



Cotati Historical Society
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 A 501(c) (3) non-profit, Tax ID# 300421172

Newsletter

Spring 2026

Message From The President

In 2025, CHS had another very productive year thanks to volunteer board and dedicated docents and volunteers.

We want to first remember those supporters of CHS we lost last year, dear friends Margie Cassero, Cheryl Nixon, and Marie Aggio. They are greatly missed.

Our annual Chicken BBQ was a great event attended by over 300 people. It's always nice seeing old and meeting new friends sharing stories, enjoying a delicious meal while listening to wonderful music, viewing the many classic cars, and checking out the silent auction and bake sale. This year, the BBQ is on Sunday, April 19, 2026 and includes tours of the Veronda-Falletti Ranch.

This year we will be honoring the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence with a special exhibit. The Semiquincentennial (that's a mouthful!) will offer a rare opportunity to reflect on the nation's founding values, acknowledge key moments in our shared history, and invest in cultural and educational legacies across the country. This celebration aims to foster unity and highlight contributions from diverse communities.

Come and learn more about Cotati's downtown history and join us on our downtown walking tours with stories about Cotati's past. The tours are offered from April through October usually on the second Saturday of those months. More information is on page 5 of this newsletter.

Board members and volunteer docents participated in several outreach events promoting our museum with displays about Cotati's history, including the Cotati Accordion Festival, Cotati Music Festival, the Eco Fair,

our annual Chicken BBQ, Sonoma County's Finding History Day, and the Downtown Shop & Stroll sponsored by the Cotati Chamber.

We also hosted the popular Thomas Page Academy 4th grade field trip, where the children not only learn about the history of Cotati but also learn about how Cotati's city government works, with the help of City staff giving a brief synopsis in each department.

Our annual fall event focused on the shared future of the Veronda-Falletti Ranch design, and we continue to work with the City of Cotati in planning for the future of the Veronda-Falletti Ranch. See the plans on display in the museum.

Special thanks to our docents. We couldn't have the museum open to the public on Saturdays without them. Our docents are the public face of the museum, answering questions and guiding our visitors through the history of our treasures in the museum. If you are interested in becoming a docent, contact us and we can explain what is involved.

I look forward to another successful year for the museum and seeing all of you at one or all of our events.

John Dell'Osso, President

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Celebrating the Nation's 250th

In 2026, the United States will celebrate the 250th anniversary of our country and the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The CHS has created a display of the history of the flag, highlighted by a flag donated to us showing 48 and not 50 stars. This version of the flag flew proudly from July 4, 1912 to July 3, 1959. At which point thereafter the states of Alaska (January 3, 1959) and Hawai'i (August 21, 1959) were added.

In 1777, it was determined that the flag of the U.S. would have alternating red & white stripes, representing the original 13 colonies. The colors of the flag were given special meaning. The red is for valor and zeal – white is for hope, purity, and cleanliness of life – and blue, the color of heaven, loyalty, sincerity, justice, and truth.

When California became a part of the U.S. on September 9, 1850, a 31st star was added to the U.S. flag (July 4, 1851).

Only the President of the U.S. has the authority to make changes to the U.S. flag.



The Evolution of the American Flag

The American flag has had as many as 27 versions. The 13-star flag was adopted on June 14, 1777—later designated as Flag Day—with each star and stripe representing one of the 13 original colonies. This flag would be flown for 18 years, until Vermont and Kentucky were admitted as states in 1791 and 1792, respectively, and two stars were added to represent their statehood. This pattern continued. As 13 states grew to 50, many flags were created to acknowledge the growing nation. It was not until the 21-star flag (the fourth edition) that each new design was adopted on the Fourth of July. California's statehood brought the 31-star flag in 1851. The U.S. flag as we know it today, with 50 stars and 13 red and white stripes, was adopted on July 4, 1960, during Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency. We're currently in the longest period without a design change on the U.S. flag—65 years! (*courtesy of Kelley House Museum, Mendocino, CA*)

The Flag on Display

The flag on display in the museum (left) is from 1920 and has only 48 stars on it. The 48-star flag was the official flag of our country from 1912 – 1959. In 1959, one star was added with the admission of Alaska and in 1960, the 50th star was added for the admission of Hawai'i.

