

Interpreting History on the San Mateo Coast

When presenting history, be aware that a string of dates is usually meaningless to most people, especially children. Try to relate local events you are describing to more familiar historical incidents. Try to paint a picture for your listener. Visitors will be grateful for references that help them “see” the people and lifestyles of the dates which you are discussing.

Here are some examples of how to make history “real.”

- Have visitors imagine what it was like to be an Ohlone Indian living on the coast. Point out the plants they used for their food, medicine, and baskets. Describe the middens. Remind visitors that there were sailing ships plying this coast within sight of land for nearly two hundred years before the first land expedition. Have them try to imagine what they would have thought those strange shapes moving on the horizon were if they had been an Ohlone Indian living on the coast then.
- You could remind your group that 1603, the year that Sebastian Vizcaino explored the California coast and named Año Nuevo Point (Punta de Año Nuevo), was 17 years before the Plymouth Colony was founded. Mission Dolores was founded in San Francisco in 1776, the same year the Declaration of Independence was signed. The year the Santa Cruz Mission opened (1794) was only 11 years after the end of the American Revolution, and George Washington was still President of the United States of America.
- Rather than merely recalling the 1853 wreck of the clipper ship *Carrier Pigeon* on Pigeon Point (then called Whale Point), you could tell your visitors that the shipwreck occurred four years after gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill (1849)—a date and era with which most people are familiar. Instead of giving visitors a meaningless date in time, you will have handed them a fistful of images that include miners, the Wild West, dance halls and saloons, six-shooters, and sailing ships.
- After conveying these scenarios, you could add the information that California had just been admitted to the Union in 1850 as the 31st state, and that shore whaling had just begun along the coast. You might tell them that 549 ships entered San Francisco Bay in one nine-month period (1848-49) or that the Pacific Steamship Company lost 19 ships along the coast between Big Sur and San Francisco during the late 1800s. This would lead right into the need for lighthouses and why one was built at Pigeon Point.
- To help visitors visualize the isolation of communities on the Coastside in the 1800s and the difficulty of building roads there, you could point out that the first transcontinental railroad was completed a decade before the first road was built along the coastline over the San Pedro Mountain in 1879.

As you can see, you can relate many facts, dates, and figures in just a few sentences. Most visitors will not remember exact dates or figures, but they will have a good image of what life must have been like, not so long ago on this secluded point of land. Put together other such stories and you will hold your audience spellbound. You will have stirred their imaginations, and on their drive back home, they might view the coast in a new light.

Time Line

The first known inhabitants of the San Mateo coast were the Ohlone Indians. Their ancestors are thought to have come from Asia, across the land and/or ice bridge that once spanned the Bering Sea, connecting Siberia and Alaska. There is evidence that they were here more than 10,000 years ago. There were about 300,000 Indians in the State when the Spanish arrived.

Below is a time line that is designed to help put the events of the Año Nuevo Region into historical perspective. The dates in boldface are among the most important ones.

- 1523 Cortez conquest of the Aztecs.
- 1542 Cabrillo expedition: the first to explore and name landmarks along the western coast of North America.
- 1550s Spanish galleons frequently sail down the coast, returning from Manila by way of the Japan and California currents. Francis Drake (England) constantly attacks them.
- 1556-98 Reign of Philip II in Spain. The Spanish Inquisition (1478-1820) is in full swing.
- 1584 Francisco de Gali sights Año Nuevo Point, but doesn't name it. He does record the abundance of seals.
- 1585 War between Spain and England begins.

The first English colony in North America was founded at Roanoke, but lasted only a year.
- 1588 Defeat of Spanish Armada by Drake.
- 1595 Sebastian Cermeno begins survey of the coast of western North America for Velasco, King's viceroy in Mexico City.
- 1598 Reign of Phillip III begins in Spain.
- 1603** Sebastian Vizcaino, on an expedition for the new viceroy in Mexico City, the Count of Monterey, sights and names Punta de Año Nuevo, thinking it is the northernmost tip of Monterey Bay. He sails further north, but fails to see San Francisco Bay. It will be 166 years before the bay is discovered by Europeans.
- 1607 The Jamestown Colony is established in Virginia.
- 1620 Plymouth Colony founded in Massachusetts.
- 1740 Russians establish sea otter industry in Bering Sea, using Aleut Indians as hunters.
- 1768 The Spanish see the English and French moving westward across North America, and the Russians moving south down the western coast of North America. Spain decides to

defend its claim to Alta California by establishing settlements there.

