

Cotati Historical Society Newsletter

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Preserving Cotati's Past
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Fall 2022

Marie McNaughton, Editor

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COTATI MUSEUM HOURS

Saturdays, 1-4 p.m.

**We will be closed in December
for window replacement.**

For research, donations &
other concerns,
call 707-794-0305.

**Inside Cotati City Hall
201 West Sierra Avenue**

THE CHS MISSION

As stated in our Articles of Incorporation, dated April 11, 2007, the specific purposes of the Cotati Historical Society are (1) to protect and preserve the history and culture of the City of Cotati, (2) to provide a permanent resource (museum and interpretive programs) for the preservation of artifacts, memorabilia and documents illustrating the past and present life of the Cotati community, municipality, and its citizens, and (3) to reach out to the general community and to support similarly guided educational and historical agencies.

From Grammar School to City Hall 201 West Sierra Building Turns 100

By Marie McNaughton

When the Cotati School District board members approved the building of a state-of-the-art school designed by famed architect Brainerd Jones in 1912 (as recounted in our Spring 2022 newsletter), they never imagined that a newer building would be required on the same spot a mere 10 years later. Sadly, on February 14, 1921, the beautiful Jones building went up in flames due to a faulty basement boiler.

For the remainder of the school year and for the following year Cotati's children attended class in a variety of locations, including the Women's Improvement Club. The eighth graders held their graduation at the Odd Fellows Hall.

The building now known as Cotati City Hall opened on August 7, 1922, thanks to a widely supported emergency bond issue. The building was designed by architect Norman R. Coulter of San Francisco, a specialist in public schools. The original construction, built by local contractor Al Hermann, featured six classrooms, seven cloak rooms, boys', girls', and faculty restrooms, a kitchen, library, office, and, grandly, an auditorium with a stage, wings, and a rear niche for projecting moving pictures. The Coulter building commanded the same corner as all the previous iterations, the fourth Cotati School building on land donated in 1890s by the Cotati Company.

(The first Cotati School was a wooden one-room building opened in 1894. Early photographs show one teacher and three dozen students of all ages. By 1903 the community had grown sufficiently for an identical building to be erected adjacent with a sliding door between the two rooms. On top was a belfry tower to call children to class. Those twin buildings were moved to the Page ranch when the Jones building was erected in 1913.)

Coulter's 1922 building boasted an impressive Tudor-arched entry oriented to the corner of School Street and West Sierra Avenue. The steps were flanked by concrete landscaping urns, a spot at which generations of elementary and junior high school children posed for annual and special event photos.

Continued on page 2



In the 1920s, the Norman R. Coulter-designed Cotati School commanded a weedy corner of School Street and what was then called Roblar Avenue, now West Sierra Avenue.

Cotati School/City Hall continued from page 1

Multiple changes to building occurred over the years. A modern annex that currently houses the Ray Miller Community Center was added to the school in 1958 to ease crowding and add middle school grades. In 1965 a Field Act survey of California schools determined that the 1922 building was not earthquake safe. For three years, plans for an entirely new school and haggling over its location dragged on.

On May 3, 1968, Prue Draper, then Cotati columnist for *The Press Democrat* newspaper, reported that a recent earthquake had school principal Annagene Cornish racing into classrooms warning students and teachers to dive under their desks. The central auditorium had been abandoned the previous year, but the shaky ceiling held firm through the latest temblor.

Ultimately, a site on the west side of town was selected for a new school and was named after long-time Rancho Cotate owner Thomas Page. The building on Madrone Avenue near Gravenstein Highway opened in fall 1969. Rohnert Park's La Fiesta Elementary built in the similarly named Holiday Park (L Section) served those in the easternmost Cotati neighborhoods.

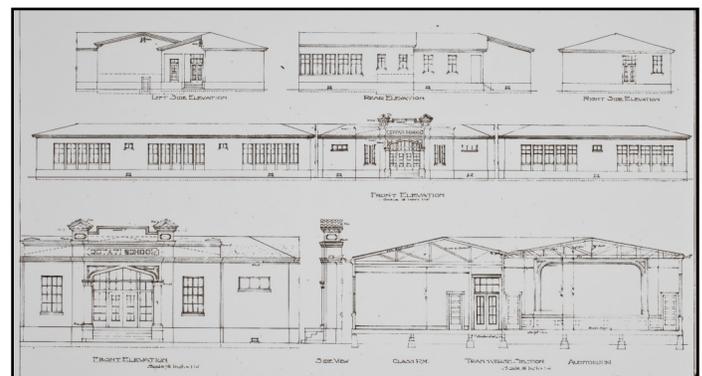
A Proper City Hall

While the village of Cotati was established in the 1890s, incorporation did not occur until 1963, in the face of its neighbor's bedroom community sprawl. Cotati city functions and council meetings had a variety of temporary quarters, including an addition to the fire station and a small residence at the corner of La Plaza and East Cotati Avenue. The tiny police department shared quarters with the United Telephone Answering Service on Old Redwood Highway.

The closure of 201 West Sierra as a school presented the opportunity for the newly established city to purchase a building near the center of town that matched the founders' ambitions. The City Council authorized the purchase of the former schoolhouse for the reduced rate of \$3,500 from the Cotati School District.

