



# HISTORICAL SOCIETY *of* MORRO BAY

February, 2020

## *Presidents Report*

I want to start this report with a request for help. Roger Castle has developed a very good system for identifying and organizing our collection, but he needs help to implement it. We are looking for someone who would enjoy putting things in order, a bit like a library is organized, so we and future historians can find things of value in our collection. Any librarians out there who like history? This will be a fun and satisfying process, and it will make a big difference. (see the short article below for contact info)

In this issue of the newsletter we include more information about the Hidden History project. We now have three interpretive panels in place along the Embarcadero with two more in the pipeline. In the near future we hope to have enough panels installed to create a walking tour connecting the historical dots (and helping visitors especially to learn more about our town).

I want to thank Professor Sean Green who gave the Hidden History project a big boost when he assigned a writing assignment about Hidden History topics to his classes at Cal Poly. The students, working in groups of four, researched episodes in Morro Bay's history and wrote short reports on them. You can find them on our website.

The February 16 quarterly Member Meeting will feature presentations on some of these Hidden History topics in some depth, though we do not yet know which of the many topics we'll choose. Take a look at the website and send in your nominations. For your calendar, the meeting is 4 pm, Sunday February 16, at the lower level of the Morro Bay Presbyterian Church. It is fun, free and open to the public, so bring a friend who's curious about Morro Bay history.

The "Little Red House" needs a forever home. I'm talking about the red cottage that is highly visible on the eastern edge of the Tidelands boat launch parking lot. It was built by Nadine Richards in the early 1940's, and moved from Main Street to its current location in about 1952. The current owners are eager to preserve the house, but it needs to be moved to a new location. Do you know of a place for it? This is urgently important, so please get in touch if you have ideas.

continued

**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MORRO BAY MISSION STATEMENT: THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MORRO BAY IS A NON-PROFIT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION WHOSE MISSION IS TO PROMOTE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE HISTORY OF ESTERO BAY BY COLLECTING, PRESERVING, EXHIBITING AND INTERPRETING THAT HISTORY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE REGION, AND NATION BEYOND, TO AUDIENCES OF ALL AGES AND INTERESTS.**

## Some other items in this edition include:

- A bit of controversy in the early history of our police department.
- An update on the historic preservation ordinance process that is part of the City's General Plan revision.
- Some snippets from the old Sun-Bulletin.
- The Salinan story about The Serpent

I hope to see you on Sunday, February 16th.

*Glenn Silloway*  
President, HSMB

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## Morro Bay Pre-history

by Susan Stewart

Before I purchased the bead store in Morro Bay, I worked as an archaeologist, and developed especially close ties with members of the Salinan Tribe, who I still consider family.

Here is one of my favorite stories or myths, the only one ethnologists have recorded about Morro Rock. Told by Maria Ocarpia. From The Language of the Salinan Indians by J. Alden Mason pp. 113-114 University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology Vol. 14, No.1 January 10, 1918

### The Serpent Once

There was an animal which ate the Indians and was called Serpent. The whirlwind was his protector and brought him food.

Prairie-Falcon heard of him and said, "what shall we do?" "How many powers have you?" asked Raven.

"I have one so fast that the snake will not be able to catch me." "Good. In two or three different mountains, there are my powers."

"Where?" asked Prairie-Falcon.

"At Asomeneka." "And the other?"

"At Asumloyam." (Both mountains are near to Cholam, where the snake lived.) "And you?"

"Oh, I'll risk my neck anywhere!"

"Good! Where is your power?"

"At the Morro; that is the last power."

"Good! I have been there; that's all right. Let's go and see the snake."

They went and the snake awoke, and when he awoke he cried out for the whirlwind.

"Come along nephew!" cried Prairie-Falcon.

Along came the wind, felling everything in its path. "Good! Run!! Come on !!!" shouted Prairie-Falcon and they fled across country with the snake and the wind close behind them.

"Fly up!" yelled one. "No, down!" shouted the other.

"Summon up your strength or he will catch us! Good!" Serpent came yelling. "Just remember your powers," entreated Prairie-Falcon.

"Good, they have passed." "I am going to cry," said Raven. "No! Don't cry! Cast your spell! Good!"

"Wait a moment; there in the mountains are my powers!"

"Yes, fly up! Good! I remember mine at the Morro."

"Good!" said Raven. "Fly ahead, I am tired, uncle!"

