

# The Novato Historian



The Quarterly Publication of the Novato Historical Guild, the Novato History Museum, and the Hamilton Field History Museum

*Preserving Novato's History*  
**News Section**

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January - March 2015

The Novato Historian

Volume 39, Number 1

## 2014 General Meeting & Holiday Party



*The December General Meeting and Holiday Party featured holiday refreshments and live entertainment with music by The Rob Sundberg Trio.*

## New Faces on the Board



### **BILL DAMON**

Bill has been a resident of Novato (Black Point) for about 20 years. He loves Marin County history and for the past 25 years, has explored historical sites throughout Marin. The first spark to become part of NHG came from a relative, Lois Eischen, who was a docent at the Novato Museum in the early 2000's. Today, Bill is a docent at the museum, organizing its impressive map collection with Bill McDill. He looks forward to helping guide the NHG for the next 2 years.

## 2015 Officers and Board Members



*From left to right: (Top row) Susan Magnone, Kathryn Hansen, Louise Koenig, Edna Manzoni, Pat Johnstone, Sheila Brossier, Yvette Jackson. (Bottom row) Bill Damon, Jim Crumpler, Tom Keena, George GnoSS.*

### **GEORGE GNOSS, JR.**

George was born in San Rafael and raised on the family fruit and chicken farm on Olive Avenue, Novato. The farm was originally acquired by his grandparents circa 1905. He attended grammar schools in Novato, and was in the first graduating class of Novato High School. He was active in 4-H, with projects in dairy and beef cattle and chickens. George graduated from Oregon State University with a BA degree in business. Post graduate work included an MBA from UC Berkeley and a law degree from UC Davis. Following completion of law

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**The Novato Historian**

Published March, June, September, and December by the Novato Historical Guild, a California 501(c)3 non-profit corporation formed on November 18, 1976.

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**Guild Mission Statement**

*Our Mission is to collect, preserve, and make reasonably available to the public, exhibits and information related to the historical and social development of the Novato valley, Hamilton Field, and the adjacent North Marin area.*

**Novato Historical Guild 2015 Officers**

President	Susan Magnone
Vice President	Jim Krumpler
Secretary	Kathryn Hansen
Treasurer	Kathryn Hansen

**Board of Directors**

Sheila Brossier	Pat Johnstone
Bill Damon	Tom Keena
Yvette Jackson	Edna Manzoni
George Gness	Louise Koenig

**Honorary Historian**

Bill Almeida

**Committee Chairs**

Collection Mgmt.	Bill Damon
	Jim Crumpler
Finance	Kathryn Hansen
Fund Raising	All Board Members
Gift Stores	Pat Johnstone
Governance	George Gness
Hospitality	Sheila Brossier
Mailing	Jim McNern
Membership	Edna Manzoni
Nominating	Louise Koenig
Oral History	Jim McNern
Publicity	Yvette Jackson
	Sheila Brossier
Public Outreach	Susan Magnone
	Jim Krumpler
School Tours	Cindy Motsinger
Sunshine	Diane Campbell
Volunteer Recog.	Tom Keena

**Newsletter Editorial Board**

Bill Almeida	Susan Magnone
Tonie Brown	Jim McNern
Tom Keena	Mike Read
Pat Johnstone	

**Typography, Layout, Composition**

Carol Aregger

**City of Novato Staff**

*Recreation Operations Manager*  
Kathy Kormos

Original articles and photographs related to Novato history are welcomed!

**Deadline for the June issue is May 1st**

**Address Changes**

*The Novato Historian is mailed by bulk mail and will not be forwarded by the Postal Service. Please notify us promptly of your address change at Novato Historical Guild, P.O. Box 1296, Novato, CA 94948.*



**President's Corner**

**Susan Magnone**

**President, Novato Historical Guild**

At the start of a new year, I thought it would be good to take stock of where we are as a Guild and report a State of the Guild. Actually, we're doing very well. Our membership has remained steady at around 400. Volunteer hours have increased over last year. Our spending was within budget and we ended 2014 with a surplus of \$10,210. There are other things to consider that may be even more important. For example, the Guild's partnership with the city of Novato is very positive. There is a collaborative and supportive working relationship. Budget cuts and the elimination of city staff for the museums is a challenge to both the Guild and the City, but we are working together to deal with those challenges.

Another thing to consider is what the Guild has done recently. This past year the Board has allocated funds to support new exhibits, updated computers, purchased DVD recording equipment for the oral history project, and created a Guild Web Site. Revised Bylaws have been adopted by the members. Volunteers are creating new exhibits, organizing maps, and converting videos to DVD's so that the public can see them. The Guild members have contributed over \$1,000 to convert the oral history cassette tapes to CDs. All of these things are important steps forward for the Guild. It may be slow and steady, but it is progress. I see these as signs of a healthy, active Guild.

