

PH 0036658

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>California</b>	
COUNTY: <b>Contra Costa</b>	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER <b>71-2,06,0001</b>	DATE <b>3/12/71</b>

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
**East Brother Island Light Station**

AND/OR HISTORIC:

**2. LOCATION**

~~XXXXXX~~: **East Brother Island. One of two small off-shore islands (the Brothers) north of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge at the junction of San Francisco Bay and San Pablo Bay. The islands are in Contra Costa County, west of Point San Pablo at San Pablo Straits.**

STATE <b>California</b>	CODE <b>06</b>	COUNTY: <b>Contra Costa</b>	CODE <b>013</b>
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**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious	<b>Navigation aid</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific		

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
**United States Government, U. S. Coast Guard, 12th District**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**630 Sansom Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**San Francisco**

STATE:  
**California**

CODE:  
**06**

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: **Hall of Records, Martinez, Contra Costa County, California.**

~~XXXXXX~~: **Records Division, U. S. Coast Guard, 12th District, 9th Floor, 630 Sansom Street, San Francisco, California**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**San Francisco**

STATE:  
**California**

CODE:  
**06**

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Historic American Buildings Survey**

DATE OF SURVEY: **April 15, 1970**  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**The Library of Congress**

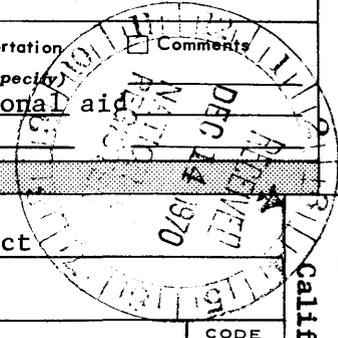
STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Washington, D. C.**

STATE:

CODE:  
**11**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



STATE: Calif.

COUNTY: Contra Costa

ENTRY NUMBER: 71-2,06,0001

DATE: 3/12/71

FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

		(Check One)				
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed	
(Check One)			(Check One)			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site			

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The East Brother Island Light Station is a visually beguiling complex of buildings, spectacularly set on a small rocky island at the north end of San Francisco Bay. The secret of its charm is not easily defined, but may be inferred from the fact that the island-light has been variously and fondly referred to as reminiscent of a Grandma Moses painting, a Victorian valentine, an Iowa-farm-on-an-island and a transplanted Coast-of-Maine lighthouse.

Sturdily set on the larger of the two small, rocky Brothers Islands (which are located off-shore west of Point San Pablo, at the juncture of the San Francisco and San Pablo Bays), the station consists of three charming, white, wooden Victorian buildings: a turreted, sedately gingerbread light tower with living quarters, a boat-house-engine room, and a combined shop and storage building. A stout, round water tank, a large domed underground cistern, and a landing dock complete the compact complement of neat white buildings, which seem from the shore or water have a gay, toy-like quality which delights the eye.

The complex of buildings is of cheerful, restrained Victorian design, tidily fenced by the original, low ninety-seven-year-old white picket fence. The buildings are solid, functional, well-constructed and (thanks to the Coast Guard's high standards of maintenance) in an excellent state of preservation. With the exception of recently added (rather homely) outside asphalt shingling, the addition of bathrooms and the modernization of the kitchen units, the main building is in its original state, as are the structures of the two service buildings. It is not surprising that New Englanders feel nostalgic when they see the Light Station, since it was built in 1873 under the direction of an East Coast Lighthouse designer. While he was not a famous architect, and while no one of the buildings is architecturally notable, the complex constitutes a delightful example of that modest form of Victorian known as "Carpenters Gothic". As such it meets the following among the criteria established to evaluate potential entries to the National Register. It is a site and building that possess "integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association . . . . The buildings embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period and method of construction that represent a significant and distinguishable entity."

