



RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

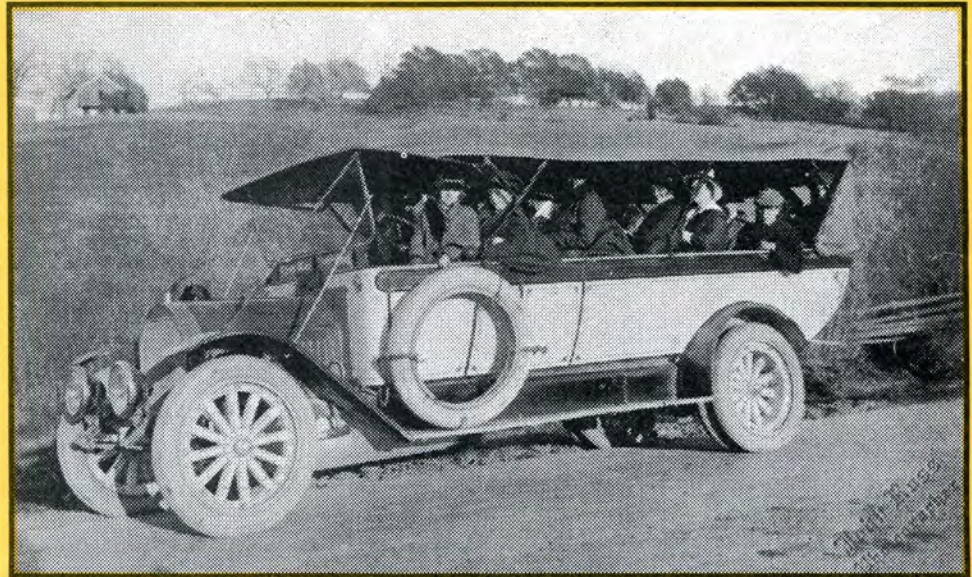
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Healdsburg 1900-2000 A Century in Retrospect

by Marie Djordjevich

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First autobus between Healdsburg and Santa Rosa, 1914



Healdsburg Municipal Band, Owen Sweeten, Conductor, circa 1937

Music in the Plaza A Healdsburg Tradition

by June Maber Smith

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Museum and Historical Society*

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IN THIS ISSUE

This is the first time, our curator Marie Djordjevich tells, she has written the feature article for the Recorder before creating a new exhibit. Prior to this, the new exhibit has been in place, and then Marie took the time to write her article, usually with the same theme as the exhibit. She has written a wonderful capsule history of Healdsburg covering the past 100 years. She calls it a "Century in Retrospect" and I am certain you will find it interesting and fascinating. Can't wait to see the exhibit.

Nostalgia is the word for June Maher Smith's account of the well-loved concerts in the Plaza. She does her usual wonderful job in recounting the history of one of Healdsburg's great traditions, band concerts in the Plaza Square.

Holly Hoods gives us a very well researched account of a treasured local landmark and a symbol of a slower-paced era in her article "Easily the Best and Strongest Bridge in the County: The 1915 Lambert Bridge". Should the bridge be preserved or reconstructed is the question that needs to be answered. Holly gives us information about both sides. The decision?

And continuing our series "Fashions of the Past" the subject this time is that contraption known as the corset!

We hope you enjoy our Summer 2000 issue.

Arnold Santucci
Editor

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HISTORIC



BUILDINGS

Dry Creek Valley Setting

The historical Lambert Bridge spans Dry Creek on Lambert Bridge Road in the Dry Creek valley, and is a central landmark of the valley. Adjacent to Healdsburg, the Dry Creek Valley runs 16 miles to the northwest and is two miles wide at its widest point. Once surrounded by grapes, then devoted to prune orchards, the Dry Creek Valley area returned to grapes in the 1970s and has been dotted with vineyards ever since. Perhaps surprisingly, there were more wineries in Dry Creek Valley in 1919 than there were in 1980. And while there might have been a lot of small family wineries in the valley in 1919, the total production of 1919 was not reached again until almost 1980. Wineries located presently within the Dry Creek Valley Appellation include: Dry Creek Winery, A. Rafanelli Winery, Lambert Bridge Winery, Preston Winery, Quivera Winery, Lytton Springs Winery, William Wheeler Winery, Alderbrook Winery, Ferrari-Carano Winery, Domaine Michel, Pezzi King Winery, Lake Sonoma Winery, and Mazzocco Winery.

The valley has not been developed in the same way as the rest of the county. It has retained its rural agricultural flavor, even in its commercial enterprises. It has only one main road and no stores except two country deli/taverns.

