

# Coastside Chronicles

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“When I was growing up in the ‘60s, Chamarita weekend was the biggest event of the year for Half Moon Bay,” Rose Ormonde.

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## Connections: Annual Coastside Festivals and Celebrations

—Patricia Strohlein

Who does not love a party? Coastsideers have long held annual events and festivities that celebrate the things that make our Coastside so unique. In this issue of the Chronicles, we celebrate everything from pumpkins to fast cars, old airplanes, sugar skulls, Chamarita meat, and our nation’s independence. A few of the festivals highlighted here have origins which date back thousands of years. Others showcase the bounty of the Coastside and honor those who make it happen. One thing every event has in common is community. Everyone is invited to attend and share the celebration.

## The Holy Ghost Festival on the Coastside

—Ellen Chiri

*Portions of this article are excerpted from the Spring 2021 issue of Coastside Chronicles*

The Brotherhood of the I.D.E.S. Society, a Portuguese fraternal organization, was organized in Half Moon Bay in 1871, and in Pescadero in 1901. The initials I.D.E.S. stand for *Sociedade Da Irmandade do Divino Espirito Santo*—the Society of the Divine Holy Spirit.

Every year the I.D.E.S. holds the Holy Ghost celebration, a tradition rooted in the Azore Islands. Portugal’s 14<sup>th</sup> century Queen Isabel introduced celebrations of the

Holy Spirit to Portugal, and its traditions became widespread in the Azore Islands. It is said that Queen Isabella would lead a procession to the church to celebrate Mass, carrying her crown to have it blessed to show her devotion to God. People emulated these processions when in difficult situations, carrying a crown to the church to ask for God’s help.

A violent earthquake, followed by drought and famine, left the people of the Azore Islands without food and shelter. Following Queen Isabel’s example, they

carried a crown to the church and celebrated Mass, asking the help of the Holy Spirit. Soon after their desperate plea, a ship arrived with sustenance and the traditional celebrations of thankfulness began.



*Procession leaving Our Lady of the Pillar in 1928 courtesy of Half Moon Bay History Association (HMBHA). This image shows the old church on the west end of Mill Street in Half Moon Bay*

Holy Ghost celebrations are held today in Portuguese communities around the world. In Half Moon Bay and in Pescadero on Pentecost Sunday, the seventh Sunday after Easter, processions leave the I.D.E.S. grounds and walk through town to the Catholic church. A Queen who represents Queen Isabel carries the crown, accompanied by her Maids and a Little Queen. The crown and scepter, symbols of thankfulness, are blessed.



*1914 Holy Ghost Festival held in Pescadero for both Pescadero and San Gregorio courtesy of Pescadero I.D.E.S.*

Tradition tells us that in 1896, each of the 100 Half Moon Bay I.D.E.S. members contributed four silver dollars to have a crown made. A San Francisco silversmith made the crown, which weighs eight pounds. That crown and the accompanying scepter have been used in Half Moon Bay's Holy Ghost festivals ever since.

After the service, the procession returns to the I.D.E.S. grounds, and the feast begins. The tradition of thanksgiving includes welcoming everyone and supplying all with meat, bread, and wine. Bob Fernandez, 1994 Half Moon Bay I.D.E.S. President, remembers, "Early on, the local farmers used to donate cattle to the I.D.E.S. for the Celebration." The members slaughtered and butchered the cattle, and "the meat was cooked and served to the people."

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... "it was to honor a centuries-old tradition giving thanks to the Holy Ghost for saving the people of the Azore Islands after a drought and famine and honoring Queen Isabel," Rose Ormonde

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Today, several thousand pounds of beef are blessed and are cooked in the large brick ovens on the Half Moon Bay I.D.E.S. grounds "...in a sauce made of wine, water, and a variety of spices and secret ingredients known only to the head cook."

The Holy Ghost celebration is also called Chamarita, after a dance. The Chamarita dance begins after the feast, and people of all ages join in. The dancers form a circle, and a caller gives directions for the dancers to follow as the music plays. The dance sings "Chama Rita! Chama Rosa! Que Bonita! Que Formosa!"... (Call Rita! Call Rosa! How pretty! How beautiful!)

In the early days, Pescadero and Half Moon Bay celebrated together. After Pescadero's I.D.E.S. was formed in 1901, Pescaderans no longer had to travel to Half Moon Bay to celebrate. In 1914 the Pescadero I.D.E.S. built the hall that still serves as the center for

the celebration there. The queen leads the procession to St. Anthony's, carrying the crown, where it is blessed. After the service the procession returns to the hall for the feast—as with Half Moon Bay's celebration, all are welcome.



