

Cotati Historical Society Newsletter

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Preserving Cotati's Past
P.O. Box 7013 Cotati, CA 94931
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Prue Draper & Connie Martin, Editors

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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

Learn more about Cotati History and
the Cotati Museum at our **Website:**
www.cotatihistoricalsociety.org

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

Archive Admin: Judy Gustafson

Our Mission Statement

As stated in our Articles of Incorporation, dated April 11, 2007, the specific purpose of the Cotati Historical Society is to protect and preserve the history and culture of the City of Cotati, California. Our goal is to provide a museum and interpretive programs for the preservation of artifacts, memorabilia and documents illustrating the past and present life of the Cotati community, municipality and its citizens.

FUN FOR ALL WAS THEME OF ASS-TO-ASS RACES



Colorful posters like this one from 1984 added to the excitement about the Ass to Ass races. (Courtesy of Sam Dakin and Ron Martin)

Cotati's hexagonal plaza has been the heart of the community ever since the Page Family gave it to the town in 1893, and it's been the scene of assorted kinds of gatherings. But perhaps the most colorful were the Ass-to-Ass Race festivals that started in 1979 and continued every summer until 1987.

The Brass Ass was a popular pizza restaurant on East Cotati Avenue, favorite hangout of many Sonoma State students as well as local families. The first Brass Ass pizza pub was in Santa Rosa, on Montgomery Drive and later on Summerfield Road.

Sue Leake, who worked at both the B.A. restaurants, remembers how much fun it was to work there – owners and employees were like a big family, and often went on camping and rafting trips together. That friendly atmosphere, as well as the informality – with peanut shells on the floor – and the hand-thrown pizza crusts, helped make the restaurants popular hangouts.

Scotty Thompson remembers that he and other Sonoma State archaeology students hiked across the fields almost every day to meet their friends there after class.

The idea for sponsoring a footrace between the two Brass Asses was hatched by Peter Shidler and his late wife Julie Shidler, co-owners of the restaurants with Bud Townsend and his wife Carol. Julie Shidler was connected with the Sonoma County Camp Foundation, and conceived the races as

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Save the Date

“Memories of Attending Cotati School”

Will be the theme of

AN AFTERNOON OF COTATI HISTORY

Sunday, November 4, 2012

2-4 P.M. - Cotati Room behind City Hall

Come and share your memories

Refreshments will be served

Ass to Ass Races were fun and raised funds for campers

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Peter Shidler donned top hat, tail and running shorts, emphasizing the “fun-for-all” atmosphere of the Ass to Ass races. (Photo courtesy of Sue Leake)

fundraisers for that organization, with the Redwood Empire Foundation as sponsor. Peter Shidler recalls that learning how to sponsor a footrace – still a new concept in those days – was a challenge.

He appealed to Bob Lyon, SSU track coach, who gave him guidance and volunteered to train a class to handle the technicalities of managing a run.

The idea was that runners would sprint from the Brass Ass in Santa Rosa to the Brass Ass in Cotati, ending up in the Plaza where there would be a big party. The distance was 13 miles – a half-marathon. To appeal to a larger crowd, there were also Half-Ass Races, which started in the Plaza, wound through several neighborhoods and ended at the Cotati Brass Ass. There were no cash prizes, but every runner got a t-shirt.

The first year they had 950 runners; the next year, 1500. Later there were 4000 to 5000 runners each year.

Anthony Tusler, who was the only entrant in a wheelchair one year, still treasures the mug he won for his first place finish in his division.

The planners decided to expand the festival, and had a variety of musicians, some who are now famous but then were just starting out, including harmonica virtuoso Huey Lewis and Robert Cray, blues guitarist and singer. They got the Budweiser Clydesdale horses to come one year and they sold 100 cases of beer – and raised enough money to send a lot of kids to camp, Shidler remembers.

Lots of water checkpoints were needed to revive the runners along Petaluma Hill Road, and the planners encouraged water stop volunteers by offering a case of champagne to the most dramatic watering team. Volunteers poured in, with unlimited imagination.

One outstanding example was called “The Last Little Cat-house in Cotati” – run by a women’s soccer team, all dressed up as streetwalkers with their husbands disguised as pimps. Another was created by a visiting construction crew who built a 50-foot wooden tunnel topped with palm branches, with a sprinkler system attached to water tanks to cool the runners.

Sonoma State Coach Bill Lyon, dressed as a sheik, sponsored an “O-Assis” with scantily clad, shapely coeds handing out the water from an ornate tent.



