



Future area of Sequoia Park—Red hill to the left and Grove Hill to the right, 1905.

Sequoia Park: A Perfect Paradise

By Michael Josselyn

\$150 BUYS A HOUSE AND LOT. A perfect paradise for a permanent country home. Of course there are other requirements, but they are easy for the right kind of man. He must be a family man; a home loving man; a man with good moral character; enough ability to hold his job; and pay on the house and lot what he now pays in rent. If you are that kind of man, you can get a home in Sequoia Park.

This was the pitch that The Doherty Company used in a sales brochure in the early 1900s for lands on Park and Sequoia Drives surrounding the Tompkins estate and on the hillside northwest of today's United Market in San Anselmo. Earl L. Doherty, a lumber magnate, was the developer of the property. He owned and operated lumber mills in Mill Valley and Larkspur and sold prebuilt homes as well as summer "camping lots" in Mill Valley, Corte Madera, and Larkspur. However, two of his largest

real estate ventures were in San Anselmo: Sequoia Park and Morningside Court.

The Coast Miwok occupied the region for thousands of years and likely used the local hills for acorn collection and the views they provided of the surrounding region. California became part of Mexico in 1821, and the area that would become Sequoia Park was part of two 1840s Mexican land grants, Rancho San Pedro, Santa Margarita y Las Gallinas Mexican and Rancho Punta de Quintin, Corte del Madera, la Laguna y Cañada de San Anselmo. Deaths of the grantees eventually led to the breakup of the two ranchos and the sale of the lands. San Francisco banker Minthorne M. Tompkins purchased 32 acres from Alexander Forbes, a wealthy Scottish shipping broker who invested heavily in Marin and acquired some of the ranch lands, and 10.5 acres from James Ross in 1870-1871. Tompkins constructed his home on Pine Hill along Park Way.

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In 1912, E.L. Doherty purchased the undeveloped lands around the Tompkins estate and soon began his ad campaign directed to those San Franciscans who lost their homes in the 1906 earthquake or wanted a summertime escape in sunny San Anselmo.

Doherty already had experience in land development. After a successful business in Bakersfield, Doherty moved to Marin and established lumber mills in Mill Valley and then Larkspur. His mills produced redwood lumber that he used to construct summer homes on small lots. You might say he was a strong promoter of the tiny home. He purchased land above Corte Madera and subdivided it in to 20x50 ft lots that sold for as little as \$25 for San Franciscans to come over and escape the summer fogs. Many of these were used for summer tents.

In 1909, he advertised in the *San Francisco Call* for homes in Mill Valley on small lots selling for \$3,000 to \$4,000. Doherty also had a brief civic career as a Trustee in Larkspur and served on the Board of the Marin Promotion League. As with many of the early developments in Marin, he installed the water systems and, in the case of the Corte Madera project, established the Corte Madera Water Company that supplied water from small mountain springs. Lack of attention to details and shoddy construction of the water works led to its eventual takeover by the Marin Water Municipal Water District.

Earl's personal life was also a bit messy as he was named in a suit for divorce in 1910 by Dr. Francis Gruss, a dentist and former Trustee in Mill Valley. Gruss stated, "Doherty was formerly a great friend of mine and he often came to our house with

his wife and two children. I noticed that my wife's love began to wane about five months ago and it was then I first became suspicious. Before Doherty came between us, she was the best woman and wife in the world." After an apparent reconciliation and another child, Earl's wife filed for divorce in 1922 stating that he left her in 1920 "without apparent reason" and sought child support of \$250 a month for herself and three children.

Sequoia Park was Doherty's biggest development with 400 lots each approximately 25 x 75 ft in size, available for purchase in phases. The first phase (referred to as Section 1) included lots along Park Way, Sequoia Drive, Cottage and Bungalow

Avenues. The second phase (Section 2) was much larger and included lots on the eastern slope of Red Hill and the southern slope of Grove Hill bordering San Rafael.

His lot layout on the narrow and meandering hillside streets was designed to provide access to both the front and back of the lots so that some

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SAN ANSELMO HERALD

ANNOUNCEMENT!

**\$41,000 Sold in
60 Days in**

Sequoia Park San Anselmo

Formerly the Tompkins' Home

PRICES WILL BE ADVANCED FROM 25 TO 50% ON JULY 15th. THEREFORE, ANYONE BUYING BEFORE THE RAISE WILL MAKE MONEY ON THEIR INVESTMENT

DO IT QUICK!

ONLY 10% DOWN, BALANCE IN 5 YEARS AT 6% ON DEFERRED BALANCES.

**Prices from \$75 to \$1,000
400 Lots to Select from**

SEWER, WATER MAINS AND ELECTRIC SERVICE NOW INSTALLED AND READY WITHOUT COST TO BUYERS. WE ARE NEAR THE STATION, BUT WILL BE NEARER SHORTLY, AS THERE IS TO BE A STATION DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE PROPERTY.

YOU ALL KNOW THE RAISE IN VALUES IN THE LAST 5 YEARS IN SAN ANSELMO. OUR PROPERTY IS NOW PRICED AT VALUES OF 5 YEARS AGO TO GET THINGS STARTED.

