

Petaluma Museum Association

Petaluma Historical Library & Museum

Preserving the Unique History of Petaluma and Providing
Educational and Cultural Services to the Community

Quarterly Newsletter
Digital Edition



Petaluma Carnegie Library under construction circa 1905

Spring/Summer 2024

Volume 34, Issue 2

On the Cover



Petaluma Carnegie Library under construction circa 1905

CORNERSTONE: BUILDING COMMUNITY IN PETALUMA

April 25-June 16

In commemoration of the 120th anniversary of the setting of the building's cornerstone, this exhibition will include photographs, documents, and ephemera related to the founding and construction of Petaluma's Carnegie Library. The exhibit will emphasize how community enthusiasm and support was instrumental in bringing the library to Petaluma in 1904, and later was key to the building's evolution into the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum.



Ceremony for the laying of the library's cornerstone on June 10, 1904. (Sonoma County Library)

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Thank you to all the contributors and
special thanks to Carl Molesworth, copy
editor. If you would like to contribute any
news or items of interest
to our newsletter,
email mrowe@petalumamuseum.org
Deadline is July 1, 2024

**Petaluma Museum Association
20 Fourth St.
Petaluma, CA 94952**

A Message from the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

The cornerstone of our historic building, originally Petaluma's Carnegie library, was placed with much fanfare on June 10, 1904. As you'll read beginning on page four, it was a moment of great pride and celebration for all of Petaluma.

Ever since that day, this space has brought people together in public-private partnership. The Museum is operated by the Petaluma Museum Association (PMA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, in partnership with the City of Petaluma, which owns the property and the collections. Members like you are the other key component—thank you for your support!

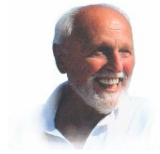
This year, as we look back on our cornerstone anniversary, we are also looking ahead to the future. We envision the Museum as a flourishing civic hub—a place to explore the past, to learn new things about our town and ourselves, and to promote dialogue about how we will shape our shared future.

As a member, you've shown that you value the Museum as a powerful community asset with far-reaching impact. Museums are proven to inspire creativity, increase cultural diversity, and boost local economies. There is increasing evidence that museums contribute to social cohesion, civic engagement, health, and well-being. Museums can also open eyes to different ideas and perspectives and help us better understand the world around us.

It takes all of us working together to keep this historical heart of Petaluma beating strong. You can put your membership into action by advocating for inclusion of the Museum in the City of Petaluma's General Plan Policy Frameworks, which are available for public feedback through June 20. These documents, which reflect the values, priorities, and goals of the City of Petaluma, include only two passing mentions of the Museum (and notably no mention at all in the Arts, Culture, and Creativity framework). We believe the frameworks could better reflect the value that the Museum brings to our community as the cultural anchor of Petaluma, leading the charge toward impactful, civic-oriented work. Make your voice heard by going to planpetaluma.org/policy-frameworks and sharing your thoughts via the Google forms linked within each framework page.

Thank you for helping to ensure that the Museum continues to be a thriving cultural resource for all of Petaluma! Just as in 1904, we can build a brighter future for our city by working together.

Warm regards,
Stacey Atchley
Executive Director



Petaluma History & Commentary

by Skip Sommer, Historian

1904: THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY CORNERSTONE

(From our newsletter archives Summer/Fall 2018, Volume 28, Issue 3)

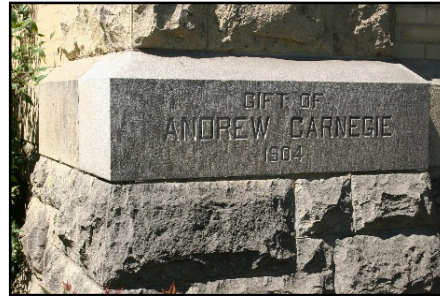
IN 1898, THE Petaluma Ladies Improvement Club started a campaign directed at Industrialist Andrew Carnegie, asking him to give the city a monetary grant to build a new library in our town. Up to then, Petaluma had only a couple of rooms set aside in a fraternal club as a library, and the ladies kept nudging this issue for three years before Mr. Carnegie responded in 1901. He said he would donate the sum of \$12,500 toward the library construction IF the two following conditions would be met: a site must be donated and designated, and the City enact ordinance insuring the support for the library and set aside a sum of \$1,250 for its maintenance.

