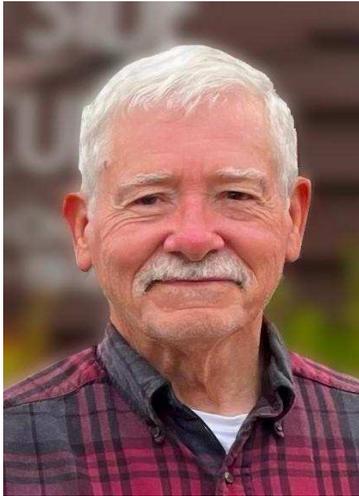


# Pacifica Historical Society

Newsletter Volume 18 Issue 1 Spring 2024

## President's Letter

Dear Members,



Recently the Pacifica Historical Society co-sponsored a talk by a noted author and a professor of geology about how climate change is affecting the California coast. Vice President Pat Kremer showed historical photos of how the Pacifica coastline has changed over the years. This is a good example of why a historical society is important as the necessary memory of a community.

A couple of weeks ago a delegation of the members of our train committee made the journey to the Western Railway Museum to inspect two sets of trucks (wheel sets) needed for OSRR Car 1409. The trucks need sandblasting and have to be transported to Pacifica, at a cost of about \$6000. We are hoping to raise that money with grants, donations, and rummage sales.

PHS is now a member of the Central Coast Railway Club, an affiliate of the National Railway Historical Society. I went to a recent meeting of the club, held at the old Santa Clara Depot, and met with their officers and members. I told them briefly about Car 1409 and will be giving a formal presentation about our project on May 17th. The next day they will visit us in Pacifica to see the car.

We are having a fundraising event on May 19th at 1 p.m. at the museum, "A Victorian Tea and Fashion Show". Gentlemen and ladies will explain the clothing and etiquette of the Victorian era, while guests are served tea - properly prepared - along with delectable cakes and sweets. See [pacificahistory.org](http://pacificahistory.org) for details. Please support the museum by coming to our events.

We are slowly restoring our school program, in which we give presentations on Pacifica and California history. Our visit to Ortega School was well received and we plan to visit more schools. If you are a retired teacher and would like to help us in this endeavor, please contact me.

Like everyone else I was sad to learn of the passing of member Denise Crawford. She was a dedicated member of the board of directors who helped us greatly by patiently teaching us how to use the email system, how to use Square for sales, and how the Pay Pal system works. She also helped us to organize the archives and the many photos in our collection. She will be greatly missed. A reception will be held April 6 at the museum after the service, 11:30 a.m. until 2 pm. All are welcome.

I want to thank all of you who renewed your membership this year. Your support is what keeps the doors to our museum open to visitors from all over the country.

Stephen Johnson, PHS President

# OSRR Car 1409 -- Progress

We paid \$2500 to City of Pacifica for the extension of our temporary use permit in January. In February we paid for our commercial liability insurance. The Train Committee made a trip to Northwestern Railroad Historical Society's yard in Petaluma to view trucks (rail car wheels), rails and ties. Some repairs are needed removing heavy bolts, the frame holding the trucks and replacing deteriorating oak supports and sand-blasting. The cost will be \$5600, plus drayage fees to Pacifica and short time storage. The vintage trucks are difficult to locate, and we have searched for months for them. Board approval is needed to make the purchase. We were advised by the Planning Dept. that another permit, to be viewed by the Coastal Commission and various City Departments, is needed prior to the rail car move to the final destination at the corner of Salada Ave. & Francisco Blvd. In March, we met with the Planning Commission and received the temporary use permit to continue work at its present site, issued for 6 months with a 6-month extension. The city requires a long-range plan, drawing of final placement on the corner, progress on renovation and information on how the PHS is funding the project. Bob Azzaro, our general contractor and workers are diligently working on the interior, installing a large mid-valance at top of the windows and ceiling panels (see photo below). Their intentions are to install the 72 windows this month. We can happily say our windows are paid for! To donate for the OSRR effort:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/PHSsorr1409>

– By Shirlee Gibbs, PHS Vice President



Our PHS Vice President, Shirlee Gibbs, is the subject of a biography by well-known local biographer Jean Bartlett. See [Shirlee's bio](#). And Pacifica's Mizpah community service organization is honoring Shirlee at their annual Tea & Craft Fair at Shelldance Nursery on Sunday, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1-4pm, free.

