



# RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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An Official Publication of the Healdsburg Museum & Historical Society

## "SHE PERSISTED"



*Notable Women  
in Healdsburg History*

## In This Issue

This issue of the *Russian River Recorder* is the companion piece to our most recent exhibition, "She Persisted," a tribute to local women and women's organizations of Healdsburg. Our issue highlights a number of notable women of Healdsburg, but we recognize that we are only scratching the surface of a vast subject. There are so many compelling stories we could tell.

In this publication, we start with a brief overview of the women's suffrage movement in Sonoma County. The (male) voters of Healdsburg did not vote for the state amendment in 1911 to grant women's suffrage, but fortunately—and barely—the larger Sonoma County did. Former Healdsburg Museum Curator Hannah Clayborn shares her fascinating research into the history of two of Healdsburg's influential 19<sup>th</sup> century women's organizations: the Albanian Literary and Military Society and the Ladies' Improvement Club. Jane Bonham profiles the three founding members of the still-thriving Alexander Valley Ladies Aid organization, using the original charter as a starting point.

Seventh-day Adventist church founder and Healdsburg resident Ellen G. White had a huge impact on the spiritual teachings and beliefs of her faith, as presented in an article by Holly Hoods.

Holly also profiled Dr. Margaret Kimball, a notable early physician of Healdsburg.

With the help of Doreene Zanzi, Janet Pimenti has researched and written about the life and leadership of Nurse/Administrator Nercilla Ames Jones Harlan in the successful establishment and operation of the Healdsburg Hospital. Doreene, Nercilla's niece, provided photos and background history for Janet's article. Whitney Hopkins has written an interesting profile of Mona Chisholm, a dynamic agricultural leader and promoter in Sonoma County. Anna Darden updated an article that the late June Maher Smith published in 2000 about Isabelle Simi Haigh, the longstanding owner/operator of Simi Montepulciano Winery in Healdsburg. Simi was the first winery to open a tasting room in Healdsburg in 1934, the year after Repeal of Prohibition. Sherrie Smith-Ferri and Kathleen Smith share a moving tribute to their grandmother/mother, Lucy Lozinto Smith, a respected Dry Creek Pomo elder, basket weaver and cultural consultant.

We hope you find this issue educational and entertaining.

Holly Hoods, Executive Director/Curator  
Pamela Vana-Paxhia, Editor



**RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER**  
*The Official Publication of the*  
**HEALDSBURG MUSEUM & HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
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Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Susan B. Anthony in 1871, the year of her visit to Healdsburg.*

## Women and the Vote

*by Holly Hoods*

The Women's Suffrage Movement began in the northeastern United States, at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. It spread across the country, involving individual fights in the states. While a federal amendment for women's suffrage was the ultimate goal, leaders focused on the individual states. When defeat seemed inevitable, they pushed for partial rather than full suffrage. After a long fight, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was added to the Constitution on August 26, 1920.

White California women, including Sonoma County women, fought for their right to vote. The Sonoma County fight, organized in 1910, was led by Francis McGaughey Martin and Sarah Martin. The side for women's suffrage, supported by Governor Hiram J. Johnson, claimed that suffrage would make women more intelligent. The opposition declared that suffrage would take women away from the home, their rightful place.

In October of 1911, the vote was close. Santa Rosa, Sebastopol and Cloverdale approved the amendment. Sonoma, Petaluma and Healdsburg (which turned it down by just 18 votes) did not. Sonoma County approved the amendment by 186

votes. Statewide the amendment won by a scant 2,000 votes. California Constitutional Amendment No. 3 gave women their franchise.

In Healdsburg, as early as 1870, women and supportive men formed a Women's Suffrage Club. Activist Susan B. Anthony actually visited Healdsburg on a speaking tour in December 1871.

Over 40 years later, in April of 1912, the women of Healdsburg voted in their first municipal election. Two balloting places were open—City Hall and Watson. Teachers led the way. Mrs. Sarah Francis Barnes was accompanied to City Hall by Healdsburg High School teachers Ruby Studley, Stella Harmon and Fannie Barnes, who all cast their votes. The first woman to vote at the Watson poll was Mrs. Drury Terry. According to the *Healdsburg Tribune*, the women "had no difficulty casting their vote, and seemed to enjoy it."

Sources:

Healdsburg Museum files, "Women's Suffrage."  
*Healdsburg Tribune*, September—November, 1911.  
 LeBaron, Gaye and Joann Mitchell, "*Santa Rosa: A Twentieth Century Town*," Historia Press, 1993.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Albanian Literary and Military Society, November, 1885*

## The Albanian Club and the Ladies Improvement Committee

*by Hannah Clayborn*

*reprinted from Russian River Recorder, Fall 2003*

It all started with a pair of fading sepia photographs I came across occasionally during searches in the archives. They intrigued me because one showed a group of prim young ladies in the bustled, tight-fitting, bust-bunching street costume of the 1880s. The other showed the same girls in military uniforms, solemnly posed with very real looking firearms. On the back of both photographs was written, "Albanian Literary and Military Society."

Albanians? In Healdsburg? These ladies looked like WASPs. Literary and military society? That seemed a queer combination. What were these young ladies up to?

Unfortunately, the club formed in the early 1880s, a time period for which there is no complete set of local newspapers. That gap in Healdsburg's historical record has caused many problems for local research and threatened to leave the young "Albanians" forever a mystery.

Having developed an affection for this oddball group, I reproduced the photos in a newsletter. The first part of the puzzle came together several years later when Addie Marie Meyer of Healdsburg was looking through an old family scrapbook. She came across a pair of undated newspaper articles about the club. Having an

excellent memory, Mrs. Meyer recalled my original ad. The first clipping read:

*Twenty-five young ladies in this city have organized a literary club called the Albanian, which meets every Tuesday night to study and discuss the work of some noted author, musician, or poet. These young ladies do not confine their exercises entirely to the musical and literary but have taken up the practical study of Upton's Tactics as a means of sustaining health and physical vigor, and they drill every Saturday afternoon. Their literary entertainments have proved very successful, making hosts of friends and admirers, and old soldiers who have seen years of service claim that the Albanian drill is remarkable for its excellence and timely regularity.*

*Last Friday night the Albanians, fully uniformed, in the presence of hundreds of friends and admirers, swept into line from side to side of Truitt's large hall in perfect alignment and with but one perceptible footfall, the two ladies on the right and the no less comely and stately ones on the left, marched to the cadence of France's delightful music, creating a furor of applause not often witnessed or heard in the quiet little town of Healdsburg...*

It may seem unremarkable to modern readers, but at the time many believed that physical exercise was unladylike, even harmful to the female anatomy,

and the sight of a local girls in military drill must have horrified some. The Albanians sparked interest as far away as San Francisco, where the *Alta California* newspaper carried the following undated information:

*Healdsburg has a club of twenty-five bright-eyed young ladies who have adopted the name of Albanians and make a practice of Upton's Tactics, a specialty for callisthenic exercises. The association is really a literary organization, with a military feature embodied. The uniform of this club is very modest and pretty, being a combination of the national colors, red, white, and blue; a scarlet liberty cap, scarlet waist sash, scarlet zouave jacket with white cloth cuffs and collar, sky-blue vest with gold buttons, close fitting, white merino skirt reaching to the ankles, and black, high-topped walking shoes complete the drill costume.*

### **Rid of Hoops**

Although the articles did not indicate what this all had to do with Albania, they did shed light on the mysterious club and placed it in historical perspective. Many think that the women's rights movement, including the fight for the vote, is a 20<sup>th</sup> Century phenomenon. The struggle for equal rights for women extends much farther, even to the Civil War. In the 1880s, however, there were very visible changes, both in women's attitudes and dress.

