

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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History Is Us

By John A. Trumbull

Walt Kelly once had his cartoon character, Pogo, say that we looked for the enemy, and it was us. In the Novato Historical Guild we look for the history of Novato, and increasingly find it is us.

Dear readers of the *Historian*, how many of you have lived in this valley for more than 20 years? Have you noticed any changes? Have you pictures or documents that are now "obsolete" or "irrelevant" because circumstances have changed so much that they rank as curiosities?

For example, I have a document entitled "Average Cross Section of Fees Charged by Lawyers in Marin County" which bears a date of November 1962. I obtained it from the Bar Association when I opened my practice in Novato. By the end of that decade the very existence of this document would be officially denied, because "price fixing" investigations had made it taboo. This artifact should be preserved in our museum.

There are a lot of Email postings of the "Do you remember when..." variety that are passed around between friends, and they can be both amusing and thought provoking.

Retrospections are becoming popular on TV and in the music business. You know what? Some of those "Golden Oldie" performers are new to me!!

I am part of ancient history so far as music is concerned. Have your grandchildren (or children, for that matter) heard of Joan Baez or the Kingston Trio or Glen Yarborough and the Lamplighters? These were big names in the Bay Area in the 50's and 60's. Do you have any of the original 45 rpm or 78 rpm records with this kind of music? How

about 8 track magnetic tapes? Do you have the guitar sheet music for "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" or "Blowing in the Wind" or "Charlie on the MTA"? I bet you can still hum



Bill Almeida has been the real hero of the Historian. In addition to his long-running 50 Years Ago column, he coordinates all the contributors, rides herd on your editor, and delivers the proofs and thumb drive to the city for printing. When the printing is finished, he picks up the 600 copies, then makes arrangements for the mailing event which he conducts. Here he is shown handing out bottles of wine at a volunteer recognition day held at Pacheco Ranch

those tunes if you are 50 years or older. (How are you fixed for blue suede shoes?)

Do you remember when singers stood in front of a microphone, fully dressed, and sang? They didn't need to be pole dancers or acrobats to sell a song – whose words you could usually understand. Do you remember when Lawrence Welk actually featured an accordionist on his bandstand TV show? All this is history!

When I was a working lawyer here in Novato, I experienced generations of word processing office machines. Remember when the poor secretary (who may have been making \$5.00 per hour and happy with that) used a manually (finger) powered typewriter and carbon paper to make 3 copies of any document? In a law office erasures or whiteouts were not acceptable, so any mistake meant retyping the whole page. And what about the third carbon copy; could anyone read those blurry letters?

The next generation of machines accelerated the power of the finger by machine amplification, but retyping was still required. Then came the IBM Selectric with its type ball, which allowed changes in type face and eliminated jammed keys. It was also easier to clean, especially since the single use carbon ribbon was replacing the two color, inked ribbon.

Xerox was introducing a new system of making copies about this same time. (Lawyers never used the purple spirit mimeograph that was popular with the schools, because not only were they messy to use, the clients and courts wouldn't accept them.) The early Xerox had a major problem: after a time the graphite that formed the letters on the paper debonded and became a shapeless black pile in the bottom of the file drawer.



Susan and John Trumbull are long time Novato History Guild volunteers. John has written many feature section articles for the Historian. Susan is constantly active with the Guild, especially with the 3rd grade tours. Both Sue and John are museum docents.

There has been a parade of word processing machines passing through the "modern" office. One of the most spectacular was the IBM punch card system which used stiff paper cards with holes punched in them to control the Selectric typewriter to create copies of documents or parts thereof. A stack of these punch-cards could produce the trust you were creating to avoid probate.

I had a word processor called a QYX for a while. It only had 7 moving parts, but it also only had a 25 letter ID screen. I was lost without my secretary who knew what document was stored on which of the 4x5 inch floppy magnetic sheets that was the unit's storage system. (Then these sheets came in cardboard holders, then 3.5 inch magnetic disks, then

metallic Compact disks, then streaming magnetic tape accessories, and finally now we have flash drives and external digital hard drives to store the digital information that isn't floating in the "cloud" somewhere.)

