

Coastside Chronicles

The Newsletter of the Half Moon Bay History Association

December 2020

In this Issue

President's Message

The Rich History of Pillar Point—page 2

What is That Thing?—page 4

Two Saloons and a Mortuary—page 4

Old Bottles—History in Half Moon Bay—page 5



President's Message

Juliette Applewhite
President

Giving Tuesday A Success!

I am so grateful to our very generous supporters. On Giving Tuesday we raised over \$11,000! These funds will help us continue our efforts to preserve, interpret, and celebrate our Coastside history.



In Other News...

Our Board of Directors has been meeting at least monthly, and our Education Committee's new co-chairs Pat Keefe and Kathleen Baker continue to work with their great team on strategies for how best to support our Coastside teachers and students.

The Oral History team has continued to find intriguing stories from the past and record them. We look forward to sharing them with you in 2021.

The Collections Team is busy working on potential loans and donations of historic artifacts. If you have a piece of Half Moon Bay history you'd like to loan or donate, we'd love to talk with you! Email us at info@halfmoonbayhistory.org, or call 650.479.1935.

Our Construction Team has been collaborating with the City of Half Moon Bay to finalize our permitting plans and complete the building permit process for expanding the museum. When the plans are final, we will begin formulating our 2021 construction timeline.

The Jail Museum is currently closed because of the pandemic, but we look forward to seeing you when we can safely welcome visitors once again.

Thank you, as always, for your support. Safe and Happy Holidays!

Oral Histories

Does your family have a long 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?

The Rich History of Pillar Point



Marc Strohlein
Guest Contributor



Pillar Point is perhaps best known as the site of the big “golf ball” radar installation, and for Mavericks, the surfing location. Dig a little deeper, however, and it turns out that it has an interesting and varied history that spans Native American dwellers, Spanish explorers, World War II-era defense, rocket and missile tracking, and even a bombing by a radical domestic terrorist group.

The earliest known inhabitants in the Pillar Point area were the Ohlone Native Americans, who the Spanish called Costanoans, or “coastal people.” University of California anthropologist Nels Nelson discovered evidence of their existence in the course of his survey of Bay Area shell mounds conducted in the early 1900s.

Shell mounds, or middens, are comprised of mollusk shells, cooking stones and ashes, bird and mammal bones, and other village artifacts. The Pillar Point mound is dated sometime between AD 500 and AD 1000.

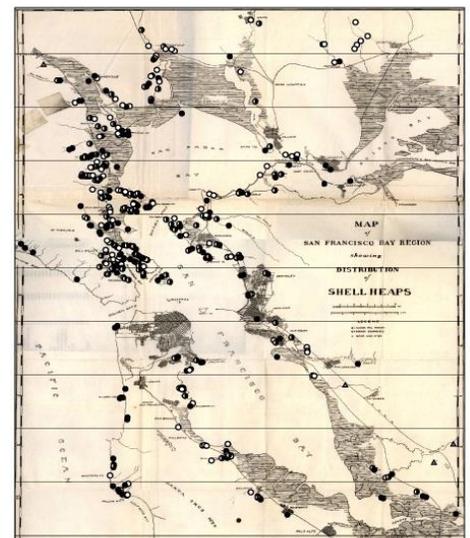
A tribelet of Chiguan Ohlone occupied a village named Chagunte at Miramar, south of Pillar Point. Those Chiguan would have watched Spanish explorer Francisco Gali sailing past the point in 1585 as he explored the coast and charted Pillar Point, not knowing how their lives would change almost 200 years later.

In 1769, Spanish Military explorer Gaspar de Portolá led a mission north from San Diego in search of Monterey Bay.

Having missed the bay, the explorers continued north and were reportedly fed by Ohlone near Pillar Point on their expedition that ultimately led to the first sighting of San Francisco Bay by Europeans. The traveling party included Father Juan Crespi, who named Pillar Point “Punto de los Angeles Custodios,” or Guardian Angel Point. The Ohlone land was subsequently claimed by Spain, and 44 Chiguan were taken to Mission Delores where many sickened and died.

In 1821, Mexico gained independence from Spain, including Alta California. Pillar Point became part of Rancho Corral de Tierra (Earthen Corral), with the 1839 Mexican Land Grant to Francisco Guerrero y Palomares. The land, including the Pillar Point bluff, was used primarily for farming and grazing.

As American settlers populated the coast, Pillar Point Marsh was dammed in the 1920s by farmers to prevent salt water from moving into upland farming areas, and to provide a crossing for farm equipment for access to the slopes above the marsh for farming.



Over 400 shell mounds remained in 1909, reminders of the Ohlone who lived here for thousands of years. Most of these shell mounds are now gone.

>> continued on page 3

The Rich History of Pillar Point ... from page 2

In October of 1940, the U.S Army acquired about 50 acres of land on Pillar Point for a military reservation. It was believed that the Japanese would attack San Francisco using the point and harbor as a “back door”, and the Army wanted to use the site as an artillery observation post.

One remaining World War II structure, a bunker, and several objects including concrete markers, are reminders of Pillar Point’s role in World War II. The Army installation was shut down after the war, with the feared attacks having failed to materialize. It was re-activated in 1959 when it was transferred from the Army to the Navy for use as a command and control facility for the nuclear-armed Regulus missile, as well as to support the Minuteman I missile program.



Pillar Point 1943, during World War II

In the early 1960s, over 12 acres of the original Army acreage were transferred to the U.S. Air Force and a missile tracking installation was established on the site. The property, still owned by the U.S. Air Force, continues to be used as part of the missile tracking installation.

