

European and American History on the San Mateo Coast

California

To begin to explore the history of California, the first stop is undoubtedly the meaning of the word. As the fifth-oldest surviving place name from Europe in the United States, the story of how California received its name fits its rugged landscape and eager sense of adventure. Most historians will account the origins to Queen Califia, the ruler of a great island kingdom ruled by black Amazonian women with no need of men. The myth was a popular tale to the Spanish in the early 16th century and many exploring conquistadors knew it well. The story goes that the remote kingdom was one of “the wildest in the world on account of the bold and craggy rocks. Their weapons were all made of gold as it was the only metal on the island.” Cortes himself had heard rumors of this great land. Upon its sighting just beyond the newly conquered lands of Mexico, many Spanish adopted the name and hence laid claim to all its riches. The claimed lands of Spanish “California” are known today as the states of Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, California and also Mexico Baja California.



Queen Califia

Spanish Period (1540-1821)



Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo

During the 1540s, Portuguese explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, acting on behalf of the Spanish Crown, led the first naval expedition to explore the coast of California, and claim the land for Spain. While some scholars claim he made no note of Año Nuevo Point, others claim he called it “Cabo de Nieve” (Snowy Cape). Cabrillo and other early explorers did, however, note the extensive populations of seals and other marine mammals during their journeys.

Years later, Sebastián Vizcaíno was sent to explore the coast of California in 1602. Vizcaíno was interested in exploiting pearl fishery sites and, in the process, compiled detailed maps of Alta California’s coast. On

January 3, 1603, Vizcaíno named Punta de Año Nuevo, which he thought was the northernmost point of Monterey Bay. He also provided the first account of the existence of the Ohlones. Following Vizcaíno’s expedition, there was virtually no Spanish exploration of Alta California for over a century and a half.



In 1768, Don Gaspar de Portolá was placed in charge of an expedition to establish settlements in Alta California and locate a usable bay Vizcaíno had described in glowing accounts. After months of extremely difficult travel, the party reached what is known now as Monterey Bay. However, failing to recognize it as the waters Vizcaíno had found earlier, Portola continued northward along the coast. On Monday, October 23, the expedition encountered a large Indian

village in what is now Año Nuevo SP. They camped at Whitehouse Creek, trading beads with the Indians, whom they termed Costanoans, though the Indians identified themselves as the Quiroste. The Quiroste welcomed them with tamales and acorn mush. A member of the expedition, Miguel Costansó, provided a description of the village:

“We moved the camp a distance of two leagues from the Cañada de la Salud (Waddell Creek), and Gaspar camped near an Indian village, discovered by the scouts, situated in a pleasant and attractive spot at the foot of a mountain range and in front of a ravine covered with pine and savin (redwood), among which descended a stream from which the natives obtained water. The land appeared pleasant; it was covered with pasture, and was not without firewood.... The Indians, advised by the scouts of our coming to their lands, received us with great affability and kindness, and, furthermore, presented us with seeds kneaded into thick pats... In the middle of the village there was a large house, spherical in form and very roomy; the other small houses, built in the form of a pyramid, had very little room, and were built of split pinewood. As the large house so much surpassed the others, the village was named after it.” (Costansó 1911)



Gaspar de Portolá

The Spanish called this camp Casa Grande because of the large lodge house there. The expedition continued north, led by guides from the village. They crossed Bean Hollow, Pescadero and Pomponio Creeks, camping that night near San Gregorio State Beach. A California Historic Marker stands west of Highway 1 and south of San Gregorio Beach entrance road to commemorate the site where Portola and his men camped. They rested there for three days in an attempt to overcome bouts with scurvy and dysentery. Moving slowly up the coast, the expedition next camped north of Half Moon Bay, which they named the plain of Los Ansaes because the area was filled with wild geese.

Over the next few days they encountered several more villages. On November 4, 1769, they reached the summit of Montara Mountain and become the first Europeans to see San Francisco Bay. A plaque on Sweeney Ridge heralds this “discovery.” Upon their return, the expedition retraced much of their original route south, again passing through the Año Nuevo Region beginning on Nov. 18. Instead of camping at Casa Grande (which they found abandoned), they camped at Año Nuevo Creek on Nov. 19.

