



# RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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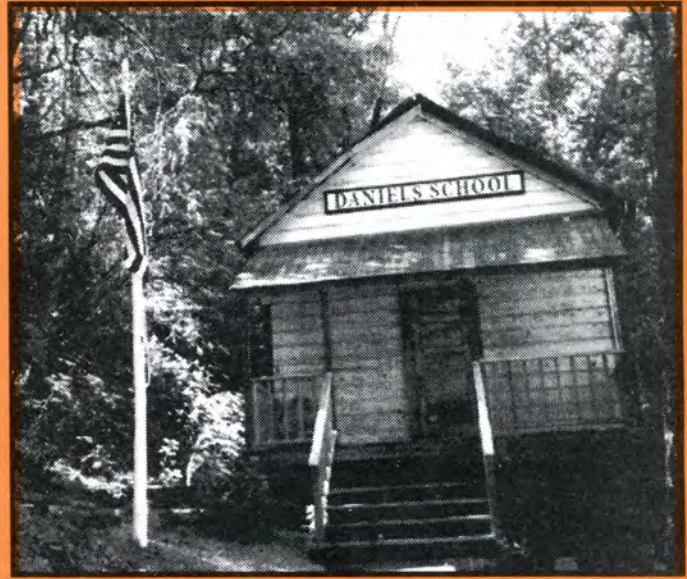
An Official Publication of the Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society



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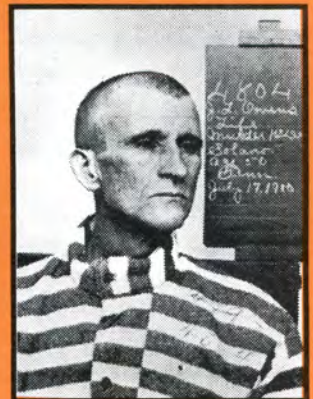
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### RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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

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October is Family History Month and a number of our articles focus on this theme.

Holly Hoods with Katherine Powell Teraji tell us the many rewards of researching family history. And our new contributor, Jeremy Nichols, a retired engineer presently residing in Santa Rosa, recalls a fascinating account of a murder involving one of his ancestors.

The logging and lumber industry was an economic factor in the Healdsburg area from the early days, and Curator Marie Djordjevich brings us an overview of the very early days of the industry plus a history of a company still in existence, the A.F. Stevens Lumber Co. (now the Healdsburg Lumber Company). I recall that in the 1950s many lumber mills were

established here and flourished and brought economic strength to the area.

June Maher Smith shares with us a way of life long gone in her well researched article, "The Restoration of the Daniels School," a project that Floramay Cootes Caletti, an alumnus of the school, has spearheaded.

And Milt Brandt, a frequent and welcomed contributor of "I Remember" Articles, tells us about Ring Spearing and his involvement in the sport.

Each time we try to include as much diversity as possible in our quarterly periodicals and we believe that our Autumn 2000 lives up to that goal.

Arnold Santucci  
Editor.

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## HISTORY



LIVES!

Ransom Powell

## “FAMILY HISTORY MONTH” AT THE HEALDSBURG MUSEUM

By Holly Hoods

(with Katherine Powell Teraji)

October is designated official “Family History Month.” One of the most gratifying aspects of my job at the Healdsburg Museum is assisting people with family history research. Genealogy has become one of the fastest growing hobbies in the United States. I estimate that 60% of the people who do research at the Healdsburg Museum are seeking family history information. So far, during the past year, descendants have researched the following local family names: Latimer, Heald, Fitch, Alexander, Matheson, Foppiano, Parker, Frampton, Carson, Sansbury, Robinson, Wieberts, Wall, Walling, Belluomini, DeGeus, Bourdens, Beeson, McDonnell, Holloway, Thistle, Poor, Smith, Stevens, Gillespie, Baker, Norton, Coffman, and Garvin.

In honor of “Family History Month,” this issue of the *Russian River Recorder* is featuring articles that have a local family focus. Katherine Teraji, a descendant of pioneer Healdsburg resident, Ransom Powell, wrote to share her experience about the rewards of doing family history. Katherine and her mother have made several trips to Healdsburg. Katherine writes:

“I have had so much enjoyment out of my discoveries in Healdsburg and the whole experience of digging up family history there--I can't really begin to adequately express how much it has meant to me, how fun it has been, and how much fulfillment I have gained from it. It has led to a trail of all sorts of other discoveries in



The Ransom Powell Home at 644 West Grant Street

my life: I feel like I should write a paper or an essay about it, or a book! Because I came to Healdsburg and was given information by the Museum which led to my discovery of the family plot at the cemetery and two houses built by Ransom Powell, I have met all kinds of people I would never have otherwise met, including the current owner of the second house built by Ransom. This man is such a dear and interesting person who has lived in the house his entire lifetime (since birth), and offered us free run of the property and tours of the grounds anytime we'd like, and said, “Granddaughters of Ransom Powell are welcome here anytime!” He showed me where the horses and wagons used to be tethered and told me all about the history of the house. I have never had so much success in my research as I have had in Healdsburg, and I owe much of my thanks for this to the Healdsburg Museum and its staff.