## Welcome New Docents



A dedicated group recently completed PHS docent training led by Michele Trausch and Susan Stallard. They participated in a month of Saturday mornings exploring Pacifica history, researching topics, making presentations, learning how to open and close the museum, taking field trips (Sanchez Adobe, our Sharp Park self-guided walking tour), getting to know our resources, learning to run the gift shop and more. A handful of current docents sat in on the training classes to increase their knowledge. Those who

completed the course included a those who know the museum, and two who are brand new to the PHS. We welcome Tabitha Woods, a senior at Terra Nova HS, who has helped us before, and Ken Miles, a former docent and board member who is now back. Brand new to us are Raquel Iverson, who recently retired from Genentech, and David Malloy, who recently moved to Pacifica from Petaluma. David already is working on a PHS event! We are so thrilled with these newly trained docents! Be sure to congratulate them when you next see them at the museum. Photo above, Michele Trausch, far left, and Susan Stallard, far right, who led the training, flank new PHS docents. With certificates (from left) are Tabitha Woods, Raquel Iverson, David Malloy and Ken Miles.

## Pacifica Against the Sea



PHS joined three community groups in hosting a talk by Rosanna Xia, LA Times journalist (above, signing books), and Gary Griggs, noted UC Santa Cruz professor and coastal erosion expert, in March at the Pedro Point Firehouse. It was a well-attended event that included a 10-minute presentation by PHS Vice President Pat Kremer on shoreline changes over 100 years. Xia's book "California Against the Sea" includes a chapter about Pacifica. We have been thrilled that in her public appearances Xia gives PHS credit for research material. Kremer's presentation, "A Town on the Edge," is available at [videoguide \(pacificahistory.org\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cazUv5JS-do). Pacific Coast Television's

video of the event is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cazUv5JS-do>

## ***Pedro Point is a Star***



At our late January event, it was fascinating to learn about the history of silent films in the Bay Area by two experts on silent movies, David Kiehn and Rena Azevedo Kiehn. We learned about the career of Evelyn Selbie, movie star of the silent film era – and a part-time Pedro Point resident in the 1910s. The Kiehns, who help operate the Niles Essanay Silent Film Museum, donated to PHS David's book on women silent film stars and DVDs of Niles movies that featured Selbie. Let us know if you'd like to check them out to read and view.

## ***Denise Buckley Crawford***



It is with much sadness we report that Denise Buckley Crawford, one of our board members, died March 15 after battling cancer. Denise, who grew up in Linda Mar and graduated from Terra Nova in 1972, was an invaluable part of our PHS family.

A self-described "history nerd," she loved researching Pacifica history and photographing our town. Her beautiful notecards are in our gift shop. Her computer and technical talents were so valuable to us. She and her husband, Jay, introduced us to Square, helping us boost our rummage sale and gift shop sales. Before she joined PHS she already had made a big mark on preserving

Pacifica history. She acquired microfiche of the Sharp Park Breakers, the newspaper that covered Pacifica from 1938-1950 and, by donating funds to the Internet Archive, had the issues posted online so that they were accessible for research. She also digitized dozens of Footprints and other video material that were on DVDs and created our YouTube channel. Even during Denise's treatments, she continued to help us, preserving photos for our archives up until her last days. Denise and Jay (also a PHS board member and docent) were high school sweethearts, and they were married for more than 50 years. She also leaves her beloved daughter, Christine, of Pacifica. Services will be at Pacifica's Chapel by the Sea on Saturday, April 6 at 10 am. Following the service refreshments will be served at the Pacifica Coastside Museum. To see some of Denise's work, she and PHS's Kathleen Manning created a wonderful Mori Point episode for PCT.

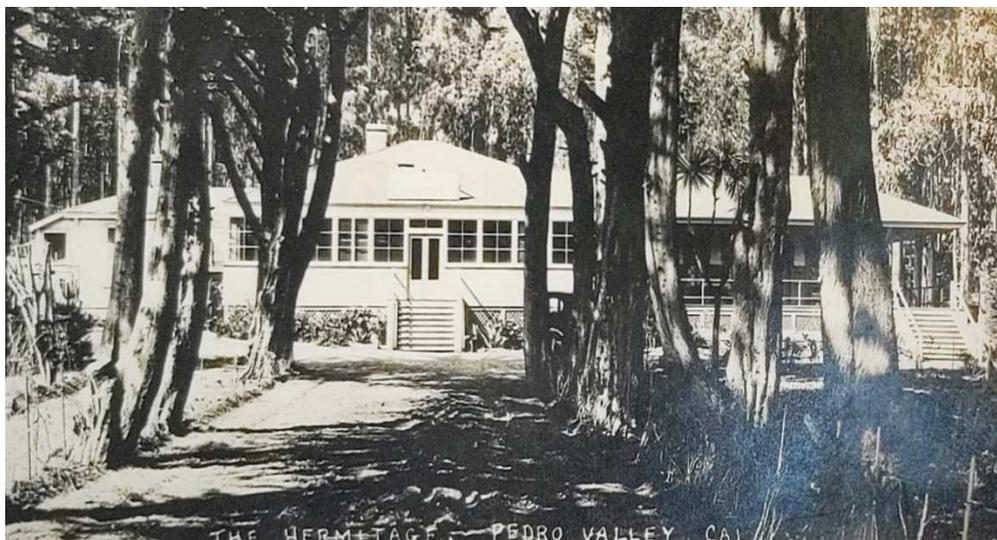
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## ***Our Past: Tobins, Pedro Valley, Historic Fires***

