

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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April - June 2014

The Novato Historian

Volume 38, Number 2

In Remembrance William (Bill) Palmer

U.S. Air Force, Lieutenant Colonel
(1942-1972), World War II, Korean War & Vietnam War



From North Africa to the Pentagon to the Skies over Vietnam. Bill Palmer flew mostly P-38s during World War II, spent most of the Korean War at Hamilton and shuttled dignitaries in Vietnam.

Reprinted from Interview by Brent Ainsworth, Novato Patch, on December 12, 2010

Bill Palmer lived in the Presidentials neighborhood of Novato and was based at Hamilton Air Force Base during World War II and the Korean War. He spent most of World War II piloting the P-38 Lightning, a twin-boom, twin-engine fighter plane, on missions over North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, Austria, the Balkans and the southern part of Eastern Europe. He was credited with three downed planes as he focused on strafing, dive-bombing and the escort of B-17 and B-24 bombers.

After training mostly in California, Palmer was moved to a Royal Air Force base in England and then to Casablanca, Morocco starting in November 1942, when the Germans had a strong foothold in North Africa. He stayed in combat

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Occupation: Career military, community affairs and personnel

Branch of military: U.S. Army Air Corps, U.S. Air Force

Highest rank: Lieutenant colonel

Years of service: 1942-72

Specialty: Pilot, community affairs

Training location: Moffett Field, Chico, Victorville, Novato

Active duty operations: World War II (North Africa, Europe), Korean War (Japan and stateside), Vietnam

Locations deployed: England, North Africa, Southern Europe, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Pentagon.

Combat: North Africa, Southern Europe, Vietnam

Combat injuries: None

Active with veterans groups: Military Officers Association of America.

31 Classes= A Busy Museum

Our downtown Novato History Museum was very much alive this Spring. Thirty-one third grade classes from twelve schools participated in the tour of the museum and Old Town. This included Novato's nine public schools as well as Our Lady of Loretto, St. Isabella's, and Marin Christian Life.

Students enjoyed the program presented by fourteen devoted volunteer docents who led the tours. The "pay" for the docents is the thank you notes sent to them from the students. Many third graders told how much they had learned about early Novato during the tour. A popular activity was the ringing of the school bell in the front of the museum. It was once in the bell tower of Novato's second school.

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Docent Susan Trumbull working with group of third graders.

The Novato Historian

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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.

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Original articles and photographs related to Novato history are welcomed!

Deadline for the Sept. issue is Aug. 1

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

Tom Keena

President, Novato Historical Guild

Spring is a wonderful time of year in the "Valley of No Regrets." Our hills are green and air is fresh. It also starts another year of 3rd grade tours at our museum. Over the years your Downtown museum routinely conducts more than thirty class tours each Spring. In addition, your Hamilton museum is now conducting several of these tours. Please contact Cindy Motsinger or Ray Dwelly if you'd like to get involved. I promise you won't regret working with this incredible group of volunteers.

March 9th marked the passing of Lt. Col. Bill Palmer. Lt. Col. Palmer (Ret.) loved Novato and was a strong supporter of the Guild. Lt. Col. Palmer flew P38's during WWII out of North Africa. He also flew in the Korean War and in Vietnam. In addition to his military record, Bill was a past Guild president and, together with his wife Irene, created the 'Hamilton Room' at the downtown museum. This was long before we had our present day Hamilton museum. Lt. Col. Palmer was a 57 year resident of Novato. He will be missed but his work in our Guild will live on. When you tour the beautiful Hamilton museum take a moment and reflect on early Guild members, like the Palmers and how their efforts led to the facility we now enjoy.

Guild volunteers strive to preserve local history. We all take great pride in the results of our volunteer projects. However, one Guild member has really taken it to the extreme. Our little Postmasters' House is getting a new neighbor. In addition to being a tireless Guild member, former Guild president and current docent, our new neighbor has decided to rescue the beautiful Kuser house from the wrecking ball. This wonderful, historic residence will be returned to a state of beauty not seen in a generation. What an incredible way of preserving our local history. We owe our new neighbor a warm thank you. Of course, I'm talking about Elayne Miller.

You may ask yourself, how can I help the Guild? Over the years individuals have

stepped forward and completed major projects. Perhaps the most well-known is May Ungemach's *Novato Township* book. May saw the need and acted. During a recent phone call it was great to hear her reminisce about the project. She told me how much she loves Novato and the great time she had writing the book. Hopefully, we'll see her at the June General Membership meeting. Volunteer contributions can be big projects or smaller ones with significant impact. Here's an example of a smaller project with great impact. Novato retired pharmacist, Jim Crumpler, discovered there was little to no connection between the five Novato museums. Yes I said five - Novato History Museum, Miwok Museum, Olympali, Hamilton Museum and the Space Museum (in Ignacio). Jim, now a Board member, took it upon himself to contact all the museums and ask if 'rack cards' could be installed. His idea is so simple but yields such benefits for all the museums. Jim noticed each museum had gift sales and information booklets about their facility but with no reference to the other Novato museums. As Jim stated, 'people who visit one museum usually enjoy seeing another'. With Board approval, Jim placed rack cards and appropriate holders in each museum thereby directing folks to all the remaining Novato museums. What a simple way of promoting education and good will among the museums.

