



Tales of Glen Ellen

The Glen Ellen Historical Society, Glen Ellen, California

Fall Issue 2012



A contemporary postcard shows Jack London in a typical pose, at the reins of a team of horses, with Charmian at his side and their faithful dog nearby.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH...

A very special conversation will be presented at Mayflower Hall Saturday, October 20th, at 2 pm. The Glen Ellen Historical Society has joined with the Valley of the Moon Natural History Association and special guests from the Institute for Historical Study in Berkeley to explore Jack London's vision of sustainable farming at his Beauty Ranch, and to discuss how the ranch is preserved at Jack London State Historic Park today.

Jack London was especially known for his stirring, adventurous writings about our dynamic relationship with nature. The forces of nature were often characterized in anthropomorphic ways that made his readers identify with and feel the presence of a landscape drenched with vitality and intention. He believed this natural world cannot be taken for granted, and that it requires our full attention and responsible interaction.

Although he was entranced by the beauty of the Valley of the Moon, he also recognized the ways in which previous farming methods had greatly damaged the environment.

After purchasing several bankrupt farms on Sonoma Mountain to assemble his Beauty Ranch, he explored the modern methods of a conscious agronomy and animal husbandry.

"I am rebuilding worn-out hillside lands that were worked out and destroyed by our wasteful pioneer

[Continued on the other side.]

Saving Jack London Village

A few weeks ago an antique safe was pulled out from where it had lain half-buried for maybe half a century, beneath the old grist mill in Jack London Village.

A few people knew it was there all along, and kept an eye on it, but nobody knew what was in it. Now the Village has been sold and the new owner has agreed to find out. The folks at *The Kenwood Press* did the research, and arranged to have it opened.

The safe is maybe 75 years old, which puts it back in the days when Prohibition was repealed and the wineries began their return. Angela Pagani owned the place at the time, with her son Charles in charge of the Glen Ellen Winery there.

When the day arrived for the safe to be opened, Charles' daughter Norma Pagani Amantite was among those who came to watch, and while Thaddeus Phelps worked away at the safe Norma spoke about living in the mill as a child (her bedroom was on the second floor), and working at the winery as she grew older.

The mill is the oldest building in Glen Ellen. A healthy stand of redwood and Douglas fir grew here at one time, where Asbury Creek empties into Sonoma Creek. This is where General Vallejo had built his saw mill in 1839, just a few years after assuming command of the presidio in the pueblo of Sonoma a few miles south.

Over the following ten or fifteen years he harvested much of the timber in the region, after which he sold the mill to Joshua Chauvet.

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An Apology & an Appeal

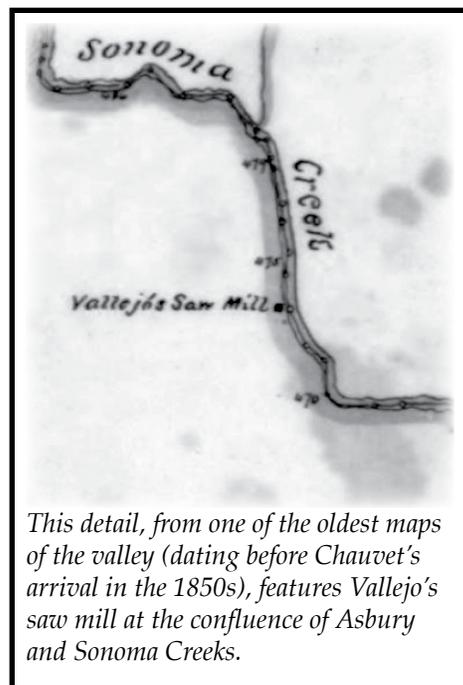
Sharp eyes will note— there was no summer issue of our newsletter this year.

In part this resulted from the calendar creep that we've been battling longer than we like, and our quarterly presentations and newsletters have appeared later and later each season. The spring issue couldn't come out until the very end of spring, and our last event, the "Great Big Picture Show" took place just as summer was beginning at the end of June.

At the same time it's not that there wasn't so much to tell you, there was just too much happening to have time to tell it. So in part we apologize for short-shrifting summer and drifting into the fall season in this way, but here we are. And we need help; the creep threatens to continue as we look at our fall and winter schedule, and we need more hands on board to handle it.

We're especially looking for people to help produce this newsletter. Knowledge of the software we've been using (mostly Adobe products such as Photoshop and InDesign) is helpful but

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This detail, from one of the oldest maps of the valley (dating before Chauvet's arrival in the 1850s), features Vallejo's saw mill at the confluence of Asbury and Sonoma Creeks.

THE GLEN ELLEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
www.glenellenhistoricalsociety.org
Annual membership is \$25, \$15 for seniors and students. Send your check to GEHS at PO Box 35, Glen Ellen CA 95442.

Board of Directors:

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SONOMA CREEK— *Stream of Consciousness*

Our own Jim Berkland isn't just a hardworking member of our board, he's a man of many talents— from earthquake prediction to poetry. Here's a recent poem of his:

Sonoma Creek meanders through
Our Valley of the Moon;
Unhurried waters seem to say:
"Let's not get there too soon."

From high in the Mayacamas,
Bald Mountain is the source
Of freshets where our stream springs forth
To grow along its course.

In 20 miles, past Wingo sloughs,
It joins San Pablo Bay;
Its waters help the wildlife thrive
To brighten every day.