So, then stepped up our wonderful Addie Atwater, President of the Ladies Improvement Club, who offered to sell a lot she owned to the City, for half of its market value. It was a done deal, and the City hired young Petaluma architect Brainerd Jones to draw up the plans. It was advertised that the 60' X 66' masonry structure would be totally: "up with the times" and even be warmed by one of those "New hot-air heating plants!" (Well, Zowie!)



Addie Atwater

It was then June of 1904, and the big ceremony of laying the cornerstone had all of Petaluma atwitter.



On Friday afternoon, June 10th, the bulky cornerstone for our long-awaited library would be set, to great celebration. R.W. Ravenscroft, editor of our Petaluma Courier, stated:

"All the stores and places of business will be closed. Visitors will come from every town in the State. A big time is anticipated. Mr. Carnegie's gift to the City, will give Petaluma one of the prettiest library buildings in the State."

As the paper anticipated, a parade from Washington Street and Main Street, down to B Street and then west a block to the future library lot, was to start at noon that day, Mayor Veale was to give the first address and present "the trowel to E.S. Lippitt" (who *always* had a lot to say). A special three-coach train came down from Santa Rosa, bearing spectators. The new

Petaluma Library Board consisted of S. Hopkins, E. Lippitt, W. DeTurk and Thomas Maclay. Our first librarian was to be Sara Cassiday, daughter of Argus Editor Sam Cassiday. All were in attendance on June 10th, 1904.

With the parade finished, the big event was ready to start, the huge crowd encircled the lot, and *THEN, as the horse-drawn wagon bearing the stone arrived on-site*, a stranger jumped from the crowd and (as Ravenscroft described it) "flung his arms and jaw into the air and shouted that the whole canoodle of workmen were *SCABS*, if they continued to work on the library building!" Well . . . what was that about? Who was that dude? And, what do we do now? One can just imagine the pall that hung over the large crowd then. Mouths were agape.

It turned out, the guy was a visiting union organizer from Colorado and was complaining that the "Driver of the dray, bringing in the stone, was *NOT* a union member!" The stone had been cut by union men and the stone and its delivery had been donated, and there really was no bad anti-union attitude to this otherwise union construction project.

So, here's what happened in a speedy fashion: A local union representative jumped on the dray, drove it out to the city limits and then back to the site and all was deemed okay for the ceremony. The wait in between had been filled with music and drink, and the dedication proceeded just an hour or so

late. The Courier commented, “The catastrophe of not having a stone to lay was averted by the heroism of the Teamsters Union.” The mouthy dude from Colorado had apparently snuck off, and I’m sure our Professor Lippitt, trowel in hand, was much relieved, and the stone was set. (Whew).



Henry Ford in his 1904 automobile

1904 was a busy year. The automobile was becoming fairly well established, with Henry Ford leading the way. Teddy Roosevelt won his second term as President and through his efforts, the U.S. purchased the Panama Canal property for 10 million bucks. '04 was the year Orville and Wilbur Wright tried out their flying machine, the Russo-Japanese war began, “Peter Pan” and “Madame Butterfly” both debuted and the first ice cream cone was consumed. Interestingly, one of the “names” that year, was baseball hero “Ty” Cobb, whose grandson, (of the same name), became one of current President Trump’s attorneys more than a century later.

We were years from “The Roaring Twenties” in '04, and women were still being constrained by some of the Victorian mores. Consider these items: The Olympics were held in St. Louis, Missouri, that year and out of 100 events, only archery was open to female competitors. In New York City, a lady was arrested for smoking a cigarette in public, and in Rome, Pope Pius X banned

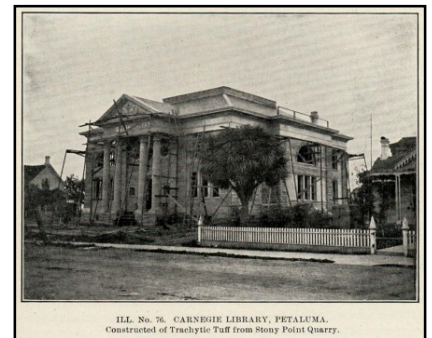
“low cut dresses, when in the company of churchmen.” (Oh well . . .) In California news, the Bank of Italy, (later to become Bank of America), opened its doors in San Francisco; the electric railroad from Petaluma to Sebastopol and Santa Rosa began hauling apples, poultry and redwood; the Petaluma Elks Club was founded; the Heritage River West Vineyard (to become Rodney Strong Winery) was planted; and a young man named Sam Melnick became our first Jewish chicken farmer when he bought seven acres outside of Cotati. By 1920, verdant southern Sonoma County would grow to contain the largest assemblage of Jewish farmers in the entire country! Many of their descendants were to become the leaders of our city for decades to come.

