



RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

WINTER 2007 • ISSUE 95

An Official Publication of the Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society



THE GEYSERS: MYSTERIOUS, MISUNDERSTOOD MARVELS OF THE MAYACAMAS

by Daniel F. Murley

Page 7

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

WEST SIDE: THE BIOGRAPHY OF A SCHOOL

by John van der Zee

Page 3

FROM RESPECTABLE TO ROARING: THE STORIED PAST OF THE RIVERSIDE VILLA

by Holly Hoods

Page 11

30 YEARS OLD: THE HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

by Charlotte Anderson

Page 14

FROM TSUNO TO SOTOYOME TO FITCH MOUNTAIN

by Charlotte Anderson

Page 16

In This Issue



HEALDSBURG MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Edwin Langhart, Founder

2006 Officers

Al Loebel, *President*
Ann Mahoney, *Vice President*
Ed Summerville, *Recording Secretary*
Ed Head, *Treasurer*
Chris Baldenhofer, *Ass't Treasurer*
Bob Rawlins, *Past President*

Directors

Mel Amato
Charlotte Anderson
John Bippart
John Cross
Anna Darden
Vince Dougherty
Lois Grace
Patricia Keadle
Dan Maraviglia
Kent Mitchell
Joe Norton
Keith Power
Kay Robinson
Frank Zak

Staff

Daniel Murley, *Curator*
Holly Hoods, *Research Curator*

Publication Staff

Arnold Santucci, *Editor*
Daniel Murley, *Associate*
Holly Hoods, *Associate*
Fran Lescalleet, *Distribution*
Amoruso Printing, *Printing*

RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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

221 Matheson Street
P. O. Box 952
Healdsburg, CA 95448
(707) 431-3325

We are pleased to welcome John van der Zee as a first time contributor to the *Russian River Recorder* with his very informative and well written article, *West Side: The Biography of a School*. John, a resident of Felta Road, is an independent journalist/author and retired advertising executive. His published works include eleven books - three novels and eight books of non fiction. He received the 1964 James D. Phelan Award for fiction, the H. C. McCann Award for Advertising Professionalism in 1978 and 1988, and a Clio Award winner or finalist from 1978-1984. He is the author of *The Gate*, the definitive book on the design and construction of the Golden Gate Bridge (Simon & Schuster, 1987) and *The Greatest Men's Party on Earth*, the definitive book on the Bohemian Grove (Harcourt, 1974). We know you will enjoy his detailed account of the founding of West Side School 50 years ago.

Curator Dan Murley again brings us an exciting look at a world wide phenomenon located only 30 miles east of Healdsburg - The Geysers. He illustrates his article with many fine photographs which can be found in the Museum's collection.

Holly Hoods, our research curator, tells us a fascinating story about a mobile home park with a "storied past" in her article entitled, *From Respectable to Roaring: the Storied Past of the Riverside Villa*. As Holly points out "wild and whispered tales of the resort's heyday as a speakeasy during Prohibition have overshadowed the quieter history of the original Riverside Villa".

Charlotte Anderson, our long time contributor and retired high school English teacher, has given us two interesting articles - one dealing with the fascinating history of Healdsburg's Fitch Mountain and the second detailing the 30 year history of the Museum's official publications - *The Recorder and the Newsletter*.

With this, our last issue for 2006, we look forward to the challenges we face in the coming year when the City of Healdsburg will be celebrating its 150th birthday. We plan to be a part of that celebration with our 2007 Spring issue.

To our readers and supporters a happy , happy 2007.

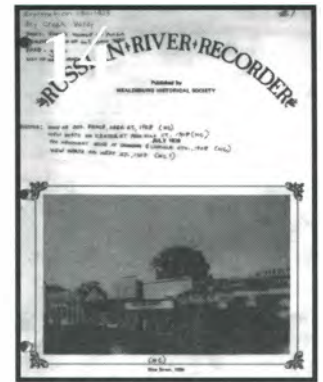
Arnold Santucci
Editor



Contents

RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

Winter, 2007 • Issue 95



4. West Side: The Biography of a School

by John van der Zee

Author and former advertising executive John van der Zee gives us a beautifully detailed and a well written history of the school on its 50th anniversary

7. The Geysers: Mysterious, Misunderstood Marvels of the Mayacamas

by Daniel F. Murley

Curator Daniel Murley delves deep in the history of the world renown Geysers located only 30 miles east of Healdsburg, an area he refers to as "our own local piece of the greater geological phenomenon called the Ring of Fire. A fascinating recounting of a very important and world famous area.

11. From Respectable to Roaring: The Storied Past of the Riverside Villa

by Holly Hoods.

By just driving by the mobile home park located on First and Front streets you would never know that it has a "storied past." Holly Hoods has dug deeply and has come up with a fascinating story. Some of our readers might even relate to that time.

14. 30 Years Old: The History of the Russian River Recorder

by Charlotte Anderson

From a typewritten sheet to a professional looking magazine, the Recorder 's history reflects the Museum's progress over the years and its ultimate position in the community as well as in the community of museums. Charlotte who has written extensively for the Recorder and the Newsletter has cataloged all the issues of the Recorder for easy reference. Her article about the publications is a detailed and interesting account of the subject.

16. From Tsuno to Sotoyome to Fitch Mountain

by Charlotte Anderson

Retired English teacher and devoted Museum volunteer, Charlotte Anderson has had a long time interest in the history of Healdsburg's focal point, Fitch Mountain. After months of research and attention to detail Charlotte has produced a definitive and informative article. which, we are certain, you will enjoy.

WEST SIDE: THE BIOGRAPHY OF A SCHOOL

by John van der Zee



*Felta School faculty and student body, 1916.
Courtesy of Healdsburg Museum.*

On November 27, 1951, neighbors of five classic one-room Sonoma County rural schools voted, in effect, to put those schools out of business.

The schools, Daniels, Felta, Junction, Lafayette and Mill Creek, had served families on the western side of the Russian River honorably and well since the early years of the century. Now changing times, including demands for expanded resources and greater efficiency, required a new approach: consolidation.

While it was recognized that the whole area would benefit from a combined operation (one of the schools had shrunk to an enrollment of five students), there was also concern that the localized quality of the schools, with their high degree of individual attention, parental participation and community support, might be lost.

In a transition from neighborhood schoolhouse to school district, students were assigned by grade to the different country schools, while planning and construction of a new unified school got underway.

A SITE RICH IN LOCAL LEGEND

The new school site, a prune orchard at the confluence of Felta Creek and Mill Creek, about a baseball throw away from the old Felta School, dripped the sauce of local legend. The creeks were spawning streams for steelhead and Coho salmon, and Native

Americans had fished and camped along them for generations. Felta Miller, an early settler, homesteaded his ranch about a mile up Felta Creek, and the green barn at the end of the county road that passed the school site was generally accepted as the original mill that Mill Creek was named for. It is believed to date from the Mexican era. Harmon Heald, a hand who worked in the mill, opened a store at a nearby crossroads, and began the town of Healdsburg. J.G. Mothorn, who founded Mill Stone Valley Ranch, on which the barn still stands, had portions of his property landscaped by his friend, Luther Burbank. Some of Burbank's plantings, which included guavas, loquats, grafted plums, and a lily tree, survive unto the present day.

Mothorn's son used stones from a cobblestone quarry on the Mothorn ranch to build the foundation of Felta School. The school, while under construction, survived the 1906 earthquake.

Though West Side School would be new, it rested on a deep and solid base of local tradition.

FARM KIDS, FARM TRADITIONS

In the winter of 1956-57, all eighty-five West Side students were gathered under one roof at the new West Side Union Elementary School, summoned by the transplanted bell from the old Felta School. "It was a rural atmosphere," recalls Tim Harrington, who attended West Side during this era, sent ten children of his own to West Side, and has served on the district board for more than twenty years, "Kids were farmers. Board members were farmers. They used to close school so kids could work the prune harvest."

In a carryover from the one-room country school era, there was considerable individual attention. "Our principal, George Peabody, noticed that some of the boys liked to go down to the creek, fool around, and smoke. He bought one of those big carnival cigars and offered it to boys who thought smoking was a good thing. It served its purpose."

The principal's job was demanding. In addition to teaching and serving as principal, West Side's boss was also superintendent of schools, dealing with maintenance, transportation, budget, a board, the state, parents, kids, everything. Keeping administrators in the job long enough to plan and implement changes proved challenging. In its first 33 years of operation, West Side Elementary had 12 superintendent/principals. Parental participation and community support were crucial to providing continuity.

continued on page 5

“IT LOOKS LIKE A LOVED PLACE”

The setting of the school, nestled among redwoods and orchards in a valley fed by spawning streams, helped encourage a deep awareness of the natural world among students, faculty and staff. “It looks like a loved place,” recalls Gay Kenny, who spent 24 years, six of them as principal/superintendent, at West Side, “a rewarding place to be.” The setting, and the attitude helped attract unusually dedicated teachers and made learning vivid among students. West Side’s quality of life and education began to attract interest, and transfers, from outside the district.

