

# Bulletin

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***Above: Two important components of enjoying and appreciating history are imagining and remembering. The museum's photograph collection helps us do both. This early morning shot of Tomales was taken on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1976 — the unforgettable day we woke up to the surprise of several inches of snow on the ground. (view west across John Street; Catholic church left of center)***

***Cover: Bray Dickinson with his camera at the ruins of a local trestle (probably at Valley Ford).***

## **Bulletin**

**Ginny Magan, Editor  
Suzanne M Lang, Design Editor**



T O M A L E S   R E G I O N A L   H I S T O R Y   C E N T E R  
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## EDITORIAL

### IN OUR 40<sup>TH</sup> YEAR: CONSIDERING THE HISTORY CENTER'S MISSION

The MISSION of the TRHC is printed on much of our literature, appears on our website, is the footer of my monthly reports to the Board of Directors, and is usually found on this editorial page. An organization's mission statement is a bureaucratic formality of course, but it also serves as a baseline — a reminder and a clear articulation of how we perceive our purpose.

So for this issue, in our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, I've decided to consider the History Center's overall purpose by deconstructing our Mission Statement. I hope this will make it more concrete, and easier to gauge its fulfillment. Continuing this inward look inspired by the forty-year milestone, the summer and autumn *Bulletins* will include memories and activities of TRHC's early years. And our annual Open House, on Sunday, November 4<sup>th</sup>, is planned to be a celebration of these four decades, over which we have learned together about the Shoreline Region's history — *and* about operating a museum.

This issue also includes a brief story of Bray Dickinson who, though best known as a North Pacific Coast Railroad historian, was probably the first to write comprehensively of Tomales Township's past, much as Jack Mason did for the areas of southern West Marin, and as Howard McCaughey and his daughter Ruth Burke compiled for southwestern Sonoma County.

And on the subject of respected local historians and their work, plan not to miss our *current* resident historian and author, Dewey Livingston, when he comes to the History Center on Sunday, May 6<sup>th</sup>. (See details of Dewey's visit — and coming book — in this issue.)

A few other events are in the works, including the launch of a new website in late April and a celebratory fundraising party at the Tomales Town Hall on October 6<sup>th</sup>. (I am looking *forward* to this; the date is already on my calendar.) Between *Bulletins*, and until our new website is live, our Facebook page is a good place to keep in touch with upcoming events.

Meanwhile, here's to Spring!

Ginny MacKenzie Magan  
ginnymac@sonic.net



*The mission of the Tomales Regional History Center is to inspire interest in the region's history through collection, exhibition, and interpretation, and to develop an awareness of the role we all play on the greater continuum of that history.*

## ABLES BRAY DICKINSON (1890–1958)



**Above: Bray Dickinson as a young man reading the San Francisco Call on the side porch of the family's house on Maine Street. (photo by Ella Jorgensen)**

**Right: The Ables and Dickinson families including, Bray at feet of his seated grandfather, Thomas J. Ables, and grandmother, Mary Martin Ables. Standing behind (l-r) are Leon Dickinson, Zilla Ables Dickinson, Robert Cottingham, Clara Ables Cottingham, T. Horace Ables, and Alice Stephens Ables. (1897)**

heritage (his father, Leon, was son of a minister to Nicaragua under the Lincoln administration), it is perhaps not surprising that Bray, alongside his duties as merchant and postmaster, was an ardent historian. He learned from his older customers of the region's pioneer days, and never knew the town without its railroad until he was middle-aged. Undoubtedly echoing the feelings of many of his contemporaries, Dickinson wrote, "All of us who grew up within the sound of a train whistle have found the steam locomotive a magnet of human interest unequalled by any other thing mechanical."

Dickinson, who frequently conducted research at the state library in Sacramento and at Berkeley's Bancroft, possessed the traits a good historian needs — an inquisitive nature, an active imagination, and a respect for accurate detail. The History Center's Bray Dickinson Collection was an early, foundationally significant acquisition which includes several unpublished manuscripts — one of which was edited by Lois Parks and Kathie Lawson, and published by TRHC to become *Tomales Township: A History* in 1993. And Dickinson's (also posthumously published, 1967) *Narrow Gauge to the Redwoods* remains a popular and sought-after railroad history today.

Ables Bray Dickinson, whose first name honored his maternal grandparents, was always called Bray. A second-generation Tomales native with roots in academia (his maternal grandfather, Tomales pioneer Thomas J. Ables, was Marin County's first Superintendent of Schools), he graduated from San Francisco's Lowell High School several years before Tomales High existed, earned a degree in History from Cal, and taught the subject at Oakland Technical High School until serving in the First World War.

