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The Lyford's Eagle Dairy

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Outside of West Marin, there are few remnants of the roughly 400 dairies that once spread over the hills and valleys of Marin County. The Lyford mansion at the center of Tiburon's Eagle Dairy is one and can still be seen along the shore of Richardson Bay just before reaching Blackie's Pasture. The grand Victorian is now home to the Richardson Bay Audubon Center & Sanctuary and its history is shrouded in a romantic mystery that transcends its origin as home to Benjamin and Hilarita Lyford.

The dairy was one of four that the Reed family established in the Tiburon area on their Mexican land grant, *Corte Madera del Presidio*. The Eagle Dairy was located on the eastern side of the Strawberry Peninsula, now the site of the resort and fitness center, The Club at Harbor Point. Hilarita Reed was the daughter of Irishman John Thomas Reed and Hilaria Sanchez, the daughter of the commandant of the Yerba Buena Presidio. She married Dr. Benjamin Lyford in 1872 who, during the Civil War, had been appointed by President Lincoln as surgeon to the 68th Colored Regiment. Besides the Eagle Dairy, the couple worked to build a utopian community that never materialized due to the strict building codes and rigid moral provisions Dr. Lyford insisted all new residents adopt.

In 2001, the Mill Valley Historical Society interviewed Shirley Larkins whose grandfather, Pedro Silveira, managed the Lyford's Eagle Dairy. According to her, the dairy had several barns, the Lyford mansion, her grandfather's ranch house and several ship's cabins on the property, one of which was Lyford's medical library. Dr. Lyford's belief in cleanliness and hygiene was carried over into his dairy production where all the fencing and buildings were whitewashed

regularly, and the cows and milking operation kept fastidiously clean. The dairy was also a stop on the early North Pacific Coast Railroad line that crossed Richardson Bay from Sausalito on a trestle bridge before continuing north to San Rafael.

And now the mystery. The Lyfords never had any children but helped raise their nieces and their nephew John Paul Reed. He inherited the family home and dairies along with his half-sister Clotilde and was rumored to be in love with the daughter of one of the Reed's tenant rancher's daughter, the much younger Rose Rodrigues da Fonte. It is believed that family pressure, especially from Clotilde, who would not allow Rose inside their home, kept the two apart for reasons of both class and bias against her Portuguese heritage. When John Paul died in 1919, both he and Rose were unmarried, and he left her the 11 acres of bayfront property on which her family lived. In 1957 with encroaching development threatening the property, Rose bequeathed her land to the Audubon Society and the Lyford's mansion, now in an advanced state of disrepair was barged over to Rose's property and restored. Rose lived another seven years and never left her small family home to live in the Lyford mansion prompting locals to coin the term, Rosie's Retribution.

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