

## Saving Bolinas Lagoon

*Parts of Bolinas Lagoon produce seven thousand pounds per acre of protein annually. It is one of the richest habitats in terms of food production on the face of the Earth.*

—Clerin Zumwalt, Soil Scientist, 1968

For a dozen years, Kent Island in Bolinas Lagoon was Marin County's most bitterly contested and costliest tideland battle. The struggle divided the tiny coastal town of Bolinas, the entire county, and the state legislature into two opposing camps: wildlife versus marina. To look at sleepy Bolinas and peaceful Kent Island today, you'd wonder what all the uproar was about.

Kent Island is only partly an island and, because of tides and wind, not a place where you'd want to spend the night. It lies close to the quaint old smuggling town of Bolinas, separated by a tidal channel. At low tide you can walk across to Kent Island from Smiley's Saloon at the edge of town; at high tide most of the island is submerged.

This is important to remember: the tidelands of Kent Island, like all state tidelands, rightfully belong to the people of California—not to the Pepper family who originally owned it, nor to the Kents. Years earlier, the state had improvidentially sold its ownership to this and a few dozen other public tidelands. We at Audubon Canyon Ranch felt it essential to buy back all these tidelands, which were so necessary to wildlife habitat, and to secure them permanently. But the Ranch had an even wider purpose: our ownership of the 120-acre Kent Island could be the key to preserving the twelve-hundred-acre Bolinas Lagoon, and indeed the entire watershed, as the gateway to the Point Reyes National Seashore. Also, with defeat of the large marina planned for the island, there would be less support for the proposed ridgetop parkway and coast freeway.

To make this prediction come true, I devoted seven years to the Kent Island battle and took one of the bigger gambles of my life.

*Wading egrets feed in Bolinas Lagoon before returning to their nests high above the Ranch house. A four-lane freeway was planned to be built between the heronry and the lagoon.*





*Looking west toward the Pacific at low tide, Bolinas Lagoon lies in the foreground with Kent Island on the left. Marin citizens challenged the state for disposing of these public tidelands for commercial real estate development.*

## A Wildlife-Rich Island

Kent Island contains a few scattered pines on sand dunes and a half-dozen roosting squawkers, Black-crowned Night-Herons, which sleep there after their nightly food forays in the tideflats. Shorebirds such as willets, sandpipers, and curlews feed busily around the island's edges. Harbor seals haul out on its sandy beaches and pelicans, terns, and osprey crashdive around it for fish. Behind the island lies the mighty Bolinas Ridge and the Audubon Canyon Ranch heronry, where the Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons return after feeding in the shallow lagoon. To the south, across the narrow inlet from the ocean, is an exclusive enclave of homes called Seadrift, with locked gates, on the Stinson Beach sand spit, where the battle of who owns the state beaches is still being fought in the courts. Tragically, dredging along the edge of the sandspit to create Seadrift Lagoon has impaired the tidal circulation of the adjacent Bolinas Lagoon.

Early in the history of Marin County, U.S. Congressman William Kent, a friend of Teddy Roosevelt and John Muir, recognized the value of Marin real estate and bought up large tracts of land. These extended from his home estate near Kentfield across Mt. Tamalpais to Steep Ravine and to the ocean hot springs at Stinson Beach and to Bolinas Lagoon. At one time a rider on

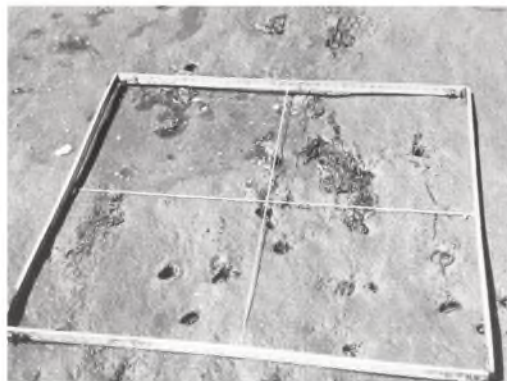
horseback could ride entirely on Kent land from Kentfield to Stinson. Kent once planned a large resort at Bolinas to be served by a railroad that would descend Steep Ravine to the ocean.