Our next General Membership meeting will be June 21st between 10AM and 12 Noon. We received many positive responses for our new time. June's theme will once again be 'Old Timers'. In addition, Betty Goerke, author of the book *Chief Marin*, will be the guest speaker. Please come and enjoy the fun along with your coffee and dessert. Finally, don't forget to visit your Guild booth at the June 14/15 Novato Art & Wine Festival. Contact Susan Magnone at Novatohistorical-guild@gmail.com or call 415-892-8458 if you'd like to work the booth for a few hours.



Novato-50 Years Ago

(April, May, and June 1964)

by Bill Almeida and Tonie Brown

“Novato 50 Years Ago” is a collection of items culled by Bill Almeida from the April, May and June issues of the Novato Advance newspapers in the collection of the Novato History Museum and micro-film at the Novato Library. Tonie Brown retypes the articles for the newsletter. We hope you enjoy reading the names and happenings of 1964.

- Following the passing of William E. “Bill” Cole in late March, an editorial in the Novato Advance stated that Novato “needed more Bill Coles”. His name appeared in almost every issue of the Advance because of his deep involvement in community service. He was a leader in activities ranging from school matters to organizing the Chamber of Commerce in 1917 and the Novato fire district and sanitary district in the 1920’s. Cole also managed the Pini Feed Mill, and until fire destroyed the business in 1945, the most modern up-to-date retail business in town.
- Novato General Hospital, three years old, retained its accreditation following an inspection by a medical team of the hospital’s operation and records.
- The April 8 issue of the Advance was critical of the Novato Police Station for being closed from midnight to 8 a.m. Only two patrol cars were serving the city from midnight to 8 a.m., each car manned by only one officer. Police Chief DiGrazia expressed deep concern about the safety of officers on patrol.
- Postmaster Harry Overly assured residents that all tax forms dropped at the local post office before midnight April 15 would be postmarked that date.
- State right-of-way officials held an auction on April 9 hoping to attract bidders on the Grant school property but no bids were forthcoming. There were at least four bidders known to be interested, however none started bidding. Interested prospective bidders felt that the minimum price of the State was too high at \$210,000

for the 109,000 square feet of property. They would have preferred to have bid up from a lower minimum price. The State was expected to hold another auction 60 days later. Note: the school property was bordered by Grant Avenue, Machin Avenue, Redwood Highway, and DeLong Avenue.

- John Novak, builder and realtor, was advertising homes in the St. Francis Heights subdivision, priced from \$23,950 to \$31,500.
- In the April 14 election for city council, William J. Adams, Douglas M. Merrill, and J. Wayne Womack, were elected by a large margin over the fourth place finisher, Mayor M.E. “Babe” Silva. Gene Trombley, Robert Manthey and Alton Lerch were also in the election.
- A memorial service was held on April 20 for Capt. Godfrey St. Maur Stocker, who died at home after a brief illness. Capt. Stocker was one of the original founders of the St. Francis of Assisi Mission in Novato. Stocker was a native of England and had lived in Marin County since 1939. He was the former owner of Mira Monte, the fishing resort north of Novato.
- Robert Carrow was sworn in as new mayor of Novato on April 21. Carrow was an attorney.
- The Novato Rotary Club celebrated its tenth anniversary on April 25 with a dinner-dance at Marin Golf Club. Clark Palmer, as charter president of the Novato Club, was master of ceremonies. One Hundred twenty attended the dinner-dance.
- A third rabid skunk was found in Novato on April 25. Mrs. Frank Sabbatini 700 McClay Road, reported her daughter had spotted a skunk in a paralytic condition on the road. Tests by the Marin Humane Society confirmed the skunk was rabid.

• In early May, Dr. Merton Shelton was appointed to the city planning commission to replace Douglas Merrill. Merrill left the commission in April when he was elected to the city council.

• Three members of the first graduating class (1959) of Novato High School were hired to teach in the San Jose and Novato School districts. Sally McDermott was to teach at San Jose (Ignacio area), and Janet Thomas and Gary Edwards in Novato.

• It was just one of those frustrating nights....In the dark predawn hours of May 13, police spotted a knotted rope dangling from the roof of the Safeway market on Diablo Avenue. Thinking a burglary was in progress, two patrol units from Novato closed in on the store. Five additional units from the C.H.P. and Marin County Sheriff’s office responded. The Novato fire department rolled a truck and ladder. But it all ended up with a Mack Sennett comic twist. The rope turned out to be the tail of a kite accidentally dropped on the building earlier.

