

# FIVE WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

By Susan Cluff

*Note from Publisher: In lieu of our typical Family Feature, this month's feature article kindly contributed by Landmarks Society's Susan Cluff and Dave Gotz, brings you five outstanding family members from our Community's past. Enjoy the read!*

*In times when community and a sense of belonging are important, there have always been people in Belvedere and Tiburon who stepped up to help others and make the Tiburon Peninsula a better place for everyone. Here are five who made a difference from our local history. Perhaps not surprisingly, each one is a bit of a character, determined, energetic, quirky, and absolutely passionate about this place we call home. (Photos courtesy of Landmarks Society)*



Peter Donahue, the bold and brilliant engineer who built the San Francisco & North Pacific Railroad and founded Tiburon.

## PETER DONAHUE (1822-1885)

It's said that the wily businessman and railroad tycoon that founded Tiburon was a hard man to work for. He had a vision for Tiburon as the new railroad and ferry terminus for the North Coast, kept relentless hours, demanded the very best of his workers and tracked every dollar. In 1884, Donahue completed his new railway line to Tiburon from San Rafael, established ferry service connections to San Francisco, and opened railroad and ferry machine shops, creating a new town where there once had only been rocks and fishing boats.

As his crews blasted tunnels through ridges, sunk trainloads of ballast to fill in marshes and hammered nine miles of iron rails over soggy bogs and rock, Donahue brought in a new-fangled steam shovel to chisel out the hills and create flat land at Point Tiburon. He barged down buildings from his old terminal at Donahue's Landing on the Petaluma River, built a ferry slip, depot, shops, stores and housing for his workers. Still, one thing was missing – a church and meeting place for the new community.

No one really knows who built the little white church overlooking the Bay but Dr. Benjamin Lyford and his wife Hilarita Reed donated the land and Donahue's workers did much of the construction. Despite his rather stingy reputation, Donahue donated heavily to local charities, schools, and orphanages, and helped out struggling friends with the understanding his name never be mentioned. Shortly after his unexpected death, Donahue's daughter Mamie donated a church bell in her father's memory. That bell still rings today at the (new) St. Hilary's Catholic Church.

## HARRY B. ALLEN (1891-1967)

The Belvedere Land Company has always been the fairy godmother of Belvedere and the Peninsula. Formed in 1890 by businessmen from San Francisco to turn the island into summer homes, it was an immediate success. When the 1906 earthquake hit, residents extended a helping hand to fleeing city dwellers and sent boats and supplies to help the City get back on its feet. But when the Depression hit the Bay Area, Belvedere Land Company investors asked successful real estate man Harry Allen to step in.

Allen had been introduced to Belvedere by his wife, Winifred Bridge, who'd grown up on the island. He was an enthusiastic convert, spending summers in Belvedere with their growing family while he built the Seacliff development in San Francisco. Taking over ownership of Belvedere Land Company in 1935, Allen developed the island and peninsula, becoming, as a City Council member said, "the one (person) who had the greatest influence on the arrangement of land, water, house, roads and people in Belvedere."

The San Francisco local ready to leave the Tiburon depot (Donahue Building) about 1890.



Belvedere Lagoon during construction with Belvedere Land Company building in foreground, about 1950.



Recognizing not everyone could afford hillside properties with gob-smacking views, Allen dredged and filled the Belvedere Lagoon, creating man-made peninsulas for homes with waterfront access. He and his sons, and then grandsons, built and managed rental and commercial properties including the Ark Apartments and Boardwalk Shopping Center. To provide more places for bayside walks and children to run and play, Harry donated 53 acres of tidelines off Belvedere's west shore to prevent them from being filled in and helped develop the Community Park next to City Hall, that was dedicated to him in 1958.

## FREDERICK G. ZELINSKY (1894-1982)

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Tiburon Peninsula was still mostly dairy ranches, a clanging train repair and freight yard, a rundown downtown, and some waterfront yacht clubs. It wasn't until the boom years in the 1950s that the population surged, trains disappeared and the community started to change. Much of that change ended up being in the hands of Fred Zelinsky, owner of a large San Francisco painting company. Zelinsky and his wife Juanita lived in San Francisco but loved Tiburon and around 1939 began renting China Cabin on Beach Road as a weekend residence.

In 1955, the whole town joined in to paint the dilapidated storefronts on Main Street in the great "Tiburon Paint Up," with Zelinsky donating scaffolding, paint and some painters from his crew. Seeing something special in Tiburon, Zelinsky had begun acquiring much of Main Street and Ark Row, repurposing floating arks and restoring old buildings, creating the charming downtown village we have today. "I don't want a super duper shopping center," he said in 1956, "I want Tiburon to be made as beautiful as it can be and Main Street as beautiful as possible."

In addition to running his businesses, Zelinsky found time to be a director of the San Francisco Yacht Club, San Francisco Boy's Club, Marin City Boy's Club, and Davies Medical Center and could often be seen cruising Tiburon in his black Eldorado with a yachting cap on his head. After his passing, Fred's son Ed and his wife Laleh, and Fred's daughter Barbara Abrams donated the land that's now the site of Tiburon Town Hall, Belvedere-Tiburon Library and Zelinsky Park.

