

Cotati Historical Society Newsletter

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Preserving Cotati's Past
PO Box 7013 Cotati, CA 94931
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Summer 2022

Marie McNaughton, Editor

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COTATI MUSEUM HOURS

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

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 pies to prime rib

A History of Dining at the Green Mill Inn

By Susan Kashack

The Green Mill Inn sits on the Old Redwood Highway at the junction of Cotati and Penngrove. In its heyday, it was a hopping night spot for the growing communities surrounding it, as well as for generations of travelers on what was then Sonoma County's primary north-south route, the original Highway 101. Large enough to seat 500 guests in its eight separate dining rooms and nooks, the dining landmark has had a varied and interesting set of owners, each bringing a unique flavor to the popular dining spot.

In 1932, Maud M. Sherer, a former poultry woman known for her homemade chicken and fruit pies, started taking reservations for dinner "by letter, phone, or personally." It is said that her husband, a carpenter who remains anonymous, built the iconic green tower. In 1939, Captain Ferdinand Schlette, a merchant sea skipper took over and introduced a "Java Rice Table" to local patrons. In 1946, Swiss-born Jules Fisher and his brother Tony bought the restaurant and introduced a European-style smorgasbord with pate and pickled herring. They also offered an a la carte menu with \$4 Charcoal Broiled New York Steak and \$2.50 Baked Lobster Thermidor. In those days, the Inn served up to 2,000 patrons per week. Special holidays or events could mean serving 1,400 or more in a day. As the largest gathering spot in the area the Green Mill Inn often hosted weddings, dances, and other large-scale celebrations.

After just two years, the Fishers sold the inn to a Bay Area family who did their best to draw wealthy San Francisco friends north. Alas, it was not to be. The brothers took the restaurant back and continued to run it successfully into the 1970s, well after Highway 101 was rerouted west in 1957.



Then & Now: These images of the Green Mill Inn, one undated and the other contemporary by author Susan Kashack, make it seem as though time has had little effect on the Old Redwood Highway landmark. Only the mill's motorized blades have gone.

Continued on page 2

A “New” Page Descendant Visits

Thank goodness for ancestry.com! If Michele Brewer’s husband, John, pictured with her here, had not been researching family history, Michele might never have known she was a descendant of Cotati’s Page family. Michele had fond but cloudy memories of a grand-mannered grandmother “Lizzie,” who died when Michele was young. John uncovered the identity of thrice married Elizabeth Page Gorrill Sproul McLaren, born right here in Cotati in 1894, the daughter of Wilfred Page, 19th century head of the Rancho Cotate, and his wife, Emma. Here are the Brewers in the museum in April learning about Michele’s storied family from California, Chile, and New Jersey, pictured in displays above and behind.



Green Mill Stories, continued from page 1

In 1973, Vince Dell’Osso and his wife, Rose, moved their family to Sonoma County and bought the Green Mill from the Fishers. Born in Lucca, Italy, Vince came to the United States in the 1940s at the age of 21. He became a chef at the famous Original Joe’s in San Francisco and then part owner and chef at Westlake Joe’s in Daly City. In 1968, he sold his interest in that eatery and operated his own Dell’Osso’s of San Mateo before moving north.

The Dell’Ossos ran the restaurant for another 20 years, offering continental cuisine “with an Italian flavor.” The small rooms and alcoves separate from the main dining room created opportunities for an intimate supper.

One waitress of the 1970s was Lisa Moore, who recalls the many “regulars” who dressed up during the week or on weekends when music and dancing were offered.

An older couple came for dinner every Friday night, Moore remembers. They would sit in one of the alcove booths. They weren’t large tippers, she says, but they were loyal and very devoted to one another. They always ordered the same menu items, week after week, which was not uncommon for the regulars.

The Andreoli triplets—Marie, May, and Melba, born in 1938—dined at the Green Mill every Saturday night. May and Melba worked in San Francisco and would drive up to meet Marie. “The food was excellent, the people were nice, and we especially loved the prime rib,” remembers Marie, the last surviving of the threesome. “We celebrated our 60th birthday at the Green Mill just before its final closing,” she says. “Good memories of that place.”