From the time Bray was about nine years old the Dickinson family's business was his father Leon's general store — the building now known as Diekmann's. His mother, Zilla Ables Dickinson, was the postmaster. Eventually Bray came back to Tomales to help with the business, and by the mid-1930s he had married Elaine Peake and assumed the responsibility of postmaster. This inherited vocation of storekeeper / postmaster seems to have suited the popular, gregarious man well. But Bray Dickinson will be remembered best for his seminal role in our knowledge of local narrow gauge railroad and Tomales Township history.

With pioneers, educators, and government officials as part of his

## ***LOCAL MERCHANT, POSTMASTER, AND HISTORIAN***

Roy D. Graves, whose collection of over 23,000 San Francisco and transportation-based photographs was purchased by the Bancroft Library, was a friend and colleague of Dickinson. "I met Bray Dickinson one Sunday in the early 1930s in the store at Tomales. By chance the N. P. C. (*North Pacific Coast*) was mentioned and we were fast friends from that moment. I had been collecting pictures of this unique rail line which I had grown to love as a boy fireman... My wife and I often accompanied Bray and Elaine on trips to search out some old photo or a bit of data for the book. Mrs. Dickinson remembered that Bray and I often sat up half the night discussing old times on the railroad."

The knowledge and sensibilities of spending much of his life in Tomales, of having known some of its earliest settlers and seen it through some of its pivotal changes, surely gave the history-oriented Dickinson an enviable perspective. The sense of place he enjoyed, and the knowledge he pursued and passed along in his work, has enriched and added to ours. We are surely in his debt.

### **sources:**

"Families of the Tomales Presbyterian Church Cemetery," Lee Erickson, 1990.

*Narrow Gauge to the Redwoods*, A. Bray Dickinson, Trans-Anglo Books, 1967, 1970.

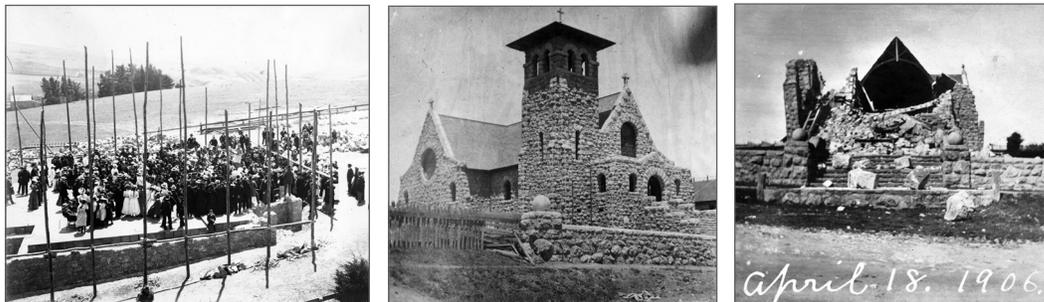
*Tomales Township: A History*, A. Bray Dickinson, Ed. by Kathie Nuckols Lawson and Lois Randle Parks, Tomales

Regional History Center, 1993.



## **DECONSTRUCTING OUR MISSION AND AIMING TOWARD ITS GOALS**

*The mission of the Tomales Regional History Center is to encourage interest in the region's history through collection, exhibition, and interpretation, and to develop an awareness of the role we all play on the greater continuum of that history.*



**Three Ella Jorgensen images show us the phases of the short life of the stone Church of the Assumption at Tomales. Turn-of-the-century dedication, seen through what was probably the first, vertical frame of scaffolding; the brand new, Richardsonian Romanesque building, c. 1901; and finally, the ruins of the stone church, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1906.**

The History Center's mission ends with the phrase, "... to develop an awareness of the role we all play on the greater continuum of that history." This awareness is, we hope, encouraged by the thoughtful implementation of the three components of what we do: Collection, Exhibition, and Interpretation.

### **COLLECTION**

Collection is the foundation of these three. It also happens to be the aspect of our mission for which we have always most directly relied on our patrons. Occasionally we purchase an item, but this is rare because, over the last forty years, our neighbors, members, and friends have been very generous with their pieces of the local past.

We do, however, have general plans and specific policies for the collection that help us make decisions about what we will accept or purchase and what we will not. (Often these decisions are based on various combinations of the item's size, relevance, and nature, and our available archival space and capabilities.) We have a Collection Committee to consider the more



**Buildings — like the artifacts they are — do a good job of helping us relate Today to the Past. This is especially true because they are among the rare artifacts we can actually use in the intended way. Here, the Salmina Brothers' store in Marshall (now the Hog Island Oyster Company) has a parking area filled with horses and wagons instead of cars — as busy then as on a summer afternoon today. (The people in the rear stand along the railroad track.)**



***Our collection includes many photographs of proud drivers of the new machine that came to be called the “automobile,” and even a few of men at the wheels of race cars — probably occasional competitors at the 1921 Cotati Raceway. Shot by Ella Jorgensen, from her Maine Street, Tomales home.***

complex decisions. Our Collection will always be a work in progress, with items included sometimes by serendipity and sometimes by plan.

