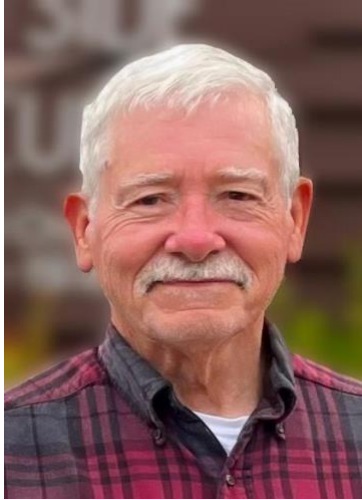


# Pacifica Historical Society

Newsletter Volume 18 Issue 2 summer 2024

## President's Letter



Dear Members,

We have had a busy several months of activities, starting in May with a talk I gave to the Central Coast Railway Club, based in Santa Clara. The talk was a PowerPoint presentation about the Ocean Shore Railroad, which was well received by these folks who love everything about railroads.

The next day the group came to see Car 1409 and visit our museum. They were able to go inside the car to get a close look of the detailed work while Bob Azzaro, our contractor, explained the next steps in the restoration of the car. After, several PHS members joined the CCRR club members for lunch at the Vallemar Station, where the railroad fans were delighted to see

the many photos of the OSRR hanging on the walls.

The Victorian Tea in May was very successful – all the tables were filled with guests, and they were entranced by the men's and women's fashions of the Victorian era that were worn and explained by actors from the Dickens Fair.

In June, we had a visit by a delegation from Catalonia, Spain, who wish to revive our sister-city relationship with Balaguer (see article). Later that month there was a very interesting program at the museum about plans to put interpretive signage on the grounds of the former WWII internment camp (now the site of the archery range in East Sharp Park). This is an almost forgotten piece of Pacifica history. Italian and Japanese communities, together with the San Francisco Rec/Parks Department (who owns the land), want to make sure that this story is known. We have enlarged our exhibit on this topic in the museum and made its information available on our website.

The much-anticipated opening of the new Pacifica Civic Center, adjacent to the museum, took place at the end of June with music, speeches, and a ribbon cutting. Tours of City Hall took place, and our museum held a reception where guests could see newspaper articles and photos of City Hall – converted from a schoolhouse – over the years.

We are happy to announce that the production of Pacifica Jack cheese has resumed. Stop by when the museum is open to purchase this fabulous, historic cheese. And we could really use the help of members when we have a 3-day rummage sale August 23-25. Contact us to volunteer at [info@pacificahistory.org](mailto:info@pacificahistory.org)

*Stephen Johnson*, PHS President

## OSRR Car 1409 – Progress



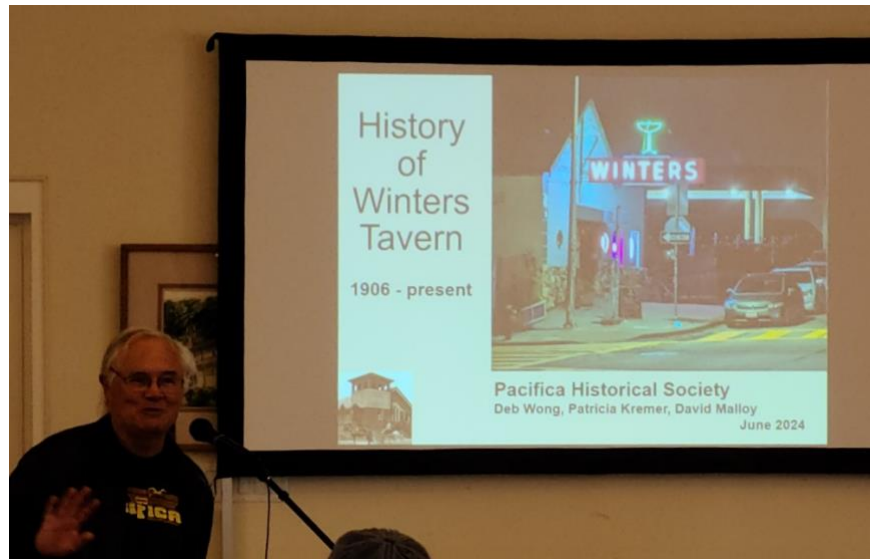
The Central Coast Railway Club's visit to Pacifica was a wonderful occasion to see the progress on Ocean Shore Railroad Car 1409. Left photo, at left is PHS President Steve Johnson, center is PHS Board Member Kathy McGuire, far right (in black shirt) is Bob Azzaro, lead contractor on restoration with members of the CCRC. Right photo, CCRC members look at the work. After viewing Car 1409, the CCRC members met with PHS folks, and then went to Vallemar Station (the last remaining OSRR Station open to the public in Pacifica) for lunch. Please remember to donate for the OSRR effort: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/PHSsosrr1409>

## Victorian Tea



Our May Victorian Tea was another big success as PHS President Stephen Johnson (right photo) donned Victorian-era clothing and invited his friends from the Dickens Fair (above left) who demonstrated how ladies and gents of the era dressed elaborately in that period. The audience enjoyed tea, sandwiches and sweets prepared by PHS members and served by Terra Nova high students.

