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SANTA CRUZ YESTERDAYS

Down through the years, Santa Cruzans have been good theatre-goers. Particularly before the arrival of home radio and television.

Prior to the Opera House opening in the middle 70's, local entertainment was given in halls, and sometimes, ballrooms.

Movies were having their first crude beginnings in New York when a popular downtown theatre on Pacific avenue, opposite Lincoln street, was giving the older house on Park street, now Union, some stiff competition.

This was the day of living actors behind the footlights, not just talking images on a silver screen. Flesh and blood heroes chased living villains, and, as often as not, there were "illustrated songs" between acts—with slides thrown on a screen. Living musicians played the opening overture, before the first curtain, as well as the exit march.

Came Here In 1907

Mack Swain, a Utah native, and his capable stock company arrived here in the Spring of 1907. He took over what had been originally the Unique, first opened as a vaudeville house, August 8, 1904 — revamped from a second hand furniture store in what had been a stable, built in 1882 by D. Wilson.

When the Mack Swain Theatre company made its bow before local audiences May 6, 1907, the former Unique was known as Alisky's. The troupe was composed of 18 people, 11 men and seven women. With them had come "6 tons of baggage". "Sidewalks of New York" was their initial offering.

Feminine Lead

Swain's wife and leading lady was Cora King Swain, here pictured in one of her famous roles: "La Belle Marie". The photo is reproduced from a souvenir folder, such as were distributed at special matinees, from time to time. The theatre name became "Swain's," which it remained for around three years before being re-christened "Unique".

The Swains left Santa Cruz late in 1909, eventually settling in Hollywood when the film industry was in its beginning. Here the name of Mack Swain rose to great



CORA KING SWAIN, LOCAL STAGE STAR

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

heights of movie fame, mainly as a comedian.

He was first with the Mack Bennett Keystone comedies, from 1913, where he became known for his "Ambrose" comedies.

Earned Hollywood Fame

A 6-foot-2, 200-pounder, he became identified as a foil for Charlie Chaplin. Swain died in 1935, leaving his widow well provided

for, who presided over the beautiful Crestmont avenue home on the heights at the eastern edge of Hollywood.

She was a gracious hostess, and most enjoyed visits from old friends and former associates. Her philanthropies were many, up until her death last year, at an advanced age.