

## ***Segment 10: Julia's Solution***

### ***Julia Platt Fights Back***

The horrible reek that fumed from the cannery smokestacks blanketed the coastline in a sardine fog. Civic leaders in Monterey and Pacific Grove welcomed the canning business but not the pollution or the smell. Faced with the fouling of the air and water, Julia Platt saw yet another danger to the coastline and to her town. It may have been especially poignant for the marine biologist in Julia to confront the erosion of the ocean environment right in front of her house. And this may explain the peculiar language in the original Pacific Grove town charter—probably inserted by Julia—that claims “the lands underwater” of Pacific Grove for the town.

In her concern about the health of the ocean, Julia was a pioneer. But she had powerful company when it came to protecting the health of tourism. Monterey hotel owner and Pacific Improvement Company head Samuel Morse, trying to keep the palatial Del Monte Hotel open for business, watched in frustration as the industrial stench gradually drove away his clientele. The 1929 *Monterey Peninsula Herald* tells of exasperated tourists faced with such “beautiful surroundings made uninhabitable by such a terrible stench.” Using desperate machinations, Morse cut a deal with the canneries in October 1926 to temporarily curtail their odiferous production when Monterey hosted the California State Real Estate Convention. The deal worked to hide the town’s fishy cloud from real estate noses, but it was only a stopgap, and the sardine smell quickly returned. Julia Platt joined forces with Morse to lodge complaints to the Fish and Game Commission over the cannery stench. Morse followed with a series of lawsuits and injunctions.

But year by year, tourism failed and fishing prevailed. Although the hotels won their early lawsuits and early city councils sided with the populace of Monterey and Pacific Grove, the sheer economic power of the canneries turned the tide in their favor. The magnificent Del Monte Hotel closed for good, selling out to the Navy, and it now stands as the center of the Naval Post Graduate School. By 1939, few battles were being fought because the canneries were too powerful. As historian Connie Chiang sums up, “Though the conflict diminished, the smells . . . probably worsened.”

Morse bemoaned his business losses. Julia bemoaned the destruction of Pacific Grove’s natural beauty. But Julia, perhaps frustrated with what would be a losing legal attack, also found other, more direct action to take.

Julia’s house at 557 Ocean View Boulevard commanded a view of the battle zone from China Point to Lovers Point, and from this vantage, she carefully crafted a scheme that would consume all her political capital and demand all her argumentative skill. Julia anchored her plans at the China Point headlands and intertidal beaches of the Hopkins Marine Station. Next door to the biggest of all the canneries, the shoreline at Hopkins was awash in fish entrails, so many that an army of pallid sea anemones had grown up

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along the rocks to partake of this oily feast. This part of the shoreline cried most loudly for help, and Julia planned to protect it.

The basic problem had a clear solution: Cannery operations had to be cleaned up. But Julia knew that no single person, not even a mayor, could stop the cannery stench or reclaim the coastal waters that had become a soup of fish guts. She faced the simple fact that ocean problems are usually bigger than something a single person can solve.

But were there ways to help besides completely solving the pollution problem? Julia never said when the solution occurred to her or how long she sat at her window looking out over the bay, pondering the problem. Julia's solution recognized that pollution was not the only threat that Pacific Grove's ocean life faced. Fishing pressure was another one, and destructive collecting of tide pool life, and the development of the shoreline. And if Julia could not solve the pollution problem on her own, perhaps she could help by reducing the other problems. Perhaps healthy shores in Pacific Grove could reseed other shorelines if the problems in Monterey were ever fully solved. These two goals—reducing local threats and banking areas of healthy marine life for the future—became Julia's core plan. Of course, this plan presented a formidable challenge too. Just the type of challenge a bold mayor could face.

### ***Stealing the Shore from Sacramento***

Julia was fully aware that the Pacific Grove coast, just like all of California's shores, was owned by the state rather than the city. Although protecting the shoreline was technically outside her jurisdiction, she believed that through force of will and some political capital, she could defend the shoreline from stresses besides industrial pollution.

But Julia had already test flown a solution in the 1926 town charter. She merely needed to alter state law to parallel her local ordinance and give the right of shoreline management to the town. So Julia drafted a new state law titled "An Act granting to the city of Pacific Grove the title to the waterfront of said city, together with certain submerged lands in the Bay of Monterey contiguous thereto."

