



RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

SUMMER 2010 • ISSUE 109

An Official Publication of the Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society



Livia and Joe Vercelli

GRACEFUL ENDURANCE: ITALIAN AMERICAN WINE FAMILIES DURING THE HARD YEARS

by Bo Simons • Page 14

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

At Center and Matheson

by Will (Chick) Chaney • Page 4

A Second Chance To Look Inside The Wahrman (Geyserville) Hotel

by Ann Howard • Page 9

Dressed for All Occasions: 20th Century Fashions of the Healdsburg Museum

by Melissa Leventon, Holly Hoods, and Meredith Dreisback • Page 7

The Great Depression, The Salvation Army and Tayman Park

by Arnold Santucci Page 17

In This Issue

With this, our 2010 Summer issue, we welcome Bo Simons, Librarian of the Sonoma County Wine Library which is located in the Healdsburg Public Library building. We invited Bo- many know him as a columnist for the *Healdsburg Tribune*- to choose his own subject relating to his expertise. We know you will enjoy his very interesting article about Italian American wine families during the hard years. Thanks, Bo, for sharing your talents with us.

Ann Howard, our very faithful contributing writer, gives us the rich history of the Wahrman (Geyserville) Hotel and the Skaggs family. Ann, in submitting her article, asked if we would let her lay out her article so that she could take full advantage of the historic photos she had been able to obtain. The result you will see starting one page 9.

If you haven't yet seen the new exhibit in the Museum's gallery, "*Dressed For All Occasions; 20th Century Fashions of the Healdsburg Museum*" by all means do so. To give you a preview Holly Hoods, Meredith Dreisback and Guest Curator Melissa Leventon have supplied us with a small sampling of the exhibit.

In her research endeavors the Museum's Research Curator Holly Hoods came across an article that had been previously printed in the *Healdsburg Tribune* in October, 1960, written by Will (Chick) Chaney, a well known businessman of the community. Holly thought it would make interesting reading for museum membership and rightly so. I recall that when we arrived in Healdsburg in 1950 Chick owned and operated a successful ice cream and candy store. In his article, he reminisces about the changes that had taken place at Center and Matheson Streets, the location of the original city hall, since his boyhood.

Lastly, we have added a small article entitled *The Great Depression, the Salvation Army and Tayman Park* which gives us the history of how Healdsburg was able to acquire the Healdsburg Golf Course and make it a part of the City's Parks and Recreation Department.

The RRR staff and I always welcome your comments.

Arnold Santucci
Editor



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Contents



RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

Summer, 2010 • Issue 109



4 At Center and Matheson

by Will (Chick) Chaney

Reprinted from the *Healdsburg Tribune*, October, 1960.

As he watched the original City Hall being torn down the author reminisces about the changes being made in the community.

7 Artifacts: Dressed For All Occasions: 20th Century Fashions of the Healdsburg Museum

by Holly Hoods, Meredith Dreisback and Melissa Leventon

A discussion of some of the many articles of clothing now on exhibit in the gallery.

9 A Second Chance to Look Inside the Wahrman (Geyserville) Hotel

by Ann Howard

A wonderful history of the old hotel and its owners with exceptionally fine historical photos.

14 Graceful Endurance: Italian American Wine Families During the Hard Years

by Bo Simons

A reflection drawn from the Oral Histories in the Sonoma County Wine Library.

17 The Great Depression, the Salvation Army and Tayman Park

by Arnold Santucci

A recounting of how the City of Healdsburg acquired the Tayman Park Golf Course.

AT CENTER AND MATHESON

by W.H. "Chick" Chaney

Reprinted from the *Healdsburg Tribune*, October 27, 1960

(As he watched the original City Hall being torn down in the fall of 1960, Mr. Will "Chick" Chaney wrote the following reminiscences of the changes that have taken place at Center and Matheson streets. It is obvious that - - and many of us share his doubt - - Mr. Chaney is not entirely convinced progress has really been "progress."

—Healdsburg Tribune Editor, October 1960)

The wheels of Progress move slow, but - - like the wheels of Justice - - they do move. For in a pause, while passing, one finds that change alone is constant.

Standing at the curb, awaiting an early bus, the staccato of the wreckers' hammers in the destruction of our old City Hall flipped open the shutters of my photographic mind and nostalgic memories hastened by in bold review.

Just before the turn of the century, my father, a tall and handsome man of twenty-nine years is walking toward town from the south on Center Street. His left hand is clutched firmly by the chubby fingers of his boy of four years, grey eyes and curls black as ink hanging down over a lace collar attached to a full blouse with lace cuffs, knee pants and button shoes.

Frozen to the other hand was his brother of three with soft brown eyes and long straw-colored curls, dressed in a twin outfit which smacked of the clever needle fingers belonging to a proud mother.

It seemed difficult, walking three abreast, to stay in the narrow lane which was held in bounds by the green grass and picket fences on the one side and on the edge by weeds and horse manure, stumped by shod hoofs, into the muddy earth around each hitching post. Along this path, before reaching the City Hall, stood old wooden shacks boarded up-and-down with false fronts and loose-hanging doors like those used on barns and woodsheds.

In the opening of one of these doors, through which drifted the warm air of hot steam mixed with the smell of hard laundry soap, stood Sing Fat. Like a big bowl of rice was the belly holding up his broad smiling face, from the back of which hung a long black



City Hall dedication, 1886



City Hall demolition, 1960

queue; as the green dragons would come to life on his glistening silk costume as it shimmered when he laughed and talked while standing in the setting sun.

In each hand he held a large red apple which we always took without fear because Jack Engalls, the town Marshall, (he was the police force) was standing in the door of the police station. This room was shared by the City Clerk and others in those days and the rooms at the front of the building, where Ed Langhart now [in 1960] holds out, was used by the United States Post Office. Each day at 11:30 a. m. and 6:30 p. m. the local citizens would gather and stand around in groups to chat and wait the final call of Postmaster Hall, that "All was ready," as he opened the General Delivery window.

Taking place in line each would get their mail, then head back home, or the saloon and elsewhere as some went upstairs to the



Drinking in plaza in front of cigar store, circa 1899



Minstrel show on Matheson in front of City Hall, circa 1900

public library occupying then the rooms used now by the City Council and City Engineer. There Miss Zoe Bates, the librarian, would keep the books and the boys in order with a stern look, not stern enough though to hide traces of her good humor.

