



RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

WINTER 2000 • ISSUE 71

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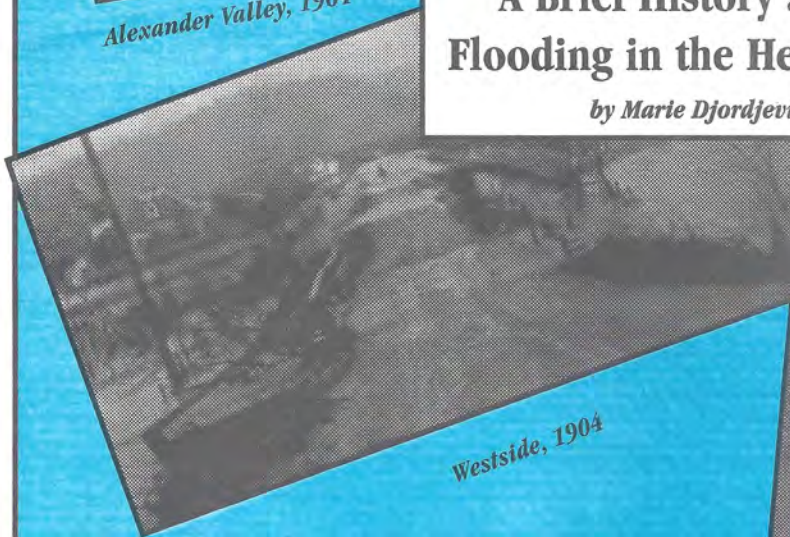
Alexander Valley, 1964



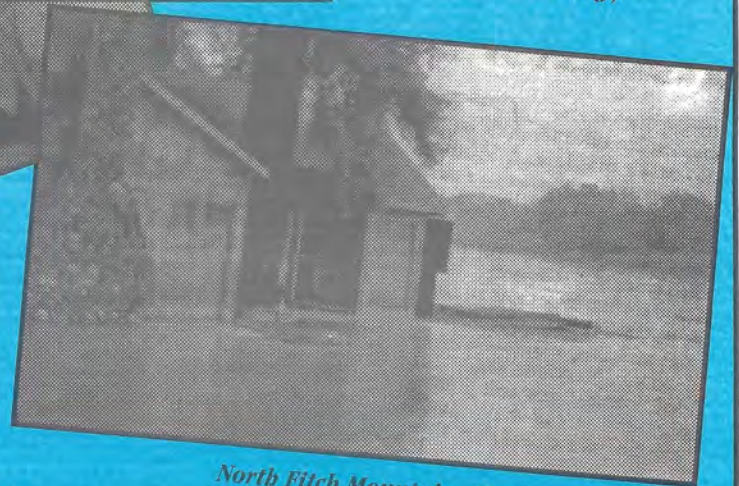
Mill Street, 1937

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Artifacts: Fashions of the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's



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RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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

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IN THIS ISSUE

The fourth and last issue of the year 2000 *Russian River Recorder* gives our readers a look at an historic community, the many floods that devastated the Healdsburg area, an oral history by two sons of immigrant parents, and lastly, a look at the fashions of the 1920's, '30's and '40's.

June Maher Smith in her very special way tells us of the Alexander Valley Community known as Jimtown, a commercial center since the 1890's. Of particular interest are the two stores, the Alexander Valley Store and the Jimtown Store, their histories and the role they play today.

Everyone is interested in the weather but there isn't much you can do about it. Flooding has always been a part of our weather history and curator Marie Djordjevich gives us a fact-filled account of the flooding in our area in the article aptly titled and well chronicled "Healdsburg Awash : A Brief History and

Look at Flooding in the Healdsburg Area."

Assistant curator Holly Hoods delved into the Museum's oral history archives and came up with and edited a fascinating account of growing up on a ranch in Geyserville in the 1920's and '30's by two brothers, sons of Italian immigrants. Jim Myers conducted the interview in 1993 when he was a Museum volunteer and attending Sonoma State University. The Oral History Project indeed is a very important program, one of the many services offered by the Museum.

And to complete the picture, Marie Djordjevich in photo and text, gives us fashions of the 1920's, '30's and '40's.

At this time the staff and I extend a wish for a very happy holiday season to all our readers and their families.

Arnold Santucci
Editor.

