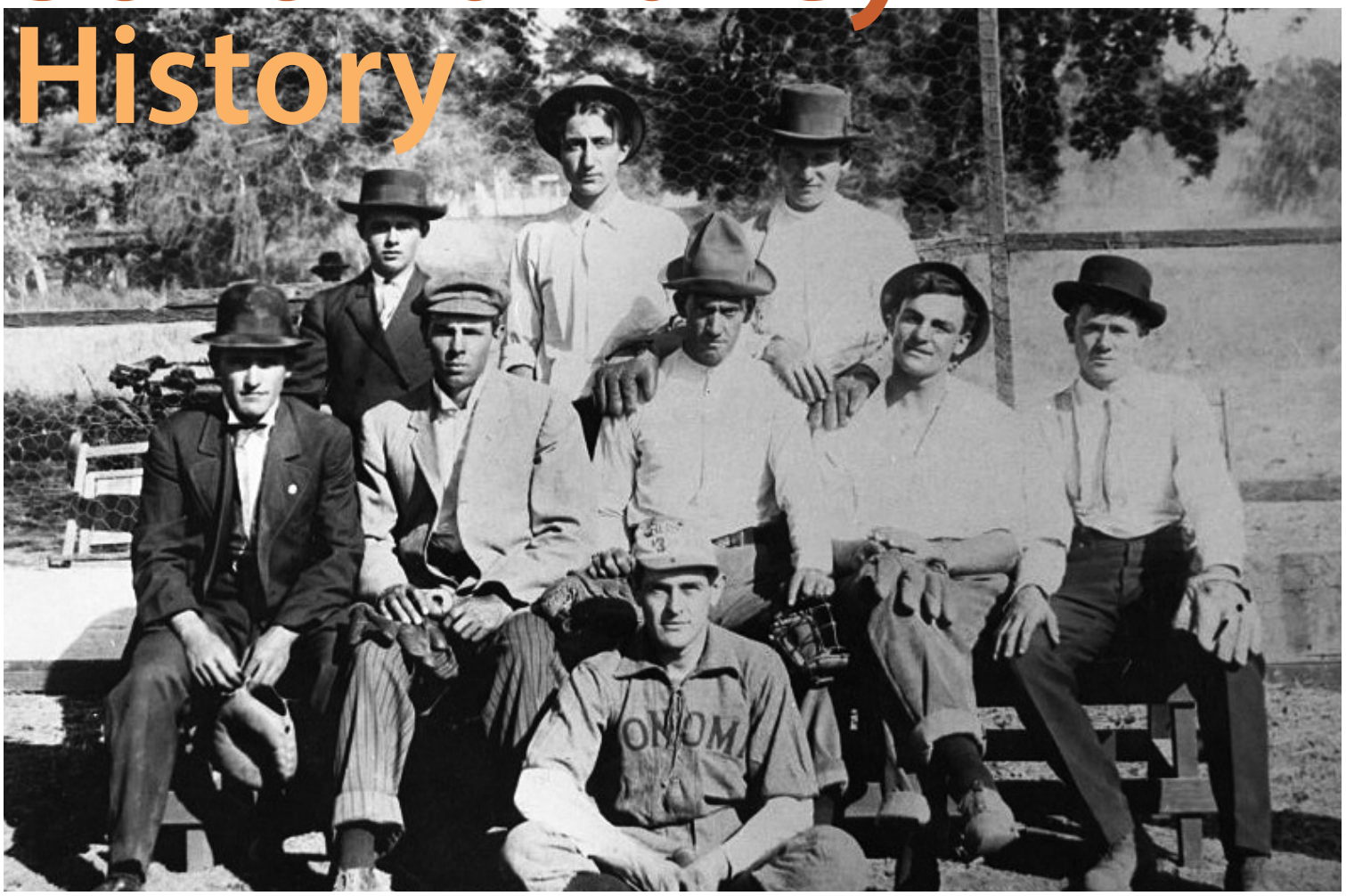
Founded in 1937

Volume 57 • No. 2 | April - June 2026

Sonoma Valley History



Inside this issue:

When Sonoma was Nuts for Baseball

More than 50 active baseball or softball teams were playing in Sonoma in 1970. Read about it here.

Page 6

Baseball in Boyes Hot Springs

Back in the 1920s and beyond, Boyes Hot Springs was the Spring training ground for San Francisco teams.