Mail in pocket, we would cross the wet and sloppy street, as the sprinkling wagon made its last pass for the day, to the corner where Nelson and Beeson operated their saloon in a one-story wooden building newly painted white. Behind this, at the east end, a large vacant lot was used each season by a traveling medicine show. From a high platform, backed against the high board fence at the far corner, and under the light of kerosene wind-lamps hanging to the awning poles, the "Negro Minstrels" would entertain with music, dancing, story-telling and buffoonery while the medicine man would extol the wonders of "Brother Benjamin's Herbulo" — it was good for corns, bunions, heartaches and divorce. The

people so hungry for any type of entertainment in those days would over-run the lot out through the wide swinging gates on the sidewalk and often across the street to the front of the Farmer's Co-Op Market known as "The Rochdale Co." and managed by Joe Prince.

Next to Nelson and Beeson, on the north, was a long narrow room with small tables in a row against the wall and covered with clean white linen. This Café, as it was called, was owned by Lee Fong, nicknamed "Jim." His cracker barrel belly was always covered by a long white chef's apron hanging by the strap round his chubby neck atop of which his round face would turn in glee to show his American haircut.

Joining Jim's Café was one of Healdsburg's leading cigar stores with counter and showcases close to the wide open front. The back part of the building, with its low ceiling, was filled with felt-top tables and captain's chairs into which all kinds and types of men would come to deal a hand, including so often, the man from the dairy or the farm with his large hat and dung-covered leather boots which shifted about, unashamed, among the patent leathers of the card sharks. Over and around all of these hung a heavy veil of tobacco smoke, spawned from the bowels of dark Havana cigars and the crusty old bottoms of favorite pipes, it would hang in evasive billows -- always aloof -- going nowhere, holding itself in readiness for a quick foray across the ceiling and down around the opening made, as someone goes through the door leading to the back-house, to be on guard lest some sinister force, perchance, escape its haunts. Then rolling back headlong over the card-tables giving men and chairs strange shapes as it smothers the cursing complaints for drawing the wrong card. Like a shifty dishonest blackguard beckoning, without promise, to the card game, where large brass cuspidors stand sentinel, haughty and proud; though long since had their shining armor been buried beneath the constant barrage from gobs of chewing tobacco spat aimlessly at them from every direction.

The dice game with the cigar clerk ended, we stepped out again onto the old wooden plank sidewalk, still bloodstained where a forty-five Colt ended an argument over a stacked deck of cards the Saturday night before. Then kitty-crossing the street to a large two story building, with a high front, where we picked our way to the entrance through boxes of potatoes, bags of onions, sacks of corn, a wooden rack filled with brooms, and hanging by a long hemp rope was a huge bunch of ripe bananas with a long thin bladed knife, the curved end stuck fiercely into the naked stem. Inside -- so many things, on the floor, on the counter, on the shelves; but

Continued on page 6

I liked most to watch the white cone of string, hanging high over head, as it danced fast, changing silhouettes while Mr. Passalacqua tied up our packages.

Arms filled with groceries and smoking his free cigar, our dad would take us out the side door where, at the sidewalk, it joined another door behind which a narrow flight of ominous dark stairs led to small rooms above the grocery store. There a flop for the night cost twenty-five cents, and often a lone cowboy would sleep off his hangover while his pony, reined to the Plaza rail, would broadcast his discontent at being saddled through the night by stumping and scraping at the cobblestones forming the gutter.

Leaning hard against the south end of the grocery store was a wooden shack with double swinging doors to enter the saloon, catering to the volunteer firemen, ball players, many of the town's second-rate politicians, along with a few winos and always the proverbial flunky - - who at the break of dawn would polish the brass rail, clean the spittoons and scrub away all the debris from the day before. For his labor he usually satisfied his hunger from the free-lunch counter, found in all the saloons of that day, along with several free shots of straight whiskey spread out between the hours he wasted away while parking his lazy fanny atop an empty steam beer keg as he drowsed in the warm September sun.



Town Band and Pastime Minstrels in front of Truitt's Theater, Center Street, circa 1910

A little further south - - "Truitt's Opera House" - - a large wooden building with a huge gingerbread front was entered over wide and fan-like wood steps. Inside was long and narrow with the balcony running all the way round and ending, on each side, at the top set of private boxes, stacked two high like chicken nests, ending at the very edge of the stage upon which the earlier performances were

acted out behind tallow kindled footlights. The floor was level, and plain oak chairs with rawhide bottoms were nailed into groups of four, eight, and sixteen, for faster moving to prepare the floor for dancing or skating or to place again in rows for the season's attractions. It was all patterned after-- though not so elaborate--the Ford Theatre in which Abraham Lincoln was shot.

The click of the bus gears snaps closed the shutters on my kaleidoscopic moments of reminiscence, but a backward glance, as the wheels rolled away from the curb, showed "progress" making another pass: long-gone were old wooden shacks with their false fronts, bat filled attics, rat infested floors, and old wooden sidewalks ending at the edges of muddy streets.



Rochdale Store Matheson Street, circa 1909

Scalped of the Pompadour hairdo and beat down to her waistline still stands the old City Hall - not unlike the backwoods country mother, out in the front yard, arms akimbo, sleeves rolled up and wearing an old kitchen apron still defiant and determined not to move and screaming at the top of her voice, "If it was good enough for my 'Pappy,' it is good enough for me." Progress IS inevitable; it keeps popping up on Center Street.

---Will "Chick" Chaney, 1960
(Transcribed by Victoria Taneyhill, 2010)

ARTIFACT:

WOMEN'S WAVE SERVICE UNIFORM WORN BY MARGE BARNARD

by Melissa Leventon



Margaret Barnard, 1946

Hats for WAVE uniform

The Women's Reserve of the United States Naval Reserve (WAVES) was created by an act of Congress on July 30, 1942, to recruit a corps of militarily fit women to assume non-combatant naval jobs usually held by men, who would thus be freed for combat duty. Tens of thousands of women answered the call; in 1944, when 20-year-old Marge Barnard enlisted, there were more than 72,000 WAVES.

The garments on display comprise the standard WAVES uniform for enlisted personnel; also in the collection are the white shirt and black satin tie prescribed for dress occasions, which Miss Barnard is wearing in the accompanying photo. The stripes on the jacket's left sleeve identify her rating as Seaman First Class. The round, soft-brimmed hat, which would have either a blue or a white crown, was standard for WAVES and its color determined the color of the WAVE's gloves; white gloves with the white crown and black gloves with the blue crown. The garrison cap was authorized for WAVES uniform in early 1945, just a month or two after Marge Barnard enlisted. The rain hood, known as a havelock, was designed to fit snugly over the brim of the round hat and extend to cover the shoulders. Donated to the Healdsburg Museum by Marge Barnard, the uniform, numbered #610-1f-h in the collection, is currently on exhibition at the Museum.

