

est. 2012

Historical Society of Santa Rosa

Upcoming HSSR Events

free admission!

- Sept. 20: Historical treasure Hunt, 10 am – 2 pm, Sonoma County Museum
Sept. 24: Gaye LeBaron, quirky local history, 6 pm, Sixth Street Playhouse
Nov. 5: Pete Golis/Doug Bosco, history and politics, 6 pm, Sixth Street Playhouse

(limited seating at Sixth Street Playhouse)

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Remember When—1958

by Rick Blaine

Yes, 1958 was a memorable year because it was the last year that Santa Rosa High School would be the only public high school in Santa Rosa. Montgomery High would open in September. Santa Rosa had a population of just 35,000 and we were still getting used to dialing Liberty prefixes. The telephone book had 140 pages in print that you could read. That book today has 536 pages in small, small print.

It was the year that “Gigi” ran away with the Academy Awards, Cary Grant starred in “An Affair to Remember,” and who could forget “Tammy and the Bachelor?” TV was black and white, remote controls didn’t exist and we chose from just four channels.

We watched Ed Sullivan on Sunday evening, followed by the “\$64,000 Question” and “What’s My Line?” “The Lawrence Welk Show” featured Champagne Lady Alice Lon. The new attraction on the show was the Lennon Sisters, who earned \$203.50 each week. (One of today’s dollars has the same buying power that 12 cents did in 1958 when the minimum wage was \$1 an hour.)

If you stayed home on a Saturday night, you could always watch Jimmy Durante or “Gunsmoke.” TV’s “Ole Lonesome George” Gobel came to Santa Rosa for a United Crusade benefit in January at the new Flamingo Hotel.

We didn’t have many foreign cars. Fords, Chevrolets, Mercurys and Plymouths were everywhere. G.K. Hardt advertised that he was pleased to be selling the “most remarkable car in the country today—the Edsel.” Volkswagens had been around for a few years. You could buy one at Veale Motors, located where City Hall is today.

Traffic wasn’t so bad. We were getting used to the Fourth Street entrance to McDonald Avenue being closed off. The traffic commission debated whether to install a traffic light at Fourth Street and Farmer’s Lane to replace the stop signs.

The “Grace Addition” at Grosse Avenue and El Camino Way offered new

houses for between \$20,000 and \$30,000. A new car cost less than \$3,000. You could buy a VW “Beetle” for \$1,675. Monday night was \$1 night at the Village Drive In Theater.

We had Montgomery Village, but we’d never heard of a shopping mall. Stores closed at 5:30 pm, and none were open on Sundays. Some stores were open until 9 pm on Monday and Thursday in the weeks before Christmas.

How about downtown Santa Rosa in 1958? At the intersection of Fourth and B Streets, you’d see The White House, Keegan Brothers, Hardisty’s and The Fashion. Between Fourth and the Courthouse, you’d find Wright’s Coffee Shop, Rosalie’s, Henderson’s Men’s Store, Keith’s Foto, Smith’s Shoes, Corrick’s, The Hub and the Exchange Bank.

On Exchange Avenue were Bank of America, Al’s Place, Hahman Drugs and Eisenhood’s Restaurant. ‘Til Two was on Third, south of the courthouse, and the Topaz Room was on the east, on Hinton Avenue underneath City Hall and next to the police department, the sheriff’s office and the jail.

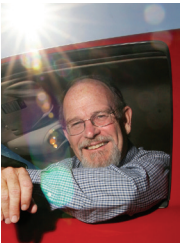
Back on Fourth you’d see Gensler-Lee jewelry (with the big clock), Newberry’s, Kress Five and Dime, Stanroy’s Music, Mailer-Frey Hardware, Burlington’s Bakery, and Sawyer’s News.

The Exchange Bank still sits on Fourth and Mendocino and Hardisty’s, Corrick’s and the B of A have moved, but the others are long gone, evidence of the changes in Santa Rosa in 56 years.



Intersection of Fourth and B Streets, Santa Rosa, California in 1941, looking east on Fourth Street.

President's Message



In the few months since the last newsletter, the HSSR board has been busy. As typical of fledgling nonprofit organizations, we are still seeking our groove in the community and have discussed where we would like to be by the end of 2014.

