

# HUMBOLDT BAY ISLANDS "FORGOTTEN LAND"



Cupola atop old Gunther mansion seems to stare with sightless eyes.

## Could be Developed Into Valuable Area

By CHET SCHWARZKOPF  
PHOTOS BY DICK RYAN

In the middle of Humboldt Bay, between Eureka and Samoa, stand two of the most potentially valuable pieces of real estate in the Eureka metropolitan area . . . Gunther and Woodley islands. Much has been written about their histories, for these islands occupy an interesting place in the past. But they occupy a strategic place in the future, if you'll stop and look ahead.

Funny what a few hundred feet of water can do. You can stand at the foot of F street on land that is worth a lot of money, and you can look across a narrow river-like channel to comparable land that is not worth five percent as much. It is that close . . . and yet so far.

There they sit—Gunther and Woodley islands—between the seaport capital of the northern Redwood Empire and the great mills of Samoa. If ever there was a potential location, they are it . . . except for one thing, A bridge.

Oh, sure—there are those who say it can't be done. They said that about the first steam engine, the first automobile, the first airplane—and no doubt they said that about the first bow and arrow! And the world's topmost "experts" said the Golden Gate could never, never be bridged. Oh, definitely not! . . . until Strauss came along and did it. Now they point with pride.

### NO DIFFICULT JOB

Humboldt bay is no Golden Gate. Nor is it a fraction the problem San Francisco bay presented to the bridge builders. Humboldt bay is hardly more than a big, shallow lagoon. To throw a bridge across the channel to Woodley island—say from foot of G street—isn't heavy enough job to attract a headline outside of Humboldt county. And to continue it to Gunther island is the same. Yes, those channels are navigable water—but navigable water has been bridged before. In fact, most bridges that amount to anything cross navigable water!

### A BIG OPPORTUNITY

Think what an annex to Eureka's industrial waterfront those two islands could be if they were connected to the mainland. Think of the taxable area that could be added to the city. Think what an ideal natural they would be for Eureka's fast-growing fishing industry.

There could be wharves, boatways and processing plants erected over there—to say nothing of additional industrial acreage for mills, or any of the varied industries that are looking toward Eureka with favorable eyes these days. Needing only a bridge to

connect, there stand several hundred acres of fine industrial land right at Eureka's front door. Doesn't that stir your imagination?

### TRIP TO ISLANDS

Through the kindness of Les Hoffman, who, with his brothers, Oscar and Bill, owns the Eureka-Samoa ferry service, a pair of newspapermen were able to obtain a rowboat and look the two islands over at their leisure. And quite a trip it proved to be, with a strong tide running out, and foul weather brewing.

First landing was made at Tom Kennedy's dock, on Gunther island. Tom works at Samoa and "commutes" back and forth by rowboat. His bachelor quarters are neat as the proverbial pin, and a big stack of splitting wood in front of his house attests to Tom's preparations for winter's cold.

Tom was about to leave for work, but made his visitors welcome and supplied much information in a brief time. Two lumber mills, at least, have operated on Gunther island, he says—which goes to show right there what a bridge would mean! He and most of the people who live on the island own their land. It was a part of an old millsite, explains Tom, and he and the others bought it from the Evans estate of Eureka some years ago.

What about water, his visitors wanted to know, surveying the salt water which surrounds the low-level island. About 150 feet deep, states Tom, you encounter abundant amounts of fresh water. There are several wells on the island, run mostly by gas engines, although one, owned by Werner Sweins, has a windmill.

Electricity? Tom shakes his head sadly. The several home owners on Gunther island—and Woodley island as well—have been trying to get a line run over from Eureka for a long time, but no luck. So they either generate their own power by gas engine sets, or still use kerosene lamps.

### TWO LADIES ON ISLAND

How many people on Gunther island? About 15 or 20—including two ladies—Tom says . . . Mrs. Ernie Lampella and Mrs. Andy Gabrielson, both of whose husbands are fishermen. And now Tom must leave for work, so at his suggestion, his visitors cross afoot to a neat white house with its own docks and rock retaining-wall.

Mr. and Mrs. Ernie Lampella are the owners of this place. It is that fair-sized white bungalow you can see on Gunther island from the foot of F street. Ernie is "out front" working on his fishing vessel, the Queen City, which is tied up about where the curbstone of a town dwelling would be. But here, instead of the family automobile, it is the family boat! The visitors are quite impressed by the prosperous and well-kept premises as Ernie makes them welcome and invites them in to meet Mrs. Lampella and enjoy a cup of coffee.