In the 1880s ladies got rid of the huge hoop skirts that had incapacitated them since the 1850s. They began to wear long full skirts with matching jackets, tailored very much like a man's suit. Except for the weird aberration known as the bustle, and the ever-present corset that helped contain them beneath the taut silk and linen of their jackets, it was much easier for women to move about in this new full skirt devoid of barrel structure.

A group of Healdsburg girls was obviously in the forefront of this new attitude for women, the revolutionary idea that girls could exercise without damaging their psyches, their bodies, or their sterling reputations. Not only did they have the originality to link the concept of books to bayonets, they got up and exercised, possibly even sweating, in public, on the stage of Truitt's Theater in downtown Healdsburg in the 1880s. But as it turned out, this was only their political boot camp.

### **Taking Up Political Arms**

It was not until the photos were published in the local newspaper that the largest puzzle pieces fell into place. Healdsburg native, Carmel Byington Bottini, recognized her mother, Katherine Ryan Byington, and her aunt, Mary Ryan Swisher, in the photographs. Although she could not tell us why the group chose the Albanians, she did recall that her mother said the group met at Truitt's Theater. Most importantly, she remembered her mother saying that most of these girls evolved into another group called the Ladies Improvement Club.

The Ladies Improvement Club of Healdsburg mustered in November 1899. By the spring of 1900 they were absolutely the most controversial club in town. It would appear that these teenage revolutionaries, upon reaching their thirties, and perhaps now with their children out of diapers, took up political arms to improve their community. In so doing they challenged the male political establishment and ignited a firestorm of controversy.

It all began innocently enough, holding fundraising bazaars and electing the obligatory annual officers. By January 1900, under the leadership of Mrs. W.H. Barnes, Mrs. E. Hamilton, Mrs. J. McDonough and Mrs. Wolf Rosenberg, the group had already accomplished the lettering and installation of the first street signs and had all of the electrical poles painted (maybe white?).

Even before they became an official club, the women apparently played a significant role in the great fight for publicly-owned electricity and water in Healdsburg, and this battle might have given them a taste for politics.

### **Ladies Take Reins of Municipal Coach**

A glowing letter about the Ladies Improvement Club from a Healdsburg correspondent was printed in a regional newspaper and quoted in the *Tribune* on April 5, 1900:

*Dissatisfied with the progress of the town under masculine rule, the ladies gently but firmly took possession of the reins and are now driving the municipal coach in their own sweet way. And man – slow going Silurian man! – well, he has been shelved, forced aside, and made to take a back seat while his wife and his sisters and his cousins and his aunts give him practical lessons in making a city clean, attractive and beautiful.*

There is an organization, of course. It is called the Ladies Improvement Club of Healdsburg and it was formed in August of last year. Since that time – in the short space of seven months – this is what the club has accomplished: a municipal water system, a municipal electric light plant, comfortable seats on the Plaza, names given to streets, signboards with street names, a drinking fountain on the Plaza.

All these improvements had been discussed for years – by the men...as desirable...in the misty future. It remained for the women to make them realities.

The editor of the *Healdsburg Tribune* reprinted portions of this letter without trying to conceal his sarcasm and hostility towards the purposeful “ladies.” He seemed to doubt that the club should take credit for the list.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection  
“Lady Imp” fountain, 1908

### Lady Imps Ignite Firestorm

Yet there was one thing that everyone in Healdsburg was ready to credit, or blame on, the Ladies Improvement Club—that drinking fountain right in the middle of the Plaza. Since the early 1880s, the town had erected a seasonal bandstand in the center of the Plaza. The Saturday night band concerts that focused on this structure had become famous throughout the County. In 1897 the town invested in an attractive circular gazebo to cover the old bandstand and to draw more visitors. Perhaps it was the popularity of the bandstand for socializing and the ever-increasing fame of the Saturday night

concerts that led to its controversial downfall only three years later.

Evening concerts inevitably included the consumption of alcohol. One aspect of the progressive, improvement-oriented spirit that seized some segments of the nation at the turn of the last century included the temperance movement to ban alcohol. Following the lead of Temperance Leagues throughout California, Healdsburg’s progressive group, the Ladies Improvement Club, received permission from the City Trustees to replace the bandstand with a central drinking fountain. Many cities installed such fountains as a symbol of their determination to outlaw stronger refreshments.

They might have placed the fountain anywhere on the Plaza, but the “Lady Imps,” as they were now tauntingly labeled in the press, had aimed their political clout directly at the bandstand and its unsavory influences. The proposed removal of the town’s favorite gathering place ignited a firestorm of controversy. The City Trustees, caught in the middle of the debate, became mired in indecision.

### Indecent Graffiti

When a citizen’s petition began to circulate to save the bandstand, the Ladies Improvement Club, intent upon their Higher Purpose, had the thing hurriedly axed down. This rash action started a yearlong battle between community factions, fought out on the Plaza, in the newspapers and at City Trustee meetings.

On April 12, 1900, the *Tribune* reported that a group of young people had played a hoax on the Lady Imps. In the dark of night, they erected a fake “marble” monument in the center of the Plaza, built out of muslin stretched over a wooden frame. The newspaper fussed over “indecent” inscriptions that were scrawled upon the thing stating, “The sentiments expressed on the monument were worthy of Barbary Coast hoodlums.”

With the help of an attorney, the Ladies finally prevailed over all and dedicated that gravestone-like drinking fountain on May 1, 1901. Not completely defeated, however, the rest of the community immediately erected a temporary bandstand next to the fountain, succeeded by a permanent one donated by local businessmen in 1915.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Dedication of Ladies Improvement Club fountain in  
Healdsburg Plaza, May 1901*

on the group was a notice of a meeting held after the Red Cross departed in September 1919. That meeting was probably their last.

By this time most of the charter members of the firebrand Albanian Literary and Military Society would have been in their early to mid-fifties. The sword of their militarism may have been blunted by age or by the triumph of the nation in garnering the vote for women. Women's suffrage was assured by the date of that last meeting, although it was not official until 1920. It was time, they may have hoped, for their "dancing daughters" to take up the good fight. And then, of course, came the Roaring Twenties.

### **Random Acts of Beautification**

This "triumph" seems to have been the zenith of the group's combative political activism. They went on to perform such random, and to some masculine minds perhaps senseless, acts of beautification as the lining of the highway from Healdsburg to Lytton Springs with trees in 1904.

By 1912 they had adopted the more liberated title, "Women's Improvement Club," but their projects became less ambitious, if no less worthy. Now they concentrated on raising money to aid the Fire Department, the Chamber of Commerce or the local schools.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Women's Improvement Club meeting house, 1918*

They did manage to incorporate with stockholders in 1912 and to erect a clubhouse of their own the next year on Center Street, between North and Piper. Yet by 1918 the little-used building was taken over by the Red Cross. The latest record found





Source: Elmshaven

*Ellen G. White, 1878*

## **Prophetess Ellen G. White and Advent Town in Healdsburg**

*by Holly Hoods*

Of the many churches with deep roots in Healdsburg, the Seventh-day Adventists' ties to the area are especially significant. Healdsburg was once the home of Ellen G. White, a founding mother of the Seventh-day Adventist faith. For over seventy years until her death in 1915, Ellen White served as the primary spiritual counselor to the Seventh-day Adventists, striving to communicate the will of God in speeches and writings.

Inspired by miraculous visions and healing trances, Ellen White's prophecies and admonitions shaped the spiritual direction of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide. Her influence was

also strongly felt in the development of Healdsburg College, an institution she helped found in 1882, which is still thriving today in Angwin, Napa County, as Pacific Union College.

Seventh-day Adventism arose out of the ashes of the "Second Great Awakening," a multi-denominational evangelistic movement that captivated the nation in the 1830s and early 1840s. William Miller, a Baptist preacher and former War of 1812 Army captain, convinced thousands of people that Jesus would return to earth on October 22, 1844, based on his study of the Bible prophesy of Daniel. When Jesus failed to keep the

appointment, thousands of Miller's followers left the revival movement deeply disillusioned. A few, however, turned to their Bibles to try to understand why they had been disappointed.

