

RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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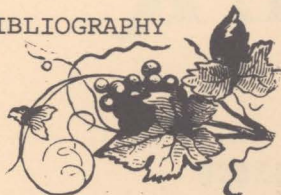
The Grape & Hop Industries In Early Sonoma County



GRAPE PICKERS IN THE SIMI VINEYARDS
FITCH MOUNTAIN IN BACKGROUND
1910

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WINE INDUSTRY IN CALIFORNIA AND SONOMA COUNTY

Wild grapes were native to the western part of the United States, but they were not often eaten by the Indians because of their bitterness. Wine grapes were first cultivated in the late 1870's by the Franciscan Padres that established the missions in early California. These vines were used by the priests to make wine for sacramental and medicinal purposes as well as for pleasure. The Padres imported these first vines from Europe and the first winery was established at Mission San Gabriel in 1771.

Beginning with these first mission vineyards the mission wine industry grew so quickly that by 1824 all importation of wine was forbidden. When the Mexican Government took over California in 1834 it secularized the mission system and nearly all vineyards went into neglect. The single exception was General Mariano Vallejo in Sonoma. After taking over the old mission vineyards there, Vallejo continued to export wine and did a good trade with the Russians at Fort Ross, although the Russians had their own vineyards at the Fort.

The wine industry in California revived with the arrival of the Euro-American settlers in the late 1840's and 1850's. Again, these vines planted by the newcomers were imported from Europe.

It is said that grape-growing and wine-making in the 1850's was not particularly profitable and the wines made during this period were of poor quality owing to mis-

treated grapes or premature sale of the wine.¹ By the 1860's however, commercial grapes-growing had reached sizable proportions in the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas and vineyards were multiplying in Sonoma and Napa counties.

In 1855 there were 24,800 bearing grape vines in Sonoma County, but by 1876 the industry had so grown that over 2.5 million gallons of wine were produced.²

One of the earlier settlers, Colonel Agoston Haraszthy, had a great deal to do with the expansion of the wine industry during this 20 year period. Col. Haraszthy, who settled in the Sonoma area in 1856, made a trip to Europe in 1861 and returned with 100,000 vines of 14,000 different varieties. Many of these European varieties were distributed throughout California. Col. Haraszthy is also credited with being the first to grow vines without irrigation³ and to use redwood to build wine casks.

The introduction of foreign varieties and legislation beneficial to the industry caused an upsurge in wine-making after the Civil War. By 1870 the entire California industry was worth over 30 million dollars, and San Francisco was a major center for wine export.

From 1870 to 1874 there was an influx of new grape vineyardists many of whom made their own wine. These growers for the most part are said to have produced a lesser quality wine. Healdsburg's first winery dates from this period, established in 1873 by John Chambaud near the corner of Front and Hudson Streets.

Difficulties began for many of these new growers in the late 1870's when a depression in the industry forced many of the smaller vineyardists out of business. Then, in 1879, a species of lice known as "Phylloxera" (pronounced: fi-lox-era), which eats the grape vine root, began to appear in California, and by the 1880's had spread all over the State. The pest seemed to have been centered in Sonoma County, but this may have been due to the fact that Sonoma County was by this time the premier grape-growing region in California.⁴ Although all growers were plagued by the louse, Sonoma County vineyardists were not hit as hard as many southern California growers, who were virtually wiped out. Some attribute this difference to the rich Sonoma County soil which¹ supposedly counteracted the root damage.



FERMENTING ROOM AT SIMI WINERY CIRCA 1910

Early methods of protecting the vines from the louse were ineffective, but finally progress was made by grafting wild native vines from the eastern and midwestern United States which were resistant to Phylloxera to the planted European vines. Through trial and error the proper combination for both resistance and grape yield was found, and the Phylloxera plague, commonly referred to by locals as "the Flux", was defeated. Many of these new hybrid vines were exported to Europe, which was also infested with Phylloxera. Many European vines today originated in California.

By 1890 the growth of the California wine industry had cut into the European market, and many European winemakers, especially Italians, began to immigrate to California.

Although the price of grapes fluctuated locally (in 1888 local newspapers pleaded with growers not to rip out their vines), wine-making and grape-growing in Sonoma County was lucrative and encouraged the newcomers. During some low grape-yield years growers could demand their own prices. In high-yield years the local wineries benefited.

