

## Please Consider a Year-end Donation to the Marin History Museum

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### Museum News



The Marin History Museum  
Welcomes Charlie Barboni to our  
Board of Directors!

Charlie Barboni is a local boy who grew up in West Marin and is best known today for being the manager of the Marin County Fair. He originally got involved with the Fair in 1972 when he organized the Fair's first petting zoo. He has been involved with fairs since then and has been the Marin's Fair manager since 2015. Just over a year ago, Barboni was recognized for his extensive work and unflagging enthusiasm by being appointed to the Western Fairs Association Hall of Fame, one of the highest individual achievements in the county fair industry.

Part of his job as fair director, Barboni coordinates and supervises the competitive exhibits, which have won numerous Western Fairs Association awards over the years and have grown from 4,000 to more than 14,000.

This type of involvement with the Marin County Fair has given Barboni a chance to work with many community groups, as well as given him an appreciation of history. This can be seen in the Fair's annual themes, for example the 2017 theme celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Summer of Love. Barboni still resides in West Marin and is a collector of art.

## Feature Article

### Staying in Touch: Mail and Post Offices

Sending and receiving mail in early Marin was challenging. News of births, weddings or deaths of far-off friends and relatives might take months to arrive. Christmas cards would show up in the spring. The post office only delivered packages weighing less than four pounds. Anything over that weight had to be delivered by private delivery or express companies.

During Gold Rush days, most mail came by Pacific Mail Steamship. A signal would go up on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco and people would rush down to the docks to get their mail. Those living in rural areas like Marin had to wait for slow-moving paddle-wheelers and stagecoaches to bring their letters and packages to the closest town and pick them up there, paying on delivery.



Ocean steamer, Pacific Mail Steamship Company, 1857  
Source: Smithsonian Museum



Southern Pacific U.S. Mail railcar, about 1906  
Source: Marin History Museum

After 1869 came U.S. Mail railcars, which were traveling post offices. Mail was sorted onboard, then dropped off at the rail station in padlocked pouches for the local postmaster

Marin's first post office (1851) was in San Rafael on 4th and C Streets. Many early post offices were located inside railway stations or nearby grocery or tobacco shops. Postmasters or postmistresses worked part-time and had other jobs.

In Marshall, the postmaster sold grain feed; in San Anselmo, candy. In Corte Madera, hotel-owner Jerry Adams briefly renamed the town "Adams, California" hoping for some free advertising. The original post office in Novato is now the Novato History Museum.



San Rafael Post Office on B Street, about 1940  
Source: Marin History Museum





Historic Postmaster's House (1850)  
Now Novato History Museum  
Source: Novato Historical Guild

In 1899, rural home delivery started with carriers offering for-fee services like stamps, money orders, and newspaper delivery. Rural carriers had to provide their own transportation and sign an oath that they would not use intoxicants or take an active part in politics.

Towns with more than 10,000 people, or \$10,000 a year in post office business, could get "city mail delivery" to their homes. But first the town had to install sidewalks and assign street-and-number addresses instead of house names like Hillhaven, Mulberry, or Lockwood. Local mail carriers hand-delivered the mail to customers by knocking or ringing at doors, knowing everyone by name.

In 1913, parcel post service started; airmail service came in 1918. By 1928, all homes had to have a proper mail slot or mailbox on the sidewalk or at the end of the road. Some Marin communities like Ross and Lagunitas decided to keep having residents come down to the post office to pick up their mail. Just like the old days, you'll see everybody you know.



Ross Post Office  
Source: YOURPIECEOFMARIN.COM

By Susan Cluff

**Can't get enough of Marin's early mail services?**

[Click here](#) to read Robert Harrison on Marin's first local mail service in 1847. \$7.50 to send a letter from San Francisco to Sacramento? Whew!

## Faces of Marin



Photo source: Anne T. Kent Collection

### **Sophia Livesey (1865-1945)**

Sophia Livesey was the postmistress in Belvedere from 1910 through 1937 and lived above the post office in the Belvedere Land Company building next to Allen's Grocery Store and the telephone office.

Old-time residents remember the post office where she worked as small with a long counter and window with bars on it. The mail came in twice a day and children were often sent down to wait for it. People who travelled or had summer homes in Belvedere would ask Miss Livesey to open and read their mail and send it on to them.

