



PART TWO

BOLINAS LAGOON

The Bolinas Lagoon watershed lies northwest of the Golden Gate, formed by the mighty Bolinas Ridge on the west side of Mt. Tamalpais. Salmon still spawn in its creeks, whose outlet to the Pacific Ocean is the mouth of Bolinas Lagoon. This small watershed was the site of the first revolt against freeways on the North Coast and the battle to save the southern gateway to the Point Reyes National Seashore. Two towns, Bolinas and Stinson Beach, are separated by the San Andreas Fault, which created the “earthquake bays” of Bolinas Lagoon, Tomales Bay, and Bodega Bay to the north. Bolinas’ drinking water comes from Arroyo Hondo and from Pine Gulch Creek, whose headwaters are in the National Seashore. Stinson Beach’s water comes from small springs. Note Audubon Canyon Ranch headquarters, home of a large colony of egrets, on the east shore of Bolinas Lagoon.



“Flashing the Cash” for Audubon Canyon Ranch

If you want to know the answer, you have to ask the question.

—L. M. Griffin, Sr., Sales Manager, Griffin Supplies

Inspired by the success of grassroots organizations in preserving Richardson Bay, I decided in 1961 to see if the same approach could be used to help save the wildlife of Bolinas Lagoon in West Marin from a proposed freeway. This small saltwater lagoon lies on the ocean side of Marin at the foot of the Bolinas Ridge and, with its twin to the north, Tomales Bay, flanks the Point Reyes Peninsula. It was incomprehensible that the federal government had no plan to preserve them; they were the unspoiled gateways to the proposed 53,000-acre Point Reyes National Seashore, soon to be authorized by the US Congress.

Moreover, considering Marin’s pro-growth political climate, it seemed that the National Seashore was a mirage. The county supervisors opposed it. At a raucous meeting I attended, they voted to cut the size of the National Seashore by more than half and to rush construction of the freeway that would open the unprotected coast to sprawl.

As president of the Marin Chapter of the National Audubon Society in 1961, my plan was this: if we could purchase the ranch containing a large colony of nesting egrets and herons that lay directly in the path of the freeway, it might be the handle we needed to stop the freeway, preserve the lagoon, and build local support for the wounded National Seashore. It was worth a try.

Leaders of the effort to create the National Seashore, Congressman Clem Miller and Dr. Edgar Wayburn (one of my former medical school instructors), informed me that there was no financial help to be had from the federal government to buy lands on Bolinas Lagoon. In fact, if funding could be found for the Seashore, it would be a miracle.

The town of Bolinas is on the lower left and Bolinas Lagoon is on the lower right in this aerial view of West Marin looking north up the San Andreas Fault (center) toward Tomales Bay and Sonoma County. The wild lands on either side of the Fault were threatened by development in 1960. Forty miles distant—on the Fault—a nuclear power plant was to be built by PG&E. Over the Bolinas Ridge (right) is the watershed of the Marin Municipal Water District, which we feared would be sold to developers if cheap Russian River water became available.

So the only group available to try to save these two wildlife-rich bays, which were in turn crucial to the success of the Point Reyes National Seashore, was our tiny band of bird watchers—and I hadn't talked to them as yet.

My First View of Bolinas Lagoon

The story of Audubon Canyon Ranch really began for me in 1932 when I joined Boy Scout Troop 51, which met at the old Plymouth Church on Piedmont Avenue in Oakland. For years, scouts rode their bikes to Camp Dimond in the Oakland foothills to explore a beautiful oak-lined canyon and creek alive with birds and wildlife. Here, its naturalist for twenty-six years, Brighton "Bugs" Cain, an entomologist, molded generations of boys to respect and defend wild places and wildlife, even rattlesnakes. The anguish we all felt when the Oakland Boy Scout Council sold Camp Dimond in 1951 for development has shaped my entire life.

Bugs' heart was broken; he was given a desk job, then resigned, and later took his own life. However, my training as Bugs Cain's assistant and the experiences I had with Troop 51 would help atone for the loss.

One of my most memorable adventures as a Boy Scout was an overnight trip we took the year I was thirteen to Steep Ravine on Mt. Tamalpais overlooking the Bolinas Lagoon and the Pacific Ocean. Some fifteen scouts with bedrolls and cooking cans dangling took the speedy yellow Key Route Train to the Oakland Mole, then caught the ferry to San Francisco. There we transferred to the Sausalito ferry and



In the 1930s, our Boy Scout troop rode on ferries such as The Klamath to get to Marin County from Oakland. The ferry trip was fast and thrilling, with wind in our faces and gulls overhead.

boarded the electrified train to cross the tidelands of Richardson Bay to Mill Valley. We struggled up the thousand steps to Panoramic Highway, then up the road on the shoulder of Mt. Tamalpais and down the Steep Ravine trail about two miles. By flashlight, we descended a log ladder over a little waterfall and dropped, exhausted, in a redwood grove at midnight in a drizzling rain. The next morning, ignoring our blisters, we hiked along the Dipsea Trail and came out on a most glorious sight: the sparkling Bolinas Lagoon, dotted with white birds, with fog-bound Point Reyes beyond. Behind the lagoon, thirty-mile-long Bolinas Ridge, an arm of Mt. Tamalpais, loomed in the mist. The smell of salt from the crashing surf at Stinson Beach, combined with the aroma of coastal sage after a rain, was unforgettable.

Little did I dream at thirteen that saving the white birds and their lagoon home would become the passionate goal of my life and that, some twenty-eight years later, I would make my home on this lovely coastal expanse.

My next exposure to the Bolinas Lagoon came seven years later, in 1940, just before World War II. As a zoology and pre-med student at UC Berkeley, I hiked with my ornithology class up through the tangled poison oak on a dairy ranch at the lagoon's north end to see the nesting egrets and herons. This ranch, called Canyon Ranch, extended along the northern end of the lagoon and nearly to the top of the Bolinas Ridge. It was a superb lesson in the new concept of ecology.

