

*Shooting trap (l) and an archery "Ham Shoot" (r) at the San Pablo Avenue Sportsman's Club on Pt. Isabel*

bulldozed as flat as a pancake, which greatly expanded the footprint of Pt. Isabel. (This and several other projects around the Bay helped create support for the MacAteer-Petris Act of 1965,

which established the BCDC, or Bay Conservation and Development Commission). Santa Fe, of course, built a rail spur to the development to provide a direct connection to their transcontinental mainline. Once these preparations were complete, Santa Fe sat back and waited for the buyers to line up. However, the first lot was not sold until 1963, when the old Co-op grocery store chain bought a lot for a large warehouse it needed. In the early 1970s the Postal Service chose the site for the huge bulk mail facility that still operates today.

A condition of the building permit for the bulk mail facility was that the Federal Government had to provide shoreline access for the public. Once the public saw the fantastic vistas available from the shoreline the popularity of the area grew rapidly. The area became well known as a dog-friendly place and today, according to the East Bay Regional Park District, Pt. Isabel Regional Shoreline Park has the largest public off-leash dog park in the nation. The park offers a number of recreational opportunities including hiking, jogging, biking, bird watching, kite flying, kayaking and windsurfing. The Santa Fe saw less and less activity on their spur and finally pulled it out, which allowed the right of way to be converted into the walking and riding path that today connects Pt. Isabel Regional Park and Shimada Friendship Park.

Today Richmond is considering changing the underlying zoning for a large parcel at the northwest corner of Central Avenue and Rydin Road from "Light Industrial" to "Regional Commercial District". Kohl's has indicated interest in putting up a new store at this site. This change could have a significant impact on the nearby Pt. Isabel Regional Park as well as on the bird habitat close by in Hoffman Marsh. This situation is currently under review by the City of Richmond and the Richmond Annex Neighborhood Council has requested that the City require that a full

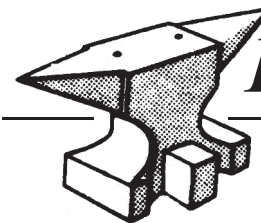
environmental Impact report be completed.

~ Much of the material for this article came from Suzanne Jean Arca's 1992 senior thesis at the UC Berkeley School of Environmental Design. The El Cerrito Historical Society is very grateful to her for granting permission to republish this material. Charles Haller, a long-time member of the San Pablo Avenue Sportsman's Club, provided information and pictures.

~ Does anyone know of additional pictures of Pt. Isabel or the San Pablo Avenue Sportsman's Club that could be added to the Historical Society's collection? Please contact us if you have any ideas about this.



*Pt. Isabel after the west end of the hills had been cut off for the Stege Sanitary sewer plant. The cut is clearly visible*



# El Cerrito Historical Society

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**OUR NEXT MEETING: 12 NOON SUNDAY, JULY 20TH  
PICNIC AT HUBER PARK ON TERRACE DRIVE**

## President's Message

Our next meeting, at Noon on Sunday, July 20th in Huber Park, will be our annual pot-luck picnic. I will have the barbecue fired up and be cooking hot dogs (vegi-dogs will also be available). This event is mostly devoted to enjoying the company of other Historical Society members in one of our most picturesque parks. We hold the picnic in the lower part of the park, near the clubhouse, which means that it is wheelchair accessible. We hope you can attend and if you do, please try to bring a salad, main dish, or dessert. But even if you can't bring something, please join us. The primary business on the agenda will be to discuss a recommendation regarding the Society's project to name the creeks in El Cerrito.

As is customary, the Society will have a booth at the City's 4th of July celebration. If any of you could spend an hour or two in the booth, please give me a call at 526-7507. You will recall that twice over the past year we have discussed at our quarterly meetings the project to name the creeks in town. The booth this year will be focused on this to give El Cerrito residents the opportunity to contribute their ideas to this process. In the booth we will have the copies of the US Board on Geographic Names' policies for naming geographic features; copies of the Historical Society's draft list of pioneers; and copies of the City's "El Cerrito Creeks and Drainages" maps on which the Historical Society's proposed names are shown - with plenty of room for people to write their own suggested names and reasons.