Ellen Harmon and her not-yet-husband James White were among the handful of earnest Christians who refused to give up their belief in a second coming of Christ. Based on their own interpretation of the Bible and their abiding faith in Miller, they concluded that his calculations had actually predicted a different significant event: the date of God's creation of a special ministry in Heaven for his (Adventist) followers. From this core group of believers in New England came the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

### Teenage Missionary

In 1844 Ellen White was still Ellen Gould Harmon, a sickly 17-year-old, whose Methodist family in Maine participated avidly in the popular revival meetings of the 1840s. It was at age 17 that Ellen experienced her first vision. According to one biographer, "It was seen by those acquainted with her that this and subsequent visions benefited the emerging church, harmonized fully with Scripture teachings and gave sound evidence of being a fulfilment of Bible predictions of the last-day renewal of the prophetic gift as set forth in Joel, Ephesians and Revelation."

Throughout her life, Ellen reported experiencing over 2,000 divinely-inspired visions and dreams. Reticent at first, Ellen became a powerful orator, compelled to deliver messages from God to the Adventists and any others who would listen. Speaking for hours without benefit of notes or microphone, she held large crowds spellbound. She also became a prolific writer, whose combined books, treatises and articles numbered over 100,000 pages. Many are still in print today.

Although the name 'Seventh-day Adventist' was chosen in 1860, the denomination was not officially organized until May 1863. The members chose the name because of their strong faith in the second coming of Christ and their shared commitment to observe Saturday, the seventh day, as the Sabbath, a day of rest and religious duty. By 1863, the movement consisted of 125 churches and 3,500 members.

That same year Ellen White received a comprehensive vision about healthful living, diet and temperance. She began to advocate the benefits of "Bible hygiene," a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet, and abstinence from alcohol, tobacco and other harmful drugs. She and James were leaders in the health reform movement and worked closely with Dr. John H. Kellogg to establish the Health Reform Institute in Battle Creek, Michigan. Her teachings about health remain central to the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventism.

### Sonoma County Adventist Beginnings

The first of the Seventh-day Adventist camp meetings was held in September 1868 in Wright, Michigan. The camp meeting format met with great success in the east. Later that year, D.T. Bourdeau and J.N. Loughborough traveled from the Adventist "capital" in Battle Creek to San Francisco to organize Adventist activities in the west.

They held the first camp meeting west of the Rockies that year in Petaluma. By June of 1869, camp meetings were being held nearby in Windsor, Healdsburg and Santa Rosa. The *Russian River Flag* gave the meetings a favorable review:

*The New Adventists began their tent meetings here last Thursday evening and have kept them up every evening since, besides preaching twice in the daytime on Sunday. At each meeting, the audience has been large and attentive. The discourses are dignified, earnest and impressive, showing the speakers, Revs. J.N. Loughborough and D. T. Bourdeau, to be men of great research in sacred and profane history.*



Source: Elmshaven

*Ellen White (seated, center) at a camp meeting, 1888.*

By November 1869, a meeting house, 30 feet x 60 feet in size, had been constructed in Santa Rosa. This was the first Seventh-day Adventist

meeting house established in California. The first Seventh-day Adventist church in Healdsburg was built in 1871 on land donated by Cornelius Bice.

Elders James and Ellen White first came to California in 1872, but they were barely able to settle down. Church responsibilities continually pulled them back and forth across the country. Within the next two years, James established the Pacific Press, an Adventist publishing house in Oakland, and a weekly journal, *Signs of the Times*. (Both of the projects—expanded and relocated—are still flourishing today.)

In late 1877, the Whites purchased a modest farm at 1950 West Dry Creek Road, about four miles from Healdsburg. The home still stands today. The couple had hoped that rural semi-retirement in a mild climate would restore James' flagging health. Unable and unwilling to completely retire, however, James never fully recovered. He died in 1881. Shortly afterward, Ellen and their son William became instrumental in the establishment of a new Seventh-day Adventist school in Healdsburg.

### **Healdsburg College (1882-1908)**

The idea of creating an Adventist school in California was first seriously proposed in 1881 at the tenth annual session of the California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, held near Sacramento. Most of the California members agreed on the importance of a Christian education but felt that the denomination college in Battle Creek was too far away for their children to attend.

The search for a suitable school site in California focused primarily on areas where Seventh-day Adventism was already established, including St. Helena, Napa, Santa Rosa, Petaluma and Healdsburg. In November 1881, William C. White secured a large, furnished building in Healdsburg, formerly the site of the Healdsburg Institute, a private academy that had failed financially earlier that year. The school was located on Plaza Street, bounded by Fitch, University, Matheson and North Streets.

The School opened as "Healdsburg Academy" in April 1882 with 26 students. At the request of the Healdsburg community, the name was changed to "Healdsburg College" in May.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection  
*Healdsburg College, 1887*

By July 1883, "North Hall," a large four-story dormitory building had been constructed at the corner of Fitch and Grant Streets, with money donated by Mary Scott, a friend of Ellen's. (Today this is the site of the Healdsburg Junior High School.)

In addition to the basic courses offered in history, mathematics, natural sciences, languages and Bible study, there was a strong vocational slant to the College. Students devoted two and one-half hours a day to the vocational pursuit of their choice. Boys could study carpentry, printing, agriculture, shoemaking, blacksmithing or painting. Girls could choose plain sewing, dress cutting and fitting, printing, laundering, cooking or general housework. By 1884, 200 students enrolled in the school.

When the school opened in 1882, Ellen White purchased a home at 201 Powell Avenue to be closer to it. The two-story dwelling stood on a two and one-half acre tract of good land with an orchard of various fruit trees. Until she went to Australia in 1891, this was her home when she was on the west coast. This home still stands today.

Here she completed two of her most important books: *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (in 1888) and *Patriarchs and Prophets* (in 1890). She also wrote many textbooks that were used by the Seventh-day Adventist church schools in the early 1900s.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

1877 Sonoma County Atlas

As parents moved to Healdsburg to educate their children at the College, the number of Seventh-day Adventists grew until eventually one-fifth of the City's population was Adventist. The 1877 Sonoma County Atlas actually depicts an area west of the city limits (Grant/Grove Street today) as "Advent Town."

To serve the needs of the burgeoning congregation, a new, larger church was built in 1884 just south of the main college building, at the northeast corner of Fitch and Matheson Streets.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

Healdsburg Seventh-day Adventist Church at Fitch and Matheson Streets with Healdsburg College at left, 1887.

As the school continued to grow over the next decade, however, officials were unable to purchase adjacent property. It was decided in 1907

to relocate to a larger site in Angwin, Napa County. The name was changed to Pacific Union College in 1906 in anticipation of the move.

In 1907 the Healdsburg College property was sold to the Healdsburg High School district. The College building (South Hall) served as Healdsburg High School until a new high school was built in 1918.

After the college moved to Angwin, the Seventh-day Adventist population in Healdsburg declined significantly. In 1921, the church property was sold and the building was demolished for its lumber and building materials. A new church and day school were built at the corner of Fitch and Piper Streets. Currently, the Healdsburg Seventh-day Adventist church is located on Terrace Boulevard. Adventist schooling is available locally at the Rio Lindo Academy.

In Sonoma County today, there are Seventh-day Adventist churches in Healdsburg, Cloverdale, Sebastopol, Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Sonoma and Rohnert Park. There are over 8 million members of the Seventh-day Adventist faith worldwide, and the church is engaged in missionary work in 209 countries.

