

by Steve Manildi

WHILE the rest of Santa Cruz is rationing water, the city has poured gallons and gallons of it into a recently purchased aquarium. But take it easy conservationists—it's salt water, and it's the home of more than 100 new sea life residents in the Santa Cruz City Museum, that little building on East Cliff Drive near the end of Seabright. Located on a pleasant grassy knoll known as Tyrrell Park, this unobtrusive institution preserves, protects, and presents to the public the natural and cultural history, and visual arts of our beloved city.

Remember the Fungus Fair last fall? That was done by the City Museum, as are the art exhibits on the second floor of the library. And that big painting of the besieged pioneers in the Oakroom Saloon. It too belongs to the City Museum. In fact, if you take the time to look, a lot of cultural activities around town can be traced back to the little building in Tyrrell Park.

Inside the museum, the emphasis is on natural history. From buffaloes to butterflies, sea otters to sand dabs—two rooms are devoted to displaying environmental aspects not only of Northern California, but of the Western United States as well. Live snakes, lizards, hamsters, and squirrels share a room with the aquarium. There's a microscope for the myopically curious, and the Indian exhibit is one of the finest of its kind on the native people of Central California. Needless to say, even if you don't dig archaeology, it's a great place to take the kids.

But the displays are only the beginning. Charles Prentiss, who took over as the museum's first professional curator in 1969, has expanded the museum's programs to include lectures, films, nature hikes, bus excursions, tours and field trips for classes, and artifact loans to teachers. With a background in zoology and art, Prentiss is well suited to oversee the diverse functions of the museum. In 1974, with the help of a grant from the California Arts Commission, he launched the Museum's Arts Program. Since then, at the exhibit space in the downtown library, the museum has had some 15 major shows. In addition to providing a showplace for local artists and art groups, the museum has brought exhibits of local interest from such places as the Oakland Museum.

Prentiss is assisted by a miniscule staff, mainly composed of John Anderson and Nikki Silva. John, whose various duties fall under the title of museum assistant, has been with the museum since 1973, and has a credential and five years of teaching under his belt. He's a natural for promoting the educational functions of the museum. Nikki, with a Bachelor's degree in Art History from UCSC, is primarily in charge of the Arts Program. She just spent a year at the Metropolitan Museum in New York as a Rockefeller intern in museum education, and she's returned bursting with ideas to bring the city museum up to the highest caliber.

The biggest project on the boards now is renovating and expanding the building. The plans have been drawn up, but before anything more can be done there is the problem, of course, of raising money. In addition to getting some of the city's Capital Improvement Funds, Prentiss is shooting for county revenue sharing funds (for, after all, county residents benefit quite a bit from the museum's services) and a grant from the Cowell

Foundation. What about private patrons like the ones who so generously attend to museums like the DeYoung in San Francisco? Well, they are working on that, too. Somehow, though, Santa Cruz is not known for its art patronage.

The building was originally constructed in 1915 as the Seabright Library. The City Museum took over in 1954 when the library was moved downtown. If you notice, the two wings of the building form a "Y" shape, intended to represent an open book welcoming the public. The plans for expansion include remodeling the interior to open up the space and bring in more natural light. The surrounding park will be turned into an outdoor exhibit area of native plants with a stream and pond environment.

To backtrack a little, the museum began in 1904 when one old Mr. Adna Hecox, caretaker of the lighthouse, donated his collection of artifacts to the city. These and later donations and purchases were watched over carefully by volunteers as they moved from place to place over the years. In 1954, in addition to moving into the present building, the City Museum was made a division of the Parks and Recreation Department. A group of seven citizens appointed by the City Council, dubbed the Museum Commission (a completely separate body from the more often publicized Arts Commission), act in an advisory capacity both in presenting proposals to the City Council and in promoting museum activities around town.



One of the hundreds of photos on display in the "People of Santa Cruz County" exhibit opening with a free reception this Sunday from 2 to 5 pm. The exhibit will be at the Cooperhouse through April 27.

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Our

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Museum

On a budget of \$56,000 for the fiscal year 1976-1977, and reaching, Prentiss estimates, some 80,000 people annually between the museum and the library, the hardworking staff has to spread itself pretty thin. Prentiss designs and builds many of the display cases himself, as he did the scale model for the proposed expansion. Fortunately, there is lots of help from the outside. Many programs are done in conjunction with such esoteric groups as the Santa Cruz Archaeological Society, the Santa Cruz Bird Club, and the Historical Society. Volunteer help comes from the UCSC Intern programs in environmental studies, art, and history. There is also the Museum Auxiliary, which is just what it sounds like—a group of civic-minded ladies lending their efforts to the cause. Prentiss hopes to expand the volunteer and fund raising functions of the museum into a more comprehensive Museum Association.

A word here about some confusion that arises. The City Museum has nothing to do with the Octagon Museum. Granted, the Octagon is downtown and the City Museum is almost outside the city limits. But the Octagon is the *county* museum and deals almost exclusively with matters of local history of the people and events sort. Although they overlap in this function, the two museums are nevertheless very separate entities. (One of the few things they have in common is that neither one has restrooms inside the building, something which the City Museum, anyway, will correct in the expansion program.)

Drop by Tyrrell Park the first of May—it will be adorned with a 40-ft., 5000-lb. model of a whale, part of a Symposium on Marine Mammals to be put forth by the museum and the university. A Wildflower Fair will be presented in the Park the weekend of April 16 and 17 in conjunction with the Santa Cruz Chapter of the California Native Plant Society (there is no end to these groups). On the historical side, there will be a photographic exhibit of "Santa Cruz People" at the Cooperhouse this weekend. And, to make sure the locals haven't forgotten what the City Museum is all about, the space in the library this month is being devoted to a show of art, artifacts, and documents from the museum's own collection.

Not too many people, if any, make a hobby out of touring small town museums. You can write much more marketable books comparing the various roller coasters across the country. Well, Santa Cruz does have the latter. But, unbeknownst to many, Santa Cruz also has one of the best of the former, well along its way to becoming one of the finest small museums in California. •



John Anderson, Nikki Silva, and Charles Prentis.