



RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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

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IN THIS ISSUE

In this, our first issue for 2004, we are pleased to introduce a new contributing writer, Giovanna (Gina) Riner, a new resident to Healdsburg who has purchased the Pat Dennes house on Grant Street and is taking the time to do extensive renovation to the historic structure. Gina, the owner of GNA Communications, a Strategic Marketing Service, gives us a fascinating history of the Dennes house and its previous owners. Welcome, Gina, to the pages of the Russian River Recorder.

Daniel Murley, our new curator (new as of last October) brings us an extremely knowledgeable and well written historic journey in his article about the Russians visiting Healdsburg and environs in the 1830s. A memorable account. Enhancing the article are the beautiful illustrations by a Russian scientist.

This year we have resumed the practice of featuring some of the Museum's many artifacts which the public does not have the

opportunity to enjoy. Charlotte Anderson has chosen for this issue the six beautiful dolls which were donated to the Museum by the heirs of Verna Sandborn Lafon. Verna was an ardent supporter of the Museum and Historical Society and her family, the Sandborns and her late husband Felix Lafon, who served as a member of the city council, contributed much to the well being of the Healdsburg community.

Carla Howell gives us an intense look on what transpired between 1980 and 2000 and how the Planning Commission and City Council worked to preserve the look and feel of our community. It was a time of awakening and what could be termed progress.

So, we start a new year with a renewed resolve to continue presenting interesting and informative articles that, hopefully, will continue to explain what Healdsburg was and is.

Arnold Santucci
Editor

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ORAL



HISTORY

From Bay Area to Healdsburg

I was born in 1949 in San Francisco. I grew up in North Beach and spent some time in school down on the Peninsula. I moved to Healdsburg in 1974. My first husband's job transferred us to northern California—from the Peninsula area. I had spent a lot of time in Healdsburg as a child and thought it would be a nice place to raise our then two children.

When I was a kid, we used to come up to Guerneville. Then when my grandparents (Anne and Tony Garibaldi) retired, they bought one of the first houses built in the River's Bend subdivision. I was still in high school then, and I used to come up and stay with them on weekends and in the summer. I used to love spending summers on the River.

Planning Commission

I was on the Healdsburg Planning Commission for about ten years, from 1979-1990. My kids were going to school at St. John's, and one of my daughters was in class with Susie Eddinger, so I got to know Jerry and Nancy Eddinger. Jerry was on the City Council at that time, and he told me that there was an opening on the Planning Commission. I had been fairly involved with things that were going on: I was on the school board at St. John's, and I had also been president of the co-op Nursery

PRESERVING THE CHARACTER OF THE COMMUNITY: PERSPECTIVES ON HEALDSBURG'S GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE 1980'S - 1990'S

AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH CARLA HOWELL, FORMER HEALDSBURG PLANNING COMMISSIONER, CITY COUNCIL MEMBER AND MAYOR

by Holly Hoods

School. So I had been pretty actively involved in terms of my children. Jerry had let me know that there was an opening on the Planning

to get "back to the land." People were buying small farms; people from my generation who were then in our 20s, looking for a change in

were some people who had lived in the community for a very long time who did not want to see change and welcomed those people for also



Carla Howell enjoying a visit to the Plaza Square (photo by Charlotte Anderson)

Commission. We'd had big discussions about changes that were happening in the community. It was kind of at that time when things were really starting to ...not boom, but they were poised to boom. It was the first time in a long time that there had been major change sort of happening along the edges there, and it was a scary thing.

Changing Demographics

There were a lot of new people moving to town—myself included. I think in the early to mid-70's, there was a big change in the make-up of the community. A lot of people who were kind of disillusioned started moving into the area, kind of looking

lifestyle; looking for a slower pace and a small town to raise our children. There was kind of an upsurge in people like that moving to Sonoma County, moving to Healdsburg, Sebastopol, Cotati and outlying areas of Santa Rosa, and I think they were bringing with them a different value system and perspective on the world. It was a time of interesting change. There was a real difference of opinion and a difference in lifestyles. The people were coming with a different value structure—a lot of them, like myself, coming from the Bay Area or from southern California, having seen what rapid growth and development can do to a community, saying "This is not what we want to see." There

appreciating Healdsburg. But there were other people who had been there a long time and felt that it was time for Healdsburg to change. They had made investments and they wanted to see those investments start to flourish. So there was a lot of discussion at that time about the direction that Healdsburg should go. I don't think I've ever been anti-growth, because I think that growth is a healthy thing, but I was anti-sprawl and anti-rapid growth. What I've always been in favor of is more thoughtful development: talking about it, thinking about whether this is what we want to live with in perpetuity.

