

Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society Historian

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www.kghs.org

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President's Message

Community has always been at the core of Kentfield and Greenbrae. Adaline and the Kent family set aside land for education (the College of Marin and A.E. Kent School) as well as the Tamalpais Center and Kentfield Women's Club in the heart of Marin. When Neil Schultz envisioned what is now Greenbrae, creating a center for the neighborhood was very important. We still honor their commitments and hope that you will all join the KGHS and Bon Air Center for our annual Community Day on May 18.

Ten years ago, May 2014, the Kentfield School District celebrated its Centennial with a huge community event. It signaled the "birth" of the Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society which led to the publication of our book *"In the Heart of Marin: A History of Kentfield and Greenbrae"* by Dewey Livingston. As we worked to preserve our heritage and to share it with you, we also wanted to "play it forward" by involving many local groups in our celebrations. Since the 2014 Centennial, more than 40 local groups have participated in our May celebrations, first at Kent but more recently at the Bon Air Center. From maypole dancing and student musicians from Bacich and Branson's to fire trucks and food, bringing the community together to celebrate how lucky we are to live here, makes for a joyous occasion. Please join Bon Air Center, Mollie Stone's and KGHS for this special event!

Marilee Rogers
Co-president, 2024-2025

KGHS & BON AIR COMMUNITY DAY

JOIN
KGHS AND BON AIR CENTER



**SATURDAY
MAY 18, 2024**

11AM TO 2 PM

**40+ FOOD VENDORS
35+ COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS
ENTERTAINMENT**

A Partial List of those Participating

Central Marin Neighborhood Response Group
Larkspur Community Development Department
Marin Enrichment Preschool, Prekindergarten, and TK
Kentfield School District (KSD)
League of Women Voters of Marin County and the Student Elections Ambassador Program
Larkspur Library and Recreation
MarinHealth Medical Center
Central Marin Police Authority
Larkspur Community Foundation
Marin Women's PACKAGE w/w
Larkspur Chamber of Commerce
Kentfield Fire Protection District
Redwood Alumni Association
Ross Valley Little League
Fire Safe Marin
Marin History Museum
Golden Gate Bridge District
Chronos Academy
Home Ground Habitats (Novato)
San Anselmo Historical Museum
Greenbrae Property Owners Association
California Highway Patrol
Emeritus Students College of Marin (ESCOM)
Marin Master Gardeners
Central Marin Fire

SPECIAL EVENT FRIDAY MAY 17, 6 PM

Join Richard Torney, Dewey Livingston* & the KGHS Board for a special presentation on the Joseph Lee Painting
Kentfield 150 years ago

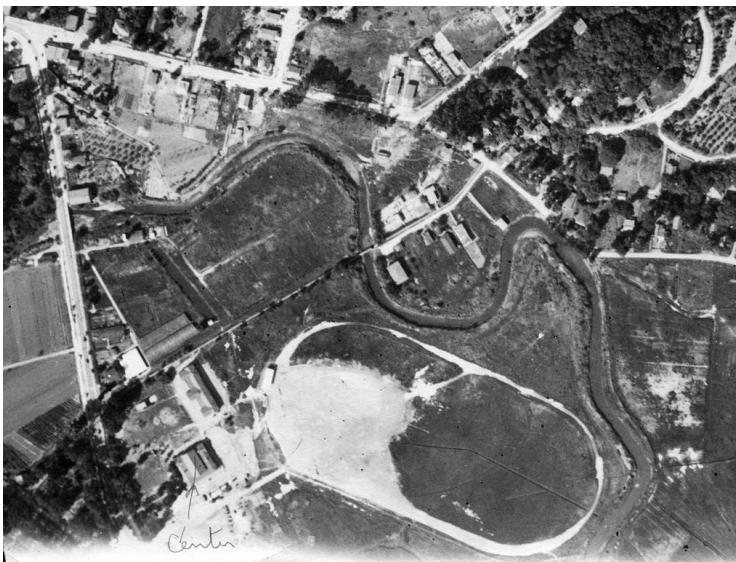
The Kent Family Created Community from the Beginning

