

The Great Tidepool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA
by local award-winning author, [Brad Herzog](#)

SIGNS OF THE TIME



Just a block from where the waves of Monterey Bay crash along the rocky shore of Pacific Grove, I stare at the small wooden plaque adorning a home at 138 Fountain Avenue: “Mrs. Myretta Steiner 1892.” A whirl of thoughts rush through my head.



First thought: I don’t believe I’ve ever met someone named Myretta.

Second thought: What a remarkable nod to origins – a plaque honoring the first recorded owner of a turn-of-the-century landmark in a turn-back-the-clock town.



Third thought: There is a story behind each name on each house – a life in full. In the case of the Steiners, it turns out that in the 1880s and 1890s A.J. Steiner owned a grocery store at the corner of Lighthouse and Forest avenues. He provided for the community’s earliest settlers, and the Steiner name lives on in the form of Myretta’s plaque. In fact, judging by the percentages of plaques, it seems that most of the listed homeowners back then were women, an interesting historical footnote.



Since 1978, these historic home plaques – more than 700 of them – have been supplied by the Pacific Grove Heritage Society. It takes a village (or at least several volunteers) to procure the redwood, cut it to the proper size, carefully craft the lettering and routing, and paint it the familiar green.



There are rules for qualifying, of course. Only houses constructed before 1926. Rebuilds don’t make the cut. No new facades. In other words, for 55 years now, these plaques have honored places that celebrate the past by still representing it.

So a stroll through town can feel a bit like an anachronistic amble. On Forest Avenue, you might find a plaque – “Annie L. Clayton 1891” – alongside a window containing an “I support military women” ribbon.



On Chestnut Street, you may spot an electric car parked in front of a boldly-painted lavender home announcing "Nancy Houghton 1899." But I love how PG seamlessly merges past and present.



Every time I spot a historic plaque on an old Victorian – and once you start noticing them, you see them everywhere – I’m reminded of Pacific Grove’s humble beginnings. The town began as a Methodist retreat featuring tents around Lovers Point... which soon became tent cabins and small cottages on the same plot of land... and then stately Victorian homes. In fact, PG touts itself as having more “painted ladies” per capita than any city in America, and modern contractors occasionally have found a surprising reminder of origins inside the walls of some of these residences – canvas.



PG’s own literary legend, John Steinbeck, once described a tide pool dweller searching for a new home: “And now one, finding an empty snail shell he likes better than his own, creeps out, exposing his soft body to the enemy for a moment, and then pops into the new shell.” Aside from the “enemy” part, that might well describe the evolution of PG’s humble abodes.



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