Sonoma Valley Historical Society
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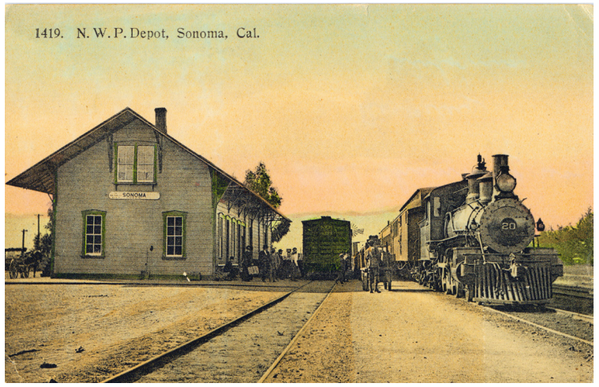


HISTORIC TRAIN DISTRICT RECEIVES PRESERVATION AWARD

The ***Sonoma Train District*** and the ***Maysonnave (Aguillon) Train Cottage*** will be recognized with a *California Preservation Design Award for Cultural Resource Studies*, one of twenty such awards to be presented at an in-person and online event on October 21st.

Patricia Cullinan, with the permission of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society Board, applied for and was granted the award. Researching the historic context of the Maysonnave Cottage (slated for demolition by the City of Sonoma), Jerri Holan, an architectural historian, discovered an intact Victorian neighborhood and Train Depot, concluding that the buildings contributed to a previously unidentified historic "Train District". Concerned citizens requested a re-evaluation and the 2016 Historic Report determined that the Cottage was eligible for the National Register as was its surrounding neighborhood and train depot. The use of the archives of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society were instrumental in saving the building and receiving the award.

https://tinyurl.com/8jykz9s4

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 52 • NO. 4 OCTOBER • NOVEMBER • DECEMBER 2021

REMEMBERING ROBERT PARMELEE (1929-2021)

"Robert Parmelee practiced law in Sonoma for nearly a quarter century, but was known around town almost as much for being an unofficial 'city historian' as he was for his legal acumen."

Jason Walsh, Sonoma Index Tribune, 9/2/2021

Introduction

Bob Parmelee was an important part of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society. We are creating this newsletter to showcase the ways he was a friend and supporter to many local historians and to share some of the reasons why all of us appreciated him.

Bob in the Depot Park Museum

Fascinated by trains from childhood he had a personal relationship with trains through his family's Parmelee Transfer company. Bob documented fast fading train stops in Sonoma Valley and relished dressing up as a conductor to promote the Depot Park Museum. He rode the last excursion train to Sonoma's Vintage Festival in 1968.

In 1998 Bob became the president of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society and he also spent many years on the Board of Directors.

Bob had a close relationship with the late Diane Moll Smith, former curator of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society and a fellow lover of Sonoma history. He rode his bike almost daily to the Depot Park Museum to check in and talk to Diane about interesting aspects of Sonoma history.

Bob's typical response was 'good report'.

We will miss Bob's dry humor and deep knowledge of Sonoma history. Bob leaves a void for all of us.

Patricia Cullinan

Bob the Station Master

Bob Parmelee, the Teacher

On reflecting upon the many years I knew Bob, what stands out are the countless episodes, especially early on, that invariably followed this pattern:

> Bob (at my office): "So what are you working on these days, Peter?"
>
> Me (while my staff keep pointing at the clock): "Well, right now I am looking into … ."
>
> Bob: "That's interesting. I need to show you something at my office. Call me next Monday."

Next Monday, after maneuvering past his bicycle into his crowded office, Bob motions me to a seat.

There are three books he has placed on his desk in preparation for this meeting. He opens the first one to a bookmarked page. *(continued page 3)*

SONOMA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OFFICERS

Patricia Cullinan, President
Carol Page, Vice President
George McKale, Treasurer
Shelley Hoffman, Secretary

DIRECTORS

Michael Acker
Kathleen Hill
Dr. Peter Meyerhof
Sharon O'Neil
Ron Price
Charlotte Ruffner
Kate Schertz

BOARD MEETINGS

First Wednesday of the Month
12:00 pm via Zoom

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Sonoma Valley Historical Society was formed in January 1937 and has served the Valley as a nonprofit organization ever since. It is dedicated to the collection, preservation and dissemination of the historic heritage of the "Valley of the Moon."