ARTIFACT:

CLOTHING WORN BY HENRY AND BLESSILLA PASSALACQUA

by Melissa Leventon, Guest Curator



In this picture you see the meticulously tailored suit made for Henry Passalacqua, a Healdsburg native who toured the United States and Europe in the 1920s, performing as tenor "Enrico Passalacqua". It seems likely that he wore the suit on stage. The tailcoat and trousers are made of midnight blue superfine wool, trimmed with black silk satin. They are worn with a starched white pin-tucked cotton shirt, collar and bow tie.

Passalacqua later returned home to devote himself to agriculture, real estate investing, and winemaking. His home at 403 Sherman Street, a Colonial Revival built in 1936, was purchased by Henry and his wife, Blessilla, in 1947. They raised three children there.

The dress in this picture is made of printed, crimped, yellow silk georgette, trimmed with yellow silk appliqué, a yellow velvet ribbon belt and worn with a peach rayon underslip. The dress is from the 1930s and was most likely worn by Blessilla Passalacqua.

The handsome suit and dress were among a cache of clothing found in the basement of the former Passalacqua Healdsburg home by subsequent owners. They were donated to the Healdsburg Museum by April McDonald in 1985 and can be seen in the current exhibition "Dressed for All Occasions: 20th Century Fashions of the Healdsburg Museum."

ARTIFACT:

BOB WADE'S WWII BOMBER JACKET AND POCKET GEAR

by Holly Hoods (with thanks to Melissa Leventon)

The current exhibition of 20th Century fashions from the Healdsburg Museum features several spectacular military garments. On display for the first time are a World War II bomber jacket and its associated pocket gear. The jacket was worn by pilot Bob Wade, a local young man who enlisted as a Cadet in the Army Air Corps in January 1941. The jacket was donated to the Museum by Robert ("Bob") Wade and his wife, Jean in 1993. No information about him or the use of the jacket had been solicited at the time of the donation, so the quest for more information began when Guest Curator Melissa Leventon selected this garment from our collection for her display.

The son of Charles and Marian Wade, Bob was born in 1917. He and his brother Stewart, born in 1915, grew up on Mill Creek Road in the Venado section, attending the one-room Daniels School before graduating from Healdsburg High School. Stewart Wade, a longtime supporter of the Museum, lives in Hawaii—still an active realtor in his 90s—and helped us locate Bob in Seattle to interview him about the jacket and his military service.



Robert Wade, circa 1944, India

Bob served five years in the Army Air Corps in the Ferry Command Service, based in Great Falls, Montana. His job was to pick up and deliver Army aircraft, flying them to wherever they were going to be used. Frequently he would fly back other planes that needed to be reconditioned.

Interviewed by telephone in July 2010 from his residence in Seattle, Bob recalled that he was constantly flying during the war. He wore the jacket around the base and whenever he flew, because "it was cold in those planes." Once he was gone for four

months on a long continuous trip. "Laundry became a big problem!" he laughs. Bob was honorably discharged from the Army Air Corps as a Captain in 1946. He became a safety engineer for an insurance company in Hawaii and later went into real estate.



Bob Wade's Bomber Jacket

Bob's bomber jacket, numbered #493-1 in the Healdsburg Museum collection, is made of brown horsehide leather with knitted wool waist and cuffs. It was standard issue, made by the Aero Leather Clothing Company of Beacon, New York. The jacket has an insignia on front, which was used to distinguish different theaters of war. Bob explained that the one on this jacket stood for "CBI," which meant China, India, and Burma. A distinctive patch centered on the back of the bomber jacket was written in Chinese in case the plane went down. Bob couldn't recall the exact translation of the patch's message, but said it meant something like "we are friendly, treat us well."

Included with the bomber jacket were two fabric maps: one of Indochina (Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia), and one of South America, featuring British Guiana (now "Guyana"), French Guiana and Brazil. Also in the pockets were handy phrases printed on cards in several foreign languages, a miniature lighter, a whetstone, steel wool, a tiny matchbox and a small compass. This gear was standard issue, according to Bob, and always carried in the cargo pockets of the bomber jacket "in case we went down." Fortunately, Bob never had to use it. Guest Curator Melissa Leventon, who selected this jacket for her clothing exhibition, was intrigued about the gear in the pockets

of the bomber jacket, wondering why Bob would need a map of South America. When queried, he explained that the route they flew took them from Montana across the United States through Florida to South America (specifically to Brazil) then to Africa across the Atlantic Ocean (where there was a small island halfway across where they could stop if necessary) before heading across Africa then India then China.

Bob donated his bomber jacket and all the contents to the Museum, but has held onto one very personal souvenir of the war: his "Short Snorter." This was a band of currency from every country he visited, stuck together with tape, (starting with a U.S. dollar bill), signed and dated by other air crew members. Short Snorters were great ice breakers and conversation pieces among airmen during the war. It was loosely understood that if an air crew member offered to exchange signatures, and the other could not produce a Short Snorter, then he had to buy the drinks ("a short snort") at the nearest bar. The Short Snorter usually inferred that the owner had crossed the Equator, but not always.

Bob kept his Short Snorter in a leather wallet that he had specially made for it in India. When he was discharged in 1946, his Short Snorter was at least 20 feet long! At my request, Bob and Jean's daughter, Kate Wade, photographed Bob on July 4, 2010 with his wartime souvenir, pictured here. It was a pleasure and privilege to connect with the Wades, and to learn more about fascinating artifacts in the Museum's collection and about the military service record of an American hero with Healdsburg roots.



Bob Wade and short snorter, 2010

Sources:

Telephone interviews by Holly Hoods with Robert H. ("Bob") Wade, Kate Wade and Stewart Wade, June-July 2010.

A SECOND CHANCE TO LOOK INSIDE THE WAHRMAN (GEYSERVILLE) HOTEL, GEYSERVILLE, CALIFORNIA

by Ann Howard

When Vince Colombano, age 91, born in 1919, was a small boy, he remembered the Ferguson brothers from Marysville, California, visiting his father at their home east of Geyserville, and the brothers would stay at the Wahrman Hotel. Vince's older brother, Lou, age 95, born in 1915, remembers long ago peeking in the window of the bar at the Hotel, empty of patrons, fascinated by the carved wood above the long bar. Prohibition in 1918 had closed down the bar, but the rooms upstairs were still rented out.

