



Nicasio Historical Society

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Letter from the President

Great Good News: NHS Museum Revival

When the front room of Druid's Building #2 recently became available, the NHS Board of Directors decided to reopen our museum!

Looking Back at our Museum 2014-2020

We originally opened our museum in spring of 2014 and held a Grand Opening Celebration that fall, our best-attended event to date with over 200 guests.



For the Grand Opening, we mounted a museum exhibit on Nicasio's Coast Miwok village Etchatamal, displaying vintage photographs with interpretive text and our topographically and historically accurate scale model of Etchatamal, generously funded by a Marin Arts Council's grant of \$1,000.

Creating the scale model was a year-long project for my Nicasio School students, who worked in



collaboration with Dewey Livingston, Arden Wood, Ken Irving, Jodie Martin, Dave Goelz and me, their teacher. Student research included field trips to Kule Loklo, the Novato Miwok Museum and the actual site of Etchatamal on Jody Martin's property. She showed us the area where the chief's cabin and the Indian graveyard had been located. Meanwhile, in the classroom, students researched and wrote reports on specific facets of Marin Coast Miwok life, which were to be depicted in our scale model.



In addition to the museum exhibit, in Druid's Hall there were talks by Betty Goerke and Dewey Livingston, a display of works of art depicting Nicasio and a scale model of the town square in 1900 (also produced by my students). Outdoors, there were carriage rides, refreshments including local wine

and cheese tasting, Miwok games, live music and more.

We plan to regularly mount new exhibits inside the museum and hold special mini and maxi events both outdoors and in Druid's Hall. We've just begun to think about our Grand Opening event 2024! We'll keep you posted.



Nicasio Website Update

Thanks to Seth Bain of the NLOA, the entire **nicasio.net** website, including the Nicasio Historical Society webpage **nicasio.net/nhs** has had a major overhaul, simplifying and organizing the content, rendering it easier to navigate and more visually pleasing. Check it out.

New Video Highlights the Work of Bob Arrigoni

Bill Harrison and friends have produced a video entitled *It Didn't Just Happen* about efforts to specify land planning and design principles in Nicasio Valley to maintain its rural charm. Recollections by Bob Arrigoni and Rocky Shone, among others, tell the story. Techie on this project is Nicasio-raised Frankie Bourne. We hope to show it to our members and guests later this year.

Interview with Jim Simon

by Amy Morse

February 2024

Aldalbert Von Rotz, known as “Von,” was a prominent Marin civic leader, contractor, and grandfather of local Nicasio resident Jim Simon.

While Jim Simon was working around the property, he unearthed this old-growth redwood sign.

croquet area and 22 picnic tables. As one can imagine, Von loved big gatherings of friends and family with music, dancing, games, and an abundance of food and drink. He hosted parties for the Swiss Club, the Lions Club, the Elks Club, and local dignitaries. His grandson, Jim, recalled one party at Von's Grove for Sheriff Prandi's reelection, with about 500 guests and just about every local law-enforcement officer in attendance. When the raucous party continued late into the night, a displeased neighbor phoned



In 1939 Von purchased five acres of redwood forest on Nicasio Valley Road where he established a family retreat, named Von's Grove, complete with an outdoor bowling alley (with a gravity-powered ball return), a dance floor built right at the edge of the creek, and an enormous outdoor BBQ pavilion with sliding barn doors for rainy-day protection. He built a bar area within a stand of trees, a bridge over the creek to a bathhouse, and in the summertime, he dammed the waterway to create a swimming hole for all his grandkids. There were horseshoe pits, a

and threatened to call the cops, but all the cops were at the party!

Von loved to play cards, especially Canasta. He was very competitive and hated to lose, getting visibly miffed if any of his grandkids beat him. But he was also an extremely generous man, and every Sunday would host his extended family at Deer Park Villa with prime rib and many rounds of Shirley Temples and Roy Rogers refreshments.

Von liked to have the grove looking its best. Jim remembered his grandfather would assemble

the grandkids and enlist them to haul branches and rake every inch of the place so that it was clean-swept and looked immaculate.

In the early days of owning Von's Grove the Von Rotzes were friends with many Nicasio families including the Farleys, the Lafranchis, and Barbara and Neils Schultz. Their across-the-street neighbors were the Longhofers, including daughter Annavie Longhofer Farley, Nicasio's long-time Postmaster who was married to Paul Farley. In the 1960's that ranch was occupied by members of the Grateful Dead. Von didn't like it when he could hear their music blasting out across the valley and would grumble about "those dang hippies" and other more colorful expletives.

Von's Grove eventually became home to Jim and Linda Richardson Simon (daughter of Lee Richardson, longtime resident of Inverness) and where they raised their two sons. Jim recalled before the Nicasio dam was built, the creek ran year-round, and salmon would swim up the waterway. After the dam was built, Jim remembers riding his bike along quiet Nicasio Valley Road to the reservoir to go fishing with his friends. The Casertelli kids lived just to the north and the Fahey kids lived to the south.



Cory, Jim, Linda and James Simon
Photo by Dianne Arrigoni

Von was a native of Wolfenschiessen, Switzerland where he left school before the sixth grade and trained as a cabinet maker. Born in 1896, he came to the United States in 1922 when he was 26 years old and opened his own cabinet

shop in San Anselmo which he eventually parlayed into a construction company.



