

## CHAPTER 5

### A RETREAT FROM INDUSTRIALIZATION

In a period of increasing commerce and industrialization, Protestant Americans experienced an extended alienation from nature, a subject often discussed in newspapers and popular periodicals of the late nineteenth century. Many of America's greatest authors, among them William Cullen Bryant, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman, felt the call to express the nation's divination for the natural world. America's discomfort with advancing commerce and mechanization extended beyond the years of these authors, well into the early twentieth century.

During the time of America's first authors were writing their works the nation was in the throes of the Third Great Awakening. It was during this period when there came a shift from attending wilderness revivals and being born-again, to efforts directed toward educating and moralizing the American society. One result of this shift was the Protestant reform movement came to establish and use the Methodist campgrounds for something other than saving souls. The camp meeting grounds, like the revival camps before, continued to be located in rural settings, close to nature, and far away from the industrialized immigrant crowded cities of the nation.

Now referred to as Methodist retreats, rather than revival camps, these camp meeting grounds, positioned under a well-foliaged grove of trees, provided members of congregations with the opportunity to spend their leisure time vacationing in God's natural cathedral. Those who visited the Methodist camp retreats found available the opportunity to partake in religious services, education programs, and recreation activities.

Leisure time spent walking within the forested grove or along the sea shore allowed one to reflect upon the divine presence of God in nature and offered an occasion to replenish one's spiritual, physical and psychological well-being.

The natural beauty and breathtaking scenery associated with the Monterey Peninsula inspired a handful of California's earliest Methodist ministers to establish in 1875 a Methodist camp retreat in Pacific Grove. Nestled among the tall pines, Pacific Grove's open-air temple provided a pulpit to preach that an interaction with the natural environment was essential; not only for the professional and popular understanding of science but for the moral development of a society threatened with displacement from an ever increasing industrialized country.

The coming years saw John Steinbeck take up residence in the family summer cottage in Pacific Grove, California. During the 1930's Steinbeck found his voice considering how the advance of commerce and industrialization had resulted in the nation's disassociation from an intended mythical errand into the wilderness.

**PACIFIC GROVE AND THE  
ANNUAL CHAUTAUQUA ASSEMBLY**

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Monterey Peninsula's abundance of nature and unparalleled scenic beauty were expressed by some of the most famous American landscape painters, including Jules Tavernier, George Inness and William Keith. Presented within their works of art was the majestic beauty of the American wilderness which many believed God had reserved for the landscape painters of the nineteenth century.

The combination of natural beauty and breathtaking scenery associated with the Monterey Peninsula also inspired a handful of California's earliest Methodist ministers to establish in 1875 a Methodist camp retreat in Pacific Grove.

In 1879, the Pacific Coast Branch of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle selected Pacific Grove as the permanent location of the annual assembly. And with the exceptional abundance of nature at hand, the Pacific Coast Chautauqua Assembly delighted in the opportunity to place a strong emphasis for the teaching of natural history as part of the summer program. Over the next 30 years, the summer Chautauqua gathering provided a two-week educational program.

During the annual two-week gathering of the Pacific Coast Assembly, readings, lectures, and courses of instruction celebrating the works the Romantics supported the effort the Chautauqua programs education in the humanities and the arts. These programs included lectures discussing the writings of the European Romantics - William Shakespeare, Lord Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, William Wordsworth and John Milton; and the American Romantics - William Cullen Bryant, Robert Browning, Ralph

Waldo Emerson, James Russell Lowell, Henry David Thoreau and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Steinbeck provides the following brief reference to the Chautauqua program in his book *East of Eden*: *He took the letter from his pocket and unfolded it. "It's from Ollie," he said. "She wants us to come and visit in Salinas. They've fixed over the upstairs rooms. She wants us to get to know the children. She's got us tickets for the Chautauqua season.*

As the event served as a mecca for the gathering of California schoolteachers, there exists the strong likelihood that Samuel Hamilton's Bluestocking daughters were participants of the annual Chautauqua Assembly. In fact, the girls may have attended the first assembly of 1880, the same year Euna Hamilton passed the Monterey County Teachers Examination. With John and Olive Steinbeck locating the summer cottage in Pacific Grove in 1903, Mrs. Steinbeck had ample opportunity to take part in the Chautauqua and various other social and civic programs in Pacific Grove.

