

# POINT REYES LIGHT

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Janitor Paul Norris prepares the grounds at Tomales High School. Classes resume on August 27, and registration for new students is already underway. Photo by Jasper Sanidad.

## Guilty pleas from Bolinas perpetrators

by Clark Merrefield

Five of the six defendants accused of attempted murder in the late-June beating of homeless Bolinas resident Ricky Green struck plea deals with county prosecutors yesterday and are eligible for significantly reduced sentences.

The sixth defendant, Lamont Elkins Jr., who faces up to ten years in prison, will stand trial on attempted murder and weapons charges. His preliminary hearing begins today.

Marin County Superior Court was filled nearly to capacity yesterday afternoon with supporters from both sides, as

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## Campground faces hard hit

by Jacoba Charles

Soon the quirky enclave of private trailers huddled near Tomales Bay at Lawson's Landing may pack up their porches and move on.

The Marin County Planning Commission laid out the details of what it will take for the popular RV campground to finalize a master plan during a public hearing on Monday.

Some worried that the demands placed on the Lawson's threaten the survival of the business.

"The commission is moving toward eliminating our means of income, while adding in a lot of things that cost more money," said Willy Vogler, one of the owners of the property. "They said that they aren't concerned about the econom-

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**Blogger from Inverness bakes gluten-free**

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**A hitchhiker in Eden couldn't be happier**

## Lairds' unclear future

PART THREE OF A THREE-PART SERIES

by Jacoba Charles

A handful of crumbling buildings on the western shore of Tomales Bay hang in the balance between a vivid past and an uncertain future.

Lairds Landing, a former Miwok homestead and artist's enclave now owned by the Point Reyes National Seashore (PRNS), could soon deteriorate beyond repair. While many feel the structures should be preserved as a tribute to local history, the park faces the challenge of whether it can—or should—find fund-

ing to maintain them.

"We'll put them in the queue," said Gordon White, chief of cultural affairs for the Point Reyes National Seashore. "There are a lot of buildings that need TLC, and it all takes money."

The oldest three buildings standing on the site were built around the turn of the century by a Miwok family who lived there for nearly a century. Later artist Clayton Lewis moved in, transforming the property into a vibrant bohemian enclave. Lewis altered the old ranch buildings during the 1960s and 1970s, and

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replaced an old barn with a house and foundry.

Over the last two decades, all buildings on the point were evaluated by PRNS to see if they were eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The old boat-house and main house at Lairds Landing were tentatively approved for that list in 1996, though the process is ongoing and there are questions about whether the buildings that Lewis modified are eligible.

Although reconciling the different layers of history is a challenge, the main reason buildings aren't being maintained is a lack of funding, according to White.

"We barely have enough money to keep the historically designated places we have in shape," he said. "It would take a lot of effort on somebody's part even to stabilize it."

In the meantime, the two tentatively approved buildings are protected as if they were on the register.

"For buildings that aren't being used, that just means mothballing them," White said. "We board them up and make sure they're weather tight. But Lairds Landing is a hard site to manage just because it's so remote. Our people don't go by routinely, and it's easy to vandalize."

Whether the house will ultimately be approved for the register—and whether there is any chance of Lewis' other buildings being salvaged—remains up in the air.

"The easiest building to designate is when it's just like it's always been, and it illustrates a certain feel or sense so you can tell that it's a part of history," said historian Dewey Livingston.

It could be possible to get the entire site placed on the list, he suggested. Designating a group of buildings as historic could bypass the trouble caused by Lewis' modifications. Even the road to Lairds Landing is historic, appearing on the earliest maps of Point Reyes.

The evidence of the site's long history—down to the windbreak trees—all gets factored in, Livingston said.

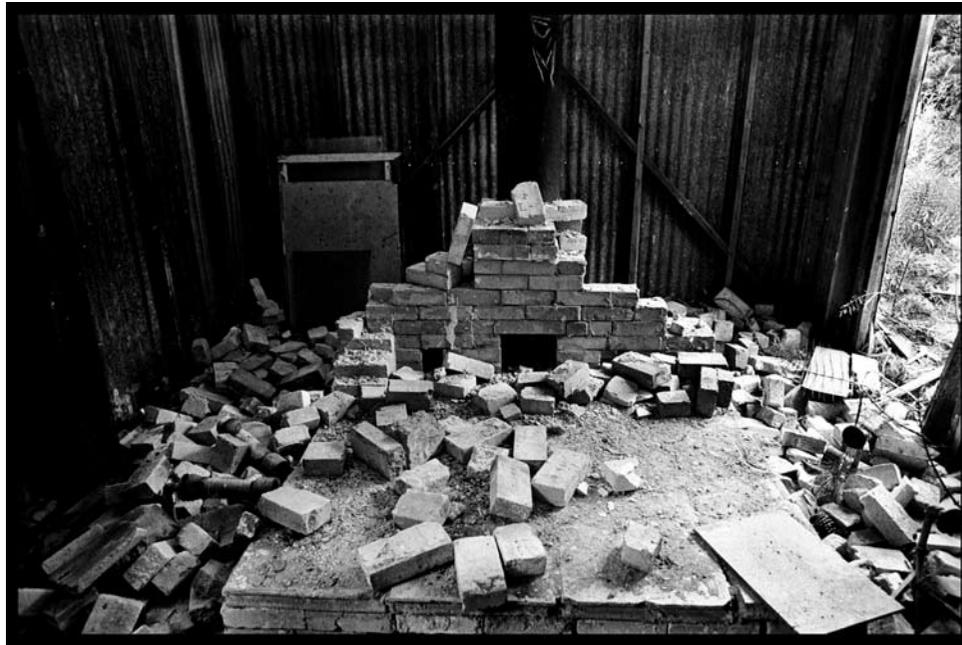
However, some doubt that the park has ever planned to preserve Lairds Landing.

