

DRAWBRIDGE



1876-1979



Founders and craftsmen of the South Pacific Coast, the well-whiskered Senator James G. Fair and his mutton-chopped henchman, Alfred E. "Hog" Davis, appear in the portraits above. They began the railroad's construction with the Dumbarton Point ferry terminal, marked by a cloud of smoke at the upper right of the Thompson & West landscape. (Above: Robert Hancocks collection; top: Thompson & West's "History of Nevada")

DRAWBRIDGE, CALIFORNIA

On March 25, 1876, San Francisco millionaire Alfred "Hog" Davis and Senator Slippery Jim Fair, who had made his money in the Comstock Silver Mine, created the South Pacific Coast Railroad. The narrow gauge railroad was built to challenge the mighty Central Pacific and Southern Pacific lines. Originally the SPCR was to run from Newark to Santa Cruz with ferry service from Dumbarton Point to San Francisco. The line changed its plans and the northern terminus was moved to Alameda.

Near Alviso, the SPCR ran across a small, marshy island between Coyote Creek and Mud Slough. Scows and barges used these waterways to transport hay, grain, salt, hides, fruits and vegetables from Warm Springs and the Santa Clara Valley to San Francisco. To allow for the water traffic, drawbridges were installed on each side of the island in the fall of 1876. Being hand-operated, a bridge tender was stationed on the island, now called Station Island. Later it became known by its dominant feature, Drawbridge.

The people who used the waterways near Drawbridge frequently took advantage of the excellent hunting and fishing. Work soon spread and visitors began arriving by the new railroad, even though there was not an official stop on the timetable. Initially, only a few came and sometimes they spent the night in the bridge tender's cabin or in a nearby baggage car. Soon many more made the trip to the island and a few built their own cabins. Now the train was making regular stops at Drawbridge.

In its heyday, Drawbridge boasted 80 to 90 homes, two hotels, boat builders and many gun clubs. On weekends, as many as 600 people visited Drawbridge to enjoy the rustic atmosphere, hunting, fishing, boating and swimming. Having neither government nor law enforcement, Drawbridge acquired a reputation through newspaper accounts for gambling, bootlegging and brothels. Recollections from former residents, dating back to 1900, discount these accounts as an exaggeration. Photographs of the inhabitants and visitors show well dressed, middle class citizens.

Drawbridge began its decline around 1936 with the decline of ducks. This, along with the creation of salt ponds and the dumping of sewage, changed the environment of the area. Soon the hunting and fishing were less bountiful and water pollution became a problem. The island began to sink into the marsh as wells in Drawbridge and the surrounding areas tapped the water table. The leisure activities that drew people to Drawbridge were no longer as enticing. By the 1950s, few residents remained. Many of the abandoned homes were vandalized, looted and burned.

In 1972, the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge acquired 23,000 acres of the South Bay. This included Drawbridge. By 1979, Charlie Luce, Drawbridge's last resident, had left. The train, the Southern Pacific since 1887, still passes through but it no longer stops. Only the drawbridge on Mud Slough remains, though it is rarely opened. The few remaining houses are sinking into the marsh, grey with age and the elements. Some of the old salt ponds are returning to marshes.