*Chamarita feast in Pescadero, 1915 courtesy of Pescadero I.D.E.S.*

The Holy Ghost Festival continues to honor the Holy Spirit and to give thanks, becoming less solemn over the years. Bob Fernandez remembers, “In earlier times like the 1950s and 1960s, students at the local schools had a minimum day on the Monday after the Celebration. This was so they could go to the Celebration, enjoy the rides the carnival had and have the traditional meal.”

Rose Ormonde tells us “When I was growing up in the ‘60s, Chamarita weekend was the biggest event of the year for Half Moon Bay. I remember the excitement... the lights of the Ferris Wheel, the delicious smell in the air of the Chamarita meat cooking for hours in the cookhouse, the first taste of pink popcorn or that wonderful cherry snow-cone...As I grew older, I understood that the Holy Ghost Festival was more than a carnival or a colorful parade... it was to honor a centuries-old tradition giving thanks to the Holy Ghost for saving the people of the Azore Islands after a drought and famine and honoring Queen Isabel.”

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## Joyful Celebration Honors Deceased Loved Ones

—Patricia Strohlein

On the final days of October, locals and tourists start to see signs of a celebration that dates back thousands of years. Sugar and paper skulls, intricate paper designs and flowers, and beautiful marigolds decorate shops and public spaces in Half Moon Bay and along the coast. This is Dia de los Muertos, a vibrant and joyful two-day celebration honoring deceased family members and loved ones. It is held over two days on November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. Typically, November 1<sup>st</sup> commemorates children, and November 2<sup>nd</sup> honors adults and ancestors.

Dia de los Muertos (also known as The Day of the Dead) has its origins and traditions in Mexico and other Latin American countries long before Spanish settlers arrived. The Aztecs and other Nahua people living in what is now central Mexico believed that death was an integral, ever-present part of life.

Aztecs believed that after death a person began a lengthy journey to Chicunamictlán, the Land of the Dead. After nine challenges spanning four years, their soul could finally reach Mictlán, the final resting place. During annual festivals, which were held to honor the dead, family members provided food, water, and tools to help them during their journey. The practice of leaving these offerings on their graves shifted to makeshift altars called ofrendas.

The ofrenda is a carefully curated space that serves as a bridge between the living and the deceased. They are typically constructed in family homes as well as public spaces such as plazas or parks. Ofrendas can have two to seven levels, or steps, and include personal and common items representing these four elements: earth, air, fire, and water.



*Dia de los Muertos altar (ofrenda) courtesy of [www.alasdreams.com](http://www.alasdreams.com)*

An altar with two steps represents the earth and sky. Those with three steps represent purgatory, earth, and heaven, or the Holy Trinity. Some may have up to seven steps with each containing something different, including candles, pictures, toys, food, paper flowers, candy or paper skulls (calaveras), and marigolds.

The element **earth** is signified by food, such as tamales, chicken, or fruits such as oranges and bananas. A favorite food or drink of the deceased is included along with Pan de Muerto, a sweet bread which represents the circle of life.

Papel picado, a traditional Mexican folk art, embodies the element of **air**. Sheets of tissue paper with intricate and elaborate patterns such as birds, skulls, skeletons, and flowers are combined into colorful banners to adorn or surround the ofrenda. The delicate and airy nature of the paper symbolizes the fragility of life and the movement of the papel picado in the wind is

believed to represent the presence of spirits visiting their loved ones.

Candles (velas) symbolize the element of **fire**. They serve as a guiding light for the spirits of the deceased, helping them find their way back to the world of the living during the celebration. Each candle honors a single person and reminds us that the soul never truly dies and lives on in memory.

A cup or bowl of **water** is placed on the altar as a symbol of refreshment and to help cleanse the souls that are traveling back to the land of the living. Water is a source of life and a reminder of the cycle of existence.

Marigolds, known as cempasúchil in Spanish, are a key element of an ofrenda. Their vibrant orange and yellow hues combined with the beautiful scent help to guide the spirit back to their altar. They are also associated with the sun which gives life and energy. They are used as an expression of love as their delicate petals remind us of the fleeting nature of life. Marigolds can be scattered around to create a path to the altar or used in garlands and other flower arrangements.

Sugar or paper skulls (calaveras) serve as a sweet treat and as a gift to the returning soul. They are colorful and highly decorated and often personalized with a name or image to remind viewers of the joy their loved one brought during their lifetime.

In an article in the October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1996 issue of the *Half Moon Bay Review*, David Lemus says “The skulls are happy and joyous.” Lemus, who is a native of Mexico and worked with the Mexican Cultural Center in San Francisco, went on to say, “We don’t want to dwell on the sorrow of death as it is just a transition from this life.”

