

# The Novato Historian

The Quarterly Publication of the Novato Historical Guild, the Novato History Museum, and the Hamilton Field History Museum  
*Preserving Novato History*



## Feature Section

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## Novato Boys' Club Part II Pine Knoll Ranch –680 Wilson Ave By Michael Read

**1879 – 1915**

The land that the Novato Boy's Club is built on at 680 Wilson Avenue was part of the Sweetser DeLong Ranch. Later it was just the DeLong Ranch in 1879 when Frank DeLong went bankrupt in 1894. The Novato Land Company took over the ranch on October 28, 1894, and Robert Hatch managed the property until 1905. At that time Robert Trumbull ran the property for the Novato Land Company.

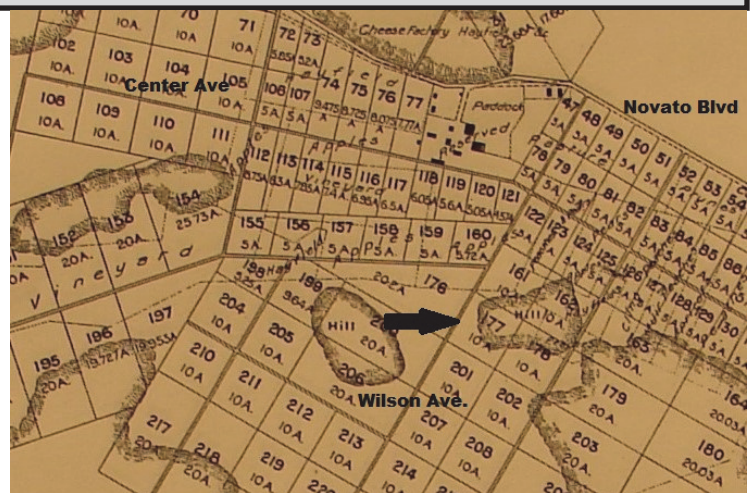
On November 1, 1909, the Novato Land Company divided five hundred acres of the ranch into five, ten and twenty acre tracts. The Novato Land Co. sold lot 177 to John Heetebry on December 15, 1910. John called his place Mount Beulah Poultry Farm. He was making a reputation for himself and his successful poultry business.

**1916 – 1949**

In February 1916, Mr. and Mrs. John Heetebry sold their ranch, Mt. Beulah, to a Mr. Kock of San Francisco who would engage in poultry business. Mr. and Mrs. Heetebry moved to the Sacramento area. Henry William Koch was born in Germany and named Hans Peter Wilhelm Koch on March 27, 1865. He was a fruit grocer and lived in San Francisco most of the time. He called his property the Pine Knoll Fruit Ranch and won many blue ribbons for his fruit. William was the name he used, and he would also go into the realtor business called "Wm. Koch Novato Real Estate."

William Koch died on December 24, 1929 and his obituary read: "Death again invaded our community - William Koch passed away. The day before he evidently realized the end was near and called his faithful wife and son and gave his last wishes. He was a well-known resident of Novato, where he established a beautiful home known as Pine Knoll. In addition to conducting the big ranch, he also engaged in the real estate business with success. He was of German descent and 64 years old. He is survived by a wife (Marie Metzler), who was untiring in her devotion during his life and exceedingly faithful in her care during the long illness. He had one son Henry Koch, of San Francisco, and two sons in the East."

Mrs. Kock would sell the Pine Knoll ranch in October 1931 to Joseph H. Cash. Mrs. Cash was deeply interested in the Novato Pear Growers Association. Mr. Cash would die in February 1939



1910 map— Arrow shows lot 177

and his obituary read: "Old friends and neighbors regretted to learn of the sudden death of J.H. Cash from a heart attack at his home in Millbrae at the age of forty years. He is survived by his widow and one son. The family owned Pine Knoll ranch." Mrs. Dora Cash married Robert D. Young on September 2, 1940. Her son, Lester Cash, worked at the Nave's Garage in 1949 when he married Lillian Tobin of Petaluma.

