

# Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society

## Historian

March 2, Volume 14, Issue 1

[www.kghs.org](http://www.kghs.org)

[info@kghs.org](mailto:info@kghs.org)

### President's Message

Spring is in the air and KGHS is coming out of hibernation! There are two major activities to add to your calendar. This year, 2026, is the Centennial of Marin Junior College/College of Marin. They have already “kicked off the year” with the opening of the new Dr. David Wain Coon Center for Student Success (CSS) on February 4 but have many more activities planned throughout the year. KGHS and the College of Marin have been collaborating on various projects highlighted by the loan of the Joseph Lee Painting *Ross Landing 1871* now hanging in the lobby of the Academic Center building, and the *Illustrated Landscape Rendering of the College Campus 1930*, a donation from Jeff Craemer, which now hangs in the new Center for Student Success CSS. COM will soon be the recipient of a George Demont Otis painting of Mount Tam donated by Arel Keck and arranged by KGHS. It's only fitting that we focus on the history of College of Marin in this issue.

KGHS is also partnering with Bon Air Center and Mollie Stone's to host the annual FREE, family-friendly Community Spring Fair on May 16 from 11-2. Mark your calendar to share in the community spirit of over 100 local organizations and food vendors. There will be activities for all, and the annual “passport game” with prizes from local vendors.

Marilee Rogers

Co President, KGHS 2025-2026

### Community Spring Fair



#### Community Spring Fair

May 16, 2026

11am-2pm

Join us as more than 110 community organizations, local farms, food producers, and vendors come together with Bon Air, the Kentfield–Greenbrae Historical Society, and Mollie Stone's for this annual community celebration!



100 Years in the Making!  
Join us on April 6th at the Kentfield Campus to celebrate the College of Marin 100th Birthday at Founders' Day and Spring Fling. All members of the college community are invited to gather for this centennial milestone.

Event Highlights:

- \* Free food
  - \* Birthday cake for all attendees
  - \* Live music and DJ sets
  - \* Announcement of the Ideation Challenge winners
  - \* Official Time Capsule ceremony
  - \* Games and campus activities
- Mark your calendars for 11 am – 2 pm. Stay tuned for more details as the event approaches!

April 6, 2026

11 am - 2 pm

College of Marin, Kentfield  
Campus



View of Mt. Tam from the new CSS Library by Wally Jones (Courtesy of the COM Alumni Facebook page)

The early history of College of Marin begins with the Coast Miwok, and the “rough and tumble” origins of Ross Landing in the 1860s. Soon there were hotels and the estates of families such as the Murrays, McAllisters, Kents and Butlers. The Butler Estate eventually became the site of the current College of Marin. Please enjoy the full narrative of Kentfield and College of Marin History in Dewey Livingston’s book: *In the Heart of Marin: The History of Kentfield and Greenbrae* (onsale on our website!)



*Aerial View Kentfield 1928 COM/ Butler Estate circled by trees; Corvi Gardens below (Courtesy of Anne T. Kent California Room MCFL)*

**The BUTLER ESTATE: “BRIGHTHURST”**

*Excerpts from Dewey Livingston from In the Heart of Marin p. 60-62*

A particularly fine piece of the lower Ross Valley landscape has seen only two active owners. The George and Adeline Butler estate sat on a gently shaped low ridge that sloped to Corte Madera Creek ...A known Coast Miwok village site, the place was used as a hay field and grazing land... the south section was entirely flat, almost marshy; the north side was solid land, a couple of feet in elevation above the creek...

Butler was a successful insurance executive...He became a wealthy man and invested in Marin County land. At Ross Landing they created an attractive estate, which they called Brighthurst, completed in the fall of 1883...They surrounded their large home with beautiful landscaping.

Butler retired in 1905 but enjoyed a short rest. In 1906, following the devastating San Francisco earthquake and fire, he was appointed as a special agent...George died in 1924 at age 80. That summer, Brighthurst was put up for sale and their fine furnishings auctioned off...

The Tamalpais Union High School District bought the property with the intent to build a junior college and, in the fall of 1926, the Marin Junior College opened for its first 85 students on the former Butler estate...The college used the old mansion and barn for classes until they were razed to make way for modern campus improvements.



