



# RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

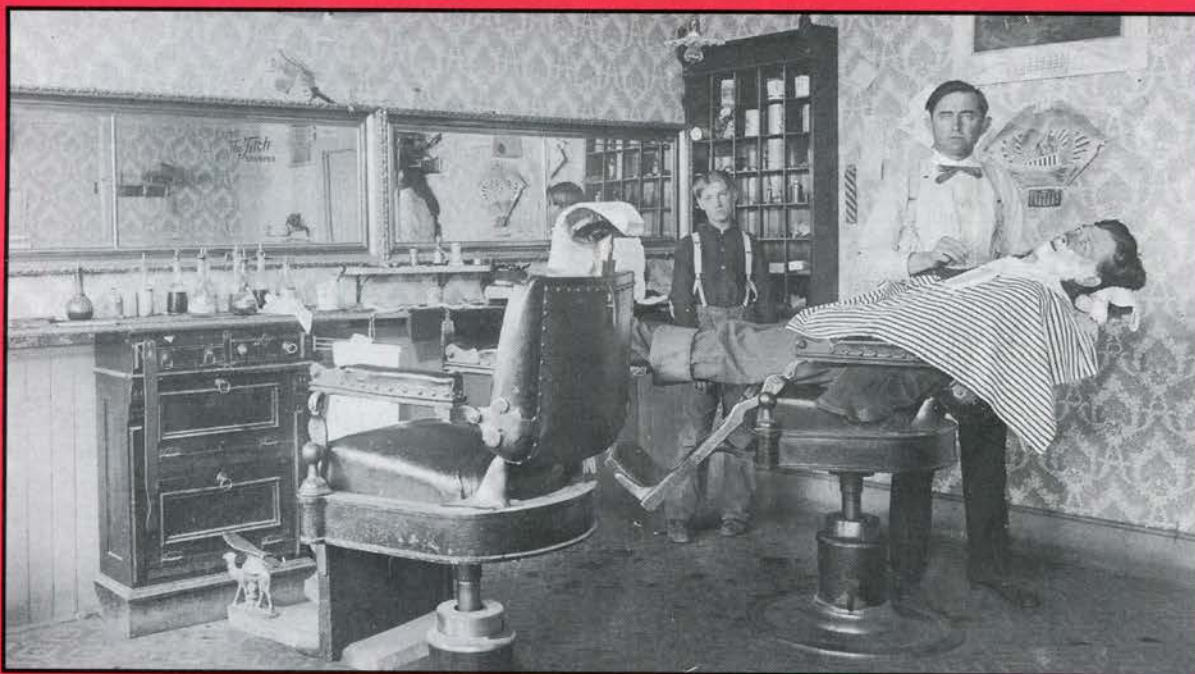
SPRING 2008 • ISSUE 100

An Official Publication of the Healdsburg Museum and Historical Society

## TONSORIAL PURSUITS: THE BARBERS OF HEALDSBURG

*by Daniel F. Murley*

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## In This Issue

In this, our 100th issue, we are pleased to bring our readers a collection of articles that reflect the gamut of our heritage -- an historic home on Matheson Street, a look at the history of barbering in Healdsburg, the beautiful and colorful gardens of the past and in conjunction with a new exhibit in the Museum's main gallery the "Memories of a Life in Geyserville in the 1860's" plus a recounting of a train wreck.

In planning this, our first issue of 2008, I asked one of our favorite contributing writers, June Maher Smith, to research and write about the history of a lovely old home at 314 Matheson Street. The home, I noticed, was being extensively renovated, and I recalled that a number of our friends had enjoyed living there over the years. June, as is her wont, has come up with a most interesting account of the home's history and how many families' lives were involved. Many old timers referred to the home as the Hall Home and the photos illustrating the article were supplied by the Hall twins - Vivian Hall Nunez and Virginia Hall Higbee. We understand that they agreed to share their family photos with the Museum. The Museum will scan the photos and then return the originals to the family. This is an ongoing project with the Museum thanks to our many generous volunteers.

Our curator Dan Murley has come up with another very interesting niche of Healdsburg history in his well researched article *Tonsorial Pursuits: The Barbers of Healdsburg*. Check out this little tidbit: one of the early barbers was an African-American who came to Healdsburg with his family shortly after the Civil War. An aside: a very young Jack Zanzi gave our young son his first haircut!

We are very pleased that former *Recorder* editor Darla Meeker has joined us again and has brought a wonderful recounting of *Colorful Gardens of the Past*, vividly bringing to life three of the many gardens for which Healdsburg has always been well known. We know you will enjoy this walk down memory lane with Darla, as did the Healdsburg Garden Club at a recent meeting.

Long time contributor Charlotte Anderson, in her research, came across an interesting account of a train wreck in town involving a loaded lumber truck-trailer, circa 1952 when the lumber business was an important factor in Healdsburg. Most interesting is Gino Bellagio's recall of the front page event.

In conjunction with a new exhibit in the main gallery, *Geyserville: Our Neighbor to the North*, Ann Howard has made available a historic hand written account of Memories of Geyserville in the 1860's written by Martha Kilgore Stites when she was about 82. It gives you an eye witness account of those pioneer times.

Each issue of the Recorder we produce we consider a challenge which is met with enthusiasm by the staff and our contributing writers. I thank them for their constant vigilance and great support throughout the years. And we thank our readers and the Museum's board for their much appreciated encouragement.

