

The Signpost

January-February, 2017



Under the Flat Hat

by Matt Cerkel

Land and open space preservation in Marin County largely began with the preservation of Mount Tamalpais. With the incorporation of Mill Valley in 1900 the first public parks on Mount Tamalpais began with Old Mill and Cascade Parks being set aside. In 1903 the Tamalpais National Park Association was founded with the hopes of preserving the then private Mount Tamalpais as a national park. In 1908 298 acres were set aside as Muir Woods National Monument on the southern slopes of Mount Tamalpais. In 1917 the MMWD opened its newly purchased 10,700 acres watershed on Mount Tamalpais as a public park. In

1928 Mount Tamalpais State Park was established (on land donated by William Kent), followed by Samuel P. Taylor State Park in 1945, Tomales Bay State Park in 1952, and Angel Island State Park in 1955. Point Reyes National Seashore was created in 1962. In 1972 the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Marin County Open Space District were created. In 1976 China Camp State Park was created, followed by Olompali State Historic Park in 1977. Today there are over 140,000 acres of Marin County preserved in Marin, and Mount Tamalpais is its centerpiece.

The Marin Municipal Water District's preservation of Mount Tamalpais as a public park and creation of a park ranger program in 1917 can be seen as the foundation of all future park and open space preservation in Marin County and an important event for land preservation in the Bay Area and beyond. Today there are over 140,000 of park lands preserved in Marin and it was largely "built" around what the Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD) did 100 years ago. In 1903 the Tamalpais National Park Association was founded with the hopes of preserving the then private Mount Tamalpais as a national park. This group was started by William Kent. The "cornerstone" was laid in 1908 when 298 acres of the southern flank of Mount Tamalpais were preserved as Muir Woods National Monument, after William Kent donated land to the federal government to protect an old growth redwood forest from being flooded by a private water company. However, the vast majority of

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Mount Tamalpais remained privately held, and in cases of the lands owned by the Marin Water and Power Company and the Lagunitas Water Company they “were patrolled and trespassers were warned or arrested accordingly.” In 1912 the voters approved the creation of the MMWD, which promised to bring into public ownership a large portion of Mount Tamalpais as a source of drinking water and as a public park. William Kent also played a key role in the creation of MMWD and four years later, while serving in Congress was the lead sponsor in the bill that created the National Park Service.

In Leo L. Stanley’s “A History of the Marin Municipal Water District” the author stated “A Mount Tamalpais Public Park was visualized by the planners of the Water District...The slopes of Mt. Tamalpais have long been the joy of the nature lover. Walks from the low-lands to the top of the Mountain and back, or from the top of the Mountain along the Bolinas Ridge to the head of Cataract Gulch, down Cataract to Lagunitas Creek and home have found favor with many who love out-door life... With the development of the Lagunitas Creek water supply the Marin Municipal Water District will assume control of all the property both north and south of Mt. Tamalpais and open...to the people this beautiful county...the whole area can be made into a game refuge where deer and game, birds will live in peace and security. The Mt. Tamalpais Park will then become a natural venter and resemble in miniature the great National Parks of the United States. It will have one advantage in that it will be within two hours ride of the Bay District and can be enjoyed and used by people in all walks of life.”

Leo L. Stanley also stated one of the leading arguments for the passage of the 1915 bond that would allow the MMWD to take over the private water companies is that “The Water District will forever secure Mt. Tamalpais and a tract of 10,700 acres surrounding it as a public park, thereby eliminating the possibility of destroying the scenic value of the mountain which is the county’s greatest asset.”

In 1915 the voters of the MMWD approved a bond measure that provided for the purchase of several

private water companies, their watershed. However the bond money could not be used to operate MMWD’s planned park. So the Board had to look for alternative ways to fund the park. MMWD board minutes from a meeting June 1915 indicated that there was public support for a “policing park fund to be used for protection against forest fires and for proper policing and sanitary control of the properties proposed to be acquired by said District.”

