

Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society

Historian

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President's Message

Environmentalist. Equal rights activist. Community organizer. Reproductive rights advocate. Treasurer of the United States. All of these descriptors could have been pulled from today's headlines—yet not even one of the individuals referenced was alive at the turn of this century. Who were they? Adaline E. Kent, Elizabeth Thatcher Kent and Elizabeth (Libby) Rudel Smith Gatov, all Kentfield residents and women who worked to effect positive change in their community and in their nation.

Their accomplishments and long-lasting influences are highlighted in the articles in this issue of *The Historian*. Throughout the remainder of 2017, the KGHS will be focusing on the stories of some of the remarkable women who not only worked to improve the quality of life within their communities of Greenbrae and Kentfield but, often, “took the show on the road” to national and international stages impacting government, the arts and more.

As I reread the histories of Adaline Kent, Elizabeth Thatcher Kent and of Libby Smith, the recently-coined and often-used slogan “nevertheless she persisted” springs to mind. Persist they did and left legacies to inspire new generations of Kentfield and Greenbrae women.

Susan Morrow

President, Kentfield-Greenbrae Historical Society 2016-17

ADALINE E KENT... excerpts from *In the Heart of Marin* by Dewey Livingston

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. The lower hills steepened as they rose to sharp ridges, clad in emerald green native grasses, oaks, buckeyes, bay trees, and clusters of redwoods. A small knoll near the center offered not only a prime view of the mountain but a wide vista of the lower Ross Valley, including the picturesque marsh and creek with the surrounding oak-studded hills, culminating with the sheen of northern San Francisco Bay in the distant east....

Albert E. Kent married Adaline Dutton in 1857, before he had made his fortune. Adaline Kent provided the obligatory support of a nineteenth century wife to a difficult and distracted mate, yet also endowed the community with a legacy that is felt still. Mrs. Kent's name remains prominent in Marin County. The Adaline E. Kent School has, for a century now, reflected the high standards and good citizenship that Mrs. Kent promoted during her lifetime.

...



The big house Tamalpais, the Kent Family Estate (Anne T. Kent California Room MCFL)

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 (all men as officers, with a women's auxiliary, both first headed by Mr. and Mrs. William Kent, respectively) would be called 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 centre 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 land is donated freely and without restrictions, except that there must be no intoxicants sold on the grounds, nor shall any well-behaved person be denied the privileges of the grounds on account of race, religion, or color.” Bennett considered the Tamalpais Centre to be “by all of us for all of us.”...

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 a large building commenced in May of 1909, also funded by the Kent family....

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-long program featured foot races and track events (mostly for men and boys), special amusing events like a greased pig race and fat men’s and women’s races, a maypole dance with the crowning of a May Queen, and “literary exercises.”...

However, not all events drew crowds... The Woman’s Club thrived and was put in charge of the Center in 1911, but the big new hall proved to be difficult to fill...

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....

Less than two years after the dedication of the building, the Kentfield Civic Association in 1911 announced that it was in negotiations with Tamalpais Centre to transfer the property to the Kentfield School District,... That year Tamalpais Centre deeded the property to the Ross Landing School District, pending passage of a bond issue that would pay for the improvements....

Five years after the Tamalpais Centre opened, on July 7, 1914, 2.34 acres in the northwestern section of the Centre’s land was sold for \$1,000 to the school district for a new schoolhouse, which was built and opened in 1915 and named Adaline E. Kent School (See schools section). Mrs. Kent, the matriarch of Kentfield whose forward thinking outpaced that of the community at large, died in March of that year before knowing of the honor. A memorial service was held at Tamalpais Centre, with all attending feeling appreciation for her gifts to the area.



1909 May Day Festival at Tamalpais Centre, Kentfield
Courtesy of Anne T. Kent California Room, MCFL

ELIZABETH THACHER KENT ... excerpts from *In the Heart of Marin* pages 101-103
Laurie Thompson Librarian, Anne T. Kent California Room MCFL

Elizabeth Thacher Kent, remembered for her leadership in the Women’s Suffrage movement, masterfully balanced family life, advocacy for women’s rights and participation in local affairs. “For she embodied that rare mixture of old-fashioned wisdom and grace, of vision toward the future, and of fighting spirit which seems so rare today,” hailed a 1952 tribute in the *Marin Independent Journal*.

Born in Connecticut on September 22, 1868, Elizabeth Thacher was the only daughter in a family of eight sons. Educated in private schools, she grew up in an environment which valued intellectual pursuits and higher learning. Her father, Thomas A. Thacher, taught Latin at Yale University, and two of her brothers established the Thacher School in Ojai, California.

In many ways she had much in common with her future husband, William Kent, even before they met. The Thacher and Kent families shared a love of the outdoors and a belief in the power of nature to inspire and build character. Both families were also strongly connected to Yale University, boasting several generations of graduates. ...



