



# THE METEOR

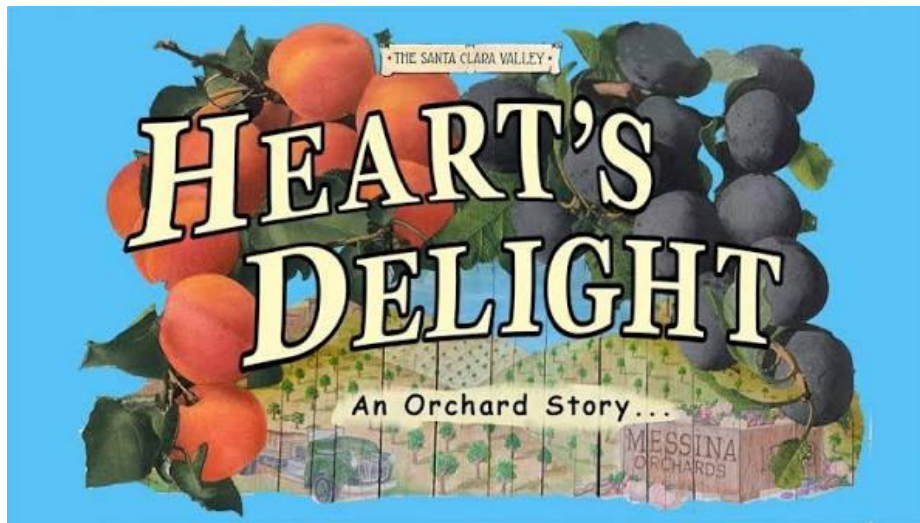
Historic Preservation Society of Santa Clara  
Harris-Lass House Museum

Fall Edition – September 2026



## *Movie Night in the Barn*

On Friday evening, **September 25, 2026** the Harris Lass Museum will hold its annual “Movie Night in the Barn.” Arrive at 6:00 p.m. to check out the Museum gardens, get settled in, find a chair, and have some popcorn and a beverage.



About 6:30 p.m. ***Heart's Delight: An Orchard Story*** will be shown. Running about 40 minutes, the film was professionally made in early 2024, debuted at the Saratoga Blossom Festival that year, and tells the story of the Messina Orchard Farm in San Jose. The film follows the journey of Sicilian immigrant **Stefano Messina** and the generations of orchard families who helped shape the valley before Silicon Valley transformed the

landscape. Through rare stories, memories, and beautiful imagery, the documentary captures the spirit of the orchards, blossoms, and communities that once defined the Santa Clara Valley when it was best known as “The Valley of Heart's Delight.” This is a free event and suitable for ages 12 years and older. Although no one will be turned away, RSVP's are requested to determine how many chairs to set up in Barn and how much popcorn to provide. Leave RSVP on Museum message line at (408) 249-7905 or email to: [info@harrislass.org](mailto:info@harrislass.org).

## *Annual Flea Market & Yard Sale*

Save this Date! On **Saturday, October 10, 2026** on the Harris Lass grounds and lawn, the Museum will hold its Annual Flea Market & Yard Sale, open to the public from **8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.** The Museum will be selling unneeded donations and deeply discounted gift shop clearance items. In addition, members of the Museum will be selling their crafts and/or vintage items and rummage. Members that want to have a table to sell their wares must register with event coordinator Sue Harper email [sejharper@aol.com](mailto:sejharper@aol.com) or text to (408) 888-0581.

### **Guest Author Rohan Keshari**

After volunteering at last year's “Movie Night in the Barn”, high school student Rohan Keshari was inspired to do some secondary source online research about the agrarian period in the Santa Clara Valley preceding the farm and orchard era when California was part of Mexico.

The essay he wrote is entitled: “***A Pre-History to Agriculture at the Harris Lass Property***” and is printed on page 3 of this newsletter. Thank you, Rohan!

## Mary Ann Marinshaw Retires from HPSSC Board

After over 35 years of dedicated service to the Board of the Historic Preservation Society of Santa Clara and to the Harris Lass Museum, Mary Ann Marinshaw resigned from the Board in August. When asked, Mary Ann said that she was not one of the founding members with Bea Lichtenstein of the HPSSC or among the original set of volunteers Bea recruited in 1987 (like Kathy Foley, Lou Faria and Jackie Hughes). However, by 1989, when the City was still renovating the Museum and before it opened to the public in February 1991, Mary Ann joined the volunteer corps along with her friends Carol Legleiter and Joan Hastings. The three of them offered to come to the house on the first Saturday of every month and vacuum, clean and dust the house.