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HISTORY



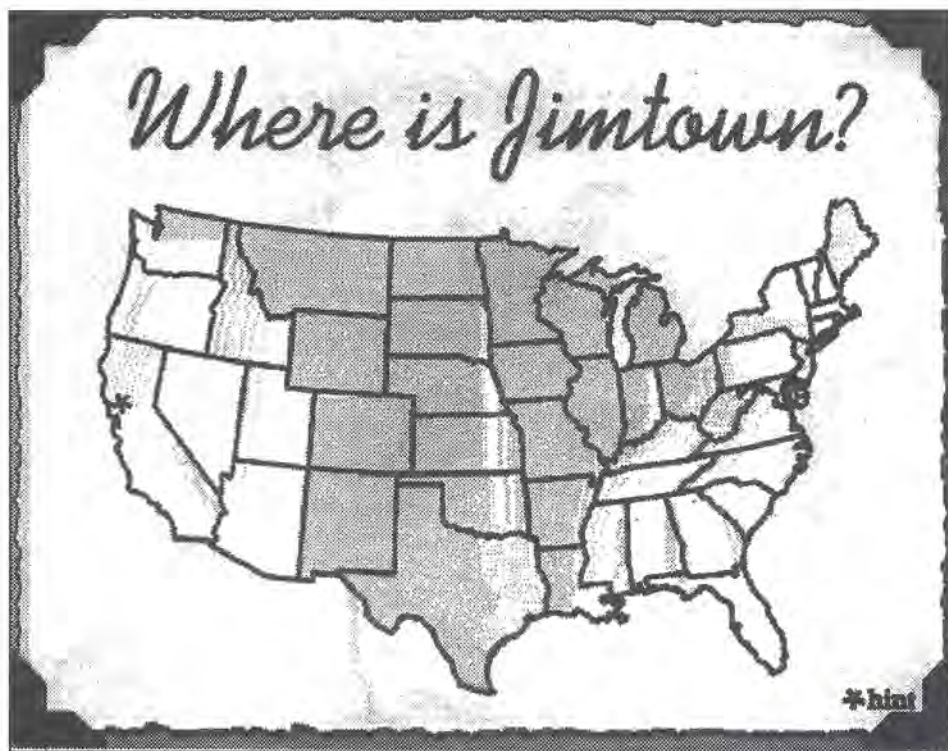
COMMUNITY

WHERE IS JIMTOWN?

By June Maher Smith

Did you know there are 18 Jimtowns in the United States, including three in West Virginia, three in Kentucky, and two in Ohio? This article is about California's Jimtown, right here along Highway 128 as it jogs through Alexander Valley past the Community Church and the two stores. It is noted on the maps of the area and has been a small commercial center at least since the 1890s.

This area was named for James Patrick, who opened his general store selling groceries and hardware beside the road in 1893. Patrick was born in Indiana and came to California with his parents in 1856. Prior to becoming a valley merchant he was a road overseer in Knights Valley and farmed on rented land. There is a brief newspaper paragraph in 1874 stating that a J. M. Patrick opened a variety store in Healdsburg on the southwest corner of the Plaza. This could have been either James or his father, Jefferson. Also in 1874 James married Harriet Matthews. George St. Clair says Patrick's store was previously operated by a Mr. Matthews (probably James' father-in-law).



Map courtesy of Jimtown Store

There was plenty of activity in and around the Jimtown area in the spring of 1892. A front page ad in the *Sonoma County Tribune* offers 20-acre lots for sale, the land being on the "fine farm owned by Mr. Osborne." At the same time, a newspaper article tells us there were three buildings being constructed in the valley: a blacksmith shop, a paint shop, and a general merchandise store.

In 1893 Stagg's Leap winery was about a half mile down the road and C. H. Wilson opened a blacksmith shop next door to the general store. Dan Harrington was the smithy from 1917 to 1937 when his son Jess took over the job. The first permanent church in the valley was built in Jimtown in 1896. (See *Russian River Recorder* Issue No. 68.)

There have been several Post Offices in Alexander Valley starting in 1858 with Pacific Home Post Office. This was followed by Alexanderville, Excelsior, Alexander, Soda Rock, and Alexander Valley Post Offices. The latter was in Patrick's store and he was the

postmaster. It served the area from 1892 to 1903 after which mail was delivered out of Geyserville on R. F. D. Route No. 1.

In 1910 Julius Myron Alexander wrote, "Near the center of the (Alexander) valley is the little hamlet which bears the name of Alexander, a little gathering of houses, a church and a shop and a store." Evidently the name Jimtown was not being used yet.

Let's look at the history of the Jimtown Store as described in articles and personal recollections. James Patrick operated the store until 1934 when ill health forced him to give it up. For the following three years his granddaughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Batt, were in charge of the business. Betty Warren Bellotti remembers Mr. Patrick and the mail drop in the front of the store. In 1937 the Patricks sold the store to Mr. and Mrs. Frank Minkler. The new owners lived on the property but did not open the store, and within a few years they