The flag was kindly donated to CHS by Michael Gardner.

CHS Board Members Receive Awards

This past February, two Board Members from CHS received awards recognized by the Cotati Chamber of Commerce. Val Kingsbury received the Citizen of the Year and Judy Gustafson received the Volunteer of the Year! A special ceremony and dinner was held at the Ray Miller Community Center where State dignitaries and Federal representatives came to present each of them with certificates.

Val was honored for her many years of service with the CHS including working the annual BBQ since its inception. Additionally, she worked for over 20 years in the Cotati – Rohnert Park Unified School District in Special Education. She has also served on the Thomas Page PTA and Little League Board. She currently serves as the Secretary for the Cotati Historical Society.



State Senator Christopher Cabaldon, Val Kingsbury, State Assemblymember Damon Connolly and U.S. Congressman Mike Thompson's Field Representative Sergio Toscano.

Judy has served on the board of the CHS for over 16 years. She started as a volunteer several months before the museum opened, setting up the first computer, and soon became the Archiving Administrator.

Judy has organized and accessioned our entire collection of several thousand items and documents, with help from other volunteers over the years.

She has also mentored student volunteers from Sonoma State University who have helped with our archiving efforts. Additionally, Judy responds to many inquiries each year, fulfilling requested needs by researching documents, photos and additional resources. Judy provides technical information for our newsletter, yearly community special displays and gives tours of our museum.

Our community is so lucky to have the expertise of Val and Judy caring for Cotati's history.



State Senator Christopher Cabaldon, Judy Gustafson, State Assemblymember Damon Connolly and U.S. Congressman Mike Thompson's Field Representative Sergio Toscano.



Our Barbecue Sponsors

The following is a list of our Chicken BBQ sponsors as of the printing of this newsletter,

We are so grateful to our Sponsors

City of Cotati

Cotati City Council

Dist. 2 Supervisor David Rabbitt

Full Circle Bakery

HenHouse Brewing

Jackson Family Winery

Lagunitas Brewery

Larsen's Feed

Barbara & Jake Mackenzie

Oliver's Market

The Martin Family in memory of Connie Martin

Carl's Autobody

Parliament Brewing

Recology



Calling All Volunteers

We are looking for Museum Docents and Research Volunteers

Do you have excellent customer service skills, a passion for your community, and an interest in history? Contact the Cotati Historical Society to learn more and apply to be part of our team!

707-794-0305 or
CotatiMuseum@gmail.com

Flowers Not To Reason Why

A fixture on East Cotati Avenue across from the Rancho Adobe Fire Station for over 50 years, Michael Larrain recently passed away. Michael had been selling flowers out of his vehicle with the business name of “Flowers Not To Reason Why.”

Michael was known for his vibrant spirit and contributions not only as a flower vendor, but as an actor, a poet and a novelist.

Prior to landing in Cotati, Michael had a career in Hollywood with acting roles in film and television. Included in his list of television shows are *Gunsmoke*, *The Virginian*, *Ironside*, and *Marcus Welby M.D.*, and the films *Buckskin* (1968) and *The Last Child* (1971) among others. He was also an author of four collections of poems



and several novels.

We have a **Reason Why** we miss this kind gentleman.

Walking Tours of Historic Downtown Continue

- 4/11
- 5/9
- 6/13
- 7/25
- 8/8
- 9/12
- 10/10

Have you ever wondered, “How old is that building?” or “I wish I knew what business was in that building 50 years ago?” Well, we’ve got an answer for you. Sign up for one of our popular downtown walking tours with our knowledgeable docents to learn more about the history of some of the buildings and businesses downtown.

See the information to the left for walking tours in 2026 scheduled for this year on the second Saturday of each month (except July) from April through October, all beginning at 11:30 at La Plaza Park downtown and going until about 1:00.

