

Notes on Aquatic Park history and challenges by Florence Minard, generally credited with saving the park, founder of first Friends of Aquatic Park. Undated, but ends in 1969. From Bancroft Library. Thanks to Douglas F. Smith for retrieving this.

AQUATIC PARK

A brief review of its beginning and revival.

**Prepared for Friends of Aquatic Park
by Miss Florence Minard.**

Printed by Ecology Center Press

Please accept in behalf of our newer members-
A Brief Review of the Beginning and Revival of Aquatic Park

In the early 1930's

Lagoon cut off from bay by building of Bay Bridge and East Bayshore Highway. U.S. Federal Gov't grant to amount of c. \$1,000,000 to build Aquatic Park. Lagoon area dredged, shoreline defined, island planned.

Seven (7) tide water valves built (5 in west side, center, 1 each in the north and south west ends.)

The encircling road, Bolivar Drive, built.

Marginal land planted, drought and wind resistant growth chosen. (Landscape architect, Vernon Dean).

Dedication 1937-Festive occasion.

Buildings for general use: Sailing concession, north east Bolivar Dr. Rod and Gun clubhouse east Bolivar Dr. Model Boat Clubhouse south Bolivar Dr.

Late 30's, early 40's:

Used enthusiastically by many Berkeley families.

Quotes: "We went there often with the kids"

"...for sailing lessons, rowing and canoeing lessons"

"...picnics and fishing"

"Great for children's bike riding (no cross traffic)"

"...for sketching"

Gradually during the late 40's into 50's the quality of the water allowed to deteriorate.

Major Causes-

Lack of engineering

Supervision of tide water valves

Need for annual reaming unrecognized (Usual park maintenance for lawns, ball-fields, tennis courts etc. totally inadequate)

Pollution-Sources Unrecognized

Four or more Rest Rooms around the lake's margin serviced only by septic tanks, inevitable seepage-

Several industries on bordering acreage to east emptied fluid waste (un-suspecting damage)

Silting-no steps taken by the city to prevent surface run-off from flooded streets from emptying into lagoon.

Need for adequate rainy season sewers not yet realized.

Resulting Growth of seasonal algae increasingly annoying to water sports.

In What Condition did "Friends of Aquatic Park" find this \$1,000,000 Federal Gift in 1962?

Water in the lagoon almost stagnant. Bolivar Drive almost impassible on west side, badly broken surface, frequent holes.

Water pipe line, to serve rest room facilities, irrigate plants broken down. Two rest rooms closed.

Scare Stories Circulated-
Infestation of Area by Undesirable Characters.

"No one goes there anymore."

Rumor Rife-Citizens asking for road repairs told, "Why pay for repairs? Better to fill and sell to developers."

\$8,000,000 named as buyer's offer.

With End of 50's early 60's

Two Favorable Happenings-

Presenting of vacant Sailing Concession to vigorous John Berry and Family. Building of Helmet Club By Berkeley Fire Fighters at north end of lagoon (Both bringing new life, new use to Aquatic Park.)

Also in late 1962 and early 1963 Berkeley City Council focussed attention on Aquatic Park

- Study of estimated current value
- Study of offer for sale, \$800,000
- Study of estimated cost of rehabilitation
- Opinions gleaned from impartial professionals

Legal Opinion

To deal with "Infestation by Undesirables", stop newspaper publicity in re topic.

Stimulate general use of the area

Increase wholesome activities

Offer of \$800,000 by potential buyer not to be considered seriously

Landscape Architect's opinion

Site of Aquatic Park enviable

Available open space

Original planting hardy, survived in spite of evident neglect

Cost of rehabilitation well justified can be spent gradually

Offer of \$800,000 to Council as purchase price absurdly inadequate, Value steadily accruing.

Regional Park Authorities' opinion

Valuable Park, Recreation Property for Berkeley

Conveniently located, gateway to the city

Unquestionably should be restored for both land and water sports to be undertaken gradually, steadily cost not prohibitive

Graduate Students from the U.C. Dep't. of Statistics present Comparative analysis of attendance of Aquatic and other Berkeley Parks.

Prove that reports of "non-use" of Aquatic inaccurate

Used a surprising amount despite lack of maintenance and unfavorable publicity

Berkeley City Council voted in '63 not to sell Park for fill in or factory sites. Voted in early '64 (confirming earlier vote) to retain Aquatic Park in City Recreation and Park System with emphasis on use of entire lake for "water oriented sports."

Berkeley City Council in '64 begins allocation of funds for patching of part of west Bolivar Drive. Reaming of 5 central valves (thoroughly cleaned in 1958 at Mr. Berry's insistence) Opening north and south end tidal valves Dredging of lake begun extending into '66 to rid lake of accumulated silt and of algae growth Thus by deepening lake, accelerating twice daily tidal flow, lowering temperature of lake encouraging return of fish.

Between late '64 and '67 seven surplus school bungalows were delivered to Aquatic Park and used as follows:

Berry Sailing Concession (2)
Rod and Gun Club (1)
Nature Study Center (1)
Kenneth Hayes Memorial Rowing Center (3) reassembled in one attractive boat house.

(These all sit on weather-tight cement slabs and raised foundations, serviced by whatever reconstruction required.)

The Berry Sailing Concession at its own expense has also added an extension of its boat-landing yard (earth and concrete), wharf platform (wood over water), and gained two new teaching staff members in 1962 and ten in 1969.

The Berkeley Water Ski Club acted as host in August '69 to National Water Ski Tournament at Aquatic Park. Entrants and visitors from all over the world numbered over 50,000 for the four day event.

The laying of a new water line by city engineers in 1967 as well as refurbishing 2 West Bolivar's rest rooms and tidying up shoreline growth, paid for by the local Water Ski Club, added to improved appearance and regeneration of the park.

There was additional development in the landing area (earth and hardtop) and launching wharf (wooden) at the Kenneth Hayes Memorial Rowing Clubhouse dedicated in 1967.

The Clubhouse has also added to its collection of rowing shells row boats and practice barges. Many oarsmen and women from Berkeley High School, U.C. and other nearby institutions can now practice at Aquatic Park. Formal competitions have been held successfully.

At Audubon Nature Study Center Miss Phyllis Lindley continues classes for teachers, group leaders, parents and other interested adults, on how to observe identify and enjoy nature from a tiniest bug found under a rock to the tallest tree.

Early in 1969 a throng of little girls and group leaders visited the Audubon Nature Center to present their offering, a glass jar filled to the brim with bright coins "Nickels for Nature." Very happy young gift givers-