

Supplement to my Early History of Richmond

In my early history of this community, I did not go into details of the various subjects mentioned therein, as I was merely writing a few facts that I thought would be of interest to a hiking club being formed by Miss Maude Wood of the Richmond Public Library staff. The intent was to acquaint the members with the conditions that existed in earlier days.

To Iona M. Booth of the Contra Costa County Development Association and Miss Maude Wood of the Richmond Public Library must go the credit for its publicity.

Miss Wood's wish for information on conditions as they then existed and Mrs. Booth's desire for historical data that could be used in the Contra Costa County exhibit at the Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island were the real impetus that prompted the effort, and a suggestion from Dr. C. L. Abbott, taken in connection with kind advice from Mrs. Booth, has made me attempt a supplement.

Since the publication of my history of the early days of Richmond, I received, through the courtesy of Mrs. Booth, a copy of Annie Loucks' history of Pacheco. While I was not acquainted with the early history of Pacheco, the mention of various names brings to my mind recollections that have afforded me much pleasure.

I was acquainted with Colonel W. W. Gift, as he frequently visited my father. His daughter, Mrs. I. E. Marshall, was a resident of Richmond in the early 1900's. I. E. Marshall was tax collector of Richmond for years.

I never met James Curry although I was well acquainted with his four sons and two brothers, one of whom, R. H. Curry, is living here now.

I note with pleasure the mention of the I. O. O. F. Lodge, as it was my privilege to be their District Deputy Grand Master for the 1912 and 1913 term.

I take this opportunity to answer some questions that have been asked me since my first history was published.

The Castro Grant made by the Mexican government to Francisco Castro extended from San Pablo Bay to what is now the Contra Costa County line. Dr. Tewksbury at one time had a scheme (later abandoned) to extend it to include what is now Albany, which proved to be a part of the Peralta Grant.

This attempted annexation was not generally known, but it is a fact nevertheless as the doctor discussed the plan with my father, who always remained in the doctor's confidence.

Some information on adobes seems to be wanted. There were, or are, now remains of some of the old mansions of the past, namely, Victor Castro's home at the county line, Ramon Castro's home near Wild Cat Creek, and Antonio Castro's home on the south side of Wild Cat Creek, known as the Proviso home, ex-Governor Alvarado's in San Pablo and the Guterrez home. There were also two adobes belonging to the Castro heirs whose given names I cannot remember. These were located, one west of San Pablo on the north bank of Wild Cat Creek, the other north of the San Pablo Depot.

There were fireplaces in all these adobes but some curiosity exists about a unique fireplace which heated the entire house in one of these adobes which I am informed is still in existence.

This fireplace may be in the adobe just west of San Pablo, but I think it is more likely to be in the Guterrez adobe located at the confluence of the Wild Cat Creek and San Pablo Creek. My reason for thinking this is the fact is that Guterrez, a native of Wah Chow, China, but of Spanish origin, a more traveled and experienced man than the Castros, was of a very observing nature and such unusual things were more apt to appeal to him. He also had more opportunities of informing himself on such matters. Guterrez married one of the Castro heirs. [Editor's Note: Candido Guterrez married Jovita Castro. She was a daughter of Victor Castro.]

Questions have been asked about schools in this vicinity prior to 1872. Visualize, if you can, the sparsely settled area adjacent to San Pablo Avenue between San Pablo and what is now Oakland, with one school between 7th and Market Streets, Oakland, and San Pablo. It was a one-room school, with one teacher, on the site of the present Franklin School at what is now Delaware Street and San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley. In San Pablo there was a three-room school.

In those days there was no Berkeley. There was a road, now Delaware Street, that led from San Pablo Avenue to Jacob's Landing. This wharf was also used by Sam Heyward's lumberyard.

I recall the erection of one of the first units of the University of California in the spring of 1872, after which this vicinity took on a substantial growth and was christened Berkeley.

I wish to correct an erroneous impression regarding the site of this city and the channel between the main land and the Potrero. [Editor's Note: When Mr. Griffins speaks about the Potrero, he is referring to the area around the short range of hills that runs north and south through the Pt. Richmond area, plus the adjacent land.]