The Lampella home is a dandy, and Ernie and his better half have ambitious plans for further improvements. You note it has electric lights. Yes, Ernie explains, they have their own Delco 110-volt plant. "But," Ernie goes on to say, "it is only enough for household use and one or two light tools. Axel Anderson and I own the docks you see, while I own a boat-way for repair work. If we could get electric power over here, we could do vastly more. We are only half-equipped, at best, the way matters stand."

### HISTORIC OLD HOME

At the upper end of the island, partly screened by trees, stands what is left of the old Gunther mansion. To get there by rowboat against the tide that is racing down the channel, would be almost impossible. The good-hearted Ernie comes to the rescue with an outboard, and tows his visitors over a half-mile against that strong current to cast them loose inside the slough that leads right up to the house.

Obviously of early Victorian design, the deserted home stands stark and forlorn. Vandals of recent days have stripped it of everything that could be moved, from doors and windows to every bit of piping and ornamental woodwork. Especially forlorn seems the old cupola atop the house, which, with its windows gone, appears to be staring at the bay with sightless eyes.

A rather risky climb gets you



Aerial Photograph by Merle Shuster, AAAP  
Air view of Eureka waterfront opposite islands showing islands' strategic possibilities as regards city.

into the cupola, from which you could command a superb view of Eureka, with the snow-clad hills in back. So close seems Eureka that you feel you could almost hail the court house from where you stand. A locomotive clanging its bell and slipping its drive-wheels sounds startlingly close, while the myriad noises of city traffic waft across the narrow channel that separates the island from the mainland and cause both visitors to say in unison—"If there were only a bridge to this place . . ."

Ernie has said there is an Indian burying ground near the old mansion, but the thick undergrowth seems to have blotted out all traces of it. Many Indian tools and arrowheads have been found hereabout—and probably more are still there. It was not far from here that the ill-famed Indian massacre of 1860 occurred, in which some 200 Indians were ambushed and slain by the whites. Although the Gunther home was built many years after this occurred, a rumor persisted that the place is "haunted." Surveying the scene with a realistic and somewhat cynical eye, it would seem difficult to explain how a crumbling old pile of rotting wood could have any attraction for even the famed ghosts of England—let alone those of savages who never in their living day saw such a dwelling place. So a good ghost yarn is dismissed with regrets.

On the lower end of the island once upon a time was located the Humboldt Yacht club—complete with swimming pool, dance floor and landscaped grounds—which was the scene of many a gay party in early days of the century, but which was abandoned long ago. Not a trace remains now, except for a depression where the pool once lay—a reminder of the depression that ended its career. What was left of the building was torn down in the 1930s, and, for the most part, taken away. But given a bridge, the place would again seem to have possibilities.

