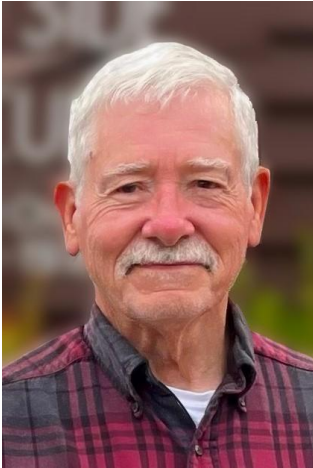


Pacifica Historical Society

Newsletter Volume 19 Issue 3 Winter 2025

President's Letter



This year has been a rather busy one for the Pacifica Historical Society. We hosted a panel discussion and exhibit in March on the "Lost Gas Stations of San Mateo County". This esoteric subject brought in a surprising number of residents who had nostalgic memories of the gas stations of the 1940s - 1960s along the coast, when oil levels were checked, windshields were cleaned, and tire pressure was checked by the attendant.

Also popular was "Scouting in Pacifica" in April. Former scouts and scout leaders spoke fondly of their scouting experiences. In July I gave a talk on the 1776 Anza expedition, which brought the first settlers from Mexico to what is today San Francisco.

In August we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Pacifica Coastside Museum. Exhibits and a video showed how an abandoned church was renovated by dedicated volunteers to become a splendid museum. And recently, the museum became a haven for runners and tired visitors looking for a respite from the crowds at the Fog Fest; they left rested -- and often with a block of our cheese.

In October we hosted a meeting of museum directors from around San Mateo County to discuss common issues: how to increase membership, attract visitors, and involve young people so that our museums will thrive. As a result, the Historical Associations of San Mateo County was formed and will meet regularly to collaborate and support each other in our common goal to preserve the history of our communities.

As we do every November, a talk was given on November 1 about the Portola expedition at the Community Center, marking the 256th anniversary of its sighting of San Francisco Bay from what is now Sweeney Ridge. Afterward a group of about 15 hikers followed a ranger to that very spot, to see the Bay on one side and the Pacific on the other.

This month also brought a sad occasion, with the death of our dear Shirlee Gibbs. She was a mainstay of the PHS, a fundraiser, a mover and a shaker, with an amazing store of energy and memory, an icon of volunteerism. We will do our best to continue her legacy of giving to the community, and to realize her dream of having Ocean Shore Car 1409 completely restored and open to the public.

We hope to see you all Dec. 7 at our annual Holiday Party.

Stephen Johnson, PHS President

Happy Holidays

Party at the Castle



Please join us to celebrate the season at PHS's annual Holiday Party for members at Sam Mazza's Castle on Sunday, Dec. 7, 1-4 p.m. Admission is free for members. Renew your membership for 2026 at the door. Feel free to invite friends and neighbors to the party; if they aren't yet members they can join when they arrive. No RSVPs required.

We'll have a wonderful spread of potluck finger foods (please bring a dish to share, finger food only), drinks, raffles, prizes, award announcements and much more.

Holiday music and a sing-along will be by our own PHS board members, Steve Clark (left) and Jay Crawford.



Enjoy the castle's festive atmosphere and beautiful terrace views at one of Pacifica's most famous historic landmarks.

SHIRLEE GIBBS ~ PRICELESS LEADER

May 25, 1930 – November 3, 2025

by Pacifican Jean Bartlett, longtime Bay Area News Group writer

"Shirlee Gibbs was a fantastic, dedicated worker for our community," said Allan Hale, longtime Pacifica Lion. "I had the honor of working with Shirlee on many Lions Club projects and she was always a great inspiration. She was one of a kind."



"Shirlee Gibbs is irreplaceable," said longtime Pacifica Historical Society member, mover and shaker Kathleen Manning. "I had the pleasure of working with Shirlee on a Palmetto Committee for the City, and 10 years of Little Brown Church restoration, and 20 years on the Ocean Shore RR project including hundreds of hours on rummage sales. She was brilliant, dedicated, generous and good-humored! Second only to her love of her family was her desire to make our town a better place. Our wonderful museum at the Little Brown Church is a testament to her impact. We will sorely miss her but will honor her memory by continuing her work."

Shirlee's 95th birthday was celebrated earlier this year at the museum.

Shirlee Gibbs, a nonstop go-getter for her Pacifica community, died early Monday morning, November 3rd. Many of you reading this article were accustomed to seeing Shirlee carrying "stuff" into her garage for upcoming PHS rummage sales. These rummage sales put a huge dent in raising funds needed to restore Ocean Shore RR Car 1409. "This car once carried people through what is now Pacifica," Shirlee would say as she priced the rummage items. "Of course we should save it!"

