

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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Western Weekend

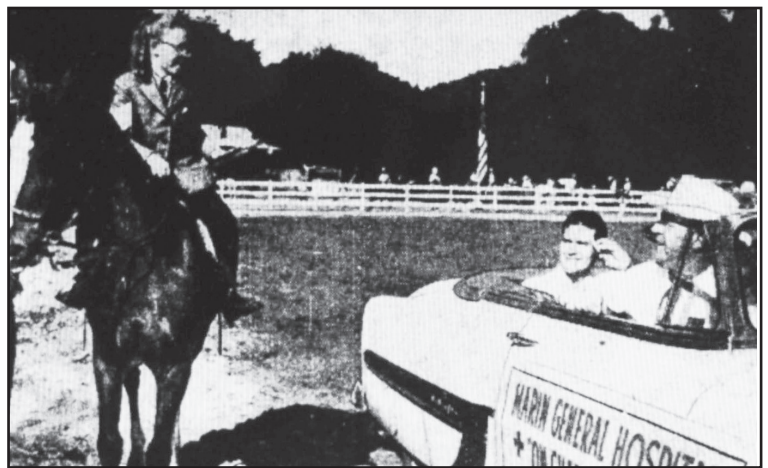
By Michael Read

The history of the Western Weekend celebration is, in many respects, the history of the Novato Horsemen's Association. (See Novato Historian April - June 2019 issue for the history of the NHA.)

When Novato was a small town it had a rural atmosphere. It drew people to it who liked horses. The Novato Horsemen's Association (NHA) started the first parade and horse show on June 3, 1945. The NHA would run the parade and horse show every year on Father's Day, until 1952 when the Novato Junior Horsemen's started running the parade.

1952 June 14 & 15: 8th Horse Show

The Annual Horse Show saw a western "Frontier Dance" added to it on Saturday evening, June 14, at the Community House. The horse show was presented on the following day. The two events were combined that year into a gala "Western Weekend" with cowboy clothing, setting the correct fashion note. This was the first time the term "Western Weekend" was used. The dance was a benefit affair and funds were used for the maintenance and improvement of the Community House.



Bill Nye in back seat with Ralph Briggs in front seat. Lynn Ballachey of Sleepy Hollow on Horse.

1953 June 19- 21: 9th Horse Show

This was the ninth annual Novato Horse Show and it was also the ninth annual charity carnival staged by the Novato Druids. The Druids had the carnival on other days in the past years, but this year they had it on Friday and Saturday, the days before the horse show. The carnival featured games and contests on Friday night and a dance on Saturday night. Prizes awarded were a television set, electric grills, sandwich toasters, a radio and cash.

1954 June 19 & 20: 10th Horse Show

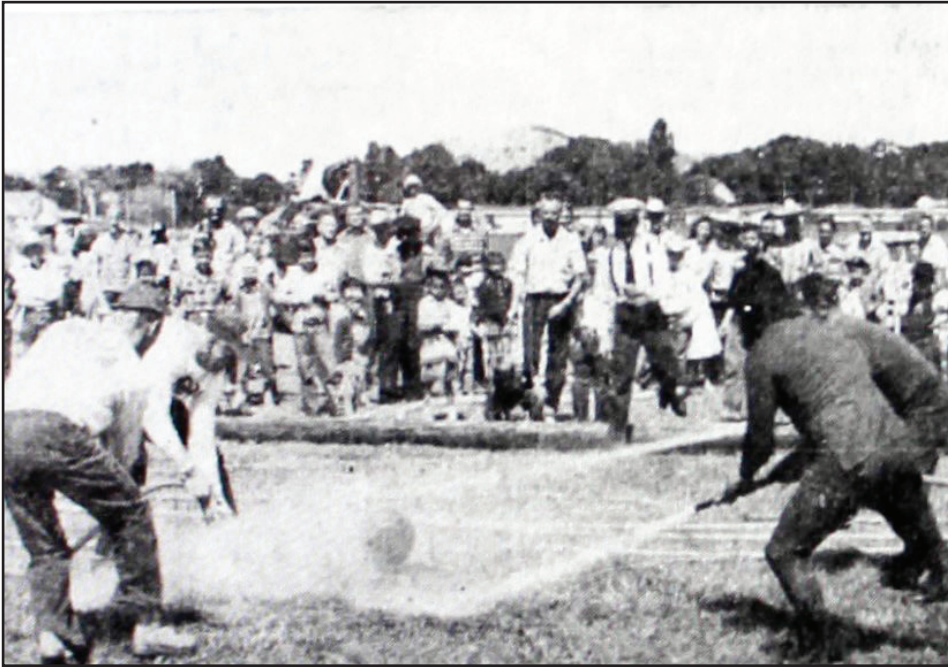
The tenth annual horse show saw "Horse Show Weekend" commence on Saturday night with a frontier dance given by Novato Community Inc. The dance was attended by more than 300 persons, most of whom came from pre-dance dinner and cocktail parties. Many Novato hosts and hostesses would arrange pot-luck dinner gatherings prior to the dance, which would follow a Western theme in decoration.



