Santa Rosa's Olympics were the team to beat in 1872, and they whipped the Sotoyomes by a score of 52 to 24.

Interest and participation in community baseball in Healdsburg must have waned, and Healdsburg's city teams disappeared. In an April 2, 1891 editorial the Sonoma County Tribune rebuked the town of Healdsburg for not having a baseball team:

"There is scarcely a town of its size in the state which but has a good baseball team. Even the little town of Geyserville surpasses Healdsburg in this respect. Last Sunday the Geyservilles came down to play a game with the Healdsburgs, and when they arrived they were astonished to find boys only 14 and 15 years old who would play. The Geyservilles immediately turned on their heels and left for home in disgust. We have several good players here and they should take an interest in the national game and keep pace with the times."



Prune Packers 1923: Front Row, left to right: Red Corrick, Chick Autry, Hurk Cortade. Middle Row: Harlan Rimmel, Frank Meisner, Pep McDonald, Jim Shinn, Pop Arlett (Capt.), Gus Smith, Ben Begier. Back Row: Albert Bidwell, Bob Weston (Manager), Bob Vellou (Umpire), L. J. Hall, Quim V. Seawell.



Prune Packers 1958: Back row: Walt Kimes, Loy Thornburgh, Wayne Cook, Charles Timberlake, Ron Puccioni, Ed Millestrom. Front row: Elmo Barbieri, Frank Passalacqua, Don Farley, John Williams, Sam Pullaro, Lane Fuller. Bat Boy - Steve Barbieri

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Following this editorial Healdsburg organized the Association of Ball Tossers, and Healdsburg's interest in baseball was revived. Baseball became an important part of community life.

The Prune Packers, which were called one of the best semi-pro teams in the state played until the late 1920s and then disbanded. In 1931 The Healdsburg Eagles Lodge fielded a team that won the Redwood Empire League (teams from Ukiah, Occidental, Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Novato). The Healdsburg team included players Dan Modena (manager), Nick Scatena, Francis Passalacqua, Leland McCord, Bruno Della Maggiora and Les Whaley.

In 1921 the famous Prune Packers were organized. They were headed by Pop Arlett, a former Coast league pitcher, and managed by Bob Weston. Some of the players on this original team included Rollin McCord, Don Petray, Frank Corrick, Frank Meisner, Shorty Cortade, George Drew, Biff Schaler, Roney McDonald, Chick Autrey, Ralph Strand, Jimmy Shinn, and Frenchy De Selle. The Prune Packers (named after Healdsburg's agricultural base crop in those days) were a formidable team. They defeated the county teams and went on to play Bay Area semi-pro teams. The success of the team drew large crowds - 800 plus people - to their games in Healdsburg. For a few years at the end of each season the Prune Packers would play the semi-pro Santa Rosa Rosebuds, drawing crowds of 100 or more.

1931 also saw the start of a team fielded by the Healdsburg Odd Fellows. Waldo Iversen managed, pitched and played first base. Other players included Art Ruonavaara, Len Williams, Doug Badger and Frank Mott. The I.O.O.F. continued to sponsor a baseball team for many years. In 1951 they decided to drop their involvement in baseball. At this time, the Prune Packers were revived by the Healdsburg Lighting Committee, with Dan Modena as manager. A Baseball Committee to manage the Prune Packers, consisting of Art McCaffrey (Chair), Quinto Barbieri, Ernie Biasotti, Francis Passalacqua, Doug Badger, Maynard Boulden, and George Smith was appointed by the Lighting Committee President Doug Badger.

The wider world of baseball also came to Healdsburg during this time. The Yakima Bears, a Washington team that was a farm team of the San Francisco Bears, the forerunner of the Giants, trained in Healdsburg. They stayed in the Plaza hotel and played games against other semi-pro and college teams. They drew large crowds to these games. A Canadian team from Vancouver also trained here in Healdsburg, and played semi-pro teams from the Bay Area, as did teams from Oregon and Idaho. After training season for the teams was over, the Prune Packers continued to play.

### Twilight League

In the late 1920s and 1930s Twilight League baseball was very popular. There was an eight team league that played. Various clubs



### Reed and Bell Team, Twilight Champions for 1931

Back Row, left to right, Everett Johnson, Floyd Brooks, Spiv Davis, Al Strider, Buck Nardi, Fred Martin.

Front Row, from left, Louie Bottini, Petersen, Vince Rafanelli, Rene Revel, Dan Modena, Gino Buffi and front center, Americo Rafanelli.

