



Nicasio Historical Society Newsletter

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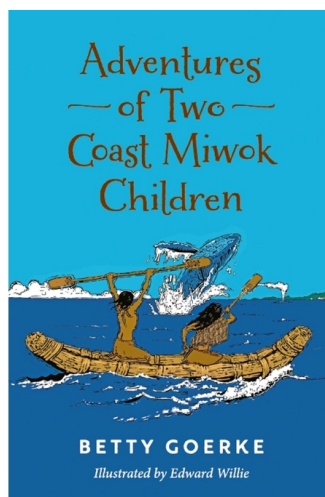


Letter from the President

New Board Members

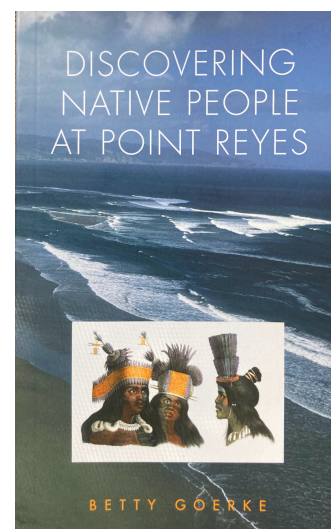
We welcome Mimi and Stephen Lewis to our Board of Directors. We are delighted to have them onboard.

Supporting Our Students



To facilitate instruction on the indigenous people of the Nicasio and West Marin areas, we are donating class sets of two books by Betty Goerke, *The Adventures of Two Coast Miwok Children* to the 3rd/4th/5th grades classroom and *Discovering Native People at Point Reyes* to the 6th/7th/8th

grades classroom. Our expectation is that Nicasio students will attain a more vivid and complete picture of who lived here before the early settlers arrived.



Twentieth Anniversary Event

I continue to work on our narrated slideshow presentation with impressive photographs from our archives depicting Nicasio's rich history paired with narration excerpted from our copious collection of in-person interviews and some published work. We are looking forward to this event and we will keep you posted as our plans develop.



Burning down the house at Big Rock Drill, Monica Seybold, John Bulthuis, Jake Bourne, Frank Wells, Terri Carlson, Jeff Parrish

Interview with John Bulthuis NVFD Fire Chief in the 80s & 90s by Amy Morse

When my time as chief began in the early 80s, I took over from Spike Drady, whose connection to the fire department went back to the 1960s. The impression of the people in town in the early 80s was that we were those guys who hung out at the



Interview with John Bulthuis
NVFD Fire Chief in the 1980s and 1990s
Conducted in February 2023
by Amy Morse

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Rancho, loved to drink, only sometimes trained and liked to squirt a lot of water on the Town Square on Saturdays.

We were all pretty much new members in the early 80s, and for the most part we were genuinely interested in trying to become better firefighters. We did not go to a lot of fires in those days, but we did train with the County firefighters and Skywalker Fire Brigade as often as possible. At that time we only had a few “full turnout” gear outfits and guys would go to the fires with their own coats and maybe a helmet and some boots, definitely in mismatched gear. We had two or three ladies training with us, one of whom was Marcy Shone who was pregnant at the time. She had her own large turnout coat that would cover up her baby bump. It was a sight to see!

In the early days, we had a hard time raising money from the community because the residents didn't really view us as a legitimate organization. They thought we were just a social club. We had to scrape by on a few thousand dollars a year even though we were trying to buy equipment and turnout gear so that our firefighters would be safe responding to emergencies. We needed to raise money as fast

as we could. I remember one time speaking at the Landowners annual meeting at the Rancho and we had three firefighters lined up behind me decked out in recently purchased turnout gear, complete with helmets, goggles, gloves, air tanks, the whole nine yards. The objective was to show the people of the town that we were an authentic firefighting organization and we were genuinely trying to do the job correctly. Eventually, the residents started getting on board with the idea that we were serious and legitimate. They began donating money a little more often. This allowed us to start saving up to rebuild the old fire house which was in danger of falling down.

A lot of our new firefighters had never been in a large truck, much less had any experience driving one through an obstacle course. Some



©Art Rogers/Point Reyes 2008

firefighters had to learn the basics like how to shift and how to sit up high enough to see out the window. Skywalker was very helpful in those days because they had the roads where we could set up with cones and maneuver the trucks through obstacle courses. One member, Jeffrey Stein, was an absolutely

horrible driver. But his heart was in the

right place, and he wanted to do a good job, so he worked really hard to learn how to drive the big trucks. He eventually became a valuable member of the department. We had one or two members who were serious enough about being a firefighter that they got certified as paramedics. They used their training and taught the rest of us as best they could.

One day I had a meeting with the Marin County Chief, Stan Rowan, who at the time was bemoaning the fact that they had built their fire station in Hicks Valley, thinking there was going to be a gigantic housing development nearby. He wished they had built a County Fire Station in Nicasio, which would have been better situated. I asked him what the NVFD could do to help the county meet their goals. He told me then the best thing we could do is install a 20,000-gallon water storage tank on the Town Square because if there was ever a fire in the center of Nicasio, there was no water to put it out. Our next project then was to get that tank, which is now buried outside the centerfield fence line on the Town Square.

