



# THE **ELECTROLIER**

*Illuminating St. Helena's History*

**A Publication of the St. Helena Historical Society**

**Summer 2011, Volume 9, Number 3**

## **Theron Ink & the Ink House** BY MARIAM HANSEN

*This issue of the Electrolier focuses on giving background on two landmark houses and their owners: the Ink House, now a bed and breakfast, and the Sullenger House, now used for tasting Nickel & Nickel wines. Look for information on page 4 about the Barn Tour featuring barns built nearby.*

### **Theron Herbert Ink**



Theron Ink was born in Enfield, New York, in 1831. After finishing his education, he taught school for a short while. At age 21 (1852), he crossed the plains to California and began to look for gold at Coloma. Ink migrated to the Carneros area of Napa County in 1853, marrying the neighbor's daughter, Harriet Goodrich, in 1860.

*continued on page 3*

## **Cornerstone** BY SKIP LANE, BOARD PRESIDENT

For the past year, Tricia Westbrook has served as SHHS's interim executive director. During her tenure, she spearheaded numerous advances: she guided us through our first annual plan and budget development process. She negotiated a new licensing agreement with the library and initiated changes resulting in the *Electrolier's* new look. Tricia was instrumental in the installation of our new computer network and revised our approach to membership issues. She helped staff to define their roles and increase their efficiency. The society is most appreciative of Tricia's contributions and wishes her well as she takes on new work challenges.

## **Why a Barn Tour, Anyway?** BY WENDY WARD, DIRECTOR, PRESERVATION NAPA VALLEY



*The Helios Barn near the Ink House, built in 1886.*

The Napa Valley has some of the most interesting and amazing events in the country, from kitchen and garden tours to a plethora of wonderful wine auctions. We are nestled among vast acres of perfectly coiffed rows of Cabernet, Merlot, Pinot, and Chardonnay. So who cares about all those lonely old barns out there?

*Answer:* Preservation Napa Valley does. We put on a barn tour every year to show just how important these agricultural icons really are. These barns—with their surrounding landscapes and with Old Timers as docents—tell us where we have been, where we are now, and where we may be headed in the valley's future. Barns are the stalwart outposts to our collective memory.

Partnering with the Napa County Farm Bureau, this year's tour will be in the Oakville-Rutherford area, a region full of history and beauty. The self-guided auto tour heads out to numerous sites and includes music, food, art, resource tables, and talks by community leaders about historic preservation, land conservation, and other topics.

Preservation Napa Valley thanks the SHHS for their incredible help and research for this year's tour.

## REMEMBERING BABE

Edna May (Babe) McCormick Learned was a member of the St. Helena Historical Society from its inception. She was passionate about recording her family's history, as well as events leading back to 1845 when the McCormicks put down roots in Napa Valley as pioneers who came here by wagon train. Babe's dad, John, served as a county supervisor from District 3 and was instrumental in getting many local roads built, including the northern section of Highway 29. Babe was delighted with Scott Snowden's depiction of John in last year's "Spirits of St. Helena" Cemetery Discovery Walk.

Babe passed away on June 14, 2011, at the age of 95. Predeceasing her by many years were her husband, Edwin, and her son, Gary. She left behind the fifth and sixth generations of the family: daughter Sandra Learned Perry and husband Jim, and grandsons Scott and Cole. The society is grateful for the continuing support of the McCormick family.



*Above: Babe with grandsons Cole and Scott, wheeling the family's 19th-century horse-drawn buggy into SHHS storage. The buggy is the largest thing in the society's collection. Top right: Babe poses in the buggy's new temporary home. One day this beautifully maintained piece of the past will be on display for all to admire. Babe and her family's generosity in donating items to the collection from the McCormick Ranch has assured that early St. Helena ranch life will be remembered.*

### Memorial Gifts

SHHS can help you remember a loved one in a meaningful way. Gifts may be made to the society in general or to support specific efforts such as research, collections, educational programs, or our future museum. Memorial gifts help to carry on the society's important work of discovering, preserving, interpreting, and sharing St. Helena's diverse heritage. Call the office to find out more.



Special thanks to the following people who have given donations to the Historical Society in Babe's memory: Mr. and Mrs. Paul Caffo, Mary Elizabeth Fryer, Donald F. Houghton, Guy and Connie Kay, Elizabeth Martini, Betsy McCormick Malmgren, Joseph G. Peatman, Susanne and Ed Salvestrin, Upper Napa Valley Garden Club, Judith and Craig Wolcott, and Jeannine Yeomans.

## Office Update



We would like to extend our gratitude to former library director Larry Hlavsa, city technical manager Randy Fischer, library director Jennifer Baker, and the City of St. Helena for setting up and maintaining the Historical Society on the city's computer network at the library ten years ago when we were a fledgling organization. We would also like to acknowledge Randy for assisting us, on his own time, in solving various computer glitches over the years. Without the support and good will of these folks, we would not have been able to effectively catalog our collection, memorialize our research discoveries, communicate with our membership, and actively participate in the local on-line community. As we debut our own computer network, we won't forget all who helped provide a technological foundation for us to build on.

Thanks to Vera Trincherro-Torres's generous donation, reported in the *Electrolier's* spring issue, the transition from the city's network to our very own network and new hardware and software has been taking place over the summer. We are pleased to announce that Michael Wood of Computer Therapy on Adams Street will be taking care of our tech needs as our "IT assistance provider and e-mail host." Welcome, Michael, and thank you for your expertise—and your patience—in making this technological transition a reality.

