



Nicasio Historical Society Newsletter

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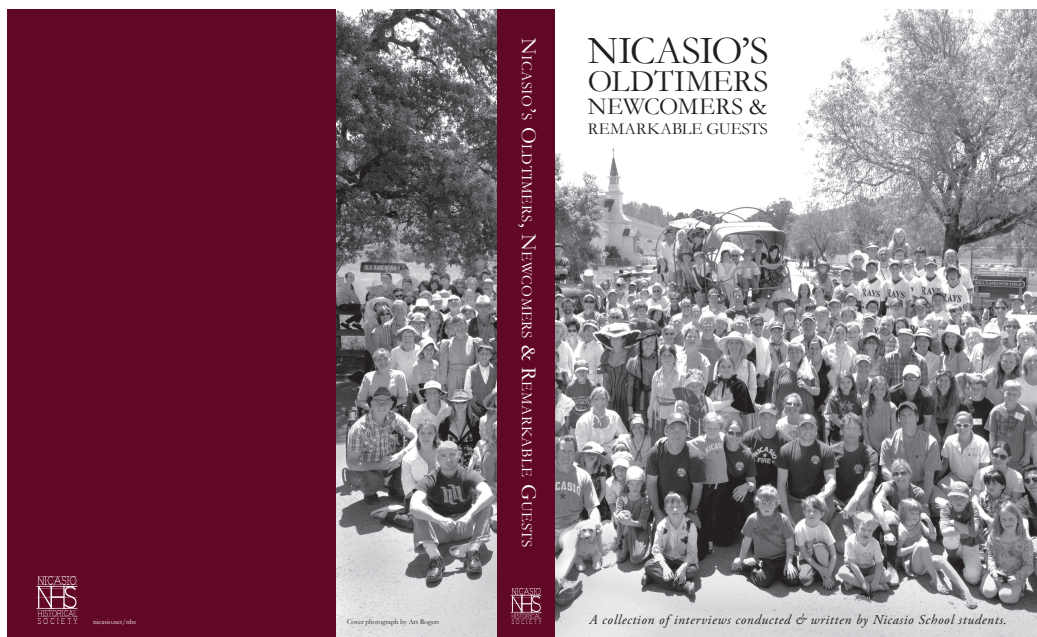
Mary Ellen Hoffman

Letter from the President

Like Rip Van Winkle, the Nicasio Historical Society has been in an extended sleep mode imposed by the pandemic. Over the past 15 months, we held no public events, mounted no exhibits and held only a brief Annual Meeting on ZOOM.

Now that it's nearly summer and COVID on the decline, it's time for new beginnings. We intend to vigorously resume pursuing our Mission to: Document, Preserve, Share and Celebrate the Rich History of the Nicasio Valley.

We are about to publish a new book entitled *Nicasio's Oldtimers, Newcomers and Remarkable Guests*. It is a collection of 68 interviews conducted and written by my Nicasio School students for our classroom newspaper, the *Nicasio News* between 1994 and 2012. The interviews represent an important chronicle of Nicasio history that covers the period from the early 1900s to 2012. This book is full of interesting information, clever writing and amusing humor. I trust you will enjoy it.



In addition, we look forward to resuming our enjoyable and informative events, a tradition since 2003 once COVID restrictions permit. Our tentatively planned first event will be a reservoir walking tour led by

Dewey Livingston during this drought year to see the locations and remains of past ranches that were removed due to the construction of the dam and the eventual flooding of the valley. We will let you know when a date is set and tickets are available. Our tentatively planned second event is *Recollections VII*, a live interview by Dewey Livingston before an audience, possibly of members of the families who ranched the Northern end of Nicasio Valley.



We will also resume our work capturing drone photos of the hillsides surrounding the site of *Etchatamal*, Nicasio’s historic tribal settlement. This will enable us to convert the Miwok village scale model, presently on display in the Nicasio School Library, into a diorama, which was our original intention.

In addition, we are presently looking into the possibility of including an NHS eCommerce site on our webpage for our books and NHS merchandise

A portion of the Etcha Tamal scale model created by Nicasio School students in 2009 in collaboration with specialists like Dewey Livingston & Betty Goerke

May the Fourth Be with You

On May 4, the United States Post Office began issuing Star Wars Droids stamps in honor of Lucasfilm’s 50th anniversary. In addition, Nicasio was chosen as the “first day-of-issue city” and had a special postmark used only during the month of May. We sent our members postcards with Droid postage stamps and special postmarks to commemorate the day and as potential collectors’ items.

A small group of postal workers and townsfolk gathered in celebration outside the Nicasio Post Office on the afternoon of May 4, 2021 for an Art Rogers photo that was published in Art’s Pt. Reyes Family Album in the Point Reyes Light two days later.



Interview of Edward Lafranchi

Conducted on January 15, 2006

By Joe McNeil

Also present Martha McNeil

Continued from our last issue

Most cattle now are Holsteins that produce huge quantities of milk at butterfat content of 3.5% to 3.8 % as opposed to 4.5% to 5%. They'll produce about ten gallons of milk in a day. And they don't have to go forage anymore. They're in what are called loafing barns, and they just produce milk and have calves and produce it again. Then after a number of years they're shipped out; so, they really become milk factories.

JM How many cows are over there now? Do you know?

