

### “SHEET DAY” - SAVING OLD ST. HILARY’S OPEN SPACE

By Dave Gotz

Not long after the Landmarks Society had purchased Old St. Hilary’s, the two acres below were zoned for development. Eminent botanist John Thomas Howell urged Landmarks to preserve the land and protect the many rare plants and wildflowers growing there. With the help of Marin County the land was purchased as open space and named for Howell. In 1968 the 1.5 acre lot above Old St. Hilary’s (OSH) was slated for an apartment building. Again Landmarks worked with local, state and national governments to purchase the land. That rocky serpentine area was named the Caroline S. Livermore Vista Point in honor of perhaps the most important conservationist in Marin County history.

Twenty years passed without any major threats to the land around OSH particularly the vast native open space adjacent to the northwest. However it was inevitable that development pressure would impact the last large area of open space on the peninsula. In March of 1988, Landmarks founder Beverly Bastian, the powerhouse behind our preservation successes for three decades, sent out a “Demonstration of Determination” letter describing a grand gesture to bring attention to this land that needed protection. She invited all the citizens of Belvedere and Tiburon to “form a human fence across the 117 acres during the noon hour on Sunday, April 10.” Participants were asked to come and stand side-by-side on the unpaved section of Vistazo West which winds across the open space and “bring white sheeting to create an amateur Christorunning-fence for visual impact.”

On the appointed day 500-700 people were in place by 12:30, white sheets gleaming in the sun as the words and the tune of “America the Beautiful” rippled down the linear gathering. The demonstration was very successful at raising community awareness; however the work to purchase this huge area had just begun. Over the next nine years, several organizations and dozens of individuals joined together as the “Last Chance Committee to Save Old St. Hilary’s Open Space.”

In 1993 there was a special voting district ballot measure which approved a tax for acquisition of several large properties. Marin County Board of Supervisors approved \$17.9 million to acquire the 117 acres in 1995, and finally, by a slim margin, two-thirds of the voters approved a \$98 parcel tax to secure the purchase of the property in June 1997.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of our fellow citizens and the generosity of the thousands of property owners who still pay the yearly parcel tax on the 30 year bond, a spectacular piece of land in the center of our community has been preserved for all who live here and those who visit from around the world.

*Help Landmarks Society preserve our local history and keep it accessible for the community and visitors. To become a member, or volunteer, visit our website at [www.landmarkssociety.org](http://www.landmarkssociety.org) or call 415-435-1853. “The Tradition Starts With You!”*



1. Local residents crowd along the old Vistazo West with their sheets unfurled to produce the intended Christo-like running fence (Ed Vasso photo)
2. Above Old St. Hilary’s “Open Space” is declared; nine years later it became a reality (Valarie Johnson photo)



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