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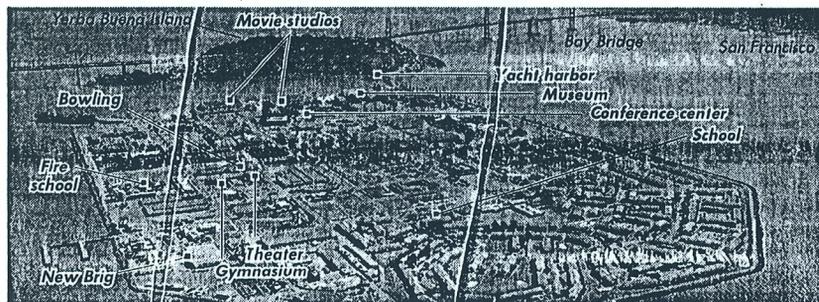
THE VOICE OF THE WEST

EDITORIALS

Treasure in The Bay

TREASURE ISLAND

The 403 acres of Treasure Island are a self-contained small city in the middle of San Francisco Bay and contain everything from a jail to 903 housing units, a big theater, a gym and a conference center.



View of Treasure Island looking south

PHOTO BY CHRIS STEWART / THE CHRONICLE

FUTURE URBAN historians need only to glance at Treasure Island and Yerba Buena Island in the middle of San Francisco Bay to measure the vision, enterprise and creativity of the city's leaders in the waning days of the 20th century.

San Francisco has a once-in-a-lifetime chance to transform those two islands into a self-supporting community and world-class recreation center that could be a glamorous adornment to the Bay Area and a healthy tax base for the city.

On September 30, the Navy will officially turn over both islands to San Francisco — lock, stock and barrel — except for 32 acres of YBI that will remain a Coast Guard base. It will be up to the city to decide what to do with these priceless pieces of real estate.

Thanks to the hard work of Gloria Root and her 22-member Citizens Reuse Committee, the city has a blueprint of how to proceed that emphasizes recreational, entertainment and hospitality industries, recalling Treasure Island's golden years of 1939-40 when the Golden Gate International Exposition was held there.

Not since the depressed 1930s, when the Army Corps of Engineers created the 403-acre island out of bay mud, gravel and stone for the dazzling fair, has there been such an opportunity to prove that "The City that Knows How" still does.

Even during the Great Depression, when the country was an economic basket case, bold visionaries constructed the world's largest man-made island and created a magical city in the bay to celebrate the recently-completed Golden Gate and Bay bridges.

The island was built in 18 months, and the exposition, with all its buildings, gardens, exhibits and infrastructure, was also completed in a year-and-a-half — the whole project took three years. On Feb. 18, 1939, the fair opened and for 372 glorious days Bay Area residents were enchanted by the brilliantly lit island fairground.

The exposition's theme, "A Pageant of the Pacific," saluted the diversity of Pacific Rim cultures with an exotic, eclectic and elaborate mix of architecture, art, music, entertainment, cuisine, sports and gardens.

It was a place of grand buildings, soaring towers, heroic statuary, blooming flowers, fountains, lagoons, changing lights and sci-

ard Reinhardt in his classic, "Treasure Island: San Francisco's Exposition Years."

"It was a peaceable island, crowned with towers and glittering with light, that seemed to float like a vision in a sea of gold."

By the time the fair closed Sept. 29, 1940, World War II had begun in Europe and Asia, and the fun was over. Within five months the Navy took over the island and has used it as a base for the past 57 years.

When the Navy departs in September, it will bequeath to San Francisco the islands, their roads, piers and infrastructure. The city will receive 1,011 housing units, an elementary school and kindergarten, 150 military buildings, two vast hangars, a jail, a fire department and firefighting school, a movie theater, a marina, a sewage treatment plant, sports fields, a bowling alley, tennis and handball courts, space to build, and spectacular views.

A recent tour of the islands was a reminder of their fabulous potential. Set smack in the middle of the bay, with access by bridge and frequent ferry service, the islands could — with properly planned development — become a dramatic centerpiece and an enticing tourist attraction for San Francisco's 48 million annual visitors.

There remain a few obstacles, including seismic instability and toxic wastes on Treasure Island. And there is a need for improved access roads and a large fleet of ferries and water taxis to transport visitors without clogging the already crowded Bay Bridge. But these challenges are small compared to the potential payoff.

The Citizens' Reuse Committee has proposed a vision of bayside promenades, hotels, restaurants, a theme park, a golf course, tennis courts, a conference center, movie-making studios, facilities to house and train the homeless and maybe another world fair.

What is needed now is the kind of imaginative, can-do attitude that created Treasure Island and the aggressive marketing spirit that made the original Golden Gate International Exposition so successful.

"A strong marketing plan is the key," says Root, who chaired the committee. "Think big and don't wait. Establish the groundwork now among investors and developers."

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