Even then, there were danger signs that angered me. The dairy ranches around the lagoon were flushing all their manure into its waters, and the tiny resort towns of Bolinas and Stinson Beach were dumping their garbage and flushing untreated sewage directly into it too. This fragile, life-filled lagoon was not only home to the large colony of egrets and herons, but it was also the wintering and feeding grounds for birds coming down from the Arctic Circle and Alaska. Was it destined to be just another stinking dump for garbage, like the thousands of acres of tidal flats on San Francisco Bay?



Great flocks of Dunlin migrate along the coast from Alaska to Baja California. They depend on Tomales Bay and Bolinas Lagoon for resting and food. Tomales Bay consistently tallies one of the nation's highest Christmas bird counts.

The Battle for West Marin Begins

The year 1957 spelled doom for Bolinas Lagoon: development was encroaching from every side. The Army Corps was building the first dam of its Russian River Project, the Coyote Dam. George Leonard, an astute developer, purchased eighteen hundred acres of the Bolinas Ridge that year. This purchase encompassed small creeks, the meager water source for Stinson Beach, and two miles bordering Highway 1 on Bolinas Lagoon. At the same time the State Lands Commission, still in the real estate business, leased twelve hundred acres of the lagoon to the Bolinas Harbor District, which had plans to dredge a harbor and build a marina.

In 1958 Pat Brown, the new Governor, started building the one thousand miles of freeways he had promised. By coincidence perhaps, his chief of advance freeway planning for the state was Harold Summers, whose wife, Mary, headed the Marin County Planning Department. Hearings began on transforming rural Highway 1 into a freeway, eventually connecting it to both the Golden Gate and Richmond bridges, and running it up the



Great Egrets have made their nests high in the redwood trees of Canyon Ranch for generations. In 1961 their home and feeding grounds were threatened by the freeway and harbor development plans. For thirty years, ACR Research Associate Helen Pratt has scientifically studied and published the nesting successes of the heronry. In 1990 there were ten Great Blue Heron nests, eighty-six Great Egret nests (above), and four Snowy Egret nests.

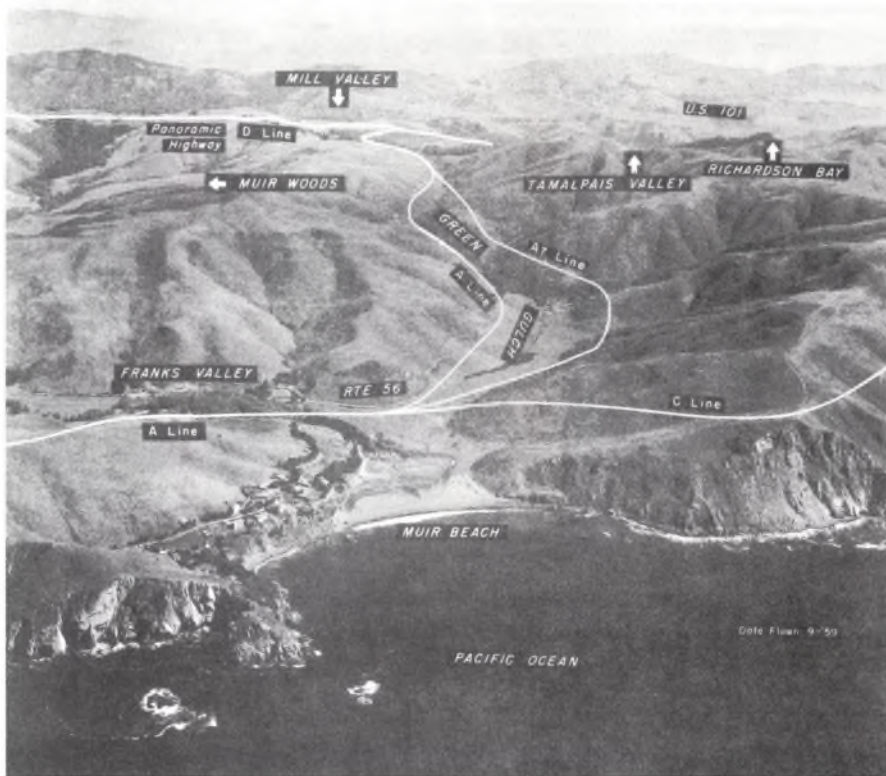
coastline through Sonoma County. If the freeway project had gone through, it would have made huge cuts and fills on the border of Bolinas Lagoon and urbanized the area around the entrances to the proposed National Seashore.

By 1961 nearly the entire southern Bolinas Ridge, and the lagoon itself, were in the hands of experienced developers. However, they did have one problem: they had no water supply. Even so, that year they prodded Mary Summers and the supervisors into adopting a frightening Bolinas-Stinson Beach Master Plan, which showed a freeway along the lagoon and a “parkway” along the ridge. There were also home sites and service roads on the steep, unstable ridge. At that time there were no zoning restrictions to prevent cutting up much of the rural land in both Marin and Sonoma counties into two-acre parcels.

Marin Audubon strongly protested the plan, but Mary Summers called it a “done deal” engineered by the pro-growth supervisors. And it was probably true that the general population still favored growth and freeways.

Our dream of saving the Bolinas Lagoon seemed impossible. Treasurer Stan Picher and I, representing the Marin Audubon Society, had spoken with other groups against the plan at state freeway hearings, but no one else was speaking on behalf of leaving the lagoon alone. Quite the contrary: there was considerable amusement at the idea that the lagoon’s tire-studded mud flats and burning garbage dumps might have any value whatsoever except for landfill. Some of the residents favored a large harbor development, or even a racetrack, because of the jobs they would bring.

With Caroline Livermore’s training behind me, it was all too clear that to preserve the lagoon, we had to do exactly what the developers had done: flash the cash and buy strategic land—and soon. I visited the State Lands



This proposed freeway route would have crossed over a ridge of Mt. Tamalpais from Highway 101 at Mill Valley to Muir Beach and headed north through Stinson Beach, cutting through the mountain ridges and filling in the valleys and shoreline.

Commission in Sacramento and, closer to home, talked to the directors of the Bolinas Harbor District.