## J. C. Sullenger & the Sullenger House

WRITTEN BY ROBYN ORSINI &  
RESEARCHED BY MARIAM HANSEN



John Crawford Sullenger (aka Sullinger) was born in North Carolina in 1833, one of 14 children. When he was 10, the family moved to Missouri. In 1850, one of J.C.'s brothers crossed the plains and was hired as the foreman of George C. Yount's ranch. A year later, at age 18, J. C.

headed for the gold mines, splitting his time between Placer and Napa counties. He spent a lifetime—and made his fortune—staking out mines and prospecting for gold, silver, and quicksilver.

Sullenger was married twice. His first wife, Mary Donahue, bore him two sons and two daughters. His second wife, Mary McCarthy, bore him two sons and four daughters. From here the family record fades.

The *Star* (1912) reported that in 1865 Sullenger had bought 150 acres “extending from the county road to the center of Napa Creek.” The property was in the vicinity of his Bella Union quicksilver mine. The article continues: “The land . . . is largely under meadow and grain, but there is also a family orchard in good bearing condition, and 50 vines furnish delicious grapes for the table. Three head of horses are kept on the farm for work purposes.”

### Sullenger House

8164 St. Helena Highway, Oakville

Records indicate that the Sullenger residence was built in 1884, but given his local mining interests and growing family, it is likely that another house on the parcel preceded the one we see today. During its life as a working farm, the property contained the residence and two barns, most likely used to store hay and grain and to house the horses and other farm animals.



*The original Sullenger residence. Courtesy of the Jack and Marcey Smith Collection.*

The Sullenger house, with its square, symmetrical shape and covered porches, is typical of the “folk or national” Victorian style. After Nickel & Nickel bought the remaining 42 acres in 1998, it renovated the abandoned farmhouse to a new level of 19th-century sumptuousness, now used as the tasting room. Many of the exterior touches are original to the house.

## Theron Ink, continued from page 1

Moving to Marin County in 1861, Ink soon acquired a 2,650-acre ranch, raising cattle and running a dairy. By 1870, he was living in Petaluma with Harriet, a son (J. G.), and a daughter (May). The Ink family moved to the northern end of Pope Valley in 1873, where they owned over 5,000 acres; Ink Grade Road went to the property, where he raised cattle, horses, sheep, and goats.

Ink was a busy man: along with other North Bay ventures, he owned a livery stable and saddle and leather shop in St. Helena. From 1874, for 10 years, he served as county supervisor of Pope Valley and was instrumental in building the Butts Canyon Road to Lake County.

In 1878 he bought 133 acres abutting the county road at Whitehall Lane, naming it Helios Ranch. He hired Chinese workers to convert his fields from wheat to grapes and to build rock walls. The workers put in 10 miles of drain tile, making cultivation possible in swampy areas. By 1881, Ink had 90 acres planted in grapes at the ranch; by 1886, he was making wine in a winery constructed for a 150,000-gallon capacity. A cellar under the house, 7 feet high with cemented walls and floors, was used for storing about 10,000 gallons of wine.

### The Ink House

1575 South St. Helena Highway, St. Helena

Construction of the Ink residence began in 1884 and was completed in 1885. In the Italianate style, the footprint measures 52 by 36 feet. A veranda wraps around the first floor; the second floor is topped by a glass observatory, from which Ink could view his land, bringing the height of the structure to 50 feet.

The rooms were large, plastered, and well lit. The house was even plumbed for hot and cold running water. Like today, the estate sat on 4 acres of grand lawns, gardens, a Petite Syrah vineyard, and olive orchards. The property originally had a barn, carriage house, and cistern, which still exist today and may be viewed on the Barn Tour (see page 4).

Since 1979, the Ink House has operated as a popular bed and breakfast. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the current owners, the Outcalts, have lovingly maintained many of the house's original amenities, including stained-glass windows, a fireplace, and crystal chandeliers.



## upcoming programs

### THE BARN TOUR Oakville-Rutherford

Sunday, August 28th,  
9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.



This month, in lieu of our monthly program, SHHS is supporting Preservation Napa Valley's annual Barn Tour. This tour is so full of interesting buildings and local lore that we are sure the \$35 admission fee will be worth it. This is PNV's major way to raise funds to continue creating projects that help preserve our past. The tour is officially sold out; call 707-258-9286 right away to get on the waiting list.

Mariam Hansen and Susanne Salvestrin will be docents at the Ink House barn. Drop by SHHS's info table at the Ink House.

### SPIRITS OF ST. HELENA Cemetery Discovery Walk

October 1st, 1:00 pm

This year's tour will educate guests on different sections of the cemetery. An expert will be posted at each unique section to tell the story of the group buried there.

### HARVEST FESTIVAL Wine Tasting & Auction

Saturday, October 22nd,

Noon–4:00 p.m.

Oak Street Parking Lot

We hope to have more wines to taste and auction this year. Call Skip Lane to donate at 967-6210.

Rare local wines not found elsewhere will be on hand. At the booth, see a rare video from the 1934 Vintage Festival Parade. View the new tents purchased with last year's proceeds. Organized by and benefiting SHHS and the Boys & Girls Club of St. Helena.



## ABOUT US



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## From Canton to St. Helena

On June 14th, 2011, SHHS hosted an event called From Canton to St. Helena. It was held on a balmy evening on the lawn of the Salvestrin estate, Sunny Acres. Over 100 people came to learn about St. Helena's Chinese heritage. Photographs courtesy of Bruce Nelson and Joe Orsini.



*Dr. Philip P. Choy, from the San Francisco Chinese Historical Society, regaled the audience with stories of immigration, prejudice, work gangs, and hardship.*



*SHHS historian Mariam Hansen had a lot to say about the local Chinese presence. Her notes are available by calling the office and see the spring *Electrolier*.*



*Between speakers, Helen Nelson presented Jeff Parady with a plaque in gratitude for hosting SHHS at his mining museum in Pope Valley.*

*Images of the Past: St. Helena* may be purchased for \$24, including tax. Contact the office to order your copy.