



Source: The Otto Estate via Estero Bay News. American Gothic in the Back Bay, c 1920s

## American Gothic in Baywood Park/Los Osos

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Have you ever seen the famous Grant Wood painting called '[American Gothic](#)'? The painting celebrates a stern farm couple holding a pitchfork between them (possibly homesteaders somewhere on the Great Plains) determined to succeed in their endless work, fulfilling their version of the American dream.

Is that what the couple in the photo from the 1920s Baywood Park/Los Osos are doing? We found this photo in a collection that features Richard Otto, a 1920s developer of Baywood, and that's a good clue about it.

The man seems made of sterner stuff than the woman who's looking askance at the camera, but they are engaged somehow in a work project along the Morro Bay estuary, with Black Hill to the left and Cabrillo Peak behind them. They are taking a break for the photo.

What they are doing is sort of mysterious but it might have something to do with managing the water in the tidal flows of the estuary. The foreground is a heavy stream of water being pumped from the left. At the couple's feet are three pumpkin-shaped objects that might be plant-based or maybe are manufactured floats used to mark something in the water. The photo is not clear enough to be sure, but there are u-shaped handles on the top of two of the objects where a rope could easily be attached.

We do know that Otto used equipment like this in efforts to create channels in the estuary so small boats could be used when the tide was out. For Otto the point was to enhance the appeal of the Baywood Park real estate for potential buyers. Did he use the pumped silt from the estuary to fill in elsewhere?

What do you think is going on?