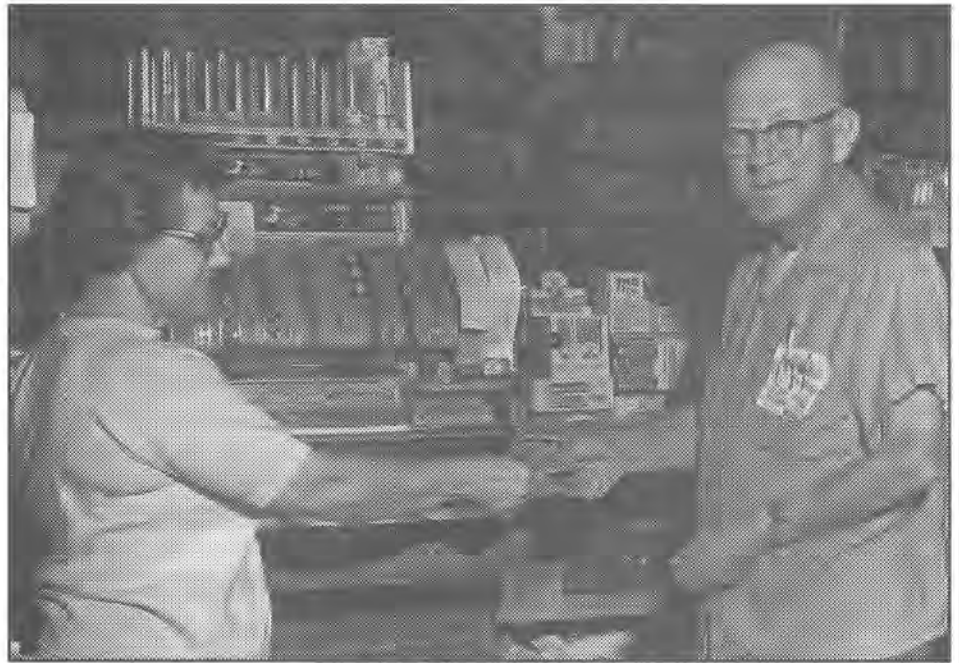
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moved back to Fresno. Lloyd and Lydia Goodyear bought the Jimtown Store property in 1942 and their younger son, Gerry, and his bride, Tissie Ponzo, lived in the residence for five months after their marriage in June of 1942. Lloyd and Lydia, who then were running the Alexander Valley Store just down the road, used the Jimtown Store buildings for storage and overflow stock until December 31, 1947. On that date, having lost their lease, they closed the Alexander Valley Store, moved down the road and commenced business at the Jimtown Store on January 1, 1948.

In 1950 the Goodyears built a warehouse at the Jimtown Store. Their older son, Bob, and his wife, formerly Caroline Teldeschi, were working with his parents. About 1967 Lloyd and Lydia retired and Bob and Caroline took over the management of the business. In addition to making sandwiches, selling groceries and hardware and pumping Chevron gasoline, they cashed checks and sold money orders and stamps. Shoppers could also buy fishing, hunting and dog licenses. Bob and Caroline continued to be a vital part of everyday life in Alexander Valley until 1985 when they retired and closed the store.

The store sat vacant until it was "discovered" on July 4, 1989, by Carrie Brown and John Werner. This New York couple was visiting Carrie's parents in Healdsburg. They saw the store, stopped, peeked in and were immediately intrigued with its possibilities. They bought the property with the determination to keep it as it was. They did install a new kitchen, but kept the walls and "feel" of the old store. Although it took some time, what with permits and cleanup from the gas pumps which had been in front, Carrie and John reopened the Jimtown Store on Memorial Day, 1991.

You can experience that "feel" as you walk through the front door. A look at the merchandise takes you back to stress-free, childhood times, when simple toys-not computer games and robots-entertained children. The



Caroline and Bob Goodyear, Goodyear Store, 1964

shopping here is great; kids can choose from many of the old-time toys and adults enjoy browsing the eclectic collection of foods from all over the country. Walk on to the back room and you'll enjoy the collectibles and antiques displayed for sale. Both Carrie and John have art backgrounds and that is evident in the decisions they've made. They are also renowned for their gourmet foods and coffees, so plan to have lunch. You can order box lunches to go, or enjoy your meal inside the store or take it out to one of the outdoor tables sheltered by seedless grape vines. They also sell a line of their specialty food items to other gourmet shops.

Under Carrie and John's ownership the Jimtown Store has earned Sonoma County Landmark status and also received the 1992 Historical Preservation Award from the Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society.

Now let's look at the history of the Alexander Valley Store located right at that sharp turn where Alexander Valley Road becomes Highway 128. The original store at this site was torn down and rebuilt in 1927. Newspaper articles state S. Vaughn operated the store prior to 1920 when he sold it to the Belli brothers, Harry and Earl. Harry's wife,

Angelina, helped in the store. Their daughter, Dolores Belli Rebok, says her mother often spoke of that time, especially the swift way news traveled in the area, thanks to everyone being on the same phone line. Being online had a different meaning then, but it worked well. After a couple of years the Bellis sold the business to Charles Peavler. Charlie died in 1931 and Lloyd and Lydia Goodyear took over the store at that time. The Goodyears were already experienced storekeepers-they had operated the Dry Creek Store over in Dry Creek Valley since 1917. (As previously noted, the Goodyears changed stores again in 1948.) Gerry Goodyear remembers loading the pickup with soft drinks and driving over to the campground on the other side of the river to sell refreshment to the workers harvesting the hops in the area.

The next Alexander Valley Store owners were Pat and Marion Young Penry. From 1948 to 1964 they were there to sell groceries, general merchandise, hay, feed and fertilizer. They also pumped Union gas for cars and tractors. To accommodate those who wanted to wet their whistles they served beer and wine at a small bar which they

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Pat Penry, Alexander Valley Store, 1960
Photo Courtesy Marion Young Penry

moved from inside the store to an addition they built on the side of the building. The Penrys lived next door to the store and raised their three daughters while keeping the store open seven days a week. Marion vividly remembers the flood in December of 1964 when the water rose several inches inside the store and even higher in their home. The water flowed on down to the church's front door, but didn't enter that building.

The next owners of the store were Al and Karen Underhill who sold it to Hank Marseilles in April of 1977. The present proprietor is Jan Marsiglia who came to Alexander Valley to care for Hank, her ailing uncle. When he died in 1984 she took over the business. In some ways things haven't changed much. For instance, they still sell money orders, cash checks and sell groceries and other basic necessities. The chalkboard

on the wall lists sandwiches which are made to order, and the refrigerated case in the front of the store displays their other deli items. The bar is larger and is leased as a separate business, Barbie's Bar. Three of the early post offices were housed here in this building.