With rainbow trout, and turtles too,
where busy beavers thrive,
The shady beaches, swinging vines
Make spirits come alive.

Before TV, Sonoma Creek
Provided fun for all.
(I learned to swim dog-paddle long
Before I learned the crawl.)

Your scenes of picnics, skinny dips,
And baptisms as well,
Have made our vale so memorable,
We're happy here to dwell.

—By JOB

Come to see **MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH...**

How the Valley of the Moon
Natural History Association
is preserving Jack London's
vision of sustainable farming.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20TH, AT 2:00 PM
in Mayflower Hall at the Community Church
5311 O'Donnell Lane in Glen Ellen.
Admission is free— *but come early.*

Finding New Nuggets...

Argonauts who occupied the mother lode back in 1849 will tell you that nuggets are the precious lumps of gold that could be found ready-formed in their pans and sluice boxes. The dictionary reminds us that they are also valuable ideas or facts, as in nuggets of information. Here are some emerging nuggets we've lately run across to share with you.

Charles Mikulik, a graduate student at Sonoma State University in archeology, has begun interning with our president Arthur Dawson, and will be taking part in the Sonoma Mountain oral history program.

Jim Shere and Peter Meyerhof continue to study and index the documents and artifacts being uncovered at the Serres Ranch. The current focus is on over a hundred letters written in San Francisco during the 1850s.

Emmy award winning PBS producer Susheel Bibbs will present her fascinating work on Mary Ellen Pleasant at the Sonoma County Historical Society's luncheon next spring. Pleasant, who established Beltane Ranch, was denigrated by the Hearst papers at the time as "Mammy" Pleasant.

Evelyn McClure's new book *Beneath the Mountain of the Burning Bird* is a compendium of Bennett Valley History, including Sonoma Mountain. It can be found at Copperfield's Books in Montgomery Village.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH...

farmers," Jack London once wrote to a friend.

This relates directly to our own belief that the true value of our heritage (what we have received from those who came before us) lies in our posterity (what we hand on to those who will follow us), and that the purpose of understanding our history is to inspire an intelligent and responsible attitude towards our future.

The presentation at Mayflower Hall will feature an informal discussion including Tjiska Van Wyk (executive director at Jack London Historical State Park), Susan Nuernberg PhD (professor at Sonoma State University and Jack London scholar), Greg Hayes (president of the Valley of the Moon Natural History Association and JLSHP docent), and Arthur Dawson (historical ecologist with extensive experience studying Sonoma Mountain).

As the day approaches other speakers may also be able to join in the discussion. We hope you will join us as well.

Apology & Appeal

not necessary. We simply want to get the word out on the printed page for others to read in a timely way, one way or another.

Help is also needed developing and presenting our quarterly events. Usually these are panel discussions about one topic or another. A list of the ones we've already held can be seen on the events page of our website at <http://glenellenhistoricalsociety.org>.

Another technological need is post production on the videotapes that we've got of all our previous events. Video recordings of every quarterly event are just waiting to be digitized, so they can be distributed on DVDs.

If our local history fascinates you, this is a wonderful way to get into it. Give director Jim Shere a telephone phone call at 935-3663, or email him at jim@glenellenhistoricalsociety.org for more information.

Saving the Village

Chauvet had been searching for a place to set up the grind stones his father had brought around the Horn from France. He recognized the opportunity, and quickly converted the old saw mill into a grist mill. The two grind stones can still be seen by the front door of the mill.

Farmers had begun settling the region, building fences and growing grain to grind into flour, so Chauvet did quite well. However he was still French, and so he recognized how well suited the land was to viticulture. In 1880 he ran an ad in the *Sonoma Index* announcing that no more grain would be ground until after the grape harvest was in. The grist mill closed down soon afterwards.

Joshua Chauvet died in 1908. Two years later Felice and Angela Pagani purchased the winery from Chauvet's son Henry. Felice passed away soon afterwards, leaving his son Charles in charge of the winery for his mother.

Norma was the oldest of Charles' three daughters, and worked right alongside him. It was Charles who had the great cinderblock winery built, with room-sized cement fermentation vats that were considered state of the art construction for that time.

After Charles died the family sold the complex to Charles Beardsley in 1969. Beardsley saw its potential as a commercial and cultural center, and named it the Glen Ellen Mill and Wine Village. A community of colorful artists and artisans, musicians and restaurateurs accumulated there over the following years.

Russ Kingman was one of these, a Jack London scholar whose museum and bookstore started out in the basement of the mill. It was Russ that helped change the name of the enclave to Jack London Village.

Beardsley and Kingman are now long gone, and over the past few years the Village has suffered some neglect; but the new owners are changing all that. Jack London Village has now been declared an historical district by Sonoma County, and all the deferred maintenance is being carefully pursued, with plans to continue the vision of a community there while honoring its history and legacy.

Things are happening once again at the Village, from the farmers market on Sundays to the free book exchange shelf, and from the live music on weekends at the Olive & Vine and Grist Mill Restaurants to the big screen football in the Grist Mill Bar.

And then there's the safe cracking, which is still going on. Thaddeus is still manfully hammering away at it, using his torch, drills and saws— and he's not giving up. Three inches of case hardened steel is tough to get through, but he's just as resolute as the safe is— well— safe. Stop by and see his progress, as Jack London Village continues to evolve.