Charles Lambert Connection

The bridge is named for Charles Lee Lambert, a Dry Creek pioneer who settled in the area with his family in the early 1850s. Lambert descendants still reside in Healdsburg. Originally the Lamberts owned a lot of land in the Dry Creek valley, including

“EASILY THE BEST AND STRONGEST BRIDGE IN THE COUNTY”: THE 1915 LAMBERT BRIDGE

By Holly Hoods

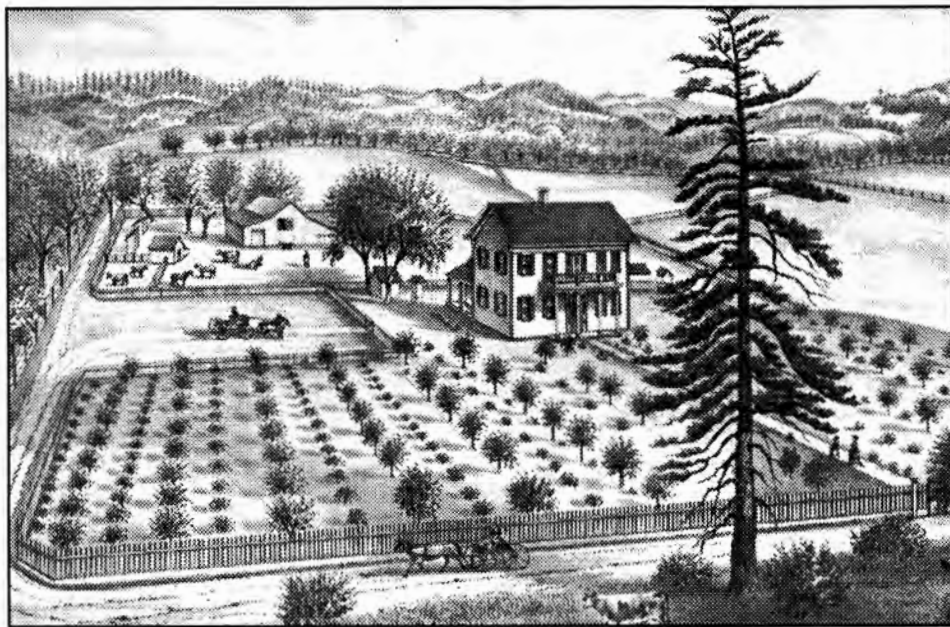
the land upon which the bridge was built. In 1880, the first (wooden) bridge over Dry Creek was constructed at the Lambert site. The circa 1860 Lambert House still stands in Dry Creek Valley, under the ownership of David Stare of Dry Creek Vineyard.

Bridging Dry Creek with Steel

The present bridge was constructed in 1915. It replaced the wooden bridge over Dry Creek which had been a landmark in the valley since the 1880s. The new bridge was built of steel truss design. Steel had become the new symbol of industrial might and progress in late 1900. Strong, light and durable, steel could be beautiful as well as

functional. Three powerful forces combined around 1900 to change the design and construction of truss bridges in California. The organization of the American Bridge Company as a subsidiary of U.S. Steel created a national firm capable of overcoming the natural advantages enjoyed by California-based builders. American Bridge at the time of its organization controlled half of the country's bridge fabricating capacity, and soon came to dominate truss fabrication throughout the United States. Of the surviving truss bridges in California for which a builder is known, American Bridge was responsible for 25 percent of those built between 1911 and 1920, and 45 percent of those built in the 1920s.

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Lithograph of the Charles Lambert residence, 1877. The house is still standing, owned by David Stare, Dry Creek Vineyard. Lithograph published in 1877, Sonoma County Atlas, Thomas H. Thompson and Co.



Lambert Bridge, 1952 flood. Photo provided courtesy of Howard and Adele Dicke

After 1900, the typical truss was designed by a county surveyor to standard American Bridge Company specifications, and was located across a major crossing in a remote area. By the 1930s, the truss was used very rarely for "ordinary" spans--fixed bridges of small to moderate length.

Easily the Best and the Strongest Bridge in the County

The bridge was built by the American Bridge Company in 1915. The designer was Malcolm P. Younker, and the contractor was D.E. Alders of Santa Rosa. There were some delays experienced by the contractor due to the inability to get the bridge material in time. Once the steel was on the ground, the bridge was erected in just 18 days. The contract price for the structure was \$8,961. A crew of ten men did the work. The completion of the bridge was celebrated in the *Healdsburg Enterprise*, 23 October 1915:

The carrying capacity is many times greater than contemplated future demands will ever impose. It is said that this structure would sustain a train of cars. The statement is entirely credible

when it is known that the installation of the concrete floor, of an aggregate weight of ten tons, only served to lower the bridge center one quarter of an inch. It is easily the best and strongest bridge in Sonoma county, although not the longest.

