

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

Kilkare Woods, Sunol

Sunol's Main Street and Foothill Road both intersect with Kilkare Road just to the east of the railroad station. This road to the north was the site of many major Sunol buildings in early days. The two-story Hazel Glen Hotel with its welcoming balcony was on the northeast corner of Foothill and Kilkare. It burned down in 1916.

Phoebe Apperson's brother bought a large Victorian home on the west side at 86 Kilkare Road. A short way farther, the Little Brown Church has been at 141 Kilkare since 1885. The 17-room Ellis home, its exterior designed with sandstone cut from a nearby quarry in Niles Canyon, was designed by architect Julius Weilbye in the 1890s. Now part of the Elliston Vineyard, it is at 367 Kilkare. The home of local rancher and major land owner of the area, Thomas F. Batchelder, was on the west side of the road across from his remaining barn at 1011 Kilkare. His house burned, but the barn, built of stone in 1888, survived the fire.

Thomas Batchelder built the beginnings of Kilkare Road—it was the road to his ranch. Originally it was called Batchelder Road. The creek that runs alongside was Batchelder Creek. Later, the road was renamed Hazel Glen Avenue. According to *A Place Called Sunol* by Connie and Allen DeGrange, in 1925 the old ranch road through the narrow canyon was improved by Charles Henry Crocker and his wife, Carlotta. Charles was the grandson of Charles Crocker of railroad fame; his father, Henry Smith Crocker, owned a flourishing printing and stationery company with ties to the Bay Area. One of its main sources of revenue was the printing of railroad tickets. By 1915 Charles was the president of the publishing company, and vice-president of the American National Bank and the Italian-

American Bank of San Francisco. He was also president of the H.S. Crocker Realty Company. He and Carlotta bought property along the creek, now named Sinbad Creek, and planned a development called Kilkare Woods at the northern end of the canyon. The road leading to the new homes was renamed Kilkare Road.

Victoria Christian in her book, *Sunol*, wrote that Crocker bought the land for Kilkare Woods in May 1926 and subdivided the area a year later. He built 101 rustic summer cabins that were rented to wealthy patrons who came by train, mainly from San Francisco. According to Christian, the original blue prints show a pool, playground, ball field, and clubhouse for the community. An article in the *Pleasanton Times* on 30 August 1929 said that the Kilkare Woods tract offered a quiet and secluded weekend respite with a concrete swimming pool, two clubhouses for dancing and entertainment, a large playground, hiking trails, and a game sanctuary. Each cabin, built in a half-log style, originally had a large main room, one or two bedrooms, a bathroom, wood casement windows, and French doors opening to decks that overlooked Sinbad Creek. By 1940 most of the cabins were occupied year-round by owners, and the newly organized homeowners association purchased the remaining lots in 1943.

Last Thursday, my husband and I rode the approximately 3½ mile Kilkare Road to its dead end and back. We were in our convertible Mazda Miata; with the top down, we could hear the bluejays complaining about our progress. The beautiful fall day was perfect for our journey. On either side of the narrow road are steep tree-covered slopes. The road follows the course of Sinbad Creek, winding back and forth. Many of the trees in the riparian area are large: sycamores with their

mottled bark, bay trees, live oaks, and big-leaf maples with their foliage starting to turn bright yellow. Some of them lean across the rocky creek, dry in this season. The cabins have been cleverly conserved; one of them is completely encased inside another building. In the quiet sylvan setting, the smell of autumn was in the air.

Pat Stillman, who has lived here since 1971 with her family, said, "I don't know why anyone here would go on a vacation—we live in a park. Kilkare Woods is now surrounded by East Bay Regional Park land. We wake up to the sound of birds. It is an enchanting place." Irv and Diane Tiessen live at cabin #77, called Tanglewood. "What this place gives us is a park-like setting in a large metropolitan area," said Irv. "People that live here need to be fairly skilled in basic maintenance. Only a few cabins look the same as when they were built." Al Ducharme lived in Hayward and his barber kept telling him about this beautiful place near Sunol, but Al couldn't find it. Finally, his barber drove him to Kilkare Woods, and Al said, "I was absolutely awestruck." He bought cabin #6 in 1958 and, as a preservation measure, erected a canopy over it.

The Kilkare Woods Homeowners Association was formally organized in 1955 with officers and rules for the area. At first water for the homes came from local wells and springs, but with the change from summer to year-round occupancy, water became scarce and had to be trucked in. Residents in 1964 passed a bond to bring Zone 7 water over the ridge from Pleasanton.

Even if you do not have a convertible, I highly recommend a drive on the little road and lunch at the Railroad Café.

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