

# Cotati Historical Society Newsletter

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

Preserving Cotati's Past

P.O. Box 7013 Cotati, CA 94931

E-mail chsinfo@sonic.net

September 2015

Prue Draper & Connie Martin, Editors

Vol. 8 No. 3

## INDEX

In this issue, you will find:

<b>Finnish Families</b>	<b>Page 1</b>
<b>Pioneer Pool Memories</b>	<b>Page 2</b>
<b>Parade Time</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Members &amp; Donors</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Thomas Page Academy</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Street Name History</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>State Farm Grant</b>	<b>Page 4</b>

## SOCIETY OFFICERS

**President:** Marie McNaughton  
529-0734

**Vice Pres.:** Yvonne VanDyke

**Secretary:** Velma DiMeola

**Treasurer:** Connie Martin

**Historian:** Prue Draper

**Archive Admin:** Judy Gustafson

**Directors:** John Allred  
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

## Our Mission Statement

As stated in our Articles of Incorporation, dated April 11, 2007, the specific purpose of the Cotati Historical Society is to protect and preserve the history and culture of the City of Cotati, California. Our goal is to provide a 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.

## MANY FINNISH FAMILIES IN OLD COTATI

Gypsies in Cotati? There aren't too many folks around who can remember that, but Ed Nordman is one of them. He also remembers the time when there were about 100 Finnish families living in Cotati and Penngrove.

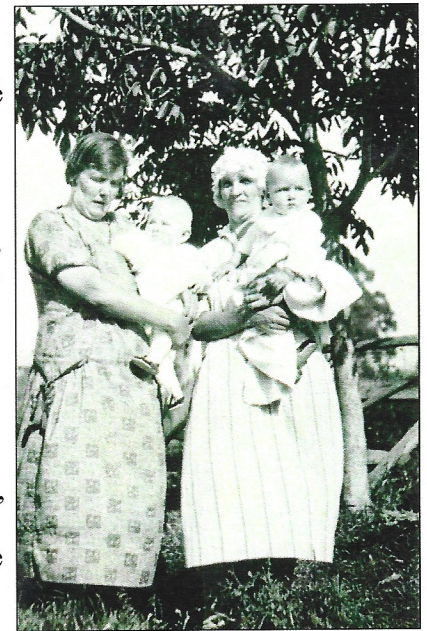
Ed was born 90 years ago when his parents lived on Henry Street. His parents were Finnish, and like many of their countrymen, had come to America seeking opportunities after the Finnish fishing industry declined with the advent of steamships instead of sailing vessels. Many came to Minnesota, but some came to California, drawn by the sea or by the Gold Rush.

Another Finn, John Mattson, who came in 1909, welcomed many of his countrymen to his home on West Sierra Avenue, property that is now the Veronda-Falletti city park. Mattson built the house and water tower that are still on the property, as well as a windmill and sauna steam bath, no longer there.

Mattson had a quantity of beds, and welcomed newcomers from his home country, often putting them to work building houses for laying hens, the main source of livelihood for Cotati families. Thanks to Mattson's hospitality, the Nordman family also settled in Cotati. They first lived on Henry Street, which Ed Nordman remembers as a wet, mudhole of a street, where his father's car got stuck in the mud and they had to hitch it to a horse to pull it out.

Father Karl Nordman built a home and a 100-foot chicken house where he learned to raise chickens for the egg business. Later, the senior Nordman bought land for a ranch on a hillside on what is now West Sierra Avenue, where Ed and his wife Vi still live.

Most of the Finnish sailor-fishermen were good carpenters and built whatever they needed – for Finns, that was always a sauna. They would stock it with two-foot eucalyptus logs laid over large rocks. When the eucalyptus fire had brought the rocks up to a high temperature, buckets of hot water would be poured over them, producing a thick steam. People would sit on benches in the small buildings and soak up the steam. If there was a pond or stream nearby, they would jump in that after the steam bath. Jennie Falletti remembers when the sauna was torn down on the ranch that she and her husband Al had inherited.



**PROUD FINNISH MOTHERS**  
*Lydia Eliason, left, with her daughter, Lillian, and her friend, Eine Nordman with her son Edwin, were friends among Cotati's active Finnish community 90 years ago. Both the infants are celebrating their 90th birthdays this summer.*

*Photo courtesy of Lillian Blodgett*

*Continued on page 2*

Continued from page 1

In those days, Ed Nordman remembers, chicken houses were surrounded by high wire fences so the hens could get out and scratch around in the daytime. Doors were securely locked at night with big padlocks for protection from the gypsies who traveled in covered wagons and usually settled in a grove of eucalyptus trees on what is now Grove Street, near West Sierra Avenue. The gypsies would pilfer whatever they could, bargain for chickens and stop at the ranch houses to sell food or small gadgets to the housewives.