Get Busy and Make Money by Sunday

LOOK FOR THE SIGN, "SEQUOIA PARK." OUR AUTO MEETS ALL TRAINS, SUNDAYS AND HOLIDAYS AND WILL CALL AT YOUR HOME FOR YOU IF YOU DESIRE. WRITE OR PHONE OUR OFFICE.

The Doherty Co., Owners 410 MUTUAL BANK BLDG. SAN FRANCISCO

PHONE SUTTER 1979

Doherty Co. Advertisement in the *San Anselmo Herald*, June

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Sequoia Park in Sunny San Anselmo

Improvements are not only promised but are actually ready

Note the prices in both Sections 1 and 2. Lots as low as \$50.00 on terms



Beautiful, Winding Drive in Sequoia Park

A Perfect Paradise for a Permanent Country Home

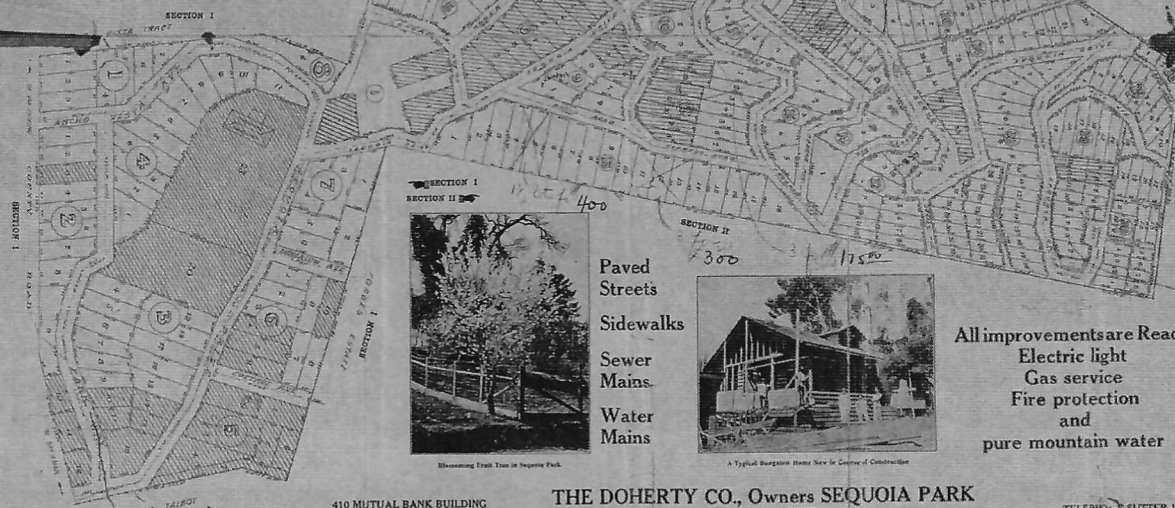
\$150
Buys a House and Lot

Of course there are other requirements. But they are easy for the right kind of a man.

He must be a family man; a home loving man; a man with good moral character; enough ability to hold his job; and pay on the house and lot what he now pays in rent.

If you are that kind of a man, you can get a home in

Sequoia Park



410 MUTUAL BANK BUILDING
704 MARKET STREET AT GEARY

THE DOHERTY CO., Owners SEQUOIA PARK
SAN FRANCISCO

TELEPHONE SLUTTER 1979

Sequoia Park Map in Sales Brochure. Courtesy Marin History Museum

“streets” were merely lanes that were never constructed, but those lanes still had lots abutting them. This has resulted in some confusing house numbering today. There are no street connections to either San Rafael’s Sun Valley to the north or San Anselmo’s Hilldale Park to the east, so Sequoia Park remains an isolated area from its surrounding neighborhoods exasperating modern day emergency access requirements.

The first record of his efforts to sell the lots was in 1912 with ads in the *Marin Journal*, *San Francisco Call*, and the newly started *San Anselmo Herald*. The Doherty Company promoted land speculation noting that “people always make money in buying and selling land” and suggested a return of 25 to 50 percent. Doherty promised that “we stake our reputa-

tion that his property will double in value in two years or less” due to the many improvements that will be made free of charge to buyers. This was a self-fulfilling prophecy as Doherty stated in a subsequent ad that “prices will be advanced from 25-50 percent on July 15th, therefore, anyone buying before the raise will make money on their investment. It was clear that some were buying in to all the hype as he announced \$45,000 in lot sales in just 10 weeks.

