

Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society

Historian

Spring 2020 Volume 8, Issue 2

www.kghs.org

info@kghs.org

President's Message

I hadn't realized that Beth Ashley had passed away until I read a friend's text message: while her declining health and advancing age didn't allow surprise, I was taken aback to a greater degree than I would have expected. What a lovely, honest voice she has been for this place we call home, for this spot on the globe that has acted as a magnet, not only for Ms. Ashley but also for those us who dream of traveling to far away places, not only now, when such yearnings have been put on hold, but on the regular when a memory or National Geographic photo sparks a new itinerary.

As a young mother, I travelled vicariously through China with Ms. Ashley and devoured her columns, then reread them when I could find a moment. Her writing was accessible, yet always supplied plenty to think about. From politics to families to life in Marin, she offered perspectives with clarity and grace. Her work gave us a sense of place and, oftentimes, it seemed that her home reflected ours.

Many of you knew Beth Ashley personally; she was, after all, a longtime resident of Greenbrae. Aside from brief introductions at various events, my acquaintance with Ms. Ashley was limited to the Corte Madera Creek bike path. A little over a decade and a dog ago, my friends and I would regularly meet Ms. Ashley on the bike path; we would be finishing our early morning walks as she started hers. She consistently remarked on the joyful countenance of my fluffy, yellow dog, claiming, more than once, that she had seen him smile.

I will miss this woman, this writer, who could make dogs smile and never fail to remind us that home is where the heart is, right here in Marin.

Stay safe and be well.
Susan Morrow
Co-President, 2019-2020

Coronavirus Update...

We hope everyone in the KGHS community is safe and healthy. We are living in unprecedented times for both young and old. If you are finding time to go through family history and photos, please let us know if you come across stories or artifacts that you'd like to share with us. We are currently working on an archival system for maps, documents, letters, oral histories, photos and other items that are already part of KGHS.

Due to the coronavirus, our **KGHS Pop Up Store & Gallery** has been closed but you can still see some of the photos in the window. We hope to update it soon, and of course, reopen so that you can stop by. You can still visit us online at www.KGHS.org and become a member or renew your membership, purchase a book and read more about local history in our archive of newsletters.

We sadly had to cancel the **May Heritage and History Day** that was scheduled for May 2, 2020 but we will return on **May 1, 2021** better than ever. All other KGHS events are also on hold but the KGHS Board is meeting regularly via Zoom to discuss future plans.

We need your continued support!

It's never too late to renew or join! Renewal letters will be mailed in early June. 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.

DO IT [ONLINE](#) NOW before you forget!

- \$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.

Golf Course in Bon Air ???

In October of 1922, a map for a Proposed 18 Hole Golf Course at Bon Air, (Marin County, CA) was filed. It was designed by William Watson, a Golf Course Architect, know world wide for over 100 golf courses. The course stretches from current-day edge of Hwy 101, west on marsh and lowlands to Bon Air Hotel and future site of Marin Catholic (third, fourth and fifth holes). There was a Central clubhouse with road near the where the Bon Air community pool is today. It shows the Bon Air Hotel and Tract, Greenbrae Station, trestle and tracks and County Roads to Sausalito and San Anselmo.



Proposed Bon Air Golf Course West side showing Cortes Madera Creek, holes 2-7, Bon Air Hotel, Cortes Madera Creek, future sites of Marin General Hospital and Marin Catholic with the San Anselmo- San Quentin Road (Sir Francis Drake Blvd. to the north.

(Temporary photo's courtesy of Richard Torney; Official photo unavailable MCFL Map Annex)



Proposed Bon Air Golf Course East side showing and future Highway 101 on the right, holes 11 and 12 where the bowling alley and later Jason's were located along with the County marsh.

William Watson, the Golf Course Architect was born March 31, 1860 in Kemback, Fife, Scotland. The Watson's cottage was eight miles removed from the holy grail of golf, St. Andrews golf club. He grew

into a formidable force on the links and won championships at both St. Andrews and at his nearby home course. Watson would eventually leave Scotland for the United States where they would design some of the most prominent golf clubs in America.

The Minikahda Club was Watson's first American architectural design and he would go on to design or redesign over 120 golf clubs from Virginia to California. He began designing golf courses during a time period when most people in the United States knew nothing about the game of golf much less how to play or had access to golf clubs. Consequently, Watson was immediately understood to be one of the foremost experts on the game of golf and an authority on the design of courses. He would draw large, curious crowds from far and wide when word that "Professor William Watson", the golf expert, was going to be in town.

Of the over one hundred Watson designed golf courses, a few of significant note in the area are: Harding Park, Lincoln Park and the Olympic Club, all in San Francisco. The "Golden Age" of golf course architecture is a loosely defined period during the early part of the twentieth century, sometime between the end of World War I and the beginning of the Great Depression, where the number and quality of golf course designs greatly increased - and William Watson found himself in his heyday.

Golfers, of this period, played with hickory shafted clubs called brassies, spoon's & cleek's, as well as mashies, bulldog's & niblick's. Hickory golf was a form of golf played largely along the ground in stark contrast with today's game of soaring drives and towering approach shots. Consequently, architects of the day often made their greens accessible in the front for shots played along the ground while greenside bunkers and hazards were positioned left and right to catch errant shots. Fairway hazards were also strategically positioned to make the hickory golfer decide whether to challenge it with a driver or lay-up with a brassie or a spoon.

