

Kentfield Greenbrae Historical Society

Historian

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President's Message

It might have been that first or second chat with your back-fence neighbor or maybe the "hello" at the mailbox that somehow turned into five or ten minutes. Perhaps it started in the produce section of the local market or in first grade at the monkey bars. That first moment that we felt part of the neighborhood, part of the community was different for each of us, yet serves as both a memory and reminder that we have history in this place.

Over the past five plus years, the Kentfield-Greenbrae Historical Society has been exploring, documenting and celebrating the history of the communities of Kentfield and Greenbrae. In 2014, the celebration of the centennial anniversary of Kent School brought together alumni from years past and families who had recently arrived in this part of the Ross Valley.

While our primary mission is to explore the history of our communities, we realized that bringing community together is also vitally important. On May 7, our Community May Day Celebration will feature both the fun and facts of bygone eras as well as providing opportunities for almost 20 community groups to share their plans for the future of Kentfield, Greenbrae and the greater Ross Valley.

Please join your neighbors on May 7 as we celebrate our past and look to the future!

Susan Morrow

President, Kentfield-Greenbrae Historical Society 2015-2016

Kentfield-Greenbrae Community May Day Celebration

Saturday, May 7, 2016

11 am - 2 pm at Kent Middle School

**PLEASE JOIN US FOR A FULL DAY OF COMMUNITY
CELEBRATION**

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES!

Schedule of events: Ongoing from 11-2

In the Multipurpose Room...Historical Displays, Multi-media presentations including vintage Maypole footage, Student displays of history, science and art projects, Alumni and staff reunions...

In the Community Hall (outdoor quad) ...displays and information of many community groups listed in the side bar



- Kentfield Fire Department
- College of Marin
- Marin General
- Kent Woodlands Property Owner's Association
- Greenbrae Property Owner's Association
- Kentfield Schools PTA
- Kentfield Schools kik Foundation
- Kentfield School District
- Kentfield School District Safe Routes to School Program
- Kentfield Planning Advisory Board
- Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed
- Ross Valley Nursery School
- Ross Valley Flood Protection & Watershed Program
- Sir Francis Drake Rehabilitation Project (with Supervisor Katie Rice)
- Assemblyman Marc Levine
- The Marin Independent Journal
- Marin County Library

Recognizing our Community

The Kentfield-Greenbrae Historical Society was established to recognize the 100th Anniversary of Kent School in 2014. Our community is much bigger than just the School District. Earlier this newsletter, *The Historian*, celebrated the history of the long established Kentfield Fire Department as well as the 90 year history of the College of Marin. In this issue we will share a bit more history of two institutions that will also be represented at the Community May Day Celebration: the Corte Madera Creek Watershed Restoration Project and Marin General Hospital. Be sure to check out their tables and displays.

Corte Madera Creek's Tidal Wetlands

by *Sandra Guldman*, *Friends of the Corte Madera Creek Watershed*

In 1850 extensive tidal wetlands at the mouth of Corte Madera Creek extended across from Point San Quentin in the north to the foot of Ring Mountain in the south and from the bayshore westward to Magnolia Avenue and College Avenue.



Ross Landing and College Avenue 1893
Photo by Henre Chevarlier

The construction of the railroad from San Rafael to Tiburon in 1884 created the first crossing and division of the marsh, a levee built along the south bank of the creek all the way to Magnolia Avenue excluded tidal action west of the levee. Tidal wetlands persisted east of the railroad, ending at the open water of the bay at the shoreline and Corte Madera Creek remained a salt-water estuary.

A report by long-time resident Harry Richards, written in 1997 for Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed, describes what he encountered in 1925 as he rowed up the creek from its mouth. The first landmark he notes is the high-voltage transmission line across the creek, constructed in 1914 to power the Panama-Pacific Railroad, and still in use today. Next, he remarks on the Hutchinson Quarry, now the site of Larkspur Landing, which had just opened. Crushed rock, the typical greywacke used in Marin for aggregate, was carried by a conveyor belt to the barge loading dock, the site of the Larkspur Ferry Terminal. These facilities were on the north side of the creek. Across the creek, houses were reached by a boardwalk two planks wide. Some were cabins on mud sills and others were floating arks moved north from Belvedere

Cove-was this a sign of early gentrification? This is now Greenbrae Boardwalk.

