

# Calistoga



Samuel Brannan purchased a tract of land in the Napa region around Calistoga Springs in 1858, with the intention of establishing a popular summer resort. He built a hotel and twenty cottages near the springs, coined the word Calistoga from “California” and “Saratoga”, as a name for his resort and then turned his attention to the adjacent hillsides.

Encouraged by plantings in Sonoma and by a few growers near Napa, he planted the slopes with cuttings of superior wine and table grapes. Both the Spanish and early American settlers had made wine from Napa County vineyards. A notable year, however, was 1858, when Sam Brannan planted his hillside. That autumn Charles Krug made about 1,200 gallons of wine from Napa Valley Vineyards. In the year following at the Bale Mill, north of St. Helena, he made wine for Louis Bruck, and in 1860, made 5,000 gallons at Mr. Yount’s place, establishing his reputation.

The Greystone Winery has gone through numerous changes of ownership, and today, as the California Culinary Institute, it stands as it did when first constructed in 1889. Situated a few hundred feet from the main highway on the western side of the hill, it is a magnificent building over 400 feet long with tunnels into the hills at the rear.

In the spring of 1880, a well known poet, Robert Louis Stevenson, brought his bride from France to Silverado. The old mining camp of Silverado, in Robert Louis Stevenson’s day, had already been abandoned. There, in the woody canyon, filled with the scent of sweet bay trees and wild azaleas, he lived from May until July. The collection written of descriptive and narrative essays, *Silverado Squatters*, was completed in France, but came from the

memories of that dreamful summer on the heights of Mt. Saint Helena.

From Calistoga, with its geysers, orchards and hot springs, it is a scant nine miles to the Old Toll House. Accessed by a stage road, the historic Old Toll House stood on the side of Mt. Saint Helena where visitors passed on the way to Clear Lake. It was here that Stevenson took possession of an old miner’s cabin with its sashless windows, “choked with the green and sweet smelling foliage of the a bay,” and its three rooms, “so plastered against the hill that one room was right atop of another.”

A trail leads abruptly up the mountainside and around a sharp bend to the mine entrance, not far from the cabin, where there is now a stone marker at the historic Robert Louis Stevenson State Park. Here, in this deeply wooded glen, filled with its thousand mountain fragrances and lifted high above the valley fogs, Robert Louis Stevenson spent his honeymoon with Fannie Van de Grift Osbourne and then returned to France with rich memories and recuperated health.

Today, Calistoga is known for its wonderful health spas, relaxing resorts, colorful history and its famous-brand mineral water. Just 75 miles from San Francisco, visitors enjoy fine dining and access to the many vineyard tasting rooms. Shopping and a trip to the Calistoga Geyser are just a few of the many opportunities that make the small village of Calistoga a destination for visitors to enjoy -so much, so near, at the top of the Napa Valley. ■