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Healdsburg Awakens to New Challenges

I think of Healdsburg as being sort of like Rip Van Winkle. One of the things that happened—and thank God it did—was that Healdsburg kind of fell asleep. There was so much going on in other areas of the County, particularly in the Santa Rosa area, and south of us in Marin and San Francisco, and even the San Jose area. There was so much going on in those areas that Healdsburg was ignored for a really long time. Property values stayed really flat; there was very little development. The agricultural industry was not really booming and the grape industry had not really boomed yet. The area around the Plaza was pretty dilapidated, but in a good way. People had made a few changes here and there in the '50s, but mostly nothing had been done. It was sort of like benign neglect. And because of that, I think we were able to have what we have now. We didn't have to undo a lot of stuff that had been done badly in the '50s and '60s, so when it came time for renovating the Plaza, it was kind of like dusting it and polishing it. We didn't have to do major stuff to it. The same thing happened with the historic districts in the community, along Matheson Street and Johnson Street. The houses weren't as wonderful and elegant as they are now that they are all renovated, but most of them hadn't been altered dramatically either. Healdsburg just kind of moseyed along, and nobody tried to make dramatic changes until the early part of the '70s.

Saving the Plaza

One of the major issues on the Planning Commission was what to do with the Plaza; what to do with the downtown. Do we keep it the way it

is or do we change it? There was kind of push from City Hall at that time because we had a Finance Director who really was pushing for sales tax generators for the community. So he was pushing for big box stores in Healdsburg, and one of his plans involved tearing down the buildings that were on the west side of the Plaza. They were wonderful old brick and were still occupied by businesses when I moved here in the early 70s, but then the state got involved in earthquake retrofitting. Those buildings being brick, would have cost a lot of money to retrofit. I think, in retrospect, we could have done that if the right person had come along at the time, because there are examples of it working in other places, like Ghirardelli Square. But the market was not there in Healdsburg to spend the kind of money it would have cost to retrofit those buildings, so the buildings had to be torn down. The Finance Director had a plan to bring in big box retail to the site. He was actively working with K-Mart to build a K-Mart there. I think there were enough people in town that were aghast by that. There was a burgeoning movement then among members in the community to try to save the Plaza as much as we could, though we knew that those buildings were gonna have to be torn down on the west side. So that was the beginning of the saving of the Plaza.

Developing Vineyard Plaza Shopping Center

Another one of the big issues at that time was the development of the Vineyard Plaza Shopping Center. When the shopping center developers proposed it, it was going to turn its back on the downtown and face the freeway. The developer felt that if the shopping center had freeway frontage, it would be advantageous to him. People would pull off the free-

way and see this fabulous shopping center. At the time when I was on the Planning Commission, Michael Rubenstein, a young and very visionary architect, was also on it. He said, "You can't do that! You can't take a major shopping center and build it there and have it turn its back on the town. Why don't you integrate it into the downtown?" That was a really hard sell, because it pretty much went against the developers' standard practice. They didn't care about what happened to the existing downtown; they just cared about what they were building at the time. They also felt that they had paid a lot of money for freeway frontage. From the Planning Commission perspective, it was a difficult sell to the City Council. There were also Planning Commissioners who weren't completely sold on that idea. But the shopping center was dramatically redesigned to get it the way we have it. There were a lot of issues around the development of that shopping center. There were a lot of trees at the site. It was one of the major hurdles that the town had to go through. You could see there were real differences of opinion about how the town should develop. That was one of the beginning battles fought over land use that are still ongoing.

Planning for the Future

It was because of Michael Rubenstein that we did this study called the Ru/Dat. It was a really great exercise for the community to go through. They brought in top-flight designers, architects, planners, landscapers—people from varied backgrounds who come from other places. I think bringing in fresh eyes brings in a whole new appreciation, plus a broader sense of what's possible. So they work in a very focused manner in a very short time, from a Friday to a Monday. Boom, boom boom! They meet with all these peo-

ple and get all these ideas. Then they come back later and regurgitate all this stuff out.

And a lot of what happened at the Ru/Dat—was envisioned through the Ru/Dat process—has happened very successfully in Healdsburg. Because they were the ones who said, "Look at this fabulous Plaza! How many towns in California can still say that they have their historic Plaza intact? Very few. You need to really capitalize on that and here are the ways that you can do that." They suggested changing the sidewalks, putting in brick sidewalks. They suggested bumping out the curbs and slowing down the traffic around the Plaza by bringing the landscape closer, and narrowing the streets. They recommended not changing the facades of the buildings if you can avoid it. If you do add anything else, they said, make it integrated into the already existing buildings, without cutesifying it. It's not Disneyland, it's a real working town.

