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retro-spective

March, 2018

Vol. X No. 1

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL
HISTORY ASSOCIATION

RENEW > 2018

DUES

* Or join now? *

Next Meeting: SEE INSIDE FOR DETAILS

Tuesday, March 6, 2018

"The Portolá Expedition"
Changing the Future of California

Board of Directors:

Dave Cresson, President
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Barbara Dye
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Mary Ruddy

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ABOUT THE HMB HISTORY ASSOCIATION

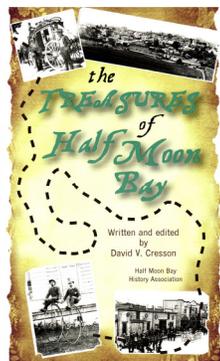
What we do:

Search for the bits and pieces ...

Tell the stories ...

Keep the records ...

... of how our Coastside came to become itself!



Annual dues \$25

2018 Membership

FREE! copy of HMBHA historic
Walking Tour book,

"Treasures of Half Moon Bay"

Pick your copy up at ...

And send form to...

HMBHA

c/o Zaballa House

326 Main St.

HMB, CA 94019

HalfMoonBayHistory.org

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Do you prefer ...

to be a quiet supporter ..

to get involved (Please!)

maybe a little of both

Annual dues: \$25

Mail to: HMB History Association (HMBHA)

326 Main St.

Half Moon Bay, CA 94019

Next Program... Everyone is invited

**“The Portolá Expedition”
Changing the Future of California**

Half Moon Bay History Association MEETING – Tuesday, March 6

Presenter: Mitch Postel
Topic: The Portolá Expedition of 1769
Place Portuguese Cultural Center, 724 Kelly Ave, HMB
Date: Tues., March 6
Time: 5:30 p.m. doors open – finger snacks and refreshments
Public welcome – No charge
Meeting begins: Business at 6 p.m., Program about 6:20 p.m.



Hear one of the most prominent voices of local history discuss the first contact between the natives of the Coastside and the earliest land explorers from the European continent. This is the story of the Portolá Expedition, nearly 250 years ago. Spain sent the expedition on a path that passed within a few hundred feet of what are now the homes and businesses of the Coastside. This became a pivotal moment in California history.

The Half Moon Bay History Association is pleased to present a program on March 6 focused on the Portolá Expedition of 1769.

Authorized by Spain to confirm its claim to the coast, Portolá’s group of soldiers, friars and servants were the first Europeans to visit California and meet the Ohlone people, among others.

The three diarists on the expedition, Crespi, Costanzo, and Portolá himself, described what they saw each day, providing an extraordinary glimpse of what life was like at that time.

After camping at the mouths of Purisima and Pilarcitos creeks and in Moss Beach, Portolá climbed Montara Mountain and soon “discovered” San Francisco Bay. The story of the Portolá Expedition tells us a great deal about early California history.

Our speaker, Mitchell P. Postel, president of the San Mateo County Historical Association, has served as its director since 1984.

He says, “In many ways, California History pivots with this episode”; adding, “in 2019, we will be observing the 250th anniversary of the event, with special exhibits and educational programs.”

Postel is an important part of the leadership of the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors’ efforts to create the Ohlone – Portolá Heritage Trail, which will trace Portolá’s route as closely as possible and link the highlands to the coast.

Please join us for another fun and interesting history program. Bring friends and meet new friends!

History Feature...

Giant Vegetables

By June Morrall

The fertile Coastside soil has offered up monster-size vegetables throughout its farming history. Colonel Albert S. Evans, who wrote for a New York newspaper, was riding horseback through California in the early 1870s, collecting data for a book called "A La \ California." He saw lettuce 7 feet in circumference and cucumbers 5 feet long and 8 inches in diameter, all grown in the black loamy soil of Half Moon Bay. These prize specimens were exhibited at the California Market in San Francisco. Half the ground fruit consumed in San Francisco came from the Coastside, according to Colonel Evans.

The Chinese and a dwindling number of remaining coastal Indians worked the fields, digging up Coastside potatoes so highly valued in San Francisco in the 1870s that they were dubbed Irish oranges.

Far more remarkable was the production of a cheese that weighed two tons.

"Oh, it weighed nearly 4,000 pounds," Rensselaer (R.E.) Steele told Colonel Evans.

The Steele Dairy was located at the scenic Cascade Ranch south of Pescadero, and as he led Colonel Evans on a tour of the dairy, they passed countless pans filled with milk waiting for the cream to rise.

"We auctioned the cheese at the Mechanic's Fair in San Francisco and donated the proceeds to the Sanitary Commission for the Union troops," added Steele. [The Sanitary Commission was the forerunner of the Red Cross.]

R.E. Steele was immensely proud of the Cheese, and it was said that President Lincoln actually tasted a sample. When Steele first settled the Cascade Ranch, neighbors had ridiculed him. They said that nothing could grow there and that the land was unproductive even for rabbits. He had proven them all wrong. It was now a veritable Eden with apple, pear, fig, plum, apricot, peach and almond trees. He pointed to the 1,500 healthy cows grazing on the native wild oats and to a bed of peanuts that survived in the coastal climate. Pumpkins and squash crept along the ground, and melons ripened in the sun.

Colonel Evans examined an outstanding pear tree and was convinced that the fruit harvested weighed at least four times as much as the entire tree.

To cultivate such magnificent produce was one thing; to get it to market was something far more difficult. Big ports were needed, and here the Coastside faced insurmountable obstacles in the shape of geographical barriers.