• Signups for the Novato Pop Warner Junior Hornet football team took place at the Novato V.F.W. Hall on Sweetser Avenue in early May. Head coach Len Genetin and former coach Sam Thomas discussed plans for the coming season. There was a \$7.50 insurance – registration fee per family.

• The McGraw-Hill Publishing Company threatened to cancel plans to establish a book storage and distribution center on the 100 acre plot it recently acquired in Novato. McGraw-Hill’s displeasure was over the prospect of construction of a gas station in the Tomahawk Lodge (now Novato Day’s Inn) complex bordering the M-H property on Redwood Hwy.

• Funeral services were held for Fay Vera Blos, 46, who passed away May 21, after a long illness. Mrs. Blos moved to

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Novato Historical Guild Board Highlights

by Pat Johnstone

February 2014

New Business – Gary Bramon, the Guild’s Financial Advisor reported that the LPL Financial had a performance return of 9.6% for the last fiscal year. From inception the annualized return is 4.32% and the performance return is 44.27%. A motion was made to move \$20K to the American Funds. The motion passed. The Guild will have a booth at the Art & Wine Festival on June 14th & 15th. Ray Dwelly and Tom Keena went through the Simmons House to assess what improvements need to be made in order to pass city inspection. The Guild would like to move the Novato Museum to the Simmons House. Carolyn Neer and Bill Damon will maintain and post on Facebook for the NHM.

City Report – Kathy Kormos reported that exhibit space for the museum at City Hall is being identified with consideration for safety. Peg Coady’s son called and commented that there was no mention of her being the founder of the Guild on the City’s Website. The City will add information about Peg Coady to the website.

Reports – Ray Dwelly reported that five third grade classes from Hamilton Elementary School have scheduled a tour of HFHM. \$250 was received from a fund raiser at HFHM and tonight a group of twenty-five people will be touring the museum. Susan Magnone reported that the oral histories need to be organized and that only one computer is on the internet at the NHM. Files in the upstairs office are being reorganized by Susan and other volunteers.

March 2014

New Business – Jim Crumpler suggested that we advertise all five museums in Novato at our two museums. He will also contact the other three museums: Olompali State Park, Miwok Museum and the Space Station Museum to see if they want to participate. Roland Fuelle reported that the City suggested putting a display in City Hall rather than the City Offices for security reasons. Tom Keena suggested having a volunteer appreciation dinner at Druid’s Hall.

City Report – Kathy Kormos suggested that the Guild put their exhibit in a wood frame cabinet to match the existing displays at City Hall.

Treasurer’s Report – Kathryn Hansen reported February’s income was \$2,730.55 and expenses were \$2,891.72, net ordinary loss (\$161.17). Year-To-Date income was \$6,857.24 and expenses were \$3,315.49, net ordinary income was \$3,541.75.

Old Business- Ray Dwelly checked the foundation at the Simmons House with a City inspector. It is uneven by 6 inches but went through the 1906 earthquake and the Loma Prieta earthquake undamaged.

Reports – Ray Dwelly reported that \$193 was raised from a recent fund raiser at HFHM and a new wireless security camera and monitor were purchased. Susan Magnone reported that a new sturdy table was purchased for the NHM and a new system has been designed by Pat Eklund to capture all volunteer hours. Active membership is 426, of that 111 are overdue.

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MEMORIAL PLAQUE GIFTS

You may honor a friend or loved one by having his or her name engraved on an individual brass plate on the Memorial Plaque in the History Museum. Please call the Museum at 897-4320. All contributions are tax deductible. Plaques cost \$250 per person named.

MEMORIAL GIFTS

You may make a gift of appreciated securities (stocks, bonds, mutual funds) to the Novato Historical Guild. Your gift is not only tax-deductible, but if you have held the shares for more than one year, your tax deduction will equal the full value of the securities on the date of the gift.

In Memoriam

Ann Bormolini Murphy
Clifford “Bud” Bunds
William “Bill” Palmer

The Guild Extends Sympathy to

The family of Ann Bormolini Murphy on the death of Ann Bormolini Murphy

Elizabeth “Mickey” Trimble and the family of Clifford “Bud” Bunds on the death of Clifford “Bud” Bunds

Irene Palmer and family on the death of William “Bill” Palmer

31 Classes = A Busy Museum

There is a current display on the museum's bulletin board of several letters and cards with colorful drawings. Stop by and see it.

This third grade program is almost always rated a 10 by teachers on an evaluation survey they complete. Teachers commented on the excellent docents and the engaging information told to the students and how they make history come alive. It's been another very successful year of third grade tours.

Novato Memories

by Jim McNern



George Gness

George Gness is a member of Novato's pioneer Gness family. His father, George Gness, was Marin County Clerk for many years, and his uncle, Bill Gness, was Fifth District Supervisor for almost two decades. George was a member of Novato High School's first graduating class in 1959. He attended Oregon State University and received his B.S. degree in 1963 and then an M.B.A. from U.C. Berkeley in 1964.