By 1990, however, with the Museum's opening fast approaching HPSSC founding president Bea Lichtenstein gave Mary Ann no choice – she told her she was going to be on the rotation of weekend docents when the Museum opened to the public. When the Museum actually did open on February 9, 1991, Mary Ann was there wearing a vintage Victorian costume and leading tours. She was on the HPSSC Board many of the years from 1991 to the present. After Founding President Bea Lichtenstein resigned from the Board in 1995 and shifted her efforts to running the Santa Clara Arts & Historical Consortium at the Headen-Inman House Museum, Mary Ann served her first term as President of the Historic Preservation Society of Santa Clara in 1995–1996. Among the other people she remembers serving on the

early Boards with her were Charlie Tucker, Ed Richards, and Leo Martinez.

Mary Ann had exceptional talents convincing businesses and members of local service groups to partner with the Museum on various projects. As examples, local hairdresser Emma Kaliterna raised money for a new carpet in the sitting room and Advance Cardiovascular Systems contributed a drinking fountain during Mary Ann's first term as President.

In later years, when serving as one of the Board members, Mary Ann would often chair special events. She was an early Chair and then a Co-chair of the very successful annual antique appraisal event, Living History Family Day, and a Co-chair with Anita Marencia of the first Garden Tour event organized by the Museum. She co-chaired the Santa Clara Historic Home Tour twice. Mary Ann worked on some memorable special exhibits in the house including the Wedding Attire exhibit and the year the Museum's hat and handbag collections were on display. The latter entailed creating lots of historical notes and attracted some local news coverage.

As the years went by, Mary Ann also recruited her helpful and talented sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren to help out at special events at the Museum such as the Santa Clara Historic Home Tour when the Museum was on the Tour; when the Museum was turned into a Halloween Haunted House; during Movie Nights; Family Day/Open House events; Antique Appraisal events, and Photo Ops with Santa. Two of her grandchildren, Jeff and Alexa, each wrote an article for ***The Meteor*** newsletter at Mary Ann's urging since a young person's point of view is needed and important.

In 2010, as an episode of The Better Part Series, the Cupertino Senior TV crew filmed at the Harris Lass Museum. Museum volunteers were recruited to play Lass Family members to recreate a day on the farm with Mary Ann cast as the Captain Lass' wife, Julia. The film entitled The Final Harvest may be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IXhjGiDmoc>

Mary Ann, you will be missed by the Board. Feel free to keep giving us ideas and strong opinions on how to engage the community. Please keep coming to our events with your family!

## **A Pre-History to Agriculture at the Harris-Lass Property** Written By: Rohan Keshari

While the Harris-Lass House stands as a cherished landmark to the Santa Clara Valley's past, its story begins much earlier. From an agricultural standpoint, the Harris Lass property is most prominently remembered for its large-scale prune farm. However the land where the museum stands today has an earlier agrarian history.

Before the first prune farms were established in California, the surrounding land was a sprawling rancho. This rancho period began with Mexican independence from Spain, where Mexico gained control over California land. During this time, large tracts of land were secularized and distributed primarily to settlers who were considered loyal citizens of Mexico, by the Mexican government. Because the land there was made up of vast grasslands, most of these families went on to use their land as open-range grazing grounds for cattle. Throughout the early 1820's to the late 1840's the export of hides and tallow remained as the main trade in the region; however soon after the gold rush began in 1848, the population of incoming settlers skyrocketed, marking the beginning of the end for the Rancho Period.

As the region transformed, and as the population increased, the industry of the Santa Clara Valley began to take a turn. With the recent discovery of gold in California, and with the increase in arrival of new settlers, the rancho system quickly became obsolete as newcomers sought to establish their own farms. Along with the rising population of incoming settlers, came an unprecedented demand for food. In order to meet this need, farmers planted staple crops such as corn and wheat, with wheat dominating the agricultural scene.

In 1850, not too long after the initial Gold Rush excitement had passed, Louis Pellier, a French horticulturalist discovered the fertility in the soil was ideal for growing prunes. In 1856, with his brother's help, he established the first prune orchard in San Jose. Other farmers began cultivating prunes, and it eventually became the most profitable crop in the State.