Before each rummage sale, Shirlee and her longtime get-it-done work partner, Kathleen Manning, would find ways to haul massive amounts of furniture and things donated for sale purposes to Shirlee's garage, get it unloaded, and then Shirlee would sit down to sort and price like a machine. She was a worker bee. "If you are going to volunteer, you can't just sit there," she would say. No one will ever say that Shirlee "just sat there."

Shirlee Lorraine (Perry) Gibbs was born on May 25, 1930, to Frederick and Mildred Perry in Oil City, Pennsylvania. Sadly, she lost her mom when she was just 4. A few months after Shirlee graduated from high school, she moved to El Cerrito, CA. Her dad opened a plumbing office and Shirlee went to work for him. She did bookkeeping and sold water heaters.

In May of 1949, the 19-year-old went to a birthday party. There, she briefly met a fellow named Chris. But once they started dating, they both knew. On New Year's Eve 1949, Christopher Gibbs proposed and on January 12, 1950, the couple married in Reno.

"Marrying Chris was the best decision I ever made in my whole life, despite everyone saying, 'You haven't known him long enough,'" Shirlee said in a biography-interview I did with her in March of 2024. "I married the best man in the world."

Their life together began in the City of Richmond. In January of 1951, they moved to San Francisco. In 1956, they bought their first home. It was located at 441 Brighton Rd., in the coastal town of Sharp Park, now a Pacifica neighborhood. Both of their daughters, Christine and then Sharon, were born in San Francisco. Son Chris came along after their move to Sharp Park.

"We lived at 441 Brighton until we had all three children. It was a small house and when we saw the contractor starting this new home just down the street, we met with him. We decided we would find a way to afford it. We moved in, in 1965. I've been here since."

Once Christine began elementary school, Shirlee, who also worked part-time, began her career of volunteering. That's a long list but it includes: starting a Brownie/Girl Scout Group; serving as a Girl Scout Leader; serving on the board of the Sharp Park School PTA; becoming a member of Pacifica's Beta Sigma Phi; and when Chris joined the Pacifica Lions Club in 1964, Shirlee became a Pacifica Lioness. When the Lions Club opened their doors to women in 1987, Shirlee became a Lion. The three-time Lions president served on the board until her death.

Together, Chris and Shirlee gave and gave as Lions Club members. This included: taking part in the annual Pacifica Resource Center Christmas toy distribution; delivering food to Pacifica seniors in need, and providing rides for eye appointments and eye surgeries. Following Chris's passing, Shirlee's great Lions Club giving continued.

Shirlee served as Chair for the City of Pacifica's 25th and 40th anniversary celebrations. There was her decades-long volunteer work with the PHS. This includes serving on the Board since 1995 and serving as the PHS Restoration Chair of the Little Brown Church. Her nonstop PHS dedication also included not only raising the funds needed to restore Car 1409 to its original glory, but also tackling the endless sea of permit and paperwork requirements.

Shirlee was involved with the Moose Lodge, the Fog Fest, the Seniors-in-Action Program and more. Somehow she was able to do all of this and still be there 100 percent for her husband, her children, her grandchildren and her great grandchildren.

When I interviewed Shirlee just shy of her 94th birthday, she noted, without hesitation, that she had no intention of slowing down. She didn't! She worked up until a very recent shoulder break completely prevented her, to her annoyance, from working like she wanted to. Shortly before her death, she held a PHS train meeting at her house to be sure everyone knew what needed to be done, in case she couldn't get to it.

At the end of her biography-interview in March of 2024, Shirlee said this.

"I had the best husband in the world for 51 years; I have three wonderful children, six incredible grandchildren, all college graduates, and ten beautiful great grandchildren. If I die tomorrow, I die happy."

Shirlee was preceded in death by her husband, Christopher Gibbs, her brother, Allen Perry, and her son-in-law, Joseph LaRoche. She is survived by her children: Christine LaRoche of Pacifica; Sharon (Daniel) Day of Pacifica; and Christopher (Angela) Gibbs of Scottsdale, AZ. She is additionally survived by her grandchildren: Erika Heusser of Pacifica; Jonathan (Tricia) LaRoche of Mesa, AZ; Steven (Lesley) Day of Santa Clarita, CA; Jennifer (Steven) Mahoney of Kansas City, MO; Taylor (Stephen) Dong of Phoenix, AZ; Tori Gibbs of Phoenix, AZ; and 10 great grandchildren.

~ jean bartlett, writer

November 6, 2025, edited by jb for this PHS newsletter 11.22.25.

Link to Shirlee's 2024 interview-biography, through Jean's website: www.bartlettbiographies.com.



A memorial service was held for Shirlee on November 23 at Nick's.