Chronological History of Drawbridge

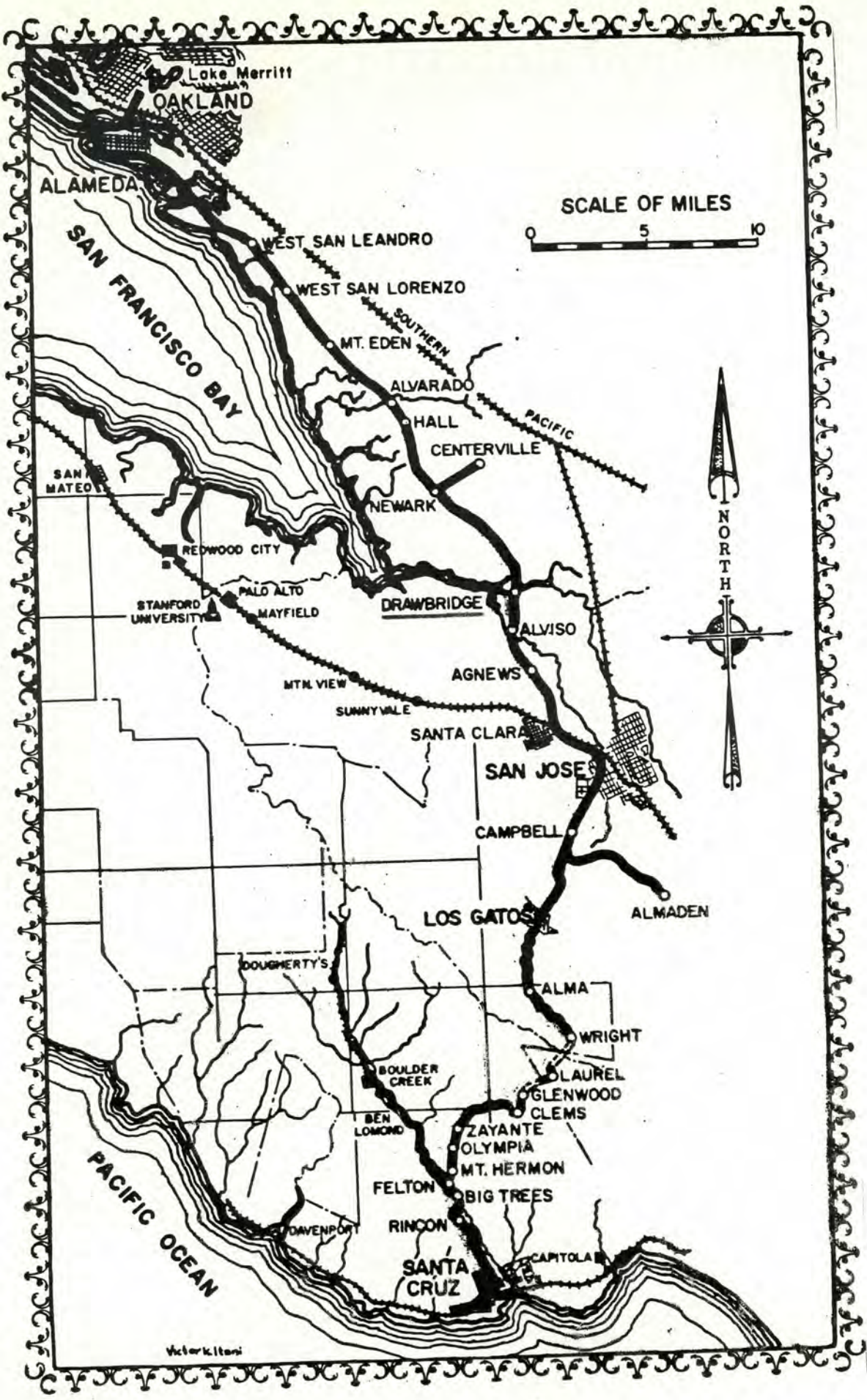
- 4
- 1876 - The bridges over Mud Slough and Coyote Creek were completed. Only one building stood on the island which was the bridge tender's house. He would often charge duck hunters \$.50 to spend the night there.
 - 1880 - The first operating timetable was issued by the South Pacific Coast #8. Trains stopped at the "Drawbridges" once a week on Sundays. The first cabin built after the bridge tender's was constructed at this time.
 - 1881 - The timetable drops any mention of duck hunters using the train.
 - 1882 - Many trains were now stopping at Drawbridge. The outstanding hunting and fishing that were available from the area spurred the development of Drawbridge as a sportsmen's and vacationers community.
 - 1883 - An Alameda newspaper made reference to "special trains" that stopped at Drawbridge specifically for duck hunters. This verified the fact that hunting was well established even in the town's early days.
 - 1885 - The Alameda Encinal wrote that many of the hunters were indifferent as to the results and contents of their game bags.
 - 1890 - Many buildings were now being built at Drawbridge. Most of these were duck hunter shacks but a few hotels were also being built.
 - 1894 - A regular Saturday night train was now available with return connections the following day. This implied that there were some sort of overnight accommodations available to travelers.
 - 1897 - For the first time the island was made an official station on the South Pacific Coast timetable. The island was now officially called Drawbridge and a white sand paint sign was hoisted at the bridge tender's shanty.
 - 1900 - Sprung's Hotel was opened.
 - 1904 - A 24 hour notice was now required to open the bridges.
 - 1908 - Market hunting was well established. Hunters would use canons loaded with shot, chains and nails to kill 500 to 1000 ducks in a single shot.
 - 1920 - This was the beginning of the end when salt companies began to build levees and drain the marshes. This, along with increasing water pollution, hurt the hunting and fishing that attracted the people to Drawbridge.