My grand strategy was to convince the Marin Audubon Society, first, to purchase land bordering the lagoon, preferably on both sides of Highway 1, as a deterrent to the freeway and, second, to work to change the five-man elected board of the Bolinas Harbor District from a group of developers into a group of bird lovers who would help us preserve the lagoon as a wildlife sanctuary.

I Make My Move

In January 1961, about twenty years after my first climb up to the Canyon Ranch heronry, I put in a call to realtor Gene McDaniel, president of the Bolinas Harbor District, to let him know I was interested in buying land bordering the lagoon. He phoned my medical office in Kentfield a few days later with startling news.

"Dr. Griffin," said McDaniel, "I thought I'd tell you that the Canyon Ranch is going to be subdivided and you can pick up a parcel. If you're



The steep 503-acre Canyon Ranch on Bolinas Lagoon was to be cut into parcels in 1961 by William Tevis, a speculator. The redwood grove in the center canyon where egrets nest was to be logged. The lagoon where they feed was to be dredged and freeways were to be built along both the ridge and shoreline.

interested, go directly to Bill Tevis.” He explained that the owners of the ranch were now William Tevis and Madame Suzanne de Tessand, owner of a large San Francisco department store. My heart sank. I had thought that the ranch was still in the hands of the Galloway family, conservation-minded landowners in West Marin. In fact, Alan Galloway had been a president of the California Academy of Sciences.

I realized that subdividing the Canyon Ranch would mean the end of the egret and heron colony. McDaniel went on to tell me about his own plans to build a marina and motel and to dredge the lagoon. And, he said, a pipeline was coming from Sonoma County to provide water for subdivisions, answering the need for water development.

I put in a call to Mary Galloway. “Yes, indeed,” she said, “we sold 503 acres four years ago, including the egret heronry, to Mr. Tevis for some eighty thousand dollars and kept the remaining 274 acres at the north end of the lagoon.” She said that they had bought the ranch in 1941 and at that time the heronry was well established. Then I called Tevis, who was visiting the other ranch he owned within the proposed National Seashore. I made an appointment for the next day.

William Tevis was born in California into a family that controlled the Kern County Land Company with huge land holdings in Southern California. His method, it seemed, was to buy a piece of land, take as much of the timber and minerals as he could, and then resell the land at a profit.

My meeting with Tevis took place on his private polo field at his two-thousand-acre Lake Ranch overlooking the Pacific at the south end of the Point Reyes Peninsula. A polo match was in progress, with Tevis and a younger man riding superbly. They were dressed in full polo regalia. They kept me waiting for about an hour, but I was entertained by this scene of landed nobility cavorting in West Marin.

Then Tevis sat down and we discussed the Canyon Ranch. He was a formal older man, athletic and handsome. "I represent Marin Audubon Society as president," I said, although I hadn't spoken to them about the purchase. "My concern is to save the heronry, which is one of the largest on the Pacific coast."

Tevis said emphatically, "I plan to subdivide into twenty-acre parcels and the birds can move elsewhere. I'm unloading because Mrs. de Tessand is impatient and needs money for her department store."

"What would you take for the entire ranch?" I ventured.

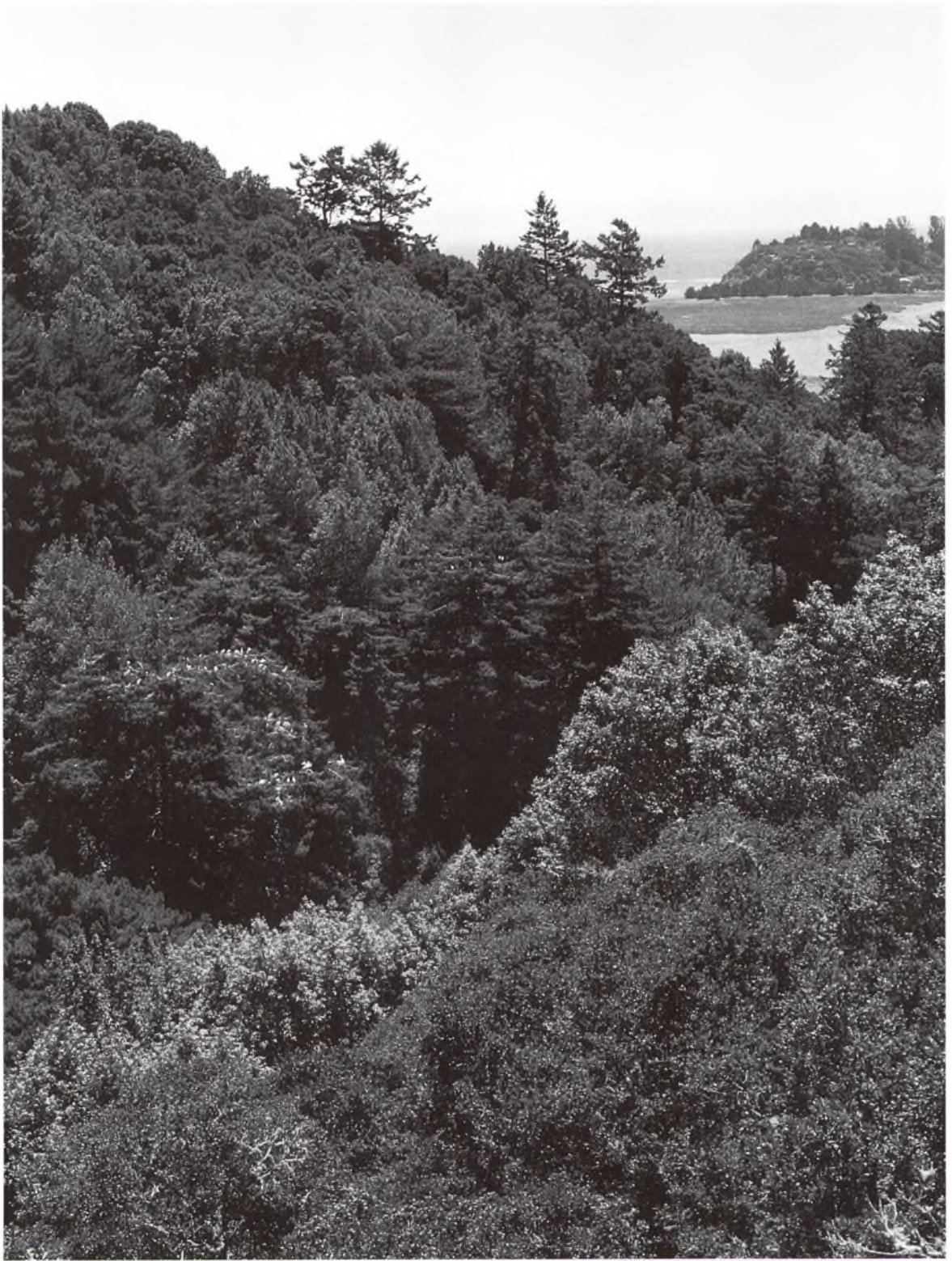
He did some figuring. "Eight hundred dollars per acre, about \$400,000," he stated without hesitation.