Early horse show parade on Grant Avenue. Building in background is Pete's Barber Shop.

Novato parade entries included the Chamber of Commerce, Welcome Wagon, and the Novato Accordion Band. In addition to the costumed riders and decorated floats, the Novato Fire Department was also in the parade, as well as two military bands – one from Hamilton AFB and one from the Marine Pacific

Western Weekend



1957 Water-ball fights—you can tell the Novatans because they wore black johns, while the Alto battlers wore white shirts and jeans.

Division. Leading the morning spectacle, which began at Virginia and Grant Avenues, was Bill Nye, 23-year-old Novato polio victim.

1955 June 18 & 19 – 11th Horse Show

Novato's annual Frontier Weekend again featured the Frontier Dance at the community house on Saturday night, the Horsemen's parade Sunday morning and the horse show Sunday afternoon. The parade left its starting point at the Catholic parochial hall at 10 a.m. and moved across Highway 101 (Redwood Blvd.), It ended at the railroad depot. The tradition of having a potluck dinner at different homes may have been going on before and after the horse show since 1945.

1956 June 15 - 17: 12st Western Weekend, 12th Horse Show

The *Novato Advance* reported: "Perhaps never before in Novato's history has there been so elaborate a celebration, with so many participating on such a grand scale as in the upcoming Western Weekend which was triggered by the 12th Annual Novato Horse Show on Sunday.

For the first time in the history of the Horsemen's Club the whole town of Novato backed up the show in a three-day celebration. The Chamber of Commerce, the Novato Community Club, the Novato Fire Department, various square dance groups, clubs and organizations, with the magnanimous aid of Hamilton Air Force Base authorities, have jumped enthusiastically into the picture under the leadership of general chairman, H. W. (Red) Potter.

The event will commence on Friday night with the free open-air square dance at the Town and Country shopping center parking area with 'Big Jim' York calling the dances.

On Saturday morning a 'two-bit breakfast' was served. The breakfast was served on the Anderson Motor Co, parking lot on Grant Avenue next to the fire station. A water ball brawl between the Novato firemen and the Alton-Richardson fire fighters was staged at Marion Avenue school grounds.

High point of Saturday's events was the gigantic parade down Grant Avenue in which there were already over 100 entries including military hands from the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corp. championship drill teams, drum and bugle corps, mounted units, floats, and marching units from all over the North Bay Area."

The two-bit breakfast, "All You Can Eat," was sponsored by the Mariners of the Novato Presbyterian Church. The Mariners were the young married couples of the church, which installed its first organ in November 1946. The church members also called themselves the "Couplers" and then later changed their name to the "Mariners." This was the first time the parade was on a Saturday. A whisker contest called "Whiskerino" was also added.

1957 June 13 - 16: 2nd Western Weekend, 13th Horse Show

New this year was the adding of the Crafts Carnival, which opened its four-day stand on the Patterson Ranch property on Grant Avenue on Thursday June 13. The "all you can eat" breakfast was called "Buckaroo Breakfast" and went for 50 cents.

