



ST. HELENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
**THE ELECTROLIER**  
Illuminating St. Helena's History

APRIL 2023 • VOLUME 21 • ISSUE 2

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- **Our Hispanic Heritage:** Stephen Taplin interviews Bob Torres
- **What's Going on at the Historical Society**
  - **Saturday, April 29:** The Heritage Center Museum is open, noon-4pm!
  - **The McCormick Ranch carriage** took a bow at the High School's production of "Oklahoma"
  - **Grant season:** We teamed with Sheli Smith, Executive Director of the Napa Valley Historical Society, to apply for a grant from the Arts Council Napa Valley. If we are awarded the grant, we'll be doing six joint lectures on the "City of Immigrants".
  - **Through the City's nonprofit grant program,** we submitted a grant for equipment--more chairs, a lectern and microphones.

## INTRO: SHHS BOD PRESIDENT BONNIE THOREEN

### Greetings to Members from Your President—

The spring rains and snow have been spectacular and such a relief. Our parking lot at the once-vacant Catholic School did not flood, and we welcome the wash-off of our beautiful tile roof.

I hope you read the editorial and the story about the Historical Society that appeared in the *Star* in recent weeks. The editorial board reminded us that our efforts to establish and fund the Heritage Center Museum are competing with the City's significant infrastructure needs.

### We remain committed to our mission to preserve and share the history of our community.

We continue to build our collections of oral histories, artifacts, and photographs that document where we have been and informs the present.

Our invitation is always open—come visit us on the first Saturday of the month from noon to 4:00. Corner of Oak and Tainter. Ask for a tour for you, your family, your social group, your service club. Arrange to book our Community Room for your meetings tied to a tour.

Our [website](#) has more information.

We hope to see you soon.

Bonnie





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**May 17, 2023 @ 4:00: THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS AND NAPA VALLEY WINES**

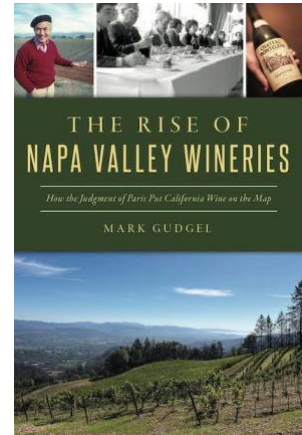
In 1976, Napa wines were little known to those who lived outside the area. All that changed in 1976 when Napa wines bested those of France in a blind wine-tasting event.

Since then, the growth of the Napa Valley wine region has been explosive and is now one of the greatest wine-producing regions in the world. This story is the stuff of legends. Dr. Mark Gudgel unpacks these legends in *The Rise of Napa Valley Wineries: How the Judgment of Paris put California Wine on the Map*.



**About the author: Dr. Mark Gudgel**

Dr. Mark Gudgel is a Nebraska native. He has an Ed.D. in Character Education, is the author of numerous books and articles, and is a regular contributor to several periodicals. His book, *Think Higher Feel Deeper: Holocaust Education in the Secondary Classroom*, was released from Teachers College Press in the fall of 2021.



**For all who have struggled to hear our speakers**

We have purchased a new lectern and microphone. Join us on the 17<sup>th</sup> and look forward to hearing the entire program!



**THE CHINESE: A FORGOTTEN COMMUNITY THAT BUILT NAPA VALLEY**

**Our first lecture of the year was standing room only**

The Chinese were an important labor force for Napa Valley's development. They came here to work in the vineyards, quicksilver mines, hop farms, leather tanneries and laundries.

Fifth-generation Napa Valley resident John McCormick discussed the way that this chapter of local history was never taught in the schools. His book, **Chinese in Napa Valley: The Forgotten Community That Built Wine Country**, tells this story.



**A new project to mark the Chinese Burial Ground**

A project is underway to mark the Chinese Burial Ground at the St. Helena Public Cemetery. Research Director Mariam Hansen is leading this effort to create a memorial to commemorate the contributions of the Chinese. "Right now there are about 47 names to be added to a memorial. Napa Marble says it will take five months from order date to receive the stone. We're aiming high and will scale back if necessary," said Hansen.