Later, an inland route from San Francisco Bay to southern California was blazed by Spanish soldier Pedro Fages, effectively isolating the Año Nuevo region for many years thereafter. Because the area was now off the beaten track, a mission in what is now Santa Cruz was established relatively late, in 1791.

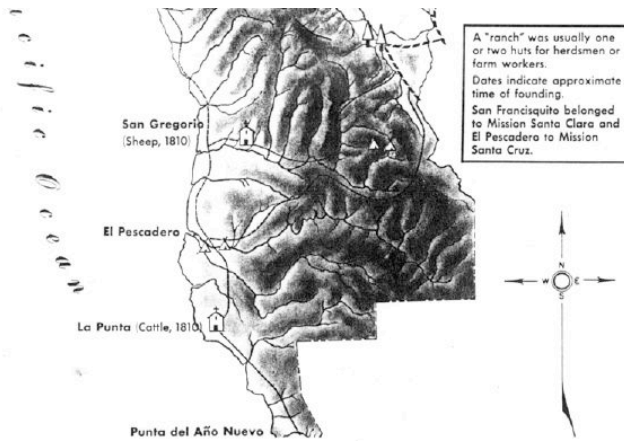
The Mission System

To counter encroachment by foreign powers like Russia and England, the Spanish used three separate institutions in their attempts to settle and control California. These included missions, presidios (military forts), and pueblos (secular towns). A mission was generally established near a concentration of native peoples, and its main purpose was to convert them to Christianity and teach them farming, ranching, and other “civilized” practices.

The founding of Mission Dolores in San Francisco in 1776 resulted in the San Mateo coast coming into contact with a permanent Spanish settlement. It soon became evident to the mission fathers that the environment around the mission site, with its sand dunes and foggy weather, was inadequate for growing crops and grazing cattle. Mission livestock were herded south into modern-day San Mateo County. As early as 1790, mission cattle grazed on the marine terraces at Half Moon Bay, while later in 1810, a sheep ranch was in operation at San Gregorio. The Año Nuevo region, stretching from Pescadero Creek down to Santa Cruz, was used for the grazing of livestock from the Santa Cruz mission (founded 1791). It reportedly owned over 2,900 head of cattle. Native California Indians tended many of these mission herds in what were termed the ranchos, or outlying grazing areas. By 1825, 16 men and one woman were stationed somewhere in the Año Nuevo region to attend to these herds, which extended as far north as Pescadero. The cattle produced not only beef but also hides and tallow, which were the main exports for the area. In addition to the environmental impact of cattle, horse and sheep grazing, exotic plants such as wild oats, filaree, mustard, wild radish, foxtail and bur clover were introduced to the land at this time.

Mission Dolores and Mission Santa Clara (1777) attracted some of the Quiroste, while Mission Santa Cruz contained 553 Native California Indians soon after its founding.

Tragically, European diseases took their toll upon native California Indians, decimating their numbers.



Farming and cattle ranching outposts operated by Mission Dolores in San Mateo County (Stanger 1963).

At Año Nuevo State Reserve, a stone foundation for an adobe building, likely a mission outpost for Punta del Año Nuevo was discovered in 2003. Two sections of the foundation were uncovered during this excavation. The foundation was found to extend under the horse barn. After archeologists recorded the site, the foundation was reburied to protect it from vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

Mexican Period (1821-1848)

Following the successful separation of Mexico from Spain in 1821, several major changes occurred in California. Foremost among these changes was the opening up of the area to outside trade. Both British and American companies became dominant in the profitable hide and tallow

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trade during this period. When a ship arrived in a designated port, rancheros and their families would be rowed out to the offshore vessels to inspect merchandise offered in trade for their dried hides and bags of tallow.

