

# Cotati Historical Society Newsletter

A non-profit 501 (c) (3) California corporation Tax ID #30-0421172

Preserving Cotati's Past  
PO Box 7013 Cotati, CA 94931  
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Fall 2021

Marie McNaughton, Editor

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## CONTENTS

Cotati Speedway 100 Years Ago	1
Visit to Veronda-Falletti Ranch	2
Brian Garret "Mystery" Resolved	2
Community Outreach Report	3
CHS Celebrated Kids Day	3
New & Renewing Members	3
Memorial & General Donations	3

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President	John Allred, 795-2791
Vice President	Ed Gilar di
Secretary	Velma DiMeola
Treasurer	John Dell'Osso
Director	Bobbie Veronda
Archiving Administrator	Judy Gustafson

### MORE VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

#### STAFF

Website Coordinator	Stephen Gold
Docent Coord.	Marie McNaughton

## COTATI MUSEUM HOURS

Saturdays, 1-4 p.m.  
& by appointment

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

*Inside Cotati City Hall  
201 W. 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.

## Cotati Speedway Opened 100 Years Ago Operated for only two years, the memory lives large

Adapted from a story by Prue Draper, 2002

Begun in April 1921, the mile-and-a-quarter-long track rose 26 feet in the air on the straightaways, and 60 feet on the curved ends. It took over 3 million feet of lumber, over 70 tons of 20-penny spikes and over 100 kegs of 10- and 12-penny nails. The surface of the track was made of 2x3s laid on edge, and the finish was said to be as smooth as a bowling alley.

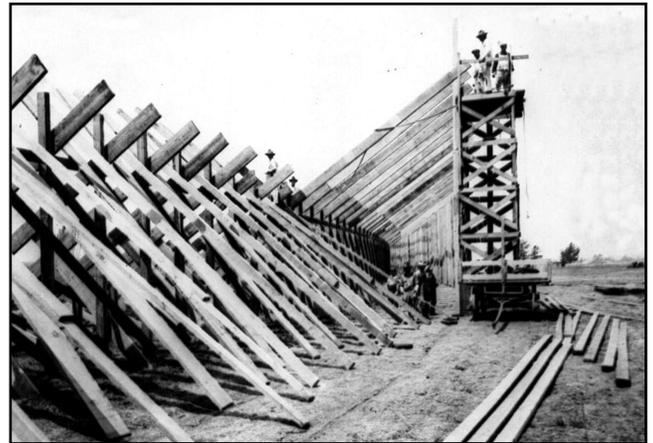
Track promoter Jack S. Prince had built tracks in Indianapolis, Beverly Hills, Tacoma, and Fresno, and thrilled local investors with the idea of the fastest track in America. The plan grew to include a county fairgrounds, with exhibit buildings and livestock show rings. The center of the track would be an airfield.

The first race, on Aug. 14, 1921, featured leading "Indy" drivers like Eddie Hearne, who drove the 150 miles in 1 hour, 21 minutes, 16 and 1/5 seconds, at an average speed of 110.84 miles per hour, setting a new world record and winning \$5,000.

The event attracted 20,000 spectators, many of whom drove their own cars and jammed roads from Sonoma County to the Sausalito auto ferry. Other visitors rode the train to the Cotati depot adjacent to the track.

Later events drew smaller numbers, in part due to bad weather and to the difficulties of getting to and from Cotati. In the end, local investors lost money and the track was dismantled. The wood was sold primarily from the Woodward Lumber and Hardware company in downtown Cotati, today's Redwood Café. Check out the café floor and see the 2x3 boards that made up the smooth raceway track.

**This story was adapted from a five-page article published in the *Sonoma Historian* journal of the Sonoma County Historical Society. Visit our museum to read the whole story and to view panel exhibits on this and other moments in Cotati racing history.**



*Built in 1921, the wooden racing bowl required 3 million feet of lumber. The site encompassed 135 acres and was located next to the train depot, seen here in the lower left-hand corner, the same spot it occupies today.*

# A Visit to the Veronda-Falletti Ranch

By John Dell'Osso

Recently the CHS board of directors toured the grounds and building of the Veronda-Falletti ranch with Dustin DeMatteo, who runs the Farmster agricultural education programs at the site. The family of two of our board members, Bobbie Veronda and Velma Veronda DiMeola, was on the ranch for decades; the sisters had many stories to recollect.

The house and water tower have been remodeled thanks to the City of Cotati. The board is interested in turning a large barn into a walk-through exhibit space, with various pieces of equipment highlighting the chicken-laying operations from the past. At one time some 3,000 laying hens were on the property. We will begin talks with the City, Farmster, and the Sonoma County Agriculture & Open Space District soon.



*At left: Ed Gilardi, John Dell'Osso (with ball cap), and John Allred (in sun hat) wait for Dustin DeMatteo to unblock the entrance to what may become a new agricultural history exhibit space for Cotati. Far left below: Bobbie Veronda and Ed Gilardi poke around for interesting bits of farm equipment, such as the grinding stone for sharpening farm tools and a kerosene tank to a chicken brooder stove used to keep chicks warm (center below). Top right: Dustin shows Ed around the recently renovated Veronda family home and water tower. Below in right corner, Velma Veronda DiMeola enjoys the sunlit office space, once a dining area for fondly remembered family get-togethers.*



## Brian Garrett "Mystery" Resolved

In our Spring 2020 newsletter, we published a photo of a La Plaza memorial stone honoring Brian MacKenzie Garrett and asked for information about the honoree. His is a compelling story of resilience and community.