## BEVERLEY W. BASTIAN (1930-2008)

Community organizers are a special kind of person, requiring a unique mix of passion, organization and dogged perseverance. Beginning in 1952, Beverley Bastian established six non-profit cooperative nursery schools in Southern Marin, serving as executive director for over 20 years. She was on the first Family Service Agency of Marin, a founding member of the Marin Public Library Foundation, and for seven years chaired Belvedere Recreation Commission, directing the creation of Belvedere Community Park. "I don't go around obstacles," she was fond of saying. "I go through them."

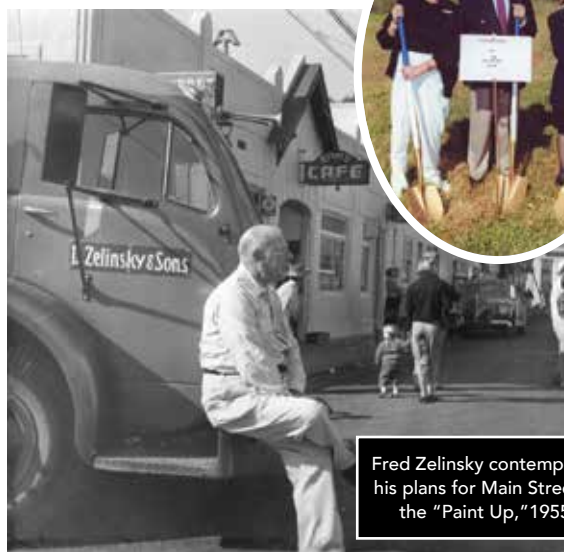
Bastian was passionate about everything she did, from saving a floundering Girl Scout troop, buying new books for school children or urging friends to make needlepoint cushions for the uncomfortable seats at Old St. Hilary's, the little white church she helped save in 1959. Under her direction, Belvedere-Tiburon Landmarks Society acquired and restored Old St. Hilary's and Open Space Preserve, China Cabin, Tiburon Railroad & Ferry Depot museum and Landmarks Art & Garden Center, and collected art, images, papers and ephemera to document the community's past.

A working journalist, Bastian contributed stories to the Chronicle and the Ark, organized the community co-op Village Salvage Shop (now Tiburon Thrift Shop & Boutique) and helped write a pictorial history of Belvedere. She did all this despite a lifelong disability that prevented her from getting a driver's license; she had narcolepsy. Recognized by the Marin Women's Hall of Fame in 2007 for her years of public service, Bastian was called "the catalyst, the mastermind, the guiding spirit" behind much that is good in Marin County.



Harry B. Allen in his first car in 1910 the year he opened his real estate office.

Barbara Abrams, Ed and Laleh Zelinsky break ground for Zelinsky Park behind Tiburon Town Hall, 1999.



Fred Zelinsky contemplates his plans for Main Street at the "Paint Up," 1955.



With Old St. Hilary's behind her, Beverley Bastian walks down Esperanza, still a rough gravel road in 1962.

*Belvedere Tiburon Landmarks Society was founded in 1959 to acquire, preserve and maintain landmarks, artifacts, and open spaces of local historical significance and make them available to visitors and the community. Landmark's historical sites include: Old St Hilary's Landmark and Wildflower Preserve, China Cabin, Railway & Ferry Depot Museum and Landmarks Art & Garden Center. Landmarks also maintains Historical Archives of photos, pictures, artifacts, books, maps and oral histories at the Boardwalk with a professional archivist. Funding for Landmarks comes entirely from private donations and site rentals with over 90 volunteers and docents who contribute their time to keep these unique buildings open to the public. All Landmarks sites have now been shuttered and events cancelled until the current shelter in place orders are lifted, but will reopen as soon as possible to keep our local history alive. To find out more, see [www.landmarks.com](http://www.landmarks.com)*



**CAROL CREIGHTON ERICSON (1914-1996)**

There are only a few Tiburon natives and Carol Ericson was one of them. The fifth in a family of six children (her father was the chief engineer on the NWP ferry Cazadero), she could tell the most remarkable stories about people living aboard arks in Belvedere cove, breezy nights when the codfishery smells wafted into town, the rowdy bars and saloons on Main Street, Tiburon's railroad workers strike of 1924, and weekly baseball games by the Tiburon Railroaders

Graduating from Tam High and UC Berkeley, Ericson came back home to raise her family, volunteering for the Well Baby Clinic, Reed School Mother's Club, and founding a woman's group at St. Hilary's Church where she was secretary for almost 20 years. In 1953, she helped start the Village Salvage Shop reselling used clothing, household goods, cut flowers and plants for local churches and charities, raising over \$15,000 in the first three years. "Community-ism is Good-ism" raved the Independent Journal. It was. Interfaith church groups that began at the thrift shop founded local food banks, built Hilarita Housing and started Marin Hospice.

In 1959, Ericson joined Beverly Bastian, and others to protect local historic treasures, serving as Landmarks Society Executive Director from 1965-75 where she described her job running lectures, musical events, wildflower walks, docent programs and weddings as "curator, janitor, painter." Those were the days of afternoon teas, spaghetti dinners, costume balls and fashion shows to raise money for local causes and whatever they were, you'd likely have found Carol Ericson there helping. "I like working behind the scenes," she'd say in her quiet cheerful way. "There's always something worthwhile to do."



The Ericson Family with six children in about 1918



Carol Ericson sorting and pricing merchandise at the Village Salvage Shop, with Anne Wilson and Verna McGill, 1953.

Do you know a neighbor who has a story to share? Nominate your neighbor to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Contact us at [pmaync@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:pmaync@bestversionmedia.com).



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