Out of that Ru/Dat session came a lot of the planning decisions about how the town was going to grow. So when we did our General Plan—the first General Plan—in the early '80s, we focused on keeping the Plaza as the center of town. Any shopping areas or retail development were going to be more like neighborhood shopping areas that would serve the neighborhood where they were planted, not to be regional or designed to serve the entire community, so that downtown stayed the regional heart of the city. One example is that little shopping area at Dry Creek Road where Big John's Market is. That was developed as a shopping area for those homes that were built or going to be built in that area. Though it can serve the entire city, it's really meant to serve that neighborhood.

That's how we wanted to see the town develop. At the freeway

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entrances and exits to town, we wanted to see more highway-oriented businesses develop: gas stations, hotels and motels, fast food. They needed more traffic than what the city of Healdsburg could provide them, and by virtue of where they were located near 101, they could get that traffic. So we didn't plunk a K-Mart on the Plaza, knowing that if we had done that, it would have had to have been a regional draw. It would have changed dramatically the whole downtown of Healdsburg. And at some point, the Plaza would have been turned into a shopping mall or a parking garage. And that was not the vision that the community had for Healdsburg.

Second Woman Elected Mayor of Healdsburg

I was elected to City Council in 1990 and served two terms in the '90s. I was the Mayor fairly soon into my being on the Council, in 1992, within the first two years. I was only the second woman ever elected (Rita Schroeder was the first). When I got on the Council, it was a very divided Council—extremely divided. There were two for, two against, and me. I often was looked upon to be the swing vote. It was a very difficult time. So when I first came on the City Council, it was time to have a new mayor and they couldn't decide who it could be, because neither side would unite around someone. So it sort of became me, I guess, as the one they could unite around. It was kind of a baptism by fire.

Women's Influence on County Government

It was an interesting time, because it was during the time when a lot of women were starting to move for-

ward politically. So there was a sort of burgeoning growth of elected women in Sonoma County. There were starting to be women on city councils in a lot of other places. Before that time there had been very few women represented in any form on the government. Helen Putnam in Petaluma was one of the very few women involved politically. So it was kind of interesting the effects. One example was the Mayors' and Councilmen's Association, which is where the different people from the city councils in the County get together once a month for camaraderie. It had been—because there had been no women involved—a men's club. It was a really interesting dynamic when women became actively involved in city councils and consequently, in the Mayors' and Councilmen's Association. It changed dramatically from purely a social event to a working event that was also social, so that there was a speaker and there was a direction.

We started talking about issues that were regional, issues that affected all of us as cities in the County. I think that that was something that women brought to the group, because I think that women process differently from men. We look at things as a bigger picture, and so I think it was easy for women to get into this group and see that we all had common issues. It would be easy to solve our problems and resolve our issues if we kind of did it together rather than separately. It would be faster, cheaper and easier if we did some things on a regional basis. So it dramatically changed the way that things were done in the County.

It opened up a whole dialog between the different cities. There used to be little individual cities, each out for themselves. There was always this sort of confrontational "Us against Them" attitude. The cities didn't work as a team very often.

They usually competed, because they were competing for dollars, for land uses, competing for development, whatever. So it kind of changed how things happened in the County as a whole. That was an exciting thing about being involved. Lynn Woolsey was on the City Council in Petaluma at the same time that I was on the City Council in Healdsburg, so I was able to see other women politicians achieving even higher office. It was a very exciting time. I think now it's sort of evened out in a way that's more fair; that makes more sense. But at the time, there was this big groundswell of movement behind getting women elected and getting us represented in a way that we are now, but that we hadn't been.

Housing and Diversity

There are a lot of voices in the community that don't get heard, and you have to represent those people as well. Sometimes they're not the powerful people who come and speak for themselves, or they don't have money. They are kind of invisible. One of the things that we really had to tackle when I was on the City Council was the issue of housing, affordable housing for farmworkers and the elderly, and we were starting to deal with housing for people with physical disabilities. Those issues were starting to come forward and we were mirroring things that were happening at the state level. All of a sudden, the state was growing and there was this really diverse population. Where were all these people going to live and work? Some of that was being mirrored in Healdsburg.

For me, dealing with the whole housing issue was probably one of the biggest challenges. A lot of people's perceptions needed to be changed. Perception becomes reality sometimes. People needed to understand that because people were poor

or underemployed in menial jobs or had made bad choices at some point in their lives, that they were not necessarily bad people. And they didn't make bad neighbors consequently, and so when you put subsidized housing in someone's neighborhood, it doesn't mean that you're bringing them a criminal element, that you're going to denigrate their property values or that it's going to lessen the community in some way. The perception needed to be that these people already lived in our community, that they had the right to live in a nice, safe place as everybody else did. I personally feel that we all have to share in helping people achieve some level of dignity and comfort and respect. The first projects that we built were difficult because people came out and said ugly and hurtful things, because they didn't know any different and they were fearful. We spent a lot of time educating the community about how affordable housing of all different kinds could be well integrated into our community without being a bad thing. I think most people now understand it, because they've seen examples of it working.

