

# 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

Contents ©2019 Novato Historical Guild, Inc.



October – December 2019

The Novato Historian

Volume 43 Number 4

## Bill Nave Has Led Busy Life



“And he became a citizen (1904) in nothing flat,” Nave says today, still with a hint of the Italian accent acquired from his family.

The eight-room house where Nave was born in 1901 went up in 1838. Nave remembers fishing for trout and swimming “in the days of no swimming suits” near what now is the Nave Shopping Center. With two brothers and two sisters he worked the orchards and gardens, milked the cows and dug potatoes.

Novato then had a couple of Blacksmith shops, a livery stable, a saloon and general store where “they’d sell everything from liquor to harnesses,” Nave remembers.

HE SPOKE Italian until he entered school. His formal schooling was short—there was business to be done. There were night courses later, but “I got most of my education through affiliation with some of the finest businesspeople in the county.”

*Daily Independent Journal*  
August 26, 1961 – By Ellen Bry

He grew up fast, owning and selling businesses, borrowing to build others, while still in his teens. The family home in which he was born was razed to make way for his Nave Shopping Center in Novato. Today he talks of building a shopping center in Half Moon Bay, a medical-professional building in Novato. He has just finished construction of the \$1,500,000 Nave bowling lanes near Hamilton Air Force Base.

But he calls the young years, up to 18, the “crowded years” when people called him the “boy wonder.”

HIS FATHER, Peter Nave, came from Genoa, Italy, (arrived in New York on June 18, 1888 from the ship La Bourgone which departed from LeHavre, France and was headed for California) to San Anselmo. He worked a vegetable garden where Sir Francis Drake High School now stands.

He later purchased land in Novato, (1899) at first 10 acres and later upping it to 70 acres in what now is the Nave Gardens subdivision.



Peter Nave at the wheel of his 1911 Buick with his three sons. William is at the left; Fred is standing and Louis seated next to his father.

## Bill Nave Has Led Busy Life



**Cabbage Patch owned by Peter Nave was an Old Town landmark. Early Marin residents bought cabbage and vegetables from Nave. This group picture in 1908 shows William Nave as the boy in overalls at the right. His mother, Mary, is kneeling by the scooter. Novato Town Constable Louis DeVoto is the bearded man, left. The windmill in the background pumped 20,000 gallons of water an hour to irrigate the farm which had 25,000 tomato plants a year and some 10 acres in cabbage.**

By the time Nave was 13 two men were working for him, buying and selling livestock and farming equipment. When he was 15 he started his jitney business, meeting the trains with a model T and a Dodge (the first cab service in the county).

The jitneys served the “little businesspeople and retired people” who made up Novato. You could get a ride for 10 cents to a quarter. “They’d get on by the dozen just to ride in a car,” Nave says, leaning back in the modern chair in the modern office of the Nave Lanes.

Money to buy cars? Nave had trapped foxes, chopped wood, did odd jobs. Cars cost \$400 to \$600. He later opened the first garage in Novato, once operated a butcher shop (a small Country slaughterhouse, located near the Druids Hall) and a country store.

“I borrowed \$10,000 off a bank here when I was 19. They knew me.” One morning in 1916 he was putting along in his car when he saw two girls walking to the railroad station to catch the train for San Rafael to attend high school. He offered them a ride and met Irene Lartigue. They were married in 1921.

Irene and her sister commuted by train to San Rafael High School. Her family had lived in San Rafael where her parents operated the French Laundry at 806 Fourth St. (started in 1903) until the early 1900’s when they moved to the ranch Mr. Lartigue had purchased in Black Point.

The 1920 census shows – Pasquale Pietronave (54); Marion (Mary J.) (45) immigrated 1892; Louis (27) Machinist; Kate (26); Molly (25) Nurse; Fred (21) Truck Farmer; William (18) Milker – Dairy Farm – All living in the house on State Highway. *Note the 1910 and 1930 census had the last name as Nave.*

She later was to become a cook on the ranches which Nave owned

and operated, where “she never seen a cow before.” She’s been bookkeeper, accountant, consultant for the business enterprises through the years.