Inside the tower and housekeeping quarters there are ample rooms and a number of pleasant details, such as some of the hardware, the charming fireplaces, and a handsome, hand-carved mahogany spiral stair rail. Kerosene lamps were originally used to provide illumination for the light, and in the light tower there are four small brass ventilators that were used when the kerosene lamps were in operation. The 1906 earthquake shook the island mightily and all the glass chimneys for the kerosene lamps were broken. At the same time the elaborate hand-ground glass lens (which magnified the light from the kerosene lamps) was cracked. A replacement was ordered from Paris, and this beautiful glass and brass precision instrument was used until the light was automated, magnifying the light from a special alloy 1,000 watt electric bulb into 18,000 candle power. This light could be seen for 13½ nautical miles and was used as a navigational aid for ships leaving and entering the San Francisco Bay, at the Oakland docks, and far up San Pablo Bay. The Paris lens was always covered during the bright light of day time to prevent the concentrated rays of the sun from melting the delicate

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**6. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century            | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) Built in 1873-4

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | <u>Maritime Safety</u>                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | <u>Navigational Aid</u>                             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____   |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce     | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |  | _____   |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

For almost as long as they have sailed the seas, men have devised and used means to guide their ships at night and in foul weather, or to warn and protect ships and their crews from hidden rocks and shoals. Long before the birth of Christ there were lighthouses here and there in the Mediterranean, including the Pharos of Alexandria, built in 300 B.C. and one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.

In the 19th Century lighthouses were built at the danger spots of all the coasts of the world, and both shores of the United States are generously studded with these guardian beacons, many of them celebrated in the songs and stones that tell of storms, wrecks, rescues and the heroism of brave men.

Thus lighthouses are inextricably a part of maritime and naval history, because of the importance of their function in safeguarding and making possible the exchange of the world's goods.

The San Francisco Bay played its part in the drama of the development of world trade, because of its safe harbor and cosmopolitan ports. This is a stirring and treasured facet of the opening of the American West and of the Far East trade routes, and in this story the faithful and sturdy little lighthouses of the coast and of the Bay played their small but vital part.

In the early days the Lighthouse Service was responsible for the care of the lights, and it was not uncommon for the lighthouse keeper to be a married man with a wife and family. In 1939 the Lighthouse Service was taken over by the Coast Guard, and nowadays in our area, the Coast Guardsmen assigned to lighthouse duty rarely have their families with them. Indeed today, in the interests of economy and efficiency, many of the lighthouses have been automated, and the men of the Coast Guard who manned them have been removed and assigned to other tasks. In some cases the buildings of the lighthouse stations have not only been closed, but removed entirely (to other sites for other uses) or demolished, since unguarded and empty they are "attractive nuisances" and an open invitation to vandalism.

Within the San Francisco Bay few of the lighthouses that were part of the Bay's earlier history remain, and eventually they will all be replaced by automatic lights and horns which will be operated from an electronically controlled push button console on Yerba Buena Island. The buildings that comprise the East Brother Island Light Station are still standing, and, since they were stoutly built to last, could endure indefinitely. But the Coast Guardsmen no longer man the light and fog-horn, which are now automatic, and the buildings are slated for demolition.

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

- a. Records of the U. S. Coast Guard, 12th District, 630 Sansom Street, San Francisco, California.
  - 1. File on East Brother Island Light.
  - 2. Annual Report of the Lighthouse Board, Secretary of the Treasury, Washington, D. C., 1873 and 1874.
- b. San Francisco Maritime Museum, "Pacific Coast Pilot", George Davidson, 1849, 4th Edition, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.
- c. Contra Costa County Library, San Francisco Bay, Harold Gilliam, Doubleday, 1957.