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Zenón Barrón, Arts and Cultural Director at Ayudando Latinos a Soñar (ALAS) says “As a child growing in Mexico, I remember going to my grandfather’s grave each year. We were very quiet, there to remember and honor him. When I imagine our celebration here in Half Moon Bay, I think about family and community. We welcome everyone to attend. This is such an important part of our culture, and we are working to continue this tradition here in Half Moon Bay.”

“Beginning in 2021 ALAS began holding a larger Dia de los Muertos festival with music, vendors, a Catrina procession, and the gathering of family altars of loved ones in Mac Dutra Park,” says Dr. Belinda Hernandez Arriaga, Founder and Executive Director of ALAS. “We create a large-scale community altar that is centered in Mac Dutra Park and is covered with marigold arches, papel picado, paper flowers, incense and photos of loved ones.”



*A Catrina, an elegantly dressed skeleton, in a parade courtesy of [www.alasdreams.com](http://www.alasdreams.com)*

Dr. Arriaga continued “this past year we remembered our seven farmworkers who lost their lives in the tragic shooting. The altar allowed us to grieve, remember, and open a process of sacred healing, a calling in of our ancestors. Also included in the day are special performances by Mariachi and Ballet Folklórico. In recent years, Zenón has gathered a group of mothers, seniors, youth, and others to represent Dia de los Muertos in a silent procession down Main Street in Half Moon Bay. Aztec Danzantes have also opened up the circle to honor our loved ones. All ages come together for this special cultural event.

“I would share that in the past the City of Half Moon Bay has worked with us to provide permits for the event around Mac Dutra Park. They have been an important support of dreaming and realizing this festival going forward,” says Dr. Arriaga.

There are many organizations working to carry on the traditions of this special celebration. Puente de la Costa Sur (Puente), the non-profit organization in Pescadero, was highlighted in the October 28, 2015 issue of the *Half Moon Bay Review*. The story reported the activities for the upcoming Dia de los Muertos celebration, including how a group of women called “las madres” helped to construct the altar at the Farmer’s Market in Pescadero.

The article also included activities at the Half Moon Bay Library, all intended to highlight this joyous festival and educate the community on its cultural importance.



*Alejandra Ortega of Pescadero organizes the sugar skulls in preparation for Dia de los Muertos celebration. Photo and caption courtesy of *Half Moon Bay Review*, October 28, 2015*

The [ALAS Cultural Center](#) on Purissima Street is a hub of activity in the months and weeks leading up to Dia de los Muertos. Barrón says that ALAS staff begin planning months ahead. “We offer classes in making the sugar skulls and the papel picado. And I will soon begin working with multiple farms to grow the precious marigolds and with local bakeries to provide the Pan de Muerto,” says Barrón.

Dia de los Muertos is a unique and deeply meaningful celebration of life, death, and the unbreakable bond between the living and those who have passed away. It is not about mourning, but remembering, honoring, and celebrating our loved ones.

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## Honoring Coastside Farms

—Ellen Chiri

The Coastside's farming roots go deep, and today we see farming in action every day of the year.

In spring, a Caterpillar D4 rattles and clanks as it plows a new field for Brussels sprouts; cattle graze on their blufftop in summer fog; pumpkins get their orange on in the soft autumn sun; the Brussels sprouts release their pungent perfume during the harvest.

Some things aren't so visible. Flowers bloom in hidden fields up a canyon; veggies grow hydroponically in greenhouses; goats hang out with their alpaca pal; fishers and crabbers gather the bounty of the sea.

And some things are gone—strawflower fields are buried under a shopping center; greenhouses once a-bloom with flowers stand empty.

Farming is hard work all year long. As the seasons change so do farm chores, but the chores never stop, with plowing, planting, tending, harvesting, maintaining equipment, and more. Winter brings a bit of a respite but there's still plenty to be done.

Jacob Giusti of Half Moon Bay's Giusti Farms reviews the previous year, strategizing for the following year—what to plant where, for example. And he spends plenty of time working on equipment, ensuring that it's in good shape. Winter chores for Jennifer Simms of Pescadero's Simms Organics involve slogging through mud on cold and windy days, not her favorite activity. Asked what her favorite winter activity is, she immediately replies "Sleep!"—something that comes in short supply the rest of the farm year.

Coastside farming is what the annual Mel Mello Farm Day celebration is all about.

Melvin Mello Sr. was a prominent community leader in Half Moon Bay, deeply involved in local agriculture, civic engagement, and cultural events. He served several terms as mayor and was a member of the city council.

He was also a key contributor to the development of the Half Moon Bay Art & Pumpkin Festival, and to the pumpkin weigh-off before festival weekend.

