



Historical Notes

While Walking And Drinking

Cameron Stamps

When the inimitable Harold Conrad¹ uttered the memorable words, "all history is gossip," he was probably well juiced and talking through his hat in a tavern down near the waterfront. His words, however, resonate with a truth all too well forgotten: keep your ears open and your nose clean and it's surprising what you can learn about a place.

So, without further ado, let us begin our historical walking and drinking tour of the Santa Cruz waterfront. We begin at the front door of the Santa Cruz Boardwalk Arcade.

This huge beachfront structure we lump under the title of Boardwalk was built under the direction of one Fred Swanton² in 1907. Swanton was without a doubt this town's most famous visionary entrepreneur and promotional flim-flam man. Not only did Swanton bring the Boardwalk to Santa Cruz, but he also introduced electricity here, was responsible for President Teddy "Rough Rider" Roosevelt's only visit, and served as mayor of the city before dying penniless in the '40s.

The Boardwalk is one of the grandest structures you'll find anywhere celebrating art deco design. Note the curves and arches, all very soft and whimsical; no straight edges here.

Now look across the street to where a large white hotel stands, also an art deco design. This is the Casa del Rey Hotel, once the show-off hotel for visiting VIPs. A glass-encased bridge once crossed Beach Street, connecting the Rey with the Boardwalk. Today the Rey is a retirement hotel, but scuttlebutt has it that the new owners (who also own the Boardwalk) have other designs for the hotel's future.

Now walk across the street to the opposite corner of Cliff Street. Let your feet take you right on into the Beach Street Cafe. Order a beer (or wine) and have a seat. You are now sitting inside what used to be one of

the hottest jazz venues in Santa Cruz—Monk d'Ana's Mambo Gardens. Many of Santa Cruz's veteran jazzheads cut their teeth at the Mambo. Have another beer, and soak in the ambience.

Now that's better, isn't it? We're going to take our mellow glow back across the street, follow the railroad tracks along the backside of the Boardwalk all the way to the river. (Watch out for the splash of water from the *Logger's Revenge* ride above you.)

Okay, we're now at the trestle. Go ahead and walk out on the footbridge that leads across the mighty San Lorenzo River. Toward the ocean you'll see the mouth of the river. Gazing down the river in the other direction it may be hard to visualize, but imagine, if you will, Flossy Garcia's mobile home riding the river like an aimless raft, coming toward the trestle and eventually the ocean.

The year is 1955³, and the river is overflowing its banks and running wild. A few of the boys from town are standing right where you are and using a thick hemp rope in much the same way a cowboy uses a lasso, they're able to get hold of Flossy's coach, with her in it, and bring it and her to land, preventing the inevitable wash into the Pacific.

Now take the spiral walkway on the ocean side of the trestle and follow it down and around to the river levee. This levee was built following the Flood of '55. During steelhead season (November-February 28) the banks of the river are covered with fisherpeople trying to hook a steelie on its way up river.

Go ahead and follow the levee until you come to the bridge at Riverside Avenue. Cross Riverside and continue on to Third Street (the street right in front of you). Over to the right side of the road you'll see where the raging San Lorenzo ripped the street-level Boardwalk to splinters during the Storm of '82⁴. On your left you'll see Hobby Nobby Court, probably one of the weirdest-named apartment complexes in town.

Getting thirsty? Don't worry, it won't be long.

Follow Third Street up the hill⁵ until you reach Main Street. On the right side of the street, at 924 Third, is the big green McLaughlin House, also known as Golden Gate Villa and Palais Monte Carlo.

There are many tales about this 22-room house that encompasses 10,000 square feet. One story is that it is haunted.

It was built in 1891 by Major Frank McLaughlin, a wildcat capitalist who eventually went bust on a gold-mining scheme in Oroville. He returned to Santa Cruz in despondence. Some short years later, McLaughlin's wife died. Following this further tragedy, one night he went upstairs and shot his daughter once in the head with a revolver. Then he went downstairs where drank a cocktail of lemon juice and potassium cyanide. That was all she wrote for ol' Major McLaughlin, whose spirit still stalks the house.

Continue, please, down Third Street and note the white art deco house at 1020 Third, another of the fine tributes to this wonderful architectural style. Check out the port holes and tubular railings. From this end of Beach Hill you should be able to gaze out over the car lots on the south side of town.

Now continue on Third until you reach Front Street (short for Waterfront Street, which is where it will take you). As you saunter down Front toward the wharf, on your left you'll come to an orange-painted burger bar called Positively Front Street.

Once a steamy bordello with red lights glowing from the upstairs windows, the joint is today owned and operated by the irrepressible Barry Jones⁶. Barry says he serves the "baddest burger in town." And he's right.

Go on inside and sit yourself down with an Elephant Malt, or Bass Ale or Anchor Steam from the tap.

Jones is a sports nut, and with the satellite dish atop the building he is able to catch all the games on TV. If you happened to see the latest Clint "make my day" Eastwood flick, "Sudden Impact," you've already been inside this waterfront bordello-cum-bar. A barroom scene in the film was shot here.

The name, Positively . . . of course, comes from an old Bob Dylan song. Jones says he and a friend were sitting around one day hunting for a name, going through some old Dylan albums. "We almost named the place 'Queen Jane Approximately.'"

Have another beer, Barry. I'm going to.

Footnotes:

1. Harold Conrad is a pseudonym for the author.
2. Fred Swanton was a real person.
3. The worst Santa Cruz flood in memory was in 1955.
4. It rained for more than 40 hours straight in early January 1982.
5. This is Beach Hill, or Beach Island before the white men came.
6. Barry Jones is a real person, too.