



**Petaluma Historical
Library & Museum**

Petaluma **M**useum **A**ssociation

Preserving the Unique History of Petaluma and Providing
Educational and Cultural Services to the Community

Quarterly Newsletter



**Join us this Holiday Season for the
many exciting concerts and events!**

Fall/Winter 2015

VOLUME 25, ISSUE 4

On the Cover

CHRISTMAS IN PETALUMA A CENTURY AGO

by John Benanti

OUR NEWSLETTER COVER photo shows a Christmas celebration in Petaluma a century ago. This 1916 photo from the Museum's collection was taken on Kentucky Street near Washington looking south. The building at the left rear edge of the photo is the old Petaluma City Hall. It served as the city's seat of government for several decades from the 1880's to the 1950's. It was a few doors up from the Museum's home, the Carnegie Library. Today it is the site of the A Street parking lot.

The buildings on Kentucky Street look much the same today as they did a century ago. One exception is the sidewalk overhangs visible in the photo at the front of a number of businesses. The photo also shows that this was a period of transition in transportation. There are both automobile vehicles and horse drawn vehicles in the background behind the crowd gathered to have their collective photo taken with a large Christmas tree and Santa Claus. Santa, however, does not quite fit with today's typical image of a more rotund jolly old elf.

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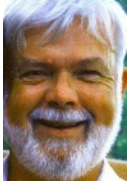
The Petaluma Museum Association Newsletter is published quarterly and distributed to our members. Many thanks to all our contributors and to our proofreaders and volunteers who help with our mailings.

If you would like to contribute any news or item of interest to our newsletter you can email to mary@petalumamuseum.com
Deadline for submission is Jan. 1, 2016

Newsletter editor: Mary Rowe

**Petaluma Museum Association
20 Fourth St.
Petaluma, CA 94952**

President's Message



Happy Holidays Everyone!

I hope you have had a chance to check out our Fall and Winter Program for all the wonderful concerts and events we are having for you this holiday season. First, our walls will be decorated with Gary Kaplan's exhibition *Petaluma Artist and Artisans* beautiful work. This art work will be for sale, by the way, with a nice share to the museum. Then, we will have concerts events and parties right up to our traditional New Year's Eve Gala.

A special thanks to our Museum donors in last year's 2014 Annual Appeal. Many of us are inclined to share in the holiday season. You have been generous in the past and we hope you can help keep the Museum moving ahead in 2016.

Last year we started our earthquake retrofit campaign and made the error of confounding retrofit gifts with regular operating gifts. We appreciate your generosity in both cases but, for legal reasons, we are unable to use retrofit donations for other essential needs.

We depend on your donations to keep the Museum running. So, if you are inclined to donate a little extra for retrofit we thank you very much.

**But please continue to help in this year's 2015 Annual Appeal
and we will be especially thankful!**

As always, your preferences and ideas for improvement are important to keeping us on the right track. Please feel free to drop me an email, harry@petalumamuseum.com when something needs attention.

I look forward to seeing every one of you at our Members Party, Friday, December 4th, 5 to 7:00 pm.

Again, Happy Holidays and
Thanks for all you do,

Harry

Regular Features

Petaluma
History &
Commentary:

"The Kerfuffle at
the Hill Opera
House"

Museum
Highlights

Volunteer
Spotlight

Program of Public
Service (insert)

Museum
Collection
Update

Petaluma History & Commentary

by Skip Sommer

The Kerfuffle at the Hill Opera House: Miss Georgia Harper in *Camille* and Madame Fanny Brown in a Box Seat

ON DEC 6, 1904, Petaluma's grand Hill Opera House opened its doors on the corner of Washington and Keller Streets. It was called "The Pride of Petaluma" and "the swellest Playhouse in California". The crowd that evening was a glittering assemblage abundant with "beautiful costumes and beautiful women, arriving in smart carriages." The elegantly furnished box seats were notably occupied by Mayor W.R. Veale, the McNears, the Fairbanks, the Fitches and the Hill families.

The Opera House was Petaluma's gift from Mrs. Josephine Hill and her son, Alex B. Hill, of the Petaluma pioneer family, the William Hills.

The cost of construction was said to be in excess of \$50,000 and the interior sported much brass work, "glittering hangings" and 2,500 electric lights! The theater sat 600, but with standing room and private boxes, it could accommodate near 725. Other unique features for the times, were "automatic skylights and asbestos curtains." The architect had been San Francisco's renowned Charles Havens, who had designed Petaluma's Carlson-Currier Silk Mill in 1892,

as well as San Francisco's elegant City Hall.

