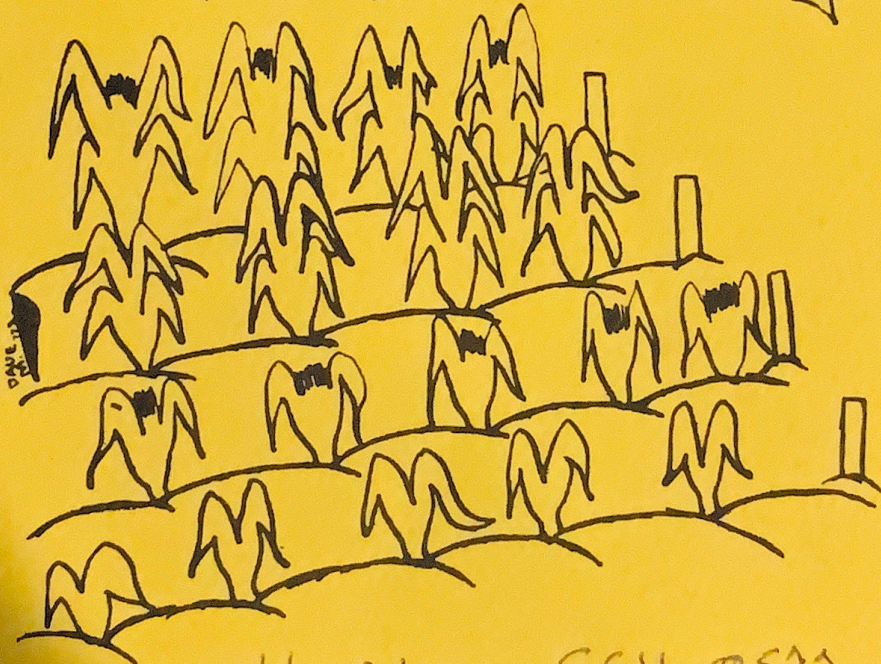


A HISTORY OF



# ROHNERT PARK

"from seed to City"



Wendy Horton 664-0577

PhilandWendy@live.com

# **A History of Rohnert Park**

**“from seed to city”**

**By John H. DeClercq**

Commissioned by Rohnert Park City Council  
Under the Direction of the Editorial Committee  
Sponsored by Cultural Arts Corporation  
Cover Design: Dave Martinelli

## **INTRODUCTION**

In May, 1976, the City Council requested the Rohnert Park Cultural Arts Corporation to designate a City Historian to compile a history of our community as part of the City's Bicentennial effort.

Mr. John H. DeClercq was appointed City Historian and commissioned to write this history. He was assisted by an Editorial Committee composed of representatives of community organizations.

Although this publication is not intended to be a definitive or exhaustive history of Rohnert Park, it is intended to provide the residents of this community with an understanding of the City's origin and the events that have helped to shape it. It is hoped that this understanding will enable them to identify closer with Rohnert Park and encourage them to actively participate in shaping the City's future. This history and the systematic gathering and organizing of local history materials will provide the basis for a more detailed history in the future.

Members of the Rohnert Park Cultural Arts Corporation express appreciation to the Author, the City Council, the Editorial Committee, and to the many persons who have provided assistance and information for the compiling of this history.

**Rohnert Park Cultural Arts Corporation**

## A History of Rohnert Park

The people who live in the City of Rohnert Park today are very different from the first land owners in this part of the Santa Rosa Valley. The original residents, a small tribe of Indians, lived in a village called Kotate, which was located to the north of today's City. They called the nearby rolling hills Lomas de Kotate, and called the peak Mt. Kotate. Their leader was Chief Kotate. Little else is known about the tribe, the chief, or about the meaning of the word "Kotate."

These people belonged to the "nation" of the Coast Miwok Indians, and were related to the Miwoks of central California and the mid-Sierras as far east as the Yosemite Valley. Their culture and life style was molded by their environment: rolling hills, streams, lakes, woods, and plentiful fish, game, and vegetation - ingredients for a generally easy life. These people are best known for the fine quality and variety of the multi-purpose baskets that they weaved.

