

## Bartlett's News Briefs

### NOT JUST ANYBODY

community-sponsored stories

by Pacifican Jean Bartlett, longtime Bay Area News Group writer

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## SOMETIMES TO SAVE HISTORY YOU HAVE TO BE HISTORY ~ AND RUN IT LIKE A BUSINESS

When Pacificans got in costume & character to rebuild the Little Brown Church



The late Frank D. Winston, also affectionately known as Emperor of Pacifica, dressed up and studied up to greet guests at Sam's Castle (Mazza Castle) as the castle's first owner Henry Harrison McCloskey. (Courtesy photo.)

In 2001, volunteers with the Pacifica Historical Society made it clear that they would get past all the naysayers, and there were plenty of them, to save and restore Pacifica's oldest public building – one of the few remaining links to Bay Area coastal history – and create a museum and meeting place to serve the entire community. They got to work spearheading a ballot measure to save the 1910-built Little Brown Church from being torn down, moved or encumbered and in November of 2004, they got their hard-earned initiative on the ballot and their fellow Pacificans voted "yes" to saving history.

The building is owned by the City of Pacifica and for 19 years until March of 2003, the City had used the historic site to house the Pacifica Police Department until the Department's current facility on the Pacific Coast Highway was completed. The City had deferred repairs on the old church building. The City didn't have any money to fix it. Inspectors declared it was "not habitable." The volunteers with the Pacifica Historical Society were not deterred, despite original cost repairs estimates running in the \$1.5 million range. But here's the most important thing, these historical society volunteers were real worker bees and the individuals who ran the committees knew how to lead.

This story is not to breakdown all the physical work and paperwork needed to preserve and restore this historic gem. Suffice it to say, it was jaw-dropping, nearly unfathomable and constantly full of unexpected, not particularly pleasant surprises – though it did get done. The Pacifica Coastside Museum at the Little Brown Church opened its doors in August of 2015. This story is to particularly celebrate one of the Society's most ingenious fundraisers: Pacifica Castle Tours, billed as "a two-hour adventure enlivened by frequent encounters with mysterious historical inhabitants from Pacifica's past." While these castle tours were PHS volunteers-in-charge fundraisers, they were run like a business and because of that brought in tens of thousands of dollars in needed restoration fees.

Who might some of these historical Pacifica inhabitants (played by well-studied PHS members) be? Ocean Shore Railroad attorney Henry Harrison McCloskey and his wife Emily, to start with. The McCloskeys, who became grandparents to former U.S. Congressman Pete McCloskey, bought land that ran along a Sharp Park precipice and subsequently built and moved into their Pacifica castle in 1908. Dolly Fine is another. She was a famous San Francisco madam with a Sharp Park hideaway. She became a cog in the wheel of a 1937, San Francisco law enforcement scandal and after spending 55 days in the San Bruno County jail for disturbing the peace, Dolly Fine closed her properties (including her vacation home on Carmel Avenue at Beach Blvd.) and quietly disappeared.



We can't forget Dr. Galen Hickock. He bought the castle after Henry McCloskey died. But his stay wasn't long. As it turns out, he wasn't a doctor at all. In early December of 1920, he was convicted of performing an illegal abortion at the castle and was sentenced to two to five years at San Quentin State Prison (now San Quentin Rehabilitation Center).

←Dr. Galen Hickock (as played by longtime Pacifican and PHS member Jerry Crow), discusses his life of crime at a 2015, PHS Pacifica Castle Tour event. (Jean Bartlett photo.)

There was also the industrialist from Montana, M.L. Hewitt, who bought the castle in 1922 and turned it into a restaurant and a speakeasy called "Chateau LaFayette." It was exceptionally popular with the San Francisco elite during Prohibition.

Reverend Herschel Davis Harkins, 1887-1977, also heads the list of Pacifica's historically famous individuals. Recognized as a beacon of the community, Rev. Harkins served as the pastor of the Little Brown Church for decades. In 1968, he gave his last service at the church. Our (now ailing) Pacifica Municipal Pier was officially named the Reverend Herschel Harkins Memorial Pacifica Pier on July 25, 1978.

Lieutenant James Carr, USCG, resided at Pacifica's castle during WWII along with 17 enlisted men. The Coastguard leased the castle to patrol the coast for enemy planes, ships and/or submarines. At that point, the castle was owned by Clarence and Annie Eakin. The couple bought it in 1928 and moved back in at the end of the war. It remained in the Eakin's family until Annie's death in 1955.

Another historically famous Pacifican was early Sharp Park resident Lydia Comerford Fahey, 1883-1972. As a teen, she met up with some unscrupulous railway surveyors in the late 1800s. They had breached the line of the Comerford family land. The Comerford Salada Beach ranch covered the area from what is today's Good Shepherd Catholic Church complex all the way down to the ocean. Lydia, astride her horse with her shotgun at the ready, invited the "gentlemen" back to the family home where they all sat down to tea with her father and diplomatically concluded their surveillance was a terrible oversight.

Swedish immigrant Bertha Anderson worked as a maid and cook at the castle in 1916. That's where she met her future husband, local carpenter and shopkeeper Math Anderson. Matt had helped build the castle. He also built and ran Anderson's Store, the landmark red building on Paloma at Oceana.

Marie Mori, along with her husband Ray, ran Ray Mori's Place at today's Mori's Point. The Mori family is responsible for giving California the delicious, semisoft white cheese, Pacifica Jack Cheese – which is again made in Pacifica by a professional cheesemaker and sold through the PHS. It was first re-introduced to Pacificans through the historical society's castle tours.

