

NOVATO HISTORY MUSEUM



# The Novato Historian

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Novato Historical Guild and the Novato History Museum

*Preserving Novato's History*

## Feature Section

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# I Scream, You Scream We All Scream for Ice Cream!

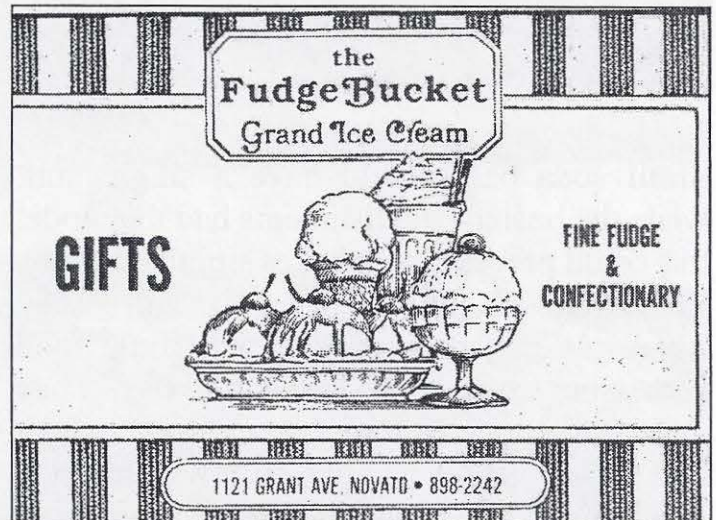
*By John Trumbull*

It is summer in Novato. The temperature flirts with the mid ninety degree range, and my thoughts turn to ice cream—more specifically to that ultimate treat, what we on the West Coast call the milkshake. (In Boston it is a “frappe.”) Remember what we used to get in the “Old Days” for less than the current cost of an ice cream cone?

As late as the 1960’s making a milkshake was an art. It wasn’t dispensed from soft ice cream machines as a homogenized puree—tasty as that may be now. One needed to craft a classic milkshake, and the popularity of any outlet would depend on the craftsmanship. In restaurants, such as Novato’s 101 Café, the waitress had the job in addition to all her other duties. However, in some shops, such as drug stores with a soda fountain and candy stores, there was often a dedicated clerk known as the “Soda Jerk.” This artist was usually distinguished by a white apron, and a white cap, and by being located behind the Soda Bar or counter where the ice creams and syrups were kept.

Until Howard Johnson came west with his

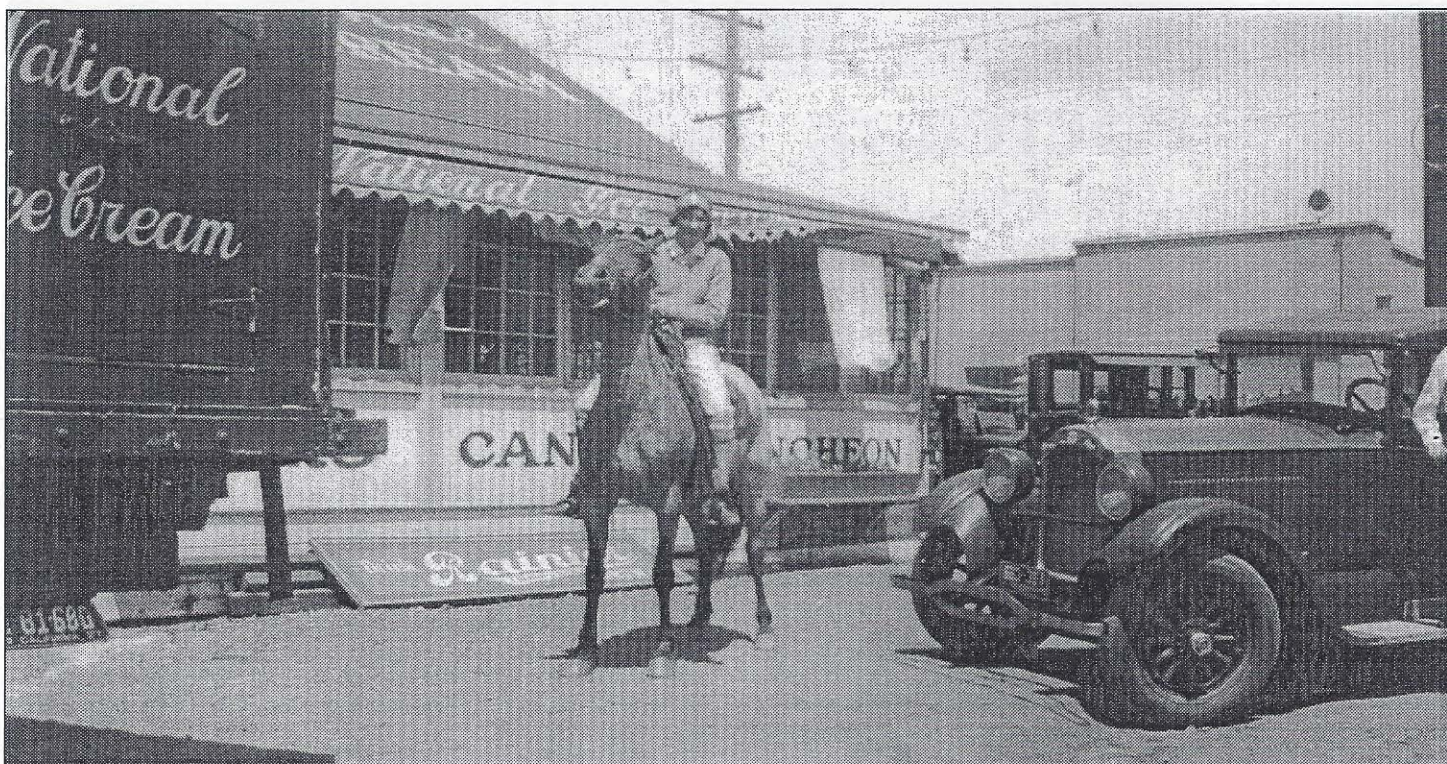
orange roofs and twenty-nine flavors, the flavors of our shakes were few and basic: chocolate, strawberry, vanilla, and occasionally pineapple and root beer. This is because they were crafted from full fat vanilla ice cream, whole milk and flavored syrup. The procedure started by placing 3 (or 4 depending on



