

El Cerrito and Richmond both tried in the 1920's to add the area known as the "Richmond Annex" to their City. The City of Richmond eventually prevailed in 1927. This article comes from the "New Vistas" section of the West County Times that was published on March 28, 1970. The dates in the article have not been verified but there is no reason to believe they are incorrect. The associated map comes from a 1953 Thomas Brothers map book.

~~came to a vote and was carried, but just barely — 181 yes, 158 no.~~

~~It was the signal to start another fight that can only be labeled "The Battle of Richmond Annex."~~

Battle of the Annex

The City of Richmond was annoyed because the new City of El Cerrito had somewhat surreptitiously sneaked in and grabbed off two-thirds of that hillside district known as Mira Vista as an uninhabited area. Richmond leaders were determined that "the annex" would not be allowed to stand until it fell into El Cerrito's lap like a ripe plum.

The proposal to include Richmond Annex within Richmond's boundaries was pushed to a vote in December, 1925, and turned down, 152 to 78. El Cerrito promptly came out fighting, pressed for a vote to get The Annex into their city and, in August, 1926, was also turned down, 136 to 107.

Richmond's Turn

It was Richmond's turn and this time the people who set up the proposed boundaries did a classical job of gerrymandering. They simply found out who was opposed to annexation to Richmond and drew a line around them. This time the proposal carried, 92 to 88, and El Cerrito was forever cut off from having some bay frontage.

In their gerrymandering effort the Richmonders even excluded a couple of areas that were left surrounded like bubbles. They were known as Bayview No. 1 and Bayview No. 2.

Bayview No. 1, which was commonly referred to as "No Man's Land," ultimately asked for and was granted annexation to El Cerrito because of policing problems, but Bayview No. 2 remains unincorporated, completely surrounded by the City of Richmond in the Richmond Annex district.

Weird and Wonderful

The annexation of Richmond Annex to Richmond also set up another oddity. The city line runs right along the western edge of San Pablo avenue. To this day there are people who live or do business in Richmond but who are in El Cerrito the second they step out their front doors.

Because of this extraordinary arrangement the western quarter of San Pablo avenue remained unpaved for many years. The state paved the center of the street because it was

part of the state highway system, and El Cerrito paved the eastern quarter. But Richmond insisted, and the contention was upheld by the courts, that property in one city couldn't be taxed to pave a street in a different city. The state finally settled the dispute by paving the entire street.

Still Feuding

The annexation argument continued right down to the modern era and it was only a few years ago that a lot of El Cerritans were noticeably displeased when Richmond pulled a quickie and grabbed off all of Wildcat Canyon, over the hill to the east of El Cerrito, thus putting an end to any further hopes that city might have of expansion.

Following incorporation El Cerrito went through a turbulent period, rife with paying payoff scandals and vice charges. San Pablo avenue was lined with bars and nightclubs and gambling, including slot machines and bingo parlors, operated openly.

