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A historic wedding

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ERIN SCHWASS AS NATALIA VALLEJO, Brian Maloney as Attila Haraszthy, the Rev. Peter Deycart as Victor Szendi, Arpad Molnar as Arpad Haraszthy and Maya Molnar as Jovita Vallejo.

Robbi Pengelly/Index-Tribune

For the second time in 150 years, the daughters of Gen. Mariano Vallejo were wed to the sons of Count Agoston Haraszthy, in a simple and solemn ceremony on the grounds of the Haraszthy family winery, Buena Vista.

This time, human longevity being what it is, stand-ins had to make do in the key roles, while a real-life audience of some 80 friends, family and well-wishers gathered at the restored Buena Vista Winery in Sonoma to cheer the re-enactment, share in a nuptial luncheon and enjoy a seemingly limitless supply of sparkling wine, pinot noir and sauvignon blanc.

Included in the wedding party were several Hungarian dignitaries and expatriates happy to bask in the reflected glow of their esteemed countryman, his family and the legacy he left as the father of the California wine industry.

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The occasion was a benefit for the Sonoma-Tokaj Sister Cities Committee, which will help defray the costs of bringing Hungarian winemakers from the Tokaj region to Sonoma for the autumn harvest.

Re-enactors in the wedding included George Webber as Count Haraszthy. His wife Cathy Webber as Countess Eleonora Haraszthy, Buena Vista winemaker Brian Maloney as Attila Haraszthy, Arpad Molnar as Arpad Haraszthy, Maya Molnar as Jovita Vallejo, Erin Schwass as Natalia Vallejo (who will soon marry Brian Maloney), Carlo Ligotti as Gen. Mariano Vallejo, Ibolya Ligotti as Dona Francisca Vallejo and the Rev. Peter Deycart as Victor Szendi.

Following are a set of interesting facts relevant to the parties involved in the original ceremony and the time in which they were wed:

The original wedding took place on June 1, 1863, a year when Gen. Vallejo was a gentleman farmer at Lachryma Montis. As the U.S. was in the midst of the Civil War, politically speaking he was an enthusiastic supporter of the Union.

But things were not going well for the Union. Ulysses S. Grant was bogged down trying to conquer the almost impregnable fortress of Vicksburg, which kept the Union from gaining control over the Mississippi and splitting off the western portion of the Confederacy.

Back in Sonoma, Gen. Vallejo was fond of Count Agoston Haraszthy and vice versa.

The count's son, Arpad Haraszthy, had spent four years studying how to make champagne at Venoge in Epernay and returned with Eleonora Haraszthy to Sonoma in the fall of 1862.

Arpad began making several lots of wine, using grapes harvested from his father's vineyards. He made two "claret casks" of zinfandel. He also began making champagne.

Visitors were coming up more and more to Sonoma in 1863 via the steamship that Count Haraszthy purchased in 1861, known as "the Princess." The trip took three-hours, and stagecoaches waited at the landing on Sonoma Creek to whisk visitors back to the Plaza, and to Buena Vista.

The wineries press house was built that year of 1862. A reporter described the 1857 wine he tasted from the cellar in back of the press house as, "A splendid wine, somewhat resembling a 3-year-old Chablis wine."

In 1862, Arpad was the cellar master and Attila Haraszthy was foreman of the vineyards.

Both Arpad and Attila made trips to Lachryma Montis and met the two Vallejo girls. Natalia Vallejo was skilled at sewing, drafting and poetry and played the piano as well. She had received proposals from many men, but turned them all down. In 1861, she was invited to attend the inauguration of President Lincoln, during which she shared a dance with the new president. She eventually fell in love with Attila, whose brother Arpad had also found a love match in her younger sister, Jovita Vallejo.

The year of the wedding, 1863, Buena Vista had 250 acres of vineyards. Count Haraszthy helped many of his neighbors develop businesses in grape-growing and winemaking, which lead to thousands of acres of vineyard sprouting up across the Valley. That summer, he was busy expanding his own vineyards, mostly with vinifera vines, as opposed to the Mission grape.

He built a new stable, with room for 50 horses; put a new roof on the main house; built a short railway to haul grapes from the vineyards up to the second floor of the press house; and laid three-quarters-of-a-mile of three-inch pipes to bring water to the cellars, distillery, stables and other buildings.