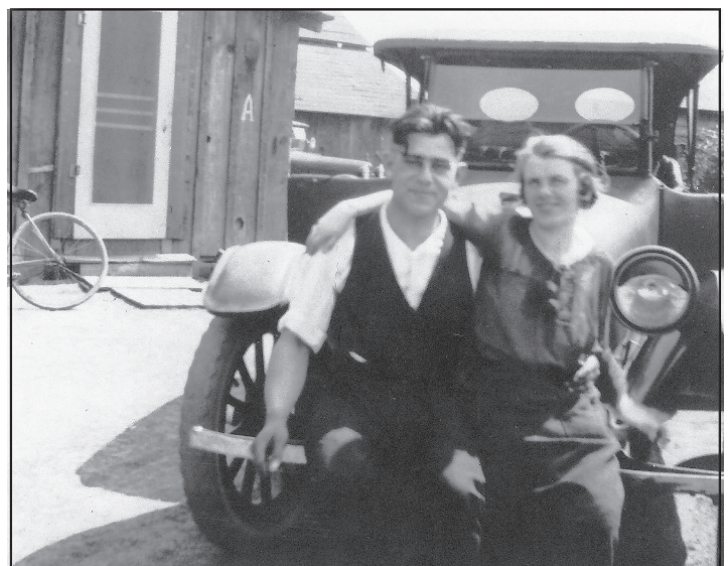
Nave learned to ride from Spanish ranchers and herders south of Novato. “Those were real cowboys. They’d put me on a horse, and I’d hold on like a snail.”

Where the Marin Golf Club now stands with its smooth green tees, cattle once munched on wild grass. In 1919, Nave bought the Loma Verde and Bodkin ranches, at one time owning 2,100 acres of the land and running up to 800 head of cattle.

The First World War came along and Nave was marching down San Rafael streets in a parade on the way to the induction center when the armistice was announced.

Nave continued in the cattle business, opening an insurance agency in 1928 and the Redwood Music Co., jukebox concessionaire in 1934. He moved to San Rafael in (October) 1929. And in 1930 the cattle business almost killed him.

NAVE FELL through a barn floor while on a cattle buying expedition, fracturing his spine and hip, temporarily paralyzing his lower body. He was in a cast for 18 months. “I suffered the tortures of hell,” he says today, shaking his head at the memory.



**Bill and Irene Nave at the Nave Ranch 1919-1920**



## Bill Nave Has Led Busy Life



This is the famous Peter Nave Cabbage Patch store – in the background is the Nave house.

The *Novato Advance* reported: "November 1931 – Last week Wm. F. Nave met with a serious accident, the result of which remains undetermined. With Harry Hale he was rounding up a number of head of cattle in the southern part of the county. One broke away, and Mr. Nave ran through a barn to head it off. In doing so he stepped on some hay that covered a hole in the floor and he fell. He was taken to Cottage Hospital, where an X-ray revealed a broken vertebra and a cracked pelvis. Mr. Nave was moved Monday to the University Hospital, San Francisco, to be under the care of a specialist. Latest reports from the hospital say that Mr. Nave is stricken with pneumonia, which makes his case more serious. L.J. Nave went to San Francisco to see his brother and is discouraged because of his condition."

When he fell through the barn loft and broke his back, he had to lie on a wooden slab for two years. Mrs. Irene Nave sold insurance to keep the family going.

The injury, children beginning to arrive, the depression, allcombined to get him out of the cattle business. Billy Nave was born in 1924; Bobby in 1926; Richard (Rich) in 1930.

In the early 30's (1933 and 1934) Nave was appointed loan commissioner for the Federal Land Bank, approving more than a million and a half dollars' worth of loans to depression-hit ranchers and poultrymen.

In 1935 he was appointed a deputy county assessor, planning to stay at the post only a short time. He quit in 1949.

The *Novato Advance* would report; December 1938 "William Nave, Chief Clerk in the Assessor's office, was critically injured shortly after midnight Monday, when his car overturned on the Greenbrae cut off and the Redwood highway. Mr. Nave received a broken lower jaw and left ribs. His right ear and right hand were badly mangled. J.C. Oglesby and Frank Holbrook noticed the overturned car, and on investigation found Mr. Nave in a terrible condition. The unfortunate man was hurried to Cottage Hospital. He was returning home from a visit at Tiburon, and three reasons for the smashup are surmised – he either fell asleep at the

wheel, was overcome by fumes or was struck by a passing car."

The time in the county courthouse was time to do some thinking, "making little notes in little books." He kept looking and noting that bowling alleys never were found in the bankruptcy columns. "It was changing from a cigar-smoking type to a family spot."

Financing for bowling lanes was not easy to get. It was the same problem he'd had with the Nave Shopping Center in Novato: "They thought the pony express still ran through Novato. You're out of your mind, they say."

THE BOWLING lanes and the shopping center are reality now. Nave owns them "with the bank and the boys." This is a family business – "banks want you to get involved, sell stock."

There are 14 grandchildren now, "just in case the automatic pin setters go out," Rich Nave explains. "I've lived a varied life," Nave says. "There's more years crammed into my life – if I was to die tomorrow, I'd be 120."