(Kiwanis, American Legion, Knights of Pythias), businesses (Bank of America), and citizens (Sewell's Indians, a group of 23 Native Americans that trained to play) were involved in the league.

In May 1932 plans were made and followed to start a girls Twilight baseball league. A four team league was started, sponsored by Aladdin Cleaners and Sunshine Beauty Shop.

### Football, Softball, Soccer, Etc...

The Redwood Empire Baseball Tournament began in 1977 by the coaches and directors of the Redwood Empire League to end the season of League play.

Girls in the seventh and eighth grade were playing baseball as early as 1900.

Football, which is a game that was developed from soccer began to be nationally popular in the 1880s. Healdsburg was playing football as early as 1897, when there was an inter-collegiate game against Petaluma. High School football became a regular news item beginning in 1902. To this day Healdsburg High School football is played at Recreation Park.

Soccer is a game that has gained popularity recently, and Rec Park is presently used for games.

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FFA member Harold Hoskins at the 1965 FFCF at Recreation Park

### Future Farmers Country Fair

On November 21, 1949 a meeting was held at the residence of George Smith for the purpose of planning a Healdsburg Future Farmer Country Fair. At that meeting a Temporary Executive Committee was appointed to organize and itemize the goals. On this committee were: Walter Wright, Byron Gibbs, Bob Silzle, Ralph Sandborn, Steve Searcy, Margaret Towle and Ruben Carlson. This group met on November 28 and recommended that: the "Healdsburg Future Farmer Country Fair" be held April 28 and 29, 1950 in the City lot next to the Legion Hall. Other various activities for the weekend were suggested (dance, bands, concession booths). On December 5 a meeting was held to plan and make committee appointments for the fair. The now called Healdsburg Future Farmer Country Fair Association stated their goals as: 1. to stimulate livestock production; 2. advertise the Future Farmer Program; 3. stimulate local business. They hoped to make it an annual affair if successful.

The Fair was successful and continued yearly. By the end of the 1950s the Future Farmer/4H Fair was entrenched in the community. The Fair consisted of a parade through Healdsburg streets, a livestock auction, and a fair. For many years it took place on the American Legion parking lot. Then in 1956 the Future Farmer Country Fair Association began looking for a new fair location. Ralph Sandborn, who was President of The Lighting Committee at that time, met with the FFCF Association to discuss the possibility of the fair being held at Recreation Park. The Lighting Committee offered use of the park for a \$150 flat fee. The offer was accepted, and the fair found a new and permanent home (the Future Farmer/4H Fair is still held at Recreation Park each year). That year the FFCF Association put a

painted barrel at the entrance gate to the fair in order to raise money to help with the cost of the park rental fee.

In 1957 the Lighting Committee and the City agreed to the idea of permanent pens for livestock for the Future Farmer/4H Fair. The pens were finally built and finished in April 1959.

## Recreation Park History

### Park Development

The early baseball games were played on what was known as the Luce tract, owned by Guy Rose, at the corner of University and Piper Streets. In 1920 Rose rented the land to Healdsburg's Baseball Committee. The Committee converted the field into a ball park using heavy equipment and manpower supplied by the City. In 1923 a group of fifty Healdsburg citizens purchased the four acre tract for \$3000. As stated in the deed, the boundaries of the property were:

"Beginning at the Northeast corner of University and Piper Streets in said City of Healdsburg; running thence East along the North line of Piper Street. 5.60 chains to an iron pin driven in the ground; thence North 2 degrees East, 6.65 chains to an iron pin driven in the South line of the land of Luke Hall; thence West, along said line, 5.84 chains to the Southwest corner of said land in the East line of University Street; thence Southerly, along said line, 6.60 chains to the place of beginning, containing 3.78 acres, more or less."

They built a grandstand (using lumber from the Cotati speedway which was being torn down at that time), erected a fence, and stipulated that baseball would have first right over other forms of recreation to use the field. Healdsburg's famous Prune Packers played there; however, towards the end of the 1920s interest in semi-pro baseball lessened, and the Prune Packers disbanded. Unable to keep up the park financially, the park's owners approached the City with a plan for the City to take over the park. In 1927 the original fifty citizens signed over the park to the City, with the "baseball first" stipulation intact: "...and that between baseball and other athletic contests, baseball shall always be given the preference, and upon the further condition that the party of the second part [City of Healdsburg] will use all rentals collected for the use of said above described real property for the purposes aforesaid in improving and maintaining the same for said purposes" (Deed). On March 1, 1927 the park became the property of the City.

