HISTORICAL SOCIETY of MORRO BAY

Fall | 2026

President's Report

Dear Members and Friends:

We are grateful as always to those of you who remained or became supporters of the Historical Society through your generous contributions during our Fall appeal. Your help is what fuels our passion for history in Morro Bay.

I hope you've had a chance to talk a walk in the Franklin Riley Park, especially during one of those perfect days we get in fall. There is no better place to sit on a comfy park bench and watch people and boat traffic with the bay and Rock in the view. The park has been adopted by the Morro Cove Homeowners Association. They keep the park clean (you wouldn't believe how many doggie bags they supply every month!) and the trees in the view well-trimmed.

We want to thank the Solu Family Foundation for kicking off our fundraising on this project long ago. And to all the others who have contributed over the years—we are finally there except for a couple finishing touches. And then on to making improvements!

You'll have three chances to be part of Historical Society events in the near future. On Sunday October 25 from 11 to 3 we'll be at the Family Fun Day put on by the Morro Bay Maritime Museum next to their facility. Free and fun for the young at heart. November 7 from 1 to 4 we'll have a display at the Vets Hall to commemorate the dedication of a Navy Section Base in Morro Bay 85 years ago. Also free and fun! Finally, you can help support the Historical Society and other worthy non-profits by attending a showing of the movie '1941'—it's a comedy with a solid core of history. This one is $15 or $25 depending on the ticket you buy.

In this issue we talk about artists, the Navy Section Base in 1941, the Morro Bay Bird Festival, and airplanes landing in Morro Bay. There's lots of activities coming up both before and after the holidays. No excuses for not finding good things to do!

Glenn Silloway
President, HSMB

In This Issue:

President's Report

The World Pivots to War: 1941

The Bird Festival Turns 30

When Art Defined Morro Bay

For Your Next Flight Out of Sky Lawn Airport…

Members Make HSMB Thrive

The World Pivots to War: 1941

By Glenn Silloway



For our next program, we will be sharing the stage with the Military Officers of America Association and others to commemorate the 85th anniversary of the dedication of the Morro Bay Navy Section Base on November 16, 1941.

The Section Base was the cornerstone of the Navy's expansive presence in Morro Bay although SLO County had been experiencing rapid growth in training and defense installations for several years before that. In many ways these military installations defined the future of the county long-term and this was especially true for Morro Bay. Just try to imagine the City without the Embarcadero.

You can learn more about 1941 in our Estero Bay News article about it. Just go to https://historicalmorrobay.org/estero-bay-news-copy/ to see the article (and a list of the many articles we've published there over the last almost two years). These short articles and a good photo are a great way to learn about Morro Bay history. If YOU have a good story or article for this publication, let us know (admin@historicalmorrobay.org)

The event is going to be in Vets Hall beginning at 1 pm on November 7. It will feature fun, food and historical displays by the Historical Society and other groups. Come to join the USO style sock hop or just absorb some history in a party atmosphere.

For follow up, attend a benefit showing of the John Belushi movie '1941' at the Bay Theater on Monday, November 16. VIP wine and cheese at $25 per person begins at 4:30 pm and the regular admission for $15 at 5:30. Proceeds will be divided among several worthy organizations, including the Historical Society. The movie is hilarious in places and follows real events in an 'assault' on LA in 1941.

The Bird Festival Turns 30

By Marlys McPherson

MORRO BAY BIRD FESTIVAL

In 2027 we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Morro Bay Bird Festival. It began in 1996 as a discussion initiated by the Chamber of Commerce to bring more tourists to Morro Bay during the dead of winter and has thrived to become one of the most successful and premier events of its kind in the country.

The idea for a bird festival was put forth by docents at the Natural History Museum. Bird festivals were uncommon then so there weren't many competitors. Plus Morro Bay lies along the Pacific Flyway, the migratory path followed by many species of birds during our winter. Our mild winters and large diversity of habitats meant birders could often see more than 200 different species.

The first festival was held in 1997 with the following organizations as co-sponsors: Morro Coast Audubon Society (MCAS), Central Coast Natural History Organization (now called the Central Coast State Parks Association), California State Parks, Friends of the Estuary, Small Wilderness Area Preservation (Los Osos/Morro Bay Chapter), and the Morro Bay Chamber of Commerce.

The festival has always been an eco-tourism event promoting the awareness of environmental and conservation issues surrounding Morro Bay's natural resources while providing an economic benefit to the community. From the beginning the event has been organized and run by volunteers.

Over the past 30 years the festival has grown exponentially. It Is always held on Martin Luther King weekend in January. It has expanded from a weekend event to five days (Thursday through Monday). The festival now offers over 260 events, including field and boat trips, educational lectures, Family Day, and renown birding experts as keynote speakers and trip leaders. It also offers a vendor fair and an opening reception. Over 900 participants come from all over the world, the majority from outside San Luis Obispo County.

