

Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society Historian

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President's Message

For the last 28 years on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings, you could find me walking along Corte Madera Creek with two friends, meeting at 6:20, then 7:00 AM. We started our sunrise strolls when our children were toddlers; now all of them are truly launched. We welcomed another walker a few years ago and have walked, loved and mourned a generation of canine companions. (Three years ago, a new pup joined us as does the occasional visiting "granddog".) Rain cancels . . . but there is often a flurry of early morning texts as to what constitutes "real rain". We have tried to solve the world's problems and have counseled and celebrated one another as time moved us forward. In short, our creek-side ambles cemented friendships now moving into a fourth decade.

Friendship engendered by a sense of place, of community, is the focus of this issue of *The Historian*. Marilee Rogers shares her memories of grade school classmates who became friends in the 1950s and are still going strong! We are also treated to a glimpse of the evolution of 20th century Kentfield from a rough and tumble saloon-laden crossroads to a community continuing to address the still-open question of incorporation.

As we move into this season of celebration, I invite you to take a moment to savor the beauty of our surroundings and the joy of friendships, old and new! May you all enjoy the happiest of holidays!

Stay safe, be well!

Susan Morrow

Co-president, 2020-2021



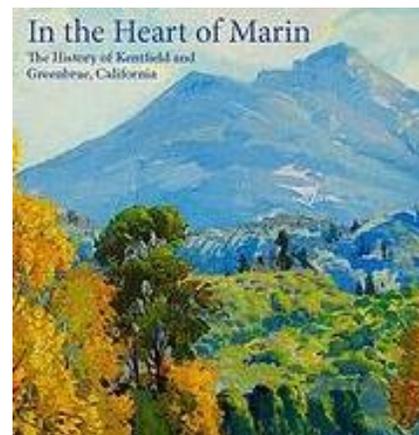
**KGHS Pop Up Store
"Home for Holidays!"**

**Are you wondering where
we've moved?**

**We are now at
150 Bon Air Center
(next to RoadRunner)**

Stop by our Pop-Up Store to:

- reflect on times past through our poster display and video
- pick up a copy of *Heart of Marin: History of Kentfield & Greenbrae* by Dewey Livingston



- purchase some cards or totes
- support KGHS with a donation or membership.

The Pop-Up will be open:

- **Thursday December 2** from 5-6:30 for the annual Stroll and Shop in Bon Air Center
- And the following Saturdays from **12 -3 December 4**
December 11
December 18

Unincorporated Kentfield

Excerpts From "In the Heart of Marin"

by Dewey Livingston p. 121-127

At the turn of the 20th century... citizens of our village (Kentfield) had had enough of troublemakers who might have thought they still lived in old Tarantulaville (an early nick-name for Kentfield). The grand estates had been isolated from the village proper, and now they were being broken up into small-lot subdivisions with the obligatory boom in population. Kentfield's stepchild status as an unincorporated district under control of county government in San Rafael irked the forward-thinking people in the community.

As neighboring communities incorporated (San Anselmo in 1907, Ross in 1908, and Larkspur in 1908-1909), Kentfield found itself surrounded by progressive communities creating their own police and fire departments and restrictive regulations, and also developing their own individual characters based on well-tended streets, community parks, and a unified citizenry. Kentfield found itself on the wrong side of the tracks. It was time to act, to clean up the place for once and for all. The Kentfield Improvement Club was founded early in the century to do just that.



One of many schooners docked on Corte Madera Creek near what is now College Avenue and the site of many saloons.

Ross Landing in 1873... (p. 20) Newall Snyder Collection

One problem on people's minds in the period 1906-1910 was the proliferation of saloons. Much of Ross Landing's (Kentfield's original name) nineteenth century population, with its salty mariners, longshoremen and woodchoppers, sucked up the alcohol with abandon, and passing years apparently didn't change much. Saloons lined the county road (College Avenue) and were targeted as a breeding ground for the "tough element."... which spurred the improvement club to take action... The method used would suppress the ability of saloon owners to obtain or renew liquor licenses... p. 121

During the first quarter of a century, from 1905 into the early 1930s, Kentfield had changed radically: most of its country estates, large and small, had been developed into modest commuter-oriented residential neighborhoods; it had gained a post office address and a fine new grammar school; Marin Junior College had chosen the community for its campus; and, despite an innovative upgrade in the train system serving the town, automobiles had taken over the roadways.

Kentfield found itself in the twentieth century but remained unincorporated, subservient to the county government and lacking a sense of independence and higher character. Its shining stars were people like Adaline and William Kent, Albert C. Olney and founders of the college, and the stern but much loved principal of Adaline E Kent, Miss Catherine Palmer. But there was a darker side-blamed on lack of attention from county leaders and its rowdy reputation- that saw a culture of saloons, horse racing, petty crime, and a general feel of wear and tear.

It is important to remember, in imagining Kentfield during this period, that the main north-south northern California state highway, designated 101, passed right through town. All auto and truck traffic, whether headed for San Rafael or Eureka and Oregon, roared through Kentfield on what was later called College Avenue and Sir Francis Drake Boulevard....



One of the local Board Walks and county road (later the State Highway and College Avenue) looking north towards Kentfield Corners. P. 126 (Newall Snyder Collection)

... In 1927 a group of citizens banded together to tackle the problems that Kentfield face. These well-intentioned people founded the Kentfield Chamber of Commerce on July 27, 1927, calling their organization "The Voice of the Kentfield District."...Roads and the pedestrian walk from Mira Mont to Adaline E Kent School took up much of the discussion at the Chamber. In addition to stop signs, sidewalks and school crossings, road safety improvements were place high on the priority list....

