



Tales of Glen Ellen

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Historical Notes—

Visitors Help Us to Remember Our Past

WE'VE HAD A FEW PEOPLE from other places contact us about their roots in the Valley of the Moon. It's been a mutual pleasure. They have learned more about their family, and we've learned more about our legacy.

Cathy Ellis of San Francisco has written to us about her great-great grandfather Timothy Sullivan, who was a blacksmith in Glen Ellen during the 1880's. He died tragically during a terrible storm on January 24th, 1890, when he volunteered to set lanterns out to warn people away from the old wooden bridge spanning Sonoma Creek. The bridge collapsed beneath him, and he was swept away by the flood. The iron bridge that was built to replace it later that same year was itself replaced in 1939 by the bridge that we have now.

Loren McClurg plans to visit Glen Ellen soon, in time to appear at our presentation on June 30th. His great grandfather Albert Ebenezer Gage had a meat market here, and helped establish the Community Church in 1895. He built the family home in 1890; today it is known as the Gage House, a very fine hotel that is regularly recommended by such travel guides as Michelin and Condé Nast.

Catherine Cox came here from New Hampshire this past March to share photographs and discuss her roots in the Valley of the Moon. She is the great-great-granddaughter of James Shaw, who had married William Hood's niece, Mary Ann Hood. James Shaw's sister, Eliza Ann Shaw, married William Hood; she has been featured as one of the three pioneer women winemakers of the valley, along with Mary Ellen Stuart and Kate Warfield. James and Mary Ann Shaw lived at Wildwood, between Beltane Ranch and the village now known as Kenwood. Their daughter Marion married John Sneyd-Kynnersley, who was among the "British Colony" that spent time in the area.

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Come to see

**OUR GREAT
BIG PICTURE
SHOW**

SATURDAY, JUNE 30TH, AT 2:00 PM
in Mayflower Hall at the Community Church
5311 O'Donnell Lane in Glen Ellen.
Admission is free— *but come early.*



The Chauvet Hotel and Poppe Building in downtown Glen Ellen. Help us decide what year it is!

EARLY AGRICULTURE ON SONOMA MOUNTAIN

WHEN JOSE ALTIMIRA TRAVELED through Sonoma Valley in 1823, looking for a place to found a mission, he described Sonoma Mountain as "well-covered with trees fit for building a pueblo." There were plenty of flat places on the valley floor to grow crops; the idea of farming the mountain probably never crossed his mind. Sixteen years later, General Vallejo established one of the first water-powered sawmills in California on what is now Asbury Creek in Glen Ellen, and the cutting of redwoods and Douglas fir began.

It was common on the frontier for settlers to be close on the heels of the loggers, moving onto the freshly-cleared land. While the big trees were being harvested, Charity and Coleman Asbury and their two-year-old daughter

Virginia began making their way west from Missouri by wagon.

Arriving in Sonoma, they found the best land on the valley floor already claimed. Looking at their options, they must have begun considering whether they could make a go of it on more marginal land. In the fall of 1850 the Asburys purchased 640 acres on the side of Sonoma Mountain from General Vallejo for \$3500. The property encompassed what became the upper part of the original Developmental Center property, running all the way to the top of the ridge.

By 1852, their family had grown to three children and extended family members had come west to join them. Coleman's younger brother Elisha was "working in Redwood" nearby. Two of Charity's brothers were also living and farming on the mountain, and so were her parents. Coleman and Charity's farm had four milk cows, three head of cattle, twenty chickens, and ten oxen. Oxen were the heavy machinery of the day; their brute force used for plowing fields, pulling wagons, and hauling sections of big redwoods to the mill. They likely used them to plow the five acres they had under cultivation, where they grew corn, wheat, potatoes and onions. Their neighbors were also growing hay and raising hogs.