**The Historical Society is supporting the Committee on this project**

John Sales, Bonnie Thoreen, Mariam Hansen, Mayor Dohring, John McCormick, Catherine Dann, Joyce Chan and others are on the Chinese Memorial Committee. The group submitted a City grant at the end of February.



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### Visible Threads Exhibit: Now part of our permanent exhibit

This art and fabric project was part of a countywide celebration of Hispanic culture. Participants used quilt squares to tell their immigration stories or what it means to be Hispanic in Napa Valley. The quilt squares are the invisible threads that tie us all together, forming community.

**Visit Visible Threads the first Saturday of every month at the Heritage Center Museum from noon-4pm. 1255 Oak Avenue.**



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## THE FOCUS ON OUR HISPANIC COMMUNITY CONTINUES

### In Conversation with Bob Torres and Stephen Taplin, MD

**Stephen:** What was it like for you growing up in St. Helena?

**Bob:** We lived on a street with old St. Helena families--the Cazet, Burgstahlers and Lenz families. When I was young, every day in the summer, Brian Lenz and I would get up early and go fishing, up on Spring Mountain. Not get home until 6 or 7. We'd take flashlights and crawl into the mines. We fished for steelhead and rainbow trout in Sulphur Creek and Napa River.

**Stephen:** What was important in St. Helena in those days?

**Bob:** It's all you knew. You took it all for granted. The town, the beauty and the safety. The fact that you can grow up here and afford to live here now and have a career. That's the big differentiator. It's too expensive now.

**Stephen:** How did you get where you are now, involved with Trinchero Family Estates?

**Bob:** I was a really good student and got scholarships in math and art. I applied to UC Berkeley and UC Santa Barbara. I went to Cal and my high school classmate Bruce Wilson and I lived in Berkeley. Math got harder, so I changed to Art. Then I switched to Architecture and graduated with a degree. I got a job with an architect designing and building projects. I really learned the fundamentals, how stuff gets put together. Meanwhile, Trinchero was starting to take off. I'd worked there for years—in summers during high school and college.

**Bob:** They needed someone to start designing wineries in 1984. I started converting a chicken farm, (Lambert egg ranch on Zinfandel Lane), into a winery—fermentation rooms, tasting facilities and a warehouse. I learned about permits--use permits and modification permits. I was at the county building permit counter every day—that was my biggest learning curve. In my 20s I was just trying to figure everything out.





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**We continued expanding the ranch and just outgrew it.** We built more space in American Canyon, and I worked through the planning and permitting. In 1986, at 26, I drew up plans, permitting again and working with an interior designer, reunited at the Sutter Home Winery with the Victorian next door (Sutter Home Inn). It was all driven by necessity—we just needed more space. We built the Montevina and Napa Valley facilities. Lodi is our primary distribution center, and it's all automated. We ship 100,000 cases/day.

**Stephen:** What was most important growing up that has helped you today?



**Bob:** The connections. Classmates, these old St. Helena names. The shared stories. We played sports together, won together and lost together. I still have these bonds, the friendships and business associates. I'm lucky to have this sense of community and belonging, of raising my family here.

**Stephen:** Describe going from planner/builder to administrator.

**Bob:** It was organic growth. Bob, Vera, Roger. Our growth was sales-driven and marketing-driven. My family are the ones who provide the direction. For 36 years Bob Trinchero has provided the institutional knowledge. We can't lose track of the family—it's why we're here. We're so big, we need specialists in our sales and marketing positions.

**Uncle John back in the 1930s and 1940s.** John lived in New Jersey—after prohibition was repealed—he'd send grapes back to New Jersey where they were making fortified wines. When he saw the Sutter Home building, he convinced Mario Trinchero, my grandfather, that they should move to Napa Valley. The facility hadn't seen any real winemaking for 20 years. He was a 49-year-old bartender at the Waldorf Astoria with three kids. He left New York, got settled and moved his family to the Valley. It was just Mario and John wanting to be their own bosses. Their English was limited, but they found community here with the Italian community.

**Bob:** Most important for St. Helena is maintaining our status as a global wine region. Being stewards of the land and the wineries. We've built a reputation for giving back to our community. Affordable housing is a big problem here. The people who work here, the teachers, the police, etc. can't afford to live here.