The Wahrman Hotel, more commonly known as the Geyserville Hotel, was built by Alexander Skaggs in about 1871-2 to accommodate guests to be taken to the Skaggs Hot Springs and Resort in the upper Dry Creek Valley about 9 miles west. The tracks of the San Francisco and North Pacific RR were extended from Healdsburg north to Cloverdale in 1872. The first official time card recorded for Geyserville was dated April 15, 1872. Depot Street was graded from the depot west to meet Main Street, which ran south and north through the small village of Geyserville from Healdsburg to Cloverdale. The Geyserville Hotel was located at the corner of Main and Depot Streets.



The Geyserville Hotel in about 1890 at the corner of Main and Depot Streets, now a vacant lot at the corner Geyserville Ave. and Hwy 128.

"Julia Skaggs, proprietor" was written on the back and identified as wearing the white apron. William Ellis is standing in front of a water trough on the left and John Ellis holding horseshoes, front and center of the group on the right with white shirt sleeves. Two little girls, Neva Harlan and Addie Goodrich (born in July 1883) are sitting by the front corner post. The legible part of the sign reads "Celebration.....Barbeque."

Alexander Skaggs and his family had been squatters in lower Dry Creek Valley in the early 1850s, and eventually driven off their coveted lower Dry Creek farmlands, as were others who had settled illegally, but not without a fight. "Captain Skaggs," head of the squatter rebels, had acted as spokesman at a standoff with the County Sheriff and his posse near Healdsburg in 1862.

During that time, in 1857, Skaggs and his brother William laid claim to 160 acres of land in the public domain, the site of three mineral springs in upper Dry Creek Valley. Skaggs built the health resort by 1860, which drew tourists and invalids from all over the state, averaging about 20 guests a day. As the number of visitors increased, a hotel was built of redwood in 1864 with an addition built the next year. By 1877 invalids and tourists numbered 300 with the resort as destination, many arriving by train in Geyserville. Speculators contemplated

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

running a rail line from Healdsburg to the Resort, but it never came to be. The Skaggs Resort has a colorful history; operated by the family and others over the years, it finally closed in 1947. Since 1985 the once popular resort is under Lake Sonoma.

In the 1880 census Charles W. Skaggs, age 25, was hotel keeper, and his wife, Julia, age 23, born in Germany, listed along with Chinaman Charley, cook, and George Bosworth, 23, storekeeper (Harry Bosworth's grandfather). Charles Skaggs died in 1883 and buried in Olive Hill Cemetery. The 1890 census records were lost. In the 1900 census, Julia Skaggs was 50 years old and a widow, head of her household and hotel keeper, owning the hotel free and clear. Won Sing, age 35, born in China, was the cook. Among Julia's boarders were her son Alex, age 17, liveryman, along with the Railroad Station Agent, a cabinet maker, two coppersmiths, and a day laborer.

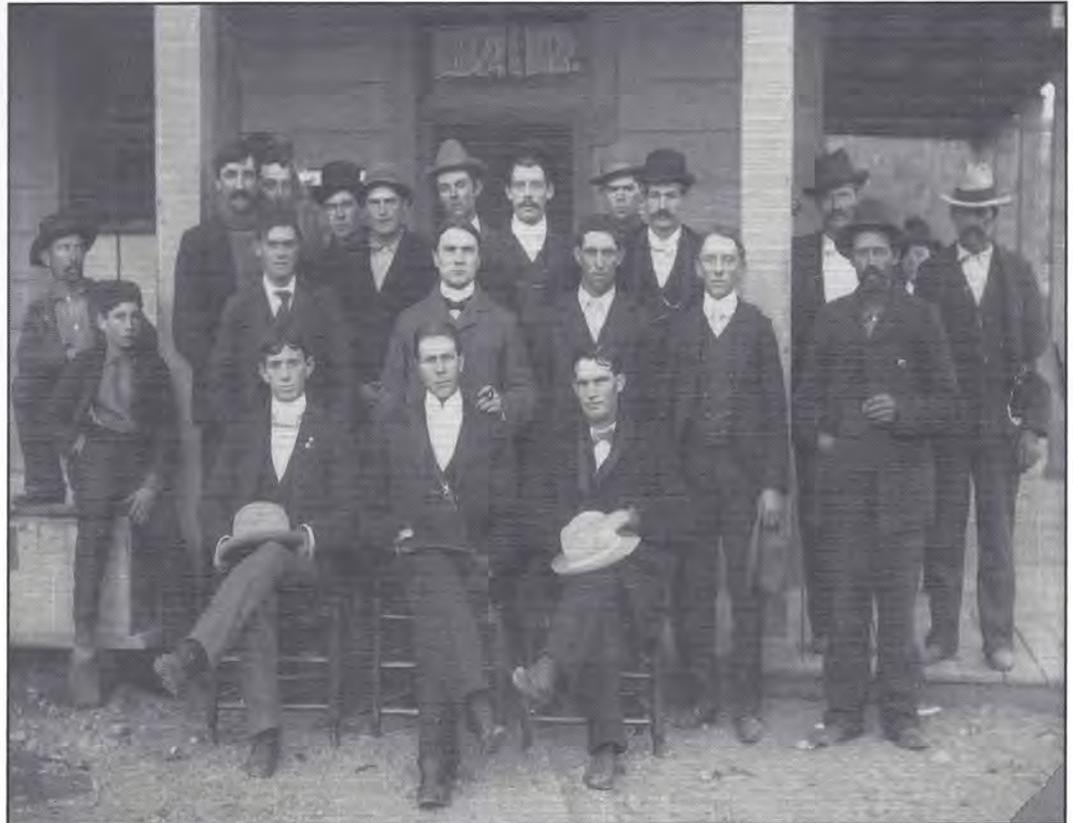


Geyserville Gazette, February 1, 1899

In 1910 Lewis Lobb may have been the owner of the Hotel, with Mary Johnson, 54, cook, Clarence McFarling, 32, bartender, and wife Maude, 27, waitress. Alex Skaggs, 27, still had the job as liveryman, his wife Carrie 25, and son Walter age 5. Julia Skaggs was living in Santa Rosa with her other son, Edward.

