

Coastside Chronicles

A Publication of the Half Moon Bay History Association

February / March 2022

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“Now, back in 1919 I had acquired... a plot amidst the redwoods on the Alpine Creek at La Honda.”

--Sam McDonald

HALF MOON BAY
HISTORY
ASSOCIATION

Celebrating Coastside Legacies

From the President

—Juliette Applewhite

2022 is proving to be an exciting year! We have so much to be thankful for, but most important is our amazing team of volunteers—our docents are rock stars! They have been flexible and ready to step up when they felt it was safe for them to return to the jail museum. We are back open for business on weekends from noon to 2pm, and more if we have available docents. Our board members have not missed a single meeting since October 2019! Pretty impressive.

Our committees are doing their best to stay engaged, and are planning for 2022 and beyond. I am grateful to be a part of this group of dedicated volunteers. Email us at VolunteerNowHMBHA@gmail.com if you're interested in joining us as we move forward!

We are looking forward to participating in Coastside Gives in May, and have already secured a \$10,000 match! Please consider us in your 2022 giving. ♦

Coastside Gives 2022

It's been a demanding couple of years, but the History Association's project of expanding our Coastside History Museum is underway!

Your [Coastside Gives](#) contribution will be used to build exhibits, showcasing wonderful artifacts that reflect the Coastside's rich history.

This has been a challenging year for all of us, in many different ways, and we are so grateful for our supporters.

Thank you.

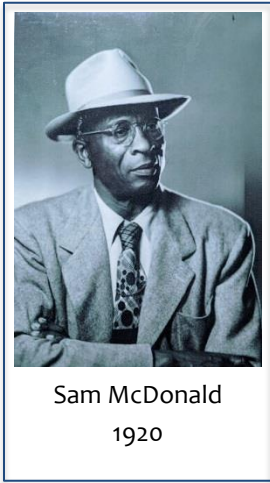


Sam McDonald and His La Honda Sanctuary

—Ellen Chiri

Out Pescadero Creek Road is a sign marking Sam McDonald Park—a sanctuary under the “lords of the forest,” as Sam McDonald called his beloved redwoods.

Emanuel “Sam” McDonald was born on a plantation in Louisiana in 1884. His father was a free, educated man; his mother was born into slavery.



Sam McDonald
1920

Sam’s mother passed when he was very young, and the family moved to Southern California in 1890. In 1897 they moved to Gilroy, where Sam gained the farming and horsemanship expertise that would help guide his career.

In 1900 the family headed for Washington, but by the time they reached Oregon Sam had decided that he wanted to stay in California. “At this stage of our journey I became grievously homesick” he wrote in his memoirs, “my mind was definitely made up to return to heavenly California.”

Leaving his father and brother, 16-year-old Sam took three horses—“one for which I had traded my bicycle and the two which I had purchased with my labor”—and started the return journey south. In San Francisco he met a serviceman who was recently discharged from cavalry service in the Philippines. This serviceman encouraged Sam to join the cavalry—the famed Buffalo Soldiers of the Ninth Cavalry Regiment, of which the 3rd Squadron was garrisoned at the Presidio. Sam learned that the cavalry regiment was filled, but that there were openings in the infantry. He wasn’t inclined to join the foot soldiers, however. He preferred horses.

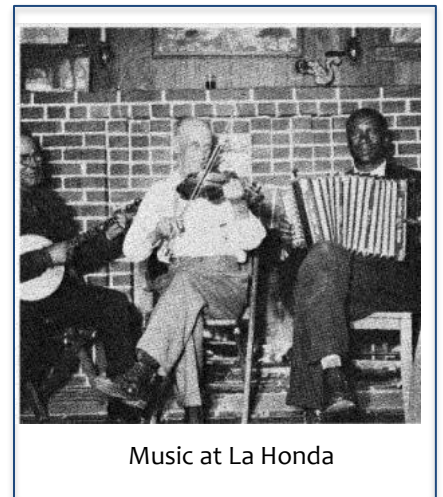
Sam found work aboard the steamboat *Modoc*, which plied the waters between San Francisco and Sacramento. After several months he began longing for Gilroy, though, and booked passage on a small steamboat that made a daily run to Alviso. He “... continued by horse-drawn bus to San Jose... once more... in the land of the happy people who dwell in the great valley of Santa Clara.”

When Sam learned that Stanford University was hiring at its horse farm, his farming and horsemanship skills came to the fore and he became a teamster. In 1903 the 19-year-old was promoted, and began work as a grounds superintendent at the University.

