Our Ocean Backyard

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Origins of some local coastal names

Santa Cruz has a large number of beaches and lagoons and it seems as though virtually each one has a name. I’m still going on these names although I may be getting to a few more obscure ones, depending upon how long you have lived here or how much time you spend on the coast.

How about Antonelli Pond on the far west side? This pond extends from Delaware
Avenue to the railroad trestle of the now inactive rail line to Davenport. Moore Creek which drains into Natural Bridges State Beach was dammed here in 1908 to create a log pond for the former San Vicente Lumber Company sawmill. The mill operated until 1923 when the company moved to Plumas County in northern California.

The pond and adjacent land was then owned by the Antonelli brothers (John, Patrick and Peter) who grew world famous begonias on the land along Natural Bridges Drive, as they also did on Capitola Road. The western side of the pond was donated in 1980 to the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County while the begonia property was developed into a large industrial building that was purchased some years ago and is now used by UC Santa Cruz.

A short distance to the west is Younger Lagoon, now part of the University of California’s Natural Reserve System and managed by UCSC. In 1973, Donald and Marion Younger donated 40 acres of land, including the lagoon and a small beach, to UCSC’s Institute of Marine Sciences for natural history study.

The Younger family had a long history in Santa Cruz, with Charles Younger Sr. arriving with his father in San Jose from Missouri in 1850, where they opened a law office. In 1857 they opened a branch office (which became the main office) in Santa Cruz where Charles became active in the community’s business, financial, mining and transportation affairs.

In 1873 Charles Sr. married Jeannie Waddell, daughter of William Waddell (another early pioneer who Waddell Creek was named after). His son, Charles Younger Jr. graduated from Santa Cruz High School and Stanford and married Agnes Hihn, also a lawyer, and daughter of Frederick Hihn, a major player in the development of early Santa Cruz and Capitola areas. Donald Younger was the 4th generation of lawyers and graduated from the University of California law school and was also involved in local politics. The early pioneer and politically active families were all clearly intertwined

Closer to downtown, Nearys Lagoon is down below Bay Street by the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks and was a former riverbed of the San Lorenzo River. There are now several housing developments on the edge of the lagoon, Shelter Lagoon being one of them. The lagoon, as is often the case, was named for another early resident, Patrick Neary, a farmer from Ireland who operated a farm in the area. Part of the lagoon and surrounding property was owned by the Neary family until 1962 when Alice Neary sold the last piece.

Not far from Nearys Lagoon but not in the category of water bodies, is Lighthouse Field State Park, which was at one time part of the Phelan estate and known as Phelan Park. James Duval Phelan Sr. was born in Ireland and arrived in the United States at the age of six. He became a forty-niner who invested heavily in real estate, was an early merchant in San Francisco, and was involved in the organization of the First National Bank of that city.

He bought the wooded area known as Pelton Grove in 1887 and then built an elaborate summer estate. Phelan Park was inherited by his son James Jr., who was mayor of San Francisco (1897-2001), a Regent of the University of California (1898-1899), a U.S. Senator (1915-1921, and a major supporter of the arts in the greater San Francisco Bay area. In 1910 James Jr. bought a 175-acre estate near Saratoga, which he named Villa Montalvo, and which on his death was willed to the San Francisco Art Association.

Phelan Park was given by James D. Phelan to his daughter, Alice Phelan Sullivan, and later to the Catholic Church for a home and school for the Oblates of St. Joseph, which still has a church along Pelton Avenue.