Hopes for the Future

If I could make a change in Healdsburg, I would take the Healdsburg that you saw in the film of the 1950s and I would bring it forward 25 years. I would work all the changes that we made on the town, but I would bring that value structure forward. I'm not sure that's possible, but I think in some ways that Healdsburg from the 50s is still there in the undercurrent. It still feels to many people like a small town. There's some underlying something that people perceive in Healdsburg and value. I'm glad. Each new generation that comes sees that and wants to preserve it. That's a really good thing.

HISTORIC



DOLLS

ARTIFACTS: SIX DOLLS FROM THE COLLECTION OF VERNA SANDBORN LAFON

by Charlotte Anderson

Six of VERNA SANDBORN LAFON'S DOLLS are among the Museum's artifacts pictured here. The tallest is a porcelain doll with a brown ringlet wig. Next in height is a Parian doll with molded black hair. The two smallest dolls are bisque with molded blond hair. The other blond is a China doll with molded blonde hair. The wearer of a green dress is a Madame Alexander doll with a blonde wig.

Verna Sandborn Lafon, daughter of Ralph Sandborn of West Dry Creek, was a second grade Healdsburg teacher for over 20 years, a longtime member of the Healdsburg Historical Society, and a member of the Healdsburg Community Church. Hiking the trails of her mountain ranch, tending her garden, and collecting dolls were three of her favorite pastimes.

At one time Mrs. Lafon had over 100 dolls dating from the mid 1800s to the 1960s. When she obtained a doll, she would recondition it and, if needed, sew clothes for it. As Mrs. Lafon said in a homemade plaque, she hoped the dolls would bring pleasure not only to herself but to others:

These dolls...

How I wish that each of these dolls could tell its own unique story! Some more tenderly cared for... wrapped and carefully stored when there was no one left to play with them. Some were thrown out with the trash and buried. Others were found missing arms or legs, hair or eyes.....lying dejectedly on flea market and garage sale tables. What a story they could tell! These dolls have been lovingly gathered with hopes that they will bring you nostalgic pleasure.

Three types of ceramic were used to make dolls' heads: (1) Porcelain or China; (2) Parian (white bisque); and (3) Bisque (unglazed porcelain). "Chinas" is a collector's abbreviation for china-headed dolls, produced from about the 1830s well into the 1900s.

The common name for glazed porcelain is china and this substance was used by German, French, and Danish manufacturers to produce dolls' heads. Dolls' heads were often sold alone for the bodies to be made by mothers or nursemaids. Early china shoulder heads were attached to cloth bodies by gluing, by stitching through



Six of Verna Lafon's dolls now a part of the Museum's Extensive Artifact Collection. Photos of the dolls in this article by Whitney Hopkins.

the sew holes at the lower edge of the shoulder plate, or by nailing through the sew holes.

The craftsmanship and painting in these early dolls was outstanding. They usually had brown or black painted hair, painted eyes, and a pink luster to the china which gave a warmth to the skin tones.

After 1860 there was a sudden profusion of blonds. Variations of blond from honey and strawberry to dark oatmeal appeared, and at the same time there was a discernible difference in the look of the chinas. They became more child-like, with chubby cheeks and short necks. Hair-styles tended to be short and bobbed.

Parian dolls are of unglazed porcelain (fine white bisque) without tinting. The word Parian comes from Paros in Greece where white marble was found. "Parian ware" was the term given to entirely white, marble-like items, such as figures, and the substance was soon adopted by porcelain manufacturers for use in doll making. The so-called "Parian" dolls were made between 1850 and 1880.

Like china heads, Parian heads are found without bodies. The face painting on Parian dolls is generally of excellent quality and defini-

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tion, and the painted eyes are usually blue. Glass eyes can also be found on Parian dolls, but are rare.

The third, and for many collectors, the most important type of ceramic dolls are those with bisque heads and limbs. Bisque is made from the same substance as china, but it is unglazed. After an initial firing at a very high temperature, the facial painting is carried out, and the bisque is then fired again, this time at a lower temperature. Such painting is sometimes known as "fired in bisque."

Bisque was the material most favored by the great French and German doll makers, and it remained a favorite material for the creation of dolls' heads from the mid-19th century until the 1930s. Bisque proved to be an extraordinarily versatile material, and the second half of the 19th century saw a tremendous range of designs

and treatments of dolls. The heads were modified from the previously used shoulder-head or swivel neck to socket and flange necks. Eyes were painted, then glass, and later sleeping or "googly." It is only in recent years that bisque has been superceded as a material for dolls by vinyl.