Adventists are still drawn to Healdsburg to visit and honor this sacred place in their church's history. Ellen White is still very much a revered figure in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

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# Ladies of the Charter: Alexander Valley Ladies Aid Society

by Jane Bonham

Ladies aid societies and “sanitary societies” have existed since the second half of the 1800s, earning the name because the women prepared medical supplies and gave aid to soldiers during and after the Civil War, just as they continued to do in later wars. The habits and patterns formed in these benevolent and reform associations enhanced women’s less formal groups, supplying the traditional structure and ways of expression found in fraternal associations. Following this template, each society established its constitution, bylaws and traditional pattern of meetings, along with a commitment to Robert’s Rules of Order. As noted by historian Ann Firor Scott, “The most striking continuity of all was that most of them clung...to the notion of women as moral beings whose special public responsibility was to bring the principles of the well-run Christian home into community life.”

So, it was in the community of The People’s Protestant Church of Alexander Valley (later named the Alexander Valley Community Church). Men and women built the church from the ground up in 1896 and gathered there together for worship. Churchgoing women, headed by Mrs. J. Ferguson and Miss Flora Young, organized a “society,” known then as the Ladies Aid Society.

It was on July 21, 1911, that the traditional structure of a charter was sought by 16 women of the church community in order to formalize the Ladies Aid Society. “After a song, scripture reading and prayer the meeting was called to order by Mrs. Felix [Ruth] Seeman, who acted as chairman. Bessie Patrick acted as secretary. Elections were held, with Bessie Patrick, President, Mrs. F.W. Goodman, Vice President, Mrs. Felix Seeman, Secretary and Mrs. Harry Patteson, Treasurer.”

What can we know of these women who emerged as leaders and planted a seedling still growing?

We know from surviving documents and newspapers that several of the Ladies had excellent

writing skills, among them historians and journalists Ruth Seeman, Belle Leroux, and Frieda Patrick.

## Ruth Hamilton Pierce Seeman

Ruth Pierce was born in 1882 in Chicago, Illinois. After coming to California in the 1890s, Orrin and Mary Pierce moved their family to Sonoma County, settling in Alexander Valley. Ruth was an apt student, and at 14 years of age, read one of the quotations from Lincoln presented by students from Healdsburg High School during a public celebration of National Lincoln Day. The following year she joined her 14 classmates receiving diplomas at the Healdsburg High School commencement exercises. In the early 1900s, Ruth Pierce married Felix Seeman, a local rancher, and the couple raised two daughters in the Valley.



Source: Ron Kron  
*Ruth and Felix Seeman, c. 1900*

Mrs. Seeman took an active interest in the valley church and its role in the community. She chronicled the church and Valley Ladies Aid in simple, straightforward prose. Ruth brought history to life with vignettes from the past, writing, "One of my early memories of the Society was of a Thanksgiving dinner when we served turkey to a crowd of people. We had no kitchen at that time and, with our wood cook stove in the corner and a cupboard for our dishes, the room was full. So, some of us stood on a platform erected for us by the Patrick Brothers, Jimmy and Ernest, outside the windows where we washed dishes and handed them back and forth through the windows."

Ruth Seeman was active in other organizations in the community, such as the Geyserville Monday Afternoon Club, and was acknowledged for her active interest in the children and young people of the community. Ruth received a tribute in 1962 for "her more than 25 years of devoted, selfless service as superintendent of the [Alexander Valley Community] Sunday School," which continued to actively teach the community's young people even as church services lagged.

Ruth assisted young people in other organizations, as reported in the *Healdsburg Tribune* in 1939, serving as an instructor for the Alexander Valley 4-H sewing club.

### **Marion Belle Hall Leroux**

Belle Hall was born 1883 in Paferville, Waupaca County, Wisconsin. She was the first of nine children born to George and Georgia Hall.

The Halls moved to Minneapolis, and then in 1890 the family followed Belle's grandfather, John Warren Horton, to a wilderness home on Lake Chelan, in the remote Stehekin Valley of Washington, where "Granpa...had struck it rich silver mining."

She later wrote, "Papa, being very much of a roving mind anyway, welcomed the chance to go to newer places." The family moved again, first to Seattle, Washington, finally settling in northern Sonoma County, California.

Belle's memories of the early years in Washington State would inform detailed stories of her pioneer childhood, which were published in newspapers and later read to charmed Sonoma County audiences.

In 1902, Marion Belle Hall married Walter George Leroux. The couple initially resided in San Francisco but, shortly after their marriage, bought a ranch in Alexander Valley where they raised a son and a daughter.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Belle Hall Leroux with her children*

In addition to joining the Ladies Aide Society as a charter member, Belle Leroux was active in other service organizations, serving as an officer in the Guilford School Mother and Teachers Association, the Sotoyome Literary Club and several of the Granges. She was elected master of the Geyserville Grand for the third time after her resignation was declined in 1928 and in 1966 was honored by the Healdsburg Grange for 50 years of service.

In 1941 the couple sold their Alexander Valley property and moved to Healdsburg, buying the Magnolia Apartments.

### **Frieda Dora Peterson Patrick**

Frieda D. Peterson was born in San Francisco in 1881, the eldest daughter of Carl and Dorothea Peterson, newly arrived from Germany. The family moved first to Healdsburg, then bought acreage in Alexander Valley where they built a farm and a home.



Source: Ancestry Family Tree

*Frieda and James Patrick's wedding*

When Frieda was 19, she married James J. Patrick and they raised two children. She worked from home as a talented seamstress.

Mrs. Patrick was active in many groups in Alexander Valley, including the Alexander Valley Sewing Club, the Grange, the Home Economics Club and Madrona Temple of the Pythian Sisters. In addition to her leadership roles in these associations, Mrs. Patrick also kept the community informed about their activities and membership through articles written in the local newspapers.

From the early 1940s until 1950, Frieda Patrick wrote the Alexander Valley column in the *Healdsburg Tribune* and in 1947 was co-editor of *The Geyserville Press* with Nancy Gates.

From time to time, local news was replaced by "The Good Old Days" with humor apparent in her selection of items: "Fredinand (sic) Burton of San Francisco brought to Healdsburg the first Great Dane

dog ever seen in this part of the state. It weighed 145 pounds."

And: "The difference between the way tourists traveled in 1894 and the way they whiz through town today is seen from an item in the *Tribune* of July, 1894, which said: 'A company of San Franciscans, who were on their way from camping, stopped in Healdsburg a short while, during which one of the gentlemen entertained the people on the streets with several banjo selections.'"

Unfortunately, being a farm wife, mother, and active in community activities took its toll on Frieda Patrick and she was forced to abandon her journalism efforts under doctor's orders.

### **Ladies Left Their Mark**

These three women of the Ladies Aid Charter brought more than their principles to the Society and the community. They modeled strength and kindness. They shared their skills and celebrated the skills of others in the organizations they joined and led. Finally, they reflected upon it all in writing with honesty and good humor, leaving windows to the past for us.

Sources:

Alexander Ladies Aid Society Meeting Minutes, July 21, 1911.

*Geyserville Press*, February 28, 1947.

*Healdsburg Tribune*, February 10, 1898; June 15, 1899; November 17, 1921; January 24, 1924; September 3, 1936; July 10, 1939; November 2, 1939; January 21, 1949; October 21, 1949; April 21, 1950; May 15, 1952; June 18, 1953; March 18, 1954; February 10, 1955; June 2, 1966; December 12, 1968; November 15, 2007.

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# Dr. Margaret Kimball

by Holly Hoods

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one of Healdsburg's most esteemed physicians was a woman. Mrs. Margaret Kimball, M.D., specialized in obstetrics, gynecology and diseases of women.

Margaret Viola Covey Doane met and married lumberman Capt. C.L. Kimball in Alpena, Michigan. The couple moved to Healdsburg in 1888, where her husband purchased the lumber mill that is today Healdsburg Lumber Company.

Margaret had been previously married to Dr. Hartwell Doane in 1869 and had her first two children with him. Dr. Doane abandoned Margaret and the children in 1874, disappearing without a trace. (Margaret found him four years later in Litchfield, Ohio, married to another woman, with a new baby.) She moved in with her parents and entered medical school, determined to succeed.

