

STRAWBERRY POINT WAS ALMOST U.N. HEADQUARTERS

By Susan Cluff

In 1945, Marin County was almost put on the world map when the United Nations charter was signed in San Francisco by leaders from 44 countries wanting to create a permanent home for the international organization. While the City of San Francisco advocated a new UN headquarters on top of Twin Peaks at the end of Market Street, a second Bay Area plan was developed for a "World Peace Center" on then almost empty Strawberry Point.

A proposal for the new UN headquarters by architects William Wurster, Theodore Bernardi and Ernest Born included a large domed auditorium to seat 10,000, several mid-rise office buildings with a museum and library, a small craft harbor for delegates to commute by boat from the City, and a seaplane-landing base. A plaza with a ceremonial court of flags around the main auditorium faced northeast with views of the Richardson Bay and Tiburon hills. Born described the five acre site as one of "unsurpassed beauty... detached from urban cramp while still part of the urban scene."

Renderings of the plans were displayed at the San Francisco Museum of Art for several weeks during the UN Conference, yet the idea of a West Coast headquarters was still a hard sell. In 1945, a journey to San Francisco from New York or Washington on commercial airlines took at least 16 hours, with several stops along the way. From Europe, the traditional center of diplomacy, it would be a two or three day journey.

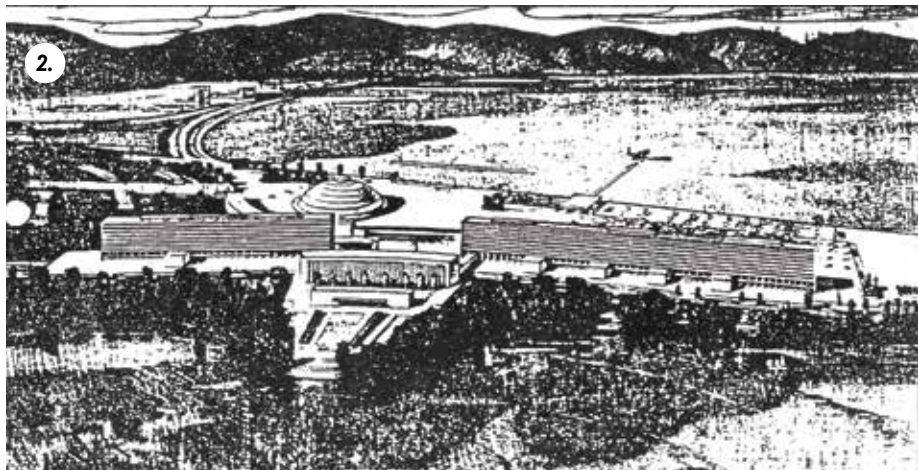
Still, the Strawberry location had a chance to show itself off the day of the signing during the ceremonial drive to Hamilton Air Force

Base in Marin to welcome President Truman. The 75-car motorcade, with nations' flags fluttering, made a quick stop at Strawberry Point to take in the views before crossing the old Richardson Bay redwood bridge back to Sausalito and onto the Golden Gate Bridge.

"For San Francisco, peace could be bigger than the Gold Rush," raved a newspaper columnist. But by 1946, hundreds of other cities and towns in the U.S. and Canada had entered the race. UN scouts eventually settled on a location in the northeastern U.S. In December 1946, John D. Rockefeller Jr. offered \$8.5 million for the site in New York on the East River where the United Nations headquarters stands today.

Developer Sam Neider of Marin Land Company then bought most of the Strawberry Point land from the Clotilde Reed estate, residential development began in the late 1940s and the Strawberry Recreation District and Strawberry Homeowners Association established in 1949. Strawberry Point School opened in 1952, the Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in 1959 and the Strawberry Village Shopping Center in 1964. While not "Capital of the World," Strawberry is now home to 5,700 residents.

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1. President Harry S. Truman's motorcade heading into San Francisco from Marin County for the closing of the UN Security Conference in June 1945.
2. A reproduction of a sketch for the United Nations headquarters complex on Strawberry Point by architect Ernest Born. In the background are Richardson Bay and the Tiburon Hills.

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