

Drawbridge: History, the People, and its Future

by Ceal Craig, PhD



Photo by Dr. Cris Benton

April 2007



Drawbridge:

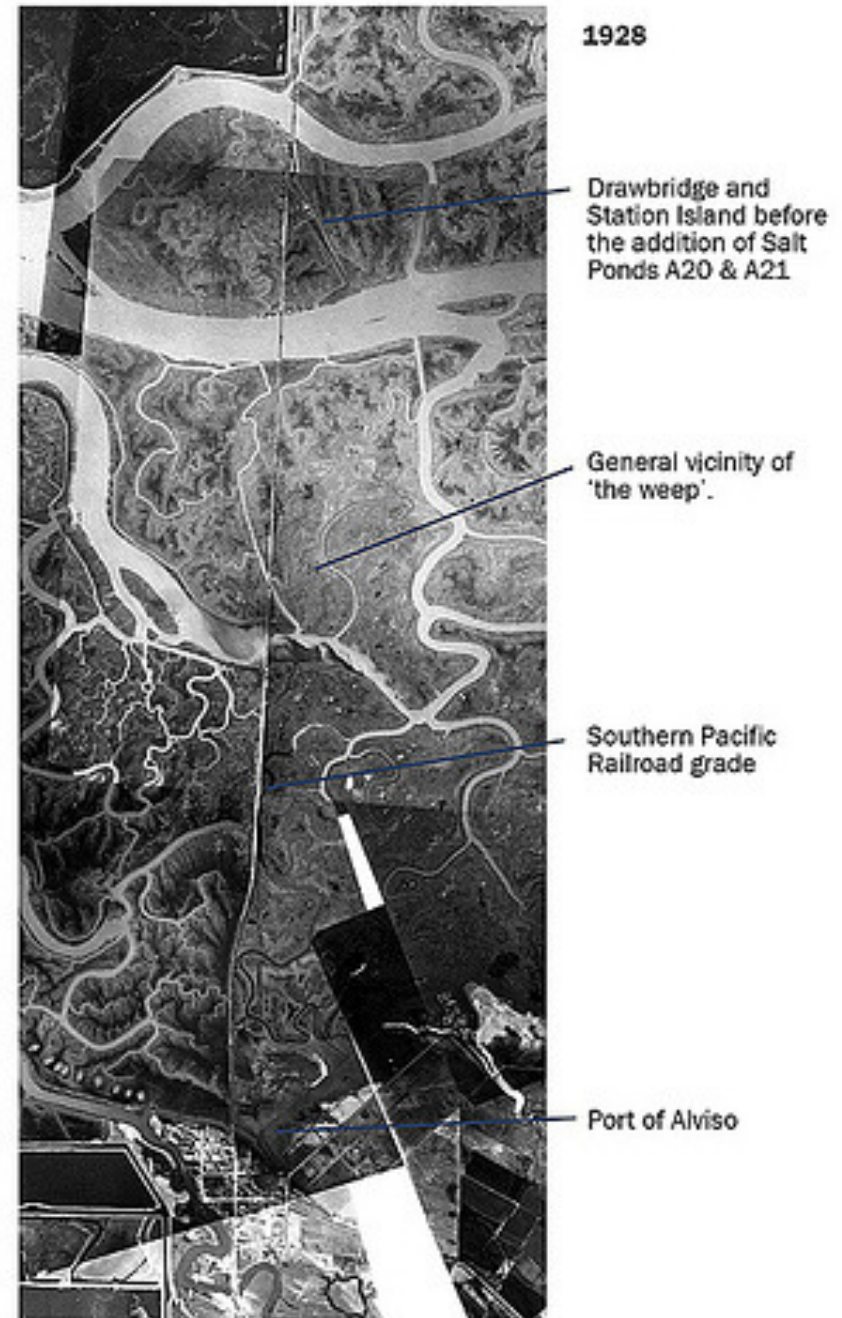
History, People, & its Future

SUMMARY

- **South Bay Life** in the 1800s
- **Trains & Bridges** of Drawbridge
- **Maps:** then and now
- **Life at Drawbridge**
 - Winter
 - Summer
 - Culture
- **Drawbridge Characters**
- **Its Future...**

A mosaic of remarkable aerial photographs from the San Francisco Estuary Institute. These show the wetlands before the salt ponds were built.