Mello Sr. co-founded the Farm Day luncheon, created to bring together the Coastside farming community, residents, and politicians to share a meal and build relationships. The first Farm Day was held June 6, 1968 at Domenic's Restaurant in Half Moon Bay. It was a Chamber of Commerce meeting with Ed Lea as the program chairman. All members of the Chamber were encouraged to attend and to bring a "farmer friend." That first Farm Day featured locally grown produce and meats, prepared by members of the community.



*Image of Mel Mello courtesy of the Half Moon Bay Farm Day Committee*

Farm Day was the idea of Louis Swain, who was a secretary of the Chamber of Commerce and who believed that agriculture was extremely important to the Coastside. His vision was to celebrate the people who bring the food to our tables, while introducing them to those in attendance. Mel Mello, Sr. and Swain brought the vision to life. For the first Farm Day meal, Swain asked friends in Butte County to donate rice but urged that all other items served be locally grown. Luncheon dishes included coastal-grown artichokes, sprouts, beef, chicken, and potatoes.

In addition to great locally sourced food, the event also brought the farming community together with local and state government officials. In the early days, members of the agricultural community and government agencies gave presentations on current events affecting the farm economy. Be it pesticides, farm-worker housing, taxes, or new technology advancements, it was an event for attendees to become informed and to meet and work with like-

minded people to solve problems and to raise awareness of the Coastside’s agricultural economy.

Mel Mello Sr. chaired the event from 1970 until his death in 1991. His family and the community continue the tradition with community participation, guest speakers, presentations of Farmer of the Year and Farmworker of the Year awards, and the delicious luncheon.

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## Chasing a Dream: The Origins of Pacific Coast Dream Machines

—Marc Strohlein

The Half Moon Bay Pumpkin Festival rightfully garners a lot of attention, but for lovers of “things that go fast and make a lot of noise,” it doesn’t get any better than the Pacific Coast Dream Machines. There are certainly many car shows around the globe, but few if any span the range of classic, custom, and racing cars; vintage and custom motorcycles; boats; vintage aircraft; steam and gas engines; vintage farm equipment; military vehicles; and new and experimental vehicles.



Rod Hadfield's Final Objective 1955 Chevy courtesy of [Streetmachine.com.au](http://Streetmachine.com.au)

Better yet, the show is a benefit—all the money raised goes to the Coastside Adult Day Care Center, contributing a significant percentage of their annual operating budget. The show has been held from 1990 to present, interrupted only by COVID, unexpected farming on the airfield, and an FAA decision to restrict activities at airports in 2024.

Bob Senz was the founding member and guiding light behind the event for many years. In a May 2015 interview with the *Half Moon Bay Review* Senz told the paper that he started Dream Machines when some friends asked him to help raise money for the Coastside Adult Day Health Center. One of his employees at the time, Francis Hibbs, had a husband Jim who had suffered a stroke and was participating in the center’s programs. Senz was a board member for the center and that was the spark that led to the genesis of the Pacific Coast Dream Machines.

The event began somewhat modestly—Senz told the *Review* “First year, we had 200 cars and had a good time,” He remembered. “I invited some steam tractor and locomotive people that I know, and it just grew from there.” Despite the modest beginnings, writing for the *Half Moon Bay Review*, Jeremy Voas described the show as “the most impressive first-time event I’ve ever seen—at least one put together by community volunteers.”

That event had 300 vehicles, thousands of spectators, and raised \$25,000 for the Coastside Adult Day Care Center. Voas described how “Senz sat down with Chad Hooker and Kathy Bristol to spell out his vision and get the machine’s gears churning.” The goal was to establish a reliable revenue source for the Center.

In a video of a Rotary Club presentation in 2018, Hooker not only describes the incredible amount of work it takes to stage the event but also detailed the perseverance and determination that Senz brought in bringing to life his envisioned “big deal,” and the event today is that and more!

Other people who have labored tirelessly to keep the event growing and evolving over the years include Tim Beamer of Miramar Events, providing publicity for over 20 years; Bill Mahar and Mike Serdy, managing the food court; and Grant Walters, securing bands and musicians to grace the music stage.

Each year, planning for next year’s event starts in September with the core group of organizers. In January, thirty group leaders begin their work, and ultimately over 250 volunteers work to bring the show to life in April.

Some highlights from shows over the years include the late Eddie Andreini’s YAK-52 and Yak-9 airplanes; Emerson Fittipaldi’s Indy 500 winning race car; a WW II PT-19 Flight Trainer; Dream Big, the world’s largest motorcycle weighing 6500 pounds; a Nike Hercules Missile; Otis Spunkmeyer’s DC-3 airplane; many P-51 Mustangs, the XB-35 Flying Wing Bomber; a B-25 Mitchell Bomber; surreal custom cars by the Blastolene Brothers; an 1899 logging engine; a 15,000 pound gas engine used on a cooling tower; and many, many others.



