

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 Feature Section

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The Novato Historian

Volume 38, Number 4

Novato Post Office History

by Mike Reade

Post Office No. 1 "Our House"

One of the first buildings built in Novato township was a store/saloon called "Our House."

It was owned by Peter Smith (1828-1878) and Henry Jones (1826-1872). They came to Novato around 1855. Henry Jones became the Postmaster on February 1, 1856 and made "Our House" Novato's first post-office.

Peter Smith built a house in 1858 and married Amanda Scown (1842-1928) in the same year. The 1860 US census shows Peter Smith (31), head of house, Amanda Smith (17), Lora Smith (1), H.F. Jones (34), Joseph Johnson (37) and J.A. Williams (53), all living in the same house.

"Our House" was probably located at what is now Nave Court, right next to Novato Creek.

In January 14, 1860, Henry Jones was no longer postmaster for Novato. According to the *1897 Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, a post office was discontinued when it ceased to be a public necessity. In this case, it was probably a lack of customers that justified the Novato Post Office closure -- although Jones and Smith kept the post office going for at least four months more without a Postmaster. On April 21, 1860 they tried to sell everything.

This is the ad that was in the *Daily Alta*, a San Francisco newspaper:



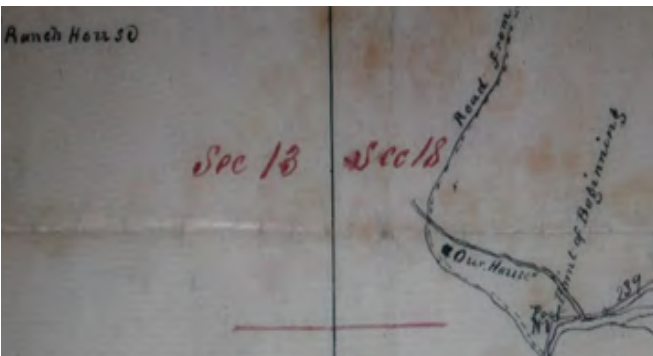
This is how the original Postmaster's House looked in 1952 when it had a side porch. Today this side of the building faces DeLong Avenue.

"FOR SALE – IN MARIN COUNTY, between Petaluma and San Rafael – A FARM containing over 600 acres of very superior land, admirably suited for agricultural and grazing purposes, nearly all fenced in, and most conveniently situated, being only 2 1/2 miles, by one of the best natural roads in the world, of an embarcadero. Post-office, store, &c. The attention of parties who are judges of the quality of land is particularly called to the above. If desired, two-thirds of the purchase money may remain on mortgage, at low interest for one or two years. Title perfect. For particulars, apply, personally only, to JONES & SMITH, Novato Post Office, near San Rafael, Marin County. Ap8-14*"

Novato Post Office History

On February 28, 1863, Smith sold all his interest in the partnership and its assets to Henry Jones for \$1,690.00. The bill of sale lists specifically “Our House” and the Black’s Store.

On January 11, 1865 Joseph B. Sweetser would be the postmaster until 1880 and he would rename the post office “Black Point.” Before 1891, the Post Office Department had no written policies about post office names. Post office names were derived from several sources, including names of towns, townships, neighborhoods, crossroads, the postmaster’s name or place of business.” There are some maps in the 1870’s that do not show Novato but rather Black Point as the township, because of Sweetser naming the post office, Black Point.



Map of final survey of Rancho de Novato, March 1857, shows “Our House” as the only building along the road from Petaluma to San Rafael.

The Pacific Coast Business Directory, by Langley 1867 (yellow page type book) shows:

Jones H.T., Groceries
Sweetser J.B

They were the only ones that bought into the directory.

It is my theory that Mr. Jones moved “Our House” because it was right next to the Novato Creek which flooded all the time. He most likely moved it to the area that was then the Connell property. He renamed it the “Halfway House,” after he bought out Smith. Records in the *History of Marin 1880* indicate that “Jones died in a horse trough” (March 22, 1872) at what was then known as the “Halfway House.”

In 1951, the *Novato Advance* reported that Jones was presumably murdered, and that the post office was taken over by Vincente Faggiano, who was Master of the scows “Novato” and “California.”