We can be pleased with the State of the Guild at the start of 2015. Just remember that there is always more that needs to be done and improvements to be made. So let's look ahead.

**Continue:** The Guild needs to continue its role in the management of the two museums, such as inventorying and preserving historical items given to the museums and designing new exhibits. A big challenge is the cleaning out of the

storage area at Bld. 500 at Hamilton. A new committee, Collections Management, was created to take on that project. Let me know if you would like to be on the team for this project.

**Expand:** Getting new technology equipment and creating a Web Site was an important first step. Now we need to expand their use in preserving and sharing Novato's history by making the oral histories, maps and pictures easily available to the public at the museums and on line. All of us can help to expand the number of volunteers by inviting someone to get involved. To honor our volunteers, the Board created a Volunteer Recognition Committee. Two committees are working to expand the Guild's presence in the community. The publicity Committee will submit articles and notices to the newspapers and online. The Public Outreach Committee is working to connect the Guild with other museums in Novato and with other organizations. We also want to expand our membership. One way to do that is for members to invite a friend or neighbor to attend a Membership meeting.

**Dream:** For many years it has been the dream of the Guild to have a larger space for the Novato History Museum. That dream continues with a new "possibility" of a building in Old Town. If that happens, the Guild needs to be prepared with a plan of what we will do to support making that dream a reality. This will involve both volunteer hours and financial support. Until then, keep on dreaming.

A positive State of the Guild depends on the support of our members and the work of the volunteers. Please join us as we Continue, Expand, and Dream in 2015.

Please see the Committee Chairs and the Volunteer Opportunities in the Historian for some of the ways to get involved.



# Novato-50 Years Ago

## (January, February and March 1965)

by Bill Almeida and Tonie Brown

*“Novato 50 Years Ago” is a collection of items culled by Bill Almeida from the January, February and March issues of the Novato Advance newspapers in the collection of the Novato History Museum and the Novato Advance. Tonie Brown retypes the articles for the newsletter. Enjoy reading the names and happenings of 1965.*

- Edward W. Adams was appointed to the post of City and Parks Recreation Director on Jan. 12. His appointment by City Administrator John J. Baget was ratified by the city council. Adams replaced former City Recreation Director Ed Mahany who resigned the post last December. Adams will begin work at \$744 a month.
- A \$225,000 building program to enlarge Novato General Hospital from 30 to 57 beds was authorized by the hospital board of directors on January 12.
- Major Gen. C. F. Necrason, commander of the 28th Air Division and deputy commander of the 28th North American Air Defense Region, announced that he plans to retire from the Air Force in March. No successor has been named.
- A San Rafael group of investors is prepared to buy the Grant Avenue school property and develop it along with Harry Johnson, owner of about 1/3 of the land at the corner of Grant Avenue and Highway 101.
- Johnson Hardware in the Nave Shopping Center was formally renamed as a result of new ownership. It is now Fuller & Sons Hardware.
- Funeral services were held January 11 for George W. Sanborn, 83 of 755 DeLong Avenue. Mr. Sanborn was known as an explorer. One of his discoveries was a legendary Hawaiian burial cave made when he was just 19 years old after sailing the Pacific as captain’s messman on the windjammer Lansing. Other exploration led him to New Zealand, Australia, the Fiji Islands and the Antipodes.
- The will of the late Herbert E. Enyeart, formerly of Novato, was filed in Marin Superior Court in early January. His entire estate, approximately \$67,500 was left to his wife Helen. Mr. Enyeart had once been a director of the Novato Sanitary District and had operated a motel on Highway 101 in Novato.
- Councilman Wayne Womack was planning to open a fabric store in a new building to be constructed at the Tresch Triangle Center at South Novato Blvd. and Center Road. He was conducting his fabric business at 1425 Grant Avenue. Womack was Novato’s first mayor in January of 1960.
- A “graveyard” was discovered at the Sinaloa Ranch at the corner of Wilson Avenue and Vineyard Road where buildings were being demolished for a future school. As many as 100 slot machines were unearthed in a creek bed.
- Funeral services were held for Joseph S. Daneri, 72, of 785 McClay Road on January 16. A native of Italy, Mr. Daneri came to California in 1902. He was a wholesale grocer in San Francisco until his retirement in 1958.
- Construction of the Indian Valley Medical Center was slated to begin the first part of February, according to Wilkes Lou Johnson, one of six stockholders in the corporation. The medical center was to be built on land adjoining the Novato General Hospital on Hill Road.
- Longs Drug Stores of Oakland announced plans to open its new Novato store in the fall of 1965. The store will be constructed in the new Downtown Novato Center on a 22 acre site at the southwest corner of Grant Avenue and Seventh Street. Longs Drugs have signed a lease for a 20,000 square foot super drug store.
- Five people were awarded Novato PTA Life Memberships on February 4. Those honored were: Robert McKeay, counselor and adult education director at Hill Junior High; Rex Rolle, principal of Rancho School; Beverly Ehreth, fifth grade teacher at West Novato School; Mrs. Jack Diefendorf, teacher at Olive School; Mrs. Dorothy Paul, Hill Junior High.
- Novato’s population was 31,603, second only to San Rafael in a study prepared by the Marin County Development Association.
- The city planning commission recommended the re-zoning of three and half South Novato Boulevard acres belonging to Richard Connell from a multiple to planned residential district. The property is located on the west side of the boulevard immediately south of the Nave Shopping Center and has been periodically in the news for the past two years.