The Collector's Encyclopedia of Toys and Dolls, Lydia Darbysbire ed. Chartwell Books, Inc., New Jersey, 1990.

12th Blue Book of Dolls and Values. Jan Foulke. Hobby House Press, Inc., 1995.



This doll with molded black hair is probably a Parian doll. She has a homemade with kid upper arms and bisque lower arms. She has a painted face and is wearing a blue/purple dress.



This "China" shoulder head blond doll was probable made after 1860 as she has molded blond hair. She has bisque lower arms, and her porcelain legs have painted boots and are attached to a homemade cloth body.



This little blond doll is bisque with molded blond hair. Her entire body is bisque, and she has connected shoulders and hips. Her blue socks and Mary Janes are painted on. She is wearing a knitted yellow and blue dress.



This Madame Alexander "Alexander-Kins" doll is wearing a green dress which has a white cloth label (sewn inside) with blue lettering saying "Madame Alexander." Made between 1956 and 1964 this doll, identified as a "bent knee walker" is made of hard plastic with jointed neck, shoulders and hips. She has a synthetic blond wig, sleep eyes, and a closed mouth.

HISTORIC



JOURNEY

EARLY EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS IN THE VALLEY OF THE RUSSIAN RIVER

by Daniel Murley

Imagine the thoughts of these men from the chilled and oftentimes frozen climes of the Northern Pacific as they first set their unbelieving gaze on the lush and luxuriant land, which lay just twenty miles from the coast of Northern California. Never before had the marine mammal hunters and commodity traders of the Russian American Company ventured so far inland, and they were pleased, yet amazed by what they saw.

In early September of 1833, they left their relatively comfortable and somewhat secure settlement on the Sonoma Coast to head eastward up the river "Slavianka". The highly appointed group consisted of the Manager of the Russian settlement of Ross, Petr Stepanovich Kostromitinov, the Chief Administrator (Governor) of Russian America, Baron Ferdinand Petrovich von Wrangell, and a group of Ross residents and aides-de-camp. Most importantly the Russians brought a few local coastal natives, probably Kashaya Pomo and Coast Miwok, along as interpreters and guides. The indigenous groups of the areas, which we now call Sonoma County, spoke diverse and sometimes distinctly different languages.

Indispensable to any travel, or for that matter any endeavor taken by Russians in North America, were Alaska Natives mostly from Kodiak Island and they probably made up the rest of this eclectic intrepid band. These Alaskans were the true lifeblood of the Russian American Company and besides procuring the fabulous furs that filled the holds of Russian trading vessels to Canton, these men and women soon became woven into the entire infrastructure of the company. Here in California they intermarried with local Native women and it would be likely that one of these interethnic couples was among the group to venture inland this late summer sojourn in 1833

Von Wrangell had come to Ross and Port Rumiantsev (Bodega Bay), to determine the condition and prospects for improvement of this most distant of Russian settlements in North America. In his inspection of the Ross Colony he had found it lacking in many important areas and felt that expansion into the interior was a must if the outpost was to survive. He also knew that the fledgling Mexican government had only limited influence in this area and the two Missions, recently secularized, were no real threat to any expansion by the Russians. So north of Mission San Rafael and northwest of Mission San Francisco Solano, von Wrangell saw a land literally ripe for development. On this first trip von Wrangell describes the land and the people he encountered in the following excerpt from his report to the Russian American Company, headquartered in Saint Petersburg...



Captain of the First Rank Baron F. P. von Wrangell was one of the ablest negotiators for the Russian American Company in North America in the 1830's but his undertakings for Count Nesselrode gained little. He served as Chief Administrator for 1830-1835. (von Wrangell image courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society).

"Arranging ourselves on the left shore (of the river) in the bushes to dine we heard voices drawing near to us from the Indians ... and shut out the sounds of the horses which were left grazing. We sent the interpreters to meet the comers, who it proved were friendly visitors, attracted to come here with the desire to see us. Their number was about 15 men. Their wives and children remained in the village nearby. From them we learned that the villains (Sotoyomis) who took revenge on the Spaniards for the violation of the tranquility of these peaceful inhabitants by pillaging the mission of the Indians have placed themselves in ambuscade behind the inaccessible bushes beyond the large valley in front, where they are ready to repulse any attack of their enemies. ... Yet before evening arrived we reached the very largest valley; at the beginning there is no wood or forest, and even like a table, covered by fat, fragrant grasses, and immense in her wideness was not less than 40 versts [1 verst .0667 miles], here mountains from the right and left presented themselves to view, their acquainted perimeter made us remark the nearness of our settlement Ross, wherefrom they are viewed. The Slavianka here pressed herself more to the western mountains, and a small river, winding herself in the middle of the valley... [my estimation of this location is some-

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where near current day Dry Creek] ... The night overtook us in one of those beautiful groves of oak, by which here and there the plains are variegated. Our horses nearly drowned in the fragrant, high grasses, which covered these plains. ... at our bivouac fires appeared our friends the Native Americans. Receiving from us tobacco, biscuits, beads, they sat down in circles with their countrymen, our interpreters and vaqueros, and took up their favorite ... occupation ... the play of even and odd numbers.