“Not only that, but because of the information I gathered in Healdsburg and the photos I took, I have now met relatives I never had met before and never even knew existed before, and this all led to my traveling to Phoenix, Arizona and having a fascinating visit with a cousin I had never met. Now he and I are sharing information and writing to each other. He has fantastic photographs from the 19th century of my ancestors that I would never have seen had I not gone to see him in Phoenix: incredible tintypes and daguerreotypes of my relatives and ancestors that his side of the family inherited, not mine.

He's making copies for me!

“That trip led to more information which led to another trip: this time to Colorado, where I discovered a family reunion was being held (all people whom I had never met), which included a journey onto what is now a wildlife preserve that is off-limits to the general public. So the land once owned by my pioneer ancestors is pristine, preserved and gorgeous Colorado countryside. We got a ranger to let us in, and we traveled by dirt road deep into the wilderness, where we eventually hiked up to my great great grandmother's grave, which stands alone on a windswept mountainside under a centuries-old oak tree. We stood near the old homestead of my pioneer ancestors and looked down upon the hand-carved-by-her-sons gravestone of Mary Jane Keeton Marlow (5/7/1827 to 10/12/1907). Her sons had carved a beautiful heart into the stone. It is very moving, because it's still so well preserved, yet it is so rough-hewn, so clearly done by hand by those who loved her. She is the woman in the John Wayne/Dean Martin movie called “The Sons of Katie Elder.” She is Katie Elder. To stand there at her gravesite with 35 of her descendants gathered around in this breathtaking Colorado setting was an unforgettable experience.

I find that the more I discover, the more there is to discover. . . .”

(See more History Lives! on page 4)

## HISTORY



LIVES!

## “AN EXTREMELY QUIET AND PEACEFUL MAN”

### JOHN L. OWENS AND THE MURDER OF DANIEL WILSON

By Jeremy Nichols

We may never know exactly why Healdsburger John L. Owens murdered that “harmless farmer,” Daniel Wilson down in Suisun Valley. Was it really because Wilson had hired Owens's wife as housekeeper? Was robbery the motive? Did John and Lucy fight all the time, as some thought, and why were their two sons always in trouble with the law? Did Healdsburg officials provide the murderer with an alibi by stating he had not left town? Why did so many prominent townspeople sign a petition asking for his parole?

When I began my research into the Owens family in Healdsburg, my intent was simply to fill in some gaps in the family of my maternal grandmother, Kittie Brown. Her eldest brother, James Buchanan Brown, had moved to California and married an Owens girl. It was my study of this family that led me to Healdsburg.

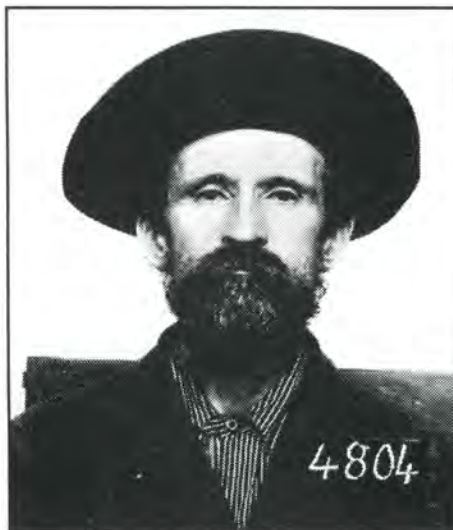
### Background of Family

John Leandrew Owens, a Tennessean by birth, came to Healdsburg in the 1880s with his parents, Thomas A. and Nancy P. (Rice) Owens. John became a barber and lived for a time in Colusa County where he married Lucy Hansard, the daughter of John Westerfield and Mary Jane (Lane) Hansard. Later, John moved back to Healdsburg with Lucy and their three children, Raymond, Leatha, and Jesse Marvin. Forgoing the barber trade, John worked as a farm hand and general laborer. His employers included the Healdsburg pioneer and farmer, Ransom Powell, attorney C.H. Pond, and Dr.

Burke at Lytton Springs.

In the summer of 1896, Lucy Owens went down to Suisun Valley in Solano County. The Owens family had lived in this area before moving to Healdsburg, and Lucy's brother was there. Lucy went to work for a fruit rancher, Daniel T. Wilson, whom she had known for some years. Wilson had separated from his wife and hired Lucy as housekeeper. This left John Owens alone in Healdsburg with three children and little or no income.

By October, John had convinced himself that his problems were Wilson's fault. “Wilson had taken his wife away from him,” as he later said; the wrong must be redressed. On October 9, 1896, Owens borrowed a cart from his father



John L. Owens

and a horse from a neighbor, James Lane. He loaded his 10-gauge, double-barreled, muzzle-loading shotgun with homemade shot and set out for Suisun Valley.

Arriving at Wilson's ranch during the evening of the 9th, John L. Owens waited alone in the dark autumn evening until Daniel Wilson appeared at his door, then fired once and turned away. As Wilson lay bleeding in his own doorway, Owens returned to his cart and rode back to Healdsburg. He returned the horse and cart and said nothing of where he had been.

