

MILL VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2006

Walk Into History - Tamalpais Park

Memorial Day Weekend - Sunday, May 28, 2006

Tamalpais Park Subdivision celebrates its centennial.

A one-mile walk - no hills - stroller and wheel chair accessible.

A neighborhood of about 300 single family homes.

Many architectural styles: Victorian, brown shingle, stucco, craftsman, modern, remodels.

Large range of house sizes: 800 to 3900 sq. ft. of living area.

Curving narrow streets designed for buggy ride enjoyment.

Channelized Warner Creek winds its way from Boyle Park to Miller Ave. through yards and beneath houses and garages.

Walnut trees on Walnut Ave., catalpa trees on Catalpa Ave., locust trees on Locust Ave.

Spectacular roses on Walnut, garden with 150 varieties of rose on Locust.

Begin with ticket purchase that day at Park School, on the corner of East Blithedale and Elm Ave. Parking on school parking lot and nearby streets.

Guided tours begin at 9:30 am. The last tour leaves at 3:00 pm.

Members \$7; non-members \$10.

First Wednesday Speaker

The final First Wednesday program of the spring will be held on June 7, 2006 at 7:30 pm in the Creek-side Room of the Mill Valley Public Library.

The subject is "Real Cold Cases with Ken Holmes, Marin County Coroner."

If you haven't heard Ken Holmes describe his job and specific cases he's worked on, you're in for a fascinating evening. He leaves time for questions which often lead to surprising answers.

Library Still Going Digital

By Tim Amyx

In what began as baby steps, the Mill Valley Historical Society is now taking BIG steps to digitize records in the history room. Current efforts focus on digitizing the thousands of photos that are turning yellow, cracking from age and degrading from frequent handling. Each photo is scanned to create a digital image for computer viewing. Backup copies are recorded on CD's to be locked in an air tight vault.

To view photos, researchers now remove them from large cabinets in the history room. Soon they will view them on a computer, either in the history room or at home where copies can be printed.

Photos are just the first step. Plans are underway to scan and digitize other records in the history room, e.g., documents, reports, maps, recipes, oral histories, and, if appropriate, essentially anything on paper.

In addition to scanning/digitizing paper documents, audiocassette tapes of oral histories will be digitized and recorded on CD's which provide more permanent archives and more convenient listening.

These BIG steps are the result of hard work by Michelle Hampshire and David Grossman of the Mill Valley Public Library.

www.millvalleyhistoricalsociety.org

- View photos of old Mill Valley.
- Learn about the history of Mill Valley.
- Review the list of available oral histories, look at a few examples.
- Read about planned and past events such as First Wednesday Programs and Annual Walks Into History.
- Go there.

History Room Management Change

Joyce Crews retired at the end of 2005 after serving many years as the person in charge of the Lucretia Little History Room. She knew where everything was. She trained docents. Researchers depended on her. She was always responsive to any request for help and advice. She will be missed.

Her replacement is David Grossman who arrives with quite a resume: University of Michigan MLS; Northwestern MBA; grew up in New York; worked in Chicago, and Washington, D.C. as writer/reporter for USA Today and various library magazines; data base builder for travel and airline industries; web master for airline.

Since David arrived, the history room has acquired 3 PCs with Internet access and a scanner. These tools and his know-how mean that 21st century technology will play an increased role in the storage and retrieval of information in the history room.

Walk Quiz

1. What railroad stations originally served residents of Tamalpais Park ?
2. What three avenues merge at a bizarre intersection in Tamalpais Park?
3. What neighborhood is east of Tamalpais Park ?
4. What was the name of the last bar on Locust?
5. How many pedestrian path sections are there in Tamalpais Park?
6. What neighborhood is west of Tamalpais Park?
7. Park School was the third MillValley school. What was the second?

Big Step Forward

On March 6, 2006, the Mill Valley City Council approved the printing and distribution of a map that pinpoints the location of 170 steps, lanes and paths.

Project leader Victoria Talkington and volunteers spent several years analyzing public documents - some over 100 years old - to locate these public rights of way.