To this end we held a goal-setting session in which we decided to focus on a few specific projects: sponsor a series of historical talks—Santa Rosa history with a bit of whimsy or irreverence, securing Sonoma County Museum space to display Santa Rosa artifacts and sponsoring a “Historical Treasure Hunt.” We also hope to host a West End Tour in September or October.

I believe a focus on these projects will provide HSSR exposure and present the community with new, different and entertaining ways to appreciate local history. This focus will avoid traditional methods of presenting history, methods that tend to limit an audience. Our approach instead intends to expand the audience and excite it about local history in order to better the community. History can be fun and enjoyable and not the boring high school experiences we remember. (I can say that because I was a high school history teacher.) We will concentrate less on fundraising for the present with intent to tackle that next year.

The historical talks will be kicked off in early September by Gaye LeBaron, who will look at some of the odd characters and events of Santa Rosa in the 1950s and 1960s. We hope to gain audience participation from both older and newer residents.

Private Schools

Last issue, the newsletter printed a list of the opening of Santa Rosa's public schools up to mid-20th century. Following is a similar look at private schools, the majority operated for profit and for just a short time.

By 1852 Sonoma County had five schools, both private and public: Sonoma, Jonive (Analy), Santa Rosa, Bodega and Mark West.

The first school in Santa Rosa was a venture by W. M. Williamson. It didn't last long.

Williamson's school was followed in 1856 by Dr. Watts' School, located a bit east of Santa Rosa.

The Santa Rosa Eclectic School opened on Fifth Street in 1857, followed on Fifth by the Santa Rosa Institute in 1858.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union opened a kindergarten at the corner of 7th and Wilson Streets in 1885.

A number of preparatory schools appeared on the scene, beginning with the Santa Rosa Academy in 1864, followed by Miss Chase's Seminary for Young Ladies in 1868, Professor Jones's Select Academy for Boys in 1877, Reverend Dodge's Boys School in 1888 and St. Charles Preparatory Academy in 1910.

The second talk, scheduled for early November, will be led by former US Congressman Doug Bosco and retired Press Democrat Editorial Director Pete Golis. They'll discuss Santa Rosa and North Bay politics past and present to engender audience involvement.

The Historical Treasure Hunt is the brainchild of Santa Rosa High School senior Thomas Pastis and Staci, his mom. The hunt will begin at the SC Museum in which clues to ten historical sites will be given to participants. HSSR volunteers will staff the sites to help the “hunters” record their progress. I doubt such an exciting event has ever happened in Santa Rosa. It will be open to all ages, and families are encouraged to participate. Interested? Contact StaciPastis@aol.com

Board members John Bribiescas and John Sawyer have made great progress as they worked with a city-wide Sesquicentennial Committee to celebrate Santa Rosa's 150th birthday. Suzanne Sheppard heads the city's effort, which is laden with experienced and interested folks. The committee will use the HSSR website until they create their own, and HSSR will be in charge of historical perspective for the celebration. Interested in helping with the planning? Email Bribiescas Jonmimi@aol.com

Creating a historical society is daunting, but the HSSR board is working to make the society a very special part of Santa Rosa. Our approach will differ from tradition in hopes of enlisting many of you in our efforts. I offer huge thanks to Gaye LeBaron for her support, ideas and wisdom.

Colleges and specialized training institutions emerged also. Professor Daniel's Business and Commercial College opened in 1886, Pacific Methodist College relocated from Vacaville in 1871, Christian College began teaching in 1872, and C. McMean's Normal School began training teachers in 1880. Both sweet and sour tunes emanated from the Pacific College of Music in the 1880s. In 1918, tongues began twisting in the Santa Rosa School of Languages. The enterprise of Sweet's Business College opened in 1891, morphed into Santa Rosa Business College with staying power into the 1930s. Luther Burbank School of Commerce opened its doors in 1933.

Perhaps the most durable of them all is Ursuline Academy, opening in 1880 and closing in 2011.

History Skits set at Cemetery

The annual Lamplight Tours of the Rural Cemetery are scheduled for September 19 and 20. The walking tours include eight original skits acted where the characters are buried. Skits this year include events set in pre-Civil War, the Centralia Missouri Massacre of 1864 and a 1935 occurrence—and their Santa Rosa connections.