This 1858 Plate of Rancho de Novato show the Black’s store, Our House and Peter Smith’s home location.



This 1866 Plate of Tide Land Survey Map for Adolphus Scown shows a store next to the Connell hotel

J.B. Faggiano (1830 – 1908)

John Baptista Faggiano was born in Italy, June 1, 1830 and came to Novato in 1860. He came to California, arriving in San Francisco September 25, 1849, and went directly to Murphy’s Camp, Calaveras County, where he mined for four years. We next find Mr. Faggiano following the occupation of a butcher in Amador County for seven years, after which he returned to San Francisco, purchased a sloop and established what is known as the “Novato Line,” plying the waters between Novato and San Francisco. Having continued this enterprise for fourteen years, he sold out and bought a store (Our/Halfway House?) at Novato, which he then managed. (*History of Marin 1880*). His oldest daughter Amelia Faggiano (1871-1969) married Richard Connell (1864- 1923).

Enoch W. Hayden (1834-1910) – Postmaster October 5, 1880 to 1887 – Came to Novato in 1863. He and his older

Novato Post Office History

Taken from the Pacific Coast Business Directory,

Mckenny, 1876-78

Black Point Marin Co. P.O. (see Novato)

Sweetser James B. postmaster

Von Hollan G F, hotel proprietor and butcher

Novato, Marin Co, P .O. address

Black Point 11 mile n. of San Rafael.

Anderson Andrew, liquor saloon

Faggiano J.B. & Co, general merchandise

Henricksdorff , shoe maker

Hodge John, agent

Johnson A - general merchandise

Pacheco JR, butcher

Tan Charles, blacksmith

brother crossed the plains in a wagon train, settling in Novato on November 4, 1864. The Hayden brothers were born in Presque Isle, Maine – Amaziah in 1815 and Enoch in 1834.

Amaziah had two children – Daniel Leonard (Hilltop builder) and Alice. Enoch worked for his brother in Wisconsin for eight years. He was 30 years old and a bachelor when they made the long journey across the plains.

Upon reaching Marin County, they leased some land in the Black Point (South Novato Blvd.) area from the DeLong/ Sweetser ranch and went into the dairy business.

Enoch Hayden married Catherine Johnston (sister of John Sweetser’s wife, Francis) in 1870 and they had one daughter, Eva W. (1872-1920). Enoch served as Black Point Postmaster for six years and as a school district trustee for four years. In 1887, the family moved to Sonoma and established a vineyard and an orchard. (History of Marin 1880)

Starting in 1880 the US Post office came out with the *Daily Bulletin* then *The Postal Bulletin*. From this date forward we have dates on everything that happened with the post office and postmasters.

From the *Daily Bulletin* – “November 1881 – Mail Messenger Service Established – Black Point, Marin Co., from Novato station, ½ mile, often as required.” This was possibly when the post-office moved from the “Our House/Halfway House” to the “Black/McDonald/Scott” store, or the Post Office had been at the “Black/McDonald/Scott” store beginning in 1865 when Sweetser became postmaster. The confusion is from the facts

that the records are unclear.

Post Office #2 - Black Store

Hayden & McDonalds would take over the Black store in 1880’s (Hayden is postmaster)

A.D. Scott came to Novato on May 5, 1884, worked for the McDonald Bros. on their ranch. They also ran two general stores, one directly opposite what we now know as the Bacaglio place (which would make it on the Connell property, Halfway House). Later McDonald Bros. closed this store but continued to operate in their main place of business which was located on what is now Novato Blvd on the spot where Lulu Sutton home stands (corner of Novato Blvd. and Pine). Scott moved from the smaller store to the main store and in 1888 he acquired the inventory of the store which was named the



Halfway House on the Connell property in 1900’s

McDonald & Scott Store. In February of 1889, the newspaper wrote that “Mr. Alex C. Scott, the popular merchant, has succeeded to the entire business of McDonald & Scott.”

In April of 1889, Scott remodeled the building by adding a second story to it and making it more of a home. The reason being that he planned to marry in May of that year to the former Mattie Benedict. The new Mrs. Scott and her parents had been Novato residents, but had moved to Santa Ana which was where the marriage took place.

