



Tales of Glen Ellen

The Glen Ellen Historical Society, Glen Ellen, California

Spring Issue 2013



Proprietor Frank Knapp is seen here surrounded by the grandly abundant decor that once inhabited the interior of Londonside Lodge. [Steven Lee Collection]

FROM LONDONSIDE LODGE TO HIPPIE HOLLOW

In this second installment, Gregg Montgomery continues remembering the colorful people and events that helped transform Glen Ellen during some amazing times.

IN THE LATE '60'S AND EARLY '70'S Glen Ellen had a far different feel from what you find today. Aside from Jack London Park, it certainly wasn't a tourist destination by any means. The character of the town was one of simplicity and easy living. Locals walked or rode their bikes into town, as auto traffic was light.

Small local businesses were the norm. At the corner of Arnold and Warm Springs, in what is now the Star restaurant, was Faith's health food store and juice bar. Further north on Arnold a fellow sold welded wrought iron products out of his home. Where the Fig Café is today a candle factory employed locals. Across the street at the corner of Carquinez Street there was a small mom and pop hardware store. A little further up was Gemini's appliance store. And of course there was Marshall's Garage, the Rustic Inn and Shone's Market. It was a community where everyone knew one another and the pace was definitely slow.

My first six months of living in the Hollow was one of transition. The creekside cabin I rented from Chef Cardini was one of the smallest in the neighborhood. It couldn't have been any larger than 200 square feet max, and it did sit literally on the edge of Sonoma Creek. The tiny bedroom, which I think was probably an outdoor deck that had been enclosed at some point, sat on pillars that were precariously set into the steep eroding embankment. It looked a little tenuous but I loved hearing the sound of the creek while falling asleep. It was rustic living, for sure, but compared to living in Sacramento, it was heaven.

The winter rains of 1970 brought a little different feel when

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Mayflower Hall DVDs now available

OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS we've had many good conversations at Mayflower Hall, next door to the community church. Each time local expert elders have shared their knowledge and wisdom with local residents eager to know more about their community.

These conversations were all videotaped, and are now becoming available on DVD so they may be viewed in the comfort of your home, and easily shared with friends and families across the country.

Six of these presentations are now available: "An Afternoon with Greg Sarris" about the Pomo and Miwok people, "The Californios of Sonoma Valley" about life here in the 1820s and '30s, "Who Knows Jack?" about Jack London, "Our Great Big Picture Show" sharing photographs and stories of Old Glen Ellen, "Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch" about Jack London's vision of sustainable farming, and "Mapping the Lay of the Land" about the early maps of Sonoma Valley—how they were drawn, and by whom.

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HEARING THE HISTORY OF OUR WINERIES

WHEN THE SPANISH PADRES first established their missions in Alta California, they brought mission grapes along for making sacramental wine. This was the only variety of grapes grown here until the 1830s, when Jean Louis Vignes brought Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc cuttings around the Horn from Bordeaux.

And with that began a tremendous expansion of the California wine industry, much of it credited to our local Hungarian Count Agoston Haraszthy de Mokcsa, who brought with him many of the 125 varieties of *Vitis vinifera* grapes found in California today.

At 2 pm Saturday afternoon, June 15th, the Glen Ellen Historical Society will present the eleventh in a series of historic conversations at Mayflower Hall on O'Donnell Lane—this one on the entire history of local winemaking, from the very beginning right down to today.

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THE RESTORATION OF JACK LONDON VILLAGE

AS THE RESTORATION of Jack London Village continues under new ownership, visitors are beginning to notice major changes. The footbridge has been completely rebuilt, and the decks along the creek have been thoroughly remodeled. Now the south parking lot is being regraded in preparation for paving and extensive landscaping.

Meanwhile, a grant from the Sonoma County Landmarks Commission is providing funds for a redesign of the existing photograph display in the hallway of the main building, and for the preservation and display of historic artifacts found at various locations around the Village.

The construction of the hallway display as a gallery will be under the direction of Don Ponte, local artist and craftsman. Framed panels will be fixed directly to the walls in such a way that the items in the display may be more easily and frequently changed. Narratives will be written and mounted to more thoroughly interpret the display.

Each of the artifacts found at various locations in the Village will be assessed to establish the best ways to preserve and display them. Local

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From Londonside Lodge to Hippie Hollow

the creek began to rise. One night in particular, heavy, continuous rains brought the creek so high that it literally was running under the bedroom. I kept an eye on the creek level for several hours, and decided to sleep on the couch when I witnessed large tree limbs and debris flying down the creek in the torrents. Needless to say, I never slept in that room when it rained. Chalk it up to country living ambiance, I guess. And hey, for \$35 a month you have to put up with a little inconvenience now and then. Of course the best part of living in the Hollow was the close proximity to work and Londonside.