Student population had hovered around 100 children for years, but by the late 1970s, the makeup of the surrounding community had begun to change. The prune orchards were gone, replaced by ever-expanding ranks of vineyards. Exurban families, many of them versed in new disciplines-computer technology, medical research, scientific viticulture-had moved to the West Side area, and were seeking to combine country school nurturing and unity with nature with a quality education for their children. Interest in, and support for an expanded educational experience came with them.

SCIENCE, GARDENING, MUSIC, COOKING, ART

There had always been a garden of some kind at West Side. Now, under Nancy Foulk, an annual gardening program was begun, with students preparing soil, planting seeds, raising and harvesting vegetables and flowers (it’s much more encouraging to eat veggies when you grow them.) An annual Science Fair gave West Side students a chance to develop and display their involvement with scientific methodology. Sparked by grants from the California Arts Council, the school was able to offer enhanced instruction from Artist-in-Residence Marcia Connell and musician Mary Drew, plus dramatic productions mounted by Eileen Williams. Performers from the Bay Area gave students live experience of professional poetry, theatre, music and dance. Through technology grants, the school was able to place computers, printers, modems and trained staff into upper-level classrooms. The expanded education was not so much a departure from traditional small-school education as an extension of it. Parents, some of them food preparation professionals, would come into the classroom and teach the children how to cook. Elizabeth Schmidt, who managed the kitchen at the nearby Bishop’s Ranch, showed a classroom of kids how to make root beer from sassafras.

EXPANDING THE SCHOOL TO MATCH THE EDUCATION

To house the increased variety and participation of a West Side education (a portable classroom had been added in 1973), a unique multi-purpose room was added to the school building

under superintendent/principal Terry Kneisler in 1982. A folding-wall system allows for division into between one and four spaces, and one wall can be opened onto the school courtyard. The room, named Felta Hall, serves as lunchroom, kitchen, play facility, computer classroom, theatre and community hall, and its exterior architecture, with its half-round arches, echoes the design of the old Felta School, which had become a pre-school and day-care center. The new Hall also offered an ideal gathering place for the Monthly Assemblies, which bring students, faculty and staff together for individual recognition as well as art and cultural contact. The Assemblies, which have hosted guest musicians from the Healdsburg Jazz Festivals, plays, artists and dance groups, have become a West Side tradition. To help raise funds to support these programs, activities were added that quickly became annual events, the Jogathon, where students and student teams pledged laps in exchange for donations, and the Spaghetti Dinner, which grew into an Annual Auction. There was a conscious effort to maintain the school’s individual character by expanding upon it.

GROWING WHILE STAYING SMALL

To meet the changing needs of modern education, special ed, a growing Latino community, reduced class size, applications for admission from outside the district, West Side administrators and board agreed to increase the student population while maintaining the school’s intimate, personalized learning experience. “We wanted to hit 155,” recalls Richard Bugarske, who became superintendent/principal in 1990, “figuring that was a good number until you got higher. We didn’t do much recruiting, though we may have put ads in the paper. It was mostly word of mouth.” In three years, the school grew by forty students. Out-of-district transfers grew so significantly that eventually a lottery was instituted for kindergarten.

“There was an effort to connect with the whole community,” says Bugarske. “We wanted to be inclusive. We included food in celebrations. Families felt comfortable that we were looking out for their children. That if the school bus broke down, their kids would be given rides home. The family atmosphere was very strong.”

STATE AND NATIONAL RECOGNITION

An awareness of what was happening at West Side-a community of parents and the school devoted to providing special instruction for students-began to spread beyond the immediate area. In 1993, West Side was named a California Distinguished School. That same year, the school also received honorable mention for a National Blue Ribbon Award. “We didn’t win,” says Bugarske, “because

Continued on page 6

we didn't qualify as a statistically significant school-not large enough."

The physical plant continued to expand, gradually, like the enrollment of the school. In 1982, two more portable classrooms were installed, and in 1997, a separate kindergarten with its own bathroom. A new water tank was added, and a work space/storage room.

With help of the California Conservation Corps, a nature path was built down to the creek, now a federally protected stream, and the subject of continuing study by the Department of Fish and Game. The Corps and local Eagle Scouts provided tools and person power, West Side food, shelter and a plan. The path is refurbished annually.

With completion of Warm Springs Dam, and the opening of a fish hatchery at Lake Sonoma, student and teacher interest in fish ecology increased. A trout planting program where steelhead, raised from eggs are planted by third-graders in Mill Creek, was developed by Nancy Foulk and Rhonda Bellmer and has become an annual feature of the school. By now, it is certain that some of the full-grown steelhead returning to the creek are West Side alums.

The annual garden became an organic garden, with Lisa Phipps as gardening consultant, overseen by a garden committee composed of teachers and staff members. A donated building was added and remodeled into a greenhouse the following year.

The annual Sixth Grade Campout evolved into an overnight on the classic sailing ship *Balclutha* in San Francisco, where students stand watch, sing chanteys, and eat sailor food.

And in a continuation of West Side's musical tradition, a school band was formed in 2004.

Initial planning for a new wing to the school, replacing the temporary classrooms, got underway in 2004.

A NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL . . . AND MORE

Despite the increased recognition and expanded programs, the school remained faithful to its roots. A quota of district children must be reached before students from outside the district can be admitted. Students are accepted in a straightforward manner, whatever their abilities or disabilities are. As the community became more affluent, with both parents not having to work, there could be a greater commitment to children's schooling. West Side has never had busing to and from the town of Healdsburg: parents must commit to providing out-of-district transportation. Fund-raising, which had expanded through events like the Auction, acquired full legal and fiduciary oversight with the forming of the Felta Education Foundation in 2003, in support of the school.

Continuity of management had long ceased to be a problem. Terry Kneisler had served as superintendent/principal for seven

years; David Levine was at West Side for three, Richard Burgarske for ten years, and Gay Kenny for six. Mrs. Kenny was succeeded in 2005 by Assistant Principal Rhonda Bellmer, a ten-year veteran of West Side.

APPEARANCES AND REALITY

The physical plant and setting of a school can be unreliable guides to the quality of education offered.

Since the days when Socrates taught in the Athenian agora, outstanding education has occurred in ghettos, monasteries, barracks, even prisons. Stories of bucolic prep schools that turn out to be nightmares for students have become a cliché.

Yet at West Side, the surroundings are a true manifestation of the inner character of the school. The fact that the property is as well kept and carefully modified as any private home from the era, surrounded by generations of roses, testifies to fifty years of devoted care and maintenance, backed by community support and parent volunteerism. The presence of Felta School, still a subject for photographers and landscape artists a century after its opening, remains a powerful reminder of West Side's small-school roots. The proximity and variety of the natural world that brings students not just the words, but the music of a meaningful and effective educational start in life, remind us that there are teachers at West Side who do so in preference to opportunities to teach elsewhere. And the rows of cars and clusters of parents waiting to deliver or pick up their kids demonstrates daily the continuing reality of West Side's high degree of parental commitment and support.

At West Side School, as with few other places in life, appearances reveal reality.

"It's a place you can sink your teeth into and feel you're doing something," says Gay Kenny. "If there are kids who need help, you feel like you can do something without stretching things too much."

"It's a wonderful place to be."

-John van der Zee

Bibliography

Bugarske, Richard, "West Side (School) Story", "A Mini-History of West Side" Healdsburg, CA, West Side School, 1996.

Enzenauer, Charlotte, *Vintage Memories, Dry Creek Neighbors and Friends*, Healdsburg, Dry Creek Neighbors Club, 1979.

A Place Called West Side, a Beginning Look Back, Healdsburg, West Side School, 1996

van der Zee, John, own notes from conversations with Cyril "Dutch" King, Gene Thompson, Len Echols, Royce Meyerott, Bobi Peters. .

Interviews

Bob Lownes, Sr., Bob Lownes, Jr., Tim Harrington, Gay Kenny, Richard Bugarske, Elizabeth Schmidt, Maggie Ross

THE GEYSERS: MYSTERIOUS MARVELS OF THE MAYACAMAS

by Daniel F. Murley



886—View up the Canyon, from the Witches' Cauldron,

Along the eastern edge of the Coast Range where the Pacific and the Continental tectonic plates collide, we experience our own local piece of the greater geological phenomenon called the “Ring of Fire”. Here the volcanism of the collision and subduction of massive portions of the world’s crust is expressed not in violent eruptive events like that of Washington’s Mount Saint Helens’ spring 1980 explosive eruption, but rather in the more manageable and less destructive thermal manifestations called hot springs, fumeroles and steam vents. The geologic footprint of the area we call “The Geysers” is approximately 30 square miles that lie east of Healdsburg and west of Clear Lake. On many mornings there in the hidden valleys, rising plumes of misty vaporous steam oddly pierce the thick gray blanket of low-lying fog and the rocky uneven surface of the earth is hot underfoot.