As Sam’s growing expertise led to more responsibility, he became superintendent of athletic grounds and buildings on the Stanford campus. He became an authority on running tracks, with universities seeking his expertise on grading, surfacing, and draining. He also became an expert on athletic fields. Today we recognize one of Sam’s contributions to athletics in the criss-cross pattern that is mowed into playing fields.

In 1919, Sam purchased “... a plot amidst the redwoods on the Alpine Creek at La Honda.” The land was 430 acres of redwood forest, where he built a cabin and created a wildlife sanctuary.

He called it “an asylum to all the woodland creatures”, and refused to allow logging. →



Music at La Honda

Sam McDonald and His La Honda Sanctuary ...continued

Sam's redwood retreat was also asylum to his friends. A steady stream of guests—students, sports officials, campus staff and their families—came to enjoy his barbecued lamb and beef. And Sam became famous for his barbecues.

“From the time of my first barbecue, prepared for the Track Squad,” Sam wrote of the 1914 barbecue at Stanford that he prepared for a crowd of 200, “... I have yielded to the acclaim of my ability...in the art of roasting meat over open fires...the guests attesting to the savor of the preparation and heaping praise on the joyous occasions of our get-togethers.”

Sam was devoted to the Stanford Home for Convalescent Children, called Con Home, which was founded in 1919. He visited the children frequently, playing his accordion, singing, and telling stories. He ran the yearly barbeque on Con Home Day, which was later renamed Sam McDonald Day.

All his adult life Sam kept a daily journal that, by 1952, totaled 1800 hand-written pages. His memoir was edited and published in 1954 as *Sam McDonald's Farm*—a reference to Stanford's nickname of The Farm, given because it was founded on the Stanford family's Palo Alto stock farm.

At the end of his life in 1957, Sam bequeathed his land to his beloved Stanford Convalescent Home for Children. The Convalescent Home later sold it to San Mateo County, to keep as a woodland sanctuary in honor of Sam McDonald.

Which it is, to this day. ♦



Sam barbecues at the Stanford Home for Convalescent Children



Half Moon Bay Drag Strip: Where World Records Were Broken

—Marc Strohlein

In the bucolic surroundings of the Coastsides, it's hard to imagine that Half Moon Bay's airport was once home to one of the fastest and most famous drag strips in the country. Such big names as Don Garlits, Don Prudhomme, Tommy Ivo, Connie Kalitta, Gas Ronda, Big John Mazmanian, and many others brought their ground-pounding cars to compete, giving the strip national attention. The track was a big part of any East Coast racer's West Coast itinerary, and all the big guns ran there while it was in operation.

Hot rodding in America dates to the 1920s when the Ford Model T, and later Model A cars made parts cheap and widely available. Drag racing started in the 1930s on California dry lake beds and took off after World War II when young car buffs began building faster and faster cars to compete. Before drag strips became available, street racing was common and hot rodders were regarded as law-breaking undesirables and hoodlums, as portrayed in movies like *Hot Rod Rumble* and *Hot Rods to Hell*. In some areas, sympathetic police officers helped hot rodders find legal outlets for their racing activities to keep racers and the public safe.

The airport had been constructed by the California State Highway Department for the U.S. Army in 1942, during World War II. It was turned over to the Navy at the war's conclusion.



In 1947, San Mateo County acquired the airport and the drag strip commenced operation in 1957.

In the late 1950s, hot rodding clubs the Lightning Rods from San Bruno and the Piston Pushers from South San Francisco raced on the Upper Great Highway near San Francisco's Ocean Beach before the government agreed to allow them to compete on the 3,000-foot-long, 60-foot-wide asphalt landing strip at Half Moon Bay Airport. None of the club members was over 21 years old, so one of those sympathetic officers, San Bruno police officer Dick Walrod, signed on their behalf so they could race in safety.

As more and more racers wanted in on the action, the city of Half Moon Bay demanded that improvements be made to the strip and insurance be taken out for safety purposes, but none of the clubs could afford to make those improvements. Enter a couple of street racers, Don Smith and Jim McLennan (who also owned the Champion Speed Shop in Colma), who negotiated a price with the clubs' creditors and approached the county to lease the strip. Soon it was back in operation.