Some of the later arrivals have told me about rowing boats on what is now Macdonald Avenue. Such assertions have no foundation. In fact they are the result of factional jealousy. As I am several years older than my informers, I must say that I have no recollection of such a condition.

The channel between the main land and the Potrero was no doubt at one time a sizable waterway. I have been reliably informed that boats capable of crossing the Pacific Ocean could easily navigate it; even as a young man I assisted in loading a schooner that ran regularly to the Ellis Landing and that afterwards was used for seal hunting in the Arctic Regions.

While my history was being mimeographed, an article appeared in the Richmond Independent which attracted the notice of a friend of mine, who suggested that I mention that John Nystrom had sailed boats through this channel. I cannot comply with this request as Nystrom did not perform such a feat. The channel has ceased to be a through waterway eleven years before he came to the United States. My records indicate that the last boat passed through in 1862.

The early settlers did not appreciate the value of the Potrero and its adjacent territory, such as Ellis Landing and North Richmond, in that it would some day be a terminal for transcontinental railroads, a harbor for ocean going ships and one of the greatest shipping ports of the state.

The Potrero should not have been a part of the San Pablo Rancho, but owing to Dr. Tewksbury's desire to increase the acreage of the rancho it was finally added.

Dr. Tewksbury succeeded in this transformation by constructing two dikes, one starting near the mouth of the San Pablo Creek and ending at a point on the Potrero at the then abandoned French Colony, the other starting at Ellis Landing and ending at the point where the road goes over the hill to the brickyard.

The latter one proved detrimental as it threatened the usefulness of the channel from Ellis Landing to deep water.

Had this channel remained open, with a little dredging and a bridge connecting the Potrero with the mainland, it would have been worth millions of dollars in the development of Richmond's Inner harbor as the water rushing through it was instrumental in keeping this channel open.

The Ellis Landing was a going proposition before my time, but I recall with pleasure my associations with this family. Captain Ellis was a very thrifty man with a very hospitable wife who was generous to a fault. They had a family of one girl and three boys. The daughter Selina still survives. The Ellis home was located on the north end of what is now the municipal warehouse.

Captain Ellis acquired a large acreage of tide and overflowed land, a part of which is now occupied by the Richmond inner harbor, the Ford Plant and Felice and Perrelli Canning Company.

The Shell Mound was a part of these holdings located at 14th Street and Hall Avenue. Captain Ellis used a part of this mound for making roads and building sites for his dwelling house and warehouses. What was left, erosion finally obliterated, as well as changing the shoreline inland at least one thousand feet since I first remember it.

In 1877 Brooks Island seemed to attract the attention of the railroad people. In fact it was generally understood that the Central Pacific Railroad Company had purchased it with a view to making it a freight terminal or warehouse site.

During the next three years the manufacture of explosives became a very important industry along the bay shore.

There was an acid plant on Fleming's Point, the Judson Powder Company at Point Isabel, California Cap Company, a black powder, a Eureka Powder Company at Stege, Giant Powder Company at Giant, and the Hercules Powder Company, Hercules.

Sullivan, Lyle, Hagen and Davis lived near the Wild Cat Creek above the Sunset View Cemetery. Sophie Hagen married George Davis, so many old time residents of El Cerrito by the name of Hagen or Davis are descendants of the Hagen's.

Mulholland farmed land adjoining the Sunset View Cemetery, on the east side. They had three children, William, Isabel and George; all are now dead.

I was not very well acquainted with the McAvoy's, meeting them only occasionally, but I recall their names as I know them: Mrs. Beaudry, Mrs. Palledeau, Mrs. La Barge, Hugh and Harry McAvoy and, I think, Joseph, although Harry and Joseph might be the same person. Hugh was junior member of the firm Beaudry and McAvoy, Morticians, of Oakland. I believe all have passed on.

William Teague farmed all the land on both sides of San Pablo Avenue from Fairmount to Fink Lane.

Mrs. Mary Peres, a real pioneer, is the daughter of the late Mr. & Mrs. Daniel O'Connell who farmed the land adjoining the City of Richmond and the Santa Fe town sites including the property where the Santa Fe Shops now stand.

She married the late John Peres who bought the Porero ranch. Their four children, John, Jr., Mrs. Ira Vaughn, George and Edward, still reside in Richmond.