"Just summon all your strength or the snake will get us! Fly up! Go!"

And they flew towards Morro with the snake in pursuit. He wrapped himself around the Morro from beneath and the allies seated themselves at the top.

He had almost caught them when up jumped Prairie-Falcon and seized his charm. With it he cut the snake into four pieces and killed him.

And from these four pieces were formed the snakes of today. On this account there are rattlesnakes and others; therefore their flesh is poison. Many snakes got their poison thus.

Coyote also came and secured poison. There are many little rattlesnakes at the coast near Morro.

The old snake said, "They shall live forever; I have died, but they shall live."

## Susan's notes:

If you climb Cerro Alto you can see the undulations of the "snake" from Islay Hill in San Luis Obispo all the way to Morro Rock, the last power. As a young girl growing up in Morro Bay, local Edna (Lamb) Burch remembers boating around Morro Rock before the breakwater was built. When they tried to reach in to the rock to land there, their hands were met by many small black rattlesnakes! Given that Morro Rock is a preserve for nesting falcons, it is interesting that long ago in Salinan legends, the Rock was the Falcon's last power.

The Salinan word for the Morro is umle'sam.

## The Hidden History Project

by Glenn Silloway

We've carried stories about this Project before, but it is beginning to gather steam so it's a good time to revisit it.

The idea of the Project is to research different topics of Morro Bay's history that might be 'hidden' under subsequent development or just forgotten in the passage of time. These can include all different kinds of subjects. Our process is to summarize the research on high quality outdoor interpretive panels that are installed at places where the panel's topic occurred. These panels can be connected in a walking tour that connects the present people see with the past that is gone. In this way, people can stand on the point where the history happened and learn about it.

To give you an idea about the topics, here's the list of the ones we have in place, and a couple more in the pipeline.

- The Bridge to the Sandspit: There is a panel behind the Harbor Center at 901 Embarcadero that summarizes the history of the wooden bridge that connected the Embarcadero with the sand spit. It was built in 1942-1943 and demolished in 1947.

- The Boatyard: Once upon a time there was a working boatyard on the Embarcadero. It was next to Glen Johnson's Machine Shop, and could



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haul boats out of the water for repair and maintenance. These old buildings were at the location of the current retail shops in what we still call “The Boatyard.” The panel is on the walkway by the bay.

- **The Tidelands Doctrine:** Behind Gray’s Inn, on the bay, is a panel that explains the legal doctrine that gives the City of Morro Bay control over leaseholds on the west side of the Embarcadero. This doctrine was at the heart of a legal dispute that still reverberates in City policies and politics.

- **Abalone:** This is a panel in the research phase, and it’s hard to overstate its importance to our past as a commercial fishing port. Its planned destination is on the bayside of the House of JuJu at the completion of its renovation.

- **The Coast Guard:** There are still a few people alive who remember when the Coast Guard cutter Alert pulled into the Morro Bay harbor in the late 1940’s, but the story of getting it here is worth telling. Since that time, the Coast Guard has been a prominent feature of our history. This panel will be installed somewhere near the location where the renovated Coast Guard HQ will be built.

Once we get to about ten panels like these, we’ll have the basics for a really fun walking tour. And an added benefit of the tour will be to get people walking through our commercial areas with a

# A Plan to Preserve Historic Resources

by Glenn Silloway

Most Morro Bay citizens know that there is a revision to our General Plan in the works. But they may not know that it includes the development of a historic preservation process as a goal.

The May 2018 draft plan includes a goal to “protect” cultural and historic resources. Included is a policy proposal to “work with the Historical Society of Morro Bay and other local groups on historic preservation guidelines.” In order to implement this goal, the City says it will become a “Certified Local Government,” and the first step in this is to create a historic preservation ordinance.

The General Plan is in the review, amendment and approval process, going back and forth with the Coastal Commission to reach a final version of this very complicated document. The final version is expected in about a year (really).

The Historical Society determined that this whole process could take many more years without a boost, and it might not include the community perspective. To improve the process, the Board initiated a citizen task force to draft an ordinance to present to the City to jump start the process and ensure that citizen voices help to shape the direction of the ordinance.

The Task Force is close to completing a draft ordinance. It follows the philosophy that participation in historical preservation of a structure or other historic resources should be voluntary. To encourage participation, the ordinance should define incentives to make voluntary commitments to preservation attractive to owners.

