

## Morse Acquires Del Monte

The second in a series of articles on the history of Del Monte Forest



Samuel F. B. Morse

by Neal  
Hotelling



Samuel F.B. Morse (1885-1969) is the individual most responsible for development of Del Monte Forest. He became aware of Del Monte while attending Yale from classmate Templeton Crocker, grandson of Charles Crocker who oversaw the initial development of Del Monte. After graduation, Morse married and moved to California, joining a Crocker family picnic at Pebble Beach in 1908. He initially managed property in Visalia and then the Crocker ranches in Merced. In April 1915, he was appointed manager of Pacific Improvement Company, with responsibility to oversee the profitable liquidation of its vast holdings.

Pacific Improvement Company was established in November 1878 by Charles Crocker, Collis Huntington, Leland Stanford, and the widow of Mark Hopkins—"The Big Four" who established the Central and Southern Pacific Railroads. It served as a land holding company for their enterprises and included everything from a coal mine in Washington to a coffee plantation in Guatemala, much property in San Francisco, and even holdings in New Orleans, Louisiana and Buffalo, New York. It also held resorts that included Castle Craggs in the north, Hope Ranch in the south, and Del Monte in Monterey.

After the last of the Big Four died in 1900, the railroads were sold to E.H. Harriman and the properties, which carried a heavy tax burden, began to lose their profitability. A.D. Shepard, manager of the company following the sale of the railroads, established a development plan for Pebble Beach in 1908 patterned on the earlier success at Pacific Grove.

It had proven unsuccessful and Morse convinced his board that a bolder plan was needed—larger lots inland and a golf course on the coast at Pebble Beach. That decision was the turning point for the future of the Del Monte Forest.

With Pebble Beach Golf Links under construction, Shepard's log lodge burned down. Morse, using lumber from an old hotel in Pacific Grove, began building a new and modern lodge, and attracted a buyer—G. Maurice Heckscher, a New York millionaire and Yale classmate. Heckscher's offer was rejected, but in trying to put that deal together, Morse became convinced he could make a plan work and made his own offer which was accepted. Working with Herbert Fleishhacker, head of the Anglo Bank, he formed Del Monte Properties Company in February 1919 just a week after the grand opening of The Lodge and golf course. They purchased the 18,000-acre Del Monte unit for \$1.3 million dollars and issued \$5 million in stock to liquidate the note and generate funds for development.



The Lodge, 1919

Photos Courtesy of the Pebble Beach Company Lagorio Archives