

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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The Novato Historian

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The Reichert Villa Story- Part II

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William Arthur Powning was born on March 24, 1864, in San Francisco. His father Joseph Powning (1834-1904) was from England and came to the U.S. in 1849. His mother Jennie E.W. Beaman Powning (1844-1895) was from Massachusetts.

William lived with his parents all his life and never married. He was in Paris in 1895 when his mother died there. His father died in Paris in 1904. Joseph Powning had made his fortune in the dynamite powder business and created an improved mining fuse. At his death he had 660 shares of capital stock of the Pacific States Telephone & Telegraph Company valued at \$66,000. His estate was worth over \$80,000. William inherited it all.

In **July 1905**, William made some very elaborate changes and improvements to his residence. The interior was altered to suit modern tastes and requirements, the large reception room especially presented a charming appearance. The 1910 Census showed William, age 43, as head of house with John Maloney (a coachman), Theodore Kipper (a cook) and Melanie Kipper (a maid) living in the Reichert Villa.

In **early 1911**, William bought the property on Grant Avenue that housed the first bank in Novato and the Zunino Shoe store. He had planned to erect the first stone building in Novato but never did. Mr. Powning was also connected with a bond business in San Francisco. In later years he settled in San Rafael and erected the Garden Theater. Later he backed the firm of Chapman & Company in the hardware business, but it turned out to be a poor venture.

March 3, 1913 William A. Powning died at his home in Novato. The direct cause of death was Bright's disease and he had

been a sufferer for months. Some years ago, he became partially blind. He took seriously ill during the night and sent for Dr. Kuser, but before the doctor arrived he had passed away. He was 48. He left an estate valued at \$50,000.

March 19, 1913 the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported "In the shortest will ever filed in Marin County, W.A. Powning, a Novato recluse, today left his entire estate, valued at upward of \$100,000 to his lifelong friend and adviser, P.C. Lutz, of San Rafael. The will contained only thirty-two words. Lutz is named executor without bond."

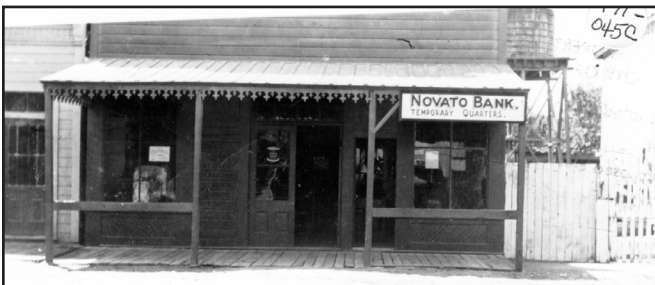
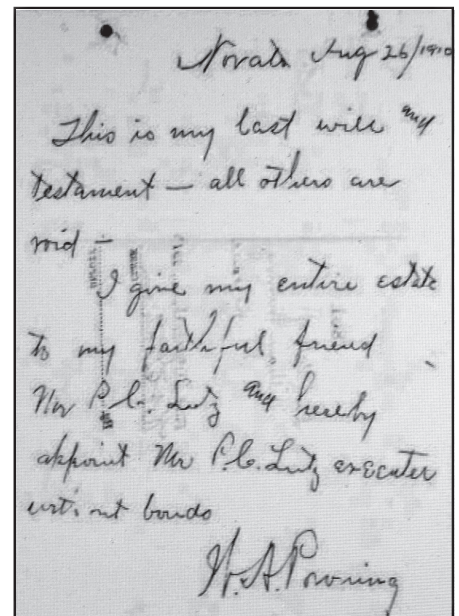
March 27, 1913 "From what we can learn, a number of relatives of the late William Powning of Novato, are getting ready to file contests in the estate. The estate is presumed to be worth about \$75,000, but according to the will of the gay old bachelor, only about \$29,000 is accounted for. Mrs. Swinney, a cousin of the late W.A. Powning, was in San Rafael last Saturday, and it is said, consulted with a San Rafael firm of attorneys in regard to contesting the estate."

"Rumor has it that William, who was one of a family of eight brothers and two sisters, secured all of the estate of his father, at his death. It was presumed at the time the father of the deceased left a will bequeathing over \$500,000 to the family. Somehow or another, the will never materialized, and all the estate was held by William." – *San Rafael Independent*. (Note: William was an only child, his father had eight brothers and two sisters.)

