

THE ROSS SEMPERVIREN

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TOWN OF ROSS CENTENNIAL NEWSLETTER VOLUME 2 2008



Centennial Update

SAVE THE DATE

The Town of Ross will be celebrating its 100th Anniversary **September 20, 2008**, with a huge “once in a hundred years” parade and picnic. Please join us for a truly memorable day.



GEAR UP FOR THE TOWN FAIR

Following the parade, the Centennial celebration will include an array of old-fashioned fun including rides, contests, exhibits, and games. It just might be more fun than this Town has seen in 100 years...!

CALLING ALL GARDENERS

Spring has sprung and it's time to cultivate your blue-ribbon produce and garden items for the Town fair, which will feature a competition for the best tomatoes, pumpkins and flowers grown by Ross residents. So germinate, plant, grow, and get ready to bring us your prize-winning entries.

And for our local artistic types and cooking enthusiasts: stay tuned for announcements about competitions in these categories.

If you have not yet signed up on the Town's email list, please do so to stay in the Centennial loop. Contact Linda Lopez at llopez@townofross.org or call her at 415-453-1453 x105.



Trees, a Ross Tradition

by Gary Scales

Trees always have contributed to the Town's charm and uniqueness. James Ross is believed to have lined the wagon road to his home (now Poplar Avenue) with poplar trees. The eastern slopes of Mt. Tamalpais were denuded after the Gold Rush,

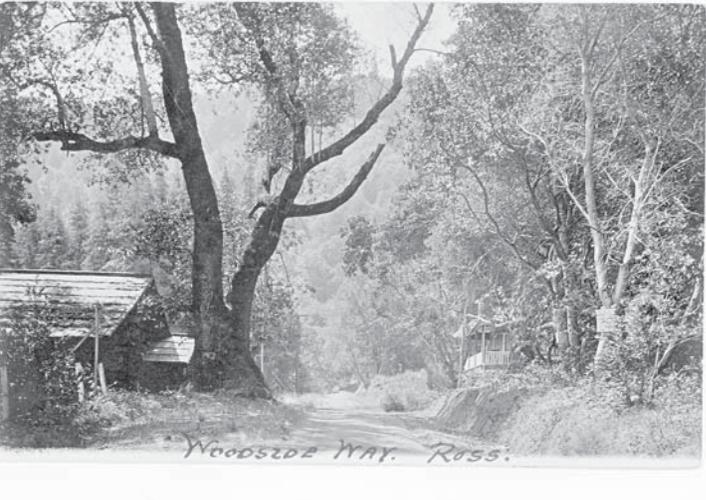


Photo courtesy of the Ken Fineman collection.

as loggers cut redwoods, oaks, and madrones to fuel San Francisco's construction boom. Teams of oxen hauled massive logs along "skid roads" that later became the main streets of the Town.

Early residents George and Annie Worn were both enthusiastic horticulturists. They traveled extensively, and brought back with them many specimen shrubs and trees. The Worns planted a *Magnolia grandiflora* on their "Sunnyside" Estate, later the Marin Art and Garden Center. For over 100 years this magnificent tree dominated the Great Lawn until succumbing to a fungus disease three years ago.

Albert Dibblee, who in 1870 bought extensive tracts

of land from the Ross estate, is generally credited with beginning a tree-planting legacy. Dibblee's main passion was trees – he simply loved them. Family members recalled how he enjoyed naming the 168 varieties of trees planted in his gardens. Many were imported from his home state of New York and included American elms, lindens, hickory trees and horse chestnuts. He named his family home "Fernhill" (The Branson School now occupies part of this land), and Dibblee planted lines of elm trees down to the railroad tracks. What was once his private driveway is today's Fernhill Drive. Although there was no official railway station at Fernhill, Dibblee obtained a letter from the railroad's president instructing the engineer to stop at Fernhill if members of the Dibblee family were aboard.