Von's childhood home in Wolfenschiessen, Switzerland

Von ultimately built more than 1,700 local homes and constructed shopping centers and schools including Terra Linda High (for the low price of \$638,000), Manor School, and the Redwood High School gymnasium. Von built the subdivision of Santa Venetia and the Oak Manor neighborhood, just west of Fairfax. There he named the streets after his grandchildren: Laura Lane, Steven Court, Gregory Drive, Gary Way, etc.

A NEW SERVICE FOR MARIN COUNTY!


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Martin J. O'Keefe - Adalbert von Rotz
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A naturalized citizen, he was very civic-minded. He was elected to the San Anselmo City Council in 1942 serving as mayor the last two years of his term. He was president of the Chamber of Commerce.

The Marin Cabinet and Fixture Works was established last March by Martin O'Keefe and Adelbert Von Rotz, both of whom were general contractors. The shop is equipped with the latest machinery, and is the only place in this locality where general work of that nature is done. Glazing, screens, hardwood and pine cabinets, and general construction, either business or residential, is part of their service.

He helped to establish the Marin County Contractor's Association. He was chairman of the Marin County Planning Commission and had been a director of the Marin County Development Association. He helped form the Ross Valley Savings and Loan, whose motto was: "Where your money grows like daisies." He was on the board of directors of the Marin County Property Owners Association and the vice president of the Bay Area Council, made up of local governments from the nine Bay Area counties. He was president of the San Anselmo Lions Club and a member of the Elks Club in San Rafael.



In 1971, when he was 75 years old, he was honored as Marin County's outstanding Senior Citizen, selected from a field of 18 nominees from throughout Marin County by a panel of nine judges. A gold plaque was presented to Von by Supervisor Peter Arrigoni (brother of local resident Bob Arrigoni). He was married for 63 years to Mariele (Mah-REE-lee) Louise Jacober Von Rotz (b.1883, d.1987).

Mariele was also from Switzerland and had met Von at Ellis Island when he was 26 and she was 29. Although after their meeting at Ellis Island they went their separate ways, they reconnected at a Swiss Club party in Sonoma. They married January 7, 1924, and had 2 children, 10 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren. Mariele loved to garden and grew an award winning "Victory Garden" at their 1 Alpine Terrace home in San Anselmo.

On her 50th birthday, Mariele's children threw her a surprise birthday in Nicasio:

1943 Marin Independent Journal

Mrs. Von Rotz was taken completely by surprise, as the automobiles and guests were hidden behind the trees when she and her husband arrived at "The Grove." There were calls of "surprise, surprise" and the popular Mrs Von Rotz was showered with gifts and well-wishes. At the festive tables, a barbecued chicken dinner was served. Mrs William Fusselman sang several solos and then led the group in community singing. After the dinner, many guests went horseback riding as others played games.

In 1944, a wildfire behind Von's Grove made the San Anselmo Herald News:

JUNE 1944 San Anselmo Herald Fire Fighters Save Von Rotz Nicasio Redwoods Grove

The Nicasio property of A. Von Rotz and adjoining heavily wooded hillside was saved from destruction by fire yesterday afternoon by county fire department crews, neighbors and a truckload of volunteers from Hamilton Field. They fought the blaze for over two hours.

Flames were discovered on the hillside west of the spot where San Anselmo Mayor, Von Rotz has graded the site for his future Swiss chalet type home. Chief Lloyd De La Montanya said the blaze was probably started by a careless hunter. A considerable area of brush and several redwood trees were burned but the fire did not encroach upon the flat area where Von Rotz has developed one of Marin's finest private barbecue and recreation setups.

In 1970, Von and his daughter, Mildred Simon, (Jim's mother) bought the Grandi Company, a hardware store in Point Reyes Station owned by the Bianchini family. At that time, the store was housed in the Grandi Building, which was owned by Joe Mendoza. Building Supply Hardware eventually moved across the street to its current location, which was built by the family, and where some of the Simon relatives still work.

Von and Mariele made many trips back to their homeland in Switzerland over the years including a 3-month trip when Von was Mayor of San Anselmo.



Mariele's childhood home in Saren, Switzerland

For their own 35th wedding anniversary, Jim and Linda Simon made a trip to Switzerland to see Von and Mariele's childhood hometowns. While visiting Mariele's childhood home, which is still owned and farmed by Mariele's relatives, the Jacober family, they climbed a narrow stairway to a dormitory-style attic bedroom where they saw a hook for hanging clothes, labeled in Mariele's own handwriting. She had printed a

name next to 12 similar hooks, one for each of the 13 Jacober children. The outside of the attic bedroom is seen (below left) in a photo from Jim and Linda's trip to Sarnen, Switzerland.



Jim's relative Martin Jakober raises prize brown Swiss milk cows.



One of the Jakober's Brown Swiss milk cows at the farm in Switzerland

In 1984, for Mariele and Von's 60th wedding anniversary, Jim and Linda threw them a big party at Von's Grove. Jim drove into San Anselmo to pick up "Gutzi-Ma" and "Gutzi-Pa" (Grandma & Grandpa) in his 1937 Pontiac 4-door sedan with mohair upholstery, his latest restoration project. Friends and family came from far and wide to celebrate this amazing couple who had left Switzerland in 1922 and had created a life full of adventure and community in Marin County!