

Cotati Historical Society Newsletter

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Preserving Cotati's Past
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Prue Draper & Connie Martin, Editors

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SOCIETY OFFICERS

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Historian: Prue Draper
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Directors: Gary Santero
Sandra Walton
Volunteer Coordinator:
Barbara Jean Veronda 795-4545

Cotati Museum Hours:

Saturday 1 - 4 P.M.
2nd Tuesday of each
month 5 - 7 P.M.
Special times by appointment
Phone 707-794-0305

*Much appreciated recent
donation:* Izzy Oretsky

*Thank you and welcome
to our most recent NEW and
RENEWING MEMBERS:*

Joyce Arnold, Betty & Maurice
Fredricks, and Jan & Mark Landman

Annual Barbeque April 12, 2015

This always-special event, will
also celebrate the 5th Anniversary
of the opening of the Cotati His-
torical Museum. **Mark the date!**

Freeway Was Big News in Cotati

Cotati has always had a major street running through it - on the earliest maps of the Plaza in 1893 it was dubbed County Boulevard. In 1915, concerned that most of the traffic was using Petaluma Hill Road and Stony Point Road, Cotati residents donated rights-of-way and persuaded the state to make the highway through the center of town the major thoroughfare, hoping to bring more business to the town.

As the years went by and traffic to the Russian River resort areas became more continuous, that was considered a mixed blessing. Cotati had a number of auto shops, restaurants, taverns and cafes to serve the travelers, but crossing the busy highway became a challenge for local folk. By 1928, the highway needed to be reconstructed to take out some curves and hills near Penngrove. In 1937, after opening of the Golden Gate Bridge, the highway was again being realigned to cope with the growing River traffic.

By 1950 Cotati residents were once more agitating for a main highway - the word "freeway" began to appear in the news stories. Cotati business owners invited Judge Roland Webb of Petaluma to come and see the problems being caused by double- and triple-parking along the highway. The judge suggested that the new freeway should help solve that problem.

He was right about that, but settling on the route for the freeway took several years as farmers protested that the big highway was dissecting their ranches. Compromises in the way of tunnels for cattle to cross under the freeway finally provided a solution.

Next challenge was the many houses that had to be removed from the right-of-way; auctions were scheduled and produced a number of homes that are still part of the Cotati scene. Local well driller Norton Keyt won a contract to provide water from a huge reservoir that he built on a hill above his property on West Sierra Avenue and brothers Joe and Angelo Ortega opened up a rock quarry to provide gravel. At last, the project was finished, the date was set for the opening ceremonies- July 2, 1957.

It was quite a celebration - probably the biggest held here before or since. A caravan of floats, decorated cars and bicycle-riding youngsters met at Denman Flat,

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The Cotati Riders at the 1957 freeway opening.

Photo supplied by Bernice Turney-Borgia



Front page of the June 27, 1957 edition of the Cotatian newspaper

and with local, county and state dignitaries, in decorated cars, rode up the new freeway to Cotati. At Sierra Avenue they were surprised by a band of wildly-painted Indians who turned out to be local Cub Scouts in costume, who presented the state highway chief with an ashtray decorated with an Indian face. With the addition of a mounted group of 22 riders on horseback, the parade, lead by Ben Oretsky, Cotati Chamber of Commerce president, proceeded to Gravenstein interchange, where ribbon-cutting ceremonies were held with appropriate speech-making by dignitaries of all levels. The crowd numbered about 300.

Sophie Gwerder served lunch at the Cotati Inn after the ceremonies and hosted a weiner roast in the plaza for the children. Local historian Marguerite Hahn reported that after the freeway opening, she counted only 19 cars on the old highway, and 87 on the new freeway. This was interpreted as a great improvement for Cotati.

Afternoon of History and Birthday Celebration



President Marie McNaughton confers with Carolyn Hacker, a descendant of Cotati's founder, Dr. Thomas Stokes Page.



Picture on left: Carolyn Hacker reviews her family history in Cotati with city councilman, Mark Landman, left, his wife, Jan Landman and Mayor John DelOsso & his wife Jacquie DelOsso.



Izzy Oretsky second from left, arrives with Carl Schollmann, left, and is welcomed by May and Marie Andreoli.

Marie McNaughton, president of the Cotati Historical Society, welcomed visitors on November 9 and narrated a power point presentation about the history of our town. She explained that it is shown to students at Thomas Page School during field trips to the museum.

Society members served cookies, coffee and tea to visitors, and thanks to Carl & Mary Schollmann, there was a decorated cake in honor of a pioneer resident, Izzy Oretsky, who was celebrating his 94th birthday that day.