A list of Russian River area wineries in 1896 includes: Simi, Asti, California Wine Association at Windsor (a cooperative), Chase, Finlayson, Lone Pine, Gunn, Fredson, Pohley, Cunningham, Schmidt, Gagliardi, Passalacqua, Reiners, Paxton, Wagner, Bloch, Scatena, Gobbi, Holst, Lorenzini, Michelsen, Whitton, and Hood.

An estimated 25,000 acres of grapes were planted in Sonoma County in 1900. Each acre had an average of 680 vines, totaling approximately 17 million county vines, yielding close to 10 million gallons of wine. A grower at this time received from \$10 to \$20 a ton for his grapes, and one year-old wine sold for 10¢ to 20¢ per gallon.

From the 1880's until the Prohibition era Sonoma County and especially the Russian River and Sonoma Valleys had the largest grape-growing industry and the greatest number of wineries in the State. The Russian River area did, and still has, preeminence in county grape yield.

In 1913 the price of grapes had risen to \$15 to \$25 a ton. A county brochure

of that year estimated that there were 150 wineries in Sonoma County producing about 11 million gallons of wine. This generated an annual income of over 2 million dollars.

Grape picker's wages, however, were another matter. In 1903 a picker made about \$1.50 per ton. An exceptional picker might pick as much as two tons per day, but the average was about one ton. Not surprisingly, there was often a shortage of pickers at harvest time, and local high school students were often recruited.

Electricity entered the wine industry in 1904 and gradually revolutionized the crushing, pressing, and bottling of the crop.

It might be mentioned that the number of private labels in Sonoma County was lessened because of the influence of the large California Wine Association in the Healdsburg area, which was a cooperative. Private label wineries flourished in Napa County where there was no such cooperative.⁴

A dark cloud loomed over the entire wine industry, however, in the form of a growing movement of Prohibitionists. As early as 1908 Healdsburg winegrowers were organizing to fight prohibition. When prohibition was enacted in 1919 the wineries suffered immediately, but the grapegrowers actually benefited. From 1920 to 1924 the local grape crop was shipped by rail through the Pacific Fruit Exchange to other parts of the state or country and the grape market actually rose to \$200 a ton! The rise in the market was only temporary and from 1924 on the price of grapes steadily plummeted.

Many of the wineries had essentially shut down operations during this period. Some barely managed to keep running by selling wine for sacramental, or religious purposes. One should never underestimate the amount of covert wine-making and selling that went on in Sonoma County. Bootlegging was a widespread fact according to several reliable sources, and sustained some wineries until prohibition was lifted in 1933. Many of the smaller wineries disappeared during this era, never to return again.

In 1936 Sonoma County still produced more dry wine than any other county in the nation and had 101 bonded wineries (compared to 64 in Santa Clara and 54 in Napa). By 1935 the county had recovered sufficiently to have about 20,000 acres of wine

grapes, which was third in the state.

By 1939 the grape acreage in the county was at about 21,000, and the market price for grapes was \$16 a ton, the same price as that paid in 1900.

Figures for 1968 show a drastic decrease in grape acreage for Sonoma County: only 12,764 bearing acres, producing 30,510 tons. A Healdsburg publication in 1967 states that prunes were by far the most important industry in the Healdsburg area since 1924 (the same year that prohibition really hit the grapegrowers).

This decrease is understandable considering the market price per ton for grapes which was about \$133 in 1968. When the increased price of land in 1968 is added in, the profit margin shrinks.

The recent explosion of the Sonoma County wine industry is best seen by comparing the 1968 figures with the 1981 Sonoma County Agricultural Crop Report. Total grape acreage in 1981 was 28,469, producing 80,676 tons at \$590.34 per ton. In 1981 the almost 48 million dollar Sonoma County grape industry far exceeds any other crop (apples run second at nearly 9 million in gross value).

Almost 160 years have passed since the Mission fathers planted the first grape vines in Sonoma. If figures are any indication, the vines are here to stay.

INDIANS AND EARLY WINE-MAKING

During the period of Euro-American settlement in the 1850's, many laws were enacted regarding the sale and use of wine and liquor. California Indians were put to work making wine, but were not allowed to buy or drink liquor. Four months of hard labor was the price for breaking this law. Rancho owners supported the law. By dispensing liquor to the Indians only on the Rancho, they felt that the Indians would stay to work.

