



# The Novato Historian

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FEATURE SECTION

June 1998

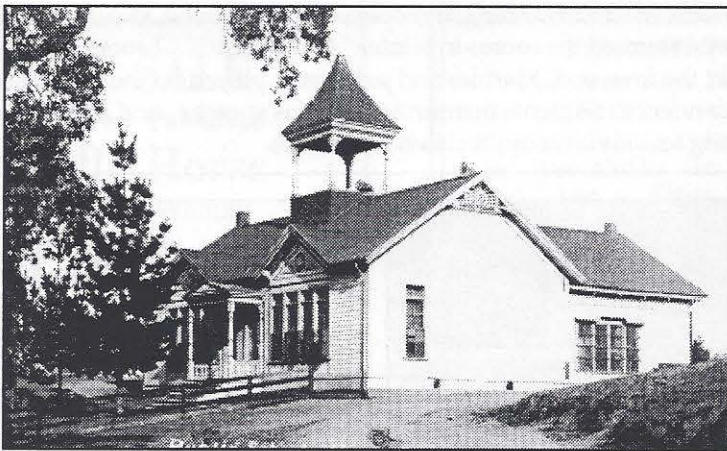
Preserving Novato's History

Vol. 22, No. 1

## Novato Grammar School— A Photo Essay

by Lin Hines and Bill Almeida

The evolution of the 3 Novato Grammar School buildings in the 96 years between the first built in 1859 and the closing of the third in 1955 is the story of a small agricultural community growing very slowly for 75 years, then exploding in population and demand for services, such as education, during the war years and thereafter. In September 1886, the Marin Journal reported "Novato also has the largest and finest school premises in Marin, the gift of Messrs. DeLong and Sweetser, Srs...." Today, the Novato Unified School District has 7100 students, with 9 elementary schools, 3 middle schools and 4 high schools, and encompasses 70 square miles with boundaries extending north to the county line, west to Stafford Lake Dam and south and east to the ridgelines. It was not always so—read on.



Second Novato Grammar School, built 1875.

### "Interesting Way to Write a Composition"

Marin Journal, Novato column, March 26, 1896

"Seventh and eighth graders were given a half day holiday and to then write what they did during that time. In a two-seated rig and car pulled by a horse, we started for the chicken ranch of Mr. Wright located in the foothills some four miles from Novato. ...passed Mr. Smith's American condensed Milk Factory... the next place of interest was the famous DeLong Ranch presided over by genial Mr. Hatch...Opened several gates and nearly running over a tramp, arrived at Wrights where Pete, Wright's partner received us."

## History of Novato Schools

- 1859— 1<sup>st</sup> Novato Grammar School built—one room—also used as a church
- 1861— Novato School District established Aug. 12, 1862—only 1 school until 1949
- 1875— 2<sup>nd</sup> Grammar School built for \$1800
- 1922— 3<sup>rd</sup> and final Grammar School built—all concrete with spacious playground
- 1947— Black Point School District, est. 1896, merges with Novato; now Novato Union School District
- 1949— 2<sup>nd</sup> school built—Marion School and the building boom began!
- 1954— became Novato Unified School District to be able to operate secondary as well as elementary schools
- 1957— opened first high school—Novato High
- 1968— the District now had 18 schools
- 1968— the District experienced its all time peak enrollment—12,000 students
- 1964— San Jose (Ignacio) School District merged into Novato Unified School District
- 1975— Hamilton Air Force Base deactivated forcing District cutbacks including closing Marion School
- 1997— majority of Hamilton on and off base military housing unoccupied with no families (or students)