*Butler Estate 1890 (Courtesy of Anne T. Kent California Room MCFL)*

**CORVI GARDENS**  
*Excerpts from D. Livingston In the Heart of Marin p.131-135*

Italian Immigrant Eugenio Corvi leased and then bought, in 1920, George Butler’s lower field and transformed them into an Eden of edible delights. The farm was located where the COM science center and parking lots are today...

Daughter Lena, interviewed by Richard Torney, had vivid memories of her father’s farm. “He grew every kind of vegetable and fruit...he had an old Ford truck that he would deliver his vegetables to San Rafael, on Fourth Street- Charlie’s Market- and sell them wholesale to Sonoma and Bolinas.” Corvi sold the farm in 1928 to Marin Junior College for use as a football field, tennis courts and gymnasium...



*Corvi Vegetable Garden on College Ave.1922 (Anne T. Kent California Room, MCFL)*

## COLLEGE OF MARIN GRADUALLY EXPANDS

*Excerpts from D. Livingston In the Heart of Marin p. 141-143; 195-201*

The site of Peter Smith's store and house was purchased early on by Marin Junior College. Little is known about what happened to Smith's enterprise and buildings in the years after his death in 1879. The land was used in the 1930s and 1940s by the college for various uses, including the bookstore/cafe and a new chemistry building constructed in 1941 on the north end of the lot, which was recently demolished. College of Marin constructed a new library and learning center, with a small parking lot in 1968 on the site of Peter Smith's pioneering trading post on the banks of one bustling Corte Madera Creek.



*Marin Junior College Gym with snow on Mt. Tam (College of Marin Archives)*



*COM Gym fire 1963 (College of Marin Archives)*

To the south, between the creek and Stadium Way, all was agricultural open space until the Marin Junior College constructed a large gymnasium in 1931. The remaining land served as the football fields, scene of many memorable games enjoyed by locals and visitors (also for water-skiing during floods!), and tennis courts at the far edge. The gym burned down in a spectacular fire in December 1963. With the new gym and football field constructed down by the Larkspur boundary in 1964, College of Marin transformed the playing fields into parking lots and the Autin Science Center.

The Gym had originally been built in 1931, at a cost of \$57,000, or about \$450,000 in today's dollars, given inflation. It had been constructed on a 10-acre site purchased from Ernesto Corvi for \$26,000. The original plan called for an identical second Gym to be built next door, to house Women's Athletics. This second Gym, however, was never built.

The 30 year-old Gym had been condemned for public assembly use in 1961 by the Kentfield Fire Protection District, deeming it a fire hazard. It was, however, still in use while a new gym was being built. The old structure was used in 1963 for physical education classes, basketball practice, and equipment storage, and was scheduled for demolition when the new building opened.