Improvements to the park were made continually. Streets were paved, gutters, curbs and sidewalks were added, a new fence was built, showers and dressing rooms were added under the grandstand,

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concrete dugouts were built, a ticket office was installed and the grounds were made level and smooth. In 1949 lights were installed for night games. In 1951 the Lions Club took over the concessions on a profit sharing basis. A new fence was built in 1952. In 1959 stock pens were added for the display of livestock during the Future Farmers Fair. In 1965 portable bleachers were added and in 1966 additional bleachers were built.

### Lighting Committee

In 1948 the Healdsburg Lighting Committee was formed to install and construct a lighting system for the park for the "playing of baseball, softball, football, and any other recreational activity approved by the Recreation Board" (Healdsburg and Community Recreation Lighting Project). Members of the committee included Doug Badger, Ralph Sandborn Clarence Ruonavaara, Norman Schwietert, Walter Cottini, Smith Robinson, Francis Passalacqua, Morris Ruby, George Smith, and Maynard Boulden. Other members that joined the committee included Dan Modena, Quinto Barbieri, William Carroll, Len Williams, Ernie Biasotti, Art McCaffrey, Felix Lafon, Steve Searcy and Ernie Demostene. To finance the lighting their plan was to raise \$20,000, which was done through the selling of \$5.00 and \$10.00 denominational, non-interest bearing bonds

The Lighting Committee had a strategic methodology for the distribution of the bonds. Healdsburg's areas - both outside of the City limits and within the City limits - were divided up and assigned a committee man to be responsible for a particular section. He was in charge of selling bonds in that area. A man was also assigned to be in charge of selling bonds to schools, clubs, fraternal and civic organizations. In addition, bonds were on sale at the Chamber of Commerce and at every tavern in Healdsburg for voluntary buyers. A publicity campaign kicked off the selling campaign.

March 7, 1949 was the opening day for general sales of the lighting bonds. Art McCaffrey of the Lighting Committee stated that it was a "community-wise enterprise." The argument for lighting said that the night games would allow people to attend the games who cannot do so during the day. The 20-30, Kiwanis and Rotary clubs all publicly supported the project. Lou Luciani of Rotary said, "In my opinion, no finer project has ever been undertaken by this city. Its success is important to the youth of this area" (HT, 3-4-49).

By March 11, \$12,835 had been raised, and the Committee was working hard to complete the drive by the end of two weeks. On March 25 the drive to raise \$20,000 for Rec Park lighting ended one night early because the goal was reached. The Committee had thought that they would have to extend the deadline until Saturday rather than the original Wednesday, but overwhelming community support drove the sales over the top. Once the campaign was over the Committee contracted Charles Anderson/Healdsburg Electric Shop for the installation of the lighting.

After the funding drive the Healdsburg Lighting Committee reached an agreement with the City of Healdsburg to take over the administration of the park and raise money through recreation activities to pay off the original bonds. The park was used for a variety of activities: various ball games, high school football, and the Future Farmers Fair. The Committee worked at the games, collecting tickets and turning the lights off and on. In 1950 the Committee began issuing Annual Reports of their activities and financial situation "in order that bondholders and citizens of the Healdsburg area be kept fully informed of the activities of the Healdsburg Lighting Committee, Inc." (1950 Annual Report, Healdsburg Lighting Committee).

For 30 years the Healdsburg Lighting Committee administered the park. The Committee was organized under a Constitution and by-Laws. Under this document their purpose was for "promoting and maintaining recreational interests in the City of Healdsburg and its surrounding vicinities." The Committee had a Board of Directors, and was made up of 14 men at any given time. They met regularly each month - and then sometimes more if the situation called for it. Every activity that took place at Recreation Park had a Lighting Committee representative in attendance. All those who participated on the Healdsburg Lighting Committee did so on a voluntary basis. It was a combination of both work and spirit: "The committee has a long road ahead, and anything done which will cut down its time in operation is welcomed. Members of the committee ask that you do everything in your power to make activities at the Park a success, so that sufficient funds for bond retirement will be raised as soon as possible. Every bit of promotion is desired, but overflowing enthusiasm is sure to be the greatest asset. Enthusiasm brought the committee together in the first place and enthusiasm of the lighting idea permitted the use of your dollars" (1950 Annual Report).