For the originals see www.southbayrestoration.org/



Drawbridge : Statistics



Photo by Ceal Craig



View to south towards Alviso

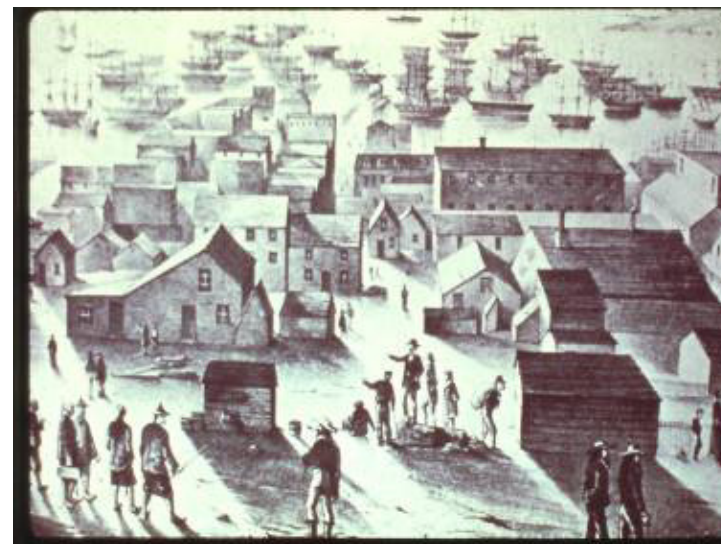
*Photo by Dr. Cris Benton
May 24, 2010*

- **Size**
 - 7/8 of a mile long, 80 acres in size
- **Demographics Timeline**
 - 1887: bridges completed. Two-room bridge tender's cabin
 - 1906: 79 cabins, two hotels
 - Sprung's Hotel, middle Drawbridge & Hunter's Home in south Drawbridge
 - 1926: 90 cabins, five passenger train stops a day
 - 1931: Electricity arrives
 - 1940: water levels dropping (begin in early 1930s)
 - 1976: one resident remained



Life in 1800s in South Bay

- **South Bay** was area **breadbasket**
- **Fruit trees** dotted the landscape
- **Alviso was a working port**
 - 1838: “hundreds of hides loaded onto mission-built boats” [3]
 - Three sail & steam lines ran out of Alviso
 - Into 1920s: Passengers and freight moved north to San Francisco and beyond
- **Landings** dotted the Bay
- **Hunters build duck hunting blinds** on Station Island (1850-1870)
- **Railroads** entered the landscape...



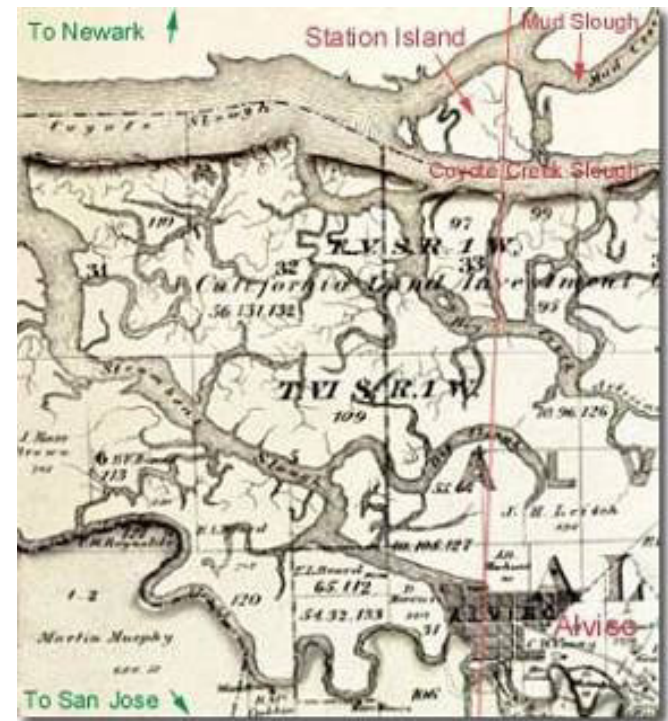
Origin unknown

Burrill & Rogers



How the town began...

- 1876 - 1880
 - **Two people**—James Fair & Alfred Davis—**had a vision:**
build a narrow gauge railroad between Newark (later Alameda) & Santa Cruz
 - **Problem!** Two waterways must remain open to boat traffic:
Warm Springs (Mud Slough) Slough & Coyote Creek
 - **Solution:** Bridge tender living on “Station Island” managing two swing bridges
 - **Drawbridge was born!**



Historical Atlas of Santa Clara County – 1876 [2]



San Francisco to the South Bay & Beyond

San Francisco to San Jose

1849 - 1864

•Stagecoach:

- \$32 or “two ounces of gold”
- Trip was 9 hours

•Boat:

- \$35, 3-4 hours (?)
- 50 steamers on Bay by 1850

•Boat & Carriage:

- \$8, taking 6.5 hours

1864 – 1870 and beyond

- San Francisco & San Jose Railroad >> Southern Pacific

1876 – 1906

• Stagecoach:

- To Santa Cruz: 2 days & cost ~ \$40.00

through Drawbridge to San Jose then Santa Cruz

• Steamboat & train: South Pacific Coast Railroad

- Took 3 hours and 55 minutes. Cost \$3.50
- 1897 Drawbridge station added & named

1906 – 1955

- Went to standard gauge in 1906
- Wood bridges replaced in 1904
- Coyote Creek Bridge: truss in 1955

1955

- No more regular stops at Drawbridge

Today

- Amtrak & freight trains pass through daily



Bridges of Drawbridge



Swing Bridges



Second Bridge

*Built in 1904, four-lever mechanical interlocking bridge.
Retired in 1944 and replaced by trestle bridges*

