



THE

ELECTROLIER

Illuminating St. Helena's History

The Newsletter of the St. Helena Historical Society

SPECIAL EDITION: FOCUS ON COLLECTIONS

Winter 2011, Volume 9, Number 1

PERSPECTIVE

Who Do We Think We Are?

BY TRICIA WESTBROOK

Misperceptions of a Newbie Settler

In February 1997, my husband and I were lounging on the terrace of our barely occupied new home on Sylvaner Avenue. Lolling at our feet was a huge, muddy, inquisitive dog of unknown provenance. Our smiling faces basked in the early spring sunshine, which our realtor guaranteed would appear for two weeks each February. We sipped the Spring Mountain cabernet she had supplied to drive home the wisdom of our relocation.

The dog, it turned out, belonged to Mary Novak. He had sneaked out of the Spotteswood vineyard that comprised our backyard view, forded a small creek, and vaulted over our low wire fence, seemingly compelled to monitor the new St. Helena settlers. When Mary retrieved him, I learned some history—about Spotteswood Winery, the riparian habitat she was cultivating along the creek to keep the good bugs in the vineyard and the bad bugs out, and the culture of my new home town.

Our neighbors across the street immediately recognized that we needed help negotiating the St. Helena frontier. The husband was in finance management at Mondavi, the wife owned a cute children's store downtown. They opened up their

wine cellar, educating our palate and regaling us with stories about the wine industry, and St. Helena in the 1960s. What I learned from their hospitality and friendship added to the erroneous notion I had that St. Helena history was all about wine.

continued on page 6

Message from the Interim Director



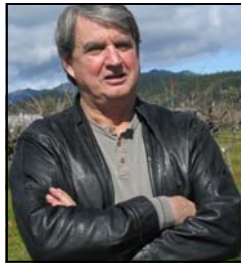
Welcome to the new *Electrolier*. We have split our newsletter into two separate publications in order to have better, ongoing communication with our members. The quarterly *Electrolier* will focus on sharing what we learn about St. Helena history and on keeping you up to date about how we go about doing our job as repository for St. Helena's history and prehistory. In accordance with this purpose, this special issue focuses on the art and science of *collection management*—giving you a glimpse into what the Historical Society collects and how we go about caring for historic treasures.

The e-blast, *FlashForward*, will come to you during those months when there is no *Electrolier*. It will bring you timely announcements about upcoming activities, new donations to the collection, volunteer opportunities, and the various events, meetings, and other activities at SHHS. We ask our members to supply us with their e-mail addresses so that we can save both financial and environmental resources by distributing both publications electronically. If you do not have access to e-mail, we will be happy to mail you a copy of *The Electrolier*. Look for *FlashForward* posted at Napa Valley Roasting Company and other places around town.

INSIDE

- President's Corner *Skip Lane* 2
- Editor's Notes *Robyn Orsini* 2
- Down by the Riverside 3
- JOBS & HISTORY: Collection Management 3
- New to the Collection 4 & 5
- Building & Caring for the SHHS Collection 4
- How to Take Care of Historic Documents & Records 5
- Coming Attractions and More 8

Cornerstone



The year 2010 was a banner year for the Historical Society. In March, we had a release party for *Images of America: St. Helena*, a wonderful, informative book put together by board members Mariam Hansen, Susanne Salvestrin, and Kim Farmer. We celebrated Pope Valley History day in March, topped off with lunch at the Aetna Springs Club House.

We co-sponsored the reopening of the Carnegie Building last May and saluted the 150th anniversary of the David Fulton Winery in August. Our annual "Spirits of St. Helena" cemetery tours this year featured politicians from the past.

While the Historical Society has always had a booth at the St. Helena Hometown Harvest Festival, this past year we undertook sponsorship, along with the Boys and Girls Club, of the wine tasting and auction. Lots of volunteer labor went into it, and we raised some much-needed revenue for our budget.

In recent years the city has been working on an extensive flood control project along the Napa River.



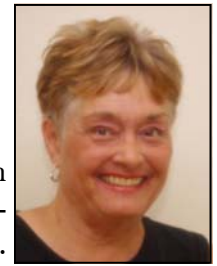
Obsidian bifaces, shell bead, and bone tool fragment unearthed during the St. Helena Flood Control Project.

During excavation, a large number of Wappo Indian artifacts were uncovered. We have been working diligently to become the repository of these relics, some of which date back 4,000 years. We look forward to adding these treasures as a mainstay of our collection.

In the first half of last year, the board crafted its first Annual Plan and Budget in order to better guide our ever-expanding menu of programs and projects. To facilitate implementation of the plan, we hired Tricia Westbrook, a former board member, as our interim executive director. Volunteer time can only take us so far; with Tricia's efforts we have been able to focus our work more effectively.