Eventually, over a thousand acres of the Kent estate on the eastern side of the county were subdivided and dubbed Kent Woodlands, which soon sported expensive homes. In 1912, Kent assembled thousands of acres of forested watershed lands on the rainy north slope of Mt. Tamalpais to help start the Marin Municipal Water District. Parts of Mt. Tamalpais State Park are former Kent lands donated by the congressman. He named Muir Woods, the first National Monument, for his friend and gave it to the nation; and at one time his heirs offered the whole of the Stinson Beach sandspit to the state as a park, but the state turned it down. Just hours before his death in 1928 he donated the 204 acres of Steep Ravine where I camped as a Boy Scout to the state park system. Kent's pioneering work in preserving large parts of Mt. Tamalpais as state and national parks laid the groundwork for the purchase of the Point Reyes National Seashore and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area some forty years later.

When William Kent died, his two sons inherited Kent Island in the heart of the Bolinas Lagoon. Roger Kent and his wife Alice received nine and one-half acres. Thomas Kent and his wife Anne inherited 111 acres. Alice and Roger were our neighbors in Kent Woodlands, and Alice knew Stan Picher through the Asian Art Museum. Roger was a well-known attorney and chairman of the State Central Democratic Committee. Unforeseen by the congressman, the battle for this low-lying island—really just a shifting sandbar—was to determine the future of the Bolinas watershed and the National Seashore.

## Dredging the Egrets' Food Basket

The controversy started quietly in 1957 when the California State Lands Commission leased twelve hundred acres of tidelands adjacent to Kent Island in Bolinas Lagoon to the Bolinas Harbor District. The District, as established by the Bolinas voters, had been allotted ten years by the state to dredge a harbor in the lagoon and make "other improvements," meaning a large marina, a motel, and parking lots on the filled-in Kent Island tidelands. Over the next decade the district spent \$317,843, mostly for studies and



*This one-meter frame was laid on the "worthless" muddy sand in Bolinas Lagoon and the organisms within were dug up and counted. Ranch naturalist Clerin Zumwalt, or Zumie, estimated that parts of the lagoon produce seven thousand pounds of protein per acre per year, while good pasture land only produces about eight hundred pounds of beef per acre.*

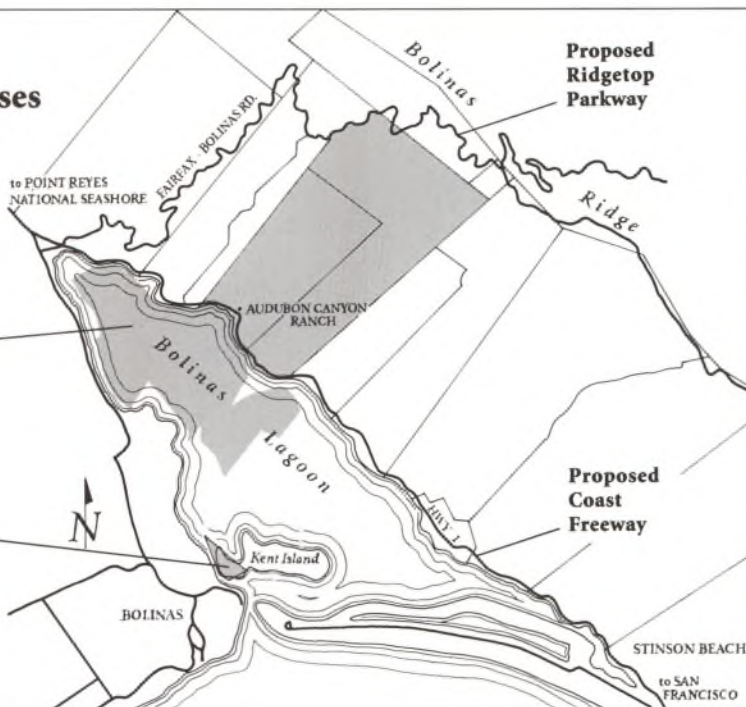


## Aububon Canyon Ranch Purchases, Gifts, and Leases on Bolinas Lagoon

### Phase II. A Strategic Gift and Lease

Lease of 368 acres  
of Bolinas Lagoon  
from Bolinas Harbor  
District, 1961

Gift of 9.6 acres  
of Kent Island  
by Alice and Roger  
Kent, 1961



*In 1961 we obtained a lease of 368 acres of the lagoon for one dollar a year from the Harbor District, and we received a key parcel from Alice and Roger Kent—9.6 acres of Kent Island.*

expenses, but didn't move a single shovelful of mud.

When the Marin Audubon Society bought the Canyon Ranch in 1961, Alice Kent became the chapter's first new board member. To help deter dredging, Alice and Roger donated their nine-and-one-half-acre portion of Kent Island in 1961 to the Marin Audubon Society as a wildlife preserve. This gift proved to be a gigantic thorn in the side of the Bolinas Harbor District, which needed that portion for its marina.