(continued)

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

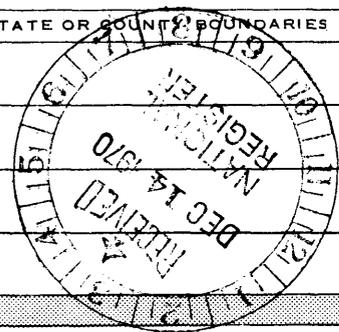
LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		37° 57' 42" North	122° 26' 01" West	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

UTM  
10/54985  
4201700  
CD

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: .7 acre

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Mrs. Thomas E. Edwards**

ORGANIZATION: **Contra Costa Shoreline Parks Committee**      DATE: **May 15, 1970**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**237 Bishop Avenue**

CITY OR TOWN: **Richmond**      STATE: **California** (See Continuation Sheet)      CODE: **06**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name: [Signature]

Title: State Liaison Officer

Date: August 3, 1970

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

[Signature]  
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: FEB 12 1971

ATTEST:

[Signature]  
Keeper of The National Register

Date: Jan. 28, 1971

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
COUNTY	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
91.2.86.0001	2/12/71

(Number all entries)

7. Description

metal interior fittings. Since the cable that carried electricity to the island (from the Point San Pablo shore) was sometimes cut by ships docking at the Point San Pablo wharves, a gas Coleman lantern hung always ready in the light tower to ensure that when the need arose the light would be ready to shine. And the light has been kept in a state of perpetual readiness and continuous operation except for one three-day period in 1934. At that time the operators were issued orders to close down the station, but an immediate protest from ship owners forced a hasty reversal of the order.

The original fog-horns were coal-fired, 12" steam-whistles. A large bell was kept handy which was tolled every fifteen seconds in case of a breakdown, and which was also used while the steam pressure was building up enough power to blow the steam whistles. The original steam-powered whistles were subsequently replaced by electrically air-powered diaphones, whose deep two-toned voice could be heard thirteen miles away. Fishermen returning to the San Francisco Bay in the fog from the Petaluma River, groped their way down San Pablo Bay, guided by the comforting bellow of the East Brother Island fog-horn.

Because the sound of the fog-horn was as important as the beacon of the light, a whole series of auxiliary engines guarded against the possibility of a breakdown. There was an auxiliary gas engine in case of an electrical failure, a diesel engine in case the gas engine broke down, and if all these mechanical devices were simultaneously powerless, there was a hand-operated horn.

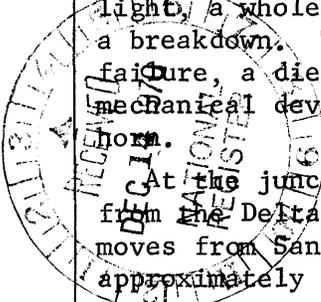
At the juncture of the San Francisco and San Pablo Bays, where tule fog from the Delta comes towards San Francisco, and ocean fog from the Pacific moves from San Francisco towards San Pablo Bay, there is need for a fog-horn approximately 500 hours each year.

Prior to the automation of the East Brother Island station, and the removal of the Coast Guardsmen who attended it, the fog-horn was activated when visibility was two miles or less or, roughly, whenever Point San Quentin, Red Rock and the Sisters Rocks were hidden.

It was originally intended that the automatic fog-horn which replaced the diaphone would be an intermittent signal, which would be operated twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, during the foggy season (i.e., October until April). But this horn had so piercing and disagreeable a sound that numerous complaints were registered following its installation. So the round-the-clock signal was cancelled and the fog-horn is now activated by a fog detector ---a stroboscopic sensor which continually scans the sky and automatically controls the horn.

While this is a great improvement, the residents of Contra Costa and Marin Counties who are within earshot of the irritating horn think wistfully of the hoarse two-toned growl of the diaphone. Those who have studied the "Historic Preservation Act of 1966" regret that, when automation was being considered, the installation was not protected by the National Register, and by the following criteria under Section 106 of the Act. "A federally financed or licensed undertaking shall be considered to have an effect on a National Register listing when any condition of the undertaking creates a change in

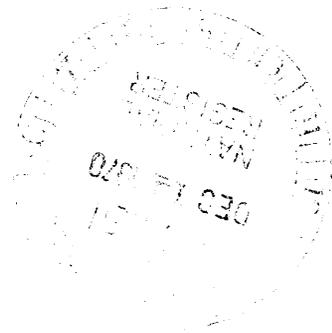
(continued)



## 7. Description

the quality of the historical, architectural, archeological or cultural character that qualified the property for listing in the National Register. Generally, adverse effect occurs in conditions which include,

1. Destruction or alteration of all or part of a property
2. Isolation from, or alteration of, its surrounding environment
3. Introduction of visual, audible or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the property and its setting."