Our year was capped off by a well-attended Christmas party and dinner held at the historic Grandview Hotel. We look forward to an even better, more exciting, and challenging year in 2011.

Editor's Notes



First, many kudos go to Kim Farmer, who formatted the newsletter from its inception eight years ago. As Tricia explained on page 1, the focus of *The Electrolier* is changing somewhat. By means of *The Electrolier* and the monthly e-mail newsletter *FastForward*, members should receive even more information than before.

This special 8-page edition gives a behind-the-scenes look at how we gather, record, and maintain our growing collection. Future smaller issues will cover St. Helena history as it is uncovered and are planned to come to you quarterly.

My current role as editor of *The Electrolier* is to copyedit the material and lay out the pages. You will see a new and, I hope, easily readable format. It is likely that as issues roll along, I will become more involved in content planning and writing.

I first became involved with SHHS by editing, proofreading, and helping to coordinate the production of *Images of the Past: St. Helena*. It was a terrific experience working with the book's three dedicated authors, Mariam Hansen, Susanne Salvestrin, and

Kim Farmer. It was this experience that made stepping into Kim's shoes a natural fit.

I have spent almost 40 years in the business of creating publications of all kinds—newsletters, magazines, and brochures, but mostly books. I have worked in house for publishers, but have spent most of my time as a freelancer and the owner of a book production company. I continue to teach editorial skills to professionals and for a few years got to call myself a professor (the best part of the job) when teaching editing at San Francisco State University.

As some of you know, I am in the fourth year of coordinating adult programs, producing the monthly library newsletter, and supervising other events publicly for the St. Helena Public Library. These efforts are half volunteer and half supported by a stipend from the SHPL Foundation.

Let me know your comments and suggestions about *The Electrolier*. You may reach me by leaving a phone message at or e-mailing the SHHS office.

Down by the Riverside

Today, thanks to artifacts unearthed during St. Helena's Napa River Flood Control Project, there is tangible evidence that people lived along the stretch of the Napa River where we make our homes today at least as early as 2,000 to 1,000 BC. Evidence suggests that they were here for the acorns and the obsidian, the mild weather, and the richness of the river. Perhaps they enjoyed the hot springs, too; our research has just begun. For a heritage institution such as the St. Helena Historical Society, the artifact collection is a profound discovery and anchors the beginning of our temporal scope of interest.

Though the artifacts will provide some answers, mostly they pose questions. What happened in the 3,500 years between the time when some artifacts were state-of-the-art tools and when the descendants of those who used them first saw a white person? How would understanding that timeframe broaden our idea of who we think we are as St. Helenans?



Aboriginal mortar and pestle, and obsidian tools and fragments, circa AD 500, from the St. Helena Flood Control Project excavation.

The Historical Society is seeking to keep the Flood Control Project artifacts in St. Helena as part of the SHHS collection. In that way, they can be preserved, made available for research, and used to shed light on cultural traditions. Having these artifacts in our collection will assure that St. Helena school children will always have the opportunity to feel in their hands the weight of an authentic prehistoric, obsidian biface point or granite pounding stone and to sense how a young person's life along this river in AD 500 might have been different, or the same, as their own.

JOB & HISTORY

Collection Management



Historical Society volunteer curatorial staff, Helen Nelson, Susanne Salvestrin, and Kim Farmer, prepare accessioned items for proper storage.

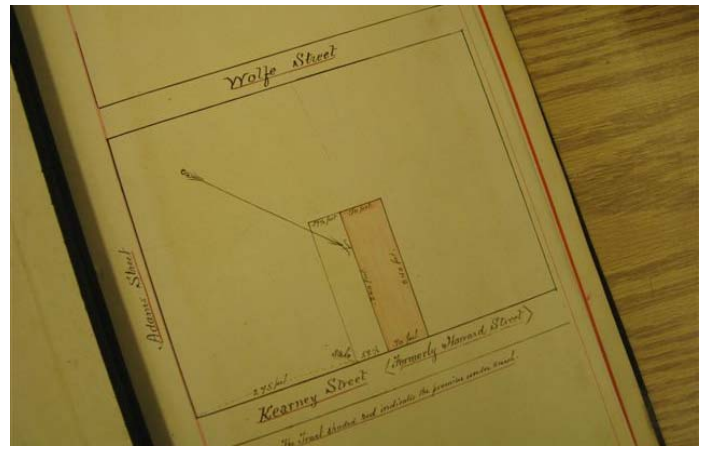
Each edition of *The Electrolier* will showcase careers that utilize a passion for history. This issue's focus is on careers in collection management. History-based collections exist in museums, historical societies, universities, private businesses, government buildings, historic houses, and individual households throughout the world. Consult the websites of the American Association of State and Local History (<http://www.aaslh.org>) and the American Museum Association (<http://www.aam-us.org>). John F. Kennedy University (<http://www.jfku.edu>) offers a nationally recognized museum studies program that includes all aspects of collection management study.