Mrs. Peres is now comfortably located at Tenth and Barrett in a home she had built after the death of Mr. Peres.

L. D. Reynolds born in Canada was of a sporting nature, venturesome, kindhearted and a splendid neighbor. Prosperity was knocking at his door so he thought the time had arrived when they could afford to enjoy themselves by paying a visit to his old home in Canada.

The transcontinental railroad had been completed the year previous so a journey on the train was probably the greatest incentive. Upon their return he decided to venture in a hay, grain, feed and fuel business in Oakland which ended in failure. In 1875 they returned to their ranch (his wife dying soon after) where he struggled along until the summer of 1881 when he sold his 72 acres to John R. Nystrom for the sum of \$3000.00.

Mr. Nystrom could not be classed as a pioneer yet he contributed much to the development of the city.

Mr. Nystrom married my sister Mary. Most of their children are residents of Richmond and vicinity. I am the only surviving child of the Owen Griffins' original family of ten children.

Charles Mayborn, besides farming, bored a majority of the wells in this territory as well as numerous ones for the Spring Valley Water Company of San Francisco. In 1871 Mrs. Mayborn died. He afterward married Mary I. Little, a teacher of the Denman School in San Francisco. A daughter of Mayborn's, Mrs. Margaret Whitney of Berkeley, still survives.

Walter Mills, a cousin of T. D. Young, lived on his ranch. He and his wife were both natives of Scotland. They reared a large family, who with the parents, have passed away. The nearest surviving heirs are five grand children.

If my memory serves me correctly, it was in 1870, Mills moved to a ranch adjoining Mira Vista, and when Peter Dooling rented the Young place that soon after become the McClure property.

Peter Dooling died in the summer of 1886, his family remaining on the ranch until it was subdivided as Walls Harbor Center Tract.

William Wood and his three brothers, James, Benjamin, Frank and his one sister and his brother-in-law, were members of an emigrant train made up, I believe, in Illinois.

This train was attacked by Indians in Utah resulting in the death of James Wood's wife and child, and both James and William were wounded by arrows. A full account of this attack was written by a man who assisted in their rescue, a copy of which is now in possession of Mrs. Dunlap.

William Wood and the Ticknors settled on the land between 23rd and 34th Streets, south of the Metropolitan Square tract, Wood occupying the western half; Ticknor, the eastern.

Mr. Wood married Miss Ann Cross, a very estimable young English lady who assisted in the development of the community by giving moral support to every endeavor that was for its advancement. They had several children, two of whom, Robert N. Wood and Mrs. Paul Dunlap of Point Richmond still survive.

The Ticknors did not remain many years, selling out to Wood and moving elsewhere while the three brothers finally settled south of Soledad and engaged in farming.

Benjamin Boorman arrived here via the prairie schooner route, a government outfit hauling freight to Salt Lake, then, with others, buying a part of the equipment continued on to California. For several years after his arrival he divided his time between the mines in Nevada and the Mayborn family with whom there was a semblance of relationship in that his oldest brother married Mayborn's widowed mother.

The Boormans enjoyed a long and happy life always active in affairs of public interest, finally coming to the close of life, she over 80 years, he over 90, leaving two daughters, Mrs. William Picton and Mrs. Emily H. Axtell, who are still living on the old home ranch.

My first recollection of the Morgan house was when a family named Weise lived there followed by Aleck Norman, an elderly gentleman with a grown up family of three sons and two daughters, namely, Aleck, Jr., Jerry, William, Mrs. Robert Seaver and Mrs. H. I. Tillotson. I first remember the Seaver addition as the home of James Porter who after eight or ten years moved to Oakland where he was Deputy City Marshall for several years. Robert Seaver became the owner of this place after Porter's departure, of whom very little can be said owing to the fact that they lived a very secluded life never mingling with their neighbors or taking any interest in any activities.

Captain Gill was a seafaring man, consequently being away from home much of the time, so my acquaintance with him was very limited, although I knew the family very well. My information of him was that he was employed on coastwise steamers, at one time being First Officer under Captain Connor, who was a brother of Mrs. John Davis. The Gill family consisted of one girl, Etta, who married the late Daniel McHarry, and four boys who with the exception of the oldest boy, Lewis, are all dead.

