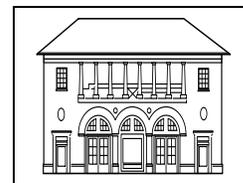


# THE JOURNAL OF LOCAL HISTORY

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*The Archives Committee of the Redwood City Public Library  
1044 Middlefield Road, Redwood City, CA 94063*

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## The President's Message

I was looking at an article in the Redwood City Tribune (remember that paper?) today about Union Cemetery. The article was written on Tuesday June 2, 1992 and talked about the experience people had at the Memorial Day ceremony the previous month. On the other side of the page was an article about an award received by the head librarian at the time Jane Light. I thought it would be nice to describe a little of her success.

"As the inaugural recipient of a national, "library-of-the-year award" the local institution has certainly proven the value of keeping its ear to the ground. I could not help but think how far we are away from such an honor today. Ms. Light's attitude was, "give the people what they want and need." "It's an attitude the whole staff has," she said to the interviewer.

This award was created by a major publisher and was, or is, designed to honor libraries for creatively serving the public in a time of reduced budgets and resources. Where is Jane Light today? We certainly, and unfortunately, find ourselves in the same position.

Ray Spangler wrote an article for the Tribune on February 27, 1963 talking about the time in history when Mr. Hawes wanted those that had been buried on his property removed. The people formed a committee of Charles N. Fox, J. W. Turner and Charles Ayers and asked them to solve the problem. When the committee met on February 7, 1859 they were given, and accepted, a proposal by

Messrs. Baird and Berry for six acres of land well outside of town on the road from the redwoods.

The subscribers to the cemetery each purchased plots for \$10 and became members. The first board of directors elected Charles N. Fox, J. V. Diller and J. W. Turner on February 28, 1859. Thus Union Cemetery came into existence, oh, incidentally Horace Hawes threw in \$500 to get the process started. This did a lot for his popularity around town.

The cemetery today looks better than it ever has in recent memory. The Peninsula Rose Society along with the San Mateo County Master Gardner Group will be in the cemetery on February 6<sup>th</sup> to put the winter shine on the roses in order for a dramatic presentation in the spring and summer. Please drop in and enjoy the cemetery as it becomes more and more beautiful. As I write this report there are three boys working on their Eagle Scout awards. One boy is building two fences, a second boy is cleaning up the Odd Fellow's plot at the back corner of the cemetery and a third boy is considering building two heavy cement benches for people to sit on and relax. These additions will further improve what is becoming a beautiful cemetery.

Now seems a good time to express my real gratefulness and appreciation to the Redwood City Civic and Cultural Commission for their interest in this Journal and their generous contribution of \$700 to the Archives Board and the Cemetery Board to help the two associations grow and prosper.

John Edmonds

## Mount Carmel is 125 years old.

By Jim Clifford



*Mount Carmel Church 1930s*

Mount Carmel Catholic elementary school in Redwood City this year celebrates the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding, marking the latest landmark for a pioneering school beloved by faculty, students, alum – and real estate agents.

The tuition supported school would have no money problems if it garnered royalties every time an ad for a house boasted that the residence was located in the “Mount Carmel area.” The term, which refers to the church as well as the school, shows that “landmark” is not a cliché in this case. Besides, any institution that is 125 years old provides landmark lessons in history

Would “Notre Dame Academy area” or “St. Mary’s area” provide the same lure? Those were the names Mount Carmel went by in its early years.

The Notre Dame Academy, which consisted of a high school and grade school operated by the Sisters of Notre Dame, was dedicated on July 26, 1885 by a procession of 80 children, Archbishop Patrick Riordan, four nuns and two priests. The two-story school cost \$5,700 and was built by contractor Joseph Binet of San Francisco, according to the Schellens history collection at the Redwood City Library. Classes were held on the left side of the school with the right side serving as the convent. A very tall wooden fence was in front of the building.

Classes did not start until August 3 because the furniture for the school at El Camino and Brewster did not arrive in time. Classes did not last long. In those days students stayed home in September and October to help harvest crops.

One of the best summations of what it was like to go to school in that era was provided by President Dwight Eisenhower when he recounted his experiences as a grade school student in a small Midwestern town in 1896.

“Most members of the community agreed that common sense and hard work rounded out a good common-school education,” he recalled. The aim was to master reading, penmanship, spelling and arithmetic.

“An eighth-grade education was considered adequate, and it was certainly no disgrace to leave school after the fifth or sixth grade,” he added. “High school was largely a female domain.”

Records kept by the Notre Dame nuns at their provincial house in Belmont bear out that last remark. Statistics kept from 1889 to 1993 show that there were more girls than boys in the Redwood City school with 1943 the first year boys, at 226, outnumbered girls, with an enrollment of 221. A photo of the 1915 graduating classes of both the academy and grade school shows 15 girls and 4 boys.



*Old Mount Carmel School (Notre Dame Academy)*

Notre Dame Academy high school was entirely a “female domain.”

It wasn't until 1896, with the opening of Sequoia High School, that there was a secondary school for both boys and girls in the area. If one thinks the number of students at the academy was small it should be pointed out that Sequoia had 53 students on its first day.

A search of past editions of *The Monitor*, the official newspaper of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, of which Redwood City is a part, showed almost all issues of the weekly in the 1890s carried at least 15 ads for schools for "young ladies" operated by nuns.

Truly "old school"

Yes, it was a different world, one that, by today's reckoning, seems turned upside down.

Of course, Mount Carmel is a Catholic school. Were public schools of the 1880s and 1890s much different? Eisenhower noted that "religious education was well integrated into the public school curriculum. The school day generally began with the teacher's reading a Bible verse to the class."

What made Catholic schools of that time different were the nuns, but more about that later.

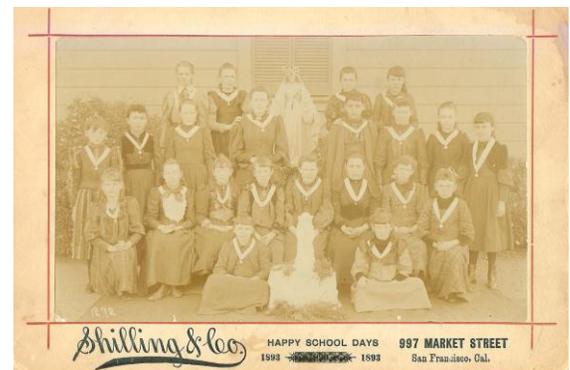
Mount Carmel, aka Notre Dame Academy and St. Mary's, was the first Catholic school in San Mateo County, even though the church regarded Redwood City as mere mission territory. Father Denis Dempsey was named pastor at St. Matthew's in San Mateo in 1863 and, as such, had pastoral responsibility for all of newly minted San Mateo County, which split from San Francisco in 1856. Dempsey died in 1881 and Father Michael O'Riordan, the pastor at Nativity in Menlo Park, took over the mission, which officially switched from St. Mary's mission to Mount Carmel parish in 1887, although records are unclear as to the exact date. According to old newspaper clips, the St. Mary's designation was used in public prints as late as 1889.

O'Riordan (His name is sometimes spelled without the "O," but his tombstone has that Irish designation) approached the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur at San Jose where they opened the Notre Dame Academy in 1851, one of the earliest secondary schools to be accredited in California.

The reason the honor of being first went to Redwood City was the foresight of the church hierarchy, according to the nuns' archives. Archbishop Joseph Alemany decided Redwood City "would provide a better field of apostolic labor" than elsewhere in the county. "In Harvest Fields by Sunset Shores," a history of the Notre Dame Sisters' efforts on the Pacific Coast, notes the opening of the academy with the line "here was the greater number of young children who would profit by such an institution." In short, Redwood City was a community "on the move."

The census of 1870 placed the population of Redwood City at 727, a figure that swelled to 1,383 by 1880. Ten years later it was 1,572. The nuns' archives say "the number of students increased steadily" which resulted in two nuns added to the staff by July 1886. The Notre Dame records note that 80 percent of the population was "native American. The greatest percentage of these were born in San Francisco or Redwood City." Native American at that time simply referred to a person born in America.

The first of the four nuns who established the academy included Sister Claire, who eventually returned to San Jose to head an orphanage, a job she held until her death at 54 in 1915, an event reported in the *Redwood City Democrat*. The obituary added, "in the world she was known as Margaret McIntyre."



*Class of 1893 Notre Dame Academy*

There's little in any of the archives about the high school and even less about the grade school.

The Mount Carmel staff has put out a call for any information, articles or artifacts that could help in the celebration of the anniversary.

A look at an academy report card from 1915, however, revealed what courses were taught to the young ladies. Classes involved English, math, science Latin, French, Spanish, deportment and typewriting.

It is not certain when the academy closed and the school became strictly a grammar school, but in 1919 there was a newspaper ad for the academy that billed itself as “a boarding and day school for girls.” The current Notre Dame High school in Belmont opened in 1928 so it is not much of a stretch to consider the Redwood City school a forerunner.

The sisters “superioress” had to fill out a yearly report from church officials. One is struck by the neat handwriting of the 1895 account by Sister Louis de Gonzague, which stated that the school had nine nuns and 66 pupils. The official form asked if the facility had a “chapel in which is kept the Blessed Sacrament.” Sister Louis answered: “We have that happiness.”