In a January 1966 City Council meeting Councilman Felix Lafon stated that the Lighting Committee had completed their goal in regards to the lighting of, the payment in full of that lighting, and management of the park. Lafon suggested that the City decide whether the Lighting Committee should continue operation of the park. For over 10 years more, the Lighting Committee administered the park. Since the lights were financed they looked for other projects that would expand the use of the park. Many projects were undertaken and completed, including: the installation of a press box, P.A. system, scoreboard, permanent and portable bleachers (\$5,800 was donated by the Kiwanis Club for bleachers and a baseball scoreboard), an automatic sprinkler system and new fencing. They continued to finance these projects through the renting of the field to various sporting (and fair) groups. It was said of the Lighting Committee: "The Lighting Committee is truly a unique example of how highly motivated and concerned citizens can group together to serve the needs of their community" (CA Park and Recreation Society). In 1977 the operation of Recreation Park was turned back to the City of Healdsburg.

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## Recent Recreation Park Happenings

In 1995 Rec Park received many improvements. Repairs included: renovation of the turf, painting, sprinkler system repair, and lighting system upgrade (new bulbs and repair). This renovation of Rec Park was a coordinate effort. The City contributed \$5000 for labor, materials and coordination. Both the high school football and soccer program's staff and players volunteered their services, and under the management of the City of Healdsburg Community Services Department helped with the sodding and painting. Contractors repaired the scoreboard and rehabilitated the field. The City's Electrical Department repaired the electrical system and replaced lights. Efforts were assisted by the cooperation of the fall sports programs - Pop Warner football, boys and girls soccer (high school), high school football, adult softball - who all scheduled their games elsewhere.

For the last six years there has been a Cooperative Agreement in regards to Receptions Park. There is a joint relationship between the schools and the City, covering joint development, scheduling and maintenance of the park. A newly renovated Recreation Park will open in March 2000. ♦ ♦ ♦



*Healdsburg High School football game.  
Circa 1950's*



*Putting in lights at the ball field:  
Left to right, Jim Clarke, Jack Quinby, Felix Lafon, Art Schieffer, City  
Superintendent Waldo Iversen and Mayor Doug Badger. Circa 1964*

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In the Spring of 1951, Lt. Col. Fred Weyand was commander of the Seventh Infantry Regiment's First Battalion. Stationed in Korea, Weyand wrote to his wife, the former Arline Langhart of Healdsburg, about the scarcity of non-military items on the Korean battle front. They discussed the possibility of asking the town of Healdsburg to "adopt" the Battalion.

The Weyands turned to Smith ("Smitty") Robinson for help. Healdsburg had already distinguished itself as a patriotic town during WWII, with Robinson as a key booster. People in the community recognized the value of hometown support during wartime. Kept out of the military by a heart condition, Robinson had contributed to the war effort by keeping up morale. He wrote letters (up to 300 a month) and mailed "Smitty's Scoops," his own hometown newsletter, to every Healdsburg serviceman. The Kiwanis Club had bolstered his efforts by financing the postage and Rotary had helped with preparation and mailing.

Robinson agreed with the Weyands that adopting the Battalion would be a worthy project--and a huge undertaking. The Battalion numbered 1,000 men, and the population of Healdsburg was 3,184. The effort would require the support and participation of the entire community. They discussed the idea with citizens and town leaders. Acting mayor Roy Henderson issued an official proclamation on March 19, 1951 that Healdsburg would "adopt" the Seventh Infantry Regiment's First Battalion. Headed by Smith Robinson, a Battalion Committee was formed to coordinate the mailing of care packages to Korea.

The project became a major community effort. Virtually every service or volunteer group in town contributed time, labor, gifts and/or money. Participating organizations included the Lion's Club, Kiwanis, Rotary, American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Women's Golf Club, Dry Creek Neighbors Club, Healdsburg Garden Club, Russian River Riders, Inc., 20-30 Club, War Mothers Club, Grange Home Economics Club, 4-H Club, and the Business and Professional Women's Club. The schools and churches were also significant participants in the adoption program.

Teachers encouraged their students to get involved. They raised money, popped popcorn, and packed cookies. Mrs. Mary Uboldi's freshman Social Living class wrote personal letters to the servicemen. The letters, promptly answered,

appeared on the front page of the *Healdsburg Tribune* May 12, 1951.

The men described how Healdsburg's actions had lifted their spirits: "Although we have never met, I feel as though I am writing to some of the nicest people and to the best friends I've ever had." Another wrote: "In a world which is filled with hate and misery, suffering and brutality, it is a wonderful thing which you folks in Healdsburg are doing for all of us who find ourselves in this conflict in Korea." All of the letters mentioned how good it felt to know that they were being remembered.

