

HALF MOON BAY
HISTORY
ASSOCIATION

Celebrating Coastside Legacies

326 Main Street
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019
(650) 726-4468

retro-spective

March, 2013

Vol. V No. 1

Next Meeting:
March 14, 2013

Topic:

**Joining with the Coastside's
American Association of University Women**

- See story on inside -

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A TALE OF TWO VOYAGES

By JoAnn Semones

For more than 40 years, the steamship *San Juan* passed our Coastside shores carrying passengers from the Golden Gate to ports as far away as Panama. In the 1920s, the ship focused on coastal trade, plying a popular route between San Francisco and San Pedro. The fare was attractively priced at a mere eight to ten dollars per person.

For most passengers, the trip was filled with anticipation and joy. "I was only four years old, but I remember the ship, I remember the voyage," Patsy Hartje recalls of her cruise in 1928. "Mother warned us not to go on the deck. She said we'd fall off."

Having romped often at Half Moon Bay's beaches with her father, Morris Beddoe, Mrs. Hartje looked forward to a shipboard adventure. She shared the *San Juan* voyage with her mother Florence, older sister Gertrude, and baby brother Donny. "We slept in bunk beds and thought it was a great adventure," she chuckled. "Everyone was so excited. I kept asking when we'd get there."



Patsy Hartje (far left) has happy memories of a trip on the *San Juan*. Here, she enjoys Half Moon Bay with her father Morris Beddoe, brother Buddy, uncle Roy, and cousins Pansy and Leona. (Courtesy of Patsy Hartje)



Paul Wagner with his sisters, Elsa and Anne Marie. (Courtesy of Natalie Foster)

For other passengers, memories of a trip aboard the *San Juan* mean only tragedy. On August 29, 1929, the steamship collided with an oil tanker twice her size. It was the Coastside's worst maritime disaster. The ship was sliced in half and sank in five minutes, plunging seventy-five men, women, and children deep into the sea.

Paul Wagner, 23, was among them. Having secured a master's degree in physics from Stanford University, he was studying for a Ph.D. A teaching position awaited him at the California Institute of Technology. No doubt, his future gave promise of a productive and successful academic life.

"My grandmother, Elsa, often talked about her younger brother, Paul, who was aboard the *San Juan* when it went down," Natalie Foster recalled. "She bought him a ticket to visit her in Los Angeles and always felt guilty about it. How sad she was, always crying."

Following the mishap, a sensational scandal erupted. Some charged that the oil tanker, which was damaged but still afloat, pulled away from the *San Juan* too soon. They believed the tanker could have saved more lives by staying with the wreckage. Meanwhile, officers and crew of each vessel blamed the other for changing course and causing the accident. Ultimately, responsibility was placed on the third officer of the tanker and on the captain of the *San Juan*.

Families and relatives of those who were lost flooded the District Court with lawsuits. In January of 1932, a final decree fixing claimants damages was settled. Standard Oil, the tanker's owner, paid a total of just over \$329,000 in death, personal injury, lost effects, and lost cargo claims. Of that, Paul Wagner's parents received \$3,500.

"The way Paul died, the way the accident happened, has always bothered me. He was physically fit and did gymnastics as a hobby," Foster noted. "If he'd had a chance, he might have saved himself."

Do you have an artifact, photo, or tale about the past? If so, you could discover it in a future story. It can be about anything related to the Coastside. Please share it by contacting me through my website at: www.GullCottageBooks.com.

(Editor's Note: JoAnn Semones is a maritime author and historian. See her book "Shipwrecks, Scalawags, and Scavengers" for more about Coastside history.)



Another voyage aboard the *San Juan* brought tragedy to many passengers. Paul Wagner was among them. (Courtesy of San Francisco Chronicle)

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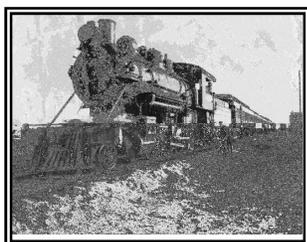
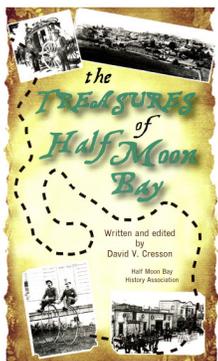
Celebrating Coastside Legacies

**TIME TO JOIN... OR
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**Annual dues \$25
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Walking Tour book,
"**Treasures of Half Moon Bay**"
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What we do:

**Search for the bits and pieces ...
Tell the stories ...
Keep the records ...**

...Of how our Coastside came to become itself

Name: _____
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e-mail: _____

Do you prefer ...