Margaret graduated from the University of Michigan Department of Medicine and Surgery at age 27 in 1880, specializing in "Women's Medicine," aka "Diseases of Women." She spent the following five years working at the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Michigan.

At the time, it was unusual, but not unheard of, for women to train as doctors. Capt. Kimball, who was 13 years older than Margaret, encouraged his wife's medical career.

After moving to Healdsburg, Dr. Kimball opened her first medical office in 1890 on Matheson Street near City Hall.

Her medical practice grew and Dr. Kimball became active in children's welfare and the local Baptist Church charity work. By 1896, she and her husband were instructing a juvenile hygienic and temperance class for young boys.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dr. Kimball was the only female doctor in Healdsburg, although she was not the first woman doctor in the state (Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, 1849) nor in town (Dr. Ella Barrett, 1859) in the state (Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, 1849).

After her brief partnership with Dr. Stratton, a gynecologist, in the Ottmer Building on West Street in 1900, the Kimballs decided to build a small medical office for Margaret at the southeast corner of

their house at 544 Tucker Street. She practiced there for her remaining years.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Kimball home at 544 Tucker Street, 1899*

Dr. Kimball's experience in both sanitarium work and women's medicine made her especially valuable and in demand. A December 1904 *Healdsburg Tribune* article lists the services she offered:

*Her offices and treatment rooms on Tucker Street are fitted with all the latest electrical devices and appliances, including Galvanic and Faradic batteries, everything from the high-tension current to the mild and soothing waves of the electric vibratory machine. She also gives hydropathic, or water treatments, and her rooms are fitted up for administering the Turkish dry heat, full electric bath, electro-vapor bath, spray or shower bath, sitz bath, etc. She is also prepared to remove moles and superfluous hair by the use of the electric needle.*

Dr. Kimball's son Lafayette William Doane died in 1909, tragically followed the next year by the death of Charles Kimball at the age of 70. She largely retired from her medical practice after the death of her husband.

After a bad cold turned to pneumonia, the accomplished Dr. Margaret Kimball died at home on April 1913 at age 60.

Sources:

*Healdsburg Tribune*, December 2, 1897; December 28, 1899; December 7, 1906; March 15, 1910.

Shobe, Marie, "Women's Work: The Changing Roles and Work of Women in Healdsburg's Early Years," *Russian River Recorder*, Spring 1998.





Source: Doreene Zanzi

*Nercilla Ames Jones Harlan*

## **Nercilla Jones Harlan: Healdsburg's Beloved Nurse and Co-Founder of Healdsburg General Hospital**

*by Janet M. Pisenti*

On July 21, 1897, in the state of Colorado, Nercilla Sylvia Ames came into the world, the daughter of Fiasco Mendez Ames and Frances Mary Nelson Ames. She had three brothers: Ray, Lynn, and Clint, and two sisters, Gertrude and Leola (White), the mother of Doreene White (Zanzi), a lifelong Healdsburg resident. Doreene adds color to her aunt's story in an interview held at her home.

Each child in the family eventually went its own way, and Nercilla was no exception. She had one thought: to start medical training at the Nurses' Center at the U.S. Army Corps at Fort Collins in her home state, where she became a surgical and obstetrical nurse, a registered X-ray technician and an Army nurse.

That is where she met a young man, a World War I Army medic, named Charles A. Jones, born the

same year, almost the same day, as Nercilla. They were 22 years of age when they were married on May 19, 1919, in Silver City, New Mexico. A year later, their son, Robert Eldon Jones, was born on May 31, 1920, and one year later, they arrived in Healdsburg.

According to one report, the Ames family members in Colorado followed them to Healdsburg. They settled on College Street, but later included Brown Street and a ranch in Windsor. Mr. Ames provided veterinary services in town.

### **The First Healdsburg General Hospital**

It didn't happen right away. Nercilla and Charles worked for various doctors in town, especially Dr. J. Walter Seawell, who had a five-room sanitarium in his home. Dr. J.C. Condit operated a small hospital in his office on the west side

of the Plaza, and Dr. F.E. Sohler had a medical practice in various buildings like the other doctors. Dr. Seawell, seeing the need for a hospital, asked Nercilla to join him in this effort. Nercilla and Charles had also been talking about it and after saying yes to that, effort was made to convert the home of Tom Merchant, a two-story building on the corner of Johnson and Lincoln Streets, into a hospital. All previous separate operations then became combined into what was known for the first time as "Healdsburg General Hospital."



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

**First Healdsburg General Hospital, 1920s**

The hospital was owned by Dr. Seawell, Nercilla Jones, and Dr. Sohler. Nercilla became the Director, and Charles, from that day forward, became what one person described as General Manager, Maintenance Manager, or Purchasing Agent. He also filled in as janitor, cook and gardener.

On January 31, 1929, a fire took place at that building, causing damage totaling \$6,000. "My Mom was also a nurse," Doreene recalled, "and she and Nercilla were there at the same time. I remember my Mom saying, 'Our feet were feeling so warm. Then our feet felt very hot, when someone yelled at us, 'Get out, the building's on fire!'" There were only seven patients in the building that day and they had to be moved to the Bowers' residence. Nercilla helped remove them safely and continued with their care. Ira Rosenberg then offered the old Rosenberg residence for temporary use.

### **The Second Healdsburg General Hospital**

Something more had to be done. Dr. Seawell and Nercilla began spearheading a fund-raising drive to construct an up-to-date, thoroughly modern

hospital. Dr. Sohler, Ira Rosenberg, and Fred Young were part of the team. Forty-five others were asked to participate and with great enthusiasm, they raised \$50,000 in 10 days! Construction began in April of 1929 and it was finished in October.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

**Second Healdsburg General Hospital, 1940s**

The new hospital—one story, stucco walls, and tile-roof—occupied the same site as the old one at Johnson and Lincoln Streets. It featured ten private rooms, two two-bed wards, and a nursery with a window for viewing the newborn. There was room for 14 patients, which grew to 25 by adding an additional wing and putting more patients into the existing rooms.

In a speech given to the Healdsburg Hospital Volunteers, Billie Jo Haley added, "When anyone talks about the old hospital, they are talking about Nercilla Jones Harlan. Nercilla *was* the old hospital! Yes, there were doctors, too, but she was the life of the hospital. She was—the BOSS!" She also taught home nursing in the high school and trained young girls in working as nurse's aides at the hospital.

Nercilla's husband and helpmate for 18 years, Charles A. Jones, passed away on April 23, 1937. That left her with total responsibility of their son, Robert. Seven years later, on June 25, 1944, Nercilla married Ellis Harlan. Unexpectedly, Ellis tragically died six months later on December 23, 1944.

### **"She Belonged to Every Lodge in Town!"**

Doreene was amazed at the amount of club activities her aunt Nercilla could handle. "In all of them, she worked her way up the ladder to become the Grand Everything!" Doreene recalled.

Nercilla was the only woman commander of the American Legion Post 111 in Healdsburg, a women's auxiliary, serving in that post in 1927, and

she belonged to the Business and Professional Women's Club. In 1941, she became a member of the Medical Civil Defense Commission and a charter member of the Sonoma County Blood Bank and the California Heart Association. She was president of the Redwood Hospital Association in 1945. She was the Past Chief of the Madrona Temple 43 of the Pythian Sisters and Grand Chief of California of the Sisters in 1947. She was also instrumental in organizing the Order of Sunshine Girls, later called Rainbow Girls, sponsored by the Pythian Sisters. She was past matron of Sotoyome Chapter 82 Order of Eastern Star and deputy grand matron of the chapter in 1964. She was also a member of the Daughters of the Nile and a loyal member of the Federated Church.

Doreene remembered when Nercilla's name appeared in the first edition of *Who's Who of American Women* in 1958. "Our family was informed of this and I remember one day searching that big book for her name." She had already been honored in the 1956 edition of *Who's Who of American Women in the West*.