We hope that a lot of people will be interested in this subject and stop by the booth to share their ideas with us. We are happy to add names to our list of El Cerrito pioneers and would welcome all suggestions on names to be applied to specific creeks. The Historical Society is hoping to make an initial recommendation regarding creek names near the end of July. ~ 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).

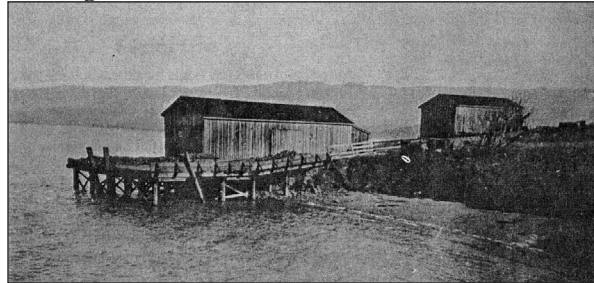


# Point Isabel

Since the Spanish era, the topography of Point Isabel has changed probably more so than any other feature in the El Cerrito area. It seems likely that the Huchiun Indians who lived in our area for thousands of years must have visited Pt. Isabel. However, we have changed the topography at Pt. Isabel so drastically over the past sixty years that today it would be impossible to document any Indian presence there. Pt. Isabel originally had a much smaller footprint than it does today. Hills rose to a considerable height above sea level - more than fifty feet, according to the 1915 USGS topographic map. This map also shows there was marshland between Pt. Isabel and the “mainland”. This is still fondly recalled by old-timers, who often needed a rowboat to access Pt. Isabel during the highest tides of the winter months.

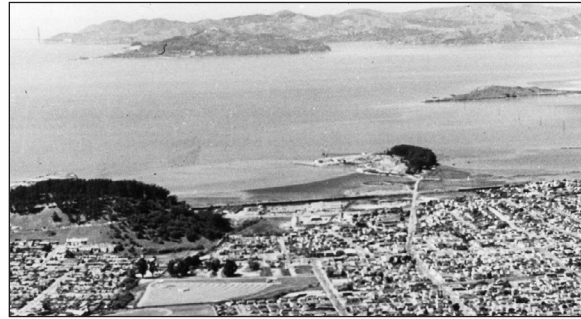
Our area started to see some development after the Castro family's San Pablo Rancho land grant was finalized in 1834. The family's original San Pablo Rancho land grant ran from Cerrito Creek on the south to Point Pinole on the north and from the bay on the west to the top of the first range of hills on the east. (While this was a large tract, the Peralta family's grant ran from Cerrito Creek south all the way to San Leandro Creek!) Victor Castro built his adobe residence where the El Cerrito Plaza shopping center is now located. He and his first wife Luisa Martinez had nine children, including a daughter Isabella (1848). Pt. Isabel was named after this daughter, but it is not known exactly when this part of San Pablo Rancho was first called Pt. Isabel.

Pt. Isabel was considered one of Victor Castro's major assets. He built a wharf, corral, slaughterhouse, and hotel there for about \$8,000 - a considerable sum in the 1800s. One of the primary products coming from ranches in those days was cowhides. The cattle were slaughtered primarily for their hides and although some of the carcasses were used as food, in large part they were considered scrap and left for the grizzly bears and other scavengers.



*Pt. Isabel and some Vigorite Powder Works bldgs ca. 1901*

Victor Castro had two or three boats



*Pt. Isabel as viewed from above Kensington, about 1955.*

*Note the wooded hills on Pt. Isabel..*

mission in San Rafael. Spending a summer day sailing from Pt. Isabel to Mission Santa Clara for a festival would certainly have been preferable to riding there on horseback for two or three dusty days.

Unfortunately, scheming Americans deprived Victor of most of vast landholdings, including Pt. Isabel. Title to Pt. Isabel bounced from the hands of one unscrupulous American to another a number of times before 1900. In the early 1900's the Vigorite Powder Company built a dynamite plant at Pt. Isabel. While it is not known exactly what structures were built at the time, we know that there were several buildings, a wharf, and a narrow-gauge railroad to shuttle materials around the site. The 1915 USGS map indicates that there were about 40 structures on the “island” and that a standard-gauge spur from the nearby Southern Pacific Railroad ran out to Pt. Isabel.