June 24, 1913 The Novato Bank directors secure temporary quarters in part of the Powning building on Grant Ave. They rented from the estate until Nov. 10, 1913, at \$5 a month.

The other half was rented to Webb & Rogers Drug Store starting in May for \$10 until February, 1914.

In **January 1914**, the estate showed rent from Webb & Rogers and Cobbler for \$10 and \$5 respectively.



Built in 1889, Powning would own it in 1911. In this picture the Novato Bank is in the right side of the building and a drug store called Webb & Rogers was on the left side.

The Reichert Villa Story - Part II

The building on Grant Ave. was sold by P.C. Lutz and his wife to W.H. Hilton and his wife in September 1916. Robert D. Hatch, former manager of the Novato Ranch, rented the Powning Place for the summer of 1913. In Nov. 1915 Ralph Rogers (Webb & Rogers) of San Rafael married Helen Hatch, daughter of Robert D. Hatch.

Oct 22, 1914 *The Independent Journal* - "FOR SALE - Bargain, to settle estate, beautiful home ranch of W. A. Powning, deceased, consisting of 20 1-3 acres of land, about eleven acres orchard and vineyard, balance in pasture: house contains 10 rooms and bath, first class stables, garage, aviary, water system, electric lights, phone, flowers, shrubbery, and also four room cottage suitable for help, or can be rented. The property is located at Novato, Marin County, minutes away from depot. To inspect premises and for terms and particulars apply. - P. C. LUTZ, Executor Estate W. A. Powning. 999 Petaluma Ave., San Rafael. Cal."

Peters Place

May 29, 1915 *The Tocsin* reported: "The Powning place has finally been sold and the new owners will take possession in about a month." Victor V. (1870-1948) and Norah H. Peters (1870-1940) will buy the Reichert Villa and the Vila will be known as "Peters Place."

The Peters were married in 1899 in Missouri and came to California around 1903. He worked in the printing industry and later becoming a traveling salesman for A. Carlisle & Co. based in San Francisco.

In February 1919 they leased the property to Pietro Bigongiari and the lease was to go to October, 1921. But in March of 1920 the Peters sold the Villa to John & Halyn P. McDermott.

McDermott

Halyn P. McDermott was in Novato as early as 1906 buying property, before buying the Reichert Villa.

Sept. 27, 1924 *The Daily* reported "Mr. And Mrs. John McDermott have returned home. They have their residence in Novato, where they own considerable property, and Mrs. McDermott writes that 'her heart is here,' for no matter where we are there is no place which equals Novato for its natural beauty, climate and so on."

Oct. 17, 1925 *The Daily* reported "Silva's brick store on Grant Avenue has been leased to John McDermott, who expects to open on October 15th with a complete stock of dry goods, men's furnishings, etc. Mr. McDermott, who resides in Novato, is a man with capital, owning several pieces of valuable property both in "the Valley of No Regrets" and in San Francisco. Joe Deborba, the previous owner, is extensively engaged in cattle buying and with sickness in his family was unable to continue the dry goods business."

November 1929 *The Advance* reported "John McDermott, for fifteen years a resident of Novato, died in the Ross Hospital at 1:30 Monday morning. He had been taken to the hospital the week before, suffering from heart and stomach trouble, and it was believed he was doing well, but a turn for the worst came Sunday night and he passed on as stated. John McDermott was a native of California, being born in San Francisco. He was a son of the late John and Alice McDermott. For years he conducted hotels there, and only a short time ago disposed of his hotel on Ellis street. He was well known in business circles and had many friends. Deceased leaves a wife and one son, John F. McDermott."

John McDermott, who had been chief clerk at the old Palace Hotel before the fire, took the same position at the Hotel St. Francis when it opened in 1904. With Thomas Keating, he opened the Mint and the St. Nicholas Hotels." Halyn McDermott left for Portland two months later to take care of her ill mother. By May 1930, she sold the dry goods store to John Hoffman of San Francisco. He did not make it in the business and Frank Silva's son, Manuel "Babe," opened the Novato Department store in November of that year and closed the dry goods store one year later.