The Coast Miwoks inhabited about 885 square miles of Marin and southern Sonoma Counties. At the turn of the 19th Century, there were approximately 3,000 persons in about 40 villages. Each village consisted of 75 to 100 persons. The people of one such Miwok village near Tomales greeted Sir Francis Drake when he landed in 1579.

The valley land was rich and inviting for farming and grazing. It was only a matter of time before Spanish and Mexican settlers would try to settle the area. And when the Russians came to Fort Ross in 1812, the Spanish realized that they had to act quickly to protect their settlements around the bay. They considered the unoccupied and unclaimed Santa Rosa Valley to be an unsecured frontier border that needed to be defended.

The founding of the northbay missions, Mission San Rafael in 1817 and Mission Sonoma in 1823, was a move to claim the farm and grazing lands and to keep the Russians out of the valley. It also meant the end of the Coast Miwok Indians. They were captured, brought into the Missions to live, and were made to work the Mission lands. The Europeans brought many strange diseases and viruses to the valley. The Miwoks had no resistance to the new illnesses and many died.

The few Indians that still lived in their native villages began to fight the advances of the "white men" as best they could. But they were always defeated by the Spanish and their superior weaponry. One intruder that was attacked by the Indians was John Reed.

John Thomas Reed was the first Irishman to come to California and was the first English-speaking white man to venture north of Yerba Buena (San Francisco). From his arrival in 1826 until his death in 1843, Reed set a string of record "firsts."

Reed was born in 1805 in Dublin, Ireland. He sailed across the Atlantic in 1820 to Acapulco, Mexico. While he was there, he learned the language and customs of the Spanish and became a naturalized citizen. In 1826, he ventured north. When his ship arrived in the San Francisco Bay, it anchored in Richardson Bay, near Sausalito, where crews often went ashore for drinking water and firewood.

Interested in acquiring the plentiful land, Reed borrowed a small boat and crossed the bay to the Presidio of Yerba Buena. He applied for a grant of land to create a rancho. The commanding officer of the Presidio, Ignacio Martinez, informed him that the government would not grant him any land around the edge of the bay, that the government had to retain possession for security reasons.

The soldiers at the Presidio suggested that Reed make a claim on land to the north of Mission San Rafael. Reed took their advice, returned to Sausalito and went to Mission San Rafael for supplies and an Indian guide. He boldly set out to stake his claim in the Santa Rosa Valley at the age of 22. Reed built a small home on the east side of the valley, on a rise near Robert Crane Creek (named for the settler who came in 1852). But the Indians were as hostile to this Irish farmer as they were to the Spanish padres and soldiers. Reed was burned out in 1827 before he was able to harvest his first crop. That was the last time that John Reed saw Sonoma County.

Returning to Mission San Rafael, Reed worked there as a foreman, built a cabin near Sausalito, and started the first ferry service from Marin County to Yerba Buena. In 1834, he applied again for a rancho at Sausalito and was finally successful. He received a large land grant in the Tiburon-Mill Valley area on the condition that he build a saw mill to cut wood for the Presidio. The grant was appropriately named Rancho Corte Madera del Presidio. His mill is the namesake of the City of Mill Valley.

Reed died of fever in 1843 at the age of 38, leaving his 26-year-old wife and four children wealthy land owners-- 7,845 acres with over 20,000 head of cattle.

Land was so plentiful then that many men acquired large ranchos. General Vallejo, who came to the area in 1829 to provide a military defense against the Russians, was unable to pay the soldiers who guarded his rancho in Petaluma and who were stationed at the garrison in Sonoma. He had to pay some of his soldiers with land. Juan Castaneda was one such soldier.