The design of the new steel bridge was Parker Through Truss. The one lane, single span pin-connected bridge is 185 feet in length. The superstructure has minor decorative detailing. Unmodified, the bridge is in need of rehabilitation. In 1993, Dennis Harris and Dana Dericco prepared a thematic nomination of Sonoma County historical truss bridges to the State Office of Historic Preservation. The Sonoma County Historic Bridges Thematic District included 19 bridges and the site of a 20th. A total of twelve bridges were designated as Sonoma County landmarks in 1999, including Lambert Bridge.

Historical Significance of Lambert Bridge

Historian Dennis Harris determined that Lambert Bridge was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the

local level of significance. Of the 406 bridges standing in Sonoma County, Lambert Bridge is one of the few remaining intact Parker Through Truss bridges still in existence. It is one of seven. Built by the county as part of its early "Automobile Age" highway system, Lambert Bridge is important, according to Harris, both for the aesthetic values of the structure and its surrounding site and for its early role in the development of automobile travel in the Dry Creek Valley.

Preservation of Lambert Bridge

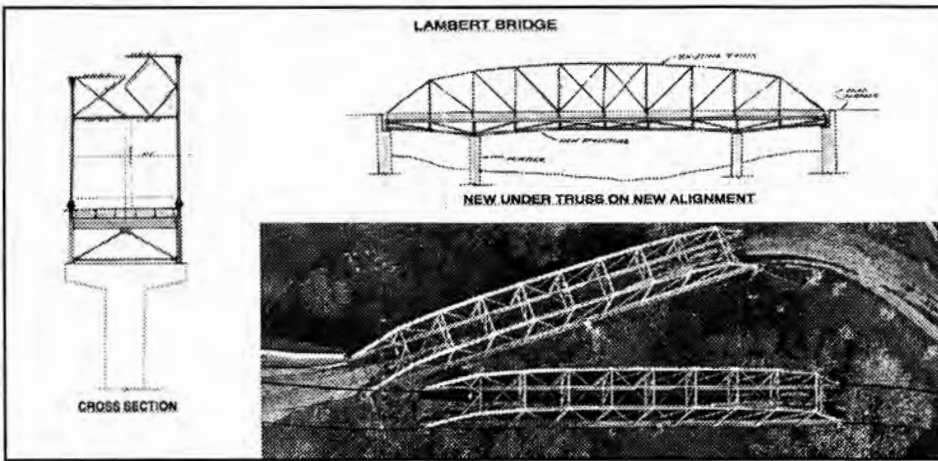
Though Lambert Bridge has recognizable historical significance to the county, it is especially prized by its local Dry Creek neighbors. Lambert Bridge has been recently in the news as a historic preservation issue. The county is under pressure to replace the bridge because of a state mandate to make sure that all of the bridges in the county are seismically safe. Susan Clark, Sonoma County Landmarks Commissioner, warns, "Every single historic bridge in Sonoma County is threatened because of this. If people are concerned, they need to show up at Public Meetings to be heard." She recommends that interested people contact Public Works and Kathy Jacobs at the Planning Department to be put on a notification list for public meetings concerning bridges.

CALTRANS will pay the county millions of dollars to build a concrete box girder replacement bridge, but does not want to spend the money to stabilize an historic bridge.

An outcry of protest, from those advocating Lambert Bridge's historical significance, greeted initial plans from the Public Works Department to replace the bridge. As bridge preservationist Dana Dericco commented, "If you tear down all the historic aspects of the town, what is there left to see?"

In April about forty concerned people attended a public meeting about the bridge, held by two representatives from Public Works, at Dry Creek Vineyard. According to

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Proposed bridge alignment and new substructures. Department of Public Works, May, 2000.

Public Works, there are several problems with the current bridge. In particular, the abutment is unstable, the bridge is load limited and difficult to approach. Wine trucks can only cross the bridge when empty. Levi Gurule, senior engineer, has been in charge of the bridge program in Sonoma County. In response to local concerns, Gurule and Public Works are currently proposing a plan to straighten out the curving approach to the bridge by moving it over a few feet. A new galvanized steel truss would be placed under

the bridge to stabilize it, essentially by bearing the weight of the old bridge. A new abutment would be created. Gurule's goal is to develop a way to strengthen the bridge while attempting to preserve the historical appearance of the bridge. The new frame below the bridge would not be visible from the top. Gurule notes, "If we just leave the bridge on the site, it's just going to deteriorate further. The best chance of keeping it around for another 50 years is putting it on a new foundation."

To residents of Dry Creek Valley, the one-lane bridge is a treasured local landmark and a symbol of a slower-paced era. Don Wallace, General Manager of nearby Dry Creek Vineyard, disagrees that the wineries want to have the bridge changed. He commented, "It's one of the places in Dry Creek Valley where people stop and wave to their neighbors."

