

Cotati Historical Society Newsletter

A non-profit 501 (c) (3) California corporation Tax ID #30-0421172

Preserving Cotati's Past
P.O. Box 7013 Cotati, CA 94931
E-mail chsinfo@sonic.net

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Prue Draper & Connie Martin, Editors

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INDEX

In this issue, you will find:

Plaza Improvement
4th Grade Field Trip
Our Annual BBQ
Our Fifth Anniversary
New Donations
Membership Grows
Musical Memories?

Cotati Museum Hours:

Saturday 1 - 4 P.M.

2nd Wednesday of each
month 5:30 - 8 P.M.

Special times by appointment

Phone 707-794-0305

SOCIETY OFFICERS

President: Terry Dutra 795-3977

V.Pres.: Connie Martin 795-2772

Secretary: Marie McNaughton

Treasurer: Yvonne VanDyke

Historian: Prue Draper

Art Director: Judy Pagnusat

Archiving Administrator:
Judy Gustafson

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

4th ANNUAL CHICKEN BBQ

April 15, 2012

Noon to 4 p.m.

(Meals served until 3 pm)

Complete information on page 3 of
this newsletter.

VOLUNTEERS HELPED BEAUTIFY OUR PLAZA

Back in 1893, when the Page family had their big ranch surveyed and a town named Cotati designed, its heart was a plaza surrounded by streets named for six sons of Thomas Stokes Page. Reason for the hexagonal design is a mystery, but the Pages ordered that it remain a public park to belong to the people of Cotati.

The Plaza has always been the heart of the community – center of the little town's business district; for several years the home of a small herd of deer that entertained passers-by; the locale where the St. Joseph's Parish held its huge annual barbecues; the place where the people of the community placed monuments to honor very special deceased citizens; site for the annual Accordion and Jazz Festivals, and in recent years, a demonstration garden illustrating water-conserving plantings.

But in spite of its importance to Cotati, there were many years when the hexagonal park was a park in name only, except for the one section where the American Legion had erected a flagpole in memory of WWI servicemen. Native weeds grew around the trees and little attention was paid to it except now and then when a special occasion was planned. Everybody was busy with his or her own ranch or business.

But toward the end of the 1950's, things began to change. Rohnert Park had started growing, with elaborate plans for the community it was to become; Cotatians developed a new sense of pride in their town with its efficient fire department, diverse businesses and an energetic Public Utility District that had produced a water and sewage system, street lights and even some sidewalks.

The public land that was the Plaza had been a county responsibility for years. In 1959, discouraged with the lack of upkeep, the Cotati Chamber of Commerce, always a sparkplug for progress in the town in those days, appealed to the county for help. Bill Kortum, chamber president, convinced the supervisors to spend \$400, promising it would be augmented by citizen contributions, to plant low-maintenance shrubs in one section and rye grass lawn in the other five.

A citizens' group called the Cotati Civic Improvement Committee, led by H.W. "Bud" Howard, a local farm equipment dealer, began landscaping. Dr. John Roberts became chairman of a new club called the Keep the Plaza Green Club,



COTATI CIVIC IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE: Workers in the Keep The Plaza Green Club celebrated buying a riding lawn mower, being demonstrated by H.W. Bud Howard, a local equipment dealer. Left to right are Dr. Bill Kortum, Les Petersen, Mrs. Bill Johansen, Jim Davidson, Dick Braden, Mary Sisk, Annie Minatta and Bill Johansen.

Plaza

continued from page 1

established to raise money to buy a power mower and a traveling sprinkler system.

Club volunteers sent out letters to every household in Cotati asking for donations. The Chamber and the Lions Club, also a leader in Cotati's civic life, each pledged \$100, a princely sum in 1960. Donors were asked to send their contributions – any amount – to Harold Griffith, the club treasurer, with the promise that they would not only help beautify the plazas but they would receive a membership card and would get their names in the local weekly newspaper, *The Cotatian*. The goal was \$2000.



Keep the Plaza Green membership card.
Courtesy of Jim Brower

There were posters around town that said “You don't have to die to get your name in *The Cotatian*!” One wag doctored the one in Sophus Jensen's blacksmith shop, (now Dos Amigos Restaurant) adding a P.S. that said: “But it helps!” Contributions poured in, and workers got busy.

A local builder, Vladimer “Bill” Budinsky, produced a picnic table and benches for one Plaza section, and other business owners contributed such items as hardware, concrete and welding.

Two years later, when the urge to incorporate Cotati as a city became overpowering, the newly beautified Plaza was a gathering place for incorporation proponents. A rally with a big bonfire, a band, free wieners,



Sonoma County Supervisor Leigh Shoemaker, right, presents deed to the Cotati Plaza to Stanley Olsson, Mayor of the new City of Cotati in 1965. (Photo from Marguerite Hahn archives.)

donuts and coffee attracted more than enough people to swing the election, easing fears of an underground anti-incorporation effort. After the successful incorporation election on July 3, 1963, another big party was held at the firehouse, overflowing into the Plaza, to celebrate the end of what had been a year-long campaign.

Soon after the new little city became official, the city council petitioned the county to turn over the Plaza to the city. In 1965, Supervisor Leigh Shoemaker officially presented the deed to the Plaza to Mayor Stanley Olsson, and the Plaza, ever since, has been improved and carefully protected as a major city asset.

