

Old Santa Cruz By Ernest Otto

Curio Cabinet Was Feature Of Every Home In Days When Boys Were Avid Collectors

Hobbies and collections were different in the seventies and eighties although collections of buttons are coming back again and are quite a fad. Collecting of postage stamps never stopped but in the early days it was by boys, girls and older persons. Even then stamps were sold and exchanged.

Santa Cruz was quite a place for hobbies as there was considerable to collect here not seen in other places.

In most of the homes was what was known as the "cabinet." Here was the collection of rocks, minerals, shells, curios, etc. The cabinet was often an outstanding piece of furniture in the "sitting," now "living" room. With the sea moss and shells from the beach, fossil shells from mountains and coast, Indian pestles and mortars and things Chinese which could be collected in Chinatown, the boy or girl had an unusual foundation for the cabinet. The young peoples papers and magazines subscribed for and usually in the homes carried an exchange column and constant barter was carried on.

HECOX COLLECTION

Largest collection of this kind was owned by Miss Laura Hecox of the Lighthouse. It occupied an entire room and visitors to the lighthouse would visit this room of unusual interest. It was turned over to the library and much of it is now a part of the Santa Cruz museum. It was a marvelous collection and Miss Hecox, a woman of rare culture and gentility knew the history of everything collected.

Practically every boy collected bird eggs and here again Santa Cruz was unusual and the boys collected along the river, the mecca of all collectors, climbed giant trees in the forest, searched the rushes in the lagoons, scaled cliffs. This will make a separate story some day. It was here that "Del" Snow, who lived along the banks of Branciforte creek, started to collect bird eggs and had the biggest collection in town, the envy of every boy. He was a great lover of nature and finally went to Africa "shooting" with a motion picture camera, about the first wild game pictures thrown on the screen in the motion picture houses, and many of the trophies brought back are in a museum in Oakland. Here again the exchange columns meant much as Santa Cruz had many kinds of bird eggs. Laws against such collecting of eggs prevents this sort of collecting today.

BOYS STUFFED BIRDS

There were numbers of older boys who collected birds. They learned the art of taxidermy, only they called it "stuffing" birds. The men would take a box-like background and possibly take a branch of a tree and on the branches would be their collection covered with glass. This also occupied a place on the walls of the "sitting" room. Especially striking would be the golden oriole, the red wing blackbird, the wild canaries, bluebird, meadow lark, red headed linnet, quail, golden crested wren, woodpeckers, bluejays and the tiny humming bird. These were the ones that showed brilliancy of color. Dr. J. F. Christal had an unusual collection framed. Others would take the larger birds and ducks and these on backgrounds of silk cloth would be ornaments for the home. Some in the Ennor home were unusual.

PICTURE CARDS

No child was without a picture card collection. Some had several thousand. These were usually pasted in books. It must have been a

bane to the clerk when a new lot of cards was received to advertise the wares. The news spread and a continuous line marched into the store until the advertising cards were exhausted. The drug stores always had a supply including the perfumed cards advertising certain perfumes. In Sunday school cards were received for attendance and in public schools as "rewards of merit" and these helped to add to the collections.

Girls had "memory" strings or button collections. Now there is a revival of such collections. They were strung on a string in those days; now mounted on cards. The buttons were more in use then and many were beautiful glass ones. The writer not long ago gave a string of buttons to a niece which had been started by his sister Gertrude and then finished by his sister Cora. The niece received \$150 for it last year from a present day collector.

INDIAN ARROW-HEADS

Some boys collected arrow-heads mostly in exchange from the middle west. Old Indian burying grounds were searched here, one around Laguna, and flint arrow-heads used by California Indians were exchanged for arrow-heads from the east. Older persons gathered the Indian mortars and pestles.

Stamps were not issued as frequently as now but boys and girls and older persons collected them. Their foreign-born friends saved the stamps for them. It was the desire of every collector to have a "Scotts Album," but most of them would get cheap notebooks and paste them in those books. Although revenue stamps did not count, yet revenue stamps on medicine packages or old ones from official documents were in many collections. A stamp was a stamp and the small boy knew no difference. The writer had about 1000 in his collection, a fair sized one in those days, but despairing of a "Scotts Album" he sold them to another boy collector for \$1.50, received 50c on account and never the balance.

The collector had a catalog with the value attached. He received stamps from the writer that he did not have for his collection and many dollars for others. All wanted the triangular shape Cape of Good Hope stamp.

Postmarks were also another habit and the collector especially prized marks from the smaller places especially in foreign countries.

There were albums for sea mosses and the girls had these and sea moss, kelp and sea coral were gathered from along the beaches. It is strange that no sea moss washes in now, but at low tide after a storm the sea moss and kelp were gathered, spread out on tins, floated, and with a small wire spread out and dried. The specimens of various species were not only mounted in the books but from small pieces they would turn them into designs, the favorite being of the cross, harp, etc.

Shells were collected from the beach, the sand dollars, mussels, various kinds of clams, abalone, limpits, periwinkles and many others. These also were great for exchanges.

Wild flowers were collected, pressed and placed in wild flower albums. Some had over 200 specimens. Another album would be devoted to the wild ferns.

These collections were enjoyed and prized highly as well as taking up much spare time.