

Coastside Chronicles

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“My Dad had a LARGE neon sign made to put atop the Moon Dream—a multi-colored martini glass! ”

-- Sherry Gozzi Bradley

HALF MOON BAY
HISTORY
ASSOCIATION

Celebrating Coastside Legacies

From the President

—Juliette Applewhite

What an exciting few months it has been for the Half Moon Bay History Association!

- Verdura Construction has wrapped up 99% of their work—our museum building is nearly complete.
- Our exhibit design team has brought me to tears on more than one occasion with their brilliant ideas for our Coastside History Museum space.
- Our board members have been taking additional shifts to expand our jail museum hours to include several additional weekdays.
- We attended Half Moon Bay High School’s Real Life Learning Service Jam and are thrilled at the prospect of working with some enthusiastic new volunteers.
- We hosted a booth at the MidPeninsula Open Space 50th Anniversary Coastside celebration on September 10, and look forward to attending California State Parks’ celebration of Pigeon Point Lighthouse’s 150th anniversary on November 12.
- Our education team is looking at all opportunities to share our history with our local learners.

Stay tuned for information about the opening of our new museum space, and about other exciting activities that are in the works!

Upcoming program: Native American Lifeways

Mark your calendar for October 18! Mark Hylkema will present *Native American Lifeways of the Half Moon Bay Area and San Francisco Peninsula* at 925 Main St, Half Moon Bay (Senior Coastiders). Doors open at 5:30, program starts at 6:00.

Call for docents! With expanded museum space and new exhibits coming soon, we’re looking for more docents. If you enjoy history and helping people learn about our Coastside’s vibrant story, come join the fun! We provide training to get you started. For more info, email us at VolunteerNowHMBHA@gmail.com

Princeton-by-the-Sea: The rumrunner years

—Marc Strohle

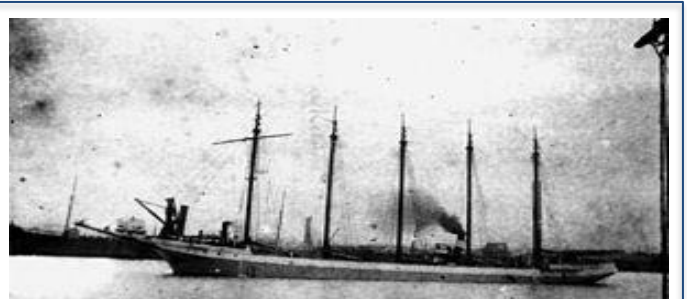
Walking through Princeton today, it's hard to visualize a scene of illicit liquor smuggling, speakeasies, and bordellos, but from the early 1920s till 1933, the town was a hotbed of rumrunning and unlawful nightlife.

Princeton-by-the-Sea's heyday as an up-and-coming beach community was scuppered by the demise of the Ocean Shore Railroad in 1920, as we described in our last issue. Yet like the Phoenix rising from the ashes, Princeton entered a new era, brought about by Prohibition. It became a major center for bootlegging and was called rumrunner's paradise.

The 18th Amendment, known as the Volstead Act, banned "the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors." From 1920 to 1933, the amendment marked the end of legal alcohol sales, but at the same time, it opened new opportunities for Coastside residents—at least for those willing to break the law.

The San Mateo coast from Pigeon Point to Montara was the perfect locale for smuggling with its craggy shorelines and coves to hide activity. Local fishermen were seeking new ways to make money by bringing booze ashore from Canadian ships, such as the schooner Malahat, anchored offshore on "rum row."

In short order, fishing boats were delivering thousands of dollars' worth of illegal liquor, much of it destined for speakeasies in San Francisco. One El Granada fisherman recalled his runs to a small freighter where he could order any liquor he wanted and be back to the harbor in three hours. Coastside youths were paid \$100 dollars to unload boats and load bootleg liquor onto trucks destined for San Francisco.



Malahat lumber-schooner-turned-rumrunner reportedly delivered more contraband liquor than any other ship

The Bureau of Internal Revenue was responsible for enforcement, with 3,000 agents nationwide known as "pro-his." In California, local police were responsible for enforcement, but most were understaffed and ill-equipped to deal with the rumrunners. Treasury agents staked out the beaches and coves as well as the harbor, but smuggling operations continued to boom. It's interesting to note that the current site of the Half Moon Bay Yacht Club was a Coast Guard station with two cutters used to chase rumrunners' boats and ships.