# *History of Winters Tavern*



One of our newest docents and members, David Malloy, did an outstanding job presenting the history of Winters Tavern, a longtime landmark on Highway One. The event at the tavern (preceded a week earlier by a members-only event at the museum) was organized by Pat Kremer, PHS VP, and PHS member Deb Wong, who did much of the research. The events were a huge success as audience members learned the colorful history of Winters over the decades.

# *Catalonians Visit Pacifica*



We were thrilled to host Catalonians representing our sister city in Spain, Balaguer, birthplace of Portolá the explorer. We're hoping to restore the sister city relationship. Pat Kremer, PHS VP, far left, and Steve Johnson, PHS president, far right, welcomed Isidre Queralt (in dark suit, head of the delegation) and Michael Utsunomiya (second from right, the Catalonian Representative in Washington, DC). The delegation reviewed PHS materials from original efforts to establish the sister city relationship. They told us that the Catalonians like to celebrate a city each year, and in November 2025, Pacifica will be the city celebrated! Make your plans now to visit Catalonia in November next year!

## ***Sharp Park Internment Camp Plans***



The Sharp Park Detention Center, an internment camp where Japanese, Italians and Germans were held during World War II, was the focus of an event June 20. The first stop was the archery range, site of the camp. Christina Olivolo (white jacket), an Oceana High graduate who has done extensive research on the camp, reviewed the camp's site. The event's second part was a presentation at the museum. Signage is being created by a San Francisco Rec/Parks committee made up of Japanese and Italian community representatives, and Laura Del Rosso, a PHS board member whose father lived under restrictions as an Italian citizen during WWII in Pedro Valley. Interpretive panels are planned to be installed in 2025 at the site, which is owned by the City and County of San Francisco.

## ***Pacifica Civic Center Opening***



PHS welcomed visitors to the museum for refreshments after the June 27 opening ceremonies for the newly remodeled Civic Center. We've been following the work for more than a year and are thrilled to be part of it all, with newly planted trees, landscaping and the renovated buildings, including the 1914 City Hall.

## ***Castle Tours and PHS***

“High on a hill overlooking the Sea, my true love built a Castle for me.”

So begins the tale of Henry and Emily McCloskey, and a beautiful home they shared in 1908. After the devastating earthquake and fire of 1906, the McCloskeys’ Van Ness Avenue home in ruins, the attorney for the Ocean Shore Railroad decided to build a 22-room, 10,000 square foot fortress in Salada Beach, now present-day Pacifica.

The young McCloskey family moved in before construction was even complete, so anxious they were to be safe and secure within its sturdy, concrete block walls.

You can re-live this story and many others by attending Castle Tour & Tea events held twice monthly for adults (no spiky heels) by the Sam Mazza Foundation, in partnership with the Pacifica Historical Society.



Longtime PHS members Jerry and Deidra Crow (above) portray the McCloskeys in tip-to-toe Edwardian style. Jeanette Cool, CEO of the Foundation, generously provides our OSRR Car 1409 renovation with an honorarium for their efforts.

The light Tea following also features a tasting of our Pacifica Jack Cheese, along with other treats and an unsurpassed view (on some days) of the Coast.

Starting in September, there are also musical salons in the evening—which make a great “date night”— about once a month.

Visit [sammazzafoundation.org](http://sammazzafoundation.org) for reservations and support PHS fundraising.

## ***Coming Up at the PHS***

**Aug. 3** – Sharp Park Walking Tour. Conducted by PHS as part of San Mateo County Historical Association’s Victorian Days. Meet at 6:30 pm at the Pacifica Coastside Museum for a one-hour easy walk and learn about the area’s fascinating history. Free admission, no RSVP required.

**Aug. 16** – Bel Canto flute concert, classical and popular selections. 7 p.m. at the museum. Free admission, no RSVP required.

**Aug. 23-25** – Rummage Sale at the museum. PHS moved its regularly scheduled rummage sale dates (second Fri-Sat of each month) to Aug. 23-25 to take part in Pacifica’s big community wide garage sale.

**Sept. 28-29** – Pacifica Fog Fest. The museum will have extended hours and be open both days.

## ***Our Past: Who was Ray Higgins?***



With the opening of Pacifica’s Civic Center, the name Ray Higgins was in the spotlight. His name is on the new plaque commemorating the renovation of City Hall, explaining that it was Higgins who sold the 1914 building, which for decades served as San Pedro School, to the newly founded city in 1957 for \$1.

The Higgins name pops up often in Pacifica history because, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, he was everywhere. There was not one person more influential in the development of Pacifica – from the northern part of town to the south -- than Higgins.

Higgins was a realtor, a businessman, but mostly a developer. According to Tribune articles, he started in 1928, buying up lots in Salada Beach (today, Sharp Park) on behalf of the father’s business, Higgins and Sons of San Francisco. Many lots had been owned by the Ocean Shore Land Company, which had failed in its efforts at development.

