

Moments in Time

SAUSALITO HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

FALL 2014

A STROLL THROUGH SAUSALITO, 1948

The following was written as part of a Sausalito Village memoir writing group which Rick Seymour coordinates:

I returned to my hometown of Sausalito after eight years of living in various eastern and mid-western places, including New York City, Chicago, Greenwich, Connecticut, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Madison, Wisconsin, and most recently, Huntington, West Virginia, in the summer of 1948. After staying for several months at the Alta Mira Hotel while house hunting, my parents bought a most unusual home at 543 Sausalito Boulevard and I enrolled in the sixth grade at Central School, now Sausalito's city hall. My sixth and seventh grade classrooms are now the exhibit and research rooms of the Sausalito Historical Society where I volunteer as chair of the Accessions Committee.

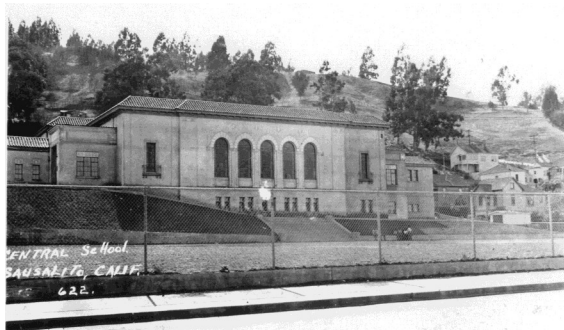
Coming home to Sausalito was like a long held dream for me. Periodically, through the war years and beyond, I would come west by train with my mother to visit her sister and aunt in Oakland and her brother in Sausalito, but these visits barely provided a fleeting glimpse of my home town. Returning for good opened a whole new world for this twelve year old.

Central School was on double sessions, so I had every afternoon to roam about and get reacquainted. Our house backed on a wood that ran all the way to Prospect Avenue and was bordered by Cable Lane, where my parents had built their first home in the 1920s. I quickly dubbed the wood "Curewood Forest." The rusted remains of a Model-T Ford pickup sat in its center. There was enough left of the wheel-less wreck so that we could sit in the cab and pretend to be 1930s bootleggers. Bruce Marshall and I found a perfect obsidian spearhead nearby.

South of Crescent Street and Cable Lane, Sausalito Boulevard was a single lane dirt track that wound through the wooded hillsides of Hurricane Gulch and came out near the south end of town. Ours was the next to last house in that direction. Beyond, there was only the old water mine and a storage tank at the base of a grassy slope where we grass sled on cardboard shipping boxes until the rains started in the late fall.

To the west of Prospect Avenue were the three lanes, (one north, one south, with a passing lane in the middle) of Waldo Grade that led to a single tunnel aimed at the Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco. In those early "Cold War" days it was suggested that in the event of an atomic attack being eminent, the population of Sausalito could take refuge in the Waldo Tunnel until someone pointed out that inasmuch as it was aimed directly at the city, a direct hit on San Francisco would blow everyone sheltered inside all the way to San Rafael like pellets from a shotgun.

Crossing the highway, we could climb up beside the tunnel and follow a steep path to Apatite Rock, a frequent lazy afternoon destination from which we had a clear view of the headlands, the bridge and the Golden Gate. I later learned that the upthrust formation was named for the mineral "Apatite" of which it was composed. Phil Frank maintained that it was so named because climbing up there gave you an appetite. Directly below, the last Sausalito hillside was bare except for the large PG&E substation on the descending ridge. This facility was later disabled by a stray lightning strike that knocked out the town's power for several days.



Central School as it looked in the 1940's.

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The spectacular explosion that occurred led many to believe that the Russians had attacked our town.

The valley is known as Hurricane Gulch, for the nearly incessant winds that race through it from the ocean. The base, at the terminus of Sausalito Boulevard, however, was relatively calm. The beach that ran beneath the various docks and boardwalks had been featured that year in Orson Welles' movie, *Lady from Shanghai*, and credible kids that we were, we spent time at low tide searching for the pistol Welles chucked into the water below the Walhalla. No luck, but we did find starfish, baby crabs and lots of seashells, including sand dollars.