Castaneda was a native of Texas and was a veteran of many battles between Spanish and Mexican armies. Castaneda built a home in the

Santa Rosa Valley in 1839, and in 1844 received a payment in land from Vallejo--The Rancho Cotate. This land grant of 17,238.6 acres was located north of Vallejo's Petaluma Adobe, south of Santa Rosa, and included present day Rohnert Park, Cotati, Penngrove, and surrounding areas. Castaneda decided to settle in San Francisco, however, and sold all of his land holdings. He sold the Rancho Cotate to Thomas Larkin (the American Consul at Monterey). Larkin sold the grant to Thomas S. Ruckel. Ruckel sold the grant to Doctor Page for \$16,000.

Thomas Stokes Page, M.D., like the previous owners of the Rancho, was an absentee landlord. Born in New Jersey in 1815, Page graduated from the University of Pennsylvania at the age of 21. He traveled briefly through Great Britain and France and then sailed to Valparaiso, Chile, which became his home for many years. In 1846, during the Mexican-American War, he ventured north into California, and served as Sheriff for Sonoma District. During his stay, he bought the Rancho Cotate from Ruckel. In 1849 he returned to Chile, where he lived until he became seriously ill in 1869. He returned to the Rancho with his wife and eight of their ten children to recuperate. The change helped for a little while, but he passed away in 1872.

The Rancho saw many changes toward the end of the nineteenth century. The San Francisco and North Pacific Railroad laid track through the valley--the first run from Petaluma to Santa Rosa was in October, 1870. The water-wood stop along the way was first called Page's Station, then Cotati. The town grew, attracted business, and streets were plotted. The downtown was laid out like a six-sided hub of a wagon wheel--each side named after one of the six Page sons: Olof, Henry, Charles, Arthur, George, and William. The seventh son, Wilfred, the manager of the Rancho, is the namesake for Wilfred Road to the north of town.

Gradually, the Rancho was broken up and sold off piecemeal. Portions were sold to the Yankee squatters and homesteaders who came into the

valley after the gold rush was played out in the Sierras; portions were sold to the sharecropper tenants; and large portions, the majority of the Rancho, were sold as ranches. By the turn of the century, the Cotati Land Company (the Page sons) owned only 4,000 acres--primarily the low black meadowland in the sink of the valley, which was crossed by several creeks, subject to frequent flooding, and used primarily for grazing.

George P. McNear was the next land baron to acquire the remainder of the Rancho. McNear did not take much of a personal interest in the Rancho, but rather, bought out the Cotati Land Company and allowed the farm to be managed much as it had under the Pages.

It was Fred Keppel, born in Marin County in 1878, and a blacksmith by trade, who managed the farm for the company. As the foreman of the largest ranch and biggest employer in the area, Keppel came to be influential and respected.

This turn-of-the-century era was a colorful and adventuresome time for the country, and Sonoma County shared in many of the nation's innovations. The first air mail flight in the nation was from Petaluma (over present day Rohnert Park) to Santa Rosa in 1911. In 1921, local businessmen built the North Bay Counties Automobile Speedway to the southeast of Cotati and drew national celebrities. But the financial venture flopped after only one year. Also, an electric railroad was ventured; a few lengths of track were laid in downtown Cotati, but the plan was abandoned. A highway was built through the valley--the Redwood Highway. In 1915, the communities of Penngrove and Cotati reached a compromise as to the location of the road, and the local farmers donated the needed land for the right of way. The highway would serve as the main arterial through the valley until 1957. Cotati was also the scene of oil speculation and derricks were constructed. But oil did not gush.



The 1920s were boom times. Businesses were expanding. In 1929 the Rancho was sold to one such successful businessman. Waldo Emerson Rohnert was a native of Detroit, Michigan (born in 1869) and an honors graduate from Michigan State Agricultural College (in 1889). He came to California and became established with the C.C. Morse Company, the largest seed growing firm in the west. In 1893, Rohnert started his own seed growing business in Hollister, where he also planted one of the largest prune orchards in the west. He then expanded into the San Joaquin Valley near Firebaugh and in 1929, north to Cotati.