Arnold Santucci  
Editor



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### RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

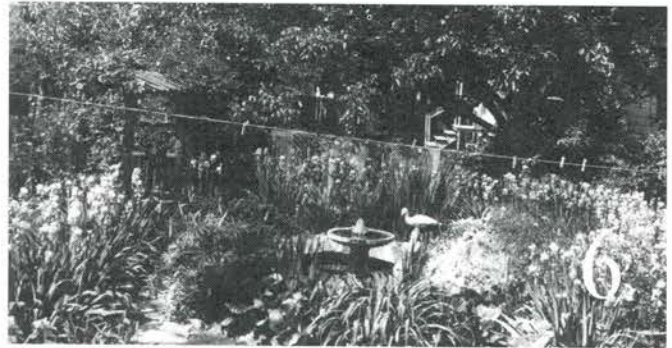
*The Official Publication of the Healdsburg  
Museum and Historical Society*

221 Matheson Street

P. O. Box 952

Healdsburg, CA 95448

(707) 431-3325



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An interesting history of a lovely home located at 314 Matheson Street and the families who enjoyed living there over the years.

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*by Darla Meeker*

Three historic gardens are brought to life based on interviews with members of the family.

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A spectacular train wreck involving 25 tons of lumber.

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*by Daniel F. Murley*

A recounting of the unique role of a barber in a small town.

## 13 Geyserville: Our Neighbor to the North

*by Ann Howard*

An historic hand written document by Martha Elizabeth Stites recalls "Memories of Geyserville in the 1860's." An exhibit honoring Geyserville businessman and historian Harry Bosworth and in memory of Louise Bosworth Davis can be seen in the main gallery of the museum.



*314 Matheson Street, Healdsburg, CA, circa 1910. Lieuallen Hall, Jr., Lieuallen J. Hall (aged 2 years) and Nellie Gum Hall.*

## AN HISTORIC HOME NOW HAS A MODERN TOUCH

*by June Maher Smith*

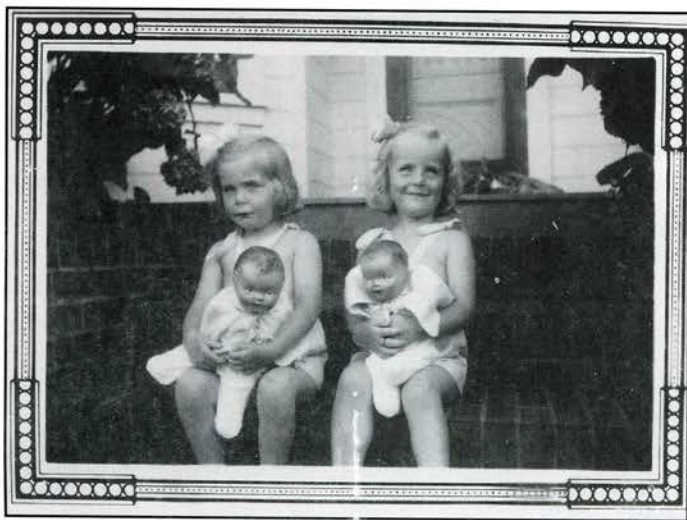
**G**ustavas Peterson was the builder of the home located at 314 Matheson street here in Healdsburg. Peterson, a Swede, traveled to the United States and was in Sacramento in the early 1840s. He was involved in banking ventures in San Francisco and then moved to Healdsburg with his wife Ellen. He opened a mercantile store near the plaza and bought residential property at the corner of Fitch and South (now Matheson) streets, receiving the deed from J. B. and Ana Mary Heald in 1857. He sold the corner portion of his parcel to P. M. Peck around 1872. The following year that corner lot and improvements were assessed at \$1600. Peterson's remaining portion of the lot (facing Matheson street) and improvements were assessed at \$500.

In 1902 the corner property was purchased by W. H and Orietta Skinner, who moved here from Massachusetts. Skinner opened a new and used furniture business in town. It must have been profitable because in 1903 he built a two-room addition to his home. A year later he sold his furniture business to James Skee and the house on the corner to Melville Rosenberg, a local retailer. The Rosenberg house was subsequently moved south on the lot, facing Fitch street. That home, now occupied by Melville's daughter Barbara Ashbaugh, was upgraded and remains one of the most attractive homes in the neighborhood. The corner portion of the lot contains the gardens developed by the Rosenbergs.



*Lieuallen "Lutie" Hall, Jr., and wife Nellie Gum Hall standing by the fish pond, circa 1940.*

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*Vivian and Virginia Hall, circa 1943, sitting on the front steps at 314 Matheson Street*

In 1907 Lieuallen "Lutie" Hall, Jr., and his wife, Nellie Gum Hall, bought the remaining house, facing Matheson street. Hall was a member of the prominent Alexander Valley Hall family. Nellie and Lutie's son, Lieuallen J. Hall, was born in 1908. Ten years later they added a sleeping porch, a summer kitchen and hardwood floors in several of the rooms. Lutie was an avid gardener and his yard showed it. The back yard was full of colorful flowers, a fish pond, an aviary and redwood log furniture. It's no wonder that his twin granddaughters, Vivian and Virginia Hall, who lived close by, enjoyed spending time at 314 Matheson street. Not only was the yard a great place to play, one of the rooms inside was reserved for their dolls, toys and games.

Nellie Gum Hall passed away in 1949 and Lutie died in 1950. During the next few years renters lived in the home. These included John and Mary Uboldi and daughters (approximately 1948-1954). Father W. R. Baskin, his wife Ann and their two sons lived there for about 5 years when he arrived in Healdsburg (1955) to lead the congregation at St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Ed and Carol Griffith also lived in the house, either as owners or renters. In 1975 the property was owned by Marion S. and Jacqueline B. Willeford. In 1992 Drs. Hilary and Roger Bartels purchased the home and put up the white picket fence. In 1997 Bobby and Fred DeCook owned the property and they sold it to Jon and Cynthia Iverson, the present owners, in 2004.

The Iversons recently completed a renovation of the home, preserving the exterior charm with its porch posts, front bay window, and architectural gingerbread. They added three gables and kept the original roof line, converting the unfinished attic space into an office,

a bedroom and bath and storage space. In back they added a carriage house/garage and opened the south side of their lot to Alley 2. This historic home now has a very modern touch—the Iversons installed energy producing photovoltaic cells on top of the roof covering the back deck.