- 1769** First European settlement established at San Diego—a Spanish mission/fort.
- Gaspar de Portola is sent on an overland expedition up the coast of Alta California. He departs San Diego in July. His company camps at Waddell Creek in October, encounters friendly Indians at Whitehouse Creek, and continues north along the San Mateo coast until he sights San Francisco Bay from Sweeney Ridge, just above what is now Pacifica.
- 1776** American Declaration of Independence signed.
- Mission Dolores founded in San Francisco.
- 1775-83 American Revolution. Independence from England.
- 1784 Captain Cook writes about the abundance of sea otters on the western coast of North America, and about the Russians hunting them. The rush after sea otter pelts begins.
- 1789 George Washington is President and the French Revolution begins.
- 1794** The mission at Santa Cruz is completed. The mission's domain extends from Aptos to San Gregorio.
- 1806 The Lewis and Clarke expedition reaches the Northwest Pacific coast.
- 1810 An outpost of Mission Santa Cruz, called La Punta, is established at Pigeon Point. It supplies cattle to the mission.
- 1812 Russians establish base at Fort Ross.
- 1814** Santa Cruz Mission, having moved grazing operations to Año Nuevo, records 2,900 head of cattle in the region.
- 1822** Mexico wins independence from Spain. Californians, who are primarily of Spanish heritage, align with Mexico.
- French engineer Augustin Fresnel invents the Fresnel lens system.
- 1833-36** The California missions are secularized. The extensive mission lands are converted to ranchos and granted to individuals. During the 64-year mission period, the Ohlone population had been drastically reduced and their culture radically altered.
- 1833 The Santa Cruz Mission is secularized and the land divided into ranchos. Rancho El Pescadero (fishing place) is granted to Juan Jose Gonzales, majordomo of the mission. It consists of more than 3,200 acres.

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- 1835 Political chaos in Mexico. Four governors in 16 months.
- 1836 Juan Alvarado, Secretary of Territorial Deputation, with the aid of Isaac Graham (future owner of Rancho Año Nuevo) and his men, force the Governor out of office. Alvarado promises Graham and his cohorts land grants in return.
- 1840** Don Castro, owner of Rancho Año Nuevo, “occupies” his land by putting 400 head of cattle on it in 1840.

The steady influx of Americans into California and the Battle of the Alamo (1836) begin to make Alvarado distrustful of Graham. Alvarado has Graham and his men arrested for treason and imprisoned in Mexico. The “Graham Affair” becomes a rallying cry and justification for U.S. penetration into Alta California. Graham is eventually released and purchases Rancho Zayante.

- 1842 Don Castro’s Grant signed into law. The Rancho contains 17,753 acres and extends from Año Nuevo Creek to Butano Creek and from the shore to mountain ridge. It is producing hides, tallow, wheat, corn, melons, and potatoes. Don Castro dies and his Rancho is divided up among his heirs.

- 1846 A group of American settlers in California declare the independent Republic of California and begin the “Bear Flag Revolt” against Mexico.

- 1846-48 U.S.-Mexico War.

- 1848** Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo cedes Alta California to the United States. The U.S. Government agrees to honor land grants.

- 1849** Gold rush begins in California.

- 1850** California is admitted to the Union as the 31st state.

Shore whaling begins on the coast.

- 1851** Graham purchases Año Nuevo Rancho for \$18,000 and has a house built at Whitehouse Creek.

- 1853 The clipper ship *Carrier Pigeon* wrecks at Punta de la Ballena (Whale Point), lending its name to the renamed Pigeon Point.

Alexander and Adeline Moore of Santa Cruz became the first American settlers of Pescadero.

- 1857** The first of the Steele family arrives in California and begins dairying in Sonoma and at Point Reyes.

- 1861 Civil War between the states begins.