We had some really exciting training sessions with the County in those days where we learned how to fight serious fires. The County had all the props to make the fire seem real, so some of our training sessions were very exciting. An especially fun drill was called a "toilet paper drill" where we would drive the old International #762 truck out onto the hillside. Someone would take toilet paper and spread a big outline all the way up the hill to mark the fire outline. We learned how to drive inside the burn and spray outside of the fire line. Practicing how to deal with a fire of that scale was really very helpful. The time did come when we had some pretty serious grass fires to fight, and our troops knew what to do because of that training. The drills were conducted by interested members of the

Marin County Fire Department, who would come out on their own time and work with us.

I served as chief twice, each time about eight or nine years. My first administration was focused on making the community aware of the fact that we were serious about what we were doing. My second administration was spent raising money

and rebuilding the old fire house. We had a strong crew of leaders, all of whom took it upon themselves to instruct the new members and develop a self-perpetuating membership of trained individuals. I always made the point clear to the group that this was a community fire department, the ultimate democracy,

where each member of NVFD was in charge of the fire department and responsible for its well-being. My job was as chairman of the board to set the agenda and run the meetings. Their job was to run the department, make it work and be effective.

During my first administration, the secretary of the department was Evelyn Reyna. She had been the NVFD secretary previously and was a long-time resident of Nicasio. Aside from knowing everyone in town and being a major part of the Ladies Auxiliary, she was a charming woman who went out of her way to be helpful at all times. Her advice and guidance helped me get through my early relationship with the Ladies Auxiliary, which, as you know, was very important then as it is now.

To keep our many vehicles running at all times there had to be a member who knew how to fix



©Art Rogers/Point Reyes

things. This was Mike Percy, another old-time Nicasio resident who came during his hippie days and had built his home in the mountains behind town. He was the Captain and could repair all things mechanical. He was a good friend and a very useful member of the department

Needless to say, Spike was still around and was the mainstay of training the volunteers since he had been in the department for so long. He had been the NVFD Chief for quite a while, having taken over from George Gallagher. George was getting on in years by then, but he sometimes would attend drills and enjoyed sharing the camaraderie. Spike was a transitional figure between the original Nicasio residents, whose roots went

way back and us new folks. Gallagher, of course was the real deal. His family had been here for generations. One day George showed up with his arm all bandaged to his chest. I think his shoulder had been broken.

Of course, we all had to know what happened, so he relayed the story about how he was out there in the Dolcini deer camp, for the annual deer hunt. While he was hunting, a deer came jumping over a big shrub and landed right on top of him. Now George was a small man and this deer was a pretty big deer. George really enjoyed telling us that story and if you remember George, he could get really animated!

Spike was in the California Highway Patrol for a number of years and had recently retired. I recall

him telling me that the day after he stepped down as the NVFD Chief, he landed some work as a private detective. But he continued to volunteer tirelessly and because he lived just down the street from the fire house, he was always the first in the truck when the alarm went off. If nobody else showed up, he would take off and answer the call by himself. Mike Ingerman and Spike were the primary responders for quite a while, and both were involved in training all of us new guys. Back in the early 80s, Mike was one of the first people in town to have a computer. He made sure that I learned how to use a computer and it turned out that it was a great resource to me and my business. So, I have to thank Mike for dragging me into the 20th century!



The Nicasio Volunteer Fire Department, following the traditional community washing to welcome their new truck.

July 2014 Photo by Tom Forster

development of a new wing at Kaiser in San Francisco. In that new wing was a new Cardiac Cath Lab headed up by a nurse, who had a reputation of doing an excellent job and not taking any nonsense from anyone. That turned out to be Leslie! It was great fun to work with her again as my secretary in the department. She was consistently full of excellent advice, strong opinions and good cheer. I always considered her to be the backbone of the department.

During my second administration, when I had a better idea how things worked and had a pretty good relationship with the Ladies Auxiliary, my secretary was Leslie Gompertz. Curiously enough, I had met Leslie some years before in my capacity as a Signing Consultant for Kaiser Permanente. I was involved in the

The Captain in those days was Jeff Parrish. He could repair anything and kept everything running and turned out to be a key member of the rebuilding team for the fire house. Without his help I never would've been able to do my job.

I think it's really important to remember everyone's name who were members of our fire department and had something to do with its success. A lot of folks come and go and some are here forever. I'm starting to forget names now in my old age and I wish I could list them all here, but I can't. I just want to remind everyone that it's the key individuals who keep the wheels on and make these Nicasio organizations work. And

luckily, Nicasio has had our fair share of dedicated individuals volunteering their precious time to serve the community.

That 20 years or so that I was active were very good years for me, and I'm proud of them. I was rewarded by the community with the Good Neighbor Award and other accolades which made me feel really great. I'm very proud of the fire department now. They are extremely professional, well-trained and dedicated to serving our community, and I like to think that with my tenure back in the 1980s and 1990s that I have had something to do with making that happen.