Archivist. Responsible for the care, research, and documentation of a historical archival collection. Provides responsible access to archives for researchers and the public.

Conservator. In charge of preserving all works in a collection. Duties include examining and cleaning, restorative treatment, condition monitoring and reporting, and assuring that storage and environmental conditions minimize deterioration.

Curator. Directs the planning, development, and care of a collection, and undertakes the work personally or supervises others. A history-based collection may include photographic media, books, objects, archival items, and ephemera. Each collection item category and each type of material requires special care. Ephemera are items of short-lived usefulness, such as event flyers or concert tickets.

Registrar. Creates and maintains orderly systems for organizing, documenting, and retrieving collection items. Maintains collection care records, coordinates lending and borrowing, supplies information from the database on specific artifacts for interpretation, and assures that the collection is properly insured. A collection's database is managed using a specialized computer software program.



NEW TO THE COLLECTION

From the Archive Collection: These leather-bound portfolios, donated to the Historical Society Archival Collection by Edgar Beard, are from the 19th and 20th centuries. Collections such as these were assembled by county authorities for landowners to document the history of property ownership transfer. One of these abstracts traces a parcel on Kearney Street back to the original Carne Humana land grant that was made to Dr. Edward Bale by General Mariano Vallejo on behalf of the Mexican Government.

Building & Caring for the SHHS Collection: Privilege, Responsibility, Challenge, Entertainment

A paintbrush full of solidified green paint, circa 1956, rests on a shelf in the Historical Society's office. It is there to remind us to finish SHHS's Collection Acquisition Plan. Such a plan is the difference between a meaningful, historical collection and a pile of unused old stuff that costs a lot to store.

When you offer an item to the collection, we ask you to write down everything you know about it. Then we accept it on a temporary basis while it is evaluated using questions designed to reveal its value as a testament to history. The artifact is accepted or not based on the consensus of Collection Committee members, who do the evaluating. The paintbrush, which came from a ranch where St. Helena's roots go back generations, wouldn't make the cut.

When we accept something into the collection, we make a commitment to do the following:

- Properly handle, clean, restore, pack, secure, and store it.
- Accurately catalog and register it in our database, so that it may be easily located.
- Diligently document its provenance and meaning.
- Proactively share what we learn by providing access to it for research and using it for educational programs and exhibits.

The collection includes historic photographs; objects made in, made by, or used by St. Helenans; and documents and memorabilia of all sorts. Our current interest is to acquire the indigenous artifacts that were unearthed during the St. Helena Flood Control Project. As the earliest tangible evidence of St. Helena-area habitation that has been found to date, they are priceless.

Items requiring climate control are packed according to material content and stored in protective containers in library stacks near our work stations. A fire safe holds oral history recordings. Items that do not require special environments are housed off site. For example, a horse-drawn buggy is parked in one board director's garage. Ernie Navone's red truck, the late butcher's notorious ride, is secure in a member's barn.

Think of the Historical Society before tossing out pieces of the St. Helena story that lurk in your attic or photograph albums. If you are in doubt, please err on the side of bringing in those historic paintbrushes. Please also understand that sometimes we must pass on some items, so that we can reserve scarce space for other pieces that will best illustrate the depth and breadth of the St. Helena story.



From the Historical Photo Collection: Anderson Gas Station, circa 1930. Peter Ensinger (center, rear) fills up his mule-drawn gas engine so he can use it to cut wood. Peter farmed property on Pope Street where the Ogletree Apartments are today. The gas station, one of the first in St. Helena, occupied the space at Main and Pope Streets, where Nature Select Foods is now. Original photo donated by Norm Manzer.

How to Take Care of Historic Documents & Records

We hope you will donate important papers related to St. Helena history to the Historical Society collection, where they will be carefully preserved so they can be made available to researchers. However, if you cannot part with them or have family records to preserve that are not related to St. Helena, you can care for them properly at home.

What to Preserve

Historical documents worth preserving include all unpublished and one-of-a-kind works, such as:

- architectural and landscape drawings
- business papers
- diaries
- genealogical information
- letters
- maps
- memoirs
- minutes and reports
- photographic media
- printed materials
- speeches and lectures

Preservation Tips

1 STORE IN A COOL, DRY PLACE. Major fluctuations of temperature will shorten the lifespan of documents. Garages, basements, attics, and places subject to flooding are the worst places to keep records.