- 1862** To pay off debts, Graham sells Año Nuevo to John Baird for \$20,000 (March); Baird sells ranch to Loren Coburn and Jeremiah Clarke for \$30,000 (August). The Steele family leases Año Nuevo with an option to buy at the end of ten years. The lease is for \$6,000 per year for the 7,000 acres between Gazos and Año Nuevo Creeks. Año Nuevo Island and Pigeon Point are excluded from this deal.
- 1862 Portuguese establish shore whaling station at Pigeon Point.
- 1864 William Waddell constructs 600-foot wharf at Año Nuevo Bay to facilitate shipping of his lumber. Rail lines run from the wharf to his mill at Waddell Creek. The Point New Years store is built near the wharf by Horace Steele.
- Steele family produces large block of cheese to support relief efforts for the war.
- 1865 End of the Civil War.
- 1865 The clipper ship *Sir John Franklin* wrecks at what is now known as Franklin Point, south of Pigeon Point.
- 1866 The *Coya* wrecks near Año Nuevo Point.
- 1868 The British ship *Hellespont* wrecks at Pigeon Point.
- 1868 The San Mateo County line is moved south to its present location. People on the northern side of Waddell Slide had often been unable to get to the county seat in Santa Cruz
- 1869 The first transcontinental railroad is completed.
- Horace Steele builds house near the Waddell wharf.
- 1870** The Federal Government buys Año Nuevo Island and Pigeon Point from Loren Coburn for \$10,000. After numerous shipwrecks along this part of the coast the government decides foghorns and/or lighthouses are needed.
- 1871 Congress appropriates \$90,000 for the U.S. Lighthouse Service to build the Año Nuevo Fog Signal Station and Pigeon Point Light Station. Construction is begun on Pigeon Point Lighthouse. Pigeon Point's fog horn is activated.
- 1872 The Pigeon Point Lighthouse tower is completed. At sunset on November 15, Captain Patterson, Principal Keeper of Pigeon Point Light Station, lights the oil lamp inside the first-order Fresnel lens for the first time.
- The whaling community at Pigeon Point now numbers 17 crewmen.
- Twelve-inch steam fog whistle installed on Año Island.

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Settlement at Waddell's Landing now includes several store houses, at least two residential buildings, and a general store with a post office and bar. The post office served 150-200 local patrons.

1875 William Waddell is killed by a grizzly bear in Waddell Canyon.

1878 Effie Steele and Edwin Dickerman married.

1880 Waddell's wharf is destroyed.

Two keepers and their families living on Año Nuevo Island in a 36' X 28' building.

Original Steele Brothers Dairy operations break up. Land divided among owners and their children.

1883 Keeper, assistant, and friends drown when their boat overturns while crossing from the island to the mainland.

1887 Carrier *J.W. Seaver* wrecks at Año Nuevo Point along with the carrier *San Vincente* that burns and sinks two miles off Año Point.

1888 A kerosene-burning lamp replaces lard oil apparatus in Pigeon Point Lighthouse.

1890 Light added to the Año Nuevo Island station. 20,000 candlepower oil lens lantern mounted on water tank.

1904 Large, double house built for keeper and assistant and their families. Building still standing!

1905 The Ocean Shore Railroad is incorporated for the purpose of constructing and operating a railroad line from San Francisco to Santa Cruz.

1906 The San Francisco earthquake and fire occurs on April 18, 1906.

The Ocean Shore Railroad's southern section is completed from Santa Cruz to Swanton on May 1.

1908 Ocean Shore Railroad reaches El Granada in June, Half Moon Bay in October, and Tunitas Creek by the end of the year. This will be as far south as it would reach.

1909 Ocean Shore Railroad declared bankrupt.

1911 Lighthouse keeper's residence renovated.

1912 New incandescent oil vapor equipment at Pigeon Point Lighthouse produces a 160,000 candlepower light visible for 18 miles.

- 1914 Lens installed on steel tower on Año Nuevo Island. Visible for 22km.
- 1919-33 Prohibition.
- 1920** The Ocean Shore Railroad goes out of business.
- 1922** Mexico protects newly rediscovered elephant seals.
- 1924 Prohibition agents capture four bootleggers, including Jay F. Steele, at Año Nuevo. They were unloading the goods and transporting them via mule-drawn wagons to Steel's barn. Four touring cars and 240 cases of Canadian Club whiskey confiscated. Steele turns State's evidence.
- 1926 Electric power is introduced at Pigeon Point Lighthouse, providing a 680,000 candlepower light visible for 30 miles.
- Severe earthquakes topples lamp and leaves lighthouse a shambles on Año Nuevo Island
- 1929-39 The Great Depression.
- 1930** Steele ranch switches from dairying to field crops. Pond built as reservoir for the sprinkler irrigation system, one of the earliest on the coast.
- 1931 United States protects elephant seals.
- 1939 The U.S. Coast Guard supplants the Lighthouse Service for managing national aids to navigation.
- 1941 U.S. enters World War II.
- 1943 A radio-beacon signal begins transmission at Pigeon Point, using the Morse code signal "PI." (The signal was discontinued in 1995 due to the availability of satellite systems.)
- 1948** Automatic marker buoy installed on rocks 1,500 meters south of Año Nuevo Island. Range of half a mile, with a 400 candlepower light. Station on island abandoned.
- 1955** Elephant seals appear on Año Nuevo Island.
- 1958** Auction of Año Nuevo Island and its purchase by the State of California.
- 1961** First elephant seal pups born on Año Nuevo Island.
- 1962 Stanford University given permission to conduct research on the Island.
- 1967** First male elephant seals sighted on the mainland at Año Nuevo Point.