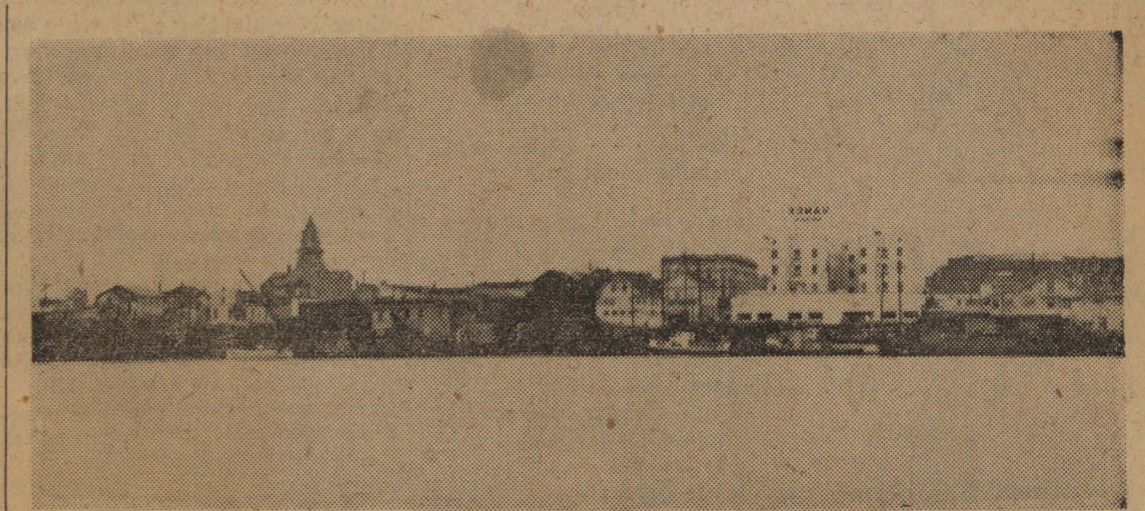
### A LOOK AT WOODLEY

Across the channel to Woodley island now, and pulling a lusty stroke against the tide. Shallow water along the island's shore proved easier going, and the visitors worked their way as far up as Harvey Harper's dock. Directly across loom the ways and buildings of Werner Sweins' boat station, but swift water makes it virtually impossible to get there. Later you see Werner in Eureka and learn that he has five fishing vessels on Gunther island, together with a complete maintenance plant and several cabins. His is the enterprise that has a windmill for pumping water. "But," says Werner, "we are handicapped for lack of electric power. Some day, maybe, they'll give us a break. We'd be a good customer."

"And another thing," he adds, "did it ever occur to you what a fine airfield and seaplane base Gunther island would make? We need a bridge for a starter. After that, with Eureka, Arcata and Humboldt developing the way they are, things would happen quick." And his visitors must agree. Werner has something—but definitely.

But back to Woodley island again . . . it has a couple of fishermen and one retired man living on its Eureka side, while the Harper cabin occupies its upper end alone. Obviously, this last is used for a duck hunting spot and, from the large numbers of waterfowl that abound in both islands, it should be a good one.

It was on Woodley island, too, that a retired Englishman, now deceased, spent several years building a fair-sized vessel on which he planned to tour the Pacific. However, he never realized his ambition and the boat stood



So near and yet so far—Eureka waterfront from Woodley island.



Ernie Lampella has the most attractive home on the island.



Duck hunters have bulldozed out decoy pond on Woodley Island.

stark on its ways for many seasons. It was finally sold and launched and is now, you are told, doing service on Humboldt bay as the Susie Q.

Quite a bit of indiscriminate rifle shooting is done on the Humboldt bay islands, mostly by amateurs, you're told. Bullets are found embedded in doors and boats and one man had a sugar-bowl shot off his table while eating!

Laurels for longest residence belong to Gus Reynolds and Bert Smith, both of Gunther island. Gus has resided there for 30 years and is satisfied except for the water, which he says is bad because he recently lost a tooth!

Bert Smith, who is 77 years of age, is a sprightly bachelor who says he likes the island fine—

wouldn't like anywhere else, Bert went back east by plane last year, but said it took too much time. Next trip, Bert plans to go by rocket!

### A BIT OF HISTORY

Gunther island also is known as Indian island because of the former long-established Indian residence there. Thornburg, in his excellent book on Humboldt, says Gunther or Indian island was used for tribal ceremonies for countless generations. Clam shells to a depth of 22 feet have been found there, and this writer says it must have taken thousands of years for them to accumulate in such quantity. And, as Indian bones and relics are found clear to the bottom of these shell mounds, it is assumed that they were the result of In-