His first order of business was to minimize the periodic flooding of the fields. His crude drainage system was sufficient--a two-foot mound down the middle of the field with two-foot ditches on each side. Then he concentrated on enriching the soils. Waldo Emerson Rohnert barely saw his seed farm produce. In 1933, at the age of 64, he passed away, leaving a wife, Edna, and children Fred and Dorothy heir to the Rancho. It was Fred Rohnert, a graduate of Stanford Law School that actually took over the Company.

Fred Rohnert farmed the Rancho, some as hay fields, some as seed farm, from his office in Hollister. The seed farm and the wholesaling of vegetable seeds turned into a successful venture that lasted many years. The seed farm was a major horticultural asset to the County, some say second only to the gardens of Luther Burbank in Santa Rosa.

The close of World War II brought a housing boom to Sonoma County that gradually took over agricultural areas. Where seeds had been planted, cities grew. The orchards and fields became subdivisions. Builders and brokers were busy from Petaluma to Santa Rosa. The law firm of Golis and Fredericks was one of many that was busy developing land.

Paul Golis, born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1917, was a graduate of Duke Law School. He came to Santa Rosa in 1948. Maurice Fredericks

hailed from Petaluma, a "native son of a native son." He joined Golis in 1951 after he graduated from the University of Santa Clara Law School. Golis and Fredericks became very active representing builders in the valley. They soon realized that the best way to develop large tracts of land was to draw up a master plan for an entire area at the outset. And thus began the City of Rohnert Park. Golis started in the fall of 1954 to lay out a plan for a new town. The core of the plan was the "Neighborhood Unit" concept. The plan was a modification of Pennsylvania's Levittown. It provided that each neighborhood would consist of 200 - 250 homes centered around a 10 acre school site and a 5 acre pool-park site. No child would have to walk more than  $\frac{1}{3}$  mile to school; the school would be the nucleus of a cohesive community. The commercial and industrial development would be large enough and diverse enough to support the entire community. Eight such subdivisions would constitute a city of 30,000 people. With planned pools, parks, and services the city would be a "country club for the working class."

Golis contacted C.C. (Tex) Carley, manager of the Rohnert Seed Farm (whose home still stands at the corner of Snyder Lane and E. Cotati Ave.--one of the oldest homes in today's city limits) in March, 1955. On July 4, 1955, Golis and Fredericks headed south to Hollister. On the following day the two men presented to Mrs. Edna Rohnert their plans including a scale model of the town to be named after the family. They finalized negotiations with Fred Rohnert for a purchase-option agreement for the 2,700 acres, the entire seed farm, at \$200 per acre. Golis and Fredericks then headed home to the business of building. Their next move was to enter into a joint venture agreement with Valley View Land and Development Company, which had purchased the adjacent 580 acre Brians Ranch.

The Rohnerts and the builders then petitioned the County Supervisors to allow the creation of a special assessment district. (A special assessment district can tax land and sell bonds to finance the construction of public improvements, i.e. streets, water, and sewer services.)

Their petition was approved, and the Rohnert Park Community Services District was created. The new District consisted of two rental houses, a barn, flooded fields, and pheasants, but "not a single tree." On April 10, 1956, the District held its organizational meeting. In attendance were the only four adult residents that lived within the District boundaries. Three of the four were elected to be the first Directors: Bob Porter, Malenda Porter, and Floyd Ramsey.

The old seed farm became a flurry of construction then. In July, 1957, the Division of Highways completed the Cotati bypass, the Route 101 freeway from Denman Flat, north of Petaluma, through the hills to the north of Cotati (which cost the town its historic landmark--the home of "Doc" Page). Rohnert Park District called for bids, sold bonds, and let contracts. Many construction companies and well drillers were busy. The first wells were dug, the first phase of a modular sewage treatment plant was built, water and sewer mains were extended to the "A" neighborhood, and some streets and sidewalks were put in--all completed in seventeen months!

The Federal Housing Administration was the first stumbling block to the "best laid plans of men"--they refused to provide financing for home buyers. The builders (Golis, Fredericks, and Valley View) had invested all of their money in land and didn't have capital or a credit record to secure a loan.