A long piece in the May 13, 1916 Monitor reported on the girls’ school winning first place in the Foresters’ parade in Redwood City, which “marked the first time the Sisters of Notre Dame competed in any civic event in Redwood City.” The academy entered a float that was 16 feet long and 10 feet wide that featured a “garland flag of peace with the American flag in the middle” with the words “peace to all nations sewn on.” The report mentioned that 29 nations were represented by “beautiful girls in native dress.” The judges’ verdict was unanimous in awarding a silver cup (anyone know what happened to it?)

The academy’s graduates included a young woman who went on to become a nun famous in Nevada history, although not as a sister of Notre Dame. She was Charlotte Rypcsynski (sometimes spelled Ribzinsky) who entered the Dominican order in 1900 and took the religious name Sister Mary Xavier. She became a nurse and supervised surgery at Saint Mary’s hospital in Reno. She died in 1978 at the age of 97. She is mentioned in the book, “Commitment to Caring,” which says, “there was a sweetness and simplicity about her that kept her lovely and young until the day she died.”

### Recess for a Quake

The students had a long vacation after the 1906 earthquake severely damaged the school, and, apparently, the nerves of the Mount Carmel pastor, Father Henry Kirk White. The late Father Dominic Desjardins, who gathered information used in a history published in 1987 on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the parish, said Father White was so shaken by the earthquake that he moved to an apartment in Menlo Park, resigned in 1907 and returned to his native England. After that, nothing is known about White.

“We lost most of our records” in the earthquake, Desjardins told a reporter. “So I had to get most of my information from old newspapers and from the historical society.”

It wasn’t until 1908 (some reports say as late as 1911) that concerned parents were able to reopen the school. During the interim, the students went to public schools and the nuns returned to San Jose. Father White had told church officials there was little interest in reopening the school, despite the fact he was presented with a petition with more than 250 names calling for a school.

What White couldn’t see was the impact the earthquake would have on the growth of Redwood City and the Peninsula as people fled San Francisco after the disaster. By 1920 Redwood City’s population increased to 4,020 and it more than doubled by 1930, reaching 8,962.

The nuns returned to Redwood City and lived at the school until they moved to the former mansion of lumber baron Charles Hanson. The huge home at Brewster and Arguello was acquired by the church in 1921.

The stay in the Hanson mansion was far from uneventful, according to Sister Ann Maureen King. She swore the place was haunted, according to a paper she wrote that is in the order’s archives.

“We had never told the parishioners about our ghosts while we were experiencing them or it,” she wrote.

### Now it can be told

Sister Ann Maureen said at least six nuns, including her, were all in different areas of the structure in December of 1932 when each of them “was called but found herself unable to move. Someone seemed to be blocking her way.”

“The call was a loud ‘sister, sister,’” she continued. “No one was there. The paralysis lasted but a few minutes. Naturally we were all frightened, but after praying for whoever needed our help we went about our work.”

The “haunting” went on.

“We continued to be called at various times, sometimes the call was just “sister,” sometimes it was a prolonged sighing ‘sister.’ One night we were in bed and the call came along with three knocks, the drapes over the large mirror fell to the floor, but again, no one was seen.”

In the last episode, however, the nun was called “by her full name.”

“We did not hear or experience any further callings,” she concluded.

The nuns reported the events to the parish priest who came over and blessed the former mansion. Sister Ann Maureen wrote that the priest “looked on us all as ‘hysterical women.’”

“Strangely, while we were all puzzled, no one had hysterics!!!”

Sister Ann Maureen, who was the youngest nun in the house at the time of the “visits,” retired after a 50-year teaching career. She once described her life as “a long blessed journey.” She passed away in 2009.

Her death brought back fond memories to former students, including one who recalled that the nun’s nickname was SAM, standing for Sister Ann Maureen.

“Despite her strictness in the classroom, I always suspected she really enjoyed us mischievous boys a lot,” he said.

The old Mount Carmel school was torn down in 1931, an event that made a reporter at a local paper nearly break out in a rash of poetry: “The old rugged cross that stood as a beacon to children on their way to the classroom is gone forever.” The space occupied by the convent school was used as a parking lot for the adjacent church, which would see its end in 1937 when it was demolished so El Camino Real could be widened.

### Here Comes the New School!

The present school at 301 Grand was built in 1932, providing some light during a dark year in American history. About 17 million Americans would be out of work by the end of 1932, 1,616 banks would fail and the national income would fall to \$40.2 billion, almost cutting in half the figure from 1929.

Just the right time to build a school, decided Father John P. Cavanagh, who served as pastor at Mount Carmel from 1927 until his death in 1961.

The school was more than “a denominational undertaking,” he said in a front-page story in the July 18, 1931 Monitor that detailed his plans. “It is a step forward in the life and progress of one of the fastest-growing suburban sections of San Francisco,” The priest said 50 families stated their intentions of establishing homes in the area of the school. The newspaper added that the school would help “the unemployment situation” while taking advantage of lower construction costs. The price tag for the school was \$100,000.

The Redwood City Times-Gazette reported the plan a few days earlier, saying the new school would “introduce all of the modern teaching methods.” The paper saved most of its praise, however, for Cavanagh, a World War I veteran who “has not only endeared himself to his local parishioners, but he has won the respect and admiration of all classes in the community.” The architect selected for the job was Henry Minton, who came to San Francisco from his native Boston following the 1906 quake and built a career designing churches and banks. His other accomplishments included the Alameda County Courthouse as well as work on the now gone and mourned Fox Theater in San Francisco, a job that saw Minton join forces with the famous theater architect Thomas Lamb. The general contract for the new school went to Louis N. Pollard, a Redwood City builder. Plans called for a two-story structure of Spanish design that would accommodate 400 pupils. The old Mount Carmel school had operated for more than 20 years at a full capacity of 200 students. Minton’s design envisioned ten classrooms, an auditorium that seated 600 and a cafeteria.

One of the more interesting of Minton's Mount Carmel designs is the entrance rotunda that features office doors that form a circle around a mission-style tile floor. Inspired by the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the school, a fund drive is underway to pay for two wall-sized oil on canvas wall hangings by San Francisco liturgical artist Katie Wolf. The art will depict the school's mission of faith, academics, and community, a school official said.

Mount Carmel was never a stranger to raising money – even in the middle of the Great Depression. A committee headed by Mayor Daniel Stafford was formed in July 1931 to campaign for the funds to build the school. Ground was broken just two months later with Stafford throwing the first shovel of dirt. Interestingly, another Stafford, James, was mayor in 1885 when the original school was founded.. Daniel Stafford, who died in 1948, donated the land for today's popular Stafford Park. Several of Daniel Stafford's descendents went to Mount Carmel. They said they are not aware of a relationship between the two Stafford mayors.

In January 1932 a cornerstone was laid as the school neared completion. A few coins, some newspapers and other items were sealed behind marble flagstone. The capsule was opened in 1985, the year of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding, but "oxidation had corroded almost everything," the Peninsula Times Tribune reported. "About a dozen religious medals and coins were about all that had not disintegrated" despite the fact all the items had been "sealed carefully between metal plates."

#### The Great Day Arrives

The opening of a school was big news in 1932. Hundreds came from out of town for the dedication on Oct. 2, according to newspapers accounts that said the visitors wanted to "witness the colorful pageant and outdoor ceremony" highlighted by a parade, bands and drum and bugle corps.

Archbishop Edward Hanna dedicated the school. The main speaker was University of California Regent John Neylan who stressed the importance of patriotism.

"You may search history and you will not find any group of men existing in any one country to compare with Washington, Marshall, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, the Adams', Madison – to say nothing of the others," said Neylan. "Why not teach our children to appreciate these men?"

Getting Neylan as a speaker must have been a bit of a coup for Redwood City, much less the school. Speakers of his caliber are usually reserved for institutions of much higher learning. An attorney who claimed he never lost a jury trial, Neylan would grace the cover of Time Magazine in 1935. He was the attorney for newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst and served as a UC regent for 27 years. According to biographers, Neylan was in great measure responsible for the university's role in the development of atomic research.

William Issel, an expert on San Francisco history, says Neylan's statue should not be underestimated.

"Two years later his negotiating skills would help end the longshoremen's strike in San Francisco," said Issel, professor emeritus of history at San Francisco State University.

Issel is the author of several books. His latest is "For Both Cross and Flag: Catholic Action, Anti-Catholicism, and National Security Politics in World War II San Francisco." He had made an extensive study of Neylan's papers in the Bancroft Library at Berkeley.

Why this heavy hitter at Mount Carmel?

"Neylan was a very active Catholic layman who helped charitable efforts and sent a check regularly to the pastor of his church in San Francisco," Issel said. "He was very close to Archbishop Hanna who may have asked him to speak."

Issel also noted that the Mount Carmel speech came about the time Neylan moved from San Francisco to Woodside.

The dedication concluded with the raising of an American flag donated by the George A. Evans Relief Corps, an organization that gave a flag to all Redwood City schools, public and parochial alike.