Jan is aware of the history of her property and is proud to be involved in the local community. She says she has great neighbors. She is a board member of the Community Hall Association which oversaw the hall's renovation and continues to plan for future upgrades to the property.

As you can see, there is a lot of history in little Jimtown and there's undoubtedly a lot more not covered in this article. I hope this has given you a peek at earlier times-in many ways those were the "good old days."

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HISTORIC



EVENTS

HEALDSBURG AWASH: A BRIEF HISTORY OF AND LOOK AT FLOODING IN THE HEALDSBURG AREA

By Marie Djordjevich



Foss Creek, 1995, Barry Dugan Photo

flood *fləd* 1: a rising and overflowing of a body of water, esp. onto normally dry land; also, a condition of overflowing <:rivers in->

Introduction

In January of 1995 as much as twenty four inches of rain fell between the 8th and the 14th over the Russian River Basin. The Russian River flood stage measures at 19 feet. During this storm the river reached 26.25 feet. Lake Sonoma was raised to record levels, waterfalls cascaded down roads, homes flooded, businesses sand-bagged their stores to no avail, Foss Creek overflowed, due to high turbidity a "Notice to Boil Water" was imposed, and an estimated \$1.5 million dollar damage to public and private property was caused.

This was not the only time Healdsburg flooded. In fact, the Healdsburg area has a relatively long history of battling flood waters and cleaning up after the fact. Healdsburg's floods are caused by its proximity to water, specifically the Russian River and Dry Creek.

The Russian River

The Russian River is a river that flows for about one hundred miles. For the first seventy two of those miles it flows in a southeasterly direction towards San Francisco Bay; however, it then abruptly turns westward, and flows for twenty three miles towards the ocean. The river can be divided into three sections: the upper river, which starts in Mendocino County near Clear Lake, with the St. Helena Range to the east of it; the middle river, which roughly begins at Preston, two miles above Cloverdale, and runs through Alexander Valley and Healdsburg at Fitch mountain on to the Santa Rosa Valley; and the lower river, which runs through Guerneville, and on out to the ocean, the mouth situated at Jenner. The first seventy two miles of the Russian River flow through agricultural lands; the last twenty three turn rugged and wooded.

The Russian River at the Healdsburg area starts in the Alexander Valley, flows through the valley to Healdsburg, where it forms a reverse S curve around Fitch Mountain. The river then emerges just below the town of Healdsburg, where it is met by the parallel stream of Dry Creek.

Dry Creek

Dry Creek is the second largest tributary of the Russian River. It is about thirty two miles long and seven miles wide. It originates along the northern edge of the watershed at 3000 feet and flows southeast, parallel to and about five miles southwest of the Russian River.

Russian River Basin

The Russian River Basin generally has a mild climate. Summers are warm and dry; winters are cool and moist. Annual precipitation varies from eighty inches in the highlands, to 20 inches in the valleys. Natural runoff from the Russian River Basin, including the Dry Creek watershed, follows a seasonal pattern. Eighty percent of the the runoff occurs between December and March. Floods in the Basin usually occur between November and April.

The soil in the Russian River Basin is extremely well suited for agriculture. The soil along the valley bottom lands is rich and loamy. When the frequent overflows of the Russian River receded, a layer of

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rich alluvial soil was left. This soil was very conducive to agriculture, and the Healdsburg area became a huge agricultural region. Grapes, prunes, hops, apples, pears, plus many others - all have been grown in the Healdsburg area with phenomenal success.

Flood

"Nothing is so beautiful as drifting silently in a canoe or rubber raft through their deep canyons or hearing the roar of distant rapids. Each stretch of the river reveals scenes of swift shining water, golden streamers of wild grape vines, above misty waters live with rolling salmon and clouds of insects hatching along the gleaming gravel bars." (Griffin, 1998)

But there is another side to the river, a side that is equally beautiful in its raw, untamed nature. It is a force that is wild and strong, gathering that strength as more water comes from the skies, pulsing with the force of gravity, flowing over and under, around and through all in its path, gaining force and breadth, and saturating the land when it has become too big for its banks. In earlier times the river followed its own seasonal patterns, flowing through valleys and canyon, woods and hill. It rose and fell with the rain, with the season. Nowadays, the river and its flooding are influenced by man made things - Eel River diversion, gravel mining, Warm Springs Dam, detention basins - but in earlier times the river flowed and flooded according to its own nature.

Earliest on Record

"It is astonishing to one who has been here, as we have, to notice the wonderful changes which this mighty stream has wrought." (*Democratic Standard*, 1-3-1867)

One of the earliest descriptions of flooding on record comes from the *Democratic Standard*, a local newspaper, in 1866. The *Standard* mentions the "heavy and long continuing rains of the past two or three weeks" (December 26, 1866). It goes on to say that all the mountain streams are overflowing, and the Russian River is higher than any of the previous years. It then describes: "The farms below town, on the Dry Creek bottoms, were under water, and much damage was done by the the washing off of fences. The new bridge across the slough was swept away at the first of the rains..."