- 1926 - Near the height of Drawbridge's popularity when it would have as many as 600 visitors on the weekends.
- 1936 - The fresh water supply began decreasing while water pollution increased. Weekend visitors and residents begin to disappear.
- 1940 - For the next 10 years, the few remaining residents are subjected to severe vandalism, looting and burning of the abandoned cabins.
- 1963 - Fewer than 5 residents remain. A white flag must now be waved to get the train to stop.
- 1972 - The San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge acquires 23,000 acres of the South Bay, including Drawbridge.
- 1979 - Charlie Luce, the last resident, leaves Drawbridge.
- 1980 - The town of Drawbridge is now a ghost town. Some salt ponds are being turned back into marshland. Guided tours of Drawbridge are available through the SFBNWR.

The South Pacific Coast Railroad, founded in 1876, ran from Alameda through the Santa Cruz Mountains to the city of Santa Cruz. From Alameda, the line provided ferry service to San Francisco.

Just north of Alviso, the railroad crossed Station Island, commonly called Drawbridge. Sportsmen rode the train to Drawbridge for easy access to the excellent hunting and fishing in the area. Soon the railroad made regular runs to accommodate the increasing hunting crowds. A few stayed to build homes and a couple of hotels. At its peak, Drawbridge had 80 to 90 buildings, including two hotels and gun clubs.

Drawbridge flourished from 1876 to the 1930s. It began to decline in the 1940s and by 1979 it became the ghost town it is today.



Victor Kilton



When the first American settlers came into the San Francisco Bay area in the early 1800s, there were hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, thousands of deer, antelope, and elk. By 1899, most of the wildlife had been killed off by professional hunters. However, there did remain thousands of acres of wetlands and marshes, indicated in black in the above map. These areas provided vital habitat for the remaining migrating waterfowl.

The map below indicates what remained of the wetlands and marshes in 1979. Little has changed since then. Landfills for towns, airports, and industry and dyked areas for salt ponds have caused a considerable decline in our wetlands. This decline severely impacted Drawbridge's popularity as a hunting and fishing resort. As a result, Drawbridge is now a ghost town.



In the middle of this photograph you can see Mud Slough, crossed by a still-operable drawbridge. On the far side of the island is Coyote Creek. Its drawbridge has been replaced with a trestle. The few remaining buildings can be seen on either side of the railroad tracks.





This is a current aerial view of Station Island and Drawbridge. Alviso lies three miles south, which is on the left in this photograph. The narrow neck of the island near the south end was the dividing line between the "South" and "North" towns. The salt ponds on the east and west sides of the island were marsh at one time.



1974

Looking north across Coyote Slough, at least half the buildings on the south end are now gone.



1974

Looking south across Warm Springs Slough. The two most northernly houses have been burned down.



The narrow gauge South Pacific Coast Railroad passes through Draw-bridge. The building is the Recreation, a vacation cabin.

Since 1904, trains have made daily use of the north drawbridge.





