

Pacifica Historical Society

Newsletter Volume 15 Issue 1 Winter 2022

President's Letter

Covid, downpours, tsunami, oh my! Happy New Year (we hope) anyway. It does feel like one step forward and two back some days. Will we ever get back to normal, whatever that is anymore?

We at PHS are trying to keep going forward. The Museum is open (since July 2021) on our regular days, T, Th, and Sat from 1 – 4 PM. Our loyal and wonderful docents are womanning and manning the Museum and the Gift Shop. Our famous cheese is still for sale and continues to be our best-selling item year after year. We are holding our monthly rummage sales to benefit the renovation of the Ocean Shore passenger train car, which is scheduled to be placed in the new Pacifica Civic Center soon. And we have planned quarterly meetings and new exhibits for your education and enjoyment. Granted, some of the events are still on Zoom, and will be until the Covid crisis is passed. Another example of the step forward, step backwards syndrome, but it is progress, however slow!

And we welcome two new Board members to our ranks this year, Denise Crawford and Mike O'Neill. Denise, a Terra Nova grad, has been one of those loyal docents I talked about earlier for some time now, and she is also a talented artist and has contributed to our offerings in the Gift Shop. Mike is currently on the City Council and also served many years on the local School Board. Both bring their many talents, and we are so grateful they agreed to serve with us.

Expenses continue no matter how many steps we are taking, and we are asking for your membership dues and contributions to help meet our obligations, and to keep the place humming. Many of you renewed at the Holiday Party and we thank you for that. Those of you still needing to re-up, please fill out and mail in the form in this newsletter, or pay on-line, or in person at the Museum, whatever works best for you. With your help we will survive whatever 2022 has to offer.

If we all work together, not only will 2022 be happier but busier as well. If you are so inclined, docent training is available on-line. Contact Susan Stallard. Help is need in the archive room. Contact Pat Kremer. Help is always needed at the rummage sales. Contact Shirlee Gibbs. Or contact me, Judy Heldberg, and together we will invent a way for you to contribute your talents.

Let's try for two steps forward and no steps back and turn 2022 into a win-win for all.

Historically Yours, Judy Heldberg, President PHS, judyece@aol.com

A Note About Membership

Because all membership dues expire at the end of the calendar year, December 31, now would be an excellent time to renew your membership or join us as a new member. Your dues go further if you join early in the year!

See <https://pacificahistory.org/join> to renew or join online, or mail a check to PHS, PO Box 752, Pacifica 94044. Be sure to include your name, mailing address, phone number, membership level and email address.

Membership Levels:

Senior or Student \$15
Individual or Senior Couple \$20
Family Membership \$25
Patron \$100

Upcoming Events

The wild Prohibition days of rumrunners, moonshiners and speakeasies in the area that is today's Pacifica will be the topic of a presentation on Saturday, Jan. 29 at 4 p.m. via Zoom. To RSVP and receive the link, send an email to info@pacificahistory.org. Space is limited and PHS members in good standing have priority. The presentation will be recorded and available for viewing at www.pacificahistory.org.

Carmen Blair, deputy director of the San Mateo County Historical Association, will share stories she discovered while researching exhibits for the San Mateo County History Museum.

It was a time when the area was infamous, considered the "wettest" county in the state during Prohibition with rumrunners landing Canadian whiskey on isolated beaches, moonshiners operating in homes and speakeasies drawing clients from San Francisco.



The Hotel San Pedro, in the Sanchez Adobe, was a tavern and inn operated by the Mori family during Prohibition.

Photo courtesy of the San Mateo County Historical Association.

New Pedro Point-Shelter Cove Exhibit

The Jan. 29 talk coincides with a new PHS exhibit about Pedro Point and Shelter Cove, both areas that saw lots of action during Prohibition.

Prohibition was big business: In just one day in 1923, about 40,000 cases of whiskey were unloaded at Pedro Point. Federal agents eventually blasted shut the old Shelter Cove railroad tunnel that rumrunners used to store the hooch.