The Indians had their own method of wine-making according to an observer, Edwin Bryant, circa 1840: "Four posts were erected, each 4 feet high, forming a square 2½ feet each way. Over the tops of the posts a raw cowhide was fastened, hair down, with considerable sag in the middle. Into this went the grapes, followed by an Indian who mashed them with his feet. The juice was poured into a tub or leather bag, left a few weeks, or two or three months to ferment and then was bottled."⁵

THE SONOMA COUNTY HOP INDUSTRY

Hops were first planted in Sonoma County in the 1870's. The 1877 County Atlas lists 150 acres of hops planted in the county in 1876, with a production of 15,000 pounds.

By 1900 approximately 2,000 county acres were planted in hops, and the average yield was 625 tons per acre, dried.

In 1909 it was asserted that the "Russian River Valley was known as one of the greatest hop-raising sections of the west", and that industry employed "thousands"⁶ of workers during the picking season.

In 1913 Sonoma County was responsible for nearly one-half of all the hops grown in California, amounting to 5,000 acres. One-third of the hops grown in the county were grown in the vicinity of Healdsburg. Until 1913 the average price of hops was 14¢ a pound.

Only one variety of hops was grown in the county. It was known as the English Cluster, or commercially as "Sonoma County

Highest Grade". The hops were planted by the roots, three roots of the "hill", and 680 hills to the acre, in March or April of the year. New plants reached full production during their second year and were thereafter perennial.

Hop poles, 14 to 18 feet long were set in rows 8 feet apart at intervals of 36 to 48 feet. Trellis wire was strung from the poles and in early spring the vines were trained to the wires. The hops were picked by hand in September and hauled to the kiln in burlap sacks.

In 1939 there were 2,348 acres of hops planted county-wide, with a 3 million pound yield sold at 22¢ a pound. That created an income of approximately \$650,000. At this time hop pickers were recruited from other parts of the state at harvest time. There is no doubt that picking hops was a difficult, hot, and dirty job, and in the late 1930's paid the picker only about 1.5¢ a pound. Further, the hops had to be cleaned thoroughly of leaves and stems before they were bagged.

According to Milton Brandt of Healdsburg some of the most familiar names associated with hop-growing in the county were Grace, Jones, Buzzman, Steele, Slusser, Cameron, Woods, Ballard, Lytton, Richardson, Rochioli, and Wohler.

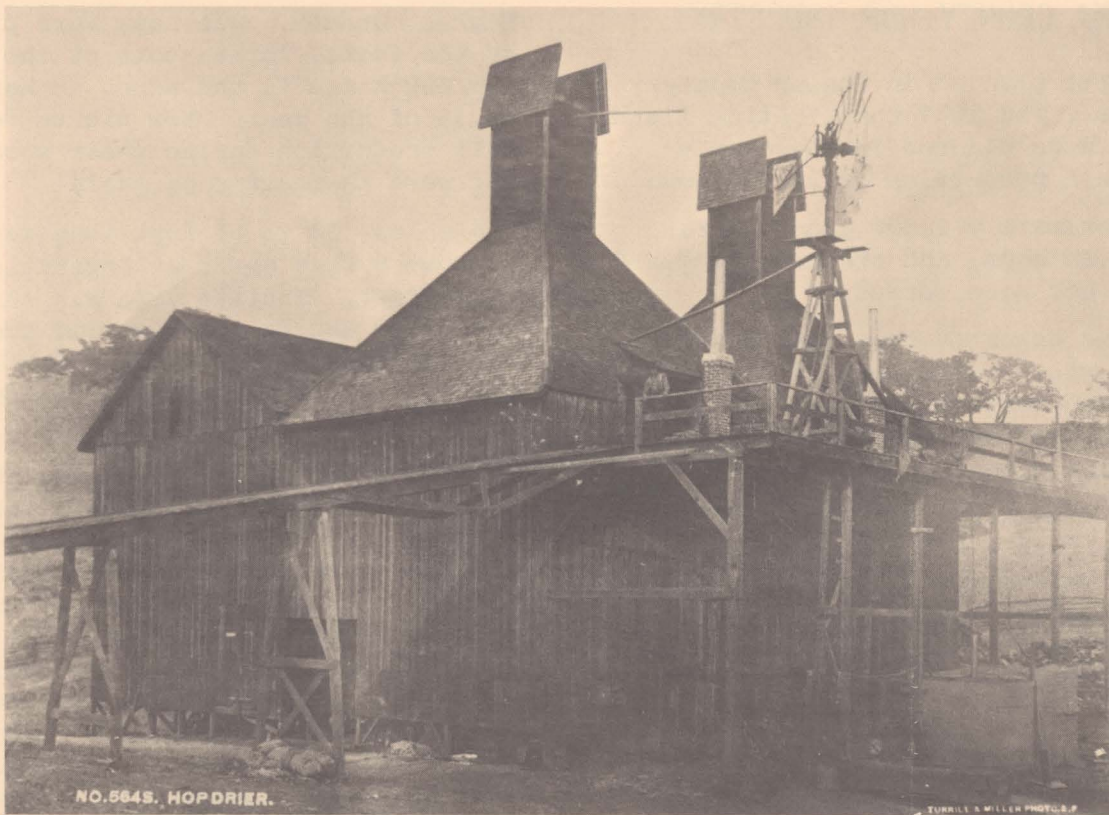
Calamity struck the Sonoma County hop industry in the mid-1940's with the appearance of a fungus called the "Downie" mildew. Although efforts were made to combat the fungus, lack of knowledge and the local fog only aggravated the disease. By this time Oregon had taken most of the hop market and the Sonoma County industry withered and died. The spores that caused the fungus were airborne, and according to Milt Brandt, could be seen settling on the wings of an airplane flying above the hop fields.

