

# Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society Historian

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

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## President's Message

I know we are all enjoying the fall colors and cooler temperatures after the recent heat wave. We've had a busy month. You may have noticed some changes... We no longer have our KGHS Gallery at Bon Air. We have been so fortunate for the last 10 years to have a presence in the Bon Air Center thanks to the generosity of Andrea Schulz and Bon Air Management. Bon Air has grown and is now a community hub, our space was needed. We hope to be back... or find another generous donor who has space available. Our photos, archives and books are safely stored. You can still purchase books online [www.kghs.org](http://www.kghs.org) or contact us at [info@kghs.org](mailto:info@kghs.org). We may not have a physical presence, but we have a very active agenda for the rest of this year and into next year.

We are so excited about our upcoming Membership meeting with Keith Bell. He is the Great Grandson of Daniel Brown, longtime coachman to Albert Emmet Kent, his wife Adaline, and son William. He has produced a fascinating video, *Mutual Respect*, about his great grandfather growing up on the Kent Estate and raising his family here, one of the few black families in Marin County at the time (1872-1910), the same time frame as the Joseph Lee Painting *Ross Landing 1871* that we have purchased. This presentation is in collaboration with the Anne T. Kent California Room of the Marin County Free Library.

Marilee Rogers  
Co-president, 2024-2025

## KGHS & CALIFORNIA ROOM PRESENT

Join KGHS and  
ANNE T. KENT CALIFORNIA ROOM

Daniel Brown, Coachman to the Kents  
"Mutual Respect" with Keith Bell

**Thursday, November 14, 2024**

**6:00-8:00 pm**

**(program begins at 6:30)**

Anne T. Kent California Room Map  
& Special Collections Annex

1600 Los Gamos Drive \*directions insert  
Lobby B, Suite 182

Ross Landing 1871  
Joseph Lee

## HELP US REACH OUR GOAL!

We are very close to meeting our fundraising goal to acquire the extraordinary and historically-significant 1871 painting by Joseph Lee—featuring Ross Landing, which later became Kentfield—as well as acquiring much needed materials and services to securely archive KGHS's collections for permanent access by the public.

### WAYS TO DONATE:

Cash donation (online at [www.kghs.org](http://www.kghs.org) or by check KGHS, PO Box 236, Kentfield, CA 94914)

A donation of \$1000 or more will entitle you to a limited archival giclee print of the painting.

A framed print of the painting now hangs in the AE Kent School Library thanks to a generous donation from the Michael Schwartz family.



## Daniel Brown, Coachman to the Kents

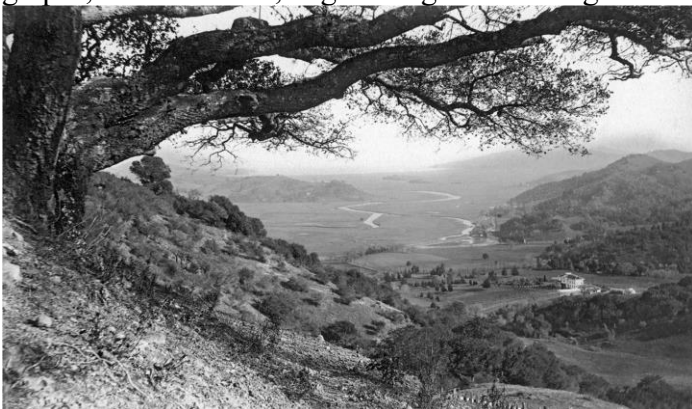
Excerpts from *In the Heart of Marin: A History of Kentfield and Greenbrae* by Dewey Livingston p. 36-45

Deep in Kent family lore is the story of their matriarch's first view of what would become their longtime home. As the story goes, Mrs. Albert E Kent took a buggy ride from her rented home in San Rafael over the south ridge and, as the Ross Valley vista unfolded below with Mt. Tamalpais as a backdrop, she proclaimed what she saw to be "a vision of paradise" or some such words of delight.

What Adaline Kent saw that spring day in 1872 was a bowl-shaped valley, often shaded by the distinctive and pleasantly shaped east peak of Mt. Tamalpais...Of course it was paradise...It was absolutely perfect for Mrs. Kent. Her "paradise" soon became her home, and the home of generations of Kents, as it remains today.

Albert Emmett Kent was one of five children born to somewhat prosperous farmers...He undertook a law career in Chicago... but started, with financial help from friends, a commission business that he called A. E. Kent & Company...He married Adaline Dutton in 1857 before he had made his fortune...The Kent marriage soon produced three children: Albert, who died as a toddler; Mary, who was disabled and died at 29; and William, born in 1864 (later to become a Congressman and environmentalist.)

While on a trip to California in 1871, word of the great Chicago fire reached them and ...Kent summoned his family to Marin County...Mrs. Kent found the property she wanted and so the Kents bought land and built house, developing a significant estate and entering Marin as productive citizens...They had a fine home built at the choices spot on the property, a low knoll with a wide view of the marshes, bay and distant Contra Costa hills...Kent cultivated about 20 acres of land with grapes, fruit orchards, vegetable gardens and grains...



*From Rock Road...Kent Estate*

The Kent stable was of highest quality. A horse barn and necessary outbuildings, including a fine carriage house, were located west of the house and connected to the driveway... The open spring wagon was the vehicle used for daily errands, while the elegant Victorian carriage-the best money could buy-was only used for church and "making calls..."

