

Pacifica Tribune



Jean Bartlett photo

The ghost of Marie Mori, left, (a doppelgänger for Pacifican Robine Runneals) poses with descendants of the Mori family, Steve Dellamora and his sister Jill Dellamora Grossi.

Festivities spin around rightful origin of cheese

TRUE 'CRIME' STORY ON MONTEREY JACK

By Jean Bartlett

Tribune Writer

On Saturday, April 6, the Pacifica Historical Society sponsored their 4th Annual Pacifica Jack Cheese Contest at the Pacifica Coastside Museum. The place was packed with chefs, judges, several talking cows and ticket-buying diners. Plates brimmed with bite-size samples of recipes all featuring the star of the day, Pacifica Jack cheese, a tale that begins in 1888.

In 1888, Stefano Mori and his wife Angelina looked out over the Great Pacific from the 19 acres of land they had purchased in the area that is now known as Pacifica's Mori Point. On their land they grazed cattle and horses, they grew Brussels sprouts, artichokes and cabbage, and in their ranch kitchen they made a delicious semisoft white cheese. It was an old family recipe they had brought over from Lucca, Italy. On their minds was a fellow named Baldocchi. He had left their employment and gone to work on the Jack Ranch in Monterey. When he left, he took the recipe for the Mori family cheese with him. Soon Baldocchi's new boss, David Jacks, was manufacturing that cheese on a commercial scale. He called it Monterey Jack and the true history behind the cheese crumbled.

Eventually the Mori ranch became a roadhouse/tavern. During the 1920s, Stefano's son Jack did bootlegging out of the tavern. In 1923, he was arrested by federal agents and hauled away along with 24,000 cases of whiskey. In the early 1930s, Stefano's son Ray and his wife, Marie, turned the property into a popular restaurant, hotel and dance spot. In 1966, fire gutted the old coastal stop.

But what of the cheese?

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More than 100 years after the original recipe was stolen, the PHS discovered the Mori cheese recipe and its story, and it is now being made for the Society by an artisan cheesemaker. (\$8 a pound, it can be purchased at the Pacifica Coastside Museum.) Three years ago the PHS held its first Pacifica Jack Cheese Contest. Successful from the get-go, this year news of the event traveled to a home five miles outside of Santa Cruz. That home is owned by Steve Dellamora, the grandson of Almenia "Minnie" Mori. Minnie's grandfather was Stefano Mori. Steve remembers the family hotel from a childhood visit in the 1950s.

"My grandmother was born in 1897 and she lived in what is now Pacifica through part of her childhood," Dellamora said. "She was here on Mori Point during the 1906 earthquake. Her father was not one of the sons that went into running the old tavern/inn. Our side of the family has stuck with farming. I'm a farmer."

Joined in Pacifica by his sister, Jill Dellamora Grossi, as well as his wife, daughter and granddaughter, Steve has a strong link to his great, great grandfather. Like Stefano, the main crops he has worked are artichokes and Brussels sprouts.

"None of us, however, knew the Jack cheese story before," Dellamora said, proudly armed with two pounds of his family's legacy.



Jean Bartlett photo. **Judges for the 4th Annual Pacifica Jack Cheese Contest: Aaron Bonner, Robby Bancroft and Gail Benjamin.**

That legacy was used by the pound in each contestant's entry. PJC (Pacifica Jack cheese) entries were as follows: Artichoke Spinach Dip, Jack'd Up Savory Sable, Savory Party Bread, Piggies in Blankets, PJC Taco Balls, PJC Corn Casserole, PJC Cannon Balls, PJC Tamale Bites with Jalapeno, PJC Quiche, I "Heart" Pacifica (heart-shaped bites), Cheesy Cranberry Cookies, Pineapple Cheese Dessert, Romeo & Juliet Bagels, Sea Salt Chocolate PJC, and Cheese & Cherry Truffles. Judges, all locals, were: Aaron Bonner, owner and brewmaster of Pedro Point Brewing; Robby Bancroft, development and communications coordinator at the Pacifica Resource Center; and Gail Benjamin, foodie.

Linda Jonas took first prize in desserts with her Sea Salt Chocolate PJC. Second prize went to Camilla Hough for her Romeo & Juliet Bagels, and third prize went to David Alonzo for his Cheesy Cranberry Cookies. First in hors d'oeuvres went to Amy Andonian for her Artichoke

Spinach Dip, second went to Dennis Liang for his PJC Corn Casserole, and third went to Sandy Cavallaro for her Jack'd Up Savory Sable. Sandy Cavallaro also took first in Creative Use, and the People's Choice award went to Dennis Liang for his corn casserole.



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A number of cows – Elsie, Tom and Lucy – were photobombed by the spirited ghost of Mrs. Mori at the 4th Annual Pacifica Jack Cheese Contest. Rumor has it that they all gave nom de plumes and their real names are: Carol Fregly, Marv Morganti, Robby Bancroft and Robine Runneals.

The whole event is another reason to support the Pacifica Historical Society, www.pacificahistory.org. Join them for their next event at the Pacifica Coastside Museum – 1850 Francisco Blvd. – on Friday, April 26, 5-7 p.m. for a wine and cheese celebration of their new exhibit, "From Rancho to Ranch Houses: The History of Pedro Valley."

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Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco. Contact her through her website, www.bartlettbiographies.com.