

# Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society

## Historian

June 2021 Volume 9, Issue 2

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

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

### President's Message

Emergence from our "Covid pods" brings to mind a couple of images: the butterfly shedding layer after layer of cocoon and Rip Van Winkle waking from years of sleep, mixed with of healthy dollop of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland!* Even as we explore our communities, delighting in meeting up (in person!) with family, friends and neighbors, we find ourselves proceeding with caution. Mask or no mask? Can we hug or would an elbow bump be better? A large meeting . . . indoors? Well, maybe . . .

The challenges facing our communities this summer have shifted: as we sort out the protocol for post-lockdown living, we are also faced with a drought of historic proportions. Three-minute showers, unwatered landscaping and buckets and basins scattered throughout the house recall water shortages in years past. A water pipeline across the Richmond-San Rafael bridge? It worked in 1973 and is on the table again.

This issue of the *Historian* also looks back at development of Kent Woodlands subdivisions, ta jewwl of the Ross Valley. As I scan today's real estate offerings, I can't help but wonder what mid-century homeowners would make of the current-day real estate prices!

Our communities are faced with a season of choices and challenges, but as I look out to the horizon, I am once again reminded that there is no place like home!

Stay safe, be well!  
Susan Morrow  
Co-president, 2020-2021

### Pop Up Moved!

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

Thanks to Andrea Schultz and Bon Air Management we have moved to a new space next to Road Runner!

**We are now at**  
**150 Bon Air Center**  
and preparing to open again this summer

### Join or Renew Your Membership NOW!

It's never too late to renew or join! 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.

- \$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.



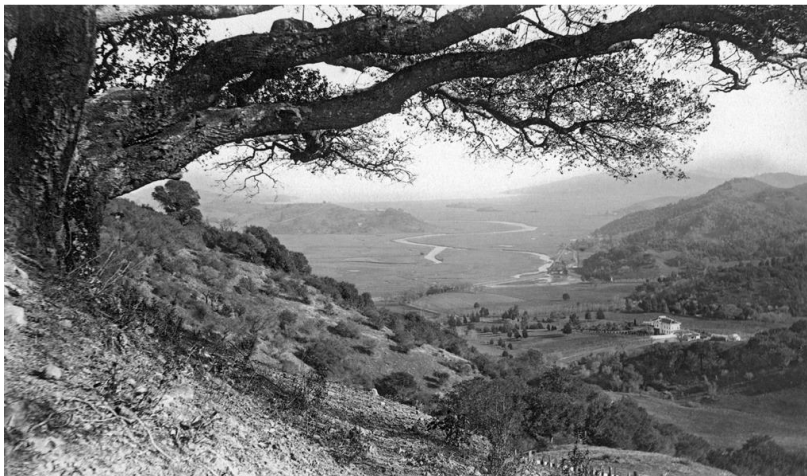
**You can still order books  
and renew memberships  
online at  
[www.kghs.org](http://www.kghs.org)**

## The Birth of Kent Woodlands

Excerpts From "In the Heart of Marin"  
by Dewey Livingston p. 212-231

As the twentieth century progressed, the population of Marin County grew. Automobile traffic increased, new highways were built, a grand new bridge spanned the Golden Gate, and modern living became the trend of the day. Despite the Great Depression, the lure of Marin County cast a spell on the Bay Area residents and others from near and far. From 1936 to 1946, the lower Ross Valley saw two major subdivisions of former estate and ranch land into well-planned communities.

Del Mesa was the first of the modern post-estate subdivisions in the area, an ambitious scheme launched shortly after the stock market crashed. While it took some time to fly, Del Mesa became one of the premier locations for a fine Marin home. The famed Kent estate saw the end of an era with the death of Congressman William Kent and its subsequent family-controlled division in 1936 into an exclusive and pretty residential area called Kent Woodlands. These two developments proved to be a turning point in Kentfield history; both were developed as high-end residential area. Del Mesa associated itself with the highly regarded and somewhat insular Ross (school assessments with to Ross rather than Kentfield), and Kent Woodlands had the cachet of being carefully created out of the last of the big Ross Valley estates. And so, these two developments put Kentfield on the path to becoming an upscale community...



*Early View of Kent Woodlands with Kent Estate (Anne T. Kent Room, California Collection MCFL)*

At the time Kent Woodlands was created, the Kent estate stood virtually unchanged. The 1873 main house overlooked a landscaped pool with grape arbor, lawns and underground changing areas. A tennis court with grandstand had been added, but the old barn, laundry, servant's houses, out buildings and the Parson's house remained. Elizabeth Thacher Kent's New Haven had been recently built and the historic Richardson house stood intact. The vineyards would eventually be replaced by housing and new landscaping, and the dairy was discontinued. ...

During WWII, the family life on the Kent Estate changed radically and tragically. Family members left for the war effort, others gathered lived together in the big house. The estate grounds were opened for the good of the war effort and the family reached out to the local needy. Coming back after the war, family members saw that changes would continue and nothing would be the same. Kent Woodlands took up the estate, parcel by parcel, and the traditional family entered the modern world of post war America.