In Petaluma, which sported a population then of about 5,600, the Wickersham Banking Company, (Thomas Maclay, president), was boasting a capitalization of \$200,000, a young lad named Denman McNear graduated from Petaluma High, the Bank of Sonoma County was opened, Josie Hill had begun work on her Hill Opera House, and the new theater would be faced with Stony Point stone. It was said: “It will be one of the best play houses north of S.F.!” (It’s now the Phoenix Theater).

Our Chamber of Commerce was boasting about Petaluma’s excellent location, pointing out that we had a “fine asset in our sewer system, the refuse being carried to the bay, on each tide,” and it got there by way of our Petaluma Creek!

(Hopefully, there were other community highlights, as well). That

year, an average of 11,000 dozen eggs were shipped out of here *daily* to SF, and we also sported a shoe factory employing 100; three tanneries; the only silk mill on the West Coast, employing 90; the Golden Eagle and the McNear Mills and the Petaluma Incubator Company. Speaking of incubators, inventor Lyman Byce sold his existing buildings that year to expand to a new larger factory on the river, but also fronting Main Street (now Jan Rosen’s restaurant, 256 North Main).

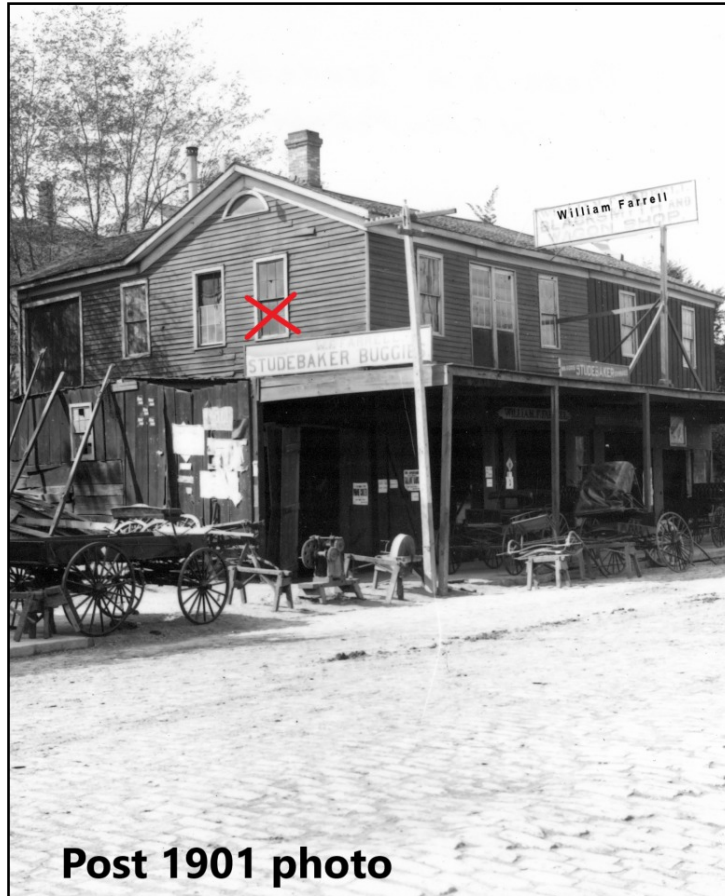


Carnegie Library, just finishing construction 1906

And, last but not least . . . *dredging of our river* was an issue in '04. (Really?) The river just had to be straightened out too, and that involved lopping off some pieces of embankment to accomplish. Two of our city founders, John McNear and Hiram Fairbanks, stood to lose some property footage by that, and were “very concerned.” City Trustee Zartman moved that “a cut” above the Washington Street Bridge would “result in an open canal,” and the city would offer \$500 for that parcel. However, both Fairbanks and McNear volunteered to donate their land, and the motion was passed. Both the dredged and straightened river and the new Carnegie Library (then less than two years from completion) were to make major positive differences in the life of our community. Both were great steps forward.

“X” Marks the Spot Burning the Midnight Oil

by Terry Park



Over the years, **Lyman Byce** continued to position himself at the head of the who-perfected-the-first-incubator queue. This included Argus Courier articles and the puff piece titled “How It All Came About” that appeared in his Petaluma Incubator Company’s product catalogues along with a photo of a building.

