

HERB CERWIN, DEL MONTE PR MAN EXTRAORDINAIRE

- by Charles Osborne

Pebble Beach founder S.F.B. Morse had a knack for hiring strong employees and keeping them. Marion Hollins founded the Cypress Point Club while selling lots for Morse. John Gardiner was dissuaded by Morse from being the Stanford football coach and instead ran the tennis program in Pebble Beach. Dick Collins spent his entire life training equestrians at the stables, and Peter Hay and the Puget Brothers Cam and Henry were the only teaching golf pros in Pebble Beach for decades. Spike Graham took pictures that made everyone look good.

Herb Cerwin helped Morse keep the operation going with brilliant public relations schemes during the depths of the depression. It took a stroke of luck and an audacious piece of journalism for Herb to land that job in the first place.

Cerwin was a 21-year-old unemployed writer living in Carmel on San Antonio street in the early 30's with his wife Dagmar. He was born in Guatemala where his mother lived and where his American father had wandered. At some point the family moved to Stockton California where he spent his youth. He quit high school to earn his living at age 17 and got a job with a local newspaper. He heard of an opportunity to be a reporter in San Jose and moved there. One of his assignments brought him to Carmel to interview Lincoln Steffens, the muck raking journalist. After a brief stint in the Hearst organization, and right after he got married, the paper closed, and he was out of a job.



Herb Cerwin
Photo by Julian P. Graham
courtesy of Pebble Beach Archives

Cerwin decided to move to Carmel and try to sell freelance articles. He became friends with Robinson Jeffers, Lincoln Steffens and Stephen Allen Reynolds, the writers of the colony. He would try to get articles published in newspapers, but it was the depression and there were not many opportunities, and not many stories in Carmel.

One day he was bemoaning to his friend Stephen Reynolds about the lack of stories available to write about in the quiet hamlet. Reynolds slyly suggested he go to the city council meeting the next day and he would have his story. These meetings were gruesomely dull and Cerwin was skeptical, but he dutifully followed the advice of Reynolds and went. Not much happened at first, but toward the end of the meeting the mayor, John Catlin said a letter had just arrived by messenger, and he was going to read it. The letter was from "The Society of the Sun."

"Gentlemen: We are followers and worshipers of the Sun. We believe that only the sun provides the necessary health-giving qualities that everyone requires. We believe that God never intended human beings to wear clothes."

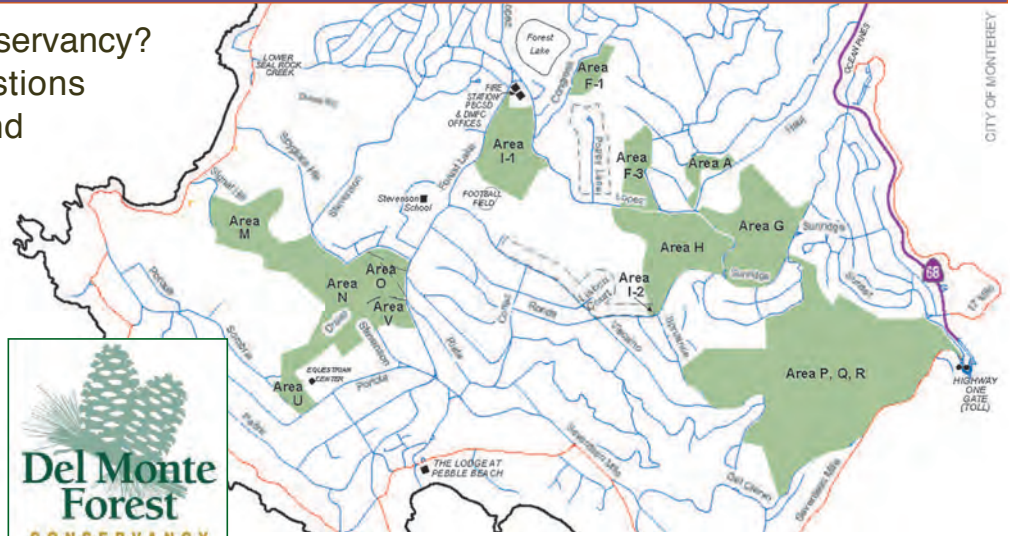
"For some time now, we have been living in a home located just outside the city limits of Carmel...As our membership has grown, the house and garden have proved inadequate."