The San Francisco native was a formidable presence: a welterweight boxing champion and energetic promoter. Trips down the coast convinced him that the golf course that San Francisco was building would lure homeowners and that the scenic coast would boom. Higgins and Sons spread flyers and brochures inviting prospective buyers south.

The prospects, however, were bleak. The Ocean Shore Railroad had gone belly up. There was no Coast Highway (until 1936) and the only roads were narrow, fog-shrouded Mussel Rock or pot-holed Hog Ranch Road (through today’s Fairmont and Edgemar).

After the railroad shut down in 1920, the area had fallen into a desolate state, with even the Little Brown Church (today’s Pacifica Coastside Museum) shuttered up. Seventy-five percent

of the townspeople were “on relief.” There was no natural gas, little water, no garbage pickup and spotty telephone service. Only three stores, two gas stations and a couple of restaurant-taverns were operating. Still, Higgins bought up property.

It was the height of Prohibition and old-timers weren’t happy when he trimmed cypress trees in Salada Beach. Turns out that they were using the trees to cover their bootlegging operations. Many houses had their own stills and produced liquor using local spring water.

During the Depression, lots sold for \$150-\$175 and he scooped them up. He eventually owned more than 3,000 pieces of property throughout today’s Pacifica. In some cases, he built frames of houses and sold them to DIY homeowners to finish themselves. Many of the lots he owned, he sold and then bought back and sold again, profiting each time, and eventually amassing a fortune. “Real estate is a revolving thing...you have to keep the ball rolling. You can’t stand still, you must develop,” he told the Tribune.

Higgins was the most prominent man of the area from the 1930s through the early 1950s, and it led to him twice becoming foreman of the San Mateo County Grand Jury. He used his position to lead a campaign against county officials whom he claimed favored southern county interests.



Circa 1950s

His final and biggest real estate deal was with developer Andy Oddstad. The two men knew each other from San Francisco’s Olympic Club where Higgins was boxing champ from 1921 to 1927 and Oddstad wrestled.

Oddstad was from an Icelandic family, the Stonesons, that had developed Stonestown and that residential area of San Francisco. A civil engineer and decorated Navy frogman in WWII, Oddstad worked for his developer uncles and then started his company, Sterling. His first tract housing was in Colma. Oddstad started to look further south.

In 1952, he asked Higgins to help him buy seven ranches in San Pedro Valley for a huge development that would become Linda Mar. Most of the landowners were Italian artichoke farmers who were reluctant to sell. In one weekend, Higgins negotiated the deals and got the farmers’ signatures. Perhaps no one else could have done it: Higgins was a familiar figure to the ranch owners, and he had built trust with them. Not only did he own much of Sharp Park

and its commercial strip, but he also owned a part of Pedro Valley (Higgins Road is named for him).

When the deals with the farmers were finalized in a short 48 hours, Higgins called it “the biggest thrill of my life.” Within months, Oddstad started building at the corner of Rosita and Adobe roads, the first of his hundreds of Linda Mar ranchers that sold for \$9,995.



Circa 1950

Higgins died suddenly of a heart attack in November 1979 at age 78 at his Woodside home. He had long before sold off his Pacifica property. His highly visible Sharp Park real estate office – for decades headquarters for his business (photo page 7) – had been razed years earlier with Highway One construction. He was survived by his wife, DeLores, children and grandchildren.

The Tribune wrote in its Nov. 28, 1979, obituary of Higgins:

“His faith in the Coastside, although he experienced many wobbly, controversial years along the way, proved valid. Interviewed in 1966, when he had sold most of his holdings here, he told of a Sharp Park lot he had bought for \$500 had been sold for \$16,500 years later. Then, in a prophetic comment, he said ‘The Coastside is the land of the future. If you think this is growth, you haven’t seen anything yet.’”

-by Laura Del Rosso



# Pacifica Historical Society

A Non-Profit Organization

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Subscribe to our Facebook page: Pacifica Historical Society

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Emeritus Members Kathleen Manning, Jerry Crow, Clorinda Campagna

Newsletter Editors: Laura Del Rosso, Susan Stallard

The Pacifica Historical Society welcomes everyone to join our organization and join our committees. We hold monthly Board Meetings on the second Tuesday of each month, 7 pm. The Planning Committee for events and activities meets monthly on the last Thursday of each month, 4 pm.

The Pacifica Coastside Museum and gift shop is open Thursdays and Saturdays, 1 to 4 PM. The shop features books, postcards, and other items of interest, including the famous Pacifica Jack cheese. The museum is free to the public and ADA accessible, and our docents are there to assist.

The museum (aka The Little Brown Church) is a wonderful venue for meetings, weddings, parties and events, and it's a revenue generator for the PHS. Please spread the word that it's available. For rental information, contact Deidra Crow at 650-359-6874.

Bargains are available at the PHS's popular rummage sales, usually held during the second Fridays and Saturdays of each month. Donated items are welcomed for drop-off on the Thursday mornings before the days of each rummage sale.

To join the Pacifica Historical Society, see <https://PacificaHistory.org/join>. Dues are good for the calendar year. Donations are always gratefully accepted. Our Federal Tax ID # is 943117665.



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