

Santa Cruz House

A pioneer among the town's hotels

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THE EARLIEST "hotels" in Santa Cruz were probably extra cornhusk mattresses in someone's attic or cowshed ... perhaps in one of the Santa Cruz Mission's adobe storerooms which surrounded the Upper Plaza.

Hotels were furthest from the minds of early arrivals who had enough to do just putting square meals on the table. The Spanish settlers didn't need hotels. Their homes were open to all in a way that we find hard to believe today.

"Mi casa es su casa..." My house is your house — and they meant it. In many cases, silver or gold coins were left beside the bed for the use of the guest.

Eventually a large, handsome two-story adobe on School Street was converted into the Eagle Hotel. But soon, in the early 1850s, the business part of the Mission settlement moved down to the "flat" which had been the padres' vegetable gardens.

The budding downtown needed a hotel and the Santa Cruz House was constructed about 1851 of split redwood. It was later enlarged. It stood where the Veterans Building is today, next to the main Post Office. Front Street was the main thoroughfare; what was to become Pacific Avenue was still Willow Street, named for the willow trees the padres planted along their path.

The Santa Cruz House looked like something right out of New England. Two and a half stories, sort of a salt box effect, with an overhanging roof over the second story front porch. Green boxes of red geraniums hung at intervals by the supporting pillars.

Front Street's plank sidewalk ran along underneath the porch and a door

A glance at history

opened into the hotel's office with its long counter and big black registry book. Old-fashioned room keys hung from a board behind the desk and there was another board where guests could paste their business cards.

The office also served as reading room. Off to one side the bar with its long mirror stretched along one wall behind green felt billiard tables. A low-ceilinged dining room opened off the office in another direction. In fact, according to oldtime historian Ernest Otto, all the rooms had low ceilings, which made for a cozy atmosphere and helped with the heating situation in winter.

If hotel guests needed private transportation, all they had to do was order a horse and carriage from Aaron Goodwin and C.C. Martin's Livery Stable adjoining the hotel.

The Santa Cruz House thrived until one fateful afternoon on May 30, 1887, when a nearby Chinese laundry caught fire. The Chinese heated their irons with charcoal and it was not uncommon for fires to break out. The alarm was sounded and the hose cart teams came running to the rescue, but the wind was blowing briskly and the town's water supply was at low pressure.

In about an hour the Swanton House, two doors down, was afire, and Goodwin and Martin's Stable caught next. It was located between the two hotels. Finally the flames reached the Santa Cruz House and the old wood structure was gone in minutes.



In the 1870 s, Aaron Goodwin and Charles C. Martin had a livery stable adjoining the Santa Cruz House.

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