



Source: Commons Use. Carp Lake Lithograph, c early 1900s

Greening Lake—Or Is It Carp Lake?

Published April 10th, 2025

A little over a hundred years ago, fresh-water lakes were fairly common behind the dunes adjacent to the ocean along the west coast. Creeks and runoff would collect behind the dune-barrier forming lakes that would be home to fresh-water fish and other wildlife. One of the surviving examples is Oso Flaco Lake.

At the turn of the 19th century there was such a lake in Morro Bay, a part of our Hidden History. It was located about where the current high school and parts of the Cloisters subdivision are. If you could see an aerial view of the school, you would notice a striking stand of trees between it and the beach located where there was once water.

Carp Lake is the story of the odd commercial ambition of John Greening, a man obsessed with his own history and beliefs. The lake in the lithograph is where Greening decided to raise carp for sale along the west coast as part of a national effort to enrich the American diet with affordable fresh fish. It illustrates how every

little place is a dot on a larger map, connected to the larger society in part through market dynamics and the efforts they attract.

It's also a tale of caution—the market can be unforgiving. As a German emigrant, Greening had eaten carp as part of his diet and saw it as a delicious and easy-to-farm part of the solution—he was a very early aqua-farmer on the Central Coast. In his vision, he thought his carp would be happily accepted with open arms by Americans.

Greening's ultimate failure was the consequence of an amazing story of determination (get several thousand German carp to grow in your lake, if you can) and his misunderstanding of the American diet. Before Carp Lake disappeared because flooding changed the course of Morro Creek, it had lost its role in the American food chain.