The Spivok brothers, Norm, Hal, and Monroe, who were then building homes in the East Bay, provided financing for the first homes. They bought into Rohnert Park Homes, changing the name to Alicia Homes. They built five homes at Alison and Alma. Then Golis secured a loan to build his own home on Adele Avenue. In November, 1957, the day after Thanksgiving, the Paul Golis family and the "Tuckey" Moran family moved into the first completed homes in Rohnert Park.



**The Public Safety Building, dedicated in September, 1963.**



**The City's first ambulance, acquired July, 1968.**

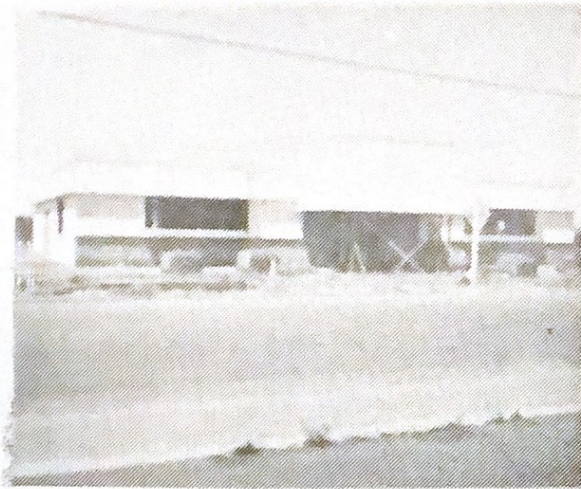


**One of the City's many ground-breaking ceremonies. This one is for the Copeland Creek Project. Pictured are County Supervisor Ignacio Vella, Councilman Jimmie Rogers, County Supervisor Leigh Shoemaker, Mayor Art Roberts,**

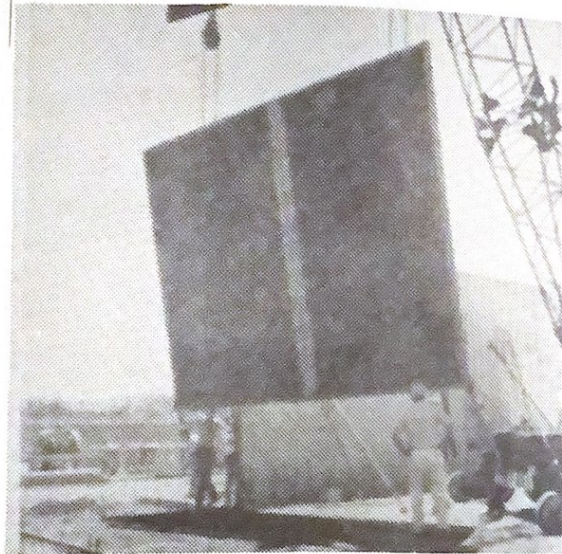
**engineer Milt Hudis, City Engineer Bill Wiggins, County Flood Control Engineer Carl Jackson, City Building Inspector, Barney Barnhart, City Manager, Pete Callinan, developers Victor Stromer, Allan Forsyth, and Paul Gollis.**



**The City replaced the farm.**



**The Gold Coin (Carriage House) restaurant under construction, summer, 1964.**



**A & B Market (Sissa's) under construction, summer, 1962.**



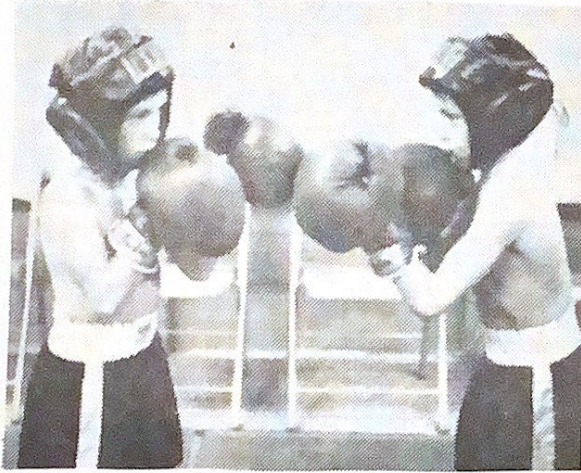
**A familiar sign, "Another Community Improvement Project," this one is for a second Public Safety Building, summer, 1977.**