### Recap of Boys' Club

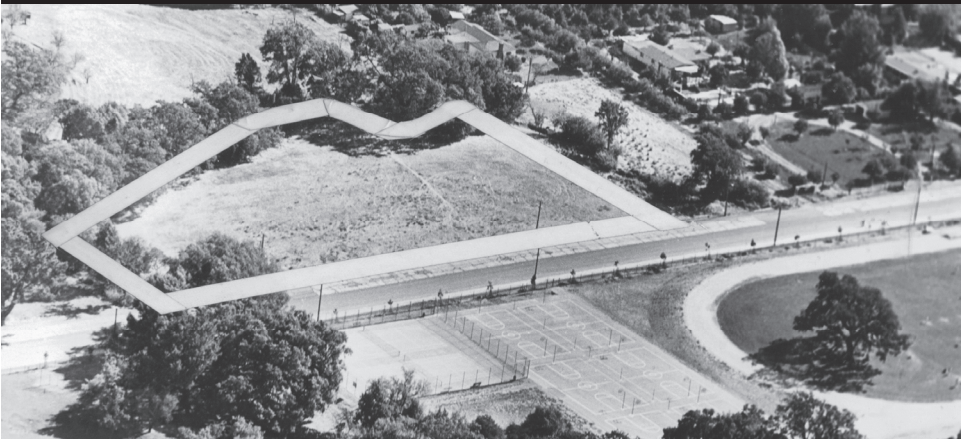
March 28, 1974, Independent Journal - By Theron A Newell "Eight years of frustration, work and planning, and finally success will be rewarded in about two weeks when construction is to start on the Novato Boys' Club. At that time



William Koch in front of his property  
April 1924

(Continued on page 2)





1972 Aerial view of the site of the Novato Boys' Club located on an acre and a half.

volunteer labor, both by individuals and labor unions will start work on the clubhouse on Wilson Avenue opposite Sinaloa Junior High School. "It's the result of a community effort by people who want to do things for boys," said Chester R. MacPhee who headed the fund drive that made it possible. The club now has approximately \$121,000 in funds for its building and equipment, and owns a 16-unit motel valued at more than \$200,000, whose income was earmarked for operation of the club. The success of the club was brought about by people, who didn't know each other, working together for the good of the community," MacPhee said. "Everybody likes to help boys and the Boys' Club reaches every boy, and is not limited like the Scouts or Y," he said.

The Novato club was organized in 1966, with Joseph Bonomolo as president. It set a goal of \$50,000 to be raised for the club, but a struggle of several months raised only \$1,500. A lady's auxiliary was organized to help with fund raising, but

little progress was made. As years passed, officers of the club changed and various methods of raising money were tried without notable success. The club's directors then decided on a site at Railroad and Lamont Avenues for the club. With definite plans and a location, residents of the community started taking the fledgling club seriously. In 1970 the goal was raised to \$72,000, which was thought necessary to buy the land and build the clubhouse. Then, in 1971, MacPhee, who had been treasurer of the San Francisco Boys' Club for 20 years, was named campaign chairman. "I gave them a push by suggesting that we get \$1,000 contributions and gave one myself," he said. Altogether the club received more than 20 such donations. "Then the drive cannonballed," he said. "It became a community enterprise with everyone working together. It really drew the community together. Women's clubs held "whist" parties with proceeds going to the Boys' Club, and there were many

other types of fund-raising events going on in the community." The progress of the campaign is spelled out in reports of money on hand. In 1971 on Aug. 27, the club had about \$12,000; on Sept. 8, \$18,449; on Sept 23, \$26,500; on Oct 27, \$35,673; on Dec 3, \$48,000; on Jan 11, 1972, \$57,333 and on Feb 11, \$62,172. During these months, contractors, building material dealers, labor unions and volunteer laborers had been working on a house in the name and for the benefit of the Boys' Club. The culmination came on Feb 18, when the house was sold and \$28,000 was added to the Boys' Club fund, raising it to more than \$85,000.

In April the Ladies Auxiliary opened the Secondhand Rose, a second-hand store, selling anything donated, the proceeds going to the club building fund. It was given use of the Rodoni house, adjacent to the community house, rent free by the city, which had bought the house for part of the civic center complex. The April reports showed \$97,383 in the coffers and by June 26, it had risen to \$106,182. The club got its biggest shot in the arm in 1972 when it was disclosed that former Novato businesswoman, Clara L. Meyers, had left the 16-unit Mission Lodge to the club. With the clubhouse now assured and the fund drive still going at top speed, the directors realized that the more money they had the more that they could add to the club, such as swimming pool and outdoor athletic facilities. The goal was raised again, this time to \$150,000. By then, the club was getting attention outside of the Novato area. The James Irvine Foundation of San Francisco in July gave the club a \$25,000 grant for the athletic equipment.

