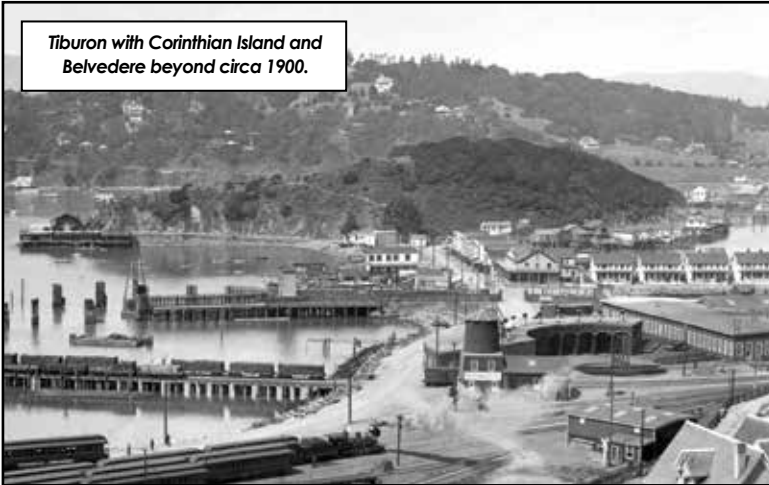


CORINTHIAN ISLAND: A PICTURE POSTCARD WITH A PAST

By Susan Cluff



Tiburon with Corinthian Island and Belvedere beyond circa 1900.



Belvedere Cove and Corinthian Island, circa 1920. Old St. Hilary's in the distance.

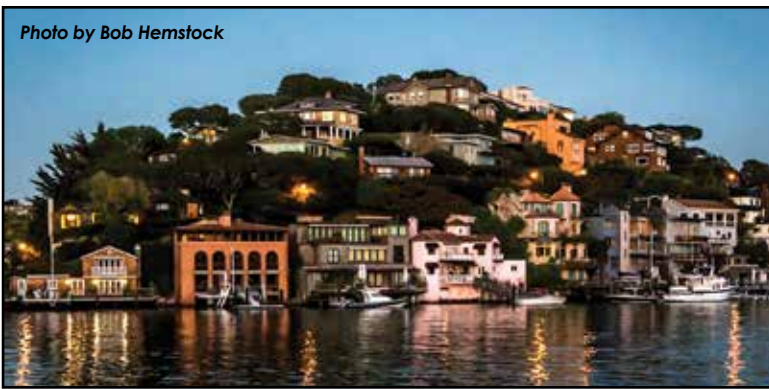


Photo by Bob Hemstock

Picture-perfect Corinthian Island has a bit of a foggy past. Early images show it surrounded by water only at high tide, its steep slopes covered with low scrub, just a little hill with muddy links to the peninsula and later a drawbridge to Beach Road.

Part of John Thomas Reed's Mexican land grant, the property was acquired by developer Thomas B. Valentine in 1891. No one knows why, but when Belvedere incorporated in 1896, its boundary was drawn along the island's crest; so only two-thirds of the island is in Belvedere. The island's first building was the Corinthian Yacht Club, a rough wood clubhouse built by a group of amateur yachting enthusiasts in 1887. In 1910, it was damaged by fire; the present yacht club, completed in 1912, rests on the lower story of the original.

In 1907, Valentine's widow sold "Valentine's Island" to partners James and Fred Kelley, Sidney Plant and William Corran who created the Corinthian Island Company, naming it after the yacht club. The 15-acre property was divided into 97 narrow residence lots. Prices for the lots ranged from \$300-\$2,500. Sales brochures lauded the island as "the finest spot on the bay", touting the new development's good weather and promising good roads, sewers, water, telephone and electrical connections. There's no mention of the sheer verticality of most of the lots - homes are all three, four or even five stories, with many, many stairs.

In 1908, three of the Company owners built homes on the island. Others followed, choosing a Mediterranean theme with stucco terraces, arched windows and red tiled roofs reminiscent of the Italian Riviera, or the popular Arts & Crafts style with its gables, turrets, porches, windows seats and beveled glass. A few more budget-minded owners remodeled Victorian floating arks with their typical curved ceilings, rough wood timbers, clerestory windows, and galley kitchens.

In 1910, the women on the island formed the Corinthian Island Improvement Club to plant trees, build lanes and erect signs, commissioning the two stone columns at the entrance in 1913. The current one-way street system for the island's narrow roads was mandated after a fire broke out in 1950. Residents were evacuated on foot and four additional fire departments were called in to help Belvedere's volunteer firefighters put out the blaze.

Today, there are 53 homes on the island, many of them still original. Corinthian Island's extraordinary views, proximity to shops and ferry, great climate and scenery mean few residents ever move. While it's difficult to drive or park on the island, its postcard views are always worth the hike. You can rest at the little park where the roads circle at the vista point and return by Nanny Goat lane.

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