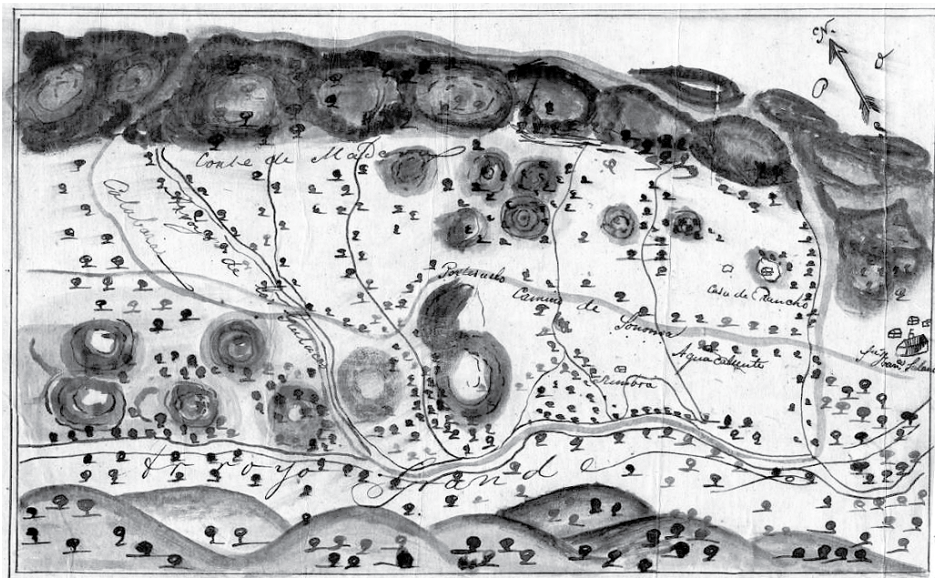




Tales of Glen Ellen

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Original diseño (map) for the Agua Caliente land grant, made to Lázaro Piña in 1840.

UNCOVERING OUR LOCAL LEGACY

Here in California we are fortunate that our history is so colorful, so vigorous—and so recent. And here in the Valley of the Moon we are especially fortunate that so much of it is so close by. Yet the irony is that significant historic artifacts and documents are tucked away, overlooked and largely unrecognized, in many of the attics and closets of the older homes of the valley.

In the spirit of our vision, “to research, disseminate, preserve and celebrate the history of Glen Ellen”, we have been busy identifying and evaluating some of those tucked-away items. Currently we are itemizing the collection that has accumulated over the past century and a half on the Serres Ranch, which may be traced back to the Watriss family, and before that to Joseph Hooker of Civil War fame. Hooker had purchased it in 1852 from General Vallejo, when the vast Agua Caliente Rancho originally granted Lázaro Piña in 1840 was first partitioned.

That the entire collection is still intact is due largely to the efforts of John Pierre Serres, who had begun managing the ranch for the Watriss family in 1913 and inherited it upon the death of Frank Watriss in 1925. An active member of the Native Sons of the Golden West, and a founder of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society, Serres was sensitive to the historical significance of the ranch.

The Roberts/Serres Collection is kept in the original Watriss home, a great two-storey ranch house built of redwood in the 1850s in which the original furnishings may still be found. Shirley Roberts, granddaughter of John Serres, has made us feel welcome and comfortable in the grand old living room, where it is not difficult to feel transported into a vigorous yet genteel past during the afternoons we’ve spent studying the collection.

Each item in the collection is being carefully cataloged and digitally recorded, and where necessary it is being translated into English. Three 19th Century documents now undergoing translation include a proclamation regarding tariffs to be imposed by the 1842-43 Micheltorena administration of Alta California, an 1844 letter from General Vallejo to Sonoma Alcalde Jacob Leese, and an 1845 directive from Yerba Buena Sub-Prefect Francisco Guerrero (under the orders of Governor Pio Pico) on the raising of a militia to meet the developing threat of foreign invasion—namely, the Americans.

