

Local Legislative Government in Napa County

Local legislative governance in Napa County today is found in two bodies if one lives in a city or town – the Board of Supervisors and the local city/town council. People living in the unincorporated part of the County have the Board of Supervisors (BOS) as their sole local legislative representatives, as did all county residents until 1874 (when the City of Napa incorporated).

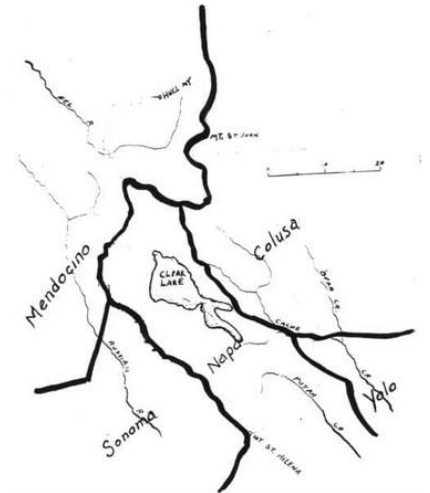
This is the norm for residents of all 58 counties in California, with one exception: since 1856, San Francisco has had a consolidated or hybrid city/county government – an elected board of supervisors (currently 11) and elected mayor.

This county-wide legislative governance system began with the original 27 counties in 1852, after a three-year period (1850-1852), when a 3-person Court of Sessions governed each county. It consisted of an elected County judge and two associate judges chosen from among the locally elected justices of the peace. In addition to its judicial duties, it served as a form of transitional local legislative government until the first county Board of Supervisors (BOS) was elected in November 1852. In Napa County, the Court of Sessions eventually was merged into the local county judicial system in the 1860s.

The early 1852 state law establishing boards of supervisors provided that the Court of Sessions should establish three townships in the county, and that three supervisors should be elected countywide, each to represent one of the townships, for a one-year term. On October 6, the Napa County Court of Sessions established the townships and boundaries, as well as election precincts. On November 2, 1852, there were 469 voters in Napa County that cast ballots for representatives from President down to local Supervisors. The Napa County Board of Supervisors met for the first time on December 6, 1852.

Napa County in 1852 included a significant part of what is now Lake County (which was not established until 1861), but had few if any persons entitled to vote under the laws at that time. The first three townships were designated Hot Springs, Yount, and Napa. Viewed north to south, they generally were divided by two somewhat horizontal lines drawn across a map of the county - the northern line even with Sulphur Springs (there was not yet a community of St. Helena) and the southern line in mid-Napa Valley where Dry Creek empties into the Napa River. The three Napa County Supervisors elected in 1852 – John M. Hamilton, Florentine Kellogg, and Jesse Whitton – correspondingly were designated to represent those three districts (north to south).

Hamilton, age 32, was born in Philadelphia, had studied law, and in 1850 been appointed Assistant United States Marshal for Delaware. But his sea captain brother-in-law convinced Hamilton to bring his family to California and they arrived here on August 22, 1851. He would later serve as county school superintendent, become a founding member



*Courtesy of Lake County
California USGenWeb Project*

of Napa's First Presbyterian Church, and in the 1880s/1890s was an elected Lake County Supervisor.

Kellogg was age 36 and already a prominent member of the upper-valley community. Born in New York, his parents had moved west to Illinois. In 1846, Kellogg and his young family made the seven-month trek to California, and he built their home on land that he received in trade with Edward Bale for iron work on the construction of the Bale Mill.

And then there was Jesse Whitton, age 40, perhaps the most 'seasoned' of the three – and the only Supervisor of Napa County ever known to be an occupant of its jail. Jesse was born in Kentucky, and moved to Missouri. He came to California in 1845-46 with John Fremont's third expedition, and returned home vowing to return – and naming his 5th child (born in 1848) "California Whitton." By 1850, Jesse and his family were living in the town of Napa. His in-laws and two of his brothers and their families were also living close by in the Napa Valley.

Jesse was not only on the first Board of Supervisors, but served several subsequent one-year terms. His election in 1859 to his fourth term was the most controversial, and we'll learn more about it in our next posting! Stay tuned!

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