Post Office #3 - Scott Building

February of 1890 Scott started to erect a fine two story store on Grant and Sherman Avenue and moved his general merchandise

business and the post office by May of that year. In July he moved his remodeled home, the former Black/McDonald/Scott store, to his lot on Sherman Avenue, behind the new Scott store. According to a former resident, it took a week to move the building from Diablo and Novato Boulevard across the creek to its new site.

The Scott family lived in the home on Sherman Avenue until 1912 when Scott moved the house once again – this time onto a lot he owned on the north side of Grant Avenue (about where the Patio area is today) and built a new two-story home on the Sherman Avenue site. Today, the building is part of the City of Novato office complex and is used by the Park and Recreation Department.

He sold out his store in 1940 because of ill health and lived only a few years longer, dying in 1945, a much respected man after whom Scott Street was named.

John Redmond (1819 - 1893) – Postmaster February 27, 1888 to 1891

He owned a ranch where Stafford Lake is located.

George H. Albers (1860-1944) – Postmaster March 9, 1891 – Dec. 1891

From May Ungemach's *Novato Township* book "Next to the Novato House Hotel, George H. Albers opened a store in December 1889, and stocked it with groceries and a general line of goods."

Sausalito News – Feb. 26, 1892 "Grocery Store for Sale – The stock of groceries of George H. Albers of Novato, will be sold at auction on Saturday, February 27th, at 10 o'clock a.m. The stock is complete, and will be offered as a whole. If price bid is not satisfactory, it will be sold in lots to suit. Store and fixtures to let. Geo. D. Shearer Public Auctioneer." He moved to Napa in the same year.

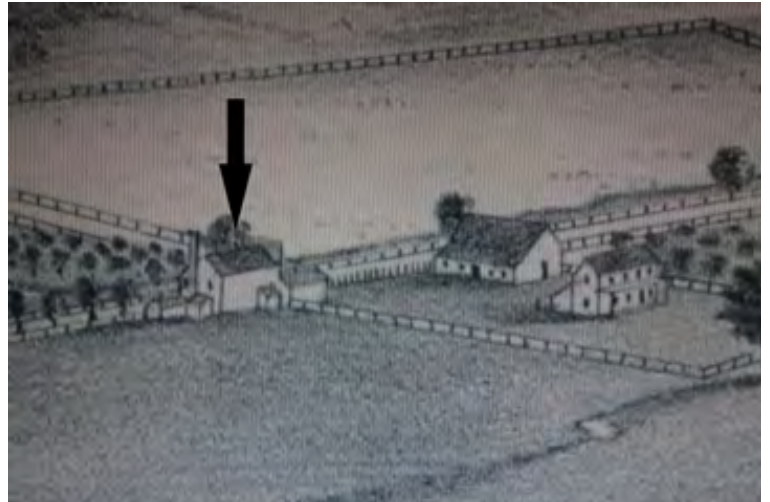
February 20, 1891, the name of the post office at Novato is changed from Black Point to Novato...

Post Office Site Changed – "December 18, 1891 Black Point, Marin County, ½ mile E, on Route 16011, to Novato."

Alexander Scott (1860 – 1945) Postmaster December 18, 1891 - 1896

Post office #4: Moved to the Hamilton Store (Community House from 1919 to 1923) from November 15, 1923 to May 9, 1934

July 21, 1923 *Novato Advance* - "Improving Property. A. H. Anderson is changing the appearance and greatly improving recently acquired town property. The awning of the old Community House has been removed, the building given a coat of paint, a neat sign painted on the front directing visitors to the farming section of the



