

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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April - June 2014

The Novato Historian

Volume 38, Number 2

Down Memory Lane

Loustaunau Still Remembered

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Novato Advance August 7, 1963

When you think of old Novato, no land mark comes easier to the memory than the Loustaunau place. The old building, now known as Druids Hall, was a focal point for those who need a refresher in the old days, and for those who danced in the upper hall on Saturday nights.

John Loustaunau was a gay, outgoing Frenchman with a heart of gold, and a cheerful greeting for all. Though he ran a tavern, it was conducted with the decorum of a country club. He never drank with his customers. Although few knew this, his libation was a glass of strong tea poured from a decanter hidden under the "plank." This practice, I have learned, is now forbidden by law.

It was legal to sell absinthe in those days, and the so called "drink of the devil" could be handled by very few.

Pictures Banned

John never allowed the lurid pictures featured in many taverns, but displayed instead, the



In May of 1889, Dr. H.J. Conrardt would buy for \$10 lot 1 and 2 in block "G". When John Loustaunau decided to build his own hotel, saloon and restaurant, he would purchase these two lots in August 1898 at Reichert and Grant Avenue from Dr. Conrardt.

The building, constructed by Joseph Faggiano and named "The Club" by Loustaunau, was the largest recreation hall in the county measuring 40 by 80 feet. "The Club" had its grand opening June 10, 1899.

Loustaunus Still Remembered



John P. Loustaunau would have the porch removed and add concrete sidewalks in May of 1923.

ornate calendars issued by the business firms of the day. These gaily colored mementos of a bygone day are collector's items, and from time to time, people still advertise offering to buy them for their collections. They gather them as others hoard stamps and coins.

Some of these old time calendars resembled elaborate valentines, with cut work edges, and some even had deep receptacles for letters. Many householders used them to store away the daily mail and unanswered letters.

The living quarters of the Loustaunus were seven large rooms on the ground floor.

Above them was the dance hall with an orchestra platform and small oaken stations for the various lodge officers when in session.

John's wife, Alice whom he called "Al-ee-se," was a small quiet Englishwoman. She was the picture of British primness, always immaculately dressed in starched linens and with crisply curled hair. Going to school in the mornings, she would wave at us from the window. She was devoted to "Johnnie," and he to her. Her home was so perfectly keet that one hesitated to walk across the kitchen floor, since it was thoroughly mopped after

each meal.

John did all the cooking, everything turned out with a delicious French flair. On a huge wooden chopping block in the kitchen he concocted dishes with ingredients we couldn't even guess at.

The couple's one sorrow in life was that they had no children, but to every child within reach of them they gave kindness and affection, and many gifts the parents couldn't afford.

Every year, John, Alice and grand old Capt. Leon Hiribarren, with a few guests, rented a spacious cottage in Bolinas, and stayed for a memorable two weeks. Capt. Leon took over the cooking there and did an expert job with clams, abalone, fish and oysters. The trip taking an entire day was made by horse and buggy with a dinner stop at Caesar's Villa near Tocaloma Bridge.

At least twice a year the same group met to go to Paper mill Creek at Camp Taylor for a big picnic outing. The picturesque paper mill was still standing at that time, and formed the colorful setting for the many pictures taken with Brownie cameras. Out of the big wicker hampers came food fit for royalty. This was spread on checkered tablecloths on the grass, and all were hesitant to come back home before dark.

Bit of Old England

In the Loustaunau "parlor" one gazed on a bit of old England.

Loustaunus Still Remembered

The mantel held beautiful English china figurines, lusterware, and Cinderella slippers ornamented with gold lace and filled with flowers. Handmade dollies were everywhere on the overstuffed furniture. The rosewood piano held beautifully framed pictures from England.

Alice's father, known only as "Mr. Masters," arrived one year to spend the summer. He turned their back yard into a paradise of beautifully kept flowers, and astonished the natives by growing the first asparagus ever seen outside a Novato grocery store.

Then came the day when niece Katie Talbot arrived from Southampton.

The entire town had been alerted, as seldom did Novato have a visitor from so far away. Kate, as she became in America, was petite, pert pretty, and a blond with blue eyes. Her accent completely fascinated us, and she played the piano like mad.

Soon, happy singing sessions were held in the parlor and the young people gathered for many a gay evening. Sometimes, Sandy McIntosh brought his violin, and every few weeks John's French relatives would come from San Francisco, and a handsome young nephew would play his mandolin, as the girls practically swooned. Nothing like it had ever been known before the advent of Katie.

The home life of this pioneer couple was completely apart from the tavern, and was entered



Inside Druids Hall 1955 – Lady Druids Sylvan Circle 115 installation of officers

through a private door leading from the street. They were respected and loved, and their memory, I find, is still revered throughout the Novato community.

Obituaries

January 22, 1937

Death came quietly and peacefully to John Loustaunau, pioneer resident of Novato, when he passed away while sleeping early Saturday morning.

Mr. Loustaunau had been suffering from a cold, but had been around as usual and on Wednesday had celebrated his 74th birthday with a small dinner party.

John Loustaunau was born at Ogen, South of France, in 1863. As a young man he came to this country in 1880 and forty years ago (1897) settled in Novato, where he acquired property and went into business.

Besides many friends, he leaves to mourn his loss, his widow, Mrs. Alice Loustaunau (married in 1902); a brother, Harry Loustaunau, of San Bruno, and a sister, Mrs. T. Fredericks, and several nephews.

He was a member of the Novato Grove of Druids; Novato Council I. D. E. S. I., and Petaluma Aerie of Eagles.

Loustanaus Still Remembered



Mrs. Alice (Masters) Loustanau

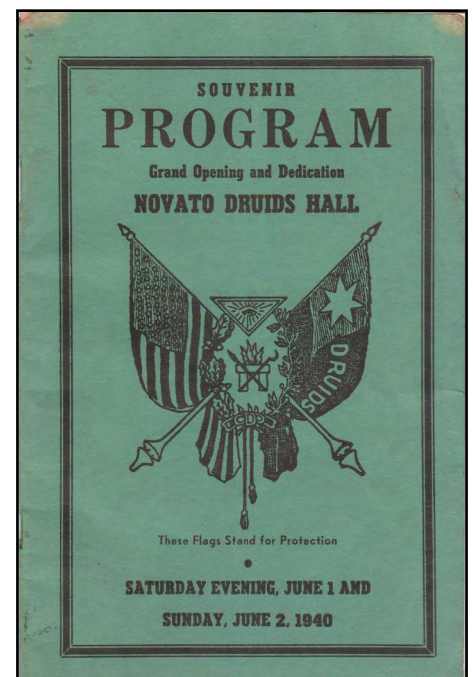
Funeral services were held at Keaton & Dusel Funeral Parlors on Monday, the services being conducted by the Petaluma Aerie, No. 33, F.O.E., President Raymond Momboisse, officiating, and Henry J. Meyers, acting as chaplain, cremation following. The ashes will be buried in the Novato cemetery.

Sept. 1938

Mrs. Alice (Masters) Loustanau passed away at her home at 11 o'clock, August 31, ending many months of suffering. Mrs. Loustanau, who had been a resident of Novato for thirty-five years, was the wife of the late John Loustanau. She was a native of England and sixty-six years of age.



Inside Druids Hall 2012 – David Johnson (center) getting his 50 year pin to the right is Bill Koenig.



The Loustanau Building, a dream of the Novato Druids since 1909, when they started using the hall, was dedicated as the Druids Hall on June 1, 1940. With its large lodge room, new kitchen range, new fixtures and many other additions that would make it a well-equipped lodge hall.