*XB-35 Flying Wing Bomber courtesy of Wikipedia*

Former co-chairman and this year’s Master Builder Bob Pelikan has been a key player for the event for over 20 years and has exhibited a number of vehicles at the show including a rotary-engine motorcycle, the Corvette/Jeep hybrid called the Corveep, and most recently a VW microbus with a Tesla motor.

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Pelikan described some of his favorite memories over the years, including the Pink Lady with her pink Studebaker and matching outfits, tattoo artist Wild Bill with his zany vehicles, and most of all, Rod Hadfield’s Final Objective 1955 Chevy, painted to look like an aircraft and powered by a twin-supercharged 27-litre V12 Rolls Royce Merlin certified at 3000hp.



*The Pink Lady in her Studebaker and Will Bill’s Metropolitan courtesy of Telstar Logics on Flickr.com*

Far from a static display of vehicles and motors, the show has featured a myriad of activities over the years including unicycle races, monster truck rides, fly-ins and flyovers by rare and historic planes, helicopter rides, a demolition derby, and much, much more. It has also featured a wealth of fun for kids of all ages from rock climbing to a maker faire, food and music festivals, and this year, the Grease Monkey Kids’ Zone.

The 2025 show website described the event as “a whimsical, fascinating, amusing, curious and absolutely unique show-and-tell spectacle featuring some 2,000 magnificent driving, flying and working machines from the 20th and 21st centuries.” The show included a new

“Machines of Tomorrow” showcase with fascinating displays of all things to come in the next generation of transportation—concept cars, flying cars, robotics, autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles (EVs) and more.

Aside from adverse weather and unanticipated events, one of the biggest challenges has been finding volunteers—the show currently requires about 250 of them to operate (it’s fun and highly recommended!). Balancing costs with creation of memorable activities and features is another challenge. Organizers have scaled back fly-ins due to the costs of fuel and fees to bring in vintage aircraft—the event is a charity after all.

Pelikan recalled one scary episode some years ago when cash was the primary form of entry. He was taking a hefty portion of the proceeds to a local bank in a police car as escort when a notorious motorcycle gang came roaring up on the car stuck in stopped traffic in the Tom Lantos Tunnel. The police sped around the

traffic jam, and the motorcyclists fortunately did not follow.

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... but for lovers of “things that go fast and make a lot of noise,” it doesn’t get any better than the Pacific Coast Dream Machines.

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Bob Senz died in 2023, but his memory and dream lives on thanks to current co-chairmen Frank Besnyi and Kevin Palmer, who took over from previous chairmen Chad Hooker and Bob Pelikan, along with a large group of volunteers who continue to make the show bigger and better than ever. For aficionados of virtually all forms of vintage and custom flying, rolling, and floating machinery the opportunity to experience such a unique event that also benefits seniors on the Coastside truly is a dream come true! And volunteering is both fun and a valuable contribution to the Coastside community!

## The Long History of Fourth of July Celebrations on the San Mateo Coastside

— Bill Scholtz

Today we celebrate the Fourth of July with a big parade and many barbecues. Did you know the Fourth of July celebrations on the Coastside go back at least as far as 1857 in Spanishtown?<sup>1</sup> That’s almost 170 years.

In a July 7, 1857 travel log in the *Daily Alta California*, a couple were quoted as saying: “About two miles from the foot of the mountain is ‘Spanishtown,’ a collection of a couple of dozen adobe houses, in the principal one of which the natives had gathered to spend the Fourth of July. The appearance of things about here reminded us more of California in its ante-golden days than anything we have seen before in this vicinity. The gente had gathered from the neighboring ranches, and were smoking cigaritos, ‘talking horse,’ and swearing, looking as happy, and as careless, and as sleepy as we have often seen them in the early times, before this Anglo-Saxon race broke in upon them....We learned

there had been two or three horse races during the day, and that there was to be a ‘fandango’ at night.”

By 1866, celebrations had spread to Pescadero where there was a procession, speeches, and a picnic. Fireworks had been used to celebrate the Fourth of July in the Bay Area at least as early as 1857 when a boatload of fireworks from China was bringing higher prices.

By 1870, Half Moon Bay (Spanishtown) had added a parade to their celebration. According to the 9 July 1870 *San Mateo Times Gazette* at Half-Moon Bay, there was quite a patriotic demonstration consisting of a procession, oration by H. N. Nutting Esq., a reading of the Declaration of Independence, music by the Redwood City Cornet Band, and singing of a couple of patriotic psalms by Judge G. R. Borden, who was pronounced by those present to be the best singer in

California. The day wound down with a fine display of fireworks and a ball in the evening.



