

# Hihn family's roots run deep

Bio-H  
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**L**OUIS EDWIN HIHN was born in Santa Cruz in 1903 and it was a different place ... a different world.

Businessmen seldom appeared in public without their bowler hats and neckties. Women's skirts swept the toes of their ankle-high leather shoes. Many town residents kept the family cow in the "back lot." Streetcars rumbled down Pacific Avenue. Watsonville was the better part of a day's journey over rough, unpaved roads. A round trip to San Jose or San Francisco was measured in days, not hours.

Louis Edwin Hihn traveled the world, but always in the back of his mind was the thought that some day he'd come back to Santa Cruz.

"I've always had a great love for this area," he said.

Longtime Santa Cruzans will recognize his family name. His great-uncle, Frederick A. Hihn (pronounced Heen) was Santa Cruz's first millionaire, a man who had a finger in almost every important pie in Santa Cruz County. Louis Hihn's grandfather and Frederick were brothers. The Hihn name has undergone several changes — the U.S. Army changed Louis's to Hines. However, he's really a Hihn, he reminds firmly.

Today Louis Hihn is in a wheelchair in his apartment at Dominican Oaks. His mind often travels back 80 or more years to his early Santa Cruz days.

"The Great White Fleet ..." he muses, recalling a visit to Santa Cruz waters by about a dozen U.S. battleships in 1908. "I was just a little fellow — about 4, I think. My father took me. We went out in a small boat with other passengers and went aboard one of the battleships. I never forgot it. That was a wonderful experience. To me it looked like the whole Bay was full of those big ships."

**T**HE HIHN story really began with three brothers who were born in the Duchy of Brunswick, Germany. The family name was spelled Hühn.

"Frederick changed the name to Hihn," Hihn explained.

The Hihn brothers came to Santa Cruz in the early 1850s after Frederick had an early disastrous adventure in the California gold fields and several unfortunate business reverses.

Hihn has a book that tells it in

## A glance at history



1909: While the stork was bringing his sister, Madeline, Louis Hihn, 6, was sent to play in Hihn's Watsonville Lumber Yard.

detail. Titled "California Gold Mines," it was written by Friedrich Gerstaecker in 1849-50, and published by Biobooks, Oakland, in 1946.

"Frederick Hihn and Gerstaecker came to San Francisco together on the sailing ship 'Reform' in 1849," Hihn said.

With several other young adventurers seeking gold, they headed for the mines. Once there, they expected to scoop up nuggets by the handful. Instead, they found freezing weather, exhausting work, little or no gold and near starvation when their money ran out. Desperately hungry, they were reduced to eating wild berries cooked up in flour dumplings one of the men whipped up.

"Their mining adventure ended with them half starved at Sutter's Fort," Hihn said.

Frederick then tried businesses, first in Sacramento, then San Fran-

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Louis Hihn, at 86, has returned to reside in Santa Cruz.



As a baby, Louis Hihn, at right, visits the first Santa Cruz Beach Casino with his mother (in fluffy hat), his cousin Gaylord and his mother's sister, Nellie Andrews.

Photographs from the Louis Hihn collection





Frederick A. Hihn's mansion became Santa Cruz City Hall upon his death in 1913 and served as such until it was torn down and the present Spanish-style City Hall was erected in 1937.

## Hihn/ A lifetime of memories

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cisco, and was flooded out, then burned out. He ended up in Santa Cruz. With a partner he established a general store, prospered, invested in land and lumbermills and became a very wealthy man.

**F**REDERICK AND his wife, with six children of their own, took in Louis's father when he was 12 years old.

"He was like a father to my father," Hihn explained.

Hihn's father, Albert Joseph Hihn, was born in Santa Cruz in 1868 and had been partially orphaned as a child. He grew up in Santa Cruz in Frederick's home and married Mary Ellen Hannaford of Watsonville. Mary Ellen was a sister of Jennie Menasco. The Menascos are an old Watsonville family. Today, George Menasco — a cousin — is a close friend of Hihn's and was instrumental in introducing him to Dominican Oaks.

"There have always been close ties to Santa Cruz County," Hihn said. "My Aunt Jennie Menasco was more like an older sister to me and I traveled up here often, to visit."

Hihn's father was put in charge of Frederick Hihn's lumber yards in Watsonville, Santa Cruz and Hollister. Frederick had a string of mills in the redwood forests and was shipping lumber all over the country.

Frederick's interests were widespread, he happened to be in the right place at the right time and he had a remarkable ability to see ahead. One of his ventures was Camp Capitola, an early tent resort he laid out in 1869 as a summer camp for families. Later he built a large hotel there and Hihn recalls Frederick's annual birthday dinner parties at the hotel.

"He always sat at the head of a long table and the whole family was there. It was his annual birthday party. Everyone showed up for it. He had a favorite black man waiter who always served him."

Hihn also recalls shaking hands, as a small boy, with Frederick: "I was surprised at how soft his hands



Albert Hihn, second from right, at Venetian Carnival, 1898.



Louis' father, Albert Joseph Hihn, died at age 92.

were. I was used to lumber workmen's hands."

**W**HEN FREDERICK died in 1913, the lumber yards were sold to Hammond Lumber Company. Hihn went with his parents to Oakland, where he went through school before entering government service as a lifetime career. First he was in the U.S. Army Transport

Service, then in President Herbert Hoover's Reconstruction Finance Corporation, then in President Franklin Roosevelt's Civil Works program.

In 1946, he went to the U.S. Zone of Occupied Germany with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency.

**I**N 1950, Hihn was back in the United States with the Internal Revenue Service, where he stayed until he retired in 1968. He served as president of the IRS National Association and worked mainly with special procedures, legal aspects.

In 1954, troubled by his experiences in foreign lands, he and his wife with friends set up the League of the Americas to foster good relations between North and South Americans.

"We managed to build a small hospital in Oaxaca, Mexico, and an orphanage in Tijuana," he said.

He is a longtime member of the Los Angeles Anchor Club, an organization of Catholic men in business and public service. His wife is gone now and he moved into Dominican Oaks last July.

"Happy to be in Santa Cruz again."