

Point Richmond Residents Take Fond Look at Roisterous History

reprinted from The Independent & Gazette, Nov. 6, 1980 by Gordon Raddue

A hospital sanitarium that admitted patients for \$1.50 a day, including food and medicine....a "little" Barbary Coast that harbored 34 saloons, several poolrooms and a number of houses of ill repute...A world's lightweight championship boxing match that ended in a 40-round knockout...A movie theater that attracted 1,200 people on its opening-day in 1913, proudly advertising a restroom "for mothers with their babies."

These are part of the colorful past of Point Richmond, much of which is documented in "This Point in Time: An Historical view of Point Richmond," a heavily-illustrated 85-page book to be made available for purchase Saturday as part of "Point Richmond History Day."

The release date was timed to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the First Methodist Church at Martina Street and West Richmond Avenue, which will hold an Open House from 1 to 4 p.m. and present at 7:30 p.m. a concert of early American and classical music.

The Washington Elementary School PTA will join the celebration by presenting a show and sale of antiques and collectables at the 565 Wine Street school from 11 am. to 4 p.m.. With the theme "The Way We Were," the show will be geared toward depicting Point Richmond home life in bygone days and will feature needlework, household items, rugs, toys and tools lent for the day by community members.

Supplementing the show will be an exhibit of photographs of early Richmond and a walking tour of historical buildings in the Point. The tour will wind up at the Hotel Mac, where complimentary tea or coffee will be served. There will also be a raffle of collectables donated by local businessmen.

The high point of the day is likely to be the appearance of "This Point in Time," published and co-edited by the multi-faceted Donna Roselius, founder and former publisher of the weekly newspaper, Point-Counterpoint.

The history grew out of the first anniversary issue of Point-Counterpoint. Published April 9, 1967 and titled "Historic Houses," it highlighted a collection of Mrs. Roselius' artistic sketches of Point Richmond homes which, along with pertinent historical data, were a weekly feature of the publication.

Many more sketches produced during the additional three and a half years she published the newspaper are included in the history book she co-edited with Rosemary Corbin. Teresa Albro and Michelle Brown. Two other long-time Point residents, Mildred Dornan and Lucretia Edwards, submitted writings on some of the homes.

The idea for the book was the collective inspiration of Mrs. Roselius and Mrs. Corbin, whose original plan was an updated version of "Historic Houses."

"We found so much interesting historical information from talking to people about their homes that we decided to use it as a vehicle to get at the whole history of the Point, including the commercial buildings," said Mrs. Corbin. A lot of things haven't been mentioned before, such as the history of the Italian families who came here after the San Francisco earthquake in 1906. It's nice to have it written down."

Mrs. Corbin already is anticipating a second edition of "This Point in Time."

"There are probably some gaps in the book," she said. "We sent out questionnaires to home owners in an effort to cover the whole Point, but got a very mild reaction. We're hoping the first edition will start people telling us more about the history of the Point that we can use in a later book."

The Point, of course, marks the beginning of the City of Richmond, and Mrs. Roselius and the others were able to gain a great deal of material from the Richmond Museum. Maurice Doherty and his daughter, Clare, assisted with the interviewing and other research, which produced a considerable amount of interesting information.

For example, the apartment house at West Richmond and Martina was once the Abbott Hospital and Sanitarium, a place where a patient could be admitted for \$1.50 a day, including food and medicine. The owner, Dr. Clark L. Abbott, became the first county coroner and also was employed as a doctor by Standard Oil and Santa Fe Railroad.

The short-lived Curry Opera House, erected in 1901, harbored activities ranging from church services to boxing matches, symbolizing the turn-of-the-century cultural division that existed in the area that could produce Club Mendelssohn, Contra Costa County's first organization devoted to classical music, while at the same time being overrun with saloons, poolrooms and brothels.

The Point Theater, which opened Jan. 9, 1913 at the site now occupied by the Point Orient restaurant, was considered a marvel of its day, but its heavily-trumpeted air conditioning proved such a failure that it had to be replaced by a heating system to relieve freezing

patrons.

Nonetheless, some 1,200 people were crammed into the 450-capacity theater opening day for two showings of the silent movie, "The Caprices of a King." To dramatize its intention of entertainment for the whole family, the management advertised its rest room "for mothers with their babies."

The 201 West Richmond Ave. site now occupied by Sherry and Bob's Department and Variety Store was originally the first bank in Richmond, whose manager — then known as a cashier — bore the impressive name of Waverly Stairley.

On Feb. 22, 1910, the Point gained boxing immortality as the site of a bout in which Ad Wolgast dethroned Battling Nelson as world light champion on a 40th round knockout, or "knockout decision," as referee Eddie Smith declared it.

A bit of the raucous spirit of the old days returned to the Point during World War II, when some of the homes were converted into rooming houses to accommodate the huge influx of shipyard workers.

However, at the end of the war the area quickly settled back into the quiet, friendly, cultural community envisioned by people like the founders of Club Mendelssohn, which continues to contribute to the advancement of music with its annual awards to talented young singers and instrumentalists.

Sunday afternoon musicales are back at the 76-year old Baltic bar and restaurant, which is moving toward highly musical entertainment. Good time music pours fourth nightly at the Point Marina Inn and Dick Oxtot's Golden Age Jazz Band has been a Friday and Saturday night fixture at The Point on Washington Avenue for some five years.

With several fine restaurants to choose from and The Masquers, Inc., providing nearly year-round theater presentations, the Point offers a rich amount of social and cultural diversion in a small area while retaining what Mrs. Corbin calls "a nice community feeling."

This feeling will be set to music at Saturday night's concert at the First Methodist Church, where soprano Susannah Wood and her husband, bass-baritone Paul Tavernier, will be performing with violinist Bill Pezick, violist Patty Marsh, cellist Tom Fattaruso and, of course, oboist Donna Roselius, who will be featured in Telemann's Concerto for Oboe and Strings.

A Bach cantata, the Bach-Mozart Prelude and Fugue for String Trio and early American music arranged by Fattaruso also will be heard. A \$3.50 donation is requested to assist the church in its restoration program. To make the day complete, celebrants can go home with a unique history book about a unique community.



History's helpers: Rosemary Corbin, Donna Roselius, Mid Dornan, Teresa Albro