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ARTIFACTS: FASHIONS OF THE PAST - THE CORSET

No discussion about women's fashion in the late 1880s and early 1900s can be complete without taking a look at the contraption called the corset. Women's fashions at that time changed just as quickly as they do today. Different silhouettes were desired at different times. Undergarments, such as the corset, rearranged a body's flesh to create the wanted figure shape, in this case by constricting the waist and recontouring the breasts.

In the 1860s fashion dictated that women's figures consisted of small waists and huge rear ends, this illusion created by the corset and the bustle. The bustle disappeared briefly in the mid 1870s, but returned, and the tight-laced corset/expanded rear continued into the 1880s.

By the end of the century, fashion had changed. Bustles became small, though the corset continued. The 1900 female figure was a tight corseted waist and a belled skirt.

After 1910 women's fashions began to be more shapeless, and by 1918 loose fitting empire waist dresses were the top style.



Healdsburg Museum Collection
#78.40.13
Gift of Eleanor McCausland



Hattie Truitt
Goddard c. 1880
Notice the cinched waist.
Healdsburg
Museum Collection
#442-14 Gift of
Rollo Darby



Sears Roebuck Catalog
page as shown in *Everyday
Fashions 1909-1920*, edited
by JoAnne Olian

HISTORY



LIVES!

HEALDSBURG 1900-2000

A CENTURY IN RETROSPECT

By Marie Djordjevich

"Uncovering what has taken place over the years in a family, an organization or a community reveals the origins of conditions, the causes of change, and the reasons for present circumstances. Examining how conditions evolve over a period of time and considering the impact of a wide variety of factors on the process provides enlightenment and perspective."

(Kyvig and Marty, Nearby History)

Healdsburg in 1899 at the turn of the century was a town that had come far in a relatively short amount of time, and was poised on the brink of municipal growth.

Established in 1857 by Harmon Heald, Healdsburg was originally eight acres of subdivided land. Heald laid out the town on a north-south axis around a central park - or plaza - and donated the plaza park, as well as lots for a school, cemetery and churches to the community. The rest of the lots he sold for \$15 each. In 1867 the town was incorporated under state law and the first city council meeting was held.

Early growth of the town was rapid. Population swelled from 300 in 1857 to 1600 in 1869. Commercial and residential growth was great as well. By 1877 five additions to the City limits had been established. Commercially Healdsburg developed around the central plaza, and between 1880 and 1906 the downtown area grew steadily. Early residential growth patterned that of the commercial: North, South (Matheson), Tucker, Haydon, University, Fitch, East and Center Streets - all close to the commercial core - were the first to grow. "North Healdsburg", the area north of Piper Street along West Street (Healdsburg Avenue) also developed both commercially and residentially.

In 1899 Healdsburg was town that was very proud of itself and its accomplishments. As the *Healdsburg Tribune* writes of Harmon Heald in its December 28, 1899 New Year Illustrated Edition: "Little did he dream that it would ever become the Healdsburg of today. He had taken no thought of the then distant future, no visions of its coming glory clouded his brain."

Population Chart

Year	Population
1857	300
1869	1600
1880	2000
1910	2011
1920	2712
1930	2296
1940	2507
1950	3251
1960	4816
1970	5410
1975	6166
1989	9000
1996	9586
1997	9625
1999	10,000

1900-1925

25 Years of Firsts

The first quarter of the 20th century marked a time of municipal growth for the town of Healdsburg. It was at this time that much of the city's modern infrastructure was established.

In 1898 Healdsburg's city council wanted to make both the water and electric systems municipally owned. They bought the privately owned water plant for \$9,000 and set about making improvements. By 1904 water demands had grown so much that the Water and Light committee decided to build another reservoir next to the existing one above Oak Mound Cemetery. In June 1922 a bond election was authorized for new water mains to be laid under the streets, and the streets to then be paved.

Municipally owned electricity did not happen as easily. In 1898 the owner of the electric plant (A. H. Babcock) refused to sell, and the struggle between the city and Babcock became somewhat nasty. The city was going to construct their own plant, but Babcock filed suit and secured an injunction. The city began regulating light pole sizes and power wire sizes, both in excess of Babcock's supply. Babcock fold-

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ed and the city built a new hydro-electric plant at the Gird ranch in Alexander Valley. Water flowed from the reservoir and city owned electricity flowed to the people in 1900.

City sewage developed slowly. Outhouses were the early method of disposal. From 1901 on, a sewer system plan was discussed. It was not until 1911 that a sewer plan was accepted and developed. The plant site was on West Street (Healdsburg Avenue) where the Chamber of Commerce now sits. The first lines were downtown, with expansion as funds permitted.