But, for real live drama, let us fast-forward five months to May of 1905, when the traveling



HILL OPERA HOUSE, PETALUMA, CAL.

stage performers The Georgia Harper Company opened with Miss Georgia Harper in the lead role of *Camille*. Admission prices were 25¢, 35¢, and 50¢ (for box seats). This important play, written by Alexander Dumas, was later adapted into an opera

The Hill Theatre		STATEMENT	
		DATE	1904
ADMISSIONS	478	50	23900
BOX SEATS	197	35	6895
STANDING ROOM	70	25	1750
TOTAL	745		32545
CONTRACTOR'S SHARE	75		75
TOTAL RECEIPTS	75		32620
TOTAL			32620

Hill Theater statement from Dec. 1904

(*La Traviata*, by Verdi). The plot revolves around a young woman, wronged, broke, and desperate, who, out of misery, becomes a courtesan, thus forsaking true love and happiness. *Camille's* death scene in the final act, is one of the great tear-jerkers of theater history. It was said that Georgia Harper's portrayal was "so real as to cause many to weep, and some, to wail!"

Now, for many years prior, in Petaluma, a house of prostitution had been quite popular at the end of C Street, next to the Petaluma Creek. The madam of the establishment was a Ms. Fanny Brown who had in her employ up to six "ladies of the night" at any one time. Her red light, facing the creek, was well known among lonely sailors plying those waters. It was also rumored, (but not written about) that prominent Petaluma gentlemen were sometimes sampling the business offered therein. On occasion, loud and raucous laughter and little "exultations" could be heard emanating from "the brown bagnio" (bordello) on C.

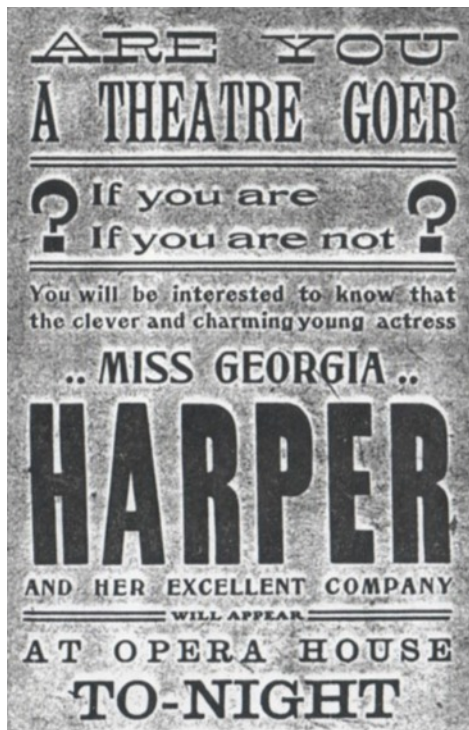
Thus the set-up for a great story. It occurred the evening, of May 2, 1905, that Ms. Fanny Brown, thinking fondly of the ladies in her charge, and also knowing

well the plot of *Camille*, was moved to invite two of her most popular “girls” to don their finest dresses and reside with her in a reserved box in the elegant new Hill Opera House, to view a tragic story, not unlike their own.

Well, one can only imagine how this went-over in Petaluma. The Petaluma Argus reporter, the next day, fairly shouted out his words:

“The auditorium was filled with many of the best people of Petaluma’s homes, representatives of the pure womanhood and the decent manhood of our city. The presence of women of the half-world (is) an insult to the theater-going public.”

(Wow! the “half-world“? The French have a word for it: demi-monde.)



Apparently, Ms. Brown and friends had been quite joyous and animated and word of their presence quickly spread throughout the audience.



Miss Georgia Harper and leading man

The Argus went on to state: [The women were] “displaying themselves in a public place, constantly moving about and [get this] “received many visits from a man, who knows no decency!” (Brazen!) One wonders what the glamorous Georgia Harper was thinking, while portraying with great talent, a “soiled dove” on that stage, to the soiled doves in that private box.