We at PHS are constantly amazed at what we discover about Pacifica history. We recently stumbled across a 1917 San Francisco Examiner article about Richard Tobin, the wealthy San Franciscan who owned much of Pedro Valley, today's Linda Mar. The article (which follows on pages ) is about Tobin's love of horses and his Pedro Valley ranch. Sometime before his death in 1887, he built a tunnel through Mussel Rock, which later became the Ocean Shore Railroad route. The reason for the tunnel: simply so that Tobin could ride his horses along the miles of shoreline from San Francisco's Cliff House south to his ranch in Pedro Valley.

Also fascinating is the end of the article, under "Fin — For Appetites." This refers to The Hermitage, which was built as the Tobin's ranch house and later became an inn and restaurant. The building is long gone and today the site is part of Shamrock Ranch, across from Linda Mar Rehabilitation on San Pedro Terrace Road.

A bit of background: The Tobin family acquired a vast part of today's Pacifica after the death of Francisco Sanchez in 1862. We don't know exactly when their ranch house was built but it was sometime before 1908. A photo appears of the "Tobin Estate" on a blurry 1908 Ocean Shore Railroad ticket archived at the California Historical Society. The other photo of the building we've found is this one, when it was The Hermitage sometime in the 1910s or 1920s.



The Tobins, who founded Hibernia Bank, were connected through marriage with the DeYoungs and other prominent families. Their visitors could take the OSRR to the Pedro Point stop, called the Tobin Station, and walk or buggy ride the short distance to their ranch.

By 1917, when the Examiner article was published, the Tobin house had become The Hermitage, operated by Italian restaurateur Phillip Forneron. It was a fancy place, said to have some of the best dining outside of San Francisco (Coast Side Comet). Sadly, on Sept. 25, 1917, Forneron, age 36, died after a car accident near Moss Beach. He was driving south and a vehicle heading north slammed into his car and sped off. Frederika, his wife, continued operating The Hermitage, applying for and receiving a San Mateo County dance permit in May 1918. She sold the business in March 1920, two months after the start of Prohibition. The buyers were Mr. Cerra and Mr. Vincen (Coast Side Comet).

With Prohibition, the new owners got in trouble. They were arrested in September 1920 along with other “innkeepers” in Rockaway, El Granada and Montara. Federal agents said there was so much liquor at The Hermitage that they “couldn’t begin to count it.” (Coast Side Comet)

The story of The Hermitage does not end well. The building – described in the SF Chronicle as “an old time resort of bon vivants” -- burned down on Oct. 22, 1929. It was engulfed in flames when arsonists lit dozens of fires along the hillsides. Firefighters rushed from San Francisco and parts of San Mateo County to fight the blazes, the biggest fires in county history up to that time. At Salada beach (southern Sharp Park), acres were set ablaze, including a ranch, two summer cottages and the San Francisco-owned land where Park Superintendent John McLaren had started planning the golf course.

The Hermitage proprietor at the time, Leo Mercandetti, and a cook barely escaped, jumping flames through a bedroom window in their night clothes (San Francisco Chronicle, Oct. 23, 1929). Rumor had it that rival bootleggers set the fires. On Nov. 22, another suspicious fire swept through Montara, destroying the town and leaving 100 people homeless. There were no reports of fatalities in any of the fires, thankfully.

