

BIG REED RANCH TO BEL AIRE SCHOOL

By Dave Gotz

In the November issue of 94920 we outlined how the three public schools on the Tiburon peninsula are located on former dairy ranches. In the next three issues we will take a closer look at each property.

The original Rancho grantee John Thomas Reed had three children, John Joseph, Hilarita and Inez. At the time of his mother's death, the 30-year-old John Joseph Reed was the master of his inherited 2,000 acres, which was made up of about two thirds of the Tiburon peninsula. This land was eventually broken up into two ranches; the Big Reed, which covered the area from the Redwood Highway to what is now Trestle Glen, and Little Reed, which went from Trestle Glen to the boarder of Hilarita's land at the tip of the peninsula (the border line ran across the peninsula on a line from San Rafael Avenue to Paradise Drive). John Joseph had two children, Clotilde and John Paul.

By 1876 the family had moved into a new fourteen-room mansion on a hill overlooking Richardson's Bay with San Francisco beyond on what is now Barn Road. This place became the center of the Reed Ranch, with hundreds of dairy cows and beef cattle wandering the hills from one shore to the other along the middle of the Tiburon

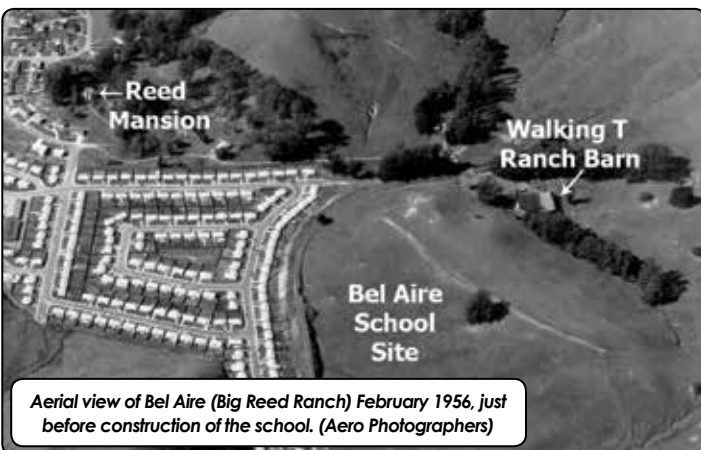
peninsula. Clotilde and John Paul were given their own livestock and trained in the business of ranching. When the railroad came to Tiburon from San Rafael in 1884, the tracks came directly through the ranch and Reeds Station was established just a short walk from the mansion.

By 1940 both John Paul and Clotilde had died without children so the Big Reed Ranch was inherited by Thomas Deffebach Jr., son of Inez Reed and Thomas, Sr. The mansion was rented out until 1949 when Thomas Deffebach III and his family moved in. He revived cattle ranching on the Big Reed property, running Hereford's under the "Walking T" brand. The cattle grazed the hills above Bel Aire Estates and on Ring Mountain until the mid-1960's when the Big Reed Ranch finally closed.

The Reed Union School District purchased several flat acres of pasture land from Tom Deffebach and built Bel Aire School in 1956 adjacent to the railroad tracks. In October 1959 the aging Reed mansion was torn down and replaced by a new house designed by Tiburon architect Warren Callister for the Deffebach family. The old barn was finally removed in 1989 to make way for the Cypress Hollow Subdivision.



Bel Aire School 1958.
(Landmarks Archives)



Aerial view of Bel Aire (Big Reed Ranch) February 1956, just before construction of the school. (Aero Photographers)



The Reed Mansion circa 1890. John Joseph Reed on the front porch with his wife Carlota and daughter Clotilde on horseback. (Landmarks Archives)