The map will help achieve the ultimate goal of preserving and restoring about 300 public steps, lanes and paths - many are now inaccessible.

Pedestrian paths provide an alternative to driving children to school, a means of accessing public transportation and an emergency escape route. They can also enhance the quality of life by providing opportunities for fitness and recreation.

The map which costs \$5 will be available on Memorial Day weekend at many locations in Mill Valley. They will also be sold at the Walk-Into-History on May 28.

Historic New Year's Eve Flood

Mill Valley Coffee Shop on the corner of Locust and Miller displays two historic photos that show how the floods of 1945 and 1982 inundated the coffee shop. Last winter's flood did it again. A third historic photo should be added.

Here is how the coffee shop got clobbered this time. Start at the corner of Miller Ave. and Willow St. which is toward town from the 7 Eleven. Walk on Willow St. to the pedestrian bridge over Arroyo Corte Madera del Presidio. Water from Blithedale canyon, Cascade canyon and the rest of Mill Valley's watershed upstream flows under this bridge. On December 31, 2005, the creek became hydraulically constricted at this bridge by debris washed down in the storm. Water backed up, overflowed the creek banks, flowed down Willow St. to Miller Ave. and flooded the coffee shop as well as other businesses down Miller.

Cross the bridge and continue on Willow Path to Sycamore Ave. The rest of the water blocked by the debris under the bridge took this route. When it got to Sycamore, it formed a large pond about 2-1/2 ft. deep covering front yards on both sides of the street. The flood waters flowed down Sycamore to Locust, crossed the bridge over Warner Creek and increased flooding further down Sycamore caused in part by an extra high tide.

Expert Takes On Oral History Project

Alison Owings brings a great deal of expertise to this important job. She teaches a course on how to conduct oral histories, lectures on the subject and has written two remarkable books utilizing oral histories: "Frauen/German Women Recall the Third Reich" and "Hey, Waitress! The USA from the Other Side of the Tray."

She plans to work with a team of trained and not-yet-trained volunteers to conduct interviews in two different avenues. One is to continue the traditional approach of interviewing current and former residents of Mill Valley about their specific memories. Also, Alison plans to set up thematic interviews. She has at least a dozen categories in mind, and wants to start with the following two:

1. War and peace. Interviews with military veterans and peace activists.
2. Rock and Roll. Interviews with musicians.

Perhaps you'd like to participate in the oral history project, as an interviewer, interviewee, or transcriber, or propose that a certain person be interviewed, or offer suggestions. If any of this piques your interest, you can contact Alison by e-mail at ajowings@sbcglobal.net, or leave a message for her in the Mill Valley Historical Society box, at the library.

The Historical Society has recorded and transcribed more than 150 oral histories, many of them fascinating, all of them important

Oh to be a History Room Docent

A rewarding experience. And, your service is greatly appreciated by the Mill Valley Public Library as well as the Historical Society.

First of all, training for the job opens up a new world. Discover how much information is available. Learn how to find specific facts.

Secondly, there is the job itself. Where else can you find two hours of tranquillity - well most of the time anyway. The telephone doesn't ring very often. Very few interruptions. Much of the time you're alone - a time to think, a time to read, a time to search for answers to your own history questions, a time to peruse maps and photos, a time to google and surf the web on one of the new PC's. Believe it or not the time goes fast.

On most shifts there really aren't a great many visitors to the history room and some of them even know what they're looking for and where to find it. There are of course those who are "just looking, thank you." Some visitors have specific questions, sometimes ill-defined. Its a challenge to get them headed in the right direction. You get a great sense of satisfaction when they succeed and express their appreciation for your help. Then there are the elementary and high school students who usually work on their history projects in teams. This is a seasonal phenomenon. Things get pretty activated, but it can be fun helping them find what they need for a great history report.

Three shifts Monday through Thursday: 10 am to noon, 2 to 4 pm, and 7 to 9 pm. Two shifts on Friday: 2 to 4 pm and 7 to 9 pm. Two shifts on Saturday: 10 am to noon and 2 to 4 pm. One shift on Sunday at 2 to 4 pm. Not all shifts have docents at the present time. Openings are available.

