

# history

## What's in a Name?

### Loma Prieta

Neil Wiley

Our children learned that Loma Prieta is derived from the Spanish *Loma* (a small hill), and *Prieta* (dark color). The name is given to our highest local mountain at 3,791 feet elevation, but in 1854 it was renamed Mount Bache by the Coast Survey. Fortunately, the name didn't stick. Since 1916, our dark hill has been officially known as Loma Prieta.

The name is so popular that it has been attached to many roads, schools, organizations, a village, the 1989 earthquake, and northern Santa Cruz County (even though the mountain is in Santa Clara County).

The confusion doesn't end there. Visitors don't always know that while you can turn off Summit Road to reach Loma Prieta Avenue, you need to travel Mount Bache Road to find Loma Prieta Way.

When the 1989 earthquake was named the Loma Prieta Earthquake, those of us in the Summit area complained that the epicenter wasn't near Loma Prieta School, but further south in The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park.

While that was true, most of us didn't know that the village of Loma Prieta was there before the state park, most of our Summit community, and the earthquake. The village opened in 1883, about four miles north of Aptos.

According to Donald Thomas Clark's *Santa Cruz County Place Names*, it was located "just below where Bridge Creek and the main Aptos Creek join after crossing Aptos on a high bridge for the Loma Prieta Railroad. It crosses a rather broad flat in a curve of the creek where the banks fall



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away vertically for 50 to 60 feet to the creek bottom. A beautiful fringe of trees grows along the flat, and it is here that the Loma Prieta Company decided to build their little town. It consisted of a store, hotel, Wells Fargo office, post office, extra switch track, and a large water tank for the locomotives. Here also were homes for the more important employees. Further up the railroad track, on a slope to the right, was the schoolhouse and two or three dwellings." This was written by A. Stoodley of the Loma Prieta Lumber Company.

Although little remains of the village, we visited the site with the Loma Prieta Museum in July. (I may have some pictures for you in our September issue.)

I believe that the schoolhouse mentioned by A. Stoodley was in the Loma Prieta School District, formed in 1885. It appears to have disappeared before 1906.

In 1949, several school districts (Burrell, Hester Creek, Highland, and Summit) were merged to create our present-day Loma Prieta Joint Union School District. Although it is a Santa Clara County school, the elementary and middle-school buildings are now located in Santa Cruz County. If you go out to the athletic field east of the school, you can see the same old Loma Prieta mountain. Some things change, but some names live on.

***Special thanks to Sandy Lydon, the history dude, who led the history department at Cabrillo College, and led us on many wonderful travel adventures. He recently gifted our Mountain History Archive with two books: Santa Cruz County Place Names, and Monterey County Place Names. He says that the Santa Cruz book is the single most important book ever published on Santa Cruz County.***



***The Loma Prieta Shingle Mill, 1888***



***Loma Prieta Elementary School in the 1940s***



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