

Tales of Glen Ellen

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From the Bear Flag Republic to California Statehood

THE BEAR FLAG REVOLT, the Gold Rush, and then California statehood— three enormous events that took place within five short years, and turned the entire world on its ear. Come to Glen Ellen January 29th, and learn about what happened back then, as the Glen Ellen Historical Society continues exploring the impact of our past upon our lives today.

Our conversation began last Summer with a discussion of the original people— the Miwok, Pomo and Wappo— who had lived here peacefully for thousands of years. Then Spain rode into our valley from the south, in an attempt to protect its Alta California from the southward advance of Russia in its pursuit of fur-bearing otters.

And so last Fall the discussion turned to the Californios, who ruled Sonoma Valley from 1823 to 1846. These were the two short decades that brought a resounding change to the region, when a European culture supplanted the indigenous one. Rolling hills and valleys were transformed into sprawling ranchos, and herds of cattle quickly replaced the natural wildlife. And yet, severe and quick as this transition seemed, it only set the stage for the much more intense change brought about by the advent of the Americans.

On the afternoon of Saturday, January 29th, the conversation will continue with a panel discussion about the abrupt and tumultuous transition from Mexican rule to American statehood, which took place in less than five years— from 1846 to 1850.

The focus will be on three specific dates: June 14th, 1846, when the Bear Flag Revolt interrupted Vallejo's administration of Alta California, and then the "discovery" of gold by James Marshall at Sutter's mill on January 24th in 1848. Then, finally came the day when "Intelligence of the admission of California reached San Francisco" on October 18th, 1850. That was when the steamer *Oregon* entered San Francisco

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from the Roberts/Serres Collection

The Legacy Project— EMERGING ARTIFACTS OF YESTERYEAR

OUR SONOMA VALLEY holds an extraordinary place in California history— much of which took place right here, where several contrasting cultures converged and intermixed throughout the 19th Century. It was here that Spain had reached farthest north from Mexico, to protect Alta California from the southward advance of Russia; and it was here that the Bear Flag Revolt declared the Republic of California to be a sovereign nation, independent of Mexico, five years before it became the 31st member of the United States of America.

AN EATING CONTEST IN OLD YERBA BUENA

ANDREW HOEPPNER was so much more than the legendry musician that received a large part of the original Agua Caliente land grant in exchange for piano lessons for General Vallejo's family. He was already a successful language and music teacher in Yerba Buena, long before it became known as San Francisco. But few then knew of his great appetite— at first.

There is an extraordinary story told of a gastronomic duel that was arranged between short and round Jean Jacques Vioget, proprietor of Yerba Buena's foremost house of public entertainment (or "saloon") and the tall and slender Hoepfner. Here is an eyewitness account by William Heath Davis, from his book *Sixty Years in California*, which appeared in 1889.

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There are several privately held collections of memorabilia and ephemera in our immediate area that date from those times, such as the extensive Roberts/Serres Collection that we have been examining and cataloging over the past several months. For the most part, these collections remain largely undocumented, and therefore unprotected from further deterioration and eventual loss.

In response to this situation we have now established the Legacy Project, which is focused upon the conservation of locally emerging artifacts that have been brought to our attention for identification. Among them are two very fine examples of 19th Century firearms that had been found in Sonoma Valley.

If there was any personal appliance as ubiquitous back then as the cell phone has become today, it was certainly the gun. It's constant presence as an equalizer was the bottom line of most gentlemen's agreements, in what was then a generally lawless region.

One is a revolver at first thought to have belonged to Joaquin Murietta, the outlaw that inspired the legend of Zorro. The pistol was found in the late 1980s by a local father and son while exploring the hills above our valley with a metal detector. It's a .38 caliber cap and ball "Colt 1851 Navy" pistol, which was first issued to Union officers during the military buildup towards the Civil War, and was kept afterwards as a popular and useful souvenir. It is now believed to have belonged to a Mr. Munson— of whom little is as yet known. The first letters

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A Report From Our Board—

ALTHOUGH WE FOUND OURSELVES pretty busy this past year, this next year promises even more excitement. There are now 68 members, and 208 "friends" visit our FaceBook page frequently at www.facebook.com/GlenEllenHistoricalSociety to learn the latest news about the "good old days" in Glen Ellen. And there's a good deal going on these days as well.

