

Cotati Historical Society Newsletter

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Preserving Cotati's Past
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Winter 2019

Bobbie Veronda and Marie McNaughton, Editors

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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BOARD POSITIONS OPEN SKILL SETS NEEDED

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Graphic Arts . Social Media . History
Newsletter Editing and Production

COTATI MUSEUM HOURS

Every Saturday, 1-4 pm
2nd Tuesdays, 5-7 pm

For tours and research
appointments,
call 707-794-0305
Inside Cotati City Hall

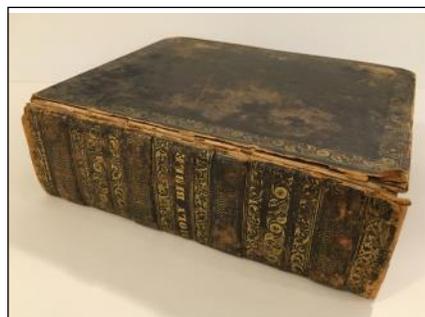
THE CHS MISSION

As stated in our Articles of Incorporation, dated April 11, 2007, the specific purposes of the Cotati Historical Society are 1) to protect and preserve the history and culture of the City of Cotati, 2) to provide a permanent resource (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, and 3) to reach out to the general community and to support similarly guided educational and historical agencies.

Cotati-Page Connections Keep History Alive

Since its founding in 2007, CHS has been fortunate to have the support of the descendants of Dr. Thomas Stokes Page's family, longtime owners of the Rancho Cotate and designers of our town plan in the 1890s. They have been generous with advice, information, images, artifacts, and funds, and have attended a number of our events. One of our strongest allies in this preservation of local history is John R. Page of Palo Alto, a descendant of Thomas Page's son Charles (1847-1912).

Earlier this year, John Page confirmed his confidence in us by entrusting the family's 19th century Bible to our care. Containing the handwritten genealogical records as penned primarily by Dr. Page's bride Ana Maria Liljevalch of Valparaiso, Chile, the Bible is believed to be a wedding gift from her mother, Mary Anne Delano Liljevalch, in 1841.



Page family Bible

The family records section (tucked between the Old and New Testaments) details in several hands, across two continents Page family births, marriages, and deaths from 1775 to 1955. The sacred volume, in very good condition, was first published in Boston by C. Ewer, T. Bedlington, and J.H.A. Frost in 1828.

On hand for this unique donation were Page cousins Eduardo Ibanez, a

descendant of Henry/Enrique Page (1845-1913), and his wife, Deborah Vieitas, visiting from Sao Paulo, Brazil. CHS president John Allred received the long hoped-for gift—joined by treasurer Bobbie Veronda and volunteer Marie McNaughton. Eduardo wrote John Page the next day, thanking him for the opportunity to be part of the transfer: "Tracking our roots is being part of something larger than our own lives." John Page has previously donated the



Eduardo Ibanez & Deborah Vieitas

copies of family portraits and historic snapshots featured at the entrance to the museum, as well as transcripts of Thomas Page's 1830s diary and a volume of correspondence between him and Faxon Dean Atherton, one of the Pacific Coast's most prominent Yankee traders and a personal family friend.



John Allred & John Page

(Continued on Page 2)

"Around the Horn" to Chile and Cotati: A Brief Account

(Continued from Page 1)

Thomas Page was born in New Jersey in 1815, became a physician in 1836, and settled in Chile in 1837 to establish what would become a very successful medical practice among the elite of Valparaiso. The city was then the most significant port on the West Coast of the Americas. Of his and Ana Maria's 13 children, 10 lived to adulthood and visited San Francisco and Rancho Cotate.

The Pages in California

In 1848—after losing the 1846-1848 war—Mexico ceded "Alta California" to the United States. A New England ex-patriot in Valparaiso and later in California, friend Atherton facilitated Page's 1849 purchase of the 17,000-acre Rancho Cotate land grant and other properties in the new territory. However, due to legal complications transferring land between Mexican and American citizens, Page did not visit the Rancho Cotate until 1860. Then serious development of the property by hired ranch managers began. Sections of the ranch were sold off for cash, leaving 10,000 acres for pasturage and farming.