Thirty-seven camellias from the early 1900s, at least some of which were planted by Lutie, are now in bloom and add a colorful accent to this lovely home.



*Nellie Gum Hall*

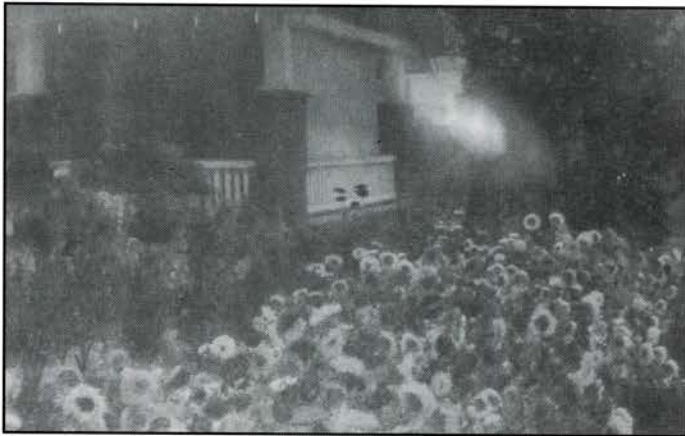
**Sources:**

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Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps 1893, 1898, 1911  
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# COLORFUL GARDENS OF THE PAST

Based on an oral interview with June Smith, Catherine Curtis, and Barbara Ashbaugh

by Darla Meeker



*Minnie Mason's front yard in full bloom.*

## MINNIE MASON'S "WORKING" GARDEN

*South-east corner of Johnson & Sherman Streets,  
extending east to Prince "Alley"*

One of the most accessible gardens in Healdsburg during the 1930s belonged to Minnie Mason, who was known for her life-long love of sharing her flowers with others.

When Minnie Mason's husband Chris died in 1931, however, Minnie found herself without a steady source of income since her husband's saloon had fallen prey to Prohibition, and there was no estate left to speak of, to afford her a comfortable retirement.

To make ends meet, Minnie eventually began selling bedding plants, funeral sprays, and cuttings that she grew in the prune orchard on the Prince Alley portion of her large, sunny Johnson Street lot. She also grew a vibrant sea of cut flowers in her front and side yards.

One of Minnie's most popular garden items was her "French Bouquet", which included a fragrant mix of rosebuds, daisies, and other seasonal flowers artfully arranged in a paper doily and tied with a colorful ribbon. Minnie sold her signature Parisian-style nosegays for "two-bits" each. Satisfied customers returned time and again to purchase these ephemeral garden beauties.

In fact, Minnie Mason's "working" garden became Healdsburg's first floral nursery, which provided Minnie with a source of income throughout the years of the Great Depression.

Although many local gardeners attributed Minnie's success to her "green thumb", Minnie did not subscribe to that theory. Instead, she told her granddaughter, June Smith, the real secret of her success: "I'm up every morning before breakfast to tend my garden. To plant, weed, whatever needs doing."

## TRAMPS, HOBOS, AND THE VALUE OF FRESH CHICKEN MANURE

Like many other local gardeners of her time, Minnie Mason occasionally hired hobos to help her with her garden chores. In return for their help, she offered them a home-cooked breakfast.

It was well-known in local Depression-era gardening circles that tramps—unlike hobos—would not work for money. Instead, a tramp would go from door-to-door, trying to sell Healdsburg residents a basket of fresh-picked blackberries . . . without ever once offering to help around the yard.

Chickens (and ducks) also were a common sight within the town limits during those early days. White Leghorns, Plymouth Rocks, Rhode Island Reds, Buff Orpingtons, and Bantams provided plentiful manure for home gardeners. In fact, according to local gardening lore, if you wanted especially fragrant sweet peas, a healthy dose of chicken manure would do the trick!

## CORA HEARING'S "HIDDEN" GARDEN

*South-west corner of Matheson and University Streets*

Charles and Cora Hearing built their home on Matheson Street in 1903. The Cedar of Lebanon tree, which still graces the west side of the property, is believed to have been a gift from a family friend, world-renowned horticulturist Luther Burbank. Nearby, a century-old camellia bush also continues to put forth colorful blossoms each year.



*Gladys Schalich feeding "Toughie" and "Baby" in her Matheson Street backyard.*

*Continued on page 7*

Yet it was the backyard where Cora Hearing's artistic talent for gardening was best exemplified. Here, hidden away from public view, a vibrant kaleidoscope of sweet peas, iris, violets, and pansy beds surrounded the large, generous fish pond and fountain that still exist on the property today. An oriental-style stone bridge and a banana tree also added an exotic dimension to Cora's exuberant gardening style that would more than likely qualify for a present-day gardening award.



*A sunny summer's day in Cora Hearing's garden.*

"It was a beautiful garden," according to Cora's granddaughter, Catherine Curtis, who spent many happy hours in the large, fragrant garden with her grandparents and other family members.

Catherine, whose favorite flowers are sweet peas, violets, and camellias, also recalled that rhododendrons were considered a symbol of wealth, and that very few gardeners in Healdsburg during the Depression years could afford such an expensive plant.

### **MATTIE ROSENBERG'S "HOSTESS" GARDEN**

*South-east corner of Fitch and Matheson Streets*

In 1932, Mattie Rosenberg hired a landscape architect to transform her extensive garden area into an elegant and inviting early-day outdoor entertainment center that would be both esthetically-pleasing and unique to Healdsburg.

Upon Mattie's request, the architect designed and built a large stone fireplace and a nearby pergola that were flanked by two giant elms.

A hand-crafted, 8-sided wooden table, built to seat sixteen, was made to order. Then, to add an extra touch of elegance, 7 beautiful Oriental-style metal lanterns with colored isinglass panes also were commissioned. The lanterns were eventually hung on the giant elms' over-arching tree limbs, to enhance the elegant garden setting, by day or night.