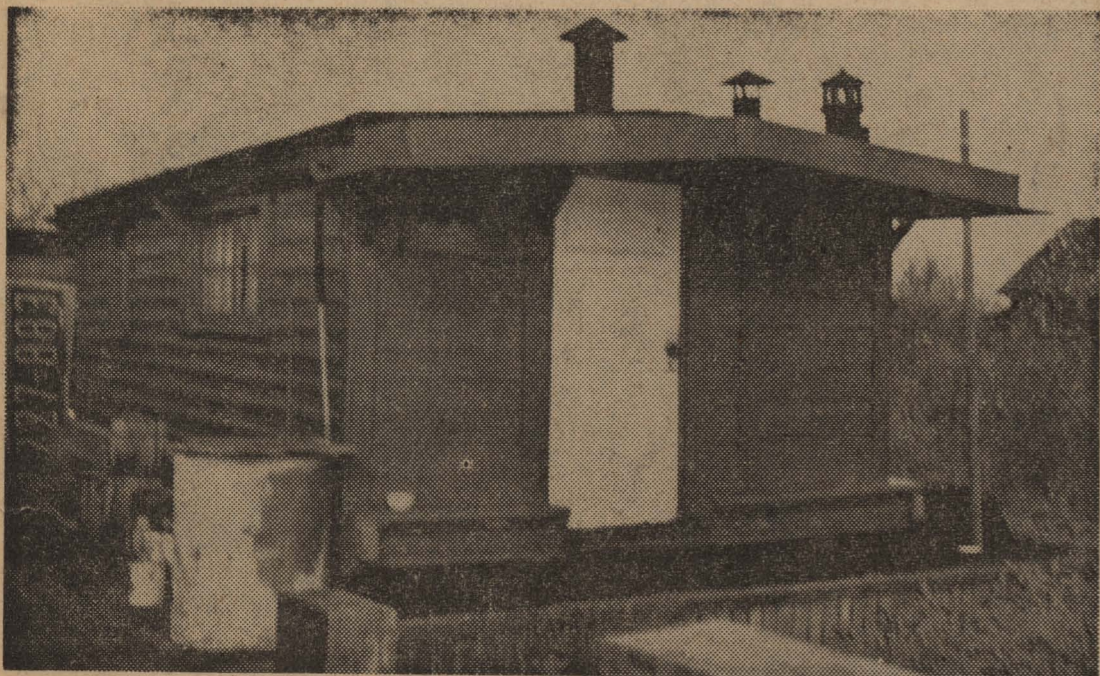
dian residence and celebration. Thornburg also says: "We find their mills and hammers for grinding acorns and seeds, together with their spears and arrowheads. As the mounds contain no metal, we know that these people belonged to the Stone Age."

A well, dug through the mound upon which the old Gunther house stands, passed through 22 feet of clam shells, beneath which were found decaying spruce trees—and the tooth of a mastodon!

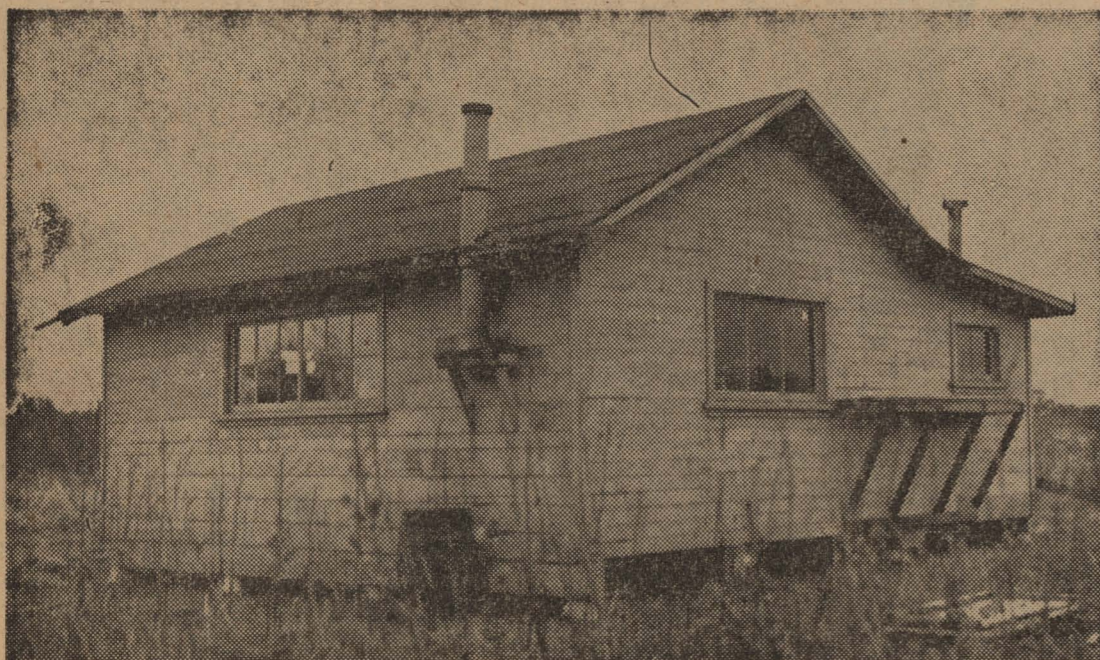
So there you have a brief picture of Humboldt bay's historic islands—as of today, and a glimpse into their past. What the future may have in store for these neglected but potentially valuable locations, only the progress that goes on in the minds of men can determine.



Time and vandals have wrought havoc with abandoned home's interior



Tom Kennedy's bachelor quarters on Gunther Island are neat as pin.



Harper duck shooting lodge on Woodley Island is attractive.