(Excerpts from the Belvedere Golf Club, Michigan website...Dennis "Marty" Joy II, Belvedere Golf Club's Head and PGA Professional)

Summertime and the Living was Easy for the Burk Boys

Lorelei Evans, KGHS Board Member

Can you imagine growing up in Kentfield at the turn of the century, in the early 1900s? Fortunately, I am able to, as the Burk Boys loved to regale us with tales of their idyllic youth when they roamed the wide open spaces like free range chickens! The Burk Boys were my grandfather, Frear (Frela), and my great uncles, Dean (Dosie), Norval (Antoine), and Bois (Boisie), whose parents were educators who believed in experiential learning and progressive teaching methodologies. Thus, in addition to ranging freely, the boys had animals, gardens, and fruit trees, and they were encouraged to experiment with plant propagation and animal husbandry.

Stories from our family dinners, old letters and photos, and their prized publication "The Lone Indian" have all contributed to my patchwork picture of life emanating from their brown shingled home located on Palm Avenue at Laurel Grove. The boys famously created their own newspaper, "The Lone Indian." My favorite news article described Antoine's thriving business of selling his goats' milk to their Kentfield neighbors. At one point he wasn't able to sell all his milk. So he decided to pass the milk off as white paint and peddle it elsewhere, much to his brothers' amusement and his parents' dismay!

The Burk family allegedly had the first swimming pool in Kentfield. Their plain concrete pool was still nestled into the hillside when my great uncles took me to visit their childhood home. This was not your Marin County pool of today. It had no patio, pergola, hot tub, paint, tile, ladder, slide, diving board, or heat, but it provided the boys with refreshing swims as part of their summer entertainment! Granddaddy and Uncle Bois continued to swim throughout their entire lives at Heart's Desire Beach, Stinson Beach, Lake County creeks or the YMCA.

During the summer the Burk family also swam in the Bolinas Lagoon. They would hitch up their horses to their wagon, and load it with camping gear, such as canvas tents, cots, picnic baskets filled with fruit

preserves and pies, and other homemade goods. They would then head over the Bolinas Ridge to camp with the Kent family on the Kent's property near Kent Island. The boys swam out to Kent Island, built forts, dug for buried treasure, and enacted other scenarios from Treasure Island and Robinson Crusoe.



Frear (on left) and his cousin during a beach outing in 1904. Note the ringlets he wore as a 4 year old!
(photo courtesy of Lorelei Evans)

Kentfield and Marin County provided a perfect playground for the boys. They roamed the hills by foot and on horseback, and explored the woods and marshes. They picked wild berries and fruit from their own trees, with which their mother made pies and preserves. Their hearty appetites and passions for fruit pies were witnessed at family dinners we shared. Corte Madera Creek was enticing, as was the Bon Air Hotel for these energetic lads. Frela's school friend's father was the hotel caretaker and allowed the boys to bowl in the hotel's basement bowling alley. I was under the impression that they were bowling there after the hotel had burned, but it appears that the fire took place in 1918, by which time Granddaddy had joined the Army and headed to France for World War I.



*The Katzenjammer kids.
(photo courtesy of Lorelei Evans)*

But as Granddaddy was fond of saying, "Never let the truth stand in the way of a good story!", and I prefer my version with the boys bowling in the burned out hotel!

A postcard photo featuring the older Burk Boys seated in a small blimp was taken by an enterprising soul with a camera. The boys sent the post card to their father at Kent., Cal., dated September 1, 1912, with the message, "Happy Birthday from the cazenjamer (Katzenjammer) kids."

It might have been taken at one of the gala opening events of Kentfield's Tamalpais Centre, as they had the "Grand Balloon Ascension and Parachute Drop by Professor Hamilton." However, the truth is standing in the way of a good story, since the opening was in 1909, but perhaps the photo was taken at a later Centre celebration! Dr. Frederic and Mrs. Caroline Burk were committee members and charter members of the Marin Stadium Association, which was called a "New Social Experiment." Hopefully, the Burk Boys were not the unruly boys the Kents were hoping to reform through "wholesome leadership" at the Tamalpais Centre.

Although the Marin Stadium Association developed the Kentfield Speedway for horse racing near the Tamalpais Centre, Granddaddy confined his races to those he held with his best friend, Al Morgan. They were each responsible for delivering their respective and respectable fathers to the Kent train depot. Legend has it that as soon as Pops was on the train and heading to the ferry, Frela would challenge Al to race their horses with their buggies still hitched. It makes one wonder if racing isn't hereditary, as Frela's grandsons and great grandsons raced sprint cars as well!

There was no talk of dancing around the Maypole at the May Day celebrations held in Kentfield. But a very patriotic photo of Bois indicates they participated in patriotic events, as he proudly stands at

attention, holding the flag and saluting, perhaps emulating his older brother who had served in World War I. They ran the foot races and enjoyed other competitive events, but they weren't known for their fancy footwork on the dance floor. Although painfully shy, Uncle Norval, who in later years attended the local Senior Center, did ask me to practice dancing with him when I was home from college.

At the end of their busy summer days the boys relished sleeping out in the fresh air on their sleeping porch. During our visit to their childhood home, they made a point of showing me their cherished porch. It was always a pleasure to be taken down Memory Lane by the Burk Brothers, and we covered a lot of territory with hikes led by Granddaddy and driving tours organized by Uncle Dean when he could leave his research projects at the National Institute of Health and his home in Washington, D.C. to visit his brothers. They shared their beloved childhood haunts and their love and knowledge of local history. Summertime living truly was easy for the Burk Boys!

Board of Directors

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