The mission system also declined in power and importance following independence. In 1834, the entire system was dismantled, and all land holdings were secularized and subdivided. The mission lands were granted to the government to be deeded to private citizens. Subsequently, eight Mexican ranchos were granted to various individuals along the San Mateo coast. Generally, after receiving a grant, the ranchero built a small adobe near a source of water a short distance from the ocean and beach areas. As in mission days, cattle grazing was the major economic activity. Cattle roamed freely along the coast until the annual rodeo in March, when landowners and their vaqueros gathered to separate the cattle by brands. Following the round-up came the *matanza* or slaughtering of a certain number of cattle, that generally never exceeded the number of new calves marked. The hides were allowed to dry and the animal fat rendered into tallow for export. The round-up and the arrival of a trading ship marked a time of increased activity for the rancheros, in contrast to a California lifestyle characterized as easy and carefree for most of the year.



Santa Cruz Mission

Mission Santa Cruz was included in the secularization, and mission lands were divided and parceled out to prominent Mexican citizens. In the San Mateo coast area, several rancho parcels were granted, including Rincon de la Ballena (between Bean Hollow south to Gazos Creek), and Rancho Butano (Bean Hollow north to Butano Creek) to its north. However, in a confusing turn of events, Rancho Punta de Año Nuevo (Waddell Creek north to Butano Creek) was

given to Simeon Castro. These lands included both Rincon de la Ballena and Rancho Butano. The resulting legal dispute was not resolved until many years later.

Castro's Rancho Punta del Año Nuevo consisted of over 17,000 acres, including much of what is now Año Nuevo SP, as well as Butano SP. By 1842, Castro took possession of the rancho, although he continued to live in Monterey. Largely through caretakers, he ran large herds of cattle on the land, as well as growing wheat, corn, melons, and potatoes.



*Map of the Rancho Punta de Año Nuevo
Land Grant ca 1840s*

American Settlement

California Statehood 1850



The original Bear Flag Revolt flag. Photographed in 1890, it was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake. The star and the bottom line were red, along with an orange bear.

From 1846 to 1848, the United States and Mexico were engaged in war. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended hostilities and ceded Alta California to the United States in 1848. Conditions of the treaty included the Mexican Cession, where Mexico was to give the United States 525,000 square miles amounting to 55% of its pre-war territory. Texas was not included in this arrangement. In exchange the United States gave Mexico \$15 million dollars (\$300 million today), took responsibility for various American debts and agreed to honor Mexican land rights already established before the war. There were near 80,000 Mexicans in the areas transferred over to the United States, which included 20% of the Mexican population.

Although the U.S. Government had agreed to honor the land grants, the influx of Americans in the 1850s resulted in the division of the Mexican grants into smaller units. The break-up of many land parcels came about when the landowners were forced to sell parts of their land in order to pay legal fees incurred in defending their titles before the U.S. Land Commission. Other parcels were lost to squatters. During the early 1850s, a “Squatters Riot” took place below Half Moon Bay between the Americans and the Mexican owners. Eventually the American squatters were driven off, settling in other areas along the coast. Sales and squatting resulted in the San Mateo coast being divided by the late 1850s and early 1860s into 160- to 320-acre parcels, along with a scattering of larger holdings.



Other Americans quickly arrived along the coast, establishing farms and growing beans, strawberries, potatoes, and Brussel sprouts, as well as barley and oats. Both dairy products and farm crops found ready markets in the expanding city of San Francisco. The communities of Half Moon Bay, Pescadero, and San Gregorio were developed by the Americans to serve their farming and commercial needs.

The city of Half Moon Bay was originally a settlement named San Benito and later renamed Spanishtown to reflect the dominant language of the time. Known for its diversity, the town was peopled by French, English, Africans, Pacific Islanders, South Americans, Anglos, and Mexicans. The population in 1860 was approximately 250. At the time, this farming community could boast a flourmill, a wagon maker, a shoemaker, a harness maker, several blacksmiths,

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general stores, and saloons. A sawmill south of town supplied lumber and shingles for the growing settlement, which for years was the only major town along the San Mateo coast.

Arriving settlers noted the natural beauty and recreational potential of the coastal beaches and streams. The San Mateo coast became a leisure spot, during the summer months, for many San Franciscans.