## OLIVE HAMILTON'S ENCHANTMENT

Jackson J. Benson, in the biography of John Steinbeck wrote of Olive Steinbeck's enchantment: *Steinbeck's mother had also the sense that all things about her were enchanting if she had but the eyes to see it...It was also she who encouraged her son to use his imagination to discover a world made up of both the seen and the unseen, and to perceive the nature of things intuitively and poetically, ... .But, with all her courage, will, ambition and determination, she was also very emotional and imaginative. In some way, a mystic and a romantic, she was quite sensitive to art not as a mere cultural facade, but as a genuine part of her response to life.*<sup>1</sup>

Olive Hamilton's allure for the enchantments not evident to the human eye was an accepted idea of the residents of Pacific Grove and participants of the Chautauqua Assemblies. The Steinbeck's family cottage lay just a few blocks from the downtown section of this small community, where was located the Pacific Grove Museum, the art studio of John Joseph Ivey, and the location for the annual summer Chautauqua Program.

John Joseph Ivey, the famous watercolor painter of nature, served as the instructor for Pacific Coast Chautauqua Assembly's Department of Art from 1891-1907. A vivid description of Ivey's instruction during a Chautauqua gathering was published in the San Jose Herald:

*In the afternoon Professor John Ivey, who has delighted so many Chautauqua audiences with his walks and talks on art, spoke on "Seeing the Invisible in Nature." This time he seemed to captivate his audience even more than in the past. The same chaste diction and musical rhythm of his descriptions as have always been the charm of his*

*lectures were exhibited in a marked degree in this talk. Professor Ivey's work in water-color painting is universally considered to be among the highest of the art.*<sup>2</sup>

Described by Ivey, within his book *Talks In My Studio*, was the idea that what had been reserved for the landscape painters of the nineteenth century, was the ability to reveal the glory of God in their works of art.

*In all ages - everywhere - the love and cultivation of art has sweetened and uplifted the generations of men; but it was reserved for the nineteenth century to prove and proved it has that landscape art reveals most of the glory of God, and has the noblest mission in the interpretation of the infinite message of creation.*<sup>3</sup>

Also within this book, Ivey provides a visual description of California, referring to the countryside as the new Eden, visible to only those who have developed the skillful technique of observation, which enables one to see a greater glory.

*Each day presents the sublime panorama of mountain peaks, and rolling foothills, and valleys garnished with the luscious fruitage of a second Eden; but to-day, yesterday, and to-morrow the unwatchful ones will see "only" the same face, the same glory, while he who is wise enough to "look" will see that face move and radiate with passion and pathos, smiles and tears.*<sup>45</sup>

Scholars have suggested that Steinbeck took from his exposure of his mother's incessant schooling; from his family's large collection of classical and American literature; extensive time spent among the books of the Salinas Public Library, summer experiences at the family cottage in Pacific Grove; a unique artistic literary style that found expression in his novels, *A God Unknown* through *East of Eden*.

## THE BLUE LAWS OF PACIFIC GROVE

During the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century, the Pacific Grove Methodist community served as an education summer retreat protected from the immorality associated with California's larger racially and ethnically diverse industrialized cities. Participants who traveled to this daughter Chautauqua, established in a remote natural settings, tucked away from the large industrialized, corrupt and overpopulated cities, were presented with an opportunity to enjoy the curative, inspirational and spiritual powers that nature possessed, while taking part in the Chautauqua program of instruction, in all subjects of study, both secular and religious.

As presented in the Bentley's Hand-Book Of The Pacific Coast, the Pacific Grove Retreat was often advertised as a moralistic and idealist community, as one might associate with the Kingdom of God; nestled within an awe – inspiring natural environment, as one might liken to the Garden of Eden.