Under McLennan and Smith's management, the track became a facility sanctioned by the National Hot Rod Association (NHRA). New fencing, bleachers, a safety net, and the latest and greatest timing and starting-line equipment were added. The timing tower was on top of a bread truck, and surplus military telephones were used to signal from one end of the track to the other. They hired a kid named Andy Brizio to be the flag starter. Brizio worked part time at the Champion Speed shop and later became known as the "Rodfather," gaining fame from his annual Hot Rod Picnics. The strip was one of the first tracks in the country to use radio and television advertising—precursor to those reverberated "Sunday! Sunday! Sunday!" radio spots that spread across the country. →

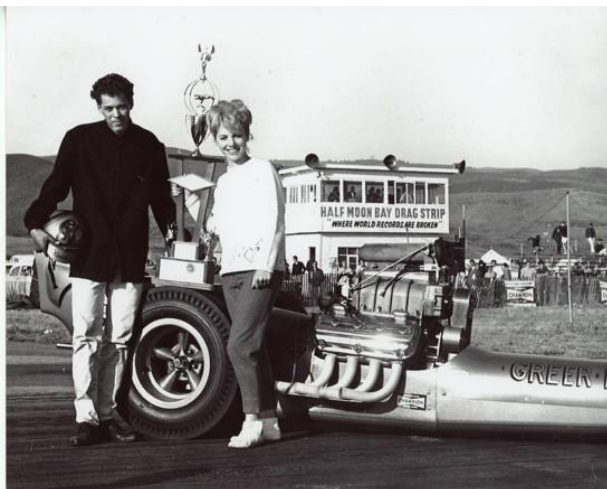
Moon Bay Drag Strip: Where World Records Were Broken...continued

The Half Moon Bay Dragstrip quickly became one of the country's premier racetracks, owing to its superior grip and sea level altitude. On the front of the drag strip tower were the words, "Where World Records are Broken," which became the track's moniker. One notable event occurred on January 23, 1966, when "Big Daddy" Don Garlits and Don "The Snake" Prudhomme match-raced there for a \$5,000 prize, with Garlits pulling out an upset win over the California racer.

The drag strip ultimately fell victim to rising safety concerns and noise and traffic complaints, which led to its closing. Racers were concerned about the short shutoff area, and as speeds surpassed 200 miles per hour, concerns about spectator safety grew.

Since racing at Half Moon Bay stopped in 1969, private pilots have had the tarmac all to themselves—except for the Pacific Coast Dream Machines Show when more than 2,000 vintage piston-powered contraptions of all kinds gather on this hallowed asphalt.

Ironically, the airport still plays host to dragsters as part of the event, but they are limited to static displays and occasional ground-shaking roars when they are fired up. Unfortunately, Dream Machines has been cancelled for the past three years but will hopefully return with the sound of supercharged engines reverberating off the surrounding hills! ♦



Don "The Snake" Prudhomme and friend with trophy, 1960s. "Big Daddy" Don Garlits once beat Prudhomme for a \$5,000 prize, but not this time!



Ceremonial torching of the tower in 1969, after the track closed.

Sybil Easterday, “Girl Sculptress”

—Ellen Chiri

In March 1900, the *San Francisco Call* published a story about a talented 24-year-old artist:

"Once there was a little girl down on a farm near Niles. Her name was Sybil Easterday, and she was very fond of playing in the mud. But it was not mud pies she made. It was the same sort of things that she wrought out of the putty which she scraped from the edges of the window panes, and the same sort of things that her mother found the butter patties made into."

Sybil Easterday began sculpting with plaster instead of mud and butter, and went on to win fame with her sculptures.

She enrolled at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art in San Francisco, where the instructor required students to



attend anatomy lectures and to use nude models in their drawing classes. Nude models were shocking in a day when sculptors were expected to learn anatomy from classical statuary.

Sybil dedicated herself to her sculpture, and set up studio in San Francisco.

The *San Francisco Call* article continues:

"...when her tub of wet clay tipped over and she found her hands and face and her skirts all covered with the

sticky substance, then Miss Easterday had one of her independent ideas...The next day when the baker-boy called, the door was opened for him by a young person in a light flannel shirt and white duck trousers...the young person's head...was a mass of fluffy red-brown hair, bound up loosely with a band of black velvet and shading the serious face and earnest blue eyes of the girl sculptress."

Sybil's choice of clothing was scandalous in 1900, but she found it practical and comfortable to work in—and she told people so.

In 1903 Sybil moved to Mexico City, to join the thriving artistic community there. She returned home only two years later, reportedly disillusioned by a love affair, and gave up sculpting.

Her father had bought land at the mouth of Tunitas Creek, where the family had camped when Sybil was a child. He built a house there, and the family moved in. After her father died in 1911, Sybil and her mother continued to live at Tunitas Creek. In 1915 she married Louis Charles Paulsen, a local tavern keeper who died tragically 3 months after the wedding.

Sybil stayed on at Tunitas with her mother, living a reclusive life and avoiding the limelight. In 1960 she received word from the Highway Department that a new highway and bridge were to be built, and she was to vacate the property. She was clearing out the house when she became ill; she died in 1961. ♦

Why Is It called Arleta Park?

—Ellen Chiri

The Coastside neighborhood of Arleta Park is bounded by Myrtle Street on the north, Magnolia Street on the south, Railroad Avenue on the west, and 3rd Avenue on the east.