In a newspaper interview Grace Danmann, widow of Pedro Point innkeeper Harry Danmann, remembered: "There'd be one fellow down at the beach with a gun all the time. He was the lookout against hijackers who would hold up the trucks and steal all the liquor from the rumrunners."

She said the locals would "go out there in skiffs and bring the liquor in. They used to pay the boys \$15 or \$20 a night, and that was considered very good money in those days."

Longtime resident Bob Keating recalled in *Footprints of Pacifica* hearing how Pedro Point was an ideal place to be alerted to the "prohis" – federal agents -- arrival in Pedro Valley.

By the time they were spotted atop today's Roberts Road and had driven through the valley to Pedro Point there was enough time to hide the hooch, sometimes buried in storage bins under artichoke fields. Local lore has it that the Italian farmers hid the cases under their artichoke crates, hauling them San Francisco speakeasies on their way to the produce market.

Colorful residents include Danmann, an early Pedro Point settler, and artist Mary Harris who trekked up and down the Shelter Cove steps until she was 100, after storms knocked out the road to the isolated cove.

The exhibit includes photos and material gathered from memoirs, videos and interviews from longtime Pacifica residents, including PHS member Charliss (Pavka) Heiser whose parents, Charles and Mary Pavka, owned Shelter Cove from 1948 until 1983.



Shelter Cove, above, during its heyday as a popular beach spot.

The Pavkas acquired Shelter Cove from George Lewis, a sea captain who operated the Clipper Ship restaurant and snack bar. It was a fishing and popular beach spot for San Franciscans who came for the day. Abalone was so plentiful, Charliss recalls, that her mother would tell her and her siblings to go out at low tide and gather some for dinner. Periwinkles, small clams, were found along both sides of Pedro Creek.

The Clipper Ship restaurant and snack bar was filled with nautical memorabilia. It had a big stained-glass window of a clipper ship. Charliss and her husband Gary Heiser married in 1957 and moved into a Shelter Cove cottage, later moving to the old Clipper Ship building once the family closed the snack bar in the 1960s.

Fierce storms caused heavy damage. In 1958, high waves flooded many of the cottages, bringing boulders crashing onto the beach and road. An even bigger storm came in February 1960. It destroyed three cove houses. The waves were so strong they picked up one of the houses and tossed it against the hill.

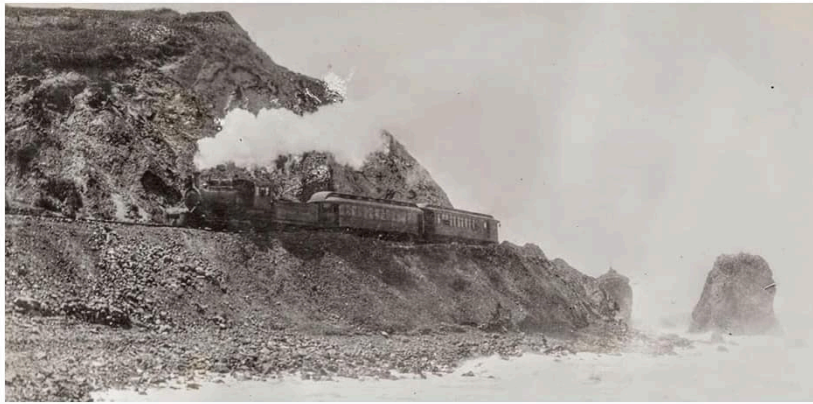
“When you looked up, it looked like stairs coming in,” said Gary of the rough, high ocean waves. He hung on to the roof of a building while tied by rope to Cal Hinton (later fire chief) while the waves battered the cove. After the storm, the Pavkas built three new two-story apartment buildings, replacing the units destroyed.

A lot of community activity at the time centered around Pedro Point’s general store and post office, originally the summer home and later year-round home of Stanley Blume and family starting in 1920. Children lined up for ice cream, adults filled up their tanks at the pump and locals picked up their mail.