Ironically, after all of the earlier preparations for a Japanese attack, the only attack on the Pillar Point military site occurred on February 3, 1975 when the radical New World Liberation Front bombed the Air Force’s station. Members of the group entered the base at night, through an opening in a fence, and planted two pipe bombs under a diesel-fuel tank. The bombs failed to ignite the fuel, and 400 gallons of diesel fuel drained into the ground. Afterwards, the Air Force upgraded security of the installation.

Currently, Pillar Point Air Force Station is a tracking station that is part of the Western Range, which extends from the California coast westward to the Indian Ocean. The highly visible “golf ball” replaced a large radar dish that was dismantled in 1996. The site is managed by the U.S. Air Force 30th Space Wing, headquartered at Vandenberg Air Force Base. In conjunction with other test ranges, the Western Range provides continuous and complementary instrumentation coverage over a large portion of the Pacific Ocean. It supports polar-orbiting space satellites and operational intercontinental ballistic missile launches from Vandenberg. Operations at Pillar Point Air Force Station include radar tracking, telemetry reception, command control, and communication services to support launch operations.

In 2011, the San Mateo County Parks Department acquired Pillar Point Bluff with a grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board as an addition to Fitzgerald Marine Reserve.

Peninsula Open Space Trust also secured parcels in the area and made public-access improvements including a parking lot, restroom, and the Jean Lauer Trail that have made Pillar Point more accessible for visitors.

Today, Pillar Point is a popular destination for hiking, whale watching, birding, wildlife photography and a host of other activities, all while the Air Force Station continues its silent tracking vigil.

Despite the modern additions, it is still intriguing to stand on the point and wonder what the Ohlone felt as they observed Francisco Gali sailing past, or 200 years later, as the Portolá expedition struggled north.

What is That Thing?



This cement pylon, anchored on the reef just offshore below the Moss Beach Distillery, is a weathered remnant of World War II military operations. During the war, the Navy operated an anti-aircraft training center on the bluffs at Point Montara.

When artillery target practice was in progress a flag was hoisted atop the pylon, to warn local air and marine traffic.

In addition to gunnery practice, the Navy trainees learned how to use the first-generation radar that was newly developed.

The pylon, originally sporting a 15-foot wooden octagon atop it, was reportedly a calibration target for the radar transmitters that had to be calibrated each time they were used. The octagon was a known distance from the transmitters, and the gunners used it to correlate readings, checking the radar's accuracy.

Part of the octagon atop the pylon was still there into the 1990s, but the wind and weather has destroyed it. All that remains is the mysterious concrete pylon.

Volunteer Help Wanted!

Our Education, Oral History, and Program Committees would love to have your help.

Do you have experience designing websites or writing grants? We need you!

Let us hear from you! Email us at info@halfmoonbayhistory.org

History Mysteries

Do you have a Coastside history mystery you'd like us to investigate?

Let us know! Email us at info@halfmoonbayhistory.org

Two Saloons and a Mortuary

The Coastside was bustling around the turn of the 20th century, and the many saloons added to the buzz.

The Index Saloon welcomed patrons at the corner of Kelly Avenue and Main Street in Half Moon Bay, in the building that later became Cunha's Market. Reportedly the index against which all other saloons were measured, the Index shared the block with a mortuary—and with another saloon.

The Miller-Dutra funeral parlor opened in 1905 where it still stands today, at 645 Kelly Avenue. In what is now the Miller-Dutra parking lot at the corner of Kelly and Purissima stood a building that was first a residence and then a boarding house.

In 1906, Joseph V. Azevedo converted the building into the Enterprise Saloon.

The Enterprise gained a reputation as being even more colorful than the very colorful Index up the street.



The Enterprise was definitely popular!

Old Bottles—History in Half Moon Bay, and How to Identify Glass Age

Half Moon Bay History Association docent Jo Fry loves researching the old bottles and other glass artifacts that are part of the Coastside's legacy of bygone days.

Jo has examined the History Association's collection of old bottles, which includes those used for medicine, mysterious elixirs, perfume, wine... and what's with the curious bottle that has a round bottom?

Jo explains bottle history and function in her article *Half Moon Bay History Revealed Through Glass*. And she gives us a bonus in her *Basic Guide to Bottle Age Identification*. Read Jo's fascinating articles on the web at halfmoonbayhistory.org.

Video Tour of the Johnston House



Have you wondered what's inside that big white house on the hill south of Half Moon Bay? Coming soon is a video tour of the Johnston House, hosted by docent Gail Stevens. She'll

take us through the house room by room, telling its story and the story of those who lived there. We'll post the video on our website when it is complete.

Our Board of Directors

Juliette Applewhite, President

Dave Olson, Secretary

Scott Frazier, Treasurer

Mary Ruddy, Education Chair and Jail Museum Manager

Sally Benson, Special Projects Coordinator

Lau Hodges, Ex-officio Advisor

Ellen Chiri, Communications Chair and Newsletter Editor

Help Preserve Coastside History

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.



Our mission is to educate as we preserve, honor, and celebrate Coastside history.

Let Us Hear From You

- Visit us on the web at halfmoonbayhistory.org
- Follow us on Facebook 
- Check out our [YouTube channel](#).
- Email us at info@halfmoonbayhistory.org, or call us at 650.479.1935.
- Write to us at
625 Miramontes St. #203
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019