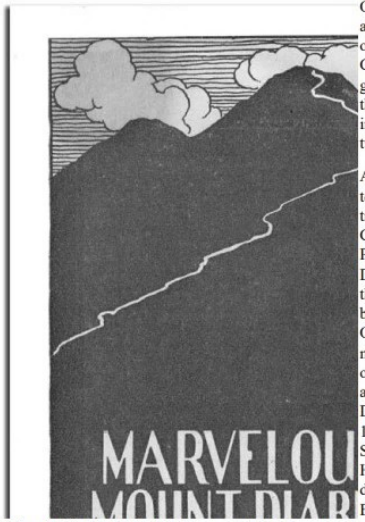


Walter Frick's Mt. Diablo brochure, c. mid 1920s (collection of Roger Epperson)

Who Was Walter P. Frick? The Creation of Mt. Diablo State Park (part 1)

By Seth Adams, Save Mount Diablo

A lantern signaled "coast clear" one moonless night, to an off shore Canadian ship. Soon the rum runners were offloading barrels and cases at a cove on Sonoma's Del Mar Ranch. Men with machine guns stood guard as Pierce Arrow trucks were loaded from boats. Del Mar's owner, Walter P. Frick, was a millionaire businessman both moral and conservative but a dollar a barrel was a better deal than cut fences and threatened ranch hands. Especially after the '29 stock crash brought the Roaring Twenties to a halt.

W.P. Frick, as he was known, bought Del Mar in 1912 with his business partner Robert Noble Burgess. Burgess had grown up at the foot of Mount Diablo and both men were experts in complex real estate speculation. Both were members of and Burgess lived at Oakland's Athenian Club, a men's club near Frick's apartment and office.

By the 1870s most of Mount Diablo had been divided into Mexican ranchos, homesteads and ceded to railroads. In 1900 largely rural Contra Costa County included 18,000 residents. The tunnel through the Oakland hills opened in 1903, and after the 1906 earthquake, Burgess and others began subdividing parts of Central County. The first automobile garage opened in Martinez in 1907, the County's first electric train arrived in 1911, and stagecoach service ended two years later.

A succession of owners parceled together then lost or passed on a large tract known as the Railroad Ranch, Cook Farms, and then the Oakwood Park Stock Farm, stretching from Danville toward the summit. At about the same time that Frick and Burgess bought Del Mar, Burgess bought Oakwood and other parcels totaling more than 15,000 acres—the west face of Mt. Diablo—and in 1913 announced grand plans for the Mt. Diablo Estates, a community of 10,000. His investors included State Senator Arthur H. Breed, Sr. and Harlow P. Bancroft (large real estate dealers in Oakland), and George Emmons, head of the Emmons Storage and Drayage Co. Each purchased a quarter share of the Mt. Diablo Park Company.

Burgess built Mt. Diablo Scenic Boulevard to the mountain's peak and encouraged tourists as potential lot buyers. Diablo was made official with a post office in December 1916, and lots were sold for summer and weekend homes. Men would take the train to Oakland or the City on weekdays, leaving their families in Diablo. In 1917, World War I intervened, Burgess went bankrupt, and Diablo declined. The only parts of his project which were built were the homes clustered around the Mt. Diablo Park Country Club. Most of the Diablo lands defaulted to investors, or to their original owners.

Burgess is often incorrectly credited for Mt. Diablo State Park's creation—and he did play a part—but starting in 1919 Walter Frick reassembled many of the parcels Burgess had controlled into the 10,000 acre Diablo Ranch. By 1920 the county's population had climbed to 54,000 in a Bay area of 1.2 million, and Diablo began a resurgence.

"Park"

During the 1920s and 30s, Walter Frick's name was front page news. By the time of his death in 1937, he had made his way into San Francisco Society, amassed and nearly lost a fortune, and owned tens of thousands of acres of land in a dozen California counties. He knew governors and presidents.

What distinguishes Frick's rise through the '20s and fall during the Great Depression were the Diablo and Del Mar purchases. Although Diablo Ranch was closer to population centers, Frick's actions led directly to creation of Mt. Diablo State Park.

In 1921, soon after Frick's Diablo purchases began, Mt. Diablo State Park was dedicated, a "State Park and Game Refuge" on 630 acres at the summit. What's rarely mentioned is that it was a designation, not ownership. In 1931 the Park was re-dedicated after the purchase of two areas stretching up Southgate Road to include Rock City. By 1937 seven purchases had been made—including the "State Park" summit. All but nineteen acres of the 2,022 acre park, including three quarters of the summit, were purchased from Walter Frick.