Tickets are available through the Santa Rosa Recreation and Parks Department or at www.srcity.org

St. Rose and Education: A Memoir

by John Bribiescas

On a late August day in 1953, my mother and I caught the city bus at the corner of Sebastopol Road and Olive Street. I had turned five years old in late spring and we were headed for St. Rose School at the confluence of 9th and A Streets.

Though enrollments had closed months earlier, my Scottish mother was determined to get me into that school. After what seemed like a long, long time (I had been dismissed to the hall way), the principal, Mother Bernadette, agreed to enroll me as the 55th student in the kindergarten class of 1953/54.

Established in 1931 by the St. Rose Parish, the school has always been a K-8 institution. Financed by the parish since its inception, the school is run by the order of the Ursuline nuns who came west from Ohio to Santa Rosa in 1872 to oversee the Ursuline College. Ursuline College eventually became Ursuline High School.

Crowned by a Spanish style masonry cupola with a cross at the top, this beautiful, three-story edifice still stands out in the surrounding neighborhood and remains visible from the 101 freeway.

The Ursuline nuns, like most orders of Catholic nuns, wore black habits and simple gold rings symbolizing their marriage to their spiritual and academic mission: provide a strong Catholic education.

The interior of the building featured Spanish tile floors, oak doors and hand-rails, complemented with shiny brass hardware. Each classroom had heavy, wooden flip-top desks with an inkwell at the top.

There were two play yards--boys' and girls'--separated by a narrow alley that ran behind the auditorium. The boys ate in their lunchroom and the girls in theirs. A special room on the east end of the first floor was a meeting chamber, replete with seating at different levels, forming a crescent around a dais. The room hosted student government meetings and Traffic Court. Yes, St. Rose School boasted a well organized, Traffic Patrol. To qualify to be a member of the patrol was a great honor. A "traffic boy" coordinated street crossings and could issue citations to students for jay walking and failure to obey directions. Offenders were sent to traffic court, a kind of detention hall. In the late 1950's my superior officer was Captain Bill Traverso, an upper classman. Bill ran traffic court. By the way, we had pretty snazzy uniforms too.

We began school everyday by saluting the flag and praying. For four days in October of 1962, the entire student body was led across campus to St. Rose Church where we spent half of our class time praying that President Kennedy would resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis. I recall smuggling a book into the church to alleviate the boredom. However, when the crisis abated, we were certain that we had contributed to the President's success -- WW III prevented.

During those years there was only one teacher not married to God: Wilma Flohr--she was married to Dutch Flohr, the city's long time chief of police. Mrs. Flohr taught third grade and kids both loved and feared her. After prayers and the flag salute every morning, she conducted a hygiene check. The daily inspection included ears, teeth, fingernails and overall appearance. Our hygiene was documented on a bulletin board for all to see. Mrs. Flohr also had no qualms about "sniffing" a student. The upshot was a

valuable life lesson on health and appearance -- we all wanted to look sharp for Mrs. Flohr.

The school janitor/maintenance man was Tony; no one knew his last name. It was assumed he'd always been there and always would. Tony slept in a little room behind the auditorium stage. Before school and every morning, Tony rang the church bells hailing morning mass about to begin--five times on Sundays.

Tony ate and bathed at the church rectory. Diligently going about his tasks, Tony was an affably taciturn man who never raised his voice. His whole life seemed contained in the square block where sat the school and the church.

As in all schools, student body officers had privileges and responsibilities. One of those responsibilities at St. Rose was posting the monthly Legion of Decency lists. These lists noted movies we could see and those we could not. Heart breaking in some cases, all Elvis movies were on the no-see list. The California and Roxy theaters were only two blocks away, their marquees seeming to harken to us; the devil's work no doubt. Talking about the most recent Elvis film at school had to be done in great secrecy.

Catholic school kids wear uniforms. Ours were sold at Rosenberg's Department Store. The boys wore salt and pepper tweedery pants, a white shirt and a blue sweater. The girls: blue tartan jumpers, white blouses, white shoes and blue sweaters. No make-up! No casual Fridays back then, just blue and white day after day, year after year. I recall thinking, "how unfair" while watching "public school" guys pass by in their pegged Levis and their cool hair styles.