Students Learn Cotati History at Field Trip to City Hall, Museum

Volunteer guides and history presenters, as well as the Mayor of Cotati, were waiting to welcome over 60 fourth grade students from Thomas Page School when they came to city hall for a field trip on February 14.



They were learning about city government and preparing to write their entries for our annual essay contest about Thomas Page and his family in early Cotati.

WELCOME COMMITTEE-left to right, Terry Dutra, Marie Aggio, Judy Pagnusat, Yvonne VanDyke, Marie McNaughton, Connie Martin, Cathryn Fairlee, Lisa Moore, Mayor Sue Harvey and Prue Draper.



Left-Teacher Yvonne Colbert, center, was among the teachers and parents who escorted the fourth graders.

Right-Cathryn Fairlee tells the story of Dr. Thomas Stokes Page and his family's influence on early-day Cotati.



Left-Judy Pagnusat explains Cotati's hexagonal plaza.

Right-Koda, the Cotati Police K-9 star, is introduced to students by Officer Chris Kaupe.



Left-Officer Chris Kaupe shows students some features of a Cotati Police car.

COTATI HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S
4th ANNUAL
OLD-FASHIONED CHICKEN BARBECUE

Sunday, April 15, 2012

12 - 4 PM

(Meals served until 3 pm)

Ray Miller Community Center

216 East School Street, Cotati

**Great
Raffle
Prizes**

Meal includes: Chicken, beans, coleslaw, roll & drink
\$10 in advance, \$12 at door
Beer, Wine & Bake Sale Desserts for purchase
Take-Out Available

Tickets available at Chamber Office &
Exchange Bank - Cotati
Or by calling: 707-795-5508 or 794-0305
Or emailing: chsinfo@sonic.net

***THANKS to the many
generous donors since
December 2011***

John Allred
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Bruce Pearson
Jeanne Pratt— *Memory of Harold Fish*
Anne & John Rock
Reta & Gary Santero
Oliver's Market
Mike Sheehan
Louise Steacy
Yvonne VanDyke
Barbara Jean Veronda

**Our Fifth Anniversary -
And Changing of the Guard**

Can it really be five years since we incorporated the Cotati Historical Society? Amazingly enough, it is! The date was April 11, 2007 when, with the assistance of Attorney **Maurice Fredericks**, we became an official 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in California. **Prue Draper**, president; **Lloyd Draper**, vice-president, and **Terry Dutra**, chief financial officer constituted the first board. In short order, our board was happily expanded with the addition of **Suzanne Whipple** and **Lisa Moore**, directors. In the years since then, **Connie Martin** has taken over as vice-president; **Judy Gustafson**, archiving administrator, and **Judy Pagnusat**, art director, have joined the board.

We're proud that in our first five years we have opened the Cotati Museum at City Hall, acquired a popular archiving system and cataloged the hundreds of items now in the museum. We have successfully revived the traditional Cotati chicken barbecues, entered parades every summer, sponsored popular public history programs, staffed information displays at the Sonoma County Fair and Cotati tree-lighting festivals, supported the Cotati Arts Project, hosted field trips for school students and sponsored annual essay contests on Cotati history.

We are most grateful for the community support we have received – help with producing the museum, generous donations of money and new relics that keep us growing.... and smiling. Now it's time for a changing of the guard.

***Welcome to these
New Members***

Kevin Comora
Vizicast Multipedia
Kevin Gingher
Spancky's
Everitt Gordon
Ben & Esther Loveridge
Steve Maass & Tom Scott
Oliver's Market
Barbara Whitfield

NEW OFFICERS

Prue Draper asked to be relieved as president, but will continue as historian and newsletter editor. **Terry Dutra** is our new president, and we know she will be an excellent one. **Connie Martin** continues as vice president and co-editor of our newsletters; **Judy Gustafson** and **Judy Pagnusat** continue in their positions. **Yvonne VanDyke** is our new treasurer, and **Marie McNaughton** is our new secretary. We are grateful to all of them for their enthusiastic assistance.

NEW MEMBERS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME

You, too, can help preserve Cotati's history as members of the Cotati Historical Society. **Dues are still only \$10 per person per year.** Please complete this form and send with your check to:

Cotati Historical Society
P.O. Box 7013
Cotati, CA 94931

Name/s _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

E-mail address _____

2012 Dues were due in January.

We're happy to note that over 150 members are paid up. To join them, send in your \$10 per person. Your dues and contributions help with **Preserving Cotati's History.**

A special THANK YOU for their printing courtesy to:

MORE unlimited
8252 Old Redwood Hwy., Cotati
(707)285-3400

Cotati Historical Society
P.O. Box 7013
Cotati, CA 94931



MUSIC MEMORABILIA NEEDED



Following up on our popular Music In Cotati program in October 2011, our Art Director, Judy Pagnusat, is collecting photos and memorabilia for a new display that will be in the Cotati Museum for the next year. Items of musical history from the days of the American Legion dances at the Women's Clubhouse, rock band era, Accordion Festival, Jazz Festival, Cotati Philharmonic etc. to the present would be much appreciated-and carefully preserved.

She asks that anyone who has items they are willing to let us copy or borrow get in touch with her at 795-2277 or leave a message on the Museum telephone, 794-0305.