Fred Bosworth, George's younger brother, seated in the center, was bartender at the Geyserville Hotel in the early 1900s.

The "Men's Drinking Club" according to Harry Bosworth.



The Skaggs Hot Springs Stage and auto stage in front of the hotel having picked up guests at the Geyserville Depot about 1912.

The stage was located in Texas completely restored, purchased by Dick Dilworth in 1987, and returned to Geyserville with a champagne reception, surrounded

Continued on page 11

Continued from page 10

by horses and riders shooting like bandits. Karen Bosworth learned later that she was riding a blind horse, and Harry Bosworth still has a bottle of the champagne! The stage is stored in Auburn, CA.

The Skaggs Spring Stage on Canyon Road near the Olive Hill Cemetery returning to Geyserville with guests from the Resort.



In May 2010 Rick Pogorzelski of Hayward, California, contacted the Geyserville Chamber of Commerce and his message was forwarded to me. He had located photographs of his great grandfather, Edward Howard Wahrman, and others with "Geyserville" noted on the backs. He sent the photographs via email, and I was thrilled to look inside the bar of the Geyserville Hotel! I printed out a large copy for Lou Colombano and couldn't wait to show him. Many decades later he was able to actually look inside the Geyserville Hotel Bar at the carving over the long bar! Lou thought that the bar was possibly built in Bulgaria or Hungary and the parts shipped around the Horn to be reassembled in place.



Interior of the bar at the Geyserville Hotel when Edward Howard Wahrman was proprietor before Prohibition in 1918 (Courtesy of Rick Pogorzelski).

(Rick's grandmother) and Edith were 4 and 2 years old, the first two of five daughters. When Edward registered for the WWI draft, he was a hotel keeper; therefore, sometime after 1910 he bought the hotel. Prohibition closed down his hotel bar in 1918, but the rooms were rented out, and in November 1927 the Wahrmans sold the hotel to Ed Cook, a butcher in Geyserville. In 1930 Edward was working as a laborer on a fruit farm. Edward Wahrman died in Hayward, California, in 1947, his wife Wilma died in 1952, and they are buried in the Olive Hill Cemetery in Geyserville.

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

By enlarging the various signs, paintings and items found in the photograph of the bar, such as Bull Durham, National Lager, Mascot Crushed Cut Tobacco with no luck dating them, or reading the illegible wine bottle labels, I finally looked closely at the cash register behind the bar. A photo sent via email to a website that buys, restores and sells old cash registers resulted in the identification of this brass model as having been manufactured by the National Cash Register Company, Dayton, Ohio, and probably model number 356 dating between 1908 and 1915. The reflection of the "Hotel Bar" sign on the front door can be seen in the mirror behind the bar.



Dining room of the Wahrman Hotel before 1927. (Courtesy of Rick Pogorzelski)

Edward Wahrman is standing on the right with wife Wilma next to him. Bouquets of lilac and iris on the tables suggest springtime, possibly for a special occasion. Small cruets of vinegar and oil, and large compotes filled with melons can be seen at the corners of both tables. Milton "Dint" Rose, 88, of Geyserville, remembers hearing that you could get a real chicken dinner at the Hotel for 50 cents on Sunday.



Edward Howard Wahrman. (Courtesy of Rick Pogorzelski)

Notice Edward's high-button shoes, popular from the 1870s until 1914, the beginning of WWI. After the war ended and leather less scarce than it had been, the high button shoes fell from fashion and were replaced by the appeal of the ready-to-wear apparel.

Geyserville Hotel		
<i>Dining-room Service</i>		
SOFT DRINKS	CIGARS	TOBACCO
E. H. Wahrman, Prop.		

Advertisement in the Geyserville High School yearbook - *The Geys* - 1925

Continued on page 13



The Geyserville Hotel and Bar, before 1918 and Prohibition, was located at the corner of Main Street and Depot Street (now Geyserville Avenue and Highway 128). Notice the Hotel Bar sign on the glass of the door.

A wagonload of puncheons in the photograph above, “180 gallons each, usually pulled an average one puncheon to a horse,” to quote Obed Bosworth, George’s son. To the left behind the last puncheon the sign board advertises “The Town Fool” playing “one night September” is all that can be read when enlarged.

October 10, 1935 – Sotoyome Scimitar – Geyserville Blaze – A Tuesday Night Tragic Episode

“A considerable portion of Geyserville’s business area was reduced to heaps of smoldering ashes shortly before midnight Tuesday [October 8, 1935] when a fire of undetermined origin broke out in the basement of the J. K. Ferguson general store, destroying the store and its contents, the adjacent home of the Fergusons, **the old two-story Geyserville hotel building**... unoccupied, the Sacchi building ... , and the Geyserville telephone office before the flames could be brought under control.” Many businesses in the vicinity “were all damaged by the blaze, and windows were shattered in a number of buildings on the opposite side of the street... as a result of the intense heat.”

“For a time, the entire town was threatened with destruction, but quick work on the part of volunteer firefighters and the arrival of equipment from neighboring communities together with an abundant supply of water from the Russian River enabled the balance of it to be saved....”

“... The [Standard] service station at the intersection of Depot Street and the highway through town was virtually surrounded by the blazing buildings, but young D. G. Ferguson [son of the owner and operator] managed to drain gasoline from the pump containers down into the underground tanks and shut off safety valves in time to avert a serious explosion. Oil drums and other inflammable products were carried from the station.”

“... Linemen from the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company and the Pacific Gas and Electric Company arrived in time to remove the Geyserville exchange switchboard from the burning telephone building, and to cut live wires from falling power poles...”

Milton “Dint” Rose, 88 and long time Geyserville Volunteer Fireman, said that the fire truck for which the May Day Festivals from 1925-1931 had raised monies and local men built, saved Geyserville that night. Lou Colombano living with his family east of Geyserville and sleeping on an open porch, was awakened by the glowing light in town and the explosion of ammunition, kerosene and acetylene canisters in the Ferguson store; Vince was away.

Lou went on to become the bartender in Santi Catelli’s restaurant The Rex in Geyserville in 1937 for a year (a photograph of him tending bar again hangs in the new Catelli’s restaurant), and he went on to tend his own bar and restaurant in San Francisco for many years... maybe all because of peeking in the window of the bar of the old Wahrman-Geyserville Hotel all those decades long ago.