November 11, 1957 - the **Novato Advance** reported: "*The Novato Chamber of Commerce directors last week voted to abandon plans to stage the annual Western Weekend Celebration and parade, held for the last two years in conjunction with the Novato Horse Show. Instead it hopes some other agency will take over sponsorship of the town's opportunity for a fling.*

The Chamber last year overspent some \$2500 beyond the amount budgeted for Western Weekend. Also, since last year's Western Weekend manager H. W. (Red) Potter won't be available, the Chamber sees little hope of providing the brains and brawn to put on the parade and other festivities. Potter's salary came near to \$1250 for staging the event here last year.

Merchants have complained they received little additional trade as a result of the Western Weekend here.

Western Weekend

The few who did. the tavern keepers, refused to support the event financially, it was said at the meeting."

The Western Weekend would not be a dead duck after all. The annual celebration was put on by the Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1958.



1963 – Nave Brothers’ comic entry of cowboys and Indians held right in the middle of the parade. Nobody minded.

1958 June 13 - 15: 3rd Western Weekend, 14th Horse Show

Even though the 1958 horse show was the most successful and most colorful horse show in the 14-year history of the annual event, it was the last horse show as part of the Western Weekend. The carnival rides site was at Redwood Blvd and Diablo Ave. (where Safeway store is now). An open-air square dance was at Nave Shopping Center on Friday and the frontier dance was at the Community Clubhouse Saturday night. The Western Weekend committee would get some flack for staging a mock hanging of a San Rafael businessman for not wearing western clothes in town.

Western Weekend saw a profit of \$1085 with a total cost of the city-wide celebration of \$1,965 most of that was for the parade, which cost \$1,163.

1959 June 19 - 21 - 4th Western Weekend and 1st Rodeo

Gone this year was the square dancing, which was replaced with folk dancing. The reason for the switch was because the event organizers couldn't pay for the western callers. Also new was the quarter-midgets racing at the Patterson Ranch with 9-year-old Larry Nunes driving off with the first-place prize in the main event.

1960 June 16- 19: 5th Western Weekend and 2nd Rodeo

New this year was state champion Tuolumne Lumber Jacks at the Nave Center. Buckaroo Breakfast, booths with dunking machines, a treasure hunt contest and dart



The Novato High School Band parades down Grant Avenue in 1960 (IJ photo).

throwing at the Nave Shopping Center. For the first time the sound of bagpipes would ring out along Grant Avenue as the Berkeley Post of Canadian Legion entered its Pipe and Drum Corps.

1961 June 15 - 19 : 6th Western Weekend and 3rd Rodeo

A record crowd of 15,000 witnessed the largest parade ever held during Western Weekend. A total of 150 units took part in the parade up Grant Avenue and took more than two hours to pass the judges stand at the Talbot building. The dance held by the Community Club Saturday night netted around \$350 for the club, with 10 percent going to the Jaycees.

The carnival featured a wild animal circus at the Patterson Ranch location (where Lucky Store is now), along with an Indian village with lots of parking. The Buckaroo Breakfast moved across the street at Lee Bros. Market (Novato Gymnastic Center) and the firemen's waterball fight was at Marion School.



Fifty-nine youngsters entered the special cowboy-Indian section of the Western Weekend parade, with prizes going to the best costumed in 1961. IJ Photo

Western Weekend

1962 June 16- 19: 7th Western Weekend and 4th Rodeo

The carnival, upon which the Jaycees depend to gain most of their receipts to finance Western Weekend, did a reported booming business. More than 700 were served at the chicken barbecue located next to the carnival on the former Patterson Ranch grounds.

1963 June 12- 16: 8th Western Weekend and 5th Rodeo

Crammed with variety, this year's Western Weekend at the Patterson Ranch covered a ground area larger than ever before - starting for the first time on Wednesday. There were more than 25 booths, more rides and bigger crowds. Close to 140 entries took part in the "biggest-ever" parade Saturday on Grant Avenue. Water-filled balloons were a problem this year when Sue Westlund, a contestant for queen, was hit on the side of her head, breaking her eardrum.

