

pictorial Living

Point Richmond: the
Near Side of Paradise on
the Far Side of the Bay

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To writer James Spohn in his home, a onetime radio station on Nicholl Nob, the Standard Oil refinery at night looks "like a city and the pipes give off the glow of Greek torches"

A Remarkable Oasis
on the East Side of the Bay

Point Richmond

Only a handful of people who drive across the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge turn into the quiet streets of Point Richmond which have been truncated by the bridge approach. When the early exploratory parties in 1772 and the settlers in the 1830's and 1840's crossed the Bay to the point, it was an island. At high tide the Bay waters would creep across the mud flats behind the low coastal hills and isolate them from the mainland.

Today, although Point Richmond is the western peninsula of the city of Richmond in Contra Costa County and is joined solidly by land and highways to the city, it is still figuratively an island. And the approximately 3,000 people who live there want to keep it that way. Surrounded by a large sprawling industrial area, the Point Richmond community has preserved a unique, almost Mediterranean charm and personality.

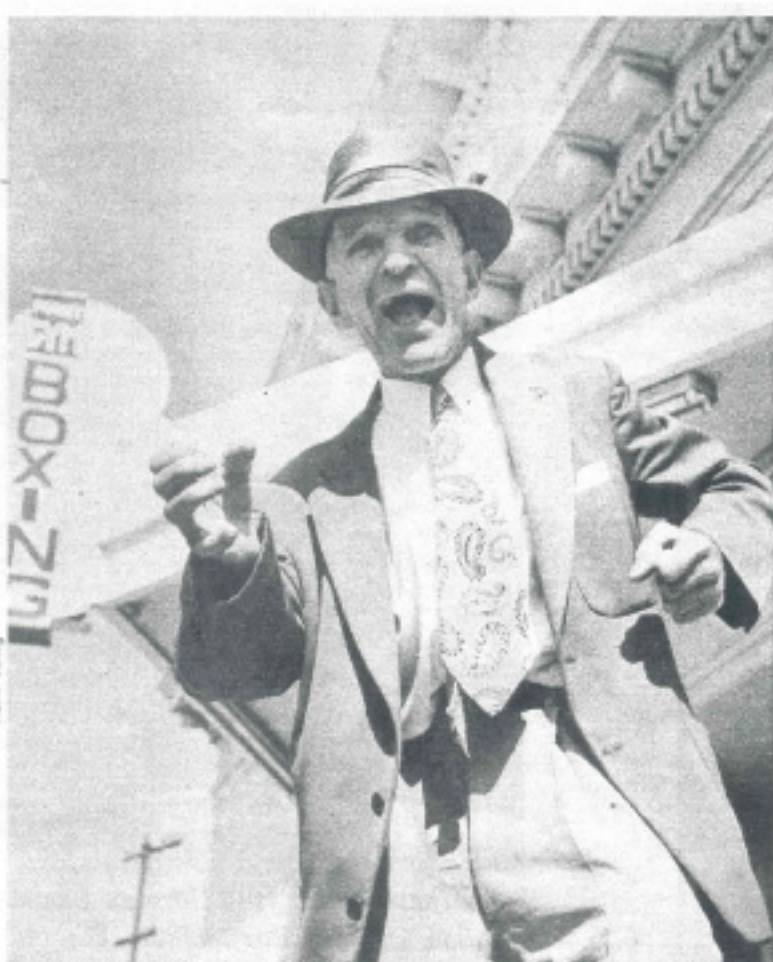
A low range of hills running north and south whose highest elevation is 400 feet forms the backbone of the Point dividing the area into an eastern and western slope. The city of Richmond began at Point Richmond when the Santa Fe Railway Company and Standard Oil Company of California moved into the section just after 1900. Their employees built homes in the shelter of the hills on the eastern slope on land that up until then had been used for cattle grazing and wheat growing.

"This used to be a good town in the 1900's," remarked Frankie "The Kid" Neil who was world bantamweight champ in 1903 and moved to the Point in 1910. "There was everything here the sporting people liked," he added, looking sadly at the closed doors of the Point's old steam beer place.