At that time the old Londonside Lodge had become a restaurant and live music venue. Rita Booth, who I believe was from Sausalito, and Jerry Fortner had partnered up to run the old lodge. Rita was the driving force behind the new incarnation of Londonside, with Jerry acting as a manager of sorts.

Rita was the chef and was well known for her culinary skills. Having lived in Mexico for some time, she became a very accomplished chef in Mexican cuisine. It was actually much later that I eventually got to know Rita. Most of my dealings at Londonside were through Jerry.

The tavern was literally right out my front door, maybe 25 to 30 yards away, and there was always some activity going on somewhere, inside or out. When I wasn't working I'd go over, check things out, and occasionally offer to help with whatever I could.

After a couple of months I got to know Jerry fairly well. Occasionally he would allow me free admission on nights when live music was happening, in exchange for helping out once in awhile. It seemed that there were always hippies hanging around wanting to volunteer for any menial jobs to gain admission.

A conversation I had just recently with Tommy Thomsen revealed the same. "Yeah, I was a swamper there at Londonside, and even slept on the pool table at night," he said casually. I have a feeling that half of the patrons that frequented Londonside were freebees on music night.

It's hard to recall the bands and music I heard while living next door, as many of these groups were unknown to me. I do know that Hot Tuna played there in '69 shortly before I moved to the Hollow. I do remember seeing the Bronze Hog, a local North Bay band, and a group called Duck Soup from who-knows-where. Their name just sticks in my head for some reason. Tommy speaks of a band, The Golden Toad, as being a trio of "wild-haired hippies playing very ethereal tunes on bizarre instruments." I think he said they were from Marin County. I definitely missed that gig!

The scene at Londonside always seemed very casual and unassuming, just a fun place to hang out. I personally never witnessed any rowdy behavior or drunkenness, though I have heard otherwise from friends. Local artist and resident Timothy Dixon, who lived in the Hollow at the time, recalls tales of prankster activity at the tavern.

Apparently a loud-speaker was placed under the floor boards of the women's restroom which was wired to a microphone that was in the hands (and mercy) of the bartender. You can let your your imagination fly on that story.

My experiences at the tavern were very short lived, and I'm certain that the best years preceded me, though I must say the brief time I did spend at Londonside was a great experience and a wonderful example of what communal spirit and camaraderie can accomplish. The old resort had been given new life— and it was good!

Several months after moving to Glen Ellen, I began to feel that change was in the air. Working full time, I was somewhat unaware of what was going on right next door. Live music became less and less frequent. Rita closed the restaurant, and at some point moved downtown to live above Shone's Market. It all happened very quickly as I recall. I have no idea what prompted this shift.

Jerry seemed determined to keep the doors open. I remember him spending many hours working on the building and talking about future plans. He was a dreamer by nature, in my opinion. A few people would stop by now and then but Londonside would never recover. By mid '71 the doors were closed— never to open again.

COME TO OUR NEXT GATHERING AT MAYFLOWER HALL—

*hear our local elder experts
tell the story of how wine first
came to the Valley of the Moon—
& WHAT STARTED HAPPENING THEN.*

SATURDAY, JUNE 15TH, AT 2:00 PM
in Mayflower Hall at the Community Church
5311 O'Donnell Lane in Glen Ellen.

first come, first seated

HEARING THE HISTORY OF OUR WINERIES

Our panel of speakers include four men who have made this story their life work— Val Haraszthy, Michael Topolos, George MacLeod, and Squire Fridell. They'll be talking about how winemaking has shaped the character of the Valley of the Moon in the public mind, and the impact that it's made upon private lives behind the scenes.

Winemakers from the 19th Century pioneers to today's young enologists will be talked about, as well as all the various advances in agronomy, enology, technology, and marketing that have taken place over the past 150 years.

As our Mayflower talks in the past indicate, this event promises to be well-attended. The afternoon is free of charge, so we recommend that you arrive early enough to be able to be in the room, much less secure a seat.

THE RESTORATION OF JACK LONDON VILLAGE

experts will sort and assign priorities, addressing the most urgent needs first. They include Steve Husing, Roger Dean, Angela Nardo-Morgan, Charles Mikulik, and Arthur Dawson.

Brass plaques bearing brief interpretations will be posted at various locations to describe the items on display. QR codes on each plaque will be scanned by smart phones to bring up audio-visual interpretations in more detail. Future visitors to the Village will then certainly appreciate what awaits them there more deeply.

Mayflower Hall DVDs now available

To get your copy, come to our website marketplace at www.glenellenhistoricalsociety.org, or visit our table at the Farmers Market in Jack London Village, just south of Glen Ellen on Arnold Drive, any Sunday between 10 and 2. Or, just come on out see us there anyway, just to say hi.

THE GLEN ELLEN
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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This barn was probably built by Joshua Chauvet in 1875, when he began producing wine. The building behind it is the stone wine cellar he built in 1881. The stone cellar collapsed in 1983, but the old barn still stands today, behind the main building at Jack London Village. [GEHS archives]