### A Crime Committed

The murder created a sensation in Suisun Valley. A three-day inquest was held at the Solano County Courthouse. Suspicion initially

landed on Lucy Owens, her brother, John Hansard, and her brother-in-law, Robert Sparks, and the three were arrested. The proposed motive was robbery, because Wilson had talked of receiving a considerable sum of money for his fruit crop. However, when no further evidence turned up, the suspects were released. Lucy Owens returned to Healdsburg to live with her husband and the investigation stalled. Even a \$500 reward offered by Governor Budd and another one of \$200 offered by Sheriff Rush didn't bring results.

When news of the murder arrived in Healdsburg, several townspeople knew that John Owens had been out of town. They knew that Mrs. Owens had gone to work in Solano County and must have wondered where John went, but chose to ask no questions. Consequently, when Solano County Sheriff B.F. Rush inquired of Healdsburg officials as to the doings of Lucy Owens's husband, he was assured that the man had not left town. Sheriff Rush remained unconvinced, but other Solano County officials persuaded him to drop Owens as a suspect.

In the meantime, the two Owens boys, Raymond and Jessie Marvin, came regularly to the attention of Sonoma County authorities, as reported in the local newspapers. In 1898, at age 13, Raymond was sentenced to twenty-five days in jail for disturbing a (religious) tent meeting. He got no pity from the *Healdsburg Tribune*, which dryly noted that, “If they can't behave themselves, they should stay away.” The next year, brother Marvin, age 11, was arrested for stealing a bicycle in Santa Rosa and selling it to a Healdsburg second-hand dealer. Finally in 1900, Lucy Owens sent both boys to the Sheriff. She said that they were incorrigible and asked that they be sent to reform school. Instead, the court sent the boys to live with their uncle.

### Apprehending the Murderer

Three and a half years went by before the murderer was apprehended, largely due to the efforts of Sonoma County Sheriff Frank P. Grace. At the beginning of 1900, a relative of John Owens told Sheriff Grace that Owens was

*Please see page 5*

Continued from page 4

involved in the murder. The sheriff then put the investigation into high gear and not only found out about John Owens's quick trip to Suisun Valley, but also tracked down both the bullet mold and the shotgun. Owens had sold the mold to Healdsburg second-hand dealer Mr. Finney, and the shotgun to a Mr. Crowley, living on the Wehrspoon ranch near Guerneville. John's older son, Raymond, also contributed to unraveling the mystery. Again in the Sonoma County jail, this time for being "a tramp," Raymond provided the sheriff with the details of his father's trip from Healdsburg to Suisun Valley.

John L. Owens, now working in Madison, Yolo County, was tracked down and arrested on April 19, 1900 by Solano County Sheriff George H. Savage, successor to Sheriff Rush, and imprisoned in the county jail at Fairfield. In spite of making a confession, Owens entered a plea of "not guilty" at his May 28th arraignment. Trial was set to begin in mid-July, but it was obvious to John's lawyers that conviction for first-degree murder was likely, with the noose at San Quentin a distinct possibility. Consequently, the plea was changed to "guilty" after the district attorney agreed not to ask the death penalty. On July 12, 1900, Solano County Superior Court Judge A.J. Buckles sentenced Owens to a life term in Folsom Prison. He was delivered to the prison on July 17 and began serving his term as prisoner number 4804.

### A Candidate for Parole

Application for parole was filed on John Owens's behalf in 1908 and a steady stream of letters flowed into the State Board of Prison Directors in support of the application. Letter writers included the sentencing judge A.J. Buckles, Healdsburg pioneer Ransom Powell, and Dr. W.P. Burke of the famous sanitarium at Altruria (and the infamous attempted murder-by-dynamite case, at this time still two years in the future). Both Powell and Dr. Burke were past employers of John Owens and described him as "peaceable" and "a good man." The lone dissent was found in a letter from Constable Fury of Williams, in Colusa County. He reported a conversation with Mr. Leland D. Lane, Lucy Owens's uncle, who thought that Owens was "just where he belonged," and "was not a safe person to be running at large."

Thomas and Nancy Owens, the convict's parents, wrote a sorrowful letter pleading that they needed John's support. At 83 and 80 years of age, they were too old to work, they said, and all they had in the way of income was Thomas's Mexican War Pension (about \$20 a month) and "I have to pay house rent out of that."

### Petition from Healdsburg

Topping off the list of documents supporting the application for parole was a petition with 127 signatures, including many prominent Healdsburgers. The text of the petition is worth reproducing as it is indicative of how people viewed John L. Owens:

To the Honorable Board of State Prison Directors;

We your petitioners respectfully show; That we and each of us are residents of the County of Sonoma, State of California; that we know John Owens, who is now serving a life term in the State Prison at Folsom, that we have known the said Owens for a number of years and have always known him as a steady, sober and industrious man, and a man in whom every reliance could be placed; that we have never known or heard of any trouble of any kind, that he has been in, up to the time of the crime for which he is now serving time, and we believe, that crime was more the result of his great faith in his wife, and great love for his children, than the result of a depraved or wicked nature, and that we and each of us do most earnestly recommend that he be granted a parole, believing as we do that he will be an honorable man, and a useful citizen if so liberated."