The schoolyard was packed with an estimated 500 people in a town with a population that was near 9,000 in the 1930 census.

The crowd earlier viewed the parade that included a contingent from a military academy in Belmont and the Sequoia High School band as well as the aforementioned drum and bugle corps, including one from the American Legion. Police escorted the parade from downtown to the school located just six blocks from the original site of the academy.

The dedication was captured in a silent home movie. Later a sound track was added that was narrated by Robert Deeken, class of 1985. He was backed by a chorus of students singing the stirring Mount Carmel school song that tells about a “treasure house of knowledge” located “in a fertile valley nestling, ‘neath the great sequoia shade.” The film shows school children joining the marchers at Clinton and Brewster, traveling past several then-empty lots to their brand new school for the ceremonies that boasted a 32-member choir.

The school was rededicated in a scaled down version on Jan. 31, 2010 during Catholic Schools Week. Archbishop George Niederauer prayed that “all who pass through these halls become lifelong learners and problems solvers, careful stewards of their environment, skillful communicators, and compassionate, generous participants in their communities.”



*The Hoffman Sisters*

Those in the crowd included Notre Dame nun Sister Margaret Hoffman, 82, a Mount Carmel graduate, who, as a child, lived two blocks from the school. Her younger sister, Patricia, 77, also graduated from Mount Carmel and went on to become a nun.

“Nostalgia was strong in our hearts,” Margaret said of the rededication. “Never more than at the conclusion of the Mass, when, yes, we and alums present stood and proudly sang the school song.”

She said the nuns who taught her were “good teachers who gave us the basics.” They were strict but they were backed by “the discipline at home.” Her sister said, “there were no frills in those days. It was mostly basics.” Her teachers “were really kind and truly cared about us.”

At a time when there are shirts emblazoned with “I survived Catholic schools” and plays or movies often depict nuns as tyrants, the Hoffmans hope an exhibit that’s touring the country will change some minds.

Entitled “Women and Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America,” the exhibit spotlights the contribution of nuns, which includes the Catholic school system in America, billed as the largest private school system in the world.

Catholic sisters have opened orphanages, schools, hospitals, colleges, universities, and provided other social services that serve millions of Americans, exhibit officials said.

The contribution of women in any frontier setting is often overlooked. San Mateo County historian Frank Stanger, who wrote a history of the county called “South from San Francisco,” noted that women were scarce as late as 1860 when females of all ages, from babes to grandmothers, were less than a third of the county’s population.

“This peculiar coloration of the population accounts for the tardy development of schools and churches,” Stanger wrote.

The last nun to head Mount Carmel was Sister Mary Grace Foley who passed away in 1996. The current principal is Teresa Anthony who was appointed in 1990 to run a school that today doesn’t have a single nun, except for a teacher’s aide.

Things were indeed changing, a fact noted rather sadly in 1979 by the pastor, the Rev. Joseph Munier, during an interview conducted for the Redwood City library archives and, possibly, published here for the first time.

The school “has felt the ravages of the last two decades,” said the priest, who died in 1993. “Instead of eight teaching nuns and a principal nun, we have now two teaching nuns and a principal nun.” The lack of vocations, Munier felt, showed that “people were going their own way, doing their own thing, not being subjected to any authority.”

Munier, who was named pastor in 1961, noted that in the “old days” classes could reach 50 students because of the “tremendous demand” and the increasing number of children.” The big classes could be difficult to manage but the “basic discipline was observed and the fundamental three R’s were faithfully taught.”

Munier saved his best shots for sports, which he called a “headache.”

Munier, a University of California graduate who played on the Bears’ basketball team, said sports can become over emphasized and bring on “endless conflicts” with parents “if their little darlings aren’t on the first team.”

Mount Carmel has always had a strong sports program, one coached largely by unpaid parents. The school has produced some outstanding athletes, including Con Dempsey, a baseball pitcher who led the San Francisco Seals in strikeouts during the 1948 and 1949 seasons before moving on to the major leagues where an arm injury shortened his career. Julian Edelman, currently with the Boston Patriots football team, is a Mount Carmel graduate.

The school has produced more than 4,000 graduates since 1885 so the large number of outstanding graduates is too long to list, said former Redwood City Mayor Brent Britschgi.

“They have been doctors, lawyers, police officers and representatives of every walk of life,” said Britschgi, who served as Redwood City mayor from 1984-86. Britschgi, Mount Carmel class of 1949, said the class he was in had up to 60 children with “one nun teaching all those children, and no aides!!!”

Still, he said, “The product that was turned out was terrific. Eight members of my eighth grade class graduated from Santa Clara.” The Santa Clara grads included Britschgi.

The class also captured the parochial school basketball crown. Britschgi was on that team and later played for Sequoia High.

The former mayor, who coached basketball when his children, Susan, Steve, and Mark, attended Mount Carmel, has many colorful memories of his student days. They included the “famous drain pipe on the play yard side of the school.”

“It separated the yard into the boys side and the off limits girls’ side,” he said, a fact that did not keep him from meeting and marrying Barbara Decia.

“We were married at Mount Carmel Church and my classmate from Mount Carmel was my maid of honor and Brent’s Mount Carmel classmate was a groomsman,” Barbara said.

Other politicians produced by the school include William Royer, who was mayor of Redwood City and also served in the House of Representatives. Another claim to fame is that he coached the 1963 Mount Carmel basketball team to the league championship.

The 90-year-old Royer is one of the few living graduates who attended both the old and new schools.

“I entered the old school in 1926,” he said. “There were two classes in each room. First and Second were combined and so were the others.”

The schoolyard was just dirt and when it rained “we got caked with mud,” said Royer. “The new school, with its big, paved yard, was a big improvement.”

Home games are played in Cavanagh Hall, the school gym named after Father John Cavanagh, the dynamo behind the building of the new Mount Carmel. Many outside Mount Carmel may not know that the school was built before the adjacent church, which wasn’t constructed until 1952. The school also came before the rectory and convent, which now serves as the parish center. The fact that it came first underlines the importance placed on children’s education.

Until the first Mass was celebrated in the new church in 1952, services were held mainly in the gym or what some call “the large hall,” although the old church on El Camino was used for that purpose until it was torn down in 1937.

Many old timers praise Cavanagh’s foresight in seeing that the future of Redwood City was “west of El Camino.” He knew a good real estate deal when he saw it and bought land when it was relatively inexpensive.

Things change but remain the same

This is the first history of Mount Carmel school. The job required hours of poring over old newspapers, archives, books and interviewing the young and old. The author went through a virtual time tunnel and came away thinking that it’s true that the more things change the more they remain the same.

Everything is the same – only different. Take the remark about the future being “west of El Camino.” Today much of Mount Carmel’s growth is to the east. That’s because of the increasing number of Hispanics, many of them living to the east of what is planned as a “grand boulevard.” While the faces and names may change, the immigrant experience is nothing new for Mount Carmel. In fact, it is nothing new to the county, which a visit to the history museum in the old courthouse on Broadway shows. The museum, which holds an Immigrant Festival every year, has an Immigrant’s Gallery that underlines the similarities of all newcomers.

At Mount Carmel, the earlier immigrant experiences can be summed up in two words: Irish and Italians. Except for Father White, who returned to his native England after the 1906 earthquake, all the pastors until Mainer, who was of French heritage, had Irish surnames.

Teresa Anthony, the present principal and the first “civilian” to hold that post, said the school hasn’t changed all that much because Catholicism in America has always been “an immigrant faith.”

The pastor, Father John Balleza, agreed.

“We are definitely an immigrant church, but I think there are some people who forget this, or want to.” he said. “One parishioner told me she spoke only Italian when she came to school, but there was a nun who helped her learn English.”

Principal Anthony said 95% of the families in the school are Catholic, which was seen as an indication that the school’s traditions are carried on.

The biggest change, she said, has been in the tuition.

“When I came in 1990 it cost \$1,800. Now it is \$5,290.”

Despite the cost, it is common for students to be the second-third-fourth and now the fifth generation of their family to attend Mount Carmel.

During the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, teacher Peggy Clifford (Full disclosure: she’s the author’s wife) did a survey to find out how many students had parents who attended the school. There were 26, some boasting that both parents had gone to Mount Carmel. The school gave each child a T-shirt reading: “I’m a 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Padre.”

What’s the appeal?

“We embraced what the sisters did,” Teresa Anthony said. “I think the best evidence for that tradition is the love of singing at Mount Carmel. The nuns loved to teach singing. We never stopped singing.”

Anyone who has heard the students, even former students, sing the school song will understand:

*Written by Fr. Cornelius Kennedy, pastor from 1920-21*

In a fertile valley nestling, ‘neath the great sequoia shade, there’s a treasure house of knowledge, where character is made.

It is there we love to linger, where all things are done well, and we vow our true allegiance to our school, Mount Carmel.

Then to Carmel, dear Mount Carmel, we’ll be steadfast, loyal, true. We’ll uphold her stainless honor, and we’ll add new glory too. For the best that there is in us. We will do that men may tell.

That we love our God and country, and that we’re true to dear Carmel.

