



HISTORICAL SOCIETY *of* MORRO BAY

President's Message

November, 2018

Preservation and Progress.

This is the new Historical Society motto adopted by your Board because it so perfectly summarizes the Society's dual focus on observing and saving the past, but in a way that supports the on-going changes Morro Bay needs to stay healthy.

Sometimes those two ideas are the same thing: the proposed, and we think funded, lights for downtown trees are a kind of progress. But they also highlight and make more attractive our downtown core. The blocks around Main Street downtown are the heart of our oldest part oftown, and an historic district we need to keep.

To keep it, we have to keep it economically healthy. Coming up on November 11 is our final quarterly Member Meeting of the year, and it's going to be a good one! See the announcement below, but be sure to save Veteran's Day for a date with the Historical Society: Sunday, November 11, 4 pm at Vets Hall.

We were not able to save the Finicky Fish boat building. I know that disappoints a lot of people because we have heard from them. We have not given up on finding a home for the Historical Society, though—there are more fish in the sea (sorry).

Your Board has started the process outlined in the updated City General Plan to create an historic preservation process that reflects our values. Our first step is to appoint an informal committee to start the discussion of the historic preservation ordinance.

If you are interested in being part of the preservation side of our action, let us know. More about this will be out soon. Thanks for supporting the Historical Society of Morro Bay. We only exist because of you.

Hope to see you on Veterans Day!

Glenn Silloway



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.



Training Base Research

by Joe Dunlap

The earliest I can recall hearing about a naval base in Morro Bay was probably about 1955, when I was seven years old. By that time, the base and its remnants were all but gone, with the exception of a few Quonset huts scattered around town.

Rumors among the children of my age were that it had been a submarine base (not true) and that there had been a gun emplacement on top of the rock, also not true.

Beyond that, there were stories of abandoned military vehicles, empty shell casings, unexploded ordinance and other related findings all over Los Osos and Baywood Park, mostly true.

The stories have always hung around in the back of my mind, but it was not until a few years ago that a great deal of the story began to come to light, most of it driven by the access provided by the internet.

The first information came from Oldmorrobay.com, a website started by Vic Hansen a number of years ago. Vic had access to a number of accounts of the base and some wonderful photos as well.

Then Rodger Castle and Gary Reams' book provided yet more accounts and pictures. Along the way, other sources, including the Historical Society of Morro Bay, the State of California Military History Museum, the Camp San Luis Obispo History Museum, the San Luis Obispo County Historical museum and many other sources began to fill in pieces of the puzzle.

Then, somewhere around 2012, my friend Paul Bradford discovered a treasure trove of photographs on the website ww2online.org. In the archives there were several hundred photos donated by a Colonel Maurice T. White of the US Army signal corp. Colonel White had been attached to the army's 81st Infantry Division, the first of three divisions to train in Morro Bay between 1944 and 45, and was apparently tasked with documenting in photographs the divisions training at Camp San Luis Obispo and Morro Bay. His collection is the primary source of the information and photos in this presentation.

It is, however, an incomplete work, and therefore ongoing. While every story and photo adds to our knowledge of what happened in Morro Bay in those trying days, they seem to raise as many or more new questions as they answer.

While I continue to search for more information, it is my sincere hope that this presentation will inspire other to take up the search with me. As anyone who has ever served in a branch of the military knows, the one thing that all of them are obsessive about is record keeping. Be it written, photographic, cinematic or some other form, more is out there, because in addition to generating all of that documentation, the military is quite good at hoarding it.

I often make the joking observation that the records of the Amphibious Training Base in Morro Bay ended up much like the Ark of the Covenant in the last scene of the movie, Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark, being wheeled away to a far corner of a vast warehouse.

The information is out there...we just need to find it.



On patrol, but only looking at friendlies...