Excerpts from *In the Heart of Marin: A History of Kentfield and Greenbrae* by Dewey Livingston p. 104-119

After the death of her husband Albert Kent, Adaline Kent continued her civic deeds... As of 1905, the community that was now called Kentfield had a number of problems. A distinct town but ruled by a somewhat distant county government as a "district," the place experienced more than its share of petty crime and social problems. Old Ross Landing was a bit worn out. Saloons proliferated and the summer resorts could become rowdy. And, in the aftermath of the earthquake of 1906, the population of Kentfield and its surrounding towns started to boom. In 1908, spurred by recent vandalism to the Kentfield post office and railroad depot "by unruly boys," William Kent and his mother conferred and decided that the best solution would be not so much punishment but rather "wholesome leadership."

The Kents had been inspired by the Abraham Lincoln Centre in Chicago, in which they had played part, and also a rural playgrounds movement, following the belief that to healthy pursuits both physical and mental, young people and adults could be averted from lowly endeavors. The situation in Kentfield, although on a much smaller scale than Chicago, might make a perfect proving ground for a West Coast version of the Lincoln Centre. The difference in scale, however, may have also been the difference between success and failure...

The Kents and their friends organized a 50-member executive committee to create the Marin Stadium Association, holding meetings in Marin towns and a fundraiser on the Kent estate. The new association gathered 121 charter members, most of whom were prominent Marin people, with the goal to build a large clubhouse and well-organized grounds for recreation. The place and its governing body would be called the Tamalpais Centre, but it would be more than a modern community facility. Called "A new social experiment," the trustees stated their goals. Tamalpais Centre ...has been established to meet the social needs of our time and place. It must be a center of neighborliness wherein all of us working together may more fully enjoy the life granted each of us. It is destined to mean opportunity for rest, recreation and instruction for men, women, and children...



The outline of the Kentfield Speedway remained in this 1920's aerial photograph, Tamalpais Centre and Kent School are directly west (left) of the track, with Sir Francis Drake Blvd. at top. (Ann T. Kent Room MCFL)

George Bennett, a board member noted that the land is donated freely and without restrictions except there must be no intoxicants sold on the grounds nor shall any well-behaved person be denied the privileges of the grounds on a count of race, religion, or color...

The Kent family owned the Flats that stretch from the county road to the creek directly east of the train depot. This land saw little use and so Mrs. Kent donated 29 acres to the association for its use as a civic park for recreation, meetings, entertainment, and general public use. Construction of large buildings commenced in May 1909, also funded by the Kent family. With Spanish architecture of stucco walls, tiled roof and surrounding open arcade, the handsome two-story building featured a large community hall, classrooms and amenities as promised during the planning and fundraising stages...

Before the clubhouse was completed, the association opened the grounds with a program on May Day 1909, in which Mrs. A. E. Kent performed a ceremonial groundbreaking. The day program featured foot races, track events, special amusing events like a grease pig race ... and maypole dance with the crowning of a May Day Queen...

Horse racing has been a popular sport in Marin county since the 1860s but organized racing didn't come to Kentfield until June 1909, when the Marin Stadium Association developed would become known as the Kentfield Speedway as an offshoot of the Tamalpais Centre...Despite heavy flooding during the winter, racing continued for several years...However, along with the Tamalpais Centre, the track went out of use, being the subject of debate as to its merits and contributions to the reputation of

Kentfield, which at the time was not among the highest in the county. The outline of the oval track remained visible for decades before its transformation into the College of Marin playing fields and being cut in half by the 1969 realignment of Corte Madera Creek.



Inaugural May Day Festival at Tamalpais Centre on May 1, 1909 (Marin History Museum)

The annual May Day festival became a staple of Marin County culture. For many years, thousands of children from all over the county danced around the maypole at Tamalpais Centre before the tradition was moved to Kent school. Schools around the county celebrated May Day, but the Kentfield event was the mother of them all, at least in Marin. The first May Day festivals were long and elaborate. ... The festival actually started on the Kent estate grounds where children with their costumes and decorated carts assembled for grand Parade through the meadows of the estate across the rail tracks and county Road to the Tamalpais Centre with the festivities took off.