Source: Doreene Zanzi

*U.S. Army Nurse Nercilla with soldiers.*

### Personal Stories

Gary Sumpter, the first son of Charles and Nellie Sumpter, was born on August 15, 1947, in the newer one-story hospital on Johnson Street, but after the delivery, it appeared he might not survive. Nercilla, knowing Nellie's family was Catholic, took this baby aside immediately and baptized him herself, knowing that this was important to the family. Gary survived his birth, grew up healthy, became quite religious and after seminary training became a Catholic priest. He has served in many parishes, baptizing many infants himself. He is retired and living in residence at St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Napa, where he is familiarly known as "Father Gary."

One day an Indian farm worker from Alexander Valley ran into the Healdsburg Jail to announce that his wife was in the car and was in labor. He knew he could not make it to the County Hospital in time because of his old car, so he stopped there. Police Chief Harry Patteson called several doctors and couldn't reach them, so he called Nercilla at the hospital, who responded immediately. With Nercilla's help, the woman gave birth to a boy; it was also Nercilla's birthday. If it was a girl, they could have named the baby after her, but it was a boy so they named him "Chief" after Chief of Police Harry Patteson.

Even though Doreene had such an exemplary aunt and mother who were both nurses, she said, "I would never be a nurse!" And she never was, although she spent over 25 years serving as clerical assistant in Healdsburg and Santa Rosa for Doctors Oakleaf, Beam, Neal, Welloch, Anderson, Robbins, Bauer and Born.



Source: Doreene Zanzi

*Nercilla Ames Jones Harlan*

Nercilla died on January 31, 1969, at her home at 407 Piper Street. She was 69 years old and had spent 46 years as Superintendent of Nursing. She was not able to be a part of the third Healdsburg General Hospital, but the first and second ones were a high priority in her life. After Nercilla's death, it was discovered that she had mortgaged her own home many times to keep the hospital alive. As a result, there was little equity left in her home.

That was Nercilla Ames Jones Harlan.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection  
*Mona Chisholm, November, 1965*

## **“Lady Boss” Mona Chisholm: Hop and Cattle Rancher and Promoter**

*by Whitney Hopkins*

*Special thanks to Mike Pardee (1958) and Tim Tesconi (1978) for their informative Press Democrat articles about Mona Chisholm. Their pieces provided much of the content below.*

In 1955 Mona Chisholm, recently widowed, and nearly 60 years old, staked her claim on a run-down old hop farm on Eastside Road and ultimately turned it into a renowned cattle ranch. This catapulted Mona into the dual role of Sonoma County cattle baroness and undaunted crusader for Polled Hereford cattle. While most of her peers were marking their days to retirement, Mona was buying cows in Mississippi, shipping a prize bull to Manila, addressing the National Polled Hereford convention in Louisiana and traipsing across California organizing a women’s auxiliary called the Poll-ettes.

Mona Chisholm’s role as a Polled Hereford promoter and boss lady of a cattle ranch was a world apart from the ambitions of teenage Mona Kelly, who graduated from Santa Rosa High School in 1916 and embarked on an art career at the University of California School of Arts and Crafts.

Mona Mae Kelly was born in Santa Cruz, California, on October 26, 1896, to Robert H. Kelly and Mae Schimelpfenig. She spent her early years in Watsonville and Salinas.

The Kelly family moved to Santa Rosa in 1914. There Mona met William “Billy” Fraser Chisholm. Billy moved to Sonoma County in 1907 from Nova Scotia, Canada, to work with his cousin, W.C. Chisholm, on the family farm. On March 15, 1924, Mona and Billy married in Oakland and they went to live on the 1,300-acre Chisholm-Wohler Ranch south of Healdsburg. The well-known ranch, considered one of the largest hop ranches in Sonoma County, had been purchased by W.C. Chisholm in 1919. Mona and Billy managed it in partnership with Chisholm. Thus, Mona switched her focus from art to hops—cultivation, training, curing, sales and marketing.

During her years at the Wohler Ranch, Mona became very active in promoting the hop industry.

She and her husband served on the board of the Sonoma County Hop and Grape Growers Association which in 1932 initiated a campaign to modify the dry law (the Volstead Act) to help the grape and hop industry become prosperous. They called for Congress to legalize light wines and beer.

Mona became secretary of the United Hop Growers of California. In 1933 Mona traveled to Chicago with Mrs. Delma Fenton to take charge of an exhibit of California hops at the World Brewers' convention.

Mona warned hop growers in 1934 that there were too many foreign hops entering the United States. As secretary for the United Hop Growers of California she spoke on the radio in 1935 about hop marketing. Mona was also appointed to a committee of Russian River farmers to examine soil erosion and control of floodwaters.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection  
*Weighing hops at Chisholm Hop Ranch*

Prohibition and Depression affected everyone, including hop growers, who experienced a significant drop in hop prices. The Chisholms went to court in 1938 to try and avert foreclosure on the Chisholm Farms Company which included the vast Wohler ranch and the 363-acre "home" ranch at 385 Pleasant Avenue south of Windsor. Mona was one of the witnesses who testified, introducing books and records from the company. The Chisholms asked for an extension of the date the properties would have to be sold. They held on until 1942, but the Wohler ranch eventually returned to the Peterson heirs from whom they had originally acquired it.

After 18 years on the Wohler Ranch, Mona and Billy Chisholm moved back to the family's Pleasant Avenue home ranch. The property included a 100-acre prune orchard, a 17-acre "u-pick" cherry orchard and a large vineyard. Visitors came from far away every year to pick their own cherries.

There was also ungrazed pasture land on the ranch, so in 1950 Mona bought seven head of cows and "babies" from neighboring rancher Howard Faught. After the seven "babies" grew and were sold, she bought ten more cows and "babies."

Widowed in 1953, Mona continued her cattle operation along with the orchard and vineyard enterprises. She became increasingly interested in the purebred cattle business and went to sales, tours and shows to observe and learn.

After observing a de-horning session on her ranch, Mona had some doubts about whether the cattle business was the right business for her—but then she discovered Polled Herefords, a breed of cattle without horns. Starting in 1954, she bought foundation cows from known breeding ranches across California and even as far away as M.P. Moore's Circle M Ranch in Sanitobia, Mississippi.

Some told her she would never get water in the location she selected for a deep irrigation well at the corner of the Pleasant Avenue property. They started calling the project "Chisholm's Folly." But, at a depth of 460 feet, it brought 540 gallons a minute to irrigate the 84-acre pasture for the Herefords.

After installing the well, Mona hired Jack Eagan who "had a way with livestock" on a temporary basis. Eagan also became interested in developing the pasture and the Herefords and stayed on.

Mona sold the Pleasant Avenue ranch to Spaich Bros. of Saratoga but retained the use of the pasture for her cattle until she could find another ranch. She asked Jack Eagan if he would be willing to work on another ranch and he agreed as long as it was no more than ten miles away.

During a trip with her sister Edythe to Arizona to relax, Mona became homesick for the cattle and came back to Sonoma County to look for a new ranch. She set her sights on the "old Billy Mitchell place" at 8004 Eastside Road which she had visited many times in the past. The ranch

included a combination of flat, irrigated pastureland and oak-studded, rolling rangeland. Mona dismantled the old hop kilns and built fences, barns and a hilltop ranch house. Much of the materials from the hop ranch were salvaged and reused. The hop poles were even cut into fences. The sole feature that remained from the Mitchell place was a little white cottage.

The foundation of Mona's Polled Hereford herd on the ranch was "Leskan Tone." Mona went against all advice from fellow cattle breeders and in 1955 bought a 14-year-old bull, who was considered too old for breeding. She paid \$1,025. Mona, and her bull, went on to surprise everyone when he ultimately sired 55 calves.

