

Coastside Chronicles

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“Pablo Vasquez, slender, grave, white head and beard, unbelievably poised and graceful. And his golden pony...”

— Galen Wolf
Coastland 1885



The new Coastside History Museum is OPEN!



Half Moon Bay City officials joined History Association Board members for the ribbon-cutting

Phase 1 of the beautiful new Coastside History Museum is complete! June 24 saw the museum’s jubilant grand opening, hosting over 400 visitors.

In Phase 2 the design team will work to expand the current exhibits and develop new ones in the yard. What would you add to the current themes? We welcome your ideas!

These efforts rely on volunteers and donors. Our heartfelt thanks—we couldn’t do it without you.



The Lighthouse String Band’s music sweetened the air throughout the day



Cata Gomes, Ramaytush descendent, sang a welcoming song

Photos courtesy of Tom Jung / San Mateo Journal

The Pillar Point Harbor foghorn—can you hear it?

—Marc Strohle

Imagine trying to navigate your boat in fog so dense you can't see the bow, much less anything beyond it. But then you hear the faint sound of a foghorn. As you follow the beacon to safety in Pillar Point Harbor, you become another in a long line of mariners who give thanks for that foghorn.

Much of the marine history of the San Mateo Coast involves fog—extremely dense fog that blankets the Coastside and has led to numerous shipwrecks and harrowing navigational experiences.

Many a mariner would tell you that they have relied on the Pillar Point Harbor foghorn to guide them to safety in the harbor when dense fog made navigation difficult and dangerous. They regard the sound of the foghorn as a lifesaver.



Despite that, however, the foghorn, the sound- and light-emitting beacon at the mouth of the harbor is one of the more controversial landmarks in Pillar Point Harbor history.

Like most of the lighthouses and foghorns that stand watch over the country's coastlines, the Pillar Point Harbor foghorn is owned and operated by the Coast Guard. Despite its seemingly straightforward mission, the foghorn has been the subject of controversy

several times in its tenure of guiding mariners in foggy or inclement conditions, mostly due to the sound it emits while doing its work. The Coast Guard has responded to complaints by “adjusting” the foghorn multiple times with vocal responses from fishermen, boaters, and local residents.

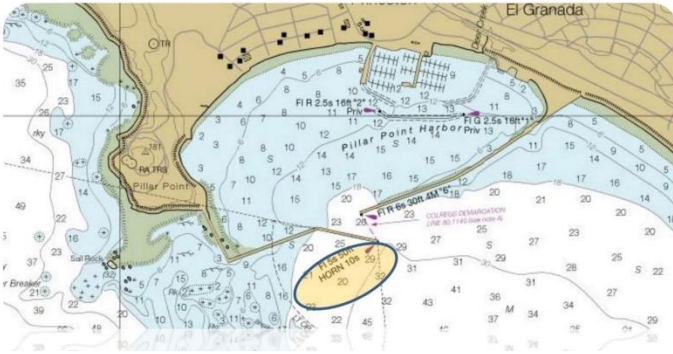
The history of the Pillar Point Harbor foghorn begins with that of the breakwater upon which it stands. The breakwater was the culmination of many years of efforts by local fishermen, mariners, and merchants to create a safer harbor after several storms and a tsunami destroyed boats and led to loss of life. From 1959 to 1961, the Army Corps of Engineers built a jetty to protect the harbor, constructed a pier and the Harbor Master's office, and installed the foghorn.

The foghorn stood as a not-so-silent sentinel at the mouth of the harbor for nearly four decades, operating relatively undisturbed until 1998. In April of that year, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported that “The foghorn was adjusted—but not silenced—in early March in response to noise complaints from guests of four waterfront hotels and some El Granada residents.” Pillar Point Harbormaster at the time, Dan Temko told the Examiner “I don't think the (Coast Guard) realized how many people on shore rock themselves to sleep by this thing.” He also noted that after the adjustments “A lot of fishermen say they can no longer hear it” when their vessels traveling close to the shore approach the harbor entrance.

