

Pacifica's layer cake of history

Layer after layer, history has left its mark on Pacifica. A geologist or an archaeologist can tell a lot about the past by studying such layers. In fact, the archaeologists have done just that at Sanchez Adobe, digging through more than 1000 years of Ohlone trash heaps, Spanish asistencia remnants, Mexican ranching discards, and, possibly, more recent layers of 1985 plastic dinnerware and 1983 aluminum cans.

If we each dug down in our own backyards, most would come up empty, but a few would turn up riches in the form of 19th and early 20th century patent medicine and liquor bottles, broken 19th century dinner plates, perhaps less savory remains of early 20th century summer cottagers, houses of prostitution and railroad builders, 19th century Italian farmers, Irish and Scots immigrants and early Portuguese and Swiss dairy workers. Someone in Edgemar or Pacific Manor might even come up with memorabilia left behind by John Griffith London, Jack's stepdad and a local potato farmer in 1883.

The Ohlone left little behind. Their mussel and abalone dinners became a few semi-permanent piles of shell, but were mostly biodegradable in the extreme. Almost all the metal tools left behind by pea, potato, artichoke and brussels sprout farmers of the 19th century have corroded away.

It doesn't take much salt wind to totally destroy tools left outdoors near the coast. Side hill plows, cultivators, tractors, manure spreaders and other such artifacts are few and far between. A whole world of Coastside iron and steel tools, originally of much value and very much appreciated in their time have disappeared, corroded to dust from a lethal combination of salt air and carelessness.

Where are the Ocean Shore Railroad engines and cars, the tracks and stations? For the most part they have disappeared almost as thoroughly as the Ohlone trash dumps that preceded them.

Happily we have Vallemar Station. Around it the world has changed. The old station itself has been a private home, as well as a sports bar and restaurant. Most of its contemporaries are gone. I don't know anybody who can tell me where Edgemar Station was at. It was somewhere within a thousand feet of the present location of McDonalds. The track came along the bluffs where upper Palmetto Ave. is now. Then it ran along what is now the playground of Pacific Manor School, passing near or under what is now Taco Bell. Salada Station was west of Anderson's store, now the middle of the freeway. Brighton Station was in front of the vacant lot at 2590 Francisco. Rockaway Station has been obliterated so thoroughly from the collective memory some of the oldest residents deny there was such a station. It lives on only in rare pictures and schedules of the line.

As memories fade, and corrosion, fire, recycling and biodegradation destroy physical evidence, we are left with government records and fading photos. Mission baptismal records provide some of the few tangible descriptions of individual Ohlones as real human beings. I hope memories of us are more enduring.