1964 June 17- 21: 9th Western Weekend and 6th Rodeo

New this year was the first annual race that began at 9:30 a.m. when runners started the 6.65-mile run at the Grant Avenue firehouse. The parade saw a record 163 entries. A ballroom brawl Saturday drew a throng of 150 people into the Town Club at 1005 Grant Avenue when a fight of about 10 people drew a big crowd of onlookers. The outdoor dance had only two couples who paid admission and a float stalled the parade for 45 minutes before being towed.

1965 June 16- 20: 10th Western Weekend and 7th Rodeo

Some significant changes were planned as a result of loss of land previously used. New traffic regulations wouldn't allow parades to cross Highway 101. The carnival and main grounds were located on "Rancho Diablo," the triangularly shaped land located at the corner of South Novato Blvd. and Diablo Avenue and backed by Warner Creek. The second big change was the parade route. It started this year at First Street and Vallejo Avenue and proceeded along the west shoulder of Highway 101 to Grant Avenue. The parade went west on Grant and broke up at Virginia and Grant Avenue. Police Chief Robert diGrazia estimated some 40,000 viewed the big parade in 1965.



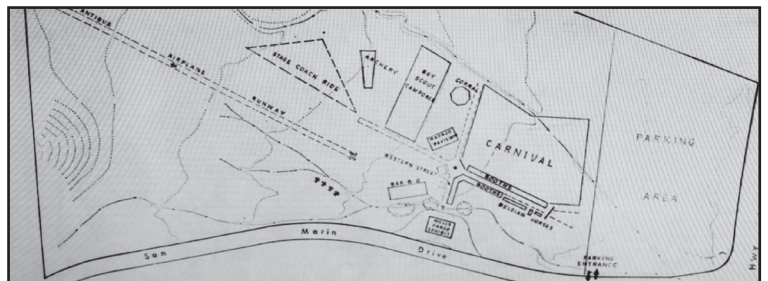
Advertising for Western Weekend.

1966 June 16- 20: 11th Western Weekend and 8th Rodeo

January 1966 - An organization meeting for Western Weekend Incorporated was held in the Community Clubhouse. The meeting, attended by 53 representatives of 18 different organizations, spent the majority of its time outlining the purposes and by-laws of the recently formed corporation. Too big -- as explained by Paul Fry of the Jaycees, the Weekend has been incorporated because "it has become too big in recent years" to be effectively headed by one organization and should be developed into a genuine "community - wide" event through the cooperation of local organizations and individuals.

John A. Trumbull, 29, a local attorney, was injured when he fell from a horse during the stunt "holdup" at the Bank of Marin to publicize the forthcoming Western Weekend. Trumbull, who had dreamed up and planned the "holdup," sustained a compound fracture of the left arm and a dislocated left wrist.

Saturday's parade featured 173 marching units according to Chief of Police Robert di Grazia. It drew an estimated crowd of 15,000 -- less than half of last year's estimated 40,000 spectators. Last year's figure was challenged by others who say the crowd was closer to 25,000.



1967 map of where most of the events were held on San Marin Drive just west of Highway 101. Sunset/San Marin had loaned the use of their area to Western Weekend Inc. which also shows the runway for the ancient airplanes.

Western Weekend

Some instances of lewd conduct occurred Saturday at DeBorba's cocktail lounge and involved members of the Bay Area's Gypsy Jokers motorcycle club. According to police, about 18 Gypsy Jokers and their women companions entered the bar in the late afternoon. They apparently caused no trouble until a group of some 75 local young men gathered in and outside the bar. The wife of one of the motorcyclists committed unnatural sex acts with four of the club members.

August 1966 - The board of directors of Western Weekend Incorporated hired Mrs. John Trumbull as executive director of the annual event. Mrs. Trumbull was paid \$1500 a year.