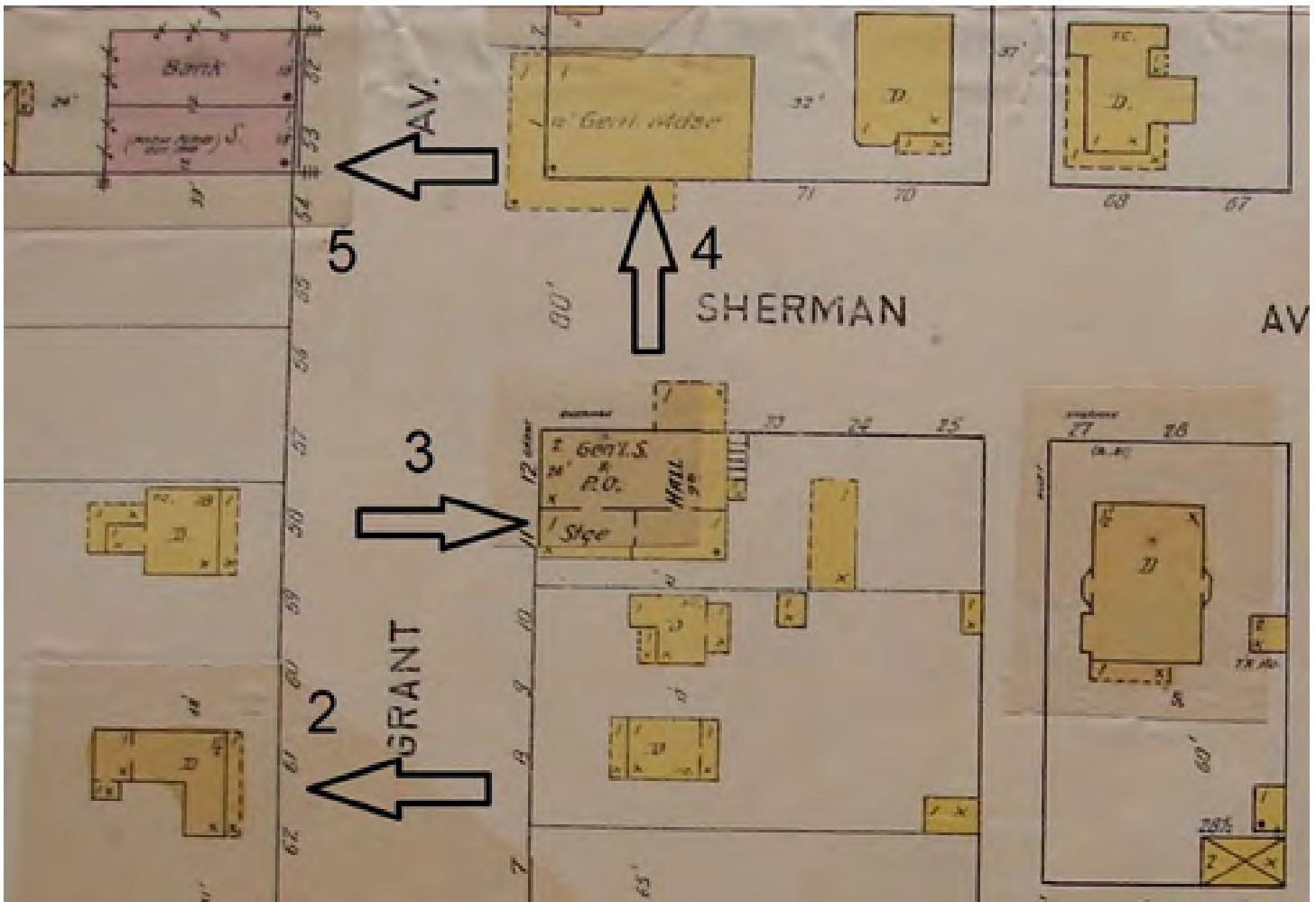
This Sweetser/DeLong Ranch drawing in the 1870's shows the Black Store which later became the McDonald / Scott store at the corner of Novato Blvd. and what would become Diablo Blvd.



House in background is the Black/McDonald/ Scott store/home after it was moved in 1912. The Scott store is in the foreground.

'Valley of No Regrets' and the ground prepared for a concrete sidewalk. It is understood that a sort of a department store will be opened in the building."

November 17, 1923 *Novato Advance* "Enlarging Business – The H. Pini & Co. are preparing to enlarge and extend their business. The old Community House has been rented and is being overhauled. A large and well-equipped room is being made for the post office, which will be moved as soon as permission is granted and the building ready. The remainder of the building will be used by H. Pini & Co. to carry their stock of heavy hardware."



