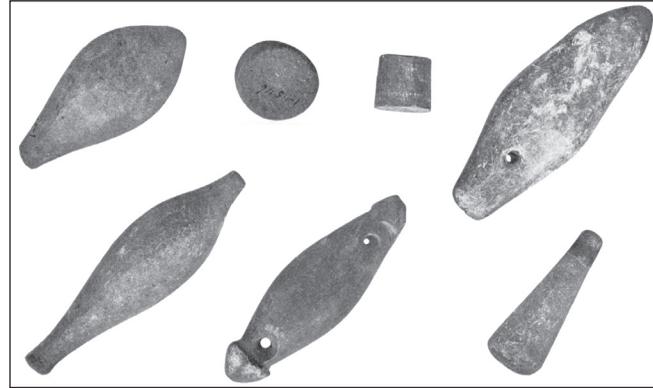


rein in measuring and analyzing the mound and its contents. The workers also organized their labor so that when sensitive material, such as human remains, were found in an area they were excavating, the workers would be able to start working on another part of the mound while Nelson and his team examined what had been uncovered. The workers hauled away about 67,500 cubic yards of material. Nelson's team recovered 125 human skeletons and more than 250 artifacts from the shellmound.



Miniature mortar and rubbing stone found in the shellmound, about 1/3 size

Based on his analysis of the constituents of the mound at different elevations, Nelson estimates that the materials at the bottom of the shellmound go back about 3,500 years. As is common with these shellmounds, materials found in the mound included ashes, broken rock,

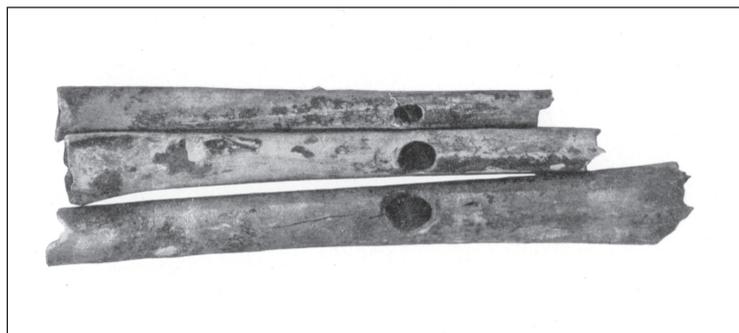


Charmstones and plugs found in the shellmound, about 1/4 size

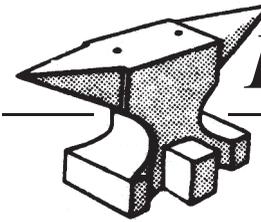
pebbles, animal bones, human skeletons, artifacts, and broken shells of clams, mussels, and other mollusks. Nelson notes that the preponderance of shellfish species changes from the top to the bottom of the mound and also that a sudden change in the general constituents of the mound at one point suggests that the mound may have been unused for a significant period of time. He also notes that there is a large difference in the mollusk shells found at this site compared to what was found in the shellmound at Point Isabel, only about two miles away.

Nelson says that it is clear that from the beginning the shellmound was used as a burial place and as a residence site. Even though it seems to be an unlikely residence site given the other good options in the area; the complete lack of fresh water or firewood nearby; and the fact that the shellmound was surrounded by marshland (which made it difficult to access, especially in the winter), something made it attractive to the Native Americans.

- Almost all of the material for this article came from N. C. Nelson's 1910 article in Vol. 7, No. 5 of the journal "University of California publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology" about the Shellmound at Ellis Landing. The first photo in the article is courtesy of the Richmond Museum of History.



Portion of a musical instrument made from bird bones found in the shellmound, about 2/3 size



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**OUR NEXT MEETING: 1 PM SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19TH
 AT THE SENIOR CENTER ON STOCKTON AVENUE**

President's Message

Our next meeting, at 1 PM on Sunday, October 19th at the Senior Center, will feature a video about the Technical Porcelain and Chinaware Company, or "TEPCO". TEPCO products could be found everywhere from the Cerrito City Club and Louie's Club here in town to Navy battleships around the world. Of course, there was also plenty of TEPCO china to be found in the kitchens and dining rooms of El Cerrito homes. For a time the company ran shifts around the clock to keep up with demand. At one time the number of men and women working at the plant was estimated to be close to two hundred. TEPCO was for years the biggest employer in El Cerrito.

