

# BELVEDERE'S CODFISH PLANT ON WEST SHORE

By Susan Cluff & Dave Gotz

In 1877, Irishman Thomas W. McCollum paid \$200 for six acres of tidelands on the west shore of Belvedere where he set up a curing station for codfish. For more than a decade, he'd made a steady trade sending schooner-rigged sailing vessels to fish for cod on the banks of Alaska and the sea of Okhotsk off the coast of Siberia. The fish were dressed and salted onboard and brought back to San Francisco for drying, flaking and packing for market. The enterprise known as Pescada Landing, and later Union City flourished until 1937.

Every autumn, schooners would come in from fish stations in Alaska loaded with cod from the summer fishing season. On reaching shore, sailors would cross the island to enjoy "the beer taps and whiskey kegs of the Tiburon taverns," according to local author Richard O'Brien. The salted fish were unloaded, put into large redwood tanks of brine, spread out to dry on racks in the sun and packed in wood boxes to be sold as food, bait, glue and fertilizer. For Bay Area residents, salt cod was often on the dinner table. To make the board-stiff fish into something edible, you had soak it in many changes of cold water to wash out the salt and fishy smell then prepare it with potatoes or tomatoes, make cod fish balls, or simmer it in a sauce.

McCollum added a wharf, large warehouse, drying yards and bunk houses for the workers at Pescada Landing. In 1891, he formed a sales agency with Lynde & Hough on the east side of the Tiburon peninsula, and in 1904 the firms merged to become Union Fish Co. On December 10, 1917, about half the fish processing plant along Belvedere's shoreline was damaged by fire. According to the Sausalito News, Belvedere residents, plant workers and a San Francisco F.D. tugboat fought the fire. It was eventually contained, but much of the warehouse and seasons' cod was lost.

In the 1930s, the operation expanded to curing and packing other types of fish — up to 200 men worked at the plant. In 1937, fire again hit the facility and the company moved to San Francisco. Two years later, Union Fish Co. sold the southern part to developer Howard Allen who formed the Richardson Bay Land Company. The Belvedere Land Company bought the fire-damaged buildings, fixed them up and rented them for wartime housing. Accessed only by water or down a steep trail from Belvedere Avenue, the buildings became a gathering place for artists. In 1952, a landslide pushed the old salt barn off its piling, displacing three families. In 1962, the old bunkhouse was razed. (More about the artists' colony and the development of West Shore in the August edition.)

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1. Workers lay out flaked fish on drying racks in the afternoon sun at the Union Fish Co. plant on Belvedere's west shore (1909).  
 2. The scow Union heads out into Richardson Bay to deliver boxed codfish to points around the Bay (circa 1920).  
 "Images courtesy of the Union Fish Co."

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