You may remember the tall windmill-shaped sign advertising the Green Mill Inn that sat on the side of 101 for more than 20 years, helping to drive restaurant patrons to what had become a rural restaurant on a local byway. Vince was able to secure a historic designation for the sign, but not, surprisingly, for the inn itself, which looks today much the same as it did in the late ’70s: a low-slung roadhouse with its distinctive mill—painted in the landmark’s eponymous dark green.

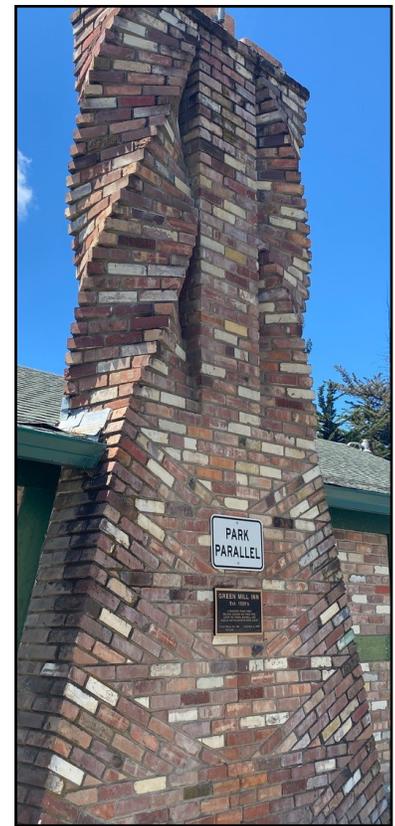
The beloved family restaurant sits quiet now, as if the last person out just turned out the lights and locked the door. Ceramic cups still sit on a shelf, wine and spirit glasses line the back of the bar, as if someone will come in the next morning, turn on the lights, and fire up the ovens.

Sadly, the era of the Green Mill Inn is no more.

Epilogue

In 2017, the Bergin University for Canine Studies purchased the Green Mill property. The nonprofit that trains and places therapy dogs will not restore the restaurant building, nor will it demolish it—leaving the historic site to inspire memories in those who pass by.

The Green Mill’s unusual twisting chimney sports a Native Daughters of the Golden West memorial plaque reminding visitors of lazy road trips and bountiful smorgasbord. To see Green Mill memorabilia across the decades, visit our new display in the Cotati Museum.



Photos by Susan Kashack



Fred Groverman, Town Vet, Community Volunteer Passes

Longtime Cotati veterinarian and Sonoma County volunteer Fred Groverman died in February at age 88.

Groverman grew up on the 50-acre family sheep ranch between Petaluma and Penngrrove. He attended Waugh Elementary School, Petaluma Junior High, Petaluma High School. He studied veterinary medicine at University of California, Davis, while concurrently running the family ranch after his father's death when Fred was 17.

Upon his graduation from Davis in 1958, fellow alumnus Bill Kortum asked him to join his practice. Together they built the Cotati Small Animal Hospital on Gravenstein Highway near Derby Lane. They practiced together until 1965. Groverman continued as a vet in Cotati until 2015.

He served 26 years on the 4-H board, oversaw the construction of Petaluma Valley Hospital, and for many years vetted every animal at the Sonoma County fair. Groverman was inducted to the Sonoma County Farm Bureau Hall of Fame with his late wife, Pat, in 2006.

In addition to his many services to the community at large, he worked with Kortum, Lloyd and Prue Draper, Dr. John Roberts, Bill Brower, C.C. Macklin, Joe Dorfman, and others on Cotati incorporation. He helped unify Cotati and Rohnert Park schools. He served as a Cotati volunteer fireman for 37 years, was president of the Cotati Lions Club, and supported the creation of the Cotati Historical Society.

Of his many accomplishments, Groverman was particularly proud of his lifelong husbandry of the herd of Shropshire sheep his father had started in the 1950s. It is the world's oldest flock of that breed. In mentoring 4-H youth throughout the county, including members of the Cotati 4-H, he offered one of the Shropshire lambs to any who wanted to start a breeding or market project. Most recently, Groverman worked as a consultant in stem cell research.

He is survived by his second wife, Lynge, and his four children, Karen, Jim, Judy, and Bill—all of whom have carved careers in agriculture.