# Novato Historical Guild Board Highlights

by Kathryn Hansen

## November 2014

*New Business* - Edna reported that the Baseball Exhibit that opened Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> was a huge success with 63 in attendance. Eight men were invited who played on the first ever Little League All Star team (1953) and seven attended; several with their wives.

Susan reported Patrick MacLeamy would like to meet with a few Guild members to come up with a list of dates/events that should be on bricks in front of City Hall. He will provide the funds and the Guild will provide the information.

*City Report* – Kathy – Heather met with Susan regarding the internet (Verizon mi-fi box) borrowed from Hamilton Pool – they will test it between now and April. If it is satisfactory NHG will get a permanent box. Four refurbished computers from the City are earmarked for the two museums.

*Downtown Report* – Susan reported that Ray ordered equipment to convert the 193 history tapes to video. 6 have been converted by Tom.

*Hamilton Museum* – Ray reported new exhibits – Fire poll and General Moore.

## December 2014

*New Business* – Roland reported that he is organizing a Boy Scout project to build benches for the 3rd grade students to sit on at the Downtown Museum.

*City Report* – Kathy reported a severe storm is predicted and the City is activating EOC (Emergency Operations Center).

*Downtown Museum* – Susan reported the Pacheco portraits are going to an art conservationist for restoration.

*Hamilton Museum* – Roland reported the museum's youngest docent, Chase Caligiuri, was named *Volunteer of the Year* at Novato High School.

## January 2015

*New Business* – Officers were elected, 2015 Calendar of meeting dates were

distributed, Terms of Office were reviewed to conform to the By-Laws and Chairpersons of committees were identified.

*City Report* - Kathy reported Third Grade docents will need TB shots based on health regulations.

*Downtown Museum* – Susan reported plaques honoring Phil Goebel have been placed at both museums.

*Hamilton Museum* – Ray reported Bldg. 500 had no water damage after the storm due to the new sump pump.

## New Faces on the Board

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school George and his wife and daughter moved to Belvedere.

George practiced business law in San Francisco for 38 years, and is currently semi-retired with an office in San Rafael where legal work and trustee responsibilities keep him busy. In addition to his lengthy legal practice, he was active in civic and non-profit activities, including as a Council Member and Mayor of Belvedere, Member and Chairman of the Marin County Redevelopment Agency, Trustee and Chairman of the Northern California Cancer Center and current member of the Belvedere Finance Committee and Belvedere Historic Preservation Committee.

While George resides in Belvedere, he continues to maintain close ties to family and friends in Novato, and can frequently be seen tending his orchard on his small piece of the original Gness farm. "Growing up in the close-knit small community of Novato had a dramatic influence on my adult life, and I look forward to continuing my family's historic involvement in the community through my participation on the Novato Historical Guild Board."

## In Memoriam

Caroline DeSouza  
Phil Goebel  
Mary Hanzlik  
Lee Janover  
Dolly Nave  
Jean Witter  
Wayne Womack

## The Guild Extends Sympathy to

Bernadette DeSouza on the death of her sister, Caroline

Diana Goebel and family on the death of Phil Goebel

The Hanzlik family on the death of Mary Hanzlik

Nancy Peters-Janover on the death of Lee Janover

Bill Mazzoleni on the death of his sister, Dorothy Paganetti

Richard Nave and family on the death of Dolly Nave

Lawrence Witter and family on the death of Jean Witter

The Womack family on the death of Wayne Womack



# Novato Memories

by Jim McNern



## Hank Sandbach

*Hank Sandbach is the second son of Tony and Alice Jean Sandbach. He moved with his parents and two brothers, Bill and Mike, from San Francisco to Novato in June of 1944. He attended grammar school at St. Rafael's in San Rafael and St. Vincent's in Petaluma. Following graduation from Marin Catholic High School in 1956 he attended Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and graduated from the University of San Francisco with a degree in English in 1961. There followed five years of active duty in the U.S. Army in North Carolina and Germany before joining Del Monte Corporation in 1966. He retired as Vice President, Public Relations, Government Relations and Corporate Philanthropy at Nabisco, Inc., in 2001. Hank holds the rank of Colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve. He and his wife, Cathie, have three daughters, ten grandchildren, and live in Sonoma.*

### IN THE BEGINNING....

The Novato of my early youth hosted two religious denominations: one Protestant, the other Catholic. Shepherding the Protestants was the Rev. Joseph D. Easter, a highly popular Presbyterian clergyman with a strong following and long tenure. On Sunday mornings he and his flock would gather downtown in a stately red wooden church house, which years later would serve as Novato's first official City Hall.