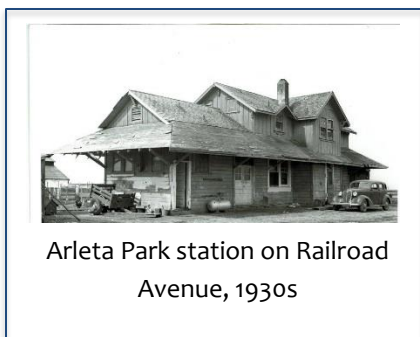
Announcing the Ocean Shore Railway's contract to locate its station, a half-page advertisement in the San Francisco Call newspaper of October 4, 1907, boasted:

“Everyone who has visited Halfmoon Bay realizes the fact that it is destined to become the most Popular Beach Resort on the Coast, as well as the Favorite Suburban Residence site for San Francisco.... If you wish to obtain a beautiful lot close to the Depot and in the very center of the NEW CITY, where you will have graded streets, alleys through every block, shade trees in front of every lot and water piped in every street, Buy in the Second Addition to Arleta Park.”

Lots were advertised at \$225.00, with terms of \$2.00 per week. The lots were offered by Thomas Benson Potter, a real estate developer, who reportedly amassed a fortune by developing subdivisions.

Several of his subdivisions, including those in Kansas City Missouri, Portland Oregon, and Half Moon Bay, are named Arleta Park.

In naming them, he honored his daughter—Arleta Natalia Potter.



\$1000.00 REWARD
TO ANY ONE WHO WILL PROVE THAT THE STATEMENTS IN THIS ADVERTISEMENT ARE NOT CORRECT.

The Location of the
MAIN DEPOT
—At—
Halfmoon
..Bay..

It is now definitely decided.
A contract has been signed by the
OCEAN SHORE RAILWAY COMPANY
Under which they are obligated to locate the same
—In—
ARLETA PARK

Ample grounds have also been made to have automatic safety gates at all St. R. street crossings in Arleta Park.

View of Halfmoon Bay and Arleta Park, including Farm and Second Addition.

Every one who has visited
HALFMOON BAY
Realize the fact that it is destined to become the most Popular Beach Resort on the Coast, as well as the Favorite Suburban Residence Site for San Francisco.

The ONLY QUESTION with respect thereto has been as to where the center is to be. This is now settled, and if you wish to obtain a beautiful lot close to the Depot and in the very center of the NEW CITY, where you will have graded streets, alleys through every block, shade trees in front of every lot and water piped in every street.

Buy in the Second Addition to Arleta Park
Large Lots Only \$225.00
Terms, Nothing Down \$2.00 per Week

T. B. Potter Company
OWNERS
901 Monadnock Building 657 Market Street
SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

There will be several small stations along the line of the Ocean Shore Railroad, in which every slow train will stop, but if you desire to have the advantage of the fast through trains, you should buy close to the MAIN DEPOT.

San Francisco Call, October 4 1907. The banner at the top says “\$1000.00 Reward to any one who will prove that the statements in this advertisement are not correct.”

History Mysteries

Do you have a Coastside history mystery you'd like us to investigate?

Let us know! Email us at info@halfmoonbayhistory.org

Articles and Videos!

Visit the History Association website to read more intriguing articles, and to watch videos—halfmoonbayhistory.org

Oral Histories

Does your family have a long Coastside history? Do you, or someone you know, have Coastside stories from long ago? Our Oral History team is gathering personal histories... may we add yours? Let us know! Email us at info@halfmoonbayhistory.org

The Coastside History Museum Is Seeking Volunteers—Join Us!

- ❖ Share your love of the Coastside and help keep local history alive—we offer training to get you started
- ❖ Set the stage for what our visitors can see and do on their coastal journey
- ❖ Chat with visitors from around the world —and with our Coastside neighbors

Would you like to volunteer for something other than the museum? Let us know what interests you! Email us at VolunteerNowHMBHA@gmail.com

Help Preserve Coastside History

Half Moon Bay History Association is dedicated to bringing together all members of the Coastside community, to preserve and share the history of the San Mateo County Coastside from Montara to Año Nuevo.

Our history is the lives and works of all the cultures that made the Coastside what it is today, from the first Ohlone people, to the Spanish and Mexican periods, through the early American period, to modern times.

Our mission is to educate as we preserve, honor, and celebrate Coastside history.



Our Board of Directors

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Dave Olson—Secretary & Treasurer

Mary Ruddy—Jail Museum Manager & Interim
Collections Manager


Kathleen Baker—Oral History Chair & Education
Committee Co-chair

Ellen Chiri—Communications Chair &
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