During World War I the federal government started looking for sites in our area where it could build a new navy base and naval academy. At the time the government felt it was important to supplement the existing naval bases on the West Coast. One plan was to level Albany Hill, Pt. Isabel, Brooks Island, and Fleming Point and build a new naval base in this basin. It was reported that this proposal was a strong contender in the race but it was eventually rejected in favor of a site further south. (The naval academy was never built.)

The Santa Fe railroad arrived in Richmond in 1900 and it, along with the Standard Oil Company, changed the face of Richmond, including Pt. Isabel. The Santa Fe owned all the tidelands from Richmond to



*Narrow-gauge railcars used at Pt. Isabel to carry powder*

normally tied up at or near Pt. Isabel. He used them to shuttle his family, friends and travelers to points around the bay. Some trips were for pleasure, some for business, and others to attend church at the mission in San Francisco or near the former

mission in San Rafael. Spending a summer day sailing from Pt. Isabel to Mission Santa Clara for a festival would certainly have been preferable to riding there on horseback for two or three dusty days.

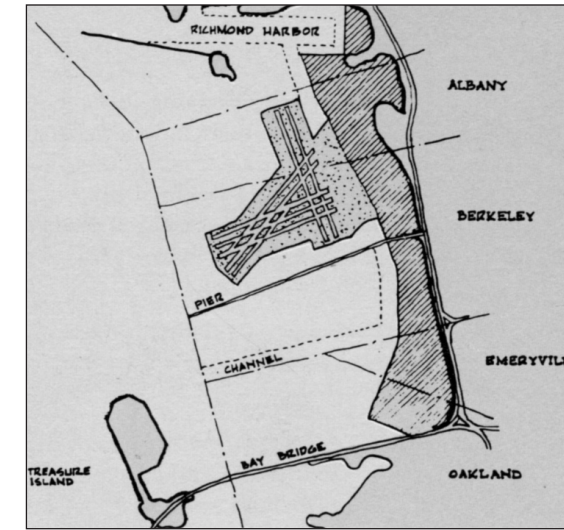
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Oakland. Santa Fe had many development plans over the years for this prime undeveloped real estate that was unfortunately covered by a few feet of bay water. Several plans were proposed over the years that envisioned

entirely new subdivisions, commercial space, and yacht harbors extending a mile or more west beyond the current bay shore. As outlined in the January 2008 Forge, one plan had the Santa Fe building a new rail line (to replace the one that ran where the BART right of way is today) by filling its bay front property with



*The proposed Golden Gate Airport as suggested in 1945*

runways pointed straight at Albany, Berkeley, and El Cerrito.

For a number of years the San Pablo Avenue Sportsman's Club was a happy tenant of the Santa Fe land at Pt. Isabel. The club improved on the target shooting range the military left behind after WWII and took advantage of the facilities nature had already installed (such as abundant game, pleasant tree-covered hills, and a quiet swimming beach). Much hard work by the members of the club turned the site into a mecca for the sportsmen of those days. Available to members and guests at the Club were an archery range, skeet range, trap range, duck hunting, swimming, picnicking, fishing, boat rentals, and two clubhouses for socializing and parties.

Stege Sanitary District was the first organization to significantly change the topography of Pt. Isabel. In 1951 they built a sewage plant on the west end of Pt. Isabel, in the process leveling the west side of the wooded knoll. A sheer cliff marked the extent of the excavation but this was only the start of Pt. Isabel's transformation. In 1959 the Santa Fe decided to move ahead with their plans to develop Pt. Isabel. Their plans called for the area to be completely leveled and unfortunately today this flat image is what commonly comes to mind when people talk about Pt. Isabel. Of course the San Pablo Avenue Sportsman's Club had to vacate their premises as well.

Pt. Isabel's hills became bay fill and the entire area was