With the Kent's deed as leverage, Stan and I met with Gene McDaniel, chairman of the Harbor District. Gene was happy to see us when we told him that our purpose was to lease an old 368-acre oyster farm at the north end of the lagoon that was a feeding ground for the birds of the heronry at the Canyon Ranch. Gene said he would give us a fifty-year lease, but insisted on a one-year cancellation clause. The lease would be canceled, he said, "if we need to dredge that end for a turning basin for motor boats."

Gene consulted with the district's board, and it demanded a rent of ten thousand dollars per year. "That's ridiculous," we said. We held firm at our offer of one dollar per year and finally they agreed. The Marin Audubon Society carefully sent one dollar per year by registered mail until the lease was abruptly canceled on January 27, 1967.

This turned out to be one hell of a bargain. The Ranch played this ten-



uous year-to-year lease to the hilt for the next six years, educating thousands of visitors and schoolchildren to the value of the tidelands as the herons' and egrets' primary feeding grounds. We taught everyone that the birds could die if their mudflat food basket was dredged or filled. Fortunately, the birds didn't know of the one-year cancellation clause or they might have moved on. For one dollar a year, we bought the egrets and herons six years of safety while we waited out the threat that the heronry might be ruined.

## Some Unwanted Bedfellows

Our lease granted us forty percent of the tidelands of Bolinas Lagoon. As lessee, Audubon Canyon Ranch had a legitimate interest in the lagoon's other tenants. Our first bedfellow was the Army Corps of Engineers, whose plans were to dredge the mouth of the lagoon and build a jetty out into the sea. In the sixties, the Corps was known as a killer of wetlands, marshes, lagoons, and rivers. It did its dirty work at the request of local developers and chambers of commerce. But Audubon was able to wear the Corps down with biological studies of the "worthless" lagoon mud which, it turned out, was teeming with mudworms and ghost shrimp essential to the food chain. The Corps finally folded its tents and left.

To see what might have happened to Bolinas Lagoon, take a look at

*Zumie counted about six hundred egrets feeding in Bolinas Lagoon one day. By proving that the lagoon is essential habitat for the hundreds of species using it, the Ranch hoped to preserve the watershed ecosystem intact. But despite the scientific data, the Harbor District forged ahead with plans to dredge the lagoon for a marina.*



AND TAMALPAIS TIMES

SAN RAFAEL, CALIF., WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 21, 1966  
YEAR 4 ISSUE 209 1817-4th St. Phone 456-2402 \$7.50 Yr. 10c Copy

\* See Page 2



Morro Bay just north of Santa Barbara which was once similar in its wild beauty. Its hills are now covered with tract houses and a freeway, and its heronries and wildlife habitats decimated. The Corps blasted part of Morro Rock, a historic rock beacon for sailing ships, to build a six-thousand-foot rock channel. Then it dredged part of the bay for motor boats, disturbing the ghost shrimp and mudworms. Though damaged, Morro Bay is still a major link along the Pacific Flyway for migratory waterfowl.

Our second bedfellow was Dr. Knox Finley, a professor of surgery at Stanford Medical School, and his brother, Malcolm. I knew Knox from medical school. Like the Bostick brothers, whom we had overcome on Richardson Bay, the Finley brothers were developers of major subdivisions and marinas in Marin and southern California. In 1965 the Bolinas Harbor District gave them a fifty-year lease, with no cancellation clause, to build a boat ramp from their eight-hundred-acre ranch on Highway 1 to Sand Island in Bolinas Lagoon, famous for its pelican rest and seal haulout. Their future subdivision was to be called Bahia Baulinas, a lovely name for a misplaced project.

In a progress report to the State Lands Commission, the district cited our tideland lease, the Corps' feasibility studies for a jetty, and Finley's proposed boat ramp as evidence of lagoon development. This report was generated by a Sacramento lobby for marina developers that we called the "sneaky, crafty harbor lobby." Nevertheless, the Finley threat never materialized. In February 1968 the Marin *Independent Journal* reported that the Finley's Bahia and Marina, a 1,300-lot tideland subdivision on nine hundred acres near Novato, a town in north Marin, had gone bankrupt. The Finleys gave up their Bolinas projects and later sold their ranch to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

## The Gilroy Plan—A Fatal Mistake

The only bedfellow whose work we actually encouraged in the lagoon was Norman T. Gilroy, a Mill Valley architect and planner for the Bolinas Harbor District. We thought that after several years of discouraging feasibility studies for a marina, he would recommend to the district that the best thing they could do was leave the lagoon and island alone.