George then attended U.C. Davis Law School where he received his law degree in 1969. He has been practicing law in San Francisco and Marin County for many years. George now lives in Belvedere. He has been active on the City Council, Planning Commission and was Mayor of Belvedere in 1984. George loves Novato and shares his Novato memories in this June edition of the Novato Historian.

WHERE BORN

I was born in 1941 at the Cottage Hospital in San Rafael. My mother worked there as a nurse and was good friends with the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Diaz.

PARENTS' NAMES

George Gness, Sr. and Mary Fitzpatrick Gness. My father was born on the family ranch on Olive Avenue in Novato. My mother was born in County Cork, Ireland, and immigrated to the US in the mid-1930s.

EXTENDED FAMILY

Shortly after I was born, my mother was diagnosed with tuberculosis. When I was six weeks old, my Aunt Gretchen, married to my father's brother Bill Gness, took me to live in their home at the family ranch, also occupied by my bachelor Uncle Joe Gness. As soon as I learned to talk, Gretchen and Bill became "Mom" and "Pop" to me. My mother was placed in a sanatorium and remained in medical facilities until she passed away when I was three years old. Until I was nine years old, I lived with the family on the ranch, growing up with Gretchen and Bill's two older children, Louise Gness Neustadt and Billy Gness, my first "sister and brother." During that period, my father, "Dad," did not live or work on the ranch (for part of that time he lived in a back room of the Druid's Hall). When I was nine, my father

married Elizabeth Alberelli, and the three of us moved into a home that he built on the ranch property with a carpenter neighbor, Johnny Ornellas. My brother Ken was born two years later. As time progressed, I shared both homes until I left for college.

NEIGHBORS

On one side of us lived my Uncle Ed Gness and his wife Katherine, who we called "Aunt Pete." They lived on 10 acres which was my Uncle Ed's share of the original 40-acre ranch owned by my Gness grandparents. On the other side was Lil and Bob McClelland's dairy farm. As a young boy, I spent a lot of time with the McClelland family, and particularly enjoyed making hay bale forts in their massive hay barn. Olive Street School was built across the street in the early 1950s. My fifth grade class was one of the five first classes to attend the new school. Ed and June Smyth, neighbors down the street, bought the first TV in our neighborhood, probably around 1950. Although they had no children, Billy and I were invited to their house on Tuesday nights to watch episodes of Hopalong Cassidy.

LIFE GROWING UP ON A RANCH

Except for my classmate Rebecca McClelland, I don't think any of my contemporaries grew up on a full-time working ranch. Growing up there was a major

contributor to my life's education. I learned such things as how to repair a flat tire, make a kite, solder a leaky milk pail, build forts and coon traps (the coons were killing our chickens), hunt and use guns safely, care for pets and farm animals, plant a fruit tree, build a fence, care for an orchard, drive and use a tractor, and much more. The ranch consisted of 10 acres of orchard, chicken houses for 5,000 egg laying chickens, various outbuildings, including a barn, feed house and tractor shed, pasture for seven milking cows, and a few pigs and sheep. With each aspect of the ranch there was a schedule and a rhythm that played out on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis. Louise, Billy and I had chores that were an integral part of work schedules on the ranch.

The Orchard. Beginning in January, Uncle Joe pruned the entire orchard. Our job was to rake up the cuttings and place them in discreet piles under each tree. When he was done, he would hook up our small track-laying tractor, an Oliver, to a sled, and we would follow him around, scooping up the brush piles with pitchforks and loading them into the sled. The sled was unloaded in an open spot in the orchard, and the cuttings burned with the aid of kerosene. Next, Uncle Joe plowed, harrowed, rolled and dragged a sled on

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Novato Memories

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the orchard with such skill that it ultimately became as smooth as a carpet. Our next phase was spraying the trees. Spraying involved hooking up a large tank sprayer on wheels to our tractor, which had a power takeoff for the sprayer to generate pressure for two spray hoses. One of us would be responsible for driving the tractor as Uncle Joe and Uncle Bill sprayed the trees, signaling us to move the tractor when they were ready. Later, I was promoted to handling one of the spray guns.

The next stage was picking the fruit in the stages when it matured, peaches, prunes, apricots and cherries being the main crops. We all helped pick fruit. The fruit was sold from the farm either to regular customers who reserved fruit every year, or to drive-by customers who stopped at our roadside fruit stand (during fruit season we always had a sign at the intersection of Olive Avenue and Highway 101, now the Trader Joes corner, pointing the way to our ranch and its fruit stand, a mile down the road).

Some fruit was taken by my Uncle Bill to the old Farmers Market in downtown San Francisco, near Jackson Square. Pears always went to a Del Monte field station in Sonoma. The prunes required special treatment. Uncle Joe would dip them in a large caldron of boiling water treated with lye, and then spread them out on large 4 by 12 foot thin redwood trays.

Our job was to go out every evening with Uncle Joe to stack the trays and cover them with canvas so that the prunes would not mildew. The following morning we would retrace the process, and spread out the trays so the prunes could dry in the sun.

