



Tales of Glen Ellen

Glen Ellen Historical Society • www.glenellenhistoricalsociety.org • Summer Issue 2011



Looking north from about where Marshall's Garage stands today. Image from the Kramer Collection.

NEW OLD GLEN ELLEN PHOTOS EMERGE

FASCINATING HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS from families in the area continue to turn up in response to our call for contributions to *Around Glen Ellen*, a book that will be released next year by Arcadia Publications in their *Images of America* series. Some were the result of our very successful Town Hall Open Mike Show & Tell this past Spring, while others have come to our table at the Sunday Farmers' Market in Jack London Village.

Another Show & Tell has been planned for November 19th, to which people will be encouraged to come and share their family albums and stories. This will probably become a regular event at Mayflower Hall due to its popularity.

Meanwhile we'll continue to be at the Farmers' Market in Jack London Village from ten to two every Sunday, where people gather to chat about what happened when in Glen Ellen, and to look at old maps and photographs of the area.

Marty Kramer has agreed to have her extensive photograph and postcard collection scanned for our archives. They can be reprinted and published while crediting her as the source, a standard procedure for making these significant images available to the public while making sure that the originals remain with the owner.

Several historically significant photographs were donated from the George and Phyllis Ellman estate, with notations by Milo Shepherd identifying some of the subjects as members of the Joshua Chauvet family. Images from these collections will be found in this issue of *Tales of Glen Ellen*, and on our Facebook page. Take a good look!

Deconstructing Jack London

THERE HAS PROBABLY BEEN as much written about Jack London in the century since his death as he himself had written throughout his brief life.

A colorful and famously controversial visionary—and easily our most famous resident ever— he drew international attention to himself at the outset of the 20th Century, a century upon which he had far-reaching influence.

Jack London has been at times compared to John Lennon: incredibly talented and prolific, extremely successful at an early age— and very, very complicated.

Many stories about this bold and extraordinarily complex man that have been perpetuated will be closely examined in our summer presentation later this month, during a panel discussion titled "Who Knows Jack?"

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Grant Awarded Valley Coalition

THE SONOMA VALLEY Heritage Coalition is an open partnership of local organizations that includes GEHS. It was formed to explore and preserve the natural, historical and cultural legacy of the Sonoma Valley.

SVHC has recently received an award of \$7,000 from the Ruth E. and Ovid S. Tuttle Fund for Historic Preservation, administered by the Community Foundation of Sonoma County. Coalition projects will provide new educational resources for local teachers and promotional materials for use by the Sonoma tourism industry.

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Now Hear This—

WHO KNOWS JACK?
a panel discussion deconstructing the public image of Jack London

with
Jonah Raskin,
author of *The Radical Jack London*,
Clarice Stasz,
author of *Jack London's Women*, and
Lou Leal,
author of *Finding the Real Jack London*

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

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH...

OUR GRADUAL, PAINSTAKING WORK upon the early California documents discovered on a local ranch has begun to provide fascinating insights into what daily life was really like in pioneer Sonoma Valley.

After itemizing some five dozen artifacts and documents in the extensive John Pierre & Myrtle Serres/Shirley Roberts Collection, the focus has now narrowed upon the letters and journals of the Watriss family dating from the 1850s. This covers their first decade in California, when they settled into the bustling boom town San Francisco and eventually purchased the Hooker Ranch in the Valley of the Moon.

George Watriss was a highly educated and cultured gentleman from Boston who had been proprietor of several upscale hotels in New York City and New Orleans, including the prestigious Astor House and St. Charles. When gold was discovered in California the family made their way west, and eventually established the very posh— for that time and place— Oriental Hotel in San Francisco.

Over a hundred letters were written from there, from the time of their arrival in 1851 until the purchase of the Hooker Ranch in Sonoma in 1858. The letters contain colorful descriptions of the early stages of urban life in California, with astute observations on the traumatic events of the day in a city on the edge

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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.

DECONSTRUCTING JACK LONDON

Popular stories about London range from descriptions of a rigorous self discipline to his sometimes outrageous public displays. Early in his career he had established the quota of writing a thousand words each morning before permitting himself to explore whatever else the day had in store for him, a practice that he kept to strictly throughout his life.

And yet people still speak today of his spontaneous impassioned dinner table political diatribes, of the ins and outs of his tempestuous marriage with Charmian, and of the patient horse that would always bring him safely home from nights of serious drinking at local saloons.