We were wrong. In October 1966, just one year before their lease from State Lands expired, the district released to the press the ten-million-dollar "Gilroy Plan" with much fanfare.

The Gilroy Plan made a theme park out of the egret and heron feeding

*The Gilroy Plan, released with great fanfare in 1966, called for a heliport and busy marina on Kent Island and a freeway all along Bolinas Lagoon. This huge, misguided development plan threatened both the heronry and the not-yet-purchased Point Reyes National Seashore. I was able to obtain an option to purchase 111-acres of Kent Island in 1967, leading to "The Kent Island Coup."*



grounds and Kent Island. It proposed to build an arboretum and observatory and to dredge the north end of the lagoon to make a turning basin for motorboats. Kent Island was to be raised several feet above sea level with dredged materials to accommodate a heliport, harbor police headquarters, district offices, parking lots, restaurants, a hotel, and fourteen hundred boat slips. A final flourish, a toll bridge, would cross the entire lagoon to Knox Finley's Bahia Baulinas on Highway 1.



*While on leave from my medical practice, I researched land for Audubon Canyon Ranch to purchase, trying to outwit the developers. Here I'm inspecting Kent Island in my canoe in 1967.*

The five Harbor District directors were completely sold on the plan. They liked the money it would generate for the district and the sumptuous 360-degree-view offices they would occupy.

The plan did one good thing: it polarized most of West Marin against the Harbor District. So much opposition rose up against the proposal that Norman Gilroy vowed to "eat the Gilroy Plan in public" if people would just leave him alone. But that didn't stop the District.

There was just one hitch in their ten-million-dollar plan—the Harbor District didn't own Kent Island, so the five Harbor District members decided to take bold action. Quietly (they thought), they decided to cancel our lease and take legal steps to acquire all of Kent Island through condemnation. They would let the courts decide the price, but their first step was to file a *lis pendens*, which freezes a piece of property pending a legal action.

## Smiley's Saloon

After their meetings, the Harbor District board often adjourned to Smiley's Saloon in downtown Bolinas, a famous if somewhat raunchy watering hole since 1856. Greg Hewlett, a regular patron and an avowed enemy of progress, monitored their loud conversations. He became renowned for removing State Highway signs pointing to Bolinas in order to keep out the hated tourists. He heartily approved of Audubon's do-nothing plan for the Bolinas Lagoon. In January 1967, Hewlett woke me with a late-night phone call. "Tom Barfield, the District's attorney, is going to cancel Audubon's lease and then condemn Kent Island," he told me.

Hewlett's intelligence was accurate. The district sent us a letter by registered mail canceling our lease. We sent it to the newspapers and the story made headlines. The article tipped us that the district's appraisal for the 111-acre Kent Island parcel that we did not own was \$54,000. The county

assessor valued it as \$85,000 and Mrs. Anne Kent was asking twice that.

It was incomprehensible that the Bolinas Harbor District had spent hundreds of thousands of tax dollars on studies of Kent Island and on salaries for Gilroy and others, when they didn't own this crucial part of the puzzle, the island itself. Acting as if they did was a fatal mistake.

The ball was now in the Ranch's court. It was our turn for bold action.

## A Risky Offer

Stan Picher was out of town and would be away for several months. Caroline Livermore's "flash the cash" motto was etched in my mind. George Peyton, city attorney for Piedmont and a member of the Ranch's board, offered me his proxy and suggested that we buy the island on the chance that the District would fold up and go away. Knowing Tom Barfield, their feisty attorney and local historian who wanted a place in history, I didn't think we could pull that off. It was a risk either way.

Paul Newell, our title company expert, said that he thought he could insure title even though the island was mostly submerged and possibly owned by the state. He provided me with a deposit receipt for Anne Kent to sign if I decided to act.

I visited Anne Kent in her lovely home, New Haven, in Kent Woodlands and sat down with her and her two daughters, Nancy and Martye, and her sons-in-law, Bob Danielson, a commercial real estate developer, and Clinton Jones, a banker. "On behalf of the Ranch," I said, "I'm here to make a formal offer for Kent Island. Our offer is firm: \$85,000 with \$10,000 down and the balance over ten years at six percent interest." The family discussed the offer and they all accepted, saying they were relieved that Audubon would get the property. We signed the deposit receipt, and they accepted my personal check for two thousand dollars. I pledged them to secrecy.