- **1876**
 - Swing bridge, central pier, iron truss span, hand-operated
- **1904**
 - Mechanical bridges built
- **1944**
 - Trestle bridges built
- **Today**
 - Mud Slough Bridge rotates/swings
 - Coyote Creek bridge – 1955 trestle span



*Mud Slough Bridge
Today, pivots in center*



Coyote Creek Bridge, 2011

Photo by Ceal Craig



Bridge Tenders of Drawbridge

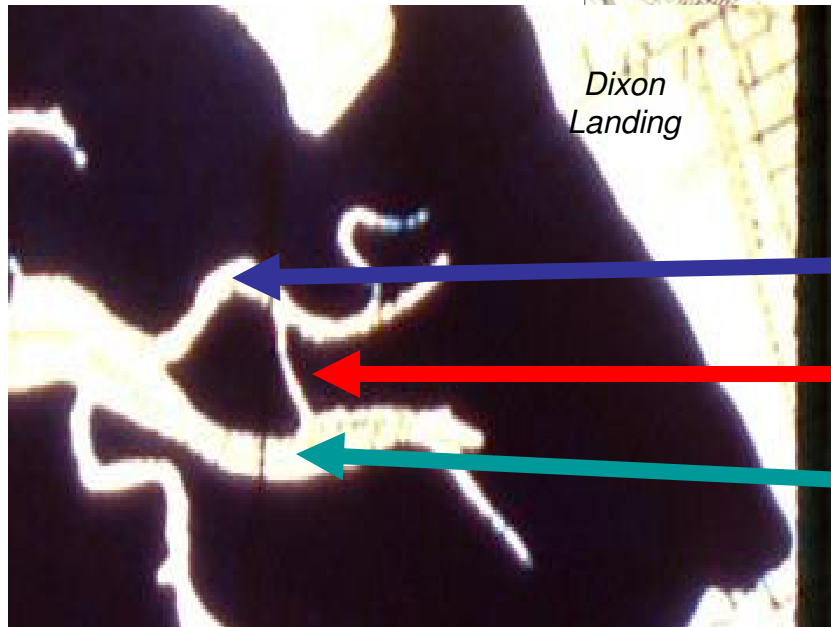
- **1876 – WWI**
 - **First Bridge Tender:** George Mundershietz
 - Hand cranked movement
 - Motors installed ~1910
- **World War I – 1940**
 - William Carrera, chief tender, Lewis Holden & Jim Hardy
 - All lived in Drawbridge
 - Engine-cranked movement
- **After 1940: Private**
 - Cargill Salt (Leslie Salt: 1936 – late 20th century) used Mud Slough Bridge



Building is *The Recreation*
(owned by Byrnes)