*Half Moon Bay Fourth of July parade float from the early 1900s courtesy HalfMoonBayMemories.com*

For most of the early years, these were the only celebrations in San Mateo County. The earliest reference to the Fourth of July we've seen for San Gregorio was in 1872. The 15 June 1872 *San Mateo Times Gazette* notes "There is talk of an extensive Sunday School picnic on the 4th of July at San Gregorio, but there will be so many good things going on that day, that one would require to be ubiquitous to attend and partake of them all."

The best description of an early celebration is from the July 13, 1867 edition of *Times Gazette* which noted:

#### THE FOURTH AT SPANISHTOWN.

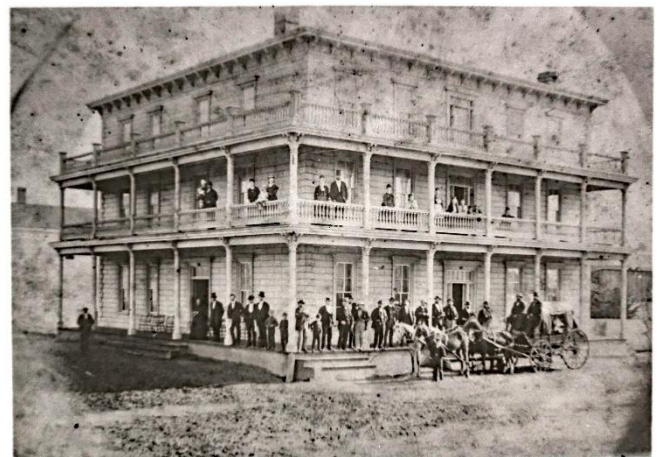
"The 91st Anniversary of American Independence, was celebrated in Spanishtown on the 4th inst., with considerable vim. This being the only place in the county in which any demonstration was to be made in the way of celebrating the 4th of July<sup>2</sup>, many people from the various portions of the county naturally found their way to Spanishtown on that day.

"The day was one of the pleasantest of the season, and the drive over the road from Redwood City to Half-moon Bay<sup>3</sup> was delightful. The ball, which was advertised to come off in the evening, brought together quite a large number of young folks from different parts of the county, and parts adjacent, the

greater proportion of whom were from Redwood City and Mayfield.

"By 12 o'clock, meridian, most of the inhabitants of the coast were assembled at Spanishtown, to witness the imposing ceremonies of the day. At noon a national salute of 36 guns was fired in front of the Half-moon Bay House<sup>4</sup>—a couple of anvils being used for that purpose. The literary exercises commenced about 2 o'clock P. M., in front of Kelly & Mattingley's store<sup>5</sup>, the audience being located in the street between the store and hotel, with the exception of those who occupied the verandahs of the hotel. H. S. Loveland, Esq., called the meeting to Order, and after a few appropriate remarks announced the order of exercises, whereupon the Spanishtown 'Glee Club' sang the 'Star Spangled Banner' in fine style. Then came a prayer by the Rev. Mr. Duncan, a reading of the Declaration of Independence by Mr. Loveland, followed by an oration by John Brier, of the late Laurel Institute in this city.

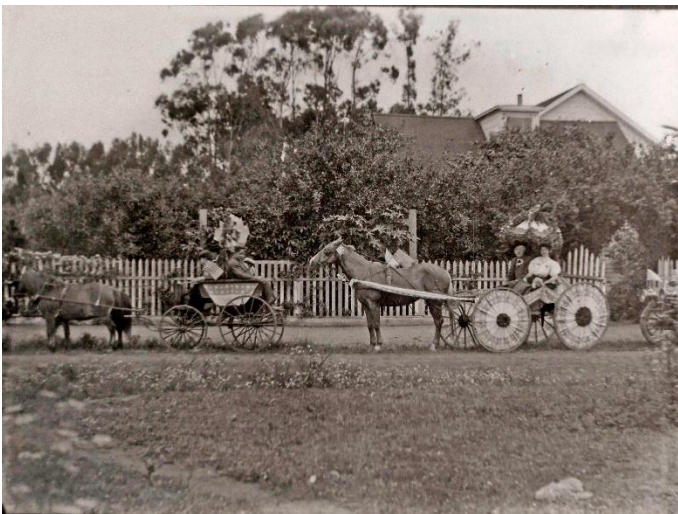
"The day's exercises closed with a horse race about 4 o'clock, at which the whole Spanish population on the coast were present, as a matter of course. Horse racing is their 'strong holt,' and the bottom dollar is freely staked on the game. They all seem to take the consequences good-naturedly whether they lose or win."



