

# Old Santa Cruz

● ● By Ernest Otto

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

Waterwheels were rather common around the city in the early days. Some were small ones, used for irrigation. But there were a few large ones in those days.

One of the first waterwheels in the city was about one of the largest. It was used mainly for power purposes, providing power for what was known for years as Majors mill, where flour was produced in the early fifties.

The mill stood on what now is Escalona drive and what was then called Mill street. It was narrow, barely more than a lane. It grew to be Walnut avenue. Mill street crossed King street and then turned at the base of Escalona Heights, and after heavy rains, the sticky adobe became almost impassable.

The waterwheel was in one of the Tres Ojos creeks, which rose in the Majors ranch, now one of the most beautiful sections of the city.

When the mill ceased to turn, the wheel remained, growing old and turning into a landmark. It was a unique thing, and artists and art classes both would go to sketch it. It was one of the most attractive spots in the city. The wheel was in what now is the Fred McPherson Jr. property.

It was just above the old Towne pasture. To the west was a quarry for an ingredient used in making cement in the late seventies in the Potrero. To the east was the site of an old Indian cemetery, where the skeletons of numerous Indians were found when digging was done for the Butler cucumber-growing hothouses. These produced cucumbers for sale in the winter.

A house to the west was occupied for years by the J. F. Cunninghams. He was a widely known lumberman of the San Lorenzo valley. Later the home was occupied by the Montgomerys of the Skyland country.

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Across the road, after the burning of the large Majors home on the heights above, Mrs. Majors erected a small house along side of the creek with a pretty waterfall in the rear. She was a member of one of the very earliest Spanish families.

The other waterwheel of a similar class also was sought out by artists and art classes. It was along the same stream and furnished power for the Kirby tannery, opposite the place which now is Babbling brook.

The San Lorenzo river also had its waterwheels. One was at the Pedemonte gardens at the edge of town. Water was lifted for irrigation purposes and was carried by flume. This was one of the finest truck gardens in town.

On the same side of the river was another wheel, also of good size, which lifted water for irrigation for places at the foot of Garfield street between the bank of the river and the rear of the houses. Here vegetables and hay were grown and later calla lily bulbs.

Along Pogonip creek, water also was raised on the Heller Berry farm, where strawberries, the large Lawton raspberries and blackberries were grown. This was one of the finest berry patches in the city.

The Chinese used similar irrigation methods in their gardens which usually were along the many small streamlets throughout the city. Among these were the Boston gardens, between the Boston tannery and the section between High street and King street. The water came from another of the Tres Ojos creeks, with its source in the Louis Doderro lime rock quarry.

The Chinese used the water for their berry patches but mainly for their vegetable gardens. They produced most of the fresh vegetables used in the city.

There was another wheel at the end of Chestnut avenue on the property now owned by the Southern Pacific and another west of the SP station. The streams provided water for the Joe Frey garden on Water street and the On Chong gardens on Market street.

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