Mary Blume, part of the pioneer Plate family of Sharp Park (owners of Winter’s Tavern), married into the Blume family. Mary became post mistress at Pedro Point, a position she held until the post office in Linda Mar opened. The weather-beaten old post office building on San Pedro Avenue was condemned by the city and torn down in 1964. --Laura Del Rosso

Below, the Pedro Point post office and grocery store.





Top, the Ocean Shore Railroad chugs along the Pedro Point tracks. The same roadbed, today, shown below.

And Much More....

PHS is planning a busy schedule of events and presentations. Stay tuned for more information to arrive in your email boxes and check our website.

In February, PHS has planned, date to be determined, a Zoom panel on Hazards of Living in Scenic Pacifica with discussions of storms, erosion, mudslides and earthquakes.

Other Zoom talks for the first half of 2022 include a panel discussion of the importance of local journalism and the Pacifica Tribune, the Western Neighborhoods Project (a unique historical association that covers the western part of San Francisco), and a somber commemoration of the anniversary of the Sharp Park internment camp where Japanese, Italians and Germans were held during World War II. Another lovely in-person tea party at the Museum with Mr. Twinning and Lovejoy's tea and nibbles is another event in the planning stages.

Holiday Party: A Time to Celebrate

The annual Holiday Party at the castle on a beautiful sunny day was a success, bringing together members to celebrate, in keeping with Covid protocols.



In photo at left, PHS Vice President Shirlee Gibbs (left) and President Judy Heldberg helped organize the raffle. Emeritus board member Kathleen Manning (in the left on photo on right) enjoyed the finger food spread with board member Clorinda Campagna.



In photo at left, Pacifica City Council member Sue Vaterlaus (left) and PHS's Deidra Crow caught up. Photo at right, PHS Vice President Pat Kremer (left) and board member Susan Stallard.



The Latest from the Train Committee

Our beloved and beleaguered Car 1409 is currently behind Vallemar Station and being worked on by Scott Lindner and his team.

We had a very successful primer paint day before the holidays. It is now a protected two-part epoxy primed "Heirloom Tomato". As the final color of the car will be a luscious deep burgundy red with shiny gold trim (the original color), this was a good base color for that to adhere to later.

We are sourcing a roof bid soon. The complex windows all around have been sent out for fabrication and we have extended our leases for the property and security fence around it.

The facts are that we need more funds to complete this amazing and costly project. Shirlee Gibbs and Kathleen Manning have been non-stop fundraising, yet that does not even cover our labor costs.

We would like to encourage you and your family and friends to attend our monthly rummage sales and help us earn the money to renovate the last remaining piece of rolling stock of the historic Ocean Shore Railroad. --Deidra Crow

Below, the PHS's Emeritus board member Jerry Crow lends a hand on primer painting day for Car 1409. Jerry, our gift shop manager, also has made available wonderful new Ocean Railroad tshirts (below) for sale.



Jerry Crow also is busy at work gathering information, compiling reports and reviewing inventory each week. Many thanks to our volunteer storekeepers who sell books and Pacifica Jack cheese and jewelry and more cheese!

All last year, Pacifica Jack was the # 1 item purchased in the Gift Shop along with the adorable matching tea towel. There are many other gift items, including new Ocean Shore Railroad t-shirts (above) in a wide range of sizes for that perfect gift or surprise.

Please stop by any Tuesday, Thursday, or Saturday from 1pm to 4 pm to check out the new items and the latest in custom jewelry creations by our talented Nattie Juvland—she is a true artist!

Denise Crawford, multi-talented docent and local maker of fabulous things, has a fine selection of her photography and local post cards on display as well. --Deidra Crow

PHS in the News

We received wonderful publicity -- and a boost in our museum visitation in the following days -- from the visit by the San Francisco Chronicle's Carl Nolte, who spent a day with the Train Committee. Here's the result: his Sunday column from October 2021 in the Chronicle.

BAY AREA//NATIVE SON

One reason an S.F.-to-Santa Cruz railroad failed: The tracks fell into the ocean

[Carl Nolte](#)

Oct. 9, 2021 Updated: Oct. 9, 2021 11:15 p.m.

Here's an idea to remember: Never underestimate the power of memory.