Byce tells the story of how he worked from 12 to 20 hours per day for nearly a year to perfect his egg incubator, barely taking time to go out for meals. According to Byce, he labored at his workbench until late at night or early morning, scarcely realizing the flight of time. So interesting was the work, he would finally brush the shavings off his bench so he could spread blankets and seek recuperation for a few hours.

Byce arrived in Petaluma in the fall of 1878 and by September 1879 was producing his own incubator model, the Axford, on his poultry farm known

as the old Church property on Western Avenue. The catalogue photo of the building is of poor quality so another later one of the Farrell business is on the cover. The catalogue photo is identified as the 1879 Conrad Blacksmith shop with an “X” on the room in which Byce labored. Dr Dias, a dentist, also worked on perfecting the first incubator, preceded Byce in using this room. They eventually became partners and collaborated on perfecting the Petaluma incubator.

Simon Conrad, the blacksmith, died in 1873. William Robinson became owner in October 1881, while William Farrell became a partner in November 1881 and sole owner in 1901. The building was demolished in 1921, and today the parking lot for Dunaway Automotive Paint occupies the spot.

So “X” marks the spot for what owner of the building in 1879? Check out the answer in the next newsletter.

What's New in Collections

by Solange Russek, Collections Manager

Collection Highlight: Dan and Eileen Welding

Thanks to Barbara Martin for donating family photos of her grandparents, who lived on Liberty St.



Dan Welding in front of his home on Liberty St.

Her grandfather, Dan, was born in California and was orphaned at the young age of five. He was sent to an orphanage in Brooklyn, New York.

When Dan arrived around 1910, he did not have the last name of his family. When he turned 18 and was ready to leave the Brooklyn orphanage, he took the name of the "Welding" shop that was next door.

Dan later met and married Eileen L. Guthrie from San Francisco. They rented a home on Liberty St in Petaluma. Eileen was nurse, and Dan worked at the Hotel Petaluma.

Dan was an amateur boxer, sportsman, and artist. Newspaper articles show him at the Sonoma-Marin fair winning awards along with Lew Barber for their art work.



Eileen in the backyard of home on Liberty St holding one of Dan's beloved Boston Terriers "Bambi"

Dan returned to California to get married to his first wife, Evelyn Tavarez, in 1935. In 1938 they had a son, Byron Ellsworth Welding (1938-1995). Dan and Evelyn divorced soon after Byron was born.

Anytime there was a boxing event happening, the Argus-Courier would ask Dan to predict the winner. "Rocky Marciano!" Dan answered.

In the late 1940s, Dan took a job as a night clerk at the Roosevelt Hotel in Oakland, CA. Read more about the Roosevelt Hotel below: https://localwiki.org/oakland/roosevelt%20hotel/files/Oakland_Tribune_Sun_May_12_1929%20-%20roosevelt%20hotel.jpg



ATTEMPTED HOLDUP FAILS—Daniel Welding (background), one-time Brooklyn amateur boxer and now a hotel desk clerk in Oakland, watched police remove the body yesterday of an unidentified man he shot and killed when the latter drew a gun. Welding said, and tried to hold him up. Welding said he took a gun from under the counter and shot the would-be bandit three times.

Oakland Hotel Desk Clerk Kills Man In Hold-Up Try

OAKLAND—(AP)—A hold-up man, but little was noted out desk clerk snatched a pistol and shot the man under a table in a rooming house. (Angels, was written on the back, attempting a hold-up. Welding said the man was seen. The clerk was Daniel J. Weld in the lobby Friday. Police said and 50, a uniformed Brooklyn man who arrested the dead, shot a m. Saturday and asked. The dead man, draped with a quarter's change for hotel, two bullets in the head and one a telephone call. The man then on the shoulder, was well dressed, an automatic pistol and said about 36 years of age. He ordered Welding to "sit down" and a driver's license, been quietly in that club," police said. (The name Clay Newman Dunn? Welding reached under the gun. The clerk here, the address country, a l.e.p.d. back said 1918 Seattle st, Los Angeles, on dropped the bandit in his tracks.

Dan was warned that there had been some robberies in the area and that he should be careful. Taking precautions, Dan purchased a handgun and practiced firing it. That paid off on the early morning of Nov. 5, 1949, when a man who had been in the hotel lobby a day before asked Dan for change for a quarter. Just then the man pulled out a gun and said: "Sit down, this is it!"

As Dan was obeying the gunman's command, he grabbed his own handgun that was hidden between some newspapers and shot the would-be robber dead!