The first human excursions into these other-worldly regions were those of Paleoindians who had entered what is now Northern California approximately 12,000 years ago. The steam vents, heated pools and boiling mud pots were shared by various Native groups. The Pomo, Wappo and Miwok peoples all, to varying degrees, used the area as a healing place and in some cases revered these places as locations holding sacred meaning in their cosmology. Many accounts, after contact with whites, tell of Native groups bringing the ill and afflicted on stretchers from long distances and building scaffolds in steamy niches for inhalation treatments or damming

up hot muddy places for immersion. In this half of a stereograph image from the 1860’s, Carleton Watkins captures what is believed to be the only photographic evidence of Native use.



Today many local Native people still avail themselves of the therapeutic and curative properties of the hot springs and many steaming caves.

It was not until April of 1847 that the burgeoning throng of non-Native people became aware of the area by an adventuresome

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

man who would later become one of the Golden State's Bear Flag rebels, William Bell Elliot. The North Carolinian Elliot had come west with the Grigsby-Ide Party in 1845 and after making across the plains and finding his way with his wife and large family, he came to work for George Yount in the Napa Valley. He also built a cabin and kept a herd of cattle on Porter Creek near Mark West Springs and with his sons, even hauled lumber for Captain Stephen Smith from Bodega.

Though in directing California's way toward statehood he was a significant player, his discovery of what he called "The Gates of Hell" will forever immortalize his name.



William B. and Eliza Elliott with two of their eleven children.

Even with the discovery of "The Geysers," interest in the area didn't take hold until the late 1850's. The first structure was built on a grassy flat just west of Geysers Canyon by Mr. M. Levy and called the "Old Homestead" to which he promoted visits by daring travelers. Soon with increased interest a hotel was constructed in 1858 from lumber sawn on the site. The remoteness of the area still kept visitation to only a few hardy souls who braved a stage ride to Knight's Valley and then, guided by early settler William McDonald, embarked on a long uncomfortable horseback ride to the site of the springs.

Those that braved the journey partook in the pleasures of the pools and some took the time to paint images of the unusual landscape. In 1862 Maude Needham Latimer produced this lovely pastel of the area known as "The Little Geysers" in which she included herself at the lower right sketching and enjoying the wonders of the natural environment in the Mayacamas. She was the wife of noted painter Lorenzo D. Latimer. They owned 360 acres and a winery near the town of Windsor.



"Little Geysers" 1862 by Maude Needham Latimer

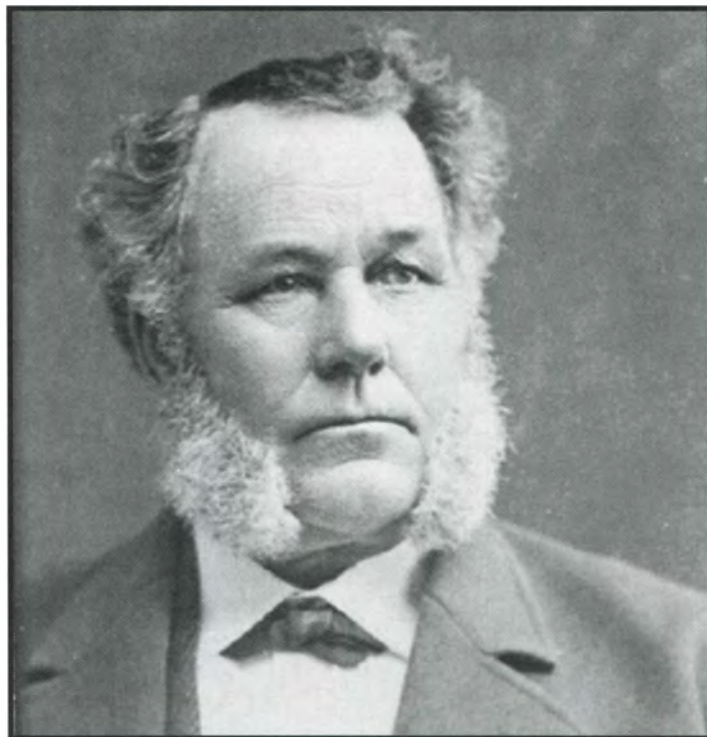
Images such as this developed interest in the recreational aspects of a visit to The Geysers. This particular work and its companion "Devil's Canyon" are on display at the Healdsburg Museum.

The first register kept at the resort destination was in 1854 when 20 names were inked in the book. By 1875, when Robert A. Thompson was preparing his Sonoma County Atlas, three thousand five hundred souls had been soaked and steamed, and many signed their names in the hotel register with a type of black inky secretion from where else, one of the bubbling pools, "The Devil's Ink Well." The guest

Continued on page 9

list in the hotel register contained the names of many luminaries who were lured by many advertisements which remarked that any trip to Northern California was incomplete without a visit to The Geysers. Among the celebrities and political figures to sign were: William Jennings Bryan, Luther Burbank, Lotta Crabtree, Ulysses S. Grant (a cabin was built and named in his honor), Horace Greeley, Jack London, J. Pierpont Morgan, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Mark Twain, Giuseppe Garibaldi, and the Prince of Wales. In his futile bout with "consumption," notable pioneer Harmon Heald also visited the therapeutic vapors of the Geysers.

Much of the increased visitation came from the improvement in transportation. Some riders may argue about the improvement after a hair-raising six hour ride while others like Healdsburg photographer Andrew Price extolled the beauty to be viewed on the long ride.



Stage driver Clark Foss by Andrew Price

Eventually the Northwestern Pacific Railroad reached Healdsburg in 1871 and from there many coaches could be taken to The Geysers resort.



"On the Way to The Geysers" Andrew Price ca. 1882



The Geysers Hotel ca. 1880

Fearless and famed Clark Foss and many other nameless "Lords of the Lash" drivers guided their teams of four and six horses pulling a coach full of wide-eyed pleasure seekers over steep and perilous, narrow, rutted roads and winding wagon trails to the Geysers Hotel and Resort.

Interest in The Geysers was not piqued however until photographic images showed people placed next to the geysers' wonderful landscape and in the context of the dramatic remoteness and eerie mystical atmosphere of the area. The renowned Carleton Watkins, the great western landscape photographer, published a series of dramatic stereoviews which were widely distributed and

interest in the area rose. Watkins' contemporary and eventual developer of the repetitive image motion picture process, Edward Muybridge, caught the eye of Victorians by staging a number of photographic sequences at The Geysers, including "The Witches Cauldron" feature in 1870.

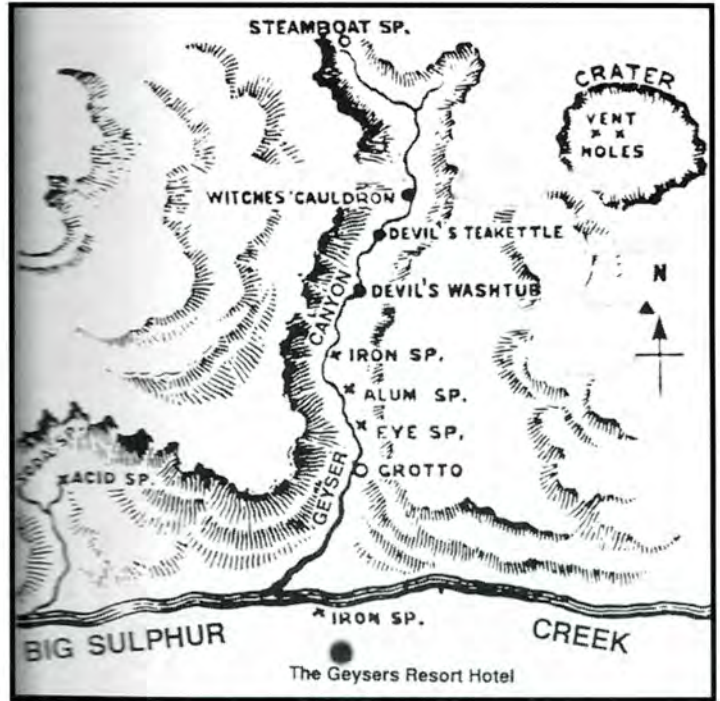


*"Eye of newt and toe of frog.
Wool of bat and tongue of dog...
Double, double, toil and trouble:
Fire burn and cauldron bubble."
Macbeth, Act IV Scene I
William Shakespeare*

The intriguing image was reproduced in an 1873 Scribner's Monthly article which drew more visitors to the remote hotel and "spa". However the heyday of The Geysers was in the 1870's to the 1890's. Visitation declined for many reasons after this period, and despite many efforts into the 1950's, the resort would never regain the popularity it had previously. Gone was the time when the lure of the exotic and far away "Gates of Hell" drew the thrill seekers to its misty rumbling hissing canyons to commune with a natural world many had only seen in the magazines.

