

WEST SHORE ROAD: A PLACE FOR ARTISTS

By Dave Gotz

After a disastrous fire at the codfishery on West Shore road in 1937, the Union Fish Company sold the land and remains of the plant to local real estate developers. Howard Allen bought the part the fire had destroyed and formed the Richardson Bay Land Company. The Belvedere Land Company bought the intact buildings, converted them into apartments and renting them out, mostly to artists, who accessed them by water or a steep dirt track from Belvedere Avenue.

Renters included Leo and Alice Rivers and their dog Benny, David Lemon and his wife Jerry O'Day, caricaturist Justin Murray and his wife Ulla, painter Peter Gullholm, wood carver Jerry McCabe and ceramist Jack Brinker. In a 1998 interview, Howard Allen recalled, "Leo and Alice Rivers were caretakers at the codfishery after it closed and apartments were rented out. Jerry O'Day and David Lemon paid \$25 to \$30 a month for their apartment. Leo was from Brittany or Normandy and was a carpenter on ships. He had a little shop but he didn't have any power tools. Alice was an immense woman. She couldn't walk over the hill, so she walked around the beach at low tide all the way to San Rafael Avenue. Alice loved to fish."

Around 1941, Lemon and O'Day were among the first to take up residence at the old codfishery. They worked to improve the docks, living quarters and studio space, which became a gathering place for local artists and friends. Dave commuted in his own boat across Richardson Bay to the Madden & Lewis shipyard in Sausalito. Jerry climbed

the 300 plus steps up and over Belvedere into Tiburon for supplies. She created line drawings and paintings, which were widely exhibited and well received. Lemon's wood sculptures were also highly successful and found a place in public and private collections. Well known examples of Lemon's work are the large Christus Rex in St. Stephen's in Belvedere and Hosea in San Francisco's Grace Cathedral.

In January 1952, a landslide pushed the larger bunkhouse, off its pilings displacing three families. Ten years later Lemon and O'Day moved to a pair of "studio boats" on the Sausalito waterfront and the remaining buildings was razed. In the late 1950s, Howard Allen, his brother, David and partner Russell Rice formed the West Shore Company, creating a road along the shoreline with over-the-water lots for lease on the last available waterfront property in Belvedere. To encourage buyers, they built One West Shore Road on speculation and sold it with the land.

A fine and more detailed new illustrated article about the artists can be found on SFMOMA's Open Space magazine at: <https://openspace.sfmoma.org/2019/06/the-forgotten-artists-of-the-belvedere-codfishery/>. The author did much of his research in the Landmarks Archives.

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1. The old codfishery buildings in about 1951. Notice the path up to Belvedere Ave. The larger bunkhouse on the right was destroyed by a landslide in 1952.
 2. David Lemon poses with one of his many fine wood sculptures on the deck of the bunkhouse.
 3. Artist Jerry O'Day relaxes inside the bunkhouse she shared with Lemon.

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