In cattle circles, Mona became known as "No Nurse Cow Mona" because she advertised that her cows were raised by their own mothers and that there were "no nurse cows" on the ranch. She even erected a sign at her ranch gate with that message.

In the 1950s, Mona made waves as a 60-year-old woman buying a ranch and developing a registered Polled Hereford cattle herd. The *Press Democrat* ran a full-page feature article about Mona Chisholm in 1958. Several years after establishing her cattle herd she had developed such a reputation for excellence that an agricultural institute in the Philippines bought one of her bulls for \$8,000. Mona loaded her "baby" on a ship in San Francisco and sent him to Manila.

Mona was one of a few female cattle ranchers at the time. While many doubted her, Mona's sister Edythe Andrews was her best friend and supporter. With Edythe, Mona traveled the California fair circuit for over two decades presenting outstanding 4-H and FFA Polled Hereford youth cattle exhibitors with trophies.

Mona Chisholm was a champion for Polled Hereford cattle and organized the Poll-Ettes Association to spread the word about Polled Herefords. She served as the first and longtime president of the California Poll-Ettes.

The Poll-Ettes organization then spread to other states after Chisholm presented the idea at a cattle symposium at Oklahoma State University in 1958.

At a meeting at the Flamingo Hotel, Chisholm also founded the Sonoma County Cow-Belles in 1958, the auxiliary of the Sonoma-Marin

Cattlemen's Association, and served as its first president.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Members of Sonoma County Cow Belles, June 1965*  
Left to right - Mrs. Thomas H. Beahm, Mrs. Burger, Mona Chisholm, Mrs. Warren Richardson, Mrs. W. C. Beaumont, Mrs. Joe Howard, Mrs. Clinton Robinson

Mona Chisholm's dedication to agricultural youth and the American cattle industry did not go unnoticed. She was inducted into the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Kansas City, Missouri, and was selected the 1971 Friend of the Sonoma County 4-H. The Sonoma Marin Cow Belles presented the Mona Chisholm trophy each year to the 4-H member who has put the most effort into his or her beef project. Mona and Edythe were also honored by the California Poll-ettes and made lifetime members.

In their later years, Mona and Edythe moved off the Eastside Road Ranch, and returned to Santa Rosa where they had arrived as girls in 1914. Mona Chisholm passed away in Santa Rosa in 1986 and Edythe Andrews in 1990. Mona and Edythe are buried in the Santa Rosa Odd Fellows Cemetery.

Sources:

*Healdsburg Tribune*, August 29, 1935.

*Press Democrat*, September 22, 1933; August 25, 1934; June 19, 1935; March 8, 1938; January 14, 1953; May 4, 1958; November 6, 1978; November 5, 1986; November 10, 1986.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Isabelle Simi, 1904*

## **Isabelle Simi Haigh**

*by June Smith, 2002*

*updated by Anna Darden, 2018*

Simi Winery's history begins in Italy when two brothers, Giuseppe and Pietro Simi, left their Tuscany home and journeyed to California in 1848. They started their first American enterprise as vegetable growers for San Francisco restaurants.

They decided to go into winemaking and in 1876 they bought a three-story house in San Francisco. Their first winery was in the basement and their living quarters were upstairs. They used grapes grown in the Healdsburg area for producing their wine, transporting them by wagon to Petaluma and then by boat across the bay.

Five years later, they bought a winery on Front Street here in Healdsburg and named it "Simi Winery." They prospered and in the early 1880s, they bought the land in north Healdsburg where the present-day winery complex is located. The brothers became citizens of the U.S. in 1888.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Isabelle's father Giuseppe Simi (right) and his brother, her Uncle Pietro (left), at Simi Winery*

They named their vineyards “Colina de Florenza” or “Little Hills of Florence” and started construction of their new winery. It was finished in 1890—a two-story building 80 feet by 100 feet, with walls of native basalt excavated on the property. The location reminded Giuseppe of his Italian home in Montepulciano, so that was the name he gave the new winery.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Simi (Montepulciano) Winery*

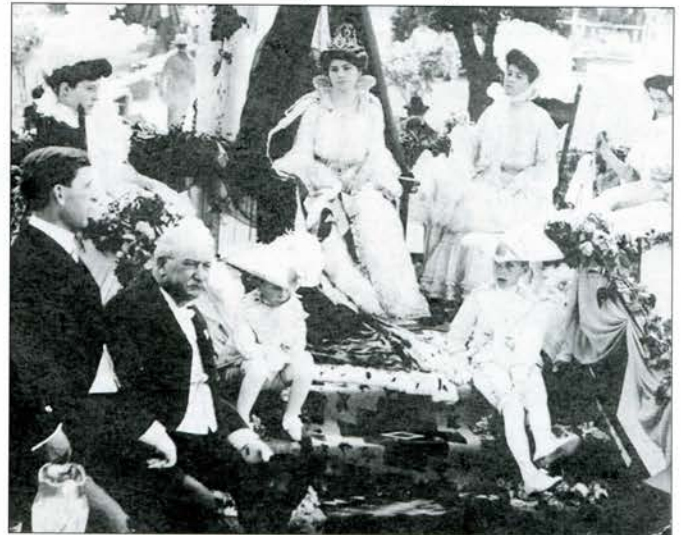
the west where a large house now sits on the west side of Highway 101. Also, in 1892, they signed a deed for a railroad right-of-way through their property to the San Francisco and North Pacific Railway Company.

The year 1904 was filled with happenings—some good, some bad. Giuseppe was adding to the original winery building. An 80 foot by 100 foot, two-story addition was built on the north end, again using basalt. The Simi Land Company filed articles of incorporation; a new well was drilled, reaching water at 50 feet this time; and two more parcels, 360 acres and 200 acres, were added to the vineyards. In May of that year, Isabelle was selected by popular vote as queen of the Healdsburg Rose Carnival. It was such a major event that Isabelle’s “royal wardrobe” was not selected in Healdsburg, but in San Francisco. Little did she know that three months later her life would be drastically changed. In the midst of all this activity, Giuseppe died in August. One month later his brother Pietro passed away.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Entrance to Healdsburg’s first tasting room*



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Floral Festival Queen Isabelle Simi and her court in Healdsburg Plaza May 26, 1904*

About this time, Isabelle Victoria Simi was born to Giuseppe and his second wife, Nicoletta Casassa. They were the first couple married, in 1885, in the new Healdsburg Catholic Parish Church. Isabelle avoided discussing her year of birth, but it seems to have been somewhere around 1887 to 1890. Her sister, Elvira, was three years younger.

The winery continued to prosper and in 1892, the Simi brothers had a license to distill brandy. Sufficient water was a problem and that year they drilled a 250-foot well, the deepest in Healdsburg at the time. The winery’s reservoir was on the hill to

Luckily, young Isabelle had worked with her father, Giuseppe, in the vineyards and accompanied him and her uncle Pietro on business trips. In addition, she had graduated from Santa Rosa Business College in June. So, she was somewhat prepared to take over the helm of the business. And take it over she did. She began managing the business when she was a teenager, probably just 17 or 18 years old. She continued using the guidelines set by her father: buy grapes with a minimum of 22%



sugar, age the wine for seven years and bottle 100% of the grape shown on the label.

Isabelle was also one of the early wine marketers. In 1908, she and her cousin traveled to Denver, Chicago and New York to visit distributors and tell them about Simi wines. In that same year, she married Fred Haigh, the cashier of Healdsburg's Sotoyome Bank. He was the son of pioneer residents Mr. and Mrs. George Haigh and had served with honor in the Spanish-American War, along with other Healdsburg men. They set up housekeeping in the Simi home on Front Street. Their daughter Vivien was born in 1915, the same year that Fred resigned from the bank and joined Isabelle in the management of the winery. They acquired even more land and soon produced Simi wine at three different locations: the Montepulciano Winery, the Dotta Winery just south of it and the Lencioni Winery in Dry Creek Valley.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Isabelle Simi Haigh & Vivian Haigh on the porch of their Front Street home*

The wine business came to a screeching halt on midnight of June 30, 1919. The U.S. Congress passed the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment and Prohibition went into effect. No more production of wine and no more wine sales were allowed, except the small amount needed for sacramental and medicinal purposes. During the 14 years that Prohibition lasted, Isabelle and Fred kept up the vineyards and held onto the wines they had in storage. However, their despair must have been deep: no income and then the

Depression hit. There were land sales and bank foreclosures and they lost most of the vineyard land that Giuseppe and Pietro had acquired.