Later settlers of the Point in search of cheap land climbed the hill to the western slope. A few Italian families built homes on the Bay side and set up grape arbors in their back yards. "Some of the families still make their own wine," remarked Betty Pearson who grew up on the Point. "Today, they buy their grapes but you can always tell when they are pressing them by the fruit flies."

Before the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge was completed in 1956, ferries plied between the Point and San Quentin Point.

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There were only a few houses up on the hill when Frankie "The Kid" Neil came to the Point some 50 years ago. Neil, bantamweight champ in 1903, remembers the town's early days when "there was everything here the sporting people liked"

Point Richmond—continued

"When we started the ferry, it docked at the wharf near the quarry," said Captain Raymond Clarke who began the ferry system in 1915 and was a captain for 35 years before he retired to an attractive pink house on the Point.

In the last 15 years people have recognized the beauty of the Bay side of Point Richmond with its view of Angel Island, Tiburon and through Raccoon Straits to the Golden Gate Bridge, and have built low modern homes on the western slope that are a contrast to the gabled, pre-earthquake settlement around the business district. Educators, writers, artists, architects and businessmen have moved into the section:

Since the zoning regulations have been in effect, land on both sides of Point Richmond has become scarce. Even 10 years ago a 50-foot, steep, waterfront lot sold for \$100 a foot. Today, there is only one small waterfront lot that would go for about \$12,500 but the owner doesn't want to sell. When houses do get up for sale, the news is passed by word of mouth. Prices for homes with a Bay view can range from \$12,000 for older ones to over \$75,000. One large three bedroom home recently sold for \$26,000.

On the eastern slope of the community, real estate is just as tight although many of the older houses sell for lower prices. However, even an old house that might sell for \$9,000 elsewhere would sell for at least \$12,000 at the Point.

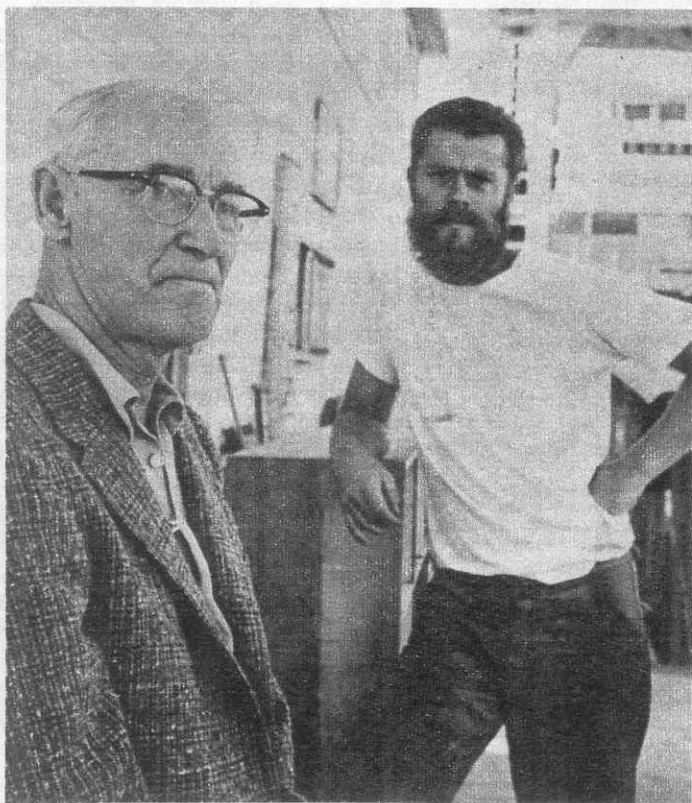
"Most of the undeveloped land on Point Richmond is owned by the Santa Fe Railway Company, Standard Oil Company of California and three private landowners—Alfred Alvarez, Milton Meyers and Adolph Tiscornia—and none of them will sell," explained Thomas W. Tedrick who is chairman of the Point Richmond Planning Committee. Although the Point is under the city government of Richmond, the community felt it needed its own protective organization, and in 1951, the Point Richmond Planning Committee was established to "fight the occasional abuses of the charm of the Point."