Historic Downtown Tours Attract a Knowledgeable Crowd

Our first walking tour of 20 participants was led on Saturday, May 7 by Cotati Chamber president Erin Armstrong and local historian and CHS volunteer Marie McNaughton. On June 4 the tour was led by Marie and by CHS vice president Ed Gilardi, attracting another 20 walkers. Participants on each easy stroll around Cotati's downtown were full of questions and stories of their own about the town's music scene, festivals, businesses, buildings, art, agriculture, school memories, youthful antics, town characters, and urban myths.

Spaces are still available at press time for July 2 and August 6. To sign up, email your name, preferred date, the number in your party, and a contact phone number to chsinfo@sonic.net.

Judy Gustafson Honored by Historical Records Commission

Kudos to our own Judy Gustafson for her award by the County Historical Records Commission for her work preserving Sonoma County History. Judy was honored at the Sonoma County Historical Society Luncheon held in March at the Flamingo Hotel & Resort. As our Archiving Administrator, Judy is



Photo by Ed Gilardi

responsible for maintaining all of CHS's computer and office facilities, including our collection records. She also trains and supervises all the other volunteers who manage our archival and membership records. In addition, she contributes to exhibits, events, and overall management of the society and museum. She is pictured here with Steve Lovejoy, chairman of the Historical Records Commission.

**THANK YOU TO OUR NEW
AND RENEWING MEMBERS
AND TO OUR GENEROUS DONORS
(March 1-May 31, 2022)**

John Allred*
Jenny Blaker
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*Indicates donation in addition to membership

General Donations

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Preserving Cotati's Past

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

Join the Cotati Historical Society at the

**SONOMA COUNTY
“FINDING HISTORY DAY”**

**August 6, 2022
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

**Free admission & parking
Santa Rosa Finley Center
West College Avenue at Stony Point Road**

*Visit dozens (!) of history and culture exhibits
Enjoy 8 different 30-minute presentations
Ask questions. Get help with research
Buy books and other history items*

Sponsored by the
**Sonoma County Historical Society
Sonoma County History & Genealogy Library
& Rancho Bodega Historical Society**

Call for Artists & Other Creatives

CHS is developing a new program of activities to draw youngsters into the museum as we aim to inspire a new generation of Cotati history lovers. As part of that effort, we are looking for artists interested in creating graphic images of recognizable Cotati landmarks like the Jim Boggio statue, Odd Fellows building, Church of the Oaks, Cotati Creek, the Veronda-Falletti Ranch, and others to use in children’s games and other teaching materials. Artists, teachers, and others with experience in child development and education are encouraged to write to chsinfo@sonic.net with samples, suggestions, and questions.

CHS Plans 2023 Chicken BBQ/Reunion

After taking a break from large social gatherings in 2020, 2021, and 2022, the Cotati Historical Society is planning tentatively to revive our traditional spring gathering. Cotati has a long tradition of public barbecues, from the days of the Rancho Cotate to the Fourth of July parades and picnics held in the 1910s to the huge public fundraisers for St. Joseph Church in the 1950s and 1960s.

So mark your calendars for April 30, 2023

Cross your fingers, and dream of succulent chicken, baked beans, good company, and a healthy future for all.

Docent Social Drew New & Veteran Volunteers

By Margie Arthur Cassero

Being a new docent at the Cotati Museum has been such a joy, learning the rich history of my home town, meeting others from Cotati with their special memories, and sharing stories of days gone by. We all love contributing to the community, welcoming visitors, and sharing our town history.

We all work on different days, so when I suggested to docent coordinator Marie McNaughton that we have a “Docent Gathering” to meet each other, she immediately agreed and suggested that my Saturday shift on March 26 should be the day and that I should be in charge!

Chuck Lucas helped me with the planning. A pop-up canopy, a few chairs, and shared charcuterie, homemade cookies, freshly delivered pizza, and drinks rounded out the gathering in the parking lot—no food or drinks allowed in the museum, of course! Thank you to all who contributed.

It was so fun meeting each other, new faces with familiar names and acquaintances from the past. Those attending included volunteers Chuck and his grandson Caden Lucas, Kathy Norwood, Robin Draper, Pat Anderson, Gregg Fautley, Marie Aggio, Dave Wasson, Marie McNaughton, Velma DiMeola, Judy Gustafson, CHS president John Allred, and our special guest, my old classmate and former Cotati mayor Alan Stansbury.