Prostitution was a fact of life in the old West. Petaluma’s ratio of women to men in 1860, was 1 in 40. By 1890, that ratio was only down to 1 in 15. It wasn’t all negative however, as the “fancy women” of the saloon and crib often shielded the decent ones from unwanted attentions. In 1890, one “house” in San Francisco advertised that it had 450 girls! It should be noted that, that year, there were less than 450,000 women living west of the Mississippi and most of

those were wives and children. The “fallen angels” had come from all over the world, as California prostitution became big business, first in gold field tents, then in cribs and houses, as communities formed. A laundress made \$25. a month those days and a prostitute could make that in one night. Sadly, most of these women ended their lives in distress and despair, not unlike Georgia Harper’s character in *Camille*.

By 1920, when the telephone came to Petaluma, the first set was installed in the Herold Drug Store on the corner of Kentucky and Washington Streets, the second was in the Fire Department and telephone #3 was (you guessed it) for the house on C Street. A few years ago, I interviewed an early Petaluma telephone operator and she told me that they would often give the girls on C Street free calls because they felt sorry for them. Rumor has it that the second floor of the Lan Mart Building was a “crib,” the upstairs over what is now Seared Restaurant was active in “the trade,” as was the second floor over the Lynch Jewelry store on Western Avenue. But, the house on C was the most refined.

The brown House on C Street burned to the ground in the 1920s and the “trade” there ceased for good. In 1923, the last vaudeville act appeared at the Hill Opera House and it became The California Theater, showing silent movies at first (Gloria Swanson in *The Humming Bird*). J.A. McNear II was then theater manager.

(Con’t on page 11)

MUSEUM HIGHLIGHTS

El Dia De Los Muertos by Faith Ross

The Petaluma Museum Association (PMA) has joined with the El Dia de los Muertos committee in bringing "The Day of the Dead" celebration to Petaluma. According to Teresa Froschl, the PMA was a part of this celebration in the past. Teresa displays a Children's Altar every year. What I know is that this year's celebration has been wonderful. What I have learned is that the El Dia de los Muertos is a ritual time to honor loved ones who have died and to acknowledge death as a part of life. Death is portrayed with affection and humor by artists and others who participate.

I am writing this before the final candlelight procession on November 1. I am eagerly awaiting to see thousands of people pour into the museum after the procession. I have seen the procession in the past with giant puppets, people with painted faces, the music and a spirit of celebration.

We want to thank the El Dia de Los Muertos team that put the activities together. It has been fun and a wonderful experience learning more about the cultures behind the celebration. Israel Escudero, Abraham Solar, Gloria McCallister and Margo Gallagher have spent hours working on this project and it has proven to be one of the most colorful and whimsical celebrations I have seen at the museum. I am sure there are other people that helped, and we thank you, but this is the core group that worked with the PMA over the last year to bring this project to life.

The events started with an Altar Workshop on September 27. We learned how to build an altar and make many of the flowers that decorate the altar. The opening reception on October 3 was magical with the music, dancing and food. The food was provided by Don Pancho's Restaurant and it was delicious.

The PMA added to the celebration a Mezcal Tasting and Food Pairing on October 15. I am still trying to understand the difference between Mezcal and Tequila, but those who attended this event enjoyed a treat of wonderful foods prepared by our local chef Amber Balshaw, Preferred Sonoma Caterers and Mezcal donated by Willbees Wine and Spirits.

On October 16, Poetry of Remembrance was held. This is a more somber event with poets and community members sharing poetry and stories about those who have died. Food was a part of this event.

There have been other events during the celebration that were not held at the museum with altars all over downtown Petaluma. We hope that you have taken part in some of the festivities or visited the museum to see the altars.



Main Community Altar



Israel Escudero - Exhibit Curator
Photo credit Jim Johnson



Artist Reception - Dancers in the Museum Garden



Mezcal Tasting

photo by Jim Johnson

Museum Highlights con't

Cemetery Tour, Oct. 17, 2015



Addie Atwater (aka Sherrie Ortegren)

Thank you to the Petalumans of Yesteryear for another informative cemetery walk at Cypress Hill Cemetery. Every October they dress up in costume and tell the history of our early Petaluma citizens who were laid to rest there.



River Cruise, Oct 23, 2015

It was another wonderful cruise on the Petaluma River. Thank you to Captain Ronn Patterson and Barbara Fitzgerald of Dolphin Charters. Also, thanks go to John "Fitz" FitzGerald, narrator, Libby FitzGerald, assistant, Ruth Robeson, refreshments and Mary Rowe, helper.