This video is about 30 minutes long and contains a wealth of information about TEPCO and how TEPCO made its products. Bev Chernoff and Jill Bauza, step granddaughter and step great-granddaughter of John Pagliero, put the video together from old "home movies" that Mr. Pagliero took in the TEPCO factory. If you have any interest in this famous old El Cerrito company, be sure to attend this meeting. If time permits Rich Bartke has a quiz for us about El Cerrito. Rich also says he may have a new creek naming recommendation to present to the membership.

Our summer potluck lunch and meeting at Huber Park was enjoyed by all. Many thanks to all who attended and who provided a delicious selection of foods to enjoy. Thanks also go to Bert Elsasser and the Friends of Huber Park for helping us set up the picnic area.

I am sorry to report that I am stepping down as an officer of the Historical Society and as editor of the *The Forge*. There will be an interim arrangement for President of the Historical Society until the January election. If you are interested in becoming the editor of *The Forge* or helping to put out *The Forge* please contact one of the members of the Board. ~ Tom Panas

The El Cerrito Historical Society is a volunteer, non-political, non-profit organization with one agenda: to locate and preserve our local history. Anyone may join; dues are \$20 (Household member), \$50 (Sponsoring member), and \$250 (Life member).

Native American Artifacts in our Area

The El Cerrito and Richmond areas have a number of sites where it is clear that Native Americans once lived. In El Cerrito we have one prominent location where native American rock art is found. In addition, easily “walkable” from the city limits of our town are two sites where the rocks have been worn down due to their use by Native Americans for grinding. Beyond that, N. C. Nelson, in his 1910 article in Vol. 7, No. 5 of the journal “University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology”, describes a large shellmound that once existed at Ellis Landing. His article locates another 9 clearly identifiable shellmounds in Rancho San Pablo (some in El Cerrito), all of which are unfortunately now gone. In addition, Nelson notes that there have been about 400 shellmounds identified that once lined the shores of San Francisco Bay. This article and the accompanying pictures are derived almost exclusively from Mr. Nelson’s document.

Where was Ellis Landing, a name most have come across in their reading but never really placed on a map? First, we need to understand that the part of Richmond east of today’s Point Richmond and west of about 23rd Street was a very soggy marsh until Dr. Tewksberry permanently started the process of drying out this area by building two dikes in the early days. Thus “The Potrero” (today’s Pt. Richmond area) became a peninsula and part of Rancho San Pablo, not an Island, increasing the value of his very large landholding there. Early resident Evan Griffins places Ellis Landing at about 14th Street and Hall Avenue. Ellis Landing was the only place east of Stege where there was a landing and even then it could only be used at high tide as it was located in an area of very shallow sloughs. The adjacent picture



Looking toward Ellis Landing from Pt. Richmond in 1910. The shellmound is gone. It’s not a flood, this is “normal”. Courtesy Richmond Museum of History.

is a fine example of the view looking southeast from Pt. Richmond toward the place where the Ellis Landing Shellmound had been. This picture was taken in 1910, after Dr. Tewksberry’s dike went in. If the

mound were still there (it was removed in 1907), also visible would be the shack that early settlers built on the shellmound. If you ever see a very marshy-looking picture of Richmond with a small wooden shanty plainly visible on a what appears to be a small hill, you are probably looking at a picture of Ellis Landing and the shellmound.

The Ellis Landing shellmound was quite large. While the famous shellmound in Emeryville was far bigger, the shellmound at Ellis Landing was recognized as a major Native American site. The shellmound was roughly oval in shape and Nelson states that it was about 460’ on its longer axis, about 70’ across its “waist”, and about 250’ across at its widest place. (As is shown by the dashed line on the diagram below, the part of the shellmound that had sunk below the marsh level was larger

