

RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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An Official Publication of the Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society

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RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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

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IN THIS ISSUE

Our curator, Daniel Murley, for this issue has researched the life and times of the Toomey family of Healdsburg. The impetus for this article was the discovery of glass negatives from the photography studio of S.E. Langhart and the desire to identify those appearing in the photos. With this process Dan has come up with a fascinating story of the Toomey family starting with Thomas Toomey who left Ireland to find his fortune in the Golden State. As Dan points out the photograph of the Toomey family is on display as part of the exhibit of images developed from the glass plate negatives. As an aside, Mr. Langhart, as I always called him, was of great help to me when I edited and published the Healdsburg Tribune in the 1950's and early 1960's. This was the time of the Graflex camera (no such thing as digital then) and cut film was used. He was always ready to develop my film at a moment's notice. A well known business man, Mr. Langhart was the father of Edwin Langhart, founder of the Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society.

We are also pleased to welcome a new contributing writer to our pages. Whitney Hopkins, daughter of Toni and Robert Hopkins and granddaughter of Kay Hopkins Roberts, presently is cataloging and registering artifacts donated to the museum. She is a graduate of local schools and earned a Bachelor's degree in History and a Master's degree in Anthropological Sciences at Stanford University. In her initial appearance in *The Recorder*, Whitney gives a very well written and interesting account of the Porter family whose ranch later was sold to motion picture actor Fred MacMurray. Whitney's research and articles can be seen on the museum's web site.

Research curator Holly Hoods, in this issue, brings us the history of an historic winery, the Soda Rock Winery and the story of the Abele Ferrari family and its connection to the Healdsburg Machine Company, a principal manufacturer of winery equipment for the North Coast. It's a most interesting account of an Italian's immigrant's influence on the wine and grape industry of this area.

And Charlotte Anderson in her report on historic artifacts came up with a novel approach... stone recycling of the 1930's. This dovetailed with Holly's account of the Soda Rock Winery and how stones from the old Healdsburg Grammar School were utilized to build the Soda Rock Winery.

With these four articles we hope that we have given you another insight in a period of Healdsburg's history.

Arnold Santucci

Editor

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by *Charlotte Anderson*

The foundation of the new Healdsburg Grammar School was under construction on Tucker Street when the April 18, 1906 earthquake hit the area. Fortunately, the foundation was not damaged but the quake did delay the project one school term, opening in the Spring of 1907. Twenty-five years later, because of the 1933 earthquake the grammar school was deemed unsafe and the school board decided to sell the property. The west wing was sold to the Catholic Church, the east wing to M. Earle Adams of the Healdsburg Tribune and the main building was razed. As a result the stones from the main building were sold to Abele Ferrari and his partner who used them for the front and back of their Soda Rock Winery then under construction. A novel use of this valuable material.

7 Healdsburg's Past Exposed: Images from the Langhart Photography Studio

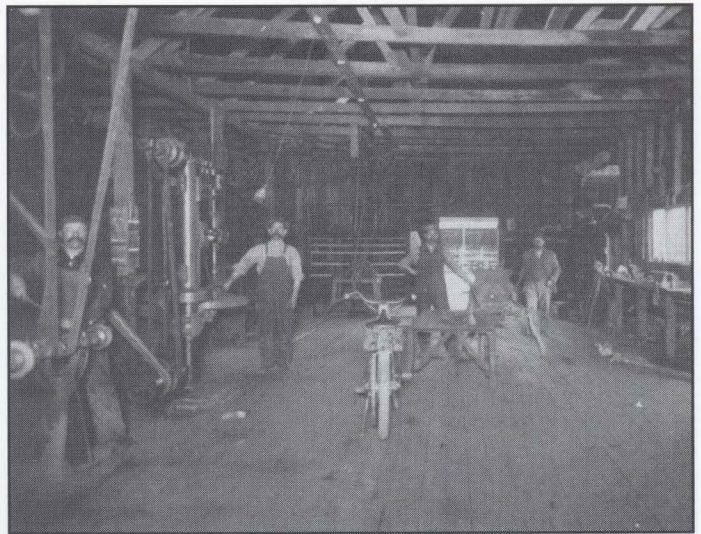
by *Daniel F. Murley*

Sparked by a photograph of an Irish family sitting around the dining room table, followed by an interview with the widow of Thomas Toomey's grandson, Maria Toomey, Daniel Murley recounts the journey of a young Irish man from Killavullen, and his journey across the waters and the United States finally settling in Healdsburg. This is where he and his wife, Margaret, purchased "their little piece of America." He was living out the "Irish Imperative" to own a piece of this earth and care for it as it provided for one's family's sustenance.

10 History of Soda Rock Winery

by *Holly Hoods*

This is also the story of an immigrant who found his way to Healdsburg and the wine country where he made good use of



Healdsburg Machine Company, circa 1909. From the left, Mario Scalione at the grinder, Abele Ferrari at the drill press and Constantino Bossi building the wine crusher. The fourth man was not identified.

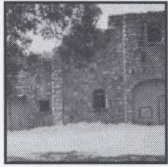
his natural abilities in machine work. Abele Ferrari, born near Mantua, Italy on April 10, 1880, came to the United States in 1904 and working in San Francisco as a "grease monkey" and then coming to Sonoma County to work for the famed Italian Swiss Colony at Asti. He stayed there a short time and then he and a partner Mario Scalione bought the Healdsburg Machine Shop where they manufactured equipment for the wine industry. In 1925 he and his partner, Frank Ferrero, purchased the Soda Rock Ranch and Winery. After prohibition was repealed in 1933 the two men rebuilt the winery using the rocks from the Healdsburg Grammar School which had been razed. It's another fascinating story of immigrants coming to America, working hard, raising the family and having a successful and fruitful life.

13 The Porter Family Collection: A Glimpse Into the Past

by *Whitney Hopkins*

Artifacts found in a home in Santa Rosa of pioneer Healdsburg family and donated to the Healdsburg Museum gives us a most interesting account of the Porter family whose "Home Ranch" in 1941 became a working retreat and cattle ranch under the ownership of motion picture actor Fred MacMurray. It was incorporated with other properties and became the "Twin Valley Ranch." Since 1966 it has been owned by Gallo Wine Company who transformed the pastureland into vineyards.