Thanks to Paul Hacker & Jerry Pagnusat for photos in this edition.



Julie Berkemeier

Museum Equipment to be Berkemeier Memorial

Harold Berkemeier, former Cotati City Councilman and Mayor for several terms, has requested that a memorial to his late wife, Julie be placed in the Cotati Historical Museum.

Julie Berkemeier died on July 18, 2014 after a long illness, and was memorialized at a ceremony at the Church of the Oaks, followed by a luncheon served by Art Ibleto, the Pasta King.

Julie was an enthusiastic supporter of the museum, and enjoyed attending gatherings there. Harold's many friends and family members have contributed funds for a memorial to her, and the museum board of directors is happy to report that Julie and Harold's wish will be granted.

A standing floor display with 20 swinging panels for photos has been ordered and will be installed soon. It will match the display already placed in memory of Lloyd Draper.

Cotati's "Hippie" Era Review Planned

By Sandra Walton,
Cotati Historical Society Board Member

It was a lively and challenging time in Cotati, those years from 1960 through the 1980's. Rural, small town Cotati, where it seemed everyone knew one another, was in the fast lane for change. **The Changes:** Cotati incorporated as a city in 1963, the impact of Sonoma State College students and faculty began to be felt, student activism was at a height, returning Vietnam veterans were a noticeable part of the community, the hippies appeared as well as a contingent of the "back to the land" movement, families were arriving to fill the new housing developments, new businesses were springing up, drugs became an issue, there were different viewpoints on almost anything, and there was music, lots of music.

There was no stopping change, and the experience wasn't easy. Transitions rarely are. Yet many benefits emerged from this era which have contributed to Cotati being regarded as a vital, interesting place to live. A successful integration of the elements of change with the stable, well-established Cotati community did happen.

The Cotati Historical Society and Museum is embarking on a project to collect information about this exciting period in Cotati's history. An initial working group has been formed composed of Sandra Walton, CHS board member; Donna Ryan, attorney and CHS member; and Geoff Dunham, attorney and former Cotati city councilman and mayor. The group's two meetings have focused on determining the scope of the project. What kinds of documentation of this era are we looking for? The general categories we have come up with are: photographs and artwork of every kind; paper items including memoirs, publications, notices of events (posters, handouts, etc.); recordings; and oral histories.

We are thinking about the resources we will need, from technical assistance and equipment to recruiting additional people to assist in a variety of ways. The organizational model we are using is that the general working group will remain small and sub-groups or individuals will be working on particular aspects of the project. We hope to involve people with connections to the music world, the university, local business, local government, and the community at large.

This is a large, complex project we are envisioning, so we need all the support we can get! As part of its responsibilities, the initial working group will produce a clear statement of what we think we can do now, and provide a guide to further development of the collection. We welcome contributions, input, and volunteers. Please contact Sandra Walton at 795-7982, sandradwalton@gmail.com, or leave a message at the Cotati Historical Society and Museum, 794-0305.



Sandra Walton, left, Geoffrey Dunham and Donna Ryan, right, reminisce about the days when this was the emblem with the white dove of the Cotati Police Department. Geoff was city police commissioner.

New Display in Museum Showcases Cotati Fire Department History



Equipment of all kinds and photos depicting the department since its establishment in 1927 are featured in this new display.



This complicated resuscitator was a prized piece of equipment over 50 years ago. The red jacket was worn on festive occasions.

Cotati is now part of the Rancho Adobe Fire Department, but originally it was the Cotati Volunteer Fire Department, established in 1927. Penngrove and Liberty District are also in the Rancho Adobe territory.

The science of firefighting has changed dramatically during those years.

A new display in the Cotati Museum shows some of the equipment used by early firemen. It will remain on display for a year.

Time to renew your dues for 2015

On Page 4 of this newsletter is a coupon to send in with your 2015 dues, which are due and payable in January. We appreciate your yearly membership and donations that help us maintain the Cotati Historical Museum and Society.

Time to renew your dues for 2015

We collect dues every January and you too, can help preserve Cotati's history. **Dues are still only \$10 per person per year.** Please complete this form and send with your check to:

- Yes I want to renew my membership for 2015*
 An additional donation of \$ _____ is enclosed

Cotati Historical Society
P.O. Box 7013
Cotati, CA 94931

Name/s _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

E-mail address _____

We can save postage by sending quarterly newsletters on-line.

Learn more about Cotati history and
the Cotati Museum at our **website:**
www.cotatihistoricalsociety.org

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Christmas Gift Idea



Shopping Bags
Available at the
Cotati Museum
\$3.00 donation