

# THE ROSS SEMPERVIREN

[www.townofross.org](http://www.townofross.org)

TOWN OF ROSS CENTENNIAL NEWSLETTER VOLUME 4 2008

*Photo courtesy of the Ken Fineman collection.*



## Centennial Update

### BE SURE TO RECEIVE YOUR INVITE!

At the end of July, an invitation to Centennial events September 19-20 will be mailed to every household listed in the 2008-2010 Ross Community Telephone Directory. The invite includes a response card for the dinner and other important information about the festivities. If you (or someone you know) are not listed in the directory and would like to receive an invitation, please contact Linda Lopez at [llopez@townofross.org](mailto:llopez@townofross.org) or call her at 415-453-1453 x105 as soon as possible. It is likely the dinner will sell out quickly.

The Town of Ross website ([www.townofross.org](http://www.townofross.org)) is a source of information about Centennial events, including the Town dinner, picnic, parade, and fair. Visit it for important details, including parking and shuttle schedules.

### GARDENERS, TAKE NOTE

Come September, it will be time to carefully harvest your vegetables and flowers for the garden and produce competitions at the Town fair. The judges will be looking for:

- Tastiest tomato
- Loveliest home-grown flowers
- Biggest pumpkin
- Zaniest-looking squash

# Ross on the Move

by Gary Scales

Ross resident Tom Berry, among the first to own an automobile in Marin, caused quite a commotion and frightened horses and neighbors alike when he pulled up in front of the Ross depot to pick up his daily mail. A 1902 proposed ban on autos captured the anti-auto sentiment: “Marin’s terrain is peculiarly ill-adapted to the use of the automobile. Marin County is essentially a horse-keeping and horse-loving county.”



The North Pacific Coast Railroad, which eventually became part of the Northwestern Pacific Railroad, ran from Sausalito to Cazadero.

Photo courtesy of the Ken Fineman collection.

When automobiles were embraced, traffic rules and regulations weren’t always welcomed. Driving around the Ross Valley, pioneer family resident Mrs. Benjamin Dibblee (Isabel Kittle) justified her total disregard of newly erected stop signs and traffic lights on the grounds that “they are for the new people.”

While horses and automobiles played a role in early Ross history, it was the railroad that initially drove both economy and population. By 1875 the North Shore Railroad had pushed its steam rail line from Sausalito through the Ross Valley. Ross resident John Martin, one of the founders of Pacific Gas & Electric Company, and purchaser of a portion of Fernhill (formerly the Dibblee estate), revolutionized rail service by using electricity as a source of power on commuter trains. In 1902 Martin and his partner, bought the railroad for \$6 million. With access to cheap hydroelectric power from dams in the Sierra,

Martin ran a 150-mile high-voltage transmission line to a substation north of Sausalito.

Martin’s successful strategy of electrifying, upgrading, and expanding passenger service soon caught the eye of railroad magnate E. H. Harriman. Within two years the North Shore Railroad had merged into the Northwestern Pacific Railroad, which was owned by Southern Pacific. Southern Pacific management moved swiftly to consolidate operations and discourage competition, including legal maneuvers to thwart growing sentiments for building the Golden Gate Bridge. But Marin County leaders were strong and early supporters, as the spanning of the Bay would spur development in their communities. Voters in six Northern California counties approved a \$35 million bond, and construction commenced January 1933. Five years later, the bridge opened Marin to the automobile, but marked the demise of passenger trains and ferries. On February 28, 1941, the ferry Eureka made its last 11:30 PM run to Sausalito: “a singing, laughing, jostling crowd of a thousand or more... generally raising hell, while they drank and sang along with a four-piece orchestra.”

Sir Francis Drake Boulevard has had many names in the past century. “San Anselmo Avenue” appears on a survey from 1886. The 1909 Map of Ross called it “Red Hill – Ross Landing Road.” Some early residents simply referred to it as “Old County Road.” In the 1930s a leading historian at University of California found “a plate of brass” in west Marin which he steadfastly believed English explorer Sir Francis Drake left in 1579 as “a monument of our being there,” and claiming right and title to the land in the name of Queen

Elizabeth. With a great deal of publicity, the County officially memorialized the road as Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. Decades later, researchers discovered that the Drake plate was hoax, intended as a scholarly prank among a playful fraternity of California history enthusiasts.

Few residents have ever thought of our Town’s main thoroughfare as “State Route 251” and that certainly was no joking matter. During the post-war boom in California, the state legislature proposed stimulating growth in coastal counties by a web of interconnecting freeways. State Route 251, engineered for four to six lanes of traffic from San Quentin-Richmond Bridge, would roar westward along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard to the Point Reyes Lighthouse. Eight sprawling cities with an anticipated population of 150,000 people were proposed along the Point Reyes Peninsula and the shores of Tomales Bay. The wild-scenic coastlines of Marin and Sonoma, as well as the rural small-town character of Ross Valley communities, were in grave jeopardy, with enormous environmental implications. Plans included construction of an elevated super highway along the railroad right-of-way, which would have paralleled Kent and Poplar avenues, passed over the Ross post office, and continued along Sylvan Lane. In 1971, under intense scrutiny, the Marin County supervisors, by a 3-2 vote, repealed the plan and pressured the state to eliminate State Route 251. Many Ross residents were instrumental in mounting strong opposition to the proposed development and freeway. As has been the case for more than a hundred years, leaders of these preservation efforts included members of the Kent family, this time with patriarch Roger leading the charge.

# Ross Remembers

Frederick Barreda Sherman, MD, grandson of Mrs. Jonathan Kittle, lived at the family's Sunnyside estate and recalls growing up in Ross:

*“Next came the peace of it all. The only sounds heard were the clopping of the horses’ hooves, the crunch of wheels on the graveled roads, and the rustling of the wind in the leaves. No automobile marred this peace while I was a little boy. I could ride my bicycle and later my sister’s small horse without fear of being hit by a car.”*



## *Ross, California The People, the Places, the History*

The first published comprehensive history of our town and the surrounding Ross Valley, this newly released first-edition book makes a great Centennial gift for friends and family.

Published by the Jose Moya Del Pino Library and Ross Historical Society, cost is \$40 donation, cash or check only. Please call 415-461-4816 to order, or stop by the Octagon House on the MAGC grounds Tue–Fri, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.