

THE HISTORY OF LYFORD'S STONE TOWER

By Dave Gotz

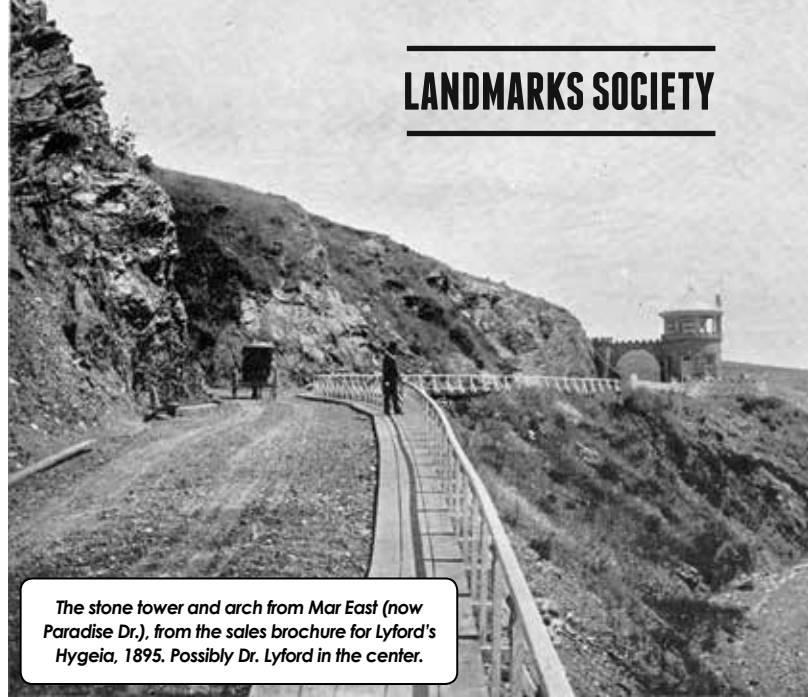
A stone tower and an archway over the road were built for Dr. Benjamin F. Lyford as a small office and gate house at the entrance to the first subdivision on the peninsula - Lyford's Hygeia (or Goddess of Health). The exact construction date is unknown however it does appear on the subdivision map from 1889. The location chosen for the tower and stone archway was a rocky point overlooking Raccoon Straits, with a sweeping view from the Golden Gate to the East Bay hills. The site was about 300 yards up Mar East (now Paradise Drive) from the new railroad and ferry terminal. It is no coincidence that this elegant entrance was located up the hill and around the corner from the noisy train yard, allowing residents to gracefully enter into their secluded neighborhood to enjoy "contentment, longevity, and a happy, healthful life." (From the sales brochure for the Hygeia, 1895).

The roadway into Lyford's Hygeia was private when first developed, but Lyford gave it to the County as a public thoroughfare in 1901, reserving the tower property for himself and his heirs. As the new century progressed, the road became known as Tiburon Boulevard (it was renamed Paradise Drive in the early 1930's after the new Tiburon Highway/ Boulevard was created). In May 1926 the County decided to resurface the road from "Tiburon to the town limits of Corte Madera, a distance of nine miles." Widening the roadway to 22 feet meant that the archway and small tower would have to be removed.