Some Highlights 1900 - 1925

- 1900 First car in Healdsburg, owned by W.T. Albertson
- 1900 Electric plant installed (Gird Ranch)
- 1903 Rural free mail delivery established, two routes
- 1905 First road built from Healdsburg to Fitch Mountain (at Camp Rose)
- 1906 The Great Earthquake happened
- 1907 Healdsburg Chamber of Commerce formed
- 1908 First Water Carnival
- 1910 Villa Chanticleer built
- 1910/11 Carnegie Library built
- 1911 First real sewer system put in
- 1912 Union Hotel renamed and opened as Plaza Hotel
- 1914 First county bus line began (autobus), Healdsburg to Santa Rosa
- 1915 Permanent bandstand erected in the Plaza
- 1915 First street paving
- 1916 First Street Dance
- 1918 High School built on Fitch Street
- 1918 First high school bus started
- 1918 Drs. Seawell and Sohler opened Healdsburg's first hospital
- 1919 Fred Young landed the first plane in Healdsburg (and crashed it the next day)
- 1920 First motorized fire equipment used
- 1920 Sheriff Petray killed; accused lynched
- 1920 Prohibition started
- 1921 Prune Packers baseball team formed
- 1921 Fitch Mountain roads became county roads
- 1921 Healdsburg-Cloverdale section of the Redwood Highway built
- 1922 Most major city street paved
- 1922 Healdsburg Country Club (Tayman Park) established
- 1922 First steam well bored at the Geysers
- 1923 Alexander Community Hall built
- 1924 First permanent dam installed at Lake Sotoyome (Memorial Beach)
- 1924 "Healdsburg, the Buckle of the Prune Belt" is adopted as Healdsburg's slogan



W.T. Albertson, owner of the first car in Healdsburg, 1900. A Stanley Steam Car fired by Kerosene products, manufactured in Massachusetts in 1899. Original cost \$950. (Photo presented to the Museum by granddaughter Violet Wabers Van Winkle of Sausalito).

1926 - 1950 The World Intrudes

If the first twenty five years of the 20th century were more municipally oriented, the second twenty five years would have to be considered as more globally influenced. While several larger issues effected Healdsburg before 1925, like World War I and especially Prohibition, these second twenty five years were very much effected by both the Depression and World War II.

The Depression was hard period for agriculturally oriented Healdsburg. Many farmers either lost, or almost lost their farms. Jobs were scarce for all people, and employment matters were at the forefront of people's thoughts. People of all ages tried to work to make a living wage. Not all businesses suffered, though many bartered goods and products for their services. Thriftiness became a way of life. Government relief programs provided Healdsburg with many new items. The WPA (Works Projects Administration) and the CWA (Civil Works Administration) ended up providing Healdsburg with: the first cast iron sewer pipe system on Healdsburg Avenue; major improvements to the City reservoir system; new buildings at the City electrical substation; a new system of City water mains and concrete culverts; a rebuilt Boy Scout Clubhouse on Center Street; new sidewalks in downtown and residential districts; a new Healdsburg Elementary School building; a new high school playing field and auditorium; A Chamber of Commerce building; an improved road from Healdsburg to the Geysers (Clayborn, 1992). The federal government supplied labor wages and some materials for these projects.

World War II deeply effected the Healdsburg community, so much so that the remembrances are close to the surface, even today. All people were touched in some way by the war. Many peo-

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A.W. Garrett Hardware store celebrated 50 years in business in 1939. The store was located at that time on Matbeson Street approximately where Felix and Louie's Restaurant is located presently. Shown here are Vernon Chaney, right, A.W. Garrett, center, and an unidentified salesman, left.

ple enlisted, were drafted or had family members that served. As an agricultural region, Healdsburg was expected to step up production. Women were encouraged to work as never before. Gasoline was rationed. "Victory" gardens were encouraged to ease food shortages. Salvage drives to collect scarce war materials were common. Defense drills and blackouts were common, and Healdsburg children wore metal tags for identification.

Some people not eligible for service became block wardens, walking the neighborhood streets at night to make sure lights were out during blackouts. Armed civilian guards volunteered to watch the railroad bridge and Russian River bridge; women and teenaged girls volunteered to be airplane spotters.

On August 17, 1945 the *Healdsburg Tribune* listed the names of the men and women who served during 1941-1945. 843 names were listed, which constituted about 26% of the total population of Healdsburg, Windsor and Geyserville.