The original site selected on Railroad and Lamont Avenues drew criticism because it was east of Highway 101 and would present a danger to the boys crossing the highway to the club. So, a site was selected on Wilson Avenue opposite Sinaloa Junior High School. The club bought 1.5 acres there."

**Groundbreaking**

**Sept 16, 1973 - Advance** – "Boys' Club: 400 attend ceremonies. It was a unique sight that Sunday afternoon shortly after 4 o'clock as John Darcy, 13, looking the role of a youthful, kilted Scot lad, piped "This Is Our World" as he slowly led a parade across Wilson Avenue to the Novato Boys' Club site for the official



Mission Lodge Motel has its look on July 1972 when it was given as a gift to the Novato Boys' Club. IJ photo





Tom Cox, Dan Milano and Scot Eustace rehearsal for the ground-breaking ceremony.



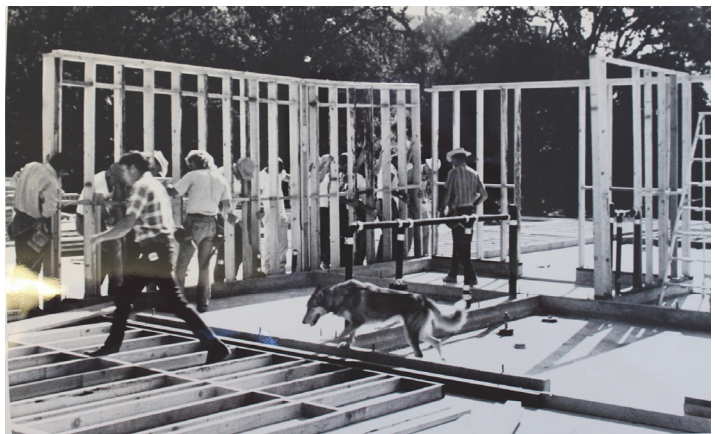
May 22, 1974—Dan Stewart on the backhoe and Bob Manzoni in the trenches



June 5, 1974—Dave Milano in the trenches



July 3, 1974—Floor slab had been poured



August 14, 1974— Framing begins on the building. *(Continued on page 4)*

Novato Boys' Club site for the official groundbreaking ceremony. This was the finale to the program which had begun an hour earlier on the outdoor basketball courts at Sinaloa Junior High School, and which was attended by some 400 youth and adults. During the program Novato artist, Mae Wygan, presented a large watercolor painting of the clubhouse which she had painted after consultation with William Kelly, AID, one of the two architects working on the project. The other was O. Robert Holm, AID, of San Rafael. A life-size floor plan of the clubhouse on the 1.5-acre site at 680 Wilson Avenue was prepared by Sam Harkleroad, general construction superintendent, for the \$300,000 youth activity center for the Novato Boys' Club on the \$150,000 site.

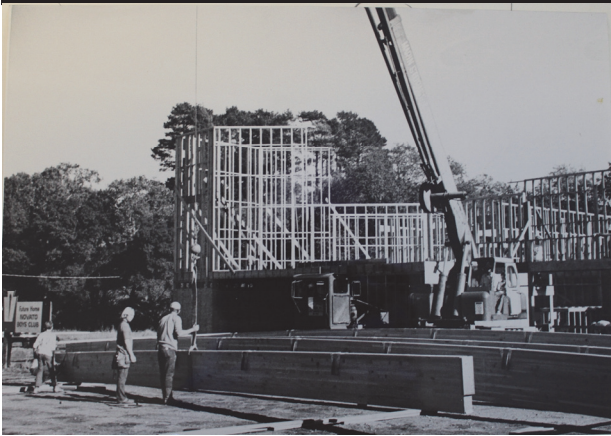
**August 5, 1975, - 1J** – “For about two years, volunteers under Scheller’s (former club officer) direction have worked on the building, but progress has been slow with work pretty much limited to weekends. But with the impetus provided by the 1,600 hours of work by the 904<sup>th</sup> Reserve Combat Squadron at Hamilton Air Force Base, the building soon should be completed. When finished, the building will be used not only by boys but also by girls, the club’s board has decided.”