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Jim Berkland's View

EVERY SO OFTEN I am asked about my favorite view in Sonoma Valley. As an 82 year old resident of Glen Ellen, my opinion has varied from time to time since my first arrival as a six-year-old youngster fresh from the Los Angeles suburb of Glendale, California. My thoughts on the subject congealed upon returning in 1997, after an absence of 30 years, to reside permanently on the family property in the so-called "Heart of the Valley of the Moon."

You might say that I had a prolonged "visit" elsewhere to study geology, teach, work in the field, and to help my wife, Jan, raise our family elsewhere in California. During my brief visits back to the Valley, I usually returned from the south, where I would see before me the convergence of Sonoma Mountain and the Mayacamas, reaching out like spreading arms, welcoming home another prodigal.

However, during the 15 years since my return, I have realized that I am fulfilling an interesting synchronicity of living here for 30 years, being away for 30 years, and am now half-way to my goal of permanently residing here for another thirty (or more?) With this

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Visitors Help Us to Remember Our Past

Speaking of Beltane Ranch, we are now in contact with Susheel Bibbs, an Emmy-award winning writer and producer. Her research on the founder of Beltane Ranch, Mary Ellen Pleasant (known derisively as “Mammy” Pleasant), provides great insight into the political and social legacy of our valley. Pleasant was a controversial Abolitionist and Civil Rights activist of the 19th Century. Bibbs’ PBS documentary on Pleasant’s life won six awards at Cannes. We hope to bring her to Glen Ellen to screen the film and discuss this often overlooked yet extremely significant woman.

We enjoy these visits, and the conversations that they inspire.

Jim Berkland’s View

experience I must comment on the view that so makes my heart leap and my eyes moisten that I cannot fully express what it means to me.

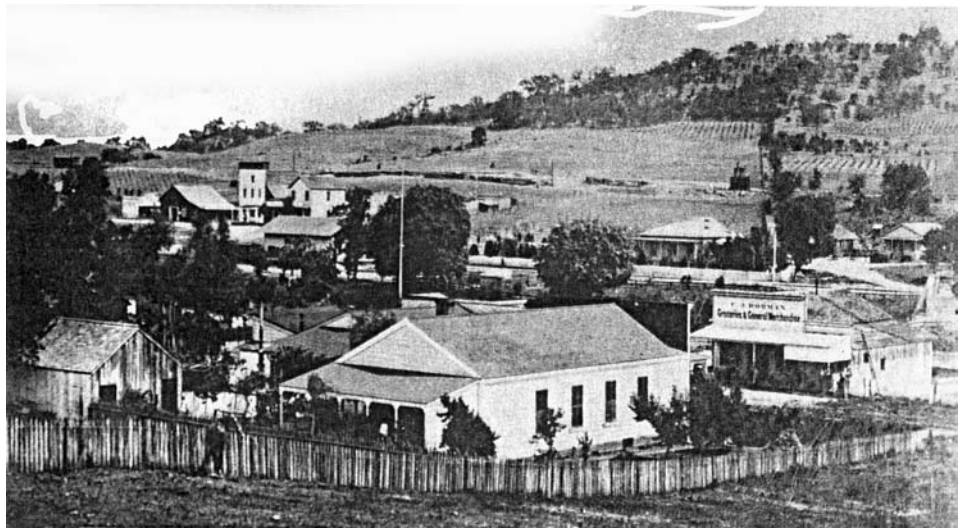
Since 1937 I have made the round-trip from Glen Ellen to Santa Rosa literally thousands of times. Given the option I much prefer avoiding Highway 12 in order to take the alternative route along Warm Springs Road and Bennett Valley Road. It is on each of my return trips that my favorite view develops.

I urge my readers to note carefully the magnificent display on their own return through Bennett Valley as they wind past the drainage divide between Matanzas Creek and Sonoma Creek. On heading eastward from the shoulder of Bennett Peak toward Enterprise Road, at first you see our Valley opening toward the south, with its spreading vineyards and the lushly forested Sonoma Mountain on the right, with its recently preserved “Beauty Ranch” of Jack London. Further to the south and east are the Mayacamas, dotted with farms and residences.