The memorial had about 200 people in attendance, which showed the impact she had on the people of the Pacifica community (and beyond). President Steve Johnson was there and said a few words in tribute to Shirlee on behalf of the PHS. He announced the board's decision to plant a tree in her honor next to the museum, which brought a nice applause from the audience.

Left, PHS President Steve Johnson (on a break from his performance at the Dicken's Fair) speaks at the memorial for Shirlee Gibbs, while her image smiles down on him.

Player Piano Holiday Concert Dec. 12

On a dreary, rainy, cold autumn day six hardy members of the Pacifica Coastside Museum gathered to learn the lore and lingo of making music on the museum's 107-year-old player piano. Rich Bourgeois was our leader. Rich had performed a lovely renovation on the player piano two years ago; we invited him back to teach us how to best share it with others. Rich began with showing us the components of the interior workings and what to check and how to adjust a host of working parts prior to playing the piano rolls that bring joy to everyone who is privileged to listen.

PHS has over 500 rolls in storage plus new ones have been purchased recently for our upcoming **"Carols 'N Care"** event on Friday, December 12, 6 pm to 8 pm. All are invited to donate a can of soup or box of pasta to our Pacifica Resource Center donation box. There will be a buffet of complimentary holiday treats, appetizers and beverages. Donations are appreciated! Pacifica Jack cheese will be for sale, too. We will sing holiday tunes at the top of our lungs!

Long ago, one in six persons were employed in the Player Piano industry and some 5,000 factories made player pianos and rolls of music. Some of our rolls are signed by the composers, songwriters and artists and are collector's items.

We even have a roll of music featuring the musical group ABBA -- yes, "Dancing Queen" may be going full blast in our hallowed halls.

For a small contribution to the donation jar, any one of them would be glad to showcase their newfound skills. —Deidra Crow

Below, from left, Terri McCann, Deidra Crow, Susan Stallard, Karen Bacheller, and Raquel Iverson (not pictured Bob Twigg) got a crash course in player pianos from Rich Bourgeois, who renovated the PHS piano two years ago.



Tenth Anniversary Celebration

August 23, 2025



Ten years of hard work and team effort were celebrated in August as PHS celebrated the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Pacifica Coastside Museum. A panel led by Shirlee Gibbs told the dramatic story of the saving of the historic Little Brown Church and huge fundraising and renovation work of the ensuing years. Above, the crowd enjoyed the presentations. Left, Shirlee detailed the enormous effort it took for PHS to transform the Little Brown Church into the Pacifica Coastside Museum along with panelists that included, from left, former PHS presidents and officers Jerry Crow, Kathleen Manning, Shirlee and John Meria. Former PHS leader Rick Della Santina (not pictured) also related stories from the years-long efforts of building restoration.

PHS Board Member Deidra Crow (center) unveiled the mockup of the “giving tree” plaque that will be installed in our foyer, honoring the individuals who contributed to the funding of the museum. A delicious cake from Mazzetti’s, served by Kathy McGuire (lower right), PHS board member, was enjoyed by all, along with a toast for many more productive PHS years ahead.

County Associations Visit



PHS President Stephen Johnson convened a gathering of San Mateo County's historical organizations at the Pacifica Coastside Museum in early October to discuss topics of interest to local historical organizations. It was a well-attended event, with representatives of many of San Mateo County's associations. Topics included succession planning, attracting visitors to museums, recruiting volunteers, board members and docents and disaster preparedness. The group agreed to be called by the name Historical Associations of San Mateo County and work towards creating a shared source of information, events and items of interest. PHS's Kathleen Manning led a tour of our Ocean Shore RR Car 1409 adjacent to the museum. Great interest was expressed by all.

PHS Board Re-Elected



Our Annual Meeting in October included elections for the PHS 2026 Board of Directors and Executive Officers. All those elected were continuing in the positions that they already held. And all Executive Officers are also members of the Board. Executive Officers are Steve Johnson, president, vice presidents Shirlee Gibbs, Pat Kremer, and Susan Stallard, secretary Carolyn Miller, and treasurer Janet Ang, all for one-year terms. Newly re-elected board members are Steve Clark, Laura Del Rosso, Pat Kremer, Kathy McGuire, and Susan Stallard, extending their terms for three more years. Pictured above are Pat Kremer, Steve Johnson, Steve Clark, Laura Del Rosso, and Kathy McGuire.

Pacifica's Past: Sharp Park History

We enjoyed having Andrea Siebert participate at our Annual Meeting recently during our look at historic Pacifica photographs pulled from our archives.

Andrea is a Sharp Park native and daughter of an early Pacifica schoolteacher, Bob Siebert, whose story of riding the Ocean Shore Railroad is one of the highlights of our OSRR Footprints episode. Andrea has wonderful memories of growing up in Sharp Park and gave us insight into historic buildings that line what is today, Palmetto Avenue.