On December 23, 2020, the *Half Moon Bay Review* reported “The foghorn at Pillar Point Harbor likely will remain a fixture of Coastside life following an outpouring of support in recent days.” The article followed news that the Coast Guard was soliciting feedback from the community about whether changes to the foghorn were needed. →

The Pillar Point foghorn—can you hear it?...continued

On January 13, 2021, the Coast Guard issued the following notice in its *Local Notice to Mariners Week 21/21* bulletin: “The U.S. Coast Guard is seeking data on the effectiveness and importance of the Pillar Point Harbor Entrance Light and Sound Signal, Light List number 4145, located on the eastern end of the western Pillar Point Harbor break-wall.”



At the time, Chief Warrant Officer Mickey Price of the Coast Guard’s San Francisco waterways sector office said, “It’s part of my job and my responsibility to be sure people are heard,” and “Our primary goal always has to be navigational safety, but we also have to allow opinions from the community because, when possible, we don’t want our signals to be a nuisance.” He went on to say that his inbox had been flooded by Coastsiders largely in favor of keeping the foghorn as it is, and “At this point we haven’t identified any information that would lead me to recommend any change in that particular sound signal,” Price said.

Yet soon after that first notice the Coast Guard posted: “Temporary changes have been made to the sound signal at Pillar Point Harbor Entrance Light (LLNR 4145). This change, which is scheduled to be evaluated through July 2021, has resulted in a slightly lower intensity sound signal to the North, North-East, and East of the aid. Mariners are encouraged to submit their feedback concerning any impact this change may have on navigational safety.”

Perhaps surprisingly, after all the adjustments to the original foghorn, in October 2022, the Coast Guard completed a replacement of the old foghorn. The Half Moon Bay Review reported the cost at \$393,000, and the replacement was said to be due to its deterioration and the danger for staff members to safely climb and service it. The Review went on to say “The rebuilt 50-foot tower includes new housing and baffles, devices that muffle the sound. It’s thinner than the old model, but the technology remains essentially the same, with the blinking signal and booming horn every 10 seconds. The Coast Guard said the sound levels should be the same after they were adjusted last year.”

Pillar Point Harbormaster Chris Tibbe noted that many calls for help have come from boaters with cellphones but no state-of-the-art navigation systems on their vessels. Tibbe said, “search and rescue personnel can ask boaters if they hear a foghorn or see a flashing light, which helps staff locate them.” He went on to say he was “grateful to the Coast Guard for identifying funding and leading the project.”

Today, although the foghorn continues to be audible to mariners, it is largely inaudible for El Granada residents, a relief to some but instilling a sense of loss in others as another piece of the fabric of Coastside living disappears. The final chapter on the foghorn will likely be its eventual disappearance altogether. As digital navigation devices continue to get cheaper and more widespread, the Coast Guard will likely shut down the foghorn, joining many of the others that have already gone silent. For some visitors and residents, that will be a blessing, for others another piece of local history lost to the ages. ♦

Ohlone basketry—art, form, and function

—Mary Ruddy

California’s native peoples have long been considered the most skilled of all basket creators. Their diverse functionality and beauty made those baskets desirable to 19th century Russian traders along the Mendocino and Marin coastlines. To this day, the best of all California Native American baskets, including Ohlone ones, are in Russian museums.

In California after European contact, colonization, disease, loss of plant habitat, and loss of Ohlone territory and autonomy meant that the baskets of peoples like the Ohlone were lost, their art and function no longer valued by those in power.

Today the closest we can come to admiring the lost Ohlone baskets is to see the baskets of their nearest neighbors, the Pomo from beyond the northernmost Spanish missions.

The few Ohlone baskets that survived into the 20th century were carefully stored in museum cases or basements, the antithesis of how the people who made and used them saw their place of honor in their culture. Mabel McKay, a most famous basket weaver and spiritual healer among her Pomo people, was once asked how best to care for those museum baskets. Her answer was to take them out of the cases, hold them and talk to them... because they were alive and needed to thrive.