While the maypole dance was a highlight, the day also consisted of running races, track events and other entertainments. ... Mayday festivals continued as the highlight of the Tamalpais Centre programs. ... They were held there on and off until 1926 or 1927. Teachers at Adaline E. Kent School took up the tradition and for decades the maypole dances continued on that campus... Despite the popularity of the larger traditional events, overall the Tamalpais Centre did not thrive... Less than two years after the dedication of the building, the Kentfield Civic Association in 1911 announced that it was in negotiations with the Tamalpais Centre to transfer the property to Kentfield School District, with the intent establishing a high school that would serve the Ross Valley from Fairfax to Corte Madera... Five years after Tamalpais Centre opened in 1914, 2.34 acres in the northwest section of the Centre's land was sold for \$1000 to the school district for a new school house, which was built and opened in 1915 and named Adaline E Kent school. Mrs. Kent, the

matriarch of Kentfield ... died in March of that year before knowing of the honor.

As time passed, upkeep continued to be a burden for the directors and in 1927 the remaining property, including the magnificent clubhouse, but excluding a small parcel that would become the site of the Tamalpais Centre's Women's Club building, was turned over to the newly established Marin Junior College for use as a women's gymnasium, assembly hall, and athletic fields. The trustees felt that the college would be better fitted to carry out the purpose and intent of Mrs. Kent...

If the Tamalpais Centre didn't take off its auxiliary Women's Club did, building its own clubhouse and enjoying an 80-year life as a center of women's activities in Ross Valley. Elizabeth Thatcher Kent was its first president and the club meeting house built in 1929 was dedicated to Adaline E Kent, but participation was spread throughout Marin County... By 1988 as the membership dwindled from the hundreds to 23, the club looked at selling the building at 800 College Avenue to a private party... but after a protest which was backed by the Independent Journal... the Kentfield school district bought the property in 2007 for 1.8 million which now houses the district administration.

**Kent Centennial 2014 to
Community Day 2024**

It was 10 years ago, on May 3, 2014, that the Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society together with many other groups, celebrated the Centennial of the Adaline E. Kent School (1914-2014). This fun, family event featured games, music, Maypole dancing, classic cars, and gourmet food trucks. The students in the Kent Art Program created and showcased their beautiful mural at

the front of the campus depicting the history of the school. The Anne T. Kent California Room featured a special exhibit of historical artifacts and ephemera showcasing the history of the area. Over 1000 people attended, many of whom were alumni of both Greenbrae School and Kent. A highlight was the release of the then newly published book, *In the Heart of Marin: History of Kentfield and Greenbrae* by renowned historian and author Dewey Livingston. (And we still have copies for sale!)

In the ten years since the Centennial, the KGHS has grown and expanded its interests. Thanks to Andrea Schultz, we have a space in the Bon Air Center for our Gallery and Store. Our focus has moved from the history of the school district to the story of our community. We are reflecting on our past and preserving the stories that make this place so special. As part of our celebration of this community, we made a recent purchase of a Joseph Lee painting of Ross Landing 1871. This painting belongs in Kentfield and has inspired us to form a collaboration with the College of Marin, which is very exciting. If you want to know more, please join us Friday, May 17 at 6 pm in the KGHS Gallery for a special presentation on 150 Years of Kentfield by historian Richard Torney.



Centennial photos... Student Maypole dance and Ann T. Kent Room Display items.

Since this Centennial Celebration in 2014, this Community Day has grown and moved from the AE Kent campus to the Bon Air Center. The support of KGHS, Andrea Schultz and the Bon Air Center and now Mollie Stone's has made this an event you won't want to miss. There will be tables of information on local issues and organizations, activities for kids, music, food from over 40 vendors and other forms of entertainment. See you on May 18 from 11 to 2!



Community Day at Bon Air 2023



Join, Renew or make a Donation

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

**VISIT www.kghs.org!
DONATE, RENEW or JOIN
NOW before you forget!**

- \$25 - Students & Seniors, Non-Profit organizations
- \$35 - Individuals & Families
- \$50 - Sponsor
- \$100 - Patron

Donations of any amount are always welcome!

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

KGHS Board 2024-2025

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