Transportation became an important factor in the development of San Mateo's isolated coast. Hauling farm goods and people over the treacherous wagon roads along the coast was dangerous and costly, so the coastsiders turned to the beaches for export centers. In the 1850s, Pillar Point was a key harbor that small sailing ships could use during good weather. By 1859, the harbor boasted a deep-water landing, where ships could dock. Owned by State Assemblyman James G. Denniston, this dock was named Denniston's Landing.

Another water anchorage was located south of Spanishtown, near Miramontes Point. Shipments were loaded from the shore using a novel method of hawsers, dragropes, and slings to get goods from shore to ship.

During this period, Josiah P. Ames built a 1,000-foot wharf at Miramar. Further south, Pigeon Point became the general shipping center for the Pescadero region, as well as the center of a whaling industry operated by the Portuguese.

By the 1880s, the isolation of the coast led to economic stagnancy, although the dairy industry continued to do well. Businesspeople began to rally for a railroad, which they believed would open San Francisco and peninsula markets, causing an economic boom for the coast.

In 1890, four partners who believed in the area's potential formed a speculative real estate alliance, purchasing 54 acres on the southern border of Spanishtown's business district and turning it into a subdivision. The entrepreneurs were Joseph Debenedetti, Frank Madonna, Giulio Fanciola, and Robert Mills. (Mills also owned the land that is now Burleigh Murray Ranch.) Their gamble paid off, and lots in "South Spanishtown" or "Millsville" were quickly snapped up. Town improvements came with the growth, such as a newspaper, two creameries, the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) meeting hall, electricity, and telephone service.

Pescadero 1856

In 1853, Alexander Moore and his brother, Thomas, started farming the land which their father had bought from Juan Gonzales, the early owner of Rancho Pescadero. Alexander holds the distinction of building the first American home in the valley. It was built in 1855 at the current location of the Phipps Ranch east of Pescadero. The house burned down in 1975.

Established in 1856, the town of Pescadero had a New England look to it. Many of the early residents came from that region, particularly Maine.

By the 1860s, Pescadero, like Half Moon Bay and San Gregorio, boasted post offices, hotels, schools, and churches. In the late 1860s, the Portuguese from the Azores immigrated to the coastside to hunt whales. One of their primary settlement areas was Pigeon Point, and later they moved to adjoining lands where they became farmers and ranchers. Although Pescadero had been in Santa Cruz County, in 1868 San Mateo County was enlarged by 90,000 acres, and the area included Pescadero. At the time of annexation, Pescadero was the fourth largest town in the county with approximately 400 inhabitants in 1870.



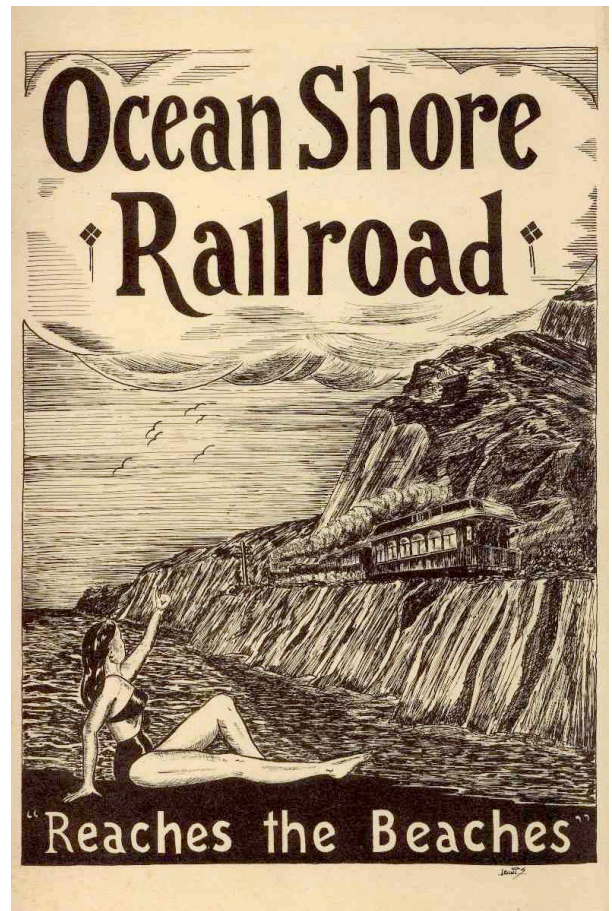
The arriving Americans noted the natural beauty and recreational potentials of the coastal beaches and streams. Streams along the coast were filled with spotted trout that attracted fishermen to the area. Pebble Beach, during the summer months, became a popular leisure spot. San Franciscans spent their days at the beach searching for opals, jaspers, carnelians, and other colorful stones that washed ashore. By the 1870s, the popularity of the beach was known nationwide.