A modern Southern Pacific train heads north, across the Mud Slough bridge. This bridge can still be opened to allow water traffic to pass. In earlier days, this took less than an hour. Now it requires at least a week.



The "Newark" ferry was one of the vessels originally built to transport people from the end of the railroad in Newark across the Bay to San Francisco. They were large ferries, 300 feet long, 80 feet wide, with 42 foot side wheels. When the South Pacific Coast Railroad company changed its mind and extended the line into Alameda, the ferries were still used from Alameda.



The railroad track was the "mainstreet" of Drawbridge. All the houses were built on "stilts" as were the walk ways that connected the houses to the tracks. The railroad charged the people \$1.00 a year to connect the walk ways to the tracks.



This photograph of the bridge over Coyote Creek was taken around 1903. Notice the double set of rails. These were installed as a safety measure in case the train derailed while crossing the creek. This bridge has since been removed and replaced by a trestle. The young lady in the picture is Ann Byrnes.



THEN



NOW

The Gordon Gun Club was the first building constructed in Drawbridge after the bridge tender's cabin. Some say it was built by a sea captain to resemble a ship's cabin. Others say that it was built by railroad men to resemble a railroad car. Both the waterways and the railroad played vital parts in the development of Drawbridge. Which story do you believe?



Billy Robinson, Drawbridge's boat builder, circa 1915. His cabin was located in the northwest sector of the island. Later on it was occupied by Charlie Luce, Drawbridge's last resident. The cabin was burned down by vandals during the winter of 1986.



This was Billy Robinson's house, later bought by Charlie Luce. Charlie was the last person to live at Drawbridge. He left in 1979. Vandals burned his house down in 1986.



Drawbridge residents Ed Smith, his wife and Ann Byrnes enjoy an afternoon on the slough in Ed's boat.

The only way to get to Drawbridge was by railroad or by boat, so nearly everyone in Drawbridge had a boat. Boats were used for duck hunting as well as basic transportation.





Since the wind is constant at Draw-
bridge, many people used sailboats.
There were many different varieties
and these are but two of them.





The Recreation was built in 1903 by John Byrnes. It was here that he and his bride, Ann, spent their honeymoon.



Posing in front of the Recreation are (left to right) John and Ann Byrnes, George and Jean Decker, and Joe and Belle Beasy.



Ann Byrnes returns to Drawbridge after a successful hunt, and John Byrnes is not to be out done.





John Byrnes and his friends relax after a day at the factory.



And with the same friends, John is ready to step out.



The Byrnes and their friends found swimming in The Slough, an enjoyable summertime activity.



The Recreation as it appears today.



Ann Byrnes and Ed Smith on the porch of the Clambake Club. This club was owned by the Skaar family.



Ed Smith, a long time Drawbridge resident, was an experienced and successful duck hunter.



Mr. and Mrs. Sprung emigrated from Germany and in 1904 they built the Sprung Hotel. Mrs. Sprung is third from the left in this photograph taken around 1915. On Mrs. Sprung's left is her niece, who married another Drawbridge resident, Ike Oswald. circa 1915



Sprung Hotel had a good well and Mrs. Sprung sold water to many of the residents for \$5.00 a year!



Family life in Drawbridge at the turn of the century was often idyllic.



Dining inside the front porch at the Sprung Hotel. Mrs. Sprung second from right. Herman Oswald third from right. Ike Oswald first at left.

Fourth of July celebration.

Mr. Ed Dowd second from left, Mrs. Sprung second from right. Billy Carrera on the right. In the saloon.





The Oswald brothers; Al, George, and Ike return to Drawbridge after a day of hunting. Bay limits were not enforced as they are today. Law enforcement officers were not too keen going into Drawbridge where everyone had a gun, plus some were quite independent and ornery. Circa 1915



This is the Sprig Duck Club in 1961. It was owned by Mr. Ed Dowd and his wife Mary. Mr. Dowd owned an electrical company in San Francisco. This cabin was vandalized and finally burned down.