Today's offices all have word processors with big screens, enough storage to hold a complete novel, automatic backup to prevent accidental deletions, and the ability to flash our work product across the globe before we have time to proofread it. Clients expect same day service

on important projects, and hard copy (snail mail) is considered "retro." Today the Courts are loath to accept paper, they want your documents already digitalized – not even the signatures are original for all the security that may cost you. This is history!

At the Downtown museum we have a number of videotapes and magnetic audio tapes of people who lived here prior to 1950. There are reminiscences and local color history

items buried in media that are becoming obsolete for lack of attention. If you have time to do some editing and organizing this material could be digitized and indexed to preserve a valuable historic resource. Will you help?

Do you remember when Novato was a “horsey” town? The Novato Horsemen were a political power in local politics as well as a social club. Indian Valley was home to more horses than people, and Western Weekend was the time when we had our rodeo. That is history.

Remember when new residents, who had chosen Novato as a place to raise a family and then sacrificed to move here, were met by an organization called “The Welcome Wagon”? At the time Novato was the financial poor cousin of the other towns in Marin, but we were a safe place to raise a family. There was a large contingent of San Francisco police and fire personnel who lived here because they couldn’t afford to live in the City, and their commute was only half an hour.

Our safety personnel lived in Petaluma, and there weren’t very many of them then. Remember Bob DiGrazia’s police department, who knew who you were before they stopped you because they knew the car you drove?

Do you remember when we were proud of the noise the fighters made leaving Hamilton Air Force Base enroute to protect the US from invasion? Those were the days we feared countries more than crazies, and we felt we could be safe from harm if we had a strong vigilant military. Come out to the Hamilton museum and see the evolution in aircraft that took place during the base’s lifetime. It was active for 40 of the most turbulent years in aviation history.

Remember the bumper sticker “Hooray, Hooray! They didn’t drop the bomb today” and the “Duck and Cover” drills at school? We have a nice collection of pictures through WW2, but not as many during the 60’s and the period when HAFB was a refugee reception point for evacuees from the Viet Nam war. Can you contribute?

On the home front, remember when wash-

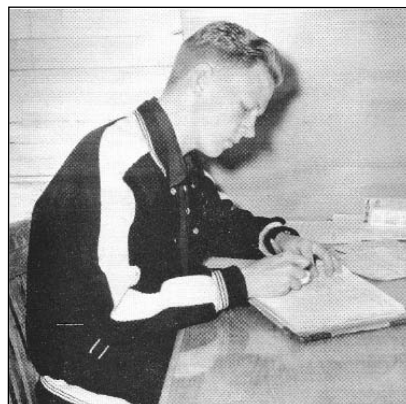
ing machines had wringers? Remember when the laundry room was separate in the expensive houses and had an ironing board built in? That was when “drip dry” meant rayon or nylon, both easily identifiable fabrics. Fast food in the kitchen came from the pressure cooker, not the microwave, and ice was made in little metal trays in the top of the refrigerator.

If you are really old, like me, you may remember breaking the color capsule in the margarine package and mixing it for Momma, because the butter lobby wouldn’t let the oleo manufacturers fool the public by coloring their product at the factory.

How about those old beer cans? Remember when it was a show-off thing to crush them one handed? Has anyone got an old Schlitz, Pabst or Blatz beer can at home?

Remember when the only electricity needed to play a game indoors was the electric light. There were dice and/or cards and boards with pictures on which pieces were moved as markers, and the players were in the same room and talked to each other.

When I was in high school near San Diego, we went by bus at about 8 a.m. and returned home by bus at about 3:30 p.m. This picture shows me in my “gang colors.” There were two school sanctioned social clubs for boys and two for girls, all of which had jackets or sweaters of



John Trumbull studying at San Diego High School and wearing his “gang colors.”