Not long after the original landscape design project was completed, the old elementary school on Tucker Street was demolished, and Mattie purchased the bricks, in order to create a lovely brick walkway that further enhanced her garden.

Over the years, many Healdsburg Garden Club receptions and

parties were held in Mattie's welcoming garden. "My mother was a marvelous French chef, who made everything from scratch," Barbara Ashbaugh recalls. "She loved to entertain guests, and work was no object."

Eventually Barbara added her own decorative notes to her mother's garden, when in the 1940s, she planted pink and lavender petunias and ageratum in concentric circles around the existing fig, filbert, and persimmon trees. As an added artistic touch, Barbara also planted a swath of lawn between each row of flowers, as well as another grass border around each of the fruit trees.

### **HEALDSBURG GARDEN CLUB**

In October 1954, Healdsburg Garden Club members met at the American Legion Hall to hear a presentation prepared by Mrs. Joseph McMinn and presented by Mrs. Hazel Young, club president in 1932 & 1933.

According to Mrs. Young, "... the impulse to organize our garden club (in 1931) came from the local Kiwanis Club."

The first meeting was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Mrs. Allen Gobbi. Elected officers were as follows: Georgia Lee, president, Hazel Young, vice-president; Gretchen Rosenberg, secretary; Esther Wright, treasurer.

Ted Kellogg, Lieu Hall, Lulu Sheriffs, Addie Cole, and Beulah Briggs were named as directors.

Early-day club projects included: sponsorship of living Christmas trees, serving as hostesses at the Redwood Empire Day at the San Francisco World Fair (1939, 1940), landscape assistance at the local elementary school, planting Victory Gardens, purchasing garden seeds to be sent to Finland to assist in garden rehabilitation, providing gardening books to the local library, along with many other activities throughout the years.

In 1937, the club won 3<sup>rd</sup> prize in a contest sponsored by Sunset Magazine, for a letter describing the most interesting activities of a garden club. The article was printed in the magazine, along with a photo of, Mrs. Rebecca Worden, the 1937 club president.

The Healdsburg Garden Club continues to grow and thrive to this day.

*Many thanks to June Smith, Catherine Curtis, and Barbara Ashbaugh for sharing their gardening stories. Please feel free to contact the Museum if you have local garden history stories and/or photographs to share. Thank you!*

# NORTHWESTERN PACIFIC RAILROAD TRAIN WRECK

by Charlotte Anderson



*Photo shows overturned engine, part of one of the fir logs, and sheared off power pole.*

As young Healdsburg resident Gino Bellagio was finishing his early morning paper route along Grove Street on Thursday, April 17, 1952, he remembers hearing the familiar whistle of a train as it crossed the various streets. From behind it was at Dry Creek, then near him at Grant Street, and continuing on to North Street, and Matheson. All of a sudden he realized that the whistle had not stopped but was a continuous one. He turned his bicycle onto Grant Street and then onto West Street and pedaled south. Not far along West Street, he encountered a line of stopped automobiles, a rare sight in those days! Bypassing the cars, he arrived at Mill Street where he saw the wailing engine completely off the track and facing north, the direction Gino was coming from!

From the *Healdsburg Tribune*, 24 April 1952, page 1: "A southbound Northwestern Pacific train struck the trailer of the loaded lumber truck of Wallace K. McKeown of Willits about 6:15 a.m. Thursday, April 17, 1952. The spectacular crash at the West and Mill Streets crossing scalded two trainmen, overturned the engine and derailed the train's tender and one baggage car. Both the engineer and the fireman received first and second degree burns when their entire bodies were scalded by escaping steam from the overturned engine.

"The fireman, Harold A. Nichols, was released on Monday the 21<sup>st</sup> from Healdsburg General Hospital to return to his Larkspur home. The more severely burned engineer, Jules W. Aubchon, of Mill Valley, was transferred Monday to the Southern Pacific hospital in San Francisco.

"None of the train's 40 passengers, its conductors or brakemen were injured. Truck driver McKeown also escaped injury.

"The engine crashed into the trailer of the fully loaded truck and was swung around, facing back in the direction from which it had come. Twenty-five tons of logs thrown into the air by the crash, sheared off a main-trunk telephone pole at the base, cutting most of Healdsburg's telephone service. The wrecked truck blocked the highway, necessitating

rerouting of Highway 101 traffic through the city.

"Clearing the train wreckage and repairing the torn up track was not completed until about 2:30 p.m. Friday. Railroad officials said that it would take about a month-and-a-half to get the engine back into running condition. The train was southbound from Eureka to San Rafael.

"McKeown told police officers that he did not see the automatic train signal at the crossing. He was cited by a State Highway patrolman for failure to heed railroad signals and of driving without due caution. McKeown appeared before Judge Edward Quinn on Tuesday the 22<sup>nd</sup> to answer the citation and his case was set for June 3."

"THE PICTURE STORY OF THE NWP PASSENGER TRAIN and truck wreck at the West and Mill streets crossing last Thursday was told in the *Tribune* beginning with a shot of the derailed engine and cars with the wheels of the truck up against the derailed baggage car. Below the overall view of the wrecked train is a closer view of the engine and derailed oil tender and baggage car, followed by a close-up of the overturned engine, with a part of one of the four fir logs with which the truck and trailed were loaded. The logs were flung 10 feet in the air and 30 feet away from the crash where they snapped off a main-trunk



*Photo shows wheels of logging truck against derailed, smashed baggage car.*

telephone pole at the ground. The next photo shows clearing the track, and finally back on the rails, the overturned engine pauses at the NWP station, Healdsburg, before being towed away for repairs."

