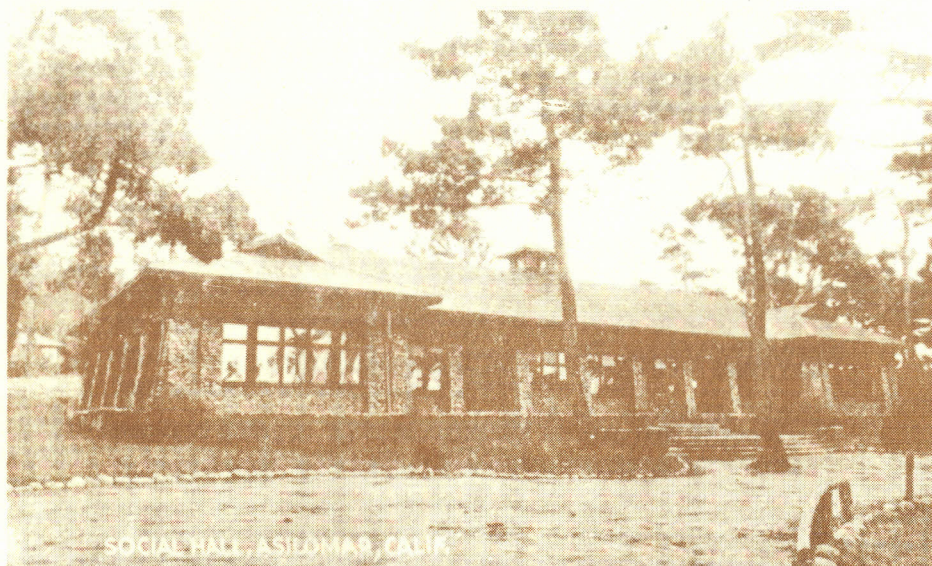


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The Social Hall, Asilomar, California, 1923

Inside: Asilomar's Rich History

ASILOMAR'S RICH HISTORY

by Roxann R. Jacobus, State Park Ranger

In the late 1890's and early 1900's, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) began playing an active role in providing homes for young women flocking to the city to take relatively low paying office and factory jobs. YWCA houses provided shelter and educational and vocational classes. In the evenings, studies were held in typing, nutrition, cooking and money management.

These "working houses" were staffed by citizens of the communities who were supporters of the work of the YWCA. Staff members met periodically throughout the year to discuss problems women were experiencing in the work place and finding ways of getting women into career fields dominated by men.

Community meetings were eventually extended to "area meetings" and ultimately led to the formation of YWCA Regional Leadership Conferences throughout the United States. The western region was called the Pacific Coast Field Committee.

In the summer of 1912, the Pacific Coast Field Committee met in Pleasanton, California, in a "tent city" on the grounds of the home of Mrs. Phoebe Apperson Hearst. Tents of red and white canvas were set up to house 350 young students and leaders of the YWCA with iron beds, mattresses, blankets, electricity, running water and all the conveniences. "I want it to have more than the comforts of home", said Mrs. Hearst.

Mrs. Hearst was convinced that the Pacific Coast Field Committee should build a western conference center and summer camp for young women. She contacted the Pacific Improvement Company in Pacific Grove which in turn indicated that they would be willing to donate 30 acres of land just outside the town limits of "Pacific Grove facing the ocean", if the YWCA would agree to pay annual property taxes and make \$30,000 worth of improvements on the land over the next ten years.

Mrs. Mary Merrill, one of YWCA supporters recalls:

I remember that autumn afternoon in 1912. A group of pioneer workers and dreamers responded to the call of Mrs. Hearst to go and inspect the 30 acres of land offered by the Pacific Improvement Company. Together we wandered through the picturesque camping grounds of old Monterey and Pacific Grove; over sand dunes and through the pine trees, catching glimpses of the ocean. The scenes grew more fascinating and captivating at every turn. We reached the marvelous beach -- the boundary of our possessions to be! Then, retracing our steps with Miss Julia Morgan, a San Francisco architect, we visualized the future sites for various buildings. We decided then and there we could meet the requirements of the real

estate company, and recommended to the National Board of the YWCA that this offer would be acceptable.

YWCA National Newsletter, 1919

The first national conference center owned by a women's organization needed a name, so the YWCA held a contest. Hundreds of entries were submitted. Helen Salisbury, a Stanford University student, submitted the winning entry with a word she had made up - a name which she took from the Spanish words "Asilo" meaning retreat or refuge, and "Mar" meaning sea. *Asilomar* - a refuge by the sea.