**Stephen:** Who spoke Spanish when you were growing up?

**Bob.** My dad's side spoke Spanish, my mother, Vera's side spoke Italian. I'm part of the generation that was encouraged to assimilate. Grandparents may have been talking in their native languages to each other, but not to us.

**Where we are today.** It started with Mario's wanting to be his own boss. Leaving NYC and building a winery in Napa Valley. It's the American dream come true. We're the second largest family-owned winery in the country. We always celebrated holidays together. The family gets fragmented as we get older. The fourth generation of the family are now involved in the winery brand. We hope to keep that core together.

[Read Stephen's interview with Bob's dad, Ray, in our January newsletter.](#)





## IN CASE YOU MISSED IT: THE MCCORMICK CARRIAGE TAKES CENTER STAGE



The High School Drama Department's production of "Oklahoma", was sold out on opening night for a good reason. It was another superb production by a team of hardworking, talented students and staff. For many of the Historical Society members, our favorite scene was watching the McCormick carriage take center stage, transformed as the "surrey with the fringe on the top." The carriage is now back home at the Heritage Center.

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## ST. HELENA HIGH SCHOOL BAND AND THE "MIRACLE OF SQUAW VALLEY"

"The Russians marched right in front of us!" exclaimed Joyce Black as she described the February 1960 Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley as a member of the St. Helena High School Band. The following is the story of how a small town became part of a world event.

In 1959 band director Leo Bardes received permission from the St. Helena School Board to audition for a slot in the opening ceremonies of the eighth Winter Olympic Games—on the condition that there be no cost to the district. The Band Boosters Club would raise the money. Director Bardes submitted tape recordings of their spring repertoire, which impressed the committee. The band played "Washington Post March", "Prelude to Die Meistersingers of Nuremberg" and "Psalm 18" by Benedetto Mariello on their audition tape, which was recorded by George Kovacevic. The Olympic Organizing Committee, headed by Walt Disney, selected all of the high school bands and choirs, including St. Helena's!

### Purchasing new band uniforms was literally a collective effort by the St. Helena community

The Committee sent all the sheet music, and the band began to practice. The band needed uniforms and by January they were still short \$800, so the Chamber and the Rotary stepped up for the final donations.



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Students decorated their bus "Olympic Bound St. Helena Band" and "Have Band -Will Travel 2 Olympics". On February 17 at 5:30am everyone met at St. Helena High School. Members were responsible for their sheet music and loading their own instruments on a truck.

## The big day arrived with blizzard/whiteout conditions

February 18, the big day, started with reveille at 6:00am. After breakfast, the musicians boarded their bus and were on their way to Squaw Valley. After a mostly dry winter with little snow, organizers had been worried there wouldn't be enough snow. But Feb. 18 started with a Sierra snowstorm, complete with blizzard conditions and near-zero temperatures. It had snowed 18 inches and was still snowing when the St. Helena band arrived.



The St. Helena High School Band on their way to Squaw Valley

There was a dress rehearsal at 9am with all the high school bands, choirs and the U.S. Marine Band. Remembers Cindy Taylor [Hays] "We were standing on the ice rink. Absolutely freezing. The keys on the instruments froze up-- including my saxophone. We practiced and then went back to our bus for a cold sack lunch. Lots of complaining." Joyce Black had to keep her French horn mouthpiece under her arm to keep it from freezing and sticking to her lips. The drumheads were in danger of cracking.

## More than 18,000 spectators huddled in near-whiteout conditions

The Organizing Committee wanted to move everyone inside the arena, but there wasn't enough room. Even the arrival of Vice President Nixon's party was delayed by the snow. The musicians could barely see band director Clarence Sawhill standing on a high platform. "The Parade of the Olympians", performed by the St. Helena band and eight others from California and Nevada and a 400-voice choir, provided a backdrop for the athletes' entrance.

The delegations entered the stadium to a drumroll by Sharon LaPierre, Don Vader, Dolores Huggins, Linda Younggreen, Dale and Dave Weidmer, plus other drummers, while 30 national flags were hoisted. Richard Nixon declared the games officially open.