George Barrett, owing to his peculiarities, was not popular with the people here as he did not associate with them or even pay much attention to his father or his sister, Mrs. Palmer, although both lived in San Pablo.

In the late 70's he decided to farm on a larger scale, so he rented his place to Charles Johnson and bought another ranch west of Dixon, Solano County. To accomplish this objective he mortgaged both places with the usual results, loosing all by 1901 and dying in 1904 comparatively poor.

John Nicholl, came to California from New York, where he had been connected with the building trades, in the early 50's via the Isthmus with five very necessary qualifications, namely; an ambition, an indomitable will, a strong back, a good wife, and twenty dollars.

He experienced prosperity, adversity and finally his cherished ambition wealth. Even those who sought to crush him in the end proved to be his benefactors.

He permitted no obstacles great or small to interfere with that determination to reach that much desired goal, but by indomitable tenacity and the steadfast faith of a noble wife finally achieved victory.

When the controversy started over the Morgan Ranch, Tewksbury vowed he would ruin him, but instead he made him wealthy.

In this dispute both parties claimed it by Squatter's title, Tewksbury having acquired a squatter right; Nicholl being in possession which he hoped to retain by virtue of his undivided Alvarado interest of which he had bought a fraction over 400 acres.

In the final settlement of the San Pablo Ranch, Nicholl offered to take a certain 150 acres on the Potrero including Point Richmond in lieu of 400 acres of his undivided Alvarado interest; the commissioners accepted his proposition.

This award served a double purpose. First, he then possessed the most valuable part of Tewksbury's favorite holding. Second, it opened the way for the consummation of that long wished desire, namely to be rated a rich man.

Mr. Nicholl, soon after acquiring this property, sold about 50 acres adjacent to and including Ferry Point to Claus Spreckles, representative of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Company for \$83,000.00, supplying him with more money than was necessary to clear up his indebtedness. Besides, he still retained about 100 acres which he subdivided and sold as town lots.

After this, he formed the John Nicholl Company under whose management, before and after his death all real estate excepting the family home in Oakland was sold consisting of a building at 9th and Washington, Oakland, the ranch in Ventura County, land in Richmond now known as the Nicholl McDonald Avenue Civic Center Tract, the Metropolitan Square, and the portion of the Potrero extending from the Santa Fe track to Point Potrero that he bought after selling to the Railroad Company.

At the present time, only two of the Nicholls are still alive, Miss H. H. Nicholl of Oakland, and William of Reno, Nevada.

Joseph L. Boyd, whose wife was a sister of Mrs. Nicholl, was a man in comfortable financial circumstances, his word was his bond, dependable and very just in all his dealings. Boyd owned the property on which the Best Hill is located.

In my early history I inadvertently omitted to mention a former owner of the McGann Ranch who, according to my information and knowledge, wore a shade over one eye causing him to be known as Patch Eye White.

White bought the place that afterward became known as Gill Nursery on San Pablo Avenue. He died soon after moving there. Mrs. White married James Driver, a member of another of our pioneer families. James Driver's sister, Annie, married Robert Burcher, his wife's nephew. The Burchers were the parents of Mrs. Richard Paasch of Point Richmond.

McGann, who was the purchaser of the White Place, formerly lived on what is now the Santa Fe town site. His family consisted of Annie, Lizzie, and Mary. Lizzie was one of the first post office officials of Richmond; Mary married John Gilmore. He was the manager of a store in San Pablo that was established in 1877 by Greenhood Brothers of Oakland, which, not proving a success, was abandoned. Gilmore returned to Oakland, retiring a few years ago. He is still very active; notwithstanding his 86 years.

J. P. Lucas, a native of the Azore Islands like many of his countrymen, was of a retiring nature, while his

wife, a native of Nantucket, was more aggressive, mingling much in social life. They had a family of four boys and one girl, Joseph of Bangor, Butte County, John of Westwood, Henry of Fresno, and our worthy citizen, Frank. The girl passed away many years ago.

Charles Shimmons was very conscientious in matters pertaining to a public trust and must be given credit for laying the foundation for the few good roads we had, being much improved by Azro Rumrill, who was later elected supervisor of this district.