Once they were dry, we loaded them into burlap sacks, and they went off to a prune cooperative in Healdsburg. When the last of the last crop was picked, the pears, we took our annual three-day vacation to Aunt Bertie and Uncle Dave's home in Comptche, near the town of Mendocino. Their home was located in remote redwoods, with no indoor utilities (kerosene lamps, wood burning stove, outhouse and well water pumped by hand).

The Chickens. The chicken cycle began every year or two when we would get a fresh batch of baby chicks from a Petaluma hatchery. They came in large cardboard boxes, and we helped unload them into our brooder house that had large metal umbrella-shaped heaters.

We helped feed and water the chicks as they progressed to young hens. It was always a large chore to move the young hens from the brooder house to one of the four large chicken houses on the ranch, each equipped with nests for laying eggs. It took both uncles and the three of us to methodically catch them, put them in chicken coops loaded on the farm pickup, truck them to the designated chicken house, and let them loose.

It took at least a dozen of truck loads, and we were always happy to catch the last chicken! Eggs were picked up twice a day. Frequently that was a chore for one of us.

The eggs had to be cleaned. Initially we would load them into an egg washing machine that had two large cork screws that moved them along to be washed and dried. Our chore was to load and unload the eggs.

The timing of this activity frequently coincided with our favorite TV program, Howdy Doody, so there were many grumbings when we were pulled away from the TV to do this chore. Eventually the egg companies would not allow the eggs to be washed, so they had to be polished by hand.

We helped clean the eggs with buffers on electric motors. Twice a week the eggs were taken to a Petaluma cooperative, Poultry Producers of Central California.

On these trips we picked up chicken feed as well. Often Aunt Gretchen would drive the 1-1/2 ton flatbed truck we occasionally used for this purpose.

Well before I had a driver's license, my Uncle Bill would let me drive the pickup truck home from Petaluma. Can you imagine that happening today?

The final stage of the chickens was periodically culling the old non-laying chickens and taking them to Petaluma for dis-

posal. Once a week the chicken manure in the roosting areas of the chicken houses needed to be cleaned out and dumped in piles outside the chicken houses. When I was in high school each Saturday Uncle Bill paid me a dollar an hour to clean chicken houses, which took about four hours. That money went a long way in those days, and was my main source of pocket money.

The Cows. We had seven cows that Uncle Joe milked twice a day. I was the backup milker, and took over when he was on his annual deer hunting trip in Modoc, or was otherwise unavailable.

One night when I was supposed to go to dinner with a good friend and neighbor, Hank Lautrup, I had to call to say I could not go because I had to milk the cows. His mom promptly sent him over to help milk, and Hank and I eventually had a nice dinner out that night with his parents.

Each year Dr. Stafford, our local veterinarian, came to artificially inseminate our one good producing Guernsey cow, Jeanie. She always had her calf way at the top of the hill on our property in a grove of buckeye trees. When she was near her due date and did not come home to the barn to be fed and milked, we knew exactly where to find her with her new baby calf.

I have fond memories of being with Uncle Joe walking down the hill with the calf on his shoulders and Jeanie walking worriedly behind. The calf was raised for veal. The milk from the five cows was separated every morning in an electric, hand-started stainless steel separator in a small outbuilding we called the Separator House.

A kid's job was to break down the separator into its multiple parts and wash them in hot soap and water in wood treys located in our laundry shed. The cream was taken twice a week to the Clover Cooperative Creamery in Petaluma, and the skim milk was mixed with oats and fed to the few pigs we usually had around to provide house ham and bacon. One of my least pleasant jobs was to scrape up and remove the cow manure from the milking stalls in the cow barn.

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Novato Memories

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4-H Projects. In addition to her sewing project, for a year or two Louise had a pig for a project.

I originally had a Guernsey heifer that I showed at the Sonoma Marin Fair. For two years I had Hereford steers that I showed in both Petaluma and Santa Rosa. They were sold at the Santa Rosa fair, and it was always sad to see the gentle, friendly beasts go off to the slaughterhouse.

4-H meetings were always held in the old railroad passenger car between the Community House and the Presbyterian Church. Once a year there was a 4-H parade in town, and around that time we sold raffle tickets to raise money for the club. We also gave away earwig bait, going from door-to-door throughout greater Novato. One of the best parts of 4-H was a one-week summer camp in Los Posadas State Forrest near Angwin in Napa County. We always thought we had it much better than the Boy Scout camps because ours was co-ed! In my last year at camp when I was 14, my good buddy Pete Ferrarese and I got to stay an extra week for free since we had jobs as the Camp Firemen.

Our duties were to take the camp truck out to gather fallen trees, cut them into firewood and use the wood to fire the boilers that heated the shower water.

GRANT AVENUE SCHOOL

My first years of school were at Grant Avenue School, grades one through four (there was no kindergarten when I started). The principal was the famous Lu Sutton, who taught my father and uncles as well. The first thing we did in class was say the Pledge of Allegiance.

