

The Novato Historian

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Preserving Novato's History Feature Section

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The Novato Historian

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Old Houses of Novato

By Michael Read

This is a newspaper feature that was in the *Daily Independent Journal* July 26, 1952 by Elizabeth Sonn.

Legends And Facts Prove Novato Crossroads In Early Marin History.

... **"The White Men Who** came to live in Novato at the time of the "tame" Indians were Don Fernando de la Trinidad Feliz, Juan (John) Martin, Ygnacio Pacheco's sons, and James Black who has been mentioned before in connection with the Indian Chief, Camilio Ynitia.

It is likely that they were all familiar with the San Pablo Bay shore and the country west of it, before they came. They might have lived on the land granted them before they received official title. This was done so often as to be a custom.

We know that Pacheco had been sent by Governor Echeandia to locate the site for a fort in Marin County, in 1829. The fort was never built.

Little is written concerning Felix. On a list of residents of California, San Francisco Presido pueblo of 1800, his name appears as "Felix, Don Fernando de la T., a child." The title indicating that he was of the "gente de razon", of pure Spanish blood.

In 1835 he is listed as a rigidore or councilman of the pueblo of Santa Clara. In 1839, he received the Novato grant, and a Grant to Rancho Sanel, 32 thousand acres in the Hopland area of Mendocino County. In 1839 he was said to have been a man of forty-one years.

His life in Novato went unrecorded except for two streets named for him, "Feliz" and "Fernando." Local legend has him a great gambler, who would sit all night in a saloon on the Novato creek dock, gambling his wealth away. No one has said what he looked like, whom he married, whether he had children. But it may be assumed that he lived as the other Spanish Californians of his day.

THE FAMILIES AT THE ranchos rose at the dawn, sometimes as early as three, or four in the morning. The whole house-



The first frame houses in Novato built by the Pacheco family on the corner of Rancho San Jose. No exact date is given for the houses. The larger house, in the background was probably the residence or living and sleeping quarters in Spanish times and the smaller house used for cooking, preserving, as it was early California custom for the Indians to cook over an open fire in the yard or in a separate building and carry the food to the main house. The older residents say that the buildings were there long before 1856.

hold and the Indian servants and vaqueros joined in saying the "alba" or prayer of the dawn; after which the men breakfasted on tortillas and chocolate. Then the patron, or head of the house, rode out with his sons and vaqueros for the work of the day.

Of the matanza or slaughter, Bancroft wrote "...when a ranchero wanted to slaughter his cattle, he sent six men on horseback to ride at full speed over the fields armed with knives. Passing near an animal, one gave it a blow with a knife in the nape of the neck and it fell dead. These nuquedores, as they were called were followed by peladores, skinners, who took off the hides. Next came the tasajeros, butchers, who cut up the meat into stripes for drying. The funeral procession was closed by a swarm of Indian women, who gathered the tallow and lard in bags made of hides by sewing up one end. A field after a slaughter looked like Waterloo after the old guard."

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The last fragment of the first house in Novato, the adobe of Don Fernando Feliz, 1838. The adobe had an eight-foot adobe fireplace in one wall, was partitioned into two rooms and had a wooden floor and roof. In 1850 a frame wing was added by Bezer Simmons. The wing was moved and added to the mansion built by Sweetser and Delong about 1870 as a kitchen wing. The adobe was used as an outbuilding until the 1930's when it was gutted by fire. The old bell in the foreground was used to call the farm hands to dinner. The children in the picture are Judy and Billy Glass of Novato.

The tallow and lard and hides from Novato Rancho would have been shipped on barges out Novato Creek to San Francisco, then called Yerba Buena.

A PART OF THE life of the rancho would be the bear hunts in Bear Valley and the lassoing of the great elk on Mare Island, and the ceaseless round of weddings and fiestas. His three neighbors, whose land touched on his were practical men – each left a record of building.

