

RIPTIDES: On the Outskirts of Town *July 18th 1951*

By ROBERT O'BRIEN

The first reference to the outer Taraval district or any of its features, as we know them now, is to be found in the report of Bruno Heceta's land expedition from Monterey to San Francisco Bay . . . Heceta, and explorer and captain of the Spanish naval ship Santiago, left Monterey Sept. 14, 1775, with Fray Francisco Palou, nine soldiers, three sailors and a carpenter, and eight days later reached what is now Ocean Beach.

The expedition pitched camp on the shore of a lake. After a scouting trip across the peninsula to the Bay, Heceta and his men raised camp and started back to Monterey. The day they left was September 24, the feast day of Nuestra Senora de la Merced, Our Lady of Mercy. In departing, they bestowed this same name upon the lake, and it has been known ever since as Lake Merced.

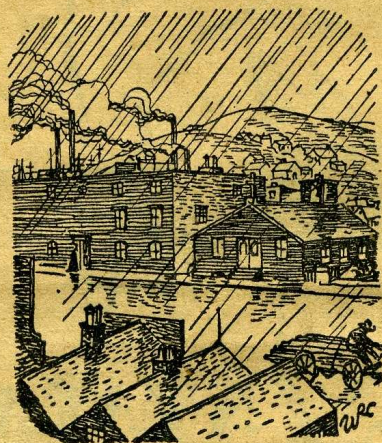
The land surrounding the lake comprised the first land grant in San Francisco, given, as Rancho Merced, in 1835, by Governor Jose Castro to Jose Antonio Galindo, a corporal in the militia of the San Francisco Presidio. . . Two years later, Galindo sold the rancho's several thousand acres to Francisco De Haro for 100 cows and \$25 in gold. . .

First owner of Visitacion Valley was Jacob Leese, whose house near the present intersection of Clay street and Grant avenue was the second dwelling on the site of San Francisco. Leese traded this holding to Robert Ridley, the Cockney adventurer, tale-spinner and brandy-bibber, for property in Sonoma. . .

Cattle of the Mission Dolores were corralled on a hill a few miles from the church. This hill became known as the Potrero, Spanish for an area in which cat-

tle are impounded. Later, this district was incorporated into the De Haro rancho. . . In 1849, when San Francisco flourished overnight into a metropolis, Dr. John Townsend and Cornelius de Boom laid out in the Potrero what was probably the city's first real estate development project. But it was too far from the center of town, and failed.

The first important step in the development of the Potrero oc-



curred in 1866, with the location at Potrero Point, at the foot of 20th street, of the Pacific Rolling Mills, the West's first iron-producing plant. . . Potrero Hill, for a time, was known as Scotch Hill because of the settlement there of emigrant iron workers from Scotland. . . The district was firmly established as an industrial area in 1883, when the Union Iron Works built its shipyard on a 32-acre site adjoining the Pacific Rolling Mills. (In 1928, the Pacific Rolling Mills merged with the Judson Manufacturing Co. of Emeryville. This combination has since expanded into the Judson Pacific-Murphy Co. of San Francisco, producer of structural steel.)

Sometimes you hear Potrero Hill referred to as "Russian Hill" by San Franciscans who are either ignoring the older Russian Hill north of Market, or are indifferent to the confusion that would result if they had their way, and the existence of two Russian Hills within the city limits was generally recognized. Wisely and fortunately, public usage has not sanctioned the duplication, and the name remains, as it should, Potrero Hill. . . The reason why it seemed appropriate to anyone to call it Russian Hill in the first place was the rapid growth there, in the years 1904-1908, of a colony of Russians who fled their country during the Russo-Japanese war.

They were, in the main, representatives of a peasant-farmer group known as "Molocans," who left Russia to escape military duty and the spiritual rule of the Russian Orthodox Church. Their name was derived from the Russian word for "milk," which they drank on fast days in defiance of church law. . . Today, the distinct nationality groups living on Potrero Hill number nearly thirty. . .

The Twin Peaks district and much of the land on the slopes of the peaks was granted in 1845 to Jose de Jesus Noe as the 4443-acre Rancho San Miguel. Included within the limits of this rancho were large sections of today's Ingleside, Glen Park and Noe Valley districts. Noe's adobe ranch house was located near the present intersection of Douglass and Alvarado streets, and when it was built, not much more than a hundred years ago, it was several hours' hard riding across the sand hills from Portsmouth Square. . . On Noe's death most of the grant (it had been confirmed by President Buchanan) was bought by Adolph Sutro, Leland Stanford and the Crocker interests.