I weighed the figure and then jumped in with both feet. "We'll never get another chance. I'd better take it now."

Tevis said he might lower the price in exchange for a substantial tax



Canyon Ranch hasn't changed much since 1961 when I obtained an option from Tevis and persuaded the Marin Audubon Society to buy it. Behind the 1875 Peter Bourne Victorian is the heronry that I had visited as a UC student in 1940. We changed the name to Audubon Canyon Ranch in 1961.



write-off to a nonprofit organization. "If we can work out favorable terms," I said, "I think I can persuade Marin Audubon to buy it. We'll start a fund drive to raise the money." Tevis was amused by my presumption, but he accepted a personal check for one thousand dollars to option the deal. Then he called his land broker, Pardow Hooper, in San Francisco, filled him in, and made an appointment for me to see him.

Picher and Griffin On the Hook

The next day Stan Picher agreed to walk over the property with me. As Audubon treasurer, he was thrilled with the idea of buying the heronry but appalled at the price. I had to sell him on the idea that the ranch had great strategic value in protecting the entire area. The 503-acre parcel contained about a mile of frontage on Bolinas Lagoon on both sides of the proposed freeway (Highway 1), and went nearly to the top of the Bolinas Ridge. There it was separated from the then eighteen thousand acre watershed of the Marin Municipal Water District by a two hundred acre dry parcel owned by Bolinas real estate broker Hurford Sharon. By owning a little of the ridge, we would hold a key to stopping the proposed high-speed freeway that was planned to cut across Mt. Tamalpais to the coast.

Stan was convinced that if we presented the wild idea of buying the ranch to the board of Marin Audubon Society we'd be laughed out of the room. "Marty," he said, "as treasurer, the largest check I have ever written for the society was \$125 to send a ranger to National Audubon's summer camp." The thought of a huge fund drive didn't exactly thrill him. Still, knowing California land values, we both felt that in five years the eight hundred dollars per acre price would seem like a great bargain.

Later that day I called on Caroline Livermore. I found her in her study dictating her daily correspondence to a secretary. She advised me to "get a written agreement signed by Tevis to sell his ranch. I'll pledge two thousand dollars if you get one."

Next came a cordial meeting in San Francisco with Pardow Hooper, Tevis' real estate broker. He was a dapper man, always dressed in pressed khakis with a jaunty hat and tie. Hooper specialized in buying and selling ranches for his wealthy clients. Hooper was highly professional and scrupulously honest. We were to become lifelong friends, and he would handle many of our future purchases in West Marin. Everyone trusted him. Without his help we could never have completed the many complicated purchases



Great Egrets, with wingspans of nearly six feet, were poached nearly to extinction for their splendid feathers, called aigrettes, worn on ladies' hats. The National Audubon Society was created to protect them and their habitat.

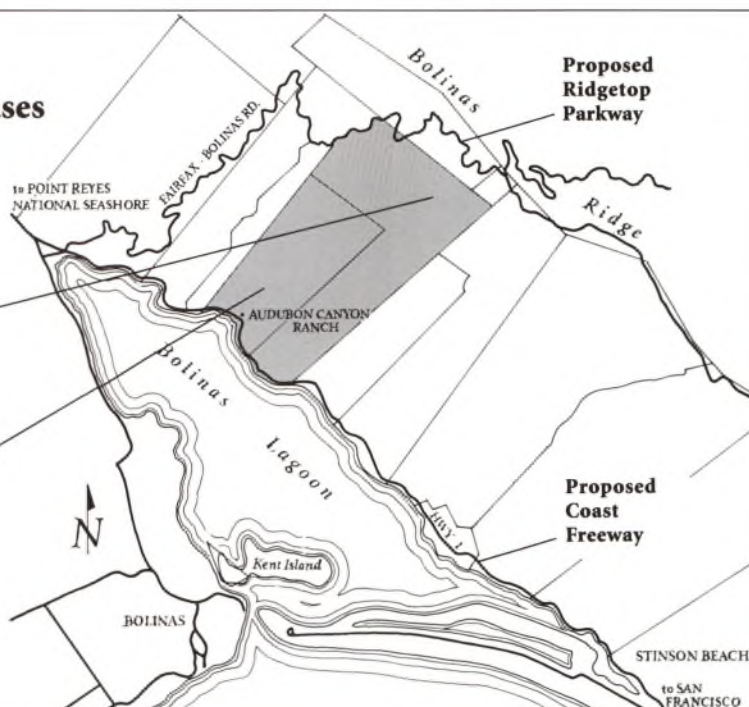
The large Audubon Canyon Ranch heronry is located high in red-wood trees overlooking Bolinas Lagoon where the birds feed. Some nests can be seen in the left mid-photo where their tree-top nests offer protection from predators.

Aububon Canyon Ranch Purchases, Gifts, and Leases on Bolinas Lagoon

Phase I. First Purchase – Canyon Ranch

Purchase of
371 acres from
William Tevis,
1961

Pledge of 132 acres,
including the egret
heronry, from
William Tevis, 1961



The Marin Audubon Society agreed to purchase 371 acres of Canyon Ranch from William Tevis in 1961, who then donated 132 acres, including the heronry, for the tax benefit. But before the escrow closed, he stripped the topsoil in a canyon and sold it for land-fill.

of the next dozen years.