My younger brother and I were raised Catholic, and during the mid-1940s he and I were altar boys at the 8:15am Sunday Mass at Our Lady of Loretto Church across the Highway (now Redwood Blvd.) on the corner of Grant Avenue and Second Street in "New Town." We needed to arrive a little early each Sunday in order to "suit up" in a black cassock and white surplice....and light the altar candles. All this was done under the keen eye of Father Bartholomew J. McCarthy, our affable Irish pastor. About 8:05am he would glance at his watch, turn to me and, with a wink of his eye, say: "OK, Hank. It's time for you to wake up Joe Easter's crowd." That was a signal for me to head over to the choir space near the altar, squeeze through the assembled singers, grab a rope hanging from the ceiling, and ring the

Our Lady of Loretto church bell for all it was worth.

I should point out that one of the principal voices in the OLL Choir those days was Eleanor Lafranchi, who later would become such an important figure in the creation and operation of the Novato Historical Guild.

But I get ahead of myself.

### NEWCOMERS IN TOWN

My first memories of Novato date from June of 1944. That's when our family moved from the Sunset District in San Francisco to a 28-acre parcel of land comprising half of a small valley at the very end of Seventh Street. I recall several weekend trips to Novato with my father getting things in order before moving in. Most memorable moment for me took place while peeking into the darkness of a large beat-up redwood water tank that served the small house on the property....and coming eyeball to eyeball with an enormous bullfrog.

We bought the property from none other than Novato's Italian Swiss businessman extraordinaire, Henry Pini. Unbeknownst to Mrs. Pini, Henry had purchased this property on Seventh Street sometime earlier as a

place for them both to live when he retired. Upon learning of its "distant location" at the end of Seventh Street, Mary refused to move from their large white two-story frame home just off Grant Avenue in downtown Novato. I was six years old when we moved to Novato, and I remember meeting Mr. Pini on one of those weekend visits to town. White-haired and frail, he had a kindly face and a gentle smile. He passed away that summer.

Our nearest neighbors were the Schekenbachs, who lived near the head end of our long dirt driveway. Frank Scheckenbach Sr. and his sister, Margaret Tracy, owned the property, and Frank and his wife raised chickens. Young Frank Jr. became a boyhood pal of ours...and he soon taught the three city slickers how to throw a rock a long way across a field. Frank became known in school for "his arm." Across from the Schekenbachs were the Ridells. Scotty Ridell's daughter Joan was a playmate of ours. When the Ridells moved, a Chinese couple with the family name of Yee-Wah, bought the property and operated a small factory that produced very elegant small wooden boxes. When the United Nations was formed in San Francisco

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# Novato Memories

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following World War II, the City of San Francisco purchased a large number of these boxes to present as gifts to delegates from around the world. To the west of our property, on the other side of the hill, was the Checkenowski family, who operated an auto junkyard.

## COMMUTING AND “CRUISIN THE SUB”

The character of Novato changed dramatically during the years immediately following World War II. Whereas before folks worked in town, on the ranches and dairies, or maybe in San Rafael or Petaluma, now there emerged a new “commuter class” of people who took the Greyhound bus to and from San Francisco every day. My father, who worked for C&H Sugar, was among this group that included Warren Kingsley, Lou Saffores... and my brother Bill, who attended St. Ignatius High School. The trip was long and tortuous, with stops in San Rafael, a run west from there to San Anselmo, then back to Greenbrae and Highway 101 for the journey across the Golden Gate Bridge and downtown.

The postwar years in Novato saw a significant rise in population—veterans and young couples for the most part—buying their first homes and starting their families. Principal locus of this new demographic was “the subdivision,” a large area of newly constructed single family homes located on the south side of Grant Avenue between First and Fifth Streets. My brother Mike and I would frequently ride our bikes through this area, marveling at what seemed to us to be such glamour and sophistication compared to the rest of town.