Fitz and Captain Ronn Patterson



Libby FitzGerald and PMA Vice President Ruth Robeson

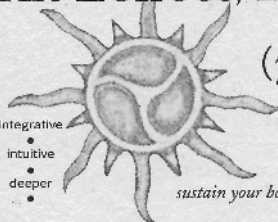


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Holiday Season Concert Series

Nov. 29 - Sunday at 3:00pm

Navarro Trio

The acclaimed Navarro Trio with Marilyn Thompson-piano, Victor Romasevich- violin, and Jill Rachuy Bindel-cello will perform music of Beethoven & Arensky.



Dec. 7 - Sunday at 3:00pm

“A Renaissance Christmas” Join us for an afternoon of traditional carols and renaissance music performed by the Festival Consort on meticulous copies of amazing renaissance instruments. Joined by singers Carol Menke & Chris Fritzsche. Complimentary Wassail punch!



Dec. 13 - Sunday at 3:00pm



“A Santa Rosa’s Children’s Chorus Christmas”

This outstanding choir and their angelic voices will delight you with songs of the season! Bring the whole family, kids free!

Concerts are:

\$20.00 / General and \$25.00 / Balcony

Tickets can be purchased at
petalumamuseum.com or 707-778-4398



NEW YEARS EVE GALA CONCERT

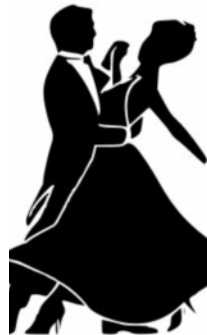
Sponsored by Sky Hill Cultural Alliance at the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum. A festive evening with Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, performed by string players from the San Francisco Symphony and Elizabeth Walter, pianist. This gala concert has become an annual tradition in the acoustically renowned “Carnegie Hall” of Petaluma. Complimentary wine & cheese!

7-9 pm

Tickets are \$40-70

707-778-4398 or petalumamuseum.com

Dec 31 “A NIGHT IN VIENNA”



A magical New Year’s Eve Ball! Gourmet buffet style dinner with many traditional Viennese dishes & desserts. Enjoy listening and dancing to Strauss Waltzes with live orchestra ‘til midnight! Fine wines and Champagne toast to celebrate the New Year in style! To benefit Sky Hill Cultural Alliance, bringing high quality classical music to our community.

9:00 pm - 12:30 am

Hermann Sons Hall, 860 Western Ave.

Tickets are \$125.00

(Special Price for PMA Members - \$100.00)

707-583-3340 or www.skyhill.org



Lectures and Music: Mozart & Beethoven

Mozart - Mondays, Nov. 9, 16 and 23

Beethoven - Wednesdays, Dec. 2, 9, and 16

Please join the PMA and Sky Hill Cultural Alliance in welcoming the newest member of our musical family, Kayleen Asbo. She will be presenting a two part series of six lectures on the music of Beethoven and Mozart at the Petaluma Historical Library and Museum. Kayleen is an acclaimed cultural historian, musician, writer and teacher who weaves together myth, psychology, history, and the arts with experiential learning.

For more information about these exciting lecture/performances and to purchase tickets go to www.kayleenasbo.com

Special PMA Members Promotion: Two for one. Bring a guest for free.

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VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

by Mary Rowe

Michael Slade



Michael was born 77 years ago in London, England. He was a child when World War II started and remembers the bombings during that time. He recalls going to bed at night to be awakened once the air raid sirens went off and having to go to the shelter his father had built in their yard. It was a simple shelter consisting of a dug out

hole and corrugated sheets of steel for the roof. It would fill with water at times if it rained. He would share this shelter with his mom, brother and sister many times. His father was absent a lot because he was volunteering as a fire warden and home guard. The bombing went on for 5 years. I asked if he and his siblings were ever sent off to escape from the bombings. He remarked that no they never left except in 1944 when his father decided that things were getting too hot and sent his mother and family to a region west of London where he hoped it would be safer. They stayed away for a few months and returned. He said at that time the Germans were using V-1 and V-2 rockets which he found very scary

as a child. You would hear a buzzing sound as they were going overhead but when they grew silent you knew that they would be dropping and causing destruction.