Three respected authorities will discuss various aspects of this colorful world-famous local figure. Our speakers are Jonah Raskin, Clarice Stasz, and Lou Leal; each of them will speak for twenty minutes or so before the discussion is opened up to the room for general conversation.

The focus will be upon deconstructing the common caricature of Jack London as an alcoholic, womanizing adventurer who happened to be a writer. A more nuanced, layered sense of this passionate social idealist will be presented.

London's perspective predicted many of the movements that took place during the century that followed, from Socialism and environmentalism to feminism and recovery—recovery from addiction, and recovery of the land and of humanity.

Jonah Raskin is a professor at Sonoma State University, where he teaches law, literature, and in a special program for first year students. He is the author of 12 books, and the editor of *The Radical Jack London: Writings on War and Revolution*, a study of his political writings and his participation in the American Socialist Party.

Clarice Stasz wrote *American Dreamers: Jack and Charmian London*, which was written to correct previous biographies of London that had represented his second wife superficially and inaccurately, and *Jack London's Women*, a significant reinterpretation of her earlier views based upon recently available source material, evaluating their marriage in the context of Jack's relationships with other women.

Lou Leal is a member of the Jack London Foundation and the Valley of the Moon Natural History Association, and has been a docent at the Jack London State Park for many years. He recently presented a paper at the Jack London Society meeting titled "Finding the Real Jack London", which explored London's autobiographical book *John Barleycorn* and his ambiguous, ambivalent involvement with alcohol.

The presentation will be at Mayflower Hall, next door to the Community Church at 5311 O'Donnell Lane in Glen Ellen, at 2:00 pm on Saturday afternoon, August 20th.

Although admission is free to the public, we encourage people to arrive early, as seats are limited and our presentations are quite popular.

THE GLEN ELLEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Board of Directors: Anne Teller, Marge Everidge, Dorothy Johnson, Angela Nardo-Morgan, Archie Horton, Steven Lee, and Arthur Dawson; Jim Shere, Executive Director.

Grant Awarded Valley Coalition

Other Coalition members include the Sonoma League for Historic Preservation, the Sonoma Valley Historical Society and Depot Park Museum, the Sonoma Ecology Center, and the Sonoma Land Trust, with supporting advisors from the City of Sonoma and from California State Parks. Discussions are ongoing with other stakeholder groups.

Coalition members have rich collections of artifacts, photographs, maps, blueprints, manuscripts works of art and historical and environmental data. They also maintain working associations with diverse scholars and researchers.

The Tuttle funds will be used to develop an initial inventory of collections held by members and to prepare for the digitization and linking of collections for presentation on the Web. An ultimate goal is the development of further financial support to provide comprehensive access to the rich history of Sonoma Valley with links to resources statewide and nationally.

Program manager for the coalition's project is Tom Moritz, who has been the Director of Library Services at the American Museum of Natural History, an advisor to the US National Science Digital Library, and Associate Director and Chief of Knowledge Management at the Getty Research Institute. Moritz, who also spent 14 years at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, will assist with survey of collections and with grant writing for future Coalition funding.



Jack London. Image from GEHS Collection.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch...

of a frontier whose infrastructure was just barely keeping up with demand.

On the flyleaf of the ranch journal, surrounded by designs for branding cattle, are the words "Hooker's Ranch / June 21st, 1858 / Commenced writing Journal". Although only 47 pages have been scanned and transcribed so far, it's discovered that they too contain many fascinating reports on the events of the day. There are approximately 500 pages to the journal in all, and all in precisely neat handwriting with occasional carefully drawn diagrams and illustrations.

Three reports on the collection are available in PDF format to members of the Glen Ellen Historical Society. These include "The Micheltorena and Guerrero Documents", two significant proclamations by the Mexican government of Alta California from the 1840s, "Five Letters From San Francisco" in which a few of the Watriss letters are reproduced, and "A 19th Century Ranch Journal" which reproduces the first 47 pages of the journal.

What makes this work fascinating, and takes it out of a routine study of historical material, is that the documents are being examined in the same room, and at the very same dining table, upon which they were originally written. It's astonishing to realize that the journal may very well never have moved more than 150 feet in the 150 years they have remained in the original Watriss home.



Merrymakers at the Chauvet Winery a century ago. Image from the Ellman Collection.