#### SOURCES

Photos by Louis Propes and *Healdsburg Tribune*

Text from *Healdsburg Tribune*

Interview with Gino Bellagio





## TONSORIAL PURSUITS: The Barbers of Healdsburg

*by Daniel F. Murley*

Sitting comfortably in the plush red leather chair, surrounded by walls of mirrors and captivated by aromatic fragrances, the catchy words of a familiar, famous song echoed in my relaxing brain. “In Penny Lane the barber shaves another customer, you see the banker sitting waiting for a trim, then the fireman rushes in...” While the scissors deftly snipped and the hair hit the floor, I discussed the unique role of the barber in a small town with Steve Beem, the proprietor of the Plaza Barber Shop in downtown Healdsburg. Much like the one in the whimsical Beatles tune, many of us harbor memories of that hub of small town life and the men who cut hair. Their roles have changed over the years. In prehistory oftentimes persons with spiritual or shamanistic propensities were allowed to remove the hair from head or face. This hair was thought to be a conduit of spiritual entities and shaving or hair removal could mediate. In the 1600s one might not only get a shave and a hair cut but might have the barber pull a tooth, stitch a small wound or “let one’s blood” to eliminate evil from one’s system. In fact the barber’s pole derived its red and white colors from the long bandages attached to poles outside each practitioner’s shop.

The drying cloth strips were sometimes whirled around the poles by the wind giving the striped appearance. Later the poles of the barber/surgeons were simply painted red and white. In the 1700s the multi-talented agent of the barber’s trade practiced

skills now employed by physicians. Many early American barbers also cut and styled women’s hair. Today very few barbers do women’s hair and in California, much to my despair, they are not even allowed to shave a customer. There was nothing more relaxing than to have an expert lather one’s face with hot steaming shave cream and after stropping his shiny razor, gently, yet firmly removing all the facial hair one desired.



*Jack Howard, August Arata and an unidentified man at their barber shop on Matheson Street, circa 1905.*

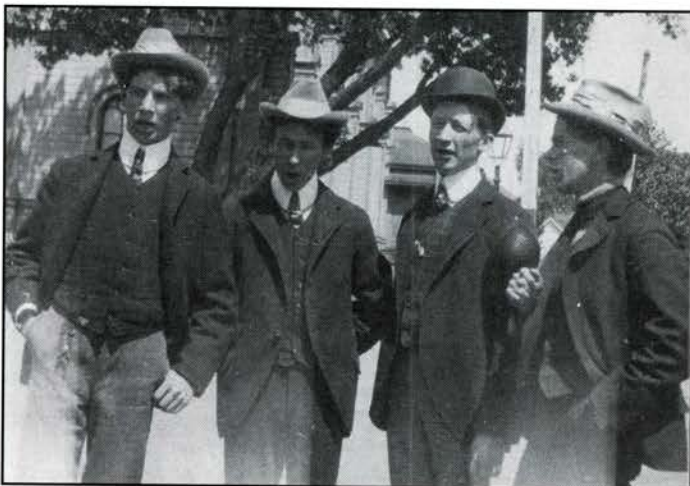
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Discounting tales such as Chekhov's "At the Barber's" or Sondheim's "Sweeney Todd", the red and white striped barber pole was a marker for a location to receive the finest in facial care. In most shops rows and rows of shaving mugs lined the wall, each one bearing the name or initials of a faithful patron.



Shaving mug belonging to one of Healdsburg's pioneer entrepreneurs  
Joseph B. Prince - 1895

This practice died out in the 1920's when a more fast-paced way of life for most American men dictated a quick shave at home. Many men, like my father, still clung to their mugs, soap and boar-bristle shaving brush for their daily shaves though they were administered in their own place of residence and at a less leisurely pace. The barber shop still remained for many men an island of reflection where a busy man might spend a personal hour or two discussing sports, politics, the stock market or his personal woes or triumphs with his favorite barber. The barber shop remained for a long time a bastion of the American male and such traditions as the barbershop quartet emerged from the gathering of male voices at their favorite tonsorial salon.



Mervyn Silberstein, Will Livernash and friends circa 1909



The William A. Scott Family at their house  
on Matheson Street in 1874.

An early favorite in Healdsburg was a gregarious mild mannered man who came to Healdsburg from Tiffin, Ohio, shortly after the end of the Civil War. William A. Scott was in his forties when he set up shop on West Street in the Sotoyome Hotel.



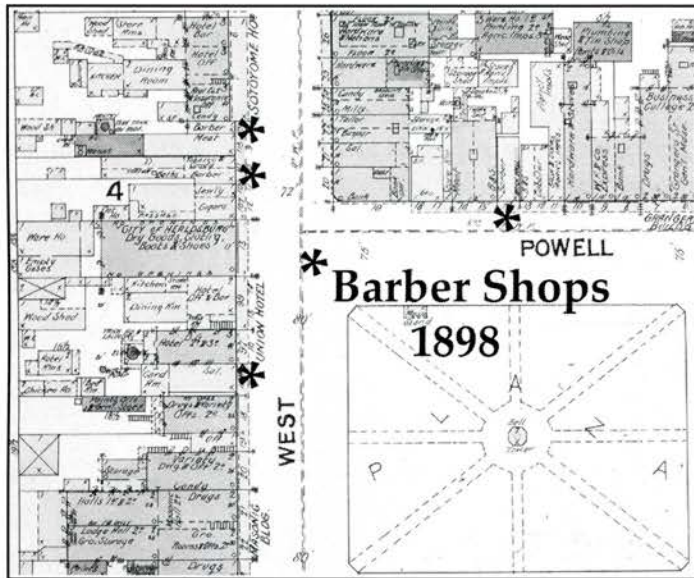
His newspaper advertisement in the Sonoma Democratic Standard in January of 1867 was head-lined, "ART TONSORIAL!" and ended with "P.S. - Particular attention will be paid to the cutting of Ladies Hair." With his wife Martha and five children he lived in a beautiful brick house on Matheson Street.

Of note regarding this early practitioner of the tonsorial, Mr. William A. Scott was of mixed parentage. He was a well-respected African-American barber. Early in the history of the barber profession in America many servants and slaves served as

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barbers for the landed gentry. After the increase in immigration in the late 1800s and early 1900s the barbering trade employed many of those European transplants.

