



**McHENRY
MUSEUM**
& Historical Society



History Lesson

Newsletter

January 2021



On January 5, 2021, Modesto Restaurateur, Stan Galas passed away. Stan Galas (1934-2021) and his brother Norman (1931-2008) were the owners of Modesto's Sundial Lodge. The Sundial is synonymous with Modesto history. When prompted by long-time Modesto residents which business they miss most, the usual answer is the Sundial. Mr. Galas' death seem to be the end of a very important chapter in Modesto, so it feels fitting to give a history of an establishment which operated for 42 years (1956-1998).

The story of the Sundial dates back to another famous Modesto business, the Hotel Covell. In 1924, George (1865-1948) and Grace (1884-1973) Covell opened their Hotel in Downtown Modesto on J Street. Gus Galas (1901-1990) and his brother, Emmanuel (1894-1985) immigrated to California from Greece and opened the Oakdale Café in 1945. The following year, Geroge Covell offered the brothers a position running the restaurant in the Covell. Following her husband's death, Grace Covell moved into a large home on McHenry Ave, and decided to open a lodge nearby. In 1956, she opened the Sundial Lounge at 808 McHenry Ave and Gus Galas and his wife, Nora (1907-1993) ran the restaurant along with their sons Norman and Stan.



**Please call us at:
(209) 618-5387**
The Museum remains closed due to COVID-19, but remain hopeful for a late-Spring opening. Please check Facebook and Instagram for updates.

The Sundial became the number one eatery in the city. Their menu was simple, Prime Rib, Pot Roast, Roast Turkey, but it was a hit with the local crowd. Their breakfasts were a favorite morning ritual for many. The Sundial was the place to stop when visiting Modesto, and played host to many notable figures passing through the city. Actors like Jim Backus, Agnes Moorehead, George Gobel, and Johnny Weissmuller and athletes like Willie Mays, always ate at the Sundial while visiting Modesto.



Images: (Above) Front of the Sundial Lo. (Below) View of pool from dinning room.

In 1972, the Galas Family purchased the building from Grace Covell. Following their parent's retirement in the 1980s, Norman and Stan Galas decided to close the Sundial on July 31, 1998. The Modesto Bee reported "Summer 1998 the nation loes Buffalo Bob, Roy Rogers, Frank Sinatra. Modesto Loses the Sundial." Many of the furnishings of the Sundial were purchased by Carmen Sabitino for his Restaurant "Sabatinos," also on McHenry, and remained there until its closing in 2019. The Sundial Lodge structure was converted into an assisted-living/nursing facility and remains under the name Stacie's Chalet.

*Information taken from various "Modesto Bee" Articles and oral histories of Sundial employees and patrons.

Updates

A reading of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) occurred between the City of Modesto and the MMH&S and has been sent to the city attorney's and is expected to be approved by April 2021. A memorandum of understanding is an agreement between two entities.

The MOU between the City of Modesto and the MMH&S will set guidelines for the roles of both organizations in the operations of the McHenry Museum.

The City owns the building and the majority of the contents, and the MMH&S serves as a support system for the building and helps alleviate certain burdens from the city in maintaining the building. Two entities coming together to better preserve our rich history.



On January 4, 2021, McHenry Museum & Historical Society Board Member, Chance Condit was sworn in as Stanislaus County Supervisor for Area 5. Mr. Condit has been on the Board for the MMH&S since June of 2018 and served as City Councilman for the City of Ceres from 2018-2020.

Due to popular demand, and though our website is still under construction, it is our goal to add Museum Store inventory for purchase.



Happy New Year Members!

Though what 2021 holds remains to be unseen and life seems to remain stagnant, we, the Board of Directors, of the McHenry Museum & Historical Society are still working hard behind the scenes to keep things running and making plans for our re-opening, at a date which remains to be announced.