

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

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It sits there, in front of the building on Pine Avenue, alongside a sign saying “City of Pacific Grove... Fire Department... Ocean Rescue... Hyperbaric Facility.” For something that weighs about 500 pounds and dates back possibly a century-and-a-half, it is remarkably unremarkable. In fact, in all the years I had driven by the fire station... or strolled past it... or stood right there to watch the Butterfly Parade, I had never actually paid attention to it. But there it is. The Curfew Bell.

The story dates back to San Francisco before the turn of the 20th century when a Pagrovia named Dr. L.D. Stone came across an old church being torn down and saved its bell, knowing that it was just what the Methodist Retreaters in Pacific Grove were looking for. So he paid \$6 for it and had it floated on a raft to PG. It hung in the first tiny firehouse on Fountain Avenue, where it became eminently useful – not so much as a fire bell but as a tool of the morality police in the Methodist Encampment that spawned PG.

You see, in those days there was a curfew. As longtime resident Lucy Neely McLane wrote in *A Piney Paradise*, a very old book about Pacific Grove, at 9 pm (8 pm from November to June) the bell would ring and “at its sound children fled from the streets.” An hour later, “everyone was expected to be indoors and all lights out on the grounds. A stroller between the lines of tents about nine forty-five would see amusing flicker pictures on the tent walls, hasty bedtime preparations, and a general blowing out of candles or lamp lights at the zero hour.”

It was unlawful for anyone under the age of 18 to be on any public street after the bell tolled. Shades were NOT to be drawn before 10 pm, oddly. A constable enforced the Curfew Law. For a couple of decades, that bell was the very symbol of the various rules and regulations that attempted to maintain a certain moral character in the Sanctuary by the Sea.

The bell was eventually moved, in 1912, to a new fire station at Forest and Laurel avenues before it was retired in 1950. Now it has a place of honor in front of the current station, albeit a somewhat inconspicuous one. But it is a lesson to look carefully as you meander through town. You are wandering through vivid history.

Sometimes, to even more greatly appreciate what is, it helps to know what was - to know that the Mammoth Stables that provided horses in the pre-automobile days once covered two full blocks on Laurel from Forest to Fountain... or that the Holman Building was built on the site of the former El Carmelo Hotel... or that there was once a Japanese Tea House at what is now Lovers Point Park.

The past rings out everywhere. So the Curfew Bell sits there, silent yet shouting a history worth hearing.