Flooding plagued the settlers even earlier. The *Democratic Standard* of January 3, 1867 lists the dates observing the overflow of the Russian River: '51-2, '57-8, '61-62, '64-5, '65-6. According to the article, '51-2 was the greatest flood and '57-8 was the next greatest. The paper goes on to say, "The river has done a great deal of damage - farms of fine Russian River bottom land have been deposited elsewhere in the shape of sediment; and it is still taking some way

by piece-meals, together with rail, pickets, etc."

The year of 1879 saw a flood agreed to be greater than that of '51-2. The river's rise was apparently very rapid due to heavy rains, and the river overflowed its banks in many places. The Alexander Valley bridge sustained some damage - the running waters pulling it off its piers in several places. Several accounts of residents and farmers losing their fences and crops, as well as accounts of houses flooding, are mentioned in the *Healdsburg Enterprise* of March 13, 1879.

"Healdsburg's Terrible Visitation"

The flood article title in the January 25, 1890 *Sonoma County Tribune* paper was "Healdsburg's Terrible Visitation". The article starts out: "Russian River is full to overflowing. Probably in the memory of man it was never so high as yesterday morning." The bridge was soon to be washed out, residents were flooded out of their homes, and isolated by the rising waters. The river was full of debris and wood and the occasional outhouse! The article continues with its dramatic tone: "Healdsburg is an island. Russian River is on the north and east and Dry Creek on the south and west have almost completely surrounded it. Dry Creek overflowed it banks yesterday..." As in the fashion of a small town newspaper in those times, damages to Healdsburg individuals were listed (Mr. Chas Alexander lost his calves to drowning; the Gladdens were hemmed in; Busch and Hickock lost seven heads of cattle; the residence of Joe Fitch, Jr. was swept away).



High Water, NWPRR, 1904

Even though there were floods recorded earlier, as noted above, the newspaper's fear and panic comes through in its writing: "The alarm

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in town is general, and it is feared that there will be loss of life with nightfall. Many futile efforts to reach the beleaguered were made before night, but some of the boats were upset by the swift waters, and their occupants were glad to get back to land. The cries of the distressed are pitiable and those on land are made frantic by their inability to render them any assistance. The storm continued in its fury all day and up to the hour of press, and the water-bound residents of Russian River and Dry Creek have to depend on the strength of their homes to withstand the impending calamity. No one looked for such a flood here, and consequently no one was prepared for the awful emergency."

A few days later the *Healdsburg Enterprise* took the *Sonoma County Tribune* to task, saying that the article consisted of exaggerated statements "without a semblance of foundation." (*Healdsburg Enterprise*, 1-29-1890). The *Enterprise* goes on to relate some "Amusing Incidents" that occurred in connection with the flooding. One such story goes like this: "One individual residing in the western portion of town, when his front gate floated off its hinges, built a raft, and tying a rope around his waist, ordered his wife to hang on to one end and at the first signal of danger to pull for dear life. He mounted his raft and paddled forth in search of his gate (the water was only six inches deep!). While paddling around he met some obstacle, and when he uttered an exclamation of surprise his wife mistook it for a signal of distress, and pulling the rope she jerked him off the raft into the water and mud, to his immense disgust."

Double Trouble

In 1895 an even worse flood visited the inhabitants of Healdsburg. Actually two worse floods. The first occurred in early January of that year. According to the *Healdsburg Tribune*, there was more water than during the flood of 1890, but less damage to personal property. The flooding itself sounds massive: "From the railroad depot to the creek and as far south as the eye could see there was one vast body of water which was gradually rising at 8 o'clock in the morning..." (*Healdsburg Tribune*, 1-10-1895).

Two weeks later, the inhabitants of Healdsburg were treated to another storm, this one much greater than the first: "For fifty straight hours the flood gates of heaven were open and the most tremendous precipitation of rain ever known flooded Russian River valley and the lowlands through which Dry Creek flows" (*Healdsburg Tribune*, 1-24-1895). Apparently, the rain fell from Sunday through Tuesday of that week without letting up or stopping at all. The Russian River overflowed its banks, and the river, marked twelve inches higher than ever before, almost washed away the railroad bridge. Again, however, there was very little damage done to personal property. Many houses stood in water - some up to two feet of water - but little damage was done to fences and orchards.



Westside Area, 1904

The most damage done by the force of the two storms combined was to the road system. The flooding left roads and highways filled with ruts and holes, and virtually impassible with wagons or any type of vehicle. Some roads were washed away, others were covered in mud and rock slides. Many smaller bridges were demolished and washed away, making creeks also impassible with any vehicle. The Healdsburg area taxpayers were in doubt that they "will get off very lightly" (*Healdsburg Tribune*, 1-31-1895) when all the roads and bridges were to be repaired

The Same Story

Flooding continued, some years worse than others, but the results very similar. In March 1904 a heavy storm blew through Healdsburg: "West street [Healdsburg Avenue], at the slough crossing, was a couple of feet under water...; Russian River seemed like the mighty Missouri in its turbulent rush toward the sea...; people sitting on the railroad bridge could almost reach the water with their feet..." (*Healdsburg Tribune*, 3-17-1904). In 1906 a storm of "unusual severity" hit the area and the water in the river "reached about as high a point ever recorded; and, there was some apprehension concerning the railroad bridge, as the water was nearly up to the timbers and great quantities of flotsam endangered it" (*Healdsburg Tribune*, 1-25-1906). In 1908/09 a storm began in December and lasted almost the entire month of January. In 1914 "the biggest storm in years" hit the area, causing washouts and giving the impression that "there is water, water everywhere" (*Healdsburg Tribune*, 1-1-1914).