Today's example is a determined group of people in Pacifica on the foggy San Mateo County coast who are keeping alive the memory of the Ocean Shore Railway Co. railroad, which ran from San Francisco down the cliffs and across the oceanside valleys heading south toward Santa Cruz. The railroad never made it that far — it was the classic train to nowhere. It went broke after only 15 years. The last train ran 101 years ago.

Even its most fervent admirers have never seen an Ocean Shore train, but the story of the little railroad somehow represents the spirit of the coastside towns. The railroad was imaginative and scenic, and had a certain against-the-odds flair.

“The Ocean Shore was a dream, a beautiful dream,” said Deidra Crow, who has lived on the coast since she was a little girl and is one of the prime movers of a project to restore passenger Car 1409 and put it on display just off state Highway 1 in Pacifica’s Sharp Park district.

“To put it out there so people can come to our town and see how it was, well, that is our dream,” said Maxime Elizabeth Hines, a photographer, videographer and confessed cheerleader for the project.

“It’s a tangible part of our history,” Crow said. “The intangible part is someone will be able to sit in the passenger seat and imagine how it was riding that train.”

It’s hard to imagine that ride now, and even harder to imagine what the original investors saw in a cliff-hugging railroad down the thinly populated coast. The original idea was to build a double track electric-powered line from San Francisco to Santa Cruz — sort of a turn-of-the-century BART operation.

It never worked out. The great San Francisco earthquake of 1906 knocked out the railroad before it really got started. The plans were scaled back, and when the Ocean Shore opened it was a conventional railroad with ordinary steam engines. Six new passenger cars were ordered from the Holman Car Co. in San Francisco. One of them was Car 1409.

The company advertised heavily. “Reaches the Beaches” was the main slogan. Developers pitched low-cost housing — \$250 for a lot on Salada Beach, \$10 down, \$3 a month. Cheap rail fares for commuters — only \$5 for a monthly pass.

They also talked about turning the foggy coast into a summer resort and advertised Rockaway Beach as “the Playground of San Francisco.” It didn’t work.

Worse yet, the railroad was built on the unstable cliffs that line the coast including the infamous Devil’s Slide where Montara Mountain meets the Pacific. It was tough keeping the line open. The tracks kept falling into the ocean.

It was only half a railroad anyway: The north end from San Francisco to just past Half Moon Bay never connected with the south end heading up from Santa Cruz. There was a 26-mile gap. After the summer of 1920, it was only a memory. “But it brought development to the coastside,” Crow said. Eventually, all the little villages became towns. Out of it grew Pacifica, nine small communities incorporated as a city as recently as 1957.

Now Pacifica has a population of just over 33,000, “an enchanted and magical place,” Crow said. “And a city of volunteers.”

One of the historical society's volunteer-led projects was to restore the town's first church, built in 1910, right alongside the Ocean Shore tracks. Over the years, it had been everything from a place of worship to a social center, a school and a movie theater and finally a ruin. It was restored as the Pacifica Coastside Museum and community center with exhibits ranging from the Ohlone days to the present.

One display features a working model of the Ocean Shore in its heyday, with miniature trains chuffing through little towns and around Devil's Slide.

Which brings us to the latest project, restoring Car 1409. In 2004, 84 years after the railroad gave up the ghost, rail historians discovered Car 1409 rotting away in a backyard in the Sonoma County town of Sebastopol. To railroad admirers such as John Schmale, it was a "tarnished jewel," an "aged starlet" and a "super candidate for restoration." Kathleen Manning, the historical society president, and her friends got the car and got to work.

Now it's covered by a tarp near the Vallemar Station restaurant, itself a former Ocean Shore depot. The old car is a work in progress, the toil performed by volunteers and master carpenter Scott Lindner. The work is slow and careful. "We're halfway there," Lindner says.

The money, about \$150,000 so far, has been raised by bake sales, rummage sales, tea parties, tours of the local castle, everything imaginable, even historical cheese.