## BUS WRECK!

I was in the third grade and Mike in the first at St. Vincent’s Grammar School in Petaluma. One cold, foggy and wintry morning in 1946 we climbed aboard the Greyhound bus at Grant Avenue and Highway 101. We scurried down the aisle and jumped into our favorite two seats near the emergency door. And off we went north into a dense fog. At a spot along the highway near Wright’s Mill (now

the Marin County Airport area) the two-lane highway offered a short and very dangerous center passing-lane for a mile or so. In the thick fog that morning, a southbound car to our front attempted to use the center passing lane at the same time as the car ahead of us made a similar move. The result was a horrific head-on collision. Our driver managed to avoid the crash by taking our bus into a deep ditch on the right shoulder of the road. A few of our fellow passengers were hurt, but none seriously. And Mike and I got to open the emergency door—a life memory. Shortly after, the area—still thick in fog—was crowded with police cars and emergency vehicles. Mike and I and little Agnes Nunes, a classmate whose family operated the large dairy nearby, huddled together and waited for a ride home. Agnes was in tears. Word of the accident traveled quickly back to town. Someone in Hale’s Meat Market on Grant Avenue overheard Harry Hale shout to someone in the store: “Better get up to the end of Seventh Street and tell old lady Sandbach that her boys are OK.”

## THE CLUB CAR

Very early on my Mother got Mike and I involved with the Novato 4-H Club, which provided some of the best friends and happiest times of my childhood. Meetings were held in an old railroad passenger car situated directly behind Rev. Easter’s Presbyterian Church. It was called The Club Car, and it was many years before the double entendre, enjoyed immensely no doubt by the adults, hit me. The Club Car, of course, is where you would go in those days to get an alcoholic beverage on the train. The meetings were fun (unless you had a presentation to make). And the friends were many: Bob McClelland, Virginia Orr, Sandy Glass, Claudette and Yvette Borloz, Earlene Porter, Jim and Joe McNern, Rich Burghi, Karl Rathaus, Louise and George Gness, Barbara Thompson, Florine Olson, and the Purdoms—Dale, Sue and Brent—to mention a few. I don’t recall Anna Young, Carol Diehl, Becky Hamilton, and Bill and Betty Haymart in 4-H, but they were certainly in the thick circle of Novato youngsters of my time.

Ditto Ray and Vern Dwelly. Our 4-H Club leaders, many of them parents of members, were just terrific, perhaps especially George Orr, Alta Johnson, and the Lieb brothers, Tyke and Dick.

Highlight each year was dressing up in 4-H whites and presenting your animal for judging at the Petaluma Fair. We slept near our animals in the livestock barns...and were careful not to be caught in the carnival area, which was seriously off-limits to us youngsters.

## FIRE ON THE HILL

One of the more dramatic occurrences during our time on Seventh Street took place on the evening of September 16, 1952, when our house caught fire and burned to the ground. My father was away at a business convention, and my older brother Bill was at West Point. It all took place in the middle of the night, likely the result of central heating system embers igniting the shake shingle roof. Mother, Mike and I sat together on the hill and watched it burn to the ground. There was little the Fire Department could do by the time the water truck arrived on scene.

The neighbors were simply wonderful. We stayed with the Lundblads the night of the fire, and the Lovejoys took us in thereafter. Others brought us food and clothing. A number of “emergency items” such as dishes, glassware and household goods were brought to us by the Sims and other neighbors are still in the family. Mr. Owens at the corner of Seventh and Vallejo Streets graciously loaned us a small house trailer during the time our new home was being built. My mother slept in the trailer; Dad, Mike and I “batched-it” in a nearby chicken barn.

## MAKING HAY

One way or another growing up, I managed to find a number of after-school and weekend jobs in and about Novato. I cleaned horse stalls at Bert Paige’s place on Indian Valley Road. I cleaned kennels for Adele Murphy who raised blue collies on

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# Novato Memories

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Atherton Avenue. I worked in chicken houses at the Duffy's broiler ranch on Novato Boulevard...and did the same—with Jerry Olrich—at the Baccaglio's farm on South Novato Boulevard. For a time I had an after school job cleaning the Novato Theater with pal Bill Hubbard. In addition to our hourly wages, the theater owner, Don Donahue, allowed us to keep all the loose change we came upon in and about the seats. In college I worked a couple of summers as part of Frank Manzoni's road repair crew and at the Marin County rock quarry on Lucas Valley Road.

But of all the jobs I had growing up, the most memorable by far was baling hay one summer for local businessman and farmer, Reno Pronzini. Brother Mike and I were part of a team, headed by George Hale, that moved from field to field, sun up to sundown, pushing oat hay through a mechanical hay baler and stacking the results across the field. When we finished one field we moved on to another. We were paid not by the hour but by the ton of product we produced. In addition to George, and Mike and I (who poked and tied wire), the crew included Howard Smith and Chick Hale. I have often thought of the enormous responsibility shouldered by George Hale at such a young age. The work was grueling and potentially dangerous. And George, who pitch-forked hay into the baler hour after hour, day after day, had the hardest job of all.

