

MILL VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2008

**WALK INTO HISTORY
TAMALPAIS HIGH SCHOOL**

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND – SUNDAY, MAY 25, 2008

Celebrate Tam High's Centennial

Guided tours begin in front of Wood Hall, the original 1908 building.

Learn about the history of the buildings on the university-like campus.

Learn about the teachers, principals and events.

**Purchase tickets that day at Tam High
Members \$7; non-members \$10**

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

FIRST WEDNESDAY SPEAKERS PROGRAM

In February, author and historian Barry Spitz presented, "Ten Days That Shaped Marin." His latest book, "Marin – A History" organizes information around landmark days. Barry chose ten of these days, starting with Dec. 14 1817, the founding of Mission San Rafael Archangel which he illustrated with an image of a magnificent nineteenth century painting of it hanging in the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History. What followed was discussion of nine other significant events that occurred in the following decades, such as the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge.

In March, railroad historian Richard Torney presented, "Forgotten Railroads of Marin," He described three railroads: San Rafael and San Quentin R.R., the first to be built in Marin in 1870; North Pacific Coast R.R. from Sausalito to Pine Point and across Richardson Bay to Strawberry Point, Lyford, Reed, Collins Summit and Corte Madera—thence to Cazadero; and the Fairfax Manor Funicular, a real estate agent's way to sell hillside lots.

The subject of the April program was to be "History of Military on Mt. Tam." However, the event had to be cancelled because the Post Office failed to deliver announcement post cards to MVHS members prior to the meeting. The speaker, Daniel M. Sebby, director of the California State Military Museum, agreed to make his presentation on Wednesday May 7.

RESERVED FOR GEORGE PARKER

On the back of the long bench in front of Strawbridge's on Lytton Square, there is a small brass plate inscribed with George Parker's name. Former long-time owner of Strawbridge's, Chris Steindl, placed the sign there to honor a man who for many years came to sit on the bench each morning.

Born in Dorchester, Massachusetts and raised in Providence, Rhode Island, George Parker joined the U.S. Navy, and served in the submarine service. Introduced to his future wife by a friend, he moved to Mill Valley after marrying local girl, Dorothy Day. Discharged from the military in 1938, he joined the U. S. Post Office where he rose to Mill Valley's Assistant Postmaster. Divorced for many years, he attended to a number of collections, including his valued postal stamps. He was a Boy Scout leader, and served two terms on the Mill Valley Library Board of Trustees in the 1950s.



He became a familiar figure around town after his retirement in 1965. In the morning, he walked from his home on lower Lovell Avenue to join two old friends, Al Lambretti and Bill Provines, for a chat on the bench. His presence was so reliable that

Chris Steindl installed a small brass plate on the bench inscribed: Reserved for George Parker.

For about an hour, before Peet's Coffee made that spot on Lytton Square such a busy hub, the three old friends would begin their day together by meeting at the bench, rain or shine. George sat in the same spot every day and would speak to passersby too. As Chris Steindl reported, "George always had something positive to say." After George's death, Chris replaced the "Reserved" sign with: George Parker 1908-1991. If you hadn't passed the bench before 1991, you might not have known the man behind the plaque, but now you know a little something about him.

Joan Murray

HISTORY ROOM UPDATE

Jessica Ryan, an intern last semester, has joined the History Room staff permanently. She keeps the History Room open every Tuesday from 10am until 2pm. Bob McCully joined the docent staff and shares Tuesday afternoon shift with John Robinson from 2pm to 4pm.

We restocked our research materials for third graders that came to research Mill Valley's rich heritage. We will post some of their best local history reports on the Library's web site.

Speaking of web sites, the History Room is now featured prominently on the new Library web site which was launched in January. Many historic photographs formerly displayed on the now defunct "94941.com" web site are once again accessible to the public. Check it out!

Digitization progresses. We have scanned almost 800 photos from the History Room collection. Many will soon be accessible on the History Room section of the Library web site using the powerful ContentDM software recently acquired.

David Grossman

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By John Leonard, Board President

I'm looking forward to our 2008 Annual Review. After being in the good hands of Joan Murray for the last two years, it is being produced this year by one of our new Board members, Wendy Zheutlin. I'm also looking forward to this year's Walk into History at Tam High, celebrating Tam's 100th Anniversary. As a graduate of Tam, I was pleased to learn that Tam is the oldest high school in the County in its current location. San Rafael High School was founded earlier, but it moved to its current location in 1924. Be sure to mark Sunday, May 25 on your calendar for the Walk into History at Tam High.

I am pleased to note the addition of Betsey Cutler, Wendy Zheutlin and Leslie Reiber to the Historical Society Board, and to welcome back Donna Carillo. It is truly a pleasure to work with a Board united by an interest in Mill Valley's history, committed to preserve this history and eager to make it accessible to current and future generations.