... A regular subject of serious discussion at the Chamber meetings was the question of incorporation, usually in the context of problems that could be improved if Kentfield was a city. Talk turned to the consolidation of Ross Valley towns as a way to raise tax money and work more efficiently...As of 1930 Kentfield residents paid an extra \$.25 a month for PG&E for gas and electric service, because of being an unincorporated district. ... The question of incorporation would linger on for years but would go nowhere. Even as recently as the 1980s, it was declared that there was not enough tax base to support incorporation. If annexation were to occur, Kentfield and Greenbrae would become part of the city of Larkspur. p 122-127

If you would like to read more about the early days of Kentfield, you can purchase our book *In the Heart of Marin: A History of Kentfield and Greenbrae* by Dewey Livingston on our website www.kghs.org or at our Pop Up Store in Bon Air Center open on Saturdays in December from 12-3.

KGHS Board of Directors

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Dewey Livingston, Author

A Lifetime of Friendship Marilee Ellis Rogers '57 KGHS Board Member

One doesn't realize that the friends we make as early as kindergarten might just remain some of your best friends for life. I was the late comer to a group of three girls who were in kindergarten together at Adaline E. Kent in the late 1940's. I arrived at Greenbrae School in the third grade and we merged with Kent during the fifth grade while they added the North Quad to the school. Paula Daly Skov, Marjean Sellman, Charlene Bland Haley and I went through Kent Middle School and on to Redwood together. Even though we went different ways in college and later, we continue to meet. We really are quite different but we share a common bond that is stronger than our differences. There is something intangible that holds people together who have also shared childhood experiences together.



*1957 Eighth Grade at Kent...
First row Charlene, Paula, classmate,
Marjean, Marilee, classmate... with
favorite teacher George Stratton*



Marilee, Paula, Marjean & Charlene

Now in our late 70's, we have lunch at least four or five times a year to reminisce about our youth, catch up on friends, share a good meal and laugh. We remember the Halloween parades in Greenbrae, walking the cow trails through wild flowers from my house to the school, sliding down the grassy hillsides in cardboard boxes during the summer. Charlene's mom (Ella Bland) was a second grade teacher at Kent. Mayday was a big and fun day at AE Kent...not only the Maypole, but games and food. This fundraiser was popular during the '40s and early '50s, ending around 1955. Charlene and Paula had Third and Fourth Grade classes in the original AE Kent school structure...wooden floors, separate cloakroom and desks with ink wells!! Middle school was filled with parties, school dances and the wonderful teaching of George Stratton whom I had for two years in a row. He was an inspiration for all of us. I'll never forget one of the questions on his history test had us identify Rosetta Stone... one of the options was an Egyptian Belly Dancer... which we thought was hilarious. We all wore skirts and dresses, no pants, with four or five starched "petticoats" underneath as you can see in the photo. We all remember the flooding which often closed the school down. The earthquake in 1957 had the basketball poles swaying and broke many of the skylights. We all were sent home.

We would walk or bike ride between each others homes from Greenbrae, to Kentfield to Kent Woodlands, often having sleep-overs. It seemed much easier and safer then. When high school came along we once borrowed Paula's dad's Model T to get to my house. Surprise... half of Kentfield had called her parents before we even made it home. We would often "hang out" at Paula's, practice our dancing school lessons (as if the boys were practicing...haha!) or cheer leading routines. Her mom used to leave us notes all over the house and even in the refrigerator with instructions on what we could eat and when. This was before PostIts! We all took school seriously, tried to get decent grades but we loved to have a good time. Both Paula and I returned to live in Kentfield for awhile, sending our children to both Kent and Redwood.

Over the years we drifted apart as our lives took different directions, but we still stayed in touch with Christmas cards, telephone calls, lunch dates and class reunions. We have always been there for each other in times of joy and grief. For the past 20-30 years we have made a point of going to lunch together, taking excursions to the wine country or Tahoe, sending numerous emails to each other about aging, animals, good humor and puns. We even mastered Zoom meetings during Covid to stay in touch and celebrate birthdays and such. Now we mark our calendars in ink with our next rendezvous date ... our annual Christmas lunch at Ca' Bianca in Santa Rosa. You can be sure we will talk a bit about the early days when we met at Kent, and what happened to so and so, but we will also catch up on family, children and grandchildren, good reads and recipes, and how we would solve the world's problems. We know we are fortunate to have such a strong bond and for so many years. Thank you Kent!

It's Giving Time: Join, Renew or Make a Donation

It's never too late to renew, join or make a donation! If you know of friends and neighbors who are interested in preserving our community and recognizing local history, please forward this newsletter to them and encourage them to become a member. Online at www.KGHS.org

- \$20 - Students & Seniors
- \$25- Non Profit organizations NEW
- \$30 - Individuals & Families
- \$50 - Business Membership
- \$100 - Patron
- \$250 - Benefactor *
- \$500 - Historian *
- \$500- Business Partner
- \$1000 + - Lifetime Membership*
- \$1000+- Lifetime Business Partner *

Or you can send a check:
KGHS Membership
Box 236
Kentfield, CA 94914.

Please include your name, level of membership, address, email and phone number. If you use a credit card number, please include your CVV code.