In the press house, he improved the steam engine with the addition of pulleys and added pumps that helped move wine from one cellar to another. He could distill 1,000 gallons of wine every 24 hours.

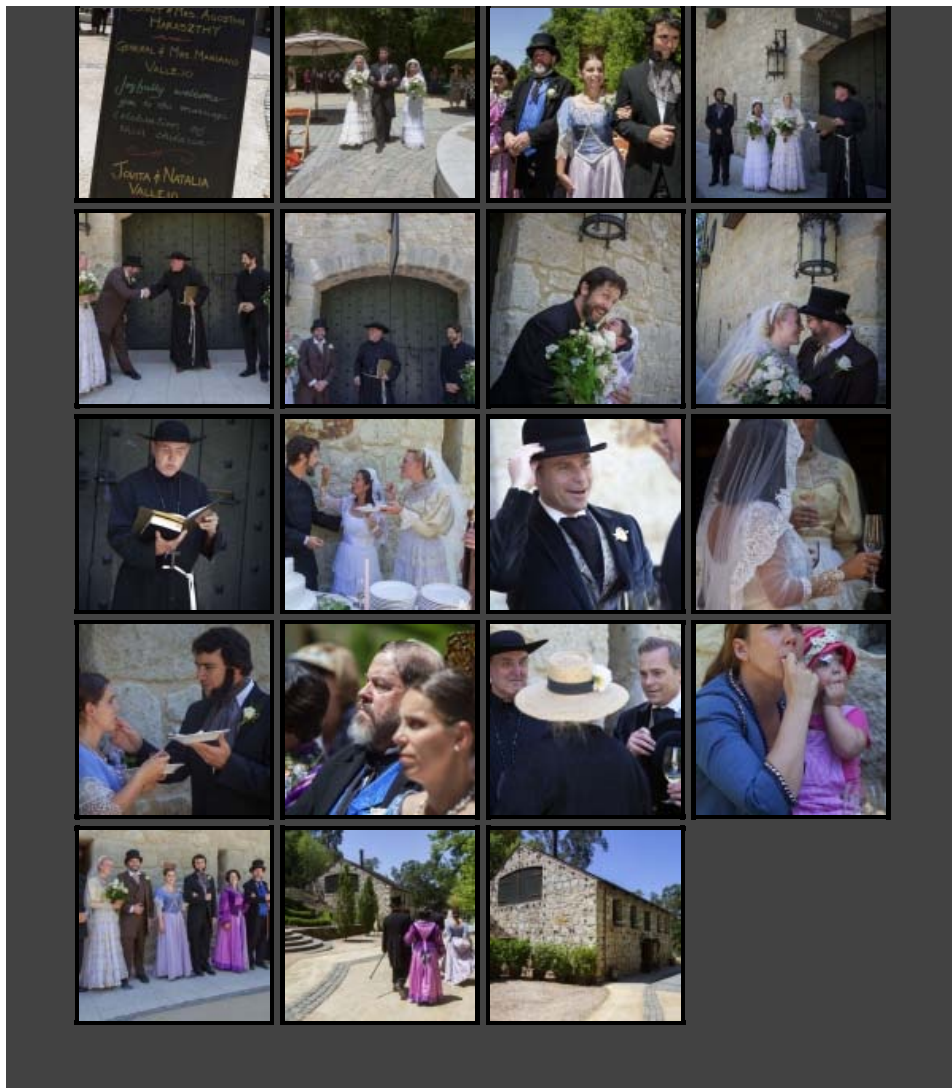
He added a new machine shop at one end of the press house and dug three new tunnels into the ground to the east. While 1863 would be remembered for a significant drought, it wasn't apparent yet on June 1 when the Vallejo-Haraszthy wedding took place at the winery, although it was a very hot day, much like Sunday's re-enactment.

While Buena Vista served plenty of bubbles on Sunday, the winery didn't always have that luck with sparkling wine. Arpad's experimentation with sparkling wine went badly; while making 10,000 bottles, the secondary fermentation to create the bubbles didn't take. Although he took his blankets and slept in the cellars, stoking fires during the night to keep up the temperature to help the stalled fermentation, it was a very cold winter in 1863. His efforts to preserve the fermentation didn't work.

The wine didn't sparkle and finally he gave up, removed the corks and wine enclosures and used the still wine for vinegar and brandy.

Visitors can see the residue from his fires on the ceiling and walls of the west cellar.





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