1895 8th Grade Class —  
note rolled diplomas &  
bouquets

## Early Grammar Schools

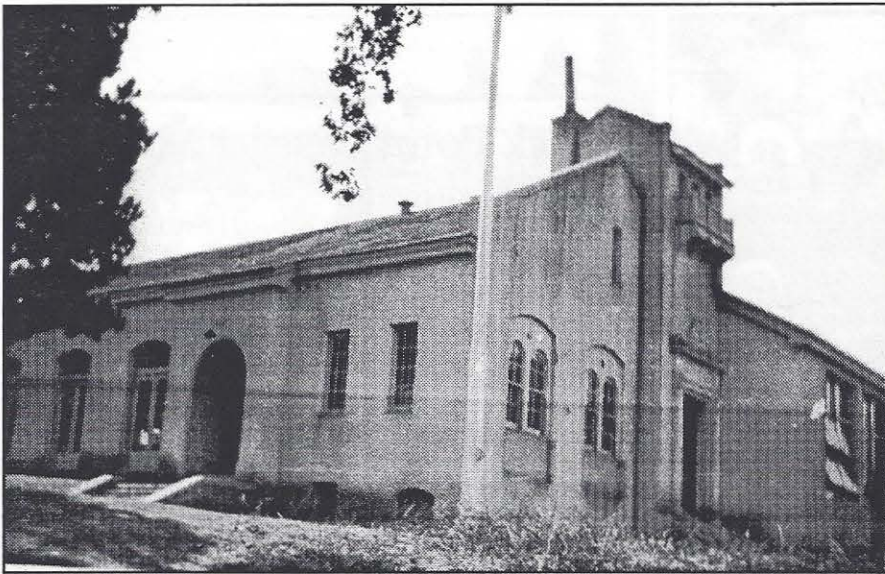
The first Novato Grammar School was a one room school wherein all grades required were taught by a single teacher. It was located near today's Redwood Shell, on the corner of DeLong and Redwood. The second school, much larger with 3 rooms and 3 teachers, a bell tower and flagpole, was built in 1875 on the Grant Ave. side on the entire 3 acre site, which contained 2 hills. The Sept. 3, 1896 Marin Journal reported "among the geological curiosities on the grounds are a number of immense boulders brought hither during the glacial period." The bell could be heard all over town and was rung at recesses and lunchtime. Heavy wooden shutters retarded the heat in the summer and 3 pot-bellied stoves warmed the rooms in winter. An outside washroom was provided and a separate shed stabled the student's horses and held the firewood. Marbles and jacks were played on the front porch. Separate play yards for boys and girls were divided by a wooden fence. Students memorized famous speeches and had a special program for each holiday. Spelling bees and weekly handwriting lessons were appreciated later in life.



1929 8th Grade Class

## What Do You Remember?

Additions or corrections are very welcome. Share your stories about the schools, the trains, Miss Sutton, fellow students, etc., in the September 1998 issue. Just write it down and send to Editor Lin Hines, Novato History Museum, 900 Sherman Ave., Novato, CA 94945. ❖



3rd Novato Grammar School (Grant Avenue School) built 1922

## Why the 3rd School Was Abandoned

*"The Grant Avenue School was finally abandoned in 1955 at the time that Novato was witnessing its first major population growth. In the main, the school was closed because it did not meet the earth-quake standards set forth in the Fields Act, while the costs of bringing it up to standard were judged prohibitive. Further, it was deemed too small for practical use, with district officials adding that its proximity to the increasingly busy 101-Grant intersection made it undesirable so far as noise and student safety were concerned. It remained on its site until it was torn down in the early sixties to make way for commercial development."*

*Novato Advance May 1971*

## School Opening Dates

- 1949 Marion School \*
- 1953 Olive & Hill Schools
- 1956 West Novato School
- 1957 Novato High School
- 1959 Lu Sutton School
- 1961 Rancho School
- 1965 Pleasant Valley School
- 1967 Hamilton School
- 1970 San Ramon & Sinaloa Schools
- 1970 San Marin High School

\* 1<sup>st</sup> school built off Redwood & Grant site



1929 7th & 8th Grade



1931 8th Grade

## School Enrollment

1861	37 students
1895	34 students
1918	120 students
1947	299 students
1965	9000 students
1968	12,000 students
1998	7,100 students



1936 3rd Grade

## Black Point District Merger

In 1947, the Novato School District and the Black Point School District (founded in 1896) merged and became the Novato Union Elementary School District. The Grant Avenue School, with 6 teachers and 299 students was the only school in this expanded district until the opening of Marion School in 1949. Novato-area high school students traveled to San Rafael or Petaluma to attend classes.