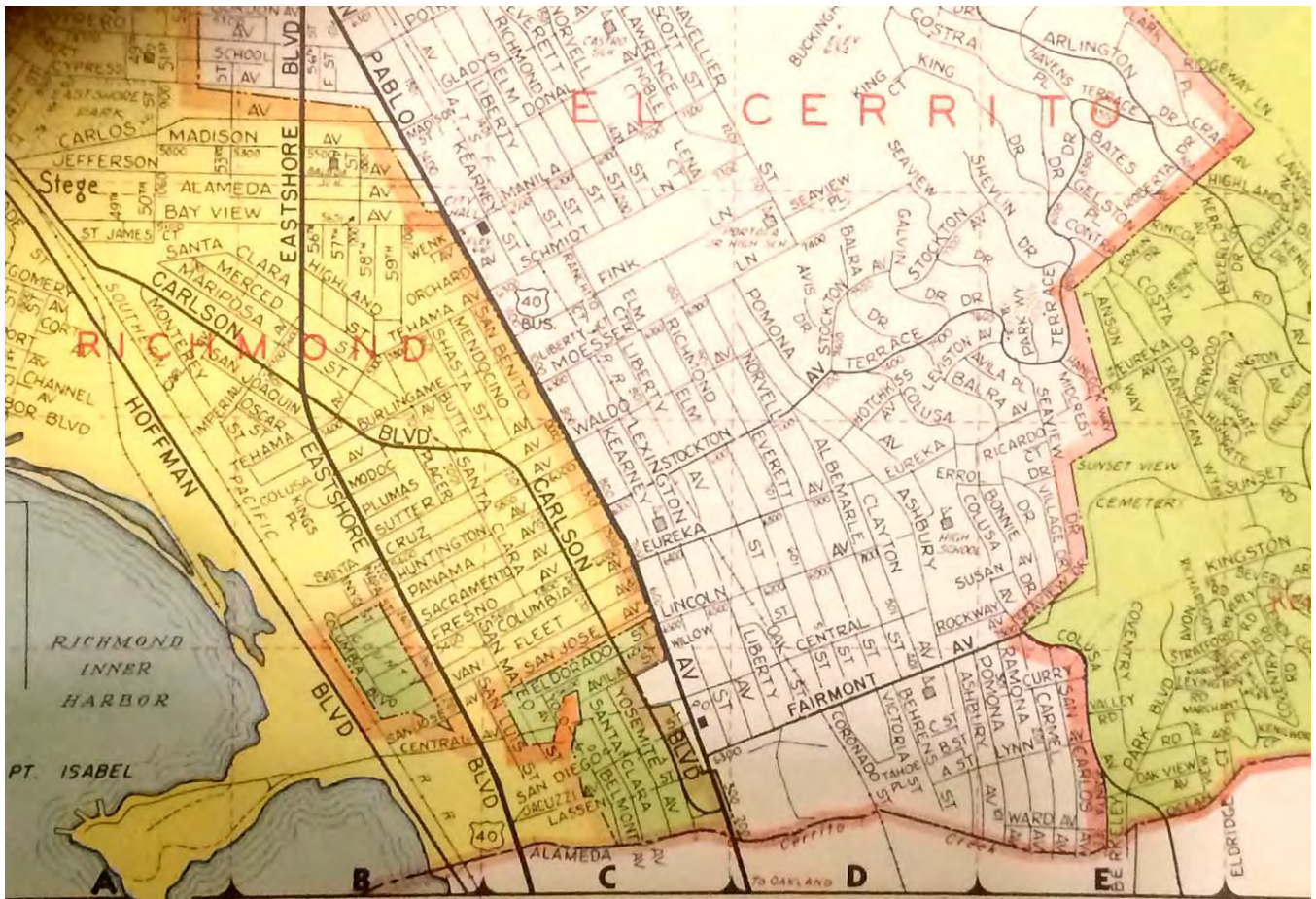
The proud and historic old Rancho San Pablo hacienda became a gambling casino featuring dice tables and roulette and catered to the party-gowned and tuxedoed set. Behind the hacienda — in "the orchard" — they built a greyhound racetrack.

For many years the "highway barnacles," as the bistros along the avenue were sometimes referred to, controlled the city's politics, but little by little, as more and more homes were built on the hillsides, the balance of power changed. These people who truly wanted a community that would live up to El Cerrito's slogan — "A City of Homes" — frowned on the avenue night life. Ultimately they were able to get administrators into office who closed the gambling establishments and turned San Pablo avenue into a respectable street.

The annexation battle is over, probably because there is very little land left to annex, with the possible exception of East Richmond Heights where the people have so far made it clear they don't want to be a part of any city.

There is quite an element throughout the western end of Contra Costa County who believe everything from the county line, up to and including Pinole, should be included in one eyebrow at such a proposal. Maybe they are most interested in preserving their "little hill" name that has existed for nigh onto 200 years — "El Cerrito."

Nov 19 1927



The larger green area in the lower left is “Bayview 1” and the smaller green area in the lower left is “Bayview 2.”