

2008 Interpreter's View #2

A collection of interpretive ideas created on a weekly basis by the
Año Nuevo docent trainee class of 2008

Topic: History

Talking about history: When the large house on the island comes into view, the focus switches from elephant seals to humans.... people who were involved in and have left their mark on the landscape of Año Nuevo. Who lived there? What did they do? It is time to become a storyteller. Stories define a place and define the people who live there. Stories create community and give us a sense of belonging. As docents, your job is to choose the stories you want to tell and then tell them in a way that will move, provoke, instruct, entertain, and include the visitor. Stories are a way to connect people with Año Nuevo.

A LIST OF STORIES TO TELL

Shipwrecks, Scalawags, and Scavengers (on sale at the bookstore) were all part of the story of Año Nuevo. Most visitors probably enjoy #1-beachcombing and #2- garage sales. Both can be considered a form of scavenging. If you could put the two activities together, you would be recreating the kind of event that brought people by the hundreds down to the beaches of this area in the 1800's. The event was a shipwreck. Consider the wreck of the *Carrier Pigeon* in 1853. As a result of what washed up on shore, houses in the area received a new coat of white paint, and clotheslines of new copper wire were common in backyards. The arguments over salvage rights brought so many scalawags and lawyers onto the scene that it was impossible to tell the difference between the two.

Año Nuevo's most famous shipwreck: You might ask visitors, "What would it take to get a traffic light installed at a dangerous intersection in your community?" Unfortunately the answer would be a terrible accident of some sort, especially one involving women and children. So it goes....and so it went... that foggy evening in 1866 when the *Coya*, sailing from Australia to San Francisco crashed on the rocks near New Years Point. Of the 20 passengers and 10 crewman, only 3 survived. The dead included the captain, his wife and child, and 5 female passengers. Action was soon taken to install a light station on the Año Nuevo Island and on nearby Pigeon Point, the scene of several other shipwrecks.

Año Nuevo Island was once for sale and was actually sold at an auction!!! So... why not have visitors guess at the amount of the winning bid and when they, do ask them, "What would you do if YOU owned the island?" At the same time you might tell why the actual bidders wanted to own the island, and then tell how the State finally acquired it. (Details can be found in *The Natural History of Año Nuevo*.)

What would save more lives, a lighthouse or a fog horn??? In 1872 the federal government had to decide whether to put a lighthouse or a fog horn (steam whistle) on Año Nuevo Island. Ask your group, "What do you think they decided to do?" Have a show of hands to solidify people's position on this question... but before you do... give them some facts to base their decision on: *There are approximately 3,000 hours of darkness per year and 1,000 hours of foggy conditions, both of which are problems for navigation.* Then tell your group the stories (and conditions) of the four famous shipwrecks that initiated and generated the need for a light station on the island. After each story, ask if anyone wants to change their original position. **HISTORY of shipwrecks and Conditions:** *Carrier Pigeon 1853 (fog)--Sir John Franklin 1865(fog)—Coya 1866(fog)—Hellespont 1868(night).*

Dangerous crossing: Did you know that most traffic accidents happen one mile from your home? This grisly truth also pertains to the one mile of water between the light station keeper's house and the shore we are standing on. One of the most appalling accidents

that ever took place on this coast happened one Sunday afternoon, when two wives watched helplessly while their husbands (both light keepers) and two of their friends drowned when their boat overturned while making the routine crossing from the island to the shore.