It was at Confirmation Class at Our Lady of Loretto Church in the spring of 1952 that I met fellow Novatan and lifelong pal Gil Medeiros. His father had a hay hauling business, and Gil was driving hay trucks long before he had a license. Brother Mike tells hair-raising tales of Gil's driving techniques when the two worked together a couple of summers.

## FIRST CAR

I used the money I had earned from baling hay that summer to purchase insurance for a car my parents presented to me. It was a blue 1939 Plymouth two door, with a peculiarity.

That would be the fact that the gas tank was mounted behind the front seat inside the car. To fill the tank required bringing the gas pump hose through the right front door. We had a lot of fun with the car until one day, while running it up a grassy hill near Marin Catholic, the transmission began making ferocious noises. I was able to get the car home...but barely. Karl Rathaus was certain he could fix things, so he set about opening up the gear box and moving parts around. We ended up with the original four speeds—but all in reverse. The car was delivered to nearby Checkenowski's Junk Yard in short order.

## COMING FULL CIRCLE

Soon enough came college in San Francisco, marriage to a Kentfield girl, and four years in the Army in North Carolina and Germany. Upon return to Novato in 1965, Cathie and I bought a home on Feliz Road. Following my Mother's death in 1968, we bought the old family homestead from my father. And it was here that we raised our three girls. When my employer, Del Monte Corporation, merged with Nabisco, Inc. in 1986, we were faced with a Hobson's choice. Either move to the new headquarters

near New York City...or find another job. With one daughter in law school and another about to start college, this was no time to go job hunting.

Selling the family home was emotionally difficult. And as the large moving van hauled all our belongings away, we vowed to return. And that we did in 2001, when Nabisco was sold to Kraft. Shortly thereafter we bought a home in Sonoma, where brother Mike had moved in the 1980s...and we headed home.

I get to Novato often these days. Our old family home is now a facility of the Buckelew Foundation, which provides shelter and residential care for mentally handicapped young adults. We have come to admire greatly the thoughtful and compassionate work of this organization and it warms the heart to think of what has become of our old home.

American novelist Thomas Wolfe wrote: "You Can't Go Home Again." I beg to differ. You can go home. And the programs, publications and most of all the people of the Novato Historical Guild show us how.



In December, Diana Goebel and Judy Brady manned the Guild's booth at the 2014 Holiday Crafts Faire that was held at the Margaret Todd Senior Center.

## NOVATO'S TREASURES Gnoss Field



*Gnoss Field 1965*



*Gnoss Field 2014*

Engineer-rancher William Q. Wright Jr. had a dream. He dreamed that someday Marin County would have its own airport north of Novato on his 1300-acre ranch. Not being a mere dreamer by nature, Wright took action.

He plowed, cleared and dragged the land in 1939 to make his own landing strip for his little flying egg crate. Most Marin flyers and businessmen thought he was out of his mind. They complained that his land was too far away from the center of things, that the highway commute was too slow. But Wright, county supervisor from North Marin from 1953 to 1954, talked endlessly about the need of the airport in North Marin.

In 1945 Woody Binford, a Novato TV dealer in the 1950's and 60's, was

discharged from the Air Force where he had served as a flight instructor and lieutenant.

Binford, who shared Wright's enthusiasm for flying and his foresight as to the growing importance of aviation, recalls that "Bill Wright and I talked it over and we agreed that I should start an airport and flying school on his land. So he loaned me his equipment and I harrowed the strip and dragged it. Then I bought a little plane and opened a GI flight school. I took in a partner Jack Lewis of Healdsburg and we built a hangar and a little office building.

"We did pretty well until 1949 when the GI Bill sort of petered out and then we gave it up." But Binford shared Wright's conviction that the property

north of Novato was the best place in Marin for the airport.

There were several small airports around the county –at Santa Venetia, San Rafael, and Richardson Bay. The former two were choked to death by real estate developments. Harry Tollefson, manager of the Santa Venetia airport took over Wright's operation north of Novato in 1950 and ran it as an airport and flying school until 1967.

As a county supervisor, Wright did everything he could to tout the Novato site, even to freezing the price he would sell his land for at \$1000 per acre for many years to induce the county to buy it. Nobody listened.

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# Gnoss Airport

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Then William A. Gnoss, an old friend of Wright's, became supervisor in 1958, and he took the torch from Wright's hand to press for the development of the airport, in spite of the most incredible discouragement.

After a while, Gnoss, Tollefson and several other Novato flyers and businessmen started a move to improve the airport with aviation gas tax money received by the county annually - a mere \$2000 or \$3000. But the improvements made were make-shift as the supervisors had no real desire to sink enough money into the Novato sue to make it really acceptable.