From her position as mayor, Julia easily persuaded the Pacific Grove City Council to petition the state legislature for passage of this new law. Then Julia turned her persuasion toward the state capital in Sacramento, convincing the state legislature to pass the act. Governor James Rolf signed the law into effect on June 19, 1931, for the first (and last) time granting a city the right to manage its own coastline. On April 21, 1932 a local version of the act was passed by a unanimous city council vote and became City Ordinance No. 284. Julia was free to manage the Pacific Grove shoreline and police its access. This was Julia's ultimate goal all along, and she had gained the legal authority to do it.

### ***A Refuge for the Future***

Anchoring the protection of the shoreline was the Hopkins Marine Life Refuge. Its designated boundaries encompassed the shore from the boundary of the Hovden Cannery (currently the Monterey Bay Aquarium) to the waters surrounding China Point. The rocky outcrops and coves that had sheltered a treasure of abalone would now be

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protected against all collecting of shore life. The exceptions were researchers who collected for scientific purposes.

In her plan, Julia reasoned that the refuge would be the center for scientific research and also would serve as a nursery for invertebrates “from where the tiny larvae may swim or be carried by currents to all points along the shore and become attached, grow up and replace those taken for food or curio.” This rationale is stunningly similar to modern reasons for protecting marine areas: the replenishment of sets of marine species that interact together. In today’s scientific world such sets of species are called ecosystems, a term that wasn’t popularized in the academic world until 40 years later. It seems that Julia’s subtle appreciation for the biology of the sea and her scientific acuity had not diminished during her three decades of intense devotion to civic affairs.

Julia knew that she could repair the damage being done to Monterey Bay most effectively by setting aside something intact and bountiful, something that would be there when needed to naturally seed other areas. Basically, she set up a trust fund for future residents of Monterey Bay, one that was invested not in stocks and bonds but in rocks and kelps and in the prodigious life of the sea. It would be held in reserve until the ocean’s bounty could be realized.

The Hopkins Refuge was tiny, barely bigger than the 11-acre land area of the station. So Julia did more. Further along the shore, she crafted the Pacific Grove Marine Gardens. This area encompassed the wild shoreline of the Pacific coast outside Monterey Bay. Along its rocks and beaches, Julia’s law would allow only small quantities of marine life to be taken for noncommercial purposes by hand.

Julia’s specific mention of noncommercial collecting suggests that part of her effort was to thwart one particular Pacific Grove businessman. Marine biologist Ed Ricketts ran his Pacific Biological Supply house from a small building just up the street from Julia’s house. Ricketts fed himself and his family by collecting and selling marine specimens for classroom use. Perhaps Julia tried specifically to stop him, or perhaps her targets were the collectors of mussels and sea urchins and abalone who sold their catch. The answer has never been clear. What is clear is that the industrialization of the shoreline in Monterey would not be permitted in Pacific Grove. Sea life would be protected and would remain to help repopulate the industrialized shores next door.

### *The Legacy of Foresight*

Dr. Julia Barlow Platt died on May 28, 1935, just 2 years after the end of her single term as mayor. She died of heart attack in her home and had explicitly outlined in her will exactly how she was to be buried. Eccentric to the end, Julia had requested a burial at sea, sailor fashion. Such burials had to be outside U.S. territorial waters, 12 miles from shore in those days. So a line of cars drove slowly through the town of Pacific Grove to Monterey’s Municipal Wharf, with Julia encased in canvas, laid in a wicker basket covered with flowers.

“Civic dignitaries traditionally accompany the body of a Mayor to its last resting place.” So on a bright spring day, in the chartered motor boat *The Two Brothers*, council members and friends accompanied the body and set out for the 12-mile limit. The weather started getting rough, and “a few were seasick.” The body shifted from side to

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side in the boat as it crested each wave. The pallbearers were not holding up well, complaining that “there were times they wished they could trade places with her!” Finally, they tied a 50-pound metal wheel to the canvas-covered body to sink it to the ocean floor and splashed the body feet first into the waves. Accounts say that her body bobbed to the surface once, with her head above water, as if she were taking one last look at her beloved coastline. A shaken city council sailed home.

Julia’s legacy is engraved in bronze within a natural granite rock cradle at Lovers Point. She passed away in a decade when the health of Monterey Bay was in steep decline. She left a town where the air was foul, the water oily, and the future uncertain. It took 32 years for Julia’s foresight to pay off and help restore the health of the bay.

Julia’s house, now a bed and breakfast, stood sentinel during these years, her front window facing out onto the bay as its ocean life declined and as it came slowly back to life. The worst years were coming, and Julia would not be there to help. But her Refuge and Marine Garden would serve the needs of the bay and would be there when, at last, they could help.