Bridgeway, where it ran along the bay, was much narrower then. There was no cemented in sewer line, just two lanes and two sidewalks. Sewage flowed directly into the bay at several points along the shore—as it did from most communities in those days. The old yacht club, now the Trident, had become the Sausalito Bait and Tackle shop and was in general disrepair. The banks turned down my parents who wanted to turn the building into a restaurant, said it would never work. North of the Tin Angel, which later became the Glad Hand and then Scoma's, a wooden platform extended out into the bay all the way to the Quonset-shaped Purity Market, our proto supermarket. Across the street, Marin Fruit Company, which had been delivering fresh produce to the people of Sausalito since before the depression, and Hoagland's Market completed the downtown food suppliers. No. Wait a minute. There was also the butcher shop in the next block past Princess Street where my mother used to buy turkey hearts for 25 cents a pound to feed to our cat.

Princess Street climbs the hill for one long block, terminating at Bulkley and the brick pillared entrance to a venerable mansion, the Nook, whose shingled façade has seen better days. Above the nook, a large empty lot extended to Harrison Avenue where the Holly Oaks Hotel was torn down in 1939. Small shops lined the lower part of Princess, culminating in a restaurant on the south side, run by two elderly and motherly sisters who served up excellent hot roast

beef sandwiches, with gravy and mashed potatoes. Across the street was the town's last billiard parlor. This was fronted by a shoe shine establishment called Tom's Shoe Shine Parlor and Billiard Room for Gentlemen. This had a billboard style sign that read THE SUN SHINES HALF THE TIME/BUT TOM SHINES ALL THE TIME.

On down Bridgeway were two bars, the Four Winds and the Seven Seas, where it was rumored that "Babyface" Nelson had worked as a bartender. Most of the cars parked along the street were prewar models, including a few classics like the old Packard 190. The business district on Bridgeway ended at the multi-story Mason's Garage. Rumor has it that during prohibition some bootleggers were running a truckload of Canadian whisky through town and were spotted by the local police. The men jumped from the truck and ran for the ferry, which was just leaving for San Francisco. Rumor further has it that a member of the Sausalito City Council, having witnessed this event, jumped into the truck's cab and drove it to the top floor of Mason's. He threw a tarp over the truck and supposedly there it sat, providing a source of libation for the town officials and their friends, possibly all the way to repeal in the 1930s.

These are just a few of Sausalito's points of interest in those postwar years. The town also had a thriving art colony and bohemian culture that, being a twelve-year-old kid, I knew very little about. That changed a few years later when I was a bit older, living on a houseboat, going to Jean Varda's lavish parties and having a hell of a good time.

FREE EXHIBITS

The Ice House information center and historical exhibition features a permanent display of local history and carries many gift items suitable for locals, their friends and families. Open from 11:30 am-4:00 pm Tuesday through Sunday, 780 Bridgeway (across from Casa Madrona).

From there, you can take our free Sausalito Sets Sail walking tour, with historic panels along the waterfront from the Ice House to Whaler's Cove.



The Bait and Tackle Shop (large blue building, center rear) was originally the San Francisco Yacht Club.

MISSING BEA SEIDLER

By the style and manner in which she lived, Bea Seidler, who died on July 25, embodied the spirit of Sausalito's history and traditions. Moving to Sausalito in 1963, she chose to live in a vintage house on Sausalito Boulevard. When an apartment at the top of the house became available, she moved up, where she could have a view of the waterfront and the bay. As she aged and the irregular steps leading to her hillside aerie became more perilous for a lady in her 80s, she refused to move, opting to continue coming and going as she had for decades.