Healdsburg High School buses, 1922

Some Highlights 1926 - 1950

- 1926 Foppiano family dumped 100,000 gallons of wine along Old Redwood Highway
- 1929 First Elementary school bus
- 1929 *Healdsburg Enterprise* sold to the *Healdsburg Tribune*
- 1929 P G & E was granted the gas franchise
- 1930 Plaza Theater opened
- 1930 Local branches of Bank of America and Bank of Italy merged
- 1930 Rosenberg and Bush celebrated their 65th business anniversary
- 1935 Volunteer fire company made regular department of city by ordinance
- 1936 First equipped fire truck purchased
- 1937 Golden Gate Bridge built
- 1937 Sewer purification plant built
- 1937 Dance hall Palomar opened in Del Rio Woods
- 1937 First Harvest Fair
- 1937 Loaded railroad cars were put on the railroad bridge to hold it down during a flood
- 1938 *Tribune* and *Enterprise* consolidated into one paper
- 1939 Municipal band organized
- 1939 A. W. Garrett's hardware store celebrated 50 years in business
- 1940 First full time paid employee in fire department
- 1942 First fire house built on Center Street
- 1943 Mexican *Braceros* came to work on Healdsburg ranches
- 1945 Eleven houses destroyed by fire on the east slope of Fitch Mountain
- 1946 Planning Commission first organized with R.B. Stevens as first chair
- 1946 Memorial Beach approved by County Board of Supervisors
- 1950 First Future Farmers of America fair
- 1950 Opening of the Aven Theater on North Street

1951-1975 A Time of Transition

The period starting the second half of the 20th century could be characterized as a time of transition for Healdsburg. Agricultural bases were changing, and the downtown area was becoming a ghost town.

Perhaps some of the biggest changes for Healdsburg occurred on the agricultural side. Until 1950 hops were one of the major cash

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crops in the area. From 1880 to 1950 Sonoma County produced about one third of the hops grown in California. By 1960 all hop yards were closed. Some of the reason for this was attributed to the public's growing taste for light beer after WWII (a large part of this was attributed to women). WWII had brought a boom in hop production, both because beer was considered essential to the GIs, and because major European hop growing countries could not export. After the war these European countries began re-establishing their hop production, and demand for Sonoma County hops fell. Another reason for hop failure was due to the Downey Mildew, a hop plant disease, that flourished in the moist soil propagated by ammonia fertilizer put into use after WWII. Finally, the invention of the hop picking machine made larger tracts of land feasible for hop farming, putting the small Sonoma County farms out of business. Another agricultural change effecting Healdsburg in this time period was the demise of the prune industry. Healdsburg and prunes had been synonymous since at least the turn of the century. By 1924 Healdsburg was the "Buckle of the Prune Belt", and prunes remained Healdsburg's most important and ubiquitous cash crop until the 1960s. A combination of consumer apathy, bad marketing, increasing production costs, and the emergence of grapes and wine took its toll on the prune business.

While agriculturally Healdsburg was changing its base cash crops, downtown Healdsburg was undergoing a change as well. The prune to grape transition created a sort of lean time, and the downtown area suffered commercially. A man named Larry Wilson began buying up land around the plaza in 1973. By 1976 he claimed to own 98% of the plaza stores. He declared his plans to tear everything down and build a theme park town called the Plaza of Flags. Residents and city officials were outraged, and worked to block his plans. For four years "Wilson Associates stopped commercial enterprises around the plaza cold" (LeBaron, 1989). After years of being blocked, Wilson began selling off his properties in 1977. Meanwhile due to the lack of commercial business in the plaza, it became a hang out for the Hell's Angels motorcyclists, as well as an area full of drugs and violence.



West side of Plaza, West Street (now Healdsburg Avenue), circa 1940

Some Highlights 1951 - 1975

- 1951 Smith Robinson spearheaded the formation of the Korean Battalion
- 1954 New high school built on Powell Avenue (Junior high took over Fitch/Grant Sts.)
- 1956 Powell Street renamed Plaza Street
- 1958 Geysers Development Co. leased geysers to Magma power for 99 years, renewable 9 times
- 1960 The 1885 City Hall building on Matheson Street demolished
- 1961 New City Hall dedicated
- 1961 Dedication of Plaza Fountain (Sandborn) occurred
- 1963 Healdsburg High School Gym named for Smith Robinson
- 1965 The third St. John's Church built
- 1966 The trees were planted on Matheson Street
- 1966 Parking meters were permanently removed
- 1967 Groundbreaking for Warm Springs Dam occurred
- 1970 Buildings on Healdsburg Avenue, west side of the plaza, were torn down
- 1971 World's deepest steam well was dug at the geysers (9029 feet)
- 1972 Geysers plant named one of the top ten engineering feats of 1972
- 1972 Opening of Healdsburg General Hospital on University Street
- 1974 Ed Langhart appointed the first official City Historian and Archivist by the City Council

1976-2000

Turnaround and Growth

The last 25 years of the twentieth century could be summed up as a time of growth for Healdsburg. From sleepy agricultural town to high energy wine producer and tourist mecca, Healdsburg has seen some definite changes.

The period of the 1980s was one of turnaround. Thanks to the growing popularity of wine and the economic viability of grapes, Healdsburg experienced a commercial renaissance. The plaza was reclaimed, and Healdsburg began eyeing the future in new ways.

The 1990s can be seen as a time when Healdsburg looked to establish her identity in a fast-paced world. Issues of tourism, and especially growth, dominated, and the city is still struggling with these issues in 2000 and probably beyond.