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

"Sonoma Valley Notes" is the official publication of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society and is published quarterly.

Editor: Barbara Zukin Heiman, Ph.D.
Assistant Editor: Sharon O'Neil

newsletter@sonomavalleyhistoricalsociety.org

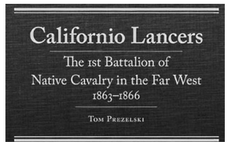
SECOND SATURDAY LECTURE SERIES

To register for these Zoom lectures, email
info@sonomavalleyhistory.org

Readers Books in Sonoma has copies of these books.

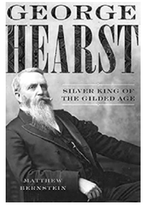
October 9, 2021, 2 pm
Californio Lancers
Presented by Tom Prezelski

Californio Lancers: The 1st Battalion of Native Cavalry in the Far West, 1863–1866. The neglected history of the thousands of Mexican Americans who served on the Union side during the Civil War.



November 13, 2021, 2 pm
George Hearst:
Silver King of the Gilded Age
Presented by Matthew Bernstein

Learn about George Hearst's actions during the Civil War, his tempestuous marriage to his cousin Phoebe, his role as disciplinarian and doting father to future media magnate William Randolph Hearst, and his devious methods of building the greatest mining empire in the West.



2022 LECTURES: DATES TBA

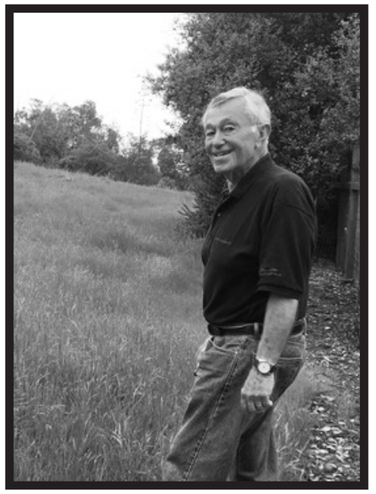
Dirty Deeds by Nancy Taniguchi

Land, Violence, and the 1856 San Francisco Vigilance Committee, focusing on the role of newspaper reporting in the rise of the committee, beginning with the invective of James King of William in the Evening Bulletin (his newspaper).

American Genocide by Benjamin Madley

This deeply researched book is a comprehensive and chilling history of an American genocide. *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873.*

Remembering Ronald James Chapman (1940–2021)



Sonoma Valley Historical Society member Ron Chapman is remembered for his love of the history of Sonoma. Ron donated copies of his research on the historical significance of the former Lawrence Villa structures on Second St East to the Sonoma Valley Historical Society.

Ron created and was active in the ***Mission Olive Preservation, Restoration and Education Project*** that focused on the search for the original Spanish Mission olive trees and the replanting of most of the 21 California Missions. He also volunteered for the restoration and harvesting of the vineyard and olive trees at Vallejo's Home.

He also donated Mission olive trees to each school garden and visited every school with Kathleen Hill to show the kids how to plant and care for the trees and what to do with the olives.

Ron also donated his records on the restoration of the ***Mission Olive Preservation, Restoration and Education Project*** to the Sonoma Valley Historical Society.

PLEASE HELP SUPPORT OUR PROGRAMS BY INCLUDING THE SONOMA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN YOUR 2021 YEAR-END DONATIONS

SONOMA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

Join, renew, or donate today and support the Sonoma Valley Historical Society's efforts to be a repository of all things Sonoma (including significant documents and artifacts) and a place of exploration and learning.

Members enjoy the Quarterly Newsletter, free admission to interesting lectures on local topics and invitations to other members-only events. Watch for your renewal notice in the mail. You can also give a membership as a gift!