In December of 1933 when Prohibition was repealed the Haighs had one-half million gallons of well-aged wine stored in their cellars. As you can imagine, much of the wine, stored in redwood tanks, was not of the best quality after all those years of Prohibition. A lot of it was sold to distilleries for making brandy. Some of it had turned sour and was sold as vinegar. Soon, however, Montepulciano Winery was producing again and Isabelle opened the first tasting room in the area. It was housed in a 25,000-gallon barrel, which Fred moved from the champagne section of the winery and positioned along the road. It was a distinctive building and served its purpose until 1970.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Picking grapes was a family affair in Simi Vineyards, c.1918. Isabelle Simi Haigh and her daughter Vivien are on the left.*

In the late 1930s Parrot & Company of San Francisco became the exclusive distributor of Simi Wines. They developed a new label, Hotel del Monte, for the Simi Wines that were sold at that hotel in Monterey. At the California State Fair in 1941, Hotel del Monte wines won gold medals for their Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel and Burgundy. The pink Champagne won a silver medal.

The years passed and Simi Winery continued to produce wines according to Giuseppe's techniques, but with outdated equipment. In 1954, Fred Haigh died and Isabelle and her daughter Vivien carried on. The relationship with Parrot & Company

had ended. With no national distribution, commercial sales were limited to the tasting room.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Isabelle and Fred at Simi (Montepulciano) Winery*

Tragedy struck again when Vivien died suddenly in 1968. At the age of 80 Isabelle, who suffered from arthritis, made what must have been a hard decision—she would sell the winery.

In the early 1970s, she sold to Russell and BJ Green, who were growing grapes on their ranch along the river in Alexander Valley. They had become friends with Isabelle, sharing a love of the land and fine wine. They agreed to carry on the quality traditions of the Simi Winery.

By that time, the Simi lands were greatly reduced from the holdings of 40 years earlier. There was just one small vineyard near the winery and another small one further north towards Asti. Russ Green set about modernizing the winery and the winemaking process. Stainless steel tanks were put in place; refrigeration and automated bottling were installed. The second story of the old building was sprayed with foam to keep the space at a wine-friendly cool temperature. Oak barrels were brought in. New buildings were built to house the tasting room, office complex and meeting rooms.

One thing did not change over the years, however. Isabelle was at the winery seven days a week greeting visitors and telling them about the “old days.” In her later years, the apron and sweater she wore were decorated with souvenir buttons from across the country given to her by the tourists who stopped to taste Simi wines.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*Isabelle Simi Haigh dressed in her trademark apron and sweater adorned with some of the souvenir buttons and new Simi Winery owner Russ Green*

After four years spent improving the winery, the Greens sold to Scottish & Newcastle Vintners. That firm continued to produce wines worthy of the Simi label.

Several other subsequent owners and noted winemakers have introduced new wines and built more buildings. Giuseppe's original stone building was renovated and now has three stories, the top two of which are used for barrel storage.

Isabelle continued to be interested in the developments at the winery until her death in October 1981. Simi Winery is now, in 2018, part of Constellation Brands and it produces many outstanding wines.

Some people still remember Isabelle Simi Haigh's presence in the tasting room and her pet turkey who guarded the cash register.

The tall redwoods, which provide welcome shade at the attractive winery site, are another reminder of Isabelle. She and Fred planted them to celebrate the repeal of Prohibition.



Source: Sherrie Smith-Ferri

*Lucy Lozinto Smith*

## **Lucy Lozinto Smith (1906-2000)**

*by Sherrie Smith-Ferri and Kathleen Smith  
reprinted from News from Native California, Winter 2000*

Lucy Smith was the oldest member of the Dry Creek Pomo when she died at age 94 on August 27, 2000. She was born April 25, 1906, at Dry Creek, the sixth of thirteen children of Rosa Bill Lozinto. Lucy spent much of her childhood living with her grandparents, Juana Cook and Joe Bill, and her "Grandma Mary" Poggie in Dry Creek and Alexander Valleys.

In the early years of this century, when Lucy was growing up, most of Sonoma County was a rural area. For the children living in the country, going to school was not easy. This was especially so for an Indian child. Lucy, however, longed for an education. She begged her mother to let her go to school, until she was finally allowed to go. Lucy was eight years old when she began her education in a one-room schoolhouse called Lambert School, near Geyserville. She walked about five miles to and from school each day, carrying her lunch in a tin lard pail. Lucy loved learning: reading, writing and other subjects. She especially enjoyed mathematics. Much as she loved going to school, however, she was embarrassed to be older and bigger than the other children, so she eventually quit, completing the sixth grade at age fourteen.

The next year she married Steven Smith, Jr., who was Bodega Bay Miwok and Jenner Pomo. They met at a dance and were married in Santa Rosa on January 13, 1922. They spent nearly sixty years together. They had nine children. One, Rose Marie, died in infancy. The eight others, Geraldine or June, Russell, William, Stanley, Marceline, Kathleen, Douglas and Nancy, grew to adulthood.



Source: Healdsburg Museum Collection

*The Smith family, c. 1934*

*Left to right - back row: Russell, Geraldine, Bill; middle row: Marcy, Lucy Lozinto, Steve, Stanley; front row: Douglas, Kathleen*

The two most important, sustaining things in Lucy's life were her abiding Christian faith and her children. As her daughter Kathleen wrote, "We eight

children were precious treasures our parents proudly wore to impress the world. The many facets of our lives reflect the love and teaching of our Mom and Dad. They taught us pride and respect in our heritage, to value ourselves, our many creative and athletic skills, to use our minds and to help others.”

Lucy Smith was a gracious, gentle, generous woman with a wonderfully warm smile. She worked hard, but cheerfully, all her life. She was a good cook and an artist in a variety of media, including quilting, crocheting and basketry. Lucy began to weave Pomo baskets when she was in her sixties.

As a child, she helped her grandmother, weaver Juana Cook, collect basketmaking materials. She had also watched her grandmother and mother and her aunt Theresa Lozinto make baskets, but it was only after her own children were raised and she was on her own that she began the job of collecting and weaving.

Her teachers were Elsie Allen, Laura Somersal and Mabel McKay. She learned quickly, and loved to go out along Dry Creek, or over to the lake, to collect materials and then prepare them for weaving. Although shy, she also loved to demonstrate basketmaking and to teach anyone who

cared to know how to make baskets. She gave her handiwork away to members of her family. She said that she did this “so that they would have something that I have made, something from our culture.”

Lucy also acted as a principal consultant for the extensive Cultural Resources Study undertaken as part of the Warm Springs Dam, an endeavor in which some of her children and grandchildren also participated.

Towards the end of her long life, Lucy Smith suffered from many illnesses, including Alzheimer’s disease. She had seen the death of her husband, two sons, one grandson, one great-grandson and all but one of her brothers and sisters. She looked forward to going to be with the Lord.

Her family made the considerable commitment to take care of her full-time, enabling Lucy to stay at home. On Sunday, August 27, 2000, she died peacefully at her house in Healdsburg, surrounded by family members.

The description of a godly woman, found in Proverbs 3:1, applies to Lucy Smith: “Her children arise and call her blessed...She is worth far more than rubies...Charm is a delusion and beauty fleeting; it is the God-fearing woman who is honored.”

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