

# CAPITOLA SUNSET

Spring 2010

## Capitola's Newest Landmark

By Linda Smith



While its current exhibit is “The Landmark History of Capitola,” the right moment has come to acknowledge the museum’s own historic status. On May 1, the Capitola Museum building with its trademark bell tower received a blue plaque at The Museum of Art and History (MAH) landmark plaque ceremony.

To mark the occasion, I recently sat down with the museum’s founder, Phil Walker, to find out more about why he was inspired in 1967 to buy an old farm house and re-create it as display space for objects of historical and scientific importance to Capitola.

Born and raised in California, Phil discovered in his youth the joy of collecting things, and a love of museums. At the age of ten, he participated in a ranger program at Lassen Park while vacationing with his family. Each day during his stay, while his father went fishing, Phil went to the “kid’s corner” of the Loomis Museum, and investigated natural history.

Phil’s first exhibit was a display built outside the town of Fallon, Nevada, at a place called Ichthyosaur State Park. A man named Harold Newman owned a quicksilver mine, and had excavated an ichthyosaur—a prehistoric reptile with a long snout and paddle-shaped limbs. The few

visitors that came to see the excavated fossil were from all over the world, and many of them were inspired to send Harold ammonite fossils when they returned home.

Harold and Phil became fast friends and one day Phil suggested that since ichthyosaurs likely ate ammonites, and there was a growing collection, they should set up an exhibit. A miniature was built, state park officials approved, and the exhibit was installed.

“That exhibit lasted forty years,” he said.

Phil lived as a young man in San Jose, and entered the service during World War II. Returning home when the war ended, he felt the city was growing much too big. He moved over the hill to Capitola and a life along the coast.

“Capitola had an oddball beginning with a story that needed to be told.” said Phil.



Phil Walker (second from right) and his wife Roberta (third from left) work with Ed Koski (far right) at the Capitola Museum in 1967.

For the first museum, Phil rented a little room behind the Chamber of Commerce office on Capitola Avenue next to McCutchen's pottery shop. He used the space between two buildings as a walkway, entering from the back. The cost was fifteen dollars a month.

A year later, when the county decided to put through the Brommer Street extension in Live Oak, Phil attended an auction of four houses. The sale was poorly attended, and after the auction there was still one house remaining. Phil's offer of twenty-five dollars was eventually accepted. Chuck Booth and Clark & Clark House Movers picked up the house and trucked it to the parking lot at the City Corporation Yard, where Capitola City Hall is today.

Work was left to be done, however, so Phil and his brother Earnest Walker, along with friends Ed Koski and Al Maher set about putting a foundation under the building. Miriam Parker provided the needed funding. Ed found an old steeple and turned it into a bell tower, giving the museum the schoolhouse appearance that identifies it today.



Phil Walker outside the Capitola Museum just after completion in 1967. Note the old city corporation yard to the left, where City Hall is today.

Forty-three years have passed since Phil and his friends brought the Capitola Museum to life. He remains a city resident, and is still passionate

about collecting and history. He has a museum in the town of Independence, California, which suits his spirit, and he is a fascinating storyteller.

I would like to thank museum volunteer, John Nicol, for introducing me to Phil, and for his help with this article.

## Capitola Museum's Blue Plaque

The Capitola Museum was awarded a blue plaque at a Museum of Art and History Landmark Awards Ceremony on May 1. The City of Capitola also passed a proclamation that honors historic preservation month and the museum landmark plaque.



## New Illustrated Walking Tour

By Niels Kisling



It's hot off the press and it complements the current exhibit. It's the Capitola Landmark and History Walking Tour created by museum board member Niels Kisling and graphic artist Don Ramie.

The self-guided walking tour features Capitola's fifteen homes and buildings that display the historic blue plaque issued by the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History. Seven paths and stairways (some "secret" and some not so secret), other historically significant homes, the Capitola Wharf, the train trestle, four distinct neighborhoods, and seven city parks are also pictured and described for your walking pleasure.



Niels says, "Capitola is a walking paradise." and he has long dreamed of creating a map featuring the secret parks, paths and stairways of Capitola. The museum's current exhibit, *The Landmark History of Capitola*, was one motivation for this new creation. In addition, Niels recently received an e-mail from his old friend and graphic artist, Don Ramie, telling of a walking tour that Don put together for Ouray, Colorado. These things combined to create the spark that put the wheels in motion!



Don Ramie, a graphic artist living in Fremont, has teamed up with Niels since 1987 to create advertising and marketing materials for the marine and RV industries. Don's talents extend far beyond the marine industry as he has been published in dozens of medical and educational journals nationwide and he is currently illustrating for the major catalog retailer, *Plow and Hearth*.



The 4-page tour features over 38 color renderings all created by Don Ramie. It began on a fine day in March when Don and Niels walked the entire route, taking photos and extensive notes along the way. From this, Don was able to render the simplified Capitola map and create the art. The Museum Director, Carolyn Swift, crafted all of the copy and pulled the project together with her influence and direction. To see more of Don's illustrations and designs, visit [www.ramie.net](http://www.ramie.net).



A wonderful take-home Capitola souvenir, the Capitola Museum Walking Tour is available at the museum for \$1.50. To download it for free on-line, go to [www.capitolamuseum.org](http://www.capitolamuseum.org). Come take a walk with us!



## Acknowledgments

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## Volunteer Spotlight: Bill Roberson

By Darcy Horton



Don't make the mistake most people make and ask Bill Roberson, age 87, what he used to do. He's still working at his lifelong career as a printer. One of his current projects involves creating train tickets for a narrow gauge railroad owned by a friend in Santa Margarita.

Bill's love affair with printing began in high school. School administrators kept promising to offer print shop classes but never did, so Bill taught himself by checking out library books on lettering and font types. After graduation he worked in the sign shop and then the print shop at Thrifty Drug Stores. He

served in WWII as an x-ray technician before returning to Thrifty and becoming their foreman.

Bill and his wife Wanda were born and raised in Southern California at a time when you could clearly see Catalina Island and the San Gabriel Mountains on any given day. They began to vacation annually in the Santa Cruz area early on in their marriage and moved to Santa Cruz in 1972 after the Los Angeles area became too smoggy and crowded. Sadly Bill lost the love of his life, his wife Wanda, in 2007.

Paul Parsons is to blame for Bill's involvement with the Capitola Museum. After going for a walk one Saturday afternoon Bill passed by the museum and decided to go in. A conversation ensued and Paul asked Bill to volunteer. They and their wives had met in 2002 at a Soquel Pioneer and Historical Association's "Celebrate Soquel 150 Years" planning committee meeting.

When he's not involved in a printing project or volunteering at the museum, you'll find Bill working as the secretary at the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Soquel. Church leaders wanted to pay him a salary. He refused and instead insisted that it be donated to VHM Christian School in Santa Cruz, which is supported by his church.

The next time you see Bill be sure to ask him about his passion for classic cars. With a twinkle in his eyes he'll relate stories of his first car, a 1932 Ford 3-Window Coupe affectionately known as "The Deuce," and his favorite car, a 1935 Auburn Boat Tail Speedster Convertible.

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Museum Hours: Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 12 to 4 p.m.

**Museum Director:** Carolyn Swift

**Board of Trustees:** Linda Smith (President), Darcy Horton (Vice President), Tom McGranahan (Treasurer), Topsy Smalley (Secretary), Gordon van Zuiden, Bob Anderson, and Niels Kisling