



Source: Photo thanks to the Atascadero Historical Society which has an excellent collection of E.G. Lewis and Cloisters information.

## **When the Cloisters Was New**

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The Cloisters has been part of Morro Bay's life and history since 1919. The place it has occupied is near the dunes next to Atascadero Beach north of the termination of Atascadero Road which extends Highway 41 west to the Embarcadero.

The "Atascadero" part of this story is important. In the mid 1910s, E. G. Lewis, the founder of the Atascadero Colony turned his active imagination to Morro Bay as a place where the investors in his new planned community could reach the ocean for cool weather and seaside living. Records vary but Lewis purchased up to 2,000 acres on the beach north of Atascadero Road. In order to link his new community in the Salinas Valley to the coast he built a road over the Santa Lucia mountains from Atascadero to Morro Bay, mostly following Morro Creek from the summit of the road. This little road saved 14 miles of the previous journey from Atascadero to Morro Bay via San Luis Obispo and it is still the basic route of today's Highway 41.

The centerpiece of Lewis' oceanside development was the Cloisters Hotel, opened for business in May 1919. He planned to sell lots on the dunes to buyers and investors who were looking for a place on the "best beach between Los Angeles and San Francisco." Lewis himself bought one of the lots, though we do not know if he spent much time there.

The Cloisters Hotel was built between 1915 and 1919 with an initial planned capacity of 20 cabins plus a nine-hole golf course installed by the Spaulding Sporting Goods Company. The Hotel featured prominently in the SLO *Daily Telegram* and later the *Telegram-Tribune* in the 1920s for its social events and as a gathering place for business organizations or promoters. It was used for these purposes into the 1930s.

The resort was financially troubled as shown in reports in the *Daily Telegram* of new management in 1924 and new ownership/management in 1927. During this time Lewis fell into financial turmoil and lost control of the property. Change continued and yet other new owners renamed the hotel as the Morro Beach Inn in 1934.

During World War II the hotel was used as housing for military officers serving in or near Morro Bay. After the war it was unoccupied and slowly destroyed by looters seeking windows, doors, souvenirs and wood scrap. By 1949 the building was gone, leaving just a scar still visible in the dunes near the west end of San Jacinto.

The Cloisters name lives on in the turn-of-the-millennium housing development just west of Highway 1 and south of the Beach Tract in Morro Bay. It took about 50 years to find the political will and the water runoff management system for the low-lying parcel, but the current Cloisters homes look set to exist for a long time to come.