Ygnacio Pacheco, who received the grant of Rancho San Jose, built a fine adobe there, luxurious for its day. (This was near the present Galli's restaurant.) Salvador and Ramon, his sons lived in Novato on the corner of the San Jose grant bounded by Novato Creek and Arroyo Avichi. That is where Old Town Novato grew up, on the horse trail that skirted the salt march, and convenient to the Novato Creek boat landing. One or the other of the Pachecos is credited with building the oldest houses still in use in Novato.



Back view of the Clark house in Novato built by the Pachecos shows its architectural grace and kinship to New England.

THE BUILDING SAID to be by far the oldest is the small dark red shed that stands on South Novato Blvd at the foot of the Baccaglio vineyard. The oldest house is said to be the one in which Peter Nave brought up his family. This house is farther north on South Novato Blvd and is on the site of the supermarket and playground planned by Peter Nave. This might have been the house in which the Californians were said to have been having their supper when chased by Fremont's motley army.

The third Pacheco building is the one known to present Novato residents as "that old house" in Marin Village. To old residents as the "Val Clark place," as the Clark family, relatives of the Pachecos lived in it for years. Harrison Hose, Clark's son-in-law bought the house, sold it to the Marin Fur Farm, who sold it to E.N. Kettenhofen.

But the really interesting fact about this house is that Henry Jones, Novato's first postmaster started postal service there in 1856. Jones was murdered in 1870, choked and drowned in the water trough. The murderer is unknown.

THE FOURTH OLD HOUSE, and third built by the Pachecos, is the old Connell

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house, where Mrs. Richard Connell III lives with her two daughters, Miss Edith Connell and Miss Olivia Connell. The fourth Richard Connell lives in a very modern house built on the front of the property. The first Richard was an Irishman sent out to San Francisco by Connell III lives with her two daughters, Miss Edith Connell and Miss Olivia Connell. The fourth Richard Connell lives in a very modern house built on the front of the property. The first Richard was an Irishman sent out to San Francisco by a Boston newspaper. But the Connell story like the story of the Cabbage Patch and the Sweetser and DeLong holdings belongs to a later period.

Feliz's other neighbors were James Black who spent many years at Olompali, and finally owned the grant as well as the land bounded by the present highway and Petaluma River and Novato Creek, known as Black's Point in 1880. This was marshland during Black's lifetime, with ridges and hills rising out of the salt marsh on which the Americans were to settle.

History places Black and Juan Martin at lunch with Father Amador who stayed on at San Rafael Mission after its desertion by the neophytes. On this occasion in 1837, Juan Martin is said to have offered the four thousand acres of Rancho Corte Madera de Novato to Jacob Speare for fifteen hundred dollars.

MARTIN, WHOSE GRANT took in the groves of laurel and oak and the redwood forests in the canyons back of the main valley of Novato was a Scotch sailor. He deserted from the whaler "Orion" in 1822, was baptized in the Catholic faith at San Juan Bautiste in 1824 and became a citizen of the Mexican Republic in 1834.

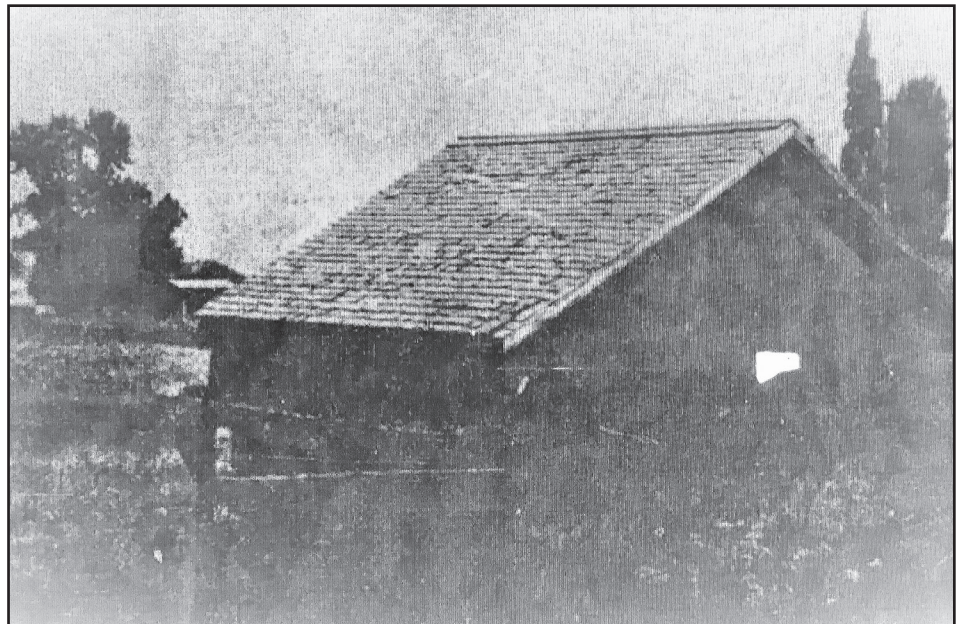
It is known that he was a ship's carpenter, and that his services were sought from Monterey to Fort Ross. He became known to Californians as "The Scotch Carpenter," his name forgotten.