Despite broad coverage of Diablo and the State Park's creation during his last years, Frick's role has largely been forgotten—a one liner mentioning his ownership of part of the mountain. Instead Burgess is remembered, as founder of Diablo and the Mt. Diablo Park Club and because of his tourist brochures and 1964 *Memoirs*. It might have been the single word, "Park." Burgess's real estate development holding company was the "Mt. Diablo Park Company." After Burgess's bankruptcy, Frick gathered the Diablo lands into the "Mt. Diablo Company." Perhaps local historians and reporters simply confused the two, failed to review dozens of complicated land transactions, and thereby deprived Frick of recognition. Burgess doesn't mention Frick in his *Memoirs*.

Maybe it was a broken heart. Frick may have been distracted or media shy because of financial difficulties and a high profile divorce from his second wife, the beauti-

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Walter P. Frick c. 1910 (c. of Robert Frick)



Walter P. Frick camping c. 1910 (c. Robert Frick)
Helen Fay Frick (S.F. Chronicle, 1-6-1924)

Frick *Continued from page 5*

ful Helen Fay. In any case, an Oakland businessman gave Save Mount Diablo founder Mary Bowerman permission to study his land, when she began her botanical research on Mt. Diablo in 1930, and with the *Marvelous Mount Diablo* brochure, including Frick's name and Oakland address, my interest was piqued.

Walter Paul Frick, 1875-1937

Frick's tale is of a middle class Indiana boy who made good in California, during the San Francisco Bay Area's maturation from the mining era following the Gold Rush to its emergence as the western United States' financial center. He was a product of his times, conservative yet visionary, hard-driving in business, socially ambitious. His life is marked by sharp deals over thousands of acres. In pictures of Frick he is often the smiling center of attention but by his 40s in the mid 1920s he has aged into a grave demeanor.

He was born in 1875 in Evansville, Indiana the youngest son of Peter Frick and Susan Emrich Frick, middle class Swiss-German immigrants. They married during the Civil War, lived with Peter's brother, well known architect Joseph K. Frick, and had six children. There was no connection with the wealthy Pennsylvania Fricks but the merchant family was prosperous enough that, the year before Walter was born, his sister Hattie and their father Peter traveled first class to Germany on the *S.S. Hohenzollern*. The family was educated and musical. Hattie became an opera singer and at one point Walter managed his brother Romeo's opera company.

"He had a marvelous voice. He had a good singing voice, the whole family was trained in music… He loved to play the guitar, but not very often. He had a harmonica harness and would call square dancing in the forest with the loggers… He had some favorite songs, like "Marquita" and "Shanty Town."… Great voice, great voice…He was a good speaker." Frick's 87-year old son Robert and his wife Ada live in Tiburon. Robert Frick grew up on Nob Hill but he and his brother worked at both the Del Mar and Diablo Ranches. When his parents separated in 1932, Robert moved with his father to their house in Diablo. Except where attributed, the italicized quotes are his.

"At the age of eighteen he left Evansville Indiana, came to California and milked cows in Placerville…he had ten dollars in his pocket." Frick moved to California in 1893, and lived in Grizzly Flat and Placerville. He became a mining engineer, then a timber broker for the Medford, Oregon Wheeler Lumber company, and joined numerous business and social clubs. *"I saw a picture once with his mining partner Seymour Hill, carrying an eighty ounce chunk of gold they'd gotten out of a mine… They owned together then sold the Starlight Mining Company, eleven gold mines in El Dorado… He had a knack for making money. He truly enjoyed the process of making deals. What he did, he'd buy up these small parcels and put them together, he'd stay one step ahead of the big lumber companies and sell to them and make a profit."*

"Dad was a wonderful horseman in the transition from horses to automobiles." "He was a man of the earth. He carried a lot of his camp equipment in the car with him." {when he was considering land} "He'd get a cursory glance with a mule then go back. He liked to be outdoors but he rarely was; he was at the office, or at home, or traveling."