Not far upstream, the railroad bridge crossed the creek on huge redwood pilings. A hand-operated concrete and steel drawbridge allowed boat traffic to pass under the bridge. Several times each day and night, steam-drawn freight trains traveled between Tiburon and San Rafael. Electric passenger trains crossed to join the main line at Baltimore Park and on to Sausalito. About 100 feet upstream of the substantial train bridge, a primitive wooden drawbridge carried Tiburon Boulevard (early Hwy. 101) across the creek. The road was narrow and unpaved, with little traffic; however the bridge served as a point to off-load hay for transport to local dairies. Highway 101 was built in the late 1920s, shortly after Mr. Richards' rowboat trip.

Upstream of the two bridges, arks and houses were found on both sides of the creek for about a quarter mile. Some of the homes on Lucky Drive remain from that period. There were a few houses further upstream reached by land from the Kentfield road. Beyond that was an undeveloped area, the former site of an Indian village, and later occupied by the Bon Air Shopping Center.

Continuing past a rocky point, now the end of South Eliseo, Mr. Richards observed a number of arks and houses along the left side of the creek. They were served by boardwalks 1, 2, 3 and 4, all coming from Magnolia Avenue. Boardwalk One is the only survivor of the four. In 1925, a flimsy wooden bridge, which had once carried guests to the Bon Air Hotel, was still in place. A few palm trees and a derelict swimming pool were the only evidence of the hotel.

Corte Madera Creek is now channelized and straightened from its mouth into Ross. The lower part was once was a meandering tidal slough, described above by Harry Richards, which lapped the shores where the College of Marin now stands. For decades, marshland was perceived as a wasteland that needed to be put to good use; it was lost by diking, draining, and filling.

Since World War II and the post-war building boom, the largest loss of tidal wetlands along Corte Madera Creek was caused by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Corte Madera Creek Flood Control Project. The wide tidal marshes flanking a narrow, sinuous main channel were destroyed in the late 1960s when a wide trapezoidal channel was dredged and spoils deposited randomly on the adjacent marshes. The two aerial photos show the changes between 1946 and 1987 in a portion of the former tidal wetlands filled for the Flood Control Project.



Kentfield Marshes in 1946



Kentfield Marshes in 1987

Source: Historic Aerials

In the small area shown in the aerial photos, the development on filled tidal wetlands includes College of Marin athletic facilities, commercial development along upper Magnolia Avenue, Marin General Hospital parking lots, medical buildings on South Eliseo Drive and Bon Air Road, and residential developments in Kentfield, Greenbrae, and northern Larkspur: Kentfield Gardens, College Court, Hillview, and many apartment and condominium complexes on South Eliseo Drive. Similar development occurred downstream on fill placed for the Flood Control Project.

One success story is not revealed in this pair of photos. The tidal wetlands at Hal Brown Park were filled along with the rest of the wetlands and the entire area was slated for residential development. However, local residents rallied in defense of tidal marshes and they were successful in passing a Community Services Area parcel tax that funded the development of the park, originally Creekside Park. Picnic areas and playgrounds are on the upland area, but most of the land was restored to tidal wetlands in one of first attempts at marsh restoration.

By any standard, this restoration is a success, but there were some mistakes that are still being slowly corrected. The spoils placed on top of the marsh were a mix of gravel, sand, and mud. This is not a problem when the soil is engineered prior to construction of buildings. However, when marsh restoration work was undertaken for Creekside Park, the soil used was inadequately matched to this purpose. Although some of the soil was suitable for marsh vegetation, there are areas of the marsh that remain bare after more than 40 years, mostly because the soil does not support marsh vegetation.

Some of that unsuitable soil will be removed and replaced with better soil in marsh restoration projects scheduled for Fall 2016.

Other ecological mistakes have been more challenging to correct. During the restoration of Creekside Park, two species of invasive cordgrasses were introduced to San Francisco Bay. Later, a third invasive cordgrass moved into Corte Madera Creek's tidal wetlands from its introduction site in the East Bay. Hybrids formed between the native cordgrass and the invasives. These invasives lined the tidal channels and infested all of the marshes, impairing native plants and wildlife and contributing to flooding. Aggressive efforts implemented by Friends of Corte Madera Creek Watershed and the California Coastal Conservancy began in the marshes of Corte Madera Creek in 2005 and now, eleven years later, over 95% of the invasive cordgrasses have been removed and the goal of total elimination is in sight. The cost has run into millions of dollars for the entire effort in San Francisco Bay.

Walk along the Multiuse Path in Kentfield and admire the rich bird life and healthy marsh, then appreciate the efforts of people who had the foresight to restore a part of the marsh fifty years ago. Reflect on how long it has taken to undo damage quickly done and how much effort and money it has taken.