HISTORIC



ARTIFACTS

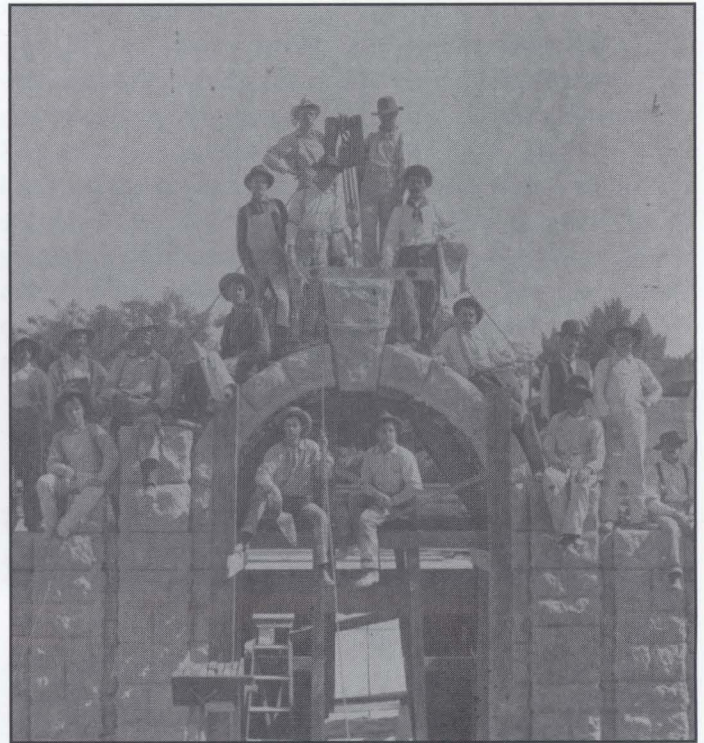
ARTIFACTS: IF STONES COULD TALK: STONE RECYCLING, 1930's

by Charlotte Anderson

Construction work on the new Healdsburg Grammar School on Tucker Street commenced in January 1906. According to the Healdsburg Tribune, the old school, over 30 years old, was in bad shape. "J.S. Williams, janitor of the public schools, is putting the rookeries in shape to house the youth of Healdsburg for another winter. The rotten plank walk from the entrance of the primary building to the sidewalk has been dug up and new boards have been laid, which from present indications will pass the way of all wood before the little feet cease to use them in entering this rookery." The article went on to say, "The ventilation could not well be improved upon. While the north wind whisks in through the large apertures under the doors, and whistles merrily, the south, east, or any old gust can freely enter through similar gaps from the other side, and together they can waltz up the stairways and skip out hand in hand between the crevices of the beautiful natural-wood-finish laths in the ceiling." (TRIBUNE, 25 July 1904, p.5:3)

\$35,000 in bonds for a new building had been voted in by the Healdsburg citizens, and in January 1906 construction work on the new Healdsburg Grammar School on Tucker Street commenced. "The basement story will be of sandstone, and the body of the building of selected red brick. The sandstone will be obtained on the Llewellyn Hall place. The material is a handsome light stone in color, and will be cut ready for the building at the quarry." (TRIBUNE, 11 Jan 1906, p.1:1) "Twelve carloads [train] of Oregon pine, consisting of nearly 110,000 feet of lumber have been delivered by the Healdsburg Mill and Lumbering Company for the new school house." (TRIBUNE, 8 Feb 1906, p.4:2) "Every resident in this district can well feel proud of the handsome building. It not only means a new era in the efficiency of our schools, but it also bodes a good forecast for the further improvement of our city, and will stand as a monument for years to come of the enterprise of our people. The building is to be ready for occupancy by the middle of August." (ENTERPRISE, 10 March 1906, p.1:4-6)

The foundation had been completed when the April 18, 1906, earthquake hit the area. While destruction was taking place all around, the foundation remained. Ole Johnson, well-known



Workmen demolishing the Grammar School on Tucker Street, circa 1934

mason and contractor appointed by the school trustees as superintendent of construction, kept a wary eye on all that went on. Answering the public's queries about the building following the quake he said, "Many steel and iron braces have been added to the original plans since the earthquake, and it will take a harder shake than the recent visitation to do the structure any damage when it is completed." (TRIBUNE, 31 May 1906, p.1:2) The 1906 earthquake did delay the project one school term, from fall 1906 to spring 1907.

The "monument that will stand for years to come" lasted barely over 25 years! On March 10, 1933, a 6.4 earthquake hit the Long Beach/Huntington Park/Los Angeles region causing great damage. It was followed by nearly 150 aftershocks. Schools in that area were hard hit, a fact which caused every school trustee

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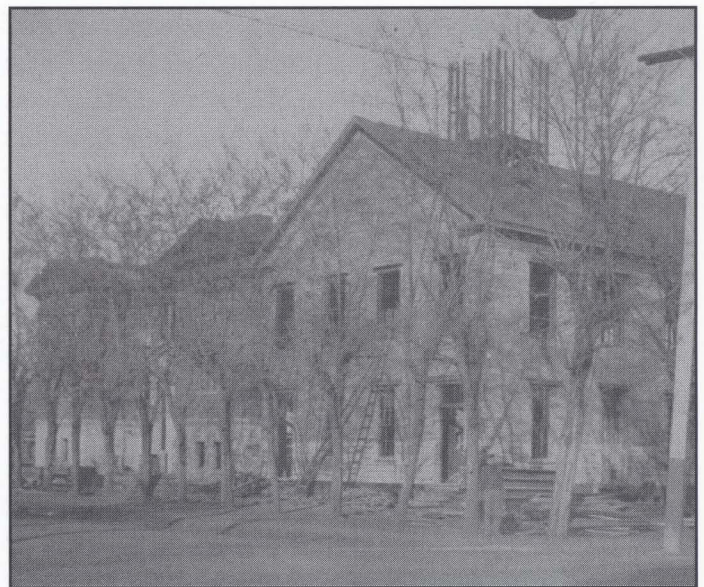


The Healdsburg Grammar School, "the monument that will stand for years to come", lasted 25 years. Circa 1907

in California to have a long look at their own schools. "Earthquakes Rock Northern California" was a headline in the May 16, 1933, Tribune. Specifically, in the Santa Rosa area in 1933 and in early 1934, there were several earthquakes which intensified the worries of school trustees in the integrity of all school buildings. In March of 1934, the Healdsburg board obtained an inspection after "attempting for more than a month to secure an engineer from the State Department to make an examination of the local buildings." (ENTERPRISE, 15 March 1934, p. 6:1-4)