South Bay

- ~100 Sq. Miles of Wetlands

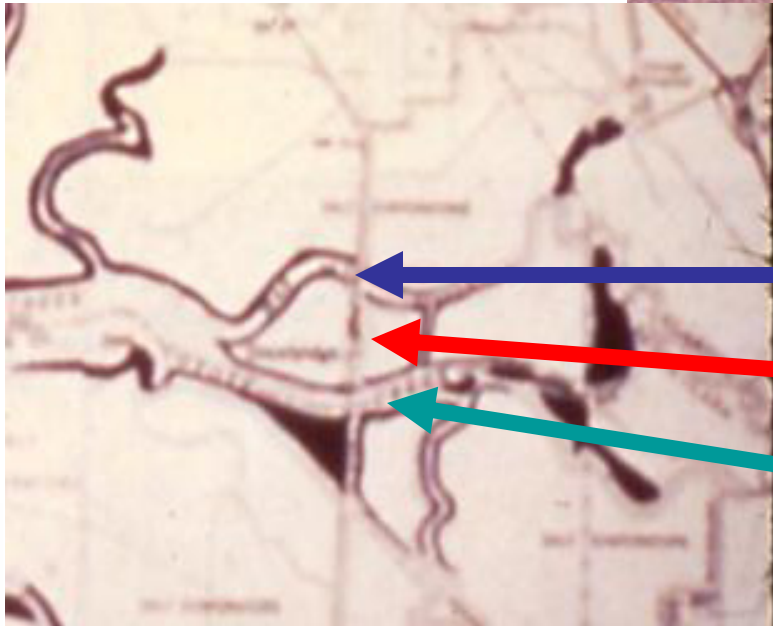
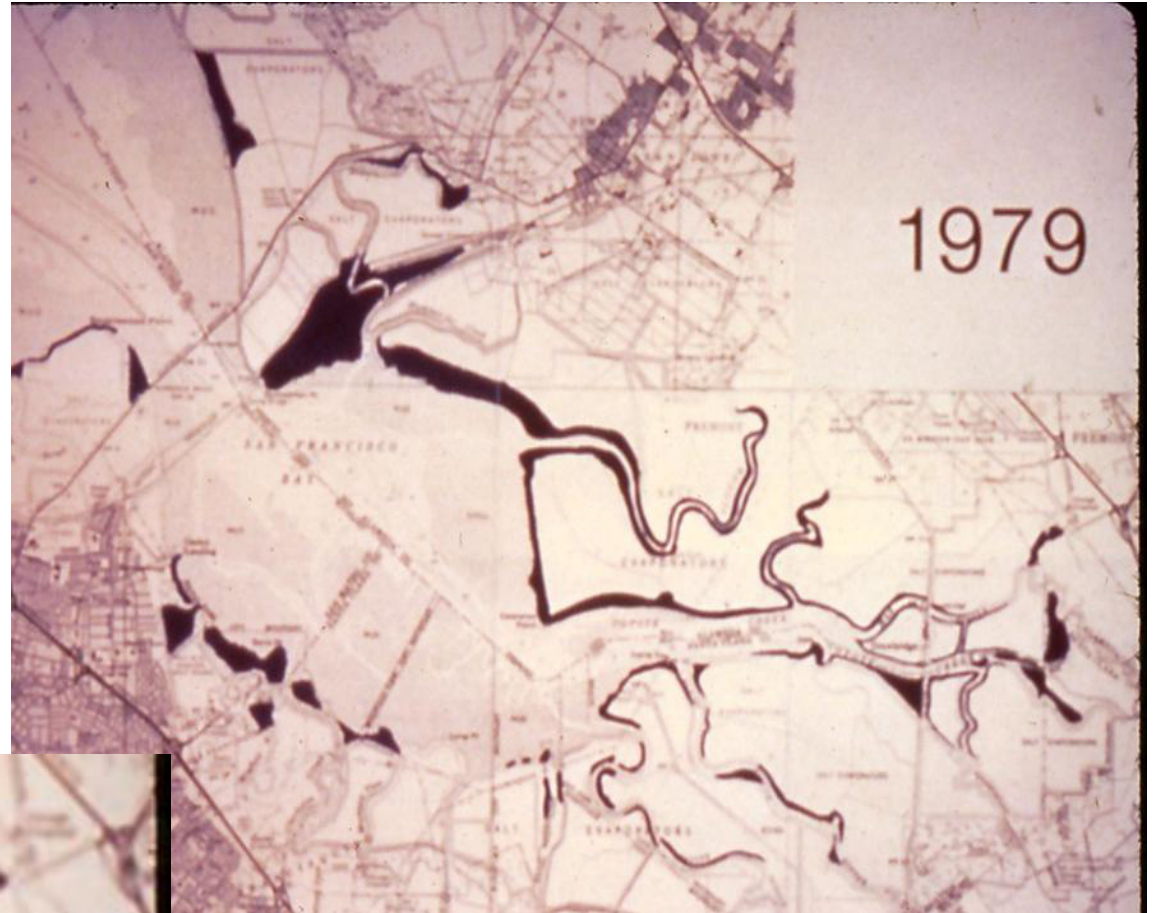