EL I really don't know, but my guess – they must be milking anywhere between 300 and 400 head. It's pretty unusual now, I think, in most dairies to have anything less than 400 cows that you milk, which is pretty small in comparison to the dairies down in the Central Valley, which have 1,000, 1,500, 2,000, 2,500 head, which causes a huge problem with manure. What do you do with all this manure and how do you take care of that? That's a really big problem.

JM It piles up.

EL Yeah. Boy, I'll tell ya'. You know, when I was growing up, if you had a herd that was much bigger than 120, 130, you had a pretty good-size herd, and I remember when George Rogers moved to the ranch down here, he bought the herd and everything that was here, and so he sold his herd up in the old ranch to my father, and there was I thinking like 60 or 80 cows in that herd, and so suddenly we went from milking 110, 120 head to milking 180 head overnight – that was a big jump in production. That was probably one of the biggest herds in the valley at the time. Now, it would be considered very small.

JM Now, what was the first car that you could remember that's your own?

EL Oh, I remember it very clearly. In 1950, I got a brand-new Mercury, two-door car. I'd gotten out of college and I really wanted a car. There was a fellow here by the name of John DeBruham (sp?), who was a friend of Bob Farley and Hank. He had a

1949 Mercury, and I thought that was the most beautiful car in the world. I just loved it. So, I went to Petaluma and looked at this car, and it was now 1950, as I say, like August or September of 1950, and they were going to get this car in soon. So, I talked to my father, and he says, "I'll pay for the car the car. We'll put it in your name, and then you can pay me back." And so that was my car, and we kept it for, I don't know, four or five years, something like that. Yeah.

JM Where was your house?

EL It's still there. It's the same house that's still right up in that yard up there.

JM Who's living there now?

EL I think one of the workmen is living in it now.

JM I see.

EL There's no family member anymore that lives in there. Actually, my father was the last family member that lived in that house. No, I take that back. Ricky and Debbie lived in it for some time, and that was probably in the late 1980s and early 1990s that they were in it, but they're the last real family members that lived in that. Between the time my father died and when they moved into it, there were various workers who lived in it, and I think there's workers that are living in it now. Willie never, after he was married, never lived in that. There were two other houses. Hank and his wife, Lorraine, lived in what was a converted bunkhouse that had been upgraded so a family could live in it.



Fred Lafranchi

My father built a garage, and over the top of that he built another house; and Willie and Mary and their family lived in that until Willie built the house that Mary now lives in up there. And that was in the early 1960s that he did that.

JM I know I asked you on the phone about any photographs you

had of your family members, but I was particularly interested in your folks' pictures. Could you describe them so we'll have a kind of a word picture, at least, of what your mother and father looked like?

EL Well, my father was probably just a little bit shorter than I. He was probably more like 5'5" at the very most. I've begun to shrink in size over the years, but I finally grew to be 5'7". He was always a bit rotund. He had a problem with weight. My father had kind of a high forehead. He had lost a fair amount of hair. He had gotten a severe case of pneumonia in the early 1930s, and an awful lot of his hair fell out at that time; just kind of a square-faced I would say. I think the child that looks the most like my father is probably my brother Art. Willie and I at least have been told that we look a fair amount alike, and we certainly resemble the Lafranchis more than we resemble the Dolcinis.

My mother was small. She was 4'11", as I recall. She certainly wasn't slim and trim, but she wasn't fat either. She had always done a lot of work outside. As a young girl, she milked cows in the barn and did everything. She did most of the work outside, and I think in the early days of their marriage, she helped outside here, as well. And I know during World War II, when you couldn't hire anybody, she went back and she actually helped with the milking. But back to her characteristics: she had very poor eyesight, so she always wore glasses. She was prematurely gray. She was gray I think at the age of 19, and it kinda never changed. She got gray and just basically didn't get any grayer. She never did learn to drive. She never drove a car, so she was always dependent on basically my father or, after that, one of us to drive her anywhere, but let's see. How else would I describe her? She was rather than round-faced, a little bit more narrow-faced. As I say, I think her

most distinctive features were the fact that she wore these glasses and had gray hair.

JM I remember your dad had a voice that was meant to be heard. I wouldn't call it loud, but you couldn't miss it.

EL Yes. That's correct.

JM And I can't remember your mother's voice. I think she was a very quiet-spoken woman.

EL She was fairly quiet, but when she wanted to be heard, she was heard. Yeah. She didn't speak a lot. I mean she wasn't a great conversationalist, if I want to use that expression. My father was much, much more so that way. My father was a very progressive guy. He really was. When you look back on his life, he did a lot of things for the first time that nobody had done – at least here in the Valley. He was willing to take a risk. He wanted to move forward. He wasn't happy with just maintaining the status quo. He was willing to take that risk.

JM And he was a community leader

EL Yes, he was. I can remember – I'm trying to remember the exact year, but I don't remember when it was. He was the clerk of the school board for a long time, and I remember him one night at supper, as we would call it then, saying, "One of

these days we're going to need a new school in Nicasio." And he says, "I'm trying to get the board behind this so we can put a new school in here, because," he said, "the old school is just not gonna cut it anymore." And probably not an awful lot of men at that time who would've thought about the fact that we really have to think about that, because the population is growing, this school is old; it's probably not appropriate

anymore, and that's how the first room of a new schoolhouse got built out here, next to the old one-room one.



*Nicasio's 1871 schoolhouse in the 1940s
(Louise Rogers King Photo)*