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GRACEFUL ENDURANCE:

ITALIAN AMERICAN WINE FAMILIES DURING THE HARD YEARS A REFLECTION DRAWN FROM ORAL HISTORIES IN THE WINE LIBRARY.

by Bo Simons

Gracefully enduring hard times remains an important part of the history of Sonoma County wine making, exemplified in the oral histories of a number of the men and women who helped make Healdsburg a center of the wine industry. We are passing some rough times now, and these strong, diligent people have some good lessons for all of us. During the hardest times, from Prohibition through the dry dusty years following repeal, through the spurt of good times afforded by World War II, when no European wine suddenly made American wine more saleable, and on to through the flat lackluster fifties, these folks grew grapes, made and sold wine in a world that was not glamorous, certainly not the idyllic vision that the words 'wine country' conjures up today. These gallant men and women took their lumps and soldiered on until the 1960's when the wine revolution started, initiating the changes that would make California wine better, more desirable and more financially rewarding.



Wine historian, William Heintz

That hard scrabble can be seen the following exchange between William Heintz and George Rosasco, who managed the Frei Brothers Ranch in Dry Creek before the Gallos bought it.

Heintz: "Why did you happen to go to work for the Freis?"

Rosasco: "You remember the Depression?"

Heintz: "I was born in it. I was told a lot about it."

Rosasco: "It was really rough times. My father died when I was -- I wasn't quite 21 when he passed away. When did he get killed? He got his leg broken in a spraying machine there in Hopland. [circa 1928] Five days later he died of gangrene. And he was heavily in debt. That was pushed onto me. I was the oldest boy. My brother was only 10. So I had to grow up."

Heintz: "Did you lose your ranch?"

Rosasco: "Yes, had to give it back to California Lands. I worked a couple of years around there. I had a friend up there that had a hay press and I had a tractor and a truck. I went out baling hay. I baled hay for about two cents. I had a friend...he knew Frei."

Over the years, the Healdsburg Museum has honored the giants among these tough wine families with tributes: both Louis J. and Louis M. Foppiano, father and son, Joe Rochioli, Joe and Anne Vercelli, the Seghesios, Rachel Ann, Pete, Ed and Ted have all been feted with dinners and awards by the Museum. These people have all deserved their hard-earned moments of tribute.



Millie Howie and Louis Foppiano

Continued on page 15

All of the people mentioned are of Italian extraction. Not all Healdsburg wine was made by Italians, but, beginning in the 1880's a lot of the people who shaped the wine industry in Northern California were Italian Americans. Italy in the 19th Century appears something like Afghanistan today: convulsed with wars, revolutions and the messy process of nation building. A lot of people left the various city states from the North and the South of Italy and came to the Americas. The Italians coming to America made this country a far richer land from one end to the other. A fair number settled around Healdsburg because the area variously reminded them of Toscana, Piemonte, Calabria, Napoli, Sicilia, the hills around Roma. There is a contradictory toughness and sweetness about Italians. Italians can be sloppily sentimental, operatically passionate, and they can be steely eyed, tight lipped and no nonsense cool. One of the great musical Italian names here is Bacigalupi, and it means 'kisses of the wolves' in Italian. To me that wonderful mouthful of a name conveys both the warmth and the dispassionate calculation inherent in a people that can produce Pavarotti and Machiavelli. It is no accident that the Romans have a founding myth that has twins being suckled by wolves.

There are further contradictions. They do not care a fig for numbers or contracts. Pete Seghesio: "*It was bandsbake all the way. Never made a contract.*" They were obsessed with numbers. Charlie Scalone: "*Well, yield per acre was not over a ton and a half. 1932 we got 64 tons of grapes, the cost of picking was \$250 and average price of Zinfandels was \$17 a ton. Average price of Alicante was \$9 a ton...1933 an early frost damaged the crop but Repeal of the 18th Amendment helped, sold to the Healdsburg Wine Company at \$42.50 a ton. We got 45 tons of grape. In 1934 prices went down again.*"

Italians back in Italy have become interested in their immigrant cousins. We have great publications in Italian about the Italians in this area. *Relazione di Un Viaggio d'insturzione negli Stati Uniti* (1900) [Narrative of a Research Trip to the United States] by Guido Rossati, is a fascinating piece of state-sponsored industrial espionage with the Italian government trying to figure out why they are losing market share in the world wine business to Americans. *Colonie Italiche in Californie* (1915) [Italian Colony in California] contains 100 mini-biographies of merchants, bankers, bakers and winemakers in Northern California just before WWI. Finally we have *Terra Soffice Uva Nera: Vitivinicoltori Piemontesi in California* (2008) [Soft Earth Black Grape: Piedmont winemakers in California] by Simone Cinotto tracing the Piedmont immigrants in the California wine industry, especially Sbarbaro and Rossi at Italian Swiss Colony, and the Gallo brothers. Cinotto did some of



Livia and Joe Vercelli

his research at the Museum and the Wine Library.

But to get back to Healdsburg and the steadfast virtues that the Italians brought to this area, let's look for a minute at the Vercelli family. Joe Vercelli was born in San Francisco, near the Cow Palace, and then moved to the Excelsior. He wanted to be a doctor, and attended Cal, working and going to school, taking a street car, ferry and electric train to get to class, and being tutored by Frederick Bioletti. But by May, 1933, his older brother had lost his job and been out of work for a year. Joe had to quit Cal in his senior year, give up the dream of becoming a doctor, and go to work at a winery. Life gave Joe lemons and he made limoncello. Over the course of the next seventy years, Joe was active in the wine industry as a grape concentrate driver, chemist, assistant winemaker, winemaker, winery owner, winery manager. He was a small man with a sparkle and joy that were infectious. In his later years he was kind of an elder statesman of the industry, and sought out when people wanted a perspective that stretched back to Prohibition. He was honored by the Healdsburg Museum in its first annual pioneer award dinner in 1999. His daughter Anne carries on the family tradition of pluck and endurance. Anne had a career as a chef ahead of her, having been the first female graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. But family duty called. Her beloved mother, Livia, became ill and required her to be the at-home caregiver for a number of years. Shortly after Livia passed, Joe, her "poppa" required her attentions. Joe died in 2005. Anne enjoys a full life as an instructor in Culinary Arts at the Santa Rosa Junior College, and working a number of wine competitions, so you will not get any sour grapes from Anne, just delicious wine.