At that first meeting, Hooper told us Tevis' final price for 371 acres was firm: \$335,000 at six percent interest spread over ten years. The 132-acre heronry canyon was to be a gift to Marin Audubon Society from Tevis, to be made when it best suited him for a tax write-off. We were given thirty days to raise a one-thousand-dollar down payment, then ninety days to raise nine thousand dollars, then nine months to raise ninety thousand. We had nine years to raise the balance. Later Stan and I agreed that we would personally refund all donations we received from our contributors if we had to default on the property and lose their down payment money. This was a frightening prospect to both of us, but a powerful incentive to make our project succeed.

Little Marin Audubon Agrees

On April 6, 1961, Stan Picher and I met with the directors of the Marin Audubon Society at the National Audubon's local headquarters on Richardson Bay, where I outlined the plan. The directors, including the Bird Lady, Elizabeth Terwilliger, were astounded at the idea of buying the Tevis ranch but, to their credit, they agreed to go ahead, with the understanding that Stan and I would be responsible for the project. For fear that someone might

make Tevis a better offer, we pledged the board to secrecy. We had our board attorney, Larry Jordan of Mill Valley, draw up agreements with Hooper. Then we had the papers signed and the deal put in escrow. For some reason, Tevis insisted that the escrow be put in my name.

Not until then did we find out about the man we were buying from. Tevis had sold thousands of cubic yards of the topsoil in the north canyon (now The Garden Clubs of America Canyon) that was to be part of his tax-reducing gift to Marin Audubon. The buyer of the topsoil had it bulldozed into trucks and then hauled it to a site across the lagoon near the Bolinas grammar school to be used for fill. This little deal on the side turned the stream bed into a barren gully and caused floods for the next *twenty years*. Two forlorn oaks were left standing on hummocks by the creek but they later died. A few years later Tevis sold his Lake Ranch to loggers who began cutting while the Point Reyes National Seashore was still attempting to negotiate its purchase.

As soon as we heard about the sale of topsoil, Stan Picher and I rushed to the ranch. The deed was half done. We phoned Hooper, who was furious with Tevis and called him to protest. Tevis responded calmly, "Let Audubon drop the deal if they don't like it." Our lawyer ruled out litigation in favor of negotiation. Our great fear was that he would log the heronry canyon before it was deeded over, as he had bulldozed a road to the ridge two years before.

Raising Half a Million

In spite of this setback, the down payment money came in without a hitch. We decided to bring in as many donors as possible to enlarge our base of public support. Ten phone calls to ten people brought one hundred dollars each. One of the donors was Mrs. Gwin (Bunny) Follis, birding friend of Elizabeth Terwilliger. We soon found that she would be a powerful ally. Her husband was president of Standard Oil of California, and he volunteered the services of his public relations firm for our fund drive. He also introduced us to attorney Dick Madden of the venerable San Francisco law firm Pillsbury, Madison and Sutro. For years after that, Madden handled several of our leases and gifts of lands *pro bono* and served on our board.

Later in 1961, Stan succeeded me as president of Marin Audubon



William Tevis (right) accepts a check for \$90,000 as the first major payment on his ranch in 1962 from Aileen Pierson and Stan Picher, co-founders with me of the Ranch. Aileen was a Mills College and UC graduate, an expert in state administrative law, and a president of Golden Gate Audubon Society. She served on the ACR board for twenty-five years.

Society, and I was named chairman of the Audubon Canyon Ranch Project to pursue our purchases. I enlisted the help of many Marin doctors and their wives, including Nancy Barbour and Debbie Ablin, who served on the Ranch Board for many years. Our first Audubon Canyon Ranch letterhead looked like a “Who’s Who” of San Francisco and Marin County. Stan and I led

groups of prospective donors, as well as the board of the Golden Gate Audubon Chapter, through the marshes, over the mud flats and up the steep trail to the overlook.



Laurel Reynolds and Mindy Willis were two well known wildlife photographers who donated a fundraising film for the Ranch. Laurel's husband, Dr. Rick Reynolds, was a president of the Golden Gate Audubon Society, which became a Ranch sponsor in 1962. Marin and Golden Gate are chapters of the National Audubon Society.

Expanding Our Support Base

Our next step, in 1962, was to expand the fundraising base of the Marin Audubon Society by joining forces with the Golden Gate Audubon Society to form Audubon Canyon Ranch, Inc. The Golden Gate Society had two thousand members in the East Bay and San Francisco. They were led by their president, Aileen Pierson, a state Public Welfare executive, who became a co-founder of the Ranch and served on its board for twenty-five years. Sequoia Audubon Society of San Mateo and Madrone Audubon Society of Sonoma County joined us later. Our appreciation for the splendor of the canyons, heronry, and lagoon was contagious.

Next we hit on the scheme of asking donors to pledge eight hundred dollars, the cost of one acre, with the promise that their name would be permanently displayed at the ranch. Some two hundred donors became sponsors, including Stan and his brother, my family, and my parents. One acre was purchased by Bugs Cain's friends in his memory and in memory of his wild Camp Dimond canyon. In the process of attracting donors, our little Marin Audubon Society, which had begun with twenty members in 1957, rapidly grew to one thousand members. We now had a powerful constituency throughout Marin and the Bay Area.

At the Ross Valley Clinic, my secretary doubled as an Audubon volunteer, typing hundreds of fundraising letters and lining up many of my well-to-do patients as sponsors. There was a standing joke that a visit cost ten dollars for Dr. Griffin and eight hundred dollars for Audubon Canyon Ranch.

After five years of fundraising, which reached statewide proportions under Stan Picher's leadership, the entire ranch was paid off. I personally

delivered a Ranch check for sixty-one thousand dollars in 1966 to close the purchase, take title, and make absolutely sure this debt with my name on it was paid off. Picher and I were at last off the hook—and ready to buy more land to save Bolinas Lagoon and rescue the gateway to the National Seashore, which was still only partly purchased four years after it was authorized.