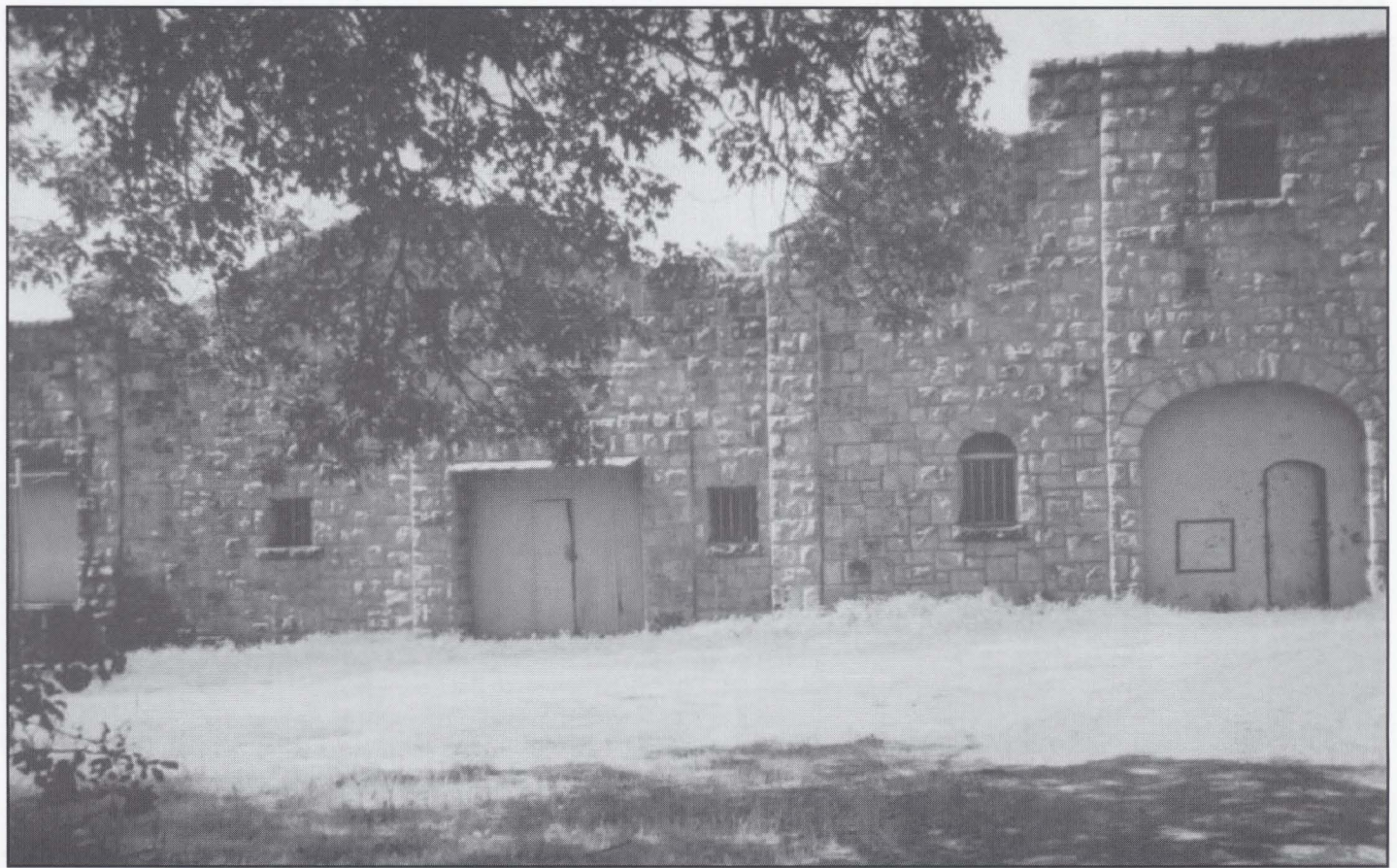
The inspection and report, made under provisions of an emergency act passed by the California legislature shortly after the March 10, 1933, earthquake, were completed in March of 1934. The State report on Healdsburg Grammar School "showing faulty construction and material" also stated "no part of the building (main structure) can be considered safe for occupancy in the event of an earthquake of moderately severe intensity." The report went on to say, "The roof cannot be considered safe even for quiescent vertical dead loads [the weight of the structure itself]. Due to the overstress in girders supporting bearing partitions, the remainder of the building has not a sufficient degree of safety for vertical loads that might come upon it." (ENTERPRISE, 15 March 1934, p.5:4-5 and p.6:1-4)

The Grammar School buildings on Tucker Street were abandoned and in May 1934 the board of education passed a resolution offering the property for sale. The auditorium (west wing) and property were ultimately sold to the Catholic Church for



The "old grammar school" which stood on the corner of Fitch and Tucker Streets.

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The front of the Soda Rock Winery.

\$6,000. The bids for the wrecking firms were rejected in favor of wrecking the main building and east wing “themselves,” (the Board, that is!) with the assistance of SERA labor. (ENTERPRISE, 2 Nov 1934, p. 1:5) The east wing and property were sold in March 1935 for \$3400 to M. Earle Adams for his newspaper, The Healdsburg Tribune, and printing plant (TRIBUNE, 2 March 1935, p. 1:6-7).

“SERA” was an acronym for State Emergency Relief Act, a part of the National Recovery Act, and a forerunner of the WPA. “The first of two crews began demolition of the main structure of the Healdsburg Grammar School Tuesday morning, November 6, 1934, with the first phase being removal of salvagable material, removal of water and light services, etc.” (TRIBUNE, 7 Nov 1934, p. 1:6) In January of 1935, the razing of the main building began. It is interesting to note that stones and various parts of the old building were “rescued” by various community members. (For example, Evelyn Iversen has a cement window ledge that she uses as a “bench” at her Mill Creek place!) The best “recycling”

of the stones was done by Abele Ferrari who had purchased a one-half interest in the Soda Rock Ranch and winery in Alexander Valley. The small winery on the place was demolished and a new one constructed. Ferrari and partner Frank Ferraro used iron beams from the old Dry Creek Bridge (Mill Street) being replaced in 1934 and stones from the condemned Healdsburg Grammar School! (from “Abele Ferrari, Master Machinist,” by Rose Demostene in the RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER, July 1977) The stones from the 1906 Healdsburg Grammar School on Tucker Street can still be seen at the Soda Rock Winery buildings on Hwy 128 in Alexander Valley.