When the draft ordinance is completed as far as the Society can go, we will submit it to the City and ask them to include the ordinance in the goal-setting that will take place a year from now. We know that this is just the first step in a long journey, but we hope to stimulate action in the right direction.

**We will be updating this story as it evolves.**

**Who Owns the Embarcadero?**

The history of the Embarcadero and Coleman Drive is actually “new” land owned by the US Navy when it built moored infrastructure for the harbor in 1942-1943 and filled behind the treatment by dredging the bay. Eventually the Navy got an Amelanchier. Treating those on the same land about where the power plant is today.

The State of California failed this century when the legislature passed S.B. 1050 in 1947 making a tidelands grant to San Luis Obispo County containing a large part of the Embarcadero (see “What are the Tidelands?” box). The tidelands grant gave property to the public to manage that private owners claimed was theirs.

The potential conflict in the competing ownership claims lay mostly dormant during the 1950’s. Development on the waterfront south of Harbor was slow, and even into the 1960’s there were open commercial lots, with few attempts to use the property. The issue was remaining beneath the surface.

The situation was further complicated when the City of Morro Bay incorporated in 1964. The statute called that the City inherited the authority to manage the tidelands grant area in perpetuity. However, the City wanted compensation from the County based on the claim that San Luis Obispo County had, among other things, based on the below-market prices. For many years up to back the land status quo, the property, the tidelands boundary and potential issues for development, was uncertain.

The original shoreline was the low of the bay, which marked where the tidal lands began. Pre WWII residents would build tiny properties “back of” and used them to assess the bay for various uses. This was the case with the late Franklin Dooly (the Executive Director of Morro Bay) passed in 1972 when, they believed, they owned the tidal lands and submerged land.

The same land for the Navy created a problem after the war because it was still over the tidal (tidal) and military land claim. How much of the new land belonged to the old owners?

**What are the Tidelands?**  
Tidelands are “submerged” areas that lie between high and low tide, submerged lands, and comprise waters, submerged lands, and tidelands. Tidelands are public lands owned by the State of California. These lands are managed by the State of California and are managed by a public trust for the benefit of the people. When California became a state in 1850, it inherited the tidelands trust from the United States land system. California was the first state to make land grants to local agencies like the City of Morro Bay to help them develop the bay. Over time, these small grants like Morro Bay to a few very large harbor developments. The Public Trust doctrine requires that development be limited to water-dependent uses, but can include non-water-dependent developments.

**The Public Settlement**  
In 2001, Mayor Pagan filed a lawsuit to terminate the public trust obligation of the tidelands grant. The suit “Other private owners argued that the grant should be preserved, arguing the Embarcadero was built on public land. Against this, the State of California had from the right to terminate the tidelands grant in San Luis Obispo County and San Luis Obispo County, including the portion on the Embarcadero. The lawsuit was eventually settled in 2003 with a settlement. In fact, permanent boundary line between private ownership and public tidelands (what is shown in the map above). Private trust of the tidelands grant was “settled” (settled) claim on the west side of the city (in red) and the city (in blue) was to be replaced by a parcel (owned by the city) (in red), which is under private use in the tidelands grant.

Discover additional interpretive panels with descriptive Hidden History stories of Morro Bay at various locations throughout the city.  
Visit [www.historyofmorrobay.org](http://www.historyofmorrobay.org) (the HSMR website) for more information about the Embarcadero.

# Hello from your Collections Committee

by Roger Castle

Work on the organization and cataloging of our collected items continues. At present the committee consists of Roger Castle, Garry Johnson, and Mary Sproul.

We have three primary goals

- Organize and identify the many photographs, documents and physical items we have collected in the last 20 years
- Provide the proper archival storage and handling containers for them
- Create databases that will facilitate research for specific names, locations, events and items.

This is, obviously a huge project. It is also a lot of fun. Each box we work through is a view into the past.

We would welcome your help. There are many projects that can be done at your own speed at home.

If you are interested, call **Roger Castle at 805-235-8477** or **Garry Johnson at 805-801-8109** for more information.

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## Commodore's Message

Welcome to the Morro Bay Yacht Club

Reprinted from their website

The Morro Bay Yacht Club (Latitude 35o 21' Longitude 120o 51') was **founded in 1956** by local boating and fishing enthusiasts. The clubhouse and dock were constructed by members, and the club remains an all-volunteer organization.