**Celebrate Veterans Day: November 11,
4 pm, Vets Hall**

1943: The Navy Amphib Training Base on the New Harbor

A Quarterly Meeting of the Historical Society of Morro Bay



Joe Dunlap will present his research on the Amphibious Training Base that the Navy built on the harbor, at the north end of the Embarcadero. We will celebrate our Veterans with a choir and a demonstration of the amphibious landing craft used in training in Morro Bay

- * **Color Guard**
- * **Singing for Hope Choir with Patriotic Songs**
- * **Amphibious Training Base presentation**
- * **Display of the landing craft by Brad Larose**

**Vets and Members
Free**

**General Admission
\$5.00**

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Our mailing address is: Historical Society of Morro Bay
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Morro Bay, Ca 93443



Veterans Day – And Armistice Day Before It

Most nations set aside a special day to honor their service men and women. Some call this 'Remembrance Day' when the focus is on the fallen heroes, the ones who died for their country. This is the meaning of Memorial Day in the U.S., which we celebrate in May.

But Veterans Day is different. It emerged, in a roundabout way, from the ashes of the Great War, World War I.

On November 11, 1918, at 11 a.m. in Europe, a truce was announced that marked the end of the slaughter in the trenches. This is the meaning of the famous "at the eleventh hour, of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month" that poetically marks the time when the world could turn again to peace and the hope it would continue.

One year later, November 11, 1919, President Woodrow Wilson marked the one-year anniversary of the Armistice with an address to the nation. In June 1926, an Act of Congress declared November 11th a formal public holiday celebrating Armistice Day, a day dedicated to the goal of World Peace.

In 1945, a WWII veteran from Alabama named Raymond Weeks got the idea to expand the remembrance on Armistice Day from those who fought in World War I to all the soldiers in past wars, including those who lived. A few years later, in 1954, President Eisenhower signed a bill to change the name of the event to "Veterans Day".

We now celebrate Veterans Day to honor all of our service men and women, living and dead. To this day, the official day of celebration is on November 11th, even though Veterans Days that fall on a weekend may make the public holiday fall on the adjacent Monday (like this year) or Friday.

To our Veterans: Thank you and God bless you.



To Build a Harbor

As the harbor pilot, Alden B. Spooner I, minister and man of the sea, knew the qualities of the Morro Bay harbor in 1877 better than anyone. And he knew it was treacherous. The rapid tides and exposure to the northwesterly winds through the then-open North channel made it almost impossible for an ordinary sea captain to get his boat into a safe berth on the estuary.

A.B. knew the steamboat Mary Taylor was due in port despite the squall-driven waves of the morning of February 5, 1877. Even though he was not feeling well, he took his small boat into the winds to help guide the steamer to a safe haven. He never returned from that brave attempt to challenge the twisting winds and waves at the entrance to Morro Bay harbor.*

For the next 50 years, the City fathers—bankers, boosters and builders—tried to design and fund a way to make the harbor safer and easier for boats to enter. Yacht men imagined an upscale port; others a shipping terminal for the vast production of the Central Valley.

In the mid-1930's several efforts were made to plan a workable harbor for the estuary. Stemming from efforts of local leaders, Congress in 1936 authorized a study of the bay to determine the feasibility of building a harbor there.

The U.S. Army Engineers delivered a report in 1938 outlining three options. The option chosen by locals was to cut a channel through the sandspit 3,000 feet south of Morro Rock to create a "turning pond" for sea-going boats. The Engineers warned the local boosters that there was little interest in funding such a project.

With war looming, and preparations for it moving full speed ahead in the late 1930's, the Navy began to get interested in developing Pacific Ocean assets to counter a potential Japanese threat.

The first breakthrough came in August 1941 when the Navy authorized construction of a Section Base on the estuary. This base would



have served small patrol craft that provided reconnaissance of the coast. By mid-1942, Army Engineers had a plan for a base on the north end of the Bay, and began building the bulkheads and piers, and dredging fill for what would be new flat land for the base.

But it all came to a halt in early 1943. The patrol boats were adequately served out of Port San Luis, and the Navy cancelled further work.

