

The Great Tide Pool

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



KETCHAM'S BARN

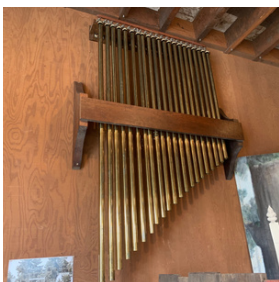
Last month, I wrote about an oft-overlooked event in Pacific Grove – the annual Birdhouse Competition and Auction overseen by the Heritage Society of Pacific Grove. Last year's birdhouses were displayed at the Museum of Natural History. But before the showing, members of the PG community (many of them Heritage Society members) drop off their creative birdhouses at a little wooden edifice on the corner of Laurel and 17th streets – a place known fondly as Ketcham's Barn.



A birdhouse is more than just an avian perch; it's a welcome home. And if home is where history resides, Ketcham's Barn is Pacific Grove's birdhouse.



Indeed, the barn has a colorful history. Built in 1891 by a fellow from New York named Joseph Ketcham, it originally housed animals, hay, and a handful of provisions. It was sold a dozen years later to local banker C.D. Cooke, who used it to store his horse and buggy, which he used to transport potential customers to PG. Later, it housed automobiles, and still later it became what has been described as a "refuge for lost souls," the kind of place John Steinbeck might have written about in *Sweet Thursday*.



This nondescript and dilapidated barn might have remained that way – a shrug, an afterthought, a once-was that could easily have been torn down and reimagined into modernity. But in 1979, the City of Pacific Grove saved it, purchasing it from a family named Radowicz, reconstructing it, adding a wishing well and benches in the adjacent lot, and leasing Ketcham's Barn to the Heritage Society for the grand total of \$1 per year.

The 24-foot square unpainted board and batten building is now open to the public from 1-4 pm every Saturday and by appointment. So I stopped by on a Saturday afternoon and found a 114-year-old building that has been converted into a cozy history museum.

Among the treasures you can find in Ketcham's Barn: An antique player piano, chimes from PG's old bell tower, a little replica of an old Methodist Retreat tent cabin, a tri-fold describing PG's 19th-century Chinese fishing village, a large aerial photograph of Pacific Grove as it looked way back in 1906, a property map from 1918, a 130-year-old front porch post from



the La Porte Mansion, and a 132-year-old sepia-toned photo taken inside C.K. Tuttle's Drugstore. One of my favorite finds (inside an old safe) was a collection of Pacific Grove High School yearbooks dating as far back as 1905. The mini advertisements within transported me back a century and more - ads for places like the Pacific Grove Curio Store and High Class Millinery.



But the second floor of Ketcham's Barn may best capture the magic of this collection of artifacts. The barn's top floor features countless binders devoted to everything from Steinbeck to Holman's Department Store, County Assessor's Records dating back to 1914, and a quarter-century's worth of copies of *The Board and Batten: The Pacific Grove Historical Journal*. There are also a dozen cabinets brimming with files containing long-ago architectural drawings, century-old photos, and census and house-by-house records harkening back to the turn of the 20th century.

It's all a reminder that, as Confucius put it, to define the future you have to study the past. The Heritage Society of Pacific Grove not only examines the past, but gathers it, preserves it, celebrates it. Its members are the keepers of communal memories.

And where does the Heritage Society's board of directors hold its monthly meetings? At a conference table on the second floor of Ketcham's Barn. Which is just as it should be.

*The Great
Tidepool*