

# The Great Tide Pool

## TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

### A BUSINESS TRIP

November 15, 2025



Picture, if you will, Pacific Grove before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, before even 1890. The Methodist Retreat that launched PG in the first place is still vibrant. Lighthouse Avenue is still decades from being paved. The automobile has yet to arrive. PG is not yet even officially incorporated as a city. What kinds of business establishments are available? Who puts up shingles in this fledgling hamlet? I was curious, so I decided to take a little tour, a trip back in time.

In 1876, when PG is still in its infancy, the first shops open their doors for summer guests. One of them is a two-story laundry run by a Chinese immigrant named All Gall. Another is 30-by-90-foot restaurant managed by a man unfortunately named R.C. Worms. A third, with wooden walls and a canvas roof, advertises "Prepared Hot Dishes" and is so popular that it draws, according to the histories, "knockdown, drag out" mobs. A couple years later, year-round stores emerge, including Seaside Drug store, where you can find everything from a soda fountain to "patent medicines" and "chest protectors." Nearby: F.H. Ray's Hardware Store, C.E. Buffum's The People's Market, and a grocery owned by J.B. Norton that promises "everything for everybody." Soon after, on upper Grand Avenue, we find an early version of a post office (well, a room with a mailbag).

By 1887, there is an official post office in town, and business is starting to boom, as the shacks and canvas of early days transition to more substantial constructions. Charles Tuttle opens what is touted as "the neatest pharmacy in the entire country." His drug store offers paper, pens, perfumery... and a pet canary flying around the room, as well as the first telephone office in town. El Carmelo Bakery sells German Milk Bread for 10 cents a loaf. B.A. Yeardley's real estate ad shouts "Buy a home in the Queen of Seaside Resorts." Cypress Johnson provides "the best quality of meat constantly on hand" but asks customers to "kindly not expectorate on the floor." He is among the butchers and bakers and grocers who close their doors for a couple hours a day in order to peddle their wares from door to door throughout town.



Harvey Garber serves as the local smithy and wagon painter. John Gray is a local carpenter earning \$1.25 a day. G.W. Hawes sells paint. A woman known as "Mother Carrington" offers piano lessons. W.H. Varien opens a barber shop and is described as "the most expert tonsorial artist on the coast." Wm. H. Rawling and Company offers wood, coal, and hay feed. The Avenue Store touts its tropical fruits. And the Aylesworth Candy Factory is positively bustling with kids, arriving with their pennies tied in handkerchiefs, drawn by the smell of peppermint and roasted peanuts.

One observer writes, "Who would have thought that we should have a business street at the Grove, and that even furniture and groceries and most of the needed things for household use should have been so conveniently got as at present and this, too, without disturbing the general character of our daily lives and duties?"

So in that sense, not much has changed. Conveniences still abound in Pacific Grove. The town's character remains very much intact. The town business district still offers the basics, whether it's a carton of milk at Grove Market, a cordless drill at Pacific Grove Hardware, or a can of cobalt blue at Kidwell's Paint Company. But now we have our choice of specialties. We can opt for Thai or Indian or Italian or Mediterranean food. We can enjoy Guinness beer at Monarch Pub or butternut squash ravioli at Aliotti's Victorian Corner Restaurant. We can find votive candles at The Quill, purchase the owner's artwork at Yellow Mustard Seed, or choose a knit cardigan at The Nest.

PG has occasionally been called "the town that time forgot." But, to reverse a phrase, the more things stay the same, the more they change.