



Vallejo & pals return to Buena Vista

July 16, 2015 by Sarah Stierch



This past weekend, Buena Vista Winery was host to some of the biggest names in American history – General Vallejo, Leland Stanford, Abraham Lincoln, and of course, Count Agoston Haraszthy, the founder of Buena Vista and the father of the California wine industry.

I’ve always been a big fan of reenacting. Call me a nerdy, but, anyone who is willing to invest the time, money, and passion into recreating well-known pages of American history is right on in my book. In a past life, I was a museum curator, working in a variety of institutions, including Colonial Williamsburg, one of the most well known living history museums – so yeah, I’m a fan.

Buena Vista delivered on their promise for a “living history extravaganza.”



The winery, which was founded by Count Haraszthy in 1857, is the oldest commercial winery in the state. The winery is not only a California Historic Landmark, but, a National Historic Landmark, too.

The event, which featured over 50 historical reenactors interacting with hundreds of guests, was as fun, eccentric and entertaining as the history of the winery and Jean-Charles Boisset, who has been overseeing winery operations since his family acquired it in 2011.

As a food and wine writer, I generally focus on, well, food and wine. But, the event was so fun, I was more distracted by the impressive and entertaining reenactors and the story being told than anything else. But, I promise you Buena Vista – I'll be back for the Bubble Lounge soon, and another glass of that Private Reserve Zin.

But for now...let us enjoy a bit of "history", shall we?



Uncle Sam led guests on a tour of three critical moments that celebrate the myth and glory of California's role in American history.

"Creative license" was the part of the theme – it's not every day when Uncle Sam comes out of propaganda and into real life, is it?



The three historical moments were 1) the founding of the California Republic; 2) the discovery of gold; and 3) the completion of the railroad.



Uncle Sam holds the **Golden Spike**, which joined the rails of the First Transcontinental Railroad to celebrate its completion.



And that spike was driven into the tracks by Leland Stanford. Stanford toasted American ingenuity for completing the railroad (a pat on the back for himself) and the Count for his fine wine – which Stanford said would be shipped throughout the country on the railroad.



Mark Twain was facilitated the meeting of historic legends. He just happened to be in the area while visiting Angels Camp where he would write his legendary “the Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”

The reeanactor was amazing – and made me want to head to the Swiss hotel to share a glarifee with Mr. Clemens “himself.”



Jean-Charles Boisset played the role of a French businessman with a focus on wine – not too far from the truth, right? He gave three big cheers for the end of the war, the completion of the railroad, and the revitalization of the American economy which – on this day – we credited the Count's wine as key to that revitalization.

Boisset was the other host for the day – when not on stage and playing his part in the show, he greeted every guest, took photos with fanatical JCB fans (seriously, he has quite a fan base) and shared the fun with everyone. We all felt welcome.



Boisset is known for his eccentric and fun fashion – and it looks like he's not the only one.



General Vallejo (in his younger years) spoke highly of the Count and the California wine industry – and bragged about the fact that his two daughters married the Count’s two sons in what was called the “Wedding of the Century,” at the time.



And then, as if out of *Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure*, Abraham Lincoln arrived to toast the Count, the wine industry and the end of the Civil War.

And no, Lincoln never visited California but, I’m sure he would have wanted to, right?



I have seen a handful of Lincoln reenactors in my day – he is by far the closest spitting image to Lincoln I have ever seen. He was also as awkward, shy, and to the point as Lincoln was credited as being while public speaking. He was great!



The afternoon wrapped up with the return of the Count's son from fighting in the Civil War.

Welcome back son! Little do you know your father will lose his winery and move off to Nicaragua to find his fortune in the rum industry only to have a run in with an alligator...

...I think we have our next history extravaganza theme!