A thank you and a note on sources:

Jeff Burns, archivist for the San Francisco archdiocese

Kathy O’Connor, archivist, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Belmont

Michelle Conci, development director, Mount Carmel

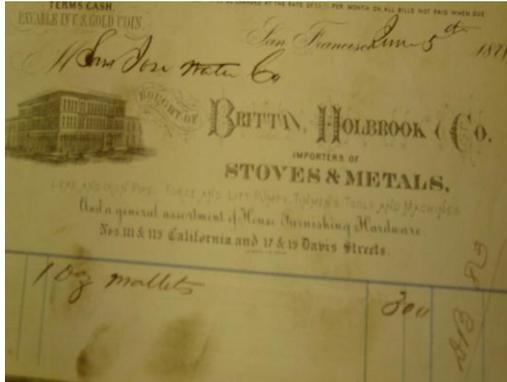
Redwood City Library History Room

San Mateo County Historical Association

“Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Centennial” by Suzzane Josvai and James O. Clifford

## The Brittan and Ayers Families

By John Edmonds



### The Brittan Family

John Wesley Brittan arrived in San Francisco from his native England in early 1849. It is presumed that he came to this area because of the gold strike looking for his fortune. However he found his fortune in the steel business instead. The first entry has him importing and selling stoves and other metal hardware from his store on Sacramento Street near Front Street in San Francisco. The date is in July, 1854.

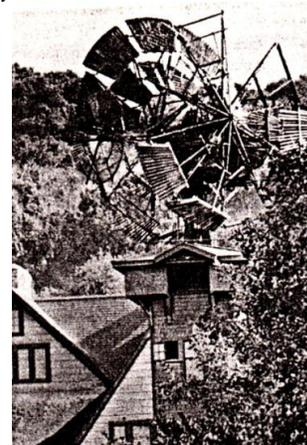
Brittan had added tin roofing tiles to his inventory and his timing for this product was great as during this period the Sydney Ducks Gang were on an arson campaign in their effort to destroy the city. Having the roofing tins helped to protect wooden structures but they were not always successful none-the-less John Brittan's business grew by leaps and bounds. In the same year they took on two more partners, the brothers John F. Merrill and Charles Merrill. The business expanded even further. Their inventory grew rapidly as stoves were arriving from all over the world. They had, in stock, some 800 stoves from various manufacturers, many of them large for hotel and large restaurant use.

When John Brittan decided to build his home in San Carlos he contacted Timothy Guy Phelps and purchased the land between Redwood City and Pulgas Creek. Brittan built his house in the White Oaks area, which was called "Wesley Bays".



*The original Brittan home stood in the area today known as White Oaks. John Brittan actually owned the entire area to what is now Canada Road and on the north to San Carlos Ave., the south to Cordilleras Creek. The property was divided after his death.*

In April John Wesley Brittan travelled to his New York office and while there he suffered a massive heart attack and died. John's body was transported to Redwood City and an impressive service was held in Union Cemetery where he was laid to rest. When John passed away he willed part of his property to his son William, part of the White Oaks property. The rest of his property to his daughter Mary Bertha Brittan and area known as Oak Park and the property north of Graceland Park. Mary Bertha lived for many years but she sold most of her property to her brother Nathaniel in her later years.



*Nathaniel Brittan's hunting lodge on Pine Street in San Carlos*

John Brittan had a brother living in Redwood City who was a very successful farmer. Morgan Luis Brittan married Elizabeth (Lizzie) M. Ayers on February 15, 1872 at St. Matthews Church in San Mateo. Lizzie Ayers was the daughter of Charles Ayers the well known and highly respected owner and manager of the Tremont House, a hotel on Main Street north of Bridge Street in Redwood City. The wedding reception was a gala affair and was held in the Tremont House.

The couple had three children but Lizzie became an invalid during the process of the birth of their third child. She suffered from this illness the rest of her life. She also suffered and mourned the rest of her life for her husband Morgan as he simply disappeared shortly after the birth of the third child. He was never seen again. A nationwide search was made for Mr. Brittan as he left with a great deal of money. The general belief was that he met with foul play related to great losses in gambling at the poker tables and the horse races.

February 24, 1912 Lizzie Brittan breathed her last and never gave up hope that her husband would someday return. Lizzie was buried in the Brittan plot in Union Cemetery which is right next to the Ayers plot on Central Avenue.

Nathaniel Jones Brittan was one of three sons of John Wesley Brittan, the other being Mary Bertha Brittan. The third son was William who was born in 1864. William went to school in Redwood City and after graduation went to Hastings's School of Law from which graduated with honors and the degree of LL.B. He was admitted to the bar and continued in private practice until he was appointed a Justice of The Peace.



*Nathaniel Jones Brittan*

When John Brittan died Nathaniel took his place at Brittan and Holbrook and the business flourished under his guidance. His preceding life somehow got him the nickname of "Colonel".

Nathaniel travelled the world as a young man and learned to speak fluent Spanish. This skill brought him into the view of the federal government and he was prevailed upon to go to Spain as an undercover agent as a member of the Secret Service. Nathaniel's hobby was collecting antiques and he filled his home on Pine Street in San Carlos with beautiful articles.

Nathaniel and Belle had three daughters the first and oldest was Carmelita (after whom the street in San Carlos is named) the second and third daughters were twins Natalie and Belle.

Nathaniel Brittan was responsible for donating the land where the train station now stands to the Southern Pacific Railroad. The terms of the sale included an agreement that "there will always be a train station at that location in San Carlos and if on some occasion this agreement is violated the property will be forfeited and the right-of-way revoked."

#### The Ayers Family



*Charles Ayers "Tremont House Hotel" on Main Street north of "A" Street (Broadway) close to today's Bradford Street*

Charles Ayers was born in Redding, England and moved when five years of age to Windsor, England. Charles father was a pastry and confection cook. Charles learned that trade from him.

In March, 1848 the family sailed to Australia where both Charles and his father worked at their trade. When Charles became of age he traveled back to his native country where he met and married Mary Ann Delahny, an English lady who was of Irish descent and of a Protestant family. Her father was a hatter and was engaged in business in London; both her parents were natives of England.

Mary Ann Ayers became the mother of nine children, seven of whom died as children. By the time the Ayers family came to Redwood City, in the early 1850s, there were three children, Elizabeth (Lizzie) and Charles Jr. and James Bicknell Ayers.

Charles Ayers built and owned the "Tremont House" on Main Street in Redwood City. The family lived in the hotel as well as renting rooms to the many lumbermen who frequented the city. Quite a number of men rented rooms for months at a time and were living in the hotel as a home.

Mary Ann Ayers died in 1879 and was buried in Union Cemetery. On July 20, 1889 Charles Ayers married a Miss Laughtry and this couple had one son.

Charles Ayers died on October 16th, 1891 and was buried in the Ayers plot in Union Cemetery. The record shows that Charles and a man named J. G. Prichard purchased the real estate for the Tremont House 39 years before his death. The only children remaining were Charles Jr., Lizzie Brittan and James Bicknell.

In 1927 James Bicknell Ayers died and joined his father in the family plot. James had been the business advisor and good friend of Walter Knights who ran the stage coach line that ran from Redwood City to Pescadero and back and much of James property was given to Walter Knights in his will.

Charles Ayers was one of the first persons to join the Board of Directors of The Union Cemetery Association. He, with a number of other board members oversaw the first burials and was present at most of the early burial services in the cemetery.

James Ayers, brother of Charles Ayers, died in San Francisco February 16, 1889, he was in Saint Luke's Hospital when death overtook him. He too was a native of Oxford, England and was 62 years of age.

James Ayers had only been a resident of this state for three years and had been ill for some time even before his arrival. James was buried in plot 129, the Ayers plot on Central Avenue in Union Cemetery.

Charles Ayers married Elizabeth Landwehr on July 31, 1879. The couple lived for years in the Tremont House, the hotel that Charles built on Main Street just east of Bridge, now Broadway, in Redwood City. However their lives were not without sad days. They suffered the loss of children at very young ages and these children were the first to be buried in plot 129 in Union Cemetery.

Ann Amelia was 2 years old when she succumbed and Mary A. was also 2 years of age Mary dying in December 1854 and Ann died in April 1855. It was not a good 5 month period for Charles and Elizabeth. Preceding Charles also were Tidy who passed at 21 years on October 5, 1879, Henry who was 22 years who died on October 15, 1878 and Mary Ann who died at age 52 on June 1, 1878.

*Brittan pictures courtesy of the San Carlos Historical Association.*

## Pigeon Point & South to the South County Line

*By John Edmonds*

While I worked as a deputy sheriff on the south coast I came in contact with many wonderful people. Perhaps Rudy Rossi was one of the most memorable. Rudy lived on what is now known as the Cascade Ranch. I talked with him almost every day as he was always easy to find in his later years. The Rossi ranch was, and still is, in the area of the Gazos Creek watershed. He used to tell me fascinating stories of the early people who he knew who worked and lived in this beautiful but rough area of heavy redwood forest and steep hillsides.