## San Jose District Merger

In November 1964, the voters approved a merger of the San Jose (Ignacio) District and formed the Novato Unified School District. The San Jose district brought in 5 more schools: Meadow Park (burned down 1996), Pacheco, Lynwood, Loma Verde and San Jose Junior High. By 1964, high school students had been attending the new Novato High School for 7 years.



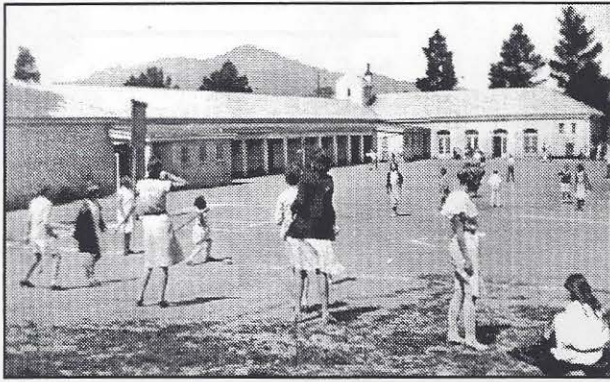
1937 7th &amp; 8th Grade celebrating the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge!



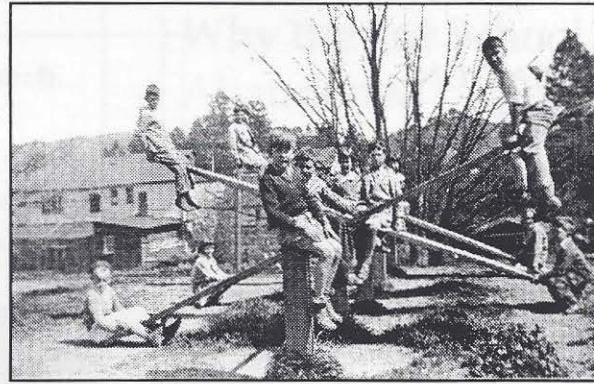
1940 1st Grade

## Superintendent Wm. J.J. Smith

William Smith was the 1st Superintendent of the Novato School District from 1948 to 1962, the post-war times of hyper-growth in the District. Bill Smith graduated from SF State in 1938, and was student body president. He taught in Burlingame and Lodi Schools from 1938-41 and was principal of Live Oak Elementary School in Lodi in 1941-42. He served in the U.S. Navy 1942-45 then became Rural Supervisor of Marin County schools under Superintendent Henry Greer. He was the Novato Superintendent of Schools from 1948-62. He is now 91 and still lives in Novato with his wife of 57 years, Lora Lou, on Eucalyptus Ave.



Girls' baseball game, Grammar School 1930-31



"Little Folks' Playground" Grammar School 1930-31

# Grammar School Graduations

Graduation was a festive time and frequently included participation of the younger grades. The Museum has a number of Grammar School Graduation printed programs. Most graduations in 1930-40's were at the Community House. In 1932, Gertrude Ross sang an opening chorus of "Wynken, Blyken and Nod" with a number of glee club songs, dances, duets, sports skits and a one act play following. The Graduate's March was played, May Louie gave a Farewell to the Class of '32, Marne Dunlap was valedictorian and James B. Davidson, County Superintendent of Schools presented diplomas. The 1933 graduates presented "Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp" in 6 scenes with "music effects by Glee Club." In 1934, a 4 act play "The Adventures of Pinocchio" and 1935, a 5 act play "The Man Without a Country". 1937 had a 3 act operetta "At the End of the Warpath" and 1938 a Mother Goose play "Mrs. Peter Peter, Pumpkin Eater." 1939 "The Princess and the Crystal Pipe" with diplomas presented by Edwin A. Wells, principal of San Rafael High. 1940 had opera selections from HMS Pinafore, Tannhauser, Faust and Carmen plus the Glee Club performed a clap dance and children's polka; 1941 had a "March of the Flags" with 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> grades and "Patriotic Medley—I am an American", chorus sang "He's my Uncle" with a solo "Uncle Sam" by Duane Tharp followed by "America, I Love You", "God Bless America" and "Auld Lang Syne", reflecting the increased tensions in the world. The 1942 class presented "The Lost Clown—Operetta" and 1945 "America Sings—a Pageant of the Progress of America in Song". ♦