RIGHT ON THE NOSE . . . Petalumans Vince Sullivan, E. B. Jessen, and Dan Welding picked Heavyweight Champion Rocky Marciano to knock out Ezzard Charles in the eighth round, and that's exactly what Rocky did.

Petaluma Argus-Courier September 20, 1954

On May 27, 1963, Dan was driving on the Redwood Highway attempting to make a left turn onto Ely when he collided with another car. Dan suffered head injuries from the accident and continued to suffer from headaches and memory loss from a tumor in his brain. Sadly Dan could not take it anymore and killed himself in the living room of the home he shared with his wife Eileen. Being a nurse, Eileen was able to deal with what had happened.

Dan Welding is buried in the paupers grave at Cypress Hill.

Eileen lived to be in her late nineties. She continued to reside on Liberty until she was evicted because the owner of the property sold the house. Eileen was good friends with Rose Lopez, who played the accordion at events and restaurants in Petaluma and Cotati.

Collections.....from page 7

Articles about Dan & Eileen Welding and more photos.

GETTING ACQUAINTED . . . Dan Welding, the new night clerk at the Hotel Petaluma, is not only a former top amateur boxer, but he is also quite an artist. Dan specializes in pen etchings—with colored ink and black and white. **NOTE:** Dan Welding is a member of the Moose Lodge. So with the Petaluma Moose Lodge interested in reviving boxing in Petaluma, Dan should be a major asset to the organization in this effort. Mr. Welding hails from New York.

* * *

Petaluma Argus-Courier July 6, 1954

Dan is Back

Daniel Welding, long-time desk clerk at Hotel Petaluma, is back on the job after a lay-off of several months.

Wonder how many people passing by the desk realize how talented this man is. He is, among other things, a master hypnotist and a fine artist.

Petaluma Argus-Courier July 26, 1959



Dan's car in front of house on Liberty St.

**Cars Collide--
3 Persons
Are Injured**

Three persons were hurt in a two-car crash at Old Highway 101 and Ely Road at 12:50 p.m. Monday.

Daniel Welding, 52, an employe of the Salvation Army who lives at 231 Liberty St., sustained severe scalp lacerations and a cut on his right leg.

Donald Smith, 30, of 367 Bruce St., Rohnert Park, has a cut on the right knee.

His wife, Della, 27, was shaken up but less seriously injured.

All were taken to Petaluma General Hospital by city ambulance. Their condition this morning was listed as satisfactory.

The highway patrol said Welding was driving south on Old 101 and was attempting a left turn into Ely Road.

The Smiths were going north, and the two cars met almost head-on.

Welding's car caught fire in the engine area, and the Penn-grove Fire Department was called. The car was burned considerably, and gas continued to drain out onto the pavement for some time.

Petaluma AC May 24 1963

OBITUARIES

Daniel Welding

Confused and disturbed ever since an auto accident four months ago, Daniel J. Welding took his own life this morning, shooting himself in the right temple with a .38 caliber revolver, according to deputy coroners.

Welding, 53, of 231 Liberty St., was a salesman for the Salvation Army.

He lost his memory after the auto accident and was described by his wife, Eileen, as being disturbed and having bad headaches.

His wife said the couple was having breakfast when she left the room for a minute. Welding rose, crossed the room, got the weapon and pulled the trigger.

Welding was dead immediately.

Surviving is a son, Barney E. Welding who is stationed at Travis Air Force Base.

Welding belonged to the Moose. He lived here for nine years and used to work on the Cader Ranch.

He was an amateur artist of note, exhibiting colored pen and ink works at the Sonoma-Marin Fair, Art in the Park and in the Hotel Petaluma.

His remains were taken to the Sorensen Funeral Home where funeral arrangements are pending.

Petaluma AC September 24, 1963



Eileen at her stove and sink in house on Liberty St.



Rose Lopez and her accordion.



Rose Lopez and musicians

Eviction served on 93-year-old

Senior receives notice to vacate apartment she's rented almost half a century

By LOIS PEARLMAN
ARGUS-COURIER STAFF

An elderly Petaluma woman on Social Security is looking for an affordable rental after being evicted from the duplex she has rented for nearly 49 years.

Eileen Welding, a 93-year-old retired nurse, received a 30-day eviction notice right after Mother's Day, which was later extended to July 8. It said the house had been sold and she had to move.

Initially that was true, according to Creative Properties' Services agent Russell Lee, who was handling the Liberty Street property. But the buyers decided the old structure was too costly to fix up, so they withdrew the escrow.