For many years the newspapers almost always carried a flood story in December, January, February or March, and the articles could almost be interchangeable: heaviest storm in years, roads flooded and damaged, railroad bridge almost under water, several sections isolated for a period of time due to flooding, roads washed out, fences floating by, etc.

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In 1937 Healdsburg suffered from a severe flooding. The December 11 issue of the *Press Democrat* declared "Healdsburg Swept by Flood." Currents ran two feet deep through Healdsburg's streets and many homes were flooded with eight inches to four feet of water. The flood of 1940 was said to be worse, and in 1955 water again swept ferociously through Healdsburg.



Flood in Ralph Grant Orchard, 1937

Flood Control

This was not by any means the last of the flooding seen by Healdsburg. The '60s, '70s, '80s (1986 was a particularly bad year) and '90s (especially 1995) all had their big floods, and residents can remember certain ones as best and biggest. Over the years the town of Healdsburg has taken steps to alleviate the flooding. Warm Springs Dam and Lake Sonoma were conceived around 1940 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the purpose of flood control of Dry Creek, water supply and recreation. It was authorized in 1962 by Congress, and the dam was completed in 1983. In the mid-1980s Healdsburg built a detention basin between Healdsburg Avenue and Grove Street, which was built to catch 400 cubic feet of water per second. In the 1990s, after the big storm of 1995, the city set about improving the city's storm-drain system, so that it could empty the flooding streets more quickly. But it wasn't until the summer of 1997, when another detention basin was built, this one a seventy five acre basin north of town, that flooding was alleviated in the Healdsburg area.

Today in the year 2000 the town of Healdsburg seems safe from flooding. But nature is not easily tamed, and life on a flood plane should never be taken for granted. Some day, the newspapers from this century will tell their tale.

HEALDSBURG, CALIFORNIA, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY, 7, 1920

COL. JOHN FAVOUR PREPARES GRAPHIC RAINFALL CHART FOR PAST 20 YEARS

YEAR	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
1901	10.54	8.97	1.03	4.59	1.25				.92	1.16	8.04	2.27	38.77
1902	2.45	21.72	5.49	5.49	1.76	.55			5.94	9.66	4.76		52.85
1903	8.99	3.53	7.66	.46					1.00	14.54	4.43		38.61
1904	3.13	17.45	19.94	3.08	.23				4.12	6.80	3.18		65.18
1905	16.91	6.40	8.41	1.02	3.47				.05	.02	3.88		38.09
1906	15.56	7.54	12.40	.78	4.05	1.77			.11				56.10
1907	10.97	4.89	18.25	.90	.29	.71			23.106	.10	9.40		45.70
1908	6.22	6.67	1.93	.18	1.17	.15			.30	.97	3.42		25.62
1909	31.57	12.72	4.25			.19			1.34	2.82	2.84		62.72
1910	6.64	3.88	5.05	.75	.06				1.15	2.17	1.84		21.54
1911	14.54	4.34	7.14	3.28	.71	.05							34.37
1912	7.75	1.09	4.62	2.50	2.72	1.66			3.70	1.29	5.03		32.00
1913	10.79	.32	2.53	1.69	1.46		.08	.02			10.62		15.68
1914	32.25	6.64	3.47	2.23	.76	.38			17.257		.80		46.56
1915	13.46	17.24	6.12	.54	6.58					.18	3.26		46.56
1916	31.11	6.34	3.43	.30	.36	.37	.60	.35	.32	.55	2.62		38.67
1917	2.30	9.52	1.24	2.35	.96		.30	1.22			2.75		23.56
1918	1.71	7.93	5.25	1.06		.30		2.02	.94		2.85		25.23
1919	6.35	11.55	3.70	.72	.11			.90	.02		.52		25.28

The following statistics give first and last days of the season, the seasonal rainfall, then the coldest day and warmest day in the respective years:

1901-42.19; Jan 1, 22°; June 23, 97°	1908-26.81; Dec. 12, 24°; June 23, 97°
1902-52.85; Dec. 30, 26°; July 24, 98°	1909-58.18; Dec. 4, 26°; June 23, 106°
1903-38.99; Feb. 4, 22°; Sep. 2, 92°	1910-30.40; Jan. 5, 20°; Aug. 23, 104°
1904-62.83; Mar. 25, 31°; Sep. 3, 95°	1911-35.32; Feb. 16, 26°; July 1, 55°
1905-61.93; Feb. 12, 23°; July 7, 108°	1912-34.07; Jan. 7, 25°; June 2, 97°
1906-49.08; Dec. 3, 30°; July 23, 100°	1913-29.50; Jan. 6, 23°; July 11, 108°
1907-49.21; Jan. 20, 32°; May 26, 94°	1914-61.37; Jan. 17, 30°; June 28, 96°
	1915-55.77; Dec. 2, 23°; Jun. 22, 106°
	1916-45.43; Nov. 3, 26°; Jul. 22, 100°
	1917-26.83; Jan. 19, 29°; Jun. 18, 106°
	1918-21.15; Jan. 3, 29°

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HISTORIC



LIVES

Ernest and Irene Spitzer atop roof of truck hauling tanbark, 1922

From Italy to Sonoma County

Luke: Our father [Louis Tedeschi] came Santa Rosa in 1905, to Occidental. At that time, it seemed like all the people from the north side of Italy were coming to Santa Rosa. They came from around Tuscany. . . Carerra, where the marble is. You know, one of them comes over and they send money for the next guy to come over. That's the way the Italians came over, one after the other. . .