*Built in 1866-7 as the Half-moon Bay House and later Dawson's Hotel, the Schuyler House, and finally the Occidental Hotel. It was the site of many Fourth of July celebrations. Courtesy of HMBHA*

The *Times Gazette* continued: “The Fourth was finished up with a ball at Pacific Hall, in the evening, which was said to be the largest ball ever got up on the coast side of our county. If there was any cause for finding fault with the ball, it was only upon the grounds that there were too many there.

“The Half-moon Bay House was literally crammed full of guests, and Clark’s wits were sorely taxed at times, as to the ways and means for providing the necessary accommodations for such an unusual crowd, but somehow or other he managed to get through with things in a satisfactory manner to all concerned. Many of the Redwood City folks remained most of the next day, and enjoyed themselves, by taking a drive on the beach, and visiting ‘Sea Lion Rocks’ below Purissima. Taken altogether we believe that all who spent the 4th at Spanishtown had more real healthy enjoyment, than they would have found by going to San Francisco.”



*Benjamin Griffith in his carriage and others celebrating the Fourth of July, likely before 1900. Courtesy of HMBHA*

Fast forward to July 4, 2025 when Half Moon Bay will mark the 54th rendition of its beloved parade down Main Street. Coastsiders and visitors have come to love this colorful celebration of America’s birthday. The day starts with our popular pancake breakfast and is followed by a parade and block party.

Whimsical floats, marching bands, community service groups, classic cars, dance troupes, and a Color Guard from the American Legion are all part of this annual celebration of patriotism and community spirit.

If you find yourself celebrating this red, white, and blue day, take some time to look around and see if you can imagine some of the sites and scenes described in this article which happened so long ago.

#### **Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>Spanishtown is the old informal name for Half Moon Bay given by the Americans who arrived after the 1849 Gold Rush.

<sup>2</sup>The area from San Gregorio to Año Nuevo, including Pescadero, were part of Santa Cruz County and would not be part of San Mateo County until 1868.

<sup>3</sup>As the name of the town (Spanishtown) started to take on the name used for the bay and surrounding areas, Half Moon Bay, it went through several spelling variations. The bay and surrounding areas were usually spelled Half Moon Bay, but the town was often referred to as Half-moon Bay and more commonly Halfmoon Bay. It wasn’t until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the town spelling settled on Half Moon Bay.

<sup>4</sup>The Half-moon Bay House was built in 1861 near the Southeast corner of Kelly and Purissima. By 1866 it was determined to be too small, so a three-story replacement was built next to it on the Southeast corner of Kelly and Purissima. It is not clear if it was finished by the celebrations of 1867. The building was later called the Dawson’s Hotel, then Schuyler House and eventually the Occidental Hotel. It burned down in 1894 and was replaced by a two-story Occidental Hotel.

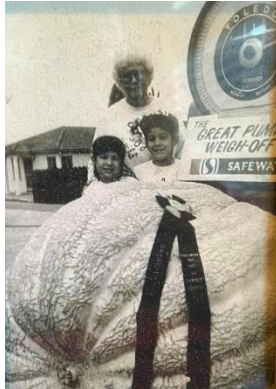
<sup>5</sup>Kelly and Mattingley’s store was on the corner of Kelly and Purissima where the Mercantile Building is today.

## The Paint-In and the Pumpkin Festival

—Ellen Chiri

In the 1970s Laugh-In was on television, love-ins carried over from the 1960s... and downtown Half Moon Bay had a paint-in.

Main Street was looking tattered. The Westinghouse organization, which was responsible for the Half Moon Bay Golf Links, wasn't happy about it so they got in touch with Dolores Mullin and Patsy Dutra, lifelong residents with reputations for getting things done. Dolores and Patsy reached out to the Main Street merchants and, with a donation from Westinghouse, they launched the Great Half Moon Bay Paint-In.



*Dolores Mullin and friends, 1970s. Courtesy of the Half Moon Bay Beautification Committee*

The whole town got involved. The streets were closed off, scaffolding was set up along Main Street, and everyone grabbed a paintbrush and got to work. Cunha's Country Store provided sandwiches and sodas to all the volunteers. Merchants donated paint and supplies. Neighbors of all ages up and down the street had paint all over themselves as they helped bring Main Street back to life.

After the paint-in's success the Half Moon Bay Beautification Committee formed, to maintain the newly sparkling Main Street. The original members were Dolores Mullin, Patsy Dutra, Edie Phillips, Bev Ashcraft, Lorraine Valadeo and Theresa Gilcrest, who met monthly to discuss ways to keep Main Street beautiful.

