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# Folks of the Land

By Allison Jones

*“I desire no future that will break the ties with the past.”*

— George Eliot



Mrs. Halvorsen's Singer



Old Olive trees, new vineyard

Sitting on the front porch of the tasting room at Six Sigma Ranch and Winery, I could easily close my eyes, listen to the yet warm October wind sift through the trees and pretend I am in a different time. The time frame wouldn't really matter because a plot of land the size of San Francisco is bound to have memories galore—generations of them. Six Sigma Ranch is roughly 4,000 acres, and at the location of each orphaned fence post or tree-grafted length of barbed wire going nowhere, there are disembodied *thought* prints; someone's memories.

Else Ahlmann has begun to gather those prints and log those memories for a book she is writing about the land that is now Six Sigma Ranch and Winery—Else, along with her husband Kaj are the owners and founders. Since 2003, she has been diligently poring over dusty county records, past land *patents* (land granted by the government), census reports and surveyor notes to discover who lived on their land, beginning with the first families to settle. She and Kaj have a deep, abiding love for their property and appreciation for those who lived there and left

clues about their lives.

Else's work for her book, *The Folks Who Walked Our Land*, is not all documentation research. She takes her camera (which she wears today as we talk), onto her property and captures things that were brought here by other hands, things that will help tell the story she is researching. She also finds people who may hold some of the memories, those still alive to talk about what happened before the Ahlmanns got there. Else admits that it has been difficult research, not laid out like a history book in the county library, as one would hope. For instance, the land

wasn't owned in total by one family in the beginning. Else has found that the Six Sigma property is a culmination of over thirty original land patents. As time went on, three families, the Asbills, the Halvorsens and the Hutchinsons through acquisition, later made up roughly 70% of the total. That in itself poses a great time investment: attempting discovery about each settling family, how they came to be there, where their children went and much, much more. Several specific stories in Else's completed research were of such interest to me that I wanted to share parts of them with our *Valley* readers, and do so here with her blessing.

## The Schwiers Brothers

In 1888, Frederick Henry Arndt Schwiers (Arndt) was given a land patent on 151 acres adjacent to today's Ranch, while Frederick William Schwiers (William), in 1892, patented 160 acres of a portion of Six Sigma Ranch, right next to his brother. The two brothers led very different lives, William being a successful businessman in the East with a large family, and Arndt, a broken-hearted man alone after the accidental death of his fiancé. Arndt lived on his land until he died, but William possibly only lived there a short time, then went back East to be with his family again. Else Ahlmann gathered much information from today's Schwiers Family and neighbors whose older relatives knew and talked of the Schwiers brothers. As valuable as the telling of history from one generation to another, were the artifacts found on the respective brothers' properties: the remains of a water well hand dug by William,

beautiful orchard trees of olive and black walnut planted by both brothers, a cast iron stove buried just beneath the grass and some rusted parts from a buggy probably belonging to William. The picture of the Schwier property location taken by Else shows the olive trees planted by Arndt, next to her son Christian's newly planted vineyard in 2004 (above). Through county records, family history and secrets from the land, Else Ahlmann was able to recreate the story of William and Arndt, one successful in coal and family, the other a recluse, dying alone on his property with his fruit trees around him.

## The Halvorsen Home

One of the most wonderful finds on the Ranch land was an old Singer Sewing Machine sitting in an open space, seemingly waiting for its owner to come back and use it once again. Else's research brought her to an article in the Lake County Bee dated Wednesday, July 22, 1925. There was told a story of an old couple, Mr. and Mrs. H.C. Halvorsen whose oil stove had started a fire in their home the week before. The sewing machine may or may not have been one of the valuables they were trying to save but the news article spoke of some important papers in which Mrs. Halvorsen's hands were burned to retrieve. Sadly, the valuable papers were brought outside the burning house but the house was lost and so were the papers.

## Secrets Everywhere

Walt Campbell a long-time friend of the Ahlmann's and Six Sigma's Hospitality Director shares stories of his time hunting on the Ranch property with his

son Caleb; a pastime they both love. If anyone knows the property besides Kaj and Else, it's Walt. Currently, all of the land except about 500 acres has been walked by someone at Six Sigma. With that said, Walt, has a few tales of his own, just in sightings. Some of the aliens to a natural landscape in Lake County have been an old Model T bumper in the southeast corner of the property, a camp stove with grass growing through it in the field behind the Ahlmann's home, barbed wire embedded in an oak tree and hand split redwood fences. "Some of the fences, they just go and stop at both ends," Walt says in wonder, "and no water!" These are some of the mysteries that Else hopes to uncover; a treasure hunt of sorts.

## "The Folks Who Walked Our Land"

I have promised Else that I would not tout "Folks" as coming out in print soon. There is still so much work to do and stories to find. But I can say with some certainty that when she finishes, it will bring together certain history in Lake County that was before seemingly just one story here and an unrelated story there. Like jigsaw pieces in a puzzle, her research will bring families closer in the truth about their ancestors and the history they all shared.

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