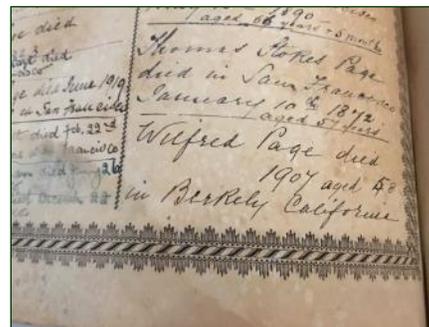
In 1869 Dr. Page (now retired), his wife, and the younger members of their large family—Lizzie, Manuela, and William—moved to California and first stayed with the Athertons at Valparaiso Park in what is now San Mateo County. The Pages soon set up housekeeping in San Francisco, the Rancho providing a comfortable income to the ambitious, well-connected, multi-lingual family. Oldest sons Olof and Enrique and oldest daughter Anita remained in Chile. Middle sons Charles, Arthur, George, and Wilfred concluded their various formal educations in Chile, the

eastern United States, and Europe before settling in San Francisco in the 1870s. Dr. Page died of a longstanding illness in 1872. He left the ranch to his children, not to be subdivided until William came of age in 1892.

Wilfred became a gifted agriculturalist and the primary manager of the ranch, known throughout Northern California as a practitioner of the best farming methods of the day. The bulk of the property was surveyed and sectioned off by The Page Brothers/Cotati Company with its unique hexagonal plaza named after six of the Page sons. Wilfred's name was given to a train station, school, and boulevard north of town. (Do note other downtown streets named Page, Delano, and Valparaiso.) The Pages also donated land for a Cotati school and post office in 1893.

By that time most family members had already established themselves in San Francisco, Marin, and Alameda counties. They kept the land around the main house and farm buildings until the 1930s, when what remained of what was once California's largest intact ranch was sold to George McNear of Petaluma.

The Page Bible and other fragile items in the CHS collection are kept in special storage and are available for viewing at the museum by request.



Page family Bible



CHS BBQ ** May 3rd 2020

Extraordinary Cotati Women Honored at Cotati Museum

Photos by Judy Gustafson show attentive listeners to the story of suffragist Althea Luetta Harmer Focht told by local historian Mary Dodgion. Other talks were given by Connie Martin, Carole Witt, Lisa Moore and Marie McNaughton. (Full story on page 4)



Lisa Moore, Ed Gilardi, Sandra Walton, Robin Draper, Craig and Carole Witt



Connie Martin, R J Banks, Mary Dodgion

The Irene Lipton Story You Probably Didn't Know

Many of our members and readers will remember Lipton's General Store and Fountain from the 1950s and 1960s. It was located in the Old Redwood Highway storefront that the Redwood Café currently occupies.

"As a ten year old," writes Gerald "Jerry" Turney, "Lipton's was the place for my friends and I to buy a candy bar, Coke, and comic magazines. During the 1950s I was too young to know much about people's life stories and that was true of the Lipton family."

It was only years later, when Turney became a history teacher in the East Bay that he learned about the amazing survival story of storekeeper Irene Lipton.

According to a *Jewish News of Northern California* article published at the time of Irene's death in 2009, Renia Libicki was born into a Polish Jewish family in 1922.

In the early 1940s, "she gave her infant daughter to a Catholic couple to protect the child from the Nazis." They changed the baby's name from Blima to Eva to protect her identity.

Renia worked in a munitions labor camp, but could sometimes arrange to see Eva and her foster mom on the street; her husband died in the war, according to the *Jewish News* story. After the war, the Catholic couple decided to keep the baby and disappeared.

Her prewar life in ruins, Renia remarried and gave birth to a son, Leonard, while in a refugee camp. The new family emigrated to Israel and then the United States in 1951, but that marriage collapsed.

Now "Irene," she moved to the San Francisco Bay Area and met eligible Jewish bachelor and Cotati general store

proprietor Irving Lipton (who had purchased Skilling's pharmacy and general store in 1949.)