One may still see an occasional hop vine growing wild by the side of a rural Russian River Valley road, a reminder of the years when hops ranked with grapes as a major industry in Healdsburg.



HOP-PICKING NEAR HEALDSBURG
CIRCA 1900





WORKING HOP KILN AT NALLEY RANCH, WINDSOR
CIRCA 1910

F.O. BRANDT BREWERY HEALDSBURG, CALIFORNIA

(as printed in "The Glass Blower", publ.
by The Northwestern Bottle Collectors Assoc.,
May, 1970)

The pine and redwood boxes were branded "F.O.B.", packed with bottles of sparkling beverage and shipped by wagon to all corners of Sonoma County in the Gay '90's. To popular resorts such as The Geysers and Skaggs Hot Springs, to Pop McCrays at Preston Bridge and the U.S. Hotel in Cloverdale, and to saloons everywhere such as the one at Trenton in the Olivet district near Santa Rosa - to all of these the F.O.B. brand was familiar. It denoted the brewery of F.O. Brandt in Healdsburg, and the bottles contained a fine local brand of beer.

Frederick Otto Brandt had known beer all his life. Born in Germany, and migrating to Green Bay, Wisconsin as a young man, he finally came west to Healdsburg, California in the 1880's. He moved his family into a large Victorian-style home on University St. between Matheson and North and erected his brewery on the same property. By 1895 F.O. Brandt was operating in full swing. Steam beer was a specialty, and this delicate product had to be delivered in small

barrels to its destination the same day as brewed - refrigeration being what it was in those days. Brandt's three sons, August, Frederick, and William each became actively engaged in the prospering business and helped it grow.

Having a large facility, Brandt eventually decided to undertake the bottling of beer from other breweries in addition to what he produced himself. The bulk beer arrived in Healdsburg by rail in large oak barrels, and his amber bottles began to carry the labels of such companies as the Buffalo Brewery of Sacramento and the National Brewery in San Francisco. By 1898 the plant was also called the Healdsburg Soda & Bottling Works. Carbonic gas generators were busy making the "pop" for Brandt's line of flavored cream sodas, and heavy glass siphon bottles with the company name etched on the side were filled at the works for "seltzer" lovers.

The manufacture of ice had become such an important function of the company by 1908 that its name was changed to Healdsburg Bottling and Ice Works, F.O. Brandt, Propr. In

1910, however, the elder Brandt's health began to fail and by 1911 Brandt Brothers were listed as proprietors of the Healdsburg Bottling and Ice Company. When Frederick Sr. passed away in 1918, and Prohibition finally reached "immune" Healdsburg, the old "brewery" completely died. The structure did continue to serve as an ice plant and creamery for several years but by 1935 it had been completely dismantled.

F.O. Brandt's embossed beer bottles were blown in San Francisco in a variety of sizes and styles. The split or $\frac{1}{2}$ pint bottle is an uncommon, shouldered variety in amber and was made about the turn of the century. The crown top of the bottles was fitted with a "Lightning" stopper. Fired into the top of the porcelain stopper is the emblem of one of Brandt's bulk suppliers, the National Brewing Co. - an eagle in flight clutching shield and arrows. Other bottles embossed "F.O. Brandt, Healdsburg, Cal." are the heavy, pint-sized aqua soda bottles, and a later crown cap, aqua, flat-bottomed ginger ale bottle of about 9 ounce capacity.