He [Louis] was working out of Occidental. He had a team of horses, he was hauling tan oak. At that time, the hide factory in Santa Rosa used tan oak to tan hides. And he used to haul ties for the railroad from Occidental. Then when my parents got married, they went and lived in Occidental.

Up this way from Geyserville if you go through Asti and Chianti, they were all guys that came from their part of Italy--all paisanis. So, they came looking for a place up here, and they found this one [on Canyon Rd., Geyserville]. This was all trees. There was no vineyard then, and there was no house. So they cut the trees here to build a little house for two. Then they had one boy, so they built another room; three boys, two more rooms, right around the house. As the family grew, they built more house.

There was no money in those days. If you had a twenty dollar bill you were rich! He [Louis] put in vineyard and made wood--he sold firewood. At that time everybody cooked with wood, and these hills were full of trees. He worked at the [Italian Swiss] Colony, and worked where he could find it, in his spare

"WE USED EVERYTHING BUT THE SQUEAL:"

1920's-30's RANCH LIFE IN GEYSERVILLE, AN ORAL HISTORY WITH LUKE AND GUS TEDESCHI

Interview by Jim Myers • Edited by Holly Hoods

time. And little by little he put in more vineyard and more vineyard. Mostly zinfandel. At that time it was zinfandel, carrignane, petit syrah, those were coloring grapes. In later years, they started coming out with other varieties. I can't even name half of them.

These guys would come over from Occidental, wood choppers. In the winter they'd stay there at the hotel, they'd run up a nice big bill. Then in Spring, they'd go out and work, and then they'd come back in and they'd pay their bill. You do that now, give a guy a whole winter for nothin', you never see him again. But in those days, people were trusted. People would come back and pay their grocery bills and stuff.

Ranch Life

Gus: We went to school in Geyserville; the oldest ones of us went to Canyon School. Everybody helped. Everybody chipped in. Everybody worked. Oh yes, we used to come home after school and work.

Luke: Had our own chickens; had our own pigs, cow, garden. Lots of garden, garden for the whole family. It wasn't like it is now, everybody had them. We were more self-sufficient; there was no supermarkets. You didn't need to go to the store, because there wasn't any money. You tried to raise everything at home.

Anything that Mother cooked was good. Mother was a good cook... raviolis, lasagnes. She didn't have recipes. She knew how to make a meal with hardly nothin'. Go out in the garden, pick up a thing here, a thing there, make a big meal, and it was good. We didn't waste anything. If we killed a pig, we used everything but the squeal.

We never missed an abalone tide. We used to always go to the Coast at abalone tide. We used to go over and get our abalones. We used to camp, sometimes two-three days; for a week at the most. It depends on how much work you had to do at home. You couldn't stay away too long. Sometimes we went over Skaggs Springs Road, sometimes we went through Boonville, up and around Hwy 128. My dad used to go abaloning in June, about June 15th he'd be finished with all the ranch work. He'd load everything into the Model T Ford truck and go up. Mother and Sis stayed home.

Gus: There was a lot of game here when we was growing up. As time went by, there was less and less. Rabbits--jackrabbits, robins, quail. Way back here they'd go deer hunting. No wild pigs, no wild turkeys at that time.

Neighboring Families

Luke: The families in the area at the time were the Marianis over here, then us here, Pedroncelli on one side, Fambrini on the other. Giovannoni down a little farther, Stefani. Up Walling Road, there was Biaggini, Buchignani, Silvestri, that's about it. Then on Dry Creek, there was Santinis, Michele, Pasquini, DelCarlo, Guadagni, Teldeschi--they came in later.

Geyserville

Luke: There was two hotels which burnt when we were in grammar school. They had this big hotel because Geyserville was kind of a way station. They'd come up from the railroad track, from the depot, and get wagons to go to Skaggs Springs or go to the Geysers. So there was more activity then. And there was a big livery stable, two of them. Three grocery stores.

Please see page 11

Continued from page 10

Gus: And afterwards there was three gas stations.

Luke: Santi Catelli came in there after Prohibition was appealed--then he couldn't bootleg anymore. So he came to Geyserville just when I started to go to grammar school; around that time. First he made the bar, then he bought all these little places around it. He built up a nice business there in Geyserville. There was a butcher shop, and there was a drug store. Doctor, Dr. Baldwin used to have an office in there, Dan Sohler used to have an office in there. There was all those things in Geyserville. A little theater in Geyserville.

Grapes and Other Crops

Luke: There wasn't that many wineries around. There was Pedroncelli, he came in after World War I. He bought this place down here and at first he was buying grapes and reselling grapes, and trying to make a go of it. And Seghesio was up here, they bought some grapes. The biggest was the Colony.