1967 June 18, 20- 25: 12th Western Weekend and 9th Rodeo

Though the Weekend has been an annual mainstay in Novato for many years, there was little that was traditional in the upcoming version. The Weekend was extended to a full week-long event with the rodeo going back to one day only on Father's Day. It was the start of Western Weekend. The carnival and a historical exhibit were at Redwood & San Marin Drive (where the Firemen's Fund building now stands.) There was also a Boy Scout Camporee, the Buck-a-roo Breakfast and even antique airplanes which flew into the site. It was also the first year of the "Novato Territorial Times," a souvenir program that was published.

Western Weekend's "Twilight Parade," held on Grant Avenue Saturday evening, attracted 142 marching entries and an estimated 20,000 spectators to the local scene.

A fight between some Gypsy Jokers and local teenagers on Grant Avenue during Saturday's Parade and a melee at the carnival grounds in which a group of Novato boys allegedly ganged up on a local Negro boy were the only incidents that caused trouble during Western Week.

The board of directors of Western Weekend Incorporated got the bad news. This year's celebration will end up about \$500 in the red. Last year's celebration wound up \$3075 in the black.

Talk circulated that maybe Western Weekend should be abandoned after 11 years. The value of Western Weekend, however, has been questioned ever since it has been staged.

1968 June 12 - 16: 13th Western Weekend and 10th Rodeo

1968 would return to its format of previous years after trying out several new ideas last year. After experimenting last year with holding the event on two succeeding weekends, the board decided to conduct preparations for the Weekend on a committee basis - as in past years - rather than depend on the services of an executive director to produce the event.

Attendance at all the scheduled events was decidedly down, partly because of the cutback necessary from last year's financially-troubled show and because of fears resulting from the annual visit of outside motorcycle gangs. Tropical 95-degree heat reduced the number of spectators at Saturday's mid-afternoon Western Weekend parade to a total estimated at less than 10,000 by parade officials.

November 1968, Novato had another, but very modified Western Weekend celebration, Western Weekend president John Gilmore reported. There will not be a parade next year, he said. The carnival was much smaller. The only booths were those run by local organizations which were members of Western Weekend Inc. The parade has drawn opposition because it attracted "undesirables" such as the Gypsy Jokers, was costly and meant lost business for merchants.

1969 June 12 - 15: 14th Western Weekend Country Fair and 11th Rodeo

Novatans appeared to have no trouble getting accustomed to the new face of the Western Weekend Country Fair. They turned out in droves for Western Weekend events, most of which were held at



Late 1960's parade (Photos from Marin History Museum.)



Late 1960's parade (Photos from Marin History Museum.)