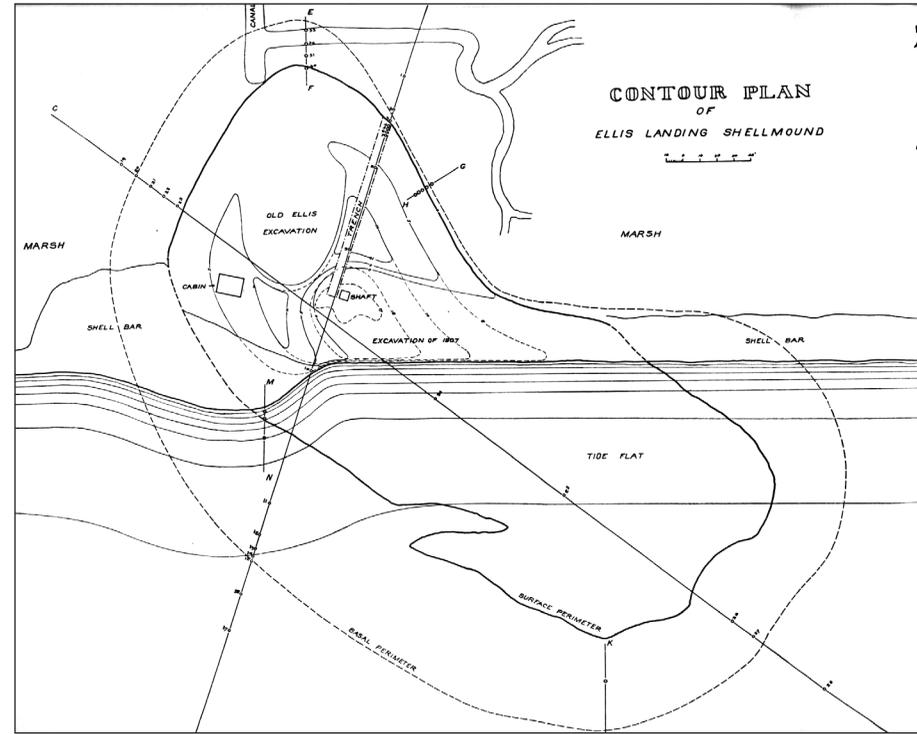


Diagram of the shellmound with some notes about the excavation that was performed in 1907

than the part above ground.) The shellmound stood about 17’ above the level of the surrounding marsh and when excavated was found to extend downward another 11’ as a result of subsidence. Nelson describes the

slope and contour of the shellmound as being fairly uniform. He points out that the top of the shellmound was dotted with saucer-like depressions and that some of these were as large as 12’ across and 2’ feet deep. Nelson suggests these were most likely the sites of dwellings.

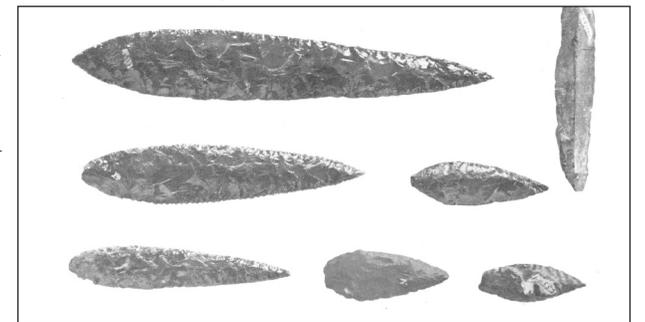


The southern tip of the Ellis Landing Shellmound

Nelson notes that a person could walk about half the one-mile distance from the shellmound to Brooks Island without encountering water deeper than about 3.5 feet. At this point the water gets deeper, apparently the result of dredging the channel between Brooks Island and Point Potrero. He notes that the shellmound and the nearby beaches from Ellis Landing to the Stege area were being eroded at a rate of about ten feet per year and suggests that this erosion was the result of the dredging. He does not suggest how much impact this erosion might have had on the shellmound but it must have been significant.

The mound was largely removed in 1907 to be used as fill in other parts of Richmond. Nelson was given a chance to examine and study the contents of the mound as it was being removed. He describes the removal of the mound as taking place over a two-week period. While this was not ideal for performing serious archaeological work, he describes the crew

removing the mound as very considerate. Nelson and his team were allowed, within reasonable limits, free



Obsidian and chert found in the shellmound, about 1/4 size