Nov 30, 1931 *The Petaluma Argus* "The beautiful ranch of Mrs. H.P. McDermott on the edge of Novato has been made by its wonder into a quail sanctuary, the flock of over two hundred of these dainty birds, last season having been reduced to about 25 by the hunters who shoot them in the road and outside their sanctuary. The survivors come to the house mornings and evenings for their daily ration of grain."

June 26, 1936 *The Argus* "Mrs. H. P. McDermott has sold her home east of Novato to H. Hoes of San Francisco. Mr. Hoes is improving the property which was formerly one of the showplaces of the town. The home site was originally owned by Theodore Reichert who sold it to William Powning. It is known widely for its elaborately decorated interior and for the lavish hospitality of its owner. Old timers in Novato vicinity still recall Mr. Powning and his guests in his tandem coach with his groom sounding a trumpet and his spotted coach dogs following."

March 25, 1944 *The Petaluma Courier* "Death came last night at 6 o'clock to Mrs. Halyn Prather McDermott of Novato at the Cottage Hospital in San Rafael following a long illness. With her late husband, who died 13 years ago, Mrs. McDermott came to Novato following the earthquake of 1906 and bought a country home on Reichert Avenue."

Hoes

Harry Edward Hoes was born June 3, 1888 in Madeira, Ohio. He married Freda Kuhn Maurin (1885-1964) on April 29, 1916. Their son, Harrison Edward was born in Berkeley in 1917. Harry's WWI draft card said he was an Associate Sales Manager for the American Laundry Machinery Co. out of San Francisco and living in Oakland. In 1920 they were back in Madeira, Ohio, and from 1930 to 1932 he was the Mayor of that village.



McDermott Dry Goods store in the left side of the Silva brick building—on the left is H. Pini & Company—on the right is the Novato Bank and the far right is Frank Silva store.

The Reichert Villa Story - Part II

The Cincinnati Enquirer reported in July 1932 that "Mr. and Mrs. Harry Hoes and their son left for Los Angeles, where Mr. Hoes has accepted an important position." Mr. Hoes later purchased the Reichert Villa and operated the ranch as a resort, calling it "Rancho Novato."

September 1938 *The Novato Advance* reported "Harry Edward Hoes suffered a sudden heart attack on Sunday while attending his saddle horses and died almost immediately. Mr. Hoes purchased the McDermott property on Lamont Avenue about two years ago, which he conducted as a "guest ranch." Mr. Hoes was 50 years old and is survived by his widow, Mrs. Freda Hoes, and one son, Harrison Edward Hoes."

The Petaluma Argus reported "Fall Proves Fatal to Rancher - Stumbling on a stairway on his ranch on Railroad Avenue Sunday afternoon, Harry Edward Hoes, 50, died soon after he had been removed to the house by his son. Dr. Weseman, who was called, found that the rancher was beyond human aid."

Their son Harrison (1917-2011) married Viola F. Clark Derickson (1909-2002) in June, 1940. Her father was Val D. Clark. Viola remembered the home saying, "The Hoes bought it from a Mrs. McDernont about 1935 or 1936. They made it into a boarding house or vacation house and had guests, normally from S.F. I never met Mr. Hoes. He died of a heart attack about 1938. Mrs. H sold it about 1939 or 1940. It was a beautiful old sprawling house with a sunken Roman bath & overhead murals of lovely ladies. It also had a 40' (?) ball room. Wow!"

July 13, 1975 Viola wrote a letter to the Novato Museum: "I was interested in Frank Galli. He was a great friend of my dad's. I worked there at one time (Galli's). The Galli's property at one time belonged to the Valencia family relatives of the Pacheco family. We were living there when the old Rancho burned in 1916. It's a long while ago, but I can still see it in my mind's eye. Dad built what was Galli's. Part of it, I should say. Sincerely Viola Hoes."

On the Pacheco Adobe fire we find this story, "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 truck which contained many ancient papers and letters, the records of the family in early days. Though a mistake, he seized the wrong trunk and the papers were burned."



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Flyer for the Hoes Rancho Novato

The Clarks moved into the "Old Postmaster's House" after the fire and Val and family lived there until his death in 1942. At which time the Harrison Hoes family bought and lived on the property until the Hoes sold the property to Kettenhofen in 1949.