"We have been fortunate, however, in locating a home that will suit our needs and which has a large patio and also a high wall...(as it is located) in the city of Carmel we have been advised to seek the council's permission so that the police and other authorities will not disturb us."

What is the Del Monte Forest Conservancy?
What does it do? These are questions asked frequently by long-term and newer Pebble Beach residents as well as people residing elsewhere on the Monterey Peninsula.

Founded in 1961 as the Del Monte Foundation, it served as a non-profit arm of the Del Monte Properties Company to receive and hold open space parcels in the Del Monte Forest. Through the years the governing board has evolved from a few, exclusively Pebble Beach Company directors holding meetings every other year, to a mix dominated by community members meeting quarterly, and most recently to complete community control, meeting every other month. Known as Del Monte Forest Conservancy since 2012, the organization is a totally independent, IRS recognized, non-profit 501(c)3 private operating foundation dedicated to forest conservation. The activities of the organization are funded by donations from the community. The Conservancy is one of four entities that “make the forest work.” The other three agencies are Pebble Beach Community Services District, Pebble Beach Company and Del Monte Forest Property Owners (publishers of this newsletter). All four organizations operate separately, with differing functions but working together seamlessly for the benefit of the forest and its residents.

The purpose of the Conservancy is to acquire, manage, maintain and enhance open space properties within Del Monte Forest for the benefit of current and future generations. A board of up to 12 directors, all of whom are Pebble Beach residents, provides governance. In addition to the three agencies mentioned, the Conservancy coordinates with the Open Space Advisory Committee, staffed by professional foresters and naturalists who develop maintenance plans for forest open spaces.



Pebble Beach Company open space tracts awaiting Conservancy stewardship

The Conservancy currently owns 232.8 acres (16 parcels) in fee title and holds conservation, scenic or open space easements on an additional 557.2 acres (on 43 parcels). As part of the 2012 Del Monte Forest Land Use Plan approved by Monterey County and the Coastal Commission, Pebble Beach Company agreed to grant an additional 563.16 acres for Conservancy oversight upon approval by Monterey County officials. There are 5,300 acres in Del Monte Forest and after easement approval the Conservancy will be responsible for 25% of the land in Pebble Beach.

Most of the easements being deeded to the Conservancy are in attractive areas. Pending easements are shown in green on the map above. Areas M, N, O, U and V are irregular zones extending from behind Signal Hill Road, abutting Stevenson Drive on the west for several miles, and ending near the Equestrian Center. Area I-1 is on the east side of Forest Lake Road adjoining the Pebble Beach Community Services District offices and fire station. Areas I-1, I-2, F-1, F-3, A, H and G are between and abut Congress, Lopez, Ronda and Sunridge Roads. The Areas P, Q and R consist of the largest bloc of open space to be acquired and are to the west of 17 Mile Drive as it extends south of the Highway One Gate.



Photos by Gina Gianfala

As I look out my window I see a beautiful example of a Monterey Pine. Did you know that this ancient tree species came to our coast from South America some 15 million years ago? The pines expanded to cover substantial areas but are now found only in portions of Cambria, Monterey, Ano Nuevo, and Guadalupe and Cedros Island in Mexico.

You can recognize the Monterey Pine by its 3 pointed needles of about five inches in length. Mature trees grow to 100 feet in height and 3 to 4 feet in diameter.

The tree is monoecious, that is, it holds females and males cones. Because it does not have flowers the tree pollinates with the wind. At this time of year the male cones produce pollen grains that reach the female cones on other trees... and our cars!

The Monterey Pine thrives in coastal areas and needs our cool, moist, marine environment. Many bird species depend on this tree: red-shouldered hawks will nest at mid height, pygmy nuthatches nest in the cavity of the dead trees, and grey squirrels eat the pinecones. It serves as an overwintering haven for monarch butterflies and a refuge for local and migratory birds. Lots of responsibility for an ancient tree.

