



UNDER THE GABLES

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Come to the Fair!

**A New Exhibit at the Jack Mason Museum of West Marin History
August 10 through October 31, 2019**

JACK MASON MUSEUM OF WEST MARIN HISTORY

Inverness Way at Park Avenue, Inverness Phone 415-669-1099 www.jackmasonmuseum.org

THE INVERNESS FAIR THROUGH TIME

by Meg Linden



ONE OF THE FEATURES of the Inverness calendar is the annual Inverness Fair held on a Saturday in August and sponsored by the Inverness Association (IA). However, the history of the fair is long and varied. It was not always in August and it was not always under the sponsorship of the IA. There have been many separate series of fairs. This article will explore all of them.

The first mention of a fair in Inverness comes from 1946 or 1947. Michael Mery remembers attending a fair at Del Bender's "Dream Farm" in one of those years. The only "printed" record of this event is a typewritten note by Jack Mason of an interview with Del Bender in 1967. It says (slightly paraphrased), "The Inverness Improvement Association gave a fair at Dream Farm before Del Bender built there the same year he bought the property. [The Benders bought the property in August 1945 so perhaps the fair was in July or August 1946.] Nan Phillips was one of the leaders of the fair. Sixteen hundred people attended. Thirty-gallon stew pots Del bought at Navy sur-

plus and huge frying pans [were used by] Mrs. Lorene Johnson to cook goulash stew." [All the hamburger supplies of two butchers were bought up to make the stew.]

In 1948 there was an "Old Time Fair" at the Inverness School on August 8 starting at 10:30, sponsored by the Inverness Recreation Council. It featured food items for sale, antiques and gifts, games such as bingo, darts and horseshoes for adults and a fish pond and other treats for the kids. In addition to a midday meal all sorts of food was for sale. One of the articles about this fair refers to the "first" one taking place in 1947, possibly at the Inverness School as well. A later article announced that it had raised \$932.

The 1949 fair was extensively covered in the *Baywood Press* starting with preliminary plans in the July 1st issue. It was also sponsored by the Inverness Recreation Council. Jessie Craig Lovell was chairman. It was detailed in the August 15th issue as seen on the next page:

Inverness Community Fair Sunday, August 28th, 1948, 10:30 TO 6 p.m. Inverness School.

Special features:

10:30 Children's Pet Show – Mrs. Keene O. Haldeman.

2 p.m. Puppet Show – Mrs. Joseph Moore and Mrs. J.C. Gidley.

3-4 Inverness Folk dancers.

3-4:30 Afternoon Tea.

4 p.m. Mystery Clown Couple (prize to guesser).

5 p.m. Drawing of prizes.

5:15 Second Showing of Puppet Show.

Continuous During the Day Barbeque Lunch: Mrs. R.L. Griffith;

Bingo: Phillip & Bruce Crane;

Fish Pond: Mrs. Lloyd Mery and Mrs. Gordon Buck;

Sewing Booth: Mrs. George Ludy;

Hot Dog Stand: Mr. Joe Sciallo;

Cakes, Pies, Cooked Foods: Mrs. Clarence M. Griffith, Mrs. Frank Spicer
and Mrs. Nels Johnson;

Darts: Jeanie Giambastiani;

Donkey Rides: Mr. Robert C. Matthewson;

Hot Corn on the Cob: The de Suvero boys;

Horseshoes: Mr. Donald Joslin;

Soft Drinks, Ice Cream: Mrs. Henry W. Davis, Mrs. Frank Giambastiani
and Mrs. Donald Joslin;

Book Mart: Mrs. David Rogers and Mr. Fletcher Abadie;

Flowers, Fruits, Plants: Inverness Garden Club, Mrs. A.J. Cavalli;

Baby Parking Center: Mrs. Walter L. Matthews;

Golf Game: Ronnie Collier;

Exhibition of work done in Summer Art Classes;

Exhibits by County Health Department, Marin County Red Cross
and Marin County Tuberculosis Association.

