



The Novato Historian

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Feature Section

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Novato Mexican Land Grants to 1976

By MARGARET A. "PEG" COADY
NOVATO CITY HISTORIAN

Three Mexican governors played a major part in the early history of the Novato area – Governors Juan Bautista Alvarado, Manuel Micheltoarena and Pio Pico. Over a period of six years they signed five land grants, portions of which now make up the City of Novato.

In 1839 Alvarado (for whom the Alvarado Inn at Ignacio is named) granted the Novato Rancho to Fernando Feliz (Feliz Road). Downtown Novato stands near the center of what was the 8,870 acre rancho. Feliz was born in what was called El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de Los Angeles (Los Angeles) in 1795, 14 years after the founding of that city. His family had come to California with the famed deAnza Expedition in 1776. Because Feliz had served in the Army and had done many acts of public service, he was granted the rancho.

In 1856-57 two of the most prominent men in early Novato history, Joseph Bryant Sweetser and Francis DeLong, purchased the rancho. The main entrance from the 101 freeway into Novato is named for DeLong. Another street in downtown Novato is named for Sweetser.

Other members of the DeLong family and those involved with ownership, management and disposal of the area are also memorialized on street names. Lamont Avenue is named for Adirene LaMont DeLong, wife of Frank Coye, son of Francis DeLong. Hatch Road is for Robert Hatch who managed the rancho from 1894 until 1905. Trumbull

Road is for Robert H. Trumbull who managed the ranch from 1905 and bought the DeLong home in 1916. Mill Road (W. L. B. Mills), Hill Road (A. B. Hill) Maclay Road (Thomas Maclay) and Sutro Avenue (Alfred Sutro) were all members of the Board of Directors for the Novato Land Company in the early 1900's.

Two of the owners of the Rancho, Jacob P.

Leese — 1844-1846, and Bezar Simmons — 1848-1850, also, have streets named for them — Leese and Simmons Lanes. In 1840 Alvarado awarded to Juan Martin the Rancho Corte Madera de Novato which enters the city limits at the western edge of the San Marin area, and to Ignacio Pacheco the Rancho de San Jose, known as the Ignacio area today.



Trumbull Ranch in early 1900's. Trumbull mansion in center.

Martin came from Scotland in 1822 and married a native woman, Tomasa Cantua. He eventually sold the western portion to William Hicks for whom Hicks Valley and Mountain are named. His children received the remainder of the 8,878 acre grant.

Ignacio's family also came from Mexico with the deAnza Expedition, settling in the San Jose area (south of San Francisco) where he was born in 1808.

About 1834 Ignacio visited Marin and saw a section of land he preferred to the Grant he had in Sonoma County. He petitioned the Mexican government to exchange his Grant for the 6,660 acre Rancho de San Jose, located south of the Novato Rancho and East of Rancho de Nicasio.

The source of the name of the San Jose Rancho has been debated. Although the Pacheco family did settle in the San Jose area, the rancho in Marin was not named by them. Records of the Mission San Rafael Archangel show that the mission padres referred to the Ignacio area as San Jose before Ignacio arrived.

Ignacio's first and second wives, Josefa Higuera and Guadalupe Duarte, died. He then married Guadalupe's sister, Maria Loreta. Their first child was Gumescindo who became a supervisor for the North Marin area from 1902-1906.

Maria had a home built in 1880 for Gumescindo and his wife, Rosa Tanforan. That home, located west of Highway 101 at Ignacio is owned and occupied as it always has been by Pacheco descendants. Today Herbert Rowland, grandson of Gumescindo owns the home and surrounding land.

Like the Novato Rancho, those associated with the San Jose Rancho are remembered in school names (Pacheco and San Jose), streets (San Jose Blvd. And Ignacio Blvd.) and many businesses in the area.

To champion and perpetuate the Ignacio name, identity and location, the area has its own "Mayor" — Frank Galli, whose family has been in Ignacio since the early 1920's.

In 1843 Micheltorena granted to Camilo Ynitia the Rancho Olompali. Camilo was the only native American to receive a Mexican Grant in Marin County. The Rancho, consisting of 8,878 acres was located north of Novato and west of highway 101.

Camilo was the son of the last Coast Miwok chief, Olompali, (Oh-lum, meaning south, pahley, meaning village).

All grantees began to have troubles in 1852 when the United States Land Commission started to question the Mexican Grants. The insurmountable legal costs forced Camilo to sell the Rancho to James Black. Black gave part

of the Rancho to his daughter, Maria Augustina, when she married, in 1863, Dr. Galen Burdell for whom Burdell Mountain is named. Following Dr. Burdell's death in 1906 his son and daughter-in-law, James Black and Josephine Sweetser Burdell moved onto the land. They built the Burdell Mansion which encompassed Camilo's adobe. In 1953 Josephine sold 800 acres including the Mansion. The Mansion had a succession of owners and then in 1969 fire gutted the Mansion and exposed the adobe. Efforts are being made to make the acreage around the adobe a park and to restore the adobe.