The Doherty Company’s sales brochure also touted the beauty of San Anselmo noting its “churches, good schools, excellent roads, electric lights, gas, telephone, sewers, and the finest of pure mountain water” and, of course, no fog or cold winds off the ocean. The fact that there were now electric trains to

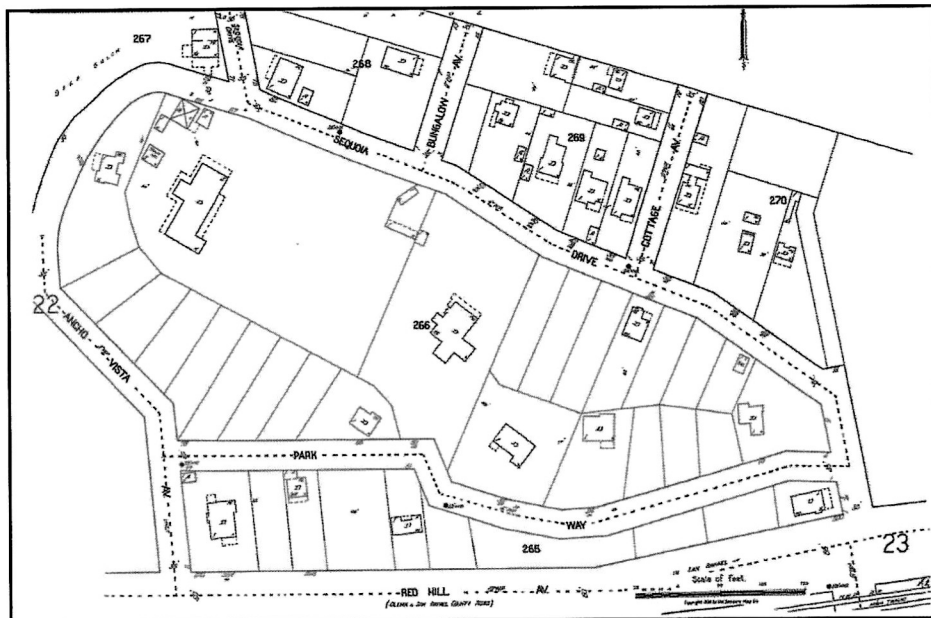
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Sausalito and a ferry to the City made it possible to have an easy daily commute to San Francisco. Road

first phase of the Sequoia Park development was finally sold out in 1924. The 1924 Sanborn maps show

about 25 structures built within the first phase, many of them on combined lots. A few of these homes still exist but have been heavily remodeled or reconstructed over the years. Many others were torn down and then rebuilt.

As homeowners moved in, the Sequoia Park Improvement Club sought to make improvements in the subdivision as well as sponsor social events. The Club was active in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. Some of their activities were to seek pavement funds from the Town and to request funds for drainage improvements and the replacement of sewer lines that were described as in a "deplorable condition." Other ac-



1924 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Section 1 of Sequoia Park

improvements in Sequoia Park were emphasized in the news and especially the addition of sidewalks to bring a more city-like setting. Apparently, there was also a road being built on the hill in the second phase that caused considerable concern and was abandoned and replaced with "a new road winding around the hill in a picturesque manner."

In 1913, the Doherty Company reported it "just planted 1500 fruit trees and shade trees in this new tract." It proudly stated that the "workmen used dynamite to dig the hole and this loosened the dirt down for a distance of 12 to 13 feet."

San Anselmo town records show that building permits were being issued for small bungalows and houses. One house to be built by a San Francisco tailor on several combined lots was "a country home quite beyond the ordinary" with "a long trellised driveway entrance on the order of the old European courts, which promises to be a show place."

During the years of WWI and the Spanish Flu pandemic, the flurry of initial advertisements ceased, but there were regular recordings of deeds and building permits for Sequoia Park. The

activities such as dealing with issues of poor water pressure, lack of fire protection hydrants, and the cost of garbage collection were on the Club agendas.



Sequoia Park bungalow pictured on The Doherty Co. advertising postcard. Promotional text on the back reads, "Dear Bill—How do you like my Bungalow in Sequoia Park, San Anselmo. Come over Sunday and see it. There is a lot near me for \$200 on easy terms if you come right away.—Jack"

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There was controversy over who was responsible for the repairs of the utilities as during one meeting of the Sanitary District it was noted that the original developer did not offer any dedication of the streets to the public and the original installation of the sewers was done by the developer. Frank Nash was Treasurer of the Club and often represented the owners at public meetings. The Club members also stenciled street names on the curbs (where they existed) to help visitors navigate the local streets. Social events were also sponsored by the Club and it was responsible for the lighting of a Christmas tree and an Easter cross on the top of Red Hill each year.

The 1930s and 40s had many records of lot sales and lot line adjustments as individuals purchased lots in the second phase of the development on the hillsides. More bungalows and homes were built on the base of Red Hill and some along the lower slopes and at the very top of Grove Hill. Most of them were

on consolidated lots through a few were within the original 25 foot wide lot. Houses continued to be built and older homes modified throughout the 80s and 90s.

In 1975, George Lucas purchased the Tompkins home and made the neighborhood famous after Star Wars was released. He has since purchased many lots in the vicinity to add to his compound including the old spring at the base of Red Hill that once served the Ancha Vista Hotel.

Today, home values in Sequoia Park range from \$900,000 to \$2.6 million. However, the infrastructure is largely based on that first laid out by Doherty in 1912. Many of the roads are still privately maintained. Narrow roads, older pipes, and non-conforming lots present problems to current residents. However, many would agree that its sunny slopes, views of Mt. Tamalpais, and unique characteristics truly make Sequoia Park a perfect paradise.♦