All these years, Wright held his land available at \$1000 per acre even though land prices in the area were escalating. Year after year complaints mounted about conditions at the airport. There were chuck holes on the strip; the road leading to it was unpaved and rutted, the runway was too short and ran in the wrong direction.

Finally in July 1959 the supervisors agreed to buy ten acres from Wright and spend some money for resurfacing the runway and building a new access road. In return for this the county was to receive one third of the tie-down rentals from Tollefson.

In November of 1966 Gnoss was sent to Washington as a representative of the Bay Area Air Pollution Control

Agency at a smog conference. He decided he would make one final effort while there to get money for his little orphan airport. He went to see the FAA officials and poured out a tale of woe and frustration so poignant that it touched the hearts of the government men. No sooner had Gnoss returned home than he got a call from Congressman Don Clausen saying that the feds were springing loose some \$273,000 from their scarce funds for the Marin airport.

This amount, with state and county funds, produced enough money for the first phase of the development, consisting of a new runway, additional land acquisition, paving of taxi and parking areas.

The airport has been appropriately named Gnoss Field after the supervisor who fought tenaciously against seemingly insurmountable odds to make it a reality for the people of Marin. Gnoss has always been convinced that it will be invaluable as a commercial asset for the county and is simply and purely a step toward the future.

But no one should lose sight of Bill Wright's early dream when his foresightedness, generosity, and determination paved the way for Gnoss later efforts. Together they deserve the credit for whatever benefits the airport may bring to Marin County's future.

# Third Graders Are Coming!

It's that time again for third grade tours. Teachers have been sent information packets regarding scheduling tours from March until June.

Novato history tours are in three parts. In part one, students visit the exhibits in the museum.

In part two which is outside of the museum, there is an overlook of downtown, a visit to the buggy room, and ends with exploring what is in Grandma's Trunk.

Part Three is a guided walking tour of Old Town where students are given a booklet of old photographs. They show what buildings looked like long ago. Did you know that Dr. Insomnia's was the blacksmith's shop? Students are rotated in small groups throughout all three sections of the tour.

This program would not be possible without the commitment of our docents who volunteer to lead the tours. New docents are welcomed and needed. Please call the Novato History Museum at 897-4320 or Cindy Motsinger at 897-4881 if interested.

We are looking forward to another successful year of third grade tours.

## NOVATO HISTORICAL GUILD GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

March 14	10:00-Noon	Novato City Hall 901 Sherman Ave.
June 20	10:00-Noon	Novato City Hall, 901 Sherman Ave.
September 12	12:00-2:00 PM	BBQ Meeting, Hamilton Field History Museum, 555 Hangar Ave.
December 12	10:00-Noon	Novato City Hall, 901 Sherman Ave.

# Novato Historical Guild Volunteer Opportunities

## PITCH IN, HAVE FUN, AND LEARN MORE ABOUT

**NOVATO'S HISTORY!** Be a part of preserving Novato's history by becoming a Guild volunteer. Here are some ways to get involved. See the contact information at the end of the list.

## MUSEUM DOCENT

Docents staff the museums on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 12:00 to 4:00. The docents greet visitors and answer questions they may have about the exhibits. You can decide how often to volunteer, once a month, once a week, or more.

## ARTIFACT INVENTORY

One of the most important jobs at the museums is the documentation and inventory of historical artifacts (objects) that are given to the Guild. This involves entering information about the artifact in *Past Perfect*, a software program for history

museums. We will provide training and support.

## EXHIBIT COMMITTEES

If you like researching topics for new exhibits, locating artifacts, designing and setting up exhibits you will enjoy serving on the exhibit committee for either of the museums. For the Hamilton Field History Museum contact Ray Dwelly, cell 250-9348 or email him at [Hamilton\\_museum@att.net](mailto:Hamilton_museum@att.net); for the Novato History Museum contact Edna Manzoni at 892-9603.

Archive Projects at the Novato and Hamilton Field History Museums Whether you have grown up in Novato or just moved here these projects are a great way to learn about Novato's interesting past.

## PHOTOS

Thanks to a generous donation from the *Novato Advance* we have literally hundreds of photos and need

volunteers to identify what's in the picture and file them in the archive file cabinets.

## ORAL HISTORIES

Do you like to hear personal stories about Novato? The museums have a great collection of Oral Histories on tapes/CDs. Volunteers are needed to listen to the tapes and take notes about the topics covered. There is a form to use that makes it easy and it is interesting.

Another task is to convert the transcribed oral histories from a floppy disk to a CD. This is computer work but with a little training, it's not hard.

There is also a need for Oral History interviewers. We have the recording equipment, a list of people to interview and will provide training on how to conduct interviews.