Collecting, of course, inevitably includes preserving and cataloging. Preservation involves appropriate



***This first-ever paving of a Tomales road must have been a memorable mark of Progress. Ella Jorgensen captured this view and several others of Maine Street being paved in the mid-1920s. View south on Highway One; Dickinson Store (now Diekmann’s) and Post Office at center.***

storage conditions, including archival packing materials, and specific climate- and light-control. And cataloging — probably the most labor-intensive aspect of collection management — ensures that each item is *known*, its essence understood, and that it is tracked and can be easily located. Our digital catalog is what ultimately makes the collection truly *useful*. (Unfortunately but realistically, the complete fulfillment of this goal is several years in the future!)

*(Continued on page 6)*

*(Continued from page 5)*

### EXHIBITION

Our exhibits are a large part of our connection with the public, where we can share and interpret various pieces of our collection, and among which we happily answer questions and enjoy hearing our visitors' memories and stories. This fluid, informal experience of a museum exhibit means that museums do not actually *teach*, except in the broadest sense. Rather they are "in the business of creating environments that facilitate the construction of appropriate meanings that energize people..." (*M.M.M.*, p.68) In other words, a museum exists to *inspire*.



**Probably the first exhibit mounted at the History Center's new museum, into which we moved in 1998. There were yet no partition walls or exhibit furniture, but we already had a good start on our growing photograph collection. The old Tomales High School's 1921 auditorium and gymnasium still serves us well, and climate control upgrades were recently installed in the lower-level storage room, increasing our archival-storage capacity.**



**Left: The museum's exhibits are designed to be self-guided, and we hope they encourage interaction with others, engage visitors, and inspire connections with the past. On a recent Sunday, this all happened at once when we enjoyed an impromptu family reunion made up of descendants of a 1933 THS graduate. Some of the Elliot Family members are grouped here at the stage-area's Tomales High School exhibit, created in 2012 to celebrate the landmark school's 100<sup>th</sup> year. (photo by Georgia Marino)**

**Right: An important collection-within-a-collection that we add to yearly is that of our Tomales High Yearbooks. Years ago we realized what a useful resource for local history a yearbook is, and we now maintain the policy of holding at least two copies of each issue — one generously donated by the school, and one purchased by the museum. In this way we always have at least one copy archived and one available to the public. Here descendants of Maxine Elliot (THS 1933) look at yearbooks of the '30s and '40s. (photo by Georgia Marino)**

## INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is simply explanation of something done in a meaningful way, and beyond merely the factual. This kind of explanatory presentation, no doubt instinctively used by some, was identified in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and especially promoted by Freeman Tilden within the National Parks Service. Tilden's definition of interpretation includes: "An intellectual activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships...rather than simply to communicate factual information."

Interpretation of history helps to bring the past into focus, and lends a connection to that often elusive time *Before*. An interpretive approach can make history classes, written history, and museum exhibits relevant and engaging. The significance of this goes far beyond the accumulation of knowledge. Through an association with the past — and by logical inference, to the future — it becomes possible to see our particular place and time, and our very *selves*, as part of something larger.

*Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.*

Freeman Tilden

But this lofty aspect of History is not necessarily the most important reason to engage in the subject of the past. For many, the glimpse of another time is simply a *pleasure*. Author and historian David McCollough believes that "History *ought* to be a pleasure...an enlargement of the experience of being alive, just the way literature or art or music is." Our formal Mission Statement, then, is in part simply a reminder of the methods by which we hope to share and expand this pleasure that so many of us know and experience.



***Probably because they often evoke emotions and meaning, pets can be touchstones to others — to our contemporaries, or to those long gone whom we never knew. Here are the beloved cats of Bray Dickinson's mother, Zilla (photo by Ella Jorgensen), and the kiddie-car-riding dog of later members of her father's family.***

sources include:

*Interpreting Our Heritage*, Freeman Tilden, University of North Carolina Press, 1957, 1967.  
*Making Museums Matter*, Stephen E. Weil, Smithsonian Books, 2002.