Rancho Nicasio was almost granted to the Indians, but due to a bit of skulduggery on the part of Mariano Vallejo, Commandante, they did not receive it. Instead, in 1843, Gov. Pio signed the papers for Don Pablo de la Guerra and John Cooper to receive the 80,000 acre Rancho Nicasio. By 1851 the partners were gone and the grant had been divided into five lots. Lot number three was purchased by Jasper O'Farrell who sold it to James Black, the owner of Olompali.

Following the death of Francis DeLong, in 1885, his lands passed to his son, Frank Coye. Frank's fortunes turned sour and the ranch fell into ruin.

Creditors formed a company to dispose of the land in order to realize the money they had loaned to DeLong. A brochure of 1888 advertised business and residence lots for sale "east of the county road" (E. Grant Avenue). Slowly the fame of Novato's climate, abundant water and scenic beauty spread. By 1918 lots in what was called the "Sweetser Subdivision #1, First through Seventh Streets, were being advertised for sale.

Novato grew slowly but steadily. It had a volunteer fire department in the early 1900's with a Fire District formed in 1926. Further foresight of the growth that would come was shown by the residents when, in 1948, the North Marin Water District was formed. A founding board member for that district was Dr. Charles Stafford for whom Stafford Lake was named upon its completion in 1953. In 1954 Novato was the first community in Marin to unify its schools. Novato High School was built in 1957.

The biggest industry in terms of payroll and employment that North Marin had came in the late 1920's and early 1930's when construction of Hamilton Air Force Base was going on. At the height of the Base activities the payroll from civilians and military reached \$3,000,000 monthly, which resulted in a tremendous economic wind-fall for Marin County.

The base had been built by Marin County taxpayers with much needed assistance, during those depression years, from other Bay Area counties.

In the 1940's, because of the mobility of the American public, the close proximity of the Base and World War II, Novato had its second major growth period.

The next one came in the 1950's when the town's population grew between 1950 and 1960 from 3,496, including Hamilton Air Force Base to 17,881, including the base.

It was in the 1950's that there were six efforts to incorporate. The first five began with a great deal of enthusiasm but all failed to reach the ballot.

It was in May 1958 that another effort was started to incorporate. This time success was to come. That month a Home Rule Study Committee was appointed with Clark Palmer, who became Novato's first city attorney, the chairman. Eight months later, in January 1959, after studies were made and many meetings held, the feasibility of becoming a city was evident.

Preliminary boundaries were drawn. Public hearings were held to determine who wanted in and who wanted out of the new city to be. Black Point, Loma Verde, Ignacio, parts of Olive and Atherton Avenues and a large portion of West Novato wanted out. The final boundary was set at 75 square miles.

Petitions were circulated and then, with all the necessary paperwork completed on January 20, 1960, Novato became Marin County's tenth city and the 477th in the state. The vote was 2,086 "yes" and 802 "no."

An indication of the strong citizen interest to incorporate was that 27 candidates vied for five council seats. It was obvious, from the beginning, that Novatans were seriously interested in "home rule."

The winners of that first council election were Charles

Johnson, M.E. "Babe" Silva, Everett Pozzi, Harvey Vicchio and Wayne Womack, who received the most votes and became Novato's first mayor. Womack served again as mayor, 1966-68 as the fourth mayor, a position decided upon by council members.

All of Novato's mayors still reside in the city. In addition to Womack

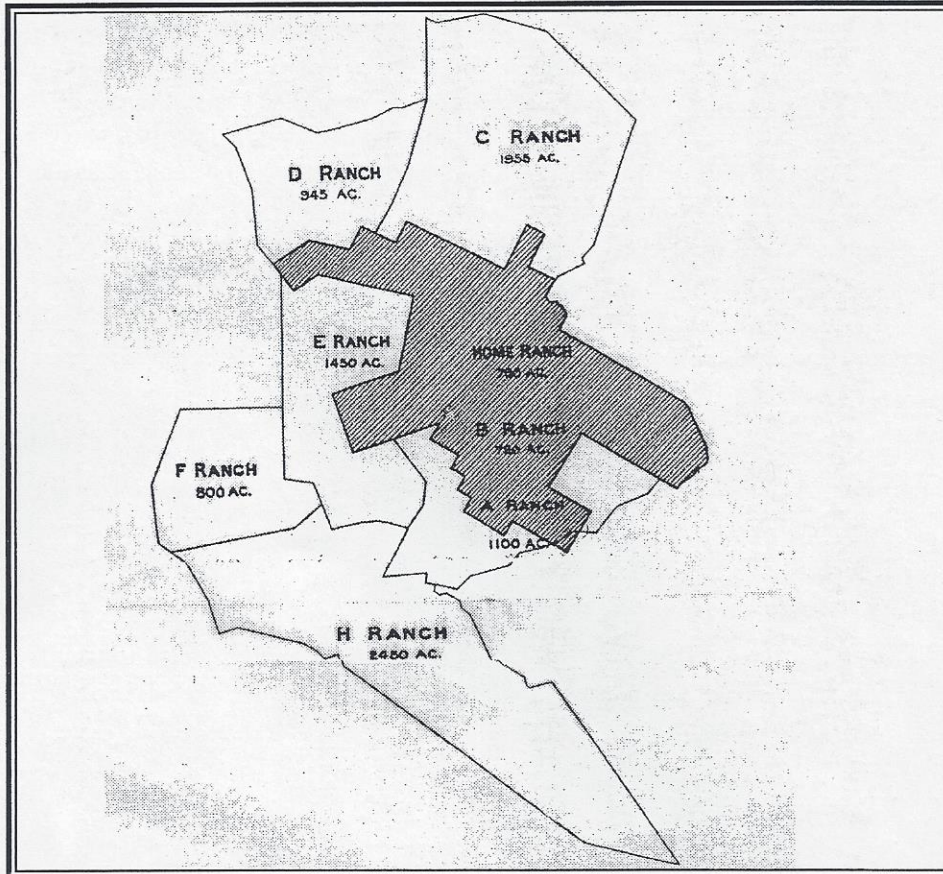
they are: Silva (1962-64), Robert D. Carrow (1964-66), Harley McAskill (1968-70), Douglas M. Merrill (1970-71), Joseph Garguilo (1971-72), Wayne Sartain (1972-73), Fred Ruegg (1973-74), David Price Jones (1974-75), Dorothy P. Young (1975-76—the first woman mayor) and David Milano (1976-77).

