

SEAFIRTH: GUNPOWDER, CHICKENS & A PRIVATE CLUB

By Susan Cluff

About half a mile south of Trestle Glen on Paradise Drive, there's a sign down to Seafirth, a small private community with its own beach, pool and sports court. Part of the original Reed Mexican land grant, the property once housed a kiln for dynamite and gunpowder for DuPont Powder Works. In the 1890s, local explosives manufacturing was shifted to the east side of the Bay, leaving the old powder buildings and workers' cottages vacant.

In 1899, Tiburon machine shop carpenter Alexander McCombie and his wife Louise (Heebner) who'd grown up in the Hilarita area, leased ten acres from John Joseph Reed for a chicken ranch. They called it "Holly Farm" after the toyon berries growing on hillside. In the book "Both Sides of the Track," Grace McCombie Wolfe remembers her father driving his horse and wagon onto the Tiburon ferry with crates of eggs to sell in San Francisco. The family also grew vegetables, sold milk and butter, and hosted summer campers. When the McCombies and their eight children moved away in 1913, the Chan family took over the chicken farm.

In 1929, Reed's illegitimate daughter Elvira Alice Garcia, who'd inherited Reed property around Paradise Cove, sold 54 acres to Thomas Frank Ross of Ross Realty. Then in 1946, the Seafirth portion was purchased by local clothing manufacturer Joseph Koret, a Russian immigrant who'd made a fortune selling women's clothes. Koret then spent \$47,000 developing the estate with a swimming pool, dock, beach, barbecue area and picnic grounds. Family stories tell of his passion for fishing, he kept a customized fishing boat

at the pier, five deep freezers in his basement and insisted visitors take home a gift of live, fresh or frozen fish.

In 1951, Koret sold the property to a Miss Leila Mae Browning who got planning permission to develop the Koret property as a country club and yacht harbor with 25 house lots. The plan was to use the Koret main house as a clubhouse, build tennis courts and a yacht harbor with a deep-water channel. But after neighbors signed petitions against it, Browning sold the development and its beach frontage to a syndicate that included local developer J. Benton Bostick, Dr. Alden White of Alameda and Francis Newton of Southern Marin Realty. The Koret home and guest cottage were sold separately, the subdivision developed, and new ranch-style view homes built. In 1955, newspaper ads announced new Seafirth view homes for sale starting at \$36,750.

Much of what we know about Seafirth comes from longtime resident Dr. Hulda Thelander who wrote a history of the area in 1972. She also created annual holiday pamphlets containing her observations and illustrations of local events, scenery and wildlife which she sent out to her friends and neighbors.

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1. Rod Hammond of Hammond, Woodbury & Smith, who laid out the subdivision, suggested the Seafirth name and created the seahorse logo.
2. The McCombie family dressed in their Sunday best in 1911 with Grace McCombie in the front row on left.
3. Realty postcard view of Seafirth about 1955 showing the residents' pool and sports court above the private beach at the end of Seafirth Place.



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