## 8. Significance

The East Brother Island Light Station was constructed in 1873. In February of that year, due to the difficulties of litigation which would have been necessary to secure a site on the mainland, Major George H. Elliott, Engineer Secretary of the Light House Board, requested of the War Department that the Easterly of the Brothers Islands, then reserved for military purposes, be released for lighthouse use. Permission was granted and an appropriation of \$30,000 was made by Congress for this purpose. The top of the rock was blasted off and the lighthouse and fog-signal were completed in February 1874. The light was exhibited for the first time on March 1st, and the steam fog-signal was put in operation on May 1st of that year.

The East Brother Island Lighthouse has a place in history, not because it is associated with remarkable episodes of rescue, but because it prevented the necessity for them. From 1874 until it was automated in 1969, the light was faithfully manned by the devoted men of the Lighthouse Service, first under the Treasury Department, next under Commerce, and finally under the Coast Guard. Like so many unsung heroes, it modestly did its job and did it well.

While the file of records on the East Brother Island Light Station is couched in rather terse and entirely businesslike language, we are fortunate in having available to us some of the homely details about life on a "house-keeping" island lighthouse because Mr. Nels Stenmark, grandson of Lighthouse Keeper Captain John Stenmark, lives in the City of Richmond, and has many of the family papers that were collected before her death by his Aunt Annie, Mrs. Charles Morisette.

John Stenmark, a native of Stockholm, Sweden, became a member of the Lighthouse Service as a reward for an act of bravery while employed as a sailor on the lighthouse tender "Madrona". After serving on isolated Anno Nueva Lighthouse, Captain Stenmark was again rewarded (for several subsequent rescues) by being placed in charge of the East Brother Island Light in 1894. He remained there for twenty years and raised his family on the island.

There were four Stenmark children. Ruby, Annie, (who was born on Anno Neuva, and was three months old when she came to the East Brother Island) Phillip and Folke. The two boys were born on the island with the help of a doctor who their father rowed to Point San Quentin to fetch for the deliveries.

The island then looked much as it does today, with neat white picket fence, shining white buildings and the domed, 47,000 gallon cistern in the center of the "yard". Until 1946 when the Coast Guard began supplying fuel and water by tanker, rain water collected in this cistern supplied the needs of the island's occupants. After the third storm of the winter, the cistern was opened, and the rain water was stored for household and garden requirements.

Earth was laboriously sacked and hauled to the island, and the Stenmarks not only grew their own vegetables in a tiny garden plot in front of the main building but had flowers and four trees, three Japonicas and a Eucalyptus. They also raised pigs, goats, chickens and rabbits.

The Stenmark children enjoyed their island life and were the envy of all their friends on shore, who coveted invitations to come and visit them. When the children were very small, the government supplied a teacher who rowed out to the island to teach them. But when a road was constructed from Point San Pablo to Richmond, they rowed ashore and then walked to Richmond to go to school there.

(continued)

## 8. Significance

Although the tides and currents that race through one channel are swift and treacherous, the Stenmark children were expert small-boat handlers at an early age, and could negotiate the difficult landing on the island with casual skill. When Annie Stenmark was sixteen, she and Charlie Morisette fell in love. At the beginning of their romance Charlie was not a skillful boatman, but since he courted Annie for four years before they were married in 1914, and rowed back and forth to see her almost every day, it was not long before he became as proficient as the Stenmarks. From 1939, when the Coast Guard took over the Lighthouse Service till 1969 when they were withdrawn, the East Brother Island Light was attended by four Coast Guardsmen who manned a round-the-clock duty watch, two men at a time, 48 hours on and 48 off.