Of course, keeping Main Street beautiful called for funding, so they decided to hold a small art festival. The committee capitalized on the Coastside's pumpkin patches that drew people from all over, and in 1971 the

first Art & Pumpkin Festival was held. Originally called the Spanishtown Art & Pumpkin Festival, the name was changed to the Half Moon Bay Art & Pumpkin Festival in 1973.

About a dozen artists lined Main Street between Correas Street and Monte Vista Street, and the Beautification Committee sold hot dogs, linguíça sandwiches, and beer on the I.D.E.S. grounds, as they do to this day. Money raised from that first festival bought wooden garbage cans and benches for Main Street.

An estimated 15,000 people attended the first festival. In *The Pumpkin Book*, published in 1975, festival chair Mary Bettencourt wrote "In 1974 more than 60,000 visitors came to Half Moon Bay for the two-day event." She adds, "There were 47 temporarily lost children and no unhappy incidents." Attendance estimates for recent festivals exceed 200,000 visitors moseying along Main Street.

The first Great Pumpkin Weigh-Off was held in 1973, to help promote the festival in the locally proclaimed Pumpkin Capital of the World. Early weigh-offs were contests among local growers and against the growers in Circleville Ohio, which also considers itself the Pumpkin Capital.



*Mel Mello Sr. and friends, 1970s weigh-off. Courtesy of the Half Moon Bay Beautification Committee*



*Bob Marsh's pumpkin farm. Courtesy of Ellen Chiri; photo by William Bakaleinikoff*

Early winners of the Weigh-Off were in the 100-200-pound range—mini-pumpkins by today's standards, when winning pumpkins weigh over a ton. Today's competing pumpkins come from across the country, and as locally as down the street from the festival.

How did the Coastside's pumpkin enthusiasm start, anyway? In the 1930s, teenage brothers John and

Clarence Arata planted pumpkins to feed the family's hogs on their farm south of Half Moon Bay. As the brothers hauled pumpkins along the road one day, a passing motorist stopped and asked to buy some. They sold the pumpkins for a quarter apiece, and their pumpkin business began. The idea caught on, and the Coastside has been decorated with autumnal orange ever since.

Since the festival's inception in 1971, the Half Moon Bay Beautification Committee has contributed an estimated three million dollars in grants and donations to local projects. That money, separate from monies raised by non-profit groups participating in the festival, is well spent.

Annual contributions include funding scholarships for Half Moon Bay High School students and the maintenance and beautification of Main Street. Beautification Committee contributions have also entirely funded projects such as the renovation of City Hall and Main Street's underground wiring.

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## President's Message

—Juliette Applewhite, President

It's Spring and there is so much the Association has to celebrate!

I am thrilled to share that we are growing our membership. It's exciting to see the positive response to our Members-Only hours at the museum. In March we enjoyed a photo gallery walk through our history, and in April we took a fascinating look back at funeral records from over 100 years ago. Our Members-Only field trip to Sam's Castle in April was another amazing excursion.

We are also honored to be recognized with some significant financial donations that will help us achieve our vision for exhibit expansion and allow us to explore more community activities. We had a tremendous response to the 2025 Coastside Gives and thank everyone who chose to support the History Association.

We are celebrating the Coastside History Museum's second anniversary and the Jail Museum's seventh anniversary. And it has been one year since we opened our Native Plants Garden. Looking towards the future, we are working hard on expanding our education program, including our quarterly speaker series.

When I reflect on all that we have accomplished, I think first about our volunteers and amazing community, and I am deeply grateful. I consider our phenomenal high school team, who have been instrumental in our collections effort; our ever-growing docent team; our devoted small, but dedicated Board; the incredible group that we call our 'gardenistas;' and our increasing membership. Coastsiders know what a fabulous community we have, and we are lucky to call it home.

Thank you all for your continued support and we hope to see you soon.

As always, we welcome volunteers who are interested in being museum docents and writers for the Coastside Chronicles. For more info, email us at [Volunteer4History@gmail.com](mailto:Volunteer4History@gmail.com). We also welcome donations of local artifacts, including written anecdotes (tales of the past!) to enhance the appreciation of our history and vibrant community.

## Help Preserve Coastside History

The Half Moon Bay History Association is dedicated to bringing together all members of the 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 times of the earliest Ohlone villages, to the Spanish and Mexican periods, through the early American period, to modern times.



## Let Us Hear from You

Stop by the museum at 505 Johnston Street, Half Moon Bay, CA.

Click [here](#) for our YouTube videos.

Follow us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/HMBHistory/>.

Visit <https://www.halfmoonbayhistory.org/>. Send email to [hmbha.contact@gmail.com](mailto:hmbha.contact@gmail.com).

Send mail to Half Moon Bay History Association, PO Box 248, Half Moon Bay, CA 94019-0248 or call (650) 479-1935.

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