3A



Ed Dowd in his kitchen.

1961



These pictures were donated by the daughter of Mary and Ed Dowd - who live in San Francisco.

Ed Dowd in his cabin bedroom.
1961



Dowd cabin kitchen.
1961



Nellie Dollin was the last woman in Drawbridge and next to the last resident. She came to Drawbridge in 1910 when she was ten years old to visit her father. She visited on and off thru the year and finally became a permanent resident. She worked in both Oakland and San Jose using the train to commute. She loved to hunt and she loved Drawbridge. Then in 1974 after a great deal of harassment and vandalism she gave up and left to move to Hayward.



Nellies first house as it appeared in 1961.



Nellies patio in 1961 - Nellie is on the right.
Mrs. Mary Dowd on the left.



Nellie at home with her dog in 1961. Her cabin is still standing although an attempt to burn it down failed.

NOTE: The following pictures are of her second cabin.



Nellie Dollin's cabin as it appeared in 1984.



The interior of Nellie Dollin's cabin was simple but comfortable.



Nellie's cabin was burned down in 1984. In the background you can see Charlie Luce's cabin which was burned down in the winter of 1986. Vandalism, particularly arson, continues to be the nemesis of Drawbridge.



The need for pilings is evident at high tide, as this 1981 photograph shows. The two story house on the right has been burned down.



Note the high water mark on this cabin that has sunk.



The only two story house in Drawbridge was owned by Barney Panella. He also owned the Hunter's Home Hotel.



44





TOURS TO DRAWBRIDGE NO longer
offered.

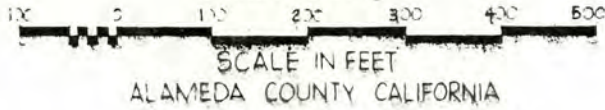
It is now illegal and unsafe
to VISIT The town 2001

<u>Tract No.</u>	<u>Tract Name</u>	<u>Acres</u>
47	Charles D. Staples et al	0.06
48,a	Charles V. Luce	0.12
49	Harris B. Cheney et al	0.05
50	Myrtle W. Mann et al	0.06
51	Benjamin J. Warren et ux	0.07
52,a	Earl Hoey	0.26
53,a,b	Martha Oswald et al	1.01
54	Albert L. Hinton	0.03
56	Louis Wohlers et al	0.06
57	Sibley Smith	0.06
58,a	George Schellmann	0.20
59	Vernon P. Higgins	0.06
60	Peter Catanich	0.12
61	Dorothea Ehrhardt	0.07
62	Louis A. Schlicher et al	0.15
63	Elsie Hibbard	0.36
64	Edward F. Dowd	0.15
65,a	Estate of John J. Pettyes et al	0.44
67	Viola Pettyes	0.28
68	Paul B. Weiss	0.32
69	Patrick Silva	0.54
70	Clifford A. Bentzien	0.08
71	Edmund M. DeSilva	0.23
72,a,-I	Frank E. Panella et al	0.21
73,-I	Albert M. Evans	0.10
74,-I	Forrest L. Bentzien	0.06
75	Cleo F. Nigro et al	0.06
76,-I	Richard Levin et al	0.26
77,-I,a,-	Michael Fromm et al	0.17
78,-I	Charlotte Holden et al	0.12
79,-I	Kenneth R. Witten	0.08