A genetically modified version of the Monterey pine is the most planted timber tree in the world. It is used for construction, heating, and fuel.

The poet Robinson Jeffers was inspired by the Monterey Pine, here is a quote: "When the stage coach topped the hill from Monterey and we looked down through pines and sea-fogs on Carmel Bay, it was evident that we had come, without knowing it, to our inevitable place."

Del Monte Forest Property Owners

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The letter went on to say they had high morals, lived cleanly and wanted to be left alone. It was signed respectfully by Madame Mathilde Baumgardner, President, Chapter Ten of the Society of the Sun.

For a minute the council chamber was silent. Then it broke into howls of protest. We do not want nudists in our quiet community they cried. Only one elderly female member disagreed saying we should be open-minded.

The letter was of course a hoax cooked up by Reynolds but Cerwin, not knowing this, now had his story. He sent it to the wire services, and it created a sensation. The San Francisco Chronicle next day had an eight-column streamer on the front page NUDIST COLONY IN CARMEL. The wire services and newspapers wanted more detail, but there wasn't any. Thousands of curiosity seekers flocked to town as did newspapermen. They wanted to interview Madame Baumgardner. Since there was no Madame Baumgardner, the press turned to the man who broke the story for more information.

The pressure was too great for Cerwin. His wife Dagmar had figured out who wrote it, and together they convinced Reynolds to write another letter from Madame Baumgardner. This time saying she was leaving immediately seeking a place where people would respect her privacy. The furor died down and Cerwin was back looking for work. That happened quickly.

S.F.B. Morse found out what had happened and tracked down Cerwin. Cerwin described Morse as *"big in size and girth, but he was not fat; he was mostly muscle and bone and he kept himself trim. He had a flattened nose that looked as if it had taken some rough treatment, and he also had a powerful, protruding jaw...People bowed and scraped to him because his 20,000 acre estate was a monarchy and he king and ruler."*

Cerwin went to see him at his office and Morse noted that he was creating quite a lot of news about Carmel. Cerwin demurred, but Morse went on *"You do something to make that news – fluff it up, or whatever you do, you manage to do it. And that's what I'm looking for – someone to make news, not about Carmel, but about (Hotel) Del Monte and Pebble Beach."*

Morse hired Cerwin on the spot. It turned out very well for both of them. Cerwin now had a steady job that paid substantially more than he had hoped, and his fertile imagination dreamed up many ways to make the old Hotel Del Monte more exciting. His ideas ranged from free dancing lessons at the hotel if you showed up in dinner clothes, to polo matches which you could watch from your car. He had the big pool drained, the floor waxed, hired an orchestra and held a party there. People talked about that for weeks. He leaked to the press that Jean Harlow went skinny dipping in the Roman Plunge at 2AM. Another time he had trained seals putting on the 16th green of Cypress Point posing for photographers. Unfortunately this stunt did not turn out well. The first seal got a whiff of the ocean smell and bee-lined for the sea. They couldn't stop her.


His most famous event was the Salvador Dali party in the Bali Room of the hotel called "A Surrealist Night in the Forest." One thousand celebrities and socialites filled the room at \$500 a head in June 1941 and overflowed to the hallways. The press was everywhere. The room was decorated in classic Dali style, complete with live animals, waiters in full costume and a wrecked car with a nude model inside. It was supposed to benefit starving artists dislocated by the war in Europe, but it was such an expensive undertaking the event ended up in the red. Morse underwrote the loss and was delighted with the press it created.

Cerwin was only 21 years old when he started working for Morse in 1933. He stayed with him for 8 years until the war broke out. He then enlisted in the Air Force and was trained as a propagandist, although he was not sure what that was. His first boss in the air force was Nelson Rockefeller, who at age 33 had convinced the president to establish an office of Latin-American affairs. Cerwin was assigned to his office because he spoke Spanish and was an experienced writer. Rockefeller was impressed with him and Cerwin stayed in his organization after the war and moved to New York. Later in life he moved back to San Francisco with a country place in Sonoma.