By the 1880s in the growing town of Healdsburg there were numerous barbers whose small shops took their place in the town center around the Plaza.



Barber shop location around the Plaza in 1898.

A Healdsburg barber of some notoriety was Rollin B. McCord. He was an avid hunter, fisherman and outdoorsman who also had a flare for fine grooming and the latest style and fashion of his day. His abilities on the baseball field were legendary in Healdsburg, and he probably spent more time dancing around the diamond than he did shuffling about the barber chair. He starred on the many Healdsburg ball teams from his teenage years through his fifties, including the champion Healdsburg Prune Packer and Odd Fellows teams. The exploits of the charismatic *bon vivant* both



Rollin B. McCord

# McCord's Barber Shop

## FOR A HAIRCUT OR SHAVE

### FIRST-CLASS WORKMANSHIP

West St., Opp. I. O. O. F. Hall, Healdsburg, Cal.

on and off the field probably made for lively conversation in his downtown shop.

Rollin Burdette McCord was born in Iowa in 1886 to George and Mary McCord. His parents moved to Oregon when Rollin was an infant and finally settled in Healdsburg in 1896 where George and his sons worked at farming.

Handsome, blue-eyed Rollin was not one to be stuck on the farm and soon became a barber in Healdsburg, eventually owning a number of different shops.



Gideon and Rollin B. McCord circa 1920.

His younger brother Gideon, another sharp-dressing young man, followed brother Rollin in the cutting and dressing of both men's and women's hair in Healdsburg. In fact "Gid" and his wife Janet opened the Sun-Shine Beauty Shop on Powell Street on the Plaza in 1924 and this shop developed a loyal following of men and women looking to show the latest in hairstyles of the '20s.

Continued on page 12



Janet McCord giving niece Janet Somes the first permanent in Healdsburg, 1929.

To keep the small town abreast of national fads and trends, Janet and Gideon purchased the first permanent wave machine for Healdsburg in 1929. Here Mrs. McCord is administering a permanent wave to her 4-year-old niece, Janet Somes, in an effort to prove to the citizens of Healdsburg that the machine and procedure were safe.

Recently, with the renovation of a commercial space on Powell Street the large lettered sign painted on the edifice above the shop was uncovered. The Plaza Barber Shop had been the last tonsorial business to occupy the space but it was in the exact location which had served many barbers prior to its final owner John Book, who left to move around the corner to Center Street in the 1960s. As early as the 1870s many a barber had set up his chair and hung his scissors in that shop.

In discussing the recent history of barbering in Healdsburg, former proprietor of Healdsburg Avenue's Zanzi's Barber Shop, Jack-of-all trades, Jack Zanzi, spoke joyfully of the many characters he knew in the profession. He cheerfully shared some of the stories, from the heart-warming to the hilarious, of those who patronized his shop and spoke fondly of their many confidential tales. Jack also recalled names like "Monk," "Shorty" and "Blackie," "Ezio" and "Perry Cherry" who trimmed and cut the hair and shaved the faces of thousands of faithful patrons in shops named "Lucca," "The 8-Ball" and "The Plaza Baths."

The 1960s marked major cultural change in the country and Healdsburg. The inescapable, overwhelming members of "baby boom" generation were in their teenage years and monumental socio-economic events, ranging from the Civil Rights struggle to the opposition to involvement in Southeast Asia, particularly the conflict in Viet Nam, were changing citizens' opinions, lifestyles and social interaction. Even trends in men's hairstyles, influenced by the fashion of popular musicians such as "The Beatles" and groups of the West Coast "Psychedelic Sound" were drastically changing to reflect a longer, freer more natural style.

Though the barber on "Penney Lane" may have been busy, many traditional barber shops lost patronage. In Healdsburg, the redevelopment of West Street to Healdsburg Avenue, structural changes all around the Plaza, and the demolition of many buildings which had housed barber shops all combined with national trends to diminish the number of barbers in business. The shop where practitioners from William A. Scott to Jack Zanzi had once plied their trade was torn down with the ignominious removal of the old Sotoyome Hotel.



The barber pole outside the Sotoyome Hotel just prior to the building's demolition.

*I would like to gratefully acknowledge the candid contributions to this article from Jack Zanzi and Steve Beem.*

# GEYSERVILLE: Our Neighbor to the North

by Ann Howard

An exhibit entitled “**GEYSERVILLE, Our Neighbor to the North**” has been installed in the Gallery of the Museum by Ann Howard and Daniel Murley. It is dedicated to the memory of Louise (Bosworth) Davis and honoring Harry Bosworth, Geyserville historians. The exhibit will be in place until June 22, 2008.

The following is the full text of a copy of hand-written document in the possession of Harry Kilgore Bosworth, businessman of Geyserville, who has allowed us to print it here. Martha Elizabeth (Kilgore) Stites' father, Allan Cochran Kilgore, was Harry's great-grandfather.



Martha Elizabeth “Mattie” (Kilgore) Stites  
taken by Maxwell Brothers, Healdsburg, California

Martha was born January 30, 1841 in Iowa and died at the age of 93 in Berkeley on October 31, 1934. Her vivid memories of moving to Geyserville as the new bride of Alexander Hill Stites in October of 1861 are the earliest on record. Her writing reflects that of an educated, observant, and adventurous woman. Her husband died in 1904 at the age of 67. Both are buried in Oak Mound Cemetery,

Healdsburg. They were the parents of nine children: William Albert; Sarah “Effie”; Louisa Isabel (Belle); Mary “Emma”; Adelaide Alivia; Margaret Edith (Marguerite); LuElla (Aunt Toddie); Kathryn Iter (Kitty); Harriet Estelle (Stella). Two of the daughters, LuElla, age 20 and Emma, age 30, died of tuberculosis.

