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TO THE

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

ON THE DISPOSAL OF SEWAGE ALONG THE SHORE OF SAN PABLO
BAY AND CARQUINEZ STRAIT IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY.

By Ralph Hilscher, Assistant Engineer, Bureau of Sanitary Engineering.

February 16th, 1917.

On February 8th and 9th, 1917, various communities along the shore from Martinez to Pinole in Contra Costa County were visited for the purpose of making inquiry relative to sanitary conditions and the following information was obtained regarding the method of sewage disposal practiced by each.

Martinez: This city has a population estimated at about 5,000. It has had a rapid growth during the past few years, brought about by the erection of several oil refineries in that locality. As a result of this growth the sewer system is said to be now taxed to its capacity and it is expected that more or larger sewers will soon be needed. The older built-up sections of the city are quite completely sewered but some of the outlying subdivisions are not yet provided with proper drainage. The outlet of the system extends across a tule marsh and discharges about 500 feet from shore at a point opposite the center of town. It is understood that some odor is detected at times although no very serious nuisance has been caused. Such odors as are produced are most apt to be noticed by persons along the waterfront and on the pier. The outfall is not entirely submerged at all times but is always covered at high tide so that a reasonable amount of dilution is afforded. The tule growth probably hinders somewhat ready removal of the sewage solids.

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Port Costa: This town is not incorporated but has a population of approximately 500. It is owned very largely by the same interests that constitute the Port Costa Water Company, which serves all of these shore towns. Port Costa depends for its existence almost entirely upon the Southern Pacific Company, the principal occupation being the operation of large warehouses and of ferries transporting Southern Pacific trains to and from Benicia. Such sewers as exist have been installed by the Port Costa Company and have an outlet to Carquinez Strait. These sewers, it is understood, serve practically all dwellings in the town. Along the waterfront several business buildings that overhang the water are not served by this sewer but have individual outlets. All the points at which sewage is discharged are said to be covered at least during high tide and no nuisance is complained of.

Crockett and Valona: These communities are adjacent to each other and are said to have a combined population of about 3,500. Neither is incorporated. The population is dependent almost entirely upon the California-Hawaiian Sugar Refining Company which operates a large plant here and owns a large portion of the town. Very few general public improvements have been made and a rather unkempt appearance is presented. The population is made up largely of foreigners. The towns are partly served by sewers that have been laid entirely by private contribution with the exception of the one main outfall which was paid for by the County. This outfall pipe leads across tidal flats to a point about 500 feet from shore and discharges into low water. This point of discharge should be satisfactory, but the outfall has a break near shore through which most of the sewage has been escaping, resulting in considerable nuisance. It is understood that the County Commissioners are aware of this break and plan to repair it. Grading has recently been finished for a new State Highway through Valona and Crockett and in certain places where deep excavation was necessary some of the

house sewer connections have been uncovered or broken. This has caused sewage to leak out onto the surface with some local offense. This condition is annoying and should be remedied by restoring the sewers. If the highway contractor or the commission cannot be induced to make the repair, the property owners should do so without delay.

The sewers of Crockett and Valera have been constructed in a haphazard manner and not in accordance with any comprehensive plan. The towns are congested for the reason that topography and the unwillingness of neighboring ranch owners to sell have prevented expansion. In such a place universal sewerage and a systematic plan is eminently essential to proper sanitary control. This community is of such size and its sanitary and health problems consequently of such importance to the community itself that there is needed more efficient local regulation than can be effected in an unincorporated town. It would be greatly to the advantage of Crockett and Valera if they would at least form a sanitary district for this purpose.

Selby and Torrey: These are unincorporated communities adjoining each other and having a population of about 500. They depend for their existence upon a large smelter and white lead factory. Both are thoroughly sewered, the systems having been installed by the Smelter Company which owns practically all the dwellings in both villages. The sewers have their outlet to San Pablo Bay. A generally neat and well-kept appearance is presented around these towns and factories.

Oleum: At this point is located a refinery of the Union Oil Company. Not over 100 people live here permanently, the majority of employees residing in Rodeo and Torrey. The Company owns a few cottages and a small hotel from which a sewer leads to the Bay. It is said to be the plan eventually to add a larger hotel and a number of dwellings and the superintendent stated that it was intended to provide complete sanitary facilities for these.

Redep. This is an unincorporated community of about 500 population. About a year ago a Sanitary District was formed to install a sewer system and this improvement has since been completed and serves the entire town. The outlet extends about 300 feet from shore and discharges into water at low tide with no serious nuisance difficulties resulting. The Sanitary Board has adopted the policy of requiring that all residences be connected with the sewer and it is said that there now remain only two or three that have not connected.

Hercules. This is a town of about 500 population adjoining the plant of the Hercules Powder Company, and is occupied almost entirely by employees of that plant. The Company owns practically the entire town and has laid a complete sewer system with an outlet to San Pablo Bay. It is understood that no nuisance has arisen from this sewage.

Pinole. This town has a population of about 800 and is quite completely served by a sewer system having an outlet to San Pablo Bay. The discharge of this sewage into the Bay, it is understood, has never given rise to any complaint but at one point, where the outfall sewer bridges over Pinole Creek, a break has allowed the sewage to escape to that stream, causing considerable nuisance. The matter has been previously taken up with the local officials by this Bureau and the town has been urged to remedy the situation. At the time of the recent visit the sewer had not yet been repaired, but it was stated that materials would be on hand within the next few days when the repairs would be made.

CONCLUSION.

Among the communities scattered along the shore of San Pablo Bay and Carquinez Strait it is the general practice to sewer directly to these bodies of water. This practice is adopted because this is the simplest solution of the outlet problem and in all probability it is the best solution from a sanitary standpoint. There is no particular objection to the discharge of

small quantities of sewage at these points no abundant attention is provided and the water down stream is not used for drinking purposes. Bathing beaches of importance are not found along this shore, although in all probability there is limited bathing by a few. The most important thing to be guarded against is shore pollution that may result in a nuisance, and this matter seems to have been generally taken into consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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Assistant Engineer

APPROVED: _____

Copies sent to:

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