Rudy Rossi knew the “Old Woman” after whom the “Old Woman Creek” was named. She was probably one of the last Native American persons in this part of the country. She still lived in the brush and came out very seldom. Rudy also remembered the days of heavy logging in Gazos Creek and could lead a walk to the remains of many a logging camp in that 5 to 6 mile often vertical climb. Not many jumped at the opportunity. By the time I came into the picture most of those spots had weathered away.

But the activities at Gazos Creek were important to the life and activities at Pigeon Point. The numbers of people living in this area were far greater than they are today. One of the mills had 50 white employees and 200 oriental employees for a period of time. And for a period of time a group of Chinese purchased one of the mill sites and produced a substantial amount of lumber.

The lumbering activities in the Gazos Creek area began in 1862 as the heavy fighting was taking place on the east coast. George Andres Notely landed a contract to cut lumber for C.H. Wideman and Ed Eaton who had leased some of the land from Loren Coburn who had extensive holdings of land in the area. He lived in Pescadero and was extremely unpopular with the citizens of that beautiful town. But let's come back to the present.

Those of us who live in the area think of Pigeon Point as a lighthouse on a lonely strip of land a substantial distance south of Half Moon Bay and we rarely take into consideration the dramatic history of the area before the lighthouse was built. Extensive lumbering was only part of the equation. Farming has always been a primary source of income for the people in the area and so has ranching, the whaling industry was substantial before, and even while, the lighthouse was coming into existence in 1872.

Construction began on the lighthouse in 1870. The records state that the bricks that make up the lighthouse were kilned 5 rods from the structure. The only location that fits that description is the beach at the mouth of Gazos Creek. And, low and behold, a kiln was located in that exact spot according to lighthouse experts.

I am privileged to introduce the Honorable Horace Templeton at this point. Horace was San Mateo County's second judge.

He lived in the town of Searsville in the early years of the 1850s and was the person who purchased the land between the Alambique Creek and the Dennis Martin Creek. He then plotted out the town, certified the map, and sold off residential lots. The lots were bought up rapidly because the area was highly active with lumbering activities.

Horace was a gambler. He played poker, with great skill, at Moses Davis hotel and was very successful. Perhaps too successful because when the hotel burned down they discovered the wires with which he was signaled by his partner on the second floor about his opponent's hand. By that time he was already the county judge and everybody just had a good laugh about it. Templeton also gambled with logging, he built a sawmill on San Gregorio Creek and produced a substantial product for a short period of time.



*Loading a ship with cable and pulley. This was a very slow process but it improved later, although it was blown down in a storm.*

Horace Templeton comes into our Pigeon Point picture when he purchases a substantial amount of property on Gazos Creek. He joins with Andrew Teague and John Crowley all living in Redwood City. They develop the Pacific Wood and Lumber Company and locate their mill some 5 ½ miles up the canyon of Gazos Creek. They build a flume to carry the wood and shingles down the 5 ½ miles to the beach. They then build a railroad (horse drawn freight cars on tracks) and ran it to Pigeon Point. They then developed a loading system to put the lumber aboard ship.

This process started in early 1870 as did the construction of the lighthouse all of which was happening at the mouth of Gazos Creek.



*Templeton's Wharf at Pigeon Point.*

I am making an assumption and truthfully have never seen anything in writing that proves my point but, I would be very surprised to read that Templeton did not get a contract to haul the bricks to Pigeon Point as well as the lumber, or at least make some kind of a deal on a local basis.

The San Mateo County Gazette wrote on June 10, 1871 that "Templeton and Company have their wharf and chute well under way at Pigeon Point. The Wharf is built out about 100 feet and the work is being pushed ahead with all possible dispatch." On July 22, 1871 the newspaper wrote, "The Pigeon Point Railroad Company filed their certificate of incorporation in the county clerk's office of San Francisco County on last Monday. The directors are Horace Templeton, Thomas W. Moore, W. A. Bollinger, J. P. Ames and George Hearst. The object of the company is to build a narrow gauge railroad from Pigeon Point to the mouth of the Gazos Creek to connect with Templeton, Moore and Company's Gazos flume. The length of the railroad is contemplated to be about six miles.

Pigeon Point obtained its name from the tragic wreck of the clipper ship Carrier Pigeon which was a figure head on the bow of the ship. The Spanish had originally named the point "Punta de las Balenas," It was on June 6, 1853 that the name changed when the Carrier Pigeon met her demise. The ship was a total loss but there were no lives lost something that sets it apart from the many shipwrecks that followed in these dangerous, unprotected waters.

The Carrier Pigeon was 175 feet long, a clipper ship that was built and launched in Bath, Maine.

The gilded figurehead of a pigeon cut through the water like a knife as it traveled from Bath to Boston for her first voyage. She left Boston on her maiden voyage on January 28, 1853. She sailed beautifully through the rough waters around Cape Horn on her fully loaded trip to San Francisco. After the ship passed Santa Cruz, the fog settled in and formed a blinding blanket that eliminated the ability to do star navigation. Captain Doane, thinking he was well out to sea and wanting to follow the coast, decided to put the ship on an easterly heading. But, before land was sighted the ship hit the rocks at Pigeon Point which extend out underwater close to 400 feet. The ship had extensive amounts of water in its hold almost immediately and was considered a total loss within a very few minutes, allowing the crew to get to shore without the loss of life.

Within a week the "Seabird" was at the scene of the wreck. She too got caught by the heavy waves and the rocks and found herself wedged in such a position that she was unable to perform any rescue. There was little of value left and the seabird was floated off and down the coast to a point near Ano Nuevo Point and grounded. She was repaired at that point and refloated. Other efforts were made to unload the Carrier Pigeon but they were soon given up as everything was soaked and ruined. The Carrier Pigeon was valued at \$54,000 and it was sold at the end of its maiden voyage for \$1,500.

The San Mateo County Gazette reported on January 21, 1865: "The American clipper ship "Sir John Franklin" was wrecked on Tuesday evening off Pigeon Point some ten miles south of Half Moon Bay. The captain and twelve others were drowned in attempting to reach the shore after the breaking up of the ship which occurred soon after she first struck. About half of the cargo will be saved though greatly damaged. The vessel and cargo were insured to the amount of \$300,000. This is the second ship lost at the same point and is by far the most disastrous shipwreck which has ever happened on our coast."

The Sir John Franklin was indeed the second vessel to go on the rocks but it was south of Pigeon Point about three miles on a point we now call "Franklin Point." The thirteen men who drowned were all buried on Franklin Point and they remain at rest there.

There was a wooden monument to the captain and crew for many years but it has disappeared, as wooden monuments do, over time.

Another ship went on the rocks at Pigeon Point in 1866 this was the British Bark "Coya." The Coya left Sydney Australia on September 22, 1866 enroute for San Francisco. She stopped at the Pitcairn Islands and she set sail for San Francisco on October 13 with a full load of coal. Captain Paige and the crew believed they were near the Farallone Islands on November 24 when land was sighted in the thick fog. The Captain tried to turn the ship around but she went aground on the sharp rocks. The sea lifted and dropped the ship on the rocks violently and it was quickly evident that the ship was lost.

It was now nine o'clock at night and the passengers and crew could easily watch the main decking folding under the angry sea. People were screaming and were gradually being pulled under the lee rigging and lost. The ship, the cargo and 26 lives were lost that night. There were twenty in the crew and ten passengers with several women and children. The few people who were rescued were able to climb onto the railing as the ship keeled over until the mast was level with the water. From that position they were able, in most cases, to swim to shore, although reaching shore was problematic as they were tired and scared and the tide kept pulling them out.

The Coya crash occurred at Point Ano Nuevo. This point had been under consideration in Washington D.C. for a lighthouse for some time and the crash of the Coya made national news causing something of an up roar in the east and quite shortly thereafter \$90,000 was pledged to place a first order lighthouse at that location.

Early in January 1867 a Mr. W.L. Carpenter rode into San Francisco from Pigeon Point to report a vessel in distress that was firing its guns and its flag upside down. The tug boats "Rescue" and "Goliah" were immediately dispatched to render assistance. They found the ship to be the Prussian barkentine "Forget-me-not" that was still afloat but in danger of going on the rocks. She was taken into tow and brought into port. Mr. Carpenter received a \$100.00 reward from the grateful owners and underwriters of the vessel.

Almost two years later in the middle of November 1868 the ship "Hellespont" went on the rocks at Pigeon Point. In this tragedy eleven men lost their lives and seven men were saved. Captain Soule, who went down with his ship, had departed New South Wales with a full load of coal bound for San Francisco.

The following Saturday, one week later, the Gazette wrote: "The recent terrible wreck of the ship "Hellespont" at Pigeon Point in this county which resulted in the loss of eleven of her crew and Captain Soule constitutes another appeal to the Government at Washington for the establishment of a lighthouse at Pigeon Point. Several vessels have been wrecked in that vicinity within the past few years and in every instance the vessels have been a total loss and often with a great loss of lives." The newspaper also wrote a quote from one of the seamen who survived, "The seaman stated that half an hour after the ship struck nothing could be seen of her except pieces of drift-wood and rigging which were washing on shore."

The Gazette had an extensive article on November 28, 1868 covering two very long columns on the front page of the paper. The article was taken, from some extent, from San Francisco papers and it goes into some depth on exactly what happened in the hours preceding the crash of the Hellespont. The information was gathered from the survivors and all were unanimous in their praise of Captain Cornelius Soule.

