

Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society Historian

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www.kghs.org

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President's Message

In the past few months, Marin County has enjoyed some particularly spectacular sunsets: the sky turns from a pale pink or salmon to a blaze of color punctuated with the graceful silhouette of Mt. Tam. Sometimes I race for my camera (or mobile phone!) to try and capture the grandeur of the moment. At other times, snagged by the power of nature's grace, I simply pause and take in the show, grateful that I have a ringside seat.

During the month of October, KGHS in partnership with the College of Marin are joining together to celebrate the artistry of a man who not only appreciated but captured the unique beauty of our communities. Over 25 plein air paintings by Kentfield resident George Demont Otis (1879-1962) will be exhibited at the College of Marin Fine Arts Gallery from October 1-27. At our Members' Meeting on October 13 will present a video on the life and art of Otis. (see below) Please join us and invite your friends and neighbors.

I look forward to seeing you this October! Enjoy the sunsets!

Susan Morrow

President, Kentfield-Greenbrae Historical Society 2016-17

George Demont Otis is Coming to COM!

The Kentfield-Greenbrae Historical Society in partnership with the College of Marin present

American Impressionist

George Demont Otis

1879-1962

Visions of Marin



*"Tamalpais-Kent Estate" by George Demont Otis 1879-1962
Courtesy of the Kentfield Fire District, by permission of Jessie Hartley*

October 1- 27, 2016

**College of Marin Fine Arts Gallery
Monday through Friday 11 am - 5 pm**

Opening Reception and Members' Meeting

**COM Fine Arts Gallery
Saturday, October 1, 2016
2 - 4 pm**



*"Trees and Creek" Looking into
Richardson Bay*

**Annual Members Meeting
October 13, 2016 at 6pm**

At the College of Marin Library
A video presentation on the life of
George Demont Otis
followed by a gallery tour...
Free parking in lot #1

How the Otis Show Came to be... Dewey Livingston

The life and work of George Demont Otis recently returned to the community's attention through the creation of our book *In the Heart of Marin, The History of Kentfield and Greenbrae*. Otis was a nationally known American artist, yet he had been largely forgotten in his home county of Marin. With the help of Otis's grandniece, Jessie Hartley, we began to collection information and memories of this most interesting man and his wife, Clara. It turns out that almost every Kentfield "old-timer" remembered the Otis studio on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard-the fairy-tale atmosphere, the lit painting in the large picture window, perhaps Otis himself making an appearance-and these revelations painted their own picture of a unique figure in the still-sleepy little suburban village.

George and Clara lived here for thirty years, and their home was a landmark to all traveling through. After Otis died, both the creek behind, and the road in front were widened and his little Eden disappeared from the face of this earth. Fortunately, Clara presented one of his finest paintings to the Kentfield Fire Department, where it has hung for decades, and Otis's family has carefully preserved much of his work.



"Otis Studio in Kentfield" Drawing

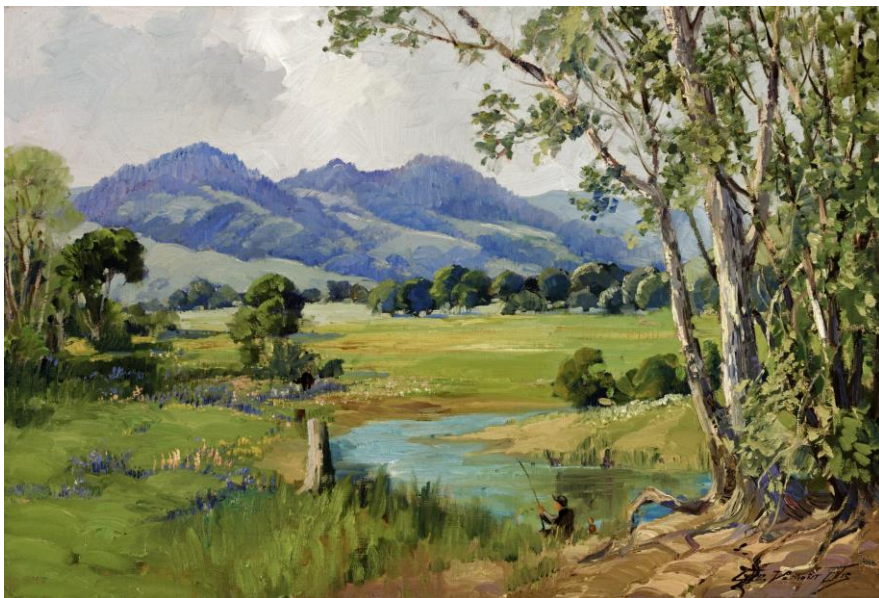


"Bend in the Creek" (Otis Studio) Oil

With the publication of our book, *In the Heart of Marin, The History of Kentfield and Greenbrae*, the historical society saw an opportunity to spread the word about Otis. We displayed paintings from local private collections at the Kent School Centennial in 2014 and are proud to be a part of this landmark exhibit at College of Marin.