**Home construction.**



**Founder's Day Pet Parade, 1967.**



**One of many youth programs. Michael Vosgrau and Joseph Almeida.**



**One of many floats entered in one of many parades. Mayor Jimmie and wife Shirley Rogers, Jim Jr. and Lisa Roberts.**



**The first "B" Park recreation building, summer, 1965.**



**The City's first golf course.**

The District had some financial problems of its own. In December, 1956, and several times thereafter, the Directors were unable to pay District employees. Even as late as July, 1959, the District borrowed \$2,000 from Alicia Homes, and \$200 from Rohnert Park Industrial Development Company.

Elections for Directors were not necessary--positions were filled as needed. Ramsey served for only 14 months until June, 1957. The Porters ran the District until January, 1959. Then Harold Worden, Harriet Krieg, and William Menzies were appointed by the outgoing Directors. A year later there were four new faces: Jack Buchanan, Norm Francisco, Dale Faust, and Pete Callinan. The following year, a fifth seat was created, and Jim Lynch was brought on board. The year before incorporation Vern Smith replaced Norm Francisco on the Board.

In 1960, less than three years after the first homes were completed, leaders in the community decided that it was time to make the District into an incorporated city. But by a vote of 118 to 85, the people voted against incorporation.

The issue of incorporation continued to be hotly debated in Rohnert Park and Cotati. Some felt that Rohnert Park and Cotati should incorporate as a single city; some wanted just Rohnert Park to incorporate; some were against both incorporation proposals. In the spring of 1962 an expert, William T. Zion, was hired to analyze the situation. Zion's study indicated that it was "feasible, but not advisable" for the two towns to incorporate as a single city.

The citizens of Rohnert Park then hired Zion to do a second study--the incorporation of Rohnert Park alone. Zion "proved" that city government would provide better services for Rohnert Park than the County could

provide. These pro-incorporation citizens then petitioned the County, requesting that a special election be held to decide if Rohnert Park should incorporate as a separate city.

Thus, in the summer election of 1962, the City of Rohnert Park was born. The vote was 308 to 238. On August 28, it was officially incorporated--1,325 acres, housing an estimated 2,775 persons; the fourth largest City in Sonoma County; the first town to incorporate since 1905.

The name of the town was chosen by the people to be Rohnert Park rather than Cotati Park by a vote of 398 to 128. There were twenty candidates for city council. All five incumbent District Directors ran; four of the five were elected (Callinan, Buchanan, Vern Smith, and Dale Faust). Jim Lynch was the only one not elected. Ken Bell, an opponent to incorporation, was elected instead.

Thereafter, electioneering was much more calm. There were fewer candidates and the issues were not as dramatic. Campaigning during the City's first decade was little more than spring socials. By the 1970s, however, the issues became more serious. There were charges of "conflict of interest," and "communists on Sonoma State campus," and the issues of pollution, ecology, and growth control became popular. By the end of the 1960s, Paul Golis, the "Father of Rohnert Park," the man who made a dream happen, had lost control of his brainchild. Lawsuits and countersuits between Golis and the City officials confused many citizens and made some very bitter. In 1972, Golis and Bart Mitchell, another long-time resident and builder, ran for City Council, but were out-pollied by newcomers.

In the City's first fifteen years, there have been thirteen councilmen (the first five, plus Joe Pezonella, Cliff Smith, Jim Rogers, Art Roberts,



Warren Hopkins, Lou Beary, Armando Flores, and Dave Eck). Most served multiple terms. Most served as mayor at least once. They came from a variety of occupations: barber, merchant, teacher, executive, broker, policeman, builder. Most have encouraged rapid residential and commercial growth for the City. The City Council has always been a team of workers, not a grandstand for individual stars.