Page 3

President's Report

Patricia Cullinan

Thanks to board member Travis Wagner, we will have a new video up at the Visitors Bureau to introduce people visiting Sonoma to the buildings around the Plaza through photos. It will soon be on our YouTube channel (youtube.com/@SonomaValleyHistory-x4t) as well. This joins a variety of videos already on our website. Travis helped with the new poster at the Visitors Bureau featuring movies made in Sonoma Valley.

A series of upcoming presentations will focus on the 250th anniversary of the United States.

Cont'd on page 2

SONOMA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Sonoma Valley Historical Society

Officers

Patricia Cullinan, President
Charlotte Gallaway, Vice President
Laurie Gallian, Treasurer
Kate Schertz, Secretary

Directors

Mike Acker, Kathleen Hill, Peter Meyerhof, Carol Page, Travis Wagner

Board Meetings

Second Tuesday of the Month, 4:30pm in person and via Zoom.

About the Society

Sonoma Valley Historical Society was formed in 1937 and is dedicated to collecting, sharing, and preserving Sonoma Valley history.

Locations

Marcy House Archives & Research Ctr.
205 First Street West, Sonoma
(707) 343-1335

Sonoma Valley History Museum
270 First Street West (at Depot Park), Sonoma

About this Publication

Sonoma Valley History is published quarterly in print and online. Send feedback of any kind to roytennant@gmail.com

Contact

info@SonomaValleyHistory.org
P.O. Box 861, Sonoma, CA 95476

SonomaValleyHistory.org

Cover Image

Probably a Sonoma Crushers team in the early 20th Century. A likely looking crowd of "ballists" (a term for baseball players back then, or also "club nines"). Teams were made up of "strikers" or "batsmen" (batters), "hurlers" (pitchers), "the behind" (catcher), and "basetenders" (infielders).

Calendar

April 12, Sunday, 1:30 pm—Spring Mountain Cemetery Tour
Learn about some of the stories of Sonoma people interned at the Sonoma Mountain Cemetery that will include visitations by the spirits of local notables, re-enacted by community members.

April 23, Thursday, 6:30 pm—Rm 110, Sonoma Community Center
A presentation about the Lincoln Highway, the first transcontinental road for automobiles in the US, dedicated in 1913. Speaker Andrew Wayne Saunders is a community historian, public-art collaborator, and civic organizer based in Citrus Heights. His work centers on preserving and interpreting the historic Lincoln Highway and elevating the cultural heritage.

May 24, Sunday, 10:30 am—2026 Schocken Stroll, Sonoma Plaza across from the Barracks. The stroll will highlight one of the city's most historically significant citizens: Solomon Schocken. Schocken's ingenuity, initiative, and industriousness elevated the city's overall economic and civic well-being in many ways in the late 1800s to early 1900s.

TBA—A presentation on the recently published book *The Great Resistance* by Carrie Gibson(carriegibson.co.uk/books/the-great-resistance/) . In *The Great Resistance*, acclaimed historian Carrie Gibson recovers their dramatic stories in one sweeping narrative. Focusing on the thousands of acts of defiance that kept the flame of freedom alive, Gibson vividly chronicles the resistance that eventually ended the slave trade and, with Brazil's abolition in 1888, the institution of slavery itself.

TBA—A Readers Theatre presentation of the Letters of John and Abigail Adams, "My Dearest Friend." A moving new play by award-winning playwright Peter Manos is inspired by the deeply personal letters exchanged between John and Abigail Adams. The play beautifully highlights both President Adams' pivotal role in American history and the enduring strength of the couple's remarkably modern relationship.

An upcoming series of presentations will focus on the 250th anniversary of the United States.

The President's report cont'd

We're working to more thoroughly identify the Chinese people, businesses, and locations in Sonoma (Thus far, more businesses and their owners have been discovered through records in the National archives).

Kate Schertz is presenting to the Woman's Club on the remarkable women of Sonoma, bringing to light new and interesting women who've contributed to our community and nationally (arts, literature, business, and politics) and may not currently be remembered.

We'll have banners around the Plaza in August celebrating the local residents, diverse immigrants, and indigenous people who have lived in Sonoma. With Jack London Park Partners, we will do a presentation at the park on how Sonoma Valley was named the Valley of the Moon.

Lorrie Fulton, our social media maven putting out stories on Facebook and Instagram, is retiring and we will greatly miss her knowledge of Sonoma and our archives. We thank community members that are helping us move toward the museum opening with materials and their time: R.A. Wilson Construction and his crew, Bill Jasper, and Darrell Jones of D.E. Jones & Daughters.