Between 1900 and 1906, when he started making dozens of timber deals in Sonoma County, Frick moved to the Bay Area and began his climb up the social ladder. *"Dad lived in the old Stanford home at the time of the earthquake. He was able to get on a ferry and across the bay to Oakland. He liked Oakland because it was more informal; he called it a shirt sleeve city."* His business ventures included speculation in the stock market, timber, mining, oil, and agriculture. By age 34 in 1909 he was wealthy enough to donate the land for an Oakland school, but stipulated that it must forever bear his name or land and improvements would revert back to him.

Around 1910 he partnered with R.N. Burgess and in 1912 they bought 4,819 acre Del Mar, which had already been logged. Frick planned to subdivide the Ranch for large estates, made many improvements and ran thousands of sheep. He planted Monterey cypress hedgerows in double parallels that still mark the subdivision lines, to shelter the sheep from the wind.

That same year he was admitted to the Bohemian Club, (he was a member until his death and a parking lot at the grove is evidently named "Frick Flat") in addition to his memberships in the Athenian, Claremont Country and Commercial Clubs, the Masons, etc. By 1913 he was in the Society pages when he married society favorite Georgina Crawford Sneathen. They moved to Piedmont and had a daughter, Shirley Frances Frick, but Sneather divorced Frick two years later. In 1916 he married Helen Fay, a beautiful Oakland kindergarten teacher from Nebraska. Walter and Helen had two sons and a second daughter from 1917 to 1919, Robert Peter, Walter Paul Jr., and Helen Jane.

"He came out of the roaring 20's, a whole bunch of people who got rich quick. My mother spent a great deal of time shopping for clothes, expensive clothes, keeping up with the wealthy people of San Francisco…We were brought up by gov-

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Walter Paul, Jr., Helen Jane & Robert Frick, late 1920s, c. R. Frick

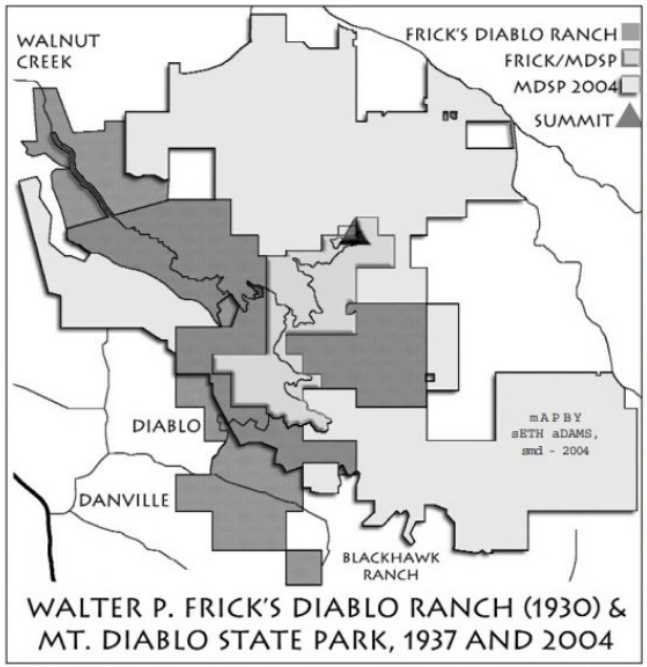
Frick *continued from page 6*

ernesses and Chinese cooks. While dad was trying to make money, mother was trying to climb up in Society."

"He always wore a hat. No one went hatless back in those days. He never swore. He was always wel-dressed, I don't remember dad ever being sloppy. He used to dress very expensively, flashy clothes, diamond stick pin—a big diamond... He had no vices, he wasn't religious. He was politically conservative, Republican. Businessmen, especially wealthy businessmen, tend to be status quo. He entertained President Hoover at the house at Diablo when Hoover was running for re-election in 1932. I remember meeting President Hoover in the living room at dinner, Hoover, father, my brother and I."

The children spent summers at Del Mar. Frick built clay tennis courts there and a playhouse for Helen Jane, the boys rowed and fished on the Gualala River and on the sea. As the boys grew older they were expected to work with the ranch hands.

"The Del Mar ranch was twelve miles along the coast and averaged about a mile and a half deep back from the coast…The ranches were always a drag financially. He used to worry about the rains not coming during the lambing."



WALTER P. FRICK'S DIABLO RANCH (1930) & MT. DIABLO STATE PARK, 1937 AND 2004

The Diablo Ranch

In 1917 Walter Frick joined the Mt Diablo Park Country Club which Burgess had founded (now known as the Diablo Country Club.) Two years later he began acquiring many of the parcels at Diablo that Burgess had previously controlled—at about the same time that public discussions began about preserving the mountain as a public park.