Families would have had two dozen or more baskets that they moved with them in the seasonal migrations. The many kinds included seed-beater baskets, basket traps for fish, fowl, and small mammals, storage baskets, burden-carrying baskets, seed-roasting baskets, cooking baskets, and baby cradles.



Cecilia Joaquin, a Pomo woman, using a seed beater to gather seeds into a burden basket

Edward S. Curtis, 1924

—Photo courtesy of the
Library of Congress

Among the plants used were sedges, redbud bark, dogbane, ferns, nettles, bear grass, bunch grasses, milkweed, iris fibers, hemp, tule reeds, hazelnut branches, willow bark, and even poison oak.

Typically, one weaver would need 10,000 shoots in a year of weaving, all harvested after careful long-term planning and gardening in an area of only 3 square miles! The work done before the first knots were tied could represent up to 3 years of gardening by the whole village.

Baskets were used in all facets of life: food collection, preparation, storage, hunting, fishing, traveling, and clothing, used in medicinal and religious rituals and esteemed as status symbols. They were also made as gifts and peace offerings, and each was an artistic and wholly integrated part of its weaver. ♦

The Coastside community basketweaving project

—Sherrie Hart

As a recent transplant to Pescadero, I found myself searching for a way to contribute to the Half Moon Bay History Association. I believe that history is now, that it is always evolving, growing, changing. We are history in the making. We all have a story to tell.



Basket beginnings

Basketry has always played an integral role in the everyday lives of cultures around the world.

Weaving represents respect, connection, and kinship to one another and to the spirit of the living plants that provide their fibers, their roots.

And so it is that the weaver can produce functional everyday objects as well as artistic expression that tells the story, the history that is closely entwined—with every wrap and cross-over—to the identities of our communities. The weavers are the historians.

Our Coastside community's history is being told through our new Community Basket Weaving Project.

Since the museum's grand opening on June 24, 2023, over 700 people have participated in weaving their

stories into our community basket! We invite you to help us grow this basket throughout the year. When visiting us at the Coastside History Museum, add your identity, your story—let's make history together!

The Community Basketweaving Project will be completed on June 24, 2023, the museum's first anniversary. It will be displayed as a piece of our Coastside community history.

We invite Coastsiders 7 years and older to join us for our community weaving circle at the Coastside History Museum, 505 Johnston Street, from 11am – 3pm on weekends. ♦



Basketweaving at the museum
Photos courtesy of Sherrie Hart

Pablo Vasquez, Half Moon Bay's earliest celebrity

--Ellen Chiri

“Pablo Vasquez, slender, grave, white head and beard, unbelievably poised and graceful. And his golden pony. Little hooves flicking like white butterflies, golden skin polished and glinting in the sun. They pass. An era passes on those twinkling hooves.” So wrote Galen Wolf, Coastside artist and writer, in his booklet *Coastland 1885*.



Pablo Vasquez and his golden pony

June Morrall collection
Half Moon Bay History Association

Pablo Vasquez was born in 1842 and spent much of his youth at Mission Dolores in San Francisco, then called Yerba Buena. His father, Tiburcio, had been awarded a land grant in 1839 that extended from Pilarcitos Creek north to Arroyo de en Medio in present-day Miramar.

The elder Vasquez was originally an absentee landowner. He was supervisor of the Mission Dolores livestock, and his responsibilities kept him from traveling the often-impassable roads to the coast.

The Bear Flag revolt, however, increased tension between American settlers and the citizens of Yerba Buena and convinced Vasquez to leave. He built the first adobe home in Half Moon Bay and relocated with his family. The adobe stood northwest of today's bridge over Pilarcitos Creek.

In 1869, Tiburcio's youngest son Pablo built the frame house that still stands at 270 Main Street, south of the Pilarcitos Creek bridge. He became a respected personality of celebrity status.



An expert horseman, Pablo often sponsored races that sent horses flying down Main Street. He was also a great billiards player, and reportedly walked around town carrying his collapsible cue stick.