Signers of the petition included such well-known Healdsburgers as the rancher, George Alexander and the city trustee and Chamber of Commerce head, Julius Myron Alexander, both descendants of Cyrus Alexander; Ransom Powell, a rancher since 1856; City Attorney and former Justice of the Peace, J.T. Coffman; members of the merchant families Rosenberg and Ferguson, and the postmaster P.J. Ferguson; and A.W. Garrett, fire chief and founder of Garrett's Hardware. Even Sheriff Grace, the man whose work sent Owens to prison, signed the petition.

# REWARD!

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

WHEREAS, On or about the 9th day of October, A. D. 1896, in Suisun Valley, Solano County, State of California, DANIEL H. WILSON was murdered by some person or persons unknown;

Now, Therefore, I, JAMES H. BUDD, Governor of the State of California, by virtue of the authority in me vested by the Constitution and laws of said State, do hereby offer a reward of

## \$500

(Five Hundred Dollars) for the arrest and conviction of said unknown person or persons. Said reward to be paid upon conviction only.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State to be hereunto affixed this 12th day of October, A. D. 1896.

JAMES H. BUDD,  
Governor.

Attest:  
L. H. BROWN, Secretary of State.  
By W. P. Ransom, Deputy.

As a result of this effort and his good behavior at Folsom, John L. Owens, Convict Number 4804, was paroled on November 1, 1909. He returned to Healdsburg, but not to his family. Lucy had taken the children and moved back to her childhood home in Mendocino County where she married Joseph Stevenson and lived out her life. John L. Owens's life after release from prison was as ordinary as it had been before the murder. His father died in 1911 and his mother in 1915; both are buried at Oak Mound.

In 1925, Owens fell ill and went to live in Santa Rosa with his sister, Martha, and her husband, Dr. Horace Lamb. They cared for John until he died on March 27th of that same year. He is buried in the I.O.O.F. Cemetery in Santa Rosa, just one of the many unmarked, unmourned and unremembered graves that dot our nation's cemeteries.

### Thanks

I want to thank the staff of the following organizations for their assistance in researching the history of John L. Owens. Especially helpful were Holly Hoods at the Healdsburg Museum and Linda Phillips at the Sonoma County Library.

California State Archives  
Healdsburg Museum  
Solano County Archives  
Solano County Genealogical Society  
Sonoma County Library

## HISTORIC



## INDUSTRY

# AN OVERVIEW OF THE EARLY DAYS OF THE LUMBER INDUSTRY, AND A HISTORY OF HEALDSBURG MILL AND LUMBER COMPANY/A. F. STEVENS LUMBER

By Marie Djordjevich

## Overview

Logging of timber was one of the earliest industries in Sonoma County. Established by the first white settlers and then fueled by the Gold Rush and the rapid influx of people to the state, the saw mills and lumber yards proliferated the area.

In the 1700s the Spanish logged some timber in order to have beams for their adobe houses, though much of their activity in northern California was centered further south on the San Francisco peninsula. Further north in 1812 the Russians along the coast at Fort Ross built all their structures out of wood. These early forms of logging used a pitsaw - or whipsaw - method to cut the wood. In this method, a framework to support the log was built over a pit. Two men then sawed the boards by hand, one on top of the log, the other in the pit below.

The first commercial water powered mill was built by John Cooper on Mark West Creek, 1000 feet from its confluence with the Russian River. This mill might have been designated as a barrier against Russian expansion from the coast. In 1840-41 the mill was washed away by high water, and was never rebuilt. The water powered mills used a vertical saw that cut in the same way as the whip saws, but a water wheel provided the power to work the saw up and down.



*Logging in the Mill Creek Area*

The first saw mill in the Healdsburg area was erected around 1850 on Mill Creek, and lumber from this mill was used by Cyrus Alexander to build additions on his house and to build a barn. Apparently at this time, lumber was bartered for pigs (a pig that never had a litter was worth as much as a thousand board feet - seventy five dollars). The first major logging operations after the gold and people rush were situated just northwest of Healdsburg on Mill Creek (March's Mill), and on the lower Russian River (Heald & Guerne's Mill). By 1869 all coastal communities, and also those with deep river access, had at least one mill, and boats would carry the cut lumber and shingles in and out.

While using the boats to haul the lumber--supplemented with overland hauling with horses--worked, it was time consuming and tedious. The growing industry needed something better. Something to link it with the east. The coming of the railroad - with the first spike driven at Promontory, Utah in 1869 - greatly expanded the industry's capabilities. In 1871 the North Pacific Coast Railroad was incorporated, an answer to the need of a rail link to the redwoods. By 1875 the railroad was in operation. This narrow gauge railroad (so called because it had three feet between its rails, rather than the standard four feet eight and a

*Please see page 7*

half inches of most railways) passed through such towns as Occidental (Howard's Station), Camp Meeker, Cazadero, Willow Creek, Duncans Mills and Markhams.