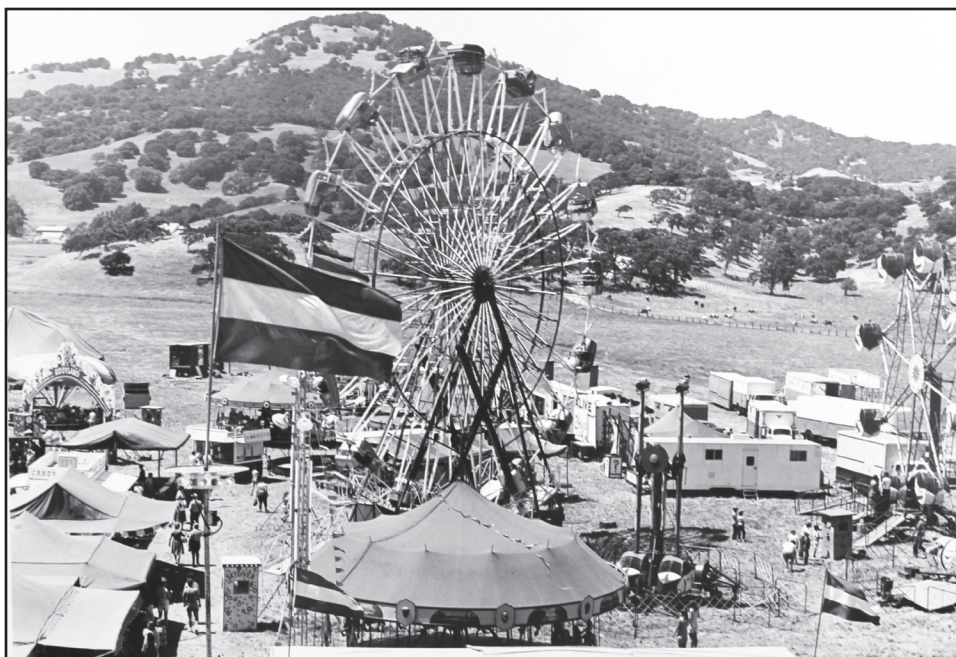
Western Weekend



1965 – Novato Junior Women’s Club float was a prize winner in the Western Weekend parade.

the east end of Rowland Boulevard on unused streets in the Scottsdale subdivision. The site turned out to be roomy and free from dust, with considerable space for parking. There was non-stop entertainment Saturday and Sunday at the pavilion erected on the site. Biggest hit appeared to be the Battle of the Bands and the Edwards Bros. Band on Sunday night.

At the organizers’ evaluation session the 1969 Western Weekend got high marks for location, entertainment, carnival and the fact the crowd was “friendly and local.” There were conflicting opinions on whether the parade should be restored next year. Also discussed was the possibility of earmarking profits for purchase of a permanent



Late 1960’s parade entry (on right), and carnival (above). Photos from Marin History Museum.

fairgrounds site that would serve Western Weekend and other functions throughout the year.

These were the gross receipts reported for the booths:
 DeMolay, \$420; Job’s Daughters, \$377; Xi Kappa Psi Chapter of Beta Sigma Phi, \$848; ‘Kiwanis Club, \$1415; Novato Hostess Club, \$630; Mariners Club, \$639; Golden Gate Mustang Club, \$411; Novato Republican Women, \$920; Novato High Buzzettes, \$940; Lions Club, \$569; Jaycees, about \$700; San Marin Lettermen, \$664; Novatans For Racial Equality, \$1046; American Legion, \$525; Dervin Mustangs, \$480.

1970 June 18, 19, 20, & 21 - 15th Western Weekend and 12th Rodeo

Most of the events took place at the fair site at the east end of Rowland Boulevard again and for the second year – no parade. Since the fair made money last year there was more entertainment this year, Barry Puppet Shows, Thompson Brothers Band, Rags the Clown and others. A ferris wheel, roller coasters and other rides were set up at the “fairgrounds.”

1971 June 17-20: 16th Western Weekend and 13th Rodeo

There was to be a parade this year after two years absence, but it was restricted to local entrants only. Unfortunately, the lack of a marching



Western Weekend



1972—Making the town safe for democracy. The Nave Parola marches along the home front in the parade.

band and only 20 entries forced the parade to be canceled. Bill Glass won the beard contest.

September 4 saw the 5th Annual Renaissance Pleasure Faire and Ha'penny Market come to Novato at Black Point. It was on the John Kenny property (the old Sartori Ranch) and had moved there from Santa Venetia. Ronald and Phyllis Patterson, originators of the fair said it would only be held at Novato one year because they were buying a ranch in Lucas Valley.

1972 May 25 - 28 : 17th Western Weekend Country Fair / June 18th - 14th Rodeo

To get high school and junior high school bands for the parade the WW Country Fair was earlier this year, tentatively scheduled for June 3. The 17th annual fair, formerly known as Western Weekend, now "Novato Country Fair," was held for the first time on Memorial Day weekend and wasn't held in conjunction with the Novato Horsemen's Rodeo for the first time.

1973 June 14 - 17: 18th Western Weekend Country Fair and 15th Rodeo

The Western Weekend Country Fair did pretty well financially, despite high winds that swept several booths into the midway. It was held on the east side of Grant Avenue, where the third Annual Old Town Festival and Art Show was held. It ran in conjunction with the Western Weekend Country Fair. The parade was on the west side of Grant Avenue. There were no waterball fights this year.

1974 June 1 - 16: 19th Western Weekend Country Fair and 16th Rodeo

Some 40,000 to 50,000 persons turned out for one or more of the events at the Country Fair.