PROGRESS IN SCHOOL SUBJECTS Grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 8				
Quarterly Reports	1	2	3	4
<b>READING and LITERATURE</b>				
Understanding (comprehension)	a	d	a	?
Audience Reading	?	a	a	?
Library Reading	?			
<b>LANGUAGE</b>				
Oral Expression	?	a	a	a
Written Expression	a	a	a	?
Correct Usage Grammar	?	a	a	a
<b>SPELLING</b>				
Weekly Assignment	a	a	a	?
Use in Written Work	a	a	a	?
<b>ARITHMETIC</b>				
Fundamentals	a	a	a	?
Problem Solving	a	a	B	?
<b>SOCIAL STUDIES (Geog., Hist., Civics)</b>				
	a	a	a	?
<b>SCIENCE</b>				
	a	a	a	?
<b>HANDWRITING</b>				
	?	a	a	?
<b>HEALTH INSTRUCTION</b>				
	?	a	a	?

PROGRESS IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES No checks appear if growth is satisfactory. A check means that much improvement is needed.				
Quarterly Reports	1	2	3	4
<b>PHYSICAL EDUCATION</b>				
<b>ART</b>				
<b>MUSIC</b>				
<b>HANDWORK</b>				
<b>CONDUCT</b>				
Shows more self-control				
Has respect for authority				
Observes property rights				
Works well with others				
Follows instructions				
Is courteous and friendly				
<b>REPORT OF ATTENDANCE</b>				
Days Absent			2	
Times Tardy				

1948 Grammar School Report Card — "A = outstanding work" —  
Novato History Museum Collection

## 1920 Graduation Memories

by Helen Trumbull Kimball\*

"I believe our class at the second Novato School was the first to have a "formal" graduation. I recall it was in the spring of 1920 at Loutanou's Hall. Miss Iva Doss ( Mrs. W. M. Nellis) was the principal. Mr. J.B. Davidson, County Superintendent of Schools, gave out the diplomas. Eleanor Carlisle, Isabel Clark, Lela Butler and, I think, Lester Knutte and Edna Butler and I were all in the class; I do not recall any others. Our colors were blue and white and we felt very important !

Miss Jane Myers was my 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher and I thought her very beautiful. I skipped 2<sup>nd</sup>. Azalea Almy 3<sup>rd</sup>, Elodie Shreve (Cole) 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup>, Russell Griffith 6<sup>th</sup> grade, Alice Canvassini (sp?) 7<sup>th</sup> & Iva Doss 8<sup>th</sup>. Principals were Ann Bertola, \_\_\_Beck, Griffith, Canvassini, & Doss. Trustees—Mr. De Voto, Mr. Antonio DeBorba and Mr. R. Trumbull. I well remember the students riding or driving in carts to school and the excitement of catching the horses after school. We also had some great school picnics at Atherton's Grove. The older boys made the ice cream.

\*Letter to Novato Historical Guild dated Sept. 1, 1981

RIDAY, JUNE 18, 1948

## Novato Graduates 24 at Ceremonies Wednesday Evening

At the annual graduation exercises of the Novato Grammar School on Wednesday evening, eight girls and sixteen boys received their diplomas at the hands of Mr. Wm. K. Mayo, member of the Novato School Board. Valedictorian for her class was Wanda Catherine Harper.

Preceding the awarding of the diplomas, sixth and seventh grade boys and girls presented a program of music and dancing in theme and costume of California in the days of the gold rush.

The graduates participated with the singing of the anthem from the symphony "America," "Aloha Oe" and concluded with the traditional recessional "Auld Lang Syne."