2 KEEP DOCUMENTS AWAY FROM SUNLIGHT. Do not store or display historic documents where direct sunlight will hit them.

3 USE ARCHIVAL-QUALITY STORAGE MATERIALS. Archival storage boxes, encapsulation materials, and marking pens are acid free and will not damage documents the way that nonacid-free materials can.

4 STORE NEWSPAPERS AND NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS SEPARATELY FROM OTHER PAPERS. Newspapers are extremely acidic and can ruin other materials with prolonged contact.

5 KEEP PESTS AWAY FROM HISTORIC DOCUMENTS. Foil pests by keeping the items you want to preserve in tightly sealed containers.

6 PROTECT SURFACES AND HANDLE GENTLY. Cotton or linen gloves provide the best protection when handling archival items. Linen is especially good for photographs. When not wearing gloves, handle photographs by the edges. Historic documents are especially easy to tear if not handled carefully.

You can learn more preservation tips from the following websites:

- *American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works*, <http://www.conservation-us.org/>
- *Caring for Your Family Archives*, <http://www.archives.gov/preservation/family-archives/>
- *Guidelines for Preserving Your Photographic Heritage*, www.creativescrapbooking.com/topics/heritage.htm
- *How to Care for . . .*, <http://www.preservation.gc.ca/howto-comment/grid-eng.asp>

On a whim, I took a part-time job at the Napa Valley Museum in order to do something for the community and make a little money while I finished a writing project. My time there was brief but the impact huge because it gave me a peek at the rest of the St. Helena story.

A museum program presented by the late local historian Kathleen Kernberger brought an enlightening conversation and subsequent involvement with the newly formed St. Helena Historical Society. My experience with SHHS—first as a volunteer, then as a member of the board of directors, and now as the interim director charged with leading the organization through a transition to a new level of capacity—is how I have learned just how broad and diverse the St. Helena heritage is.

The Rest of the Story

Kathleen urged me to look behind the wine industry. When I did, a larger agricultural heritage came into view: walnuts, olives, prunes, strawberries, wheat, cotton. “Hmmm!” I thought. Then I looked behind the farming and found that the essence of St. Helena history isn’t just agricultural; there is more.



Farms and orchards in Conn Valley at the turn of the century. Courtesy of the Clyde Kirkpatrick Collection.

At its heart, the history of St. Helena is the story of the bounty and beauty of the land and the combined cultures and collective experiences of the people who have been drawn to it for as many reasons as there are dreams. Winemaking is just the best known of those dreams. This notion of the draw of the land is the core concept around which SHHS organizes research resources and collection planning.

Prehistoric natives were here first. They sought water, acorns, and obsidian. Next (that we know of) came Russian and Finnish trappers, Spanish explorers, and Mexican padres.

Germans, Italians, Swiss, French, and other Europeans followed. They sent for relatives, who brought the seeds of their favorite fruits and vegetables to plant. Newcomers sought land, silver and gold, and work and futures of all kinds.

Chinese came to work in the caves. Wealthy San Franciscans came to play in the natural hot springs. Easterners and midwesterners came to seek their fortunes. Mexican immigrants came to tend the grapes and stayed to make new homes and businesses.

The population swelled in the 1960s, bringing many of the civic leaders and treasured old-timers of today. It swelled again in the 1990s at the crest of the dot-com boom.

The indelible marks these diverse cultures made are evident all around us. This complex heritage forms the basis of the St. Helena of tomorrow. The mission of the Historical Society is to help St. Helenans understand what has gone before.

The Community Memory

This month SHHS is nine years old. We were founded by a small group of community-minded citizens, under the leadership of former St. Helena library director Larry Hlavsa, to preserve, research, present, and interpret the evidence of St. Helena’s past. Until recently our activity has mostly been guided by opportunity. We have collected the artifacts that the community brings us. We have presented history-based programs that came to mind. We have researched the people, places, and events that have interested our researchers and those our members have asked about. In a town where no organized attempt had been made to remember St. Helena history since the Napa Valley Museum, founded here, moved to Yountville, the opportunities for SHHS have seemed endless.

In these years, we have also matured as an organization. We have come to understand the responsibility a cultural institution has to provide a balanced resource that reflects the many peoples who have lived here—in all of their diversity and through time. As the keepers of St. Helena community memory and the repository for related artifacts, it is our job to document the people, cultures, activities, and events that make St. Helena the special place it is.