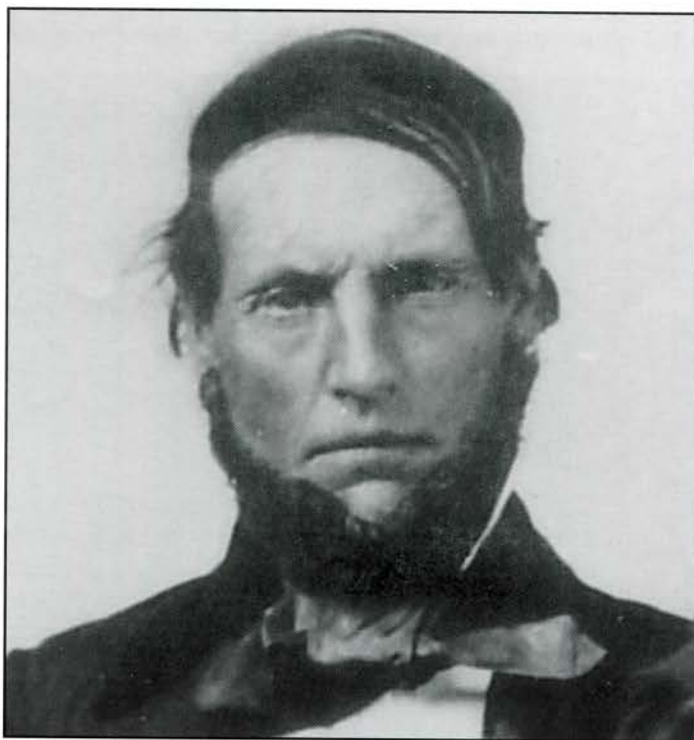
## “MEMORIES OF GEYSERVILLE IN THE ‘60S”

by Martha Elizabeth (Kilgore) Stites

(“Grammy Stites was about 82 years old when writing this, sometime in 1923.”)

*In writing my memories of Geyserville in the ‘60s, it may give a more accurate picture of the times, if I run quickly over my own early experiences as being typical of that of the pioneer woman of the period.*

*In 1852, my father, Allan C. Kilgore, organized a company of relatives and friends in the state of Iowa, and started overland for the gold fields of California. I was then a child of eleven. We brought one hundred and fifty wagons in our train, and it was*



Allan Cochran Kilgore

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claimed that on account of his resourcefulness and courage we had a much more comfortable journey than fell to the lot of many such travelers.

Weariness there was, to be sure; tedium on the plains, and grave danger from Indians and river crossing, yet, on the whole, the journey was not, to my childish mind, one to recall with misgivings, but rather as an experience of much interest and high enthusiasm.

We reached Sacramento in the fall, the year of the big flood, during which my stepmother [Elizabeth Ann (Hankins) McKeehan/McGithen/Kilgore] died, and we left the scene of sadness and desolation in the early spring of '53, going by boat to San Francisco on the way to Santa Clara. We remained in that county till '56 when we came to Healdsburg where we might have better schooling advantages, and I entered the Alexander Academy

It was an interesting coincidence that I left for Sonoma County on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, my future husband's birthday and he [Alexander Hill Stites], in the same year, was leaving the south for California. We were married in Healdsburg, in July, 1861, and went to the ranch on Sulphur Creek, now owned by George Jacobs. In October, 1861, we moved to Geyserville.

It would be impossible to write a history of any portion of the United States in the 60's without touching upon the Civil War and its effects upon our social and economic life. While we, in our remoteness, were out of the actual hardships of war, the

disturbances and sadness of enmity and estrangement made for mental agonies before which my childish hardships became as nothing.

My husband's people were in the Southern Army, while my own kins [sic] folk were all Unionists, though some of them were of Southern birth. This extreme feeling between old friends was one of the greatest hardships of our early life here, and was a source of great personal danger to the men who were of fiery partisan spirit. Such was my husband.

As to business conditions, they were in every way disturbed and prices were, of course, very high. All of our supplies were brought in by freight teams from Petaluma, where they came by boat from San Francisco. A stage ran from Cloverdale to Healdsburg, going one day and returning the next. On one occasion when my husband needed a farming implement mended, it was necessary for me to go to Healdsburg by stage, spend the night, and return the following day with the tool. The roads received very little attention, only such as individuals contributed of labor, and in the rainy season were hardly passable. In the summer, too, with dust a foot or more deep, travel was very difficult. This picture may cause you to doubly enjoy the drive through this lovely valley, with its smoothly paved highway.

Mail was carried by these stages and was kept in the private home of Squire O'dell [sic] close to the site of the present post office.

At the time of our coming to Geyserville, the center of business was about the location of the present Grammar School. McDermott and Morris kept one general merchandise store, and the Weidersheim store in a log cabin, occupied the present Bennett place. These, with a blacksmith shop, hotel and millinery store kept by Mrs. Dickenson constituted the business section. The blacksmith [Peter Archambeau in 1860 census] presented me with a hand made fire shovel for a wedding present and I have it in perfect condition, after sixty-two years of service.

Partly on account of party feeling and largely, perhaps, on account of remoteness, there was a great degree of lawlessness, and drinking, gambling, and horse racing, with frequent shooting affrays, which were responsible for a general and continued excitement. My sister, Mrs. [Sarah Jane] Toombs, lived in the old Bryant house, Geyserville's oldest dwelling overlooking the quarter-mile race track, which furnished the setting for many a thrilling adventure. She was an onlooker when Henry Morgan was shot and killed by Sweitzer, and three other men were seriously injured in the shooting that followed the discovery that tacks had been placed on the track. So far as ever was known, Morgan was



Alexander Hill Stites

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innocent. Excitement ran high following this tragedy, and further division of interest resulted, all tending to retard the growth of the struggling settlement. The women, however, were drawn closer by



Henry and Sarah Jane (Kilgore) Toombs

these ceaseless hardships and there grew up among them a fine expression of neighborhood interest. Illness or need never failed to find a response among them and they readily aroused their husbands, absorbed in their more adventurous lives.

