

THE LOST SHRIMP CAMP

The Pioneers of Pt. Molate

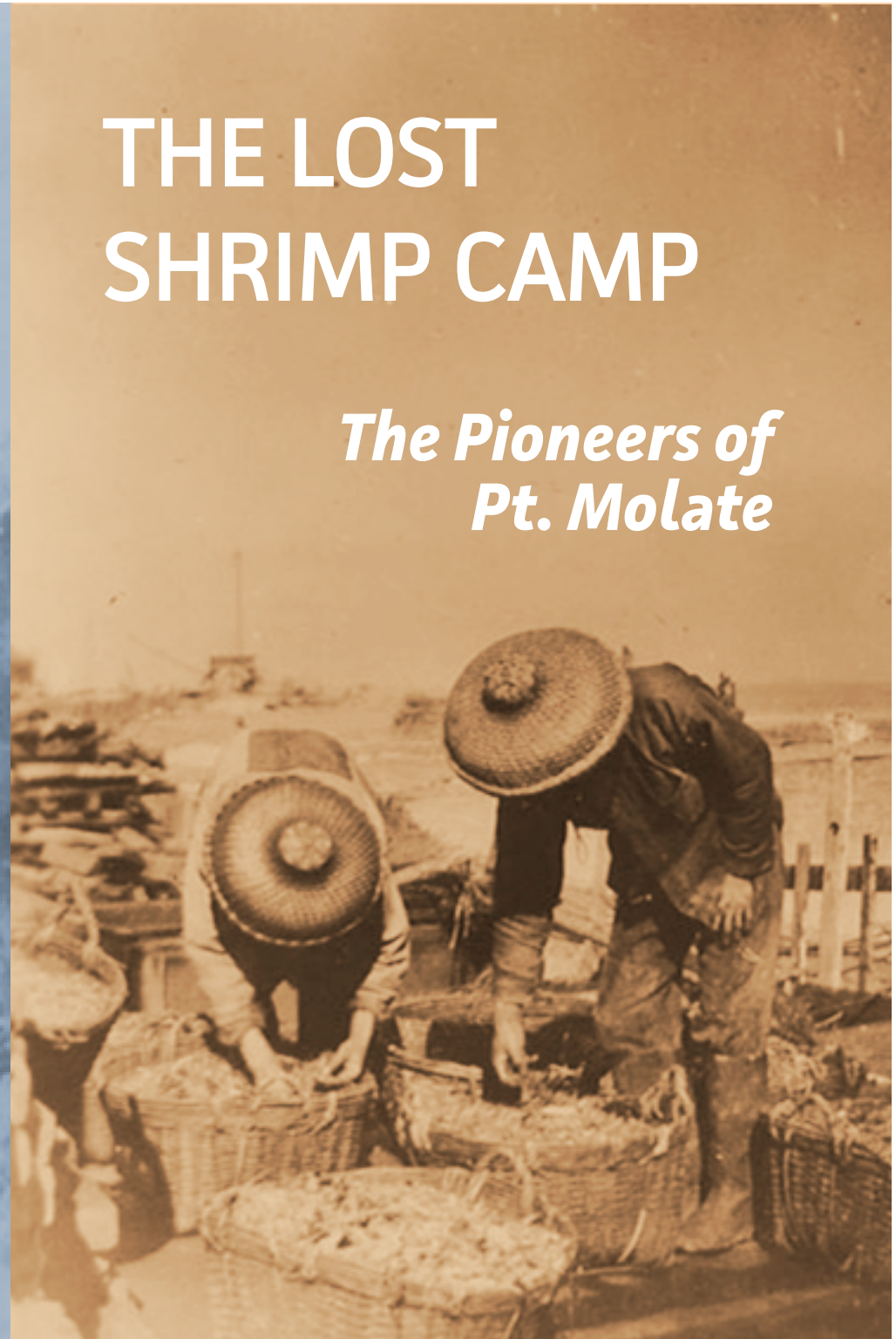
“There were billiard halls, a bowling alley, the Opera House and small theatres showing silent movies. There were daily deliveries of milk, ice, and shrimp!”

Life in bustling Pt. Richmond at the turn of the 20th century included daily deliveries of shrimp that the shrimpers would trek over the hill from Pt. Molate in wicker baskets balanced on 10 foot wide poles. One of the first commercial enterprises at Pt. Molate, the shrimp camp provided shrimp to the United Shrimp Co. of San Francisco and harvests were dried for export to China

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THE SHRIMP CAMP AT PT. MOLATE

Chinese Shrimp Camp at Pt. Molate circa 1904. Operational from ~1870- to 1912

In the decade following California's admission to the U.S. in 1850, the population of the Bay Area grew rapidly. Driven largely by the Gold Rush, San Francisco's population grew from roughly 850 people in early 1848 to more than 56,000 in 1850. (Gilman et al., 1904).

To meet the growing demand for food both locally and for export to China, Chinese shrimp camps sprang up throughout the Bay Area. Sometime between 1865-1870 a shrimp camp was established at Pt. Molate in the area of today's Pt. Molate Beach Park. Harvesting grass shrimp with large nets, by 1904, the camp consisted of about 30 shacks, five wharves, and nearly 100 inhabitants.

Efforts to severely restrict the burgeoning Chinese fishing industry began shortly after Chinese immigrants established themselves. A variety of measures including intimidation, the imposition of race based taxes, and legislation were used to try to drive the Chinese out of the fishing industry. Seen as competition to the hard scrabble fish packing and export business, the period between 1894 and 1900 witnessed a determined campaign by the

California State Commission on Fisheries to force Chinese shrimpers out of business, resulting in the abandonment of half the established shrimp camps on the Bay. In 1901, legislation was passed forbidding shrimp fishing during the height of the season, with the exportation of shrimp being banned in 1905.

Finally bag nets were outlawed in 1911, marking the death knell for the Chinese shrimp industry in the Bay Area (Hill, 2001; Ellinger 2001). The last known mapping of the extant Pt. Molate shrimp camp in 1915 depicts eighteen structures west of Stenmark (formerly Western) Drive and four short wharves extending into the Bay. (From the Cultural and Paleontologic Resources segment of the 2010 EIR for the former Navy Fuel Depot at Pt. Molate)

In 1941, the U.S. Navy took over Pt. Molate to serve as the fueling center for the ships being built at the Kaiser Shipyards during WWII. The Pt. Molate Fuel Depot would go on to fuel the entire Pacific Fleet, but construction of the 550' fueling pier and the depot itself destroyed what was left of the Chinese shrimp camp. Only a few sub-tidal pier post remnants remain today.

The former Chinese shrimp camp is located near Pt. Molate Beach Park on the San Pablo Peninsula. To visit Pt. Molate, take the Pt. Molate exit from I-580 at the toll plaza on the east side of the San Rafael Bridge.