

New book details Borina family history

Bio-B
'A little piece of the American success story,' author says

By TODD GUILD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

WATSONVILLE — Nick Borina was 10 when he fled the poverty of Osojnik, Croatia to seek a better life in the U.S. That was in 1900, a time when many young men left Eastern Europe to seek their fortunes.

Through hard work over two

decades he grew to become one of the biggest apple growers and shippers in the Pajaro Valley. He also raised two daughters, both of whom went on to create their own success stories.

The story of the Borinas has now been told in "The Borina Family of Watsonville," a book written by former Register-Pajaronian editor Mike Wallace.

The book outlines the history of the family, but also lets readers see how that story has shaped — and continues to influence — the Pajaro Valley.

"This is a little piece of the

American success story, and a piece of the overall history of the Pajaro Valley," Wallace said. "It captures a piece of what was going on with the Croats in the Pajaro Valley."

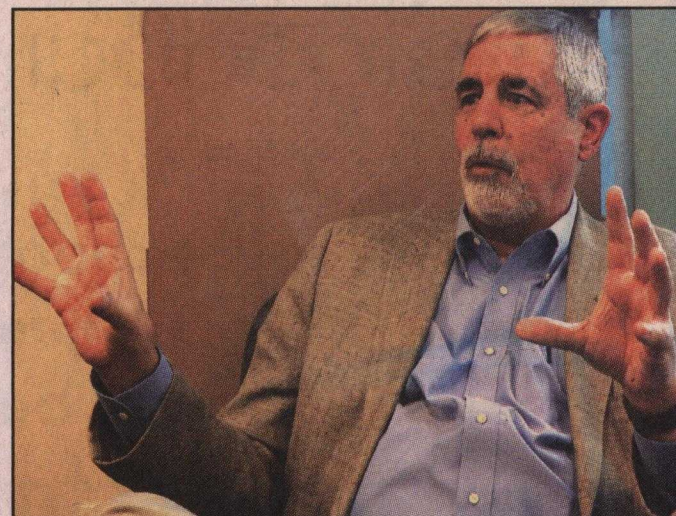
In 1917 Borina married Lucy Secondo Bakich, a widow whose first husband had been murdered years earlier on his way to work less than a month after the marriage. That case remains Santa Cruz County's oldest cold case.

Borina never saw his parents again after he left Croatia. But he came from a country whose

poverty forced those who lived there to work hard and live frugally, which may well have been a key to his success, Wallace said.

He came to own hundreds of acres of land, which were increased by his daughter Mari- anne even after his death.

Part of his success during the Great Depression came from figuring out an innovative way to ship apples to China, which not only helped pave his success but also had positive effects locally,



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Former Register-Pajaronian editor Mike Wallace talks about his recently-published book, "The Borina Family of Watsonville."

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Wallace said.

"It kept a lot of apple growers going in those days," he said.

Nick and Lucy Borina had two daughters who went on to achieve uncommon professional success for women in the 1940s and '50s.

June, the younger daughter, earned a law degree from Stanford and became the District Attorney of Santa Cruz County in 1947, at the age of 27. She was both the youngest prosecutor in the state and the first woman in California history to hold such a position.

She lost the seat in an election to Charles Moore, whose corruption was later famously exposed by the Register-Pajaronian. June died in June 2000 at 80.

Her sister, Mary Ann, took over the family farming operations after Nick's death and managed them through changing times in the apple industry. She was one of the few women in the country running a major agricultural operation during the 1940s and '50s.

The daughters' story was especially notable because of the perception in that era that women should be homemakers.

"After World War II a lot of women went back to the households," Wallace said. "These women did the opposite — they had rich exciting lives at a time when not many women were doing that."

Wallace said he worked on the book for 15 months, interviewing many of the people who knew the Borina family and piecing together sparse records.

Since neither daughter had children, the family line ended with them. The number of people who knew the family, therefore, was diminishing, as were the historical archives, Wallace said.

"What we didn't know is how much of their details we were going to get," he said.

June and Mary Ann both married but had no children, so the family line died with them. But before her death June set up the framework for the Borina



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June Borina

Foundation, which has taken measures to permanently protect the family's rich farm lands and has distributed millions of dollars to local charities and nonprofits since its incorporation in 2002.

This includes the Pajaro Valley Historical Association's new Borina Archive & Alzora Snyder and Jane Borg Research Center, which officially opens Sunday.

"We're thrilled to have the family's story told for all time," said Sheila Burke, a trustee of the Borina Foundation and the goddaughter of June Borina. "We feel that it really does a wonderful job of capturing a sense of the people and the times in which they lived."

Nina Simon, executive director of MAH, said the museum agreed to publish the book because of what it adds to Santa



Contributed

Nick Borina

Cruz County history.

"The MAH is a countywide museum, and we are always looking for new ways to connect with the diverse stories of Santa Cruz County," Simon said. "We appreciate this book's ability to contribute to the understanding of agriculture, local legal history, and the history of the Pajaro Valley."

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"The Borina Family of Watsonville" is available locally at Crossroads Books in Watsonville, Bookshop Santa Cruz, and Capitola Book Café.

A book signing will be held at Crossroads Books in Watsonville Dec. 14 from 1 to 3 p.m.



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One of the numerous apple box labels from Borina.