Lt. Col Weyand wrote his letter directly to the *Tribune* for the whole town to read: "The first shipment got here almost 10 days ago--just as the



## Smith Robinson and Healdsburg's Adopted Battalion

*By Holly Hoods*

weary doughboys came off the line on the Chinese offensive. We'd had a rough week, and were really beat out. Everyone was down in the mouth. We got into our area and found the first packets had arrived. They were full of reading stuff and things like mirrors and wash rags and combs that we could use right away for our clean up. Maybe that doesn't sound like much, but believe me, it made us all feel better to know that someone at least was thinking of us. One of the bad things about this war is that you get to feeling you're forgotten."

Between March 19 and April 9, 1951, Healdsburg shipped more than 53 cartons of magazines, candles, battery radios, note paper,

sewing kits and toilet articles. Ongoing care packages included snacks, dried fruit, tobacco, and cookies. Cookie bakes were held regularly, and hundreds of cookies were packaged in coffee cans and shipped to Korea. Grocery stores had "snack" boxes set up to collect contributions. Yakima Bears charity baseball games took place at Recreation Park. The price of admission was "something the boys can use." Fundraising dances and variety shows were also held in town. The First Battalion Committee had a booth selling baked goods at the Future Farmers of America Fair, built and donated by the Russian River Riders. Many individuals contributed cash donations, as well as labor to the cause.

Healdsburg received a great deal of positive publicity about their adoption project. Correspondent John Randolph touched off a round of newspaper and radio praise for the community after his article appeared in the *Associated Press* at the beginning of May 1951. *Reader's Digest* published an article called "The Town that Adopted a Battalion" in December 1953. The article quoted Major General F.L. Parks, who characterized Healdsburg's action as "in its way, a capsule explanation of the strength of America. It has a stirring, inspirational quality which makes one proud to be an American, and makes us in the Army grateful for our chance to serve."

Ralph Edwards, producer of "This is Your Life" television program, heard about Smith Robinson and Healdsburg's adopted battalion. He contacted Earl Osborn and asked if Smitty would be a good subject for one of his "This is Your Life" programs. Osborn agreed that he would be an excellent choice. The program was produced and aired in 1953. The town was elated. Smitty was stunned. "I felt like I'd been kicked by a mule," he joked to friends.

The press weren't the only ones to take notice. Healdsburg's efforts inspired other cities to adopt similar battalions. Frank Pace, Secretary of the Army, enthused: "It has come to my attention that members of your community have undertaken a truly American and really splendid project on behalf of the Army. . . I am confident that this display of support to the fighting soldier will be of immeasurable value in raising and maintaining the morale of those men who are contributing so gallantly to the security of our nation. I thank you on behalf of the Army as a whole."

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As the *Reader's Digest* observed: "Each man had two home towns--his own and Healdsburg." The soldiers wrote personal letters about themselves, how they felt about fighting communism, and details about the conflict. Many of them promised to visit Healdsburg someday: "We men of the First Battalion are very proud the people of Healdsburg have adopted us, and we are going all out for you just like you are going all out for us."

Late in 1951, Lt. Col. Weyand was shifted to a new position in Division Headquarters. The link between Healdsburg and the Battalion was not severed. The men wrote: "As far as we're concerned, we will always be Lt. Col. Weyand's First Battalion."

Touched by Healdsburg's generosity, the Battalion raised money to express appreciation to their adopted hometown. They donated \$175 to the 4-H Club for a club project, \$700 as a trust fund for needy children, and \$1400 to buy school playground equipment and a new radio system at Healdsburg General Hospital. "We hope that this action will only help to strengthen the already

wonderful bond of friendship which exists between the First Battalion and you swell people of Healdsburg."

The armistice ended the shooting in Korea, but not the efforts in Healdsburg, which continued until the end of the conflict. No one who lived in Healdsburg during the 1950s or served in the First Battalion will forget Healdsburg's days as an adoptive home town, or Smith Robinson's legacy of friendship and service. ♦ ♦ ♦

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Thanks to Pat Kier for research assistance.



*Congressman Hubert Scudder, Mrs. Fred Weyand (Arlene Lagbart of Healdsburg) and Smith Robinson on the steps of the Capitol, Washington, D. C. Circa 1950*



**Healdsburg Historical Society**  
P. O. Box 952  
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