"Everybody suspected that the park would agree to maintain the buildings, but would just wait for them to rot," said Peter Lewis, Clayton Lewis' son. "That's what's happening right now. Once they become a big enough eyesore, then they will bulldoze them."

For the buildings that don't make it onto the historic registry, White acknowledges that fear is likely to be realized.

"Eventually we will remove the buildings that aren't historic," he said. "There are no plans to do that right now, but the trajectory is that they'll just get more dilapidated. That's the way it goes."

Meanwhile, only minimal maintenance



has been done. In the 13 years that it has stood vacant, the place has suffered a heavy toll of neglect. Windows and doors have been broken out, boarded over, and broken out again. Dark mold traces patterns on cupboards and ceilings, while ivy and poison oak grow over entire walls and peek through windows. In a few areas, portions of floors and decks have rotted through.

When Clayton Lewis passed away from cancer in 1995, he left behind a vibrant, eclectic group of buildings that had been featured in *Handmade houses: a guide to the wood butcher's art*—as well as a large community of people that loved both him and Lairds Landing.

"There were a lot of incredible people who went out there," said Peter Lewis. "It was really a focal point for a back-to-nature alternative lifestyle."

The Clayton Lewis Institute for Arts and Ecology was formed as a tribute to his life and influence. It sought to transform Lairds Landing into an artists' retreat, while carrying on Lewis' tradition of teaching schoolchildren ecology through boating and fishing on the bay.

Low-impact plans for the artist's retreat, including advanced composting toilets, were contributed by Inverness architect Sim Van der Ryn. Although PRNS met several times with the group it rejected the plans, citing the cost for installing an adequate septic system, electricity and other infrastructure. With that, the momentum behind the effort dwindled.

"The park service had absolutely no interest in having people use the place any more," said boat builder Jeremy Fisher-Smith, one of the project's organizers. "They said that occasional use and ranching were okay, but not residents."

He added that if someone else wanted to take on the cost and responsibility of maintaining the buildings, the park might be open to the possibility. However, he said that bringing them up to code is impractical, and that no one has ever proposed a static, display-type state of preservation such as at Pierce Point.

"What I would like to see is the house restored and reconstructed closer to its original state, though I don't see erasing the entire Clayton Lewis influence," said

Livingston.

Though Coast Miwok have lived in this and other coves on Point Reyes for over 2,000 years, many suggest that Lairds Landing is significant because it represents the unique transition time between the tribe's historic and modern ways of life.

From the mid 1800s to the mid 1900s, a Coast Miwok family lived in the sheltered cove by the bay. They lived a hard, vigorous life working on local ranches and supplying much of their food from gardens, hunting and fishing in the bay.

"It was a pretty rough time, and this is the last example," said Livingston. "It's also the last site on this side of the cove where a Coast Miwok family was still living in their historic place. I think that it is important enough, and unusual enough, to be preserved."

The descendants of the family that lived there agree. "I think it's important to keep those buildings," said Shirley Turner, whose Miwok mother was raised at Lairds Landing. "They could utilize them as a place to maybe show Native American basketry. You could pick the reeds along the creek."

The tribe has no official opinion on the buildings, said chairman of the Sacred Sites Protection Committee Nick Tipon. The majority of Native Americans in Marin lived a harsher existence than those at Lairds Landing. Many were herded up and forced into missions; many others left their homes and hid in the hills, Tipon said.

"That particular story is unique, and it's too bad it didn't happen more, but it was the exception rather than the rule," he said. "Also, a European style house is a very different construct for us—it represents European culture and not our culture."

Regardless of whether the buildings stand or fall, the sheltered vale by the bay will continue to have its supporters.

"It's a very sacred place, and it's clear to me that it always has been," said Loyal Tarbet, a friend of Lewis' who lived at Lairds Landing in the mid 1990s. "There are burials there, and fresh water, and we had a lush garden. It naturally fosters growth both physically and spiritually."



At Lairds Landing on the shores of Tomales Bay, the buildings are relics of bygone times on Point Reyes.

Clockwise from left: A kiln was built by a backwoods and fisherman Clayton Lewis in the 1970s; A Coast Miwok family over 100 years ago still stayed in the cove; The kiln was replaced by Lewis' studio and foundry; Branches and doors have contributed to the buildings' decay. Photos by Jasper Sanidad.



s Bay, dilapidated  
eyes.

k-to-the-land artist  
A house built by a  
stands; An old barn  
broken windows and

