

# 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  
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Prue Draper & Connie Martin, Editors

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## SOCIETY OFFICERS

**President:** John Allred  
795-2791  
**Vice Pres.:** Sandra Walton  
**Secretary:** Velma DiMeola  
**Treasurer:** Connie Martin  
**Historian:** Prue Draper  
**Archive Admin:** Judy Gustafson  
**Membership:** Yvonne VanDyke  
**Directors:** Marie McNaughton  
Gary Santero  
**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

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.

## The Saga of the Running Fence

A Fence of cloth panels stretching for miles over the hills from Cotati to the coast? What a nutty idea!

That's what a lot of Sonoma and Marin County people thought, and when an eccentric French artist named Christo Javacheff and his wife Jeanne-Claude went to city council meetings and other governmental bodies seeking advance approval for his years-long project; lots of people thought it was a joke.

But there were even more people who believed in Christo and his artistic wife. They thought the Running Fence was exotic and fun and worth their attention, their votes, their dollars and their labor.



The beginning of the Fence on Mecham Hill, south of Railroad Ave., Cotati and east of the 101 freeway.

Photo courtesy of Sonoma County Library



The Fence crossed Hwy. 101 south of Railroad Ave. Many Cotati people flew over in small planes to get a view of the complete Fence.

plan as "a gargantuan roll of toilet paper unfurled across the pleasant pasturelands". Another was Dr. Bill Kortum of Cotati, then on the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors. Dr. Kortum vigorously opposed any development on the California coastline.

Among the supporters was Hans S. Raven, a rancher who helped Christo explain his dream project to other ranchers, and many well-known families who had large and small ranches that would be crossed.

So it happened. That was in 1976, 40 years ago.

The 18-foot high white nylon Fence stretched over 24.5 miles of pastures, starting on Mecham Road at the south border of Cotati and plunging into the Pacific at Bodega Bay. It divided the county as no other event had, with many ranchers approving it and at least as many opposing it violently.

One opponent was Dr Joel Hedgepeth, marine biologist, who described the Fence

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Fence running for 1 1/2 miles parallel to Hwy. 101, on Mecham Hill south of Railroad Ave. Note the semi trucks on the 101. One was Harry Mildren on Roblar Road, who took Dunham School Principal Eleanor Miller to see the Fence where it crossed his dairy ranch. People with small planes flew over it, local residents hiked along it, and drivers went out of their way to follow the route of the Fence.

More than 300 local young men and women worked on the erection of the poles, support cables and attachment of the 2100 panels of white nylon fabric, each 18' x 68' with metal grommets. Assorted big trucks, cranes and even helicopters were used to set the poles, attach cables and finally, connect the fabric panels. Cotati resident Kelly Smith worked on the Fence, and remembers that he quit a more lucrative job to make \$2.40 hour working on the Fence.

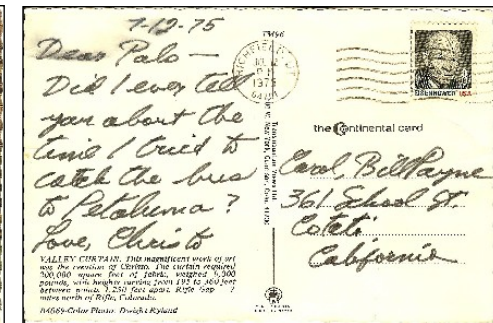
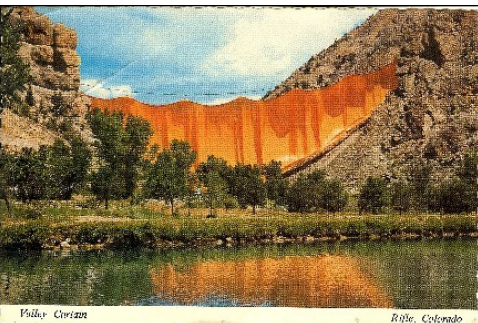
Security along the Fence route was necessary, as there were efforts to sabotage trucks and other equipment left overnight along the Fence route. But the Fence was left in place only two weeks, then dismantled without any major disasters.

Today there are still local ranches and houses where large white sheets of nylon fabric are used to cover crops and vehicles, homes where curtains look vaguely familiar, and many Halloween costumes and decorations that can trace their histories back to Christo's Running Fence.

Christo went on to design and produce a variety of exotic art projects, including one that featured hundreds of umbrellas and was viewed by many local people, but none that had such an astonishing effect on Sonoma County and Cotati as the Fence.



Kelly Smith, on the right, was employed to help build the Fence.



Bill Payne, who was a Cotati City Councilman during the time Christo envisioned his Fence, received this postcard which was donated to the Museum by Carol Williams.