Phoebe Hearst gave Asilomar the striped canvas tents and all the equipment that she had used at the Leadership Conference the summer before at her home. Architect Julia Morgan designed and started construction of fourteen structures which would be finished in 1928. In Morgan's view:

... a building should speak for itself. I design and build to please the client and their expectations. At Asilomar, the YWCA permitted me to landscape the buildings as I saw fit. This gave me the opportunity to design and build the structures to please me.

Notes to Morgan's Secretary, 1929: Bancroft Library

The first building on the property was the Administration Building (later dedicated as the Phoebe Apperson Hearst Social Hall), and at this time, two stone pillars were erected at the entrance and tent houses were built for lodging. A circus tent was put up next to the Administration Building for a dining hall which was equipped to supply three meals a day.

On July 26, 1913, Asilomar was opened for its first YWCA conference and summer camp.

Fully two thousand people gathered yesterday to witness the dedication and huge pageant play presented by the young women of the YWCA at their new grounds. The whole affair was a most vivid, true and living symbol of exactly the lines of Christian work the young ladies are attempting to accomplish toward the betterment of the world so that the general public can understand and appreciate its wide scope and tremendous value.

Monterey American, August 1913

Asilomar grew. The chapel was completed and dedicated to the memory of Grace H. Dodge in 1915. An additional 20 acres of land was purchased in 1917. In 1918, the Mary A. Crocker Dining Hall, Stuck-up Inn, Guest Inn and Visitor's Lodge were finished. By 1923, the Lodge Annex, Class Hall, Pirates' Den, Health Cottage, Director's Cottage, the swimming pool and a garage had been completed. The agreement of \$30,000 in improvements set by the Pacific Improvement Company had been met. The original 30 acres and its buildings officially belonged to the YWCA. In 1928, the last of the Morgan-designed buildings was completed and was dedicated to Mrs. Mary Merrill for her continued work and support of Asilomar and the work of the YWCA.

Each summer from 1913 to 1935, multitudes of young women came to

Asilomar. College students came for the leadership conference to learn to be leaders (called Secretaries to the "Y") while younger girls, ages 14 to 16 came for a ten day summer camp.

The "Y" hired college women to work the conferences and camps. Some of them decided that they were too modern to do the menial tasks given to them - washing dishes, doing laundry, sweeping walks and driveways - and they began to complain. Their complaints were heard and they were told that they were "just a bunch of stuck-ups". They liked this nick-name and it became an honorary title for workers during "Y" summers:

Stuck-Ups will work 6 hours a day, 7 days a week; this will be the work schedule of the time. There will be occasional time off for each employee. Remuneration is board and room and \$26.00 a month. Much baggage is not desirable. A steamer trunk or two suitcases will prove better.

Employment Announcement, U.C. Berkeley

Beginning in 1917, a group of Pacific Grove High School boys and a few college men were hired to assist during the Asilomar summer camp. They helped with general maintenance of the grounds, in the kitchen, and as bell-boys unloading luggage. The term "pie rats" was applied to these young men since they were often found taking food, especially desserts (pies) from the kitchen pantry between meals and after hours. "Pie rats" became Pirates and in 1923, a housing complex for the male employees was built and called the "Pirates' Den". Today the building is known as "Tide Inn".

Summer camp was a ten day stay. It was marked by Asilomar songs, poems and long lists of high school girls wanting to return next summer.



*Asilomar "Stuck-ups"
Summer 1924 -
upper left Wini Hurlbert -
right Francis Horn -
lower left unknown -
right Lilian Kessler*

Asilomar, Asilomar, Oh How We Love You!

(tune: Jingle Bells)

Asilomar, Asilomar, oh how we love you!

Asilomar, Asilomar, grand old ocean view!

Asilomar, Asilomar, the pine breath in the air.

The finest people on all the earth

The cream of everywhere.

The Fog Rolled Over the Ocean
 (tune: My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean)
The fog rolled over the ocean
The fog rolled over the sea
The fog rolled over the tent house
But that didn't bother me!

Oh Me, Oh My!
Oh me, oh my,
We'll get there by and by!
If anybody loves Asilomar,
It's I, I, I!

The economic times caught up with the YWCA and although the organization desperately attempted to raise funds to keep Asilomar conference grounds and summer camp operating they could not produce enough business to maintain the costs of operation. On January 24, 1934, in spite of state-wide fund raisers, the National Board voted to close the grounds. The last YWCA summer camp and conference at Asilomar was in 1935.