She, her parents Henry and Ida Libicki, and her son Leonard moved to Sonoma County. Irv and Irene married in Reno in 1952 and settled down to raise a family, soon to include Denise and Connie.

The wooden store burned down in December 1953 with all its Christmas inventory, but reopened in March 1954 in the stucco, brick, and plate-glass building we know today. Irv and Irene also became known for their support of local schools, Blue Birds, and Cub Scouts.



Irene Lipton

In 1963, Irene became a U.S. citizen. But she had never forgotten her first, lost daughter. In 1957, through an intermediary, Irene found Eva and they corresponded covertly for many years.

In 1971, in Bulgaria, they finally reunited. According to Eva, she knew her mother on first sight. "If you ever wanted proof of genetics, we are perfect for it. I look like her, I moved like her. We both used to smoke, and we held cigarettes the same way. We sit the same way, lie in bed the same way."

In 1969, Irene and Irv moved their family to San Francisco, where they ran several businesses. Irv died in 1977.

In 1979, Eva and her family emigrated to the Bay Area to be with her extended family, just as Irene had done so many years before.

Special thanks to Jerry Turney and Bernice Turney Borgia for their contributions to this story.



The first Lipton's store

Photo from the CHS Draper Collection

THANK YOU TO OUR NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS AND DONORS

Shirley Avila

George Bunting *

Lori Burke

Nancy Hunt **

Gordon McCullough

Rick Minervini *

Barbara Morrow **

Stan Poncia *

Louise Santero

Tim & Jeannie Tilghman *

Yvonne Van Dyke *

Craig & Carole Witt

* Indicates a general donation in addition to dues

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Note: Memberships and donations received after November 17, 2019 will be acknowledged in the spring newsletter

Extraordinary Women Shine at Cotati's Fall History Event

Despite fires, power outages, and evacuations in Sonoma County leading up to it, our Fall Event honoring three extraordinary women who loved Cotati was held at the Cotati Museum on Sunday, Nov. 3. Some 30 locals gathered to learn primarily about Ethel Clothier, Marguerite Hahn, and Prue Draper, and to see a new exhibit developed by Connie Martin, Judy Gustafson and Velma Veronda DiMeola.

The gathering was one of the first countywide events celebrating "20/20," a year-long national recognition of U.S. women's suffrage in 1920. Many plates of delicious homemade cookies and coffee were served while five women spoke about the foremothers that make us all strong.

Local native Connie Martin told stories about her grandma and early Cotati businesswoman, Ethel Clothier. Carole Witt came from Petaluma to speak lovingly about her grandmother, Cotati's famous journalist and librarian Marguerite Hahn. Former Cotati mayor and Draper mentee Lisa Moore talked about how Prue encouraged and advised her throughout her community service career.

To learn more about these remarkable citizens, visit the Cotati Museum's new "**Women Who Loved Cotati**" exhibit which will be featured until next fall.

In addition, Marie McNaughton shared her research on the women who founded Cotati's Ladies' Improvement Club in 1909. She also talked about Cotati's first female voters in the California election of 1912. It is not known how they voted, of course, but it was interesting to learn that not all of them registered in the same parties as their husbands.

To cap the event, Mary Dodgion of Sebastopol's West Sonoma County Museum presented research by fellow volunteer Theresa Lynch detailing the life of Althea Luetta Harmer Focht. She was one of Sonoma County's first suffragists and a one-time

president of the Cotati Ladies' Aid Society.

In 1911, as an unmarried, fully employed property owner, Miss Harmer made a compelling speech noting the unfairness of her paying taxes but not being allowed to vote. Fortunately, California's women gained suffrage that very year. She later married, farmed, and raised three children of her own in the Analy township.

To learn more about Focht and other remarkable ladies, visit the West County Museum's exhibit featuring women across Sonoma County history at 2615 Main St, Sebastopol.

(See page 2 for more photos.)



Cotati Historical Society & Museum
Inside Cotati City Hall at 201 West Sierra Ave
PO Box 7013 Cotati CA 94931

May
3rd



12th Annual CHS BBQ

Mark your calendar early!