George Demont Otis, Famed Kentfield Artist
from "In the Heart of Marin" by Dewey Livingston

Our community has been focused on the dramatic increase in traffic on all of our roads, but especially Sir Francis Drake Blvd and the Greenbrae Interchange. It's hard to imagine that US 101 was once a three lane road across the marshes, with the suicide lane used for cars turning left on to the Sir Francis Drake. Now traffic is backed up for miles in every direction especially during commute hours. A little bit of history will help you understand the changes, and why flooding along the highway will probably get even worse.



"Lucas Valley" Oil

George Demont Otis was multi-talented, being adept at oil painting, watercolor, drawing, sculpture, woodcarving, printmaking and stained glass. He had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and beauty. "During his long

and colorful career spanning sixty-five years," wrote George Roberts in *American Artist*, "Otis painted in thirty-five states, creating a body of work which stands as a purely American statement by a completely American artist...."

Already widely known in the art world, Otis settled in Los Angeles in 1919 where he painted and worked in the film industry as a designer. Within a decade, he tired of the whirlwind life of Southern California and moved to San Francisco. In 1931, he married San Francisco businesswoman Clara Van Tine, and the next year the couple visited Marin County. Rounding a bend as they entered Kentfield on the new Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, Otis saw a scene that caused him to stop the car and get out: Mt. Tamalpais with picturesque Corte Madera Creek in the foreground. As luck would have it, a "Lot For Sale" sign also appeared in the scene, and the Otises bought the piece of property. They considered Kentfield to be their Eden.



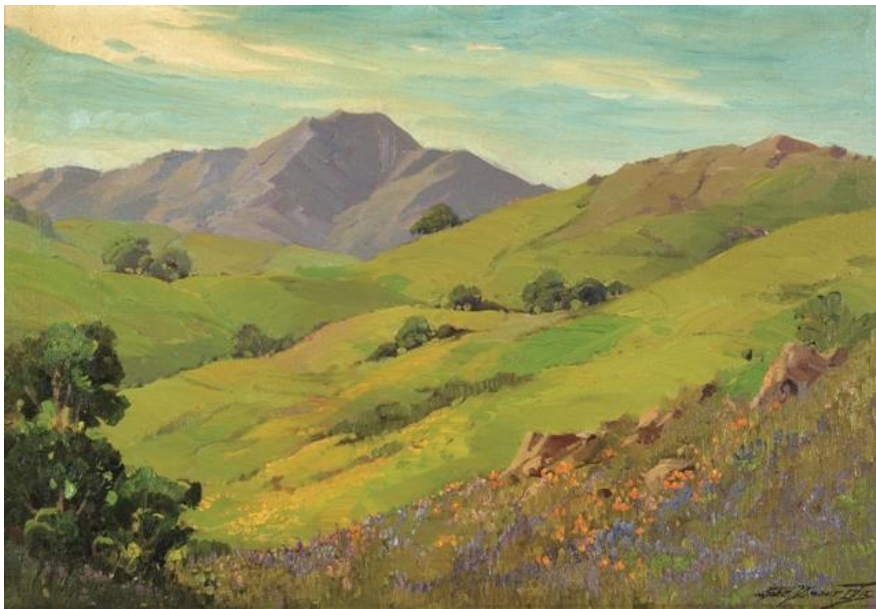
"Sleepy Hollow Trees" Oil

At this time, Kentfield's waterfront retained the feel of nineteenth century Ross Landing. The still-wide creek meandered through town, with old shacks and sheds and barns on its banks. Large groves of eucalyptus trees towered over the neighborhood and children played in the creek. Most of the neighbors were Italian. George and Clara Otis would fit right in.

The couple crafted their own house at 907 Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, an almost fairy-book cottage on the banks of the creek, with a studio and gallery, the latter open to the public. Clara was also a talented artist, weaver, ceramist and metalworker. "His home was a work of art with its stained glass windows and hand-crafted furniture, all made by Otis," wrote Roberts. "He was especially proud of a hearts-of-redwood carved staircase which depicted 152 varieties of sea life he had seen or caught."

