

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL  
11/9/75

## Landmark: What Now?

# The Historic Black Walnut

By MARGARET KOCH

Sentinel Staff Writer

On Cedar Street (which used to be Vine Street) near McHugh's Gourmet Shop and at the back of PG&E, there stands an old and huge black walnut tree.

It's roots are deep in history.

It's crown is not graced with a nest of robins but instead often gives shelter to a band of fearless black birds. Those diamond-eyed bird bandits seem to fear neither man nor beast. Several years back, one determined bird patroled a certain section of sidewalk for days, dive-bombing every startled passerby.

It's an untidy tree.

In the fall it drops hard-shelled walnuts and dried-up clusters of leaves into the parking lot and sidewalk below its far-reaching branches.

But it's also a thing of grace and beauty, spreading its delicate green lace in spring, giving the precious gift of a living thing in the midst of blacktop and concrete pavement.

The black walnut is the only bit of living history that remains from one of Santa Cruz's historic hotels — the Pacific Ocean House.

Although the hotel faced on Pacific Avenue, it had an extensive garden that faced onto Vine Street. There were paths among beds of flowers, exotic trees and shrubs grew there according to oldtimers, and a fishpond held brilliant carp.

A summerhouse lured lady hotel guests to sit and sip tea on warm afternoons, or perhaps do a bit of crocheting or reading. The black walnut was there too — it was a young tree then, more limited in its spread of branch, but even then firmly rooted in the rich river bottom soil laid down over the centuries by the periodic flooding of the San Lorenzo.

The Pacific Ocean House was built in 1866 on the site of the earlier San Lorenzo House which had burned.

Constructed of brick, the Pacific Ocean House had 150 rooms eventually when a third floor was added in 1892. It was THE watering place in downtown Santa Cruz for years, advertising "the best table of any hotel on the Pacific Coast"...and "streetcars pass the doors every 15 minutes for the beach"...and gas jet lights as early as 1869.

It was a handsome building with a wide veranda fronting Pacific Avenue. On it were a row of armchairs with iron springs attached to their front legs so guests could lean back at will and survey the world of Santa Cruz.

The world of Santa Cruz marched steadily past that hotel: at first, when Pacific Avenue was mud or dust, depending on the season, wagons loaded with barrels of lime or lengths of redwood lumber went past; local lawyers, businessmen and "characters" stopped to pass the time of day on their ways to their various destinations.

Stagecoaches brought hotel guests before the railroad curved its way through the mountains.

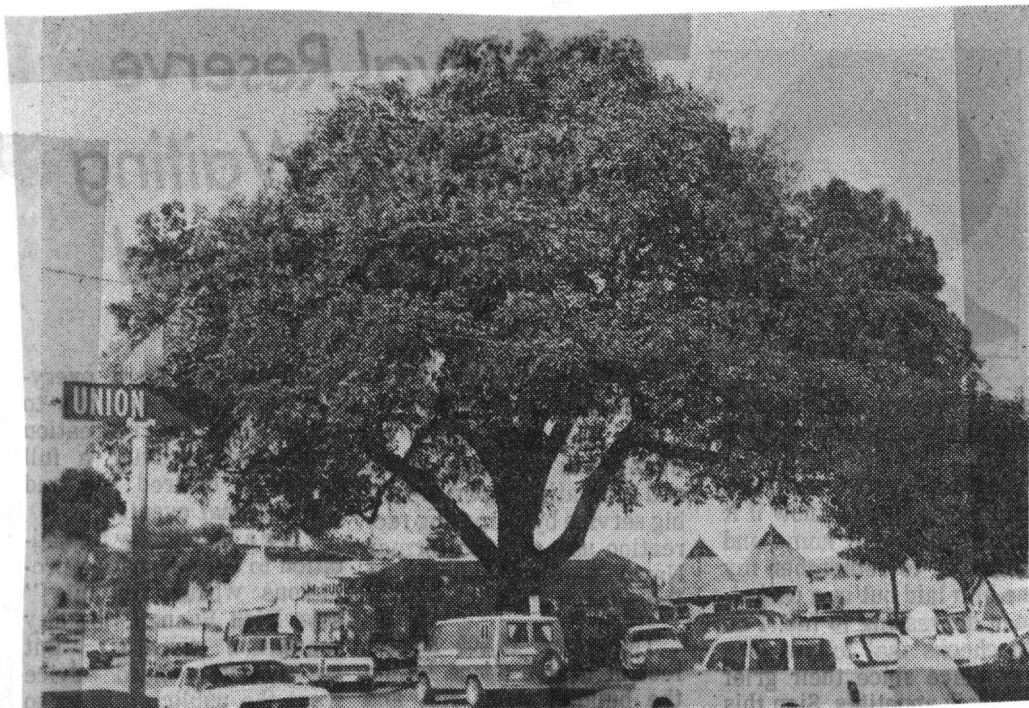
Politicians, socialites — they all found their way to the Pacific Ocean House for a comfortable bed and a tasty meal of fresh fish from Monterey Bay or venison from the hills.

