

Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society Historian

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www.kghs.org

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President's Message

Travel! In this moment of hunkering down, of protecting our neighbors and ourselves by staying home and social distancing, daydreams turn both to memories of past exploration and plans (such big plans!) for future adventures. On one hand, we see travel "on steroids" as NASA's Perseverance successfully sends back awe-inspiring images from the Red Planet. Otherwise, our wanderlust is being addressed via beautifully presented virtual travel from around the Planet Earth.

While the KGHS can't promise far flung adventures, we are inviting you to do a bit of time-travel in our very own communities of Kentfield and Greenbrae. On March 25, the KGHS and the Marin County Free Library's Anne T. Kent California Room join to present local historian and map archivist Dewey Livingston as he uses a variety of images to mark over a 100 years of changes in our Ross Valley habitat. As an additional bonus, local historian Richard Torney will introduce the program with before and after images of Greenbrae and Kentfield.

Please join us via Zoom for this fascinating opportunity for armchair time-travel! You can register via our website (www.kghs.org).

Stay safe and be well!

Susan Morrow

Co-President, 2020-2021

Then and Now....



Ross Landing/College Ave. (Courtesy of MCFL)

KGHS & MCFL Webinar

SAVE THE DATE!
The Kentfield-Greenbrae
Historical Society and
Anne T. Kent California
Room MCFL

Present

**Kentfield & Greenbrae
Transformed Over Time:
Historic Maps, Photos &
More**

**Thu, Mar 25, 2021,
7:00 PM PDT**

Dewey Livingston, Historian & Map Archivist for the Anne T. Kent California Room, Marin County Free Library will use historic maps and aerial photos to present a unique before-and-after visual history of Kentfield & Greenbrae. The geography & landscape of the area will transform before your eyes, through comparisons and overlays of historic maps, aerial photographs and current satellite images. Along the way, Dewey will delve deeper into the history of such sites as the Greenbrae Ranch, the Kent Estate, and the College of Marin/Kent School area. The program will also focus on changes to Corte Madera Creek between 1871 and 1971. Local historian **Richard Torney** will introduce the program with "before & after" images of Kentfield & Greenbrae.

**REGISTER by going to
www.kghs.org**

A Zoom link info will be emailed to those who register in advance.

Getting Around in the Early Days... p. 65-67
From "In the Heart of Marin" by Dewey Livingston

Until the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937, all travelers from San Francisco came to Marin by boat, and so the county shores offered a number of ports, in addition to Ross Landing (Kentfield today): Sausalito and sites in upper Richardson Bay; Tiburon; San Quentin Point; San Rafael; Las Gallinas; and the Petaluma River were the main places to touch land. The Gold Rush brought not only people but also watercraft to the bay by the hundreds. The early years saw private steamers, small "packet" boats (schooners and sloops catering to passengers, mail and freight) and sail-powered barges, operated at the whims and needs of the owners. When schooner service was available at Ross Landing in its early days, passengers would likely share a packet with freight- some alive, like pigs and calves- on a schedule that depended on the tides, and usually twice a week or so. In the 1860s, the sloop *Advance*, for instance, left Ross Landing on Tuesdays and Fridays for Market Street Wharf and returned Mondays and Thursdays. Passengers gathered at Peter Smith's store and endured the long and slow sail down serpentine Corte Madera slough to the open water of the bay...



Schooner on Corte Madera Creek Ross Landing (Newall Synder Collection)

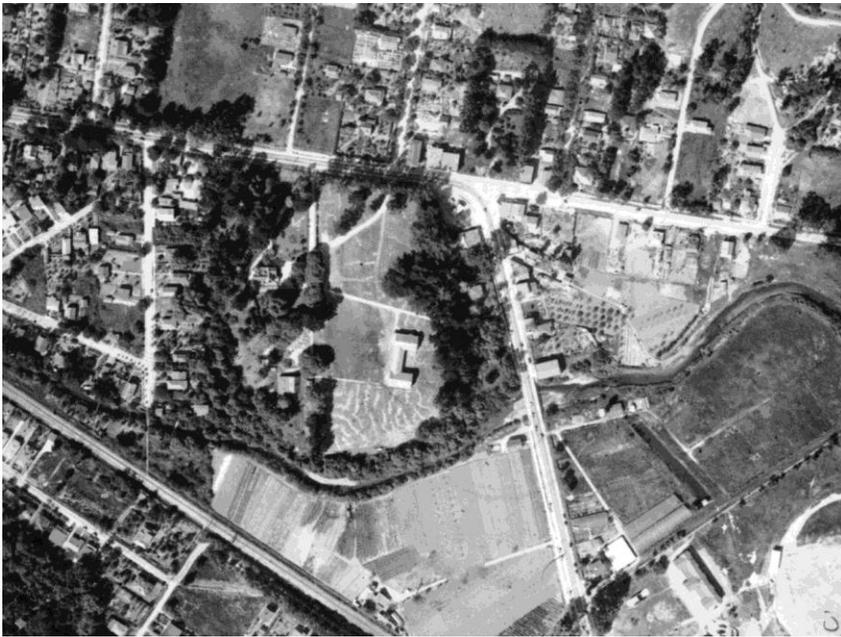
A more formal ferry service specific to Point San Quentin, also operated by Charles Minturn, commenced in 1865 and, was offered three times daily by the early 1870s. It was probably more reliable than the Ross Landing services – although vulnerable to weather—and so most residents of Ross Landing chose to journey out to the Point to embark. However, there was rarely any organized transportation, and a very poor road, through Greenbrae Ranch; the official route to the Point was a toll road across the marsh from San Rafael which wasn't convenient for Ross Landing residents. Starting in 1865 Barnard & Parsons of San Rafael operated a stage line from that city to San Quentin with a stop at Ross Landing; this made travel much easier for Ross Valley people. Hank Pass's direct stage, starting in 1868, certainly helped out. In 1870 a rail line opened from San Rafael to the Point. This was still of little