Prior to the Bond election, in the same June 1915 meeting, the MMWD board endorsed the idea of park policing fund that would be funded by public donations with the following language:

“The slopes of Mount Tamalpais furnish an unequalled outdoor park and play-ground, enjoyed by thousands of San Francisco people and by people from the other Bay Cities.”

“In all the world there is no comparable bit of scenery and, climate and wilderness, near a dense center of population.”

“All the lands on the Mountain are in private ownership and at any time the Hikers may be deprived of the choicest of outing opportunities.”

“For years there has been talk of securing a great public Park on Tamalpais. As an asset of incalculable value to the people forever.”

“The time has come for action. The people of Southern Marin County will vote on August 28th at a bond election which will determine whether the **park region** of the Mountain shall be publicly or privately owned.”

“In the formation of a public water district it is essential to take over 10,700 acres of the Mountain....The Water District intends to open the Mountain for Park purposes whenever not inconsistent with the use for water and whenever funds for policing and fire protection are available...”

“It is the intention of the Marin Municipal Water District, should it acquire said properties, to open them for public park purpose under such rules and regulations to be adopted by it as will conserve them as water producing properties and

totally free from contamination and protect them from forest fires...”

In 1916 the MMWD took over the 10,700 acres of Mount Tamalpais, but the watershed lands were still not open for public use. In February 1917, the District approved a plan to employ patrolmen (park rangers) to oversee fire patrol, firefighting and to enforce watershed protection rules and regulations. The patrolmen would be required to wear a uniform and supply their own horses. On February 23rd, 1917, the Board of Directors formally approved regulations for the public use of the watershed. These regulations were also approved by the California State Board of Health, which then issued MMWD a permit to operate. With these actions the Mount Tamalpais Watershed was officially opened to the public as a park. The last paragraph of the 1917 regulations read as follows:

“The co-operation of the public in the strict enforcement of these rules is earnestly requested... You are welcome to enjoy this park if you observe the rules, and the Patrolmen of the District are instructed to use every courtesy to make your outing a pleasure and a success.”

By June of 1917, six patrolmen were on MMWD’s payroll. Also in 1917 the Patrol Fund (formerly the Policing Park Fund) was officially established by Board of Directors “to be used for patrolling to prevent fires, maintain sanitation and preserve wild game.” In 1918 the General Manager was

authorized and empowered to receive and collect money donated from anyone for patrolling the mountain as a public park.

Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service during a 1927 talk in Marin about the then proposed Mount Tamalpais State Park praised MMWD when he stated “...and the Water District people are to be complimented on the manner in which they are handling the adjoining property.” From 1917 until the 1970’s, patrolmen were appointed as special deputy sheriffs and as deputy game wardens. In the mid 1970’s the patrolmen were reclassified as park rangers to allow for peace officer status without having to be deputized by an outside agency.

Today, the MMWD owns nearly 22,000 acres of watershed lands, including 18,590 acres on Mount Tamalpais, that are open to the public. The lands are primarily managed to provide high quality drinking water, protect the natural and cultural resources that it is entrusted with, and provided passive recreation that is compatible with the water quality and resource protection missions. Since 2010 the MMWD has been a fully accredited POST law enforcement agency and part of FIRESCOPE, with the park rangers serving as peace officers, wildland firefighters, EMTs, Search and Rescue Specialists, and park ambassadors. MMWD also employs maintenance works, natural resource specialists, and administrative staff to protect, preserve and manage the Mount Tamalpais Watershed.