In the third or fourth grade we sang America the Beautiful, which was illustrated with ten or so color photographs over the blackboard (picture "amber waves of grain," etc.)

Popular recess activities included marbles, dodge ball, jump rope and riding the merry-go-round. My Uncle Joe told the story that when the school was built my Grandfather Frank Gness was on the

school board, and every day during construction he went to the site to be sure it was being built correctly. When it was later condemned because it was not considered up to earth quake standards, the demolition crew had an extremely difficult time knocking it down. My Uncle Joe got a big kick out of that.

NOVATO THEATRE

My first visit to the theatre was when I was six years old. Louise, age ten, and Billy, age eight (grownups) took me to see "Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein." I was so scared that I hid on the floor under my jacket for virtually the entire movie. They just laughed at me.

When I was a teenager a group of my friends (Dick Olrich, Cookie Redding, Tom Mace, Jimmy Neighbors and Jim Mizell included) dressed up in costumes, snuck into the theatre, and paraded across the stage in front of the movie and audience before making a quick exit. Needless to say the owner Don Donahue knew all of us, and we got in big trouble over that caper.

TRAINS

First, two second-hand memories. My Uncle Frank, the eldest Gness brother, was one of the first Marinites drafted during the First World War. In 1918 he was stationed at an army camp on the East Coast, and contracted the Swine (Spanish) flu, which was a worldwide pandemic at the time that killed between 50 and 100 million people. He died there, and was sent home by railroad, arriving at the station in Novato. His coffin was accompanied by one or two uniformed soldiers.

Between 1924 and 1928 my father took the train from Novato to San Rafael to attend high school. I remember our second grade teacher, Miss Dalessi, taking our class down to the railroad station to see the first diesel engine to come through Novato, the beginning of the end of steam engines. I also remember small shacks along Railroad Avenue near where Grant Avenue crosses the tracks. These modest dwellings housed the families of railroad workers, and some of our school classmates lived there.

GRANT AVENUE

Grant Avenue was Main Street USA, with most everything located between Highway 101 and the railroad tracks. Walking to Grant Avenue School, I passed these familiar places: Vogel's ancient used emporium, Torassa's Bakery, DeBorba's Bar, Phil Pachal's butcher shop, Rayburn's Market, Novato Bank, the Novato Advance office run by Jack Sparrow's parents, McDonald's Jewelers owned by the Boyd's (allegedly related to William Boyd, a/k/a Hopalong Cassidy), Zunino's Shoe Repair, the movie theatre, Ray's Barber Shop, and, ultimately the drug store and fountain just cross from the school. The drug store was a treasured source of comic books, most often purchased for 5 cents typically "borrowed" from Aunt Gretchen.

KIDS' FUN IN THE 50s AND 60s

In pre-school years we just played around the hay barn, orchard and hills with neighbor kids. Often on lazy Saturdays I would sit under a fig tree in one of our chicken yards and shoot my BB gun at sparrows.

In early June, there always seemed to be a week of very hot days, over 100 degrees. When this occurred, we badgered someone in the family to drive us to Boyes Hot Springs near Sonoma, where they had two large indoor pools, one cold and one hot. As a bonus, there was a fabulous penny arcade with many fun games that you could blow your allowance on.

In many grammar school summer days I would ride my bike out to Black Point to hang out with my buddies, Geoff Lang, Cookie Redding and Bill Buck. We climbed the cliff in Black Point, dove off the railroad bridge pilings into the Petaluma River and bought soda pop at the Black Point Store.

There was a sand lot at the intersection of Olive and Chase streets, and on long summer nights kids from all over town would come to play baseball. The baseball was usually an old hand-me-down ball with several layers of electricians tape.

In the seventh and eighth grades, Jay Johnson, Chick Hale and I would put our

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Novato Memories

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22 rifles on our bike handle bars, ride to the end of Simmons Lane and hike all over Burdell Mountain shooting at squirrels, rabbits and old tin cans. The fire department was mostly volunteer when I was growing up, so when the fire whistle went off, three blasts, my uncles jumped in the pickup truck and sped off to help fight the fire.

Even as pre-teens, we were allowed to hop in the back of the truck and help in the effort by beating grass fire flames with wet burlap sacks and the occasional back pump. Baseball was always a favorite pastime of Novatans. Both my Uncle Bill and my father played on local semi-pro teams.

Uncle Bill told me that if they had a particularly tough game with their arch rival, Point Reyes, he would call up a friend of his who worked for the San Francisco Seals and have him send a "ringer" to pitch that game. The team had to pay the ringer \$50 for the day.

When I was 11, Babe Silva and others formed the Novato-Hamilton Little League, with two teams from Novato and two teams from Hamilton Field. We all thought we had died and gone to heaven because they actually had uniforms for us! Jack Sparrow, Mike Sandbach, Dick Olrich, Chick Hale, Ron Manzoni, Mike Silva, Rick Sims and I were some who played that first year. Hats off to our Little League (and later Babe Ruth) coaches: Babe Silva, Tauno Sjoblom, Jack Sparrow, Sr., Frank Manzoni and my father.