- Mud Slough
(Warm Springs Slough)
- Station Island
- Coyote Creek



South Bay

- >90% wetlands gone

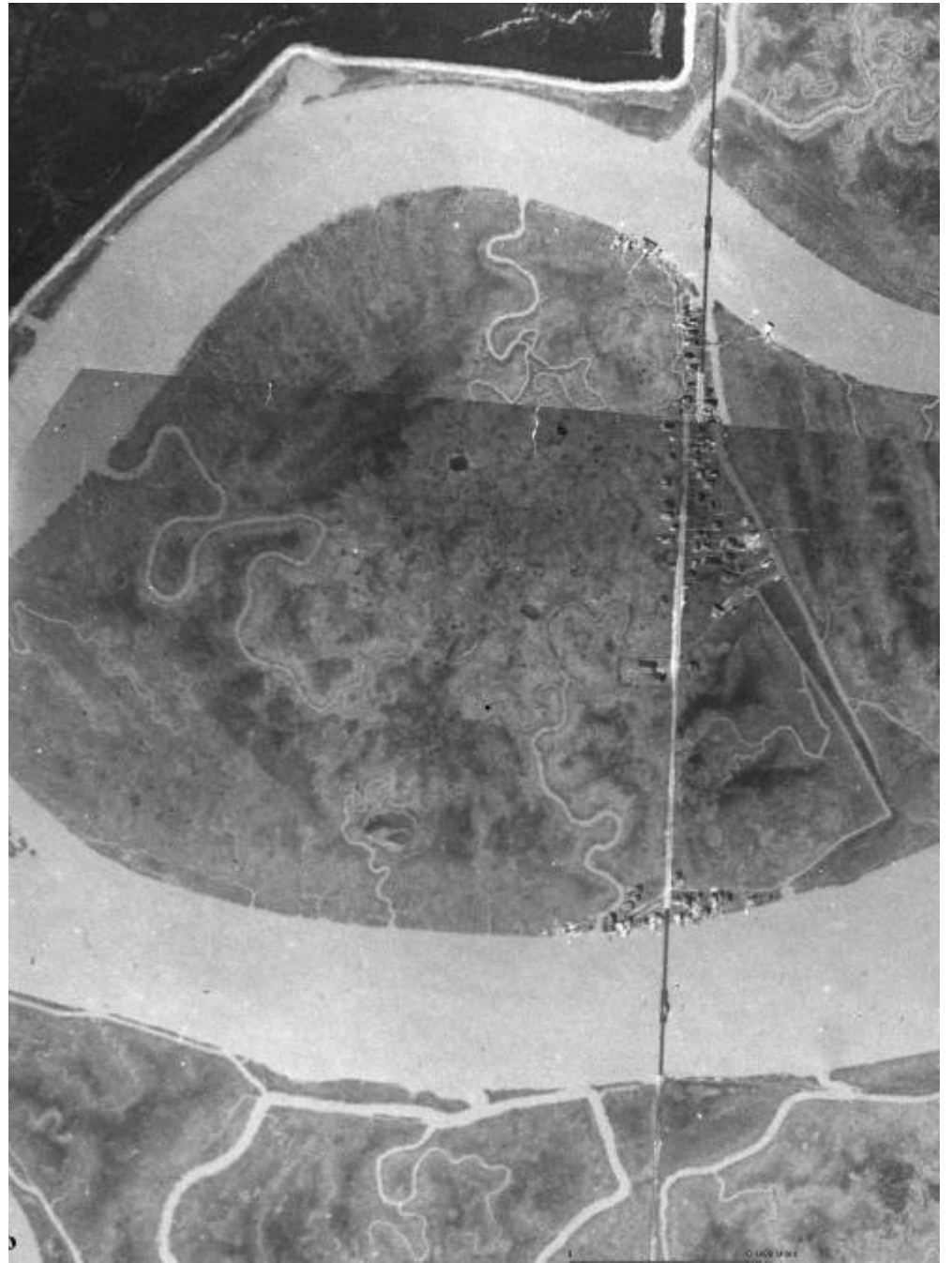


- Mud Slough
- Station Island
- Coyote Creek



Drawbridge, ~1928

- Before the salt ponds were built on Station Island
- ~90 houses
- 5 trains stopped each day



South Bay

- Compliments of Google Earth & NASA



Drawbridge 2010, Visual Earth



Drawbridge 2014, Google Earth



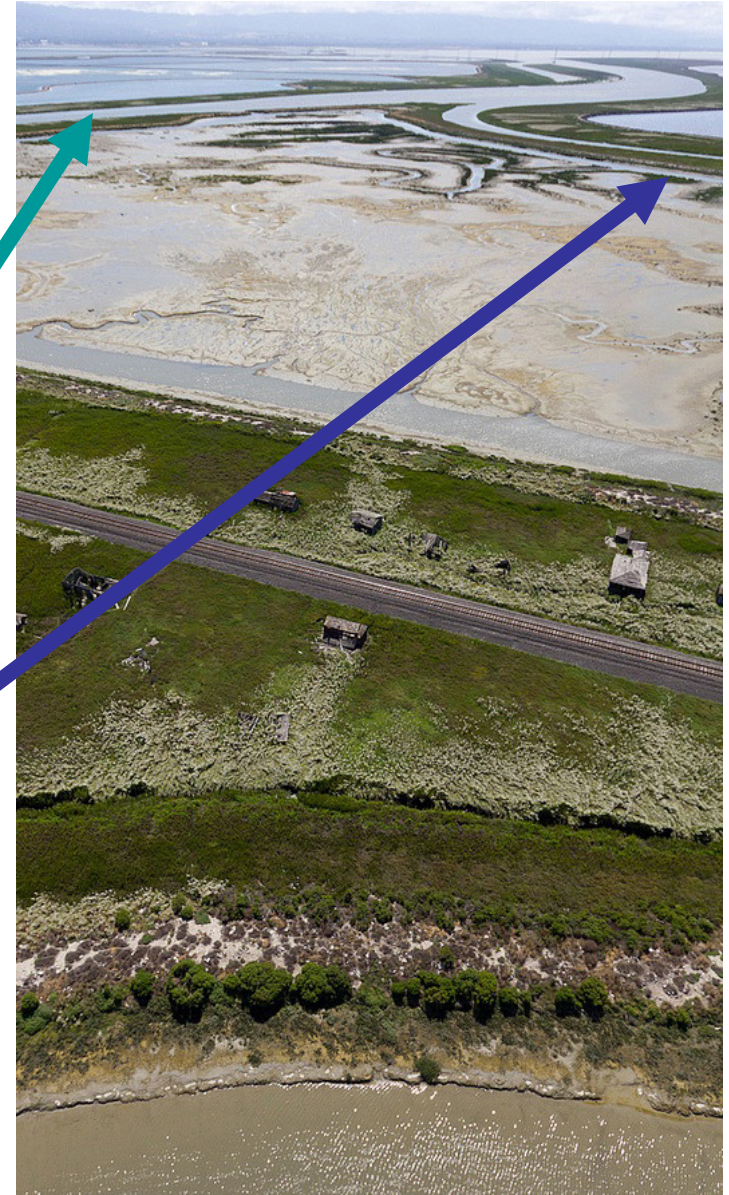
Coyote Creek & Mud Slough Meet



East facing view of sloughs converging

Photo by Ceal Craig
July 2, 2012

Coyote Creek (south)
surround *Station Island*
Mud Slough (north)



View to west towards slough convergence

Photo by Dr. Cris Benton
June 7, 2011





East Bay hills over Mud Slough

*Photo by Dr. Cris Benton
May 24, 2010*



**Earlier view of Drawbridge
after it became part of NWR**



Sinking building

*Photo by Dr. Cris Benton
September 3, 2006*



*Photo by Dr. Cris Benton
September 10, 2006*

History of Drawbridge: 1880 - 1979



Life at Drawbridge:

1880 – 1950s

- **Independent Spirits!**
 - No police, no services
 - Rumors of interesting activities...