There is so much competition for the events that many trips fill within a minute of registration opening, which this year is November 7, 2026, at 8:00 a.m. Dedicated repeat attendees prepare their registration form well ahead of time, ready to push the send button when registration opens (you can actually practice registering in advance, and we recommend it: registration webpage). The vendor fair, which includes optical equipment, authors, artists, and environmental groups, and live creatures from Pacific Wildlife Care is held at the Morro Bay Community Center and is open to the public.

When Art Defined Morro Bay

By Glenn Silloway



Before it had a big fishing fleet, before it was mostly a tourist town, before the Embarcadero and the power plant, Morro Bay had a thriving art colony. When the town was only about 400 people, in the period between the World Wars, there were 40 to 50 artists who either lived here or visited when the weather was fine. At a time when Carmel was the reigning artist colony on the west coast, the "dean" of the Morro Bay group, Robbie Robinson, said "Morro Bay's coast lines are admittedly more interesting and intriguing than Carmels."

The Historical Society produced a program about the artist colony last July 19th at Calvary Lutheran Church. Thanks to members like Marty Eckstrom, Jeff Odell, Pat Mangione, Eric Meyer, Chuck Stoll, and many others who contributed. Some, like Marty, displayed original art made by members of the colony while others, like Chuck, helped present the program (a couple of our Board members, Marlys McPherson and Joe Ingraffia, were also presenters).

We learned that Morro Bay in those years was one of the most active art colonies on the California coast, and some of their art is still hanging in well-known museums across the west. Shown above is a painting of Toro Creek in the late 1930s by Charlotte Skinner who moved here in 1933.

Links to the colony remain. It's easy to see Aaron Kilpatrick's early 1930s white stucco house at the intersection of Olive and Main or A. Harold Knott's 1928 New England style bungalow at Kern and Ridgeway. Maybe best of all, Morro Bay still has a thriving artistic culture with a foundation in the Artist Association headquartered at the Art Center on Main Street downtown.

For Your Next Flight Out of Sky Lawn Airport…

By Mary Sproul

Hard to believe for us newcomers, but not too many years ago you could climb into a plane and take off from right here in town to get a view over the old Elementary School to the Rock and the ocean.

Yes. Morro Bay once had an air strip named Sky Lawn Airport. It was located on land owed by the Domeghini family, adjacent to their dairy farm. It was a 1,900 foot unpaved strip of dirt running mostly east/west, along the present alignment of Quintana (old Highway 1) just south of the present Morro Bay Blvd offramp.



Airport photo source: UCSB aerial flight AXH-1949-frame 7F-84 4 June 1949

The landing strip was mainly used by crop dusters and private planes. In the late 1940's it had a Fixed Base Operator (FBO) certificate that gave the airport the right to provide aeronautical services such as fueling and tie-down services. The 1949 image shows a simple strip of a runway with a couple buildings on the northwest end.

The local lumber company had its name painted on the roof of one of the buildings – Morro Bay Lumber Company - which was used by pilots as a land mark. The field was active until at least 1953 when Domenghini sold the property to the State of California for the Highway 1 freeway.

Many local residents on Facebook have remembered the Airport Cafe that was located along the airstrip. Old timers remember it served beer and hamburgers. The cafe operated into the 1950's. The building became a private residence and was torn down in the early 1960's.

Members Make HSMB Thrive

Thank you to the many who have recently joined or remained as supporters! If you would like to join or renew too, you can either download and print the form below and mail it with a check to: HSMB, P.O. Box 921, Morro Bay, CA 93443. Or you can go to our website and pay with PayPal.

Your Interest and Expertise are Special!

We are always so happy to get new hands on board to help plan programs, interpretive panels, and educational events. Contact us at the address above if you are interested in getting more involved in the HSMB. We are currently looking for new Board members, as well as people who can help us plan programs.

Volunteer opportunities: Would you like to help and have fun?

	Join the Board		Help plan member meetings
	Work on historical research projects		Work on collections
	Lead historical walking tours		Help with promotions or social media
	Organize and improve the photo collection		Other?

HSMB is a 501 c 3 non-profit, volunteer organization that has existed for over 30 years because of your support. Thank you. We hope you will keep it up! You can use the form below and mail it in with a check to:

HSMB, P.O. Box 921, Morro Bay, CA 93443. Or you can go to our website and pay with PayPal.

	I am a new member
	I am a renewing member

Please check your desired type of membership:

	Individual Membership $30.00		Business Membership $50.00
	Family Membership $40.00		Student Membership $15.00

I would like to make an additional donation (enclosed) of $

Name(s) or Company: Date:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Email*: Phone:

*Please provide as it saves postage and allows us to keep you up to date on new developments.