**SAVE Saturday
OCTOBER 1, 2016
George Demont Otis
Exhibit at the College of
Marin Art Gallery**

A COM-KGHS collaboration

Marin General Hospital

Dewey Livingston, excerpt from In the Heart of Marin

At the time Niels Schultz bought land at Greenbrae in 1946, the only hospitals in Marin County were the Ross General and San Rafael General, formerly the Cottage Hospital. Both were private, old, and too small for a growing population. By coincidence, shortly after Schultz purchased Greenbrae, voters created a Marin Hospital District, on November 2, 1946, proposing what would be called Marin Memorial Hospital. Consultants for the new district searched for the ideal location for a new hospital and chose a site in Greenbrae that had been promoted by Niels Schultz Jr., which was central in Marin. The directors approved the Greenbrae site in 1947 and levied a 20-cent tax on \$100 of valuation throughout the district to finance the purchase of land from Schultz, who warned the board that he would be building housing on the surrounding hills. After a bond issue to finance a new hospital failed at the polls, voters changed heart and approved an \$800,000 bond issue in 1949. Late that year the Schultz Co. sold a 16-acre site on the west side of Bon Air Hill to the hospital district for \$35,000.

The former site of the Bon Air Hotel, which had burned many years earlier but left remaining landscaping and stone walls, was an ideal site for a county hospital, it being within five miles of 85% of the county population. The Schultz Co. would pay half the cost of paving Bon Air Road to the hospital. Without a secure location at first, Pebble Beach architect Robert Stanton had initially designed the 104-bed facility as a three-story, cross-shaped building with a roof-top patio. With the purchase of the Bon Air site, he designed a more simple, but modern, four-story hospital on the 16-acre site. Every room would afford a view of Mt. Tamalpais. The cost would be about \$2,000,000 according to early estimates, to be paid by a combination of the bond money and government grants.

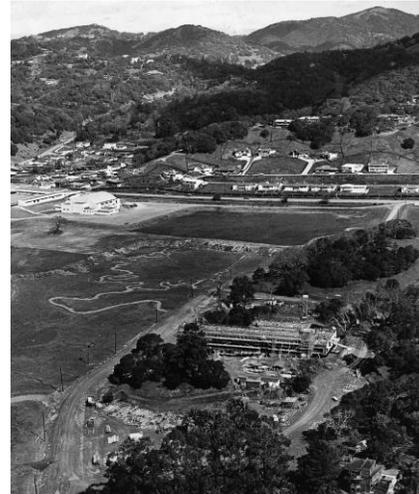
Marin General Hospital opened with 104 beds on May 25, 1952. The modern facility had an emergency room, five operating rooms with centralized oxygen supply, maternity and pediatric facilities, X-ray and pharmacy. The first year it was open the county suffered a large number of polio cases.

With the population increasing faster than the hospital could handle, Marin General needed to expand by the late 1950s. Despite defeat of a bond for the purpose, a new wing was added in 1963, called the Babcock Wing in honor of the William Babcock Memorial Endowment. Babcock's widow Julia had initiated the foundation, dedicated to middle class health care, before her death in 1954.

The Schultz family contributed to Marin General Hospital in many ways. Besides financial support, the family felt strongly about the hospital's place in the community. "Marin General is part of the community and part of the vision that my father-in-law had," said Barbara Schultz, "and so we feel that when we support it we're doing something for him, too." Mrs. Schultz's late husband, Niels Jr., served on the Marin General Hospital Foundation board for many years and promoted advances in technology and facility development, as his daughter Andrea does today.

The hospital continued to expand, building a mental health facility in 1968 and a major modern addition in the 1990s...A recent successful bond measure will allow for significant enhancements to hospital facilities, including earthquake retrofits, modernization and new construction. Plans include a five-story,

300,000 square-foot hospital replacement building, a five-story, 100,000 square-foot ambulatory services building, and two parking structures.



Construction of the new county hospital on the site of the old Hotel Bon Air brought another major Marin County institution to Greenbrae and Kentfield. At left in the distance is the newly completed Marin Catholic High School, and new development at Greenbrae is seen on the hills. That's Wolfe Grade at upper left. (Anne T. Kent California Room, MCFL, Jeff Craemer Collection)

Membership Update

Some renewal notices will be sent out in May. If it's time to renew, please do so by June 30th to continue receiving this newsletter and information about our events.

www.kgbs.org

- \$20 - Students & Seniors
- \$30 - Individuals & Families
- \$50 - Business Membership
- \$100 - Patron
- \$250 - Benefactor *
- \$500 - Historian *
- \$1000 Lifetime* * tote bags

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.

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