Miss Livesey wore tailored suits with a long skirt, stiff collars with a little tie and a tailored hat. She owned a parrot named Polly, who was usually perched on her shoulder. They apparently looked alike and sounded alike, so much so you weren't



sure who was speaking.

A cousin, the actress Lotta Crabtree (1867-1924), died and left Miss Livesey \$1,000 a year in her will. When she retired in 1937, she just walked out of the post office. She said to her successor Stella Ehrenfelt, "Everything you need to know is in that book," pointing to "Postal Laws & Regulations." She died in Sausalito in 1945.

By Susan Cluff



Nicasio Hotel 1880, Hiram Taft likely driving a wagon  
Photo Source: MHM

### **Hiram F. Taft (1838-1925)**

Hiram F. Taft was a California Pioneer from Vermont who became the first postmaster in Nicasio in 1871 (at a salary of \$12 a year) after working on a dairy in Point Reyes. He was also a stage driver and Wells Fargo express agent, working out of his home on Nicasio Square. Hiram Taft was well known and well-liked in the town of Nicasio. He married three times.

After the North Coast Railway came into the San Geronimo Valley in 1875, Hiram would meet the trains with his wagon to bring people, mail and freight to and from Nicasio. Later, he'd tell a story about picking up a lone passenger one night, a tall,



well dressed, deep-voiced man with a beard, who chatted politely as they rode along, then asked, "It's a lonely road out here, ever worry about highwaymen?" Hiram joked it off saying they'd get only about 80 cents from him and delivered the man to the hotel.

When the famous outlaw Black Bart (Charles Boles) was arrested in 1883 after robbing 28 Wells Fargo stagecoaches, Hiram saw his picture in the paper and swore it was the same man.

By Susan Cluff

## Community Events of Interest

**Wednesday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm**

**First Wednesday: Druid Heights: Interpreting an Alternative Lifestyle  
Mill Valley Library**

Kristin Baron will present a program about Druid Heights, a secluded artists' community in the Marin Headlands near Muir Woods. From the 1950's through to the late 1970's, this hidden enclave fostered creative and innovative architecture, art, poetry, philosophy and music. Hear about its heyday, about the Golden Gate National Recreation Area's efforts to protect this fragile site, and the challenges of interpreting a non-traditional resource. Kristin Baron is the architectural historian at the GGNRA and has worked for the National Park Service for over 25 years. She has been involved in many preservation and building rehabilitation projects, including the Presidio and Fort Baker's conversion to Cavallo Point. Baron earned her degree in historic preservation at Columbia University and enjoys interpreting the history of built environments.

No charge to attend. Registration highly recommended (415) 389-4292 x3

**Wednesday, December 12<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm**

***Mill Valley History Vignettes***

**Mill Valley Library**

Please join local historian and former Mill Valley Historical Society board member Chuck Oldenburg as he discusses information from his newly-released book, "Mill Valley History Vignettes." This collection of 150 vignettes is the perfect present for the holiday season. Chuck Oldenburg was born in 1929, and moved with his family to the Homestead Valley community of Mill Valley in 1963. Since 2000, he has been Homestead's unofficial historian, and his contributions to the local community include his active involvement on the boards of the Homestead Valley Land Trust and the Homestead Valley Community Association, as well as the Mill Valley Historical Society. Chuck is also known for his publication of over 180 historical articles in the monthly Homestead Headlines newsletter. A former MVHS "Walk into History" guide book editor and walk leader, Chuck has also been the prolific author of the Historical Society's bi-weekly historical "vignettes," short descriptions of specific events, people and places significant to local history.

**Saturday, December 15<sup>th</sup> at 1:30-2pm**

**Liberty Ships and the Lesser Known Facts**

**Bay Model Visitor Center**

A WWII emergency shipyard once operated here in Sausalito. Over the years, Liberty Ships have become an icon of WWII. We know a lot about the shipyards, the Liberty Ships, and the people who built them, but there is more to this story that has gotten lost in time. Come and join Ranger Linda to find out some of the lesser known important facts that bring this incredible story alive again. Program will include a tour of the Marinship Exhibit located inside the Bay Model Visitor Center.

