



President's Message

Hello to all:

Your Historical Society is still working away on some interesting and important projects. This newsletter will get you up to speed on the Franklin Riley Park, the proposed historic preservation ordinance, and news about the collection.

As you know, HSMB is on a fiscal year that begins July 1, so we are going into planning and budgeting for our on-going revenues and expenses. We are an all-volunteer force so not a high maintenance, high-cost outfit, but we still some expenses (see the Treasurer's report). We need your help:

If we have your address, you will soon receive a request to renew or upgrade your membership. And possibly to contribute to the restoration of Franklin Riley Park. If we don't have a mailing address, you can renew online at www.historicalmorrobay.org. We very much hope to have your continued (or new) membership!

A bit of good news is that our friend Dick Miller donated a very high-quality photo enlarger to us to help improve and organize our collection. Now we need somebody who knows how to use it! Are you a photographer who likes the whole photographic process? Or know someone who would fit the bill?

As always, we enjoy hearing from you. Please send us your ideas for the collections, the member meetings, and our projects.

Thank you for your support.

Glenn Silloway, President, HSMB

You Have Interests and Skills that Would Help

Your Historical Society of Morro Bay board needs you. We have meetings via zoom once a month (although we may be shifting to a hybrid technology!) and work on programs, projects and preservation related to Morro Bay's past. It's a great group of people, and all who are interested are welcome.

If you are a photographer, we can use your skills to capture donors' images digitally, or help to identify and analyze collections photos. Would you enjoy researching and writing historic articles? We have a place for you! Want to learn more about your community with a great group of people? Enjoy fundraising and seeing your vision come to life in park spaces and the preservation of local historic buildings? Are you interested in helping produce fun and interesting quarterly programs for membership and the public in general?

Join us and make a difference! Talk to any one of the current board members, or drop us a line at info@historicalmorrobay.org.

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Collections Committee Report

By Roger Castle

Did you know that over the last 30 years your Society has collected more than 5,000 photographs, at least as many documents, and an assortment of physical historical artifacts? In the early years of HSMB these items were stored in normal cardboard boxes and kept in various Board Director's homes.

Your collections committee has been working for the last several years to organize and properly protect this treasure. The goal is to make the information available to researchers. This is obviously a large job and has involved several volunteers. I would like to introduce a few of them.

Mary Sproul has been my good right hand for the last couple of years. She had taken on the physical organization of our little "cubby" on Harbor Street. In addition to that Mary, and her husband Jeff, have been delivering and picking up projects and supplies to myself and other volunteers working at home.



1 Dean and Bertha Tyler were a fixture in Morro of the 30s and 40s. They built and opened the "Chat n' Chew" restaurant now Morro Bay Butcher and Deli. They sold that and opened a rehabilitation aquarium on the Embarcadero.

Nancy Schreiber comes to us as a former docent at the Natural History Museum. She is about halfway through our collection of the raw video of many of our meetings and events. These videos contain interviews and presentations by many longtime residents, some of whom are no longer with us. This project is a first step toward making these videos into presentable programs.

Roger Ludin has completed organizing and indexing our collection of more than 4000 Harbor Festival photographs and slides. The collection covers the years from 1989 to 2004. Roger was the perfect volunteer for this task as the official photographer of Harbor Festival for many years.

Work continues on sorting through many boxes of donated and collected paper documents and photographs. Our latest find included class and staff photos from both Morro Elementary schools. While incomplete they represent the years from 1945 to the early 1980s. They are a nice complement to our High School yearbooks.

We are always eager to welcome new volunteers. Our most pressing need is someone to assist Mary in the management of our storage space. An ideal person would be able to lift and move large boxes and plastic bins and have computer skills. Our space now has a laptop and a printer. We expect to add a scanner soon. As we create databases for our collections we will put them on this laptop for use by researchers.

There are many other tasks, both large and small, that we would like to do if you have a few hours a week please contact me directly. I can send you a description of available projects and will be happy to talk to you.