Pete Callinan served the shortest term of any councilman, but has been one of the most influential men in the City's official business. He served as Finance Director for the District, and District Director. In the 1962 election he received the highest number of votes and was therefore chosen by the Council to serve as the City's first mayor. After that first year he resigned and accepted the position of City Manager, the position he has held since that time.

Rohnert Park has grown from a sketchy dream to a sophisticated city. Rohnert Park is not really an outgrowth of the Seed Farm; it replaced the farm. The growth of the City has erased the farm life that was here. Most towns grow accidentally; Rohnert Park has grown by design. And the symbols of this growth are many.

The growth and change in the City is reflected in the various locations of the City offices, from simple to elaborate: from the farm house at 7000 Commerce Blvd., to Golis' home at 185 Adele Ave., to the Public Safety Building, to the modern City offices at 6750 Commerce Blvd. The City's ultimate move to the planned civic center is yet years away.

The building of schools always reflects growth. In 1900, there was only an 8-grade, one-room school house located on land donated by the Pages. When the first Rohnert Park children started attending school in Cotati,

there were less than 250 students and only one school in the Cotati School District. The Cotati-Rohnert Park School District today is a complete system. Many schools have been built. John Reed was the first school in Rohnert Park (dedicated in January, 1962), thereafter, Waldo Rohnert, Thomas Page (in Cotati), and La Fiesta Elementary Schools, Rohnert Park Jr. High School, and Rancho Cotate Sr. High School were built.

Rohnert Park also has facilities for higher education--Sonoma State College. In 1957, the California legislature appropriated \$500,000 for the purchase of a site for a "North Bay Counties Four Year College" in the Santa Rosa-Petaluma corridor to serve Marin, Sonoma, and Solano Counties. Many sites were considered. Rohnert Park had the most to offer, however: the ability to provide water and sewer services, and a central location. The 99-year agreement to extend these services provides that Rohnert Park may annex the College site into the City at any time, but no other City may annex the College. Ambrose Nichols presided as the College's first President when, five years later, the College was opened to students in the temporary quarters along College View Drive (behind the shopping center on Southwest Blvd.). In the fall of 1966, the permanent buildings located on 200 acres of the old Benson Ranch were finally opened for classes and the College was in full swing.

The City has grown in both population and acreage. The population growth was strong and steady for a decade, from 2,775 at incorporation to 6,300 in 1970 when Rohnert Park surpassed Healdsburg as the third largest City in the County. Then the City rapidly grew; the population more than doubled to 15,100 by 1977.

The pattern of the City's growth with respect to size is just the reverse: ambitious in the early years, but slow since 1968. The original District consisted of the 2,700 acre Rohnert land and the 580 acre Brians land. When the City incorporated, however, only a part of the District was in-

cluded in the City limits, 1,325 acres. The City grew between 1962 and 1968 to 3,812 acres. Several of the annexations were routine. Some of the proposals to annex additional lands became heated battles with people to the north and south. The golf course and country club subdivisions were annexed, so was the high school site, land for Rancho Verde and Rancho Feliz mobilehome parks, and the "L" neighborhood. But lands to the north of Wilfred Road and acreage around the College were never annexed. The most ambitious proposal of the City Council was the tongue-in-cheek resolution to annex the entire city of Santa Rosa. (This unanimously passed resolution was not kindly received by the City to the north.)

The growth of the City is a tribute to the many citizens who worked hard to attract business, industry, financing, and residents. When the City was very young, it celebrated the coming of each new business. The arrival of Young America Homes, Cal-Wood Door, A.B. Dick, Holt's Marine, and other businesses was heralded. There were many ambitious projects, however, that never materialized. The Air Force considered building an academy here, but decided on a Colorado site instead. When the Baptist Bible College in El Cerrito began looking for a larger site, Fred Rohnert and Paul Golis made the College a fine offer of land and services, but were refused.

The abandoned Cotati Naval Air Base landing strip on the west side of the freeway has been the subject of several proposals. In 1958, it was one of many suggested locations for Sonoma State College. In the spring of 1968, developer Hugh Coddling offered to sell the 80 acre site to the County for development as the South County Airport, but the County Board of Supervisors would not even consider the proposal. For a while it was used as a race track; Jane Mansfield reigned as Queen on opening day. Since then, however, the site has remained the future location of a vast regional shopping complex.