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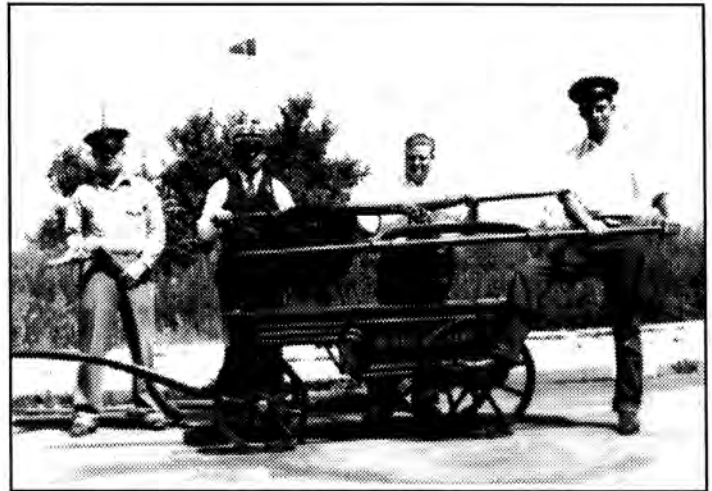
This is not by any means an all inclusive retrospective. Much can happen in one week, let alone 100 years! However, by studying the past we can see that there are similarities between what we do and want today, and the actions and desires of yesterday. What we do today, has foundation in what came before. The city of Healdsburg has not been static; it is an alive and changing entity. Through it all, Healdsburg has retained a sense of its history and community, and it is this sense that should carry it into its next 100 years.

"It can be satisfying to feel oneself part of something larger and more lasting than the moment, something that stretches both backward and forward in time"
(Kyvig and Marty).

Some Highlights 1976 - 2000

- 1976 Healdsburg Historical Society formed
- 1983 Warm Springs Dam completed
- 1983 Gobbi building on east side of Matheson Street restored
- 1985 Rosenberg and Bush closed
- 1986 West plaza redevelopment occurred (parking lot, pedestrian walkway, fountain)
- 1986 Plaza pavilion erected
- 1986 Groundbreaking for new library on Center and Piper Streets occurred
- 1986 133 Matheson Street converted to Senior Center
- 1987 Downtown Bakery opened
- 1988 Don Hyde restored the Raven Theater
- 1990 Newly refurbished Carnegie Library opened as the Museum
- 1992 New fire house on Healdsburg Avenue and Grant Street opened
- 1995 Devastating flood occurred
- 1997 Oakville Grocery opened
- 1997 Alexander Valley Community Hall restored
- 1997 New City Hall opened on Grove Street
- 1998 IOOF building redone by the Brandt family
- 1998 Healdsburg General Hospital saved by Nuestro, Inc.
- 1999 Highway 101 bridge retrofitted over the Russian River at Healdsburg
- 1999 First Oak Mound Cemetery clean-up occurred
- 2000 Carson Warner Skate Park opened
- 2000 Groundbreaking for new hotel on west side of plaza
- 2000 Newly refurbished Recreation Park opened

To be continued...!



Healdsburg fireman with handpumper, 1940

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HISTORIC



EVENT

MUSIC IN THE PLAZA

By June Maher Smith

Over the years the "City of Healdsburg" and "Band Concerts" have become almost synonymous. The Saturday night concerts in the Plaza provided entertainment for local citizens and visitors for many years. Rural families came to town to listen and socialize. The merchants stayed open on those Saturday evenings so the parents could shop and then treat the children to something cool at the soda fountain.

The Russian River Brass Band was evidently the first organized band here. John S. Williams, who came to Healdsburg as a young lad, noted in his "Pioneer Recollections" that he remembered hearing that band in the late 1850s. The conductor was James E. Fenno, a jeweler and watchmaker by trade. It is doubtful this band played in the Plaza, as back then the block donated to the city by Harmon Heald was still covered with oak and madrone trees. It was used mostly as a parking lot for wagons since there were no fountains, benches or bandstands. The Russian River Brass Band was still in existence in 1866 when Professor Carl V. Wilmot became the conductor. Previous to moving here he had been with the Presidio Regimental Brass Band.

In 1873 the native trees were cleared from the Plaza and pines, fire and eucalyptus were planted. (This was just the first of the various Plaza landscaping projects over the years, but that's another story.) About five years later the bell tower and the first bandstand were built. By the mid 1880s the Russian River Brass Band must have disbanded for another musical group, the Sotoyome Band, was formed. In March 1888 this new band gave an open air concert in the Plaza, the beginning of a series of Saturday night concerts that year. In 1891 Prof. D.C. Smith moved from Fresno to conduct the

Sotoyome Band. According to the *Sonoma County Tribune*, Smith was the "leading cornet soloist on the Pacific slope." Also in that year the city fathers granted the band the privilege of erecting a bandstand adjoining the bell tower and furnishing benches for the audience's comfort. The weekly Saturday evening band concerts started in May that year.

