

Old Santa Cruz

● ● By Ernest Otto

(Editor's Note: The late Ernest Otto, famed and beloved waterfront correspondent for The Sentinel and writer of the "Old Santa Cruz" column, left a number of columns written before his death. They will be published weekly by The Sentinel.)

The outlet of Neary lagoon in the earlier days was far different from the way one sees it today.

In those times, the lagoon, instead of stopping where it now does, extended through the banks between the Ocean View camp and the Blackburn terrace to the beach. The writer remembers the lagoon beginning at the area now covered by the fill at the foot of Pacific avenue.

The body of water between the banks to the west of the Bay street viaduct was separated when the fill was placed through its center for the tracks of the Santa Cruz and Watsonville branch of the railroad.

This side of the lagoon was lined on the portion which was the S. J. Lynch property with oak trees. There were two or three of these trees on the Blackburn property, as well.

It was a pretty body of water.

With the filling in of the lagoon's mouth, a wooden culvert was built several feet below the top of the viaduct. The willows started to grow here and soon there was a sizeable thicket of them west of the viaduct. Boys hunting birds' eggs were able to rob many a nest in these willows to the west of the railroad track.

When the railroad wharf was erected, sometimes the water at the mouth of the lagoon would be under the approach to the wharf. The wharf started only a few feet from the railroad track.

The lagoon actually was at its best in the days before improvements such as filling for the railroad track and the building of the wharf.

When the wall was constructed in the early seventies on lower Pacific avenue below the present terrace, workmen with pick and shovel excavated the petrified remains of a whale. Some of these bones even now can be seen in the sand rock almost opposite Second street.

Other prehistoric shells can be seen in the cliffs below Capitola where there are stratas of rock with clam shells. Similar stratas are also seen in the bluffs at Seacliff.

Another section of rock holding clam shells is along Aptos creek between Aptos and the old Loma Prieta mill site. Coal also can be seen in that section of the country along the creek bed.