Individual: $45 Family: $75 Business: $200
Patron: $500 Benefactor: $1,000 Docent: $15

Please note that the Sonoma Valley Historical Society membership year has changed to July 1 to June 30. Membership paid for 2021 ar extended to June 30, 2022.

DONATE TO THE SONOMA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

If you are at least 70 -1/2 years old and have a traditional IRA, there's a smart way to give to the Sonoma Valley Historical Society.

You can make a contribution known as a ***Qualified Charitable Distribution*** (QCD) from your IRA that is 100% tax-free. Even if you do not itemize your deductions on your tax return, it is possible to apply your donation and you will not pay taxes on this donation if it is sent directly to the Sonoma Valley Historical Society, P. O. Box 861, Sonoma, CA 95476

Please consider a distribution from your IRA to the Sonoma Valley Historical Society. Thank you! email Patricia Cullinan: *president@sonomavalleyhistory.org*.

Wingo

Although I didn't have a whole lot of contact with Bob, I certainly respect and refer to the work he did on local railroads and his book *Pioneer Sonoma*.

I got a glimpse of his humorous side when I was researching my *Sonoma Valley Place Names* book. I asked him where he thought the name 'Wingo' came from. He said he'd heard two stories. One that it was where "the wind goes" because it is so often windy down there. The other was that the men working on the levees were often besieged by hordes of mosquitoes.

When they slapped one that was about to bite, they'd cry "Wingo! Got one!" "Like this" Bob demonstrated by slapping his own arm and exclaiming "Wingo!"

Arthur Dawson

Judge Grinstead and Bob

The Chinese in Sonoma Valley

Upon first meeting Robert 10 years ago, we treated each other as friends. My appe
remind him of his life experience related to a Chinese family during his childhood. \
local history and a commitment to our community. Robert shared with me his research paper on the Chinese in Sonoma Valley. It was not published. He was a lawyer and let me symbolically pay $35 to acquire its copyright, which I preserve now.

In the research paper, Robert stated that "If Sonoma was a melting pot for English, German, Italian and French immigrants, with regard to Chinses residents, though there were many Chinese in our valley during the nineteenth century, someone forgot to light a fire under the pot."

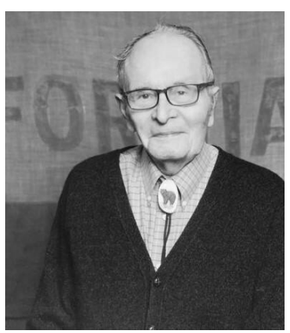
According to his research, exact numbers are hard to come by, but a fair estimate would place over two hundred Chinese, mostly men, in Sonoma Valley at late 1850s when the total population was about 800 people. Additionally, Robert inserted drawings indicated Chinese community on West Spain St between 1st and 2nd St West with 6-7 Chinese stores and residences. (I would say it is a mini-Chinatown in Sonoma.)

Actually, this piece of Chinese history in Sonoma has never highlighted, ignored or forgotten during the past 150 years. Robert felt as I do that it was a forgotten part of our history, that needed to be remembered. When I began working on the sister cities project to build a Chinese style pavilion, Ting, in Depot Park to honor these forgotten and nameless Chinese laborers in Sonoma Valley, Robert made donation to the Ting project. His endorsement means a lot. As Robert's research paper as ended as "Has someone put a fire under the Chinese melting pot? Yes. I think so."

Over time, Robert became more than a friend to me he was a mentor. Robert and his wife Nancy encouraged me to reach for my dream of serving in public office.

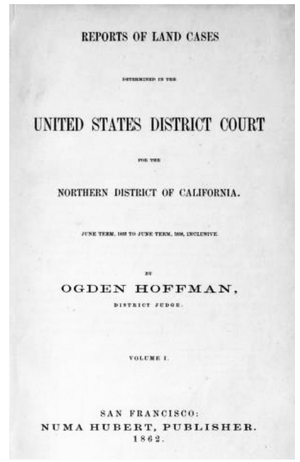
All his advice and guidance made me feel confident and hopeful. His faith in me made me a better citizen, council member and man. I only hope that someday, I can pass on all of the things that I have learned from him and inspire the next generation as he inspired me.