These lower river communities were not the only communities dealing with the timber business. Guerneville and Healdsburg, as well as many others up on north also needed rail transport to make their industry economically viable. These towns received a broad gauge railroad, eventually controlled by the Northwestern Pacific Railroad (who also incorporated the North Coast Pacific line in 1907). By 1900 the railroad companies had invested in large timber holdings along the railroad routes, causing the smaller mills to disappear, and the larger companies to gain a substantial hold on the industry.

### Healdsburg Mill and Lumber Company: "The Planing Mill Speaks"

Look at the early history of lumber in Healdsburg shows a crossover of people and businesses at different times, i.e. C. Kimball working as vice president for one yard, then later having his own yard; or, one business would share space with another, or meld into another. This latter description seems to be the case with Albertson's Planing Mill and Healdsburg Mill and Lumber.

Albertson's Planing Mill was a mill with a long history. Started in the late 1870s or early 1880s by J.A. Mead, N. Ward and Tom Hudson, it had a succession of owners until W.T. Albertson took over in the 1890s. The mill enjoyed a fair amount of work: "every kind of finished mouldings, brackets and planed work used in the construction of buildings can be obtained. Wine and water tanks are made to order..." (HT, 12-28-1899). Albertson at some point changed the name of the business to the Healdsburg Planing Mill. Albertson must have taken his work very seriously.

#### The Planing Mill Speaks

On the night of December 31st, 1900, W.T. Albertson retired early, well knowing that the new century could come in without assistance from him, and in about five minutes he was asleep. He dreamed that it was after 11 o'clock and he was down at the mill. He heard the planer running slowly, although there was no steam in the boiler, and the planer did not hum as usual. It was talking.

### A. F. Stevens Lumber Co.

Healdsburg, Cal. PHONE MAIN 61  
YARD NEAR DEPOT

#### Our Leader—Oregon Pine

Mendocino Pine and Redwood  
Posts, Pickets, Lath and Shakes  
Lime Cement and Plaster

Save Your Money—Let Us Figure Your Bill

It said: "I am the Healdsburg Planing Mill. I have the gift of speech for the next seventeen minutes. I will be 28 years old in January 9, 1901. I like every man who has owned me: Nicholas Ward, James Mead, Thomas Hudson, James Kane, James Field, C. Howard, S. Goddard, W. Goddard, A. Phelps, and John Favour, who owned me fourteen years and did well by me. He doubled my size and gave me several fine new machines, including the steel 35-horse power boiler.

"And you, W.T. Albertson, took me through the hard times when I could not make a living for you. You rebuilt two machines and gave me five new ones, including that 30 horse power Atlas engine, which can do all the mill work for Northern Sonoma County. You have done well by my inside, but look at the old shell you keep me in. Why don't you give me more room? You know that I am congested sometimes. Keep me too big for the town so that they can't stick you with work. Slick me up outside and paint my name on me so that people will know what I am, and think that I can pay you a fair interest on the money which you have invested in me. But you must work me right along. I tell you I get very lonesome when you and your men are away from me on a working day. All you have to do is give me plenty of wood to eat and pure water to drink, and a little oil for my poor old joints, and I will work for you 24 hours a day and never go on strike. There is much more that I would like to say to you, but the bells are ringing the old year out, so good bye old man. I will not be able to talk again for one hundred years, and I am afraid you will not be here to listen to me."

Sure enough, the bells were ringing, and Albertson was awake in his bed, and knew that it was all a dream. But he says that he is going to take the old mill's advice, and run it this year better than ever before, if such a thing is possible. (HT, 1-10-1901)

W.T. Albertson soon expanded his work in the lumber business. The Healdsburg Planing Mill shared space with the Healdsburg Mill and Lumber Company, and by 1904 Albertson was president of that company. The yard holdings were fairly extensive, covering four acres near the railroad depot. They had their own saw mill on Mill Creek and, of course, they operated the planing mill on the grounds. At that time the *Healdsburg Tribune* described the business as such: They are "extensive Manufacturers, wholesale and retail dealers in lumber and building materials. Their stock embraces all kinds of rough and finished lumber, shingles, lath, pickets, posts, shakes, doors, blinds, windows, etc. They also manufacture wine and water tanks of any capacity required, and carry in stock mouldings, brackets, etc." (HT, 12-22-1904).

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The business flourished, surviving a small fire (which was a common danger to lumber yards), and moving their mill around to different creeks and places once the redwoods at the present one were depleted. Then in 1907 disaster struck the company.

On July 9, 1907 a devastating fire swept through the Healdsburg Mill and Lumber Company. The fire department quickly responded, and was able to save the buildings surrounding the lumber yard. The lumber yard itself was destroyed. The loss was estimated at \$15,000, with insurance covering only \$4500. Right after the fire, the directors of the business stated that they would rebuild as soon as possible, perhaps building an electric mill rather than steam, as all the machinery had been destroyed. According to the *Healdsburg Tribune*, "This was the only planing and finishing mill factory in Healdsburg, and its loss will be materially felt" (HT 7-11-1907).