I wished to see the village of our friends; they hurried to inform their relatives of our visit and then led us about ten versts, walking ahead with such easiness and to the eye imperceptible swiftness, that to follow their steps, we were obliged to follow them on horseback trotting. Behind bushes and dried up channels, we found on sandy ground the village of the Native Americans. They consisted of from 5 to 6 families, inter-related between themselves. From white willow's rods, put in the ground, the wives of these Indians had built their temporary asylum or place of refuge. With such a taste, which astonished me in a very agreeable manner, the leaves of several shades and size of the willows, which are found in a great variety, gave a joyful view and rural simplicity from the opening to the top hut, and the opening for entering was trimmed with branches, with special care; several huts were aired by interior openings. The leaves were yet preserved in all their freshness, but before they are dried up the inhabitants leave the huts, the women take the infants and utensils on their backs, and carry them by sustaining the burden from the forehead by means of straps. The men show the new place and order is again created, so that after a few days these huts can be abandoned.

...all were kind and showed in detail the property of their husbandry. In a few baskets were preserved the supply of dough from pounded acorns, thin gruel from grains of wild rye, and other herbs, and fish caught in the riverlet. The Indians catch the fish by strewing on the water a powder, received from a root, called here Soap Root, from which the fish becomes insensible, and floats up to the surface of the water. The game hunting belongs as a matter of business to the men, but weaving, sewing, and thread making, as also all hard and difficult labors are put to the women.

The Indians told us that during the summer season, neither fog nor rain did disturb the constant clearness of the sky of these valleys. The air was always mild, and changing very little. But in the winter the rains are pouring down, the Slavianska steps out of her shores, and overflows all the lower plains and places and gives them new force and strength for vegetation.

... the natural inclination of the Native Americans for independence reflects in their plays, songs, music, and in the very handiworks. Even in such objects which they use for their ornament, as head dress, girdles, necklaces, made mostly from feathers of a different form revealing not only an inventive faculty of the mind, but even some fineness of taste. ... Food from vegetative substances, a mild climate, and the



A colonist in his hut, California.

very manner of life has formed the temperament of these Indians not bloodthirsty.

... Their children they love tenderly ... [and they] honor with due preference, old age, experience, skillfulness ... The esteem is seldom transferred from the father to the son, but the power of the chief over others is not of much account. He who wishes to leave the family village and go to other places has full liberty to do so.

... Being peaceful from nature, and timid against their enemies, such powerful ones as the Europeans seemed to them at first, the Indians learning afterwards that they were also such men as they themselves."

In von Wrangell's description of the region we now call the "Healdsburg area," he as many of us who followed after the Russians, have found the residents, the land and the climate quite pleasing and appealing. "This land is beautiful and capable of producing all kinds of cereal grains, grapes and the fruits of southern Europe. There is enough space to build whole cities, to harvest up to 50,000 poods [800 metric tons] of wheat and to maintain as many as 40,000 head of cattle." The great Baron Ferdinand actually tried to secure this land from the heads of government in Mexico City. His visit to the newly formed capital, expressly for that purpose, would probably been realized, had not vicious rumors spread by the English and the Americans about Russian intentions in Northern California been exaggerated. This eloquent and ambitious leader of an international capitalistic commercial company was unable to convince Mexico that allowing the Russians to maintain and even expand their influence at Ross, Port Rumiantsev and the valleys of the Slavianska River in the interior would actually "serve as an impediment to the overly aggressive attempts by the citizens of the United States of America to occupy all of Northern California." The Divine Monarch Tsar Nicholas I was also reluctant to enter into negotiations with a country that had gained its authority through secession or revolution. These early visits to the

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An Indian baker (vaquero), California

environs of Healdsburg, the Alexander Valley and the Sacramento Valley, provided the Russians and posterity with invaluable ethnographic and other scientific information, but never resulted in a permanent Russian presence here. In 1841 the settlements at Ross and the ranches in the interior near Bodega, Graton and Willow Creek were abandoned and the last ship of Russian colonists left their former port at Bodega Bay on January 1, 1842.

God was *still* in His heaven and the Tsar was *still* very, very far away!