WHAT CAUSES "THE GEYSERS" GEOTHERMAL ACTIVITY?

Water from the ground's surface percolates underground and heats up after it reaches the layer of fractured sedimentary rock called greywacke. This underground layer has been heated by being in contact with an ancient source of molten magma below. The heated water then rises back to the surface emerging in hot springs, steam vents, or as steam in bubbling muddy pots called fumaroles.



An 1880's map of The Geysers Resort Hotel with colorful site names

Sources:

- Bancroft, Hubert Howe, 1886, Bancroft's Works, The History of California, Volume XXI, The History Company San Francisco.
- Barrett, S.A., 1908, The Ethnography of the Pomo and Neighboring Indians. U.C. Berkeley Press.
- Box, W.T. 2002, The Geysers: The Nature, Development and Preservation of a Unique Resource. Manuscript on file, Sonoma State University.
- Fredrickson, David A., 1974, Archaeological Resources and Geothermal Development at the Geysers, Sonoma County, California. Manuscript on File Sonoma State University.
- Hodgson, Susan, 1997, A Geysers Album. CA Dept of Conservation, Sacramento, CA.
- Mulligan, Therese and David Wooters editors, 2000, Photography from 1839 to Today. Taschen, Koln.
- Thompson Robert A., 1877, Historical Atlas of Sonoma County. L.H. Everts & Co. Philadelphia.
- Warner, Barbara R., 1996, The Men of The California Bear Flag Revolt. A.H. Clark, Spokane, WA.

FROM RESPECTABLE TO ROARING: THE STORIED PAST OF THE RIVERSIDE VILLA

by Holly Hoods

Before becoming the family mobile home park of today, Riverside Villa was once a vacation resort, a swinging hotspot and eventually a local legend. Wild and whispered tales of the resort's heyday as a speakeasy during Prohibition have overshadowed the quieter history of the original Riverside Villa. A letter to the Healdsburg Museum from Dorothy Sawyer about the first Riverside Villa inspired this article. Mrs. Sawyer is also to be credited for the accompanying historical photographs.

THE WALKER BATHING RESORT

Oscar and Mary Odell Walker purchased approximately 2.5 acres on the west side of the Russian River at the end of Mason Street in the early 1880s. A handsome two-story residence was built by 1883 to house their growing family. This building, the first Riverside Villa, pictured here, burned down in the late 1890s. Since 1899 was the only year of the 1890s that the Walkers were taxed for a bare lot with no improvements--having previously paid \$600--it is evident that the fire took place that year.

The residence that replaced the first house by 1900 as "Riverside Villa" can now be seen on the east side of Mason Street where First and Front streets are fitted together at an odd angle. The Walker resort property was more secluded then, as First Street did not extend south between Hayden and Mason streets to join Front Street in front of the house as it does today. The former resort grounds of the Walker era are now paved and dotted with mobile homes.

AMENITIES OF THE RIVERSIDE VILLA

The Walkers opened the Riverside Villa in June of 1895. The *Healdsburg Tribune* reported that:

Oscar Walker's new bath house and bathing gymnasium on the Russian River is being liberally patronized.

The Walker resort was a middle class vacation camp, featuring dances, river activities, including boating and bathing, and wholesome recreation in a comfortable, family setting. In August 1904, the *Healdsburg Enterprise* endorsed the Walker resort, touting its brand new bath houses on the river banks, declaring:

Many avail themselves of the opportunity to bathe in the pleasant water. All depths make it safe for beginners. Boats, bathing suits and towels are rented very reasonably.



In 1914, a new combination dining room and dancing pavilion added to the luster of vacationing at the Walkers' resort. The Northwestern Pacific Railroad easily transported guests to Healdsburg from San Francisco and other points north and south. The Riverside Villa courted visitors by advertising in the yearly Northwestern Pacific publication, *Vacation*, a guide to resorts and other accommodations for travelers along the railroad route. Guests of Riverside Villa would be met and picked up by a Walker conveyance from the railroad depot nearby.

THE WALKERS REMEMBERED

Mary Odell Walker was the creative spark and motivating force behind the operation. Despite the strongly prevailing attitudes of the day that presumed the husband to be head of the household and master of the family business affairs, Mary's role was recognized in newspaper articles and even in post cards. Gradually "Oscar Walker's Resort" evolved into "Mrs. Walker's Riverside Villa." Mary Walker was the manager, cook, primary laundress and hostess of the resort, while overseeing a family of ten. Perhaps this is why, despite being 18 years younger than Oscar, Mary died ten years earlier than he did.

Mrs. Walker's esteemed reputation appears in stark contrast to that of her husband, however. Walker descendants who have researched the history of the family describe Oscar Walker in unabashedly negative terms. Great-granddaughter Dorothy Sawyer bluntly characterizes Oscar as "a leech who attached himself to the labors of others," happiest when issuing orders from the porch.

Continued on page 12

He removed his children from school at very early ages in order to set them to work. Oscar's daughters received minimal education. Mrs. Sawyer quips, "He had a long white beard, but he was no Santa Claus! He was very much detested by almost all of his 10 children."

What contributed to Oscar's unpleasant ways? Family historians speculate that his bitterness was brought on by the collapse of all his previous business ventures. Before opening Riverside Villa, the Pennsylvania-born Walker had moved to Knights Valley in 1858 at the age of 20. He had farmed in Alexander Valley and worked briefly as a road overseer for the next decade. Walker made at least enough money to open (and fail) at running two grocery stores: one of them in Alexander Valley and then one in Chico. He deeply resented the failures. The Walker family also lost a beloved daughter at a young age, which may have also contributed to his disappointment in life.

Mary Walker evidently took charge of the Riverside Villa to ensure a successful livelihood for the family. The former Mary Odell was born in Iowa in 1850. She hailed from a pioneer northern Sonoma County family that settled on the east side of the Russian River north of Geyserville in about 1860. Mary was 24 when she wed Oscar Walker in 1874. Oscar was 42.

After more than 20 years of resort and family management, Mary Odell Walker died quietly at home in 1916 at the age of 66. Oscar briefly continued to operate the resort with the help of his family. At 78, though, he was in poor mental and physical health and unable to manage a business of any kind. Family historians report that daughter Carrie (Bloch) attempted to keep her mother's resort going with the assistance of Clayton Walker, her brother, but he joined the Navy in World War I after the declaration of War by



The original Riverside Villa, pictured here before 1898.

Wilson. Two other brothers also enlisted in the service of their country. Oscar Walker moved into his youngest son's house in Watsonville and Riverside Villa closed its doors. The property was sold to Louis Scovelli in 1923. Oscar Walker died three years later.

THE MYSTERY YEARS OF THE EARLY '20S

Italian businessman Louis Scovelli married local girl, Ruth Fitch, soon after buying the former Walker resort in 1923. According to the *Healdsburg Tribune*, the Scovellis did not run the resort for more than a few years. They leased the property to Mr. and Mrs. Max Seidler in 1926. The Seidlers moved the cabins to the rear of the premises, planting a large front lawn and erecting tents. They renamed the resort "Riverview." They too only operated it for a few years.

No evidence has been found to connect the Scovellis or the Seidlers in any way with illicit doings at the resort during Prohibition. That being said, the 1926 decision to move the cabins away from near the street to the rear of the property is intriguing. No advertisements or even listings for the Riverview Resort in city business directories or local newspapers were found, which is curious, but perhaps entirely innocent. Further research into this era is warranted. By 1929, when the ownership changed hands, the resort clearly launched full-speed into the scandalous activities that earned its notorious reputation in local folklore.

BOOTLEGGER'S HIDEAWAY

Alfredo ("Fred") Barsotti was an affluent San Francisco *A*haberdasher--and an unrepentant bootlegger-- in 1929 when he and Frank Maddux, a San Francisco bartender, partnered in purchasing the resort. It was then known as "Riverview." During the Roaring Twenties, Barsotti was a bright star in the bootlegging constellation that linked Healdsburg and other Russian River Resort towns and the coast with San Francisco. Maddux may have been less involved in the liquor racket than his partner; perhaps he was just luckier than Barsotti in avoiding arrest.

Throughout the mid to late 1920s, Alfred Barsotti's name regularly graced the local newspapers and court dockets for bootlegging. In 1925 alone Barsotti was busted twice in one month on West Street (now Healdsburg Avenue) at the Sotoyome Hotel dining room with a bottle of "jackass brandy." Business must have been excellent, because he always plead guilty, paying fines of several hundred dollars each time without protest or excuse. Ande Nowlin, editor of the *Sotoyome Scimitar*, observing Barsotti's frequent arrests, commented that:

It is quite freely admitted by people who think they have reliable

Continued on page 13

information that the bootleggers in this city are making more money now than any saloon man ever made here in a similar length of time.

