



## **The Brief, Troubled History of the Hotel Bon-Air**

By Scott Fletcher

Marin History Museum Volunteer

The large, elegant Hotel Bon-Air, constructed in 1901, never quite lived up to its owner's hopes and expectations. Margaret and John Manlove built the hotel in late 1901 and opened for business the following spring. Advertised as a "large, summer boarding house", the Bon-Air also had several cottages, cabins and tents on the property for guests who preferred a more rustic vacation experience.

The land on which the hotel sat is the present-day site of MarinHealth Medical Center in Greenbrae. At that time, the area was known as Escalle, deriving its name from the popular resort, vineyard and train station named after its owner, Jean Escalle, just across Corte Madera Creek near Larkspur.

The first few years were the most successful for the Bon-Air as newspapers reported the hotel catering to "fashionable guests" and hosting benefits for local charities where dining, dancing and vaudeville performances were on the bill of fare. The Manloves paid to have a road built across the marshland from Escalle and constructed a drawbridge over Corte Madera Creek, both of which eased transportation to and from their establishment. The hotel also took part in the 1906 "illuminated water carnival" when thousands came to see boats parade up the creek, fully lit with Japanese lanterns. The Escalle vineyard, nearby homes and all the arks along the creek were similarly illuminated and visitors ended the evening festivities with dining and dancing at the hotel.

In 1908 Margaret became the proprietor of a new hotel in San Francisco, The Cadillac, on the corner of Eddy & Leavenworth. With her energies now split between the two, she began looking for others to lease the Marin hotel. By 1912 the Bon-Air had been managed by several other hoteliers when the partnership of Alfred Kreough and John Webster took out a 10-year lease. Within weeks the two were literally at each other's throats, with Kreough

swearing out a warrant of assault on his partner and the papers reporting that the frequent friction between the two, “necessarily injures the popularity of the resort.”

Before their partnership dissolved, the recently constructed salt-water pool leaked and had to be drained and re-cemented. The following year, as 200 opening night guests were being seated for dinner, Marin County Deputy Sheriff, Oscar Emerald and “his posse” raided the hotel and carried away most of the movable furniture, including the bar, enforcing a court order for non-payment of a \$2,000 debt. Soon after, the hotel had its liquor license revoked for serving minors during a July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration.

In 1914, The Bank and Trust Company of Tomales having already foreclosed on the property sold off the furniture and the hotel closed permanently. The bank sold the property in 1918 to Archbishop Hanna of the Catholic diocese for \$20,000 whose 700-acre property abutted the land. There were caretakers living on the land when the hotel caught fire and burned to the ground in the early 1920s.

*(January 24, 2022)*