Come on Over to Inverness and Enjoy the Fun."



The September 1 issue proclaimed the fair a success with sunshine, many colorful booths, an interesting Pet Show and an exhibit of folk dancing both by West Marin couples and by the wheel-chaired folk dancers" from the Kaiser-Kabat Institute of Vallejo.

The *Baywood Press* did not report any community wide Fair in 1950 – 1952. However, in 1951 the Inverness Recreation Council held a big sale in Inverness of items, including Japanese glass fishing net floats and driftwood ensembles to raise money for their activities. In 1953 there was a community fair sponsored by the Inverness Improvement Association (IIA) and many other community groups including the Inverness Garden Club, the Volunteer Fire Department, the PTA, the Inverness Recreation Council, and St. Columba's. It was held at the Inverness School from 11:00 to 5 on Sunday August 16. The overall chair was Roland T. Lamb. In addition to normal fair activities, games, food, items for sale it included a demonstration of military hardware by the Sixth Army Anti-Aircraft Unit from Fort Barry.

As far as can be determined there was a long gap until the next Inverness Fair. It was held in 1965 at St. Columba's Episcopal Church. The 1965 fair was held Saturday and Sunday, August 14 and 15, with Jack Mason as Chairman. Articles about the Fair started in June 17 *Baywood Press* and built up to a crescendo on August 12 when it was billed "The most beautiful little fair anywhere." August 19 had a wrap-up article. One of the main features was the Tamale Trolley, Jack Mason's converted pick-up truck that had seats in the back and a ladder for folks to climb up into the back. This took up to ten people at a time from the parking area just off Sir Francis Drake up to the main fairgrounds beside the church, and brought them down with their fair purchases. In addition a ramp and full set of stairs was built for those who wanted to walk up or down. The fair featured a large display of local artists' work under the chairmanship of

At left, during the 1949 Fair a group of wheelchair dancers from Kaiser-Kabut Institute in Vallejo performed at Inverness School. Photos by Woody Williams.

At right: Nan Phillips, who was very involved in the early Fairs and the Inverness Recreation Council.

The Inverness Recreation Council was founded in early 1947 to promote and coordinate recreation activities in the Inverness area. The original officers were Martin Glasser, Chairman, Vivian Halse, Vice Chairman, Megan Mery, Treasurer and Nan Phillips, Secretary. (She remained secretary until her death in April 1955.) One of their early projects was to create public tennis courts and to develop a community center. The Inverness Garden Club supported them in this effort as did the Inverness Improvement Association. In 1948 they put on the Old Time Community Fair in Inverness to raise money for their activities. They were concerned about developing recreational facilities in the then newly acquired Julia Hamilton Park. There were several meetings on this subject in 1948 and 1949. They also offered tennis lessons for children, teens and adults [not sure where these lessons took place. The History of the Inverness Tennis Club does not mention use of their courts during this time. They also sponsored the 1949 Inverness Fair and in 1951 they put on a Beachcombers Sale to raise money for their activities which included finger and easel painting, clay modeling and ceramics for children and adults, courses in creative dancing and folk dancing, instruction in swimming, games for boys and girls, field trips and storytelling hours for the youngsters. There were three paid instructors as well as many volunteers involved. In 1952 they held folk dancing classes for children and teens at Frick Hall. In 1953 they participated in the Community Fair providing games for children. It is not clear when they ceased to operate.





View of the 1965 Fair at St. Columba's with Jack Mason's Tomales Trolley. Photo by Abbie Purcell.

Inez Storer. Art-in-action was provided by Helen Winters and Robert Storm. Many children's games were provided and also a pee-wee golf course as well as child care for the youngest children. There was a flea market and an antique shop and the Inverness Garden Club built a plant sale area with a waterfall and a small Japanese style bridge. One of the planning articles for the 1966 fair said that the 1965 fair grossed \$2,500 and that nearly 3,000 people attended (see below).