*College of Marin Corvi garden's flood 1922 (California Historical Society)*



*COM Football Field flood and waterskiing 1950s*

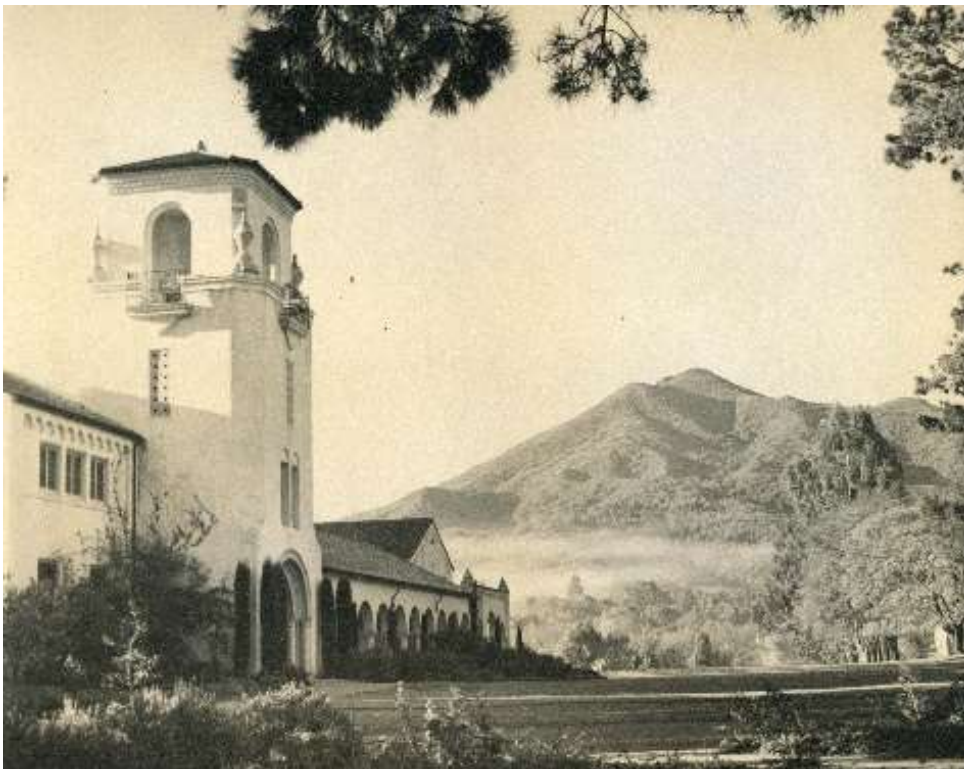


*Science Building and Harlan Hall 1930 (Bach collection MCFL)*

Pictured here, circa 1930, are Harlan Hall (left) and the Science Building, the first two construction projects taken on by the Marin Junior College, in Kentfield, California. The Science Building was the first permanent building on campus. It was designed by A. A. Cantin and constructed by contractor Wallace Snelgrove in 1927 at a cost of \$37,500. For a short time the west wing of the building housed the library and campus store. In 1931 four rooms were added at a cost of \$8,400. The new addition, named the Laboratory Building, housed the improved

zoology, botany and geology classrooms.

Harlan Hall was the second facility built, and like the Science Building, also designed by A.A. Cantin. Built by Younger & Horstmeyer in only 65 days it was completed for a cost of \$53,600 in 1929. Originally called the Administration Building, it was renamed in 1938 after George H. Harlan, the first president of the Board of Trustees. Both buildings were designed in the Spanish Revival style, also known as Spanish Eclectic, which became popular after the 1915 Panama-California Exposition held in San Diego. The school was known from its beginning in 1926 as Marin Junior College, and renamed College of Marin in 1947. This image is part of the Charles Bach Collection.



Harlan Hall (*College of Marin Alumni Facebook site*)

Harlan Hall was probably the most iconic building in the college's history. With its bell tower posing with Mt. Tamalpais in the background for countless photos, it was a classic from its beginning in 1929. Built in 65 days for \$53,000, it stood until 1969. The romantic spanish architecture was lost when they replaced it with Harlan Center, but the birch trees that were planted on the Sir Francis Drake side of the building were saved.

More COM history in a future issue

Other sources of COM History and information on Centennial plans:

Facebook: College of Marin group

College of Marin Alumni group

College of Marin: [www1@marin.edu](mailto:www1@marin.edu)

## Renew, Join, Donate to KGHS

We hope that you will continue to support us. It is important to note that membership fees and, especially, donations are the sole source of support for the KGHS. Unlike other historical societies throughout Marin, there is no governmental support as neither Kentfield nor Greenbrae are incorporated entities.

\$25 - Students & Seniors, Non-Profit organizations

\$35 - Individuals & Families

\$50 - Sponsor

\$100 - Patron Donations of any amount are always welcome! **Thank you** for your previous support ... we have more to do!

### MEMBERSHIPS & DONATIONS

[www.kghs.org/membership](http://www.kghs.org/membership)

Or you can send a check: KGHS  
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 & zip code



### KGHS Board 2025-2026

Co-Presidents Marilee Rogers  
& Heather McPhail Sridharan,  
Tamara Hull Arnold,  
Mary Gilardi, Ross McKenna,  
Lisa Sandberg, Paul Smith,  
Rebecca Sylla, Richard Torney.

Amy Gallen...Archivist

Dewey Livingston... Historian