Within two weeks the yard was being rebuilt and the town was looking forward to the reopening. By August 1, in a surprise move, the Healdsburg Mill and Lumber Company assigned all their property over to their creditors; the firm's assets over their liabilities exceeded over \$23,000. A week later the company had decided to go out of business. George Warfield, M. Raabe and J. T. Coffman were selected as trustees, and the company was turned over to them. They were to dispose of everything, pay off the debts, and turn the remainder over to the members of the firm.

It was not until 1919 that the affairs of the Healdsburg Mill and Lumber Company were finally wrapped up. By February of 1919 the creditors had received the last payment on their claims, and the books were closed.

### **A.F. Steven Lumber Company: Satisfaction in Quality, in Service, in Price**

Though The Healdsburg Mill and Lumber Company suffered a fiery and then economical demise, a new lumber yard arose from the ashes. In October of 1907 the yards, plant and business of the Healdsburg Mill and Lumber Company were sold to A. F. Stevens. Stevens had been recently working for the E.K. Wood Lumber Company of San Francisco, and came to Healdsburg having experience in the lumber business. The new manager of the yards was H. C. Sherrard, who since November had been operating small planing mill along with O.V. Albertson at those yards.

There was excitement in Healdsburg because of this purchase. The *Sotoyome Scimitar* wrote: "This is a business transaction of no little interest to the people of this section. Mr. Stevens will give Healdsburg what she has needed for a long time: a first class lumber yard, complete in every detail. As an evidence of this, eighteen car loads of lumber, probably the largest shipment ever made to this city, were received this week, and are being unloaded now".



*A. F. Stevens with staff members and customers at the A. F. Stevens Lumber Company, circa 1910. Stevens is the ninth from the left, with cap.*

The Steven Lumber Company soon established itself as a premier lumber business of the city. It continually expanded, i.e. by adding such things as a side track to help with loading and unloading lumber. The company benefitted from a building boom, as Healdsburg became a vacation destination, and many vacation homes were built in the area. Machinery was constantly upgraded, and the planing mill was kept technologically advanced.

A.F. Stevens ran the lumber mill until his sudden death by heart attack in 1928. His son Russell, who had been with the company since 1922, became president in 1929. He continued to expand the company. Branches were added, first in Cloverdale in 1924, and then in Lakeport in 1930. Russ Stevens sold the company to Pacific Lumber in 1963. In the 1970s the company was acquired by the Ziedrich family. Today it is run by Eric Ziedrich under the name of Healdsburg Lumber Company.

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Feb. 21, 1903; March 31, 1906; Feb. 22, 1919

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## HISTORIC



## BUILDINGS

# THE RESTORATION OF THE DANIELS SCHOOL IN THE BEAUTIFUL VENADO DISTRICT

By June Maher Smith

*(In writing this article I used dates that seemed to be the most logical. If you have further information, the Museum would be glad to hear from you. JMS)*

Mill Creek and the surrounding countryside attracted early settlers and still attracts people looking for a beautiful place to live, or just spend a few peaceful hours. Venado (deer or venison in Spanish) is the area around Stillman Batchellor's El Venado Ranch. The name was first used in the mid-1920s. In fact, an article in *The Healdsburg Tribune Weekly* in February 1925 states that Venado "is so new, and so far from the regular beaten track of tourists that it has attracted little attention." The "town" consisted of the redwood shake Venado Post Office. Batchellor built the little building about 1922 and remained postmaster until it closed in 1941. Quite a few of the early settlers were former engineers who bought 40-acre plots of land from Batchellor. Batchellor himself had been a mining engineer and advertised this land in a mining engineering journal. Mail was sent up from Healdsburg to the Venado Post Office via a truck driven by Steve Farnsworth. He delivered on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Farnsworth also delivered groceries to the post office as requested by families. On Tuesday and Thursday he took mail to Pine Flat.

Beside fruit and firewood, tanbark was another local product. It was hauled to Healdsburg by wagon and then trucked down to Levin's Tanning Co. in Santa Rosa.

The first school in the area was Davis District School and it must have been located near a mine. Local lore relates that when the mine closed down, the families living nearby moved away and there was no longer the need for a school at that site. The Healdsburg Museum has a copy of a journal kept by Harrison Elcaney Nosler in the late 19th century which describes the construction of a school (probably the second one) in 1883 in the area. On April 16th of that year Nosler and other residents petitioned the trustees "to move the school house near the center of the district" and they finally agreed. On April 28th Nosler commenced to haul the lumber to the site and



*Students with teacher, Miss Lonergan, 1933 Or 1934. Rear, left to right, Florence Nylander, Floremay Cootes, Dorothy Fincher, Thelma Farrington, Miss Lonergan, Billy Cootes, Donald Hadley, Sam Senteney and \_\_\_\_\_ Wise. Front, left to right, Margaret Honor, June Senteney, unknown, Jean Senander, Leona Atkinson, unknown, June Fincher, Sherman Atkinson. (Floremay Cootes Caletti Collection)*

a couple of days later he laid the foundation for the 16' x 26' building. A week later he notes that it is done except for the roof and putting in the door and windows. On May 7th and 8th he finished it.