The Miracle

In the sixty-four years since I first laid eyes on the egrets and herons of the Bolinas Lagoon, there has been a steady improvement in their habitat. Each spring is a celebration of the miracle of their survival through the eras of plume hunters, logging, fires, oil spills, pesticide poisoning, predators, and bay filling. And each spring I hike with my grandchildren up to the Ranch's Henderson Overlook, where we gaze awestruck at the noisy nesting and feeding behavior of these birds in the Schwarz Redwood Grove below. These sites were named for generous donors who helped us during the early years.

Keeping track of the birds' nesting successes is a task of great scientific value. It is an exquisitely accurate indicator of the health of the birds' habitat. Since 1961, biologist Helen Pratt has counted each nesting bird pair and each of their eggs and chicks. The average number of nesting egrets has remained fairly constant at one hundred pairs, while the number of great blue heron nests has been declining for reasons unknown.

Still, the greatest thrill is the look of wonder on the faces of schoolchildren, teachers, docent trainees, and visitors from all over the world. This unspoiled wildlife scene, devoid of commercial overtones, cannot be duplicated anywhere by man. It can only, at best, be preserved and shared.

For Stan Picher and me, the creation of Audubon Canyon Ranch and its wildlife preserves was the best thing we could ever have done for future generations. I am proud that the heronry canyon was named Picher Canyon by the Ranch Board in honor of him, and that the Martin Griffin Trail, which winds around it, was named for me some thirty years ago.

On several occasions I have overheard visitors wonder if that trail leads to my burial site, and I have thought, if I were to die today, my life would be complete knowing that the heronry and the Bolinas Lagoon are safe—permanently.



I'm proud of this trail sign (where visitors think I'm buried) placed by the Ranch board in 1966. It reads, "This trail was named in honor of Loyal Martin Griffin Jr., MD, president of Marin Audubon Society in 1961, whose vision and action created the Canyon Ranch project." The circular three-mile trail loops around Picher Canyon and the Aileen Pierson Marsh.

How the Bolinas Heronry Was Saved

Before World War II there were dozens of colonies of so-called common egrets nesting in the tops of trees around San Francisco Bay. They and their cousins, the Great Blue Herons, are the largest of California's wading birds, with six-foot wing spans. However, they were considered a noisy nuisance by many, and they gradually disappeared as their trees were cut down and their tideland feeding grounds filled. The Bolinas Lagoon heronry, one of the largest on the coast, survived fires, logging, and poaching until 1960 only by its isolation.

To save this heronry from a freeway in 1961 required a disciplined, well-thought-out campaign with a simple goal: Save the Bolinas Lagoon. Next we needed to build a growing constituency of citizens: members of our local Audubon Chapters, school children, voters, and organizations to help us raise funds and manage the preserves. We knew from the start that our battle was largely political, and that to win it we needed to educate the public and convince the supervisors. As a non-profit organization, we had to tread a fine line between education and political action.



This stunning image of a Great Egret became the logo for all Audubon Canyon Ranch Preserves.

In 1961, the Marin Audubon Society chose the name Audubon Canyon Ranch for its project as a way to link ourselves to the National Audubon Society, which gave its approval. Next we took the liberty of changing the name "common egret" to the more appropriate Great American Egret. An artist drew this stately bird, wings extended, as our symbol, and this logo appears on every letterhead and publication along with our list of officers, directors, board, and advisory board members.

To raise public awareness, our naturalist, Clerin Zumwalt, supplied his photos to the media and to schools. One picture, we confirmed, is worth a thousand words. Few could ignore the images of the birds in their stunning breeding display, courting, preening, their squabbling antics, the feeding of their young, or their graceful descent

like white parachutes into the lagoon feeding grounds.

We trained classes of docents to teach in schools, on the trails, and at the heronry overlook. There they explained to children and adults why the secluded heronry nests are located by the parents in a steep wooded canyon, fairly safe from the wind and marauding Golden Eagles, ravens, and raccoons. Through telescopes, visitors counted two to four eggs in the six-foot nests, saw the young fed by regurgitation, and heard docents and naturalists describe the birds' habits.

Visitors marveled at the redwood groves with more than one hundred nests, the Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons and tiny Snowy Egrets contrasting against the brilliant green forest of wind-sculpted bays, oaks, madrones, and buckeyes. Docents, Ranch Guides, and trained hosts explained the geology and how the active San Andreas Fault is still forming the Bolinas Lagoon and its twin, Tomales Bay. Above this beautiful and astounding geography floats a cacophony of raucous sounds from the heronry as the famished young call to their parents feasting in the lagoon below.

Gradually, the public's perception of these beautiful birds changed and word spread that the birds' habitat should be preserved. By the time we ended our land purchases after thirteen years, Audubon Canyon Ranch was well known in the Bay Area and thousands of people had contributed to its preservation work.

Now, twenty thousand adults and school children come each year to witness this scene and to realize that, in the end, it was the birds who saved themselves—with a helping hand from Audubon Canyon Ranch.



The colony of approximately a hundred pairs of nesting egrets and herons is among the largest on the Pacific Coast. Our strategy was to educate the public and the press that the heronry and the Bolinas Lagoon were far too valuable to be sacrificed for development.



The Picher-Griffin Team

It is important to have bold initiatives, not simply to play defense.

—General Dwight D. Eisenhower

There were years starting in 1961 when neither Stan Picher nor I dared show our faces at Smiley's Saloon in Bolinas, or the Two Ball Inn (a railroad term) in Point Reyes Station. The truth is that for the next thirteen years we weren't too popular with landowners who favored development in West Marin. We'd already wasted months at fruitless freeway hearings playing defense. Now we simply decided to ignore their plans, not to seek consensus, and to outmaneuver them wherever we could. Stan and I therefore decided on a bold initiative for Audubon Canyon Ranch: a campaign of strategic land purchases and organization building.