use to the residents of Ross Landing, who continued to either make the slow sail on the slough or travel by land to the Point, until the North Pacific Coast Railroad began operation through the Ross Valley in 1875. By then, the slough was of little use anyway.

Ferry service proved to be an enduring activity at San Quentin, only ending with the opening of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge in 1956. Service returned at a nearby site with the inauguration of the Larkspur Ferry in December of 1976. Still today, like those leaving Ross Landing on a packet boat, passengers- sans pigs and cattle- must endure a slow crawl towards the bay before getting to speed on open water.

Juan Cooper, Benjamin Buckelew, James Ross and the other pioneers of the Ross Valley relied on small sailing boats and overland travel by horseback to get from here to there. Ox teams hauling logs created what could be called roadways, but they were primitive and informal affairs. Even after Marin became a county in 1850, it took over a decade to build what could be called a public road through Ross Valley. During the 1850s, a common route had been established but it is not clear 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....



Aerial View of Kentfield & COM 1920s(Anne T Kent California Room MCFL)

Remember, the entire flat area forming the triangle from Corte Madera to College of Marin to Larkspur Landing was impassable marshland. It was not possible, or at least feasible, to cross the 1.5 mile expanse where cars now speed along Highway 101. Early travelers hugged the hills adjacent to the marshes, going around or over the points and deep in to the valleys to keep their feet dry. But as the population of the county increased, the call for roads was loud.



Tidal Marshes of Kentfield Then & Now

The county road through pre-Kentfield, now College Avenue, passed through a boggy area between Tamalpais Creek and Corte Madera Creek, requiring fill and eventually a pedestrian boardwalk. A bridge was built across the larger creek at Ross Landing in January of 1863 (today the modern bridge on College Avenue). North of the bridge was the first good solid land since Larkspur. This road was variously called San Rafael to Sausalito Road, the Red Hill Road to Corte Madera Road, or, usually the County Road.

What is now Sir Francis Drake Boulevard was merely a trail that allowed passage from the upper Ross Valley to Point San Quentin. The

section between the landing and what later would become San Anselmo was usually called the Red Hill Road and Ross Landing Road. When ferry service increased out at the Point in the 1860s, one could ride out and save some time compared to the slow boat through the marsh from Ross Landing. Only later was this route improved into a county road, and not until 1930 did it gain any importance as Sir Francis Drake Boulevard...

In the early 1860s, Ross Landing lumberman Isaac Shaver reportedly built a primitive roadway from San Rafael over a convenient pass in to Ross Valley, which later took the name Wolfe Grade. As timber diminished in Ross Valley, Shaver transported lumber all the way from Lagunitas Canyon, hauling heavy wagons over hills and into Ross Valley on roads he built (hikers can still find remnants of his original "Shaver's Grade" between Phoenix and Bon Tempe lakes, not to be confused with Shaver Grade fire road.) The county then built a good road to connect the bottom of the grade with Ross Landing, having to pay special attention to the unstable "sandy flat" near the bottom of the grade. (One hundred years later, Wolfe Grade (now Bacich) School was built on the "sandy flat" and its adjacent former marsh.) In 1869, the county called for a new road "from San Rafael to Ross Landing, through the lands of Short and Ross," resulting in the alignment used today. "This road is much needed," wrote the local newspaper editor, "and

will save considerable travel to persons who are obliged to visit the County Seat, residing in the southern portion of the county..." All north-south travel passed through Ross Landing, with no roads to the east because of the marshlands, nor the west because of the mountainous terrain. The new grade was preferred as it saved time and mileage, despite the steepness of the grade. As for its eventual naming, Wolfe was a San Rafael druggist, and his widow lived at the foot of the grade on the San Rafael side for many years.

In 1878, the county constructed the San Rafael-Bolinas Road, which let from San Rafael over the ridge to Laurel Grove on a route named Makin Grade for the landowners. It was also called Brewery Grade, because the San Rafael Brewery was at its eastern terminus. This route was bypassed in 1884 with the Fairfax-Bolinas Road and Makin Grade eventually became a residential road at the Ross-Kentfield border. *In the Heart of Marin: A History of Kentfield and Greenbrae* by Dewey Livingston, pages 65-67)

Share your Covid stories, photos, journals... Let's Create a Living History Archive!

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.

Renew 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*
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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.

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