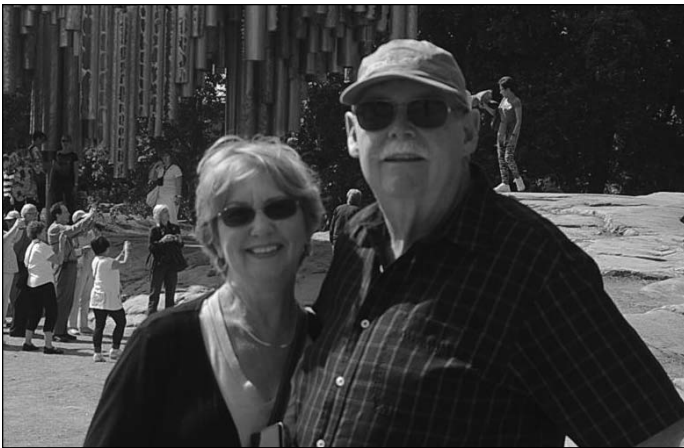
distinctive color with a club emblem prominently displayed and a faculty advisor.

Other high schools also had these clubs and such insignia were worn off campus with impunity. No one was shot, stabbed or crippled for their involvement in their club. The primary purpose was to promote group and personal involvement in school activities. Boy, has this changed!

The Guild's Historian is about to receive a face change after 10 years. Mike Clancy, a retired professional printer, has been responsible for putting together the Historian, and he is now passing the baton to Carol Aregger.

Mike has witnessed drastic changes in his industry during his employment lifetime. He started in the movable lead type and Linotype era. Printers used a press Gutenberg would have recognized. The type setup for a single page weighed 10 pounds. Photos and illustrations were done by a separate complicated process and then integrated into the type for that page.

Later photographic processes were devised which allowed use of a typewriter to create text, but reproduction of pictures was still a several step process requiring expertise. The type set-



Mike and Carol Clancy have worked hard to produce a very fine newsletter. Mike, with the assistance of all the contributors, edited and made up the newsletter. Carol, a retired college business teacher, has done all the initial proofreading of the Historian. She has done an exceptionally fine job for us.

ting of the "proof" galleys was done on a Linotype machine, a large, noisy and sometimes dangerous machine. That function has now morphed into electronic machines, some of which are small enough to sit on the corner of your desk.

The typewriter has been replaced by the word processor, which can also sit on your desk. In the last century production of a book was a time consuming and expensive task accomplished by professional publishers and printers. Today anyone can "self publish" at such a low cost that we are seeing books created for just family members or to be "printed" upon request. Book stores are under siege, and some are going out of business, because their

wares can be obtained faster, at less cost and without the need for bookshelves, electronically. This is history.

You, dear reader, may soon find the printed Historian is history. The Historical Guild board is under significant pressure to put the Historian "on the web." This would appeal to the post Boomer era public, because they could access us on demand at any time from wherever they are. Computerization would lessen costs of paper and postage, they point out, and it could be more current in reporting since an article could be disseminated right after it is written. The "back issues" of electronic postings are theoretically saved forever. The disadvantages are subtle. Proofreading is one of the skills that is disappearing. (We have had it to date thanks to the volunteer efforts and time of Mike's lovely wife, Carol.) Also changes or modifications to the printed word are obvious; not so with the Web. "Photoshopping" of pictures is causing me to doubt even what I see nowadays. The board is debating these issues at this time. We do have the back issues of the Novato Advance digitalized and indexed at the downtown museum.

Bill Almeida, the *memory* of Novato, has done his "50 years ago" column for about the same length of time, and he is also letting go (as am I, a sometime feature writer).

There are other people who will step in (probably), but more and younger help is needed to keep the Guild viable into the next two generations.

Do you know someone who lives here and loves our town that is not acquainted with the Guild? Will you introduce us? Can you spare a couple of hours a month to docent at the downtown museum or at Hamilton? The work is not strenuous, and the people you will meet are generally quite pleasant. An encyclopedic knowledge of history is not required; we have reference materials and excuses to cover most situations. The pay is lousy, but the sense of satisfaction is unique. All this helps preserve our history.