

←Emma's handwriting. Since Cornelius died in Paris, she must of have been thinking of his brother Peter Romain who died in San Francisco in 1857.
(Chris Witzel 2011)

THE STORY OF HUNTER'S POINT

by Helen Marcia Bruner

★ Today Hunter's Point, sticking out into San Francisco Bay to the south of San Francisco's busy wharves, bustles with activity of its own. For here the United States Navy has its huge plant for the repair of boats large and small. The Point is covered with homes, housing projects, stores and all else necessary in a busy community.

Try to picture it as it must have been in August, 1775, when the San Carlos sailed through the Golden Gate. No doubt a few Indians were on the heights watching the vessel and wondering about it for the springs of fresh water up there must have been a great attraction to them in their meager and wandering lives. And later, after the Mission Dolores was established, can you see it as a part of the pasture lands where the padres grazed their cattle?

In 1849 it was a part of the Bernal Rancho de las Salinas y Potrero Viejo. Two of the new citizens established in the mushrooming city of San Francisco, a Virginian named Dr. John Townsend and a Dutch merchant, Corneille de Boom, realtors of the day, had great plans for this point of land. Many of the new inhabitants of the city complained about the eternal wind which filled the air with sand and dust in the summer and the rain which made the streets sometimes hip-deep in mud in the winter. Boats could not approach the shore on account of the shallow water. And fresh drinking water was scarce.

Messrs. Townsend and de Boom decided to build a new city to be called South San Francisco on what is now Hunter's Point. Surveys were made, streets and lots laid out, advertising appeared in the papers in October, 1849.

Lots were for sale at \$150 each. The advertisements drew attention to the fresh water, the deep harbor, the clayey soil which was fertile and would not blow around, and above all to the beauty of the surroundings. The salesmen on the spot were two young New Yorkers, Robert Eugene and Philip Schuyler Hunter, brothers.

There was no response to the advertising; the new city remained just a plan on a map and a few advertisements in the papers. But the Hunters continued to live on at the Point. They were joined in a few years by their brother, John, and other members of the family from New York. The Hunter family was an old and distinguished one in New York history. In it were senators and judges. The father of the three Hunter brothers, Robert R. Hunter, was a colonel in the War of 1812. Later he was appointed United States Consul to Cowes on the Isle of Wight. The sons were educated in private schools in France. They spoke French fluently. As lads they traveled extensively. The rush to the Gold Fields brought them to San Francisco on July 28, 1849, on the Clipper Ship Memnon. Instead of going on to the mines they stayed in San Francisco and must have settled on the Point almost at once.

When the new city, South San Francisco, failed to materialize, the Hunters supported themselves by selling fresh spring water for use in San Francisco. They received fifty dollars a month for as much water as the Independent Water Company of the city cared to take away. Vessels in the Bay filled their water casks there, too.

All this time the Hunters were squatters on the land, for it still was a part of the Bernal Rancho with a business agreement still in effect between the Bernals and Dr. Townsend and Mr. de Boom. Stories of these early times are told by descendants still living in California. One particularly poignant one is about the grand house designed and sent to the family in knock-down form as a gift from the father, Colonel Hunter in New York. The vessel carrying it arrived in San Francisco Bay only to be sunk before the Hunter's eyes by a sudden storm. Articles from the wreck were salvaged by the boys of the family from time to time but the house, itself, never.

Finally through a series of gifts, purchases, friendly family law suits and other arrangements, the Hunter titles to the land were settled. Philip and Robert Hunter sold their portion almost at once. Early in the seventies Philip Hunter returned East to establish his home in New Jersey while Robert Hunter moved with his family to Duncan Mills in California. John Hunter lived for a time in Sebastopol but soon returned to San Francisco where he lived until his death in 1899. Descendants still live in California.

Much of the material in this story of Hunter's Point has been taken from the book, Hunter's Point, by the Reverend Francis Florence McCarthy. This book was published in 1942 when the mission church, Our Lady of Lourdes, was dedicated at Hunter's Point by the Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church in San Francisco, the Most Reverend John J. Mitty.

Born in Brussels: a 149 Pioneer - 1st Belgian consul of Calif - buried in Mission Dolores Cemetery