Often the fast boats of the rumrunners, with local pilots who intimately knew the coastal waters, evaded and outran the Coast Guard ships. The usual imagery surrounding bootlegging involved cars with hot-rodded engines, but for the San Mateo coast it was boats with souped-up engines. Yet sometimes rumrunners were unable to escape pursuit. Locals reported finding bottles of liquor washed up on shore after having been dumped overboard by rumrunners being pursued by the Coast Guard. One bootlegger said that in a close chase with the Coast Guard, "we'd rather throw the load overboard rather than lose the boat." →

Princeton-by-the-Sea: The rumrunner years...continued

In the middle of all this was Giovanni “Johnny” Patroni, the padrone or “Boss” of Princeton. Born in Genoa, Italy in 1878, Patroni landed in Princeton in 1903 after learning the hotel business in San Francisco.

He built the Patroni House in 1911 (near the site of the present-day Half Moon Bay Brewing Company) which became a popular destination for tourists on the Ocean Shore railroad until it ceased operation.



Four years later Patroni built a 500-foot pier adjacent to the hotel for guests to use for fishing and access to launches and rowboats. In 1921, bootlegger Thomas Murphy approached Patroni about using his wharf at Princeton for rumrunners to offload booze brought in from ships on rum row. Patroni agreed and was soon in the bootlegging business.

Patroni’s bootlegging operation got off to a rocky start when a tip led prohibition officers to his hotel, where they confiscated a \$60,000 delivery of whiskey and arrested him. He received immunity by fingering Murphy, who confessed to being part of a major bootlegging ring, leaving Patroni to resume business.

Patroni quickly learned that to be successful he had to grease some palms. Soon he was offering discounts at his restaurant along with overnight accommodations to courthouse employees and law enforcement agents who would warn of impending raids.

Amazingly, it’s reported that between the “special guests” and regular customers there could be as many as 500 people on the streets of Princeton at night—quite the Roaring Twenties scene!

Meanwhile the nearby Princeton Hotel used its past as a resort hotel to cover for its bordello and liquor distribution activities. Originally built by Frank Brophy in 1908, it fell victim to the loss of the railroad but found new life during prohibition. It was raided numerous times by Federal Agents and shut down in 1921 in violation of the Red Light Abatement Act by San Mateo County District Attorney Frank Swart as part of his peninsula-wide crackdown on prostitution. Like other Coastside speakeasies, it was soon back in business.

Prohibition ended on December 5, 1933, bringing an end to the free-wheeling rumrunner days in Princeton.

Ironically, while most of the nation was celebrating the end of Prohibition, at least one bootlegger called it the “greatest law that ever was,” bemoaning the loss of income as his smuggling came to an abrupt end. ♦

Read part 1 of the Princeton story

Part 1 of the Princeton story, “Frank P. Brophy and the Princeton-by-the-Sea Beach Resort”, appeared in the Summer edition of *Coastside Chronicles*. To read it, visit halfmoonbayhistory.org

The Moon Dream Inn and Motor Court: A young girl’s memory of living there

—Sherry Gozzi Bradley

I was fortunate to live in Half Moon Bay from 1951 to 1955. My parents, Silvio and Lola Gozzi, were proprietors of the Moon Dream Inn and Motor Courts at the end of Kelly Avenue. At the request of Sam Miano, a family friend, my folks leased the property to run the business. Sam and his wife Concetta (Connie) were Godparents to my Dad, who was born and raised in Santa Cruz. Connie and my grandmother, Amalia Belfi Gozzi Puccinelli, were good friends for years. I was fortunate to spend time in Sam and Connie’s home in Santa Cruz as I was growing up.

My folks LOVED operating the bar, the restaurant/café, the auto courts, and the little snack bar at the corner of the building.



The kitchen for the restaurant/café was overseen by Sadie Canada and my mom. Sadie taught me to cook, and to wash and dry the dishes (my favorite task!).

The bar and dining room were busy on the weekends, but during the week, the dining room dance floor and stage were all mine to play on! I rode my trike around the floor, got up on the stage to dance and sing, and entertained my imaginary “audience.” I would run to the juke box in the bar and play my favorite song, “How Much Is That Doggie in the Window”—singing at

the top of my lungs! Sometimes, my dad let me entertain the actual patrons!!