[Brandt beer and soda bottles are still unearthed all over Sonoma County, and especially the Healdsburg area, where many locals collect them. - ed.]

THE "RECORDER" IS LATE AND WE NEED YOUR HELP

As our faithful readership has probably noticed, this issue is very late. This was due to the large amount of work involved in assembling the current Museum display and initiating the Healdsburg Historical Resource Survey [see MUSEUM NEWS]. As editor I apologize and assure the readership that the Fall issue will be forthcoming.

The "Recorder" currently has a staff of one (namely me). I am grateful to those who have contributed articles to past issues, but we need more material and more staff!!!

In order to maintain the quality of our quarterly in the tradition of past editors, I need your help. If you enjoy reading the "Recorder", perhaps you can help us get it out on time. If you like to read, write, type, do lay-out, or talk to people, you could solve our problem. Call Hannah at 433-4717 right away.

MUSEUM NEWS

It has been a hectic, but productive time at the Langhart Museum this summer. Blood, sweat, and tears aside, the current Museum Exhibit entitled: "THE FRUITS OF OUR LABOR: WINERIES, BREWERIES, AND AGRICULTURE IN EARLY SONOMA COUNTY" went up in mid-July.

This show focuses on the historic hop and grape-growing, beer and wine industries in the county and particularly the Russian River Valley. Outstanding features of the display include a working diorama of a hop kiln complex, a 1915 winery office, and many rare objects from early wineries and breweries, including what is nearly a complete collection of early barrel-making tools. The following wonderful people loaned or donated items for this show which closes November 12th.

GEORGE GREEOTT	WILLIAM AURADOU
FRANCIS RITZ	WALTER WILSON
EDWARD (JACK) BEEDIE	FRANCIS BRANERN
WINDSOR FARM BUREAU	DON DUVANDER
WILLIAM BEEDIE	ROSE & NIELS BENSON
FRANCIS RITZ	VIRGINIA TUSI
DWIGHT RICHARDS	TOM CITRO
CLYDE TUCKER	JACK TROTTER
MILTON BRANDT	BOB JONES
CHARLES SCALIONE	LAWRENCE BIAGI

THE HISTORIC SURVEY IS OFF AND RUNNING. After having recently been awarded a \$14,000 grant through the California Office of Historic Preservation to conduct a survey of historic structures and sites in a 76 square mile area surrounding Healdsburg, the volunteer task force has been at work since the beginning of July. The two eminent consultants that were hired to conduct the survey, Prof. Dennis Harris, and architect Dan Peterson are directing the local citizen volunteers who will make up the matching portion of the grant through volunteer labor. The completed survey will provide invaluable historic information regarding the homes, sites, and features of our area and will also undoubtedly put some of our historic structures on the National Register of Historic Places, which opens the possibility of tax credits and restoration grants for the owners of these structures. If you would like to help call Frances Etchell at 433-6870.

THE QUESTION IS: WHAT AREN'T WE DOING? The Museum is still conducting the Healdsburg newspaper indexing project, and now we are serving as a resource center for the Historic Resource Survey of old buildings and sites in Healdsburg. We would also like to revive the Oral History Project if only we had enough volunteers. Each of these projects is vital, and none can wait. Won't you consider a more active role in the Museum and Historical Society projects?

DO YOU LIKE TO:

- READ NEWSPAPERS?
- TALK TO OLDTIMERS?
- DO RESEARCH?
- WRITE ARTICLES?
- TYPE?
- HYPE?
- DO LAYOUT?



WE ARE CALLING ON YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

NEW PERMANENT DISPLAY The materials needed for the new permanent exhibit which illustrates hunting and firearm use in 1870 Healdsburg have finally been gathered. The key pieces, as it turns out, were a good pair of men's boots from that era (seems most men wore their boots right into the ground!), and a male mannequin with moveable joints which was custom-built for the Museum by commercial artist Michael Stiles. The exhibit will go up during the next change of displays.