MILL VALLEY THEN & NOW

Arcadia Publishing has a new book series, "Then & Now," to add to its highly successful series, "Images of America." In 2005, former resident Claudine Chalmers produced "Early Mill Valley" for the latter series which also includes "Angel Island," Tiburon Peninsula," and other nearby cities.

In 2007, Mill Valley's photographer extraordinaire, Suki Hill, authored "Mill Valley" for the "Then & Now" series. Many of the 87 pages in her book contain two photographs: a particular view as it looked many years ago and the same view today. Pertinent historical commentary complements the photos on each page. For distance shots, the enormous growth of trees and hedges often blocks today's views. This is less of a problem when comparing views of downtown streets then and now. Especially interesting are photographs of people. For example, a 1920 photo of participants at the third annual "Woman's Hike," shows women in bloomer-type attire, whereas the 2000 photo of Dipsea Race participants shows women in skimpy attire.

Also in 2007, Claudine Chalmers produced her second "Images of America" book entitled, "French San Francisco" which covers the history of the French presence since 1786. Highly recommended for those interested in the history of San Francisco.

ANNUAL MEETING

On November 1, 2007, the Mill Valley Historical Society held its annual meeting at the Community Center. Turnout was greater than in 2006. The potluck produced excellent food and more than the usual number of main courses. Beautiful flower arrangements on each table added charm. A greater number of younger members attended.

Suki Hill, longtime Mill Valley resident and unofficial photographer, presented a slide show of black and white photographs of Mill Valley and its residents, transients and tourists taken between 1964 and the present.

HOMESTEAD OWNS MILL VALLEY STREETS AND LANES

In 1890, the Tamalpais Land & Water Company (TL&WC) started selling properties that are today in Mill Valley. Subdivision maps specified the locations of lots, streets and lanes. TL&WC went out of business in 1988 and deeded all its properties to the Homestead Valley Land Trust (HVLTL). In 1995, HVLTL was surprised to learn that it owned 50 streets and 30 lanes in the city of Mill Valley. A few examples: Lovell, Ethel, Summit, Marion, Molino, Throckmorton, Magee, Cascade, Edgewood, Bernard Lane, Madrona Lane and the Dipsea Steps. Ridiculous but true.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Wendy Zheutlin

Wendy has lived in Tam Valley for 13 years and has always been fascinated by its history and especially "Little City Farms" She has worked at many jobs from TV producer to writer and researcher. She brings to the Board a passion for history as a way to form community and a sense of belonging.

Donna Almada Carrillo

Donna is a third generation Marinite whose Portuguese family settled in Novato in the late 1800's. Her grandmother Mary De Borba was born in Lucas Valley and her dad, Anthony Almada, was born in the family house on their dairy ranch at Deer Island in Novato. Her family moved to Mill Valley in 1955. She graduated from Tam High in 1962. She has always been an avid reader and hiker and especially enjoys learning about the personal histories of preceding generations.

Betsey Cutler

Betsey, who grew up in New Jersey in a house built during the Revolutionary War, has always had a love of historical places. In 1969, she moved to Mill Valley and served as Old Mill School P-TA President and Mill Valley P-TA Council President. She spent six years on the MV Planning Commission and 7+ years on the MV City Council, two terms as Mayor.

Leslie Reiber

Leslie has lived in Mill Valley for 12 years. She has worked as a volunteer in Old Mill and Middle schools, and served on their Emergency Preparedness Committees. She is a board member of the West Blithedale Canyon Neighborhood Association. She also worked for three years on the Steps, Lanes and Paths map project. She and her husband, David Witt, have a son at Tam High and a daughter at Middle School.

The Board 2008

John Leonard - President
Rachel Reidy - Vice-President
Bill Devlin - Treasurer
Barbara Kent - Secretary

DIRECTORS

Tim Amyx
Donna Carrillo
Betsey Cutler
Barbara Ford
Alan Lee
Kate Menzies
Joan Murray
Chuck Oldenburg
Alison Owings
Leslie Reiber
Wendy Zheutlin

Welcome

New Members

Saralyn Almada
Heather & Bill Gordon
Maribeth Perka Haughton
William F. Ramsey
Donald Schroeder
Christopher J. Shields
Helen Rutledge
Robert Battersby

DID YOU KNOW

In 1970, the 26-year old film writer/director George Lucas and his wife Marcia found a house in Homestead Valley. This was their first home, complete with an office and a small editing room in the attic. The house was at 958 Vernal Ave. on top of the ridge behind Tam High. They lived and worked there until 1973. The Freshman Sock Hop scene in their 1973 film, "American Graffiti" was filmed in the Tam High boys gymnasium. In 2004, Tam High held its first annual American Graffiti Sock Hop. The most recent one was held in September 2007.