The school was called Davis at least through 1902, when Miss Bruner was the teacher named in a short newspaper article. Earlier teachers at Davis School included Miss Mary Meek in 1893 and Mrs. Charles D. Carter in 1899. The name must have changed to Daniels School a few years later, as a 1908 issue of *The Healdsburg Tribune* refers to Mr. R. A. Daniels "keeping the school in session regularly." This typical one-room school, where a teacher taught children in grades one through eight, is still standing. According to the 1924-1925 Sonoma County School Directory, Miss Viola Lawson taught her nine pupils for a salary of \$1,260.

The Venado Historical Society was formed a few years ago with the intent of restoring the school so it could have limited public use as a museum and historical site. The school still stands vacant, but the society has restored the front porch and steps, repainted the sign, and securely anchored the flagpole in the ground. Sometime in the future when all the proper legal steps have been taken, the long-range plan is to have the ownership of the school transferred to the Healdsburg Museum & Historical Society. Then it could be open once a month to the public for half a day or by appointment and school children could visit this relic of bygone days. This seems a perfect use for a building that formerly played such a large part in so many young lives.

*Please see page 10*

## Interview with Mildred Stuart Cussins

Mildred's first teacher at Daniels School was Hattie Kent. She also remembers teacher Viola Lawson, who taught in 1925 and 1926. Miss Lawson boarded with Mildred's family during those two years, as their home was just one-half mile from the school. Mildred and her two brothers had orders from their parents not to ask their boarder for help with their schoolwork when she was in their home. In the mornings Miss Lawson would eat breakfast and then walk to the school and get ready for her students. This included starting a fire in cold weather. Mildred and her brothers waited half an hour and then they walked to school. As they made their way they often heard the harness bells attached to Roadmaster Charles Wade's team of horses as he drove them from across the canyon where his family lived.

When Mildred's older brother, Byron, attended high school he stayed in Healdsburg. He would come home on weekends, sometimes walking the ten miles. However, when her younger brother, Stanley, started high school, Mildred and her mother moved into town with him. Thus, Mildred was a 6th, 7th, and 8th grade student at the old Healdsburg Grammar School on Tucker Street. And then she, too, attended Healdsburg High School. Years later Mildred's two daughters both attended Daniels School. Her older daughter completed eight years there; however, her younger daughter only attended first grade at Daniels because the school was closed in 1951. In that year Daniels joined four other small schools (Felta, Junction, Lafayette and Mill Creek) to form the West Side Union School District. Low attendance had always been a problem. The area families tried hard to keep the school open at one point they even hired a teacher whose own children helped fill out the attendance. They voted 11 to 0 to join the larger district.

Mildred and her husband Vernon still live out on Mill Creek Road. They are weekly active volunteers at the Redwood Empire Food Bank in Santa Rosa.

## Interview with Eloise Batchellor Hoffman

Eloise was another student who walked to Daniels School. She made the five-mile round trip each day until she was in the sixth grade. That was when she started riding her pony to school. The pony spent the day waiting for Eloise under a tree down toward the creek where he enjoyed oats for lunch. Another rider was Florence Nylander. She rode her small horse on the 12-mile round trip to school and the mare's foal followed them as soon as it was old enough. In the winter Florence boarded with the Cootes family. Eloise considers herself very lucky to have lived in the Venado area. When she was a little older she explored up and down the ridges on horseback. She recalls the very narrow gauge railroad that crossed the creek on a trestle and served the magnesite mine over the ridge. The small train was imported from a Hawaiian plantation to haul ore from the mine.

Eloise's father, Stillman Batchellor, was a mining engineer who had worked in Cuba and Mexico. When he arrived here and changed his occupation to fruit grower, he named his property El Venado Ranch. He and Mrs.



Steve Farnsworth and the mail truck at Venado.  
(Eloise Batchellor Hoffman Collection)

Batchellor built up a sizeable business selling their delicious large Imperial prunes. They marketed them stuffed with walnuts and packed in redwood gift boxes at holiday time.

The Batchellors' handsome unpeeled redwood log home is still standing. However, the picnic/barbecue area in the adjacent grove is no longer there. Eloise now lives in town, but fondly remembers the people and the beautiful woods and creeks where she grew up.

## Interview with Floramay Cootes Caletti

As a youngster Floramay lived a quarter of a mile from Daniels School. She recalls that, in addition to all the standard subjects, her teacher taught art and made sure that all holidays were celebrated with special plays, songs and poems. Once a month the music teacher, Miss Close, came and the students enjoyed singing under her direction. Other teachers Floramay remembers are Miss Shakespeare, Miss Faulk, Miss Lonergan, Miss Hammerberg, and Miss Hettie Kent. Most teachers would board with one of the nearby families, but Hettie had a car and commuted.