Pescadero suffered a decline in its prominence when most of the business district on the northwest side of town was destroyed by fire in 1921. The northeast side was leveled five years later. With an estimated population of 500 in town and another 500 in the surrounding area, Pescadero currently has about 100 residences and businesses.

The Ocean Shore Railroad 1905-1920

The building of a railroad along the coast from San Francisco to Santa Cruz in the early years of this century added to the coastal economy and put an end to ocean shipping. The railroad, incorporated as the Ocean Shore in 1905, had just surmounted San Pedro Point and the Devil's Slide area, when the earthquake of 1906 sent equipment sliding into the sea. Grading was resumed, however, and by 1907 trains were running from San Francisco to Moss Beach, by 1908 to Half Moon Bay, and eventually as far as Tunitas Creek. At the opposite end of the line, the Ocean Shore started construction from Santa Cruz northward, eventually reaching Swanton, 15 miles short of Tunitas Creek.

The railroad fueled the dreams of many more





Ocean Shore rail trestle south of Davenport. The wooden structure still exists under loads of dirt fill that was dumped alongside to stabilize the trestle.

would-be speculators, including developers, investors, and real estate promoters. Real estate agents filled the trains with prospective customers who toured the sites of planned cities such as Farallone City, Miramar, Montara, Moss Beach, Princeton-by-the-Sea, and more. Lots selling for \$250 could reportedly be bought for \$10 down and \$3 a month, with no interest.

Unfortunately for many, the Ocean Shore never completed the gap between Tunitas Creek and Swanton. Service from San Francisco to Santa Cruz along the coast was maintained, however, by carrying passengers between the two railheads

in a Stanley Steamer automobile. Eventually, the Ocean Shore declared bankruptcy in 1920, the victim of labor problems and unfair competition with the Southern Pacific Line, the completion of a coastal highway, and the emergence of the automobile and truck.

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Pigeon Point Lighthouse Station

Bootlegging along the Coast

The existence of gentle beaches, low surf, and a paved highway to San Francisco attracted the bootlegger to the coast in the 1920s. While illegal liquor could be transported directly into San Francisco Bay, it was financially risky for the dealers in bootleg hooch. Raids by the Prohibition Unit, the Revenue Service, and Coast Guard cut deep into the profits. Although unloading operations were conducted at favorite remote sites such as Pescadero and Pigeon Point, no beach was ignored as a landing area. High-speed motorboats would transport stock liquor (to be cut and resold) from offshore cruising rum ships. One firm in particular, the powerful Consolidated Exporting Limited of Canada, shipped millions of dollars in illegal booze across San Mateo coast beaches prior to the repeal of the 18th Amendment.

World War II

As a result of World War II, the military directed interest towards San Mateo's coastal beaches. A general fear existed that the coast would be invaded by the Japanese, or at least come under bombing raids. Army posts were established at Sharp Park, Half Moon Bay, and Pescadero, while mobile units were held in readiness at other points along the coast. The Coast Guard maintained a constant horseback patrol of the beach areas. As the fear of invasion diminished, the emphasis along the coast changed from defense to training installations.

The San Mateo Coast Today

Recent historical trends along the coast are in many ways a continuation of the past. After the war, new demands for housing increased the urban settling along the coast. Urbanization put new pressures on water and land resources, prompting San Mateo County to pursue a policy aimed at controlling population densities. Agriculture is still an important economic activity along the coast. Brussels sprouts and artichokes are a few of the main crops grown, along with peas, spinach, barley and commercial flowers. As in the past, people from the urban centers of San Francisco and San Mateo Counties spend their days at the beaches picnicking, ocean fishing, and relaxing.

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