We are located along California's Central Coast, midway between Santa Barbara and Monterey. Morro bay has an all-water harbor, fuel docks, shopping, restaurants, and theaters. This makes the town and our club a popular stop for cruising yachts.

We can accommodate visiting ocean cruisers up to 75' at our dock or on our six guest moorings

(all accommodations are on a first-come basis ... no reservations). We welcome visiting yachtsmen to our activities: our clubhouse and bar are open for Social Hour every Friday night and, during the summer, our hamburger BBQ is on Wednesday nights.

We have an active ocean racing fleet which competes on Estero Bay and cruises further afield. Our one-design smaller boats compete on Morro Bay about twice a month. We sail under class, PHRF, and Portsmouth handicapping rules. The racing is not restricted to members and is open to all who have an interest in the sport and an appropriate boat.

Our Junior Yacht Club provides a social and recreational environment for those under 21 who have an interest in boating. The Juniors learn not only how to sail but also how to maintain the boats. In addition to sailing instruction and races, they also have social activities including barbecues, picnics on the sand spit, etc.

The club is the home of the California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) Sailing Team, The team competes up and down the California coast and hosts the annual Mustang Regatta in Morro Bay.

Club membership is open to anyone with an interest in sailing and a willingness to get involved in the club. Just stop by during Social Hour (6:00 PM on a Friday nights) and introduce yourself.



Ken Twist  
2020 Morro Bay Yacht Club Commodore

# MBPD Debuts with Drama

by Carol Swain

Herding mother ducks and babies across a busy street might seem like a fantasy out of Mr. Rogers' neighborhood, but that is exactly what one former MB police officer told me he remembers about his tenure on the Morro Bay police force.

The background of the MBPD, however, is more complicated than its small community image represents.

The newspaper announcement from May 13, 1965 describes the hiring of first-ever Chief of Police William Holeman and his impressive background of training and experience.

The police department began operation Thursday, July 1, 1965. As of September 1, the full contingent of the 11-member city police force was on duty.

A 'spit and-polish' picture was taken of the department showing Sgt. Richard Schacht, Sgt. Conrad Feierabend, Sgt. James Bradford, Policewoman Shepania R. Evans, Chief William E. Holeman, and patrolmen Charles Leary, George VanDyne, Nino Pipitone, Van Ransler Morris, Robert Blades, and William Brandt. The photo appeared in The Sun's September, 16, 1965, issue.

Three years into the force's existence, in 1968, our own crime-fighting Mayor Giannini was elected.

In October, Mayor Giannini sought the dismissal of police chief William Holeman and chief of detectives Richard Schacht. The required report of an alleged fight between an off-duty policeman and another man at a local tavern could not be found at the police department.

The fight and its missing report led to more concern because the officer "applied for full retirement on a disability claim" at the request of Chief Holeman.

The officer involved in the bar fight was John Marsden, age 29.

Mysteriously, the report of Marsden's off-duty scuffle had been removed from the files of the police department.

Mayor Giannini's main interest was to determine "why the report of the tavern incident....was not included in Marsden's file."

Other councilmen remained silent. Giannini doggedly persisted inrequiring the notes to be submitted. He finally received a copy of the notes filed on August 1, almost six months after the incident involving Marsden.