In 1966 the Fair, August 13 and 14 promised to be more beautiful than ever. Jack Mason was again overall chairman assisted by Anna Bruckman. Many of the features of the 1965 were repeated. New this year was a 250-seat amphitheater which featured the West Marin Youth Fellowship in a talent show on Saturday and a full performance of Haydn's "Creation" by the Inverness Festival Chorus under the direction of Fae McNally. The art exhibition featured a \$25 best in show award and a display of liturgical art arranged by Mrs. Bruckman. A replica of the Brock Schreiber boathouse was built to hold a collection of old photographs of old Inverness. A miniature of the original Inverness store was the backdrop for the

Garden Club's plant sale. Both the rummage sale and the antiques sale were very successful. This fair netted \$1,169.84, according to the accounting Jack Mason filed.

In 1967 a smaller Inverness Fair took place on August 12. The theme was "A Day in Scotland." Al West was chairman and it began at 10 a.m. and ended "when everybody goes home." Many of the same features were repeated from previous years including the art exhibit and the \$25 award for best in show. Reports in the *Point Reyes Light* for August 10 said the first fair had 2,000 guests and the 1966 had more. Again the games were very successful as were the rummage and antique sales, under the direction of Elna Clerico. New this year were pony rides for the kids.

After 1967 St. Columba's energy switched to the Inverness Music Festival, which by then had grown into a multi-day, multi-concert event, and they started the Sea and Land Feast. No other group in the community picked up the torch to organize a community fair. From time to time various organizations held summer fundraising events in Inverness, but they were not a collaboration of the entire community. For example, the



The 1966 Inverness Fair featured a replica of Brock Schreiber's boathouse with history exhibits and historic photographs for sale, and replica of the Martinelli store as the Inverness Garden Club's plant sale booth.

Environmental Action Committee held an Arts and Crafts Fair in Inverness from 1972 to 1977 to raise money for their causes.

In 1983 the Inverness Association was short of money for trail repairs after the disaster of 1982. Maidee Moore approached other Inverness organizations for donations. The Inverness Yacht Club was broke, but various directors donated from their own pockets and suggested that a Fair should be put on to raise the money. Easton Rothwell suggested that they offer their facilities for the fair.

Although there was enthusiasm for this idea there wasn't time to organize a fair in 1983. The Inverness Association (IA) approached other organizations that were willing to participate with an understanding that profits would be shared between the IA and the participating organizations.

The fair took place on July 7, 1984 with an "Eve of the Fair" dance at the Inverness Yacht Club, co-sponsored by the Club and the Inverness Tennis Club. The Boy Scouts served a pancake breakfast and activities for children took place at Martinelli Memorial Park, including games, a petting zoo, cart rides organized by Winona Bucklin, and face painting organized by the Inverness Playgroup. The Inverness Garden Club sold jams and herbs and conducted a huge yard sale. The Volunteer Firemen checked fire extinguishers of those who brought theirs in. St. Columba's church sold sweets and coffee and sponsored a marionette show. Pocket House served barbecued oysters at Pocket [now Plant] Park and showed a movie.

There was a book sale as well as classical and popular music and square dancing and tap dancing exhibitions. Jack Mason opened his museum of Inverness history. This fair netted a little over \$1,000 toward maintenance of the trails and open space under IA auspices. Some groups gave all their profits and others a percentage.

The "second" Inverness Fair was held on July 6, 1985 to raise money for the Inverness Association and other local non-profits. Artwork was displayed and many of the same groups from last year returned to entertain. New performers included Harmony Grisman with songs for children and Michael Hills, folksinger. It included a book sale for Tomales Bay Library Association, a rummage sale for the Inverness Playgroup and a raffle. The Boy Scouts ran the pancake breakfast and the Volunteer Bureau sold hot dogs to raise money for the emergency food pantry. Water Dogs sold tostadas, beer and apple juice, while St. Columba's Church sold desserts and coffee. A dance was held at the Yacht Club on the evening of July 5th with Darrell Parker playing all sorts of dance music. Pocket Park had the local art display and sold oysters and wine. Ad hoc performers provided music. The late Jack Mason's house, in the process of becoming the Inverness Library and the Museum, was open with an exhibit of his archives.