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WITNESS TO THE PAST: ONE WOMEN'S UNWITTING DISCOVERY OF A BYGONE ERA

by Giovanna "Gina" Riner

I found the first one underneath the turquoise burlap flooring, in the back bedroom off the kitchen. Late afternoon sunlight streamed through the west-facing window, warming the room considerably though it was already fall. As I pulled up sections of the worn flooring I noticed one, then two, then three, until my collection totaled 11. "Guess what I found," I shouted to the painter. Walking into the kitchen, I cupped the unusual looking hairpins in one hand. We sat down at the kitchen table and spread out the found treasure. My mind raced with questions I had no answers to. Why were the hairpins left on the fir floor and later covered with linoleum? Who wore them? What was her name? Suddenly, I wanted to learn everything about this ramshackle house that I had purchased two months earlier.

Located a few blocks from Healdsburg's downtown plaza, the timeworn craftsman bungalow caught my eye when I visited friends one weekend in July 2001. On Saturday morning, as we strolled downtown, I commented to my friend, Kelly Ebeling, that the bungalow across the street was a "Gina" house. She said, "Wouldn't it be funny if you bought it." I laughed. Just then the door to 328 Grant Street opened and the tenant, Joyce, ran outside. Waving hello to Kelly she said, "Hey, this house is going on the market Monday if you know of anyone who wants to buy it!" With that she drove off in her red jeep. Kelly and I looked at each other in astonishment. At that moment the entire direction of my life changed.



The George Day House at 328 Grant Street.

I had no plans to buy a house much less move from Oakland to a one-zip-code hamlet like Healdsburg. But as soon as I stepped through the front door into the living room, I knew this was the house that I was meant to have. With its redwood wainscoting, box-beam ceilings, built-in bookcases, and sweeping porch, it was reminiscent of the first house I had grown up in.

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Within four days of making that idle comment to Kelly, I was the proud but nervous owner of this run-down house that had seen nary a paint of coat in over 30 years and was almost hidden by masses of privets, ivy and bamboo.



George Day

Just before I moved in I decided to start researching its history. With a lot of help from Holly Hoods at the Museum, one of my first discoveries was that George E. Day, who came to Healdsburg in 1900 at the age of 20, built my house in the spring of 1913. Known for building strong houses, he was also the builder and contractor for the First National Bank Building on the northwest corner of Center and Plaza Streets. He stopped building in 1915 to devote more time to the family dairy, which he and his wife Lizzie started about three houses from mine.

When Holly mentioned that his daughter, Evelyn Day Iversen, lived two blocks from me on Piper Street, my heart skipped a beat. I couldn't believe my good fortune and was eager to find out as much as I could about her father. I invited Evelyn to my history-themed housewarming party and asked her if it was okay if I picked her up in a horse-drawn carriage. Chuckling slightly, she said, "All right." I'm sure she thought I was a bit of a nut but I couldn't help myself. I was becoming absolutely besotted with my bungalow house and the town of Healdsburg. Walking into the living room on the day of the party, Evelyn looked at each of the walls as if for signs of change, and proclaimed with pride, "my father did build strong houses."

Heartened to discover so much about prominent builder, George Day, my research continued. My next venture was to find out who owned the land from the 1850s to present day. Poking through the historical survey files, maps and newspaper indexes at the Healdsburg Museum, I learned that famed scout Kit Carson's brother, Lindsey, owned the land in the mid-1850s, including 80 acres north of Piper Street. He sold the land in the spring of 1862 to August Knaack, a pioneer chair maker, and the area is known as Knaack's Addition.

When I went to the Sonoma County Clerk's Office to look up the original grant deeds, I noticed that the Clerk's office also had original maps, including a 1898 map of the City of Healdsburg. On my lot and the one next door the owner's name is Ella Boone Williams. "Could she be related to Daniel Boone," I thought? This tidbit had me running back to the Museum

to tell Holly of my latest discovery and conduct more research. I found out Ella was a pioneer woman born in 1850, a descendent of Daniel Boone and the first wife to Lindsey Carson. Now my head was truly spinning as I realized the connection my house and land had with early California pioneers.

Built for Ella's son, J. Ralph Williams, a cashier at Healdsburg National Bank, the house was front-page news in the June 19, 1913 edition of the Healdsburg Tribune. It was considered "one of the most attractive little bungalows in Healdsburg with front pillars of clinker brick." Although I haven't verified it, I can only assume that Williams' mother gave or sold her son half the original lot that she owned. After living in the house only a few years, J. Ralph Williams sold it in 1919 to George Ackerman, a Shell Oil Company manager, and his wife Mary Isabel. They lived in it until mid-1921.



Second from left, front row, J. Ralph Williams who had 328 Grant Street built and fourth from left, Ella Boone Williams.