But Welding's eviction notice was not withdrawn by her landlord, Marin County resident Mel Nunes. She still has less than a month to find a new rental on a Social Security income of about \$700. Her granddaughter, Barbara Martin, says it isn't going to be easy.

Martin said senior housing is beyond Welding's means. The only thing she can afford

is an apartment with Petaluma Ecumenical Properties, where she has been moved to the top of the list because she will soon be homeless. Typically the wait is six to eight months.

A pile of boxes sits against one wall of Welding's efficiency unit, which is half of a house that dates back to the early part of the 20th century. Martin said they are hoping Nunes will relent now that the house is off the market, but they want to be ready just in case.

"I don't like the idea of moving at all," said Welding, "but what can you do?"

When Welding moved into the small apartment with her third husband in 1954 they paid only \$60 a month. In the past 10 years the rent has increased \$200, but it is still way below market rate, making it possible for her to provide for her other needs.

Welding moves slowly and is hard of hearing, but she is as mentally sharp as a woman half her age. She has organized her life carefully to remain fully self-sufficient.

Petaluma Market delivers groceries to her door, the dry cleaner picks up and delivers,

and she is able to get around downtown on her own or with a lift from her granddaughter.

The pair has an interesting history. Martin is the child of a daughter Welding had out of wedlock. Martin's mother—Welding's daughter—gave Martin up for adoption. In early adulthood Martin began to search for her biological family and discovered Welding. Martin's mother was dead and she never located her father.

It was nice, Martin said, to find a grandmother because both of her adoptive grandmothers had died when she was young.

Martin said Welding had run away from an abusive home

life as a teenager, gotten involved in two bad marriages, then lost her third husband when he developed a brain tumor and committed suicide.

She earned a nursing certificate and worked in hospitals all over the Bay Area. She was already retired when Martin discovered her.

Now the women are hoping for a miracle, an opening at PEP or a small apartment somewhere in Petaluma where Welding can maintain her independence.

"She'd like to stay here in Petaluma where her friends are," Martin said.

(Contact Lois Pearlman at lpearlman@arguscourier.com)

Petaluma Argus-Courier June 11, 2003

NEW CHAMBER PRESIDENT



Pictured from left: Supervisor Mike Kerns and Mayor David Glass install Petaluma Argus-Courier Publisher John Burns as president of the Petaluma Area Chamber of Commerce at a May 30 luncheon held at The Running Rooster, formerly Rooster Run Grill.

Announcement

The 16th Annual New Year's Eve Concert will be the last concert at the museum presented by Sky Hill Cultural Alliance and the PMA. Sky Hill is looking for another venue to accommodate its concerts and house the Henry F. Miller 1899 Concert Grand Piano.

Sky Hill would like to keep these well-loved concerts in Petaluma so it can continue to offer exceptional classical music to our community.

All suggestions are welcome! Please contact Elizabeth Walter at Skyhill Cultural Alliance for updates on our progress and with thoughts and ideas. She can be contacted by email at ewinpetaluma@yahoo.com



Liberty Time Capsule

Address a letter with a forever stamp to where you live. Write about yourself, family, house, etc. Include some pictures. Your envelope will be included in the time capsule for the Post Office to deliver 100 years from now. You can also drop off your sealed envelope at the museum by Friday June 28.

Refer to the link below for more information about this historic event.

www.libertytimecapsule.com



Alexander J. "Zan" Stark (1889-1967)
 "Public Library - Petaluma Calif."
 Real photo postcard #738, March 1941

You have made the Petaluma Museum a part of your life. Now, we hope you will consider making the Petaluma Museum Association a part of your lasting legacy by leaving a gift in your will or trust.

Your bequest will ensure that the PMA remains a vibrant organization that welcomes our community in the historic Carnegie Library Building and passes down our history to the next generation of Petalumans. Petaluma Museum Association is a 501c3 tax-exempt organization.

To make the PMA a part of your estate plans, contact your financial planner. To find out more about how your will or trust might sustain our educational mission, contact Stacey Atchley, Executive Director, PMA at 707-778-4398.

Petaluma Sky Ranch History

Fifth in a Series

by Carl Molesworth

THE MAN WHO made the greatest contribution to aviation in the Petaluma area during the postwar period was George E. Justman, founder and longtime operator of the Petaluma Sky Ranch. Justman, a native of Tacoma, WA, was born in 1914 and made his solo flight at the age of 16. He became a flight instructor while in his twenties and was teaching college students to fly in the Civilian Pilot Training Program for the U.S. Army just prior to America's entry into World War II.

