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## Town Quirks: Sonoma Valley

Friday, September 13th, 2013 | Posted by [dhart](#) | [one response](#)



George Webber is a quirky character as Count Agoston Haraszthy, founder of Buena Vista Winery. (JEFF KAN LEE / Press Democrat file photo)

Each of Sonoma County's towns has a distinct personality. Here are some of Sonoma Valley's endearing quirks:

**Horsing around:** Cars slow down and heads turn whenever James Cannard steps out for a walk around town with his miniature horse, Peanut Butter. Barely taller than a large dog, the honey-colored horse with a flowing mane delights passersby again and again.

### WRITER SPOTLIGHT



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**She's got the beat:** Motorists also gaze upon a woman known as the Dancing Jogging Lady. The tanned, slender woman in skimpy sportswear jogs a bit and then rocks out to her playlist, seemingly unfazed by the traffic along Highway 12. There's even a Facebook page dedicated to her sightings with more than 2,400 followers.

**Pecking order:** Sonoma has a good share of backyard chickens and coops and not too long ago hens and roosters roamed the Sonoma Plaza Park until officials relocated the fowl. Chicken Car Wash owner Jerry Marino had a part in the chicken controversy, too. He was ordered in small claims court to remove the hens and roosters that flocked to his West Napa Street car wash. Today Chicken Car Wash recalls an era of squawking and crowing within the city.



Sonoma City Hall has four identical sides. Tourists love the Plaza and ghosts reportedly frequent the historic downtown, too.

**Old haunts:** Sonoma's historic and colorful past literally comes to life, with ghosts reportedly appearing throughout the Plaza and around nearby neighborhoods. In her book "Sonoma Ghosts," author Carla Heine calls Sonoma an especially haunted town, with ghosts nearly everywhere, including eight haunting her childhood home, an historic adobe not far from the Sonoma Plaza.

**Long live the Count:** Ask George Webber his name and he'll likely respond "Count Agoston Haraszthy." The actor and bearded look-alike appears as the Count at historic Buena Vista Winery events, where Haraszthy is known as the winery founder and father of California viticulture. The lines are blurred for Webber, whose portrayals of the Count

are quite credible.

**Keeping the peace:** Even before "politically correct" was a phrase, Sonoma was keeping the peace with its 1908 City Hall. The two-story Mission Revival basalt beauty was designed with four identical sides so that merchants all around the Plaza had a front-facing view.

**Zippping around:** In a town with one hospital and one high school, the valley has an abundance of post offices. If the parking lot is packed at the Sonoma Post Office, just drive a few miles to Vineburg, El Verano, Boyes Hot Springs, Eldridge, Glen Ellen or Kenwood for your postal needs.

**We're not gonna take it:** Sonoma is home of the Bear Flag Revolt of 1846 and the citizenry is proud of its feisty heritage. When controversial plans come to attention, few people roll over in apathetic acceptance. A hotel measure with heated opinions is headed to a special election in November, the latest in Sonoma's passionate politics.

**Who needs hot tubs?** Sonoma has the real deal, with soothing and therapeutic mineral warm springs. Visit the Sonoma Mission Inn, Morton's Warm Springs or Sonoma Aquatic Club for a little rejuvenation.

**All aboard:** The quarter-scale Sonoma Traintown Railroad theme park draws visitors and locals alike but back in the day, tourists arrived in Sonoma Valley aboard full-sized trains. There were depots throughout the region, with one still standing in Kenwood. When the Traintown whistle blows, it transports old-timers back to the past.



The historic Kenwood Depot still stands after trains have long departed.

**Mission accomplished:** Sonoma's treasured mission, the San Francisco Solano, is the last and northern-most of California's 21 missions. Fred and Nancy Cline pay tribute to the historic missions with scale-model replicas of every single mission gracing a museum at their winery, Cline Cellars, the only collection of its kind.

**Try that for size:** Sonoma might be small, but there's big-time fun in the valley. Flying schools, a flying trapeze, a fly-fishing facility, a skate park, an auto race track, a golf range and horseback programs allow residents to try something new without leaving the borders of the Valley of the Moon.

**Show some ID, please:** Those of a certain vintage are old enough to claim they were born in a winery. Indeed, the tasting room at Bartholomew Park Winery was once home to the old Sonoma hospital. The winery even hosted a reunion earlier this year, where former newborns were treated to boutique wine produced by the hospital-turned-winery.

**Raise a toast:** Red, white, pink or sparkling, wine is central to Sonoma Valley's history and livelihood. It isn't difficult to salute those who produce some of the finest vintages around. After