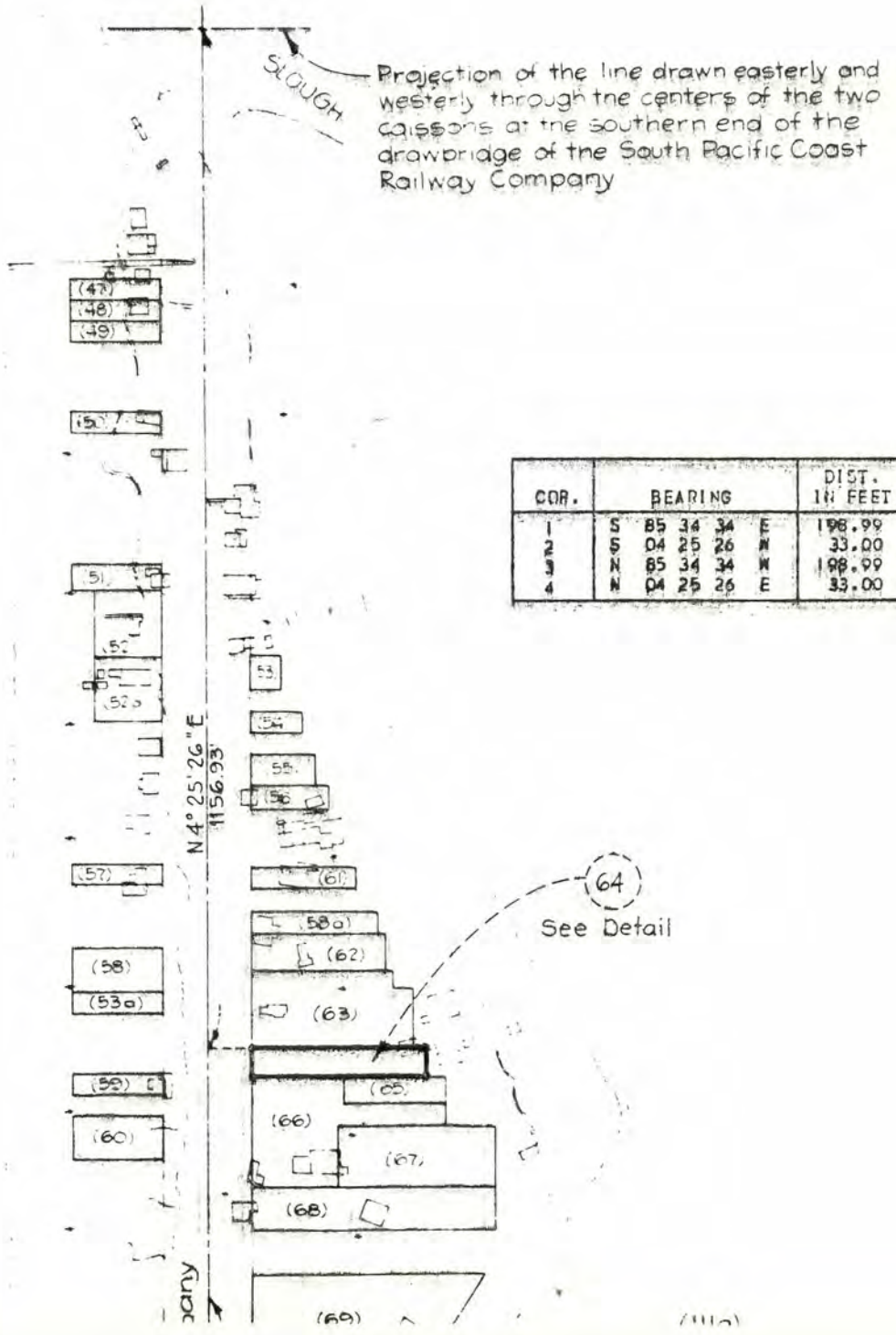
Rec'd
6 5 51

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
 FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
 SAN FRANCISCO BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
 EDWARD F. DOWD ET UX TRACT
 (64)