Encouraged by Dibblee's example, homeowners continued to plant rows of elms along Shady Lane and Lagunitas Road. Lining the roadsides with trees reminded many early residents of their New England heritage. For others, the trees simply provided shade when walking, or when riding in their carriages. Regardless, the trees greatly enhanced the beauty and charm of the community.

The Common and the train depot were focal points for residents at the turn of

the century. Estate owners would be driven to the train station by carriage in the morning and then picked up in the afternoon. Often they had their gardeners ride along and instructed them to spend an hour or so beautifying the grounds around the station. It got to be quite a custom, and reportedly somewhat competitive. In short order, the Ross Station gardens were recognized as the most beautiful and extensive along the Northwestern Pacific Railroad line. Early photographs show palm trees lining the Common, which were later lost in the early 1930s to a prolonged and killing frost. An old apple orchard stood at the south end of the Common. Children would pick the apples for themselves and to feed to the ponies and horses tied at the Town hitching rail.

Long-time Ross residents recall a Town tradition of burning Christmas trees on the Common after the holidays. Families would gather for the massive bonfire and New Year's cheer. Another weekend ritual, lost to efficiency and environmental concerns, was raking and burning leaves in the fall. The custom drew neighbors together, and children and dogs romped through huge piles of leaves lining Lagunitas Road, Shady Lane, and Bolinas Avenue.

Ross Remembered

In 1987 George Kittle, whose family lived at Sunnyside from 1880 to 1930, wrote from Cornwell, Connecticut of his memories of Ross:

"I do miss California, specially the landscape, and whenever I return, and drink in the old familiar sights—brown hills dotted with oaks, buckeyes by dry creekbeds, the lovely madrones—and the smells—eucalyptus, bay, redwood, tarweed, dry grass,—I wonder why I live anywhere else...."



Fact or Fiction?

- 1 In 1922 the Katharine Branson School moved from San Rafael to part of the former Fernhill estate in Ross. Was it always a co-educational high school?
 - A Yes
 - B No
- 2 A gift to the community was given by the family of Natalie Coffin Greene in 1967. What was it?
 - A A reservoir
 - B Tennis courts
 - C Several hiking trails
 - D Land for a park
- 3 Which local conservationist led the effort to purchase the Sunnyside property to create the Marin Art and Garden Center?
 - A William Kent
 - B John Muir
 - C Caroline Livermore
 - D Annie Ross Worn
- 4 What major event was held at the Marin Art and Garden Center until relocating to the Marin County Civic Center grounds?
 - A The Bohemian Grove Dinner Dance
 - B The Great Marin Easter Egg Hunt
 - C The Marin County Fair
 - D The Coast Guard Officers' Formal
- 5 Sunnyside Nursery was founded by the great-grandson of which famous early area resident?
 - A James Ross
 - B George Kittle
 - C Albert Dibblee
 - D George Worn

1. B. In 1922 the Katharine Branson School offered grades 1-11 and was co-educational through the fourth grade.
2. D. In 1967 the family of Natalie Coffin Greene gave 25 acres of Phoenix Lake land for a park in her memory.
3. C. In 1945 Caroline (Mrs. Norman) Livermore, President of the Marin Conservation League, convinced eight organizations of which she was a member that the beautiful Sunnyside property with its gardens and trees should be preserved as a cultural center and living memorial. A mortgage of \$25,000, due in 5 years, was taken out with Mrs. Livermore's home as collateral. Volunteers have been supporting the Marin Art and Garden Center ever since.
4. C. The Marin County Fair was held annually at the Marin Art and Garden Center before relocating to the Marin County Civic Center grounds in 1970.
5. A. Donald C. Perry, great-grandson of James Ross (and grandson of George Worn), opened Sunnyside Nursery in San Anselmo in 1940. It remains a family-owned, independent business.

Sources: Jose Moya del Pino Library and Ross Historical Society of The Marin Art and Garden Center (www.moya-rhs.org).



CORRECTION: This photo from Volume 1 of the Centennial newsletter is from the collection of Ken Fineman.