Baseball in Boyes Hot Springs

Michael Acker

Early in the 20th century, the climate and healing waters of Sonoma Valley—Boyes Hot Springs in particular—were attractive to Pacific Coast League (PCL) baseball teams looking for places to train. The San Francisco Seals were the first.

The League was founded in 1903. Teams initially were not associated with the major leagues and PCL baseball was considered an "outlaw" league until 1904 when an agreement was settled with Organized Baseball which made the PCL a Class A league.

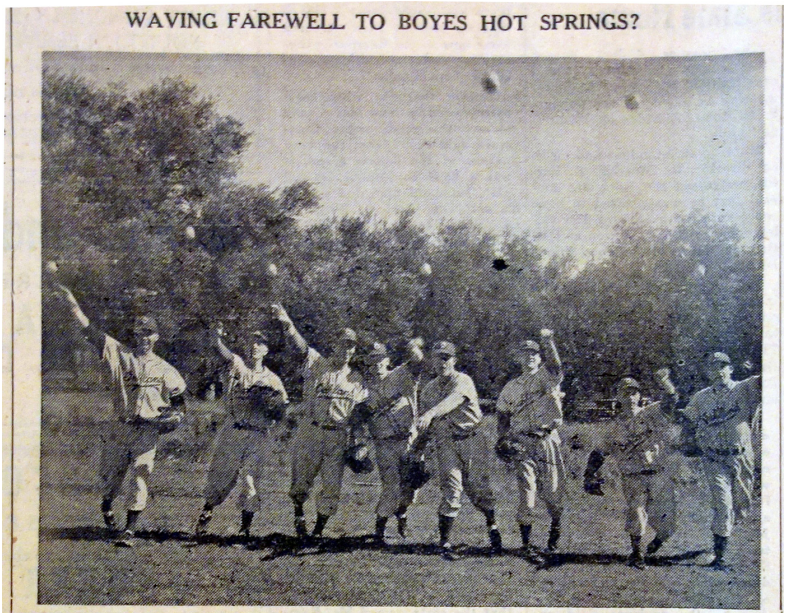
Yet, the PCL was "the only game in town" west of St. Louis until the Giants and Dodgers moved to California in 1958. Star players of the League included the DiMaggio brothers and Ted Williams which tells you something about the level of play.

We know that the San Francisco Seals, a perennial powerhouse, were holding spring training at Boyes Hot Springs as early as 1912. In that year, as a *San Francisco Chronicle* headline read, an "Eight Acre Ball Park Being Built at Boyes Hot Springs." *The Chronicle* goes on, "….it seems certain that the Seals will have the largest ball grounds in the world —and very likely the finest—in which to prepare for their pennant struggle. Manager Cal Ewing…is highly enthusiastic about the new quarters." In 1913, the *San Francisco Call* in an article about opening day declared "The Boyes Springs rooters were the most conspicuous of the bunch. Headed by Doctor Parramore and Rudie Litchenberg (sic), they arrived at noon in a big auto and they drove direct to the ball park to root for the Seals."

Originally named Fetters Field, it later became Lichtenberg Field. Today, De Chene Ave roughly follows the old outfield fence.

The Seals weren't the only team to train at Boyes Hot Springs. In 1950, the Twin Falls farm team of the Yankees were there, and the Oakland Oaks were there in 1951. The *Sonoma Index-Tribune* put the story of their arrival on the front page, with a photo of manager Mel Ott.

Some of the major leaguers who came to the Valley for training ended up settling there including Sam Agnew. According to the Society for American Baseball Research, "Sam Agnew is best remembered for being the catcher for both of Babe Ruth's pitching victories in the 1918 World Series." Agnew started in baseball with the Vernon team of PCL in 1912. His Major League debut came with the St. Louis Browns in 1913. He started as catcher for the Browns through 1915 when he was traded to the Red Sox. While a St. Louis player, he had the distinction of being called out while sitting in the dugout. Apparently, the team was batting out of order and he was supposed to be at the plate at the time.



WAVING FAREWELL TO BOYES HOT SPRINGS?

WITH THE OLIVE GROVE in the background these Oakland Acorns' pitchers will throw their final practice tosses at Lichtenberg Field next weekend, when the Oaks depart their 1951 Spring training camp at Boyes Springs. Letting fly (from left) are Wes Bailey, Frank Nelson, Hank Behrman, Lloyd Hittle, Dave Dahle, Jay Ragni, Tom Breisinger and Charlie Gassoway. (CB Photo-

Sam Agnew opened a service station in Boyes Hot Springs in 1935 at the corner of Vallejo Street and Highway 12 (where the Sonoma Eats parking lot is today). He died in Sonoma in 1951.