## Talks and Walks

Walking Tours with Marcie Miller will begin after our first rains (February?) with a walk up to Pacheco Falls in the Pacheco Canyon, then monthly on the third Saturday of the month (pending weather). This year we will walk Fairfax, Dominican University neighborhood, San Rafael Fourth St, San Rafael Hill via Boyd Park and the Boyd Estate. Planning is in the works for a destination tour to the Point Reyes Vineyard Inn & Winery.

## From the Collection



### **DuBois' Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian olive wood writing desk**

Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian olive wood writing desk lined with midnight blue velvet, brass hinges and original key. The desk opens to reveal four compartments for letters, two glass inkwells with olive wood tops, four writing instruments with olive wood handles, and a curious pin-tucked leather pouf with a grosgrain ribbon edge, presumably for resting one's hand on while writing. Donated to the Marin History Museum by the du Bois family in 2010.

Portable writing desks—also called stationery boxes, lap desks, writing slopes, or escritaires—came into fashion during the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as increased travel and war necessitated a stable surface for writing while away from home. The boxes ranged from extremely plain in the earlier part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to those which were more ornate and reflected the owner's personal tastes and social class. Victorian gentlemen's desks of the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were simple and elegant, made of quality woods such as mahogany, walnut, or rosewood, outfitted with brass hardware, and often lined with leather. Ladies' desks of the era were generally smaller and more decorative, with slopes of fine silk and velvet.

These types of desks were popular during a time when heating was inefficient, houses did not routinely have electricity and people made long trips to visit family and friends that often lasted weeks or months. The portability of the writing desk ensured comfortable writing and confidentiality, since the writer could easily move it beside a good light source, a warm fire or to a private study to work undisturbed. Many a famous novel, letter, or dispatch was written on a portable writing desk. They were notable precursors to the briefcase, laptop, and iPhone.

Sources: [www.victorianweb.org](http://www.victorianweb.org)  
[www.pamlecky.com](http://www.pamlecky.com)

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## IN THE NEWS - 100 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH

**December 1918**

### POLE CLIMBERS WRANGLE OVER NATURE OF PRIZES

Time - December 10, 2-4 pm Place - Court House Plaza Event - Pole Climbing Contest

#### **Entrants**

Sheriff J. J. Keating Assessor P. H. Cochrane Salvadore A. Pacheco

#### **Costume**

Pink Tights  
Prizes ?

This is where the difficulty lies. Keating insists that the committee in charge of the event shall place twelve plump robins at the top of the pole. P H. Cochrane declares for a box of Judge Rudolff's best French cheese. Pacheco says he won't climb the pole unless the committee puts three big juicy steaks at its peak.

While the prospective contestants are dead-locked over the settlement of the prize wrangle, and many refuse to enter in the flag pole-climbing contest, their friends in the court house are urging them to train and get in condition for the grueling test of agility. They all balk at the suggestion of greasing the pole.

Editor's Note: Pink Tights?  
Really?



## VOLUNTEER JOB OPPORTUNITIES

We can use your help! Have a little time on our hands and looking to help a local non-profit? Below is a list of some of the volunteer positions we need to fill.

Please let us know if any of these look interesting to you by emailing [info@marinhistory.org](mailto:info@marinhistory.org) or calling 415-382-1182. We would love to hear from you!

### **Administrative Assistant**

This position provides an opportunity to work on researcher requests, computer-related projects, and other interesting and supportive endeavors. This position can be done partially from home and partially in the office. This is a hands-on team job that will really make a difference at the Marin History Museum.

### **Writer**

We are starting to create a lot of content for our eNewsletters, social media sites, and future traveling exhibitions and publications. If you like to do historical research and write short articles, we could use your help.

### **Editor**

Along with writers, we need editors to give the final article its blessing before it goes to print. This volunteer job can be done from home or on site. Let us know if you have that required eagle eye and grammatical tenacity to tackle this job.

### **Special Event Assistant**

If you enjoy hosting or attending a well-planned party, you'll be a natural at during the Museum's special events. We would love to see you help create the party, greet guests who attend, and keep that friendly and festive feeling going for the whole evening.

### **Photographer**

Capture the moment for us! Your photos of the Museum's special events and exhibitions will be invaluable for public outreach, future fundraising campaigns and our institution's historical record. We could use your help documenting our history!

**Are you a student looking for community service hours? Know a student who needs hours before graduating? The Marin History Museum is a 501(c)3 and can grant students their community service hours.**

**Let us know and we'll take care of it!**