Our quarterly public presentations at Mayflower Hall have hit their stride. After the "Bear Flag to Statehood" panel discussion on the 29th of this month (described in an accompanying article), a town hall style open mike and photo sharing event is being planned for April 30th. Locals will be encouraged to bring their family albums in for scanning and recording onto CDs, free of charge, so that they can be duplicated and shared with others easily. The open mike part is to be an oral interview project, along the lines of Bob Glotzbach's *Childhood Memories of Glen Ellen*, where recollections of life in the valley will be told and recorded for posterity.

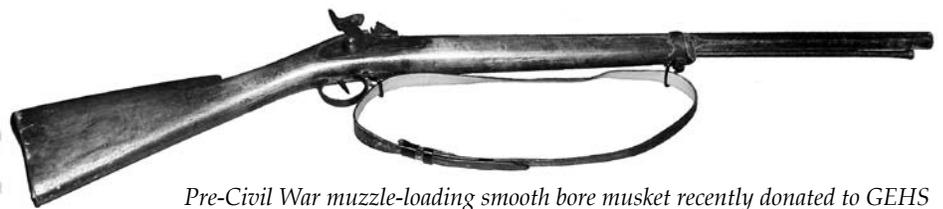
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AN EATING CONTEST

"The latter [Vioget] was known on the coast as a great eater, and prided himself on that reputation. Hoepner and several others being in the saloon one day enjoying themselves, the question of gormandizing was brought before the company, and he challenged Vioget to a contest to determine who was the biggest eater in the department. Hoepner not being known or suspected in connection with gastronomic feats, the challenge was instantly accepted and a day was fixed for the contest. Invitations were sent out to the merchants to attend. I was invited, as were also Spear and others.

"When the trial commenced, pancakes were brought on, plate after plate, and speedily devoured. Hoepner was one plate ahead. The next course was beefsteaks, all of which disappeared as rapidly as had the other; Hoepner led a little on the steaks. Next was *gisado*, a meat stew in the Spanish style—a delicious dish, several plates of which were consumed. Next came *asado*, or beef broiled on the spit, many plates; Hoepner a little ahead. After this, beans, Spanish style, large quantities of which were disposed of; succeeded by *tamales*, corn prepared as before described, each of the contestants eating at least a dozen. An immense pudding then appeared, followed by pies of various kinds, which were largely consumed.

"All the food had been prepared in the nicest manner, and made inviting, by skilled cooks—old Jack Fuller and assistant. The windup was black coffee, but during the meal no drink was taken. Vioget gave out on the pies. Hoepner, still eating, was declared the winner. All were astonished at the quantity of viands that went down the throats of those two men. After concluding their repast they got up and moved round, smoked, drank a little wine, played billiards, and appeared to suffer no inconvenience from the meal each had consumed."

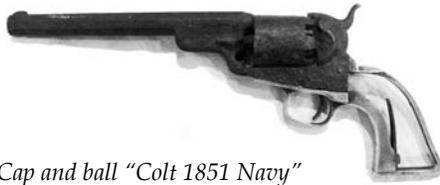


Pre-Civil War muzzle-loading smooth bore musket recently donated to GEHS

EMERGING ARTIFACTS OF YESTERYEAR

of his name are faintly scratched into the butt of the pistol, which became easily misread as Murietta.

The other gun discovered is a muzzle-loading musket that was found back in 1969 by Charles Beardsley, in what is now known as Jack London Village. Beardsley—who was the first to recognize that enclave's potential as a commercial and cultural center—had just purchased the buildings, which had fallen into disuse since the death of its owner Charles Pagani in 1954.