- To be a quiet supporter ..
- To get involved
- Maybe a little of both

Annual dues: \$25

**Mail to: HMB History Assoc
326 Main St.
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019**

NEXT PROGRAM...

“Coastside Women Reminisce”

Everyone Invited!

- The next meeting of the HMBHA will be Monday, March 18, 2013
- Location: The Conference Room at Community Methodist Church, 777 Miramontes St., HMB
- Doors open 5:30. Finger snacks and Beverages.



**Should be a fun, interesting, and a unique walk down the Memory Lane of Coastside History.
The theme...**

Next Monday (March 18) members and friends of the HMB History Association and of the American Association of University Women are invited to participate in an oral history interview of the Coastside!

The program is a celebration and learning experience about the many changes women have seen, experienced, and brought about in the Coastside throughout the years. Come hear local women share insight, memories and stories about living, working, raising families, and undergoing national and international events, while making their homes on the coast from Montara to Pescadero.

The Half Moon Bay branch of AAUW was founded over 45 years ago with the AAUW mission: Advancing equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy and research.

Come join us. Rub shoulders and chat. We will have finger foods and good company.

Brief Business announcements... 6:00

Program begins... 6:30

More...

President's Message: The Main Street Bridge in Half Moon Bay

LOVE THE BRIDGE

I do love the Main Street Bridge. It's not especially pretty. It is a bit on the old side. So old that it could be listed as an historic landmark. It is sad that there are plans afoot to demolish it. Replace it with a modern, wider, slicker bridge that meets today's Federal Highway Standards.

Why would the city of Half Moon Bay consider tearing it down? Consultants have said that it is old has cracks and could be damaged in the event of a tsunami, dam break, or big earthquake. Also millions of federal dollars are available to pay for a replacement bridge.

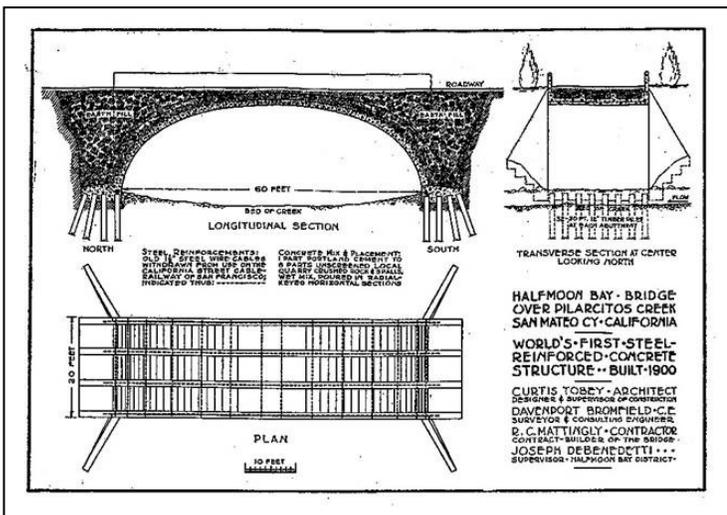
I like the bridge because it is so much a part of the still preserved, old-fashioned way of downtown HMB. It is a part of all that appealed to us when we came to the Coastside. Our bridge is one of so few historic icons of the town.

Independent bridge experts – structural engineers – tell us that our bridge is a “good candidate for repair or rehabilitation.” The only way to know if it can be repaired is to do a series of tests and studies. The tests are relatively inexpensive. We think such tests should be done – by independent experts who are not attached to the replacement idea – before any decision to replace the bridge is made.