"We united first when they wanted to put a fish reduction plant in Cozy Cove," said Tedrick. "Then it was a water tank

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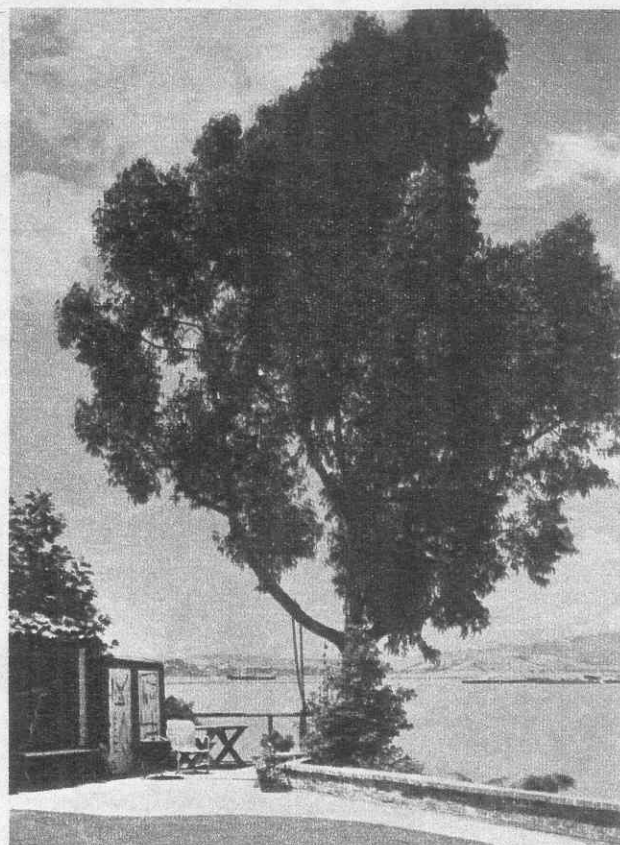
"These places never get into the ads. They go by word of mouth," says Richmond-born Betty Pearson, above, with daughters and husband Frank. Frank Pearson who works "over the hill at Standard Oil" is a sparetime inventor with a disposable mousetrap among his credits





Tom King

Captain Raymond Clarke (left) started Richmond-San Quentin Point ferry service in 1915. Barry Beyer (right) is caretaker on old ferry boat Van Damme



John Atkinson

From their garden, the Norman Lambles can see San Quentin Point where the old ferry line from Richmond ran



Tom King

Bagpipe-playing dentist Dr. Rodney Pain treasures the Point's privacy. "Here I can pull my fences around me and my family"

in the middle of one of our scenic hills. We pushed for the development of the Triangle." The Triangle, located in the heart of the Point Richmond shopping area which includes a hotel, several markets, a barber shop, bookstore and art shop, and clothing store among other buildings, has just been re-purchased by the city which plans to put a firehouse, recreation center, library and park there.

Although the two residential sections of Point Richmond are visually different, they are united in their love of their community and their desire to preserve its charm. "There's no conflict between the two sides of the hill," said Ted Hein who after his working hours at California Research Laboratory has been tallying up the results of a survey of Point residents that the Planning Committee sponsored in connection with the development of the Triangle. "The Point is a combination of heterogeneous people who have a great deal of respect for personal privacy. As a former New Yorker, I was led to believe no such thing as privacy was possible in a small community but that is not true here."

Point Richmond has two centers for its activities. On the eastern slope there is a large swimming pool at the Richmond Plunge; tennis courts; a gymnasium where dancing classes are held during the day and fights on weekends; an active little theater and book and art shops where many of the teen-agers gather. On weekends people head for the beach at Cozy Cove and swim, sun or paddle their kayaks around the Bay waters.

Many of the Point residents work for nearby Standard Oil Company of California, but still enjoy a private snicker when oil company workmen have had to literally scrub the beach at Cozy Cove after spillage from one of the company's tankers.

Most of the residents feel about the industries the way Dr. Rodney Pain does. "They're good neighbors. They don't bother any one but I wouldn't trust them to stay that way. That's why we have the Planning Committee."

STORY BY HELEN HEITKAMP