My next call was to Huey Johnson, head of the western branch of The Nature Conservancy, an effective organization that buys wildlife habitat for preservation. One of Caroline Livermore's sons, Putnam, was the Conservancy's attorney. Huey lived in Mill Valley and later served as State Secretary of Resources under Governor Jerry Brown. Huey committed the Conservancy to loan \$10,000 to the purchase and recommended that we give Kent



*Wading birds such as these egrets depend on the shallow tidelands for food. Fossil evidence indicates that birds are descended from reptiles. Feathers are unique to birds and are an evolutionary advance on scales. Ranch visitors find that observing wildlife in the field with trained naturalists and docents is a thrilling experience.*



## Gift Of Bolinas Island May Nip Harbor Plans

### Supervisors Accept Bird Refuge Property

Kent Island, in the center of Bolinas Lagoon, was presented to Marin County as a wildlife refuge today, and unanimously accepted by the county board of supervisors.

The action will reduce significantly the extent of marina development in the lagoon.

Nature Conservancy, a national conservation organization, was deeded the island for \$90,000 this morning by Mrs. Thomas T. Kent of Kentfield. Huey D.

work toward arranging the purchase.

Kettenhofen said he wanted a public hearing before the county accepted the property, since it would affect the Bolinas Harbor District's plan for development. However, he backed off from this condition on learning that the island could revert to Nature Conservancy if the county breaks the restrictions on its use.

Acceptance by the county makes the land public and presumably exempt from condemnation by the harbor district for harbor use.

The district's master plan developed by architect Norman T.

Supervisor Thomas T. Storer said the gift of the island will have "tremendous impact" on the harbor district plans.

Kettenhofen suggested putting acceptance of the deed up for a meeting at 3 p.m. today of district directors on the plan, but Supervisor Peter Behr said this would be filling of a condemnation between the 11 a.m. announcement of the gift and the harbor discussion. They then accepted the gift.

Supervisors agreed extensive harbor development would still be possible. Johnson said William of Belvedere was

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Johnson said Nature Conservancy would normally have completed the transaction without all this uncertain fund-raising activity, but that "Nature did in fact" he said, his organization has pledged \$10,000, but "will have to raise it."

He said the Sierra Club has offered to join the fund-raising effort, and expressed certainty of success in this thing together," he declared.

The surprise announcement of the "gift" on Feb. 14 by Johnson, a resident of Mill Valley, brought charges that the plan had been hurriedly put together to block a Bolinas Harbor District plan for development of the island along lines proposed by Mill Valley architect Norman T. Gilroy.

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TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 1967

Independent-Journal

## Board, Jury Exchange Slaps On Kent Island

### Behr Cries Politics; Foreman Hits Haste

By RICHARD LYTLE

The Marin County Grand Jury today took a slap at county supervisors for their handling of the gift of Kent Island, and got slapped right back.

In an interim report, the grand jury recommended that no county funds be expended on development of the island until a \$75,000 deed of trust on the property has been paid off and until the 55-year term of a reversionary clause has expired.

Grand Jury Foreman Clifford S. Lund read the interim report to supervisors at the start of today's meeting.

Supervisors accused Lund and the grand jury of getting into politics. Lund countered that there had been several requests for an investigation and conflicting reports in the press, but supervisors were decidedly unhappy.

"When the grand jury wants to enter politics," said Supervisor Peter H. Behr, "it should run for election. This is not a proper and fit report. It is an attempt to justify what you did not find. It reflects on the unanimous policy of the board."

#### DOESN'T AGREE

Supervisor Ernest N. Kettenhofen did not agree with Behr and said the grand jury had the right to investigate and criticize where it wished, but other board members were generally sympathetic with Behr's view.

#### OUTLINES TERMS

Today's report outlined the terms of the deed of trust, calling for interest of 5 per cent for the first three years, 6 per cent for the next three years, and 7 per cent thereafter. Principal installments shall be at least

Eugene A. Ostaggi, chairman of the grand jury county offices committee which made the investigation, said this may have been so but there was no note about it filed with the county documents until the second week of this month.

The grand jury concluded that "although no apparent risk or liability is assumed by the county, excepting the possible loss of substantial property values from the ultimate development of a proposed yacht basin, we believe that the board did not allow sufficient time between presentation and acceptance of conveyance to adequately evaluate the proposal."

The grand jury also concluded that "as this proposal was presented by a group with a singleness of purpose, far more caution should have been exercised to assure the board that the terms of the transaction provided necessary safeguards in order to protect any possible expenditure of public funds."

The jury also said that "the opposition and the general public was not afforded an opportunity to challenge the transaction and was denied the opportunity to agree or disagree in a normal democratic process."