Upon taking over the business in 1929, Barsotti and Maddux restored the name of the resort back to "Riverside Villa." Their well-stocked bootleg liquor bar and private dining and sleeping rooms catered to a wealthy clientele from San Francisco with deep pockets. Parties were rowdy, raucous and frequent. The resort proved to be especially attractive to men trysting with women other than their wives. Informed sources report that the upstairs bedrooms were occupied by call girls. Customers could enter the front parlor and ring one of several bells to contact a specific desired female companion for a "date." Interestingly, but unfortunately for historical research, the census taker that canvassed the Mason Street did not visit the Riverside Villa in 1930 to enumerate the residents. We will never know if the census taker avoided the place because of intimidation, bribery or oversight.

THE JACKASS KICKS

In March 1931, Alfred Barsotti and four other men made big headlines when federal prohibition officers raided a \$70,000 bootlegging operation on the ranch of Calvin Foote, former constable and justice of the peace, in Knights Valley, a half mile from Kellogg. Arrested with Barsotti were Reginald Camolli and William Hugin of San Francisco, John Elmer of Hayward and Fred Shannon, no address. Accused by prohibition agents to be the "head man in the distillery," this time he got no slap on the wrist. Barsotti was fined \$1,000 and sentenced to a year in jail. The *Healdsburg Enterprise* proclaimed the seizure to be "one of the largest in history here," noting:

The still was one of the most elaborate ever found in the county. The seizure included 1200 sacks of sugar, from which alcohol was being made. But little mash and practically no alcohol was seized, it was said, due to failure recently of the water supply. This was being repaired when the federal squad appeared on the scene at about 4:30 pm Monday.

Fred Barsotti was forced to leave Riverside Villa to begin serving the jail sentence in October of 1931. One can only imagine his spectacular send-off party the night before! Barsotti returned to Healdsburg after serving his time in the Santa Rosa jail. This time Barsotti kept a lower profile. Repeal of anti-liquor legislation in 1933 ended Prohibition and helped keep the professional bootlegger out of the news for the rest of his days. Alfred Barsotti died quietly at his home on South Fitch Mountain Road in 1968 at the age of 76.

Frank Maddux's life ended tragically. Becoming sole owner of the property in 1938, Maddux operated the Riverside Villa and auto camp until his death in 1945 after years of poor health. Ailing and despondent, Maddux slashed his throat with a pocket knife while waiting at home for an ambulance to take him to the hospital for treatment. The shock from the self-inflicted wound and other complications killed him at age 66.

AUTO CAMP TO MOBILE HOME PARK

The Riverside Villa auto camp was continued by Frank Maddox's widow, Grace, and her son from a previous marriage, Robert Edwards. Edwards started a mobile home park on the property in 1947. He and his wife Amy lived in the residence through the 1950s.

The Riverside Villa property has been a mobile home park for 59 years. The park has 19 sites for mobile homes and retains the 1900 Walker residence and an attached granny unit, which was created during the Eccles/Heidelberger ownership in the late 1970s- early 1980s. A portion of the former dining room and dancing pavilion, built onto the kitchen by the Walkers in 1914, is now a rental granny unit.

The next owners were Ralph and Blanche Connor who owned and managed the property for a decade before selling the Riverside Villa Park to John Eccles. The Connors continued to reside on the property in one of the mobile homes. Eccles's daughter and son-in-law, Phyllis and Bob Heidelberger, took over management of the property during the 1980s. Robin Naokio became the next owner from the 1990s through the early 2000s. Current owner Carol Mascherini bought the Riverside Villa three years ago to manage as a rental property investment. She has maintained the vintage residence in excellent condition and keeps the California Registered historic landmark building painted its traditional yellow.

Sources:

- Healdsburg City tax assessment records, 1878-1955.
- Healdsburg Enterprise*: 9/5/1904; 6/6/1914; 9/16/1923; 3/19/1931; 10/15/1931.
- Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society. *Historic Homes of Healdsburg, second edition* 1993.
- Healdsburg Historic Resource Survey*. 1983.
- Healdsburg Tribune*: 6/27/1895; 3/16/1916; 4/22/1926; 2/2/1945.
- Heidelberger, Phyllis. 1983 letter to Healdsburg Museum.
- Mascherini, Carol. Telephone interview with Holly Hoods, December 2006.
- Northwestern Pacific Railroad. "Vacation 1908."
- R.L. Polk and Company. *Polk's Santa Rosa and Sonoma County Directory*, 1926; 1928; 1938.
- Riverside Villa post cards on file at Healdsburg Museum.
- Russian River Flag*: 8/20/1874; 2/18/1875.
- Sawyer, Dorothy, letter to Healdsburg Museum, August 2005. Telephone interview with Holly Hoods, December 2006.
- Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of Healdsburg, 1898, 1911, 1941, 1951.
- Sotoyome Scimitar*: 1/29/1926; 2/7/1926.
- U.S. Dept of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 census. Healdsburg; San Francisco

30 YEARS OLD: THE HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

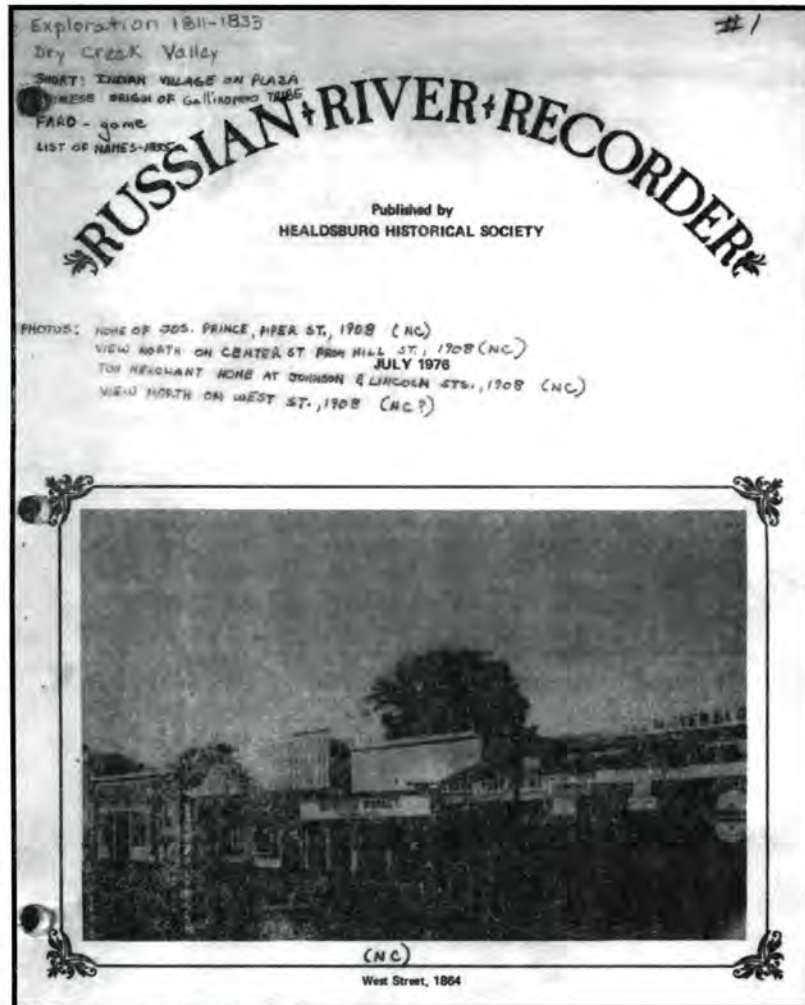
by Charlotte Anderson

Published by the Healdsburg Historical Society, the *Russian River Recorder* was originally its "newsletter" which was scheduled to come out four times a year. The Recorder included Society news as well as historical articles. Along with Edwin Langhart and a few others, Jan Harrison pioneered both the Healdsburg Historical Society and the *Russian River Recorder*.

Issue #1, edited by Ed Langhart and typed by Jan Harrison, came out July 4, 1976. Ed, the first Curator, continued as editor until his death on February 16, 1979. Jan Harrison, who was the Historical Society president at that time, took over the duties of editor with issue #12 and continued editing and typing until 1981 with issue #21. In her first issue as editor she penned a tribute to Edwin Langhart including: WE CAN ONLY READ IN BOOKS ABOUT MEN LIKE FITCH AND MATHESON, BUT WE LIVED AND WORKED WITH HEALDSBURG'S GREATEST: ED LANGHART.

Curator Hannah Clayborn came to the Museum after Langhart's death in 1979. In 1981 she became the RRR editor with issue #22. With the April 1981 #23 edition, Hannah took the RRR to a "booklet" format, replacing the former "typed-on-one-side-stapled-at-the-top" issues previously published. It wasn't very long (as in issue #24!) when Hannah's cry for help came out: "'Staff' of 1 needs help!" Laurie Wilson answered that call and shortly thereafter Carl Moore also joined the cause. However, in #26, Fall/Winter 1983, Hannah wrote, "Final Notice: Unless a core of volunteers comes forth, the *Russian River Recorder* will henceforth come out only

once or twice each year!" It so happened that in that same issue there was a heartfelt plea for Museum volunteers in many other categories, too!