*Gordon Gun Club built 1876,
shape of a railroad car or ship cabin.
Had ships bell in 1979. Rented for \$5*



Life at Drawbridge:

1880 – 1950s

- **Perfect spot to hunt and fish**
 - Smelt & striped bass
 - Shrimping
 - Salt Marshes circled the Bay.
Wildlife abounded. A simpler life



Life at Drawbridge: Winter living

- Duck Hunting!
 - Most wild stories occurred in winter
- Most women & children stayed home
- Non-residents arrived by train to hunt & party



Duck & Gun Clubs



Courtesy, California Historical Society,
Albert E. Norman Coll. CHS2012.963.tif



Duck Clubs

- Precita Gun Club



Life at Drawbridge: *Summer Living*

- **Mostly seasonal living**
 - Quickly cabins dotted Station Island
 - Cabins built on stilts above shifting tides
 - Wooden walkways as streets
 - Main Street: Railroad track!



*Social center, North Summer Drawbridge—known
for ice cream socials*

Large screened in porch.



1903

Life at Drawbridge: *Summer Living was Seasonal*

- Everyone had a boat
- Great place to play!
OR “Nothing to do.”
- “As children it was a treat to walk the tracks to [Sprung hotel] to buy candy”
 - Lucille & George Cervieres (1905 – 1928)



Life at Drawbridge

- **Outdoor people having a good time**
- **South Side:** mostly permanent residents
- **North Side:** more seasonal, duck clubs and vacation cabins
- **People enjoying freedom**

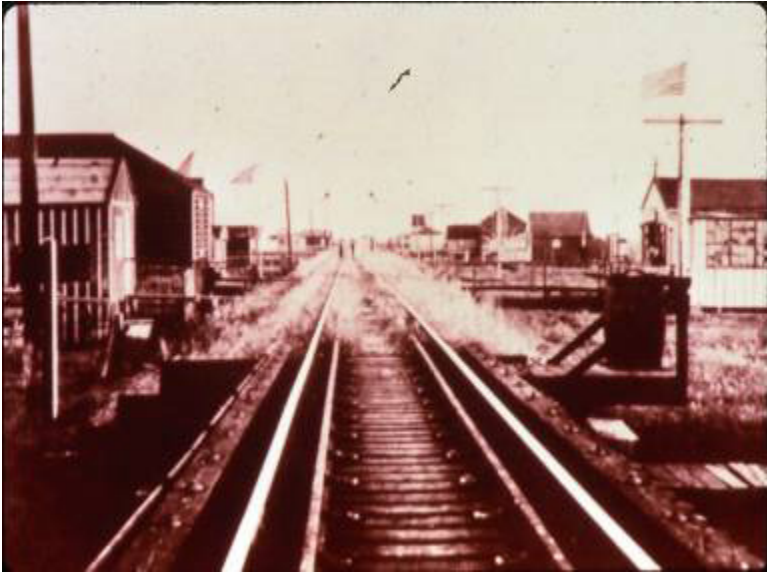
1904, in front of Southern Pacific Station