Lund said the report was adopted at a meeting last Wednesday and that he since showed it to County Counsel Douglas J. Maloney. He said Maloney explained that the county must spend some money to establish use of the island as a legal condition. He said \$1,500

keep the lagoon from silting in, but their development proposals stirred a controversy.

Conservationists said the board thought only in terms of a major harbor facility, and their plans would ruin the natural beauty of the lagoon.

District supporters argued that retaining the district would provide local control and tended that the county had constructive suggestions for the future of the lagoon.

At the campaign's end, district opponents charged the district had spent \$5,000 including \$67,518 in consultants, Norman T. Gilroy, without correcting any problems.

There also had been a plan to dredge 60,000 cubic feet of mud from Bolinas and a channel past Kent Island.

Dissolution was favored in Bolinas by a 166 to 156 vote, in Sausalito by 137 to 102 and by absentee voters 10 to 8, reported Peter C. Meyer, Marin County elections officer.

The election was called by the Marin County Board of Supervisors after two years of controversy of the district's plans for development of the Bolinas Lagoon, which were vigorously opposed by conservation groups.

Proponents of dissolution wanted Marin County to take over administration of the lagoon. State action will be required to give the county jurisdiction since the harbor district got administration from the state Lands Commission.

As proposed, Marin County also would absorb the liabilities of the district, not to exceed \$125,536, which stem from district purchases of property and state loans for lagoon studies. Any other liabilities would remain the responsibility of the property owners in the district, supervisors agreed.

The state granted the district the lagoon in 1959 on condition that it be "substantially improved" within 10 years, and last year the Legislature extended the deadline to 1971.

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## Voters Dump Harbor Area

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See BOLINAS, page 4

## Kent Island Gift Strings Revealed: Ranch Mortgage

By ROBERT STREBEIGH

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Island to the county as a gift for a new county park right away. That way, he reasoned, the Harbor District would be unable to condemn it from the more powerful county government.

That made sense to me. Huey and I agreed to meet at Paul Newell's office the next day to work out a strategy. My next call was to Grace and Ted Wellman. Grace was president of the Marin Conservation League. She and her husband were known as "Mrs. and Mr. Conservation." The Wellmans were thrilled to help save Bolinas Lagoon for wildlife. They pledged that the League would raise twenty-five thousand dollars toward purchase of the island whether Marin County accepted the gift or not. Again, secrecy.

## The Kent Island Coup

Huey Johnson, Bob Danielson, and I met with Paul Newell on Friday morning. I handed over my signed deposit receipt for the island I'd bought on behalf of the Ranch to Newell. We decided that the island should be owned by The Nature Conservancy. Newell then drew up a deed showing that Anne Kent had sold Kent Island to The Nature Conservancy, with Audubon Canyon Ranch guaranteeing the price. Now came the hard part, the political part: convincing the Marin County supervisors to accept the gift of Kent Island.

Luckily, I was able to arrange a visit to "Kett" Kettenhofen, chairman of the Board of Supervisors, at his office in San Rafael on Friday afternoon. He was a real estate developer, with extensive holdings in Sausalito and West Marin. We had been friends for a number of years, and his wife and daughter later became Audubon Canyon Ranch docents. He was running for re-election soon, and he wanted my support.

I was forthright. "Kett, Audubon Canyon Ranch and The Nature Conservancy now own the entire Kent Island in two parcels, nine and one-half and 111 acres. We want to give the 111 acres to the county for a wildlife park with no strings attached." He was astonished. He said that he admired the fact that we had put our money where our mouths were, and that he would help us. He advised me to have Huey Johnson present the deed to the board early Tuesday morning.

Kett remarked that this gift would double the acreage of county parks in Marin and would help in his re-election. The entire board might even go for



*Nello Kearney of The Nature Conservancy and Admiral Bransom-Cooke of the Marin Conservation League present me (left), as chairman, with a report on the 1967 Kent Island Fund Drive. Looking on is Mrs. Anne Kent, daughter-in-law of Congressman William Kent, who sold us Kent Island for \$85,000.*

*Newspapers were full of "The Kent Island Coup." With the option to buy Kent Island in 1967, we outmaneuvered the Harbor District by giving Kent Island to the county for a park. This killed the marina, but threatened a Grand Jury investigation for mortgaging Audubon Canyon Ranch to make the purchase.*



it, he speculated, since none of the supervisors had been pleased with the Harbor District performance. Kett advised me not even to tip Supervisors Peter Behr and Tom Storer, two of my close friends on the board, and reassured me that he would handle Byron Lydecker and Bill Gnos.