HISTORIC



PHOTOGRAPHS

HEALDSBURG'S PAST EXPOSED: IMAGES FROM THE LANGHART PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO

by Daniel Murley

The stockily built young man strode confidently through the doors of the haberdasher's. He had been to Rosenberg and Bush's general store many times before for different dry goods for his ranch and home across the river but today he was of one purpose. He was headed directly for the hat display. With barely a moment of hesitation he was trying on stiff-brimmed black derbies. Back home in Ireland this style of rounded crowned hat was called a "Bowler" after its originator the Englishman John Bowler. Finding the appropriate size he strode over to the full-length mirror and after cocking the hat this way and that, twisting his full moustache and giving different looks ranging from high-strutting dandy to street corner "tuff," he was satisfied with his choice. "Eli me-boy... what do you think?" he called to the proprietor Mr. Bush, who was busy at the counter with one of the McCord boys. Once again in his heavy brogue, he beckoned for critique and comment. "Looks good on you Thomas! That is a real Stetson from Philadelphia P A and it looks like it was made just for you."



The "bowler" worn by Thomas Toomey and purchased at Rosenberg and Bush Department Store



The interior of the Rosenberg and Bush Department Store located at the time on West Street (now Healdsburg Avenue)

"I'll take it" Thomas Toomey decided and with a jaunty tip of his new chapeau and the bill of sale for \$4.77 crumpled up in his pocket, he strode out onto the streets of Healdsburg. Just before he climbed aboard his wagon he also tipped the hat to a pair of young ladies headed for the dry goods store. He then gave a whistle to his horses and off he drove toward his ranch by the river. He dutifully and respectfully doffed the hat as he passed old St. John's Catholic Church and maybe thanked his God for his good fortune here in California.

Not many years ago he was just one of many Irishmen struggling to eke out an existence on his family's small plot near Killavullen, Ireland. He, like many of his countrymen, left the "auld sod" for the promise of land and opportunity here in America. As was true with many of Irish descent they ended their journey across the Atlantic in one of America's large cities, par-

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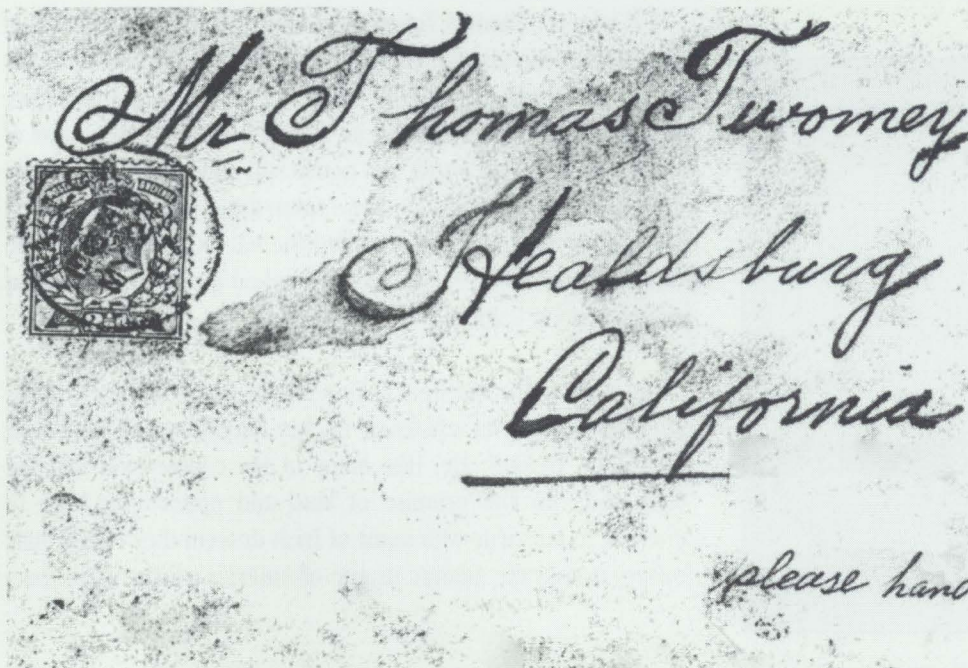


The Thomas Toomey Family.

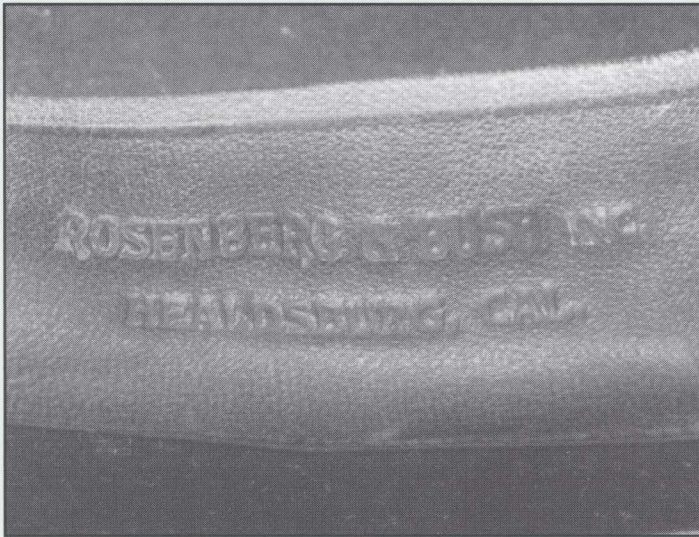
ticularly in New York City. Thomas however had heard of the good farming lands north of San Francisco from other Irishmen who had settled in these wide-open valleys after the gold rush. It was in San Francisco in 1871 that he met the love of his life, Margaret McCarthy. They had both traveled thousands of miles, she initially to New York in 1860, from the same rural county, County Mallow in Ireland, to meet in the bustling, burgeoning, city by the Bay. Thomas and Margaret were married in 1872 and settled in their new home along the Russian River just outside of Healdsburg. The property was part of the old Fitch Grant known

as the Sotoyome Rancho and was owned by the Bailache family prior to Thomas' purchase of his little piece of America. He was living out the "Irish Imperative" to own a piece of this earth and care for it as it provided for one's family's sustenance. There they raised fruit crops, particularly watermelons, peaches and cherries and Margaret gave birth to seven children, some of whom stayed on the ranch to continue the farming begun by their parents.