Courtesy,
California Historical Society, Challis Gore Coll..
CHS2012.962.tif



NORTH Drawbridge Then



- Early days, looking south from Mud Slough

- After residents leave

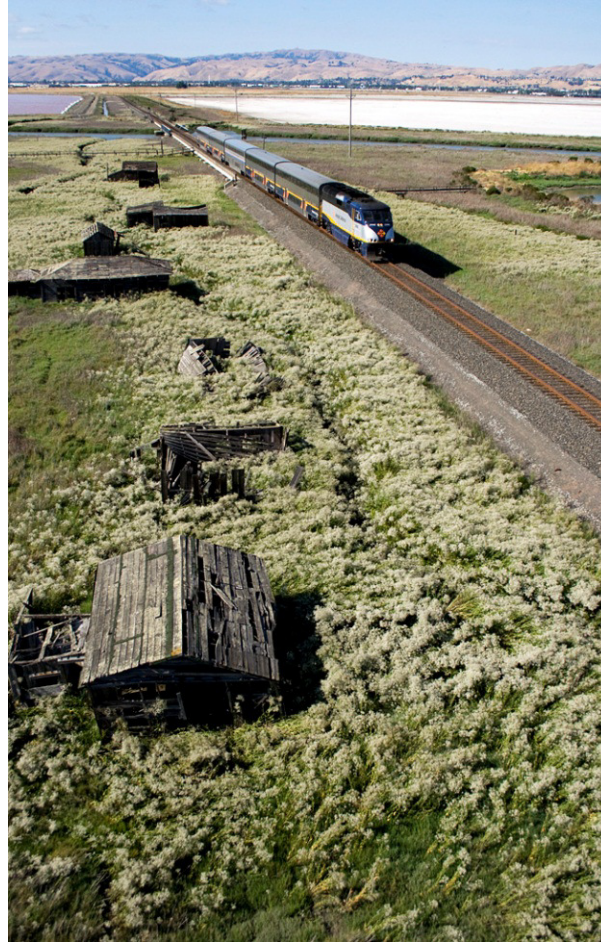


NORTH Drawbridge Now



View to south

*Photo by Dr. Cris Benton
September 6, 2009*



View to north

*Photo by Dr. Cris Benton
May 26, 2010*



View to north

*Photo by Dr. Cris Benton
June 7, 2011*



Changes over time

1981
High Tide



SOUTH Drawbridge

mid-1900s



- Permanent residents walked to Alviso for school or work
- Two story house built by Barney Panella, replaced Hunter's Lodge that burned down
- Bulkheads for confronting rushing waters in Coyote Creek
(memories from Stuart Holden, son of bridge tender Lewis Holden)

1974



SOUTH Drawbridge Now

House & Boathouse originally owned by Kenneth Witten

Photos by Ceal Craig



2011



Screen shot from Visual Earth

© 2011 Microsoft Corporation Pictom

Life at Drawbridge:

1880 – 1950s

- **North & South Drawbridge divisions did exist**
 - Catholics lived on South Side; Protestants on North
 - Italian, Irish, Portuguese on South; English on North
 - Distrust of people who were different?
 - Dinners several times a year for all residents
- **Narrow portion of island had few residents**
 - no boat access
- **Summary:**
 - Cliques...Small-town Attitudes
 - Residents & frequent visitors had common goals

People of Drawbridge:

1880 - 1979



Drawbridge Characters

John and Ann Byrns

- First “indoor toilet”: washed clean twice a day...
- With friends at honeymoon cabin... *The Recreation*, built in 1903



^^ Outhouse



Boat & Decoy Builders

- Billy Robinson, E. H. Adams, Cornelius Reinhardt
- **Scull Boats:**
a South Bay invention

~1915



Sprung Hotel

- Joe & Hedwig Sprung, opened hotel ~1905
 - November 5, 1914 deeded to Hedwig
 - March 2, 1926 Hedwig to Ike Oswald (nephew)
- Dining room served hunters for 35¢
 - Small bedrooms on one side; dining room & kitchen on the other
 - One bathroom, porch around hotel
- Kerosene lamps, wood stove
- Water tower artesian well supplied all residents for \$3 a year!



Sprung Hotel (pictured above ~1967) collapsed New Year's storm 1967-68

Sprung Hotel Tower? 1990's
Fell or pulled down 2005 at same time Nellie's home burned



Drawbridge Characters

Nellie Dollin—*Belle of Drawbridge*

- 1900 – 1987
- Lived full-time in Drawbridge, three marriages, two sons
 - Moved there at age 10, in 1910
 - 1926 bought her first home, trashed by vandals in 1960s. Moved to a two-room houseboat later. Four different places.
 - 1950s & 1960s: often the only “permanent” resident until 1974
- Knew how to use a gun



Nellie's first house 1961



Drawbridge Population declines

- **Late 1920s & early 1930s**

- Levees built for salt ponds. Marshes begin to drain
- Sewage from San Jose & Newark destroyed slough & wildlife
- Sprung Hotel closed as Great Depression begins
- Hunter's Home/Lodge burned down in late 1930s or 1943
 - Dollin: "Barney Panella lit a cigar while filling a gap pump"

- **WWII – 1950s**

- Fremont-Newark area drew water from water table
- Drawbridge deep wells ran dry
- North bridge sinks 10 inches (1948–1960), 7 more inches by 1966
- Two story home built (~1945) in south Drawbridge on Hunter Lodge site
- 1950: Anderson Dam built, slowed Coyote Creek flow

- **1960s – 1970s**

- Fewer than 25 residents remain in 1967
- 1967-68: Sprung Hotel remnants flattened by New Year's storm
- 1970s: train station torn down ("Liability to Southern Pacific" per Nellie)



1960s ...Vandalism

- Lot of thefts and vandalism
- **Plea ...**
Dear Thieves and vandals. Please do not break into this house. It's the only house we have. Inside are things of little value to anyone else and most of them are essential to our existence, Thank you.
- Unfortunately the note had no effect. House was broken into and everything stolen.
- Fires destroyed building after building, still today...



Barney's place burned in 1984



Nellie's second home burned in 1985



Drawbridge Characters: *Last Resident: Charlie Luce*

- Born in 1914,
began visiting in high school
- Asked to leave when Drawbridge
became part of NWR
 - Left Drawbridge in October 1979
- Asked what he liked about living at
Drawbridge, Charlie replied ...

Well, I keep going around here, looking in these bulrushes for someone named "Moses." I think we could use somebody with that name to lead us out of the wilderness these days, or actually, back into it.