Then, with the war in the Pacific beginning to look like an island-hopping slog of one invasion after another, the Navy decided to build an Amphibious Training Base at Morro Bay. After decades of effort, the harbor on the estuary became at least moderately safe, and usable.

The ATB opened for business in 1944. And the facilities the Navy created became the Embarcadero as we know it, the basis for much of the city's economic activity in the years after the war was possible. War is hell—but it brought Morro Bay the economic engine that could.

** From Morro Bay's Yesterdays by Dorothy Gates and Jane Bailey.*



What a difference 40 years makes...

by Jack Smith

A few days ago I stopped at Taco Bell in Morro Bay, while waiting for my order, my mind began to wander.

I remembered walking or riding my bike home from high school in 1972 and stopping at this junk/antique place, the place had everything from old appliances to bicycles to plumbing supplies to fruit crate labels. The fruit crate labels were so simple and beautiful, I was drawn to them and began collecting them. I think I paid a quarter for each one.

A few years later when I began skateboarding I fell in love with Cadillac Wheels ads and posters that Jim Evans created in the same style. I would completely lose track of time when I was at Con's, sometimes an hour or two would pass, before I would realize that I was going to be late for dinner. Somehow, my parents were never worried about where I was, as long as I was home before my mom put the food on table, all was good.

Oh, to have those carefree, timeless days once again...those days that we all thought would last forever.

The Taco Bell counter kid called my number, waking me from my daydream.

As I walked out, I thought to myself how forty years ago I had spent hour after hour in this very same spot...no worries, no real responsibilities, no thoughts about what comes next, just happy in my search through dusty old bins.



You see, the Taco Bell in Morro Bay stands in the exact same spot as the old Con's Trading Post.

Today I couldn't get out of there fast enough, forty years ago I never wanted to leave.





Good Morning from Mary,

I am going through old photographs, and came across these.

My parents lived in Morro Bay and my father worked on the Power Plant, installing the machinery. He was a millwright.

The pictures do not show as much of the surrounding area as I would like, so you can not see how it really was. All dirt roads, several little shacks that sold smoked fish, etc., a far different place than you see today. However they do show the men working on the project. It was a big one at that time, for the town and all. It was a small oceanside town. A wonderful place to visit for me and my husband. Good memories now for me.



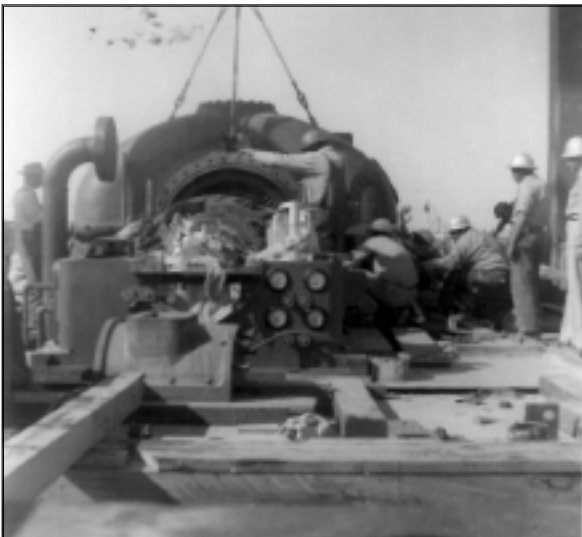
I have heard the plant and the stacks have become an issue, but I thought someone there might like to see these. As you can see the pictures are dated April 1955.

Most of you employed and living in Morro Bay were not even born yet.

You may just dispose of them. I am 90 years of age now, and the pictures mean nothing to anyone I know. I just wanted to share them with someone that might be interested in seeing them. I hope you have a good day.

Thank you,

Mary Middagh



Thank you Mary for sharing....