Asilomar was then leased to Paulsen and David Visel who operated it as a year round resort hotel:

Rates per night:

Single room with running water only, no private bath. . . . \$4.25
Single room with private bath or shower 6.00
Double room with running water only, no private bath 7.50
Double room with private bath or shower 10.00

Meal Service:

Breakfast. \$.30
Lunch.50
Dinner. 1.10

Published Motel Brochure: California State Parks Archive

Although the Visel brothers had the option of purchasing Asilomar they declined and at the end of their lease in 1940, they vacated the property.

In the early 1940's, the National Youth Authority leased the property, and from 1943 to 1946, Asilomar was a housing facility for the families of military personnel from Fort Ord and the Defense Language Institute.

The National Board of the YWCA decided to reopen Asilomar in 1947, and promote it as a full service conference facility. Roma Philbrook became the manager in 1949, and in the years that followed, Asilomar became a money making proposition. However, the National Board wanted to divest its real estate holdings and in 1951, it was announced that Asilomar would be sold.

The people of the Monterey Peninsula were shocked into action. Local newspapers were deluged with letters and there were protests from local officials and civic and religious groups. Dr. John Nelson, the Mayor of Pacific Grove,

appointed a citizen's committee to "look into the possibilities of preserving Asilomar".

In 1952, the "Y" agreed to sell Asilomar to the State Parks Department with the understanding that the grounds would continue as a conference facility "providing an inspirational setting for all", and that the "Y" would donate \$350,000 - half of the appraised price - to State Parks. However, the purchase of Asilomar which had been approved by the State Legislature, was vetoed by Governor Goodwin Knight who maintained that if Pacific Grove wanted to save Asilomar the money should come from the city tax roll and not from the State of California.

A plan was formed by which Pacific Grove would lease Asilomar from the State and operate it administratively if the State would purchase it. In July 1956, Asilomar became a unit of the State Park System, including the property along the coastline, making Asilomar's State Park acreage 91 acres.

Once Asilomar was leased to Pacific Grove, the city formed a non-profit corporation whose board members were the city council members and the city then sub-let the facility to the corporation. Later the corporation board members were appointed from the residents of the city by the Mayor. Eventually, the State assumed the city's role and a seven member statewide board was appointed by the Director of the State Parks and this arrangement is still in effect today.

General Manager, Roma Philbrook who was hired in the late 40's, retained her position until her retirement in 1977. She hired architect John Warneke to design and build new lodges and meeting rooms. She insisted that the precedent set by Julia Morgan with her original buildings be adhered to:

I never set a budget for the architect when planning. I told him to design the very best for the need we outlined. It should be simple but handsome, using native materials. If it satisfied our needs and blended perfectly with the setting and Julia Morgan's craftman's style, then we would earn the money for it. We tried to build forever as Julia Morgan had. Her buildings demonstrate that good architecture pays.

Oral History Interview, California State Parks Archive

In the 1970's, Philbrook and State Parks set out to protect the environment around Asilomar from commercialization by acquiring land adjacent to Asilomar Boulevard. Eventually, all property from Asilomar to Crocker Avenue, and Sinex Avenue to Sunset Drive became State Park property, increasing the total acreage to 105 acres.

On the new acreage the State Park training center was built and dedicated to William Penn Mott, Jr., and additional lodging and meeting rooms (The Fireside Complex) were constructed.

In the 1980's, the Asilomar Resource Management Plan was developed which restored the dunes and shoreline with native vegetation, and established a dune boardwalk and a coast trail. A forest plan was enacted to maintain the rare Monterey pine forest ecosystem inside the park.

In 1991, the Monterey Regional Park District, local citizens and California

State Parks purchased lands at Rocky Shores and Asilomar State Park Staff agreed to manage and protect the resources on those parcels.

Today, Asilomar State Beach and Conference Grounds totals 107 acres.

Phoebe Apperson Hearst, Julia Morgan, Mary Crocker, Ellen Scripps, Mary Merrill and other women with great foresight gave it life. The desire and drive to save Asilomar and secure its permanence came from the citizens of Pacific Grove, the Monterey Peninsula and the State Park System. Asilomar continues today as a *Refuge by the Sea* for nearly 700,000 visitors annually.

Asilomar's Beauty
Asilomar with her many trees,
Her silvery waters, her ocean breeze.
Her sand dunes white arise with grace,
Oh! Nature lovers, it's a wonderful place!
Stuck-Ups, 1935



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Office: 5 Custom House Plaza, Monterey, CA 93940