Anthony Tusler still cherishes the mug he won for first place in the wheelchair category. (Photo courtesy of Anthony Tusler)



This group of Brass Ass employees chose a gangster movie as theme for their water stop. The gun moll on left is Shea Lynn Baird; tough hood on right is Michelle Anna Jordan, who says this was the only time she has ever dressed in drag; the center gangster is an employee remembered as a “sweet girl named Barbara”. (Photo courtesy of Michelle Anna Jordan)

Michelle Anna Jordan, who worked at the Cotati Brass Ass, remembers one race where they chose The Godfather movie as their water stop theme. They had an antique car – an old black roadster – all dressed up like gangsters, and playfully squirted water machineguns at the runners.

One year the Cotati Brass Ass sponsored a contest they called the Gassed Ass Dash, where runners were to sprint from one Cotati tavern to another, downing a beer at each place. It was held only once; it became clear that running while drinking beer was unhealthy.

In 1992, hoping to reproduce the festivities that had become famous, the Cotati Chamber of Commerce organized a sequel called the Smartass Race, which ran from the Veterans Memorial Building out to Petaluma Hill Road, by the SSU campus and back to the Plaza. It was held again in 1993, but apparently that ended the series of riotous footraces in Cotati.

SUMMER = TIME FOR US TO ENTER PARADES



Our entry of a rare 1933 Packard Super 8 convertible won the first prize trophy at the Penngrove Fourth of July Parade. Kathy Norwood, Val Kingsbury and Yvonne VanDyke were among our members walking and handing out museum information. (Photo by Chuck Lucas)



Children helped with decorating and rode on the antique truck in Penngrove. Photo on left: Samantha Clothier, Ali Martin, Jordan & Mad-die Rodgers. Photo above: Aden Stanley, Ben Robbins, Noah Stanley & Jackson Robbins.

Don Clancy, who drove the antique auto displays the first prize trophy it won for best vintage auto.

(Photos by Jerry Pagnusat)



“Under the Sea”: Theme of the Cotati Kids’ Day Parade gave some Cotatians a chance to dress for the occasion. Snorkelers were Prue Draper and Bob Herrerias, whose 1947 Dodge truck was filled with sea animals and, left to right Jake Martin and mermaids Alexis Crisp, Lindsey Caudel, Melanie Mattos and Riley Moore.

WE HAVE MUCH TO BE THANKFUL FOR

It warms our hearts when we get donations to the museum, whether they are services that help us, historic artifacts for our collections, old photos we’ve not seen before or information that fills in blanks in Cotati’s history....and, of course, money. It’s a pleasure to report that once again we have received a grant of \$500 from State Farm Insurance through their Good Neighbor program. Former State Farm employees who donate at least 40 hours per year to an eligible non-profit organization earn this handsome amount for their organization. Once again, **Judy Gustafson** qualified (in fact, more than qualified!) and we welcomed the check from State Farm.

We warmly appreciated the help of **Green Mary** at our very successful barbecue in the spring; she’s an environmentalist who puts her energy where her beliefs lie, and provides real dishware (which is washed and sterilized between uses) to avoid using paper plates. Thanks, **Green Mary!**



Judy Gustafson, left, presents Treasurer Yvonne Van Dyke, with the check donated by State Farm Insurance. (Photo by Judy Pagnusat)

Our collection of historic books got a wonderful boost with the addition of the two-volume set of Sonoma county history books by Honoria Tuomey, one of the best-known of local historians and writers. They were donated to our museum by **Debi Riddle**, who formerly lived in Petaluma, and now is active in historic preservation at her new home in Fayetteville, GA. Thanks to you too, **Debi!**



Millie Nibe of Cotati, left, and Robin Scott, here from Grass Valley, discovered that they had been classmates years ago at Cotati School. (Photo by Misti Harris)

And recent visitors gave us extra understanding of the ties between people who knew each other years ago, as was proved again when two groups of residents arrived by the coincidence at the museum. **Mildred Nibe** grew up in Cotati, and still lives here; she had been meaning to visit the museum, and finally did. **Robin Scott** lived in Cotati as a child, and came in while she and her husband were visiting from Grass Valley with their daughter, Misti Harris, associate planner for the City of Cotati. By coincidence, the two started comparing notes, and realized that they had attended Cotati School at the same time. A warm reunion resulted – the kind of thing that keeps us knowing that the work that goes into producing and managing the Cotati Museum is worthwhile.

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 _____ City _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone _____

E-mail address _____

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REDWOOD CAFÉ DISPLAY

Check out our display board on the wall at Redwood Café. It's part of the restaurant's local history emphasis on art and literature, produced by Art Director, **Judy Pagnusat**.