Out of the Archives: Baseball

Th

The 1923 San Francisco Seals. The Seals had their Spring training in Boyes Hot Springs from the early 1920s through the 1940s.

The 195

l in the Valley Over the Years

e 1929-30 Sonoma Grammar School team.

The 1931 Sonoma Merchants baseball team. Upper center is Don Eraldi (a well-known clothing merchant in town), and to his left is his brother Dave.

7 Little League team "The Bears," who made the playoffs that year. Lee Clerici (right), coach.

When Sonoma was Nuts for Baseball

Kate Schertz

There was a time when Sonoma was a raging baseball town. Everyone played including kids, women, druggists, plumbers, and butchers. One summer in 1970 there were more than 50 active teams playing baseball and/or softball in Sonoma Valley. And they were playing baseball, not watching it!

The first record we have of a live baseball game in Sonoma Valley was May 8, 1887, as "A game of base ball was played last Sunday in the Glen Ellen Park between the 'Gibsons' and the 'Crofits,' the former coming out victorious." By 1890, there were organized teams competing against one another such as the Shellville Embarcaderos and the Sonoma Baseball Club. By 1897, teams from Sonoma were playing teams from Petaluma and Bennett Valley. The sport was gathering fans as well as players. By 1905, two words merged into one—baseball!

Soon, teams got sponsors so they could pay for uniforms and equipment At least eight Sonoma Valley teams had formed by 1912. Maybe the fanbase was being spread too thin because on June 6, 1917, the *Sonoma Index-Tribune* baseball columnist Al Joyess chastised the fans for not showing up: "Remember! Columbus took a chance, and remember the boys will play twice as good when there is a large crowd to watch them. And if you don't show up there is something radically wrong with you as every American should stand by the good old American game." In just 30 years baseball became the good old American game.

The Game Gets Serious

In 1925, Ray Tynan—though still in high school—was a star center fielder for the Vineburg All Stars. Two years later he formed a new baseball team—the Vineburg Cubs and began competing against every team in the region. The Cubs ran an ad in the *Sonoma Index-Tribune* every Friday before Sunday games, when the admission fee was 25 cents. The Vineburg Cubs dominated the baseball scene in the Valley until they were absorbed by another Tynan-created club, the Sonoma Merchants. They in turn went on to outplay almost every other team in the valley.

The Sonoma Merchants baseball team in 1931.

When Sonoma was Nuts for Baseball, cont'd

Numerous benefit baseball games became popular such as Donkey Baseball where all the players except the batter were mounted on donkeys, and games of the singles vs. the marrieds. Competition for fans emerged with the re-emergence of fast pitch softball.

In 1939, the Sonoma Valley Athletic Club was formed to promote all sports in the Valley. Tynan disbanded the Merchants in 1940 and formed a new team but found it hard to find both players and an audience as Sonomans embraced fast-pitch softball. An even bigger challenge lay ahead as World War II was coming.

Baseball goes to War

The draft in Sonoma started on April 4, 1941, and although baseball and softball continued to be played throughout the war, many of the star players were in the service. Among them, Emil "Pop" Chelini to the South Pacific; Gene Dominichelli in the Marines flying Corsairs in the South Pacific; Dave Eraldi in the U.S. Navy in Panama and beyond; Charles Bacigalupi in England and later France; Joseph "Babe" Mazza in North Africa and Italy; Ray and Andy Barrachi in the South Pacific; Frank Wedekind in Guam; Ernie Mangiantini in North Africa, Sicily and finally Italy; Ezio Mangiantini, a paratrooper wounded in Belgium; and Franck Benedetto in the Aleutian Islands and Alaska. One never came home. Ray Barrachi was an original member of the Vineburg Cubs and followed Tynan to the Sonoma Merchants. He was a strong hitter and second baseman. He joined the U.S. Marines in January 1942. His parents received a telegram in April 1943 that Ray was Missing in Action in the South Pacific. In April of 1944 he was awarded the Purple Heart. His name is engraved on the memorial in Veterans' Memorial Park in Sonoma, a star by his name indicating he was killed in action.