During the campaign to save West Marin, we had the enthusiastic support of many of our neighbors and friends "over the hill" in the more urbanized eastern parts of the county. Kentfield was filled with conservationists such as members of the Kent family, who later would be willing to lie down in front of bulldozers and get hauled off to jail to save Tamalpais Creek. Nor did my medical practice suffer, even though our clinic had many real estate people and developers for patients; in fact, several of their family members eventually took our docent training courses at Audubon Canyon Ranch. All in all, the Ranch became a very popular project that no politician or developer in Marin County could ignore.

Although several physicians were land speculators in West Marin, the close-knit Marin Medical Society became one of our strongest supporters. Dr. John Lee formed an Environmental Health Committee, which took out newspaper ads opposing any subdivisions along Tomales Bay as a threat to public health.

During those thirteen years, my wife complained about the personal checks I wrote for options, and my name could be found on page after page in the county recorder's office. But Stan Picher had exceptional fundraising

Low tide on Bolinas Lagoon brings out walkers who share the tidelands with the millions of mud holes, home to numerous unstudied species of invertebrates that make up ninety-five percent of the animal species on earth.

Stan Picher, speaking at the dedication of Audubon Canyon Ranch as a National Historic Landmark in 1969, announces the start of our docent education program. In the foreground is William Kent Jr., a grandson of Congressman William Kent and developer of the Seadrift subdivision in Stinson Beach.



and organizational talents, which made each of our land options and purchases succeed. Together with our board members, we turned the four Bay Area Audubon Chapters that sponsored the Audubon Canyon Ranch into an efficient land-buying organization, backed by a splendid training program for hundreds of docents in wildlife education and advocacy. We had built a winning team.

A Leader in the Art World

Stan Picher and I had vast differences in lifestyle and interests, but we worked well together. My contribution was a knowledge of wildlife, county politics, water supplies, and real estate, plus a large family and an influential medical practice with many patients throughout Marin.

Stan was articulate, charming, and financially astute. He had a passion for art collecting, and had run a successful bookstore and art gallery in Chicago before he retired to Marin in 1955 at the age of forty. He was among the leaders of the art world in San Francisco and New York.

We often held our meetings at the three-tiered home of Stan and his companion, Wally Goodman, which they had built on a steep, wooded Belvedere lot teeming with birds and overlooking the Golden Gate. "I didn't know one bird from another," Stan told me, "that's why I joined Audubon." He also served on the board of the De Young Museum, once as president.

You could tell us apart by our shoes. Mine were always muddy from tramping through marshes and climbing hillsides while Stan's were spotless and shiny.

Jewels Worthy of Preservation

Fortunately for Marin County, Stan Picher considered the canyons, marshes, and the egret heronry of West Marin to be "jewels worthy of collection and preservation." He used this metaphor, borrowed from his efforts in the art world, to raise funds from wealthy donors whom he graciously entertained at his home or at the Ranch. Stan Picher was one of those rare people to whom others love to give money for worthy causes. He said, "It's easier to raise one hundred thousand dollars from one donor than ten thousand donations of ten dollars." However, he also established a box for donations by Ranch visitors. Two Brownie troops collected Blue Chip Stamps and raised eight hundred dollars each for the Ranch.

Stan had the ability to ask for sizable donations both to the Audubon Canyon Ranch and the De Young Museum practically in the same breath. Few donors could resist his twin passions for wildlife and art. We once accompanied Mrs. Alma Brooks Walker in her limousine to the Ranch for a simple farm luncheon. It was preceded by a properly chilled martini, prepared by me under Stan's direction, in her own silver-handled cup. Mrs. Brooks Walker later donated twenty-five thousand dollars to repair the original ranch house, at that time called the Bourne House but now named in her honor.

An astute businessman who never allowed any donations to be used for frills, Stan used nearly every cent collected to pay off land purchases. He hated to pay salaries, and for years our employees, secretary Edris Cole and naturalist Clerin Zumwalt, were practically volunteers. To cover Ranch expenses, Stan started a successful nature bookstore on the premises. All the rest of our workers were volunteers, with Stan and me running the day-to-day operations until 1967.

Hardly a day went by that we didn't meet or talk, and the board put their trust in our decisions. Even on our vacations we kept in touch by long distance. We took turns speaking at public hearings. We met with county supervisors, the governor, legislators, and agency chiefs. We handed out



Raising \$337,000 wasn't easy in 1962, so we were out raising money for years. Here a check for \$800, the cost of one acre, is being presented to me by Steve Lato, President of the Marin Rod and Gun Club. A large gift came from The Garden Clubs of America in 1964 and a canyon is named in their honor.

press releases and made ourselves available for newspaper interviews and photo opportunities. We had stunning slide and film shows. I even invested in the liberal new weekly, the *Pacific Sun*, started by Steve McNamara, so the county would gain an alternative viewpoint from that of the conservative *Marin Independent Journal*, which had been our constant critic.

Stan and I controlled the Audubon Canyon Ranch during its first years as either president or vice president, so we could seize the now-or-never chance to buy a ranch or shoreline parcel and keep land purchase our primary goal. Stan had free time; mine was borrowed from my practice and family life. This balancing act caused a drain on my sleep and health, especially during the formation of the ranch from 1961 to 1963, and in 1967 when Stan was in Europe and the purchase and fund drive for Kent Island fell into my lap.


Stan was a quick-witted, twitchy type who tapped his foot rapidly when meetings dragged. His favorite put-down was, "I've known people less vague." He was authoritarian and couldn't abide indecision. At first he was reticent about speaking at public hearings, but he overcame this in a dramatic presentation to the Board of Supervisors in 1967. First he described a half dozen parcels the Ranch owned encircling the Bolinas Lagoon. Then he handed their deeds to Pierre Joske of County Parks, as the start of a County Shoreline Park. Finally, he topped off his talk by handing a Ranch check for eight thousand dollars to Joske to buy another parcel. This brought prolonged applause, and from then on Stan was irrepressible.

Learning How to Buy Land

Friends have asked how I learned to obtain land options that ultimately led to purchases. Fortunately I had helped my medical partner, Dr. John Siemens, purchase and develop land for the Ross Valley Medical Clinic, Ross Hospital, Ross Psychiatric Hospital, and the Tamalpais Retirement Center. From John I learned how to work with title companies, banks, and lawyers.