There were no natural harbors between San Francisco and Santa Cruz. One brave Coastsider, Alexander Gordon, took on the challenge. He decided to build a chute on the sheer cliffs, 150 feet above the crashing surf. The chute had to be big enough to handle tons of produce and huge amounts of wood products. [One giant redwood tree, which measured 17 feet in diameter, gave up 1 million shingles.]



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Vegetables Continued from p. 3

Gordon's Chute, as it was called, was composed of elaborate scaffolding secured with wire cables attached to the rocks below. The loading chute stretched out 350 feet and could be lowered on to the decks of vessels anchored beyond the surf. The chute was completed in 1872.

For a short time it worked, but soon the locals were calling it Gordon's Folly. Few ship captains relished stopping at the unprotected site. And events proved they were right; a terrific storm in 1885 blew Gordon's Chute away.

Even disasters could not stop the Coastside's indefatigable farmers from producing. When artichokes, the "dainty aristocrat" of vegetables, were introduced, they grew so large and bountiful on the Coastside that the growers prospered, and many were crowned artichoke kings.

Editor's Note: June Morrall wrote this unpublished, somewhat apocryphal article in 1993. June was the author of *Half Moon Bay memories: The Coastside's Colorful Past* (1978, 1987) and *The Coburn Mystery*, a true story set in the historic village of Pescadero (1992). She contributed to a column called *Coastside Memories* in the *Half Moon Bay Review* and wrote for other San Francisco Bay Area publications. She was a graduate of San Jose State University and a long time resident of El Granada. In 2010 those of us who enjoy good writing and rich stories about local history lost a friend. June Morrall passed away and left a large void.



News! We hope you have heard that History Association is in the beginning steps of opening a history museum. We have some essential early needs. CONSIDER BECOMING ONE OF THE **FOUNDERS** OF THIS NEW COMMUNITY INSTITUTION!

We will be needing **volunteers** for **Three** immediate types of activities...

1. **ARCHIVIST:** Is there someone who enjoys organized information and bookshelves? The history association has hundreds of documents, books and artifacts that need to be put in good order. Here is a hands-on project that needs a good record keeper.
2. **DOCENTS:** For those who enjoy meeting and exchanging kind words with the public, we will train docents to become hosts in the jail, ready to talk about the museum project and the Coastside's past. Trainers support those docents, building their strengths in becoming the best storytellers and explainers ever.
3. **FUNDS DEVELOPMENT:** Have you had experience raising money for worthy community causes? The museum project needs immediate support in presenting an effective and entertaining campaign to raise the money needed to restore the old barn. This is NOT a huge amount of money. In over ten years serving the community, we have not needed to raise serious money before. If you have worked on this kind of project, have ideas that might help, or simply want to help – please let us know!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

And so it begins...

Building a museum that is *itself* part of history

The paperwork is in hand! The City of Half Moon Bay has given the community the use of two historic buildings to celebrate Coastside history! The old barn was home to an early fast-freight shipping line. The jail was built a hundred years ago to serve a small need in a small town. Now they will be restored. The buildings will serve to interest and entertain visitors and locals by describing and explaining our remarkably varied history story.



Most folks seeing this article—people already interested in history—are aware of these themes of our past. Those who do not know about that fabulous variety in our historic tapestry will soon be learning more In our new museum.

For over a decade now, the HMB History Association has been busy answering questions, printing articles about our past and presenting programs with speakers who give authoritative and personal talks about fascinating pieces of our past. The association has also begun placing historic plaques around town. They tell stories of many of our older and interesting buildings. Local businessperson, Robin Kirby, is leading this program. Mary Ruddy and her happy team of talented and fun-loving instructors visit all the local elementary schools, where they captivate their audience with entertaining (that's a code word for "educational") stories about the Coastside's past.

But now it is time for the museum work to take center stage. Now its developers must become the champions so that the museum can become more than a "good idea." It will take some real money to restore that old barn to a first-class modern museum. That will take leaders. Our Board of Directors, guided by a Museum Development Executive Committee, is overseeing the program.

Barbara Dye is directing the critical task of raising the funds to design and restore the venerable old barn as the new history museum. Christina King, Stefanie Smitherums and Robin Kirby are pitching in with Barbara to figure out how to raise the money to bring the 2,000-square-foot museum to fruition.

Of course, the museum is more than a structure. Almost immediately, guides will be ready to lead the public down the paths of local history. Docents who enjoy storytelling are the key to success. They will start their work in the jail, which will immediately become a micro museum with small displays depicting Coastside history. Docents will staff the jail on weekends, talking to visitors about how the Coastside came to be the remarkable place that it is.

Gau ("Go") Hodges, who heads up the Docent Program, is energetically supported by Mary Ruddy, Kathleen Baker with JoAnne Semones and Julie Barrow. Very soon, a corps of outgoing and friendly folks will be recruited to learn how to engage visitors.

What's next? Now comes a most-important aspect of developing a living, breathing history museum—all of us must be more than spectators. This is our opportunity to become founders of the Half Moon Bay History Museum and to answer the call for volunteers and fundraising.

Please do join in and become one of the founders of the HMB History Museum that will serve our community for generations to come!

Still looking forward to looking back,

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

Dave Cresson

About the Half Moon Bay History Association

Our goal is ...

“To Educate, and To Celebrate and Preserve Coastside History.”

What is the Association?

The Half Moon Bay History Association is a nonprofit tax deductible 501(c) 3 corporation. (Since 2006)

It plans to...

- Try to find answers to any questions asked about Coastside history,
- Publish a newsletter about current activities of the group (Online, free to all who request it)... and programs too !
- Manage a website devoted to Coastside history,
- Develop a local history museum for the Coastside community
- And pursue whatever good idea someone comes up with...

See form on front page

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