1975 May 29 - 31 and June 1: 20th Pioneer Days / June 15, 17th Rodeo

Name changed this year to "Pioneer Days." The date changed again to Memorial Day with the Rodeo still on

Father's Day and the event was moved to the 64-acre site at San Marin Drive and Redwood Boulevard. The former site at Rowland Boulevard was lost when the Rowland Boulevard – Highway 101 interchange was constructed. Buckaroo Breakfast was held at Longs parking lot and the parade was held on Sunday. In the parade for the first time was the Nave Patrola which was formed in 1970 for the Point Reyes Western Weekend parade.

1976 June 3 - 6: 21th Pioneer Days / June 20, 18th Rodeo

The big change this year was the location of the parade - on Redwood Highway instead of Grant Avenue.

1977 May 27- 30: 22nd Pioneer Days / June 18, 19th Rodeo Canceled

High point of the festivities was the parade Sunday afternoon which was back on Grant Avenue. The carnival rides, food and game booths were in full swing Friday through Monday. The carnival grounds were on the east side of Redwood Highway opposite the Rowland Boulevard overpass. The dates were changed hoping for milder weather. Buckaroo Breakfast was at the Ross store. All of the board members for 1977 quit and a new board started with \$9000 for 1978. One Western Weekend official said "Unless the citizens and merchants get behind it, I think it has outlived its purpose."

1978 September 15 - 17: 23rd WW Celebration 20th Rodeo

February 1978 - a new board was confirmed. Members favored holding the 1978 celebration on June 16-18 – the same weekend as the Novato Horsemen's Rodeo. Western Weekend had a new look this year and many Novatans weren't happy about it. Events were dispersed all over town – at three shopping centers and other locations. That made it harder to create a cohesive community celebration. The celebration was in September and the parade and rodeo were at the same time on Sunday. But the big disappointment was Sunday's parade, which had only 47 entries and lasted only 17 minutes. The Buckaroo Breakfast was held on the paved area next to Longs Drugs and had a good turnout - about 900 people.

1979 June 2: 24th Buckaroo Breakfast / June 3: 21st Rodeo

The Buckaroo Breakfast, an annual feature of Western Weekend, was held this year even though the Western Weekend celebration



1975 Western Weekend Pioneer Days parade with baton twirlers and marching bands.

Western Weekend

SCHEDULE of EVENTS	
FRIDAY, MAY 30	
4:00 P.M.	FAIR OPENS with Arts & Crafts Show, Kiddie Carnival, Game and Food Booths, Pony Rides.
6:00-8:00	NOVATO BALLROOM STAGE SHOWS featuring Lisa Ferraro, Belly Dancing and Street Dancing (Swing and Disco).
6:00-8:00	CHAMBER OF COMMERCE RIB BAR & QUE DINNER
8:00	Square Dance
SATURDAY, MAY 31	
7:00-11:00 A.M.	BUCKAROO BREAKFAST featuring pancakes, eggs, and ham.
8:30 A.M.	FAIR OPENS with Arts & Crafts, Kiddie Carnival, Game and Food Booths, Pony Rides.
11:30-12:30	Family Circus
1:00 P.M.	Britt's Bandits - old fashioned "Shoot Out"
2:30	Britt's Bandits
3:30-4:30	Family Circus
4:30	Novato Ballroom Stage Show featuring the Barblays with Ballroom, Belly Dancers, Tabilian Dancers and general Street Dancing (Swing and Disco)
6:00-8:30	CHAMBER OF COMMERCE RIB BAR & QUE
8:30 P.M.	"CURSE YOU JACK DALTON" melodrama by Novato Community Players FREE (Novato Community House)
SUNDAY, JUNE 1	
9:30 A.M.	Fair Opens
2:30 P.M.	BARBERSHOP HARMONY CHORUS (SPESBOSA)
3:30	WIND CHILDREN
4:30	NOVATO BALLROOM STAGE SHOWS featuring Missy Kuhns, Floyd and Marjorie Pinkston, the Barblays, Tabilian Dancing and general Street Dancing, Swing and Disco.

had been cancelled. The breakfast was held on the mall between Ross Department Store and Northern California Saving.

