

OLD ST. HILARY'S – NOW A NATIONAL LANDMARK

By Dave Gotz

For more than 60 years, the little mission church of St. Hilary's above the town of Tiburon was an active and busy place, hosting services and weddings, christenings, events, meetings, card parties, and children's programs. But on Christmas Eve 1953, the picturesque white chapel stood dark and vacant as the first services were held at newly-constructed St. Hilary's Church off Tiburon Boulevard that night. Its fate now uncertain, "old" St. Hilary's was sometimes used for parish meetings and in 1964 as an overflow classroom for Tiburon School, but without care and attention the building was fast deteriorating. Soon word got out that it would be sold.

In 1959, concern for the beloved historic building prompted a group of local residents to form the Belvedere-Tiburon Landmarks Society, a non-profit whose purpose was the "acquisition and preservation of structures and property of historical significance." An anonymous donation of \$10,000 from a local family enabled the Society to purchase Old St. Hilary's and dedicate it as a local historical monument on October 30, 1960. The Society then started raising money to restore the little chapel with art shows, afternoon teas, parties, walking tours, and books about local history while using Old St. Hilary's as the headquarters for Landmarks and a home for its growing collection of historic photos, documents and ephemera from Belvedere and Tiburon.

Landmarks archives collection has grown significantly since then, and few years back, we discovered a draft nomination for Old St. Hilary's to the National Register of Historic Places from the 1990s that had never been finished. With the help of Archives volunteer Susan

Cluff, we decided to get the nomination ready for submittal – a process that has grown considerably in complexity since then. We then spent the next five months researching and rewriting the nomination which has to fit precisely into a specific format to show how the 1888 mission church building met the national criterion of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with a particular place and time in our history.

With generous assistance from the staff of the California Office of Historic Preservation (the nomination must first be approved by the State and then sent to Washington for approval by the "Keeper of the National Register") the nomination was submitted in September 2019. In February 2020, St. Hilary's Mission Church (that is the historic name) was placed on the National Register, one of only 52 to be recognized in Marin County and the fourth in Tiburon.

Just as we were preparing to have a celebration of this new honor the pandemic hit the world. We now invite you to come celebrate with us on September 12 at 2 p.m., further information will be on the Landmarks website.

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 or call 415-435-1853.
"The Tradition Starts With You!"



1. Photo by Bob Hemstock 2. St. Hilary's Mission Church circa 1890 – the oldest known photo
3. Sunday services at St. Hilary's in 1951



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