Steps to my Past

by Jack Smith

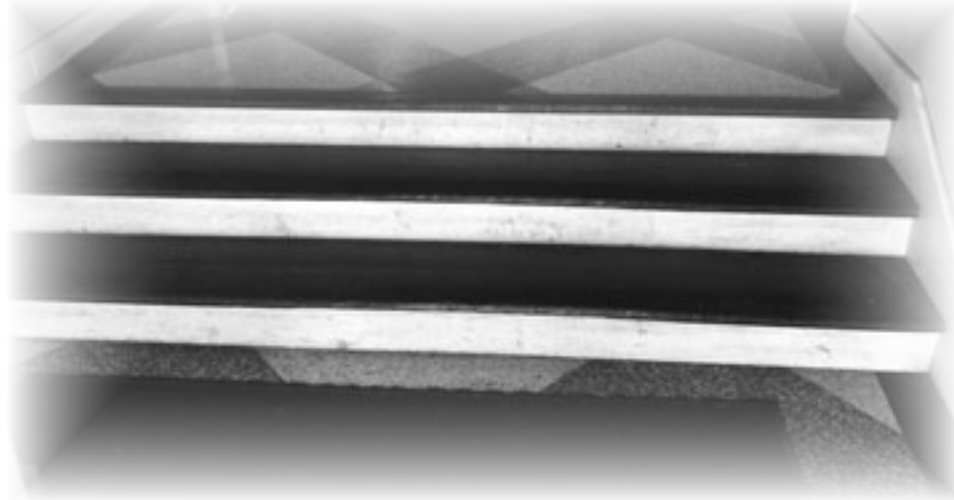
When you live in a small town there are touchstones to your youth all around you. It could be an old friend you bump into, driving past an old home or sometimes it's something as simple as glancing through an open door.

Last Saturday I decided to take a quick walk through the Morro Bay Car Show, as I made my way up Harbor Street a cool old Edsel caught my eye. The first thing that grabbed my attention was the horseshoe shaped grill, as I moved along the driver's side, I stuck my head into the open window marveling at the "space age" instrumentation. Drawing in a deep breath, I found myself imagining if this is what the 1950s had smelled like. As I reached the rear of the car I noticed that it had a Continental Kit, man that bumper was huge, it had to be, to accommodate the chrome encased spare tire.

Usually you will find the owners of these "land yachts" sitting in lawn chairs behind their vehicles, the owners of the Edsel were nowhere to be seen. It was then I noticed the open door, and the short flight of steps leading into the rear exit of what use to be a Chinese restaurant called Hung Heng Low. It was owned by the Lee family and was also where I got my first job, as a dishwasher in the summer of 1972.

I remembered sitting on those steps every other day, peeling a fifty pound bag of onions, it was probably only a twenty five pound bag, but fifty sounds better. When I first started I had to pay close attention or I would end up cutting myself. As I became more experienced, I would often entertain myself by wlooking out the open door at Morro Rock, daydreaming as I peeled onion after onion. Most of the time I was probably thinking about my latest crush, an upcoming basketball game, or maybe which climb my friend Larry and I were going to attempt next. Sometimes I actually thought about my future, would I leave Morro Bay and go to college, would I marry and have kids?

Unlike many from my class I was not in a hurry to leave town. I had arrived in Morro Bay in March of 1972 when my dad retired from the Air Force and moved our family to Morro Bay to begin his new career as Medical Technical Assistant at the California Men's Colony, a fancy name for the prison located near San Luis Obispo.



After moving six times and attending seventeen different schools before my sophomore year of high school, staying put in Morro Bay for awhile sounded very appealing to me. So that summer as I sat on those steps, peeling

continued on next page

This photo was taken last Saturday, the steps and the tile look exactly the same.

The Sea

by Shelagh Considine

The summer is over, the sails are all down.
In mornings the sea fog covers the ground.
And the chill of the earth as in leaves it abounds,
brings winter agrowing
my silent heart pounds.

At dawn when the day is just a grey night
a fishing boat sails from sight -
A harbor beacon all the light
to guide them out to the sea

And through the mist and the chilly air
a foghorn wails
a pitiful prayer for all of those who venture there.