1980 May 30, 31 and June 1 : 25th Novato County Fair / No More Rodeos

Highlights of the Novato Country Fair at Novato Shopping Center were a barbecue-rib dinner by the Chamber of Commerce and the traditional Buckaroo Breakfast.

1986 June 4 - 8: 31st Novato Country Fair
Novato County Fair opened at the corner of Redwood Blvd. and Olive Avenue. The five-day fair featured Sam Johnston's Carnival-Midway of fun, pony rides and a variety of free entertainment. Admission was free. The 7-Uppers Lions Club would do a breakfast Saturday and Sunday. The Chamber would also drop the barbecue dinners from the fair.

1987 May 27 - 31: 32nd Novato Country Fair
The only thing left of the Novato's Annual Country Fair was Sam Johnston's Carnival and Ito's White Tigers doing a Kung Fu demonstration. The fair was located on the corner of Redwood Boulevard and Olive Avenue. This was the last year of the Country Fair and it may have not been produced by Western Weekend Inc. There was no mention on them in press releases..Western Weekend Inc., which was incorporated on October 6, 1965, was dissolved on November 27, 1991.

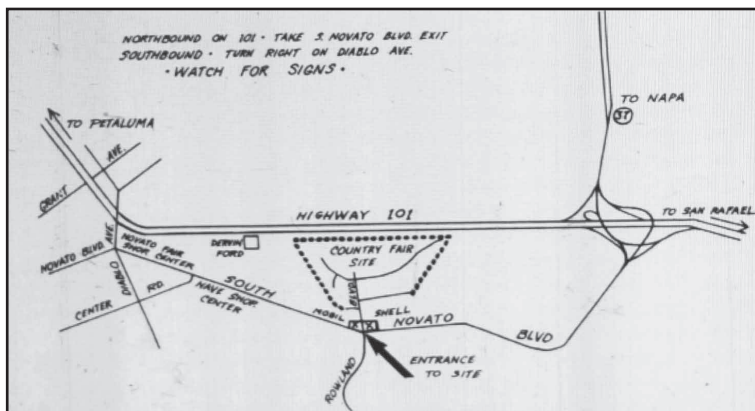
1981 May 29 - 31: 26th Novato Country Fair
The old-fashioned country fair got underway Friday at 5 p.m. with Johnston's Amusements setting up its midway at Diablo and South Novato Blvd. The Buckaroo Breakfast was at Oshman's parking lot. In October, the Western Weekend would sponsor a haunted house at the former Octopus Restaurant.

1982 June 3 - 6: 27th Novato Country Fair
The Novato Country Fair, sponsored by Western Weekend Inc., was at the corner of Novato Boulevard and Diablo. Saturday evening the Novato Chamber of Commerce had its steak barbecue in Oshman's parking lot.

1983 June 1 - 5: 28th Novato Country Fair
The Novato Country Fair reported that this was the 30th year for Western Weekend Inc. and was held again at the corner of Novato Boulevard and Diablo Avenue. Plans for the 1st annual Art and Wine Festival, sponsored by the Novato Chamber of Commerce would start on June 25 and 26.

1984 May 30, June 1 - 4: 29th Novato Country Fair
This year would also be called the 30th annual Novato Country Fair at South Novato Boulevard and Diablo Avenue.

1985 May 29 - 31, June 1 - 2: 30th Novato Country Fair
New site for fair this year -The fair sponsored by Novato Western Weekend Inc., was held at the corner of Redwood Blvd. and Olive Avenue, beside the Young Brothers furniture store (where Starbucks and Trader Joe's are located now), which donated the use of the lot. The former location at Novato Blvd. and Diablo Ave. was being developed into a condominium project.



Map site of the 1969 Novato County Fair.



1984 shows the Novato Country Fair at South Novato Boulevard and Diablo Avenue. The last year at this site.