## Welcome New Guild Members

Novato Historical Guild Membership Report—Dec. 2014

### Individual Memberships:

Rick van Adelsberg  
Justin Mori  
Matt Baldwin  
Elizabeth Olinyk  
Bonnie Barron  
Dana Sadan  
Andy Cline  
Eileen Smith  
Kessa Early  
Mary Pritchard  
Stephen Hospodar  
Nancy Kawata  
Adam Littlefield  
Nikki Lloyd  
Bill Wright

### Student Memberships:

*No new members at this time*

### Family Memberships:

Lorraine and Sal Priolo

### Life Memberships:

Jim Crumpler/Patty Alushin  
Michael Halkovich

### Patron Memberships:

*No new members at this time*

### Please support our Guild Business-Members:

Acme Digital and Screen Graphics  
Andrew McAghon Landscaping  
Bank of Marin  
Burrous Bros. Cleaning  
Marin Landscape Materials  
Marin Trophies  
McIsaac Dairy  
Nave Enterprises  
Pini Hardware  
The Wright Salon  
Trumbull Manor Inc. – Novato  
Zenith Instant Printing

*If you have questions about membership, call Edna Manzoni,  
Membership Chairman, 415-892-9603.*

*A gift membership always meets the need for that person who has everything.*

# The Gift Shoppe

The Museum Gift Shoppe has the perfect unique Novato gift!

**Books and Pamphlets**

- Novato Township*\* the definitive history of Novato  
by May Ungemach ..... \$30.50
- Novato, Then and Now* by Novato Historical Guild ..... \$21.00
- Hamilton Field* by Novato Historical Guild ..... \$21.00
- Hamilton Airfield History* ..... \$3.00

**Videos and DVDs**

- Hamilton Field History (VHS or DVD) ..... \$15.00
- Novato History (VHS or DVD) ..... \$10.00  
(available only at the museum)

**Sweatshirts (M, L, XL) ..... \$18.00**

Novato History Museum (blue or green)

**Ornaments**

Novato City Hall ..... \$12.75

**T-Shirts (M, L, XL) ..... \$11.00**

Guild Historic Buildings (3 designs):  
*Postmaster's House, City Hall/Church, Railroad Depot*

**Miscellaneous**

- Novato Historic Buildings Notecard Sets ..... \$10.00
- Guild Tote Bags ..... \$12.50
- Ceramic Thimble ..... \$1.00
- Novato History Collector Cards .....\$3/pack or 30¢ each
- Hamilton Field Historic Picture Reproductions ..... \$10.00
- Mugs ..... \$5.00
- Laminated Place Mat (11 x 14) ..... \$5.00  
(available only at the museum)

**Leather Goods**

- Coin Purse ..... \$15.00
- Business Card Holder ..... \$12.50
- Small Purse ..... \$23.00

**WE ACCEPT VISA OR MASTERCARD**

\* All proceeds from the sale of *Novato Township* go directly to the support of the History Museum.  
Prices do not include sales tax. To Order: Call the museum at 897-4320 or email [patjohnstn@aol.com](mailto:patjohnstn@aol.com) for shipping charges and information. Supporting and Life Members receive a 10% discount at the Gift Shoppe!



## Membership Form

Please mail checks to Novato Historical Guild. P.O. Box 1296. Novato. CA 94948.

Yes, I want to join the Novato Historical Guild and help preserve Novato history!  new  renewal

- Student (full time) membership \$10 year Name \_\_\_\_\_
- Individual membership \$20 year Address \_\_\_\_\_
- Family membership \$30 year City \_\_\_\_\_
- Patron membership \$100 year State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_
- Supporting membership \$200 year Phone \_\_\_\_\_
- Life membership, individual \$350 Additional donations? \_\_\_\_\_
- Life membership, joint \$500 Interested in volunteering? \_\_\_\_\_
- Benefactor \$1000 year Email address: \_\_\_\_\_
- Business membership \$50 year
- Corporate membership \$1000 year



Novato Historical Guild  
P.O. Box 1296  
Novato, CA 94948



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## YOU ARE INVITED

**General Membership Meeting  
Novato Historical Guild**

**Saturday March 14, 2015 - 10:00 am  
Novato City Hall - 901 Sherman Avenue, Novato**

*Presentation by Diane Einstein from Olompali State Park on the History of  
Olompali. A continental breakfast will be served.*

**Guild Members and prospective members are welcome**

**Novato History Museum**

**815 Delong Avenue**

**(415) 897-4320**

**Hamilton Field History Museum**

**555 Hangar Avenue**

**(415) 382-8614**

**COME VISIT AND BRING A FRIEND!**

The Museums are open three days a week -- Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday - Noon to 4 p.m.

**Closed Major Holidays**