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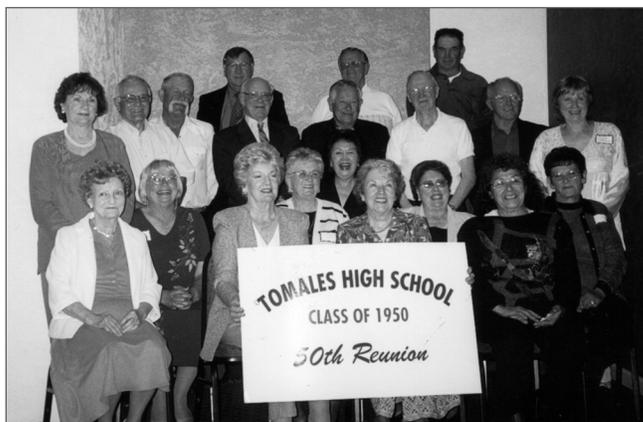
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***Above: A Tomales Elementary School Halloween parade on Maine Street has been a tradition since at least 1962, when this picture was shot from in front of the Post Office. The Piezzi Building was still an auto repair shop then, purchased from Silvio Piezzi by Gene Arenander. The building, with its original pressed-tin siding, is still easily recognizable today — the home of a deli and a bakery***

***Left: School days memories offer strong connections with the past. Here many will see familiar faces attending the reunion of the THS Class of 1950.***

**Hear Dewey Livingston talk about Tomales Bay's east shore:  
its schools, ranches, and pioneers, *and* about his in-progress book  
TRHC on Sunday afternoon, May 6<sup>th</sup>**

Join us on Sunday afternoon, May 6<sup>th</sup>, to hear well-known Marin historian Dewey Livingston speak about his new book — still in progress but coming soon, and much anticipated. The publication, in Dewey's words "a comprehensive, two-volume history of the Point Reyes Peninsula and Tomales Bay," will be a history of the land and its people, covering the ranches and towns of Olema, Point Reyes Station, Marshall, and Inverness, with photographs from the author's many resources.

The History Center's presentation will focus on Tomales Bay's east shore ranches and schools, and the pioneers for whom much of the area is named — Henry W. Halleck, the Marshall brothers, James Miller, and others. Livingston will also touch on some more recent history of the area, and highlight old maps he has recently discovered in the collection of the Marin County Library's Anne T. Kent Room at the Civic Center.

Livingston is a wonderful writer of history, following in the footsteps of Jack Mason, whose books he read as a teenager. (Shortly before he died, Mason donated his house, The Gables, to the Inverness Association for a library and museum, and assigned the curatorship of his considerable collection to Dewey Livingston. This was the beginning of the Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History.)

The presentation will take place in the History Center's lower level meeting room at 2:00 P.M., with a social hour and refreshments in the museum at 1:00. There will be an opportunity to donate to the book's production expenses at this event, or you may send a tax-deductible contribution to Jack Mason Museum, PO Box 94, Inverness, CA (please include BOOK FUND on the check's memo line). We hope to see you on Sunday, May 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Welcome to new members**

Dale Curtis    Susan Kuyrkendall    Bill Merian    Dan & Carolyn Torliatt  
Nancy Kelly Wheeler



*The shingled  
Cornett-Diekmann  
House on Railroad  
Avenue at Second  
Street in Tomales —  
the home of two  
well-known families  
of local merchants.  
(photo by Ella  
Jorgensen)*



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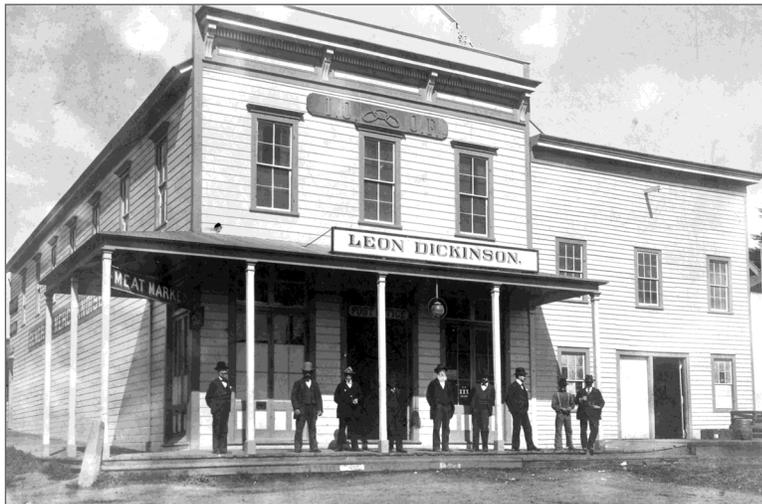
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### Museum Hours

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*The familiar Tomales general store now known as Diekmann’s was once the Dickinson family’s business, run successively by two generations of Dickinsons. The building’s architectural and historical integrity is significant, thanks partly to a 1980 restoration overseen by Bill Diekmann. (photo c. 1900)*



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