your luck) heaping scoops of ice cream in a metal blender container. Next the syrup dispenser was visited. This appliance was a set of three or four rectangular metal containers about 6 inches deep topped by a pump appara-

tus which dispensed shots of the underlying syrup. Again if you were lucky, your flavor dispenser would be an enthusiastic pumper with the flavoring. Then the whole milk was added in quantity sufficient to make the ice cream liquefy when the mixer went to work. Remember the mixers? Hamilton Beach had a monopoly on manufacture of them, I think.

sit in eager and attentive anticipation while the Hamilton Beach whirred away, causing a light frost to form on the exterior of the metal container. The waitress would pause en route to other tasks to peek over the rim of the container to check the liquefaction and blending, perhaps giving the container a little shake or twist to assure total involvement of the mix. At last



*DeBorba's Ice Cream Parlor*

Small soda bars would have a single unit, while the busier establishments had the model that could process four shakes simultaneously. They were all pea green, as I recall. They were not the bottom blade-twirling food processors we are accustomed to today. They had the motor at the top of a long spindle with two sets of small paddles that was inserted into the metal mixing container. The closest visual analogy I can think of today is the paint stirring attachment used on electric drills, or perhaps the outboard motors used on the gondolas in Thailand.

As a customer I would cheer the constructor during the ingredient assembly phase, then

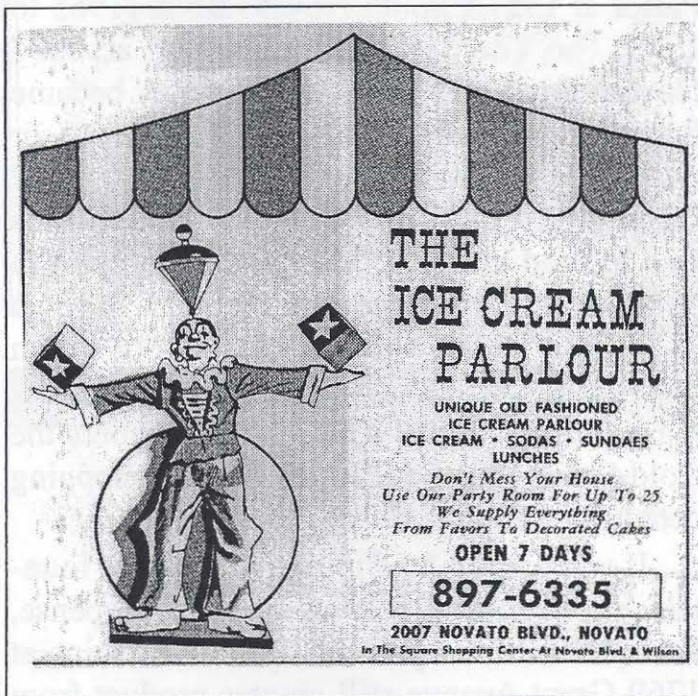
it would be time to serve me. The metal container would be removed from the mixer, tapped lightly on the work counter to free up the semi frozen contents, decanted into a 10-

**SCOPES**  
ICE CREAM &  
SANDWICHES...  
...NATURALLY...

FEATURING *Bud's*  
PREMIUM  
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(IN THE SQUARE SHOPPING CENTER)  
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ounce fluted tulip glass, topped with whipped cream and a maraschino cherry and placed before me—accompanied by a large diameter