The Finnish community grew quickly, and the families were close-knit. Whenever a family completed building a granary (which everyone had in those days, as grain was sold in bulk for chickenfeed), they would invite their friends to come and dance on the new oak floor.

Many, like the Saarinens, had acres of prunes on their ranch on Sierra Avenue. Ed remembers that after a while everybody pulled up their prune trees because they had to pay a tax on each tree.

Ed can reel off their names: Grube, Nels Hammer, Elias-sen, Lingron, Oscar Heino, Ahonen. Like most local children, Ed walked to Cotati School every day, and still remembers many of his classmates. Now and then he was treated to a ride with a Greek neighbor, John Delevois, who owned a hatchery nearby.

Ed had one sister Ailie, who finished her education and became a teacher of all 9 grades in Dry Creek Valley. She bought a Model A Ford and Ed, then only 13 years old, taught her to drive it.

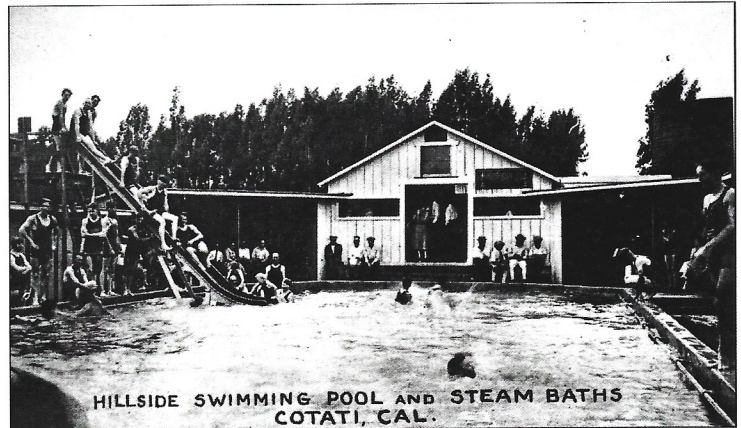
Ed's favorite childhood memory was shopping in the Ross Store, where they stocked all kinds of foods and assorted needs for local families and ranches. The post office was at one end of the store, and there was a medical office upstairs. Ed remembers when he cut his thumb badly in a kale cutter, and Dr. Honor repaired it in his upstairs medical office.

Ed had been diagnosed with bone cancer in his leg as a child but was cured at a Shriner Hospital. As a youngster he worked at the Rohnert Seed Farm, hoeing weeds around the carrots and beets earning 25 cents an hour. The second year he made a princely 35 cents an hour. He remembers well the pheasant hunts that were held in the Rohnert fields. For years afterward, pheasants were frequently seen around Cotati and what became Rohnert Park.

Mother Nordman once gave young Ed a \$5 bill to get gas for their car. Ed figured it best to fill the tank so they wouldn't have to go back so often, so he invested \$1.50. His mother was furious - she had expected him to spend about 10c, the price of a gallon of gasoline, and scolded "that money was supposed to last us a month!"

During World War II he was not eligible to serve because of his leg problem, so he went to school and became a teacher. He later learned auto mechanics in Nels Hammer's auto repair shop, which then was on LaPlaza near the Cotati Inn.

Ed Nordman and his first wife had separated when he met Vi in Petaluma. He was working in a large auto repair business, and she was a bookkeeper in the nearby Kenneth Kyle office. She often took a short-cut through Ed's auto shop, and one day they met - the result, he confesses, of his having tripped her. One thing led to another and their marriage is strong after 29 years.



*This swimming pool and steam bath complex was built on Poplar Avenue by the Finnish Lahti family in the early 1920's and attracted throngs of people from San Francisco area, who came up on the train. It featured 40 private dressing rooms, a dance hall with electric player piano, two large steam baths, a snack bar and a 30x70-foot swimming pool where many local children learned to swim.*

*Photo from Lloyd Draper Collection*

**Story about the Pioneer Pool brought back memories** - The editors of this newsletter felt we had hit the jackpot with our last issue because its photos and story about the Pioneer Pool brought so many comments to the "I Grew Up In Cotati" online Facebook column. For example:

**Kathy Norwood** - Loved the memories of the Pioneer Pool! It really was a fun place.

**Bob Phelps** wrote: I remember going there back in the early '60s; My aunt would take me to go swimming.

**Ted Macklin**: I had forgotten about the green chairs and the various warming places for the different age groups. I think I went through all of them, ending up on the highway side of the refreshment stand with other friends in high school. Thank you for helping relive these memories.