"I worked on the Diablo ranch for years as a boy. Dad had a sheep ranch there… Diablo was his favorite ranch. My brother and I favored Del Mar, but he didn't like the cold there. He liked the heat."

A sheepherder's camp was located near the present day site of the Athenian School and between ten and thirty hands would manage the sheep and cattle, and harvest walnuts. *"We would handle sheep, circumcise the lambs in the wintertime when they were just a few weeks old. You ever hear of 'mountain oysters'? We'd throw them in a bucket and have them for one of our meals. Dad was always in his office or off on some business trip. We plowed the walnut orchard. It was a mile long. It took me one hour long to go down that orchard, one hour down, one hour back. It was the only level land on the ranch…where the country club was."*

"The mountain was fascinating, especially on horseback or walking but we didn't go up Diablo much. My brother and I rounded up cattle on the ranch for Dad. Just my younger brother and I, a year younger, the foreman and maybe one permanent hand. He hired Basque sheep herders and then the sheep were herded over to the Delta. How they got there I don't know, to one of the Delta islands where they would summer. There wasn't enough feed in the summer to support 4000 head of ewes. The Basque would herd them from late Fall until the lambs were sent to market in June, then they were sent over to that island in the Delta, then brought back to the mountain following the early rains."

On Dec. 27, 1919 the *Contra Costa Gazette* reports: *"Visitor Here Urges That Steps Be Taken To Preserve Mount Diablo As Public Park" "During a visit in Martinez the past week Edward P.E. Troy, public utility, municipal and tax expert of San Francisco, discussed in some detail a plan which has been proposed for the establishment of a public park on Mt. Diablo. Troy expresses the belief that now is the opportune time to take steps to secure large tracts of land on Mt. Diablo under an act of the legislature which will secure it permanently for future generations as a place of beauty and an attraction to this section of California."*

Why did Frick buy Diablo? His motivations have been described as altruistic. It is equally likely that he envisioned a good deal doing what he had always done—putting smaller pieces together and then reselling them as a whole for a greater price.

Perhaps he intended to sell most of the acreage to the state but a park at the mountain's peak would make his remaining acreage more valuable too. In any case, he drove a hard bargain as a variety of interests statewide began pushing for funding for several different state parks. He probably never expected to own the Diablo Ranch for eighteen years—from Robert's 2nd birthday until he was attending Cal Berkeley—or to lose his wife and his health.

Special thanks to Betty Maffei and the Contra Costa History Center, Sea Ranch historian Susan Clark, Patricia Davis, Robert and Ada Frick, and Suzanne Lamble.

Part 2 of *Who Was Walter P. Frick? The Creation of Mt. Diablo State Park* will be published in the Fall 2004 *Diablo Watch*. Info for this article was gathered from many places.



Oakland Tribune Editorial cartoon, supporting land acquisition at Mt. Diablo State Park, 1923

Who Was Walter P. Frick? (Part 2)
The Creation of Mt. Diablo State Park

By Seth Adams, Dir. of Land Programs

"Dad's property was the west face and on the top… It was 10,000 acres—twice as large as Del Mar, which was 5,000. A lot of it wasn't usable land, steep hillside and scrub. One year we went around with a shotgun shooting squirrels that were causing erosion. That was a full time summer job, either killing squirrels or hacking at Russian thistles that were taking over the land. We did all kinds of things."

Mt. Diablo's preservation rests on several failed fortunes and one broken heart. In the Spring 2004 *Diablo Watch*, I wrote about Robert Noble Burgess's Mt. Diablo Park Company and his proposed development, and introduced San Francisco millionaire Walter P. Frick. Frick had made a specialty of assembling large tracts of land and then reselling them at a profit. He succeeded Burgess, his business partner in Sonoma County's Del Mar Ranch, as owner of the Diablo Ranch. He reassembled many of its pieces in 1919 in his similarly named Mt. Diablo Company—just as public calls were being made for creation of a state park.

Frick's 87-year old son, Robert, and his wife Ada live in Tiburon. Robert Frick grew up on Nob Hill but he and his brother worked at both the Del Mar and Diablo Ranches. When his parents separated in 1932, Robert moved with his father to their house in Diablo. Except where attributed, the italicized quotes are his.