This 1913 Sanborn fire map shows the location of 4 post office buildings in Novato. (2) Bottom left is the Black-McDonald-Scott building after it was moved to this location in 1912. (3) Bottom right is the Scott building, post office from 1890 to 1923. (4) Top right was the Hamilton Store, then the Community House from 1919 to 1923, then the post office from 1923 to 1934. (5) And the top left would be Novato Bank building with the Post office on the left side of the building from 1934 to 1951.

Dec. 1923 *Novato Advance* - "The post office has been moved across the street and is now settled in its new quarters."

March 15, 1924 -New Postmaster – A telegram from Senator Sam Shortridge last week announced the appointment of L.E. Leavell as postmaster of Novato. Mrs. Evers will retire with honors, and as Mr. Leavell is a man of experience in public affairs will assuredly give excellent service.

Post office #5: Post-Office changes

Novato: To Silva Building on north side of Grant Avenue, directly opposite former site; 725 feet from railroad station, (Railroad route 108748) Effective May 9, 1934.

May 12, 1934 – Post office in new Quarters – On Tuesday the Novato post office changed commander, Miss Helen Trumbull surrendering all authority in-

vested in her by Uncle Sam to Mrs. P.H. Evers. The post office was moved across the street into the Silva building, adjoining the Novato Bank. Mrs. Evers had installed all new furniture and fixtures, and gives the Novato the most up-to-date office in its history – new boxes, tables and other bright and cheery furnishings. Even the waste paper basket has not been forgotten. Novato has a post office which is a credit to the community. The very efficient and obliging assistant postmistress, Miss Alberta Warner, will be retained in the office.

July 1945 - Indicative of the progress and growth of Novato was the announcement made by Postmaster Alberta Frankamp that Novato Post Office had been raised from third class to second class. New rating was effective as of July 1.

Post office #6: December 1, 1951 – moved to Machin and Vallejo

The post office tripled its space by moving into 2,000 square



Post Office location on Silva Building on north side of Grant Avenue.

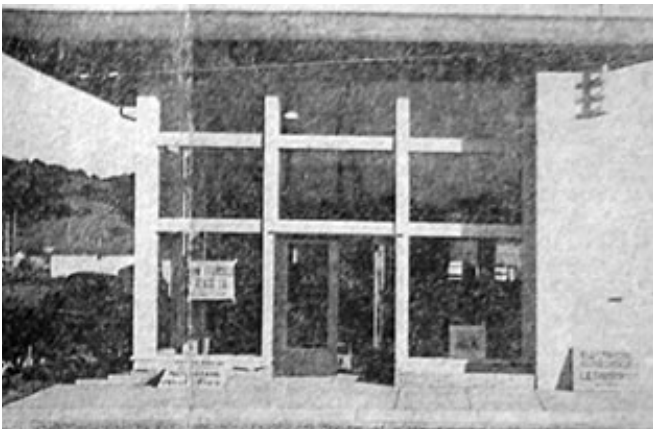
feet place. It was built by Frank Valim, contractor, to suit the needs of the post-office, which was rented from him. Lloyd Rasmussen, Novato architect, designed the building which has 2,250 square feet of floor space and is made of basaltite blocks.

Machin and Vallejo Post Office now Anthony's Automotive.

December 1, 1951 – city delivery service was established.

Post office #7: September 29, 1956 - New post office on 1st Street

The new post office tripled the space formerly available in the Machin Ave building. There now existed some 6300 square feet of floor space, compared to 2888 square feet in the old building. Herbert Dohemann of Santa Cruz was the builder. The new place cost \$50,000.



Machin and Vallejo Post Office - now Anthony's Automotive.

Postal receipts have risen from \$23,133 in 1950 to \$65,000 in 1955. Estimated receipts this year (1956) are \$85,000.

There are now 10 carrier routes and no rural routes.

First Street Post Office now Don Johnson's Pool Service.

Post office #8: July 1968 on South Novato Blvd.