I left old St. Rose School in 1962. As stated, there were always 55 kids in my class. Most of us hailed from the surrounding west side neighborhood, sons and daughters of second and third generation immigrant families. We could all read and write, our cursive cause for celebration.

Post WW II, Santa Rosa was changing at a fast pace. Hugh Coddling developed the Montgomery Village area. The St. Eugene's parish was established. At a CYO basketball game between St. Rose and the new St. Eugene's school, you could see a contrast of dark haired kids from the west side versus the blonde kids from the new east side neighborhoods.

The earthquake of 1969 propelled further change. Ironically, the old church, built circa 1900, stood strong during the devastating shake, as did the fine old school at 9th and A Streets. Nonetheless, obedient to the forces of history, the continued growth of the community and changing demographics, St. Rose School moved north to Angela Drive, the home to Ursuline High since 1955. In the mid 1960's, the Archdiocese opened Cardinal Newman High School for boys.

Today, the grand old building has been renovated, leasing offices to various professionals. Parking is difficult, no traffic boys there to ameliorate the congestion. Yet, the stubborn and proud old school still graces the confluence of the old and the new, just two blocks from the big, new shopping mall.



Author as St. Rose kindergartener

Number two in a series

Grim Reapers Reap Havoc

by Rod Sverko, retired SRPD

Several motorcycle gangs, including the Hell's Angels, frequented the North Bay in the 1960s. Sonoma County, however, was home to the Grim Reapers gang, several of whom had criminal records but nothing to indicate that three of the gang would commit three murders and two brutal rapes in Sonoma and Marin Counties.

One night in early October 1967, a 19-year-old male, the son of an official in the federal government, and his 19-year-old girl friend were parked on eastern Santa Rosa's Alta Vista Avenue, an area overlooking the city that was a frequent place for young people to park.

At 5:30 am the next morning, a newspaper carrier found a male lying in the roadway. Investigators pronounced him dead from gunshot wounds.

Later that morning, two repairmen driving on Calistoga Road saw a partially clothed female lying on the side of the road, waving for help. She was suffering from injuries sustained in a rape. The repairmen took her to a nearby residence and called the Sonoma County Sheriff's office, who took the girl to a hospital.

The girl related that she had witnessed the slaying of her boyfriend on Alta Vista by up to four males. She did not see them because they had pulled her sweater over her head, blocking her vision, but she did see a blue Thunderbird. The ensuing investigation failed to identify any suspects.

Then, in January 1969, a double murder occurred in Marin County that gave authorities some possible leads.

A married couple, both barbers, operated a salon in Marin. They drove separate vehicles as they worked different schedules. Arriving home about two hours apart, each was confronted by intruders in the act of burglarizing their residence.

When found, both had been shot to death and the woman sexually assaulted. The investigators noted that the woman's head was covered by her sweater. The home had been ransacked.

A short time later, a friend of the woman told police that the woman had been afraid of a motorcycle gang and that her daughter had been running with a motorcycle gang called the Grim Reapers. The friend also mentioned a blue Thunderbird.

This information was relayed to Santa Rosa Police and the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department. A task force was formed to locate and arrest the gang. Detectives found a possible location on Santa Rosa's Butler Avenue.

Both agencies put together a team that went to that residence in the early morning hours. When police announced they were outside, they were answered by several gunshots. Police and deputies fired back.

Four occupants emerged and were arrested. Two were charged with three murders and two rapes and a third was implicated. All three were prosecuted, two of them evidently today still in prison and the third, who was released after serving his sentence, died in a traffic collision on Santa Rosa's Fourth Street.

Historical Society of Santa Rosa

Membership Application

The Historical Society of Santa Rosa intends to build a strong and diverse organization of individuals, families and groups to investigate, record and relate the history of the City of Santa Rosa. Members will receive the newsletter and discounts on events and purchases.

Memberships make wonderful gifts! Share the benefits of membership with your family and friends. Dues are paid annually and membership is valid for the current year, expiring on December 31 each year.

\$25 Individual membership | \$40 Household Membership

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I prefer the newsletter delivery via U.S. Postal Service, not an electronic version.

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The HSSR has IRS non-profit status.