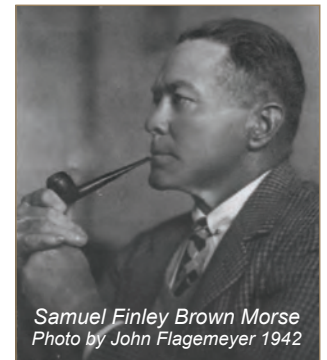
He last visited the old hotel, now the Naval Postgraduate School, in the 1960's shortly



before he died. In his memoir *In Search of Something* he recalls that visit. The hotel, he said, was the center of local society and a watering hole for people who still had money. Hollywood celebrities and socialites came to stay. He recalls Charlie Chaplin playing tennis, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas wandering the grounds, Salvador Dali making a scene in the dining room and of course Jean Harlow skinny dipping.

Carmel was the place he and Dagmar were happiest, and working for Del Monte and Sam Morse launched his career. 

Charles Osborne is the author of "Boss, the story of S.F.B. Morse, the founder of Pebble Beach"



2020 A TABLE AFFAIR TO BENEFIT YOUTH ARTS COLLECTIVE

The 17th annual "A Table Affair" will take place on Thursday, April 30 from 2:00pm - 6:00pm in the Main Ballroom, The Inn at Spanish Bay. The beneficiary this year is Youth Arts Collective (YAC), a non-profit organization that has successfully mentored the youth of Monterey County for two decades. Their motto is "Do art. Be kind."

Please come, bring friends and enjoy a pleasant afternoon viewing many imaginatively designed table arrangements created by individuals and non-profit organizations. In addition to the display of tables there will be "The Starving Artists" boutique with a great array of items for sale with proceeds also benefiting Youth Arts Collective.



There is no charge to attend the event and reservations are not required. There will be a no-host bar available and complimentary light refreshments are provided.

Guests are respectfully requested to make tax deductible donations to Youth Art Collective. Representatives will be present to accept donations and to provide receipts. Over the years "A Table Affair" has raised funds for many deserving non-profit organizations. Do attend and make 2020 another successful year!

For inquiries or further information please contact Averil Nero at acnero@comcast.net or (831) 644-0833.

CANCELLED



DEL MONTE FOREST PROPERTY OWNERS

A NON-PROFIT CALIFORNIA CORPORATION
3101 Forest Lake Road, Pebble Beach, CA 93953

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Please be neighborly:

1. The waste hauler in Pebble Beach offers free one-way service to move your trash cans from the curb to your residence between pick ups. Call Greenwaste at (831) 920-6707 to arrange.
2. Keep all exterior lighting to a minimum with low wattage bulbs. Motion sensitive lights should not shine into neighboring residences or onto adjacent roads.

Thank you for your kind consideration!

You can submit your 2020 membership dues via the DMFPO website at <http://dmfpo.org>

DEL MONTE FOREST PROPERTY OWNERS SEMIANNUAL MEETING SUNDAY, MAY 17, 2020 2-4PM THE INN AT SPANISH BAY BALLROOM

DMFPO 2020 Members are Invited • Enjoy Refreshments and Hors d'oeuvres

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR MONTEREY COUNTY: 75 YEARS OF IMPACT

The Community Foundation for Monterey County ("CFMC") is celebrating its 75th Anniversary in 2020. Founded in 1945 as the "Monterey Foundation" with a focus on historic preservation of the adobes. It expanded its scope to open space preservation, then in the 1970s to broad charitable purposes and building endowment. Full-time staff was hired in 1981 and grantmaking expanded county wide. In 1984 the organization became "Community Foundation for Monterey County."

Christine Dawson, Vice President of Philanthropic Services will present the history of CFMC as it evolved into a design studio for philanthropy, helping to fulfill the philanthropic vision of hundreds



Christine Dawson

of individuals, families and businesses. Grant programs and initiatives support organizations in the areas of youth development and education, health, human services, community development, arts, culture and the environment. Together with fund holders, CFMC has awarded more than \$167 million to hundreds of nonprofit organizations.

The CFMC provides a bridge between people and local needs to inspire philanthropy and be a catalyst for strengthening Monterey County communities.