Between January 20, 1960 and May 1965 all of Novato's first official family had been hired. They were:

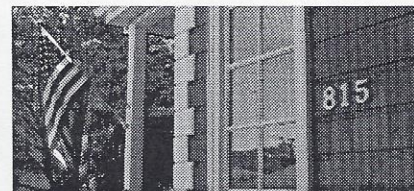
Robert O. Bailey, City Clerk; Charles A. Joseph, Public Works Director; Edmund Mahany, Parks and Recreation Director; Robert B. Lagle, Planning Director and Charles L. Foster, Finance Director.

The police department duties were handled in the beginning by Ed Levine from the Marin County Sheriff's office. In September 1960 Levine was replaced by Roy A. McLaren as Novato's first official Chief of Police.

This bi-centennial year Novato is 16 years old. It may be young in the scheme of things but it is a city that still is very interested in "home rule" for "The Valley of Gentle Seasons."



Early subdivision of the original Novato Rancho.



Successful Farming at Novato Ranch

Marin County Tocsin—December 14, 1907

It is said to be two miles from the station at Novato to the Novato ranch. If it is, the distance did not seem half that as we drove along between the rows of shade trees and looked out upon the beautiful landscape of hills and dales, and little valleys with their green pastures, and the orchards loaded down with fruit, and the grazing cattle and the houses and barns and in the distance the church and parts of the town. It was a beautiful picture and reminded me of Sweet Auburn.

The ranch itself is a great farm of thousands of acres, a large portion of which is in a high state of cultivation and which is so well managed that it returns a handsome profit to those interested in it. I think that one reason for this very desirable result is that the farm is so diversified.

There are cattle, and a creamery and cheese factory; there are hogs and a vineyard and orchards; there is grazing land; and grain land there are half a dozen interests in the fruit line, and a dozen in other directions. Many of the big

farms that I have seen in the past, in California and elsewhere, are all devoted to one single crop or at best, two or three. If the price of wheat or grapes or oranges goes down, the farm is not a success because it's only money-producing project is a failure. Thus we have the prune raisers in Santa Clara Valley sad with a deep sorrow because prunes are not as high as they would like them, and all their interests are in prunes. Or in the South or Sacramento Valley oranges are not a success this year, or last year or the year before, and the result in ranching does not pay in the opinion of the owners.

But the Novato ranch is not farmed on any such one-sided plan. Its manager is Mr. Robert Trumbull whose

ancestors made Connecticut famous two centuries ago. There is a determination about his face that shows that he is not a man to trifle with, and yet he is extremely gentle and polite, and answered a number of more or less silly questions which I asked him, with the utmost good nature and gravity. The biggest apple orchard in the world is on the Novato ranch and people who think that California can not grow apples, who fancy that the project is confined to Michigan, or New York, or the other portions of the benighted East, should spend a few hours wandering though the long rows of trees that occupy a small portion of the great California farm. They ship 30,000 boxes from

the ranch of these apples every season, and yet that is only a portion of the things that they have to ship in the fruit line alone. There are grapes by the wagon load, pears and peaches and other deciduous fruit and lots of fruit products that are left over for the hogs to fatten upon.

The dairy and cheese factory are immense interests in them-

selves. Hundreds of cheeses are there in the loft mellowing. If that be the proper term to apply to cheese, though some more particular persons might call it "odorizing" and something like 1,400 to 1,700 gallons of milk are shipped daily, besides. Besides the cheese and the fruit and the hogs, there are a splendid collection of cattle; a herd that would be a prize winner at any fair, and which are well worth the trip to the ranch just to look at them as they come in to be milked, with their sleek coats and graceful motions. When a cow is well proportioned and well kept, she certainly is one of the most graceful animals in the world, and I am not astonished that she has found so many portrait painters among the great artists. J.F.