Mt. Diablo State Park

W.P. Frick owned many of the best known parts of the mountain, stretching from the community of Diablo south to today's Sycamore Valley Regional Preserve and east to the Blackhawk Ranch, much of Curry Canyon, all the way to the peak and down upper Pine Ridge and Pine Canyon to include part of Walnut Creek's Northgate area.

Bear in mind that public open spaces, state and national parks for example, were a uniquely new American idea. In 1864 President Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant ceding Yosemite Valley to the State of California. The grant is considered the foundation for national and state parks established later. In 1872 President Grant signed a bill establishing Yellowstone as the world's first national park. Joseph Hall's wagon roads to his Mountain House Hotel had made Diablo a tourist attraction in the 1870s, albeit a privately owned one, while Martinez resident John Muir and his Sierra Club provided a local catalyst for preservation as did the academics of nearby U.C. Berkeley. As early as 1904, Club members were organizing "Local Walks" in the Bay Area and soon began publishing a hike schedule.

In 1902 Big Basin State Park was created, in 1905 the Forest Service was established, and in 1916 the National Park Service. The California State Park system didn't exist but increasing population was leading to calls for many different municipal works—such as public water systems, and including parks. From the turn of the century through 1920, the county's population tripled to 54,000. In 1920 Muir's friend Harold French founded the Contra Costa Hills Club.

Frick's businesses were flourishing. The Roaring Twenties were on and, despite Prohibition, Diablo and its Country Club became a focal point for wealth and recreation in Contra Costa County. Picnics and riding on Mt. Diablo were a favorite activity, and there were summer evening hay rides to Blackhawk.

Mt. Diablo Scenic Boulevard Co.

Like Burgess before him, Frick owned the two roads to the peak and kept the mountain open to visitors. *"He charged fifty cents a car to go to the top. There was a tollgate on each side. He advertised it as the mountain with the greatest visibility in the world. Not many people went up. It never did do well. The Garden of the Jungle Gods; he named some of those rocks—Elephant Rock, the Rock of Gibraltar, Seal Rocks. The top was kind of barren; there was a concrete structure that seemed like it was always there."*

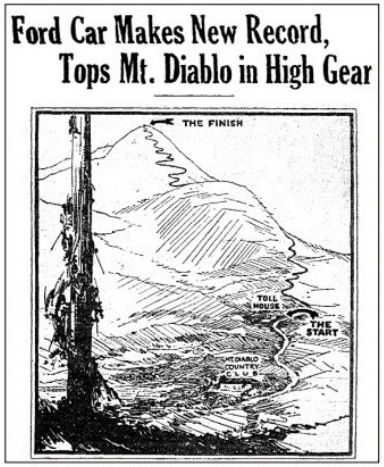
Diablo doesn't have the largest view, but Burgess had advertised the same claim; both men may have named some of the rocks mentioned. The concrete structure was the Ransome survey marker which preceded construction of a view platform and then the Summit Museum during the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) era.

1921 Dedication

Walter Frick knew that a State Park was being considered at Diablo, and some of R.N. Burgess' original investors, including Senator Breed, were still holding Diablo lands. State Senator Will R. Sharkey authored legislation to make Mt. Diablo a State Park and Game Refuge, and it was officially dedicated on Sunday, June 19, 1921. The dedication was handled by a committee from the Mount Diablo Parlor of Native Sons of the Golden West and members of the Diablo Country Club. Martinez attorney James F. Hoey presided at morning exercises at the mountain's base and after lunch at the summit, which included addresses by Lt.

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Walter P. Frick and sheep, probably at Diablo (courtesy Robert Frick)



1924 auto race to Diablo's summit, organized to popularize the mountain for tourism (Richmond Independant 1-9-1924)

Frick *Continued from page 3*

Governor C.C. Young and Sharkey. The State Park legislation failed to include funds to acquire land but a Mt. Diablo State Park Commission was formed, and a citizen organized Mount Diablo State Park Council began pushing for implementation of Sharkey's bill. In August 1922, Frick hired Wells Drury as a publicist for the mountain and the need for creation of a state park there. Drury was a pioneer newspaperman, a friend of Mark Twain and Bret Harte, and a former member of the Nevada House of Representatives. He returned to California for a variety of newspaper jobs then founded an advertising agency, the Drury Company.