For more information call Peggy Chenoweth at 381-7908 , e-mail her at peggycheno@aol.com, or drop in at the History Room and meet a docent.

1906 Earthquake Eyewitness Report

Alexander Eells was a lawyer who lived in San Francisco near Buena Vista Park with his wife Caroline and their two daughters. He was also a gentleman farmer. Friday evenings he would go to his 8-acre farm in Homestead Valley where he worked all weekend. Sunday evenings he would record in his diary what he had accomplished. Here is what he wrote in his diary 100 years ago.

"Millwood, Friday, May 4, 1906
[Millwood was the train station on Miller]
The most severe earthquake I ever felt occurred on the morning of April 18th (Wed) at about 5:15. It of course alarmed us all especially as it shook off the tops of both chimneys making a frightful noise. After breakfast, I went on my usual course down town and was astonished to see the damage done. When I got to the City Hall and found the dome tower and all the south front in ruins I was astounded. When I reached 6th and Market a cordon of Federal Cavalry stopped the crowds of people on the streets and I turned homeward. Arriving home I found water stopped. Got some siphons of Shasta water and laid in stock of groceries and provisions. Then came the terrible fire for nearly 3 days. On Sat. a.m. after much search I found an automobile which took us to the ferry and we came over here."

Thereafter, he commuted from Homestead Valley to his San Francisco law office.

President's Message

First, a few kudos to new Board members Beth Spottswood and Alison Owings for taking on our First Wednesday and Oral History projects, and to Chuck Oldenburg for taking on this newsletter.

With Spring finally here, it's time to anticipate the upcoming Memorial Day Weekend Walk into History, which this year will feature the Tamalpais Park neighborhood on its 100th anniversary. The walk begins and ends at Park School, and individuals and families are welcome. The walk is stroller-accessible, and we look forward to a good time for all.

History is an interesting concept. What we make of it reflects our own concerns and circumstances, so history as we see it always involves a dialogue with the present and fulfills the principle of Heisenberg that an observed particle will differ from one that is unobserved.

It is natural to want to preserve the past. Whether this is in the form of physical preservation or preservation of the record of past events, it is a way of showing respect for what came before as well as a means of providing material for interaction with the future. But the learning function of history coexists uneasily with respect for the past, a past that is, in a sense, someone else's history. How important is it to forge ahead into the past? I would say, in these times, it is very important, for we are in the process of making what will become the past, and as Auden wrote, "History may say alas, but cannot help nor pardon."

John Leonard

Board President

Images of Early Mill Valley

"Mill Valley - The Early Years" written by Barry Spitz in 1997 is an excellent source of information about the history of Mill Valley from the Coast Miwoks to 1929. In 2003, Barry wrote "San Anselmo - A Pictorial History" which has many more photos and far less descriptive history. Barry says that he changed his style because readers seem to prefer photos.

In 2005, Claudine Chalmers wrote "Images of Early Mill Valley" which has a great concentration of photos. This approach to writing history books seems to work. A few weeks after its publication last fall, the book was sold out at Strawbridges and the Book Depot.

Last summer, Claudine spent a great deal of time in the history room of the Mill Valley library researching Mill Valley history and copying photos and maps. Joyce Crews and Gene Stocking were particularly instrumental in helping with her research. Anne Montgomery, Cathy Blomberg and Michele Hampshire smoothed the administrative and technical aspects of the image search. Suki Hill, whose photographs are displayed in the corridor outside the history room, created photographs for the opening page of each chapter.

Claudine Chalmers, born and raised in Cannes, France, first fell in love with California at age sixteen when she became an exchange student in a Palo Alto high school. After completing her studies at the University of Nice, France, she returned to California where she married, settled in Almonte and raised two sons. She is the author of books and articles about French citizens in California during the gold rush as well as "Splendide Californie! Impressions of the Golden State by French Artists."

Answers to Walk Quiz

1. Park Ave. and Millwood
2. Locust, Fern and Elm
3. Sycamore Park Subdivisio
4. The Brothers
5. Six (four comprise Willow Path)
6. Sunnyside Tract
7. Homestead School

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