The next shipwreck at Pigeon Point occurred on July 14, 1896, this was the "Columbia".

Pigeon Point Lighthouse began construction in 1870 and the light and fog signal were working in good order when it was first turned on, the date was November 15, 1872. The Ano Nuevo fog signal was established earlier. The fog signal at Ano Nuevo Island produced ten second blasts at fifty-five second intervals. The fog signal at Pigeon Point produced blasts of four second durations with alternatively seven and forty-five seconds of silence.

People could not understand how Captain William Clark of the Columbia could confuse the fog signals because they were so easy to recognize and so different from each other. None-the-less on July 14, 1896 the Columbia went on the rocks just south of Pigeon Point in fog granting but one hundred feet visibility.



*Motor Vessel Columbia*

The Columbia was a large ship of the Pacific Mail Steamship Line and had been plying the waters of the world for five years. It was steaming from Panama to San Francisco. Captain Clark's competitive nature was evident as he continued a full throttle even in the heavy fog as he approached the area north of Monterey. He wanted to set a new record for speed instead he failed and fell into disgrace.

When the fog lifted that day the public came down to the beach at Pigeon Point in large numbers. The Columbia stood as anchored atop the rocks as the tide receded. She was a painful sight as the sun glistened off her decks and masts. But inside her forward hold there was twenty-six feet of water and greater amounts were gradually filling the ship. The crew and passengers were all removed and nobody was killed or injured.

The owners came down, during the following week, and removed most of the cargo and machinery. They left a substantial amount of material aboard that rapidly became the property of people of Pescadero and the vicinity, every house had a new coat of paint and every clothes line was made of copper wire. The people in the vicinity were used to gathering material from ships on the rocks, they had honed their skills on several opportunities in the decades since the Carrier Pigeon went down. Following one wreck the people had whiskey for years to come as the barrels floated ashore.

The Point Arena wrecked on Pigeon Point in August 1913 when she lost her mooring at the Pigeon Point Wharf. She was taking on a load of tan bark.



*The Wreck of the Point Arena*

The eighteen member crew was able to escape in one of the ship's lifeboats. The captain remained on the boat until the last minute when the ship struck the rocks a dramatic geyser of water shot up amidships and at that point the ship's cables parted at the wharf in a stiff gale. The ship drifted rapidly the couple of hundred yards to the jagged rocks. The Gazette said, "The Point Arena has been brought through the Golden Gate bottom up on two former occasions after being wrecked and predictions were made she would survive the present mishap notwithstanding a gaping hole in the hull amidships.

The lighthouse crew was quite surprised on April 19, 1911 when early in the morning they found two German officers and nine Polynesian crewmen on their doorstep. They had been the crew of the steam schooner "Triton" which ran into a large floating log on the night of April 18. The captain and crew took to the lifeboat as the ship sank and they were able to watch the ship go down as they rowed all night to the source of the light at Pigeon Point.

During prohibition there was a shipwreck on the rocks at Pigeon Point, it was the 75 foot long launch "Pilgrim." The launch was hauling 175 cases of whiskey and 100 barrels of beer. The crew disappeared and so did much of the cargo. On June 20, 1925 the Gazette announced: "The fishing schooner Elsie L, which was captured by the coast guard cutter 259 off Pigeon Point yesterday had 329 cases of whiskey on board.

Its cargo was placed in the customs seizure room at San Francisco. Captain Jens J. Nielsen and Engineer Otto Miller who were aboard the craft when it was picked up late Thursday night were placed under arrest and the boat formally seized .....

The final shipwreck at Pigeon Point actually occurred off the point a little ways and could not be blamed on the rocks. In this tragic accident, the steamship San Juan was rammed by the Standard Oil Tanker S.C.T. Dodd. They were actually 12 miles out at sea. The first mate of the San Juan, Charles J. Tulee stated, "It was not a matter of four or five minutes before the ship sank." According to survivors on deck at the time the San Juan was sheared almost in half by the heavy stern of the tanker and sank beneath the sea before most of the passengers in their staterooms and the crew members in their bunks had an opportunity to realize the vessel had been mortally struck.

The second mate tried to help a number of women and children into the only functional lifeboat but it was shattered when the boiler exploded violently throwing its human cargo into the rigging and the water. Very few of the passengers survived the accident. Seventy-two people died in this accident and they were all aboard the S.S. San Juan. One of the people who died was the captain of the ship, Captain Asplund.

The owners of the San Juan blamed the tanker Dodd and listed the heavy fog that covered the Pacific as a contributing factor. Naturally the owners of the Dodd blamed the San Juan saying that the steamship cut directly in front of the tanker and it was unable to avoid the collision. According to reports following the official inquiry, "The U.S. Steamboat Inspection Service Board found the San Juan inshore of the Dodd tried to cross the tanker's bow, was rammed and sank within a few minutes on August 29, and then the boilers exploded – shattering the ship from stem to stern.

The San Juan was built in 1882 by John Roach and Sons, Chester Pennsylvania, its' tonnage was 1308 and it was owned by the Los Angeles-San Francisco Navigation Company. Its last port of call was San Francisco and its destination was Los Angeles.

There were 115 people on board and 73 casualties. Assistance to the San Juan was rendered by the Tanker Dodd and by a freighter, S.S. Munani.

### Whaling at Pigeon Point

The Portuguese whalers began using Pigeon Point some time in the mid 1860s. They were seventeen in number and they manned two whale boats at six men per boat. The remaining five men were alternates for the crew and their responsibilities were to set up the boiling pots and keep the fires in readiness.



*The whaling port is visible from the south side of the lighthouse. While there is no physical evidence you can still see how the Portuguese whalers used the land.*

The whalers hunted, primarily, the "Humpback" whale and not the more common California Gray Whale. The gray whale was to lean and produced insufficient fat to boil into oil. The humpback whale, especially when traveling south from their Alaska feeding grounds, had immense amounts of fat for oil purposes.

An editor and reporter for the San Mateo County Gazette traveled to Pigeon Point to interview the whalers and published a full column article on the experience in the June 10, 1971 Saturday morning newspaper. They wrote about the process of using bomb-lances on the harpoons in order to kill the whale.

It was necessary to fire as many as four to six lances at each whale in order to stop and kill him. The lances cost four dollars each, a price that was affordable as long as the price of oil was sufficient, but when the price was down as it was in June 1871 there was much discussion about how to economize.

The paper also discussed the feeding habits of the humpback whale saying, "The whale lies still with its mouth wide open until it is well filled with the unsuspecting little shiners (sardines) when the huge jaws are slammed down at one mouthful. In this way it may, with truth be said, the whale can catch more fish with a single bite than any other fisherman ever known." When the whale was hauled in the whalers made every effort to the entire animal using the skin for various purposes, selling the bones in San Francisco and almost all the rest was boiled into oil.

Even with all this creative effort it was extremely difficult to make ends meet thus the whaling industry at Pigeon Point was a comparatively brief industry.

#### Building the Pigeon Point Lighthouse

The great debate in the late 1850s and 60s was whether to build the lighthouse at Pigeon Point or at Ano Nuevo Point. The general consensus was to put it at Ano Nuevo because the map of the Spanish Land Grant did not include the point at Ano Nuevo or indeed some 500 yards east of the point as well. Thus the federal government thought it would be cheaper if they did not need to purchase the property.

The property actually belonged to one largely despised gentleman in Pescadero named Loren Coburn. Coburn had purchased the land grant for most of the south coast including both Point Ano Nuevo and Pigeon Point. Coburn spent \$30,000 for 17,000 acres of the south coast property. He was not about to give the government the property at either point no matter the cost of lives that would be saved. Coburn did not care about saving lives he only cared about making a profit on his investments. He offered the property to the government that is both properties at \$40,000. Coburn thought he had the upper hand on these deals.

He intended to make the government pay more for Ano Nuevo and Pigeon Point than he paid for the entire grant. He was still receiving substantial moneys from the many lumber enterprises and dairy ranches all of which were producing and growing. In truth, the government offered \$5,000 and when they compromised to \$10,000 Coburn was informed to take the money or have the property condemned and loose it all. He wisely sold the property.

In early 1870 the decision had finally been made to put the lighthouse at Pigeon Point with a fog signal and to put a strong fog signal at Ano Nuevo Point. The first step in building the lighthouse was ordering the timber for the frame. This was done at the nearby Glen Mills on White House Creek about 5 miles east of the coast. The Glen Mills were owned by George Harrington and George Chandler who began cutting and milling lumber in 1867 and became well known in the three years before the lighthouse began construction.

Another lumber mill that helped with the lighthouse at times when Chandler and Harrington could not was the mill on Gazos Creek owned and operated by Irvin Thompson Bloom. This mill had great longevity as it was still operating in the summer of 1908. This mill developed a large mill pond that fed the saws continuously for many bountiful years.