Where am I getting all these first hand bits of witnessed history? Mostly I am drawing on the mountain of good source material that

Continued on page 16



Italian Swiss Colony Tasting Room at Asti

the Sonoma County Wine Library has in its oral histories. The library was started by the wine industry, and one of its missions from the beginning was to seek and record the memories of the people who grew grapes and made wine and grew the wine industry. We took as our model the oral history series that the Regional Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley had done. Millie Howie, the woman who could be called the mother of the wine library, got Ruth Teiser, the head of the California Wine Industry oral history series, to come to Healdsburg and train a cadre of volunteers to go out and record its treasures. Among this group there are interviews with Charlie Scalione, Francis Passalacqua, Don and Sylvia Sebastiani.

William Heintz, the wine historian from Sonoma, was another rich source of oral histories. He had been interviewing wine people as part of the corporate histories he did on commission. Gallo or Simi or Hanzell or Italian Swiss Colony would hire Heintz to do a corporate history of their winery. In the process of doing a corporate history, Heintz would interview a number of principals and employees in that winery. Over the years Heintz gave those tapes to the wine library and we had them transcribed and printed, an introduction written and an index made and put the typescript of that interview between covers and cataloged it and made it part of the library's collections. Carole Hicke was another who produced oral histories for us. Carole, Ruth Teiser's successor at the UC Regional Oral History Office, had done a number of oral histories for both the Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley and for Alexander Valley Winegrowers before we hired her to do several oral histories. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Jan Mettler, a public relations professional who helped convince these appellation groups to do oral histories. We admired Carole's work, and it was a lot of trouble to do our own oral histories, so the Wine Library

Associates, our support group hired Carole for a series of oral histories. The Wine Library Carole Hicke oral history series includes Davis Bynum, Saralee and Rich Kunde, Joe Rochioli, Millie Howie, George Greeott and the Sangiacomo Family. A number of other oral histories have crawled out of the vines and made their way into our collections from other sources.



George Greeott

These first person testimonies, transcribed and edited slightly to improve readability, have the power of witness. They waft sly and corny humor along with the flinty enduring spirit I have mentioned. George Greeott brags of "being a PGA member for fifty years. I actually was, but I never swung a golf club! I raised prunes, grapes and apples." Joe Rochioli has a narrative gift: every incident he relates has a setting, a dramatic arc, characters and irony. Dewey Baldochi and Ernest Gallo both describe the Prorate but from different sides of the fight. The Prorate was a scheme to buy up surplus grapes in hard times of the late 1930's, and it mightily benefitted the big Central Valley concerns, and essentially was a bad deal for North Coast growers. To hear each describe it, it has the discordant ring of truth. So come and discover the raw material of history. These oral histories lie waiting for you to read them. It's like sitting down on the porch with these people and hearing their stories.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION, THE SALVATION ARMY AND TAYMAN PARK

by Arnold Santucci

(So many people have been a part of Tayman Park's history, and yes, its contribution to the citizens and City of Healdsburg, that it would be impossible to recognize all in print.

More importantly is to realize that Tayman Park would not be what it is today were it not for the commitment put forth over more than 60 years by many Healdsburg residents.

Today, Tayman Park stands as a monument to the Founders' intentions: providing a recreation facility where the people of Healdsburg, along with family and friends, can gather to socialize and engage in healthy sport.....

W.J. (Bill) Mullgrew, Author, Tayman Park, A Historical Perspective, Fall, 1987.)

THE GREAT DEPRESSION

The Salvation Army Home for Boys and Girls at Lytton, in essence, was responsible for the City of Healdsburg incorporating the privately owned Healdsburg Country Club and its 63 acres into the City of Healdsburg's parks system. The catalyst - The Great Depression of the 1930s.

Healdsburg was not immune to the effects of the stock market crash of 1929. Herbert Hoover had just taken over as the nation's 31st president and he was only into his seventh month when the stock market started tumbling and he was unable to stop the tide of the stock market crash. And the Healdsburg Country Club, like many other social clubs, felt the effects of the Great Depression. The Country Club which started out with 116 members in 1923, by 1930, had only 25 members. The directors realized that they needed to seek financial aid to maintain the club and its facilities. The plan - they decided to mortgage the property. They turned to a local physician, Dr. Charles Weaver, who loaned the club \$9,000 for three years at a rate of 6 percent. Stipulated in the mortgage, dated March 6, 1930, was the addendum that when the mortgage became due and payable the funds were to go to the Salvation Army at Lytton to be used to build a children's hospital for the Lytton facility.

DR. CHARLES WEAVER

Charles W. Weaver, a native of Letart Falls, Ohio, practiced medicine in Healdsburg for many years with his brother-in-law, Dr. J.S. Stone. He retired from the medical profession in 1901 when he accepted the presidency of the Farmers and Mechanics Bank of Healdsburg, remaining with that bank until it was sold to the Bank of America. At the time of his death on September 10, 1931 in San Francisco he was a member of the Bank of America advisory board.

The *Sotoyome Scimitar's* issue of September 10, 1931 praised Dr. Weaver "as a successful man in all things he came in contact with"

"Dr. Weaver was a firm believer in the brotherhood of man and was always willing to extend his hand of fellowship to all with whom he came in touch ...,"

HISTORY OF THE HEALDSBURG COUNTRY CLUB

Arriving in Healdsburg in 1919 following a 40 year career in the United States Army, Col. C.E. Tayman purchased 22 acres of land and planted the acreage with fruit trees. The following year he married Mrs. Mabel Hannah Davis, the niece of Philip Hannah, the U.S. Consul General to Mexico. The newlyweds moved to Healdsburg where they established their home.

Two years later Col. Tayman and a number of prominent residents decided that Healdsburg was ready to establish and support a privately owned golf course. 116 signed up and paid an initiation fee of \$100 for man and wife and \$50 for single women making it feasible to purchase 63 acres from Jirah and Margaret Luce. The original course, laid out later that year, covered 2,922 yards. The Healdsburg Country Club, under the guidance of a number of professionals including Joe Novak, the first one, and Fred Zunino, prospered and offered a "sporty" course in a beautiful setting.

But enter the Great Depression. By taking out a mortgage to keep the course going it seems as though the club members were planning to outlast the Depression. The mortgage, dated March 6, 1930, was secured by a deed of trust and was to be paid within three

Continued on page 18



C. E. Tayman

years. However, before the note was due and payable Dr. Weaver died. It was September 10, 1931. Three Lytton Home Trustees - J.W. Sewell, R.B. Stevens and Floyd Darby - were appointed to recover the funds from the mortgage.

The Salvation Army's Home for Boys and Girls, the beneficiary of Dr. Weaver's mortgage, was anxious to receive the funds in order to proceed with the construction of a children's hospital.