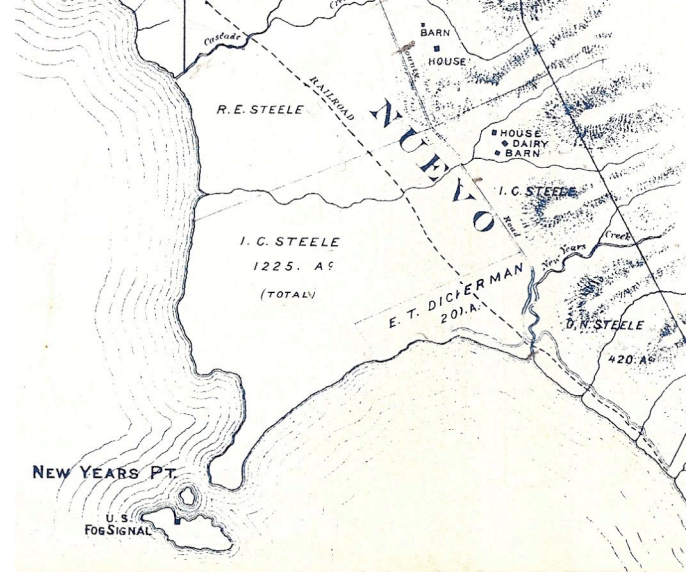
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- 1968 UCSC signs lease agreement with State for research on the island.
- 1972 An automated rotating aero-beacon light is installed at Pigeon Point. Coast Guard light-keeping personnel are removed from the station.
- United States Marine Mammal Protection Act enacted.
- 1973** Sunset Magazine article about elephant seals at Año Nuevo published.
- 1974 USCS Intern Program started
- 1975** First elephant seal pup born on mainland beach.
- 1976 Old rusty light tower toppled on Año Nuevo Island.
- The Pigeon Point fog horn signal is deactivated. Radar and other electronic navigational aids make sound signals obsolete.
- First guided walks at Año Nuevo.
- 1981 Community Docent program started at Año Nuevo.
- 1982 Dedication of State Historic Landmark #906 designating site of Steele dairy ranch. Dickerman-Steele barn placed on National Register of Historic Places. Año Nuevo State Reserve designated a National Natural landmark. The barn opens as a Visitor Center.
- 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake occurs.
- 2001 In December, two sections of the upper iron belt course break off from the Pigeon Point Lighthouse tower and the tower is subsequently closed to the public pending its restoration.
- 2005** On May 25th a public ceremony is held to transfer Pigeon Point Light Station to California State Parks.

Año Nuevo Point Through Time (1887 – 1927)



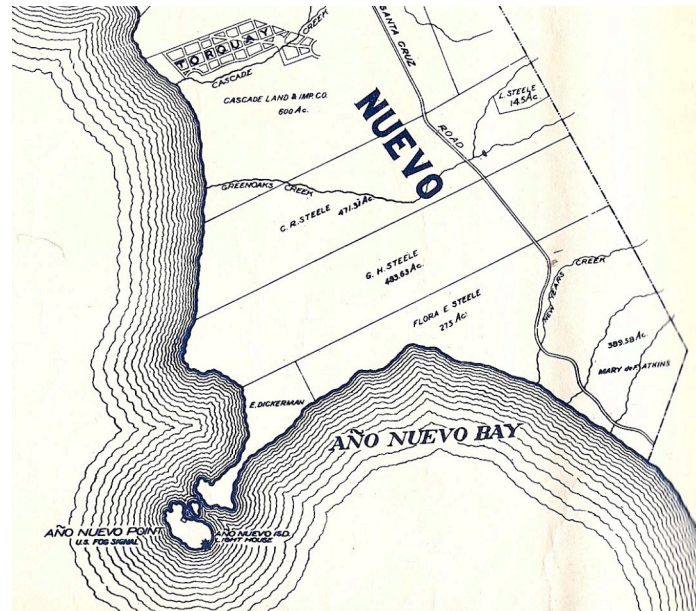
1887



1894



1909



1927