And come and go she did. For over half a century she was at the center of what was happening in Sausalito — at the Sausalito Women's Club, at the Sausalito Foundation, at the Sausalito Arts Festival, at Jazz by the Bay, at City Hall (even co-managing Sally Stanford's successful run for City Council). Indeed, the list of initiatives, large and small, in which she had a hand went on and on.

Among her other involvements, she had a keen interest in Sausalito history. As longtime President of the Sausalito Foundation, she was a master fund raiser. Among her many ways of securing resources for the preservation of Sausalito's legacy, she hit on an ingenious plan for selling replicas, crafted by Heath Ceramics, of sculptor Al Sybrian's famous sea lion. With the artist's permission, she sold hundreds (if not thousands) of Sausalito's famous marine mammal, and for years the Foundation was able to buy the work of local artists for permanent display at City Hall.

Her work in educating Sausalitans and the general public about the town's rich past continued until a few months before her death. She enlisted as a docent at the Ice House (Sausalito's Visitor Center) in about 1999, and from that date on there was rarely a Tuesday that Bea Seidler didn't hold court in the tiny white building at the corner of Bridgeway and Bay Street.

With her wide-ranging knowledge of Sausalito places

and personalities, legends and folklore, she became the "go to" person if one wished to delve beneath the surface of the Sausalito narrative and learn the story behind the story. With her wry wit and sharp powers of observation and analysis, one had the feeling that there weren't many things, past or present, that Bea didn't know about.



Doris and Bea relax after joining the other Ice House docents as Grand Marshalls of this year's Fourth of July Parade.
Photo courtesy of Parks & Rec. Dept.

She maintained two beautiful flower pots on each side of the Ice House front door, creating a colorful and friendly entry into Sausalito's premier hospitality house. She had a keen sense of what tourists wanted and needed from a visitor center. She made countless trips to the banks and the post office, making sure that there was always a supply of change on hand for people desperate for quarters and plenty of stamps in reserve for anyone with a handful of postcards who wasn't inclined to walk to the post office. At the same time, she knew how to maintain order among the 30,000 or so visitors that

streamed through the Ice House each year, especially those with young children. Who will forget Bea's stern voice, rising above the chatter of the crowd, as she descended on a small boy about to lay hands on a breakable piece of merchandise. "Young man, do not touch that sea lion!" Little boys quickly learned not to mess with the white-haired lady with the firm, decisive voice. As a result, the Ice House never lost an Al Sybrian sea lion.

The Sausalito Historical Society has lost a truly unique friend and supporter in Bea Seidler. She will be sorely missed.

— Doris Berdahl

MARINSHIP EXHIBIT

Step back to a dramatic time in Sausalito history by touring the Historic World War II Marinship Exhibit. This display of photographs, paintings and actual artifacts from the WWII ships and yard was developed by the staff of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the SHS. Open Tuesday through Saturday from 9:00am-4:00pm. 2100 Bridgeway, Bay Model Visitors Center.

MEMBERSHIP UPGRADES

We'd like to thank the following Historical Society members have upgraded or renewed their memberships at higher levels:

Sponsor-Business

Diane Alper
Sara Jane Anderson
Herbert and Sisi Damner
Jim and Cathy DeLano
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Patrica Smith and Thomas Theodores

QUOTE OF THE QUARTER:

Just in case you missed these comments by long time City Clerk Debbie Pagliaro in a recent Sausalito Currents:

“For the last several years, I have avoided references from members of the Historical Society that I should be interviewed for their oral histories.

“Recently, City Hall was the center of a class reunion for some graduates of the old Central School (now City Hall). I tagged along in order to let them in to some of the areas that used to be their old classrooms. It was such a joy, and there was so much excitement in hearing their old stories.

“It made me think twice about running from sharing my history of Sausalito - I really didn't think there would be much to share - everyone knows what I know. Well, along comes Steefanie Wicks, cornering me in my office and wouldn't let me go until I scheduled an appointment with her to participate in an interview.

