

THE POSTMISTRESS AND HER PARROT: SOPHIA LIVESEY

By Susan Cluff

In the early days when Belvedere and Tiburon were separated by a drawbridge over fast running water, there was no need for residents of Belvedere Island to go to Tiburon's rowdy Main Street. Just about everything you could ever need you could find on Beach Road. In the Belvedere Land Company Building there was a grocery and drug store, post office, telephone exchange, beauty shop, doctor's office, library, property manager's office and city hall chambers. Down closer to the drawbridge, there was a laundry, boatyard, plumbing shop, coal, wood and ice yard, gas station and the town jail.

The center of community life was the post office managed by Sophia Livesey (1865-1945) who was postmistress from 1910 through 1937 and lived in one of the flats upstairs. Since there were no street addresses then, everyone went to the post office to pick up their mail and packages which came in twice a day from Sausalito. Local children were often sent down to wait for the mail and played in the park across the street. People who traveled or had summer homes in Belvedere would call and ask Miss Livesey to open and read their mail and send it on to them.

Belvedere post office was a small, narrow room with a long counter and rows of open wood boxes. "She [Miss Livesey] stood at the little window with bars across it, and you asked for your mail there," recalled Winifred Bridge Allen in "Both Sides of the Track." More than likely, she'd

already know what was in it. "...she'd read your postcards and she slipped magazines out of wrappers before you came to call for them," joked Allen. "When boys from the First World War wrote home, they'd address the letters "Dear Miss Livesey and Mom," since they knew she'd always read them...."



Sophia Livesey was English; she'd grown up in Belvedere and never married. She was tiny, thin and sharp-featured and wore tailored suits with a long skirt, stiff collars with a little tie and a tailored hat. She owned a parrot named Polly, who was usually perched on her shoulder. They apparently looked alike and sounded alike, so much so you weren't sure who was speaking. When the post office wasn't busy, Miss Livesey would put Polly on her shoulder and walk back and forth on the sidewalk outside, smoking or reading. She came into money when a cousin, the actress Lotta Crabtree (1867-1924), died and left her \$1,000 a year in her will. She retired in 1937 and just walked out. "Everything you need to know is in that book," she said to her successor Stella Ehrenfelt, pointing to a copy of "U.S. Postal Laws & Regulations." She died in Sausalito in 1946.

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Above: Postmistress Sophia Livesey and her parrot Polly, with San Rafael Ave. behind her in about 1920.

Right: Postmistress Stella Ehrenfelt greets Rev. Ed Mohr (St. Stevens Pastor) at the Belvedere P.O. on May 3, 1956.

Far Right: Belvedere Land Building designed by architect Albert Farr seen here in 1926.



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