



Source: Juanita Tolle for the Historical Society of Morro Bay. Developers Survey the Future

Ready and Waiting: Baywood and Morro Bay on the Verge of Growth

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In this photo from about 1925 you see Baywood Park and Morro Bay in outline with open spaces ready for development. Baywood looks a little more like a “planned development” (though the lack of some of the usual features of development, like asphalt, are absent) while Morro Bay still retains its one-thing-after-another look. Both of these snapshots of development-in-process cover the more natural landscape like what you see around Black Hill on the right. The whole area was occupied by indigenous tribes for thousands of years before this.

The photo shows roads and lots in the foreground ready for a new development known as El Moro in 1889. The plans were later abandoned. Walter Redfield and Richard Otto purchased large chunks of this land and Otto began development in earnest in 1924, selling lots from an office in Los Angeles.

The town at the top in the photo, the European version of Morro Bay is older, first settled in the 1870’s mainly on the homesteaded parcels Franklin Riley claimed and patented in 1872. Riley was a jack of all trades, as he needed to be, but one mark he left behind was the spread of blue gum eucalyptus trees along the roads he laid out. Morro Bay is still a “Tree City” though there’s probably no tree left that Riley planted.

Morro Bay, encased by the sand spit and shoreline, and the beaches north of the Rock, was a popular area for tourists from the Central Valley, just like today. Some of them came to shoot ducks and brant geese, and still do, but there are many fewer birds now. The 2300-acre bay was designated as the Morro Bay National Estuary in 1995.

The 581-foot-tall Morro Rock is an island in this photo. The permanent connection to the mainland was started by the WPA in the 1933-1936 period and finished by the US Navy during wartime construction on the harbor in about 1943.

The future posts in this series from the Historical Society of Morro Bay will zoom in on small stories in this story of change, some before but most after the facts we see in this photo. We will learn things about the events that shape the places up to this point and fill in blanks as people transform spaces into homes, roads, outdoor places and all the things that make a modern town.

Image courtesy of the Historical Society of Morro Bay/Juanita Tolle