

History

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Wally Trabing's Mostly about People



Santa Cruz Around 1915

Back in 1915 when Ebert's store was built on Soquel Avenue the word in Santa Cruz was that "them people are just plum crazy to build away out there in the country!"

Virgil and Viole Macy remember what they said.

They celebrated their 50th anniversary this month and both grew up in old Santa Cruz. They now live at 541-26th Ave.

Virgil was warned after the 1906 earthquake not to play in certain places.

"There were big crack-faults running down into town and fences were put along them to keep kids from falling in."

He recollects one that ran down Broadway under what is now the Art League gallery and onto Water Street along Branciforte Creek.

"As a kid I spent most of my summers having a great time in the San Lorenzo River. It was a beautiful stream banked with forests of willows with swimming holes galore and plenty of fish.

"An old covered bridge crossed where the Soquel Avenue bridge now stands."

The river was turned into a hideous cement ditch by the Army Corps of Engineers after the 1955 flood, ending Santa Cruz' era as a beautiful city. I'm surprised someone hasn't suggested that it be covered by a six-lane freeway.

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Back around 1915 Santa Cruz was isolated. Highway 17 was a wagon trail.

"You can't imagine what a paradise it was," said Virgil.

"The beaches were long stretches of clean unoccupied sand and the forests came down to the limits of the town. To the west it was about where King Street runs. Live Oak was country and Seabright was a settlement not an avenue. Plymouth Street was the northern limits.

Violet went to Live Oak School when it had one room. Virgil, now 67, attended when an additional room was added.

"Santa Cruz was always a family town. Boulder Creek was rowdy, but not here and the beach drew families from the Bay Area. That was during the big train period," said Virgil.

Virgil's dad ran the Express Company. Macy's Express it was known as, and it met all the trains.

"During the summer season 29 passenger trains would roll into Santa Cruz over the weekend. They'd arrive every 10 minutes and unload right at the Boardwalk.

"It was big fun to hop rides on those trains."

Violet remembers her camping trips. "We went to camp at Big Basin. It would take us two days by buggy to get there, camping one night around Boulder Creek. Real adventure it was," she said.

DeLaveaga Park was deep in the woods but a street car line was run up Morrissey Boulevard and later on up to Pacheco. But the cars only ran to the end of Morrissey until someone would work a semiphone signal tower which meant there was someone way up on Pacheco Avenue to be picked up.

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There was once an airport at Capitola Road and 17th Avenue used early in World War I, mainly to sell war bonds. Army pilots would fly in the old Curtis Jennys and give rides to those who sold a certain amount of bonds.

Violet's father, I. W. Miller, drilled a lot of the important wells in this area.

She remembers hearing the caged elk cry out up in DeLaveaga Park, and the Chinese vegetable men calling their wares door-to-door and Virgil can still picture Field's Ice Cream Wagon creaking down the dusty streets of a summer, trailed by kids.

And the horse-drawn firewagons. A bell code told the firemen what part of town needed their attention and Virgil learned this code so he could race to the fires on his bike, sometimes beating the firemen.

And in the summers he would get a dime a day holding ropes for the big, gas-filled ascension ballon and spend it on the twirling "roulette" wheel at the Boardwalk which threw kids off in a heap as it turned.

"We sort of celebrated our anniversary remembering these things," said Virgil.