Although the band had only 15 members, they played a full concert of marches, waltzes and other selections. In fact, they opened the June 5th 1897 concert with John Philip Sousa's march "King Cotton". This same march is included in our present Healdsburg Community Band's repertoire.

The Sotoyome Band also played for dances. After one of their Saturday night Plaza concerts in August 1897, they played at Muller's Hall. The *Healdsburg Tribune* stated that "Perfect order will be maintained, and the dances will be conducted in the best possible manner."

By 1902 the Sotoyome Band had a new conductor, D.O. Davis. George Alexander was the business manager. Other members of the group were Ed Ellis, John Fay, August Arata, Fred and Temple Bailhache, Dave Bane, I. Morel, Ralph Powell, Charles Butler and Charles Proctor. The next year permanent lighting was installed in the Plaza.

Not even an earthquake could stop the Saturday night concerts. Two months after the disastrous 1906 quake, the band played two numbers by Healdsburg composers: "The Gaiety Girl March" by Will L. Livernash; and a march-song "The True Sons of '49", words by Arthur Price and music by Louis Meyer. The latter was dedicated to the San Francisco earthquake and fire sufferers.

The band was reorganized in 1916 as the Healdsburg Brass Band. Ed Pryor was the director and there were 19 other members. Three of them had played in the previous brass band,

John Fay, Dave Bane and Temple Bailhache. This group also played for people living over on the coast. Band members loaded their children and instruments into a large wagon and spent a couple of summer weeks camping at various spots along the ocean. In the evenings they would give a concert in one of the small town there.

Even during the World War I years, the concerts were well attended. In May 1918 the *Healdsburg Tribune* reported "Quite a number of persons drive to Healdsburg from Santa Rosa on Saturday evenings to enjoy the concerts given by the Municipal Band in the Plaza"

In the late 1920s the Lytton Boys' Band (Salvation Army Band) was providing the Saturday night music. During the 4th of July weekend in 1927 they played six concerts over three days. Major Taylor conducted the band which continued playing on Saturday nights for several years, using Healdsburg High School music students to fill out their numbers. Guerdon Miller remembers playing with them in the mid 1930s. In addition to being present for the Plaza concerts, Guerdon says they had to attend two weekly rehearsals in the gymnasium at the Lytton Home. Their weekly "salary" totaled 10 cents -- a whole dime to spend on an ice cream cone.

Also in the mid 1930s, the depression years, the merchants signed a petition to abandon the concerts as they did not bring enough profit to those businesses which contributed to the Chamber of Commerce and the concert fund. As a result the Salvation Army Band discontinued their concerts in the Plaza.

However, in 1937 Owen Sweeten was Hasked by the merchants and the City Council to organize and conduct summer concerts. Sweeten was a musician and showman who was well known in his native Salt Lake City.

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He had been a director of a large band which played for dancing at the Saltair Resort at Great Salt Lake and he had played on stage in many theaters on the West Coast.

The Healdsburg Municipal Band concerts he directed not only featured band music, they also starred local talent, both young and old, contests, and other diversions such as bathing beauties. They drew large crowds to the Plaza on Saturday nights. The *Tribune* reported that "close to 4,000 people attended the July 5th concert in 1941. At a concert the next month, bottles of wine donated by Italian Swiss Colony were given to the three oldest people in the crowd and the one from the farthest distance. Patriotism was building in this last peacetime year: The Star-Spangled Banner was played at the beginning and at the end of each concert.

The Healdsburg Municipal Band members were local men, including Jess Ratchford, Harry Latimer and John Condit. High school and junior college students also played. Some of

them were Milt Brandt, Lee Engelke, Berwyn Richards, Bob Sacry, Walter and Fred Rueger, Ed Moy, Bill Autry, Jack Garrettsee, Jack Kellar and Doug Arthur.

Although World War II interrupted the summer concerts, they were revived for a couple of years after that. However, the union raised the amount the players received to such a high level that the merchants couldn't afford the costs. Thus ended the Saturday night band concerts.

The old bell tower, bandstand and fountain are gone and the gazebo on the east side of the Plaza now served as the stage for various groups who fill the square with all sorts of music on summer Sunday afternoons. The Downtown Business District, local businesses and the Arts Council present these free concerts.

Although the old bands are long gone, Healdsburg is now blessed with its own Community Band. This polished group of musicians presents concerts that are well received by locals and visitors alike. They, too, play in the Plaza, only it's on a Sunday afternoon, not a Saturday night.

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Owen Sweeten scrapbook at Healdsburg Museum

Healdsburg Historic Resources Inventory 1983



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