March 1940 *The Novato Advance* "L. R. Knutte Realty Office, reports the sale of the Hoes property to Meredith L. Wilson. The property, one of the choicest home sites at Novato with its large spacious home and landscaped grounds, was in years past the gathering place of numerous State and National celebrities, under the former ownership of the Reichert family. Mr. Wilson shall make his home here with his family as soon as he settles other property affairs in San Francisco. Mrs. Hoes and her son Harrison, shall take care of the property until arrival of the Wilsons, after which they shall settle in a smaller home at Novato."

May 1940 *The Argus* "The cottage being built by Mrs. W.J. Derickson (Viola) on her property on Sutro Avenue has been rented to Mrs. Freda Hoes and her son Harrison Hoes, who have already moved in."

Wilson

March 26, 1941 *The Petaluma Argus* "Meredith L. Wilson, recent purchaser of the

historic Reichert mansion from its present owner, Mrs. Freda Hoes, has resigned as clerk of the appellate court, San Francisco, to attend the chemical warfare school in Washington, D.C. He is expected home shortly to be assigned to an aviation corps with the rank of lieutenant."

Mr. Wilson also called his new home "Rancho Novato," but after his retirement from the Air Force in 1949, he spent most of his time in Plumas County when he bought the Belden Resort.

April 27, 1956 *The Independent Journal* "Novato youngsters have been hammering away at an old shack to build a clubhouse for themselves, but there's an open well inside the shack that is a hazard to children," Sheriff's deputies reported Wednesday. Deputies were trying to contact a Meredith L. Wilson of 716 Lamont Avenue, who is believed to be the owner of the former owner of the vacant property at the corner of Railroad Avenue and Lamont Street. Officers want the open well to be sealed.

Mrs. Jean J. Marcucci of 701 Lamont Street told investigators that boys between 7 and 13, armed with hammer and nails, were pounding away, "fixing the house for a clubhouse."

The Reichert Villa Story - Part II

Dec. 22, 1959 in San Francisco, Louise M. Wilson, beloved wife of Col. Meredith L. Wilson, U.S.A.F. (retired), of Novato, a native of Montreal, aged 55 years passed away. She had been a resident of Belden most of the time, since 1949.

Nov 29, 1966 *The Independent Journal* "Funeral arrangements for Col. (USAF Ret.) Meredith L. Wilson, 72, of 716 Lamont Avenue, who died last Friday in a Martinez hospital of a heart attack. A native of San Francisco, Wilson joined the Signal Corps in 1918. He was a career officer, retiring in 1948."

He was one of the first aviation cadets to graduate from the University of California at Berkeley where he had been studying engineering and is a veteran of World War One.

After serving with the division of highways as an engineer, Wilson was chief clerk for District Court of Appeals in San Francisco from 1926 to 1940. Col. Wilson served as Chief of Aircraft Inspection for the South Pacific Theatre after being re-called to military duty during World War Two. He retired from service in 1948. The principal family home has been located in Novato since 1939, with frequent trips to Belden.

Wilson's family remained there after his death, but in 1970 they moved away. Since that time the mansion had been inhabited only by occasional vagrants and transients. Mr. Wilson had a large



January 28, 1972—IJ—"NOVATO EYESORE—It's scenes such as this at the old Reichert Villa, that disturb a Novato citizens group seeking to preserve city landmarks. The Reichert home, one of the earliest in Novato, has fallen into a varied state of disrepair and disarray."

collection of antique automobiles, especially Lincolns, he acquired over the years, many of these cars still remain scattered around the estate."

Nov 20, 1972 *The Novato Advance* - Fire Destroys Reichert Villa Landmark - One of Novato's oldest and one-time more stately mansions was destroyed in a fire late Saturday night, bringing to an end another link with the city's past.

Jan 16, 1974 *The Novato Advance* - "Arson fire destroys historic Reichert barn. The California School of Architecture had completed a survey

of the old, ornate structure and had developed plans to rehabilitate and relocate it. 'It's a great loss to Novato' George Wilson (son of Meredith), of Belden, told the *Advance*. He said he blamed the city's planning department for delaying plans to save the barn. At one time the property was considered by the Novato Boys Club board of directors as a clubhouse site."

Novato firemen direct a steam of water on the barn. Fire Chief Frank Kidder, who called the aging structure often used by transients a "total loss." The blaze was caused by careless children, who used the barn and nearby abandoned autos as a play area.



Pictures shows what was left of the Villa after the fire November 18, 1972