Their life in the Russian River region suited them and they became well-known members of the small Healdsburg community. Still they maintained contact with their relatives in Ireland, many still suffering from poor living conditions and numerous crop failures. In a letter from his brother Timothy in May of 1907, Thomas' life in California was clearly contrasted to his family remaining in Ireland. "Dear Brother," the letter began, "I received your letter a few days ago and was more than glad to hear ye were all well. We are enjoying good health at present T.G. [Thank God]. Well brother I must tell you the weather here at present is very black and hard frost every night. Crops are not looking well at all they are burned down. I hope we will soon have a change for the better... My son Bart sailed for new York on the 19th of May... he was very lonely parting with us but he says tis not forever please God he was the picture of my [our] father, God rest his soul." In regards to his oldest son Timmie, Timothy tells his brother that rather than New York he would like him to go to California and that "a good many from here have gone out Cal - this year the James Connell's son went last week." He then asks "Dear brother if you could pay Timmie's passage he would



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go, he is very good for work...he would pay you back again and would never forget it or you he is a very smart lad. My daughter Mary is sending 3 tie pins to ye one to her uncle Tom and one each to the boys she says she will send something to Mrs. Toomey in her next letter." It is not known if young Tim made it to California but the two sons referred to in the letter, Richard and John, stayed for most of their lives in Healdsburg. John managed the farm and eventually married and bought another house on Tucker Street behind St. John's Church. Thomas' son John lived in this home nearer to the center of Healdsburg. Tragedy and suffering did not escape the Toomey's move from Ireland. In 1927 John's son Dyril became Healdsburg's first fatal victim of "Infantile Paralysis", a condition now known as Polio. In a personal account from then neighbor, June Maher Smith, she said that her schoolmate Dyril "had been attending school that week and it was quite a shock to hear he had passed". Margaret and Thomas lived out their lives on the property they farmed on Bailache Avenue.

It was in this same home that I interviewed Mrs. Maria Toomey, the wife of John Toomey's son, Warren. Warren was a well-known figure in the Healdsburg community and owned Toomey Pump Service before his recent death.

Maria Toomey shared many stories in our visit. While we were discussing the picture I had brought for her to view and identify the persons in the photograph, I had quipped, "Now the patriarch there, Mr. Thomas Toomey, with his fine moustache and three piece suit and bowtie, looks as though he should be wearing a fine 'Bowler' hat. You know I collect hats, particularly Stetsons and he sure looks like he should have had a fine black derby atop that 'map of Ireland' head. She sat up in bed and called to her daughter-in-law. "Dorothy, go down to the cellar and in the little cabinet above the linen closet you'll find a brown cardboard box. Bring it

to me would you, dear". As I opened the box I was in awe. I removed a dusty old black Stetson derby. "That was Thomas Toomey's hat" Maria beamed. I asked if I might take it to display with the family photograph at the Museum and she agreed. When I got back to the research room and was cleaning the hat, it looked like it had been through a few floods out there on Bailache so near the unpredictable river. After cleaning the mud and dust away and stabilizing the brown leather interior headband with microcrystalline wax, I saw plainly the imprint of "Rosenberg & Bush Inc. Healdsburg, Cal.". My doubts as to who had actually owned the hat were also allayed as I saw the initials "T T" perforated into the leather band. I tried on Thomas Toomey's hat and though a little shrunken and worse for wear, it fit and I looked for a mirror to adjust and cock the derby and put the appropriate expressions on this Irish face.

The hat and the photograph of the Toomey family are on display as part of the exhibit of images developed from old glass plate negatives found in the museum storage room. These negatives now exposed have given us a glimpse into the lives of some of Healdsburg's early residents and I encourage you to come to the museum to view and delve into these deposits of the collective culture of this Northern California town.

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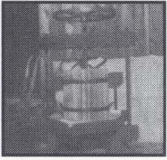
Smith, June Maher. Personal Communication, 2004

Toomey, Maria. Personal Communication, 2004



Sequester E. Langbart, circa 1935, in the Photo Studio.

HISTORIC



WINERY

HISTORY OF SODA ROCK

by Holly Hoods



Overall view of Soda Rock Winery

Soda Rock, a venerable name in Alexander Valley's grape growing and winemaking history, is located in Alexander Valley on Highway 128, seven miles northeast of Healdsburg. Wine writer Millie Howie once characterized it as "If not the oldest. . . one of the oldest wineries in more or less continuous operation."

Origins of "Soda Rock"

"Soda Rock" as a phrase to refer to the region evidently dates back to Shadrich Osborn, a prominent vineyard owner and winemaker who settled in the valley in 1875. By 1889, the name "Soda Rock" had been bestowed on the area's post office. In the 1890s, there was also a hotel, general store, a school and homes in the village of Soda Rock. The name (and post

office) shifted to "Jimtown," after James Patrick opened a grocery store in 1893.

First Wineries in Valley

Though a thriving community and vineyards existed, there was no winery in the Alexander Valley until the early 1890s. Grapes had to be hauled to Geyserville or south to the Napa Valley. Horace Chase, owner of Stags Leap Winery in Napa Valley, built the first winery in Alexander Valley in 1893. It was soon dubbed "Red Winery" for an early coat of red paint. According to wine historian William Heintz, the next winery to be erected was the winery of John and Walter Whitton, built in 1896. In 1904, Tom Meek, a friend of Shadrich Osborn's who had acquired a portion of the Osborn Soda Rock Ranch,