Elizabeth Thacher Kent, Elizabeth Kent,
 Elizabeth Arnold

(Anne T. Kent California Room MCFL)



Elizabeth Thacher Kent 1912

In 1907, the family moved to William Kent’s childhood home in Kentfield. There, Elizabeth participated in Adaline Kent’s philanthropic activities and backed her husband’s decision to purchase Redwood Canyon on Mt. Tamalpais for the creation of the Muir Woods National Monument. In 1908, when the Tamalpais Centre Women’s Club was established, Elizabeth became its first president. During this time she also became involved in the local and statewide movements to grant women the right to vote.

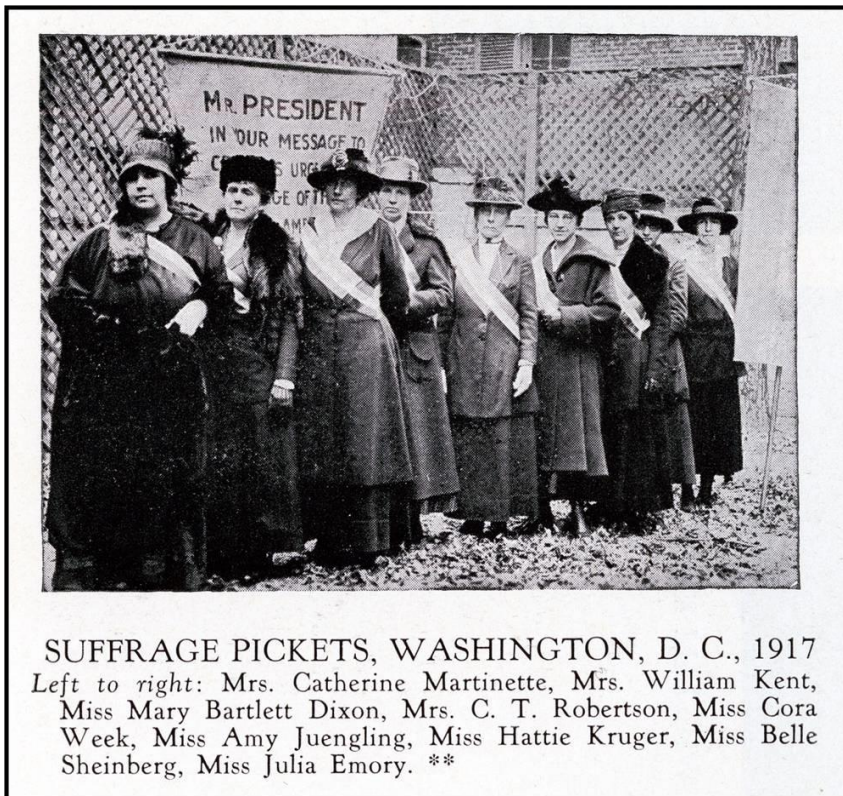
Elizabeth’s entrance into the suffrage movement made local and national headlines.... Elizabeth and her fellow suffragists were rewarded for their efforts in October 1911 when women’s suffrage became law in the State of California.

In December 1911, Elizabeth and the children moved to Washington, D.C. to join William, who was serving his first term in Congress. There Elizabeth became a leader in the national Women’s Suffrage movement and was appointed Congressional Chairman of the National American Woman’s Suffrage Association. Her duties included making sure that the Suffrage Amendment was introduced into both houses of Congress and that time was allotted for hearings. Due to her connections, important leaders addressed Congress on behalf of the cause including Jane Addams and Dr. Anna Howard Shaw....

Though Elizabeth relinquished her post as chairman of the Congressional Committee in late 1912, she continued to work hard for the passage of the Suffrage Amendment until it became law in November of 1919....

Elizabeth relates that during this period she was arrested several times in Washington while participating in suffrage pickets, and each time William Kent paid the fine, telling her “I cannot escape from the strongest sense of obligation to

spend my last cent, if necessary, to keep you out of jail. You do what you like, but I shall have to pay the fine.” Elizabeth also commented, “However little he liked to have his wife take the political stand that she did, and he certainly did not like it at all, he could never ask her to depart from her own convictions.” ...



(Photo courtesy of the Anne T. Kent California Room MCFL)

In addition to her family life, Elizabeth remained active in the California chapter of the National Woman’s Party for the rest of her life. The Party continued to advocate for women’s rights including the Equal Rights Amendment which called for women to have equal opportunity in the workplace and equal pay for equal work. Until her death in 1952, Elizabeth was on the Board of Directors of Sunny Hills and their annual fund-raiser, the Grape Festival. She also undertook the daunting process of organizing all of her husband’s papers and writing and publishing an in-depth biography of his life and political career. As the *Marin Independent Journal* noted in her obituary: Any community, any state would have been far richer for Mrs. Kent’s labors. We in Marin are indeed fortunate that she and her husband chose our community for their residence and for their good works.