We lived in a small cabin behind the kitchen at the back of the building. When my sister was born in February 1954, Dad added a large bedroom to the cabin so there would be more space for our growing family. It was in the bar that she took her first steps—on top of that bar! My brother was later born in August of 1956, after we moved from Half Moon Bay to Concord, California.

My Mom often let me help her clean the auto court hotel rooms. My recollection is that there were 5 or 6 rooms, each with its own garage. The cabin was entered at the front, and there was access to the rear, where there were gardens (tended by my mother).



The cabins were built in the Spanish style, with stucco on the outside, wood-framed doors and windows, and tile roofs. They looked like little homes, all nestled together. Each had a marvelous view of the ocean.

Kelly Avenue became a frontage road in front of the Moon Dream dining room, and the motor court garages were accessed from that road. The road led to a large parking lot for public access to the beach. →

The Moon Dream Inn and Motor Court ...continued

Although I was an “only child” until I was 7, my idyllic childhood was not a lonely one. There always seemed to be some activity at the Moon Dream Inn, with friends, locals, and out-of-towners dropping by. I kept myself busy playing with our four dogs: Harpo, King, Frisky, and Mutt. My horse, Dusty, was kept in the field adjacent to the Moon Dream. I was allowed to ride my horse in the field by the Moon Dream, or when my Mom or Dad went down to the beach, I would trail them on my horse, with the dogs running beside me. The dogs always stayed between Dusty and the ocean. What a delight to ride my horse on the beach at my young age. While dad went smelt fishing or looking for abalone, I rode my horse on the beach. Dad loved fishing, so we were down there as often as possible.

I attended Coastside Union Elementary School from Kindergarten through the end of the Third Grade (1951-1955). Coastside Union Elementary was Half Moon Bay Elementary—the Coastside name was on our report cards. (The school is now Manuel Cunha Intermediate School.) My teachers were Elizabeth Wilson, Grace Catching, and Vaughan Ross. At the end of the school day, I walked home down Kelly Avenue. Everyone knew everyone and it was a safe place to grow up. If I got tired, I would stop by someone’s home, get a drink of water, play in their yard, and then mosey on home. Some days, when my parents gave me a dime, I would walk to Cunha’s Market to purchase a popsicle! Mr. Cunha was there to greet folks, and what a kindly man he was! I loved the way the screen door opened and closed when entering or exiting the store.

The Moon Dream was well loved by visitors coming from San Mateo, Redwood City, San Francisco, Santa Cruz. My Dad had a LARGE Neon Sign made to put atop the Moon Dream—it was a multi-colored martini glass! Those making the long drive over Highway 92 coming from San Mateo could see the Martini Glass from miles away! Some of my parent’s best friendships were made

in that bar and café. People came from all over to have some of my Mom’s chili.

Friday nights were special for this little girl! While the folks worked, the local Chief of Police, a friend of my dad’s, would pick me up about 5 or so and drop me at the movie theatre! It was only a dime to get in, and I could see several movies or cartoons. When the movie was over, I walked to the Oddfellows Hall, went upstairs where there was a meeting, and waited for the Sheriff to pick me up and take me back home. When my dad was President of the Half Moon Bay Lions Club (1953-1955), he would pick me up from the Theatre after his meeting finished. There were two bedrooms and a bathroom “behind” the bar, so that’s where I slept until my parents took me to the cabin to go to bed.

My best friend was Margaret Ann Diener, who lived on Kelly Avenue with her family. She would sleep over at my house, and on Saturday mornings, while the folks slept, we would make our way to the restaurant kitchen and proceed to burn as much bacon and eggs as we could eat! Then we would play on the swing behind the Moon Dream, play with the dogs, feed the chickens, feed and groom my horse. Fun, innocent times indeed.



The Moon Dream’s dining room was used for many different occasions. I loved it when there were huge events in the dining room, such as when the Half Moon Bay Spanishtown Dons (a precision marching group) held dinners and meetings, the Lions Club held dinner parties, etc. My parents hosted my 7th birthday party there, and friends of my mother gave her a baby shower.



Half Moon Bay Lions Club meeting at Hoberg’s Resort near Clear Lake, 1954

There was a large grand piano in the dining room, and a dance floor too. The dining room was circular, with wooden floors, and windows spaced around the room to provide a view of the ocean. The draperies were imprinted with a floral design and fabric that reminded me of bark cloth.