### Judy Gustafson Again Proves To Be Good Neighbor

Again this year, our talented and loyal archiving administrator, Judy Jensen Gustafson, has been awarded \$500 as a "Good Neighbor Grant" which she has delivered to the Cotati Historical Society from State Farm Insurance Co.

Judy worked for 30 years for State Farm, and the company has a foundation that offers that amount every year in which one of their retired employees works at least 40 hours for a non-profit organization.

Judy not only keeps our computer in the museum in good operating order, but she uses it for accessioning all items donated to the museum. This year she also researched and purchased a new desktop computer for the museum.

Ever since our founding, Judy has donated more than twice the hours that State Farm requires to qualify for the grant, and this year's gift makes a total of \$3500 that she has been able to present to the Cotati Historical Society.

We are grateful to her for her generosity as well as her energy and willingness to assist our non-profit organization.



PROUD MOMENT – Judy Gustafson displays the \$500 check she received from State Farm Insurance Co. This is the seventh year that Judy has qualified for the State Farm grant.

## Summer Means Parade Time

Parades seem to be one of the most enjoyable events of summer in Sonoma County. And the Cotati Historical Society makes sure we have entries in the local ones to let people know what an energetic group we are.

First is the July Fourth parade in Penngrrove, a tradition ever since the US Bicentennial. It is always preceded the day before by a public breakfast at the fire station, and winds up on Sunday at the Penngrrove Park for a traditional barbecue of deep-pit roasted beef, grilled chicken and barbecued oysters, homemade desserts, live band music, assorted games and booths selling local crafts. Long-time residents of our area have been known to travel all the way across the U.S. to be in Penngrrove that weekend.

Cotati Historical Society's entry featured a family heirloom, owned and driven by Gary Santero with his wife Reta. It's a 1951 Ford 4-door Deluxe model purchased new by Gary's uncle, John Santero. He sold it to his brother, Nick Santero about six years later, and Nick drove it every Sunday to visit his brothers and sisters. When Nick died, Gary bought it and had it restored. A claim to fame is that it has never, in its 60-year history, ever been out of Sonoma County.

Friends and CHS members, Patricia and Roy (Doc) Bernard, helped decorate the car with American flags, tinsel and bunting, and rode along in the parade.

A couple of weeks later Cotati celebrated its annual Kids' Day, and of course, that included a parade. It started near City Hall and ended in the Plaza where assorted games entertained the younger generation and food booths offered drinks and lunches.

In keeping with the Kids' Day theme, Chairman Sandra Walton arranged to have Bob Herrerias' 1947 Dodge 4-ton truck for our entry. It was brightly decorated as a forest camp with the theme "Today's the Day the Teddy Bears Have Their Picnic." A small forest surrounded a collection of teddy bears, including an especially large black one made by Nan Waters.

As is traditional, a committee decorated the truck: Sandra Walton, Janice Haslam, Marie McNaughton and Jonathon Walton. Materials were contributed by Velma DiMeola, John Allred, Janice Haslam, Prue Draper and Sandra Walton.



**Gary Santero, a director of the Cotati Historical Society, drove his family's heirloom Ford.**

Photo by John Allred



**Bob Herrerias did the restoration on his 1947 Dodge 4-ton truck himself and helped decorate.**



**Young passengers included the winner of this year's Cotati Historical Society Essay Contest for fourth graders at Thomas Page Academy: Amelia Laird and her classmates, Chloe Griffis and Elizabeth Schollmann.**

Kids' Day Photos by Marie McNaughton

Some CHS members sighed with relief that the parade season had ended; others still have happy memories of seeing their neighbors, family members and friends so artistically presented.

## Museum Exhibit Honors 40th Anniversary of Running Fence

A new exhibit of artifacts, photos and a massive book of history of Christo's Running Fence is now featured in the Cotati Museum. Judy Gustafson, Marie McNaughton, Stephen Gold, Connie Martin and Kelly Smith produced the display.

## THANK YOU TO OUR RECENT NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS & DONORS

*Mary Lou Issel Lentz, Mary Nell McCann, Robert Waldron*

**NOTE:** Names in italics also gave donations.

# Membership Application

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.

*Yes I want to renew my membership for 2016 @ \$10 per person*

**Please send to:  
Cotati Historical Society  
P.O. Box 7013  
Cotati, CA 94931**

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

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)

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

**We Are Holding  
Open House  
Sunday, Nov. 6, 2016  
1 - 4 P.M.**

- What's new in the Cotati Museum?
- Do you need to research something special about Cotati?
- Can you suggest some local history that we should know about?
- Visit with members of the Society

**Cotati Museum**  
201 Sierra Ave., Cotati, CA  
Free Admission & Refreshments

*Come and view the new  
Christo's Running Fence exhibit!*