City functions and the police department moved into the repurposed building in April 1971. A hand-carved sign identifying "COTATI CITY HALL" was placed above the front entrance over the engraved "COTATI SCHOOL." Behind the sign, according to a *Press Democrat* story, was a sealed envelope containing information about the city, including the names of city council and planning commission members, city employees, and "other interesting data." Whether that time capsule has ever been opened remains a mystery.

In 2003, the police department moved into its own building next to City Hall, and in 2010 the Cotati Museum opened in its space, the one-time first-grade classroom.



Mark your calendar!
Next Chicken BBQ/Reunion
April 30, 2023

From 1922 through the 1940s, the front steps of Cotati School became the usual spot for annual class and other school group portraits. Above, a 1923 school baseball team and a 1935 drama club take their turn. Architectural plans feature the building's signature banks of windows, optimizing natural light and allowing students to glimpse the world passing by. The postcard comes courtesy of Jim Brower, the plans the Sonoma County Library Digital Collection.

CHS Participates in Sonoma County History Day

Cotati history displays drew compliments and questions from passing historians at a Sonoma County History Day held August 6 at the Finley Center in Santa Rosa. Dozens of history society, museum, and archives displays and dozens more history lovers, some in period costume, crowded the main hall. A full schedule of programs played in a nearby theater throughout the day. CHS's Ed Gilardi, John Dell'Osso, and Judy Gustafson fielded questions, sold books, and were afterward featured on the front page of the *Community Voice* newspaper!

The free event was sponsored by the Sonoma County Historical Society, the Sonoma County History & Genealogy Library, and the Rancho Bodega Historical Society.



Multiple aisles of history displays filled the main auditorium of the Finley Center.

Photos by Judy Gustafson

Veronda-Falletti Ranch Programs Return & Expand

A variety of farm projects and education programs are underway at the Veronda-Falletti Ranch across from Cotati City Hall, under the auspices of the nonprofit Farmster that oversees the property. The Sandy Loam preschool program, for example, provides hands-on opportunities to interact with the ranch's chickens and to plant vegetables, herbs, and flowers. Aquaponics expert Gary Koffler is working with teen volunteers to develop an aquaculture system in which a tilapia fish tank provides natural fertilizer for growing plants, which in turn purify the water for the fish.



In the long term, CHS and the City of Cotati are working to restore or rebuild the site's historic barns. The goal is to open one of the barns to the public with historic agricultural displays and informational plaques regarding the history of the ranch and local farming practices generally. In the meantime, Ed Gilardi has put together a museum display of agricultural artifacts recovered from the barns, including handmade tools, hay hooks, pest-control products, and livestock medication bottles, plus photos of the Verondas and Fallettis and the antique machinery stored in the barns.



Photos by Marie McNaughton

THANK YOU TO OUR NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS AND TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS (June 1-August 31, 2022)

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Harry Allagree* | Paula Ferroni |
| Adele Pasquini Bennett* | Martha Gustafson |
| Dick Braden* | Deborah Hepper |
| Candi Burns | Anna & |
| Ron Campbell* | Patrick Marshment* |
| Cotati Accordion Festival | Jeff & Don Millerick |
| (Scott Goree) | Kathryn |
| Ron & Sandy Dodge | Rasmussen Rohrman* |
| Lucy & William Engh* | Barbara Minatta Ryan |
| Gregg Fautley | Yvonne Van Dyke |
| Jane Ferina | Mike Whitley |

*Indicates donation in addition to membership

General Donations

Novato Historical Guild

Memorial Donations

- Dogtoberfest**
Fred Groverman
Ted & Tillie Millerick
Annie & Ed Minatta
Ruby Otani
- Ron & Sandy Dodge
 Martha Gustafson
 Don & Jeff Millerick
 Barbara Minatta Ryan
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 June Kimball
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 Carole Otani
 Fran & Gerald Otani
 Barbara Jean Veronda

Cotati Historical Society & Museum
Inside Cotati City Hall at 201 West Sierra Ave.
P.O. Box 7013, Cotati, CA 94931

Sunday, November 13, 1-4 p.m.

Past and Present

Music in Cotati

Clubs, festivals & events
*From 50 years ago to
what's happening now!*

**SPEAKERS AND
HISTORICAL DISPLAYS**

Cotati City Hall & Community Center

Please note that the Cotati Museum
WILL BE CLOSED IN DECEMBER
For Window Replacement

CHS Popular Downtown Tours Attract, Educate More than 120 Walkers Over Six Sunny Months

Who played at the Inn of the Beginning? Why is there a Rexall Drug Store sign at the veterinary clinic? Who was Cotati's first woman postmaster? And why does the downtown need a new California landmark? These and many other questions were posed and answered on the Cotati Historical Society downtown walks held seven times from May to October. The free 1 1/2-2-hour tours were led by teams of two volunteers each on the first Saturday of each month, including Cotati Chamber president Erin Armstrong, CHS vice president Ed Gilardi, docents Margie Arthur Cassero, Dave Wasson, Mike Whitley, and docent coordinator Marie McNaughton. Additional volunteers helped organize the walkers, hand out tour booklets and water bottles, and otherwise help the tours run smoothly.

Tour participants included current and former Cotatians—all with stories to share—plus family members, visiting guests, and on a special-request tour the advisory board of another local historical society.

The last tour of the year was October 1. We're sorry we missed you in 2022, but plan to begin tours again in May 2023.

*Photos by Margie Arthur Cassero (top)
and Susan Kashack (bottom).*