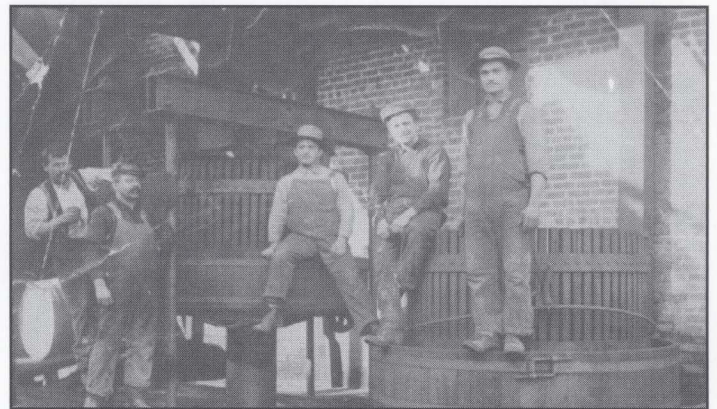
bought the cooperage and part of the building of the Whitton Winery, adding to the winery he had established in 1898. Sources differ on whether Meek's winery had actually used the name Soda Rock. During the 1910s, Meek's winery expanded its capacity to 250,000 gallons. Unable or unwilling to wait out Prohibition, Tom Meek sold the Soda Rock land and winery in the early 1920s to Abele Ferrari and Frank Ferrero. The winery remained closed while the new owners concentrated on raising grapes for home winemakers until Repeal.

Ferrari and Ferrero

Abele Ferrari was born in Savigliano, Italy, near Mantua, on April 10, 1880. He grew up

one of seven boys on a farm. During his two years of mandatory service in the army, Ferrari cultivated his natural aptitude and abilities in machine work and mechanics. At age 24, he immigrated to California. According to his daughter, Rose Demostene Benson, born in 1912, Abele first worked at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco as a "grease monkey," (taking care of all of the equipment and machinery). He was soon hired to do mechanical work at Italian Swiss Colony at Asti.

Rose recalled, "He was there not quite a year when he came into Healdsburg. He heard about this machine shop that needed somebody in Healdsburg. . . where the Sanderson Ford Agency is



Healdsburg Machine Shop

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Wine Press made in machine Shop, circa 1909

now. He found a partner, Mario Scalione, and they bought the business. And later on they took in Anibele Bossi. They had that machine shop until 1950." The Healdsburg Machine Shop was the principal manufacturer of winery equipment for the North Coast. Ferrari held eleven patents on various improvements to crushers, presses and other wine machinery, including the most famous "Healdsburg Crusher."

When Abele Ferrari and his partner Frank Ferrero bought the Soda Rock ranch from Tom Meek in 1925, the previous winery on the property

had been a small barn-like structure. The partners also bought the two-storey clipped gable farmhouse known as the "Soda Rock House." The Ferreros moved into the 1904 residence.

Building a Stone Winery

The Soda Rock ranch was planted to grapes, prunes, and a few apricots and peaches when the partners bought it. In 1933, the summer after repeal of the Volstead Act, the winery was totally rebuilt. Rose described its unusual construction of recycled stone: "I went to the Healdsburg Elementary School, which was later condemned. All the stone

was sort of discarded out in the back, and the children loved to make forts, play war, you know, with it. That's the stone that my father bought for fifty dollars, and that's the front and back of the Soda Rock Winery. . . Then the bridge, at Dry Creek, the steel work, he bought that bridge when they built the new one. It was either \$25 or \$75 that he paid for all that steel."

Work at the Winery

Frank Ferraro became the winemaker. Abele Ferrari maintained the presses and other machinery. Soda Rock Winery, under the management of Ferrari and Ferraro, had its first crush in the fall of 1934. During Prohibition, the wine barrels and tanks, as well as the winery structure itself

had greatly deteriorated. The cooperage was slowly built up until about 100,000 to 150,000 gallons of wine could be stored each year. All of the cooperage had to be new or purchased from other operating wineries. They bought only redwood tanks. And of course all of the winery equipment came from the Healdsburg Machine Shop.

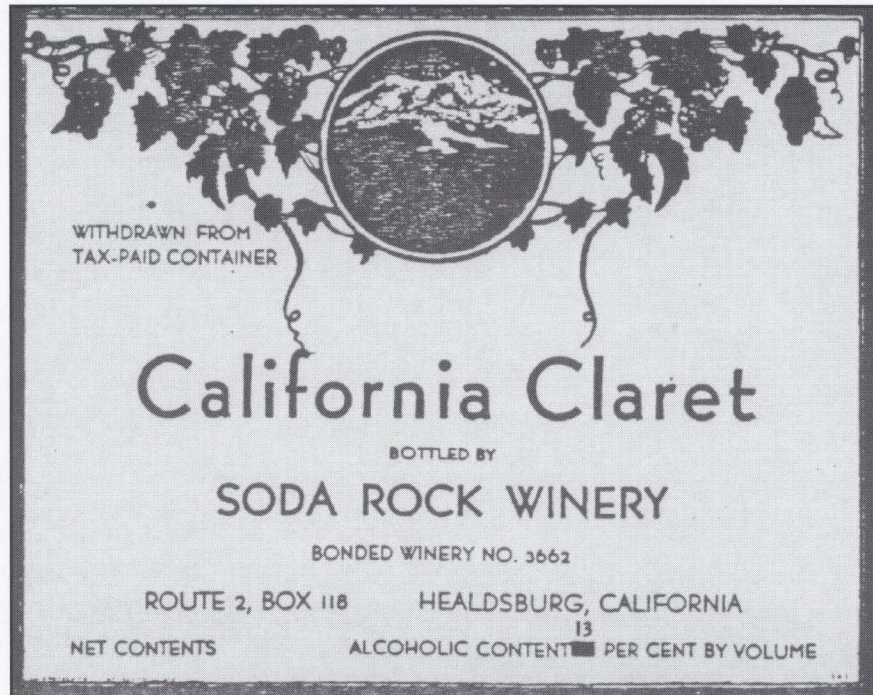
Changes in Management

Most of the Soda Rock's yearly vintage was sold as bulk wine, but gallon jugs were available for sale at the winery or in several Healdsburg stores for a brief time before World War II. After Frank Ferraro died in 1936, his widow urged the Ferrari family to take over the winery. Abele's daughter Rose and her



Abele and Mansuetta Ferrari outside their house in Healdsburg.

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husband Leo Demostene moved into the Soda Rock House in 1943, leasing Mrs. Ferrero's half interest. They also took over the operations of the winery. Leo and Rose lived on the property until 1958 when they purchased the Sausal Ranch, one mile north of Soda Rock on Highway 128.