Cap and ball "Colt 1851 Navy" pistol found in the hills above Sonoma Valley.

The musket was discovered in the old mill there, and kept in the family until just this past month when it was donated to us by his grandson, Kevin Ives. It appears to be a pre-civil war smooth bore firearm, perhaps one of those converted from a flintlock to the new percussion system known as the Pattern 1839 Musket; if this is true, it is a truly significant weapon.

Another, much older artifact brought to our attention is a *metate*, or acorn-grinding mortar, that was recently dug up with its *manana* or pestle by a young man while he was building berms for jumping his bicycle in a field near Sonoma Creek. Probably Miwok in origin, and therefore certainly more than a hundred years old, it is typical of the native California Indian artifacts that have surfaced in our valley from time to time.

Family photographs and scrapbooks of ephemera are being brought to us for evaluation as well, which are contributing important information to the local narrative. While they provide a fascinating window into another time long ago, they also demonstrate how little we have really changed over the ensuing years.

The Glen Ellen Historic Society is now at work on writing a grant proposal for funding continued work on the Roberts/Serres Collection as the pilot phase of the Legacy Project. We hope in time to establish a museum where artifacts such as these may be preserved and displayed, research may be conducted, and other items— as yet unknown— may be brought to be shared with the community.

From Bear Flag Republic to California Statehood

Bay with a banner strapped to her rigging proclaiming "California Is Now A State!" to cheering crowds.

The three speakers on the panel will be Sonoma City Historian George McKale, Sonoma Valley historian Dr. Peter Meyerhof, and local historian and actor George Webber. The presentation will be at 2 pm in Mayflower Hall, next door to the Community Church at 5311 O'Donnell Lane in Glen Ellen. As always, the program is free to the public, but seating is extremely limited, so come early— it promises to be a lively conversation, as usual.

"THE SIMPLE LIFE" SUITS JACK LONDON Author Is Camping on His Farm Near Glen Ellen.

Special Dispatch to The Call.

SANTA ROSA. June 27. —Hatless, coatless and with shirt-collar open displaying a broad sunburnt chest, Jack London, the writer, rode into Santa Rosa to-day. The object of his coming was ordinary enough—to look up the titles of the property he recently purchased near Glen Ellen in this county. He was accompanied by his reported fiancee, Miss Kettredge of Glen Ellen, the daughter of a former manager of the Overland Monthly. The young lady, who is a sprightly little demiblonde, was dressed as oute as London himself, wearing a khaki suit with leggings. She was hatless. London is so tanned that his entire appearance is changed. His hair, that was once dark, is now almost yellow.

Speaking of his purchase near the pretty little village of Glen Ellen he said he was just camping on the farm now. "Some time," he said, "I will build a shack to live in." He is writing short stories for Eastern magazines.

This brief article about Jack London appeared in the SAN FRANCISCO CALL June 28th, 1905.

A Report From Our Board—

Speaking of Bob's book, it's finally been reprinted and is once again available at the same old price of \$15. You can get your copy of this 103 page classic collection of village stories by mailing a check to GEHS at PO Box 35, Glen Ellen CA 95442. You might send along your annual membership dues at the same time; it's \$25 for general membership, \$15 for students and seniors, \$100 for supporting sponsors, and \$250 for a lifetime membership.

We've continued reviewing and cataloging the Roberts/Serres Collection, which has now become the pilot phase of a program called The Legacy Project. While writing a grant proposal to fund this project, we have clarified the scope and parameters of our work to discover and preserve emerging historical artifacts. More about The Legacy Project appears elsewhere in this issue of our newsletter.

Members of the board have continued to meet with other local historic organizations— in particular the Sonoma Heritage Collaborative, a coalition that includes the Sonoma Land Trust, the Sonoma Valley Historical Society, the League for Historic Preservation, and the Sonoma Ecology Center.

These meetings have helped us to recognize— and appreciate— how many people are committed in so many different ways to secure, celebrate and enjoy the very soul of our region— the way it's told in our rich historical legacy.