First issue of the *Russian River Recorder*

True to her word, Hannah was only able to publish one or two RRR's the next few years. In issue #28, fall of 1984, she editorialized: "In case you missed our non-existent summer issue of the Recorder, you should know that the time saved by our staff was put to good use in producing the Museum's first book, *Historic Homes of Healdsburg - A Self-Guided Tour!*" In the same issue was the following: "QUESTION: What would the RRR be like if it had a staff larger than two? ANSWER: Let's find out!"

In issue #29 in the spring of 1985, she noted "I waited and waited, and not a single elf came into the museum. As you may have noticed, our winter issue was 'late.' At Christmas-time I wrote a letter to Santa asking him to please send down the elves

after the season rush to help with the RRR, as we were going to be busy putting up two complete museum exhibits in two months. I've finally given up, as you can see. Thanks a lot, Santa!" However, when the RRR did come out it was always at least 12 pages and occasionally as many as 18 pages! As a matter of fact issue #32, Spring 1987, not only had 12 pages but also had two inserts!

Continued on page 15

At this time, the museum was situated at 133 Matheson Street, the Museum/Community Center. In 1988, the museum had to go across the street to 132 Matheson Street as the City wished to remodel the Center to a new Senior Citizens' Center! Very busy with moving and creating exhibits, Hannah did keep to her word of at least one or two RRR's a year! During these years Hannah had some help from Cathryn Fairlee, Art Reed, Chris Biagi, and Diane Johannsen.

Having moved to the renovated Carnegie Library, the Healdsburg Museum held a grand opening on May 1, 1990. With this move, the "Staff" took over the RRR. For issue #37, summer of 1990, the Staff consisted of Diane Johannsen, acting news editor Verna Lafon, Pat Schmidt, and Curt Sloan editing and layout. Jill Baker added her help for the next issue.

Issues #38 through #44, through the spring of 1993, were ably produced by Verna Lafon and Curt Sloan. With the change of curator in 1993, issue #45 listed as its staff Verna Lafon, Claire Rithner (new Curator), and Steve Perkins, printing.

With RRR #46 Winter 1993, Darla Meeker became editor. Gabe Fraire was her assistant and Steve Perkins did the layout to be printed at Amoruso Printing. The Winter 1994 #49 issue had Darla as editor and Bob Rawlins as the Computer Tech, layout by Steve Perkins, printing by Solo Press, and distribution organized by Carol Clark.

When Curator Claire Rithner and Editor Darla Meeker both left in 1995, Bob Rawlins filled in (issues #50, #51, #52) as editor and doing layout, taking it to Solo Press, and having Carol Clark distribute.

The "modern era" of the *Russian River Recorder* actually began with issue #53 in the spring of 1996 with former Healdsburg Tribune editor Arnold Santucci taking the helm. The Curator was Marie Djordevich and the Assistant Curator was Holly Hoods. They, along with others such as June Smith and Bob Rawlins, contributed articles to the now completely historic publication.

On December 15, 1993, the Healdsburg Museum Volunteer Association (HMVA) was approved as a support group of the Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society. As a result, a separate newsletter, the "Healdsburg Museum Volunteer Association Newsletter," containing goings-on of the Museum and Historical Society began being written and distributed under the direction of Betsy Bippart in February of 1994. In this 1st edition, Editor June

Smith wrote, "A newsletter should have a name. Do you have any suggestions?"

Apparently no suggestions were forthcoming and the "HMVA Newsletter" continued until June 1995 when the Board of Directors decided to have a monthly membership newsletter published so that Darla Meeker's *Russian River Recorder* could focus on articles of historical interest. June Smith continued as Editor until January 1996 when Arnold Santucci took over as editor of the "Newsletter" as well as the *Russian River Recorder*.

Articles were usually contributed by the Curator, the Historical Society President, the HMVA Coordinator, June Smith, Bob Rawlins and chairmen of events and/or categories, e.g. Gift Shop, Outreach.

In February of 2000, Arnold turned the "Newsletter" over to Betsy Bippart for a year. In 2001 Curator Marie Djordevich (Shobe beginning March 2002) took over editorship. Regular contributors continued as before. Research Curator Holly Hoods began a regular article beginning in January 2002

In November 2003, Curator Daniel F. Murley became editor for a year until Barry Stallard took over in November 2004. While the content of the "Newsletter" is mainly membership news, historical asides keep adding to its value.

The distribution of the *Russian River Recorder*, and now the "Newsletter," has been handled by volunteers since 1994. Carol Clark did it until 1998 when Elizabeth Neal took over. Elizabeth coordinated the mailing committee through spring of 2002, and since then Fran Lescalleet has been in charge of this operation.

From its inception, the *Russian River Recorder* has been the conduit through which history of Healdsburg has been flowing to the public. Always interesting and historical, the magazine has grown under the editorship of Arnold Santucci to the professional publication one sees today. With Healdsburg's sesquicentennial coming up in 2007, this same public can look forward to a new look: finally a new name for the "Newsletter" and a year-long "overview" of 150 years of Healdsburg history!

FROM TSUNO TO SOTOYOME TO FITCH MOUNTAIN

by Charlotte Anderson

Fitch Mountain has been an important local landmark for hundreds-even thousands-of years. The first people in the area were ancestors of the Southern Pomo who hunted and gathered on, and had settlements around the base of, the mountain they called Tsuno. In the late Pomo/early Rancho era, the mountain was briefly referred to as Sotoyome (after Rancho Sotoyome) and finally Fitch Mountain. No matter what the name, the "mountain" catches the eye of travelers as well as residents to this day. It is also still being written about as it was in the 19th and 20th centuries.



Picnic on Fitch Mountain, March 31, 1873 - Downing and Prince families
Museum collection

EARLY DESCRIPTIONS

"The most striking feature of the landscape near Healdsburg is Sotoyome, sometimes less appropriately called Fitch Mountain. It is a shapely, isolated hill, around the base of which Russian river winds a torturous course, as if reluctant to leave the flowery and beautiful valley to mingle its waters with the sea." (from the 1877 SONOMA COUNTY HISTORICAL ATLAS, p.22)

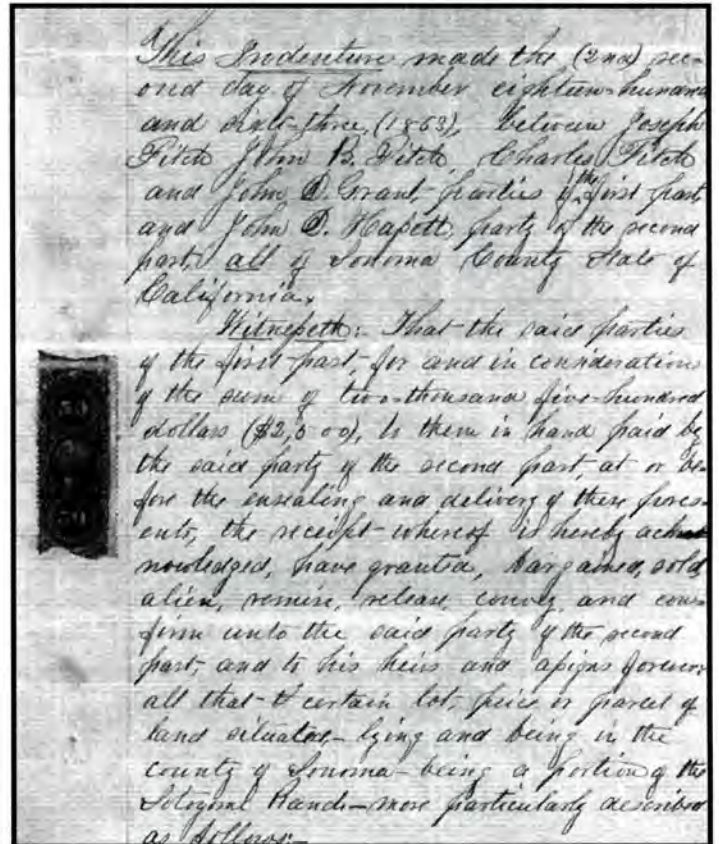
"Sotoyome Mountain (Fitch Mt.) is a hill of much symmetry, the upper portion being well wooded, while at its base are rolling lands, offering the advantage of magnificent pasturage; around the foot of it meanders the Russian river, clinging to the fertile region as if loth [sic] to part with the luxuriant vegetation on its slopes." (from HISTORY OF SONOMA COUNTY, 1880, p. 217)