Andrea told stories of the important people of the time, including Lydia Comerford Fahey, daughter of early pioneers here.



The stories are also in Jean Bartlett article. Jean's biography of Bob Siebert was updated in the last few years with an interview with Andrea. [Bob Siebert, Lydia Fahey's neighbor and an early pre-Pacifica teacher](#)

Among the quotes: "Lydia Fahey, Lyde was her nickname, was no slouch and I thought she was the most marvelous woman," Andrea said. "When the Ocean Shore Railway was being planned through the area that my dad was describing in the video, Lydia watched the surveyors. She was a young woman on a Palomino with a rifle across her lap and she rode up and said, 'What are you doing on my father's land?' They said, 'This is the Ocean Shore Railway right-of-way.' And she said, 'No it isn't. I have surveyed my father's land.' And so she invited them to tea, and ultimately the man in charge said to Mr. Fahey, 'Your daughter has saved us from a terrible misunderstanding and possible lawsuit.' She was a wonderful role model."

Renew Your PHS Membership for 2026! Or Join as a New Member!

Now is the time to renew your membership for 2026! Or join as a new member, good through 2026. All memberships are good for the calendar year, so if you join or renew now, your membership is good through the end of 2026. Membership can be started or renewed by cash, check, online or by credit card. See <https://pacificahistory.org/join> for details. You may also join or renew at our annual Holiday Party at the Castle on December 7. Join at the Silver or Gold level and you will get a gift certificate.

Membership Levels

\$25 (Senior or Student Individual)	\$100 (PHS Patron)
\$30 (Individual, Senior Couple)	\$250 (PHS Silver)* gift certificate for \$25 at gift shop
\$40 (Family, Couple)	\$500 (PHS Gold)** gift certificate for \$50 at gift shop

We thank you for your past and/or future support of the Pacifica Historical Society!

Pacifica Historical Society

A Non-Profit Organization

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Visit our website <https://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: <open>

Vice President: Pat Kremer

Vice President: Susan Stallard

Secretary: Carolyn Miller

Treasurer: Janet Ang

Board of Directors: Janet Ang, Karen Bacheller, Steve Clark, Jay Crawford, Deidra Crow, Laura Del Rosso, Sue Digre, <open>, Steve Johnson, Pat Kremer, Terri McCann, Kathy McGuire, Carolyn Miller, Susan Stallard, Brigid Voss
Emeritus Members Kathleen Manning, Jerry Crow

Newsletter Editors: Laura Del Rosso, Susan Stallard

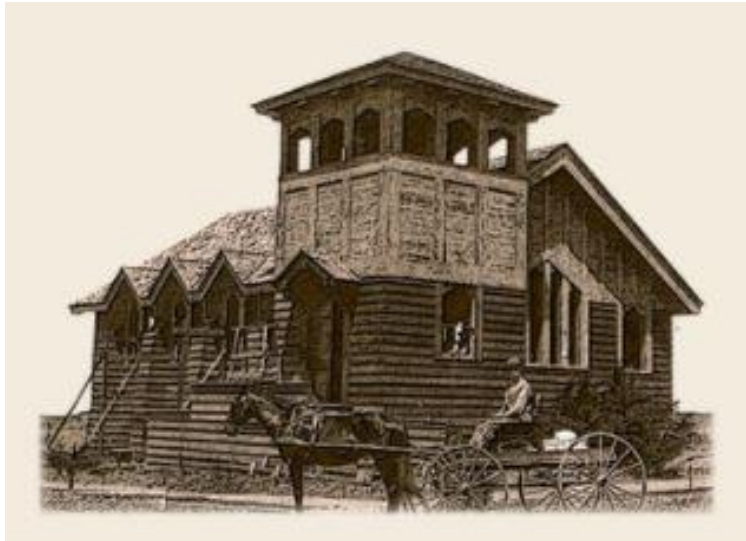
The Pacifica Historical Society welcomes everyone to join our organization and join our committees. We hold monthly Board Meetings on the second Tuesday of each month, 7 pm. The Planning Committee for events and activities meets monthly on the last Thursday of each month, 4 pm.

The Pacifica Coastside Museum and gift shop are open Thursdays and Saturdays, 1 to 4 PM. The shop features books, postcards, and other items of interest, including the famous Pacifica Jack cheese. 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 wonderful venue for meetings, weddings, parties and events, and it's a revenue generator for the PHS. Please spread the word that it's available. For rental information, contact Deidra Crow at 650-303-1670.

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

To join the Pacifica Historical Society, see <https://PacificaHistory.org/join>. Dues are good for the calendar year. Donations are always gratefully accepted. Our Federal Tax ID # is 943117665.



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