At nine o'clock on Tuesday morning, February 14, 1967, Huey presented the deed to the Marin County supervisors as an off-agenda item. The board voted unanimously to accept the \$85,000 gift providing there was no cost to the taxpayers. Kent Island was safe. Afterwards, Behr and Storer told me that our political savvy in pulling this off absolutely astounded them. We raised the money for the purchase of Kent Island from three sources: Audubon Canyon Ranch placed a mortgage on the Ranch property that committed itself to raising fifty thousand dollars, the Marin Conservation League committed itself to raising twenty-five thousand dollars, and The Nature Conservancy agreed to loan ten thousand dollars to the escrow.

At the news that the supervisors had accepted the gift of the island park, there was genuine excitement throughout the Bay Area. We had beaten developers and the most powerful state agencies at their own game. In editorials and cartoons, San Francisco newspapers called our action "The Kent Island Coup." Meanwhile, the Bolinas Harbor District was planning to file a *lis pendens* the next day to block the sale.

But by then it was too late.

When the Marin *Independent Journal* learned that Audubon Canyon Ranch had mortgaged its property, headlines triggered a Grand Jury investigation. They were after blood. It never happened. The Grand Jury was satisfied with our thoroughly prepared documents. We withstood the political blustering. My boyhood dream was achieved, and the Bolinas Lagoon was saved. I never in my life felt so relieved of a burden. Today, when I look at the birds in their lofty heronry or feeding in their tideflats around pristine Kent Island, a chill goes through me and tears come to my eyes. We came so close to losing it all.

Back then, however, there was a sizable problem left: raising the eighty-five thousand dollars.

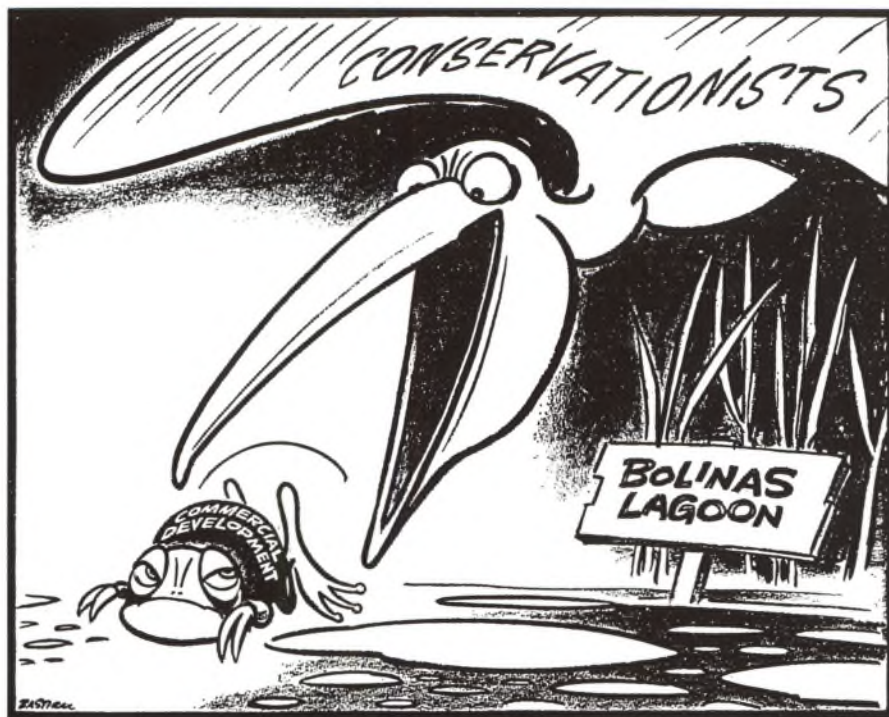
## The Joint Fund Drive

I was afraid that Stan Picher would be annoyed with the mortgage on the Ranch, and I was right. He was pleased that Kent Island was safe, but said, "Marty, you've gotten yourself into this arrangement, and you'll have to lead the fund drive." Gleefully, he added, "I'll be out of town."

My first move was to retire from the Ross Valley Medical Clinic and devote more time to land purchases. Besides, I was dead tired from my medical practice with its many night calls. This was the time to make the break.