When we came to Geyserville in '61, the schoolhouse stood vacant beside the road, on the lot now occupied by the Warren Lampson residence. My husband, from his own slender resources, employed Miss Mary O'dell [sic] as teacher at a modest salary, and opened a private school in order that the children of the community might be started on the road to education. Others joined him and he maintained the tuition for those who could not pay until a public school was started. Just how long this continued, I cannot recall. My earliest memories were when our first child, a boy of five [William A.] entered seven years later. Mr. C. P. Moore was a teacher and the school celebrated Christmas with a public tree.

On the hill behind the Bosch place, now occupied by Mrs. Hagman, was the first burial lot. It was later destroyed by the progressive spirit of viticulture, though my husband, from whose hands the property had passed and who had previously given it to the community, made earnest effort to preserve it.

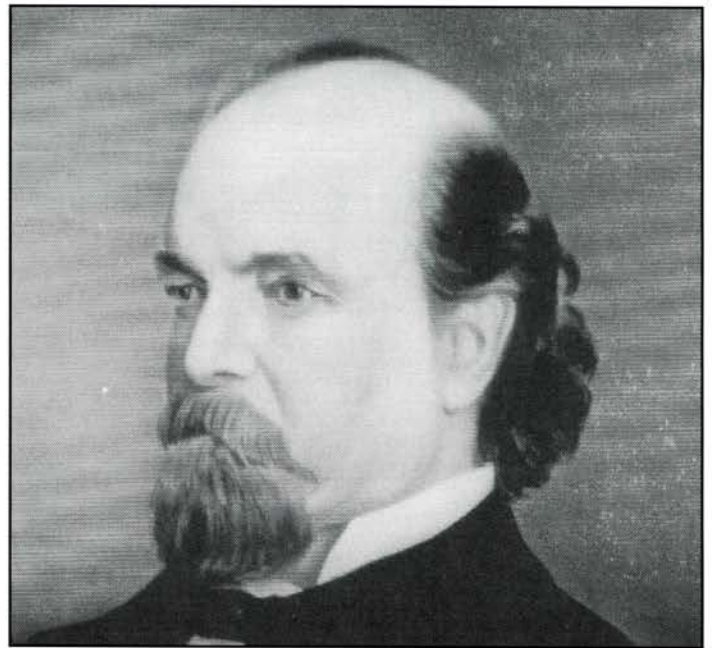
At this time we were settlers under the Spanish Grant on the Tzabaco Rancho, but later we bought from the grant, paying \$20 an acre for valley, and \$15 for hill land. Today this same land is held at \$100 an acre.

Perhaps the most outstanding character in our community life was the dearly beloved friend and physician Dr. Elisba Ely. A



Miss Mary Odell

man of education and skill, he was always available to the many calls upon his strength and resources. Many times I remember his driving by on his way from Healdsburg and calling to give me medical aid when he would produce from his bag a beef steak, or some such delicacy – fresh steak was not to be had here – with the remark, "Here, daughter, I was getting one for myself and I remembered you." He was one of those rare men whose nature combined the qualities of masculine strength and feminine tenderness. His wife [Asenath] being an invalid, he brought up his twin daughters [Louise and Mary] with a gentleness seldom seen, even in women. I recall his telling me how he wakened the children in the morning that they might not be startled from their deep sleep, by playing softly on his flute till they were gradually and happily aroused.



Dr. Elisba Ely

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He early built on [what became known as] the old Bosworth place the long farm house known as a shoe string house, which was so familiar in California in that period and he chose this picturesque spot because of the wide sweep of valley below. Here his far-flung hospitality shed its precious influence on this storm-tossed little settlement, while his justice and fair play gradually softened the bitterness and distrust of conflicting elements. He was the first certificated physician in this county, and he represented the finest type of that rapidly disappearing institution, the family physician.

Gradually, as the hot disputes of war days subsided, the little community began to take on a semblance of order and progressiveness. Mr. Remmel and Mr. Stites bought the building occupied by the most objectionable bar in town and it became the home of the Good Templars Lodge, which modest fraternity was the means of turning many drinking men to habits of sobriety. This menace to decency restrained, a better element of society came, drawn by the beauty and fertility of the valley. The school grew, a church was established [1884], and with their coming, the tiny seed of culture, already germinating, began to grow into a plant whose fiber is sustaining the educational and spiritual life of the youth of Geyserville today [about 1923].

About the year 1885 [1884], a bridge was constructed across the Russian River. Previous to this, the farms on the east side were

sometimes cut off from mails by the floods, and the only means of communication afforded with Geyserville was by means of horse back riders going around by the Alexander Valley bridge. The community was sadly shocked at the drowning of Mr. LaPant, a farmer living on the old Cottle and Smith place, while attempting to swim his horse across the swirling current of the river.

When Leander Ellis was made supervisor, he at once took up the demand for an appropriation for the bridge, and by his energy and perseverance, consummated that work which has contributed so largely to the growth and welfare of the community.

While the coming of the railroad in 1870 [1872], put us in touch with the markets of the world, its privileges as a branch road have been limited. Now, with the advantages of motor trucks, the perfecting of highways, and the establishing of chambers of commerce to make the world aware of the marvelous loveliness and richness of the valley, Geyserville has thrown open its gates and welcomes the world.

**Sources:**

- Bosworth, Harry
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- Hayse, Peggy Lou (Murray), great granddaughter of Martha and A.H. Stites
- Lindsey, Kathryn (Murray), great granddaughter of Martha and A.H. Stites
- Sawyer, Dorothy (Mary Odell's picture)
- Healdsburg Tribune, Death of Luella Stites, April 10, 1900
- Healdsburg Tribune, Death of Emma Stites, February 14, 1901
- Healdsburg Enterprise, Obituary of Martha Stites, November 2, 1934 California Federal censuses on-line



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P. O. Box 952  
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