## The Miracle of Squaw Valley

"Those big dark clouds parted and the shafts of sun came down the mountains in front of us", wrote Schwafel. Ross Coughran (drum major) remembers "It was snowing hard and you could hardly see the mass conductor during the ceremony. The bands and choirs performed the original composition, "These Things Shall Be". When the choir was singing, the clouds broke, the sun came through just as they were releasing pigeons. It was a glorious sight, along with the voices of the choir carrying through the valley!"



Linda Younggreen Schwafel at the 1960 Olympics

The celebrated band arrived home after midnight. The marching band, led by drum major Ross Coughran and director Bardes paraded down Main Street to show appreciation for the town's support.

## I can still see the torch gliding down the mountainside

Linda Younggreen Schwafel has never forgotten that moment when the clouds parted. "We were all very proud to have been participants in a very unique event," recalled Cindy Taylor Hays. Band director Bardes, "I can still see the ...torch come gliding into the arena from way high up on the mountainside and the St. Helena Band standing proudly at attention!"



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### VOLUNTEER FOCUS: SANDRA PRICE

A longtime member of the Historical Society, Sandra Price joined the Collections team in 2022. She's lived in St. Helena off and on since 1972. Her husband's family has lived here since 1910, and her three children all attended St. Helena schools.

#### Sandra has worked and studied in Italy and France

Sandra has worked as a graphic designer, a gardener, and landscape designer. She lived and worked in France and Italy, where she studied and visited gardens and developed tours of historic gardens. She studied horticulture at Strybing Arboretum in San Francisco and landscape history at Radcliffe College and the University of Virginia. For her Masters degree from Sonoma State University, her thesis was a microhistory of family farming from 1850-1910. "Ken Taplin and David Wight were very helpful and generous in allowing me access to information about their families' involvement in agriculture."



#### Several projects led Sandra to become interested in historical archives

While researching the restoration of a garden in Italy that was abandoned during WWII, Sandra visited local historical societies. She also conducted research at the Archive in Siena for that project.

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### WHAT'S NEW IN THE COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT? ARROWHEADS!



Our hardworking Collections Team--Helen Nelson, Nancy Caffo, Marilyn Coy and Sandra Price--meet every week to log in the items that people contribute to the Heritage Center.

These beautifully preserved arrowheads were found on the McCormick-Learned Ranch, situated at the end of Langtry Road in St. Helena. This site had a rare year-round spring where the local tribes had an encampment on their way to and from Sonoma County and the Pacific Ocean.

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- **May 10, 5:00:** SHHS Research Director Mariam Hansen will be talking about **Robert Stevenson's Napa Valley**. At the RLS Museum, 1490 Library Lane
  - **May 17: 4:00: The Rise of Napa Valley Wineries:** How the Judgment of Paris Put California Wine on the Map. Featuring Dr. Mark Gudgel, who will be talking about his new book. At the Heritage Center Museum, 1255 Oak Avenue
  - **July:** Founding Families: The Forces that Inspired the Westward Movement
  - **September 24:** Spirits of St. Helena Discovery Cemetery Walk
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**VOLUNTEER WITH THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY!**

We've got a busy season ahead, and we're looking for volunteers to help us organize and execute activities. We have several popup exhibits that need to be developed and set up at new venues around St. Helena. Other plans include a fundraising dinner and auction, our annual cemetery tour in September and at least two more programs that are part of our regular lecture series. Those with event-planning experience are especially welcome! We also need people to staff the Heritage Center on the first Saturday of the month. Noon-4pm shifts. Contact [shstory@shstory.org](mailto:shstory@shstory.org), 1255 Oak Avenue, St. Helena, CA 94574



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**JOIN ST. HELENA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**



On our [website](#) you can download a membership form or pay online. Membership is critical to the Historical Society's success! [Please join us!](#)

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Visit the Heritage Center: 1255 Oak Avenue, St. Helena, CA 94574 • SHHS Mailing Address: PO Box 87, St. Helena, CA 94574 • [shstory@shstory.org](mailto:shstory@shstory.org) • 707.967.5502 • [shstory.org](http://shstory.org) • 501(c) 3 Nonprofit Organization • Tax ID#: 30-0087096