Michael graduated from high school and then got a degree in Chemistry at Exeter University. At nineteen he followed his older brother to the United States and eventually ended up in California attending UCSF and received a doctoral degree in Pharmaceutical Chemistry. In 1966 he went to UC Berkeley which he attended for 3 years as a postdoctoral fellow in toxicology. He worked as a toxicologist in various private organizations and then from 1979 to 1993 he was the Chief Forensic Toxicologist for the City and County of San Francisco attached to the Medical Examiner's Office. He then went on to start his own private practice.

In 2006 Michael moved with his wife Lauren to Pezenas, France. The south of France was a place he fell in love with when visiting there at 16 years old. They lived there for 8 years. In November of 2014 they made the decision to return to the U.S. and settle in Petaluma. Lauren was raised in Petaluma and has family here.

Michael started looking for volunteer opportunities and decided the museum was the perfect place to do that because of his interest in history. He remarked that he was impressed with the town of Petaluma and the interest in the community in preserving its heritage. He has been working on the diaries of Clara Belle Sproul Ivancovich for the purpose of putting the information online. The diaries which date from 1914 until she died aged 81, in 1939 have been donated to the museum by Sue Rydberg Canavan, Clara's fourth generation relative.

Say "Thanks" to These Local Businesses

The PMA thanks several businesses that contributed to the success of the Volunteer Luncheon. Raley's supermarket provided spring water and Petaluma Coffee & Tea provided freshly brewed coffee. LaLa's Creamery donated gift certificates that were awarded to volunteers.

Please patronize these business and thank them for supporting the PMA.

Current PMA Volunteer Needs

The PMA Public Service Committee has planned a host of events for November and December 2015 and is looking for set-up and clean-up crews for concerts, exhibit receptions and other events. Helping out at concerts means you get to hear glorious music for free! See the enclosed Program of Public Service for upcoming concerts. If you can lend a hand to one or more events, please contact Kit Schlich, Director of Volunteer Development, at kit@kitsch.net

PMA Acknowledges Volunteers

This past August the PMA held a luncheon to honor its invaluable volunteers. Around sixty volunteers gathered under the heritage oak in the Garden Court on a very warm day to share food and friendship. A number of individuals were singled out for recognition: Faith Ross for her work with exhibits, volunteers and as a desk docent; intern Simone Robinson for her work with oral histories; Vicki Keith and Lee Lapinski for their tireless work in Collections. Retiring docents Ron Larsen, Jeanne DeLuca Kathy Greene and Judy Nyman were thanked for their years of service. A plaque commemorating the contributions of John Benanti and Lucy Kortum in the Research Library was presented and will hang in the Library.



Hill Opera House.....from pg 4

(He also owned the Mystic Theater on Main Street). The evolution of the Opera House building continued: in 1967 it was renamed the Showcase Theater and finally, in 1979, the Phoenix.

Side note: The Phoenix Theater has been managed for 31 years by Petaluman Tom Gaffey, with the mission to foster, through music and the arts, the emotional and social development of the young people of our community. And, in that regard, Jim Agius has served as the concert booker. Jim and Tom have done great things for Petaluma.

The "oldest profession" had thrived wherever men were lonely. Victorian sexual repression had something to do with it too, as police generally looked the other way. The saloon was where much of an evening's action started and, in 1885, tiny Petaluma sported 17 saloons. (More saloons

than lawyers!) But, as more families arrived from the East, churches and schools were springing up and the police and courts began to crack down on the illicit trade, as our little town in the West became a bit more respectable. All this really happened, right here, in River City.



Georgia Harper Troupe ca 1905, Georgia center



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Thank you to Judy Praetzel for her donation of a vehicle. The PMA appreciates your generosity and participation in our Vehicle Donation Program.



Thank you to Christine Hill for her donation of an original invoice from Schuluckebier Hardware dated 1904. This is on display in the permanent collection upstairs.

Digital Movie
Camera
Needed!



Bill Hammerman is asking if anyone has a digital movie camera for recording oral histories. Please contact the museum or Bill at b.hammerman@comcast.net



Petaluma Museum Association Board of Directors meetings are on the second Monday of each month at 6:00 pm. They are open to the public.

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Join or Renew - It's easy to do!

1. Visit our website, petalumamuseum.com, complete the membership form and make a PayPal, Visa or Mastercard payment
2. Complete the attached form, pay with Visa or Mastercard or enclose your check made payable to the **Petaluma Museum Association** and mail it to our address on the payment form
3. Call the **PMA** office at (707) 778-4398 Monday through Friday, between 10:00 AM and 3:00 PM, and pay with your Visa or MasterCard.