One of Pacifica's most surprising historic figures is Santa Claus. In December of 1963, he was planning on parachuting onto Linda Mar Beach to visit with all the children who had gathered to meet him. His landing went astray when a gust of wind gathered him up and dumped him in the ocean. Thankfully, Santa was rescued by several nearby surfers – immediately calming the great flood of anxious tears from his waiting crowd.



**In a 2015 castle tour, some of the famous historical characters from Pacifica's past (reenacted by PHS volunteers) stop for a pose, left to right: LT James Carr, USCG (Paul Slavin); Miss Jane Doe, concierge of the speakeasy Chateau LaFayette (Jo Ann Parker Zavoral), Dr. Galen Hickock (Jerry Crow); Santa Claus (Deidra Crow); Henry McCloskey (Mike O'Neill), Marie Mori (Robine Runneals); Bertha Anderson (Eileen Kewnig); and Annie Eakin (Barbara Greer). (Photo courtesy of the Pacifica Historical Society.)**





From 2008 through 2016, the PHS ran these historically informed and costumed tours at the castle. That represents a total of 36 tour days and two VIP tours. All tours took place on Saturdays and Sundays, and each tour, led by a docent, was two hours, for a grand total of 365 docent-led tours at 10 tours per day. Pacifican and businesswoman Kathleen Manning, now a PHS Board Member Emeritus, served as President of the Pacifica Historical Society (PHS) for ten years.

"We ran it like a business," Kathleen noted in a recent interview. "We had a staff of 30 volunteers to run the tours and we hired professional van drivers."

Shuttle vans met tour groups at Oceana High School's upper parking lot at designated departure times. Why? Because the street that leads to this cliffside castle, Mirador Terrace, is steep. While the castle can be accessed easier from other streets, there is little parking available near its entrance and the historical society figured out immediately that that reality, could not be a detriment to ticket buyers.

←PHS Sam's Castle tour flyer from 2014.

"Also, we couldn't have done any of this without the extraordinary guidance and encouragement from Jeanette Cool."

Jeanette Cool is the Executive Director of the Sam Mazza Foundation. Sam Mazza, a San Francisco painting and interior decorating contractor, bought the castle in 1959. He never lived there. But the San Francisco resident did host a great many events at the castle. In 1995, Sam hired Jeanette Cool as his business manager. Before his death in 2002 at the age of 96, "he took all the steps needed to ensure his estate was established as a private philanthropic foundation." Since its inception, Jeanette has been the executive director of the grant-making foundation which serves qualified 501(c)(3) organizations who work to improve their communities through the arts, education, or addressing quality of life concerns. The foundation's home is the castle.



Jeanette Cool, Executive Director, Sam Mazza Foundation, sits in the castle's living room – a portrait of Sam Mazza is on the shelf behind her. (Jean Bartlett photo, 2014.)

"We stopped the castle tours in 2016, a little after we opened the Museum," Kathleen said. "But altogether, we had 7,000 people come through these tour events and we raised \$125,000 which primarily went to the restoration of the Little Brown Church, with some funds going to our still-in-progress restoration of Ocean Shore Railroad Car #1409. But to do all of this, successfully, we had to be aware of time management, accountability and focus on the bottom line, the money needed to restore the Little Brown Church."

To set up staff and to itemize sales and expenses, Sandy Cavallaro created and ran spreadsheets.

Kathleen Manning and her husband Bill Hall were in charge of promotions. They brought in volunteers to help get it done, but promotions included contacting various groups all over the Bay Area including senior groups and creating tour packets for those groups. It also meant creating a script to pitch on cold calls to a well-thought out list of Bay Area businesses and nonprofits. It additionally meant creating and seeing to the publication of brochures and flyers, and pursuing articles/promotions in numerous Bay Area newspapers including the *Pacifica Tribune* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. A volunteer ran the online ticket sales, which included tickets purchased through the PHS or through Brown Paper Tickets. A volunteer was in charge of porta potties. A volunteer was in charge of bringing in live but ambient music, often a Celtic harpist. A volunteer took care of bringing in food and beverage professionals. Kathleen Manning chaired the entire event.



Pacifican Barbara Arietta, who frequently played the role of Emily McCloskey, stopped to enjoy a glass of wine poured by Beth Lemke, owner, wine buyer and tour guide of Pacifica's wine bar destination, A Grape in the Fog. (Jean Bartlett, 2011 photo.)

Then there were the volunteers who diligently studied the history of their Pacifica character, and subsequently created a personal script and costume.





(Jean Bartlett, 2015 photos.)

**Photo on the left.** Castle-tour historic figures enjoy the view from the deck: Lydia Comerford Fahey, (the late Helen James); Miss Jane Doe of Chateau Lafayette (the late Jo Ann Parker Zavoral); and Rev. Harkins (the late Marv Morganti). **Photo on the right.** From inside the castle, LT James Carr, USCG (the late Paul Slavin), stands at the ready.



"This whole thing was a historical society community project," Kathleen smiled. "People gave so much and were so kind and dedicated to all the things that needed to be done to make it successful. Every year we planned. We refined old ideas, came up with new ideas and worked together to achieve a goal and we did it. I've heard, or read, that volunteerism is an act of heroism on a grand scale. It really is. It is also an exercise in democracy to reach a goal. Some of our volunteers are no longer here, but not a one of them will ever be forgotten.

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**By Jean Bartlett** (August 21, 2026)

*Writer Jean Bartlett was recognized by the Board of Supervisors, County of San Mateo, for "her writing that connects community and preserves local history." She can be contacted through her website, [www.bartlettbiographies.com](http://www.bartlettbiographies.com).*