In 1865, an English cabinet maker, Henry Harris, purchased and established property on 13 acres of land on a prune orchard in the Santa Clara Valley. The house and barn that he constructed there still stand today and is now known as the Harris-Lass Museum.

### Sources:

1. [https://www.svvoice.com/santa-clara-history-the-harris-lass-house/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.svvoice.com/santa-clara-history-the-harris-lass-house/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
2. <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=155315>
3. <https://californiaprunes.org/history/>
4. <https://californiaprunes.org/articles/history-facts/the-valley-of-hearts-delight/>
5. <https://www.santaclaraca.gov/our-city/about-santa-clara/city-history>
6. <https://mchsmuseum.com/local-history/american-era-settlement/the-california-cattle-boom-1849-1862/>

## HPSSC Board of Directors

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*To see the full-color edition of this newsletter,  
view on the web at [www.harrislass.org](http://www.harrislass.org)*

**The museum is located at 1889 Market  
Street in Santa Clara (west of  
Winchester).**

**Mailing address: HPSSC, P.O. Box 3311  
Santa Clara, CA 95055-3311**

**Message line: 408 249-7905**

**We are on Facebook and Instagram**

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## Public Tours

The Harris Lass Museum will be open for  
docent tours from **Noon to 2 p.m. on the  
first Sunday of the month** on September 6<sup>th</sup>  
& October 4<sup>th</sup> 2026.

Spread the word to friends and neighbors to  
drop in those days. Even now, a number of the  
people who drop in for the Tours say they only  
recently learned about the house or have been  
curious about the property since walking or  
driving by when the house was not open.  
For members that haven't taken a tour  
recently, there is a fun and informative special  
exhibit throughout the house of vintage gadgets  
once used by the Lass Family. Inspired by  
another house museum we are also slowly  
adding a framed set of bullet points to each  
room of the house about the most significant  
features in that specific room. The Board is  
also excited that two of our volunteers want to  
be trained to serve as docents next year. One of  
them will be present at each of the upcoming  
public tours!

## Santa Clara Historic Home Tour

[www.sc-hometour.com](http://www.sc-hometour.com)

The Historic Home Tour is a delightful long-  
running Santa Clara holiday tradition. It is  
scheduled for Friday, December 4<sup>th</sup> from 6 pm-  
10 pm and Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup> from 12  
Noon -5 pm. Last tour begins a half hour  
before closing.

Four private homes plus the Headen-Inman  
House Museum at 1509 Warburton Ave. will be  
on the 2026 Tour.

Early Bird tickets will go on sale, beginning  
October 1, 2026 for \$25 and extend through  
November 14<sup>th</sup>. Beginning November 15<sup>th</sup>, the  
price for all tickets will be \$30. Tickets are  
available either online or by mail. For online  
orders, beginning October 1<sup>st</sup>, go to the website,  
<https://sc-hometour.com/>. Customers will  
receive an email receipt with additional tour  
details. For mail orders, print off the order  
form on the website. Customers will then  
receive a receipt by mail with tour details. All  
mail orders must be received by **Saturday,  
November 21, 2026.**

Tickets can be purchased for the first couple of  
hours on the days of the tour at the Santa Clara  
Woman's Club Adobe, 3260 The Alameda,  
Santa Clara, CA 95050 but will cost \$35 each.  
The Adobe will also be the point of check-in for  
the Tour where the tour map and booklet will  
be available and where fabulous raffle baskets  
will be on display and raffle tickets available for  
purchase.

The largest beneficiary of Tour proceeds is the  
Harris Lass Museum. Although, the Museum  
is **not** on this year's tour, as a bonus and an  
appreciation for the Tour, on Sunday,  
December 6<sup>th</sup> only, from 12 Noon to 2 p.m.  
Santa Claus will be visiting the Harris Lass  
Museum. Home tour ticket holders,  
neighborhood folks, community members, and  
families with children of all ages will be  
welcomed free to see the first floor of the  
Harris Lass House and to have a picture taken  
with Santa. Cookies will be served in the Barn.

Inquiries about the Home Tour may be left on  
the Harris Lass message line at 1-408-249-  
7905 or emailed to [info@harrislass.org](mailto:info@harrislass.org).