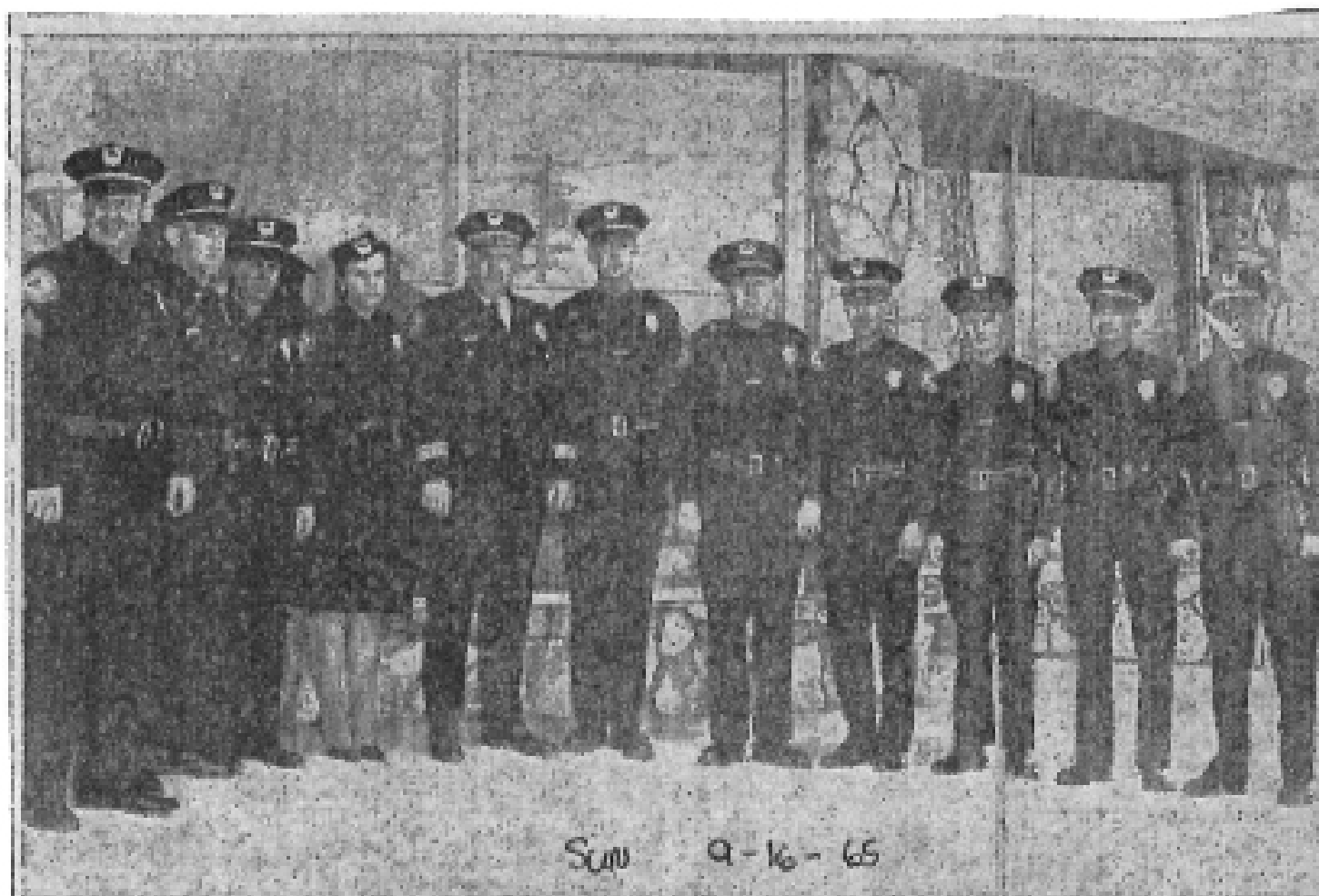
Giannini called for the release of Police Chief William Holeman and Sgt. RichardSchacht for their 'mishandling' of the matter. The mayor also requested an investigation by the state attorney general's office.

Miraculouly, John Marsden "returned to full-time duty and has been given a clean bill of health", which Mayor Giannini learned in a news report.

Giannini's attempt to get the City Council to call a hearing to investigate the case met with stony silence from the Council. Councilman Wayne Bickford said, "It is obvious your motion is dying for lack of a second."

"The burden of the case was placed on me," the mayor said. It was at Giannini's insistence that state officials investigated an alleged fight that Marsden had at a Morro Bay tavern while off duty. "The end result has been the denial of Marsden's claim, and the officer, who said he was totally disabled at age 29, is now suddenly back on full-time duty and in good health," the mayor said.

from the Sun  
August 1965



MORRO BAY CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT . . . As of Sept. 1 the full contingent of the 11-member city police force was on duty. A spit-and-polish picture taken of the department shows, above from left, Sgt. Richard Schacht, Sgt. Conrad Peterslund, Sgt. James Bradford, policeman Shepatis E. Evans, Chief William E. Holeman, and patrolmen Charles Leary, George Van Dyne, Nino Pipitone, Van Ransler Morris, Robert Blades, and William Brandt. SunFoto.

*Please join us in preserving the history of this town . Members received discounts on books, free admission to presentations, and the pride of knowing we have contributed to this towns' heritage.*

info@historicalmorrobay.org [please print]

Name(s) or Company \_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

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City, State, Zip\_\_\_\_\_

Email\* \_\_\_\_\_ Phone\_\_\_\_\_

Memberships are due on March 1st of each year

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Please provide an e-mail address if at all possible. It saves us postage costs and allows us to keep you up to date on new developments.

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