

A River And Its Bridges...



The Water street bridges have always been known as the "upper bridge." Built in 1882, the old arched span shows over the top of the "new" concrete bridge built in 1914. Prior to the arched bridge above, there was a wagon bridge built in 1868 at this spot which was an ancient Indian ford. As early as 1866, flimsy footbridges were built

which had to be periodically replaced following washouts. The bridge at this spot played a dramatic part in an early-day hanging. Two Indians who robbed a carpenter of money so they could go to a circus, killed him in the process. They were hanged by a masked mob of Santa Cruz men on the Water street bridge.

By Margaret Koch
Sentinel Staff Writer

It was almost exactly 11 years ago, December 22, 1955, that the San Lorenzo river swelled to monstrous proportions and burst its banks in the worst flood in recorded Santa Cruz history.

Lives were lost . . . Property was lost and damaged. . . .

It was days—weeks—before the badly hurt and bewildered city of Santa Cruz pulled itself back to a semblance of "business as usual."

The river—that capricious monster—was to be restrained forever in a great, unbeautiful trough of cement. And this has been done.

This is man's first real attempt to leash the San Lorenzo, which runs thin and tame, most of the year. In the past, he has merely thrown necklaces of bridges across the stream.

The San Lorenzo comes out of the Santa Cruz mountains above Boulder Creek. It tumbles and glides and bursts and falls for miles through the rocks and redwoods. It is joined and fattened by little streams with musical names like Bear Creek, Two-Bar creek, King's creek and Spring creek.

In the very earliest recorded life of the river there was an old Indian ford in the vicinity of Water street. It is likely that Portola and his Spaniards crossed and camped there in 1769 on St. Lawrence's Day.

Water street was laid out by the county to line up with the ancient ford, even before Santa Cruz was incorporated as a city. In early days Water street was commonly referred to as the "road to San Jose."

THE 'UPPER' BRIDGE

For years there was no way to cross the river there except by fording, afoot or on horseback. Foot bridges, flimsy affairs, were used as early as 1866 but had to be replaced periodically as they washed out. In 1868 the first wagon bridge was built. It had to be rebuilt in 1871-72 when the river swelled to flood stage.

In 1882 it cost \$10,900 to span the San Lorenzo with an arched bridge. In 1908 Union Traction company added a parallel trolley way and in 1914 the present concrete bridge was built for \$15,175.

THE 'COVERED' BRIDGE

Soquel avenue's once-famed covered bridge was built in 1874 for \$15,000. In those days, Front street dead-ended at Soquel avenue, and the short span of street between Front street and Pacific avenue was called Arcan street.

In 1890, horse car tracks added five feet to the bridge's width. It was the longest covered bridge in California—800 feet overall, with 500 feet under roof. In 1904 the Union Traction streetcar company took over the horse car tracks. Trolleys rumbled across the old structure and out "Soquel road." In 1921 the present concrete bridge was put up for \$150,000.

THE 'LOWER' BRIDGE

Until 1888 there was no bridge crossing the San Lorenzo river below Soquel avenue, except for temporary foot bridges. Then Fred Barson deeded land to open a road between Barson street to a new proposed river crossing. Barson owned the old Riverside hotel.

The new bridge was completed in November, 1888, and was immediately nicknamed the "cut bias bridge," because it ran slightly off a true North and South line.

THE 'RAILROAD' BRIDGE

The first railroad span to bridge the mouth of the San Lorenzo river was built around 1880. It was a narrow gauge line and over it ran the little Betsy Jane engine with her picturesque "diamond" stack.

The original trestle bridge at the river's mouth washed out sometime during the years 1884-86, according to Ed Blaisdell who remembers his father telling about it. Ed was born in 1884.

The pioneer line from Santa Cruz to Watsonville was started by F. A. Hihn in 1875 with aid from Claus Spreckels. But it never paid off. In 1881 Hihn sold to Southern Pacific—some say he gave the profitless railroad away. It was even rumored that Hihn paid SP to take it.