In the 1930s, the Tobins sold much of their Pedro Valley landholdings. Italian artichoke farmers who had been leasing the land bought up some of the property. Truman Floyd “Doc” Denman, a San Franciscan who made women’s fur coats and was known as the “Fur Doctor,” acquired a portion and established Shamrock Ranch on the former Tobin estate and Hermitage site. “Doc” Denman is not to be confused with a nearby figure important in local history: “Harry” Danmann, Pedro Point pioneer who for decades ran a landmark bar and restaurant (a story for another time). Italian farmers sold most of their Pedro Valley land in the early 1950s to Andy Oddstad for the Linda Mar development. The Denman family continues to operate Shamrock Ranch, which contains some of Pacifica’s oldest buildings, some dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the site of the Tobin ranch and Hermitage. -- by Laura Del Rosso

—SUNDAY, MARCH 25, 1917

THE SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER

# HOW TO GO TO SEA WITHOUT LEAVING LAND

Mark Daniels Tells of a Beach  
Trip That Lovers of Out-  
doors Surely Will Appreciate

*THE following article by Mark Daniels, formerly superintendent of the United States national parks, is one of a series of interesting papers on "hikes" around San Francisco. The article printed herewith is an eloquent invitation to a picturesque and unusual tramp, an opportunity to "go to sea on dry land."*

**BY MARK DANIELS.**

In the early days of the history of San Francisco those who were unable to shake off the love of horseflesh acquired in their youth were confronted with a problem that seemed almost impossible of solution. Horses were to be found of unusual grace of

limb and fleetness of foot, but there was no stretch of level road where they might be exercised and where their speed could be tested. Prominent among the fanciers of racing stock was Richard Tobin.

Succumbing to his fancy for horses Tobin established a ranch and stock farm in San Pedro valley about one-half mile back from the ocean shore in San Mateo county. Here he successfully bred and raised some of the finest stock that was to be found in this part of the State. But the country was hilly and there seemed to be no long level stretch where he could let loose the reins over the flanks of his flashing trotters. In a search for such a place Tobin and others finally hit upon the use of the beach along the shores of the Pacific.

**RACES GET POPULAR.**

It was found that there was a stretch of seventeen miles or so running south from the Cliff House which, at low tide, made an excellent course obstructed only by a point of land known as Mussel Rock which projects almost to the water's edge at low tide. Trotting races soon became most popular.

Tobin, in order to avoid the necessity of driving his horses to San Francisco over the county road finally built a tunnel through Mussel Rock so that he might drive the full length of the beach at low tide. This tunnel has since caved in so that it is not now passable, but it still remains as a landmark and a mute testimonial to the determination which characterized residents of our city even in their sports.

Despite the fact that the city is surrounded upon three sides by salt water it is safe to hazard a guess that very few who live here have ever taken the walk along the water's edge from the Cliff House south to Mussel Rock, and yet there are, perhaps, few stretches of coast line so exquisite and varied in character or so replete with fascinating features.

It also has the added advantage of subjecting no one to that more violent form of walking and climbing the pleasure of which varies accord-

ing to the waist measure. This, of course, is only true providing the trumper makes the trip at low tide and does not loiter along the way to pick up sea shells while the tide comes in and pockets him in a cove in such a manner as to necessitate his scrambling up a cliff.

From the point where the Great Highway joins the Sloat Boulevard, south of the Cliff House, the mainland raises back of the beach to bluffs some two or three hundred feet in height. These are of a sandy formation and can be scaled at almost any point so that there is no serious danger of being caught with the tide. Here and there the cliffs are festooned with streamers of wild strawberry and spotted with masses of hen and chickens, or echeveria,

Every step of the way is marked with subtle changes in the sea and cliffs. Under foot are shells and treasures of the deep cast up by the sea. Gulls circle overhead and fleeting clouds cast their moving shadows athwart the sparkling path.

#### **FIN - FOR APPETITES.**

If you have never experienced that type of appetite which dwells with longing upon the thoughts of something edible even though it be ill served just take this trip along this shore line. When you come to San Pedro valley you will find a little wayside inn set back a halfmile or so from the shore where a former chef of one of our leading hotels cooks "mussels bordelaise" in a manner that he evidently kept secret during the time of his employment in the city.

They are neatly served by his wife, and it is of record that in every instance they have disappeared from the plate of the trumper like dew before the morning sun. If time will permit you may take a plunge in the sunwarmed waters of Laguna Salada round the shores of which John McLaren is enthusiastically planting trees and shrubs with a skill that will add another testimonial to his love of nature.

The return may be made by the the Ocean Shore Railroad and there is no objection on the part of that company to the removal of shoes for the purpose of shaking out any sand that may have accumulated in them.

# 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](mailto:Info@PacificaHistory.org)

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

President: Steve Johnson

Vice President: Shirlee Gibbs

Vice President: Pat Kremer

Vice President: Susan Stallard

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Treasurer: Janet Ang

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Emeritus Members Kathleen Manning, Jerry Crow, Clorinda Campagna

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 is 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 [baz00@att.net](mailto:baz00@att.net).

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.



Pacifica Historical Society  
PO Box 752  
Pacifica, CA 94044