Next, we recruited co-chairs from each group: Admiral Bransom-Cooke from the Conservation League, Nello Kearney and Huey Johnson from The Nature Conservancy, and Erline Hevel, Bertha Underhill and Rhoda Boyd from Audubon Canyon Ranch. Anne Kent was named honorary chair of the fundraising group and generously reduced the mortgage by two thousand dollars. Then we sent out a large fundraising mailing to members of our three organizations. We also made phone calls for larger donations. The response was enthusiastic. In the mailer we used the *San Francisco Chronicle* cartoon showing a large heron (conservationists) catching a frog (developers). Within a few months, the entire amount had been raised, all loans had been repaid, the mortgage on the ranch was removed, and Kent Island had become the largest park in the county park system—at no cost to the taxpayers. I received a routine certificate of thanks for my work from the supervisors with no mention of the lagoon or Kent Island.

Our big gamble had paid off and Stan Picher was again speaking to me. To relax I went to work on a short-term basis for Huey Johnson on The Nature Conservancy purchase of the Kipahulu Preserve on Maui.



*The San Francisco Chronicle published this editorial cartoon by Robert Bastian after our successful fund drive to purchase Kent Island. We felt emboldened to oppose the even more extensive commercial development planned for Tomales Bay.*



There was still one more problem: the Bolinas Harbor District held a lease from State Lands for 1,200 acres in the Bolinas Lagoon. As long as the district held this lease, the lagoon was not safe. Harold Gregg, dynamic director of the Marin Conservation League, handled the legislative chore in Sacramento to end this dangerous lease and Frances Stewart, a Bolinas conservation leader, was elected to the Harbor District board to convince them to end the lease. In 1969 the voters dissolved the Harbor District and the State transferred title to the County of Marin. In 1988 the lagoon and the Ranch's donated parcels were turned over to the 10,700-acre Marin County Open Space District. The voters established this district, and former Supervisor Pete Arrigoni was its first chairman.

## A Well-Managed Lagoon

Today, Bolinas Lagoon is also protected under the flags of the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary, Point Reyes National Seashore, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and the Central California Coast Biosphere Preserve.

Although often forgotten, the lagoon is also part of Audubon Canyon Ranch, which still owns part of Kent Island as insurance that the lagoon's protection will be permanent. Without the grassroots efforts many years ago, these agencies might not exist today. The lagoon might instead be a giant marina, surrounded by housing tracts and hamburger stands spoiling the entrance to a much smaller National Seashore.

But with preservation comes problems, and the most threatening is siltation. The Bolinas Lagoon Management Plan of 1968 is currently being updated, with Burr Heneman, Ranch board member, and others in charge. The tidal prism—the volume of water exchanged—has been reduced by twenty-five percent since then, and controversial corrective dredging may be required to prevent the lagoon from turning into a salt marsh.

But in the 1960s we feared a far greater erosion problem in the plan to carve out four-lane freeways along the coast, which would have inevitably led to the filling in of Bolinas Lagoon. The egrets and herons, in their tall redwoods, had no idea they had a formidable enemy still threatening them: the bulldozers of the California State Highway Commission.

## The Bolinas Solution

### DESIGNING SEWAGE PONDS WITH NATURE

The Bolinas sewage ponds are a splendid example of designing with nature. For decades, the town of Bolinas had a stinky sewage problem, labeled the worst in the state, and was under repeated abatement orders. Raw sewage flushed directly into the Lagoon entrance on Wharf Road, supposedly on the outgoing tide, but the flap didn't work and sewage backed up in the man-holes, flooding the streets, polluting the Lagoon, and contaminating shellfish. A huge joint powers sewage treatment plant for both Stinson Beach and Bolinas was proposed, with an ocean outfall near Duxbury Reef, but it would have allowed unlimited growth.

The Bolinas Public Utilities District solved this problem with an innovative, self-contained lagoon ponding system installed on the mesa. I had studied this method under Professor William J. Oswald while a student in Public Health at Berkeley. The town sewage of Bolinas is lifted by pump and aerated in a series of ponds where the sewage nutrients are consumed by small plants called *spirulina*. These are suctioned off, dried, and used for animal feed or food supplements for humans, while the pond water—now relatively clean—is used for irrigation.

The Bolinas system offers an environmentally friendly alternative to the costly, over-engineered works that rely on dumping wastewater into our rivers, estuaries, and oceans. It is a method that appealed to the “slow-growthers” of Bolinas because it limited population growth to the capacity of the system. It also attracts birds and other wildlife. The system deserves to be used widely in other parts of the state.



*Four large ponds dominate the modern, environmentally sensitive Bolinas Septic System. For years Bolinas dumped its untreated waste at the mouth of the Lagoon where it was washed back in with the tides. The public was warned not to eat the clams.*