



An Imperfect History of 588 Bridgeway by Nora Sawyer

History at its most satisfying enriches the present moment. Providing a perspective allows us to see the world from a vantage point outside of the span of our own existence. Take Scoma's for example. The building seems made for its current role. What else could it be but this restaurant, with its white tablecloths and expansive views, broad umbrellas shielding diners from the afternoon sun?

But of course, it wasn't always Scoma's. You can see that from the windows, still decorated with a hand motif from its days as the Glad Hand more than fifty years ago. It wasn't always a restaurant, either. When it was first built in 1904, the building served as an office and maintenance shop for Lange's Launch Co., a local ferrying and tugboat service provided by Mat Lange. Captain Lange ran regular ferries, charters, and the "paperboat" that brought over newspapers from San Francisco. He delivered papers to Alcatraz, Angel Island, Tiburon, Belvedere, Sausalito, and even the Mile Rock Lighthouse outside the Golden Gate.

After the Golden Gate Bridge opened, there wasn't as much of a need for paperboats and ferry services. Renowned for his cooking – especially the clam chowder he served at beach picnics -- Lange and his wife opened the first restaurant in the building in 1938. Serving crab, hotdogs, and sandwiches, Lange also offered fresh crab for sale, and chartered fishing expeditions.

After Lange's death in 1949, Peggy Tolk-Watkins took over the space, renaming it the Tin Angel. The name came from an angel hung on the outside of the building, which Tolk-Watkins had found in the rubble of a New York Church that collapsed after a fire. With multi-colored windows, a yellow piano, and an interior painted purple, red, black and green by Jean Varda and a crew of Black Mountain

College students, the Tin Angel became a center for art, jazz and folk music, and bohemian life in Sausalito. Though the Tin Angel was only open in Sausalito for a few years, it quickly came to represent the dynamic, artistic side of the city that flourished after World War II. When the Chamber of Commerce held a slogan contest in 1950, one of the entries was “Sausalito: Home of the Tin Angel.”

In 1953, Tolk-Watkins sold the business to Al Engel, a banker, and Harrison Thompson, a top-ranked professional ice skater. Renamed the Glad Hand, the restaurant continued to show work by artists from around the bay area, and employed a number of local artists and writers as well, including abstract expressionist painter Walter Khulman, who worked as a cook for five years until a fellowship award from the Graham Foundation meant he didn’t “have to cook these chickens anymore.”

Though a gathering place for Sausalito locals, the Glad Hand also attracted tourists and visiting celebrities such as Helen Hayes and Vivien Leigh. Russia’s prima ballerina, taking in the view, declared San Francisco “the most beautiful city I’ve ever seen.”

In 1968, Engel successfully petitioned to have the restaurant moved 25 feet further out into the Bay. The next year, he sold the business to San Francisco restaurateurs Al and Joe Scoma and Victor and Roland Gotti. The brothers renovated the building, adding outdoor seating and brightening the interior by adding more windows to let in light and air, and of course more access to the view. Despite these changes, this small structure perched on the edge of the water has been a constant presence for over 100 years. Sausalito has changed. Newspapers are no longer brought by boat from San Francisco, and you won’t often hear the insistent rhythm of late-night jazz played along the

waterfront. But you can still enjoy a bowl of clam chowder or some fresh crab, and the restaurant still welcomes locals and visitors alike. And as you look across the bay to San Francisco, you might find yourself thinking that this view, and that city, are the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen.