OUR ENTRANCE

Photo: Deb Wona

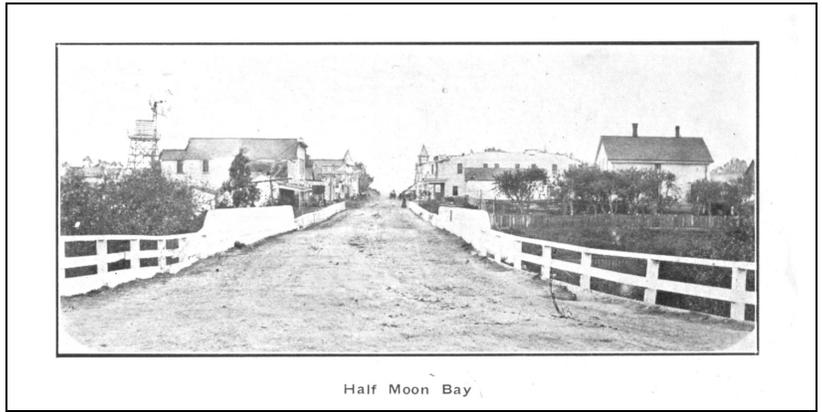


OLD THE PLANS FOR THE BRIDGE

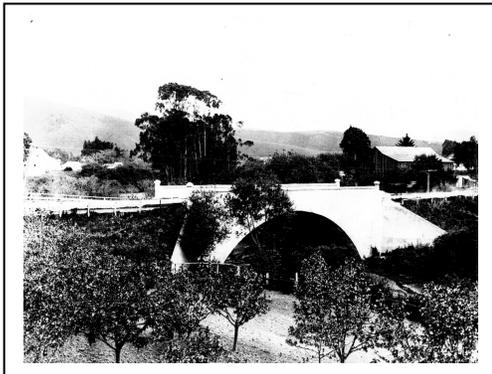
Back in the day – the late eighteen hundreds – our tiny town was led in so many ways by its business and farming leaders. All volunteers – helping to create the future. Those volunteers brought to our town fire department, a water system, a sewage system, electricity and telephones. They appointed constables. Their government, the Board of Supervisors, was in Redwood City.

Thanks to one Supervisor, the bridge started its life well over a hundred years ago (1900, to be exact). The design was simple – but had one very innovative feature – It was one of the very first bridges to use reinforced concrete. That is, steel was used within the concrete to give it even more strength than the inherently strong arch design. Remarkably, the steel they used was surplus cables from San Francisco's California Street Cable Car System. Our bridge ties together old Half Moon Bay and old San Francisco.

Half Moon Bay Pioneer and early San Mateo County Supervisor, Joseph Debenedetti, was the champion for the new bridge. He used his position as a town leader and as a county leader to persuade San Mateo County to build the bridge for Half Moon Bay. It replaced a bridge that required the road to drop twenty feet to the creek level, and then climb back up the other side. A very difficult task for the horses.



Shortly thereafter came the 1906 Earthquake. The bridge readily withstood the temblor. Noting this, Debenedetti used reinforced concrete for the new office building he constructed on Main Street – the one called - then and now – “The Debenedetti Building.”



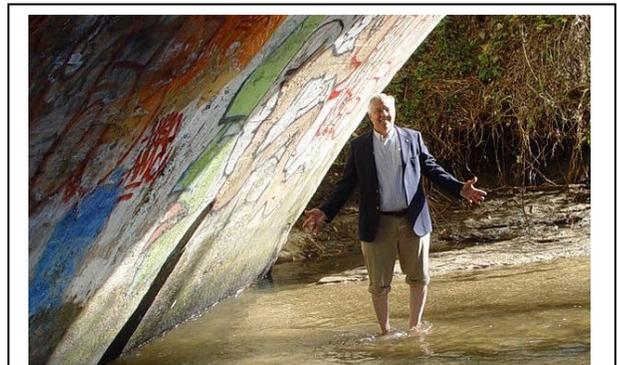
The State of California has performed inspections of the bridge since before World War II. But from then until today, they consistently judged the structure of the bridge to be serviceably sound. Sure it shows cracks, pockets and rust here and there. Since those early years they summarized (like this, in 1947) with, “None of these defects are regarded as serious at this time.” In the most recent year (2011), they rated the structure (arch, abutments and railings) their strong “Health Index” of 89.4.

The bridge has changed only a little over the years. Pillars were added to each end of the walls that border the roadway. A walkway was added on the west side of the bridge. Its design was considered poor, and it was later replaced with walkways hung on steel brackets on both sides of the bridge. The dirt that was filled in above the arch of the bridge (held in by concrete sidewalls) used to come all the way up to become part of the dirt road, just as rest of Main Street. Then a concrete road followed and later that was blacktopped, as it is today. At some point the brass plaque commemorating the building of the bridge was moved from the south side to the north side.

Until the 1950s, Main Street was the coastal road linking San Francisco and Santa Cruz. – until today’s California Route 1 was constructed a few blocks to the west. The bridge was a very important part of the north-south road system.

Now the venerable bridge is a target for replacement. The main reason for our low overall “Sufficiency Rating” that consultants cite as the reason the bridge should be replaced is that the **bridge** is too narrow... But that is just like all the rest of Main Street – below current Federal Highway Standards.

The outside engineers say to DO TESTS of the bridge FIRST.” Then we will know if the bridge is still structurally sound or not! If it is sound: Save it!



Pres. Dave immersed in his research

Built 1900. Scheduled for destruction 2014.

Enjoying forward to looking back,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave".

Dave Cresson, President