**November 19, 1975, – Fire**  
An arsonist set off a fire that destroyed a rear portion of the building and a section of the roof, causing \$32,000 damage and

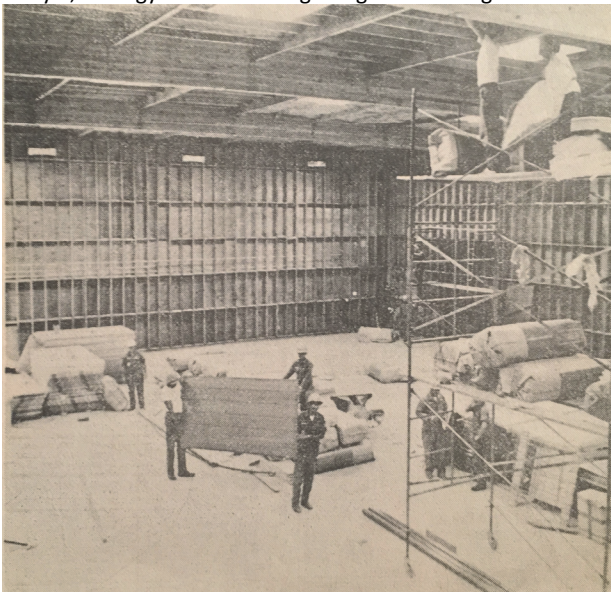
delaying the construction scheduled. The volunteers, once again, went to work and would still be working on it when opened.

**March 24, 1976**  
The Novato Boy’s Club will begin signing up members, boys and girls between the ages of seven and 17, this month as its new building nears completion. On Monday, April 19, the Boys Club’s game room will officially open. This room will house a large selection of quality table games, such as table tennis, billiards, air hockey, table soccer and bumper pool. In addition to the main game room, a smaller game room will open, allowing the Boys’ Club and its girls’ department members an opportunity to participate in various low-organized games





May 7, 1975 gymnasium roof getting tarred and graveled



Aug. 5, 1975 Air Force Reservists working on gym.



October 1, 1975— Young men from San Francisco Boys' Club help with roof tiles.

and tournaments such as chess, checkers, etc. According to Manager Chris Georgiades, 350 boys and girls would make use of the club's well-equipped game room on opening day. And although the decibel level was high, they were all "well-behaved," he said. The Gymnasium burnt from the fire would open later. Directors Don Shank, Reuben Kaehler and Ed Ghirardo beamed at the exuberant youngsters but stressed that the "community would have to support it." The club should receive about \$15,000 annually from the Mission Lodge which was bequeathed to it in a will but that represents only about one-fourth of what it will cost to operate the clubhouse, according to Shank.

**Sells Mission Motel**

August 1976, The Novato Boy's Club, which inherited the Mission Lodge Motel from the estates of the late Clara Meyers and George Schilling, would sell it to Ronald P. Ashley of San Rafael, an orthodontist with offices in Novato, Ignacio and Marinwood. Reuben Kaehler, president of the Boys Club, confirmed that the Boys Club sold the motel because "the three-year lease was up." Obviously, it was a good time to dispose of the motel because directors did not wish the club to be involved in the motel business and felt it would be wiser to sell the motel, bank the proceeds and use the interest for expenses. According to Kaehler, the Boys Club needs at least \$70,000 per year to cover operating costs and continuing donations would still be sorely needed despite the sale of the motel, since sale proceeds would be banked for a back-up fund. What was once a dream in 1966 is now a reality. The Novato Boys Club with its 1900 members is now

operating six days a week and providing a diversified program for the youth of Novato.

While the building has been open to members for several months, with workmen finishing up on Saturdays, the official grand opening and dedication will take place on Friday, November 12, at 7 p.m.

August 1983 - The Novato Boys and Girls Club would sever its connection with the Boy's Clubs of America and will become the Novato Youth Center. The change was announced by Skip Scarpa, president of the board. A major reason for the change: the Boys Club of America's regulations do not allow girls to be members. The local club allowed girls to be members since 1982, the girls had always been allowed to come to the Boys' Club but could not become members of the club. The national organization of Boys' Club of American would change its name to Boys & Girl Clubs of American in 1990.

On January 1, 2018, the Novato Youth Center and Novato Human Needs Center would merge and become North Marin Community Services.



Manager Chis Georgiades opens the door for the first boy into the clubhouse on opening day was Michael Verzo, 8, on April 19, 1976.