On March 26, 1945, a baseball sports night was staged at the Sonoma Mission Inn, which had served as a Rest and Recuperation center for the U.S. Navy throughout the war. A movie of the 1944 World Series game between the St. Louis Cardinals and the St. Louis Browns was screened accompanied by popcorn, peanuts and cokes. There was a sense of victory in the air. And the return of baseball! Well, actually…

Fast Pitch Softball Emerges as King

"Hutch" Whitehead took over the Ford dealership in Sonoma in late 1947 and began sponsoring a softball team in 1948 called the Fordy-Niners who won the league title two years running. A new team emerged to challenge them in 1950—Our Resort. These two teams battled out for the championship for the next 15 years. The names of the teams changed constantly but many of the players remained the same. In 1978, the *Sonoma Index-Tribune's* sports writer Jim Lynch deemed them "Sonoma's Boys of Summer:" Emil "Pop" Chellini (56), Don Eraldi (51) and George Block (50) reminding readers of just how long these guys had been playing ball. By 1990, you could go to a ballgame every night of the week in Sonoma from late May through September as there were seven fastpitch softball teams, more than 21 softball teams, six Women's modified fast pitch games, and Little League teams playing on three different fields in the Valley.

Starting in 1999, adult teams began to fade away as players became Little League and High School coaches. Other sports began to be popular—golf, Pétanque, and Bocce ball. By 2010, there were very few adult teams playing any kind of ball. One can still see pick-up games around the Valley but the golden era of baseball as a popular participatory sport was over.

SONOMA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 861
Sonoma, CA 95476

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Sonoma CA 95476
Permit No. 134

Support Us

Achieving Descriptive Control

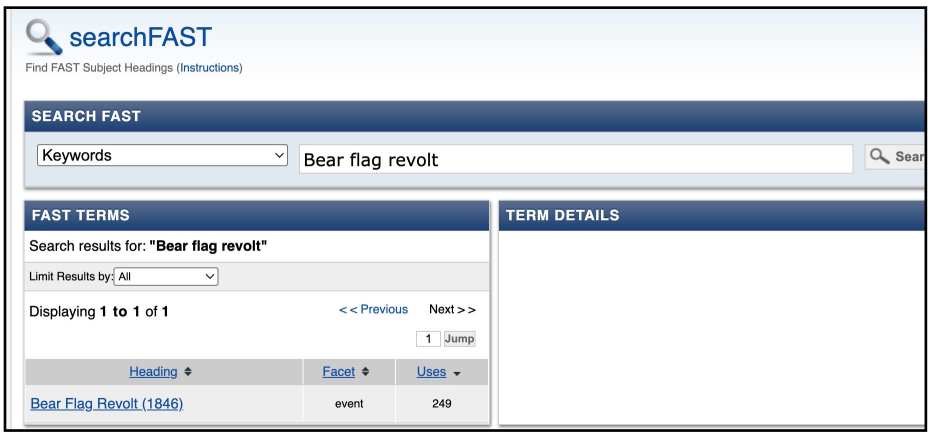
Roy Tennant

For many years, volunteers have been digitizing and describing our historical materials. The problem is that the words used to describe these objects were made up on the spot by whomever was working with that item. This inevitably led to some not always helpful descriptions in our PastPerfect ™ database where these descriptions and digital facsimiles are stored. A couple years ago Patricia expressed her concern with the confusion that this had engendered, and the librarian in me immediately volunteered to do something about it.

My last employer had a research project that had taken the standardized ("controlled" is the technical term) vocabulary Library of Congress Subject Headings and made them more useful in a digital setting. This work is called FAST for Faceted Application of Subject Terminology (fast.oclc.org). To use this standardized terminology, you can search the vocabulary (fast.oclc.org/searchfast/ see screenshot) to see what the standard terms are for the concept you are trying to describe. For example, the appropriate term for the Bear Flag Revolt is "Bear Flag Revolt (1846)".

The benefits of a controlled vocabulary are that retrieval is both more accurate and more thorough than it would be otherwise. Although it's taken me upwards of two years to go through PastPerfect record by record and update the descriptions, that work has now been completed and we now have a digital record of which we can be proud.

Besides making sure we are applying subject terms consistently, I also made sure that all the records had an appropriate geographic designation (e.g., "California—Sonoma Valley") so that when these records are seen out of context of our organization (e.g., in California Revealed) they will be properly sited geographically.



Similar to the work reported in our last newsletter about professionalizing how we store and keep our collections safe, we have also achieved professionalization of our record descriptions, thus vastly improving recall and precision when searching.