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS & CATEGORIES

BASIC BENEFITS OF ALL MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES:

- Discounted admission to temporary exhibits (admission to the library & permanent exhibits is free to all)
- Reserved seating at the Butter & Egg Parade
- Subscription to and acknowledgement in the PMA newsletter
- Personalized membership card
- 10% off Museum store merchandise
- 10% off gift memberships
- Invitations to previews & receptions

INDIVIDUAL \$35
All Basic Benefits
(\$20 memberships are available in this category to: Seniors, Educators, Students. Military is free)

FAMILY / DUAL \$70
All Basic Benefits, PLUS:
•Extension of Basic Benefits to an additional adult & children in the same household up to age 17
•Two personalized membership cards

RECIPROCAL MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP PRIVILEGES - "Museum Goer" Benefit

If you join the PMA at the Supporter level (\$125) or higher, you will receive free or discounted admission to more than 600 museums in the U.S. Some of the top Bay Area participating museums are:

Asian Art Museum • Walt Disney Family Museum • de Young Museum • Legion of Honor
CA Historical Society Museum • Charles M. Schulz Museum • Sonoma County Museum

SUPPORTER \$125
All Family / Dual Benefits, PLUS:
•Reciprocal Museum Membership Privileges

BUSINESS SPONSOR \$150
All Supporter Benefits, PLUS:
•Your business card in the PMA newsletter

PATRON \$400
All Supporter Benefits, PLUS:
•Personalized exhibit tour for you and 10 guests
•Listing of your name on the Museum's Donor Wall

COMPANY SPONSOR \$500
All Patron Benefits, PLUS:
•Your company logo in the PMA newsletter

BENEFACTOR \$750 +
All Patron Benefits, PLUS:
•Opportunity to be named the benefactor of a temporary exhibit or annual program

CORPORATE SPONSOR \$1,000 +
All Benefactor Benefits, PLUS:
•Your corporation's logo in the PMA newsletter

Payment Options:

Enclosed is my check made payable to the Petaluma Museum Association

Charge \$ _____ to my
 Visa MasterCard

Card #: _____

Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____

Member Options:

I am interested in volunteering.

I am interested in becoming a "Legacy Donor."

I am interested in including the PMA in my Charitable Trust.

Enclosed is my additional donation of \$ _____.

Petaluma Museum Association
Petaluma Historical Library & Museum
20 Fourth Street
Petaluma, CA 94952-3004

If you prefer, you can register your membership online at petalumamuseum.com, or call 707-778-4398

PETALUMA MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
Membership Categories

Individual \$35
 Senior, Educator, Student \$20. Military free

Family / Dual \$70

Supporter \$125 *

Patron \$400 *

Benefactor \$750 + *

Business Sponsor \$150 *

Company Sponsor \$500 *

Corporate Sponsor \$1,000 + *

* Reciprocal Museum Membership Levels

I want to Initiate a PMA membership

I want to renew a PMA membership

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____

Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____



Museum Collection Update

by Solange Russek & Barbara Maxwell

We would like to thank Helen Hagopian for donating her grandmother Catherine Mueller Murphy's and mother Florence Murphy Carter's collection of hats and jackets, aprons, blouses, wedding dress and bridesmaid dress.

Catherine, along with her sister Rebecca, came to the US in 1900 from Homburg, Germany. Catherine moved to Petaluma in 1905. Florence was born in San Francisco and later moved to Petaluma. Florence met her husband William Allen Carter at Professor Kenney's dance class offered at the Unique Theater located on Fourth Street. Helen's father William Allen Carter was born at the Murphy Ranch near Chileno Valley. He later worked for GP McNear loading grain.

Helen was born and raised in Petaluma, delivered by Doctor Jim Anderson. She eventually worked for him as a nurse in the 1940's. Helen married John Hagopian whom she met at dance classes in the Petaluma Hotel.

The beaver fur hat dated 1910 was worn around town by Catherine. The green chiffon dress was one that Florence wore in the 1930's at Professor Kenney's dance class.



Helen Hagopian



1910 Beaver fur hat



1930's Chiffon dress

PETALUMA MUSEUM ASSOCIATION
Petaluma Historical Library & Museum
20 4th St.
Petaluma, CA 94952
www.petalumamuseum.com

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Photo by Gary Kaplan

Petaluma Artists and Artisans
November 5 - December 27