For recreation there was an elegant bar with mirrors and mahogany fittings, a billiard room where gentlemen smoked cigars and tested their skills with hitting the ivory balls into the pockets.

The hotel had its own horse-drawn vehicle which met incoming steamers and trains and brought guests to the door. It was a busy place with comings and goings — and local historians have long grieved the fact that the hotel's register disappeared years ago. It would be a fascinating document today — a priceless document for history.

Gradually as the town grew and gained fame as a resort, newer, more elegant and larger hotels took over. The Pacific Ocean House dropped down to the status of "rooming house" which it held into the early 1900s.

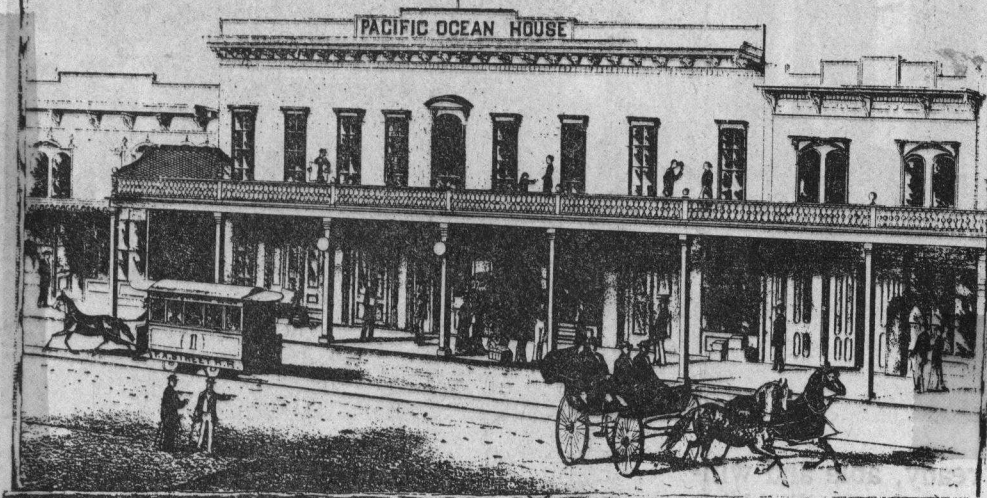
It was demolished in sections to make way for modern structures — the last section of hotel went in 1962.



Today only the black walnut remains as a reminder of the gardens behind the historic hostelry. The tree gets tender loving care from PG&E — it is tended when it needs attention.

In a way, it's a landmark of another day, another era.

## PACIFIC OCEAN HOUSE, SANTA CRUZ, CAL.



LEADING HOUSE OF THE CITY. ENTIRE CHANGE OF MANAGEMENT.

TWO LINES OF STREET CARS PASS THE DOOR EVERY 15 MINUTES FOR THE BEACH, SURF BATHING, HOT, COLD AND OCEAN BATHS.

SPLENDID DRIVES. SPORTSMEN WILL FIND THE BEST HUNTING AND FISHING IN THE STATE.

**E. J. SWIFT, PROPRIETOR.**

The black walnut tree above is one of Santa Cruz's historic landmarks, dating from the days when this section of Cedar Street was named Vine Street. It stood in the gardens of the Pacific Ocean House, one of the town's leading early hotels. At left, copy of an old advertisement of the hotel in its heyday.