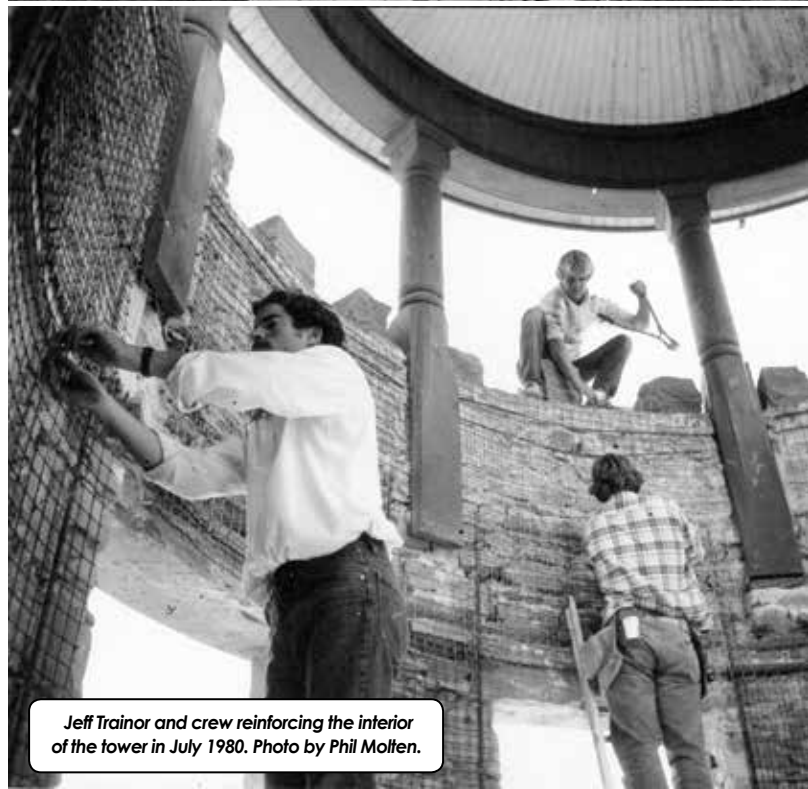
In the late 1950's Dr. Orazio G. Rosolia purchased several lots along Raccoon Straits, including the tower lot, from the Lyford heirs. He applied to Marin County to build three duplexes with one being the on the tower property, meaning it's destruction in the process. In 1961, three years before Tiburon incorporated, the County Planning Commission approved two triplexes on the adjacent lots with Rosolia agreeing to create a 25 year scenic easement for the tower lot. In 1964 Dr. and Mrs. Alfredo Caceres of Belvedere bought the triplexes and the tower property with the intention of developing them further; however in 1973 Dr. Caceres informed the Tiburon City Council that he intended to restore the tower which by then was in serious disrepair.

The Belvedere-Tiburon Landmarks Society initiated a drive to preserve the tower and other local landmarks, and the City Council responded by creating a local landmarks ordinance in 1973. In late 1974, upon the recommendation of the newly created Tiburon Landmarks Advisory Committee, the City Council made the tower Tiburon's first historic landmark. Two years later the tower was designated a National Historic Landmark. The following year, in exchange for lot line adjustments of the adjacent parcels, Dr. Caceres dedicated the tower property as open space; to this day the Caceres family owns the tower.

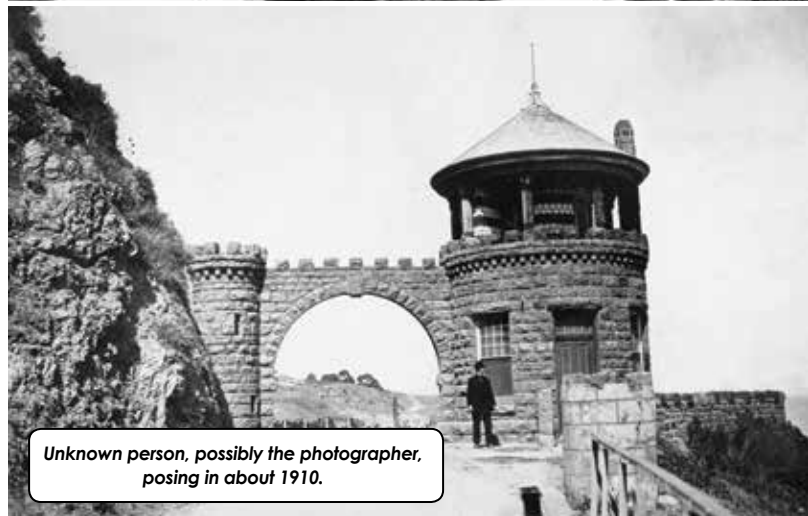
With the tower now protected in perpetuity, the big job of restoration became the focus of the new Tiburon Heritage Commission. Chair of the Commission Gene Marans launched the Friends for the Tower to raise the funds needed for the restoration. By 1979 400 people had contributed \$8000 (including \$1000 from the Landmarks Society.) The repairs began in mid-1980 and concluded with the installation of the bronze informational plaque above the fireplace. A final touch was added in June 2000 – a plaque dedicated to Gene Marans and Louise Teather for their "determined and successful efforts in placing the Lyford Stone Tower on the National Register of Historic Places." Please help the Landmarks Society to preserve our local history and keep it accessible to the community; visit our website at www.landmarkssociety.com.



The stone tower and arch from Mar East (now Paradise Dr.), from the sales brochure for Lyford's Hygeia, 1895. Possibly Dr. Lyford in the center.



Jeff Trainor and crew reinforcing the interior of the tower in July 1980. Photo by Phil Molten.



Unknown person, possibly the photographer, posing in about 1910.