The carriage horses were driven only by the family coachman except in unusual cases. For thirty years Daniel Brown was the Kent's coachman and hostler, but also much more. A Canada born black man not long out of the era of slavery, Mr. Brown accompanied Mrs. Kent and William across the country and helped them settle in Marin. About Daniel Brown's importance to Adaline, Elizabeth Thacher Kent wrote:

*Brown became her man-of-all-work and general mainstay, did stable work and housework, and even went quail shooting with Mr. Kent to chivy reluctant birds out of the brush. During the thirty years that followed, his innate pride was satisfied by driving the family carriage behind two well-matched black horses, while a black and white coach dog, which never missed a step, ran between them.*



*Adaline Kent and friends, with longtime Coachman Daniel Brown at the reins.  
Anne T Kent California Room/Keith Bell*

It is interesting to look at the Kent estate as reflected in the 1880 Census. In addition to Albert Kent's family at the main house...houses were occupied by housekeepers and their families; a tutor, laundryman and cook; farm superintendent Throop Richardson and family; and Coachman Daniel Brown and

his wife Grace, along with her nine-year-old sister. They would have their own children in the years following.

By all appearances the Kents passed the 1880s and 1890s following the education and career of their son William, tending the gardens and estate, and acting charitably in the county. Albert Kent died on January 8, 1901...The widowed Mrs. Kent continued to nurture her social contacts and good work in the community...

## In His Own Words... Keith Bell

My name is Keith Bell and Daniel Brown became my obsession with the making of my video. I was amazed how his life was so interesting and unique. I never met him, but my grandfather Walter Brown, his son, talked about him so much that I felt that I knew him. My grandfather was a great storyteller and loved to tell stories about his father.

I was ecstatic when asked to share my story. Unlike many of the topics assigned to me to write about in Graduate School, this topic is one that is dear to my heart. This topic is about my Great-grandfather Daniel Brown, who served as the Kent Family coachman for many years. I created a video called "Mutual Respect" that chronicles his life.



*Daniel Brown, longtime coachman for the Kent Family  
Courtesy of Keith Bell*

Daniel Brown was described as kind, friendly, and proud. He was proud of being a Black man who was born free in 1836. He was proud that he went to an integrated school at a time when this was extremely rare. And he was proud that his father owned 9 acres of land (I've been there) at a time when this was virtually impossible for a Black man to do so.

Daniel Brown was a huge anomaly. I guess that's why his life is still interesting to this day. Most Black men born in 1836 led an entirely different life. If they were born below the Mason-Dixon Line, they were slaves for the first 29 years of their lives. The circumstances of Daniel Brown's life made him an extraordinary man.

My Great-grandfather lived through some of our country's most historic events. He was nearly 30 years old when the Civil War ended, and although he was not a U.S. citizen at the time, he was affected by the war. He was at or near two of the country's most devastating events, one in Chicago and the other in California.

Daniel Brown became the coachman for the A.E. Kent Family in the 1860's. He began his employment with the Kents when they lived in Chicago. During his time in Chicago, he raised a very large animal. This became a historic event in Chicago history. He later relocated with the Kent Family to California.



*Walter Leland Brown 1981, Grandfather  
of Keith Bell Courtesy of Keith Bell*

A.E. Kent was a great man. I can say that because my grandfather said it several times. There are towns in the country named after men who were not great men. This is not the case with Kentfield. Kentfield was named after a man who not only had

incredible business acumen, but he also had great morals, compassion, and generosity. I feel that the qualities of this great man helped shape the town into what it is today.

Daniel Brown and his wife Gracie, a young woman from Petaluma, and their many children, lived on the Kent Estate for many years. The Brown Family lived in one of the houses on the property and had the privilege of living on one of the finest estates in Marin County. My grandfather talked about riding the Kent family ponies with their grandchildren. He talked about riding his velocipede with the estate superintendent playing with him on his horse. He also talked about spending time in the Kent Family Library in the main house.

As the coachman on the estate, it was Daniel Brown's responsibility to ensure that the horses were in tip-top condition. He was known to clean and brush the team to make them look like show horses. Making sure that the expensive Kent carriage was in great shape was another one of his responsibilities. My grandfather said that it was wonderful to ride from the Kent Estate to San Rafael.



*Edna and Fred Brown on the Kent Estate, two of Walter's older siblings. Courtesy of Keith Bell.*

Eventually, Daniel Brown retired from being the Kent Family coachman and moved his family to San Rafael. He purchased a home on Latham Street and his children went to the various San Rafael Schools. The Brown Family lived a peaceful life in Marin County, and this was due in great part to A.E. Kent.

I'm so glad that I'm able to tell Daniel Brown's story. More details will be shared in the video presentation of "Mutual Respect" on November 14<sup>th</sup>. The Kentfield-Greenbrae Historical Society gets my respect for helping me get the word out about my Great-grandfather, Daniel Brown.

**VISIT [www.kghs.org](http://www.kghs.org)!  
DONATE, RENEW or JOIN  
NOW before you forget!**

If you want to get a "jump start" on renewing your membership, now is the time! Renewal notices will go out next month. 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.

Just as our communities rely on us, the Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society, to preserve, explore and promote our history, we rely on our community members, both individuals and businesses, to support the KGHS as we move forward. Please consider renewing your membership and making a generous donation.

\$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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