*Pacific Grove Retreat. - It is delightfully situated nearly two miles from the town of Monterey, along the shore of the bay. Its groves of pines extend down to the water's edge, and is undoubtedly one of the most desirable and healthful resorts in the world. The balsamic influence of the pine has long been recognized, especially to all those suffering from throat or bronchial affections. This resort is free from all objections, and must remain the central, summer rallying place, for all Christian people, for many years. At Pacific Grove Retreat the Chautauqua Literary Society, of California, meets annually, and religious gatherings are encouraged. No purer, sweeter thoughts can pervade the human soul than those that swell into being when standing upon the shores of the*

*beautiful Bay of Monterey. No holier hour than when man bows before his Creator upon the rocky shore, where loving waves ripple and kiss its glistening sands beneath him, and the soft light of the moon glows upon the peaceful ocean, when the anthem of praise thrills through forest, and distant lights, like fire-flies, glow and glow. Pacific Grove is a large, interesting, and permanent settlement. You will find elegant structures where you are sure to receive a Christian welcome, and there are tents that may disappear at a moment's notice, whose transient occupants have caught the enthusiasm that pervades the place, yet peace and good-will prevail. The absence of liquors, gambling, and all other objectionable occupations makes it the paradise of the coast.<sup>1</sup>*

Beginning in the mid - nineteenth century, accompanying the resulting large increase in the number of churchgoers, was a push from the Protestant Christianity, to change American society. The change in society that Protestant Christians were pushing forward, was not so much about converting people to Christianity; it was more about changing America to look like the Kingdom of God. No longer was Christianity just about going to church on Sunday or individuals attending revival meetings to be born again; Protestant Christianity had turned its attention toward constructing a moralized America.

To change the American society in such a way as to mirror the Kingdom of God, came the development of Protestant - based Progressive reform movements directed toward improving society. As Protestant Christianity expanded through the nation's frontier, it brought with it a wave of Bible societies, temperance unions, and civic organizations whose aim was to reform society and educate the masses, living on the fringes of America.

The Pacific Grove Methodist Retreat provided a platform for these organizations to advance the social and civic morals associated with the Progressive reform movement to residents of California; many of who had only recently arrived from the New England States as part of the first wave of Anglo - Saxon settlers to the Golden State.

One process by which these values were introduced to the summer vacationers, conference attendees, and the year-round residents of the retreat, was through the establishing and enforcement of the community's blue laws.

Steinbeck referred to these blue laws in his book *Sweet Thursday*:

*Pacific Grove has a law that requires you to pull your shades down after sundown, and forbids you to pull them down before. Scorching on bicycles is forbidden, as is sea bathing and boating on Sundays.*

The first two laws the famous author mentions never existed, this local legislation was of generated from Steinbeck's imagination, but the third law – *sea bathing and boating on Sundays* – was an established law.

As suggested by Steinbeck's comments in *Sweet Thursday*, many of the blue laws and other characteristics associated with Pacific Grove's Methodist Camp Retreat lingered into the years he lived in the community.

Beyond the blue laws established by coastal and inland communities that formed California's Protestant beachhead, were the benevolent associations and civic organizations that supported relief efforts for the poor; and societies that fought for women's rights and alcohol prohibition. Several of these organizations took the form of Woman's Clubs, which were established in every township in Monterey County, with

efforts directed toward the civic, educational, legislative and moral concerns of the community.

Scholars have often stated that Olive Steinbeck's contributions to the Salinas community, was her participation in the civic organizations and women's clubs. Academics have also suggested Mrs. Steinbeck's sense of civic and social duty were extended to her son, who through his writings, became a prophet for social change.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, beyond the sway of the Protestant community of Pacific Grove, several other potential influences that may have shaped John Steinbeck as a writer was his exposure to the Salinas Public Library and the Salinas Wanderer's Study Club; both of which had just a few degrees of separation from the Salinas Women's Civic Club.