Charlie & Quincy



1979

Future of Drawbridge



House burned down in 1986

Future of Drawbridge...

- Subsidence impacts
 - *Photo, ~1960s*
- Too much fresh water going into the Bay
- We can do our part to limit water flowing to Bay

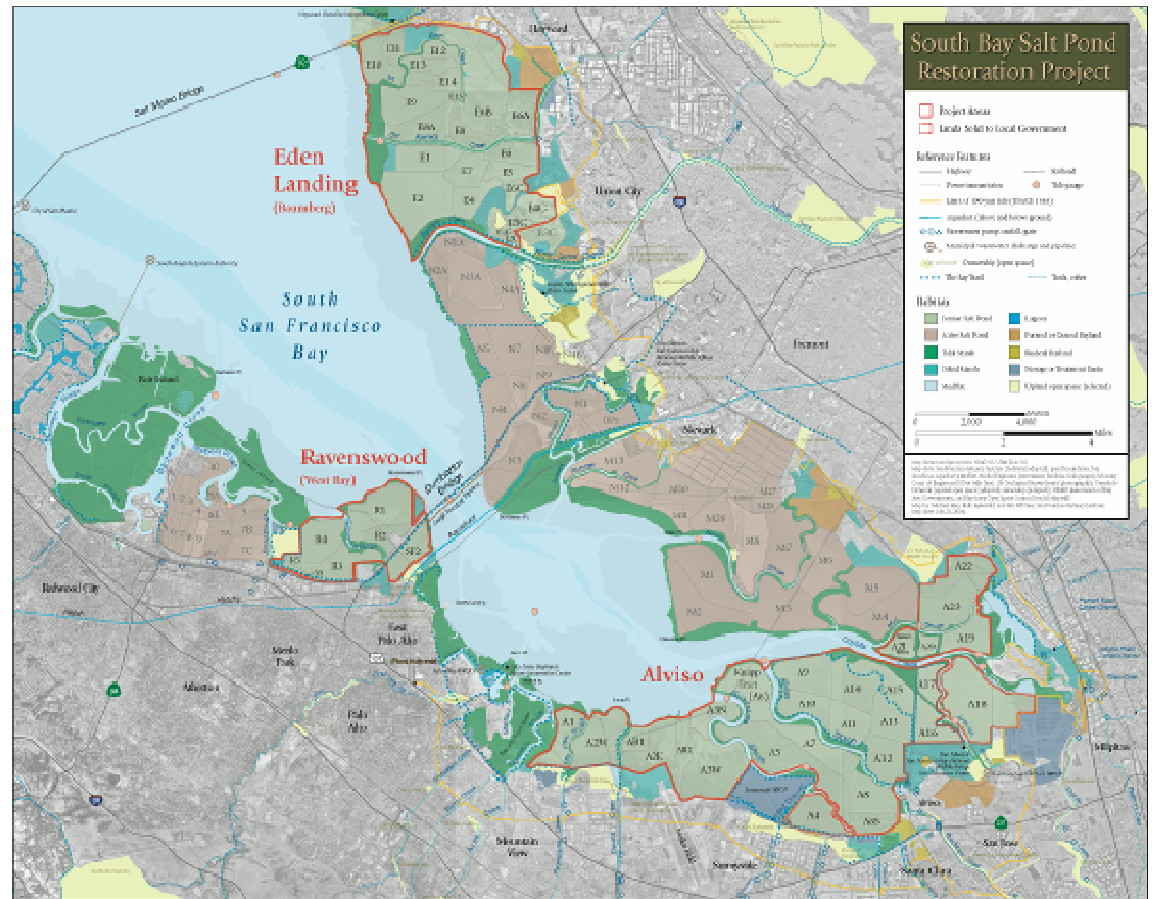


Future is brighter though...

Salt Pond Restoration Project

~15,000 acres of salt ponds being turned back to salt marsh over 50 years

And the work has begun....



Avocets & kites watch over Drawbridge today



View to north from north A17

*Photo by Ceal Craig,
September 10, 2010*

**Buildings gradually decaying back
into marshland habitat for wildlife**



Drawbridge today, sinking into the marsh



^^ South Drawbridge houses

<< Dan Ritchie's Two-Story Water Tower, Tank & Windmill are gone

North Drawbridge from afar (below)



Let's go visit!



View to south

Photo by Dr. Cris Benton
June 7, 2011



Information & Photo Credits

- **Pat Anthony**
 - Drawbridge Expert & Tour Guide at DESFB NWR for >16 years
 - Photos from Pat's presentation
- **Ceal Craig (photos)**
- **Cris Benton**
 - Professor Emeritus of Architecture, UC Berkeley
 - Digital Photos Captured by KITE! Used with permission
 - http://www.flickr.com/photos/kap_cris/
- <http://www.southbayrestoration.org/>
- **Eric Carlson**
 - CEO of “Soft Underbelly of San Jose”
 - *Historical Atlas*, page 4
 - <http://www.sanjose.com/underbelly/>
- Google Earth
- **Robert Burrill and Lynn Rogers**
 - Images of America: Alviso—San Jose (2006)
- Visual Earth