ELIZABETH (LIBBY) RUDEL SMITH GATOV ... A Son’s Remembrance by Daniel U Smith

My mother, known as “Libby” Smith until she married Al Gatov in 1962, lived at 21 Rancheria Road, Kentfield, from 1947 until she passed away 50 years later.

Libby’s major public accomplishments were (1) becoming Treasurer of the United States in 1961 under Pres. John F. Kennedy, and (2) defending women’s reproductive rights as a member of the national board of Planned Parenthood.

Libby’s path into politics was indirect and not intentional. In the late 1940s she owned a dress shop in Kentfield on Sir Francis Drake Blvd. But selling dresses did not challenge her, so in 1948 she took an aptitude test to determine her future direction. The man who administered Libby’s aptitude test saw from her scores that she had an outstanding aptitude for politics. So he urged our neighbor Roger Kent to recruit Libby for his 1948 Congressional campaign.

Libby took to politics readily. She quickly rose to become California’s National Committee Woman, representing the California Democratic Party at the national level. She also worked at the *Independent Journal*, reporting on the 1952 and 1956 Democratic Conventions. At the 1956 Convention she became a big fan of John F. Kennedy, who was nominated for vice-president. From 1956 to 1960 she used her influence to bring Sen. Kennedy to California and made certain he met the “right” people and treated them properly. For example, after one San Francisco fund-raiser, when Sen. Kennedy wanted to dash off with his buddy Red Fay for a night on the town, she advised him to spend his time courting his contributors. He did not hold

that unsolicited advice against her, and when he became President, he appointed Libby as the first and highest ranking woman in his administration.

Libby's success in the male-dominated political scene was attributable in part to her childhood. She had three brothers, who insisted that she stay in the background if she wanted to participate in their adventures. She accepted that subordinate role, but perfected the art of influencing men in such a way that the men did not feel "controlled."

Ironically, Libby did not enjoy being Treasurer. She had to travel the nation giving speeches on behalf of the Kennedy Administration, but she disliked the limelight. She preferred the behind-the-scenes role she had played for the previous 14 years—persuading men in positions of power to do what she thought needed to be done. When Al Gatov asked her to marry him, she was relieved to have an excuse to retire and return to Kentfield. Although the President offered Libby to remain as Treasurer while living in Kentfield, she declined.



President John F. Kennedy, Treasurer of the United States Elizabeth "Libby" Smith

Having left politics, Libby turned her energies to her life-long passion—protecting women's reproductive rights. Libby knew first-hand the destructive consequences of repressive attitudes toward women's reproductive rights. When she was at Smith College in the 1930s, a classmate who became pregnant drowned herself in the school pond. Also, Libby's sister-in-law was unable to have children due to a botched back-alley abortion.

When Libby served on the national Planned Parenthood Board in the 1960s, her goal was to get Planned Parenthood involved in politics. To achieve this goal, she got Willie Brown appointed to the Board. He

attended just one board meeting, declaring that if Planned Parenthood wanted to succeed, it had to get involved in politics. The board got the message, forming a 501(c)(4) entity to promote its mission in the political arena...

After her husband Al Gatov died, Libby was confronted with the difficult decisions that overwhelm many widows because their late husband had been in charge of the family's affairs. To help other widows, in 1985 Libby researched and wrote "Widows in the Dark," a guidebook to equip new widows to make legal and financial decisions on their own.

Libby left a lot of wisdom to guide her family and friends in her absence. When people praised her success, she demurred, saying "I'm just lucky," and "I was just at the right place at the right time."

On hearing of another's problems, her first response was "How can I help you?"

To overcome life's adversities, she would say: "Into each life a little rain must fall," and "This too shall pass."



Elizabeth Gatov, 1960

Did you remember to renew your Membership?

If your KGHS renewal is due, you should have received a letter and remittance envelope asking for your continued support. It's also a good time to invite friends and neighbors to join. If you know of people who are 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!

- \$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. If you use a credit card number, please include your CVV code (we left it off our envelope!) Included with your membership is the quarterly newsletter, special invitations to member events and an invitation to volunteer on one of our committees.

KGHS... What's ahead?

- **Presentations** to local organizations on local history and George Demont Otis. Here's the Video link: vimeo.com/188102799
- **Pop-Up Store Saturday** when there are activities in the Bon Air Center
- **Oral Histories**
- **Curriculum** work with local schools
- **Archival work** and education for everyone wanting to document family and local history
- **Member Meetings & Presentations in October and March**

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Dewey Livingston, Author

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
- **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.



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