He opened a livery stable at 200 Main Street, just north of his home, and briefly ran a stage line between Half Moon Bay and San Mateo. Pablo Vasquez lived a vibrant, well-respected life, from which he passed in 1910. ♦



Pablo Vasquez' Pilarcitos Stable

June Morrall collection
Half Moon Bay History Association

What's up at the History Association

From the President

—Juliette Applewhite

What an amazing several years it has been, and how grateful and excited we are to celebrate the opening of the Coastside History Museum! We are thankful to our donors and volunteers for making this museum possible. On June 24, we had over 400 people attend our Grand Opening. We are grateful to all who attended this momentous event.

The old jail and the new Coastside History Museum behind the jail are open weekends from 11am to 3pm. Come visit us at 505 Johnston Street, Half Moon Bay.

Our team also offered their first basket-weaving class, so please check our website, or social media platforms for class schedules. Please look for our Education team, which will be back in 3rd grade (and hopefully more) classrooms in the coming school year.

I hope you all have an opportunity to visit the museum and attend our events.

Oral History—Coastside voices

—Marty Koughan

History writ large is the aggregation of small details about real people and the way they lived. The Oral History project gathers these human stories to help us understand the lives of our ancestors and the forces that shaped the Coastside's social, economic, and cultural development.

We record the personal memories of residents about the Coastside's rich and varied ethnic roots that define our sense of community. They are the voices that help keep history alive. If you or someone you know have Coastside stories from long ago, let us know! Email us at info@halfmoonbayhistory.org.

Quarterly programs and speaker series

—Ellen Chiri

Mark your calendar for Wednesday September 6 at 7pm at the Odd Fellows Hall, 526 Main Street HMB. The History Association and the Half Moon Bay Odd Fellows will host speaker Ernie Koepf talking *Fish Tales!*

Mr. Koepf was born in Moss Beach and launched his fishing career from the now-gone Romeo pier, and he has stories to tell! Please join us.

Our regular quarterly programs cover Coastside history from Montara to Año Nuevo. What topic would you like to see presented? Let me know at [hmbhaPrograms@gmail.com!](mailto:hmbhaPrograms@gmail.com)

The Education Program is back in schools

—Vicky Mitchell

The outreach to local schools for the 2023-24 school year has begun. We are now offering both on-site school visits as well as encouraging visits to the new museum. Our first field trip to the museum will be with 3rd-grade Sea Crest students will be on October 5.

In addition to elementary schools, we are contemplating reaching out to HMB High School history teachers this year to explore how we might support each other.

We've had one basket-weaving class at the museum, and are planning another class that will focus on loom weaving. Our hope is to develop several craft classes and to be able to offer these same craft projects during our school visits and field trips to the museum.

New museum is open—come volunteer!

—Vicky Mitchell

We are continuing to recruit volunteers to support our need to staff both the new Coastside History Museum and the jail. The enthusiasm for our new museum is gratifying! We would love more volunteers so that we can increase the hours we are open. It's a very fun way to spend just 4 hours a week. If you are interested, email info@halfmoonbayhistory.org.

Thanks!

Our artifact collection—small but mighty

—Mary Ruddy

The History Association's collection of artifacts may be small, but it is rich in local history! Every piece tells a story of what life has been like on the Coastside for thousands of years.

We are delighted to share our artifacts in our new, expanded Coastside History Museum behind the old jail, and look forward to receiving donations or loans of artifacts and archival documents that illustrate the early days of Coastside communities. If you can help, please contact me at hmbhacollections@gmail.com.

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 intriguing articles, and to watch videos—halfmoonbayhistory.org

Help Preserve Coastside History

The Half Moon Bay History Association is dedicated to bringing together all members of the Coastside community to preserve, celebrate, 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 have 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.



Thank you!

Our Board of Directors

Juliette Applewhite—President

Dave Olson—Secretary & Treasurer

Mary Ruddy—Museum Manager &
Collections Manager


Ellen Chiri—Communications Manager,
Programs Manager, & Publications Editor

Vicky Mitchell—Education Committee Chair &
Docent Manager

Sally Benson—Special Projects

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Let Us Hear From You!

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- Check out our [YouTube channel](#).
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