The reason for automating the installation was primarily economy. Secondly it was for the purpose of eliminating "undesirable, isolated duty stations. This light is considered isolated because of a complete lack of modern amenities such as schools, hospitals, churches, supermarkets and department stores which are readily available on the mainland. The short distance from the shore has little bearing on the cost of supporting a manned unit which must be supplied by vessels."

While unquestionably efficiency, economy and progress are admirable, it seems tragic that in their name we are in danger of eliminating a beautiful and functional landmark which dates from our proud and historic maritime past, thus depriving posterity of a uniquely Bay Area, three-dimensional link with our national identity.

The installation meets many of the criteria designed to evaluate potential entries to the National Register. An even more important consideration is that it is one of the last remaining examples of the "family" or "housekeeping" lighthouse station in the great San Francisco Bay. That it is, in addition, a complex of buildings of unique beauty and charm, dramatically set off by its island location, is a plus factor worthy of consideration in a busy, depersonalized world which desperately needs the reminder that beauty and usefulness are not irreconcilable.



9. Major Bibliographical References

Sentinels of the North Pacific, J. A. Gibbs, Jr., Binsford and Mort, Portland, Oregon, 1955.

d. Records and papers in the possession of Mr. Nels Stenmark (grandson of Capt. John Stenmark), 645 - 33rd Street, Richmond, California.

e. Newspaper articles:

Richmond Independent, Thursday, October 8, 1953, Page 44, "An Island Home", Jack Bradshaw.

Oakland Tribune, Friday, October 27, 1967, "Historic Bay Lighthouse Giving Way to Progress", Curt Sutcliffe.

Point Counter Point (weekly news journal of Pt. Richmond)

November 28, 1969, Page 4

February 13, 1970, Page 5

March 13, 1970, Page 14

April 17, 1970, Page 5

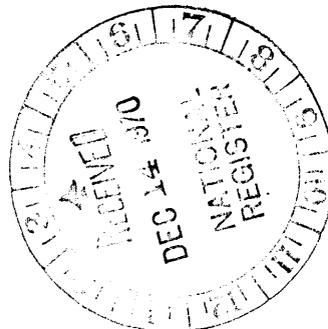
Richmond Independent, Thursday, April 23, 1970, "Campaign to Save an Island Rich in History", Bill Parker.