**Paul McQuaid** - I rode my bike out there when I lived in Rohnert Park. It was a great place to swim.

## PARADES ARE PART OF COTATI'S HISTORY

Marching in parades is an old Cotati tradition, dating back to the turn of the century. Those who haven't joined in the exercise of preparing a parade entry can hardly realize how much thought, energy and talent go into producing the rolling work of art.



Representing us well in Pennngrove's Independence Day Parade were the patriots, left to right, Gary and Reta Santero and Roy "Doc" and Pat Bernard. They all were passengers in Gary's 1951 Ford Deluxe sedan. Photo supplied by Gary Santero

### WELCOME TO OUR MOST RECENT NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

Lucy Kortum, Elyse Lord, Kiyoko Katy Maruyama, Bob Nelson, Ed Nordman, John Richardson, Louise Santero, Joan Simon, Jack Withington

### THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

Kiyoko Katy Maruyama, Bob Nelson, John Richardson

## How Cotati Streets Got Their Names History Program Sunday Nov. 1 at 3 p.m. Cotati Room behind City Hall

How did Cotati's streets get their names? Most people know that the men's names on the streets around the Plaza came from the sons of Dr. Thomas Page. But how about all those other names?

Pamela Wilford and Prue Draper (and others if they would like to participate) will present a program on the history of city street names on Sunday, Nov. 1 at 3 p.m.

Pamela remembers that her father, Severa Wilford Jr. suggested to the City of Cotati that names of local families be given to new streets. That idea appealed to the city council, and especially the late Arch Stewart, a councilman. After Arch retired from the council, Prue Draper was asked to suggest appropriate names for new streets

This process will be discussed at the meeting, and questions from the audience will be welcomed. Admission is free and refreshments will be served.



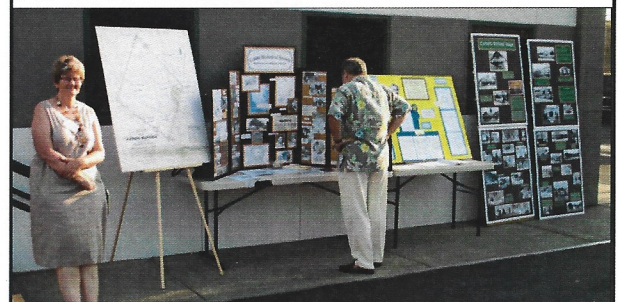
At the Cotati Kid's Day parade, July 11, our entry was prepared by Sandra Walton, who decorated Bob Herrerias' 1947 truck to illustrate the Kid's Day theme "Up with Art". Students who had won top prizes in our Historical Society's annual essay contest rode on the decorated truck. Left to right, Wyatt Daly, Anane Wilson, Frida Preciado. Photo by Jan Haslam



Kid's Day Parade Team: Left to right Bob Herrerias, Sandra Walton, Marie McNaughton, Joshua Walton and Jan Haslam. Photo by Jonathan Walton

### Thomas Page Academy Modernization

The modernization of the Thomas Page Academy was celebrated on August 17. A ribbon cutting opened new classrooms, library, and computer lab. Marie McNaughton and Connie Martin prepared an exhibit of the Dr. Thomas Stokes Page family and Cotati School history, which was enjoyed by the large crowd in attendance.



CHS President Marie McNaughton with exhibit.

Photo by Bruce Martin

# Not too late to renew your dues for 2015

We collect dues every January and if you have not yet renewed, we would appreciate your help in preserving 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](http://www.cotatihistoricalsociety.org)

The Cotati Historical Museum always needs volunteers to welcome visitors on Saturday afternoons, when we are open from 1 to 4 p.m. Docents work in pairs and the duties are basic - unlock doors, turn on lights, open blinds and prepare to be friendly. We have an instruction pamphlet that tells you everything you need to know. If you are interested, contact Barbara Jean Veronda, 795-4545.

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

## SHE DID IT AGAIN!



One of our loyal and hard working volunteers is Judy Gustafson, our archive administrator, managing our computer system website and cataloging. Her former employer, State Farm Insurance, offers a \$500 grant to a non-profit organization for which a retired employee donates at least 50 hours of volunteer work in a year. This is the fifth year that Judy, was given this check, which she presented to Treasurer, Connie Martin, right.