The Dec. 3, 1922 *SF Examiner* reported on a Council meeting he attended: *"Park Favored Atop Mount" "Charles J. Wood of Danville… declared that the people of Contra Costa County are in favor of completing a great outdoor playground on Mount Diablo… 'A number of Contra Costans held a conference the other day', Wood said, 'and agreed that ample plans for the park ought to be kept constantly in view…it is believed that 10,000 acres would not be too large an area to include in the park, and that the present toll road should be acquired, so that under State ownership there would be no charge for going up the grade.'"*

Negotiations began with Frick and lasted into the 1930s with both sides lobbying the State to acquire at least part of his land.

For the next several years Frick and Drury began intensive work to publicize the mountain. At some point a *Marvelous Mount Diablo* brochure was issued. Organizations were encouraged to visit and well publicized events were held. Drury's Mt. Diablo scrapbook includes a landslide of news stories in dozens of newspapers, including issues ranging from the naming of the Diablo Valley, to auto races to the peak, to the mountain's visibility. A push for state funding was attempted in 1924.

Frick drove a hard bargain. James Hoey said as much in a Nov. 6, 1923 letter to Drury, *"…I don't know just what Mr. Frick's attitude is regarding the sale of this mountain. I have always contended that I thought the price placed upon this property by Mr. Frick was too high, and I fully realize that as a member of the commission I will be subject to much criticism when the sale is consummated, but I am willing to endure that for the good of the cause. I am greatly interested in the creation of state parks throughout the State, but if we can't get more cooperation from the people who are really interested in the future than we have had in the past, I am quite willing to resign from the Commission… ."*

A testimonial penned by Drury about Frick for anonymous publication held the other side of the coin, "*Those who are familiar with the inmost aspirations of your heart know that you prize these possessions and these advantages chiefly because you feel that you hold them in trust; that you hope to pass them on to our beloved commonwealth; and that your cherished ambition is to have established here a great mountain park, which shall forever be a health-giving playground and pleasure resort for all the people."* Frick was as interested in the creation of the State Park as local residents.

Regardless of his motivations, the joint efforts were unsuccessful until May 1927, when the State legislator and Governor Clement C. Young approved three bills by State Senator Breed and Assemblyman Feigenbaum. Senate Bill (SB) 439 created a single State Park Commission. SB 440 provided for a survey of potential park sites throughout the state. The *California Park Survey*, or "Olmstead Plan", was completed by famed park planner Frederick Law Olmstead. Among its recommendations was acquisition of 5-6000 acres to "amplify" Mt. Diablo State Park. SB 441 authorized a bond issue of $6 million, to be used for expansion of the park system, to be submitted to the voters in November 1928. Frick continued to drive a hard bargain but as success appeared certain, time was running out.

The "Eye of Diablo"

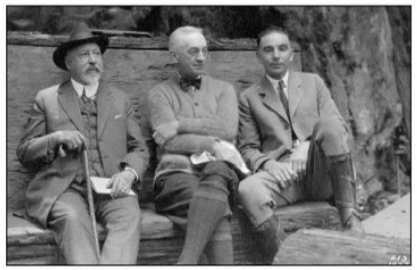
"Back when air transport was just starting, Dad was at the installation of the beacon. He loved to speak up on a soapbox; he was quite an orator." Frick's publicity efforts continued, and in 1927 he allowed Standard Oil to place its Standard Diablo (SD) tower at the peak; the beacon became known as the "Eye of Diablo." It was meant to encourage commercial aviation and to capture the public's imagination.

Luckily for everyone the voters did approve Proposition 4, the State's first park bond, on November 6, 1928. It included $6 million statewide. In October 1929 the Stock Market crashed. Frick was badly damaged with repeated calls on his assets even as land became more available all around the State—and the state money required a 50% private match. The State now had the stronger negotiating position but the onset of the Depression also elevated other priorities.

1931 Re-Dedication

"He sold to the State for the State Park…During the Depression he had to raise some money." Frick was on personal terms with Governor James "Sunny Jim" Rolph, a long time mayor of San Francisco who succeeded Clement on Jan. 6, 1931, and carried out Clement's recommendations in expanding the State Park System.