The following is the list of the graduating class of 1948:

Donald Robert Rose, Wanda Catherine Harper, John Nickolas De La Montanya, Richard Joseph Walker, Jeanette Catherine Worden, John Raymond Myers Jr., Lowrence Ronald Good, Margaret Alice Eide, Raymond Joseph Chattman, Donna Marie Lang, Ann Marie Sjoblom, Richard Earl Clark, Avelle Calvin Calvert, June Sonja Kuhlken, Jacqueline June Dempsey, Richard Lawrence Beale, Robert Andrew Raven, Robert Oliver, Barbara June Stoner, Donald Edward Azevedo, Gary Larimer Porter, Kenneth Henry Myers, Thomas W. Poague, John Leroy Smith.

## Before Novato High

Before Novato High opened in 1957, all Grammar School graduates went out of town to high school, mostly to San Rafael High School. They got there and back by train leaving from the NW Pacific passenger depot at the foot of Grant Avenue although a few of the boys drove their hot rods in the 40's, according to Bill Almeida. Around 1932, two school buses began making the trip each day. Bill remembers that one bus route covered Hamilton Field, Black Point and East Novato while the second bus picked up west of Redwood and Indian Valley. Boys on the 2 buses from opposite sides of town regularly conducted an East/West football games with lots of posturing and taunting between the sides!

## DEDICATION AND GRADUATION

## PROGRAM

NOVATO GRAMMAR SCHOOL  
Thursday Evening  
June Fifteenth,  
1922



## Graduates

Ida Marian Trabucchi  
Glen Edwin Gaar  
Merle Vernell Manville  
Enid Marian Porcella  
Stella Carrie De Lucchi  
Dorothy Mae Warner  
Wilma Gaar  
Thomas Keena  
Viola Mildred Zecker  
Manuel Edward Silva  
Stanley Harold Gustafson  
Mary Almada  
John Stanley Zecker  
Alice Field  
Frank L. Grey  
Mary Bernice Dilena

## PROGRAMME

1. March of Graduates
2. Song, "Four Leaf Clover," Graduates
3. Invocation - Father Batteste
4. Opening Remarks - Mr. Guy Sage
5. Song, "Doan Do' Cry, Ma Honey,"  
Enid Porcella
6. Dedication Address - Mr. Henry Greer
7. Song - Mrs. R. H. Trumbull
8. Address - Rev. Charles Christensen
9. Presentation of Diplomas  
Mr. Jas. B. Davidson
10. "Star Spangled Banner"

1922 Grammar School Graduation Program from Novato History Museum Collection

## Novato's Legendary Teacher — Miss Lulu Sutton, 1882-1959

Lulu Sutton was born on a dairy ranch in Ignacio. She was the great niece of Don Timoteo Murphy, a pioneer, who settled in Marin in 1838 and built the first house in San Rafael. She graduated from San Francisco Normal School (later San Francisco State College) and came to Novato in 1918 when there were only 120 students in the district. She became principal of Novato Grammar School in 1922. She became the first principal of Olive School in 1951 and retired in 1958 after 40 years of service. She died April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1959 at 77. "Lu was a very good marble player and she would play the boys for keeps! She had quite a marble collection. She was very strict but every student she had said she was an excellent teacher. Everyone knew history and civics when they graduated."\*



Lulu Sutton

\* typed copy in Novato History Museum files—no attribution

\*\*Novato Advance article March 1969

The Advance in 1958 quoted Superintendent Smith that "Miss Sutton is a 'Novato tradition. She has taught the children of her children. So many people in Novato know her that she has become a sort of community authority to whom people turn for information. She's most famous for her knowledge of the Constitution and of English grammar." Before her retirement in 1958, the school board voted to name a new school in her honor to be located at Center Road west of Crescent Court. A retirement dinner at Rickey's Rancho Raphael in Ignacio was held on May 28, 1958 with many local dignitaries along with 200 of her friends and former students attending. Over 400 people attended a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death tribute in March 1969 at Lu Sutton School. Many Novato old timers turned out and remembered her "as a strict disciplinarian, applying ruler to knuckles and soap to mouth when the occasion demanded. She was also remembered for her more informal moments—umpiring baseball games and playing marbles with the boys."\*\* She is still well-loved! ♦

## Caesar's Ghost — The Real Reason Why Things Never Change

The U.S. standard railroad gauge—the distance between the rails—is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. Why that exceedingly odd number? Because that's the way they built them in England, and the U.S. railroads were built by English expatriates. Why did the English people build them like that? Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramway, and that's the gauge they used.