I know one year my dad hauled grapes to Healdsburg; Roma was buying down there by the railroad tracks--used to be Passarino Winery, I think. Foppiano bought some. Joe Vercelli had a little winery north of town. He used to work for Angelino Massoni. He used to also have a machine shop. He had made the winery there on Grove Street, now belongs to Seghesio. Joe Vercelli worked there for a while. There wasn't very many wineries. Frei was there with a little bitty winery, but he never made much noise. And then later on in years, the Windsor Co-op started. But that was about it around here. Mostly they sold wine in bulk. The Colony bottled. In those days, it wasn't like now. You'd go down to Pedroncelli, he had it in gallon jugs. He'd just hand you a gallon jug. Now you gotta have a paper around it and everything else. Oh and there was Nervo, Frank Nervo. He and Pedroncelli used to sell in gallon jugs. I think at that time, it was seventy-five cents a gallon. My dad always used to say, "Use good grapes, make good wine."

Luke: In my time, there was grapes on these hills, prunes down on the flat. There was apples. Right across from Goodyear's Store

there used to be two big ranches of apples. Over here, just about every ranch had a little patch of apples. Right below Geyserville, there was two or three places. The growers had a packing plant there, they used to pack the Gravenstein apples. That was the first job we got when we got out of school--picking apples.

Then there was pears, there was a big ranch of pears, like the Myers out here, a lot of pear ranching like up in Ukiah. And there was cherries. The Houghtens down here had a patch of cherries.



Birdseye view of Geyserville. 1928

Wisecarver--where the old Saccomano place is--had cherries in there. Peaches, down here, Yoakim down here, he had a patch of peaches. Myers had a patch of peaches. Jefferson plums, they had Jefferson plums they were growing.

Hops had to be in soft, heavier soil. On Westside, where Rochioli Winery is, that used to be a hop ranch. And the one next to it, Hop Kiln Winery, that used to be a hop ranch. All through that West side down to the River, then over here at the bridge--Russian River bridge at the Alexander Valley, Grace had the big ranch in there and Peterson had the big place down on Hasset Lane.

Gus: Who harvested the crops? There was no welfare. Kids, everybody.

Luke: We used to go out and work, we had to buy our school clothes. There was no money, there was no welfare. Nobody gave you a check in winter. You got your money, you bought your clothes, and that was it. Nobody likes to pick prunes; nobody likes to pick grapes.

Gus: We picked prunes--and they were small--for only three cents a box. I'm not kidding. We

picked hops for seventy five cents a hundred.

Luke: In the summer you've got three months, you can pick a little apples, then you've got the pears, then you'd pick prunes. Then you'd come home and pick the grapes, and by that time, it was time to go back to school!

Source: November 1993 Interview, Jim Myers with Luke and Gus Tedeschi, Geyserville, CA. Tape on file at Healdsburg Museum.

ARTIFACTS: FASHIONS OF THE 1920's, '30's AND '40's



#378-9

Bronze silk dress, shorter length, straight lines. Beaded with bronze glass beads. c. 1925-1928

#473-7

Black silk chiffon sleeveless dress. Longer hem, straight lines. Beaded with black bugle beads, intermingled with pink translucent sequin beads and glass bead chains. c. 1928

1920's

After the solemnity of the war years (WWI), 1920s fashion reflected a more youthful, carefree spirit. Female liberation was mirrored in the clothing style - the corset was discarded, legs were exposed and freed, breasts were flattened and hair was cut short. Clothes became simpler and lighter in weight, and feminine curves were replaced by vertical lines. By 1925 waists had dropped and surface decoration had begun to make an appearance. In the mid to late 1920s fashion focused on a slender, youthful look. The look was boyish, totally flat, rectangular and mid calf length.



#329-16

Forest green rayon crepe dress of street length. Draped deep v-neck with inset. Front panel hangs loose and buckles at back in center. c. mid 1930s no #

Black rayon dress, long length, straight lines. Sleeveless, low back, silver beads on upper bodice, front and back. c. 1930s

1930's

In the 1930s the adult female figure came back into fashion. Hemlines fell and the waistline, which had dropped to the hips, returned to its natural position. In the early '30s hemlines dropped very low, then slightly lifted and stayed that way until the end of the decade. Torsos were sensually molded, contrasted by squarish shoulders. Long dresses were the fashion for evening wear.



#384-4

Black sheer cotton lace cocktail dress. Black underdress. Shorter length, feminine lines, short sleeves. Lace belt at waist. c. 1940s

#313-188

Black rayon knee length organza dress. Bodice beaded with sequins and beads. Sleeves are short and sheer. Bows at waistband. c. 1940s

1940's

Three quarters of 1940s fashion were influenced by WWII. Textile restrictions forced clothing makers to become resourceful. Women recycled clothes and relied on sewing patterns. Slacks became part of a woman's wardrobe. Things were conservative. Clothes were crisp, efficient, and angular. But 1947 saw a change. A "new look" was proclaimed by the fashion press. Clothes became dressy, soft and drapery. Sequins, beads, ruffles and wide hemlines were part of the look. An extravagant use of fabric and curvy silhouette expressed a luxury and femininity, in contrast with the war years' austerity.