Thanks,
Roger Castle
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2 The Anderson Building was built in 1927 by George and Lillie (Brown) Anderson. They added the 2nd story in 1928. It housed the post office (Lillie was postmaster, a drygoods store, and an early telephone exchange. Note the large cable on the upper right side.

An Artists' Colony

By Glenn Silloway



Some of you may remember when Morro Bay was a well-known and active artists' colony. In the 1930s and 1940s a number of successful artists like Arthur Harold Knott, Charles "Robbie" Robertson, and Aaron Kilpatrick. The homes of Knott and Kilpatrick are still on view where they were when the artists lived in them.

This photo is of a painting by Arthur Knott. It is a view of Black Hill in the 1930s from the door to the artist's studio. Thanks to Eric Meyer for bringing this to our attention.

We are looking for more information about these and other artists who lived and worked in Morro Bay and other Estero Bay communities. Do you know of any records, art, images, photos that capture part of Morro Bay by time and place?

This would be a great topic for a member meeting, don't you think?

City to Adopt a Historic Preservation Ordinance

By Glenn Silloway

Some of our members may remember that HSMB created a draft Historic Preservation Ordinance during a months-long process during 2019 with a fine and dedicated committee. Joan Solu and Glenn Silloway of our Board led the effort. We ran into a long delay in 2020 due to the pandemic but submitted the draft ordinance to the City of Morro Bay in November 2020.

The draft ordinance is based on the principle of voluntary participation by property owners, with an emphasis on creating incentives to make them more likely to join. The details of these mechanisms are part of what completion of the draft requires.

Thanks to Council Member Cyndee Edwards' efforts, the City Council has included the completion of the ordinance in its work plan for the next biennium. Doing this is in line with the recently adopted General Plan update that prescribes a historic preservation program for the City.

The next step is for the City to define a process for doing this work. It will likely include some role for the Planning Commission under Chair Bill Roschen. The PC has recently been doing brief educational sessions about the history of the City during its regular meetings, in part to help people understand why we need to preserve important aspects of our history, including historically important properties.

We'll keep you informed.

A "Deep Dive into Morro Bay History"

By Glenn Silloway

Another Hidden History interpretive panel is about ready to be installed on the Embarcadero. This educational panel will help the Embarcadero capital project run by Cherise Hansson and Travis Leage meet Coastal Commission requirements, and they are paying for the panel.

The panel summarizes an amazing part of Morro Bay history. Abalone was a big part of the commercial fishing industry here for many years from the late 1920s until the 1980s. For most of that time, people fishing for abalone used diving gear to reach the submerged rocks where the giant sea snails attached.

Explore the Hidden History of Morro Bay

The Hidden History Project tells stories of Morro Bay's past, often revealing truths that are right in front of our eyes if we only knew what to look for.

Discover additional interpretive panels with descriptive Hidden History stories of Morro Bay at various locations throughout the city.

Visit www.historicalmorrobay.org (the HSMB website) for more information about A Deep Dive into Morro Bay History. Special thanks to Steve Rebeck for his help—HSMB is solely responsible for how it was used.

A Deep Dive into Morro Bay's History

Morro Bay Abalone Divers
Morro Bay abalone divers led in the development of commercial diving gear that took them far beyond abalone to deep water oil fields. Their inventions were creative solutions to problems they faced—they learned by doing with themselves as the guinea pigs.

Free Diving
Before 1900 Japanese immigrants did free dives in very light gear to take abalone below the low tide line south of Monterey.

Heavy Gear From Japan
Genmeike Kodama, working with agents in Japan, imported heavy Japanese gear to allow divers to go deeper and stay down longer with hand air pumps.

Adoption of the Heavy Gear
In 1929 Morro Bay resident and abalone industry promoter, Bill Pence used heavy Japanese gear to fish abalone. At first, he just waded into the surf, but soon moved to using a boat and powered air compressor with a crew of pilot, diver and tender.