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Walter Frick (r) at the Bohemian Grove July 1923 (Gabriel Moulin)



Mt. Diablo's peak was acquired from Walter Frick and the Summit Museum there (in snow) planned during his lifetime (DPR - W.Rowe).jpg

Frick *continued from page 8*

On April 3, 1931 the first two acquisitions from Frick's Mount Diablo Company were completed, totaling 348.5 acres for $168,000. They included the right of way for Southgate Road from the edge of the community of Diablo to a point south of Artist Point, across other Frick lands which were subsequently added to the Blackhawk Ranch. The other area included Fossil Ridge and Rock City from Live Oak Camp to Curry Point. A $70,000 match was reportedly raised by County residents, with the remainder as land gifts from the Mission Beach Company and Frick.

On April 26, 1931 Mt. Diablo State Park was dedicated for a second time. The next day, the *Contra Costa Gazette*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Examiner* reported the disarray of 600-1000 cars and 2000 participants who were stuck on the mountain. The *Gazette* reported: *"Even Diablo's thunder served its unwilling purpose in yesterday's ceremony. Governor Rolph, heading the caravan enroute, heard the rumbling and crashed {sic} of ethereal artillery. Is that my salute?"* The governor made it only as far as a banquet at the Mt. Diablo Country Club, where a brief ceremony was improvised before his departure. The drenched crowd at Rock City was deprived of both the Governor and of the ceremonies.

Frick sold the third and fourth additions to the park in Aug. 1931 and Aug. 1932, 557 and 597 acres respectively. One stretched north from the community of Diablo in narrow rectangles, including Dan Cook Canyon, Live Oak campground, Southgate Road up to the junction, and part way up the Summit Road. The other continued north up the Summit Road almost to Juniper Camp and included Chase Pond, the Pioneer Horse Camp site, and stretched west down Northgate Road to the Boundary Group Camp site and the old tollgate location.

In 1932 Frick's financial difficulties became acute and in 1933 Helen Fay Frick filed for divorce—he remained in love with her until his death—and he and his two sons moved to Diablo full time. *"In later years he bought the cheapest suits, he became a penny pincher. Must have been a terrible struggle after so much wealth to find yourself in financial straits. With the divorce, it must have helped along an early death. He didn't marry again."* The fifth addition took place in June 1936, 303 acres which extended north up the Summit Road and included the SW, SE and NE corners of the Diablo summit itself, along with Devil's Elbow and Devil's Pulpit, almost to Prospectors Gap.

Finally on February 10, 1937, a sixth and final sale from the Mount Diablo Company was completed. Its 198 acres included a gap in the Summit Road from Juniper Camp to the lower Summit parking lot. Walter P. Frick had negotiated the sale but didn't live to see it—he began having motor difficulties in November 1936 and died on January 15, 1937.

Given his real estate skills, had he lived, W.P. Frick may well have repaired his fortunes. Instead his assets were thrown into disarray during an estate probate period lasting through 1948. The beneficiaries of the estate, his four children, relied on his executor. His first daughter pushed for settlement, necessitating sale of most of Frick's real estate; some was sold in tax sales.

Mt. Diablo is part of Walter Frick's legacy. He put the mountain on the map for many people and a state park was created in a rural area with a small population. As with Burgess, Frick's ownership of the Diablo Ranch delayed fragmentation of the mountain. His high profile contacts provided legislative support and funding for the matching component of the park's creation.

Six acquisitions were completed from Frick's Mount Diablo Company, totaling 2003.5 acres and stretching up Mt. Diablo Scenic Boulevard from Danville through Rock City to include the peak. They are among the most rugged and important parts of the park, historically and in terms of resources. Several generations of Diablo visitors have come to know these parts of the park best. They were the site of numerous Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) projects, including the Summit Museum, campgrounds, trails, picnic areas, the park's corporation yard and first headquarters. Other areas were held in limbo during estate proceedings and then by other owners until they could also be protected in subsequent years, often with the help of Save Mount Diablo.

By contrast, the East Bay Regional Park District was formed in 1934 but Contra Costa County elected officials chose not have our County participate in the District. Until 1965 only 146 acres were added to the 2003.5 acres Frick sold to create Mt. Diablo State Park, and the State Park was Contra Costa's only significant protected open space.

Walter P. Frick is buried simply at Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland.

Info for this article was gathered from many places. Special thanks to Betty Maffei and the Contra Costa History Center, Sea Ranch historian Susan Clark, Patricia Davis, Roger Epperson, Robert and Ada Frick, and Suzanne Lamble.



Walter P. Frick, c. 1936 (c. Robert Frick)