Jack Ding



Recent Photo of Bob

Bob Parmelee, the Teacher: continued


REPORTS OF LAND CASES

DETERMINED IN THE

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

FOR THE

NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA.

JUNE TERM, 1851 TO JUNE TERM, 1858, INCLUSIVE.

BY

OGDEN HOFFMAN,

DISTRICT JUDGE.

VOLUME I.

SAN FRANCISCO:
NUMA HUBERT, PUBLISHER.
1862.

Bob: "Read this page."

Me (after reading what appears to have little to do with the subject I thought we would be talking about): "Well that's interesting, but …"

Bob (after explaining its relevance to a better understanding of the times, puts another bookmarked tome in my hands): "Ok, I think you are ready now to read this."

And so it would continue for an hour. Frequently the meeting would involve him pulling from the bookshelf his dog-eared copy of Hoffman's Record of Land Cases. (https://archive.org/details/reportsoflandcas01hoff).

He would remind me, "This is a rare book, but if you ever get a chance, you need to get a copy. Well I need to go home for lunch now. Bye bye." And so the meeting would abruptly end until the next time.

It took almost 20 years, but today I proudly have my own copy of Hoffman and other important reference books that I first became aware of in Bob's office. As the years went by, there was less background instruction and our discussions focused on an ever-changing list of historical topics. Remarkable maps and photos would appear. And amazing property records that contained unexpected details would greatly facilitate my research on Sonoma. Bob was always equally pleased at seeing the dots connected in new ways. Yes, I will very much miss Bob, and his enthusiasm for history.

Peter G. Meyerhof

Remembering Bob Parmelee

One morning Bob Parmelee sat down with Jerry and me at a table in front of the Basque Boulangerie. Bob was on his way to his former law office, which turned into his Oriental rug collection gallery.

Bob and Jerry got into a strongly worded discussion over who should be the first City Historian for the City of Sonoma. Each of them argued that the other should apply for and get the "job". Clearly neither of these gentlemen wanted to grab the spot from the other.

In the end, neither of them applied, and George McKale became" Sonoma's first official historian.

Kathleen Hill

Bob with bike in front of the Sonoma Mission

Sonoma's First City Historian

In 2008, I was appointed Sonoma's first City Historian. While I had been working for years as an archaeologist, I was only known in Sonoma in Little League and Soccer circles. Bob called me immediately and invited me into his office. I was very excited as I had heard about some of the treasures he housed in his personal archives. I was also nervous.

He sat me down across from his desk and began to ask me questions about my life. I do believe it was sort of a test, an evaluation of sorts. Eventually, he smiled and said, "I want to show you something." Out came documents and maps from Sonoma's days of old. I'll never forget his joy when sharing and discussing history.

George McKale

Schumann Hotel and More

I met Bob at the Depot Park Museum when Diane Smith was curator, I was asking Diane about the building I live in and Bob said: "oh, that's the Schumann Hotel". That little tidbit set me off on a very fun few years of local history, meeting Bob in his office, and being given the run of his collection, with limits. Bob also followed up on leads I had; we had fun!

Bob set me on the trail of local history and besides doing an exhaustive study of the Schumann Hotel and related people, I branched out into studies of early German immigrants and settlers, and a masterwork of the Matsuyma-Wallman family whose ranch is now the site of the Adele Harrison Middle School.

Bob liked my interests, read my stuff, loved to chat in his office and he supported my shift to more current events. The train has left the station. Bon voyage Bob! Now Bob joins the pantheon of Sonoma history and town lawyers: Poppe, Grinstead, Parmelee, substantial and significant figures all in their own right.

Fred Allebach

Bob moves to Sonoma

Talking History

When I started to get serious about Sonoma Valley history and using it in my art, I was nervous about being accepted by the "locals", since I was very much a newcomer. Diane Smith was the first person I knew who I had to convince. She introduced me to Bob, and he became my second, but not secondary, supporter.