It is pleasant to think of the shed and the old houses as the work of "The Scotch Carpenter," – the Connell house does suggest the sea, but the Clark and Nave houses look like a New England man's dream of home.

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The Connell house facing east on South Novato Blvd. in Old Town Novato. This house was built before 1860 by the Pachecos and sold to the first Richard Connell before completion. Connell was an Irishman sent out to San Francisco by a Boston newspaper as a correspondent. He married an Irish girl, Mary Kelleher. The small band of Indians of the Novato tribe, still living after 75 years of Spanish occupation, lived in the laurel grove on the Arroyo Avichi in back of the house.



This sturdy shed on the Baccaglio property has the honor of being the first frame building in Novato. It was a blacksmith shop on the horse trail between Petaluma and San Rafael, probably about 1846. In those days west Marin traded in Novato following the water courses, game and Indian trails, down to the Novato Creek dock, from which they shipped tallow and hides to San Francisco.

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Historic Landmark Destroyed By Fire Wednesday Night - June 23, 1944 *Novato Advance*.

One of Marin's oldest landmark's, the original home-site of the Sweetser-DeLong holding, when they owned some 18,000 acres in this valley, was destroyed last Wednesday night when fire raced through the building before firemen could attempt to control the flames.

The building was on the R. H. Trumbull ranch and was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Lee Wilkinson and their three children. The Wilkinsons were awakened by the screams of their children, the youngest only six weeks old, all were carried to safety along with a few personal belongings.

Fire originated about 11:45 from an undetermined cause.

THE LATE ROBERT TRUMBULL was county supervisor from the fifth district when he died in July 1952. His public-spirited services to Novato, Marin and the Bay Area have left an indelible imprint. He was a member of the original Golden Gate Bridge district board of directors, appointed in 1928, and helped guide the realization of the bridge dream. He is shown by a fragment of the old Fernando Feliz adobe built prior to 1839, which stood next to the Trumbull mansion.



Robert Trumbull



Historic Landmark Destroyed By Fire—*Sausalito News* May 27, 1916

One of the historic landmarks that has connected Marin's past with the present was blotted from existence (May 23, 1916) when the old adobe Pacheco hacienda built by the Indians nearly 100 years ago at what is now Ignacio station, burned to the ground.

Every one of the Pacheco brothers, the eldest of whom la Ramon, aged 77 years, was born beneath the historic adobe roof. Ignacio Pacheco, for whom the town of Ignacio was

named, made his home there. For many years it had been occupied by the Valencia family, and the property upon which it stood now belongs to Julia Thayer (nee Valencia).

In the high wind of last Thursday, the chimney was blown over and sparks communicated to the woodwork which had been built over the adobe. Val D. Clark with his family was a tenant. But little of the contents of the house was saved. An effort was made by Clark to rescue an old trunk which contained many ancient papers and letters, the records of the family in early days. Through a mistake he seized the wrong trunk and the paper were burned.