The world went into a financial depression shortly after William Kent's death. His children and heirs, seven potential decision-makers, formed a trust in 1934, which gave them equal control of the property. Subdivision was the logical answer to most of the estate problems. William Kent Jr., without prior development experience, took charge and made the decision to subdivide about 800 acres. Even though there were many family fights, the Kent estate was transformed into a tasteful and nature-friendly community of homes. The divisions would occur in small phases and would take about 25 years to accomplish...

The building sites were carefully chosen to protect trees, views and drainage. Unlike most developments, ideal home sites were selected before property boundaries were drawn and roads built, affording the most pleasant and private personal spaces available. The first subdivision

map...created 28 lots along newly laid out Rancheria Road. Lots ranged in price from \$2500 to \$5250 with most in the \$3000 range....Roads were gradually extended up Woodland and Goodhill in 1940... Early residents enjoyed a back yard not unlike the Kent's. With construction beginning in the low areas, all of the surrounding hills remained open and wild.

when it was improved into a real roadway. This route roughly followed today's Magnolia Avenue and College Avenue, fording Corte Madera Creek somewhere near today's College of Marin, and heading west up the valley on today's route of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. As public roads were built, they followed this route....

After World War II, new property owners hired top architects of the day, and so Kent Woodlands soon exhibited fine examples of the work such architects as William Wurster, Joseph Esherick ...and Charles Warren Callister among others. Following a movement that would be termed the Bay Area Tradition (Mid Century Modern to others) that utilized a simplicity of style, attention to the environment and ample use of raw local materials, many of these homes were featured in national architecture and fine living magazines and have been subject of a number of architectural studies...Prominent Bay Area landscape architects also worked in Kent Woodlands, including Thomas Church, Robert Royston and Lawrence Halprin...

The story of the historically important post-war architectural renaissance at Kent Woodlands has a shocking ending: many of the cutting-edge houses have been demolished and replaced by larger estate homes. A handful remain but with no know protections in place.

For the most part the older Kent family houses survived the subdivision era. Some have been remodeled many times and threatened with demolition but the 1872 Richardson house still stands as does Elizabeth Thacher Kent's New Haven on Good hill. The Kent's 1873 main house has undergone updating and is privately owned. For many years it was the site of many public events and fundraisers but it is best remembered for the Ballet Aquacade.



*Kent family home 1880*

*Anne T Kent California Room  
MCFL*



*Joseph Esherick Mid Century Modern  
1950 Kent Woodlands Home  
(Greatbuildings.com)*

## The Drought has Returned

What are you doing to save water? Do you remember the droughts of 1973 and 1976-77? It was a time when many of us began to conserve water on a regular basis, many of us continuing to be aware of water waste and finding it more challenging to save even more. In 1973, the now bike lane on the Richmond San Rafael Bridge, provided life support with a pipeline bringing water from the California water system across the bay. We gerrymandered our washers to use rinse water in our gardens and lawns went dry. We established the "yellow is mellow, brown down" mantra for the bathroom. No more playing in the sprinklers, washing cars or long showers.



*Richmond San Rafael Bridge Water Pipeline 1973 (Courtesy of MMWD)*

According to the Marin IJ, Kentfield has had 14.75” of rain this year, 27.66” last year, compared to an average of 47.48” yearly normal.. When I was growing up in Kentfield, my father was a rain gauge fanatic, recording 82” during one of the heavy rain seasons. We seem to be having fewer floods and more droughts as climate change takes its toll. We in Marin live in a self sustained water system, relying on our reservoirs for water, and they are already drying up. We have the added anxiety of projected wild fire season with all the dry hillsides, and the lack of water to fight them. Please share with us your suggestions to save water, protect our community and prevent wildfires. [info@kghs.org](mailto:info@kghs.org). We will post them in the next newsletter and on our website.



*Nicasio Reservoir 1976  
(photo courtesy Jack Mason  
Museum of West Marin History)*

### KGHS Board of Directors

Susan Morrow, Co-President; Marilee Rogers, Co-President, Heather McPhail Sridharan, Co-President, Tamara Hull Arnold, Lorelei Evans, Mary Gilardi, Julie Gondak, Ross McKenna, Paul Smith, Rebecca Sylla, Richard Torney Dewey Livingston, Author

## Share your stories of life during Covid...

The **Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society** is inviting you to capture a snapshot of life in the time of coronavirus. Your contributions will help build a resource of primary documentation so future generations can understand the history we are now living. We are asking you to share documents, handwritten journals, photographs, audio/video recordings, drawings, and poetry. Thanks to widespread electronic communication, there’s little physical record of our everyday lives unless people make a point of collecting and sharing it. Historians of the future will want to know how we spent our days. What was the local, lived experience of a global pandemic and rapid political and social change from day to day and week to week?

As we work, teach and learn from home, and practice social distancing, our normal experiences and routines have been displaced and disrupted. We hope to collect the stories, experiences, and evidence of our changed lives, both the painful and difficult, and the unexpectedly beautiful and hopeful.

An [Entry and Permission Form](#) can be found on our website or we would be glad to mail you one.

You can mail them to:  
KGHS PO Box 236,  
Kentfield, CA 94114  
or email them to [info@kghs.org](mailto:info@kghs.org).