

The Novato Historian

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Preserving Novato's History Feature Section

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Novato History in 1955 - Part 3

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This is a newspaper feature that was in the *Petaluma Argus-Courier* on August 18, 1955 by Mary Ellen Lester.

(Continued from last Historian)

Another person who can tell the ins and outs of nearly everybody in town is Miss Kitty Chaplin, present manager of the Los Gatos Telephone Company. Kitty remembers the days when Novato was served by one switchboard, and four phones, in a building at the corner of Machin and Sweetser Avenue. "I used to take messages for everybody – knew when the lady of the house went to town to shop, heard all the troubles and joys of each family, because we were all one big family then," reminisces Miss Chaplin.

TELEPHONE SERVICE

Telephone service was begun with the Novato Utilities Company, in 1912, owned by A.J. Cain and his brother, who later sold out to Cain. Cain and his wife, still Novato residents, sold out in 1951, though retaining a directorship in the present company.

In July, this community for the first time experienced dial telephone service, as the switchover was made from manually operated boards. An \$85,000 building has just been completed at Diablo and George Avenues to house the new equipment and the greatly expanded force. The new telephone exchange for Novato is called Twinbrook. A history of Novato wouldn't be complete if there was no mention of the town's oldest businessman, spry C.E. Carlile. The 78-year-old merchant runs a flourishing hardware business in one of the town's oldest Grant Avenue stores, built in 1911. He came to Novato in 1895, when he was 18, and served until 1909 as the station agent for Northwestern Pacific Railroad, the town's only carrier in those days.

SUNDAY VISITORS

"Half of San Francisco used to come up to visit on Sundays," he reminisces. "That's when the train was crowded. But on weekdays we shipped milk – 1,200 gallons in the morning and another 800 gallons at night. And poultry and eggs, too. Why, we were second to Petaluma then, in the poultry business, and almost all the small ranches around



Seen in the picture with Miss Chaplin (holding toaster) are Golden Ryan, former telephone operator, Mrs. Evelyn Clark, of the plant department, and Ross Wright. Miss Chaplin started to work for the phone company in 1925 and retired in 1955.

town sold eggs and chickens. And of course, we did have a few commuters even then. Some of the passengers were high school students and private school pupils, going to San Rafael or Petaluma."

Carlile opened his hardware store as a side line, handling the Wells Fargo Express when he left the RR station employ. Ten years later he gave it back to the NWP office, and devoted his attention to the store which he has owned and managed ever since, in the same location. "I remember when there was only my store, the E.R. Samuels merchandise store across the street (now used as a second-hand store owned by the 'Fix – It' man, Ernest Vogel), and Scott's Store down the street, Silva's grocery and saloon across from that; and three or four other saloons, and the Porcella blacksmith shop. Porcella died last year after more than 60 years in business. He ran the 'Fashion Shop,' as we called it, until recently."

"Grant Street was laid out in the 80's, before I came here, and while it was graveled, it was still muddy and dusty until macadam was put down about 1912. I remember Sweetser – he was a supervisor then – put in the street we have now. He had bulldoz-

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Seen here in 1959—Charles Edgar (Ed) Carlile owner of the Old Fashioned Hardware Store died in 1961, at he age of 84. Carlile moved to Novato in 1895 on a “temporary” two-week duty as station agent for the Railroad. He remained there the rest of his life.

ers level off a hill in front of my place, and that made my sidewalks raised above the level of some of the others.”

“ERRAND BOY”

As well known as Carlile is, he is not as familiar a sight to newcomers and old timers alike as Bruno Schultz, Novato’s “volunteer errand boy” of past 80. He been voted the “good neighbor of Novato” because of his interest in the town and everybody in it, and his willingness to run errands, deliver parcels and messages, and fill in any listener with historical facts about the Novato he knew when he came here in 1897. He’s a little hard to understand, because of his German accent - but Bruno is as much a part of downtown Novato as the streets themselves. He knows everybody, and everybody knows him, and watches for his cheery greeting and the tap of his cane as he make his rounds.

One might ask, “Who runs Novato?” The answer, at present, must be “Nobody here.” But that’s not because nobody is interested.

CIVIC BODIES

Two semi-official civic bodies, the North Marin Civic Council, headed by Leo Mindling, and the North Marin Planning Committee, headed by Darrell Kent, acted as “sometime” clearing houses for discussion on problems

which beset the section. The Citizen’s School Committee, Glen Graham, chairman, is another body of citizens interested in community betterment. But none of them can speak for the community as a whole, rather, for a relatively small group of citizens who are interested in various phases of Novato development which happen to affect them in some way or other.

Perhaps the largest of the social organizations in town is the PTA. Three sections existent today are an outgrowth of one unit started in 1924. Some of the hardest working, most community – minded people in town assist on regular PTA functions.

COMMUNITY CLUB

Most of these belong to the Novato Community Club, an organization formed early this year from the merger of the Novato Improvement Club and Novato Community Incorporated. The NCC, headed by Hugh Turner, has its headquarters in the Community Clubhouse, rambling, brown-shingled building at the corner of Machin and DeLong Avenue. The historic structure was built in the 1890’s (1922) through the efforts of Presbyterian Church members, and later deeded to the community. It has had over the years a succession of managers, a host of tenants, and is now in the position of being the patriarch in need of support. The approxi-



Bruno Schultz, shown in this picture, died in 1956 when he walked across Highway 101 against a red light. His dark clothing rendered him nearly invisible in the rain.