“Ok, so I did it - did I have anything new to share? I don't know; but maybe something that I remembered, someone else might not know about (and let me tell you how difficult it is to try and remember things on the spot). Which brings me to my point . . . to any of you out there that have spent time in Sausalito and have a story to share, a remembrance, a special time, WRITE

IT DOWN and send it off to the Sausalito Historical Society (420 Litho Street, PO Box 352, Sausalito 94966) -- or e-mail it to: info@sausalitohistoricalsociety.org. That way, you won't be put on the spot --- you can think about it, polish up your story and forward it all clean and well thought out but PLEASE think about sharing your special moments for all to experience and learn. I know that I now plan on being more cognizant of sharing more of my experiences (in a much more refined and polished way than being put ‘on the spot’ . . . tripping over my every thought).”

Thanks, Debbie, for sharing the joys of keeping Sausalito's history alive.

ARE YOU A SHEL COLLECTOR?

The Historical Society is pursuing an exhibit of the eclectic works of poet, cartoonist and songwriter Shel Silverstein, who was a longtime Sausalito waterfront resident.

We're hoping some members might have Silverstein memorabilia you'd like to donate to the Society, or lend for the exhibition. We can also scan and return photos and other graphic images.

If you can help, please contact us at info@sausalitohistoricalsociety.org or 415-289-4117.

PORTUGUESE HERITAGE WALKING TOUR

The Sausalito Historical Society is proud to have collaborated with the Sausalito Portuguese Hall to create a self-guided walking tour through Sausalito and its surroundings (including the Tennessee and Gerbode Valleys in the Marin Headlands) that features structures and locations with a connection to Sausalito's long Portuguese-American history.

In the late 1800's, individuals of Portuguese ancestry made up an estimated 30% of Sausalito's total population. Portuguese, the majority of them from the Azores, initially came here on whaling ships. Subsequent immigrants followed, with many of them finding work on the numerous farms in Southern Marin that supplied dairy products to San Francisco.

In 1888, five years before Sausalito was incorporated, a group of Portuguese-Americans established a social and cultural organization here in Sausalito named the

IDESST. That organization remains active today and is called the Sausalito Portuguese Hall.

The self-guided walking tour through Sausalito and the surrounding area features 33 locations highlighting Sausalito's long Portuguese-American history. Although the entire tour is several miles long, it can be enjoyed in segments and the individual stops taken in any order.

A free 92-page Guidebook for the tour may be downloaded without charge on the History page of the Hall's website (www.idesst.org). Joanne's Print Shop (2000 Bridgeway here in Sausalito - 332-1344) also offers color or black and white copies of the Guidebook for a fee.

We hope you will take the tour and learn more about Sausalito history. Any questions or suggestions may be directed to the Hall's History Committee at history@idesst.org.



Original IDESST Hall - Sausalito's original IDESST Hall, today the home of the Sausalito Christian Fellowship church (r.) was built at 131 Filbert Street in the late 1800's and served as the primary meeting place for Sausalito's Portuguese-American community until the Hall moved to its current location on Caledonia Street in 1953. Photos courtesy of IDESST archives and Mike Moyle

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION EVENING

The Society's first annual Volunteer Recognition event was held at Christopher Holbrook's lovely venue at 333 Caledonia St. on the warm summer evening of June 19. With members, non-members and volunteers in attendance, the jolly group bid farewell to retiring Board members and to the retiring Newsletter staff.

After sipping local wines, devouring delicious appetizers donated by Angelino's, Cibo, Saylor's and Venice Gourmet, the Volunteer of the Year Award was presented to Jeanne Fidler. Jeanne has been a regular volunteer at SHS since 1991 and is well known for her undying support of the Society's undertakings, her lovely period costumes featured at SHS events and her regular service as a docent. She received a framed photograph of herself, Phil Frank and Shelby Van Meter as they appeared in the 1990s at the Caledonia Street Faire.