Why? Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing. OK! Why did the wagons use that odd wheel spacing? Well, if they tried to use any other spacing the wagons would break on some of the old long-distance roads, because that's the spacing of the old wheel ruts.

So who built the old rutted roads? The first long-distance roads in Europe were built by Imperial Rome for the benefit of their legions and been used ever since. The initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagons, were first made by Roman war chariots, which because they were made for or by Imperial Rome, were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

So, the U.S. standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches derives from the original specifications for an Imperial Roman army war chariot. Specs and bureaucracies live forever!

Source: *Kyoto Journal* (#33) as seen in *Noritsu News* April 1998.

Comic strip and old advertisements from Novato Advance newspapers, 1948

**FOR SALE**  
Well Bred Palomino  
**Saddle Horse**  
Gentle for Woman  
or Child  
**PRICED TO SELL**  
May Be Seen at  
**"F" Ranch**  
End of Vineyard Rd.

FOR SALE — 28 Dodge pickup  
for parts. Some good 21  
inch tires. A. W. Scheller,  
Benton Lane, off Simmons,  
Novato.

FOR SALE—Live young ducks,  
25c per lb. John Westlund,  
corner Center Rd. and Tamal-  
pais Ave.

**TEE-SHIRTS**  
For Men and Boys  
Short Sleeves  
Men's "Gtis" Mills panel  
rib Tee-shirts in white,  
blue, tan. Sizes S-M-L.  
Regular \$1.25 value at  
**\$1.17**. Boys of same at 98c  
Men's triple rib full weight  
Tee-shirts. Excellent rib  
neck. Sizes S-M-L. Colors  
blue, maize, tan. An honest  
\$1.50 value at **\$1.39**.  
Men's "Utica Bodyguard".  
Plain knit white Tee-shirts.  
Regular \$1.00 value at 89c.  
Trade Here and Save  
**J. C. FOISEY**  
Railroad Ave. Ph. 87-M

*J.C. Foisey, see above ad, ran a clothing department in the Pini store on Grant Avenue. When the store burned down in 1945, Mr. Foisey operated the business out of a garage behind his home on Railroad Avenue and was still selling there in 1948. (Bill Almeida)*

**NOVATO**  
MARIN'S MOST MODERN THEATRE!

FRI. - SAT.

**July 23 - 24**

R. Milland, M. O'Sullivan,  
C. Laughton

**"The Big Clock"**

Also

L. Palmer, S. Wanamaker

**"My Girl Tisa"**

**Bank Nite Jackpot**

**\$50.00**

SUN. - MON.

**July 25 - 26**

C. Grant, D. Niven,  
L. Young

**"The Bishop's  
Wife"**

Plus

A. De Cordova,  
L. Brener

**"Adventure in  
Silverado"**

TUES. - WED. - THURS.

**July 27 - 28 - 29**

I. Dunne, B. Bel Geddes,  
P. Durne

**"I REMEMBER  
MAMA"**

Also

**SHORT SUBJECTS**

# Novato — 50 Years Ago

by *Bill Almeida*

In June 1948, Bing Crosby enjoyed dinner at Maison Marin (now the Hilltop Café). He expressed a desire to arrange a dinner party the next month at the restaurant "high on a Novato hill."

Constable Fred Nave issued a reminder to Novatoans that no fireworks would be tolerated over the 4<sup>th</sup> of July holiday and that any infraction would bring about "strong action".

Leonora Valim and John Azevedo were wed on June 19<sup>th</sup> at Our Lady of Loretto Church.

Novato Bank was the only bank in town. It was located in the Silva Building on Grant Avenue opposite DeBorba's. In August of 1948, the bank celebrated its 35<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Novato residents received mail through post office boxes or rural delivery. There was no home delivery at that time. Home delivery was not started until December 1951.