0.151 Acre

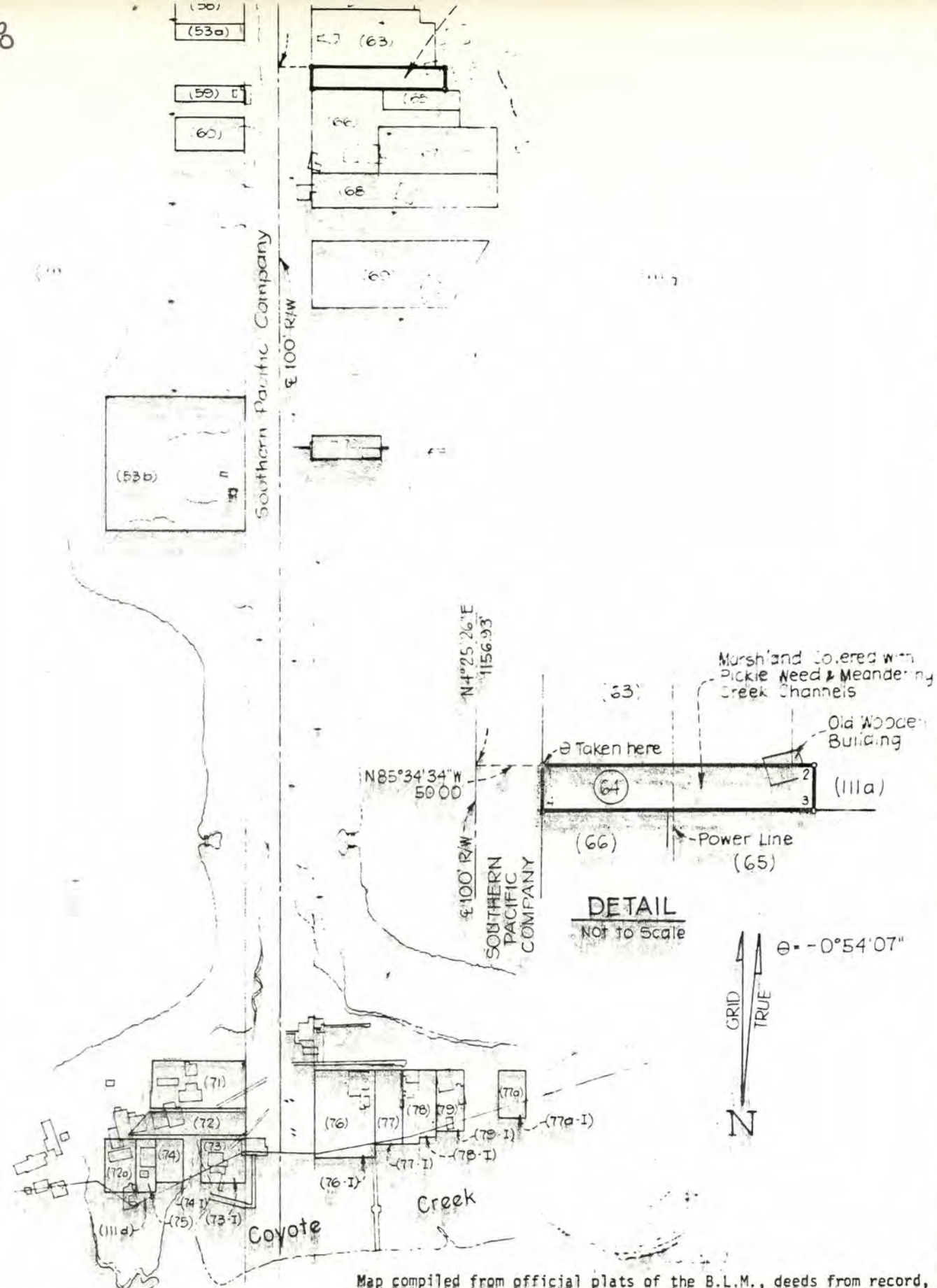


To N.G.S. Survey Point
 Red Hill
 N48°48'51" W 46,146.06
 MUD



COR.	BEARING	DIST. IN FEET
1	S 85 34 34 E	198.99
2	S 04 25 26 W	33.00
3	N 85 34 34 W	198.99
4	N 04 25 26 E	33.00

64
 See Detail

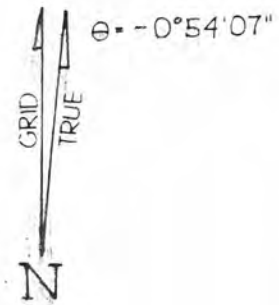


ALL BEARINGS AND DISTANCES ARE BASED ON THE CALIFORNIA COORDINATE SYSTEM, ZONE 3. TO OBTAIN GROUND LEVEL DISTANCES MULTIPLY DISTANCES SHOWN HEREIN BY 1.0000587. ALL AREAS SHOWN ARE TRUE GROUND AREAS.