Do not rush your trip downhill, but appreciate the Cinemascope widening of the view to the north, with more vineyards and slopes culminating in the peaks of Hood Mountain and Sugarloaf. If you are driving, your views may be fleeting, but are most rewarding. Your lucky passengers can fully absorb this magnificent opportunity to justify what Jack London’s 100-year old book, “Valley of the Moon” was all about. (Be sure to review Chapter 27.)

My own extensive world travels have provided me with views beyond the Arctic Circle, past the Equator and way down-under, but none have warmed my heart like this one!

Become an active member of the **GLEN ELLEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY** today. Membership is \$25, or \$15 for seniors and students. Send your check to GEHS at PO Box 35, Glen Ellen CA 95442.



This photograph looking east at downtown Glen Ellen was taken in 1888. The original Poppe Building is in the foreground, and the vacant lot to the right is where the Chauvet Hotel will be built. The general store across the street is where the Glen Ellen Village Market is today.

EARLY AGRICULTURE ON SONOMA MOUNTAIN

Elsewhere on the mountain, logging continued until about 1856, when the sawmill was converted to a grist mill.

After 1852, the Asburys mysteriously disappear from the record. Were they visited by disease or some other catastrophe? Did they give up farming the mountain because it was just too hard? All that’s left is their name on the creek that drains their old homestead. By 1867, their property appears to have been abandoned, with no legal owner. Eventually, William McPherson Hill took over the land and ended up selling it to the state of California in 1890.

Wresting a living from the side of Sonoma Mountain was tough.

Farming probably provided a subsistence living in better years and something less in harder times. Milo Shepard described these early settlers as mostly Scotch-Irish, similar in heritage to the people who settled the southern Appalachians back East. They included the Cowans, whose homestead included Cowan Meadow (now in Jack London State Park) in the 1850s. The Cowans were tough people. Some locals still remember Hazen Cowan, who was Jack London’s foreman and was still around in the early 1970s. His brother Norman was a rodeo rider. During one competition, Norman broke his leg. Unwilling to accept defeat, he spent the night in an icehouse with his leg between two blocks of ice and went on to win the finals. But even the Cowans were ultimately unable to make a go of homesteading. Scrambling to feed themselves during the Depression of the 1880s, they hunted out the last deer and finally had to abandon their place on the mountain.

Jack London summed up the experiences of the early farmers: “Most of the ranchers were poor and hopeless; no one could make any money there, they told me. They had worked the land out and their only hope was to move on somewhere else.” These “farmers of the old school” had “lost their money, broken their hearts, lost their land.” London pieced together his Beauty Ranch from

a half-dozen bankrupt farms and set to work, “rebuilding worn-out hillside lands that were worked out and destroyed by our wasteful California pioneer farmers.”

Jack must have found inspiration in the knowledge that at least one pioneer family had managed to prosper. The Thompsons, his neighbors to the north, were farming land “Redwood” Thompson had homesteaded in the 1850s. London’s own property included a commercial vineyard planted by wine merchants Kohler and Frohling in that same decade. During his brief years on the mountain, Jack experimented with many crops, growing hay, grapes, and eucalyptus, raising pigs, horses and cattle. Recognizing that the volcanic soil was delicate and prone to erosion, he built terraces to keep it from washing away. Jack knew that finding the right practices and the right crops were essential to keeping his ranch going in the long run.

Since his death almost a century ago, London’s family has carried forward Jack’s vision, carefully working within the limits of the land. Likewise, some of “Redwood” Thompson’s descendants are still living on the family’s mountain homestead, and the land where Kohler and Frohling planted their vineyard is still in grapes. Some kinds of success can only be measured over the course of generations. Where others moved on in broken-hearted defeat, a few have managed to make the mountain a true home.

THE GLEN ELLEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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[This article by Arthur Dawson had originally appeared in The Sonoma Mountain Journal, and was published by the Sonoma Mountain Preservation.]