Other documents of historic significance that have been identified so far include records that clarify

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The Colorful World of Alta California

Our next general meeting is planned for two o’clock Saturday afternoon, October 23rd, in Mayflower Hall at the Community Church of Glen Ellen. It will feature a discussion of that brief period when Alta California was under the rule of a newly independent Mexico, and Sonoma Valley was just awakening.

Although Sonoma’s past is historically rich and significant, our history goes back less than two hundred years to 1823, when Father Altimira first entered the valley in search of a place to establish a mission. The Mexican government was at that point exhausted by its ten-year war with Spain, and was suffering from frequent rebellions as well as bitter internal struggles. For this reason Mexican control of the most distant part of Alta California was tenuous at best.

As a result, an independent and idiosyncratic society developed quickly, and dramatically. The region grew itself up by values and rules that evolved spontaneously as adventurous foreigners arrived, married the *hijas del pais* (daughters of the country), and helped to shape a dynamic new society out of contrasting traditions and heritages.

Just 23 years after Altimira’s arrival, the Bear Flag Revolt brought this seminal, teeming world of the Californios to an abrupt end; but because all this happened so recently the stories of what had taken place here have not yet fully dimmed.

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A Report From Our Board—

Bob Glotzbach’s very popular book *Childhood Memories of Glen Ellen*, originally published in 1992, is finally being reprinted. It contains over 100 pages of photographs and stories of Glen Ellen during the first half of the 20th Century, as told by 34 people. It’s a must-read for those of you who want to learn the fascinating details of how we became who it is we are.

We are pleased to welcome Angela Morgan back to the board of directors of the Glen Ellen Historical Society. Angela was among our founding members, and brings with her a seasoned appreciation of our region.

While voting members of the board must have been members of the organization for at least one year, anyone may attend our meetings as a guest to take part in the planning of our activities. The next board meeting is planned for October 16th; for further information you may phone Jim Shere at 935-3663, or email jshere@sonic.net.

At this writing there are 52 memberships. We encourage people to join by sending \$25 to the Glen Ellen Historical Society at PO Box 35, Glen Ellen CA 95442. Annual dues for seniors and students is \$15, and a lifetime membership is \$250. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and all donations are tax-deductible, so donations in any amount are welcomed.

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An Historic Consortium is Established

Throughout the Summer we have been taking part in a fascinating conversation with representatives from four other organizations also interested in the legacy of Sonoma Valley. A mutually collaborative coalition is evolving out of these meetings with members of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society, the Sonoma League for Historic Preservation, the Sonoma Land Trust, and the Sonoma Ecology Center.

Our valley is an extremely significant historic region, and each of these organizations has a particular interest and approach to the preservation and interpretation of that history. The conversation has focused upon identifying the resources of each group, the challenges facing them, and how to apply for the grant money needed to address them.

The greatest interest lies in organizing the archive collections that are located in various places, and making them available for research and display in a consistent and coherent way. Private collections are also coming to our attention (as the accompanying article on the Roberts/Serres Collection demonstrates) that also need organization. These sensitive documents and artifacts need to be preserved and curated carefully. Developing technologies—such as the internet—can make their information available for public use, even as they remain privately held.

A mission statement has been developed for the coalition, which reads: “The mission of this coalition is to preserve the natural and cultural legacy of Sonoma Valley by documenting its architecture, artifacts and records while making them available for education, research and public access. We encourage communication and collaboration among our member organizations, in an appreciation of the character and contributions of each and the purpose and values held in common by all.”

The Colorful World of Alta California

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There will be a panel discussion of the social and political aspects of the time, including the desecularization of the once powerful missions, and the gradual transformation of the great cattle ranches into the homesteaded farms of pioneer Americans.

Speakers will include Dan Markwyn, history professor emeritus from Sonoma State University, Juan Pedro Gaffney Rivera, director of Coro Hispano de San Francisco, and Jim Danaher, manager of the Sonoma State Historic Park. Admission is free, though donations and membership in our organization are encouraged.