GREYHOUND BUSES.

Even as pre-teens, without an adult we were allowed to take the Greyhound Bus to two of our favorite swimming pools. One was located in Cotati, and the other at Hamilton Field. I think the fare was 5 or 10 cents. At Hamilton, we would go to the noncommissioned officers pool, and sign in under false identities (for example, "George Smith, son of Sergeant Smith"). One day when a bunch of us Novato kids were being very rowdy we were taken aside by the lifeguards. They lined all of us up and asked us if we were "dependents." Since none of us knew the mean-

ing of that word in that context, we were unceremoniously kicked out and advised never to show our faces there again.

DR. WESEMAN

Doc Weseman was the town doctor. He delivered me, as well as Louise and Billy. If you were sick, he came to your house. He took out my tonsils in a back room of his small office on Grant Avenue, now occupied by North Bay Chiropractic and Acupuncture Center. The room spun when he knocked you out with evil-smelling ether dripped through a mask that looked like a gravy strainer. He had you count backward down from 30, and I think I only made it to 15 before I passed out. When I came to, my throat hurt like hell. He sent you home with a diet of Jell-O and ice cream, so that was the only good part.

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

Two very fond Christmas memories stand out in my mind. In the seventh grade many classmates participated in a choir led by Mrs. Larrish. We practiced hard for an evening Christmas concert for students, teachers and families. We all loved Mrs. Larrish, and the camaraderie of that group was heartwarming.

The other memory involved playing in a Holiday basketball tournament in an old wooden gym in Healdsburg during our junior and senior years of high school. The gym was decorated with fragrant pine boughs. Even today when I smell pines at Christmas time it brings back fond memories of that tournament.

FAVORITE TEACHERS

Except for our freshman year English teacher, who will go unnamed, who taught us English by having us read Classics Illustrated comic books, my generation was blessed with wonderful teachers and coaches. With no disrespect to others, a few stand out.

Mrs. Estes was my first grade teacher, and she was a wonderful introduction to my education. I was a poor reader, and my third grade teacher, Ms. Dolcini, gave me special attention by providing me with flash cards to study at home.

In high school, Vincent Clemente, our

English teacher, blew our minds with what he had us read and listen to, including a recording in class of Thomas Wolfe's poem "Do not go gently into that last good night." I know my classmate Gary Edwards, and perhaps others, became teachers as a result of his inspiration.

Mr. DeNegri was not only an excellent language teacher, he also gave us wonderful history lessons between conjugations of French verbs. I loved my geometry class from Mrs. Palmer, one of my few A's in high school. I firmly believed that having been raised on a ranch gave me the visual perspective to "see the light" in geometry. Of course, our coaches were great, Bill Wood, Fred Rodak, Ralph Cutler and Mr. Melton, to name a few.

MY FIRST CAR

I bought my first car before I was old enough to have a driver's license. It was a 1940 Ford Deluxe Coupe, with opera seats in the back. I paid \$200 for it. So many exhaust fumes came through the firewall, I had to drive with the windows down, particularly if I had a date.

NOVATO LEGACY

Growing up in Novato had a dramatic influence on my adult life. Novato was a close-knit small town where community spirit and volunteerism were omnipresent. The volunteer fire department sponsored the annual Fourth of July picnic at Ed Armbruster's privately-owned park behind his Joe's Crossroad's bar, as well as the St. Patrick's Day dance at the Community Hall and the Easter egg hunt.

Elections were held in our garage at the ranch, with Aunt Gretchen and other volunteers manning the polls. 4-H leaders and little league coaches devoted countless hours to the youth in their organizations. These are a few examples of the heart and spirit of the town where I grew up.

When I moved back to Marin after completing my formal education, my family and I settled in the Tiburon/Belvedere area, another small community where I still make my home. Although my legal

Continued from Page N-10

Novato Memories

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practice was in San Francisco, my Novato upbringing made me want to be a part of and contribute to Marin County and the community where I lived.

Over the years I was on the Marin County Redevelopment Agency and the Belvedere Planning Commission and City Council, where I served a stint as Mayor. I also contributed both legal and non-legal volunteer time to various other com-

munity boards and projects. Although I commuted to San Francisco every day by ferry, this gave me the opportunity to meet and become friends with various diverse community members, much as my family experienced in Novato. The personal enjoyment I received from my community involvement was enormous, and I have my Novato roots to thank for that.

In Remembrance William (Bill) Palmer

Continued from Page N-1

zones until January 1943, when he was shifted back to California on training command duty. At the end of the war and into 1946, he worked in the office of the Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon.

Palmer spent the Korean War years at Hamilton and in Japan, but stayed in personnel. He first went to jet school in 1959. He spent the late 1950s and early 1960s stationed in Thailand, where he flew high-level military personnel, intelligence groups and dignitaries in a C-119 cargo/passenger plane and received credit for flying through combat zones. He was based at the Pentagon again from 1964-72.