The sea is often hardly fair

'Steps to my Past' continued...

onion after onion, my fifteen year old mind
would wander and wonder.
Years later my mom would tell me of how
her and my dad had come to Morro Bay in
the summer of 1956, for a weekend getaway
before my dad left for a new duty post in Ko-
rea, one last weekend together before a year
apart. She told of me of, how over dinner she
had said to my dad, "wouldn't it be wonder-
ful if we could live in Morro Bay someday",
and him replying, "you never know".
The restaurant where they dined that eve-
ning was the very same one where I would
sit peeling onions on the back steps fifteen
years later...perhaps when they left the
restaurant that evening, and made their way
back to their motel, they noticed an open
door and the steps, where their unborn son
would someday sit wondering about his on
future.



The Sad End of the Finicky Fish

The Finicky Fish boat building (most recently named Dockside 3) came down on October 23rd, leaving a gap in our collective memory. The tear down happened remarkably quickly once the preliminary utility and prep work was done.

As you know, the Historical Society has been seeking a place to call home for a long time, and we were really excited that the Finicky Fish might be the answer. It was not to be.

Right now we have a cubby hole at the Visitor Center so small two people cannot occupy it at the same time. Our collection is stored in places all over town, thanks to the generosity of friends and the City.

We haven't given up. Getting a more stable space for an office and at least parts of our collection is a high priority. Ideally, we would like to locate in the downtown area, or on the Embarcadero. If you think you know of a place that might fit, please let us know.



A picture of a downtown a lot different than the one we have today.

And a harbor filled with fishing boats!



And now we bring you some interesting pictures of our past

Pulished by the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce.
We don't know the year.

(1) "Gibraltar of the Pacific" and gigantic guardian of the entrance to Morro Bay harbor is picturesque Morro Rock, rising 276 feet right out of the ocean.

First seaside town north of San Luis Obispo on the Roosevelt Highway is picturesque Morro Bay, famed for huge Morro Rock, "the Gibraltar of the Pacific," the sporty Cabrillo country club public fee golf course, a land-locked harbor five miles in length, and an excellent facilities for swimming, boating, fishing, hunting, riding, and a wide variety of other recreations.

A year-round climate, "Warm in the Winter, Cool in the Summer," has helped make Morro Bay an ideal resort for vacationists and week-enders seeking sports and play or merely rest and relaxation in its wooded parks or on its broad white beaches.

Millions of dollars have been and are being spent on harbor improvement, channel dredging, and navigational aids, so

FOR A
GOOD TIME
OR A
LIFETIME.

Morro Bay

"THE SUNSET TOWN"

AND FAMOUS
MORRO ROCK

(2) Sinking a putt at No. 9 on the Cabrillo golf course in Morro Bay State Park. Clubhouse, in background, provides locker rooms, caddy shop, dining room, and other facilities.

(3) Both year-round residents and visitors frolic in Morro Bay's famous surf winter and summer.

(4) Equestrians enjoy the great panoramic view from Black Mt. Lookout in Morro Bay State Park.

(5) A Morro Bay diver prepares to take a breath. Tasty vibrations in Morro Bay visitors from his day's work.

(6) It takes no time to get your limit of fun any place along the Morro Bay.

the advantage of visitors who come to enjoy the boating, sailing, and fishing.