*The Glen mills on Gazos Creek supplied the milled lumber to the Pigeon Point Lighthouse as the framing agent.*

Sometime before July 1869 Samuel Horace Steele constructed a general store at Point Ano Nuevo. The store was built on land leased by his brother Rensselaer E. Steele. This store also dealt with the sale and purchase of lumber for transportation by ship. There were three lumber mills working in the immediate vicinity, then Mills of Harrington and Chandler, the New Years Creek Mill of William Waddell and Waddell's son's mill further up New Years Creek. The mill at Cascade Ranch (as we know it today) belonged to Rensselaer E. Steele and it took a major role in supporting the various enterprises along the south coast. While the Steele's were known primarily for their dairy prowess and their making of cheese, the lumber industry played a supporting role. When Rensselaer took over the 2,116 acre property he was 71 years old. He soon sold the property to his nephew Charles Edward Steele who continued and expanded both the property and the business.

The San Mateo County Times and Gazette reported that Pigeon Point School opened on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the month. Miss McMullen, formerly of Pomponio, is the teacher. By April 1, 1876 Miss Morehead became the teacher at this little school.

All the canyons south of Pescadero were owned by Loren Coburn, and his brother-in-law Jeremiah Clarke, and were leased for periods from three to ten years. Rensselaer Steele (Ano Nuevo) and Isaac Chapman (Steele leased large acreage from Coburn and operated both sawmills and dairy farms. The foggy coastline kept the grass green and growing for longer periods just a few miles inland. During the Civil War the Steele family was well recognized nationally for two reasons. First another brother was a highly recognized Union Army General, Frederick Steele, and second for a giant cheese, some 500 pounds, they manufactured and donated to the Sanitary Commission.

The appropriation of \$90,000 for the lighthouse at Pigeon Point was finally signed on March 3, 1871.

Construction started almost immediately with Mr. Phineas F. Marston, a very highly experienced builder having built lighthouses along the Washington and Oregon coasts and several construction projects in San Francisco especially at the Presidio. By June the lumber had been purchased, cut to proper lengths and the framing of the tower was well underway. The crew was also building the fog signal building but that was a comparatively simple wood frame and siding building.

We have already discussed the bricks and the kiln found at Gazos Creek making that a likely spot for the manufacture of the bricks. The first bricks that were made came from a location some 40 to 50 rods from the lighthouse property. These bricks were unsatisfactory and were rejected after a number of them had been installed. The Gazos Creek bricks were sound and were only 3 or 4 rods from the lighthouse. Rods are surveying measurements and the reader will recognize that Gazos Creek is 3 or 4 miles south of Pigeon Point.



*Pigeon Point Lighthouse and the Victorian keeper quarters.*

There were many delays in the construction. By September 10, 1871 the fog signal went into action but the lighthouse was far from finished. Mr. H.T. Holbrook, who has been in charge of the fog whistle at Point Montara for the past few years has been appointed to take charge of the fog whistle at Pigeon Point and will remove to the same as soon as his successor, Mr. Price, of New Year's Point arrives.

In early 1872 the workmen were again at a standstill waiting for the staircase and accompanying pieces to show up from San Francisco. When they did arrive they didn't seem to fit together properly and they had to wait again for a representative of the manufacturer to travel to the lighthouse to illustrate how the product worked. While that was struggling forward they were also waiting for the lantern room to arrive. On July 6, 1872 the San Mateo County Gazette reported, "The light, first-class, is on the ground at Pigeon Point but not yet put up, the workmen having suspended their labors some time ago for reasons known only to the government." In August of 1872 the newspaper wrote that the flume at Gazos, the railroad to Pigeon Point and the wharf at Pigeon were moving 25,000 feet of lumber each week.

The San Mateo County Gazette reported on September 21, 1872: "Two new post offices have been established in this county, one at Pigeon Point. H. (Henry) S. Steele, postmaster, the other at Purissima, Richard Doherty, postmaster. Some time ago there was a post office at Purissima but the inconvenience was so great and the mail so small that Mr. Doherty threw up his commission. Purissima mail matter is increasing rapidly in quantity, the mail department has provided him with a special bag and to the great convenience of the people in that vicinity he has been re-appointed postmaster. The New Years Point post office will be a great accommodation to the people of the lower end of the county and the upper part of Santa Cruz. The Pigeon Point folks heretofore have had to go to Pescadero for their letters and newspapers as have those living further down the coast...."

Finally in November they were able to finish the project and on Friday, November 15, 1872 at sunset the clockwork mechanism began ticking and the powerful beacon spread its dancing light out some twenty-five miles to sea. It was a clear and crisp evening and the light seemed extremely impressive. The first order Fresnel lens had apparently been shipped from New York after being removed from the light station at Cape Hatteras, during the civil war. The lens has 1,008 hand-polished lenses and prisms and is capable of more than 500,000 candlepower illumination. The Fresnel lens was manufactured in Paris by the Henry-LePaute Company.

Augustine Jean Fresnel was an artist and an engineer. His first order Fresnel lens with its 1008 separate prisms, six feet in diameter and seventeen feet high, weighing more than four tons with the apparatus that makes it turn at a specified rate is art work at its very best. But imagine the difficulties in raising such a heavy instrument one hundred and fifteen feet to the lantern room. The author can speak from experience that no one should stand in front of the lens when it is focusing its power seaward, it is immediately painful.

The Pigeon Point Lighthouse is 115 feet tall and 47 feet above high tide making it the tallest lighthouse, off the water, on the Pacific Coast. Point Arena Lighthouse is just as tall and just the same as Pigeon Point but it is not as far off the water. But, the 133 steps from the floor to the lantern room are not made too many times each day. The Gazette reported on April 1, 1876 "Lighthouse Inspector's Office, San Francisco, California, March 14<sup>th</sup> 1876. Sealed proposals will be received for .... For furnishing and delivering at Pigeon Point Steam Fog Signal, 150 cords of 128 cubic feet of merchantable pine wood ... A. T. Snell, Commander U.S.N., Light House Inspector.

Pigeon Point Lighthouse contains 500,000 bricks it is 27 feet across at the base and tapers gradually to the top. The walls are five feet thick. The author was a docent at Pigeon Point Lighthouse and remembers taking ten people, and I tried to limit to ten because more than that became pretty crowded, up to the walkway that circled the inside of the lamphouse. On one Sunday afternoon we all looked out at the ocean and down at the surface and watched a pod of killer whales, perhaps ten of them, lolling around apparently enjoying themselves and entertaining us.

The wharf activity some several feet to the south of the lighthouse tower was consistently a very active business. Ships were coming into the wharf, which extended out several hundred feet, and loaded lumber from the many mills in the area, especially the Pacific Wood and Lumber Company on Gazos Creek.



*Pigeon Point Lighthouse*

Trouble was always afoot when Loren Coburn was about. The success of the wharf made him extremely jealous and this greedy individual decided to reposes the docks which apparently were not part of the lighthouse government property. I wrote a two issue article for the Half Moon Bay Review with the first part of the article on August 20, 1987, I will retype the article here as it explains why, especially on cold and windy nights; visitors can hear the moaning and weeping of Scotty Rae. The article was titled; "The ghost of Pigeon Point Lighthouse.".....

"It would seem that every good lighthouse must have a ghost that keeps a close eye on its mortal playground. Ghosts generally result from persons who loose their lives in unexpected and brutal ways. Pigeon Point Lighthouse on the San Mateo County Coastside is one sentinel that may very well have a spirit lurking about its walls.

The year was 1875, Pigeon Point Lighthouse , a new and powerful beacon in the cadres of the United States Lighthouse Service, had been warning ships at sea of the dangerous Coastside for three years. The point was not used solely for the purposes of the Lighthouse Service. Along the cliffs to the south of the point were many small houses of the Portuguese whalers who used these waters. To the north and east were the farms and fields that grew hay and fed the grazing cattle.

But immediately adjacent to the south and literally in the shadow of the 115 foot tower was a chute which was used to load local produce aboard ships which floated in the small bay when weather permitted.

It was the the foot of this chute that Alexander "Scotty" Rae lost his life violently at the hand of one William Wolf under the pay of Loren Coburn.

In July 1875 the ownership of the loading chute was in dispute. The legal owners were Goodall, Nelson and Perkins but this ownership was being challenged by Coburn in the courts of San Mateo County. By this time the dispute had become well known around the town of Pescadero.

The owners of the chute hired Alexander Rae to manage the day to day operation. They had also installed a telegraph system adjacent to the foot of the chute and hired John Kelly to operate the office.

Scotty Rae had started his day early on the morning of July 2 and had gone to Captain Fairchild's House, where he boarded, for breakfast. Captain Fairchild was the lighthouse keeper and lived in a two-story Victorian style house that was constructed as the keeper's house by the government and it was just east of the lighthouse on the inbound road. Rae arrived for breakfast at about 8:15 a.m.

Meanwhile Mr. Loren Coburn along with William Wolf, E.P. Sparrowhawk, George Stanton and H.G. Balcom arrived at the chute and watched from a concealed position as Rae entered the Fairchild residence. When he was out of sight on of the men entered the telegraph office and wrote out a telegram and gave it to John Kelly to send. While the telegram was being sent two other men entered and told Mr. Kelly to "Clear out or we will hurt you." Kelly refused to leave saying he was in charge of the chute while Rae was away. The men then grabbed him, dragged him to the door, and kicked him out.