Justman was working for United Airlines when he took a military leave of absence to become an Army pilot during World War II. As a member of Ferry Command, he delivered Army aircraft to front-line units as far away as India and Russia, reaching the rank of captain and earning numerous decorations. When the war ended in 1945, he decided to return to his career in civilian aviation and settled on Petaluma as the place to do it. At the same time, he would be able to continue his military flying with the Air Force Reserve at nearby Hamilton Field.

Like the partners at rival Petaluma Skyways, Justman saw opportunity in the new G.I. Bill, which provided veterans with a variety of benefits that included paying for flight training. He acquired 22 acres from the Perry Ranch on South McDowell near the intersection with Caulfield, cleared a grass landing strip running perpendicular to the road and began signing up students for his flight school. He



George Justman, left, and a man wearing a Sonoma-Marin District Fair hat stand in front of an Aeronca Champion at Petaluma Sky Ranch airport in the 1950s.

proved an able promoter of civil aviation in general and his business in particular, writing articles for the newspaper about his students' successes, organizing a flying club called the "Throttle Benders" and partnering with the

Petaluma Lodge No. 475 Loyal Order of the Moose to form an Air Scouts troop. He added a hangar at Justman Field and purchased several Aeronca Champion light aircraft for trainers. Justman Flying Service thrived for three years, but by 1948 it was becoming clear that residential development around his airfield would soon make the site untenable.

In October 1948, Justman received a use permit from Sonoma County to build a new airport on property he purchased from the Pronini Brothers on East Washington Street. The permit allowed for construction of a Class 1 airstrip for light aircraft, along with four hangars to house 12 aircraft, living quarters, offices, and the Justman Flying Service flight school. It was located on the south side of East Washington Street abutting the west side of



Housing developments had not yet encroached on Petaluma Sky Ranch in 1953 when this photo was taken from above Ely Boulevard looking east. The open ground beyond the airport is now the site of the Petaluma Municipal Airport. Ken Schroll Studio

the current Petaluma Municipal Airport. Justman's new Sky Ranch Airport opened on Sunday afternoon, July 10, 1949, with an open house that featured flight demonstrations, parachute jumps and flyovers by military aircraft.

Sky Ranch Airport quickly became a popular destination for pilots from the Bay Area and beyond, and in June 1950 Justman recorded more than 70 takeoffs and landings by visiting aircraft. His flight school also was thriving, even though the GI Bill funding for flight training was soon to expire. In addition to primary flight training, Justman Flying Service also offered courses in commercial flying and flight instruction.

Presumably, Petaluma Sky Ranch benefited from a reduction in competition with the demise of the Petaluma Skyways operation on North McDowell in the spring of 1952. International affairs also began to have an impact on Justman's operation with the increased tensions of the Cold War and the outbreak of hostilities on the Korean Peninsula. In April 1951, Petaluma Sky Ranch was designated a Control Airport by the California State Aeronautics Commission under its civil defense plan. Pilots departing from the Waldo Rohnert airfield at Cotati for flights higher than 4,000 feet were required to file flight plans at Sky Ranch. By 1953, the GI Bill funding for flight training was restored as a benefit for American servicemen and women returning from Korea, and signups at Justman Flying Service picked up. In addition, Justman joined the newly formed Private Airport Owners



A passenger stands on the wing of the Justman Flying Service's twin-engine Piper Apache in front of the operations building at Petaluma Sky Ranch.

Association, an organization tasked with advocating for the interests of privately owned airports such as Petaluma Sky Ranch. Wear and tear on the busy little airport were inevitable, and in 1954 the Sky Ranch runway and turnaround strips were resurfaced, and a sidewalk was installed at the ready room. The following year, Justman Flying Service got a State Fire Patrol contract to use its Cessna 170-B and 180 aircraft to cover western California from the Bay Area to Crescent City. They flew with forest rangers and firefighters to blazes throughout the Redwood Empire, using the Navy's surplus airfield at Santa Rosa as a base.