So how did the City of Healdsburg become involved with this transaction?

The Salvation Army agreed to accept \$6,000 on the promissory note of \$9,000 owed by the Healdsburg Country Club. The provision was that the City of Healdsburg would buy the property from the Healdsburg Country Club to be used as a public park. The City agreed to the proposal, paying \$6010 for the property with the City Council passing an ordinance approving the transaction on January 7, 1935.

The City of Healdsburg took over responsibility for the land and the course on March 4, 1935 and two days later, by resolution the

Council established operating personnel and fees for the use of the course. In addition the City Council decreed that the park golf course was to be named after the founder and first president of the Healdsburg Golf Course, Col. C.E. Tayman.

The Fees for playing a round of golf in 1935 were:

- One round of 9 holes .25c
- One round of unlimited play .50c
- One month of unlimited play. \$5
- One year of unlimited play for bonafide residents of Healdsburg \$12
- One year of unlimited play for non-residents of Healdsburg \$15.



Colonel and Mabel Tayman

Continued on page 19

So the Salvation Army did the citizens of Healdsburg a huge favor when the Army proposed that the City of Healdsburg buy the golf course at a discounted price and make it a part of the city's park system. The Tayman Park Golf Course, as a city owned facility, has been enjoyed by the residents of Healdsburg and the surrounding area and many vacationers and visitors since 1935 -- 75 years.

THE SALVATION ARMY AT LYTTON.

Acquired in 1860 by Captain William H. Litton, the property at Lytton, over the years, became a plush resort hotel featuring the waters from the two springs - the soda springs located about a half a mile from the hotel site and the seltzer or sweet water located by the north gate - a military academy for boys from the Bay Area families and a sanitarium. Then in 1904 it was purchased by the Salvation Army. Under the leadership of Captain Wilfred C. Bourne and his wife, Alice Smith Bourne, the Salvation Army took over the premises establishing the site as an orphanage and a school for boys and girls.

The Bournes arrived at Lytton on October, 1904 with only \$21 and with sixteen children including their young son and daughter and a "foster" daughter, Vera Nelligan. Prior to their arrival at Lytton they had been stationed at Amity, Colorado where they operated the Cherry Tree Orphanage. This facility had been closed because the severe weather prevented the children there from carrying on a self sufficient lifestyle.

During their tenure at Lytton, 1904 to 1916, the Bournes were parents to approximately 1500 children, who, technically, were not all orphans but either were abandoned or could not be cared for by their parents. The Bournes established the day by day program for the children, setting the tone of the facility for the next 54 years.

Captain Bourne admonished his charges: "Every man shares in 24 hours of the day. Devote 8 hours to work, 8 hours to sleep and 8 hours to play. But his own be done when the money to support the whole 24 is in sight."

The main building, the focal point of the property even today, in 1920 was the scene of a huge fire which burned for three days. The cause? It was presumed it was the result of an electrical short. The imposing building which housed the girls' dormitory, offices, kitchen and sewing room was reopened in 1921. The cottages located on the north side of the property were used to house the boys. The boys, while the main building was being rebuilt, gave up their quarters to the girls and were housed in tents.



Alice Bourne



Wilfred Bourne

The Lytton facility, during those 54 years, was operated as an orphanage at first, then a farm for boys and girls and finally as an industrial school. And it was always self sufficient, having its own grammar school, the William Booth School, gymnasium, swimming pool and plenty of room to roam and participate in "farming."

The Lytton facility became an integral part of the Healdsburg community, with the students, upon completing the eighth grade, attending the Healdsburg High School. Many of the Lytton students

Continued on page 20

Continued from page 11

took part in the school activities, especially the sports program. The high school students from Healdsburg would often trek up to Lytton on Saturdays to play in Lytton's gymnasium since the Healdsburg school did not have any such facility.

In 1959 the Lytton facility became an Adult Rehabilitation Center for men. In the Spring of that year Captain George Duplaine and Brigadier Eldin Tobin, established a retreat for men from the Salvation Army's centers in San Francisco, Sacramento and Oakland Rehabilitation Centers. From that "retreat", the Lytton facility became a reality. The adult rehabilitation program for drugs and alcohol dependency at Lytton is supported by sale of clothing, household items, furniture, books, bric a brac and vehicles donated by North Bay residents and sold at the Army's thrift and family stores. Admission to the program is voluntary and services are provided without cost to the participants. A trained counseling staff facilitates the program.

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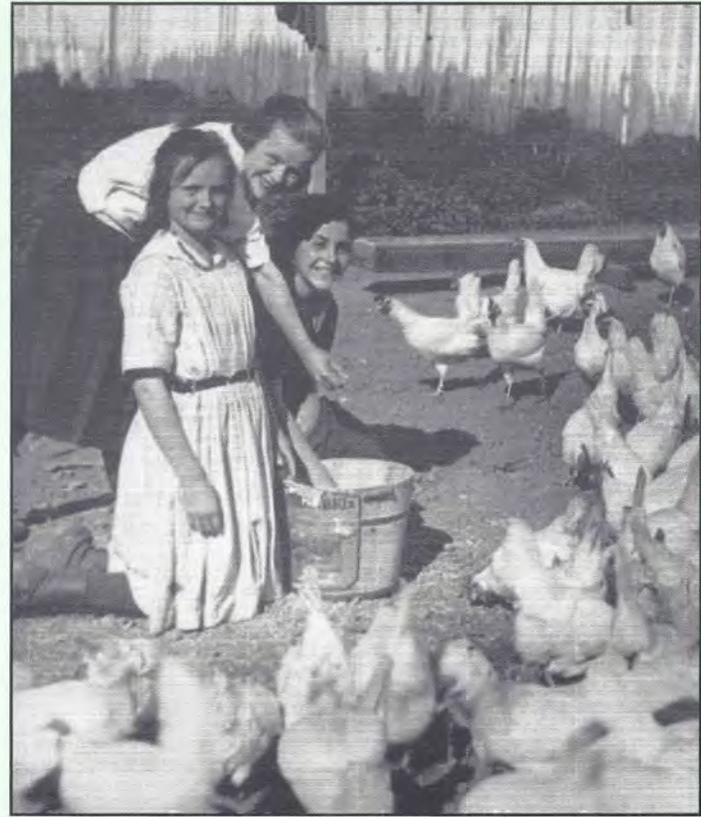
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Children and chickens at Lytton