ARTIFACT DONATIONS since our last publication have been received from the following:

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| MR. & MRS. JOHN MUIR | ETHYL OAKLEAF |
| ROSE BENSON | PERRY BEESON |
| LOUISE PALMIERI | ROY LOWE |
| BARBARA SCHREIBER | IRMA CUNEO |
| MARCY MEESE | JUNE JONES |
| LARRY LE GALLEE | WILLIAM BEEDIE |
| THELMA PITTS | |

THE MUSEUM IS STILL LOOKING FOR certain hard-to-find artifacts: a Persian or Oriental carpet circa 1890, a glass-front bookcase circa 1870, and almost anything to do with early wineries. Look in your attics or basements for a good income tax write-off.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTES

POSTER CONTEST A SUCCESS The Historical Society poster contest for first through twelfth graders even surprised us with its popularity. On several sub-categories centered around "Historic Healdsburg" the judging panel received 460 entries. The poster contest was the brain-child of Historical Society director, Donald Loveless, who carried the whole project off. The winning posters were displayed at the Edwin Langhart Museum and the lobby of Healdsburg City Hall. All entries were displayed at the Future Farmers of America fair. The winners were also presented to the general membership and received their cash awards at the July Historical Society meeting. The winners are as follows:

GRAND PRIZE	\$50	ED BURTON	10th gr.
			HHS
FIRST PRIZE	\$25	WENDY HEITZ	4th gr.
			HES
FIRST PRIZE	\$25	SARAH HOWELL	5th gr.
			HES
FIRST PRIZE	\$25	BRENDA HILL	12th gr.
			HHS
SECOND PRIZE	\$15	CHRISTIAN BROOKS	1st gr.
			FMES
SECOND PRIZE	\$15	CAROLINE LOTSPEICH	5th gr.
			HES
SECOND PRIZE	\$15	RENIE DONMAN	9th gr.
			HHS
THIRD PRIZE	\$10	FRED REA	2nd gr.
			WS
THIRD PRIZE	\$10	JODY GEHRMAN	5th gr.
			HES
THIRD PRIZE	\$10	FRANK EDGERLY	11th gr.
			RLA

Honorable mention and a \$5 check went to Thong Nguyen, a third-grader from Fitch Mountain School, and Phaedra Wolden, a seventh grader from Healdsburg Junior High.

The judges had a hard time judging 460 entries, but they divided it into three grade categories: grades 1-4, grades 5-8, and grades 9-12. The judging panel this year were artists Dennis Hill and Rosinda Holmes, Rio Lindo Academy history teacher Donald Loveless, and Historical Society Board members Billie Raust and Darla Meeker.

The grand prize winning poster done by Ed Burton was framed by the Society and will be on display and kept permanently by the Edwin Langhart Museum. We hope that this contest, which received so much favorable comment, will be an annual event.

SOMETHING NEW AT THE NEXT GENERAL

MEETING The next general meeting will be held Thursday, September 23, at the Healdsburg Community Center, 131 Matheson St., at 7:30 p.m. (see flyer). This is going to be an exceptionally interesting meeting because we will have many speakers. It will be an experiment in group oral history.

Because we need to gather information about the historic building and businesses in downtown Healdsburg we will tape record a discussion between all of you Historical Society members who remember so much. No one will be forced to volunteer information and everyone, even new residents are invited to come and learn more about their historic commercial district.

If you think you don't know much, come anyway. You'll be surprised how much you remember about the stores and businesses and the people who ran them.

If this meeting is a success we will hold other informal discussions about other subjects. If you know others who are long-time residents of Healdsburg, make sure that they attend.

Refreshments, as always, will be served, and people of all ages are welcome.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE LIBRARY

The Museum already has a fine collection of historical reference books, but recently the Historical Society Board has discussed creating a reference section at the Museum for things such as antique farms tools, dolls, toys, furniture, architecture, etc. The public would be welcome to use this specialty reference section and it would aid the Museum greatly in identifying and learning more about its collection.

Would you like to know the best method for cleaning old silver, preserving your family photographs, what the proper name for Aunt Sally's old rocker is, how old the bottles you found are, how to make authentic period costumes?

We are asking for donations of these types of specialty reference books that relate to historical objects. The Historical Society will also be purchasing some of these books.

Editor and Lay-out: Hannah Clayborn
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY: EDWIN LANGHART MUSEUM

AT OUR LAST GENERAL MEETING on July 22, Milton Brandt spoke to our members about his family's famous brewery that supplied beer, and later soda and ice, to Sonoma County. Milt also gave a very interesting account of the brewing process itself, and a brief history of the hop industry in Sonoma County. (see article on F.O. Brandt Brewery this issue)

WELCOME TO NEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS :

PATRICIA BENZMILLER
ROBERT W. CURTIS
ETHEL HALVERSON
JAYE MILLER
ELIZABETH MORANDA
FRANK W. NORMAN
ELMER & JARETTA SWANSON
DOUGLAS WHITE

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