Wine Selling and Prices

During the years of operation, Rose Demostene did all the bookkeeping for Soda Rock Winery, contacting the buyers and paying the bills. They rarely had a written contract with growers for grapes or wineries for wine. They sold bulk wine primarily to premium wineries in Napa. Rose remembered: "My dad or husband would simply shake hands with the buyer; I witnessed, and that was it. How

times have changed!"

"We borrowed from the bank to pay grape growers and even advanced growers picking costs. Then when we were paid for the wine, I would go immediately to the bank and pay the loan off." She saved a box of old records from Soda Rock Winery, dating from the 1960s through the 1980s. During this time, Soda Rock sold wine in bulk, not bottle. In the early 1960s, the price of a gallon of wine was forty seven cents to fifty cents. By 1968, the price went up to seventy-five and eighty cents a gallon. In 1972, \$2.85 and \$3.00 were the sales. By 1980, it was \$4.35 a gallon. The records showed that grape prices went from \$135 a ton in 1964 to \$505 in 1972.

Soda Rock made wine for Gallo for ten years. They

employed local workers during the year except for harvest, when they contracted workers from Mexico ("braceros").

Recent Decades at Soda Rock

The winery closed in 1971, following the death of Leo Demostene. It stood idle for ten years until the property was purchased by Charlie and Etza Tomka. The Tomkas, who emigrated to the United States from Transylvania in 1957, reopened Soda Rock Winery and operated it as a family business through the early 1990s. The current owners, Ken and Diane Wilson, bought the property two years ago, and are seeking to restore the building and to return it to winemaking. The Wilsons also own Wilson Winery in Dry Creek.

Sources:

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HISTORIC



FAMILY

THE PORTER FAMILY COLLECTION: A GLIMPSE INTO THE PAST

by Whitney M. Hopkins

When Pamela Jasper purchased her home in Santa Rosa, she discovered many treasured belongings of an old Healdsburg-area family still in the Spring Street house. Jasper purchased the house following the deaths in 1974 of the elderly owners, 90 year-old Lucille Bolles Porter and 93 year-old George Porter. Because the Porters' only child Walter was killed in World War II, the Porters had no close relations to claim their belongings following their death; thus, Jasper was left wondering what to do with the clothing, books, letters, photographs, and other items which remained in the Porter house. In 2002 she donated the Porter Collection to the Healdsburg Museum.

George or "Geo" Porter was the son of Hugh and Jane C. A. (Kabrick) Porter. According to Honoria Toumey in her 1926 History of Sonoma County, Hugh Porter traveled overland by ox team from Tennessee to California in 1846. Shortly after he enlisted in the California Volunteers, with which he took an active part in the Mexican war. Hugh then turned to mining before purchasing 160 acres of land on the Russian River, nine miles west of Healdsburg, where he lived until his death in 1897. Hugh's wife Jane, a native of Virginia, died in 1924.

George was born September 28, 1880, on the family homestead, and had one sister, Maude. He attended the one-room Lafayette School and following his education took charge of the family farm. The ranch expanded to 575 acres, which included prunes, hops, hay and pasture.

In October 1914, George Porter married Miss Lucille Bolles, the only daughter of Alice (Griest) and Walter Bolles. Lucille was also born and reared in Healdsburg. Lucille's father, Walter, was born in Connecticut in 1854, but set out for California after his father, a whaler, died. Walter arrived in California in 1877, working as a carpenter. In 1881 he married Alice Griest, whose family had been in Healdsburg since the 1850s.

George and Lucille's only child, Walter Hugh Porter, born July 10, 1919, grew up in much the same way as his father on the "Home Ranch." He attended the Lafayette School, as did his father, and graduated from Healdsburg High School in 1938.



George and Maude Porter, circa 1888.

Walter enlisted in the United States Army in 1941, and in September 1944 went overseas to the Vosges mountains in France with the 44th Infantry Division of the 220th Field Artillery Battalion. On December 1, 1944, he was killed by enemy fire while on duty as an aerial observer in a liaison airplane directing artillery fire. Porter was posthumously awarded a Purple Heart, and is buried in the Epinal American Cemetery in Epinal, France.

Following Walter Porter's graduation, his parents moved to Sebastopol and later to Santa Rosa. The Porters' "Home Ranch"