You can sign up by sending us an email at CotatiMuseum@gmail.com or by leaving a message at 707-794-0305 and leave your name, phone number, the date you are interested in and how many in your group.

Make sure to wear comfortable walking shoes. Since it will take place outdoors, don’t forget the sunscreen!



Thousands Witness Graduation Ceremony

The time for school graduations is upon us and we recently had some stories shared of a rather large graduation ceremony for Sonoma County students here in Cotati.

The Cotati Speedway was the site for a very special graduation ceremony in 1922. Over 12,000 people came and some 6,000 children from all over Sonoma County participated in what was called “*The Melting Pot of Nations.*” Each school represented a different nation by creating their own costume and learning a folk dance from that country. They then took part in a large procession around the racetrack. Nearly 600 students received their diplomas and participated in special events including the largest simultaneous Maypole dance in the state, as well as a track meet.

The Northwestern Pacific Railroad brought people to the event from both the north and south on a special graduation train.

If anyone has more information on this story, please contact the Cotati Historical Society.



Petaluma Daily Morning Courier, Vol 50,
Number 72, 4 June 1922.

Did Ya Hear?

Mark your calendars. 2026 Chicken BBQ will be on Sunday, April 19 from 12-4. Tickets at Exchange Bank or on-line at CHS website. You can help us by volunteering. Call 707-794-0305 or email CotatiMuseum@gmail.com



Thank You To Our New and Renewing Members and Donors

December 1, 2025 – March 31, 2026

Individuals and Families

Maria Alvarez & David Trouse
Clifford & Vanessa Davenport
Velma DiMeola
Robin Draper
Ben Ford & Judith Newton
Judy Gustafson
Darryl Henke
Lee Howard
Val Kingsbury
Steven Lavoie
Pat & Anna Marshment (Sani)
Bruce Martin
Gary & Kim Martin
Jake Martin & Grace Witt
Nita Miller
Rick Minervini & Gwyn Marshall
Millie Nibe
Kathy Norwood (Jacobsen)
Lindee Reese & Theresa Abts
Trudy Simonton
Daniel & Carolyn Torliatt
BJ Veronda
Dave, John & Laura Wasson
Pamela Wilford
Simone Wilson & Creighton Bell

Memorial Donations

Lloyd & Prue Draper by Robin Draper
Prue Draper & Connie Martin by Judy Gustafson
Connie Martin by Bruce Martin
Mildred & Howard Jacobsen & Marie Aggio
by Kathy Norwood (Jacobsen)
Susan Issel Reichardt by Kathy Norwood

Donations

Keith & Carla Schoenthal
Bill Tomrose
BJ Veronda for Veronda-Falletti Project Fund
Marie E. Von Der Porten

2026 Business Memberships

Millerick Bros.
Oliver's Market
Redwood Self Storage

2026 Board of Directors

President	John Dell'Osso
Vice President	Ed Gilardi
Secretary	Val Kingsbury
Treasurer	Kim Martin
Conservation/Restoration Consultant	John Allred
Archiving Administrator	Judy Gustafson
Board Member	Vanessa Davenport
Board Member	Velma DiMeola
Board Member	Gary Martin

The CHS Mission

Our mission is to preserve Cotati history through the acquisition and preservation of artifacts, photos, archives, and other historical materials. We provide resources for visitors and researchers interested in Cotati's unique past. Our community outreach program enables us to support Cotati-related cultural activities and events and to maintain reciprocal relations with other historical entities.



Cotati Historical Society
PO Box 7013
Cotati CA 94931

Membership/Dues/Donations



This form may be used for new & renewal memberships, general or memorial donations.
Thank you for your support of Cotati Historical Society.

Dues: Individual \$20, Family (All members of same household) \$25, Business \$40

___ Yes, I want to join/renew my/our membership: _____

___ An additional donation of \$ _____ is enclosed.

Member Name/s _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip code _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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

Please send an acknowledgment to: _____

Address _____

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

Online payments: cotatimuseum.org/support