Sadly, in the Spring of 1955, Sam advised my dad that the Moon Dream Inn, Motor Courts, and property were being looked at by the State of California. Initially, we were told that the new highway was going to pass through the property.

Later, Dad was told that the property was going to be taken through Eminent Domain, for the State Park that is currently in that location.

We moved to Concord, California in the Summer of 1955, and someone else was then recruited to operate the Moon Dream.

I don’t know when the Motor Courts were demolished, but the property seems so strange without them today.



Today, the Moon Dream is home to the Half Moon Bay State Beach Ranger Station

Oral Histories

Does your family have 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

Early statehood on the Coastside: Californio culture meets U.S. Expansion

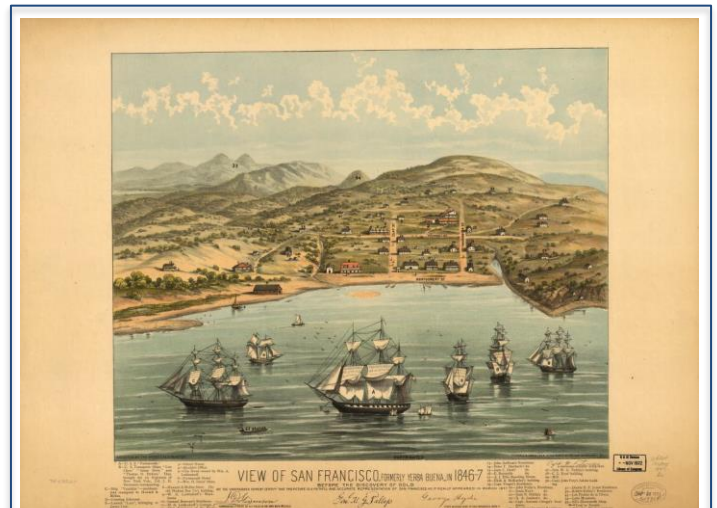
— Siena Hinshelwood

The Mexican-American War ended in 1848 with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which was supposed to guarantee Mexican landowners' rights to their land. However, the United States instead put the burden on the rancheros to prove their land rights to a land commission. This was a very long and expensive process that put immense pressure on rancheros, especially as drought and cattle disease threatened their profits. A new California law required rancheros to fence in their property, which was expensive and a divergence from the more shared grazing land style of the Californios. The commission also did not speak Spanish. Some of these land cases even went to the U.S. Supreme Court. While all the Coastside land grants were confirmed to their owners, it is illustrative of the process that, although each party filed in 1852 or 53, the Guerrero y Palomares grant was only confirmed in 1866, the Vásquez in 1873, and the Miramontes in 1882.

Regardless of the land commission and changing U.S. rule, the character of the Coastside remained staunchly Californio. When Anglo-Americans first rode onto the Coastside, they dubbed the place "Spanishtown," which is what it was called until 1861 when the name Half Moon Bay was adopted by the Post Office. Spanish was still the predominant language, and Californios outnumbered Americans in the 1850s.

The Gold Rush dramatically changed the character of the state and the Coastside. Within days of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, gold was found in the hills of the Sierras. A huge influx of people came to northern California seeking their fortunes or supporting the growth of people in the area.

At the beginning of 1849, there were about 26,000 non-Indigenous people in California, but by the end of the year there were close to 115,000. 20,000 foreign immigrants arrived. On a smaller, but still explosive, scale, San Francisco went from about 800 people in March of 1848 to 36,000 in 1852. Imagine that change! The state population grew to more than 300,000 by 1860, and among Europeans and Anglo-Americans, men outnumbered women 12 to 1.



View of San Francisco, formerly Yerba Buena, in 1846-7 before the discovery of gold.

Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division Washington

This huge increase in people increased demand on goods, so the cost of food and other consumer products skyrocketed compared to the East Coast. For example, a loaf of bread was 4 to 5 cents on the Atlantic seaboard, but 50 to 75 cents in San Francisco. →

Early statehood on the Coastside...continued

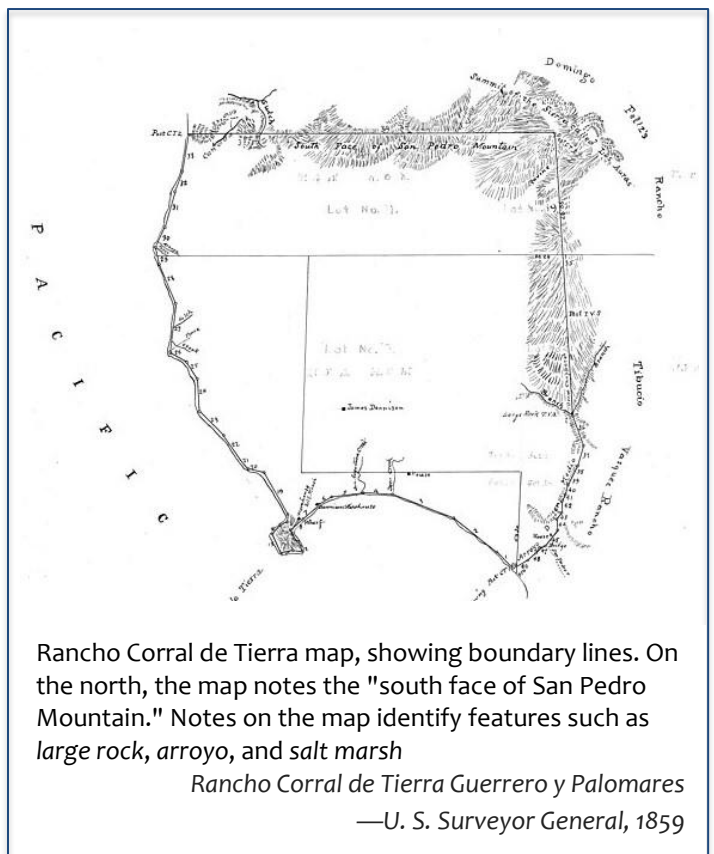
Labor costs also went up since, at one point, approximately half of the adult population was engaged in mining and had abandoned work on the coast for the mountains. This undoubtedly affected people on the Coastside, as friends and family members either tried their luck in the mountains, struggled to meet rising costs, or faced the ballooning population.

One common issue linked to the population explosion in early statehood California was squatting. As men used up their savings and didn't strike it rich, they left the mountains and took up farming. The landscape was already transforming from Mexican cattle ranching to American wheat farming, and many Anglo-Americans did not respect Mexican land rights (which was reflected in the land commission process). Some U.S. politicians even encouraged squatters. This was a face-off between Californio understandings of land use and the U.S. understanding, which generally constituted very individualized property ownership for maximum efficiency. Of course, both systems had already undermined Ohlone land use. Coastside Californios were able to stave off squatters, but a contingent of squatters did zero in on a disputed section of land to the south, which became the community of Purissima.

The severity of the land issue in early-statehood California is clear when we look at the deaths of José Tiburcio Vázquez and Francisco Guerrero y Palomares. Guerrero y Palomares was a respected official in San Francisco and a man knowledgeable in the informal borders of Mexican land grants. In July of 1851, he was clubbed in the head and died on the street in San Francisco. The *Alta California* newspaper, reporting on this "most terrible and cold blooded" murder, wrote that Guerrero y Palomares was "well-known and celebrated for his kindness and hospitality, particularly among the Americans to whom he was a warm friend."

Years later in April of 1863, Tiburcio Vázquez was sitting near the window in a saloon in Half Moon Bay when he was shot and killed. Both men were witnesses in a long and contentious lawsuit about a land fraud case, leading to speculation that their deaths were connected. As *Alta California* had written in 1851, "many parties were interested in having [them] out of the way." Clearly, land was a powerful, igniting issue for people after California joined the United States, and Californio rancheros were not reaping any benefits.

A less contentious way to get land was through marriage, which is what James Denniston did. He came to California in 1846 with the U.S. Army, then went for the gold fields once the war was over. Unsuccessful, he joined the masses in San Francisco. He met Guerrero y Palomares' widow, Josefa de Haro, and through their marriage in February of 1853, U.S. citizen Denniston came to own the northern Corral de Tierra land grant.