The end of the school year was celebrated with a program at a nearby grove complete with a stream and log bridge. Here the children presented skits, songs and poems for their parents and guests. At the end of the performance everyone enjoyed a picnic topped off with hand-cranked ice cream. To end the afternoon the children played games and the adults visited and pitched horseshoes.

When it came time to graduate, Daniels School students joined with other country schools in the area for ceremonies at Healdsburg High School. Then in September it was quite a transition for these children to go from their one-room school to the three-story high school in town.

Floramay is chairman and one of the founding members of the Venado Historical Society. She leads the society's restoration of Daniels School and



Mill Creek Road near Aker's Cabin.  
(Eloise Batchellor Hoffman Collection)

is the liaison with the HM&HS Board. She keeps our board members informed about the project and she is also a weekly volunteer in our research library.

(A few years ago Stewart Wade, another Daniels School student, wrote the following description of a typical school day circa 1927-28 when he was 13 years old.)

Thought you might like to know what a typical school day was like. We would be up and at 'em at 5 to 5:30. Went outside and then take milk buckets to barn. Feed the cows and milk them. Never more than 5. We would then take the milk to our home where we had a hand-turned separator. After separating the skim milk from the cream, we would thoroughly clean the separator parts. Bob (Stewart's brother) would take the skim milk and feed the pigs. I would put the cream in a 5-gallon can; then once every two weeks we took it to town and shipped it by train to the cheese factory in Petaluma. After wood was brought in for cook stove and fireplace, we would clean up and change into our school clothes.

After running our trap line on the way to school, we would do the janitor work. This consisted of bringing one or two buckets full of water from a spring that was located down an old abandoned road. Then we would sprinkle oiled sawdust on the school floor and sweep it up, clean the blackboard, dust the desks and bring in wood and start the stove.

After school we would scoot (sometimes) for home, where mother many times had fresh baked rolls or other good things to serve us as we had only

had two sandwiches since breakfast. Then I would go after the cows. They could be very elusive. Many times I didn't get back till well after dark. On wet, dark rainy nights I would hang onto a cow's tail and they would lead me home.

After milking and separating the milk, we would wash up and all sit down together for dinner. After dinner Bob and I would do the dishes. Then the good part would come: we would read together or separately till 9:30 or 10. We were always ready for bed by this time.

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## RING SPEARING - A LOST ART OF THE EARLY HORSEMAN

by Milt Brandt

In my daily travel down Healdsburg Avenue along the Plaza, I am reminded of a little bit of history told to me by my old friend, Clyde Briggs. Clyde and his two brothers, Otto and Edgar, sons of Hiram Briggs, were cattle ranchers in Knights Valley. All three were excellent horsemen and enjoyed the competition of Jousting, or what was later to be known as Ring Spearing.

This was a weekend pastime occasionally held on West Street, now Healdsburg Avenue, between Billy Gums Saloon, at the corner of Matheson and West, and Mueller's Beer Garden, at the corner of North and West. This was long before the streets were paved. West Street, being straight as an arrow on the west side of the Plaza, made for a fast track for a running horse.

Ring Spearing was practiced through time, originating from the art of Jousting. What was needed was a fast running horse, spear and a good eye to thread a 2-1/2 inch harness ring onto your spear from your fast running horse. These rings were suspended from a standard made up of a pole that supported an arm, in turn supporting a short rod hanging downward which those rings were clipped to. They would easily release when the spear was threaded into them.

Three standards were placed in a line approximately 50 yards apart. The start line to the first standard was another 50 yards to give your horse time to get to a fast, steady run. The faster the horse ran, the straighter and more even you could run the course to spear the rings.

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### Ring Spearing:

The challenge was to spear all three rings. Timing was not a factor, just the number of rings you ended up with on your spear. This event continued in downtown Healdsburg until the automobile and pavement drove the contestants back to the open fields and barnyard show grounds.

Many years passed by the time I was first introduced to ring spearing. My wife, Mary, and I had become active members in the newly formed Russian River Riders Club, chartered in 1944. We always had horses at that time, one of which was a fast, smooth running little mare which made the ring spearing event right up her alley. This fast, sleek little mare and I joined the Russian River Riders Spearing team. The team eventually went on to the State Finals held in Sacramento. We didn't go down in the archives of Healdsburg history, but looking back on our successful team and State Championship, I thought it would be worthwhile telling this story,

being the last surviving member.

The original team was Sid Grove, Frank Towle, Sr., Floyd Beffa, Jake Boatman and, my self, Milt Brandt.

To my knowledge, this, like many other events, faded from the annals of history. My association with the Russian River Riders was terminated in 1953, not by my choice. My love for horses never ceased and must have been rubbed off on my older daughter, Sally Jo Smith.

Sally and her husband, Barry Smith, are partners in the Medicine Creek Cattle Ranch outside of Laramie, Wyoming. Her first love is still horses. Both her husband and son, Ty Brandt Smith, are champion ropers, participating in many Wyoming rodeos and horse show events during their spare time from ranching.

I still remember Sal's early start. At 6 weeks old, we packed her in a wicker basket and attended the Boonville Apple Show and Rodeo in 1947.



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