Shimmons possessed all the attributes to human wretchedness and life's failure, in his case resulting in domestic trouble and suicide.

The Palmer family lived on Church Street, San Pablo, as did the Ware family. The father, John Ware, a son-in-law of Palmer, was engaged in the painting business. Palmers arrived in California via the covered wagon in 1857, locating at Fruitvale, afterward moving to San Pablo where he was Justice of the Peace for many years; followed by Azro Rumrill, who was succeeded by William Duffy, who served for ten years. Mr. Duffy married Eugenia (Jennie) A. Palmer.

In 1895 Terrill and Belding engaged in a general merchandise business in San Pablo. The venture proved very successful, Terrill severing his connection after about ten years when Belding became the sole owner.

G. W. Terrill had been a resident of these parts since the early 70's when he purchased the Gould boat landing property west of San Pablo depot, continuing its operation with Capt. Charles Toby operating the schooner.

Mrs. Terrill was a cousin of Mrs. E. H. Harlow of this city.

William Belding came here at the inception of the store project now San Francisco when, I believe, he had been a very successful member of the Wheat Pit. Belding was active in the business and political affairs of the town and became very popular. He became quite wealthy by the early 1900's, but still carrying on the business until his death several years ago, soon after followed by his wife. Mr. Belding was one of the first trustees of Richmond Union High School.

Frank Bartholomew, who lived at the crest of the San Pablo hill, was a favorite among the early settlers, as in times of distress or sickness, Frank was one of the first to proffer assistance.

A nephew of his, at one time was engaged in business in Richmond, whose daughter, Jean, married A. B. Innis, who was at one time connected with the Standard Oil Marine Department. They are engaged in the mining business at Oroville and vicinity.

There are other old timers worthy of mention, among whom are the Flemings whose three descendants, Edward, Thomas, and Mollie still live in Richmond; Dr. Goodale who represented this district in the state legislature for many years; the Stowells, Bonsons, Rivers, Ireland, John McCarthy, Klose, Henry Blume, and Henry Johnston who in deference to a cherished friendship since 1876 are considered as one of us.

Some additional facts about the Alvarado family, who were of the pure Castilian race. They possessed many good qualities, although very reserved in their mingling with other people.

The Ex-Governor always maintained a dignified and aristocratic manner with the happy faculty of adapting himself to whatever circumstance he was in. He was a loyal citizen of any government under which he lived.

One of the early secretaries of the California Pioneer Society of which he was a member, wrote his biography which is a work of art as it is written on excellent paper in the most superb penmanship I ever saw.

More about Stege and the beautiful grounds.

One of the most important factors in beautifying this place was his daughter Edith, who had a natural

ability for such work, spending most of her time planning and assisting him in every way.

The Dohrman family, whose home was just this side of the town limits of Pinole, were not considered as old timers here. Owing to the fact that their son, Fred, married Miss Quilfeldt, a step-sister of Miss Edith Stege, he became closely associated with affairs of the San Pablo Valley, but living in Oakland where their four children were born. Three of them still are living. Minnie, the oldest, is now a resident of the Stege district.

One of Fred's sisters married Frank Castro, who (if my information is correct) was a brother of Mrs. Juan B. Alvarado. Their daughter, Mrs. Scott, (Olivia Castro) I meet occasionally. She lives at 763 Eighth Street, Oakland.

Answering Dr. C. L. Abbott's inquiry regarding the first among the Portuguese settlers, I will name Antome P. Silva, Manuel Machado, Gracia, Aguiar, Lucas, Porerero, Repose, Quailia, Rivers, Byrone, John Enos, John Williams, (former owner of St. Joseph's Cemetery) and Joseph Lewis as being residents as far back as I can remember.

It is my desire to present names of other old timers who, in my estimation, did not receive from other writers the recognition they were justly entitled to, also to cite facts and incidents in the lives of those they did mention that may prove interesting but purposely avoiding historical facts published in two former histories access to which may be had at the Richmond Public Library.

In closing, I want to express my admiration for all those I have mentioned for being important factors in the advancement of the social condition, as well as having been instrumental in producing the better environment we enjoy today.

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