Early statehood on the Coastside...continued

James Denniston was a founding figure on the coast in early statehood. He converted the rancho to wheat farming, but still appreciated and participated in Californio culture. He represented San Mateo County in the State Legislature from 1860 through 1864, where he listed his occupation as *ranchero*. This shows the continuance of Californio culture even into statehood. He converted a Mexican land grant into an American farm, spoke fluent Spanish, and demonstrated a merging of cultures, even though that merging wouldn't last long.

With the influx of single Anglo men, it's no surprise that others married Californiana women. James Johnston was a Scottish immigrant living in Ohio when he came to California in 1849 after fighting in the Mexican-American War. He made some money in the mines and then more as a partner in the El Dorado Saloon in San Francisco. He then settled on the Coastside. He also invested in real estate, including buying land from the Californios.

His involvement with the *rancheros* is how Johnston met Petra Maria de Jara, and they married in 1852. Immersed in the Coastside community, Johnston knew the Miramontes family and was ready to purchase their land when it went up for sale, probably as *rancheros* sought ways to make money in the new economic climate of statehood. In 1853, he bought 1,162 acres of the Miramontes land grant and then invited his brothers over from Ohio. They drove 800 head of cattle overland to the Coastside to start dairy farming.

Johnston built his saltbox-style house from 1853 to 1855 and



Johnston house

brought an East Coast style to the Coastside. However, the home also included some Californio elements, like the protected patio and the small indoor chapel. A well-respected family, the Johnstons reflected a blending of Anglo-American and Californio values and culture.

Land on the coast continued to be divided into smaller and smaller parcels. The large land grants were a thing of the past with U.S. expansion, farmers seeking land, and the growth of American agriculture. After Denniston died, for example, the Corral de Tierra grant was divided among Josefa and her two sons Victoriano and Augustine. This land continued to be subdivided over the rest of the century, and even more so in the early 1900s when the Ocean Shore Railroad company bought up the land.

The Californio lifestyle, while enduring after the Mexican-American War, did not last long. Spanish-speaking citizens continued to be important town leaders, including Miramontes' son-in-law Estanislao Zaballa, who laid out the streets of Half Moon Bay, and Pablo Vásquez, son of Tiburcio Vásquez who was also the local constable and livery stable owner. However, U.S. expansion included its insistence on values and land use different from Californio culture, and so California became a very American place. Regardless, even as U.S. laws, customs, and control increased in presence, the impact of Spanish and Mexican history on the town is undeniable.

If you have family stories of local life during this time, we'd love to hear them! Please send us email at info@halfmoonbayhistory.org. ♦

The old bell—more to the story

The Summer edition of *Coastside Chronicles* included an article about Silvio Modena, who found a very old fire-damaged bell at Our Lady of the Pillar cemetery on the hill east of Half Moon Bay back in 2008. The bell mysteriously disappeared after Silvio found it, and its current location is unknown.

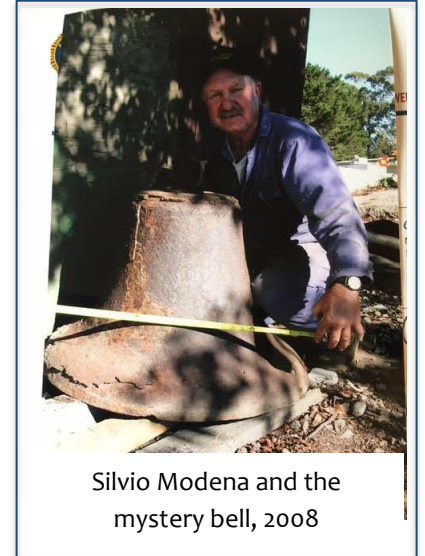
In response to that article, we received this message from a Catholic theologian:

“I read with great interest the...edition of *Coastside Chronicles* about Silvio Modena and the lost bell of Our Lady of the Pillar Cemetery.

“While I unfortunately cannot shed light on the whereabouts of the bell, I can tell you that it is highly likely that that bell was used as a church bell. Church bells are blessed and consecrated as sacred objects...in the Catholic Church, and Catholics traditionally retire sacred objects by burying them in consecrated ground, quite often in Catholic cemeteries.

“Thus, the circumstantial fact of the bell's being found in the cemetery, combined with the evidence of fire damage, makes it very likely that it was indeed the bell of the original Our Lady of the Pillar church.

Many thanks to our theologian correspondent! ♦



Silvio Modena and the mystery bell, 2008

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

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.



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