

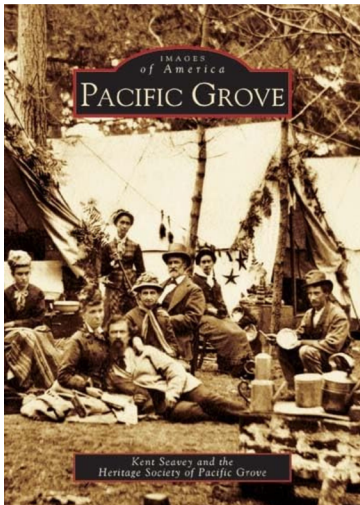
The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

INDELIBLE IMAGES

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It's been said that all we ever see of stars are their old photographs. Distance from the real-time moment is filtered through time. We are viewing what once was. But that old "photograph" we're seeing is still a wonder, replete with possibilities – a snapshot bearing stories.

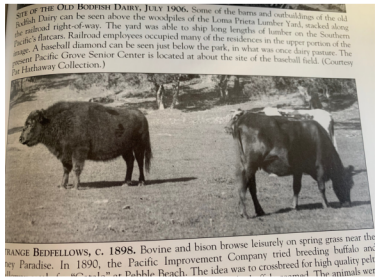
Arcadia Publishing in South Carolina understands that notion, having churned out hundreds and hundreds of books in its "Images of America" series – volumes that tell the story of places or people or moments via 128 pages of old photographs. There are historical collections about Yellowstone National Park, Ellis Island, Paramount Studios, Texas gunslingers, the Lincoln funeral train, Route 66... the list is nearly endless. Also among the books in this series are tomes about lesser-known American hamlets that boast storied pasts: Dixon, Illinois... Centralia, Pennsylvania... Bristol, Rhode Island...

And Pacific Grove, California.



The PG version – there's a copy available at the public library – was written and curated by historian Kent Seavey and the Heritage Society of Pacific Grove and published in 2005. It is a sepia-toned journey through the decades, a sort of small-town version of a through-the-years scrapbook. More than 100 pages of pics celebrating Pacific Grove's past – PG's first school in 1891, bicycle enthusiasts in 1896, the golf course in 1934, the Butterfly Parade in 1951, etc. It's a lot to sift through. But I've taken a leisurely stroll through the pages. So, for anyone who wants to take a historical journey – but may be short on time – here are my seven favorite selected scenes:

P. 14 – Point Pinos Lighthouse (1890) – It's easy to forget that Pacific Grove was once an untamed wilderness – until you consider a 135-year-old photo of the oldest continuously operating light station on the Pacific coast. Before it was surrounded by the back nine of the Pacific Grove Golf Links, it was a lone sentinel amid the dunes.



P. 56 – Class in Session (1890) – Every small town starts as a tiny gathering of residents. Nothing quite evokes that notion like a photo, taken at about the time the city of Pacific Grove was incorporated, of a one-room schoolhouse. I count 20 students and a single teacher.

P. 53 – Strange Bedfellows (1898) – In the late 19th century, the local Pacific Improvement Company actually tried to breed “catalo” – yes, cattle and buffalo – as seen in a photo of the creatures grazing side by side. The unsuccessful experiment literally led to buffalo roaming – and sometimes even swimming around Point Pinos.



P. 13 – Shipwreck Near Asilomar (1909) – Imagine this sight right near the shore at PG’s Moss Beach: The Roderick Dhu, a 1,534-ton converted oil barge carrying crude oil, ran aground (well, on the rocks) on April 26, 1909. At first, the ship’s crew guarded the vessel from potential looters. Eventually, after attempts to free it failed, the ship became a popular local tourist attraction for several years.



P. 71 – First Telephone Exchange (1910) – Fourteen years after the first permanent telephone line was installed in PG (a line connecting to local pharmacist Charles Tuttle), Tuttle’s young daughter handled telephone exchange duties. The photo of Winifred Tuttle shows her listening in one of some 150 lines she handled in PG.



P. 109 – The Mysterious Mr. X (1932) – One of the most famous passages in Cannery Row – Chapter 19 of John Steinbeck’s masterful study of the Peninsula’s quirky local characters – concerns the time a performer known as the Mysterious Mr. X thrilled onlookers by skating around the flagpole on the roof of Holman’s Department Store for more than 50 hours. It was based on a real event. Images of Pacific Grove actually has a photo to prove it.



P. 122 – Camouflaged Water Tower (1942) – A reminder of the West Coast’s high-alert status during World War II, the tower adorned in green-and-gray camouflage was designed by a local artist/air raid warden. Overreaction? Well, in late December of that year, golfers at Pebble Beach watched an oil tanker outmaneuver a Japanese submarine.

So that’s merely seven photos out of some 200 in the book, but you get the idea: Photography as historical biography. As the great photojournalist Dorothea Lange once said, “Photography takes an instant out of time, altering life by holding it still.”