A ROMANCE AT GLEN OAKS RANCH

Set in the Valley of the Moon during the 1850s, this romantic novel captures the richness and drama of the ranch life of yesteryear. The author’s parents, Charles and Ellen Stuart (for whom Glen Ellen was named) pioneered the region, and it is apparent that he drew heavily upon his childhood at Glen Oaks Ranch in writing the book. After publication in 1906 it has long since been out of print, but now it’s once again available for downloading from Google Books.

Although many landmarks will be recognizable to the local reader, such as the names of creeks and nearby villages, the name of Rancho Agua Caliente was amusingly enough changed to Rancho Aguas Frias— from hot water to cold— and the title of the book is taken from the name of General Vallejo’s vast Petaluma estate.

Each chapter is filled with stirring and dramatic episodes of dangerous adventure, alternating with long philosophical conversations about law and love in a raw new land. It’s a story of the emerging class struggle that develops between landowners and homesteading squatters, characterized by the great stone Casa Grande of the sprawling ranch, and the neat farmhouse of the little homestead with its gardens.

The pioneer Americans, whose European sensitivities are still evident, and the later arrivals from the midwest who must search for a corner to settle, are pitted against one another in an inevitably narrowing landscape where there is increasing competition for survival. Remnants of people who have already become marginalized in this struggle are present: Mexican servants are all that remain of the Californio world, while Native California Indians labor silently in the fields of the Americans.

Fully developed characters are archetypal of the time and place: the kind and heroic ranch owner, the scrappy girl that gets in trouble, the plainspoken sheriff, the anxious mother, the worried country doctor, the sophisticated woman from San Francisco, the faithful family servant, the idealistic young man dreaming of a better life— they are all here.

Life-threatening injuries and illnesses occur, and storms and fires scathe the land while vigorous men vie for the affections of a woman. Grizzlies attack, and great bulls fight one another to the death for turf, and then— eventually— love proves to conquer all. The book is definitely worth the read.

Our Local Legacy

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land ownership, such as a notarized document handwritten and signed by General Hooker and countersigned by George Watriss that specifies the boundaries of the land sold to Watriss in 1855.

While the information provided by these documents is of great help in clarifying historic events, their presence as artifacts of another time also carry a significant emotional impact, evoking a personal experience that brings it all to life. When we see how Vallejo had periodically dipped his pen in ink to continue writing, or how Watriss had signed a document in the wrong place, and crossed out his signature before writing it elsewhere, we don’t think about the event, we feel it— and we feel its meaning more deeply.

And as we are emotionally moved by these personal encounters with the past, we are prepared for a more conscious, meaningful future. Making it possible for other people to have this experience is the purpose of protecting our legacy. This will help make certain that what has happened in the past can inform and inspire what will take place in the future.

A REPORT FROM OUR BOARD—

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While we have yet to develop a formal website, we have established a fairly active Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/GlenEllenHistoricalSociety>, where questions may be answered and announcements can be made. It currently lists 190 “friends”, and there’s always room for more of you.

About seventy people heard Greg Sarris speak at our general meeting in June on the world of the Native California Indians, then and now. Audience participation was lively, and feedback was very positive. A DVD of that talk is planned for release soon, and future programs will also be recorded.

A copy of the 1967 issue of *Cavalier Magazine* has been donated to our own collection, containing the controversial article on the Rustic Inn by Hunter S. Thompson described in the last issue of our newsletter. It surprised many of our readers that Gonzo journalism can be traced to Thompson’s tortured sojourn right here in Glen Ellen.

We are very grateful to the Sonoma County Historical Society for underwriting our research of the Roberts/Serres Collection, and the translation of some of the 19th Century documents found there. Inventory and evaluation of the collection is an ongoing project of GEHS, a service that we can now extend to other private collectors in the valley.