Otis's grandniece Jessie Hartley vividly remembers regular visits to the house in the 1950s. "Everything was handmade," she recalled. "Together the combination of all of her woven rugs and his carved daybed and the carved staircase and the big beautiful front table he made, everything was the total arts and crafts life style, and for a kid it was the just most beautiful, homey, warm, colorful, exciting place you could be."

Otis's paintings are treasured for their color and spontaneity; his quick brushstrokes and thick application of paint "imparted a vigor and directness to his lyrical, evocative paintings," wrote Roberts, who also noted Otis's allegiance to local scenes. He painted all over Marin County, but Mt. Tamalpais was a favorite subject as was the creek in his backyard. A later Kentfield neighbor, artist and critic Ada Garfinkel, wrote about Otis's "ability to convey seasonal temperature and time and weather variations through hue and tonal contrasts...."



"Mantle of Spring" Oil

In the spirit of fellow Kentfield resident William Kent, Otis believed strongly in appreciation and preservation of natural places. He supported the conservation movements throughout his life, providing art works, lecturing and exhibiting. In his last years he lent his talents in the campaign to create Point Reyes National Seashore, and two of his paintings were later displayed at the White House commemorating the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

George Demont Otis died at age 82 on February 25, 1962. Shortly after Otis's death, Clara Otis gave a fine painting of Mt. Tamalpais to the Kentfield Fire District to show her husband's gratitude to the organization and its volunteers; the painting hangs proudly in the firehouse today and is reproduced on the

cover of this book. The Otis home and studio were torn down in 1967 through eminent domain to make way for the widening of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard on one side and channelization of Corte Madera Creek on the other. The idyllic spot is entirely changed, but George Demont Otis's paintings remain as a reminder of when Kentfield's creek side was a beautiful and magical place. (Full text can be found in *In the Heart of Marin: A History of Kentfield and Greenbrae* by Dewey Livingston, pages 186-187)

Membership and Outreach Update

It's never too late to renew your membership! Or to invite friends and neighbors to join. If you know of people who might be interested in preserving and recognizing local history, please forward this newsletter to them and encourage them to become a member. DO IT ONLINE NOW before you forget! ... WWW.KGHS.ORG **RENEW or JOIN NOW!**

- \$20 - Students & Seniors
- \$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. Included with your membership is the quarterly newsletter, special invitations to member events and an invitation volunteer on one of our committees.

KGHS What's ahead?

The KGHS has big plans for the coming school year...

- **SAVE SATURDAY OCTOBER 1st for the GRAND OPENING OF THE**

GEORGE DEMONT OTIS EXHIBIT COLLEGE OF MARIN FINE ARTS GALLERY

- Continued curriculum work with the Third Grade
- Expanding the History Club at Kent Middle School to include tours of Kentfield, Greenbrae and other neighborhoods
- Archival work and education for everyone wanting to document family and local history

Please pass this newsletter on to your friends and encourage them to join the KGHS. Your support will allow us to continue to enrich the lives of students and the community. This all can be done on our website www.kghs.org.

Be sure to VOTE on or before (absentee) November 8th!

The November election will be soon upon us. There are many candidates and issues that affect our future. Be sure to support what is best for our community and our schools!

Get involved!

We are always looking for more community members to become involved. If you are interested, please contact us!

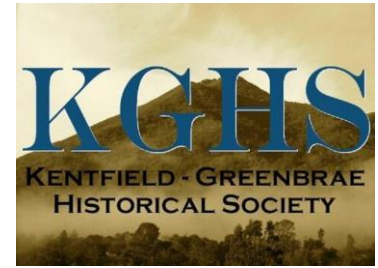
- **Events Committee:** helping to organize and publicize member and community events such as the upcoming Otis exhibit.
- **Research Committee:** collecting more oral histories and generating the historical background of sites in the Kentfield and Greenbrae area...developing curriculum for third grade students, creating walking tours...
- **Membership & Outreach Committee:** reaching out to local businesses and alumni to expand our membership

If you would like to be on one of the above committees, please send a message through info@kghs.org and we will get back to you.

KGHS Board of Directors

Susan Morrow, President

Lorelei Evans, Sarah Fletcher, Mary Gilardi, Ross McKenna, Sydney Park, Marilee Rogers, Heather McPhail Sridharan, Richard Torney, Marlies Zeisler Dewey Livingston, Author



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