When it moved to its new place at Nave Shopping Center, it triples the size of the old place to 18,000 square feet. Novato Advance – "You have to hand it to Novato Postmaster Harry Overly the city's new post office will open tomorrow morning in all its spacious glory. The change of address is to the remod-



Post Office #7: First Street Post Office now Don Johnson's Pool

eled McAfee Department Store building in Nave Shopping Center on South Novato Boulevard. There are 948 post office boxes in the new headquarters, 423 more than the total available at the previous location on First Street."

New Novato post office at Nave Shopping Center, South Novato Blvd., would provide plenty of parking for customers. It was remodeled inside and out (formerly McAfee's Department Store) at a cost of \$125,000 and would have a 10-year lease at about \$46,000 per year. The former location on First Street was leased for \$8,400 per year.

94945, 94949 zip code started July 1, 1987

May 1987 - Many Novato residents will be facing a slight change of zip code come July 1. Due to an increase in population and a growth in mail, "Novato has become too big for one zip code," says Novato Postmaster Dan Horn. The zip code for central Novato will remain the same. Northern Novato will experience a change to 94945 and Ignacio, Bel Marin Keys, and Hamilton Air Force base, will have 94949 as a new zip. "By breaking Novato into three zones, we will get the mail coming quicker and better," said Horn. "It is a necessary move to ensure quality in the mail service." Response from the community has not been positive. "People get confused and think they won't get their mail if the right zip code isn't printed right," said Horn. "We aren't changing their physical address, they will still get their mail."

List of Postmasters for the town of Novato

Henry Jones	Feb. 2, 1856 – Jan. 14, 1860
Joseph Sweetser	Jan. 11, 1865 – 1880
Enoch W. Hayden	Oct. 5, 1880 – 1888
John Redmond	Feb. 27, 1888 – 1891
George Albers	March 9, 1891
Alexander D. Scott	Dec. 18, 1891 – 1896
Earnest Samuels	Jan. 24, 1896 – 1900
Alexander D. Scott	March 1900 – 1914
Fred Hamilton	Dec. 14, 1914 – 1917
Thomas Keating	March 16, 1917 - 1918
Martha Lewis	Nov. 21, 1918 – 1919
Myers Evers	Aug. 15, 1919 – 1924
Lewis Leavell	March 7, 1924 – 1930
May D. Smith	Nov. 5, 1930 - 1931
Helen Trumbull	April 6, 1931 – 1934
Myers Evers	April 24, 1934 – 1943
Mrs. Alberta Frankamp	July 6, 1943 – 1953
James M. Morris	Nov. 30, 1953 – 1961
Harry M. Overly	May 26, 1961 – 1971
Joseph "Bill" Almeida	May 28, 1971 – 1979
Dan R. Horn	March 22, 1980 – 1988
Ronald G. Carroll	July 30, 1988 – 1993
Romeo S. DeGuzman	Feb. 6, 1993 – 1997
Gilbert A. Barker	Sept. 12, 1998 – 2002
Behroz Barry Amiri	May 18, 2002 – 2005
Michelle D. Tucker	Nov. 24, 2007 – 2013
Alberta M. Ellis	May 3, 2014 -



New Novato post office at Nave Shopping Center, South Novato Blvd., would provide plenty of parking for customers. It was remodeled inside and out (formerly McAfee's Department Store) at a cost of \$125,000 and would have a 10-year lease at about \$46,000 per year. The former location on First Street was leased for \$8,400 per year.



THEY'RE OFFICIAL NOW—Four of Novato's letter carriers have received permanent civil service appointments and blossomed out in uniform last week in celebration. Resplendent in their blue-gray outfits are (from left) Harry L. Anderson, Harold A. Anderson, William Almeida and Charles Field Jr.
-12-17-1953 Advance Photo

Novato Advance - December 17, 1953

"They're Official Now – Four of Novato's letter carriers have received permanent civil service appointments and blossomed out in uniform last week in celebration. Resplendent in their blue-gray outfits are (from left) Harry L. Anderson, Harold A. Anderson, William Almeida and Charles Field Jr."