I also found that people won't sell their lands to committees, but will sell it to one person whom they trust. When I approached someone to ask for an option or a gift of land, I always went alone. The Ranch had an excellent reputation that preceded my visits or phone calls. Part of my success, I think, was my sincere dedication to wildlife and my reputation as a physician. Often I was able to secure options on parcels with only a handshake or a modest personal check. However, our offers were always based on careful research, appraisals, and legal review, and as much cash down as possible.





Marin Audubon Society
P.O. Box 441 • Tiburon, California

These are the officers of the Marin Audubon Society in 1961. On April 12, 1961, this board voted unanimously to take on the Canyon Ranch Project costing \$337,000! The most this board ever spent prior to this was \$125 to send a ranger to Audubon Summer Camp. Dr. Griffin and Stan Picher agreed to be responsible for raising this sum.

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"MAKE MARIN CONSERVATION CONSCIOUS"

L.D.S.

Sometimes we purchased large ranches with hardly a dime in the bank. A banker new to our board was shocked when we told him we always bought the ranches first and then raised the cash. We told him that if we had waited, there would have been no Audubon Canyon Ranch. One other point: I knew from my research and studying maps just which parcels we needed, and I called on the owners repeatedly asking that they let me know when they were ready to sell. That's how we got the Thompson Ranch (Volunteer Canyon), the Galloway Ranch, Kent Island, and numerous parcels along Bolinas Lagoon and Tomales Bay. I always pledged the owners to secrecy so no one would trump me with a better offer until each parcel was safely in escrow. Jack Mason, West Marin historian, complained in one of his books that we were buying ranches so fast he couldn't keep track.

Amazingly, during those thirteen years, when more than 1.5 million dollars changed hands in numerous escrows, we were never served with a subpoena or received a threatening call from an attorney. I attribute our success to honesty on our part and dealing only with trusted title companies, brokers, and especially our Ranch attorney of thirty years, George Peyton. Stan and I took some enormous personal financial risks, but they faded away as each fund drive succeeded.

Left: The influential Marin Medical Society opposed sprawl in West Marin as a threat to the county's environmental health. Here I am flanked by Jack Manwaring, MD (left), president of the Society, and Ike Livermore (right), Resource Secretary under Governor Reagan, who spoke to Society members in 1969 against dams on north coast rivers. Right: This simple stationery has served the Marin Audubon Society well since 1957.

Setting a Relentless Pace

Board meetings were often at my home in Kentfield or at Alice Kent's home nearby. We always served food and drink to make the meetings as enjoyable as possible. Later we met at Stan's new apartment in Pacific Heights, where Wally cooked hamburgers for the board. Because our board meetings were fun and cozy, our attendance was phenomenal. At these super-organized meetings, which moved at high speed, Stan reveled in his financial reports. He had a high sense of drama, and each of his reports contained some new surprise that evoked applause and cheers—a ranch paid off, an unrestricted fifty thousand dollar gift, a donation of oil rights in Fresno County. Stan was also generous in



Our four daughters were a constant reminder of our responsibility to future generations. Left to right are Linda, Anne, Joan, and Carol in 1964.

his own donations to the Ranch. To my amazement, he even persuaded my parents to donate their home in Citrus Heights near Sacramento to an endowment fund for the Ranch, which was set up with the San Francisco Foundation.

Stan was meticulous in his correspondence. He answered every letter warmly and eloquently. Every donor received a personal, typed note, and he kept a card file with cryptic notations to personalize future letters of thanks. But the push, push, push took its toll. It was as if he and I were courted by the same demon. We drove ourselves and each other. Several of our valuable volunteers in the early years dropped out from our relentless pressure. In 1963, after two years of fundraising, I took a year leave of absence from the Ross Valley Clinic and moved to Italy with my family to regain my perspective.

The greatest fear of the Picher-Griffin team was that some future Ranch board might sell these hard-won lands, paid for by thousands of donors, to raise funds to pay salaries, or for extravagant education programs. It was for this reason that we wrote the reverter clauses into our deeds: if someone tried to sell the land or misuse it, it would revert to the National Audubon Society or the County Open Space District. We didn't want any of our lands to meet the fate of my Oakland Boy Scout camp.

Our mission from the start was to preserve these lands permanently for wildlife habitat, as buffers to the National Seashore, and to help protect, restore, and maintain the watersheds of Bolinas Lagoon and Tomales Bay. Today the Ranch has active research, educational, property, and development committees to achieve these ends.

Remembering Stan Picher

Stan Picher's greatest achievement for Audubon Canyon Ranch and for Marin and Sonoma counties was his ability to build a large and successful organization embracing four National Audubon Chapters with six thousand members, thousands of donors large and small, boards, committees, and training courses for volunteers and docents. He established endowment funds that grew under his direction, and he made sure that all land purchases were promptly paid off.

His fundraising abilities were legendary, attracting not just funds but actual gifts of land for new wildlife preserves. In addition, he gave his full support to able young activists who showed promise of developing a leadership role in the battle for West Marin. He enthusiastically helped raise the funds for scientific studies, for public education programs, and for employing outstanding naturalists.

A talented writer and lecturer, Stan wrote fundraiser letters and brochures that were classics of brevity and succinctness. He attracted people from all walks of life to support the Ranch, helping to create a warm and loving Audubon Canyon Ranch family.

Stan suffered an untimely death from a brain tumor in 1981. A memorial service in San Francisco overflowed with his friends, including many from Audubon Canyon Ranch and the De Young Museum, to which he also donated his time, talents, and financial support.

Shortly before Stan's death, the board of Audubon Canyon Ranch honored him by naming the main canyon the Picher Canyon. The plaque at the Ranch headquarters reads, "His fundraising abilities and inspired leadership were there when the Ranch needed them."



William Stanton Picher was renowned throughout the Bay Area for his expertise in Asian art and for his dedication to Audubon Canyon Ranch. Stan was a Missouri native, held a Master's Degree in Art from Harvard, and served in the US Army Intelligence Corps during World War II.