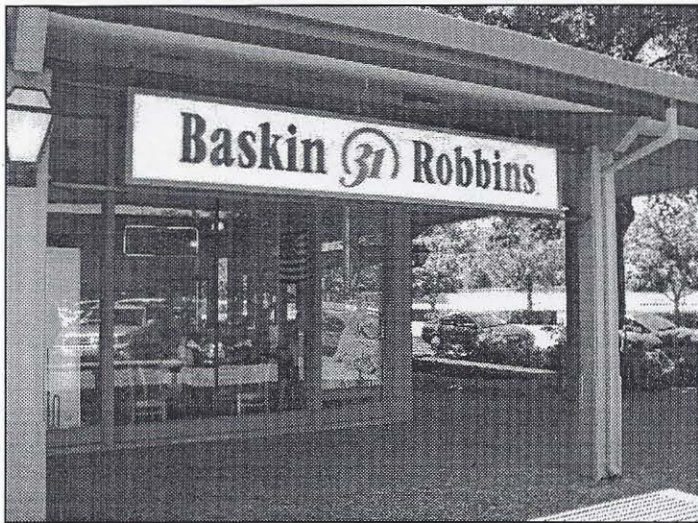
straw and the lightly frosted metal mixing container with about four additional ounces of milkshake. Ah, those were the days, my friend !!

The shake has a long and dignified history in Novato, not all of which is known to me. My earliest reference was the result of Prohibition. Adolph DeBorba, Jr. was forced to close his bar business by the law, and he opened an ice cream parlor at the southwest corner of Grant Ave. at Redwood Highway. His trade was largely the tourists driving to the Russian River, so he instituted a drive-up window. With the end of Prohibition, Mr. DeBorba went back to his bar on Grant Avenue. The 101 Café opened at about the same location as the DeBorba Ice Cream Store had been and lasted until West America Bank was built.



*Before Novato became a commuter town it was the half-way stop for many vacationers and weekenders on their way to the Russian River area. At this time there were no McDonald's, etc. Burge's hamburger stand was the place to take a break on the "long" trip to the River. Many folks who now live in Novato spent time at Burge's long before they moved here.*

Paul Scheller and Bill Wright will remember the Creamery run by the Glass family just east of the Novato theater between 1950 and 1953. It had a good location just across the street from the Novato Grammar School. Later I imagine the teens made Burge's Drive-In located about where the Shell gas station is on the west side of Highway 101 at Entrada Drive in Ignacio, their outlet of choice.



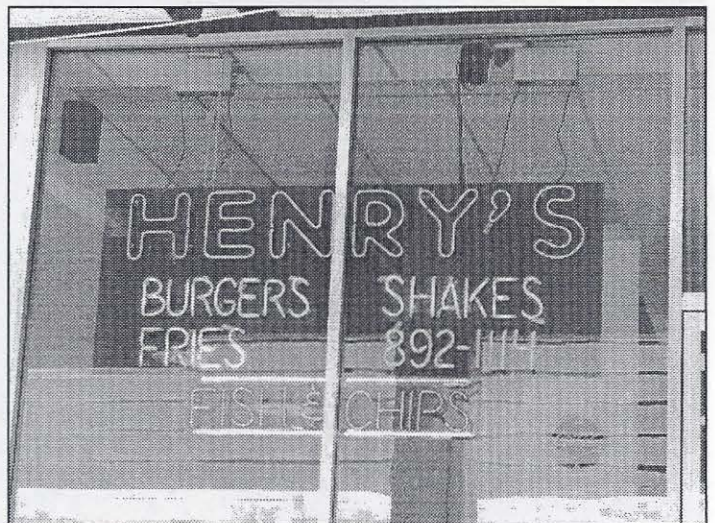
*This shop is the current mainstay of Novato ice cream. Great location and 31 plus flavors has made this shop the longest-lived ice cream establishment in town.*

One of my favorite establishments was the Berkeley Farms Creamery located at the northeast corner of Lamont Avenue and Redwood Highway. This business, which opened in 1963, was both a milk home delivery hub and a restaurant, and they made great milkshakes. There was a big horseshoe counter as well as perimeter booths in a light and airy eating space. Unfortunately, between the demise of milk delivery and the relocation of the freeway, the Creamery closed down in 1976.

Novato has seen several other dedicated businesses, of shorter duration. Remember The Creamy Corner at 1401 Grant Avenue (1964 to 1979), or Red Topper's Ice Cream

Parlor at 1557A South Novato Blvd. (1965 to 1970), or The Ice Cream Parlour at 2007 Novato Blvd. (1975 to 1980) which became Scoops at that same address (1980 to 1983), or Old Uncle Gaylord's Ice Cream Parlour at 822 Grant Ave. (1976 to 1980)? Famous Amos was located at 922 Diablo Ave from 1984 to 1986, and The Fudge Bucket held forth at 1121 Grant from 1986 to 1991, both of whom offered milkshakes in addition to their primary line of sweets. And who remembers the Cold Stone Creamery in the Square shopping center?

If you are tempted to revisit the soda fountain experience, albeit at a greater expense, from 1966 to the present, Baskin Robbins at 1769 Grant Avenue still creates product from



*Go to Henry's just once and you'll forget about the big chain fast food establishments. Just great hamburgers.*

scratch, and with a significantly more varied pallet of flavors. To do the full Archie, Veronica, Betty and Jughead scene, go to Henry's Burgers in the shopping center located at the southwest corner of Wilson and Novato Boulevard. There you can not only get a properly constructed shake, but a big hamburger to drip down your shirt while you drink it. (Weight Watchers, don't even ask the point count !)