The City was unsuccessful in getting a full clover-leaf interchange for Rohnert Park Expressway-101, but nevertheless heralded the opening of the on and off ramps in 1968 as the opening of the "era of growth," with full freeway access to the College. Equally unsuccessful was the City's fight with the Northwest Pacific Railroad to have them pay for a grade separation at Southwest Blvd., either an overpass or an underpass. The Public Utilities Commission studied the problem for eighteen months and decided that a simple crossing gate was protection enough for the people.

After a decade of success, the City looked back on itself with pride. Rohnert Park was unique to have two municipal swimming pools. It was the smallest city in the State to own and operate an 18-hole golf course. It ambitiously completed a massive drainage project, Copeland and Hinebaugh Creeks--a five year, three-mile, \$1.3 million project, uniquely planned with landscaping and bike, hiking, and equestrian trails. Another successful ecological venture is the recycling of treated waste water for irrigation of local crops. The City is self-sufficient in its water supply and sewage treatment plant capacity, unlike other communities in the County with perennial problems. Rohnert Park grew from the "largest assessment District in the history of the County," to become the "largest designed landscaped city in California."

The City has always prided itself for the services and amenities that have been provided for its citizens. The City has a branch library of the County system, thanks in large part to the City's first historian, Marguerite Hahn. Parks and pools have been a part of the City since its inception. Golis and Fredericks donated Alicia pool, completed, when there were only a dozen homes completed in the "A" neighborhood. Additional parks have been completed over the years. Colegio Vista Park, Dorotea Park, Eagle Park, and Ladybug Park (in the respective "C", "D", "E", and "L" neighborhoods). The City is also co-owner, together with the County, of one hundred acres of the Reposa Ranch at Ben Cannon Creek, east of Sonoma State College, to be developed someday as a regional park.

The creation of the Department of Public Safety was a daring and creative concept of combining police and fire departments. Experts warned that, "City Hall will burn down while the Bank is being robbed!" Joe Spinnelli served as the first police chief; Bob Ryan was the first fire chief of the volunteer fire department. The Department started small--the first piece of equipment was a hose nozzle that Bob Ryan bought in the 1963 annual KQED benefit auction. But the dual-function Department, aided by a strong volunteer fire fighting force, has ably served the City.

Citizen participation has been the key to the City's success and has brought about a quality life style for residents. The 20-30 Club and Women's Association built playgrounds and ballfields. The Recreation Commission organized swimming programs and summer outings and spearheaded the successful \$150,000 bond issue in 1968 to build the Community Center in Benicia Park. The Cultural Arts Commission has sponsored art shows and concerts, and the Good Neighbor Day celebrating Rohnert Park's ties to its sister city in Mexico, Morelia. The Garden Club hosts an annual flower show of great interest to the whole area. The list of groups is long and replete with the names of concerned citizens: the Scouts, the well baby clinic, the Citizens Advisory Committees, the Planning Commission, the School Board, the Friends of the Library, the Chamber of Commerce etc. In October, 1967, the City gave itself a party and held an awards dinner to acknowledge the contributions of the most active--82 in all. Today the list of citizens who have contributed would be many, many times as long.

The "good ole days" are gone, except for the few original residents who remember it as it "really was." The City sponsored tree plantings for the shadeless town; carrots and other vegetables came up in the cracks of sidewalks and streets; children fished for crawdads in the corner storm drains; Saturday night garage parties were the town's main social events; and the new streets were named after the children of the councilmen, the children of other early residents, the town dentist, etc. The wild-eyed

enthusiasm of young men building a town, from scratch, without the help or hindrance of the past, has subsided. The most outlandish dreams of a hospital, an airport, a recreational lake have been bandied about. The City is no longer so receptive to the grandiose dreams of developers, but they welcome those who dream of a good way of life. Rohnert Park has always provided that.