"FITCH MOUNTAIN--THE BEAUTIFUL"

by Julius Myron Alexander

"Fitch Mountain comes from the valley, a lone mountain of close to 1000 feet in altitude. As a cone, it rises from the valley,

while on its easy declivities are orange and olive groves; far up its sides grows the vintage of the vine, and all about it are the soft blossoms of the Vale of Sotoyome. On its north, as if a buttment for the great river, it bends it from its course, still winding, its waters bear far around, leaving it at last in their rush to the sea. From the summit of the mountain one has a magnificent view. Far to the east is blue Mt. St. Helena, and there on the north are the gray mountains of Mendocino, westward are the great redwood groves of the coast and far to the south Mt. Tamalpais, just shading the great city from the view. At its base the city of Healdsburg nestles as a great white swan midst the trees of green and the blossoms of the valley. It is the lookout mountain of the valley, easy of access and pays a rich reward to those who stand upon its summit." (from the Healdsburg Tribune, January 19, 1910, p.1)



1863 Indenture between Fitch family and J.D. Hassett (Museum Collection)

EARLY OWNERSHIP HISTORY

8 square leagues in Sonoma and Mendocino counties were granted on September 28, 1841, by Manuel Micheltoarena to Henry D. Fitch. The claim, the Sotoyome Grant, was filed February 2, 1852. (48,836.52 acres)

Continued on page 17

An indenture made on 2 November 1863 between Joseph Fitch, John B. Fitch, Charles Fitch, and John Grant sold acreage containing the whole of Fitch Mountain to John Davis Hassett for \$2500.

In 1877, J.D. Hassett sold 10 acres on the south slope of Fitch Mt. to Fritz and Maynard for \$5000. The new owners built an earthen reservoir on the land, which had many natural springs, and piped water to Healdsburg, thus establishing the first water system serving the community.

When John D. Hassett died in 1887, part of Fitch Mt. went to two of his heirs, Louise C. Walker (daughter) and Sarah E. Hassett (wife), several hundred acres having been sold in the years since acquisition.

Upon the death of Sarah E. Hassett in 1908, attorney John Wesley Rose received 1300 acres when he settled the Hassett estate (including the top of Fitch Mountain). J.M. Alexander prevailed upon Rose to put lots on the market for summer homes. As a result "Camp Rose" was carved out of the tract. Then came the sale of "Camp Hale" to Nathan Hale of San Francisco. Later on Robert G. Cook acquired a portion of the mountain which was being subdivided and readied for sale as Del Rio Woods ("The River by the Woods") in 1924. "Del Rio Woods is the portion of Fitch Mountain extending from Villa Chanticleer on the north around the mountain side and down to the banks of Russian River to Camp Rose on the south. Thus it is that the northern, eastern and southern slopes of the mountain will become one large summer resort, ideal, picturesque and inviting. Every foot of the mountain at whose base flows Russian river will then be dedicated to rest and recreation-for be it known that the famous river actually flows around three sides of the mountain, approaching it from the north, circling it on the east, and departing from it on the south." (*Healdsburg Tribune* 22 August 1924)

From the very first days, people have been drawn to the mountain for various reasons. In the early days, people hiked to the top, and children were fascinated with the various trails that were on it. Fitch Mountain has been the subject of many "writings," not the least of which were the ones penned by Julius Myron Alexander. One writer not often heard about was Healdsburg's first mayor, Colonel L.A. Norton who wrote a poem entitled "WRITTEN ON THE SUMMIT OF FITCH MOUNTAIN WHILE SITTING ON AN ANT-HILL." The first of the seven-stanza poem read; "Little ant, come, tell me why/ Thou hast built thy home so high;/ These high cliffs why didst thou scale/ And leave the warm and pleasant vale?"

FITCH MOUNTAIN OR FITCH HILL?

A mountain is a land form that rises prominently above its surroundings. It is generally distinguished by steep slopes, a relatively confined summit, and considerable height. The term



Fitch Mountain (Museum Collection)

"mountain" has topographic and geologic meanings. It generally refers to rises over 2000 feet (610 meters) Compared to a hill, a mountain is defined by its greater height and volume.

The *Healdsburg Enterprise* reported on 6 February 1870 that "Dr. Thomson and his surveying class measured the height [sic] of Fitch Mountain as 1,037.89 feet."

According to a record on a tree at its summit marked down there many years ago, Fitch Mountain is 999.8 feet above sea level. The figures are from the official records of the geodetic survey, but they were taken so long ago that they are subject to change "in the event that the picturesque hill has sprouted any or slumped down in the past quarter century."

The *Healdsburg Tribune* ran two articles in 1924, the first on 17 January which stated "How high is Fitch Mountain? The chances are that even the oldest resident of Healdsburg, who has lived for most of his life under the shadow of the picturesque mound that thrusts its shoulders up by the side of Russian river to the east of this city, doesn't know how far above sea level or above the floor of the valley the top of the mountain is.

"Six boy scouts of the second patrol of the Healdsburg high school troop, realizing the lack of information on the interesting subject decided to find out the answer to the question for themselves. So on Sunday they climbed the slopes of the hill and on its peak determined the facts with an aneroid barometer.

"Fitch Mountain, they learned, is 960 feet above sea level and 850 feet above the level of Healdsburg. Those who climbed with the 'aneroid thermometer' were Frank Sohler, Lieuallen Hall, Clarence Engelbret, James Robinson, Fred Comstock and Richard Warfield. W. Ellis Pickett was leader of the patrol on the climb.

"Previous measurements taken show Fitch Mountain to be just a little under 1000 feet above sea level. These are geodetic survey figures."

USES OF FITCH MOUNTAIN - AN OLD CONTROVERSY

13 February 1889, *Healdsburg Enterprise*. "Fitch Mountain has been leased to parties who propose manufacturing coal from the growth that constitutes the principal attraction of this old land mark. It is a decided pity that the beauty of this, the pride of this section, should be marred by the woodsman's axe. What a contrast it now presents with what it will when the timber has been cleared off. While it will still be Fitch Mountain the timber that adds beauty and grandure [sic] will be wanting, and it will stand simply as a barren, desolate hill."

Since there was an immediate uproar following the above article, the *Enterprise* printed another one the following week: "We have been informed by the owners of Fitch Mountain that it is not their intention to have the timber cleared from the mountain, but only to thin out an unusually thick growth or clump on the north side" where a fence is to be built. "The mountain is useless for other than grazing purposes, and appreciating its beauty as it now stands, they had not the remotest idea of converting it into a barren hill by cutting off the timber. The fears of the people that the beauty of the mountain was to be marred may therefore be set at rest, as the owners positively assure us that it is not their intention to destroy one of the most attractive objects of this section."

12 July 1894, *Sonoma County Tribune*. "FITCH MOUNTAIN TO BE CONVERTED INTO A SCENIC PARK. Some of our leading citizens have come to the conclusion to improve, embellish and make accessible many of our surrounding points of natural vantage, especially mountain views, romantic forest, valley and creek scenes, etc., by means of establishing easy and perfectly graded roads and paths, guideposts and boards, resting places and benches in convenient nooks, watering troughs and receptacles, using all springs and rivulets, information boards of all historical places and things of interest, etc.

"It is the intention to organize an embellishment club for this purpose, taxing its members the small sum of 10 cents per month or \$1.00 a year if paid in advance.

"If Healdsburg and environments are successfully improved and beautified our own people and the people at large will be attracted and consequently bring life and money to our town and vicinity.

"The start was already made on July the 4th by the erection of a flag pole on top of Fitch Mountain and the hoisting of the stars and stripes thereon. In remembrance of this occasion the place was baptized 'Washington Heights,' and at this point we believe the work of embellishment will commence."

Two weeks later in the 26 July 1894 *Sonoma County Tribune* appeared the following: "A multitude of voices have been raised in objection to the name of 'Washington Heights' which is erroneously

understood to take the place of that of Fitch Mountain, so gloriously suggestive of pioneer days and commemorative of the first settler. The title adopted is for the summit alone when the improvement club has built upon it a place for recreation and observation. The name of Fitch Mountain will never be obliterated and it is hoped this explanation will mitigate the opposition and make the appellation, Washington Heights, less indigestive."

FLAG ON FITCH MOUNTAIN

1 November 1894 *Sonoma County Tribune*: "Baron von Schilling has presented to the city of Healdsburg the large, costly flag which once was 'unfurled to the gentle zephyrs' upon the summit of Fitch mountain. It was a generous gift and is an evidence of his love for this locality."

12 February 1914 *Healdsburg Tribune*. FLAG ON FITCH MOUNTAIN. "George Stretter and a party of relatives and friends climbed to the top of Fitch Mountain Sunday on a picnic excursion. Mr. Stretter has formed a strong attachment for the picturesque mountain that forms the background of Healdsburg, and about the base of which twines the Russian River.