Interest among certain Petaluma leaders for a city-owned airport dated all the way back to the end of World War II, and it began picking up again as the 1960s touched down. On April 29, 1961, Justman published a long column in the local newspaper questioning the need for a publicly owned airport in Petaluma. He mentioned that many city leaders feared that zoning around the airport, allowing housing developments, would

eventually make the airport untenable. He went on to report that of the 26-30 airplanes based at his airport, only three belonged to Petaluma residents. But by this time, George Justman's 14-year marriage to the former Violet Patocci of Petaluma was ending. He soon left Petaluma and leased out the airport and business to H.E. York & Sons, who later turned over the lease to three partners, Howland Smith, Thomas Cole, and William Connors, with Harold French serving as airport manager in 1965.

Connors wrote an article for the Argus-Leader in 1969 extolling the virtues of the airport, including its 2,200-foot paved and lighted runway, its FAA-approved flight school and a variety of aviation services including aircraft maintenance, rentals, charters and air taxis. He quoted FAA statistics showing 22,000 takeoffs and landings in 1967. In 1970, Violet Tufts, Justman's ex-wife, sold the airport property but retained the flight school and was operating it herself. She reported the following year that 60 planes were based at

Petaluma Sky Ranch.....from pg 11

the field, and Adobe Aviation had 30 students and 12 employees. Seven businesses were using the airport. The recently formed Petaluma Pilots Association had 73 members. In 1973, John Runyon took over the flight school, followed in 1975 by Jim Higgins, who also was doing charters and rentals. Mike Jose, a well-known one-armed pilot who had managed the airport 1972-77, owned and operated Petaluma Sky Ranch 1980-82. Phil and Sharon Perrin bought the airport in 1983 and stayed for one year before selling it to the City of Petaluma.



Numerous airplanes are parked around the hangars and shop building at Petaluma Sky Ranch in this 1973 photo. Sonoma County Library

Despite the activity at the airport, its days were numbered as residential neighborhoods continued to encroach. In September 1977, Petaluma Vice Mayor Bill Perry, a licensed pilot, convened a committee to discuss plans for a municipal

airport. This time, the city meant business. Plans were made for the city to acquire Petaluma Sky Ranch and property east of it for a new, larger airport with sufficient buffers from nearby residential neighborhoods. The Sky Ranch was dismantled, and Petaluma Municipal Airport opened in 1985.

George Justman was long gone from Petaluma by then but not forgotten. On Feb. 2, 1992, Bill Soberanes published a column in the newspaper updating the news about Justman. He was living in Friday Harbor, WA, had 34,500 flight hours and was still giving flying lessons. Justman died in 2005.

Come tour historic downtown Petaluma, guided by a docent in period attire!
Saturdays from May 4 – October 26
10:30 am to 12:00 pm
Please meet on the steps of the Petaluma Historical Library and Museum
Free, Donations of \$10 Appreciated. (Please register for ticket)

The Petaluma Historical Library & Museum invites you to join our living history docents—the “Petalumans of Yesteryear”—dressed in period attire for a guided tour of our historic downtown. Petaluma has a unique and fascinating history as a bustling river town during and after the Gold Rush, then as the “Chicken and Egg Capital of the World,” and now as a town that loves its history. Learn about Petaluma’s incredible architecture (including 8 sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places) and other important and interesting facets of our town’s history. You’ll be informed by your docent’s historical knowledge and entertained by their characters’ stories.

Free, suggested donation of \$10 appreciated. Meet on the steps of the Museum at 4th and B Street at 10:30am to embark on your trip back through time. *Participant(s) with special needs can contact the Museum several days before the walk they have signed up to take, and they will be able to participate fully in the tour.*

2024 Good Egg Awards and Butter and Egg Days Parade



Faith Ross, 2024 Good Egg recipient on left with Mayor Kevin McDonnell, Stacey Atchley, Executive Director, PMA and Katherine Rinehart, Historian (photo credit Jim Johnson)



Faith Ross with past Good Egg recipients on the front steps of the Petaluma Historical Library & Museum. (photo credit Jim Johnson)



The Helen Putnam Award, given out for the most entertaining entree, with emphasis on clever use of historical themes, went to the Petaluma Historical Library and Museum, with a float populated by the Petalumans of Yesteryear, dressed as real-life figures from Petaluma's past. The museum also received First place in the Antique vehicle (Non Commercial) category. (photo credit Paula Freund)



Faith waving from vehicle at the Butter & Egg Days parade (photo credit Paula Freund)

Lots of exciting events are happening at your museum!



For all the latest updates for events and exhibits please visit us on our website at:

<https://www.petalumamuseum.org/events>

Museum hours: Thursday–Sunday, 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Exhibits are free to the public — Donations Accepted



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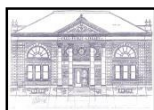
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