John Kelly left the chute and went directly to the Fairchild residence and told Rae about what had taken place.

Scotty Rae immediately left Captain Fairchild's residence and went to his barn. He picked up his Navy six-shooter and returned to the chute. He went directly up on the chute keeping the weapon hidden behind his body with his right hand. He was in full view of Captain Fairchild, his daughter and four other people as well as the five invaders.

Rae came down the chute toward Wolf, Sparrowhawk and Stanton who were crouched behind a gate but in plain view.



*Loren Coburn: probably the most unpopular person on the coastside.*

He ordered them off the chute but as did this he displayed his gun. Instantaneously several shots rang out and Scotty went down after being hit by one round.

Wolf then left his place of hiding and walked up to the wounded watchman. Witnesses then saw Wolf lean over and fire three rounds straight down into the still alive body of Scotty Rae. Sparrowhawk and Stanton were directly behind him when this happened while Loren Coburn and H.G. Balcom were but a few feet away at the end of the chute.

Within several hours word of the shooting reached Pescadero. The town people, incensed over a needless killing of a very popular fellow Pescaderan, decided quickly to end this injustice and left promptly for Pigeon Point Lighthouse. They found Coburn and his companions still at the scene. The five were taken into custody and transported to Pescadero where they were placed in jail.

A coroner's inquest was held in Pescadero later that afternoon. The jury inspected the body then took testimony from several witnesses. Alexander Moore, P.J. Pinkham, F.S. Moorhead, A. Weeks, L. Chandler and J.T. Reed declared that Alexander Rae aged 31 years came to his death by pistol shot wounds inflicted by William Wolf, E.P. Sparrowhawk and George Stanton.

The homicide was committed while in the commission of an unlawful act, that H.G. Balcom was present aiding and abetting in the commission of the act and Mr. Loren Coburn, immediately before the commission thereof advised, encouraged and procured the act to be done.

The following Wednesday a preliminary hearing took place in Pescadero. The examination was presided over by Justice Walsh, George Fox conducted the prosecution and Judge Tyler of San Francisco was retained by the defense. The style of argument was best illustrated by the San Mateo Times in an editorial saying: "The latter gentlemen fell into a fault too common to city lawyers, even those of eminence when they appear before county courts. They appear to revel in the unwonted liberty which is too often accorded them and brow beat the bluster in the most approved style of the cheekiest police court shyster. Mr. Tyler's method of conducting the case was in many instances characterized by a violence and disregard for decency which at the mildest we must call reprehensible. Mr. Tyler's shouting did have its effect as the prisoners were admitted to bail at \$5,000 each.

The murder trial for all five defendants began on a Monday morning in late February 1876 in Redwood City. The prosecution provided evidence that Loren Coburn hired the other defendants for the purpose of taking possession of the chute.

The defense began their rebuttal after several days of prosecution testimony. They insisted that Rae had fired the first shot and thus the defendants acted only in their own self protection. They called for an early acquittal. The San Mateo County Times and Gazette on March 4, 1876 reported the jury stood ten for conviction and two for acquittal from the first ballot to the end. After two days of deliberation, Judge Dangerfield discharged the jury. In the process of discharging the jury the judge was critical because he felt this should have been done much earlier. The defendants were grossly disappointed because they had a \$25,000 investment in the Pigeon Point Chute.

A second trial began in early June 1876 but it ended rather abruptly and disappointingly to the people of Pescadero. When the prosecution completed its case the defense asked the judge for a directed verdict of acquittal before they made any attempt to put on a case. The judge said he thought such an instruction was proper under the evidence presented. He told the jury that the evidence could not warrant a conviction and they must therefore bring back a verdict of not guilty. The jury retired and in about 30 minutes returned with a verdict in accordance with the instruction of the court.

Pigeon Point has a well known history of shipwrecks along its rocky shores. But shipwrecks are accidental and the deaths can be understood. But in the death of Scotty Rae we have a fully unadjudicated murder.

It is easy to assume that this old lighthouse has a ghost as the sounds of wind echo through the brick walls on stormy winter evenings. One can assume that if there is a ghost it is the restless soul of Scotty Rae searching for justice in a society that all too often, even today, listens more to greed than to the people of Pescadero were to receive more unhappy news a few months later when the court decided Coburn's lawsuit in his favor and awarded him full possession of the profitable loading chute. The chute was then, and until its demise, to be known as "Coburn's Chute." Coburn's luck in the ship loading business ran out on November 15, 1885 in the evening hours. Mother Nature reaped the only true justice for this story when a very heavy storm hit the San Mateo County coast with a destructive fury that brought down the chute at Pigeon Point and its more famous brother at Tunitas Creek known as Gordon's Chute.

The Wharf at Pigeon Point had been operating since 1872 and Coburn knew full well of the operation. The business built up slowly and by 1885 it was becoming more and more successful. Coburn had many opportunities to prefer charges years before he did so. His delay simply gave the Goodall, Perkins Company, who was operating the wharf, encouragement to continue. They believed they were fully right in their efforts. The judge, whose name was Dangerfield, severely alienated himself to the people of the coast.

He was wrong to give Coburn the wharf without some sort of compensation. This occurring when the people of Pescadero were already angry about the poor court procedure, and demonstration of favoritism, the court showed in its directed verdict acquitting an obviously guilty Coburn of murder.

In 1876 Pigeon Point's population had been building up substantially as the whaling was still in progress the local dairy ranches were functioning well and the lumber industry was still healthy. There were more children now and a new school house was erected. Miss Freda Barg was appointed to fill the position of teacher temporarily as they waited for the permanent teacher to arrive from Washington.

There were more shipwrecks at Pigeon Point even though the lighthouse was operating well up to standard. Most of them had to do with simple carelessness of the captains. They were mostly fishing boats and sailboats as time went on. The Times & Gazette announced, on June 10, 1882, "That one of the keepers at the Pigeon Point Lighthouse plunged into the surf on last Thursday a week ago and saved from drowning a little daughter of Manuel Silva who had been swept off the beach. He swam nearly a mile before he could reach the infant and then she was almost exhausted. The act was heroic." Life at the lighthouse was not always as dull as one might imagine.

The radio beacon was established in 1940 it is and was a welcome signal and easily recognizable with its dot-dot-dash-dash-dot-dot and dot-dot in Morse code that reads P-I. It is hard to believe that it was confused, at one time, with the signal at Ano Nuevo. As a former Coast Guard radioman I sailed up and down the Pacific Coast in the Coast Guard Cutter Comanche and on many occasions listened and took bearings on the two signals especially in heavy foggy conditions. They are a valuable asset to the life saving efforts by the lighthouse.

In 1939 the Lighthouse Service was transferred into the Coast Guard and a new realm began. In 1960 the beautiful, large and still in very good shape Victorian home was torn down in order to build four bungalow type family homes for the four coastguardsmen.

By this time life was vastly improved with an airport beacon operating instead of the Fresnel lens and the entire system operating under electricity. There was still a myriad of things to do on the tower and the light itself as it had to be constantly kept clean and in good shape. A failure of electricity meant the original light had to be placed in operation until the electricity was restored.

On October 3, 1980 a well attended ceremony was held at the Pigeon Point Lighthouse. A large brass plaque was placed near the tower designating the lighthouse as a State Historic Landmark. At the same time the Coast Guard handed the property over to the State of California, officially relieving the crew at the lighthouse. The state then leased the property to the American Youth Hostel, a nationwide organization based on the youth hostels of Germany. Until recently the lighthouse was open for tours on most Sundays. However as of this writing the lighthouse is closed for repairs that are very slow in coming. It seems rather fitting and somewhat historically accurate.

A front page article in the "Bay Area" section of the San Francisco Chronicle on December 8, 2008 titled, "Lighthouse Gets A Spark From Historic Trust" reported that it began a jump start on the repairs because of a \$54,000 grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express. The national program was launched in 2006 and came with a \$5 million, five-year commitment to preserve environmental and historical treasures. This program gave a million dollars to several such landmarks that were falling apart in the Bay Area.

Please give to the Archives Committee of the Redwood City Public Library and the Historic Union Cemetery Association by filling and cutting out the applications below. Mail to either:

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 Redwood City Public Library  
 1044 Middlefield Rd  
 Redwood City, CA 94063

Or

Historic Union Cemetery Association  
 PO Box 610033  
 Redwood City, CA 94063

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## Editor's Note

Thank you to the Redwood City Civic and Cultural Commission for their monetary and vocal support for this journal.

Hope you enjoyed the new and improved Journal of Local History of the Redwood City Public Library. Please send us a line at [gsuarez@redwoodcity.org](mailto:gsuarez@redwoodcity.org) or call me, Gene Suarez, at 650-780-7098.

We welcome any comments or constructive criticism. Our next issue will appear in the Winter 2009. From all of us at Redwood City Public Library's Archives Committee, we wish you a pleasant Fall.



## Urgent

The Local History Room in the Main Redwood City Public Library will be CLOSED after June 30, 2010 most likely if the Archives Board cannot raise \$50,000 to staff it at least 4 hours, 4 days per week. Please, consider contributing, as you can, to:

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