Manning discovered that the famous buttery Monterey Jack cheese was actually invented by a coastside resident named Stefano Mori. Mori's Point is named for Mori, but the cheese is named for Monterey. A dishonest employee stole the recipe and sold it to a "scoundrel" from Monterey named David Jacks. So Manning and the local historians found the original recipe, hired a professional cheesemaker, and Pacifica Jack was reborn. All profits go to the Ocean Shore project. They have sold nearly 3 tons so far. Their motto: "If you don't know Pacifica you don't know Jack."

Volunteering for PHS

The Pacifica Historical Society is an all-volunteer organization that needs to draw on the interests, skills and talents of its members to function at its best. Please consider volunteering some time to help out.

If you have good computer skills and a moderately techie mindset, we would appreciate your input. There are always ongoing projects at the museum, such as filing clippings or copying and labeling DVDs. Volunteers can become involved in the docent program or work in the museum shop.

If you'd enjoy participating in any of these areas, you can contact the Pacifica Historical Society at info@pacificahistory.org. --Carolyn Miller



PHS Lending Library

The PHS museum has a small but growing lending library for its members' use, located downstairs.

Almost all the PHS Book Club selections are available. (We could still use a good book on Julia Morgan.) We have Pacifica and Bay Area materials, California history, including some excellent books on the Ohlone, a little historical fiction, and a few more general books.

The collection has been donated by our members and reflects varied tastes and interests. Recent additions include *Early California Families* (2017, focused on San Mateo County Italian families), Karen Joy Fowler's San Francisco novel *Sister Noon* (2001), John McPhee's geological history of our state *Assembling California*, which begins and ends at Mussel Rock (1993), Margo Patterson Doss's local classic *San Francisco at Your Feet* (1964), and *Fore! Frogs on the Golf Course* (2011). Checkout is easy. Just sign the card in the pocket in the front of the book and leave the card in the box provided. (Instructions are posted on the side of the larger bookcase.) There are no due dates. We count on you to return the book in a reasonable amount of time. Next time you're at the museum, look in and see what we have to offer.

Board members, patron members and docents may also check out Footprints of Pacifica and Pacifica Currents DVDs, as well as DVDs copied from tapes of past PHS meetings and including an impressive assortment of speakers on Pacifica's past. These can be checked out for a week, no more than five at a time. Please sign the sheet on the clipboard in the bookcase when checking out DVDs.

If you have some reasonably sturdy DVD cases you'd like to donate, they would be very helpful and much appreciated. You can drop them by the museum during open hours and tell one of the docents they're for the lending library. --Carolyn Miller

Pacifica Historical Society (A Non-Profit Organization)

Mailing Address: PO Box 752, Pacifica, CA 94044

Museum Location: 1850 Francisco Blvd., Pacifica

Phone number: 650-355-1909

Email: Info@PacificaHistory.org

Please visit our website www.PacificaHistory.org for news and materials, including links to historical resources and videos.

Subscribe to our Facebook page: Pacifica Historical Society

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Vice President: Shirlee Gibbs

Vice President: Pat Kremer

Vice President: Stephen Johnson

Secretary: Carolyn Miller

Treasurer: Janet Ang

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Emeritus Members Kathleen Manning, Jerry Crow

Newsletter Editor: Laura Del Rosso

Board & Planning Meetings are held on Zoom due to COVID-19 health requirements.

The PHS welcomes everyone to join our organization and join our committees. We hold monthly Board Meetings on the second Tuesday of each month, 7 PM. The Planning Committee for events and activities meets monthly on the first Tuesday of each month, 4 PM.

The Pacifica Coastside Museum and gift shop is open every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, 1 to 4 PM. The museum is free to the public and ADA accessible, and our docents are there to assist.

The museum (aka The Little Brown Church) is a great venue for meetings and events, and it's a revenue generator for the PHS. Please spread the word that it's available. For rental information, contact Judy Heldberg at 650-359-6874.

Bargains are available at the PHS' popular rummage sales, usually held during the second Fridays and Saturdays of each month. Donated items are welcomed for drop-off on the Thursdays before the days of each rummage sale.

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PO Box 752
Pacifica, CA 94044