Lt. Col. Bill Palmer, U.S. Air Force



NOVATO'S TREASURES 814-16 Grant Avenue



2014



1955

This Novato treasure at 814-16 Grant Avenue, was built sometime in the 1890's. It was believed to be a restaurant owned by a Frenchman (Cooper). The 1911 Sanborn map shows it as a restaurant. On September 1922, it would open has Novato Bakery with Firenze & Serafino as proprietors. Guglielmo Torassa would move to Novato just after the bakery was opened and in a few years, he had become a partner with Mr. Firenze – then with Mr. Romitti. Later he bought out his partner and the business became a family operation. The building is still in the family today. For the past 24 years, Valentino Fine Jewelers has been in the building.

Mr. and Mrs. G. Torassa would have the front of their bakery building stuccoed on April 1939.

816 Grant Ave. - Mrs. Warner would moved her dressmaking establishment into the new bakery building in 1922. This store beside the bakery would be the first office for Novato Chamber of Commerce on March 1951. It currently has Village Clip Joint.

50 Years Ago

Continued from Page N-3

Marin County in 1947. She had worked for the Marin Municipal Water District and San Jose School District as a secretary, and the Novato Advance as a bookkeeper.

- Harry Moore was named Novato High's athletic director, varsity baseball and assistant varsity football coach by high school principal Robert Wisgerhof. Moore replaced Ralph Cutler as athletic director. Cutler was named to head the school's physical education department.

- Sam Thomas retired from the California Highway Patrol June 1 after 13 years of service. His retirement stemmed from a neck injury suffered 2 years earlier in a motorcycle accident. Thomas and his wife, June, planned to move to the east bay in August.

- James Fritz began work in late May as senior engineer with the North Marin Water District. Fritz had 12 years of experience with the East Bay Municipal Utility District. He was a graduate of the University of Wisconsin and a California registered civil engineer.

- In early June, the Advance reported that Novato firemen wanted to form an employees' association, just as had been done by the Novato police department and the workers at city hall. The firemen believed an association would speak with one voice in matters pertaining to them in a growing organization.

- Novato's population, as of April 1, was officially 23,900 people. This was an increase of 1,850 since May 1 of 1963.

- Mr. & Mrs. Sam Marzell, of Indian Valley Road, announced the engagement of their daughter, Joan Angela Marzell, to Richard P. Quinn of San Anselmo. The nuptials were scheduled to take place in late August in Our Lady of Loretto Catholic Church.

- First steps toward annexation of Loma Verde to Novato were taken June 16 by the city Council and the planning commission with about 800 registered voters and total residents estimated at about 1500, Loma Verde would have been Novato's biggest annexation in population so far.

- The city council heard and then, "with deep regret", accepted the resignation of Novato's Building Inspector Fred Westfall. The council called the young-in-heart Westfall "the city's number one employee", a title richly deserved according to everyone around city hall.

- Mr. & Mrs. Manuel Pimentel of Cypress Street announced the engagement and coming marriage of their daughter Deanna Louise Pimentel to Ron V. Vela, son of Mr. and Mrs. Renaldo Vela of Center road. October 3 was the date set for the wedding. The young couple graduated from Novato High School in 1963.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Gaut signed an agreement to sell the oldest building in the city of Novato so that it could be preserved as a historic landmark and be used as a museum. The building was the Gaut home at 1416 South Novato Boulevard which they had restored and lived in. The option agreement called for sale of the structure for \$5,000. Also signing the agreement was Alfred Bowman, president of the Downtown Improvement Association. Novato's first post office was established in 1856 in this building. Note: now Novato History Museum.

- Sandra Lee Lazzari, daughter of Lt. Col. And Mrs. M. E. Lazzari of Bradley Avenue revealed her engagement to Lt. Edward Alan Young during a passing of the candle ceremony at Gamma Phi Beta Sorority House at Colorado College. Wedding date was set for August 22 at the Hamilton air force Base Protestant Chapel.

Welcome New Guild Members

Novato Historical Guild Membership Report—April 2014

Individual Memberships:

William Cline
Michael Corlett
Joyce Palmer
Mary Scheuing

Student Memberships:

Mike Sjoblom

Family Memberships:

Judy and Glen Herrington
Nancy and Emery Jones
Haven and Jon O'Halloran

Please support our Guild Business-Members:

Acme Digital and Screen Graphics
Andrew McAgon Landscaping
Bank of Marin
Burrous Bros. Cleaning
Marin Landscape Materials
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 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

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



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YOU ARE INVITED

General Membership Meeting
Novato Historical Guild

Saturday, June 21, 2014 at 10:00 am
Old City Hall
901 Sherman Avenue

Old Timers Recognition

Presentation by Betty Goerke on the Origins of Place Names in Marin County

Enjoy a continental breakfast, good company, and an interesting presentation
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