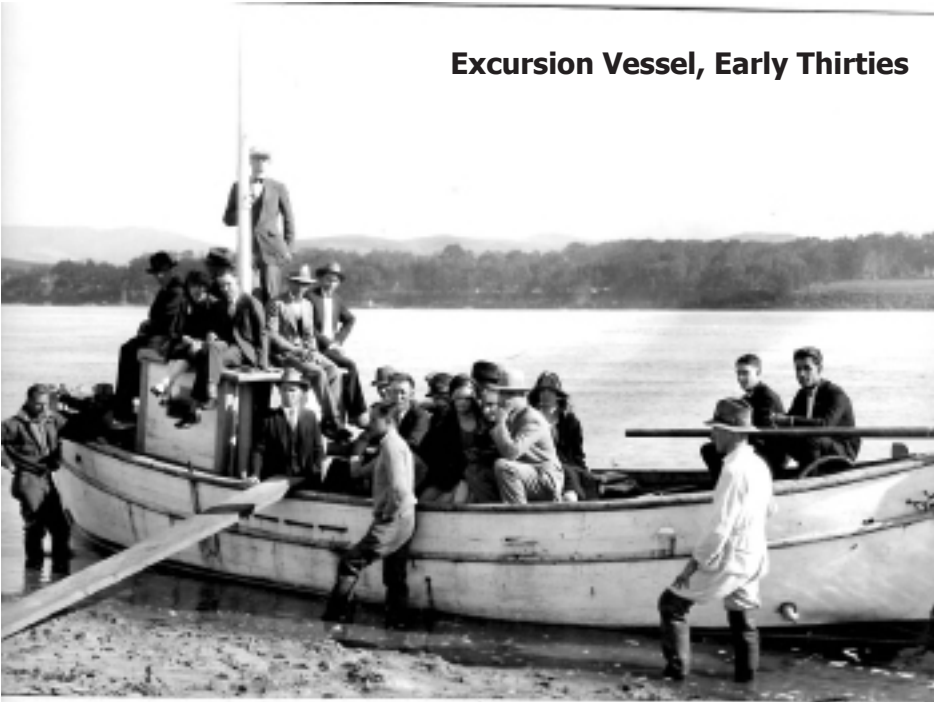
On the south side of town is Morro Bay State Park, which offers golf, tennis, camping and picnicking, bridge paths, and, from Black Mountain Lookout, a panoramic view of ocean, bay, and mountains that cannot be equaled anywhere else on the coast. Separating the harbor from the ocean is the picturesque "peninsula" — five miles of green vegetation and clean white sand dunes with one of the finest beaches in the world.

In the town itself are modern stores, cocktail lounges, recreation centers and club rooms, a theater, and numerous restaurants specializing in tasty sea food dinners.

Annually more and more vacationists are finding Morro Bay an ideal place to establish year-round residence. Sportsmen, fishermen, writers, artists, and small-business proprietors especially. Many times have come to sojourn — and stayed to make their homes here.

Morro Bay and its every recreational facilities are conveniently located just halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles on the Roosevelt Highway, or can be reached easily and quickly from US 101 by turning east at Atascadero for a scenic 17-mile drive through the mountains. Regular Greyhound bus service and convenient connections with Southern Pacific in nearby San Luis Obispo also are maintained.

Excursion Vessel, Early Thirties



The owners and operators of this boat brought in down from San Francisco - all three of them land-lubbers and greenhorns.

Thank Tommy Thomas, Basil Jackson and Sidney Nichols for their enterprising spirit!



Here Neil Moses and Olive Cotter emote before the footlights and the piano.

During the Depression Morro's residents were active in Graphic, Fine and the Performing Arts. The Community Players, The Merrymakers all presented plays in the building currently at 365 Morro Bay Blvd. This was the Golden Hour Theater, presenting films occasionally. Electric Light sockets outlining the facades of the building attest to its life as a theater.



A fireplace made from the 'Rock'

The Historical Society has some wonderful visions of our past. We hope to be able to show them all to you.

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

info@ historicalmorrobay.org [please print]

Name(s) or Company _____

Date_____

Address_____

City, State, Zip_____

Email*_____ Phone_____

Memberships are due on March 1st of each year

Individual Membership (\$20.00)

- ☐ Household Membership (\$35.00)
- ☐ Business Membership (\$30.00)
- ☐ Student Membership (\$15.00)
- ☐ Information Change/Correction Only

- ☐ New
- ☐ Renewal

☐ Tax deductible donation also enclosed \$_____



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