In July, Frosty Wright made his solo flight at Gness Airport at the age of 16. He was then a student at San Rafael High. Frosty was believed to be the youngest person to solo at Gness.

June saw the first election of directors to the new North Marin County Water District. In April, the Secretary of

State had filed his certificate with the Board of Supervisors of the County of Marin declaring and certifying that N.M.C.W.D. was now incorporated. The first directors were Frank Baccaglio, Virgil Hill, Emil Renati, Dr. Charles Stafford and William Q. Wright.

The Black Point bridge was a draw-bridge. The "Little Cliff House" was a tavern and restaurant on the Marin County side of the bridge. The present concrete bridge was completed in 1958.

Paul Brindel sent a letter to Jack Sparrow congratulating Novato School Bond winners. Brindel had mailed a mimeographed "bombshell" to quote his words, intending to gain some votes for the "NO" side. Instead the voters responded with a 601 to 91 "YES" vote. For those who knew Brindel, his letter to Advance editor Sparrow was unexpected and a surprise. Paul Brindel was without a doubt one of the most controversial individuals in the history of Novato.

On July 1, 1948, the U.S. Post Office Department initiated service between San Francisco and Willits via Highway P.O., a big red, white and blue bus. The

"HYPO" as it was well known, was manned by a driver and 2 clerks who sorted mail while traveling on HWY 101. Novato was a 6 PM stop on the return trip to S.F.

California Department of Agriculture established a 24 hour truck inspection of fruits and vegetables at Ignacio.

Anita Miller, who was a reporter of Black Point news for many years, announced she was toying with the idea of writing a book entitled "How to Have a Nervous Breakdown in Three Lessons". Visits of several teenage relatives were the motivation for her proposed book.

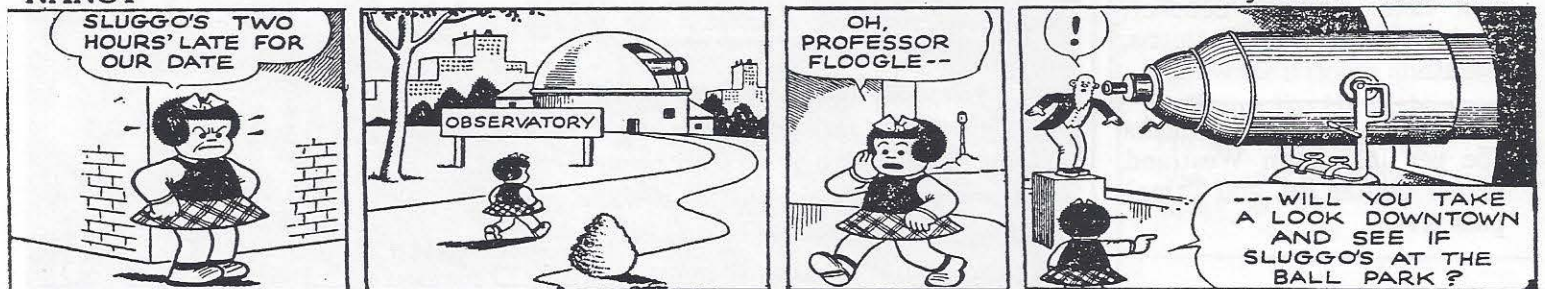
M.B. Boissevain, Marin County Farm Advisor, stated that "The smallest hen that will lay the most large eggs" is the most efficient producer for the poultryman interested only in eggs.

Novato Fire Department baseball team traveled to Kelseyville in Lake County for a July 4<sup>th</sup> baseball game. The Novato team lost 7 to 4 although Gordon Quilici hit a home run. Many players and their wives enjoyed a stay at Soda Springs returning home the following evening.

The Novato Advance carried a story about a man who had placed a box of eggs on his car bumper in Black Point. When he arrived at his destination about 10 minutes later, the eggs were still on the bumper. When he told his story, an argument ensued over ownership of the eggs. ♦



## NANCY



Comic strip and old advertisements from Novato Advance newspapers, 1948