The 1986 fair was labeled the "third." It started with a dance on Friday night June 27 at the Inverness Yacht Club featuring Judge Bob Kroninger's Dixieland band "The Incognitos." The Saturday activities were spread over the Green:

Scenes from the Inverness Fair 1965-67



pancake breakfast by the Boy Scouts, tostadas to benefit the Waterdogs swimming scholarships, and hot dogs to help the Volunteer Center stock the emergency food pantry. Desserts and coffee were sold by St. Columba's. A number of entertainment acts also occurred. At Pocket Park there were oysters and wine, recorder music, an art exhibit, antique cars and horseshoe pitching. The Inverness Playgroup had a rummage sale. Books and popcorn were sold by Tomales Bay Library Association and the Garden Club had two booths and its scholarship fund sold garden produce and Tomales Bay notepaper. The Fire Department refilled fire extinguishers and sold new ones. In 1987 a flea market in Martinelli Park was added. Any Inverness household could rent a card table space or two. Most of the customary activities were repeated. Lin Lamme was the coordinator.

The 1987 fair contained much that was the same and some that was new. The Eve of the Fair dance was on July 17 and the Fair on July 18. The youths were challenged in advance to make posters with the Inverness Public Utility District and volunteer fire fighters offering cash prizes for best posters on fire safety and prevention or on water conservation. It was a lovely day and the donations from

the various participating organizations (some gave all they made on the day and some a percentage) netted \$852.28 for the trail maintenance account. The Fair Committee voted to do it again and set a date of July 16, 1988 with Dorothy Nason White in charge of a committee that included a member from each group taking part in the fair. One change in this fair was that the "Eve of the Fair" dance at the Yacht Club took place a whole week early.

The Bagpiper headed their article about the fair "Marionettes, music, marathon and mirth are on the agenda for ... the fair." It also mentioned "a clown, singers, swingers, pipers and prizes." An admission charge of \$1.00 for everyone 16 and older was requested because of the rising cost of putting on the fair. The Fair was held on July 15th (again the dance was a week earlier) and the admission charge included a detailed map of Inverness. The same organizations provided food, items for sale artwork, music and fun.

The July 1989 issue of the Bagpiper says, "The Inverness Fair has very plainly become an annual tradition. It not only provides a financial boost for the Trails Committee, but is a cohesive activity for the community." It remains so to this day, thirty-five years later.

Come to the Fair! The 2019 Inverness Fair will take place on the Firehouse Green in Inverness on Saturday, August 10, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., with a pancake breakfast set for 8 a.m. The Fair, produced by the Inverness Association, is a free community celebration with music, food, drinks, cake raffles, interactive activities, and legendary book and plant sales all benefitting local non-profits.

It starts with a pancake breakfast prepared and organized by the teens of the Tomales Bay Youth Center at 8 a.m. The Fair formally opens at 10 a.m. The entertainment lineup includes a scene from the local Shakespeare summer performance of *As You Like It*, fiddle playing by Just Us and on-the-spot poems written by Silvi Alvicar.

There will be three cake raffles with the best of the local baker's cakes and pies as prizes, a postcard booth with local vintage postcards, a photo booth, button-making, and the Inverness passport game and raffle. Fair organizer Mike Parkinson has produced a passport just for the Fair that participants can travel around with, collecting passport stamps from all the presenters. Holders of full passports will be entered in a raffle.

The food, always a highlight, includes tostadas benefitting the Waterdogs swim program, hot dogs from the Inverness Yacht Club, local oysters by Saltwater, ice cream, pie and sweets by West Marin Senior Services & CLAM. Beer, wine, lemonade, and hot cocoa are also to be found among the various booths.

The Inverness Garden Club holds a vast rummage sale along with their hugely popular plant sale, and the book lovers of Inverness produce a used book sale that captures a large audience and moves hundreds of books out into the world.





Scenes from the
Inverness Fair
1965-67