I liked him immediately. He was fun to talk to. Our talks consisted mostly of me asking questions. Occasionally he would answer by loaning me a document, photo, or newspaper clipping. After a while, he started to give me little assignments. For instance, he tasked me with finding out as much as I could about the Boyes Springs water that was bottled and sold in the Bay Area. He recalled having a dispenser in his office when he was a disrrict attorney, but didn't know much else. I found out what I could and reported back. He appreciated my effort, though my results were meager, and handed me another topic to look into.

The documents he had about the founding of Boyes Hot Springs astounded me. They included personal letters and the original abstract of title to the land. He used them when he wrote his fine article on the topic in 1992. In that article he talks about the court cases centered around ownership of the land there. Regarding Thaddeus Leavenworth's dispute with M.G. Vallejo, Bob said "eventually, in 1855, Leavenworth's claim was approved, Vallejo's claim having been rejected by the (Land) Commission. Apparently Leavenworth had better appearing forged documents than his adversary." To me, this epitomized Bob's dry humor and I loved it. I still quote it whenever I get the chance.

Young Bob with train • 1934

After we met a few times he told me to come around to his office in the Poppe building any time. I'd wander by. Seeing him with his feet up on the desk, I'd knock. And that's the image of Bob I carry; feet up on the desk, ready to talk history.

Mike Acker

Tribute to Bob Parmelee

Robert Parmelee's funeral on Sept. 11, 2021 in the Methodist Church courtyard was a private gathering of about 40 people on a pleasant sunny day. Those who shared insights into Sonoma's beloved historian told of cherishing his friendship, whether it had been for 70 years or seven.

They marveled at his integrity, encyclopedic knowledge of the Valley and willingness to uncover information for nearly everyone who came into his Plaza office over the decades. Laughter, tears, love and pain wove their way through the gathering, but the one common theme was that Bob Parmelee was an extraordinary man who will forever remain in our hearts.

Sandi Hansen

Call of the Valley

I got to know Bob while making an historical film about the Sangiacomo family and through that process I was inspired by Bob to make ***Call of the Valley***, a film about the history of Sonoma Valley. He initially spent several months trying to talk me out of making the film but once he got on board he was unstoppable.

Bob, Sandi Hansen, and I worked very closely as a team over three years to put the film together. His very large collection of historic images and his encyclopedic knowledge of Sonoma Valley formed the backbone of the film. He spent untold hours reviewing the script, correcting historical inaccuracies, and suggesting relevant images. Without his involvement, ***Call of the Valley*** would not have been made.

Julie Morrison

A Roadmap to Sonoma History

All the pieces fit together in Bob Parmalee's understanding of historic Sonoma. And he had the raw stuff of history to prove it. Letters, legal notices, lawsuits, newspaper clippings, photographs---reams of stuff, box after box of moments frozen in time. The true history of Sonoma was right there. Analyzing all that, creating an internal road map of the factual history of Sonoma---it was the task of a lifetime. And what a life---what a man!

It seemed to me that his true love of historical discovery never left him; when explaining how THIS was connected to THAT, and WHY, a look of mischievous look of pleasure would light up his face. The quirky fact that illustrated his point, the surprising truth about an incident from 130 years---the past was never really over. As long as he worked that internal road map there was more to discover, more connections to make. Mysteries could still be solved; motives unearthed, lives revealed, stories fleshed out. It must have felt like history itself was falling through his hands as he examined the ornate and powerful cursive script found in ancient wills and letters. So much more to see in ink on paper than electronic letters living in the cloud.

Bob Parmalee was always encouraging and kind to me; he found my quixotic quest to bring General Vallejo to life on the Plaza worthy and amusing. He shared with me stories of the General that answered many of my questions, a real gift. Thank you Bob, it was a genuine pleasure to know you!

George Webber

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Sonoma Valley Historical Society is to provide a forum and a resource for the study and dissemination of Sonoma Valley history for present and future generations by identifying, collecting, preserving and sharing artifacts, documents and images.