Our understanding of that mandate is changing the way we work in three important ways. We are:

- becoming proactive and strategic in building our collection, focusing on acquiring artifacts that will bring to life our diverse cultural heritage.
- developing a research program that has the capacity both to capture opportunities that add to the knowledge base and to initiate special research projects that systematically fill in the blanks.
- planning for educational programming that represents a broader spectrum of St. Helena's history.

The Community Tree

In archival parlance, a *community* is a formal or informal group with a common history. It can have its base in a geographical area, such as the City of St. Helena and the area surrounding it, or around a topic of interest. What we call the "St. Helena community" is actually a collection of many topical-interest communities that operate within the same geographical area. There is the winery community and the mini-communities it contains. There is the school/parent community. There is the Vineyard Valley community and the one that encompasses each of our churches. There are the communities that hang out at the Boys and Girls Club, the Carnegie Building, and the Napa Valley Roasting Company. There is the restaurant community and the people who cycle. And on and on.

The framework upon which individuals organize clues to who they think they are is the *family tree*. In the case of a community, the framework is a *timeline*. At the Historical Society we start with a long horizontal line. We put today's date at the right-hand end and the date of the first known inhabitants at the left-hand end and set about filling in the middle. To date we have amassed an impressive collection of information, artifacts, and educational programming related to the time between the 1840s, when General Vallejo bestowed a land grant on Dr. Bale, and 1976 when the Judgment of Paris put Napa Valley on the map. This is the timeframe about which the most information is available.

Over time we will fill in the blanks, both through research and collection acquisition. To add greater meaning, we must put our timeline into context with significant world discoveries and events. By collecting and conserving the sources of our history, SHHS can give successive generations the opportunity to debate the meaning of historic people and events and come to their own conclusions.

Why Does Remembering Matter?

The Historical Society exists because we believe our purpose is a good one—a mandate that a responsible community undertakes. The bigger question is *Why?* Why does history matter? The answer for me is very personal. I discovered it during my mother's eight-year battle with Alzheimer's disease. Remembering matters because who you are is a function of where you come from. If you don't have that memory, then you are doomed to begin each day from scratch.



Susanne Salvestrin, Marie Oliver, and conservator Antoinette Dwan display the original 1876 Map of Napa County that Marie donated to our St. Helena collection. The map underwent \$5,000 in meticulous conservation work. Check it out opposite the north stacks at the St. Helena Library.

My understanding of why history is important for a community is much the same. History chronicles accomplishments, helping to measure progress and offering evidence of cost. History inspires with stories of heroes, and it cautions with tales of evil. It is both fun and thought-provoking to ponder the workings of a Victrola when you have an iPod in your pocket. Understanding sacrifices made by predecessors to secure what we take for granted humbles hubris and entitlement, reminds us of a shared heritage, and promotes community and civic pride.

Finally, a grasp of history brings the privilege of insight into the meaning of my own life. Learning about those who came before me offers me the option of living smarter. Our community can have that option too. By documenting the results of the choices St. Helenans make today, we can promote civilized progress for future generations.

The Future of the Past

Fourteen years later I am not a newbie settler any more. I know this because I am aware of how much I *don't* know about our history. I plan to do my part to help the St. Helena Historical Society document our collective community memory. I hope you will too.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES



LIVE AND LEARN: AN EVENING WITH ST. HELENA MAYORS PAST

WHEN? THURSDAY, MARCH 24, 7:00 PM

WHERE? COUNCIL CHAMBERS, VINTAGE HALL
UPSTAIRS AT 465 MAIN STREET, ST. HELENA

WHAT? Six men and women who have served as mayors of St. Helena will come together for a panel discussion moderated by Judge Scott Snowden. Come hear thoughtful perspectives on holding public office and on issues facing St. Helena today. Stay for cake and to celebrate the 135th anniversary of the incorporation of the City of St. Helena.

FIRST ANNUAL MEMBERS-ONLY SECRET VISIT

Be sure your dues are paid up, so you won't miss this event! On Thursday, April 21st, members only will enjoy a private tour of a historic 12- acre estate garden in Rutherford. Watch for an e-mail in early April with your invitation and details.

DONATING TO THE COLLECTION

To donate original photos, documents, or other artifacts to St. Helena Historical Society's collection, please call the SHHS office and leave a message for Kim Farmer. She will contact you to arrange an appointment. Unfortunately, we are not able to accommodate drop-in visitors.

You may be able to use the value of your donation as a tax deduction. Discuss this with your tax advisor. SHHS does not do appraisals, but can assist you in locating one.

ABOUT US



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Images of the Past: St. Helena may be purchased for \$21.99, including tax. Contact the office for more information.