Based on the Historic Resources Inventory dated August 1, 1983, I knew who the owner was in the 1980s but it was still a mystery as to who bought it after the Ackermans in 1921. So I hurried back to the Sonoma County Clerk's Office to look in the books that contained the original grant deeds. Since Healdsburg didn't have a large population at the time it was easy to find the grant deed but the street number was different than it is today, and I still needed other confirmation that it was the correct house. I checked the old issues of the July 1921 Healdsburg Tribune for more information. Bingo! On the July 14, 1921 front page I found an article that linked my house to the person who owned it for 66 years. Titled "R.R. Dennes Is Wed Sunday to Girl of Choice," I learned that "Mr. Dennes' act was not unexpected. It had been known for some time that he was contemplating this step when he recently purchased property at Grant and College Streets."

My curiosity about R.R. "Pat" Dennes, his wife Bess, and his family led me again to the County Clerk's office where I found a "Decree of Distribution." The names of three women were listed on the decree: Peggy Leiser, Donna Peterson, and Diane Keegan. Who were they? How were they related to Pat Dennes? I looked in the Sonoma county telephone book, and Eureka! There was a Peggy Leiser in Santa Rosa. My fingers were trembling as I dialed her number. When her husband, Wally, answered, I said, "Hello, uh, well, hmmm, is Peggy Leiser there? No? Ah, well, this is Gina Riner, and

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she doesn't know me, but I think she's connected to my house on Grant Street in Healdsburg." Wally told me that Peggy was the former wife of Pat Dennes, Jr., who grew up in the house with his sister Nancy.

Later, I talked to Peggy on the phone. "Who are Diane Keegan and Donna Peterson?" I asked. "They're my twin daughters and the granddaughters of Pat and Bess Dennes," Peggy replied. I invited the three of them to my house for tea and cookies, and was thrilled when they accepted. In a three hour visit, they took me through the house, pointing to things they remembered, telling me that their grandmother, Bess, had also had Bauer pottery in the built-in hutch. The same type of black rotary telephone was in the same place. They found it eerie that I had many pieces of furniture similar to those of their grandparents, and in the same places, too.

Donna told me that their great-grandfather, Edward F. Dennes, gave Pat the money to buy the house in 1921 as a wedding gift for his bride, Bess. I said, "Wait a minute, I have some interesting history about your great-grandparents." I then pulled out a page copied from the book "History of Sonoma County" that said Edward Dennes came to Healdsburg on Christmas Day in 1878. He was a butcher by trade and owned a grocery business with C. Haigh. He married Hattie Ray, a native of California and the daughter of John Guinn Ray, who came to Sonoma county in 1846, as a member of the historic Donner Party.

So many tantalizing details! Bess loved to play the piano. She was an accomplished professional whistler and she whistled specific tunes to call her children home. Pat made bootleg liquor in the basement during Prohibition; their cat, Mousie, lived in the house for 31 years – giving me hope that my own beloved feline companion, Tantri, will enjoy a similarly long life.

I shared these "finds" with my neighbors, including Nancy Roberts from 402 Grant Street. Nancy wrote to Shonnie Brown, suggesting that I'd be a good subject for one of her "Neighbors" profiles in the Tribune. After Shonnie's article appeared, I received a phone call from Norma Passarino. "You should call Dorcas Allison," she said. "She lived at 402 Grant and was best friends with Nancy Dennes who grew up in your house."

From Dorcas, I learned that the families at 328 and 402 Grant had been close since the 1920s. "I was in and out of 328 Grant Street like it was my own," Dorcas told me. "I remember when I was a girl of 10 or 11, playing hours of board games with Nancy and Pat Dennes, Jr."

The shadowy figures of Pat, Bess, Mousie, and the others began to seem present in my house. The sweetness of those bygone days was evoked by everything I learned: the simplicity, the slowness, people walking across the street for a cup of coffee with a neighbor. It was a "yoo-hoo" time – no phone calls, no email, no coordinating schedules. I felt enveloped in that comforting past.

Bess died in 1979. Pat Dennes, Sr. vacated the house and went to live on Fitch Mountain with a friend, and the house sat empty for five years (that's probably when the bamboo and ivy went wild). In November 1986, Pat, Sr., died, and the house was sold in 1987 to Mary Powell. It was a rental until I purchased it in July 2001.

Learning about George Day and the Dennes family has inspired to continue to preserve the rich heritage of my house's past and those who lived in it. With a strong network of neighbors and friends who believe in the value of community, a bygone era is coming to life again. This spring my bungalow is on the 14th Annual Healdsburg Historic Homes Tour, and I think Pat and Bess would be proud. The original oak floors gleam, the pink and red camillia trees are in full bloom, and the built-in china hutch still has Bauer pottery filling its shelves, just like years go. Bess's hairpins now sit on a shelf in her old room.

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