### Added by Mike Read

The eldest of Nave's sons, Bill Jr., served in the Navel Air Corps as a tail gunner in a torpedo bomber. Bill Jr. and Rich hold secondary teachers' credentials and are college graduates. They were assistant coaches at San Rafael High School under Paul Miller. Rich served in the Marine Corps and Bob saw service as a paratrooper with the famous 11th Airborne Division. All three sons live in San Rafael. William Sr.'s brothers, Fred Nave would die in 1957 at the age of 59, Louis in 1979 at the age of 87. Peter ihs father would die in 1958 at the age of 94.



The IJ would report in 1952 that this house was the oldest house in Novato and that "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." Peter Nave would make the front of the house a saloon, he would add a dance floor to the side, upstairs was the living quarters and the kitchen was in a separate building.



# Bill Nave Has Led Busy Life

## Death – William Nave Sr.

S.F. Examiner – May 11, 1986, Novato – William “Poppa” Nave lived to the age of 86 here and grazed cattle and sheep on the rolling hills now occupied by homes and schools and businesses.

His grazing land, while he was still in his teens, occupied much of the land of Indian Valley where a college stands today, and in Pacheco Valley and Ignacio.

The old family home used to stand where people today crowd the Nave Shopping Center and post office.

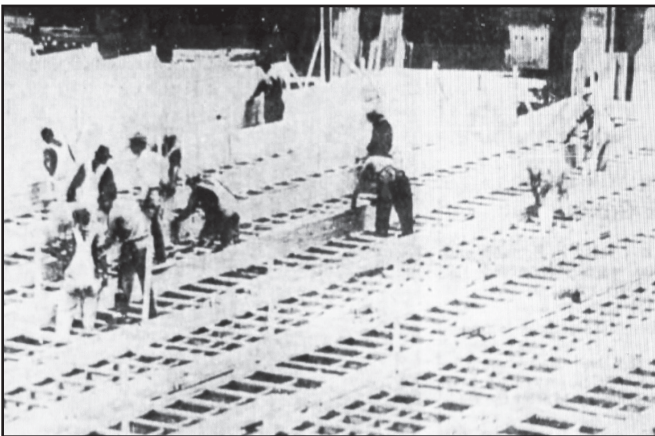
He died in Ross General Hospital.

Mr. Nave was an entrepreneur of an early day, riding from farm to farm and ranch to ranch, collecting empty burlap feed bags to sell to the businessmen in town when he was just 15.

He didn’t use his Model T Ford. The country roads prohibited that. He took a horse and cart.

The Model T he saved for the town of Novato, where he had his own garage for repairing cars, and met incoming trains for the business of driving arriving passengers to their homes.

He said once in his later years, “They called me ‘Dynamite’ because I was going all the time.”



1955 wedding reception of Rich and Dolly Nave at Druids Hall. Top row L-R William Sr., Louis and Fred. Bottom row Rich, Bob, Peter and Bill.

In his childhood, Mr. Nave worked with his two brothers and two sisters in the family produce business, and in the family livery stable and general store near the family home.

He bought and sold cattle and soon accumulated a herd of 500 to graze on family lands, along with sheep and hogs.

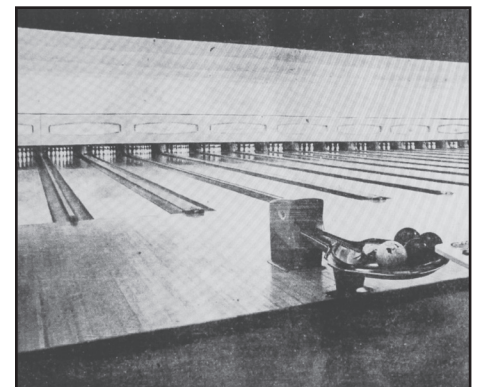
Neighbors used to see Mr. Nave roaming the hills with his two hounds, chasing the coyotes that killed his lambs.

He said he almost didn’t have the time to court his wife, Irene, but he did, and she married him in 1923. She died in 1976 after 53 years of marriage. Their three sons helped him build the shopping center on the site of the old family home and general store, and the bowling alley and other businesses that still bear the family name.

Mr. Nave was known over the years as a good friend to have in a political campaign, and an expert at fundraising. He was active in all his affairs until the last year of his life. He leaves sons William J., Robert and Richard, who is a member of the San Rafael City Council, and a sister, Mollie Scott of Novato, there are 17 grandchildren and 16 greatgrandchildren. He was buried in Mount Olivet Cemetery, nine miles south of the site of old house where he was born.



Nave Lanes and Nero’s restaurant had a grand opening on November 18, 1960. The doors would close on September 12, 1999 and the building demolished in 2004.



Nave Lanes bowling alley.