

Presentation by Charley Osborne at DMFPO Semi-Annual Meeting  
11/12/2017

## **Preface to “Boss”**

### **The story of Sam Morse, founder of Pebble Beach**

California in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was ripe for plundering. Vast wealth was being created; the population was exploding; land was being despoiled, and the rule of law was questionable. At the turn of the century the state government was in the pocket of the railroad barons, crooked land grabbers, development schemers, and in San Francisco a bribe-taking racketeer ran the town.

Meanwhile a ruthless businessman had bought up almost all of the Monterey Peninsula by acquiring legal debts secured by land and quick foreclosures on late mortgages.

By 1915, new communities along the coast had a familiar layout—small lots and small houses crammed up next to each other from the edge of the sea to the highway. This was about to happen to Pebble Beach when Sam Morse came into the picture.

This is the story of my grandfather, S. F. B. Morse, founder of Pebble Beach, a personal hero and an icon of the good life in his time. He was a classic big fish in a small pond, but it was a beautiful pond, and he made that pond even more desirable. He dominated the Monterey Peninsula

for 50 years, and surprisingly, he was extremely well thought of by most everyone.

“Sam Morse could out-imagine anyone.” Said Herb Cerwin, Del Monte PR man, drinking buddy and Sam’s friend. Cerwin was right, and he could have added that Morse turned these thoughts into reality.

Morse had a big imagination. He imagined a place with a pristine coastline, green-belted and free of buildings. He imagined the creation of a playground for his wealthy sporting pals and gals. He imagined he could go the distance with Kid McCoy, a professional boxer who took on all comers.

He made these things happen through force, charm, determination, teamwork and grit. It wasn’t always smooth sailing. Early investors wanted a quick return and he had his disagreements with forces in Carmel and Pacific Grove, but he got his way in the end.

And he did go the distance in the ring with Kid McCoy.

*He did not invent the telegraph. That was a distant cousin.*

I grew up in Pebble Beach across the first fairway from him. My best friend Lawson Little lived next to him. We would often climb the front wall of his house and use his pool. Thankfully he was not home much. He was a loving grandfather, but had a manner about him that kept you at a distance. He was stern with his family, as his parents were with him.

He liked to show off his strength and masculinity at parties by ripping phone books in half and telling football and cowboy stories from his early years. But this man also told me once that if I got into business I should have art in my life for balance. He liked people and wanted people to like him. Others enjoyed his company, and most importantly he was extremely loyal to his friends.

Sam was more artist than investor, and more conservationist than developer, but he was definitely all those things. He had a painterly vision for the Monterey Peninsula and deliberately set about to achieve it. Sam was passionate about the lands he acquired in 1919, and he let that passion rule his life. He created this Newport on the West Coast, and he did it slowly and carefully always keeping his vision in mind. While Newport has declined, Pebble Beach has maintained its panache due to this careful planning. All details were Sam's concern. He personally approved the design of every house built in Pebble Beach and every tree cut down from 1919 to 1969.

He was a man of his times who loved to paint and write, who also didn't mind getting into a barroom brawl. In fact, I am told, he sought them out. He loved the women in his life (maybe too much) and enjoyed male company whether it was at the barbershop, the bar, the corral, the boxing ring or the boardroom.

A newspaper dubbed him "The Duke of Del Monte," and although he pretended to be embarrassed by that title, I believe he liked it. Del Monte was more than a chunk of some of the most beautiful land on the planet. It was a style of life that included golf, tennis, polo, beautiful mansions, and beautiful people having a good time. He very much enjoyed being in charge of that. In fact he wanted people to damn well know that he was in charge. Damn was one of his favorite words.

Sam's vision of a sportsman paradise lives on. The cultivated green of the golf courses in Pebble Beach accentuates the shoreline nicely. The large homes are set back leaving the coast undisturbed. The sounds of golf balls being thwacked, sails luffing, rackets plapping, horses snorting and children splashing show the joy of use that he intended for the place.

His friends and associates called him Sam, and his employees called him Mr. Morse. When people referred to him he was known as SFB, and he signed his paintings and documents SFB Morse, never Samuel F.B.

The family called him Boss.

Boss was a painter who loved his living canvas, the land he called Del Monte, and those of us who live in, or visit, this place are grateful for **this** legacy.