The following are stories from Bill Almeida, Novato's "Official Historian" and once Postmaster of the Novato Post Office, including an article recapping the *History of the Novato Post Office*.

By Bill Almeida

My Recollections of the Novato Post Office from 1951 to date.

The post office was located on Grant Avenue next to the Novato Bank (Silva Building at 826 Grant). Due to growth of Novato, a new Post Office was built by Frank Valim at the corner of Machin Ave and Vallejo Ave. at 1072 Machin. The Novato Advance office was next door at 1068 Machin.

The Post Office on Grant was closed on Saturday November 17, 1951 and Sunday November 18 for moving of equipment & P.O. boxes to the new office. Because of high dollar bids received by the government, the move was made by the postmaster (Alberta Frakamp), her husband, and postal employees. City delivery started December 10. That was delivery to downtown business and homes with a mile or so of the new Post Office. Prior to December 10, residents and businesses had to pick up mail up at the Post Office in a P.O. Box. Outlying areas of Novato, Black Point and Ignacio were served by a rural carrier. After December, every home and business had to have a street address. Numbers were assigned by the county.

In July or Aug 1956, the post office moved into a new building at 1118 1st Street. The new building, was contracted with Herb Dohemann, an auto dealer in Novato. It remained the Post Office until July of 1968 at which time a move was made to its present location in the Nave center.

Because of growth in Novato, the present Post Office has become too small but somehow the building is still in use.

In the 1970's, William Jonas, whose two Roger Wilco stores were contract mail stations for the postal service, offered space FREE in Ignacio. The space would have been for carrier service in the Ignacio, Hamilton, Rafael Village, Loma Verde, Bel-Marin Keys areas. Unfortunately, higher postal officials decided against the proposal.

The Nave family has been a good landlord for the past 46 years. When I was postmaster in the 1970's, any building maintenance needs were always promptly taken care of. That was not always the case when the Post Office was on First Street. Mr. Dohemann disliked spending money, even for minor items such as screws or nuts or nails.

This is the story where we get the Museum as the postmaster's home.

Novato Advance - December 7, 1951

"The above is the building (picture of the Postmaster house on Yukon Way) in which Novato's first post office was established on February 1, 1856, with Henry F. Jones as postmaster. The house was built by one of the members of the Pacheco family, who at that time owned the land from Novato Creek south to St. Vincent's Hill, bounded approximately on the west at Novato by the foot hills and the bay on the east.

Jones was presumably murdered, and the post office was taken over by Vincente Faggiano, master of the scows "Novato" and "California" who had bought 13 acres from the Pacheco family.

Postal service was discontinued on January 14, 1860, and the post office was not reestablished until after the Civil War in January, 1865, when it was opened by Joseph B. Sweetser in a store building then standing near Miss Lulu Sutton's home on Novato Blvd. This post office was called Black Point's post office.

A. D. Scott, an early Novato merchant, who had a store on the Novato dock, was the next postmaster. According to his daughter, Miss Ann Scott, he was instrumental in having the name of the post office, and hence the name of "the settlement of houses and shacks strung out along the road," changed back to Novato.

Novato is supposedly named for the chief of the native Indians, who when baptized took the name of St. Novatus, an early Christian.

A. D. Scott and E. R. Samuels served as postmaster in alternate administrations, depending on which political party was in power. Before the railroad came through, both men, were merchants with stores on or near the Novato Creek dock. Scott was postmaster as late as 1910. He was followed by F. S. Hamilton.

Thomas Keating and Martha Lewis. Myrtle Evers took office in 1919. In 1924 Lewis E. Leavell became postmaster and served until his death in 1930. Helen Trumbull became acting postmaster. Mrs. Evers was postmaster again, with Alberta Warner Frankamp as her right-hand assistant. Mrs. Frankamp has been postmaster since 1943.

The post office has had several homes since its establishment in the farm house built by the Pacheco family. Its latest is the new building (below) on the corner of Vallejo Street and Machin Avenue, built for the postal department by Frank Valim, local contractor. Lloyd Rasmussen designed the building. It has 2,230 square feet of floor space and is made of basalt blocks, with ceiling beams of steel, and a concrete floor covered with linoleum tile.