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mately 300 NCC members spend time in devising means of raising funds to keep the weather-beaten meeting house in repair, so that it can be used by those Novato organizations which have not yet secured their own meeting quarters.

Novato's social structure is divided into many different clubs. Of these the oldest, perhaps, is the Druids, and Sylvan Circle. The Portuguese societies, SPRSI, IDESI and UPPEC, as well as others connected with the social life of the Portuguese ranchers and dairymen and their families, hold regular meetings at two halls-built side by side on Sweetser Avenue, a block off the Highway. Here, it is that the colorful annual Portuguese celebration of the Holy Ghost, is held. This Pentecostal observance is customarily attended by people of this nationality from all over the Bay Area.

SOCIAL CLUBS

Newer social clubs include the Lions and Lionettes, the Rotarians, Square Dance and Folk Dance organizations; several social and study groups from various churches; the DAV and its Auxiliary; the VFW and its Auxiliary; Amateur Photographers; Novato Guild to Sunny Hills; the Nova Marin (Grandmother's Club); Needleworks Guild; Toastmasters; 20-30 Club; Tamalpais Radio Club; Hamilton Masonic Lodge and Entre Nous Club, in addition to others mentioned in preceding pages, and a host of other smaller, neighborhood clubs.

Youth groups include the Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts and Brownies; the four unit 4-H Club, largest in the county; Blue Birds, Camp Fire Girls, CYO, Junior Horsemen, and various dance groups.

NOVATO HORSEMEN

One of the largest and most active Novato social groups is the Novato Horsemen, Inc. This group, headed presently by Frank Scott, sponsors the annual Horse Show and parade, a summertime event which draws more people to town than any other affair of the year.

This proves, in a way, how sports-minded the community is. There are several small riding clubs, made up mostly of people who have their own horses and love to roam the quiet hills and trails. And some day, over the huge Freitas Ranch in West Novato, golfing fans will clamber over hillocks made into a \$125,000, 18-hole course, managed by the newly formed Indian Valley Country Club. More than 500 members have been secured.

NOVATO CHURCHES

Faith in the future of Novato as the center of the rapidly expanding North Marin area is evidenced in plans announced by virtually every church in the community. Construction will begin soon on the town's newest church, Methodist. This is on very nearly the same ground as the original Catholic Church was built in 1890. This later burned down, and the present Catholic Church, Our Lady of Loretto, was built on Grant Avenue in 1937.

PRESBYTERIANS

Presbyterians met in Novato as early as 1895, in the homes of various church men, and in the old Scott Hall on Grant and Sherman Avenues. The present building at Sherman and DeLong Avenues was built in 1896. In 1950 the adjoining Trevitt Hall was built as an educational and social meeting place.

Novato Baptists have approved plans for a \$200,000 church and pastorate to be located on 2 ½ acres on the north side of Olive Avenue between Second and Third Streets.

EXPANSION PLANNED

The Novato Episcopal Church, St. Francis of Assisi, organized in 1948, has found



Assembled on the site of the proposed Methodist church on September 11, 1955 were about 150 Methodists. They met on the tree-bordered property at Yukon Way and Novato Blvd.

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that the Bishop Block parish hall, completed in December 1953, is too small, and expansion will be necessary before long.

Construction of Grace Lutheran Church on Grant Avenue at Virginia Avenue will begin this year. Meanwhile this growing congregation worships for the Novato group of the Christian Science Society. Two younger church groups are the Church of Christ, with 807 Grant Avenue as its meeting hall, and the Assembly of God, which gathers at the VFW Hall on Machin Street.

Glowing, and growing, as has been Novato's past, it can hardly be compared with what is its future. Marin County Planning Commission authorities believe the land will hold an ultimate population of 92,000.

To accommodate the children, 29 elementary and three high schools will be needed. Provisions for localized shopping centers must be made, streets and highway planned to carry the estimated traffic load of ten times present day usage.

FUTURE GROWTH

Any plans for industrial development must depend upon an adequate drainage and flood control program, say planners. A sudden air attack; the dropping of an A-Bomb in the San Francisco area, would result in North Marin becoming the refugee center from those fleeing destruction. Civilian defense protection is in the hands of a committee working with the schools to have plans for evacuation ready in case of such a disaster.

But most Novato people don't worry about that. They're too busy raising families, commuting to work, landscaping the yards of their new homes, and changing their habits from urban to rural. When that's done to satisfaction, maybe they'll take up the heavier matters of tending to city government, IF and when Novato becomes a city. But those are the things the "city fathers" must manage, and right now these men are busy growing up themselves.

The old leaders are nearly gone, and a new generation is pulling itself up by the bootstraps.



August 1955 - Novato auto dealer John Garatti would receive two pieces of luggage as a reward for selling 200 per cent of his quota of Willys jeeps and station wagons during June. Making the award is Bill Briggs, regional representative for Kaiser-Willys



Poor Santa Claus is barely visible in this photo of the annual Novato Firemen's Association kids Christmas Party, held at the local fire house. The youngsters had just rushed across Highway 101 (well protected and by firemen and the CHP) from a free movie and party sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars at the Novato Theater.