

minedly with the Annual Tasting, served three terms as president of the organization, coordinated the making of wine from “Barney’s Backyard” by Turley Wine Cellars, consulted on the Report and helped plan the seminars, organizing the Fall Field Seminar in the St. Helena appellation shortly before he died. Reg’s guideposts for the organization of history, clarity, integrity and loyalty remain.

In Memoriam

Leslie William Niemi

October 8, 1917 – August 8, 2005

Les Niemi, architect for the St. Helena Public Library, Napa Valley Wine Library and Silverado Museum complex in St. Helena, has died in Napa after a brief illness. He was 87. Les had been a practicing architect in Napa Valley for many years, first with the late John Nichols and then in his own firm, L. W. Niemi & Associates, St. Helena. Les first collaborated with Nichols on a number of Napa Valley residences. He then provided architectural guidance for many wineries, including Burgess Cellars, Caymus Vineyards, Freemark Abbey, Long Vineyards and Robert Mondavi Winery as well as designing many well-loved private residences throughout the Valley.

Les’s parents were born in Finland; their families were drawn to America by the flourishing mining industry of its Great Lakes region. Les was born in Neganuee, Michigan and grew up in Hibbing, Minnesota. It was while Les was an undergraduate at University of Minnesota that he became interested in architecture. After serving in WW II, he took a graduate degree in architecture at UC Berkeley. Les first practiced with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill in their San Francisco office.

In 1944, Les had married his Hibbing sweetheart, Helen Gleason. In 1960 they left San Francisco for St. Helena, where they raised two daughters, Sarah Forni-Carlidge of St. Helena and Jan Niemi of



St. Helena and Florence, Italy. Helen and Les were active in many organizations in the Valley. Helen was a founder and secretary of the Napa Valley Wine Library Association and persuaded Les to make renovations to the Carnegie Building in St. Helena in order to house the first collections of the Wine Library at the St. Helena Public Library. Helen also headed up hospitality at Freemark Abbey. She died in 1988.

In 1992, Les married Karol “K” Van der Veur. Les and K were both active supporters of the Napa Valley Symphony. Les also gave generously of his time and expertise to numerous other projects. He was a docent at Napa Valley Museum and past president of Napa City-County Public Library Foundation as well as a long-time member of the Wine Library.

Les was as proud of his Finnish heritage as he was of being from Minnesota and he particularly enjoyed mentioning fellow Minnesotans in the Valley: the eponymous Robert Mondavi of Robert Mondavi Winery, wine tutor John Thoreen and Larry Hlavsa, Director of the St. Helena Public Library. Les’s spirit endures in the many buildings of his design that provide for the vicissitudes as well as grace in Napa Valley.