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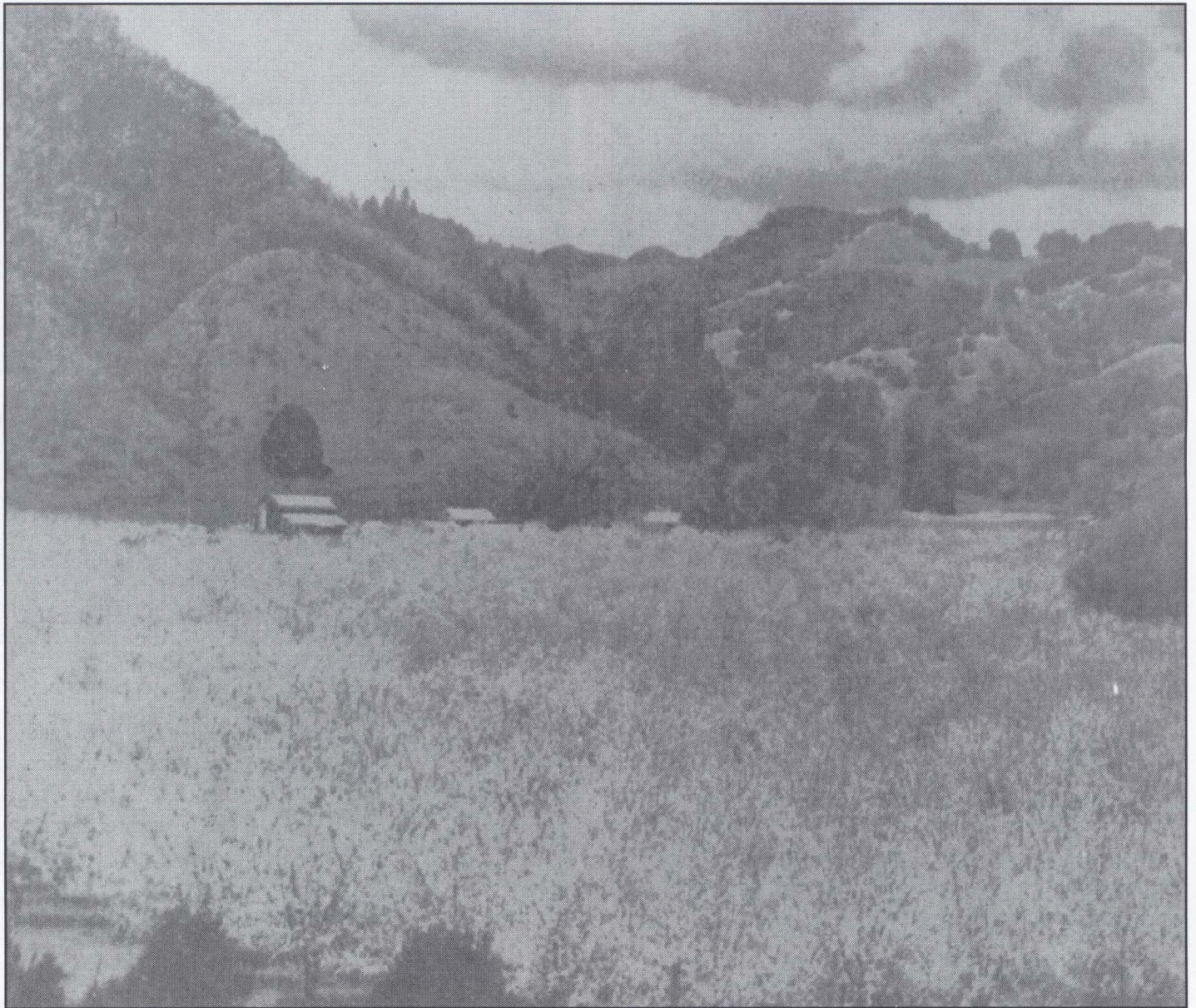
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was sold to actor Fred MacMurray in 1941, where it became a rural retreat and working cattle ranch. Incorporated with other properties it became the "Twin Valley Ranch." In 1996, Gallo Wine Company purchased the property and transformed the pastureland into vineyards. Porter Creek which runs through the property was named after the ranch's early owners.

Although they have no direct descendants, Pamela Jasper's donation will keep the memory of Lucille, George, and Walter Porter alive. Once forgotten details of day to day events emerge

from this outstanding collection. The donation included childhood photographs of both Lucille and George Porter, as well as photographs of their parents, account books detailing expenditures and earnings on the family ranch, correspondence between Lucille and George before they were married, their marriage certificate, and much more.

It is obvious that Lucille and George cared deeply for their only son because they saved many items from Walter's short life. Included in the collection are Walter's christening gown, report



The Porter Home Ranch, circa 1941.

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cards, programs from events at Lafayette School, a Future Farmers of America award, Walter's autographed Healdsburg High School yearbooks, high school graduation cards, letters sent home by Walter Porter while in the United States Army, Army dog tags and even a can of his Army rations. One of the most touching pieces is a scrapbook of Walter Porter's life with photos of Walter as a baby, a schoolboy, and a young man about to go overseas shortly before he was killed in the War.

(Whitney Hopkins is currently working on cataloging and registering artifacts donated to the Healdsburg Museum. She grew up in Healdsburg, and received her Bachelor's degree in History and Master's degree in Anthropological Sciences at Stanford University. Her Master's thesis focused on the need for a community museum in Chavin de Huantar, a Peruvian town situated next to a pre-Incan UNESCO World Heritage archaeological site.)



Walter Porter, circa 1925.



Lucille Balles, circa 1941.

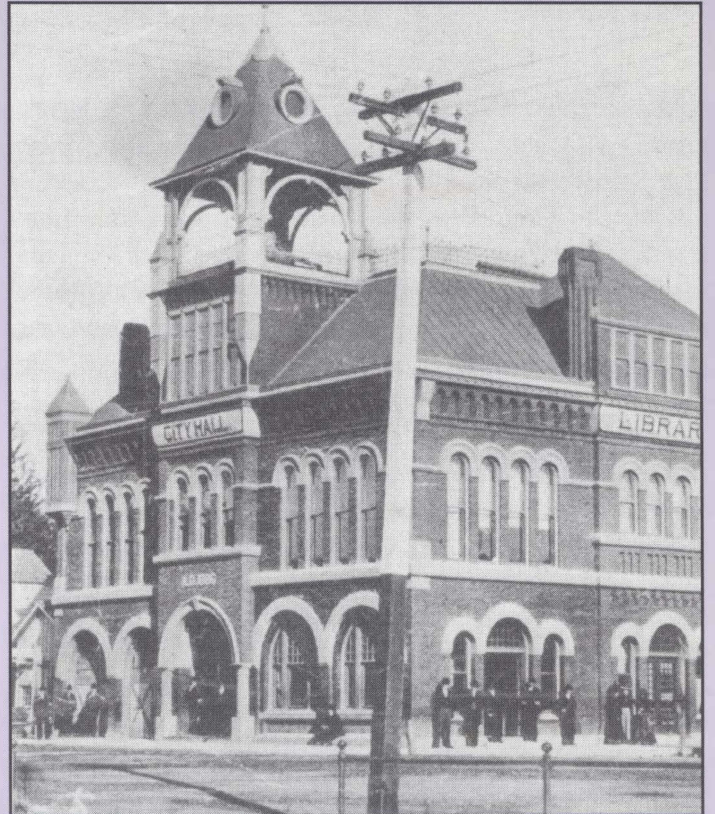


Walter Porter, circa World War II.

At the Library

Among the artifacts in the collection of the Healdsburg Museum is an 1896 - 1897 Librarian's Record Book from the Healdsburg Free Library. This book contains the applications for library privileges pasted in alphabetically by last name, with many familiar families included. At that time Healdsburg's first City Hall, completed in 1886, housed the Library. On September 9, 1896, the City took over the management of the Library from the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) who had been operating a Public Reading Room and Library in the City Hall since 1889. When the City took over management of the Healdsburg Free Library it was declared a free lending library open for all persons over fourteen years of age. James Benson Leard, former City Marshall and Deputy Sheriff, served as the City's first Librarian until his death in 1901, when he was succeeded by his wife. The library was housed in the City Hall until 1911 when it relocated to the new Carnegie Library.

Written by Whitney Hopkins



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