Diving Dangers Promoted Innovation
Abalone divers invented ways to reduce danger and increase productivity. They added air regulators; improved visibility; attached "ballot" bottles of compressed air to make the suit buoyant in an emergency; installed two-way communications.

Helium-Oxygen Gas
The US Navy pioneered Heliox to replace ordinary air to reduce the threat of nitrogen narcosis. This allowed Dan Winton to dive to 400 feet in modified heavy gear. Mixed gases enabled divers to work on oil rigs and deep water. For Morro Bay, abalone diver Len Handelman set up Cal Dive to do this work.

The Rat Hat
Former abalone divers Bob Ratcliffe, Bev Morgan and Jim Kirby created a regulator helmet design that are the foundation of current dive gear maker's like Kirby Morgan.

Atmospheric Dive Suits
Cal Dive's Cal Dive alum Phil Nyström created the Ecuotest that can reach 1,000 feet.

Oceanering International
In 1971 Cal Dive merged with other companies to form Oceanering International to provide workbuds deep in water services. Len Handelman was its first President. (NYSE: OII)

Morro Bay's abalone divers left a permanent mark on commercial diving. What they started continues to evolve. They will not be forgotten.

The panel describes the evolution of diving gear. The surprise in this history is that Morro Bay abalone divers were instrumental to making innovations that helped divers go deeper and stay down longer. Eventually, divers migrated from abalone to offshore oil fields all over the world—they went from diving to 100 feet to diving hundreds of feet. The panel will be at 833 Embarcadero in a month or two.

Treasurer's Report

By Marlys McPherson



Franklin Riley Park Funding

I am pleased to report that the Historical Society of Morro Bay has already raised almost \$42,000 toward the costs of renovating Franklin Riley Park. \$20,000 of this comes from a successful grant application made by the City of Morro Bay to the State Habitat Conservation Fund. In order to use these funds, the Historical Society has to supply a matching amount. But, thanks to generous contributions from members, the Solu Family Foundation and the City itself (see below), HSMB has the money to make the match.

The City estimates the total project will cost about \$100,000, so we still have fund raising to do. This amount is based on installing a new wheelchair accessible path, a display of the 9 sisters, plantings, new benches and signage. HSMB has requested donations from other sources, and we are cautiously optimistic. We'll let you know.

The City of Morro Bay, through its Community Grants Program, awarded HSMB \$6,000 to develop and install two Hidden History panels in Franklin Riley Park. One panel would explain how Mr. Riley, considered the European founder of Morro Bay, developed the plat map and promoted the town that became our City. The second panel would be two-sided. One would provide the geological explanation of the Nine Sisters (the phenomenon that begins with Islay Hill in San Luis and ends with Morro Rock). The second side would relate the story of the Nine Sisters as told in an old Salinan legend.

We would greatly appreciate it if you can support this project.

Annual Membership Drive

If we have your address, we will soon be mailing a request for your membership renewal, or to join for the first time. We operate on a fiscal year basis (July 1 to June 30). The Society has ongoing, recurring expenses such as insurance, office rental, equipment, P.O. box rental, banking fees, meeting expenses, supplies and specialized collections storage systems. And the Franklin Riley Park project, which will be a permanent part of our history as well as an entertaining educational installation, is short of the funds we need to bring it to life.

We hope you will renew or join us to help us tell the story of Morro Bay's history.

If you prefer to join or make a donation online, go to our website www.historicalmorrobay.org where you can use PayPal or a credit card.

If you prefer to mail in a contribution, use this little form:

Name(s): _____
Street: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Email: _____

_____ Individuals: \$30
_____ Households: \$40
_____ Students: \$15
_____ Businesses: \$50

_____ Additional donation

The Historical Society of Morro Bay is an all-volunteer 501 c 3 non-profit organization. Your contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Federal EIN 77-0574960.