

# Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society Historian

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

[info@kghs.org](mailto:info@kghs.org)

## President's Message

It's hard to believe that it's already time to turn our clocks back from daylight savings. We've been blessed with a beautiful summer and fall, able to enjoy the outdoors, magnificent views and support of a wonderful community. Many of us were lucky to grow up here, attend the local schools, and take morning walks around Phoenix Lake. Others have purposely chosen this paradise "in the heart of Marin." Our Joseph Lee painting reminds us that where we live is very special.

If we take a few minutes to stop on the bike path along the marsh and creek, or pause on one of Mt. Tam's many trails to take in the wonders of nature, we will appreciate why the indigenous Coastal Miwok chose this setting as their home. They knew a good thing early on. It's important to see through their eyes and remind ourselves of those who came before. There is a rich heritage from these peaceful people that can be found in not only in local museums but passed on by local residents such as Charles (Charlie) Kennard. He has been devoted to their native basketry and tule boat techniques and is active in native habitat restoration in Marin, managing several projects for Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed. I often watch him teach his basketry classes on his front lawn, promising myself that one day, I will join them. Take a moment to reflect on Dewey Livingston's narrative and Charlie Kennard's appreciation of the Coastal Miwok who settled in Kentfield and Greenbrae.

Marilee Rogers  
Co-president, 2023-2024

## KGHS GALLERY at BON AIR



### VISIT US AT BON AIR CENTER

(next to Roadrunner)

**Holiday Hours**  
11AM TO 2 PM  
Tuesdays and Saturdays

Books  
Cards  
Totes

## Ross Landing 1871 Joseph Lee

### HELP US REACH OUR GOAL!

We are nearly 2/3's of the way 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)

Purchase of our book "*In The Heart of Marin; The History of Kentfield and Greenbrae, California*" by Marin Historian, Dewey Livingston

Purchase of KGHS notecards

Purchase of Other Merchandise

The painting by noted nineteenth century artist Joseph Lee is a rare and important view of central Marin County made during a period when photography was still in its infancy. A painter typically takes some liberties in depicting a scene like this, but here Lee detailed the village of Ross Landing—what would become Kentfield in 1905—and its surrounding landscape with incredible accuracy. Ross Landing was the only town in the vicinity at that time: no Larkspur, Corte Madera or Greenbrae. It was a busy shipping port yet to be influenced by the coming railroad.



*Ross Landing by Joseph Lee circa 1871*

The painting provides us with a clear view from 150 years ago, a scene so vivid that one can almost walk down the dusty street and visit with the Smiths at their pioneer store, and walk over to the pristine valley that would soon become the Kent Estate under looming Mt. Tamalpais. Lee's artistry reveals not only a great talent but also a finely honed skill at depicting a place and point in time in a way that draws the viewer into the life and feeling of the scene. The painting is of great value to residents, historians and naturalists, and contributes to a California-wide base of knowledge and appreciation.

## The early, early history... Coast Miwok in the Lower Ross Valley

Excerpts from *In the Heart of Marin: A History of Kentfield and Greenbrae* by Dewey Livingston

(*In the Heart of Marin* Pages 4-9)

Imagine our suburban neighborhoods as they once were: giant condors and bald eagles flying overhead with seasonal clouds of ducks and geese casting shadows on the vast and rich marshes that provided a wide opening to the bay; grizzly and black bears, coyotes and wolves, mountain lions and bobcats, all wandering uninterrupted through open grasslands and dense forests; and the sounds of wind, water and bird. Consider the beauty, the color. In this environment Coast Miwok people lived in small settlements near the bay shore....There were small encampments along the Corte Madera Creek and its tributaries as evidenced by significant shell mounds, now obliterated, in Kentfield and Greenbrae. In season, Miwok Indians gathered at the shores of the vast marshlands where they processed the bounty of the bay, shelling and drying clams, mussels and oysters and leaving hill-sized mounds of broken shell, charcoal, animal remains and tool-making debris known by archaeologists as "midden." They also buried their dead in these mounds....

Coast Miwok made use of local plants and materials for medicine and the construction of shelter. Clothing, tools, baskets, musical instruments

all came from the land. Local basket makers were masters of the craft ... producing practical yet beautiful baskets of all sizes from willow and sedge, interweaving dyed materials and decorating them with colorful shells and feathers...

It can be safely assumed that the major trail connecting Marin's tribal groups passed through what is now Kentfield, skirting the marsh around Larkspur (today's Magnolia Avenue) and leading up into the Ross Valley. The trail would have crossed Corte Madera Creek at some point, and also split to provide a trail east to the San Quentin peninsula.... With trails also reaching into the surrounding hills, although the Coast Miwok were noted for their avoidance of Mt. Tamalpais, considered to be inhabited by "evil spirits."



*Corte Madera Marsh and Creek*  
courtesy of Charles Kennard

Life changed dramatically for the local Indians with the arrival of the Spanish ship, *San Carlos*, in 1775...A Coast Miwok Indian named Huicmuse was christened as Marino at Mission Dolores, and acted for a short time as the *alcalde primero* at San Rafael. After an eventful life in and around the North Bay villages and missions, Marino's name shortened to Marin—died in 1839. Eleven years later, in 1850, the county of his birth and life was named after him....