"Mr. Stretter's patriotism led him to purchase a large flag-8 by 12 feet-and this was taken up the mountain Sunday. The old flagpole, which was going to decay, was taken down and reset, underbrush and trees were cleared away, and the new banner-the Stars and Stripes-now floats from the top of the mountain."

That flag and flagpole evidently did not last long because in April of 1917 there was another flag pole setting and flag raising. (see article in the *Russian River Recorder*, Winter 2002, p.13) The flag pole was anchored in the fork of an oak tree and the flag was raised. It flew there for seven years, finally coming down when lightning struck the tree in 1924!

Meanwhile, in 1921 the students of Healdsburg High School decided that there should be a symbol of Healdsburg on the mountain. "The 'H' was erected by high school boys, and the students of the school have considered it their especial ward." On February 15, 1924, "desecration by a person or persons unknown was wrought" when the "H" was painted red making it almost invisible from town! The students were irate and a delegation of six (Frank Sohler, Walter Albertson, Ed Esler, John Warner, John Bailhache, and Leonard McClish) climbed the steep slope with brushes and white paint to repaint the initial. "They suspect high school sophomores as responsible for the offense, and guarantee a ducking reminiscent of freshman days if they ever catch the culprits responsible." *Tribune*, 18 February 1924.

Another incident occurred before a football game with Analy when the "H" was "magically" transformed into an "A"!

On November 5, 1933, "Students of the Healdsburg high school completed the erection of a new 'H' on the side of Fitch Mountain



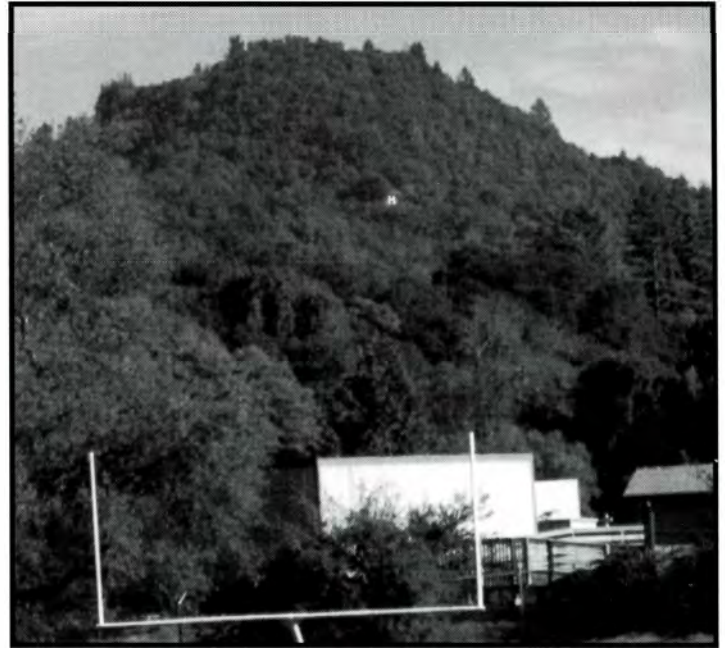
Putting up the "H", November 1939. Front row, l to r: Sis Schwab, Virginia Anderson, Charlotte Beckwith, Gloria Masini, Marge Barnard. Second row, l to r: Norma Kelly, Maty Wattles, Vivian Kramer, Virginia Kramer, ?, Dorothy Childress. (Photo courtesy of Marge Barnard)

to replace the old symbol which had become badly twisted and bent through the years. The new 'H' is 18 feet by 13 feet, made of two-inch redwood, 24 inches wide, set on concrete foundations, and is expected to last for several years. The material for the new letter was furnished by the Healdsburg high school student body and was made by A. Valette and F. Lafon under the direction of Faculty Advisor George Stanley who also is shop teacher. The 'H' was erected by Gerald McClish, Robert Jones, Lloyd Patterson, J. Silvas, L. Musselman, Charles Mallon and Felix Lafon. (*Healdsburg Enterprise*, 9 November 1933)

The last mention of the "H" was in the 1940 "Sotoyoman" in the sophomore class history: "In the middle of the year, the sophomore girls decided it was time the 'H' was once more hoisted to its place of honor, and twelve of the most ambitious scaled Fitch Mountain for that purpose. Eight hours later they descended triumphantly. The 'H' stood, however, for only a week, and then again slid to a resting place far down the mountain side. This time the boys, determined not to be outdone, made short work of righting it."

It has been determined that an "H" of some type was put on the

mountain until 1951 or 1952 with either freshmen or sophomores responsible for its placement. Today THE spot is still visible as a totally bare brown spot. With a bit of imagination one can still "see" the "H" on Fitch Mountain.



Fitch Mountain showing position of "H", from Recreation Park, 2006
Photo by Charlotte Anderson

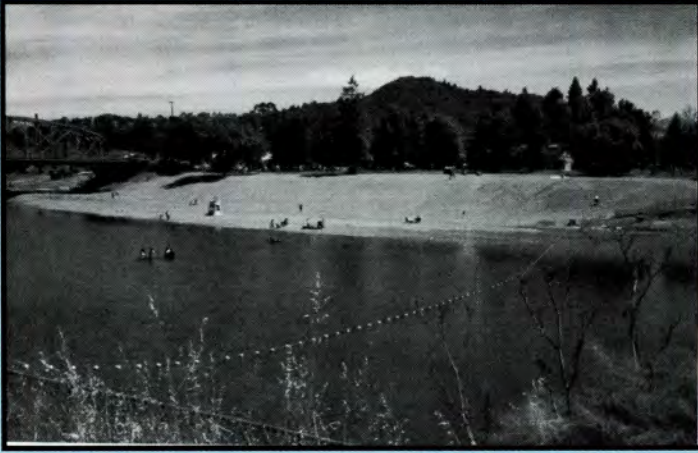
In 1927, Del Rio Woods, including Fitch Mountain, was sold by Cook and Pohley to "a group of capitalists headed by Thomas Scobel. Scobel was interested in a continuation of a road to the top of Fitch Mountain. In September of 1928, a steam shovel could be seen at work just above the letter "H." Quick work was done and a "wonderful road winding up the northeastern slopes" was opened with the first automobile reaching the summit on October 3, 1928. (see "Road to the Top of Fitch Mountain," *Russian River Recorder*, Winter 2002)

Another scheme was proposed in 1929, to put a "beacon light on the top of Fitch Mountain! If not a beacon light, why not decorate one of the trees like a Christmas tree or use some other lighting scheme that will show off at night time and attract the attention of the passing throng and afford a little advertising to this section." Needless to say, that idea never lit up.

In June 1943, Earl Callicut, 13, of Del Rio Woods saw a plane crash on the mountain and led Saul Richman, former Tribune editor, and Dianne Wolking to the site. The plane, on a training flight from the "Fulton airdrome" evidently lost a stabilizer causing the pilot to lose control. "Army officials removed the body of the pilot to San Rafael and took such parts as they wished. Souvenir hunters made short work of the balance." *Tribune*, June 18, 1943.

Although many plans and hopeful ideas for the use of the top of

Fitch Mountain, one strain has always remained the same---KEEP IT NATURAL! The various owners, while at times threatening to build hotels and the like, have not carried out any of these things. John Hassett bought "the whole mountain," and subsequent owners have owned 95% of "the top," all whom kept it in pristine condition.



*Fitch Mountain from Memorial Beach, 2004
Photo by Charlotte Anderson*

In 1954 Zelma Ratchford purchased a 264 acre portion of the top of Fitch Mountain, calling the transaction her "Magnificent

Obsession." She and her family rode horses on the property, picnicked, and truly loved enjoying the views. Zelma wrote in her JOURNAL: "I am hopeful that Healdsburg will eventually combine my property and Chanticleer city park for a handsome well-located Regional Park, a satisfying solution. I feel lucky to be able to help Healdsburg and the surrounding area have a beautiful walking and wildlife park from my 'Magnificent Obsession.'"

So it was in 1994 that Sonoma County's Open Space Authority Board approved the purchase of the top of Fitch Mountain from Ratchford so that the land would remain as open space. It looks as if, after 120 years since its first purchase, that this will no longer be an "obsession" but a reality!

SOURCES:

- Healdsburg Enterprise*, 1870, 1889, 1933
- Healdsburg Tribune*, 1910, 1914, 1924, 1943
- HISTORY OF SONOMA COUNTY, 1880
- Norton, Col. L.A., LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF COL. L.A. NORTON, 1887
- Ratchford, Zelma. GRANDMA ZELMA'S JOURNAL
- Russian River Recorder*
- SONOMA COUNTY HISTORICAL ATLAS, 1877
- Sonoma County Tribune*, 1894
- Thanks to Eric Drew, Holly Hoods, Dan Murley for their help



Third Class

Healdsburg Museum & Historical Society
P. O. Box 952
Healdsburg, CA 95448

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE PAID
HEALDSBURG, CA
PERMIT 149