

# Live Oak plays role of country cousin to county's city folks

By CAROLYN SWIFT  
(First of a series)

Live Oak is an unincorporated community of 4.78 square-miles located roughly between Arana and Soquel Creek in north Santa Cruz County—and is generally known as a place one must drive through to get from Santa Cruz to Capitola.

Because there is no city government to tend its needs, Live Oak has traditionally been regarded as a "country cousin," to the more prestigious neighbors. Without a well-defined character, Live Oak has remained diversified and its concerns treated with lesser priority than other city areas.

Reasons for Live Oak's low status go back further than its present problems of inconsistent zoning, poor planning and mixed land uses. Live Oak was ignored for 200 years ago—when the county's residents were Ohlone Indians.

Before the Spanish arrived in California there were about 10,000 Indians who lived between San Francisco Bay in the north and San Diego to the south. In Santa Cruz County, Ohlone Indian villages were political units ranging in population from 100 to 500 people—and sites used by the Indians were largely the same. Sites were largely the same water picked for towns and villages by American settlers came at the end of the 18th century period in the late 1840s. Indian lifestyles depended on a delicate ecological balance within the environment. Villages were all good sites for hunting, fishing, food gathering, and never far from an ample water

of influence" lines for Live Oak in the early days too. Edwards said territories might have been used by several tribal groups for food gathering or weaving, but recognized as an "open land," a buffer to prevent conflicts between tribal units settled in the areas now occupied by residents of Capitola and Santa Cruz.

Since there are no real streams in Live Oak, the resources may have been insufficient to support continuing use or a permanent population.

Live Oaks too, were poor substitutes for the tanbark oak, which was abundant in the Santa Cruz mountains but not along the coast. In his book, "Monterey Bay Area: Natural History and Cultural Imprints," Burton L. Gordon said tanbark oak trees were the most important oaks in the northern half of the Monterey Bay area, and were regular producers of good quality acorns preferred by the Indians, who made annual trips to areas with the greatest number of oaks.

Coast live oaks—the type found in Live Oak—were the most common species, but its yield was low and its acorns mediocre.

Eventually Santa Cruz County became famous for its fine beaches, impressive redwoods and prosperous agricultural valley—but this recognition eluded Live Oak, which came to be known more for its weeds, marshes and gulch wetlands vegetation that were obstacles to early day travel.

Jan Fosselius, senior planner for the Santa Cruz County planning department, said there are a few spots up the coast today that



This was Live Oak in the late 1950s, shortly after the brick school of 1914 and its additions had been torn down. The original school of 1872-73 is a part of the Live Oak Clubhouse, shown at the corner of Chanticleer Avenue and Capitola Road. At bottom, center, is the Martin Kinsley home built in 1881. Surrounding lands had been subdivided as chicken

ranches in the 1920s. Of the two streets running diagonally from upper right to lower left, the upper street is 17th Ave. and the lower Chanticleer Ave. Capitola Road is shown running from right center toward the upper left corner of the photo.

—Photo by Vester Dick