According to a heartfelt response written to us by his siblings Laurie, Banning, and Linda Garrett, Brian was always in a hurry and always helping others. "Nearly born in a taxi cab on June 21, 1953, from his earliest days Brian had an insatiable desire—an urgency—to bring fairness and justice into his world, to learn and devour ideas . . . and to hold out a helping hand to those in need. For these aspirations Brian paid a price."

At the age of 11, Brian intervened in a bullying that resulted in lasting brain injury and a lifetime of serious epileptic seizures. Nevertheless, he built a life of scholarship, music, poetry, documentary photography, and radical activism.



Born in Los Angeles, he came north to study political science and economics at San Francisco State University. "In the late 1970s Brian worked as an economic analyst at Merrill Lynch, where he became fascinated by the impact of social and political events on financial markets,"

according to his brother and sisters. Brian moved to Cotati to take on graduate studies in macroeconomics at Sonoma State University.

He fell in love with Cotati and engaged fully in the cultural and political life of Sonoma County. In his phone conversations with his sister Laurie, he recounted fights over development schemes, access to water, and farmworker housing, and his research into military-political-financial connections.

In 1983, the 30-year-old died alone after a grand mal episode. Shortly after, his many friends gathered to celebrate his life; they placed a plaque and planted a redwood tree in his memory in the heart of Cotati, La Plaza Park.

# CHS Community Outreach Report

By John Dell'Osso

CHS directors Ed Gilardi and I recently represented the historical society at two local community events, the 2021 Chamber of Commerce Business Showcase on August 18 and a Rotary Club of Rancho-Cotati luncheon on August 25. Ed and his wife, Pat, set up a booth at the first event, sponsored by both Cotati and Rohnert Park's Chambers at the Rohnert Park Community Center's outdoor courtyard. Over 50 people stopped by our booth to ask questions, some of whom had not heard of us before, but were very excited to learn we exist and about our planned walking tours of the City.

## CHS Celebrated Delayed Kids Day

CHS joined Cotati kids and grown-ups in celebrating "A Very Merry Unbirthday" Kids Day Festival and Parade on August 14, 2021. Usually held each year in July, the event was cancelled in 2020 and delayed somewhat this year due to COVID-19 restrictions. Its Mad Hatter-ish theme was selected to remember all the birthdays uncelebrated during the ongoing pandemic.

Cotati native Marc Libarle provided his 1930 Model A Ford once again for the CHS parade entry and CHS president John Allred performed his usual master of ceremonies duties as announcer of the parade. He also took the opportunity to remind festival goers that 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the Cotati high-speed raceway. See the front page for more information about this well-known "moment" in local history.

Cotati Kids Day began in 1993 as the brainchild of CHS members Harold Berkemeier and Terry Dutra, the latter of whom was featured in the September issue of *Neighbors of Cotati* magazine for her contributions to community life.



Above, John Dell'Osso (left) and Ed Gilardi shared historical exhibits and a video walking tour at the Cotati and Rohnert Park Chambers Business Showcase. Below, Marc Libarle's 1930 Model A once again served as the CHS entry in the Cotati Kids Day Parade. Photos provided by Ed Gilardi.



## THANK YOU TO OUR NEW AND RENEWING 2021 MEMBERS

- Kathryn & Frank Bianchi
- Lori Conrad-Burke
- Sandra & Ron Dodge
- Robin Draper
- Pat & Ed Gilardi
- Jean Gilbert
- Janet Gingher\*
- Marilyn Gordon
- Rick Hull
- Kit Lofroos
- Paul & Jill Martin
- Vi Nordman
- Kathleen (Jacobsen) Norwood\*
- DeLoris Osborn\*
- Jerry & Judy Pagnusat
- Ron & Connie Petty
- Stan Poncia \*
- Robert Waldron\*
- Carol Williams\*

\*Indicates donation in addition to membership

## MEMORIAL DONATIONS

- Dogtoberfest**  
Sandra & Ron Dodge
- Prue Draper**  
Robin Draper
- Bob Jensen**  
Judy Gustafson
- Don Leivas**  
Argonaut Constructors  
Peter Callinan  
Velma DiMeola  
Robin Draper  
Christopher Leivas  
Richard Risbrough  
Bobbie Veronda  
Nancy Yoshioka
- Eleanor Miller**  
Robin Draper
- Ed Nordman**  
Vi Nordman

Cotati Historical Society & Museum  
Inside Cotati City Hall at 201 West Sierra Ave  
PO Box 7013 Cotati CA 94931

***A Community Gathering***  
*Sponsored by the Cotati Historical Society*

Will Feature  
**New Cotati Museum Displays**  
Light Refreshments &  
**A Vintage Book Sale**  
in the Cotati Room

**November 7, 2021**

12:00-3:00 p.m.

For more information,  
call 794-0305 or visit

*[www.cotatihistoricalsociety.org](http://www.cotatihistoricalsociety.org)*

**Donations/Dues 2021-2022**

If you have already paid your dues for 2021 you will be marked paid thru 2022. This form may also be used for donations, memorial donations and volunteering. Thank you for your support of Cotati Historical Society.

Yes I want to join/renew my/our membership thru 2022 @ **\$10 per person** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

An additional donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed.

A memorial donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed in memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send an acknowledgement to: \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Member Name/s \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

**I would like to assist the Cotati Historical Society in this way:**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help staff the museum on Saturday afternoons.     | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with membership mailings & data entry.       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help with the annual barbecue and silent auction. | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with student field trips and essay contests. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help with publicity and advertising.              | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with cataloging archives and artifacts.      |

Other ways I might help: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send to: **Cotati Historical Society, PO Box 7013, Cotati CA 94931**