MMWD lands highlighted by red boundary, the white portion is the original 10,700 acres protected in 1917



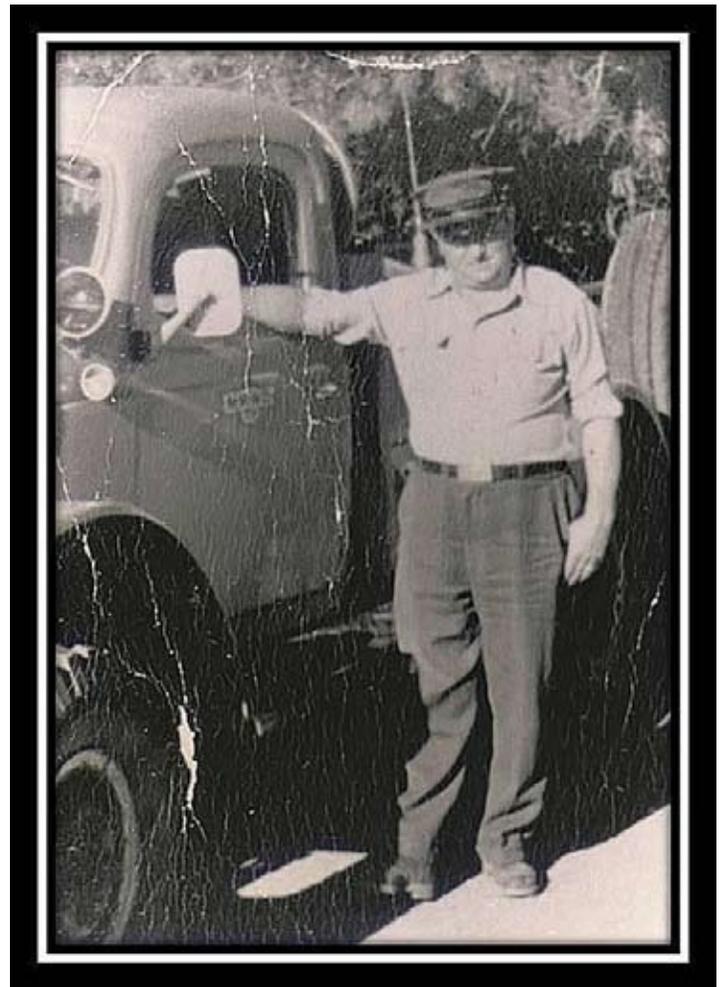
MMWD Patrolman's Badge, the Patrolman job titled was used by MMWD park rangers from 1917 until 1975



The MMWD ranger badge used from 1975 until 2010



The current MMWD park ranger badge in use since 2010



Early MMWD park ranger



Current MMWD park ranger truck

**Park Rangers Association of California
Board Officers 2016**

President

Matt CERKEL
(415) 609-3863
E-Mail: Matt@CalRanger.org

Region 1 Director

Michael WARNER
(415) 473-2816
Cell: (415) 999-2151
E-Mail: Region1@CalRanger.org

Region 2 Director

Pam HELMKE
(408) 794-6517
Cell: (408) 201-2886
E-Mail: Region2@CalRanger.org

Region 3 Director

Shane ROMAIN
(530) 896-7800
Cell: (530) 624-1102
E-Mail: Region3@CalRanger.org

Region 4 Director

Richard WEINER
Cell: (909) 952-1520
E-Mail: Region4@CalRanger.org

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Candi HUBERT
Cell: (714) 357-7861
E-Mail: Region5@CalRanger.org

Region 6 Director

Andy BROWN
(775) 849-2511
E-Mail: Region6@CalRanger.org

Region 7 Rep

Vicente HARRISON
(503) 823-1637
E-Mail: Vicente.Harrison@portlandoregon.gov

Past President

Heather REITER
(408) 794-6517
Cell: (408) 201-2886
E-Mail: PastPresident@CalRanger.org

The Signpost Editor

David Brooks
(831) 336-2948
Fax: (831) 335-1178
E-Mail: Newsletter@CalRanger.org

Executive Manager

Betsy ANDERSON
(707) 884-3949
Fax: (707) 884-1945
E-Mail: office@CalRanger.org

WebMaster

Jeff PRICE
(805) 278-9201
E-Mail: WebMaster@CalRanger.org

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Park Rangers Association of California
P.O. Box 153, STEWARTS POINT, CA 95480

Park Rangers Association of California
P. O. Box 153
STEWARTS POINT, CA 95480-0153

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