It is significant to note that the two known clusters denoting Coast Miwok villages or encampments within the current boundaries of Kentfield and Greenbrae are located at what became the hubs of both communities. The mounds have long since been removed or paved over by the development that formalized the founding of those two communities: in Kentfield at the site of its first railroad depot and the College of Marin, and in Greenbrae at the initial core of the Bon Air Center....



*Illustration of three Coast Miwok natives wearing various headbands and headdresses. Meriam Library, California State University, Chico*

With the removal of the Coast Miwok during the Mexican period, the earliest European settlers chose this site as a farm and boat landing. Maps of the 1850s, '60s and '70s show a person named Gillman living here on a farm, complete with buildings and fences. It was later part of the large Greenbrae Dairy property.... In 1951 development started at Bon Air Center, as part of the Schultz Company's Greenbrae subdivision... (He invited historians and archeologists to inspect the site.) ... In addition to artifacts such as mortars and pestle fragments, bone awls and whistles, bone and stone tools, obsidian points, beads and ornaments, and a whalebone wedge used for splitting wood were unearthed. On August 29 the crew found a skeleton reported in the newspaper as "one of the oldest ever found in the Bay Area."

For more information: The most comprehensive published work on the Coast Miwok is Betty Goerke's *Chief Marin: Leader, Rebel, and Legend* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2007)

Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria <https://gratonrancheria.com>

Marin Museum of the American Indian <https://www.marinindian.com/about>

Coast Miwok Tribal Council of Marin <https://www.coastmiwokofmarin.org/our-history.html>

## Plant Uses of the Coast Miwok

Charles Kennard 1999

Plants are people's ancestors, their brothers and sisters sharing the earth, in the Coast Miwok world view. It is a mutually beneficial relationship, in which, if plants are treated with the respect and restraint that is relatives' due, the food-gatherer or basket-weaver will be rewarded with

bountiful harvests. Weavers today say that living plants need to be used in order to flourish, but at the same time the gatherer must leave a prayer and an offering in exchange, and honor taboos regarding when and how to gather.

These attitudes, together with practices such as pruning, weeding, digging and fire setting, regulated and increased the harvest of what we tend to keep at arm's length with the term 'natural resources.' The relationship between people and landscape was intimate, spiritual and transforming. Pre-European contact Marin was no virgin wilderness, as park managers discover through their efforts to maintain open grasslands and their floral diversity. Here, where lightning is rare, frequent intentional burns are necessary to prevent brush from taking over meadows and hillsides at the expense of grasslands, and keep forest undergrowth from accumulating to dangerous levels.



*Photo Courtesy of Charles Kennard*

Virtually every common native plant has a traditional Indian use as food or medicine, in ceremonies, or for making houses, clothing, boats, baskets, tools or twine. There was a gathering season for each, and as much harvest as possible was preserved for future use, protected in a granary or stored in a dry place not too far from the warm hearth. Basketry materials required storage and seasoning to shrink fully before use.

In February, the first spring greens were greeted with delight: miner's lettuce with its spade-shaped first leaves, clovers, mule-ears and fiddleneck. Gray willow, used in basketry, budded in March, when Coast Miwok families traveled up to the Healdsburg area to cut and peel longer withes than those found at Nicasio (The Ross Valley's last known gray willow died in 1998.) In late April, the first wood strawberries bear fruit, heralding the Strawberry Festival - revived at Kule Loklo, near Olema, in 1987 - when dancers carry the delicate fruit into the roundhouse hung with wreaths of wildflowers. Spring was the time for digging 'Indian potatoes,' the bulbs and corms of grassland flowers in the lily family...

As spring turned into summer, the berry and seed season began: manzanita berries and California blackberries ripened, as did the fruit of the rare leatherwood shrub found near Nicasio and at Bodega; the seeds of checkerbloom, farewell-to-spring, California buttercup, mule-ears and goldfields were parched with hot coals and ground into flour for pinole. In the summer, tules were cut to dry for thatching and for double-ended tule boats, and hazel sticks were gathered for cradles and strong burden baskets. It was also harvest time for huckleberries, blue elderberries, and the late-blooming tarweeds.

Fall was a busy time, when a village gathered enough acorns to allow for 400 pounds or more for each family. The Ross Valley still has an abundance of live oaks and valley oaks, although few residents are allowing the trees to regenerate themselves for the future... Fall was the time for collecting cordage material from perennial herbs before rain rotted their dying stems; the Coast Miwok most likely made use of California hemp growing eight feet tall along San Anselmo Creek, dogbane found near Fairfax, and the ground iris, whose leaf contains two strong fibers...In the rainy winter months, golden chanterelle mushrooms push up through the forest humus, and oyster mushrooms form pale staircases up the trunks of dead alders and oaks; these fungi and others were baked on hot rocks, perhaps alongside toyon berries.

Coast Miwok today continue to celebrate the rhythms of the seasonal cycle, teaching the rest of us the beauty and generosity of this earth, especially of this corner of the earth where we live, Marin County.

Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed P.O. Box 415, Larkspur, California 94977 phone: (415) 457-6045 fax: (415) 457-6362

info@friendsofcortemaderacreek.org

## It's time to 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.

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 a generous donation.

**VISIT [www.kghs.org](http://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.

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