Map compiled from official plats of the B.L.M., deeds from record, filed records of survey, unfiled surveys, filed Record Maps, and field surveys made during 1974, 1975 and 1976 by Murray-McCormick, Inc. under Contract 14-16-0001-5734 EN with the Fish and Wildlife Service.

OCTOBER 23, 1975
DATE

A.P. Christensen
A.P. CHRISTENSEN LS 3936



Deed of Gift

This Indenture, Made this 2nd day of March,
in the year of Our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Twenty-Six,

Between Hedwig Sprung, a widow, of Drawbridge, County of Alameda, State of
California,

And Mr. Ignatius Oswald, of Santa Clara, Santa Clara County, State of Cali-
fornia,

Witnesseth: That the said part of the first part, the party of the second part,
love and affection which the said party of the first part has and bears unto
the said party of the second part, as also for the better maintenance, support,
protection and livelihood of the said party of the second part, done by these presents
Give, Grant, Alien and Confirm unto the said party of the second part, and to his
heirs and assigns forever.

All that certain lot piece or parcel of land, situate, lying and being at the
Station of Drawbridge County of Alameda State of California,
and bounded and particularly described as follows, to-wit:

Commencing at a point on the center line of the Right of Way of the South-
ern Pacific Company, distant thereon 2747.0 ----- feet southerly
from the point of intersection of said center line, with a line drawn east-
erly and westerly through the centers of the two stations at the southerly
end of the drawbridge of said Southern Pacific Company, across and through
Alameda County, State aforesaid, and running thence at right angles
to said center line 115.0 feet to the point of beginning of the de-
scription of the property hereby conveyed, thence at right angles southerly
65 feet to a stake; thence at right angles easterly 65 feet to a stake;
thence at right angles northerly 65 feet to a stake; thence at right angles
westerly 65 feet to the point of beginning.

Being the same lands conveyed to Joe Sprung by the Dubarton Land and Im-
provement Company, a corporation by deed dated January twentieth, 1906, A.D.,
and recorded in the office of the County Recorder of Alameda, in Volume 1405
of Deeds, page 324 Alameda County Records.

Together with all and singular the tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances
thereunto belonging or in anywise appertaining, and the reversion and reversions,
remainder and remainders, rents, issues and profits thereof.

To Have and To Hold all and singular the above mentioned and described premises
together with the appurtenances unto the said party of the second part, his heirs
and assigns forever.

In Witness Whereof, the said party of the first part has herunto set her
hand and seal the day and year first above written.

Signed, Sealed and Delivered in the Presence of
George Schellmann

Hedwig Sprung

State of California,

ss

County of Alameda

On this 2nd day of March A. D. One Thousand
Nine Hundred and Twenty-six, before me, S. J. Bartle
a Notary Public, in and for the County of Alameda
State of California, residing therein, duly commissioned and sworn, personally appeared

known to me to be the person described in and whose name is subscribed to the
within instrument, and she acknowledged to me that she executed the same.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my
hand and affixed my official seal, the day
and year in this certificate first above written

S. J. Bartle
Notary Public

In and for said County of Alameda
State of California

INDEXED

Book of Gift

Prepared
R. M. J. M.
P.O.C. S.A. B.

TO
Mr. Ignatius Ostfeld

DATED March 2nd, 1926.

Recorded at the Request of

GRANTIE

JAN 10 1929 A. D. 19

at 5 min. past 2 o'clock
M. in Lib. 2056
Official
Records

Page 10
Records of

Alameda
County

County Recorder

By
Deputy Recorder

120

(5)

40