MILL VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER
SPRING 2010

WALK INTO HISTORY

LOWER HOMESTEAD VALLEY

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND – SUNDAY, MAY 30, 2010

Purchase tickets at Homestead Valley Community Center
315 Montford Ave.

Members $7; non-members $10

SITE OF “THE HOMESTEAD” — 1866

THREE COMMUNITY CENTERS

THE 2 AM CLUB, THE QUONSETS (WHOLE FOODS)

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

Marin Rocks

Marin Rocks is the name of a rock and roll museum that's projected to open this fall at 850 Fourth St. in San Rafael. There are certainly a lot of historical connections between rock and roll and Mill Valley. The History Room has already contributed copies of photos to be displayed in the museum. The Homestead Valley Community Association has loaned the museum a "Brown's Hall" sign that has hung in the present community center for 25 years. Homestead’s community center from 1934 to 1972 was Brown's Hall, a Marin rock venue between 1965 and 1972 for such groups as Clover & Flying Circus, Muskadine Blues Band and Don Hicks and his Hot Licks. The museum will likely also recognize the 2 AM Club close to Brown’s Hall where Huey Lewis and the News hung out.

In June, 1975, a wedding ceremony was held in Three Groves, a park in the redwoods of Homestead Valley. The groom was Pete Sears, British-born pianist and bassist of Jefferson Starship. The bride was Jeanette Dilger of Mill Valley. It was an absolutely gorgeous day. Guests were brought to Three Groves from the Tam High parking lot in a Rolls Royce. Some wore formal attire complete with top hat. Rock stars were well represented. They included Grace Slick, Paul Kantner, John Barbata, Marty Balin and David Freiberg.
FIRST WEDNESDAY PROGRAM

February program: “Military Plane Crashes of Mt. Tam and Marin County”. The speaker, Matt Cerkel, reported on his extensive research of the Navy and Army Air Corps airplanes that crashed in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. There were many. He showed photos of debris at crash sites as well as comparable WW II fighters and bombers. Causes were poor weather conditions, ineffective communications with Hamilton Air Force Base and Alameda Naval Air Station and lack of information on the exact location of the plane in flight, and in a few cases, mechanical failure.

March program: “Marin County Ferry Boats”. Paul Trimble showed historic photos of ferries that plied the bay from Sausalito and Tiburon to San Francisco. Passenger ferries went to the Ferry Building, car ferries to the Hyde Street Pier and freight and railroad cars to other piers.

April program: Panel of Four Mayors: Bob Burton, Dick Spotswood, Clifford Waldeck, Stephanie Moulton-Peters

May program: to be announced.

June Program: Dipsea Race, Barry Spitz

NEW MVHS BOARD MEMBERS

Vivian Broadway-Firmage. Dentist. Wife of a MV native. Two daughters: Middle School and Tam High.

Michael Dyett. Urban planner. Mill Valley Film Festival board member. Active in city projects.

Bob McCully. Retired CPA. 30-year MV resident. History Room docent.

Dick Swanson. City planner. Former MV Planning Commissioner, city council member, and mayor.

History Room Update

David Grossman

Open Hours Extended
With more than 20 docents and interns working, the History Room is now open every day and evening, a total of at least 54 hours per week.

Digitization Project
At latest count, over 2,000 photos have been digitized, more than 50% of the collection. Digitization of other paper records has begun: maps, oral histories, Reviews, newsletters, History Walk Guidebooks, etc.

Beta Test of Online Database
A subset of historical photographs, maps and other items will soon be accessible in a beta test of an online data base. Visitors to the library’s web site will be able to search and browse historical photographs and other information using a Google-like program. Members of the Historical Society are encouraged to try the new local history database during the beta test.

Miller Avenue Historical Photograph Exhibition
The hallway gallery outside the History Room has a new display—History of Miller Avenue. This exhibition is the first in a continuing series. Hallway gallery displays that will feature different aspects of Mill Valley’s rich and vibrant history. In May, histories of the Dipsea Race and the Mountain Play will be featured.

President’s Message

I got to thinking the other day that our historical interests are certainly not limited to the city of Mill Valley. Perhaps we should be called the 94941 Historical Society. Last year our annual Review featured articles on Tamalpais Valley. This year’s Review focuses on Homestead Valley. Currently two members of the board are from Tam Valley and two from Homestead. The 94941 area has a lot of interesting history. The History Room is a great resource of such information.

Every fall, we need to replace retiring board members. Residents of Mill Valley are of course recruited, but I would like to urge members who live outside the city limits to consider becoming board members. Muir Woods Park, Alto and Strawberry are not represented. The board deals with challenging decisions, and manages activities that are often fun. The learning experience can be rewarding.

Tim Amyx, president
MILL VALLEY LIGHT OPERA COMPANY

In 1952, several musicians met in Mill Valley and decided to form a local light opera company. Barry Mineah gathered people from vocal groups around Marin. With his own church choir from the Episcopal Church of Our Savior in Mill Valley as a nucleus, he soon had a chorus of some 35 voices. He also lined up a 16 piece orchestra.

In May 1953, the Mill Valley Light Opera Company performed Gilbert and Sullivan’s “Trial by Jury” and the “Ballad for Americans” by Latouche and Robinson.

Encouraged by its success, the company expanded for a November 1953 performance of Gilbert and Sullivan’s “Pirates of Penzance”. It ran for two nights at Tam High and drew record crowds.

In July 1954, the company performed Gilbert and Sullivan’s “Mikado” at the Marin Art and Garden Center amphitheater in Ross. There were four performances and standing ovations for musical excellence. The Mill Valley Record reported that Hughes Call of Homestead Valley gave as excellent a performance as “Pooh-Bah” in “Mikado” as he did in his debut as “Sergeant of Police” in Pirates of Penzance”.

There followed three more Gilbert and Sullivan operettas: “Iolanthe”, “Gondoliers” and finally “Princess Ida” performed at San Rafael High School in June 1957.

All concerts were benefits for the Episcopal Church.
Welcome New Members

Vivian Broadway-Firmage
Stephen Burke
Carolynne Farrell
Jerry Freeman
Jon E. Goerke & Cynthia LaMar
Robin Heard
Corinne Purnell
Lorie A. Shay

INDEX FOR MILL VALLEY – THE EARLY YEARS

In 1997, Barry Spitz wrote probably the most complete book of information about the history of Mill Valley before 1930. However, only names of people are found in the index. History buffs and researchers spend a lot of time searching for information on other subjects.

A new and much more extensive index has been developed by Joyce Crews, retired Mill Valley librarian, under the direction of Laurie Thompson in the Anne T. Kent California History Room at the Marin County Civic Center.

The index will be available soon on the following web sites: californiaroom.marinlibrary.org and Millvalleyhistoricalsociety.org