



Tales of Glen Ellen

The Glen Ellen Historical Society, Glen Ellen, California

Summer Issue 2014

The Wildflowers of Glen Ellen

FAMOUS IN HER DAY for precise illustrations of local wildflowers, Edith Bruning's paintings appeared in the finest galleries of San Francisco during the first decades of the 20th Century, and were on prominent display at the 1939 World's Fair at Treasure Island.

Edith Bruning lived with her husband, Bill Bruning, at the family ranch on Sonoma Mountain, and taught at Enterprise School for several years in addition to her career as an artist. A retrospective show of her life and her work will be presented at Mayflower Hall on O'Donnell Lane Saturday afternoon, October 18th.

Edith used a unique process for recording and documenting our local flowers, by pressing them against photosensitive blueprint paper and exposing them to sunlight. After the paper was fixed, she applied paint that matched the colors of the actual living plant, lending a startlingly realistic quality to the finished piece of artwork.

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An early drawing by Edith Bruning at age 13 indicates her skillful eye and hand.

CHARLES STUART— *pragmatic pioneer*

THE PUBLIC CAREER of the pioneer that gave our village its name came to a predictable climax the year before his death, when he was the only delegate to the California State Constitutional Convention to speak out in favor of the Chinese and against the widespread prejudice under which they suffered.

Charles Stuart was born in 1819 and raised on the farm of a prominent Pennsylvania family, in a region characterized

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DON'T MISS OUR NEXT PRESENTATION—

The Wildflowers of Glen Ellen featuring the paintings of Edith Bruning

2:00 pm Saturday, October 18th
at Mayflower Hall on O'Donnell Lane

Admission is free,
though donations and membership in
our organization are encouraged.

Were Cable Cars Designed Here?

AFTER YOUNG George Cabot Watriss had completed his studies in 1853 at the prestigious engineering school in upstate New York, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, he came out west to join his family on their ranch in Sonoma Valley. Among the first to commute between here and San Francisco, he soon found his place in the rapidly changing world that his parents had pioneered less than ten years earlier.

While still a student he had worked as a surveyor in the planning of the Erie Canal and so— as the industrial revolution continued its impact on a burgeoning society— it's no surprise that Watriss helped design and establish public

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from the Director's Chair—



WHEN YOU COME TO the annual Glen Ellen Village Fair Sunday, October 12th, be sure to stop by our table and have a look at what we've been doing lately. A new edition of Bob Glotzbach's book *Childhood Memories of Glen Ellen* should be out by then, now with an affectionate and thought-provoking introduction by Bob's good friend Arthur Dawson. DVDs of several of our presentations are also available, along with lots of good, fascinating talk about our home town.

Other public presentations in the works include panel discussions on the history of our fire department (and the great fires of the region), Dunbar School (second oldest elementary school in the state), and Joe Miami (rootstock whisperer). If there is anyone out there who'd like to contribute information or help develop these talks, please let us know.

The QR code plaque project begun at Jack London Village just last year has now spread south into the Sonoma Plaza and north to Santa Rosa. Thanks to the Sonoma County Historical Society— which is promoting the project throughout the county— we imagine the little yellow plaques that bring audiovisual information to smartphones will eventually become ubiquitous.

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The Wildflowers of Glen Ellen

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This presentation by members of her family will provide an extraordinary opportunity to learn about our local natural history, as well as the social history of Glen Ellen, and to be reminded of how intertwined the two worlds have always been.

Were Cable Cars Designed Here?

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transportation throughout the quickly growing San Francisco Bay Area.

His designs for the Market Street Cable Car Company in 1880 and the Oakland Public Transit System in 1890 were instrumental in making these railways as successful as they were, as was his work on the *Solano*, the largest ferry boat ever built, before or since.

The draftsman's tools and notebooks George left behind on the family ranch provide more than a glimpse into the details of 19th Century industrial design, much of which has been all too easily overlooked throughout the century since then.

The first of three notebooks, dated 1880, has just been scanned and prepared for further study. In this slim volume of 78 pages, measuring a little less than 4 inches by 8 inches, carefully drawn diagrams and meticulously written notes and calculations—all in pencil—show the precision that went into making mass transportation possible for a restless and increasingly mobile society.

Discoveries like these notebooks help us to understand and appreciate the pioneering and inventive minds that helped create the world in which we live today—and all too easily take for granted.

Charles Stuart— *pragmatic pioneer*

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by the great social liberal revolutions of that time. When gold was discovered in California he was chosen to lead a fast-moving mule team there, without wagons. A thoughtful and deliberate man, his diaries show he knew who to ask for advice, and how best to follow it.

When they arrived in California, and the others headed for the goldfields, Stuart had another idea. He went instead to San Francisco, and established one of the first farms to supply fresh fruits and vegetables for those who came to look for gold.

Stuart was elected to the first board of aldermen in 1850, quickly stepping in to provide the civic regulation needed by the teeming young metropolis. Successful and influential in his business dealings, and highly respected for his personal integrity and sense of community, Stuart prospered during a chaotic economic time when fortunes were quickly won and lost.

When he purchased his ranch here in Agua Caliente, he made certain that every person who had claim to the land was taken into consideration. He even paid the heirs of the original owner, Lázaro Peña, whose title to the land seemed somehow to have been conveyed (without documented payment) to his superior officer, Mariano Vallejo, many years before.

Charles Stuart named the ranch "Glen Ellen" for his wife, in a characteristically generous and tender gesture. It was in the same spirit, and a testament to his sense of community, that he relinquished the name to the post office established on the neighboring ranch of Charles Justi— changing the name of his ranch to "Glen Oaks".

Stuart exhibited the same sense of community, and concern for order, when the constitutional convention was finally called in 1878. Although he was a Lincoln Republican he attended as an Independent, probably to build a coalition against the very powerful Workingmen's Party that was then vociferous in demonizing the Chinese. His speeches before the convention were passionate and articulate, but his ardent protest failed to stop the institutionalized xenophobia

that led inevitably to the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Stuart died the following year, but his words, though they fell on deaf ears then, still ring clearly today: "I beg of gentlemen on this floor to pause, to consider well, and not to be carried away through blind prejudice, through political ambition, or through race hatred; but act like civilized, just, and Christian men; not to do an act that would shock all humane men throughout the world."

from the Director's Chair—

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On another note, after five full years directing our activities, it's now time for me to allow others to manage the business end of GEHS. I will of course remain an overactive member of the board, but other concerns are claiming priority—and five years of me is enough; we really do need younger minds to keep our Facebook page stirred up, not to mention bringing fresh ideas to our presentations, newsletters, internet presence, while addressing the bookkeeping our government likes us to maintain.

So here's an unabashed shout-out to people who have a strong interest in our unique local history, and some skills in the technical world of desktop publishing and surfing the internet. You'll be taking part in some of the most fascinating conversations, with some of the friendliest people I've ever known.

—Jim Shere

THE GLEN ELLEN
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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