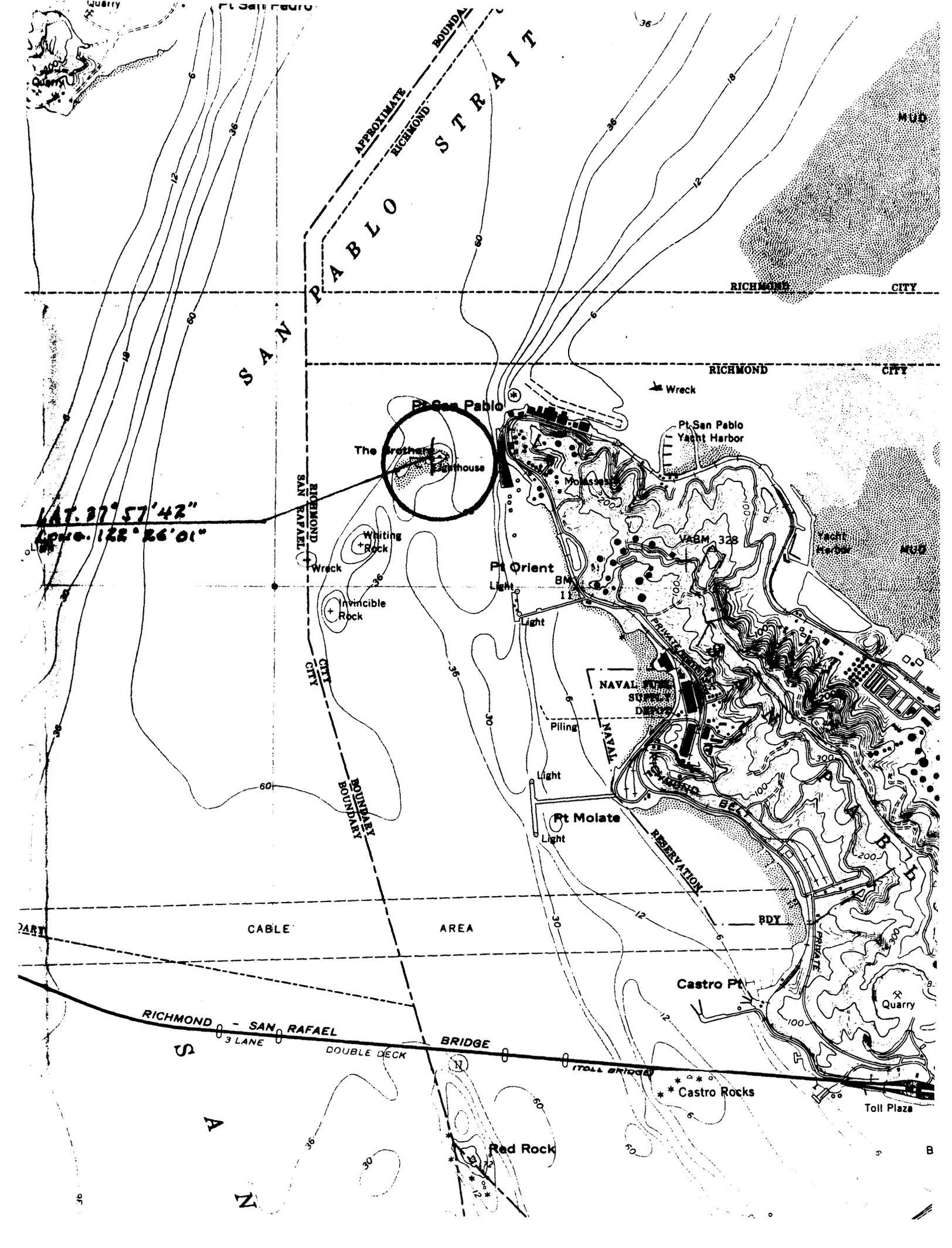
Oakland Tribune, April 27, 1970, "Lighthouse in Jeopardy", Bud Wakefield.

San Francisco Chronicle, Monday, May 4, 1970, "Fight to Save Old Lighthouse", Jack Viets.

10. Form Prepared By

In cooperation with  
Mr. Joseph Salvato  
Director, Department of Parks and Recreation  
Civic Center, Richmond, California





Form 10-301  
(Dec. 1968)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
PROPERTY MAP FORM**

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with map)

STATE <b>California</b>	
COUNTY <b>Contra Costa</b>	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER <b>71.2.06.0001</b>	DATE <b>2/12/71</b>

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

<b>1. NAME</b>			
COMMON: <b>East Brother Island Light Installation</b>			
AND/OR HISTORIC:			
<b>2. LOCATION</b>			
STREET AND NUMBER:			
<b>Junction of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays at San Pablo Straits</b>			
CITY OR TOWN:			
<b>Richmond</b>			
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
<b>California</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>Contra Costa</b>	<b>013</b>
<b>3. MAP REFERENCE</b>			
SOURCE:			
<b>U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Geological Survey</b>			
SCALE: <b>1: 24,000</b>			
DATE: <b>1959 Photorevised 1968</b>			
<b>4. REQUIREMENTS</b>			
TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS			
1. Property boundaries where required.			
2. North arrow.			
3. Latitude and longitude reference.			