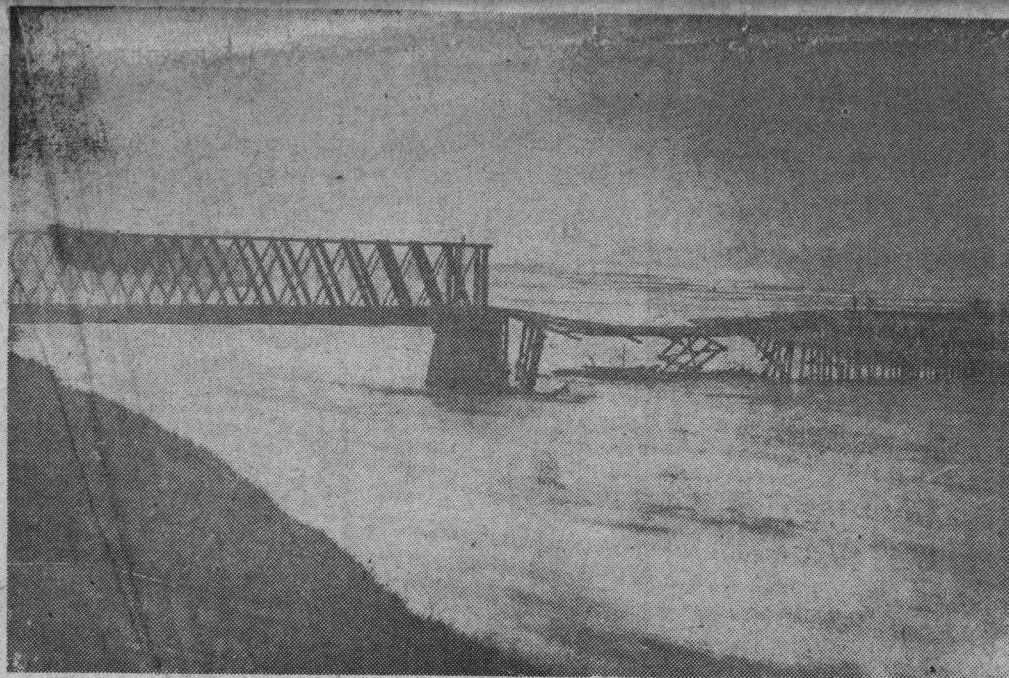
Anyhow, the line was broad gauged in 1883 and the entire road bed was re-worked. A new trestle bridge with a barn-like roof was built.

And guess what?

Santa Cruz boys—who were as curious and resourceful as boys are anywhere—in 1904 were using the enclosed railroad bridge for a dressing room. They changed into their bathing suits there when they went swimming in the mouth of the San Lorenzo river.

This titillating bit of news comes straight from one of the "boys"—Bob Lincoln.

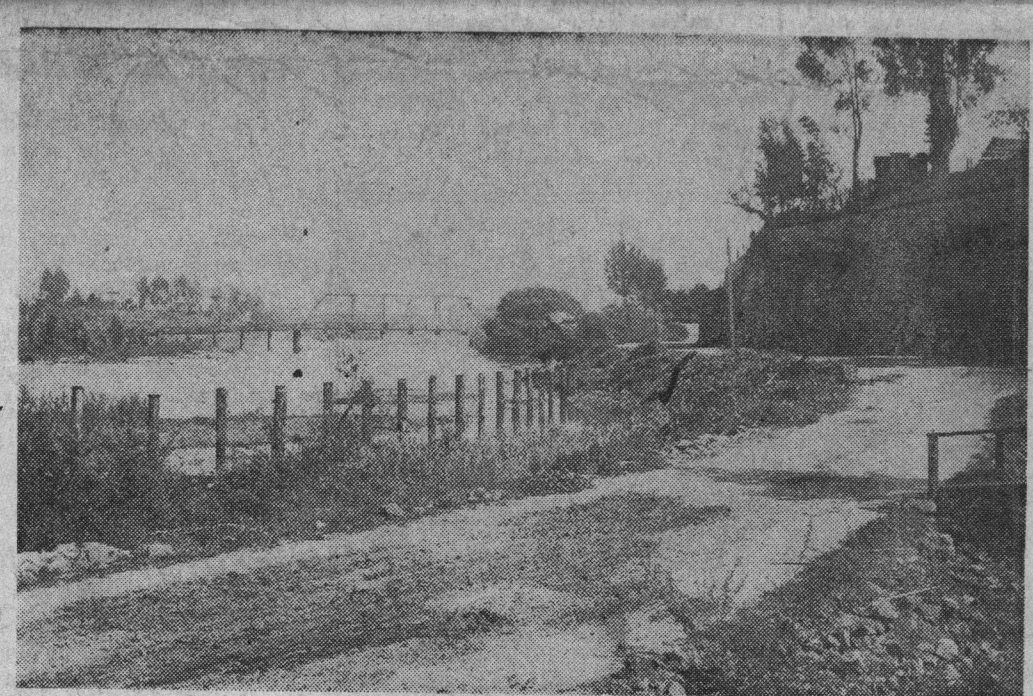
All photographs from the
Roy Boekennoogen collec-
tion.



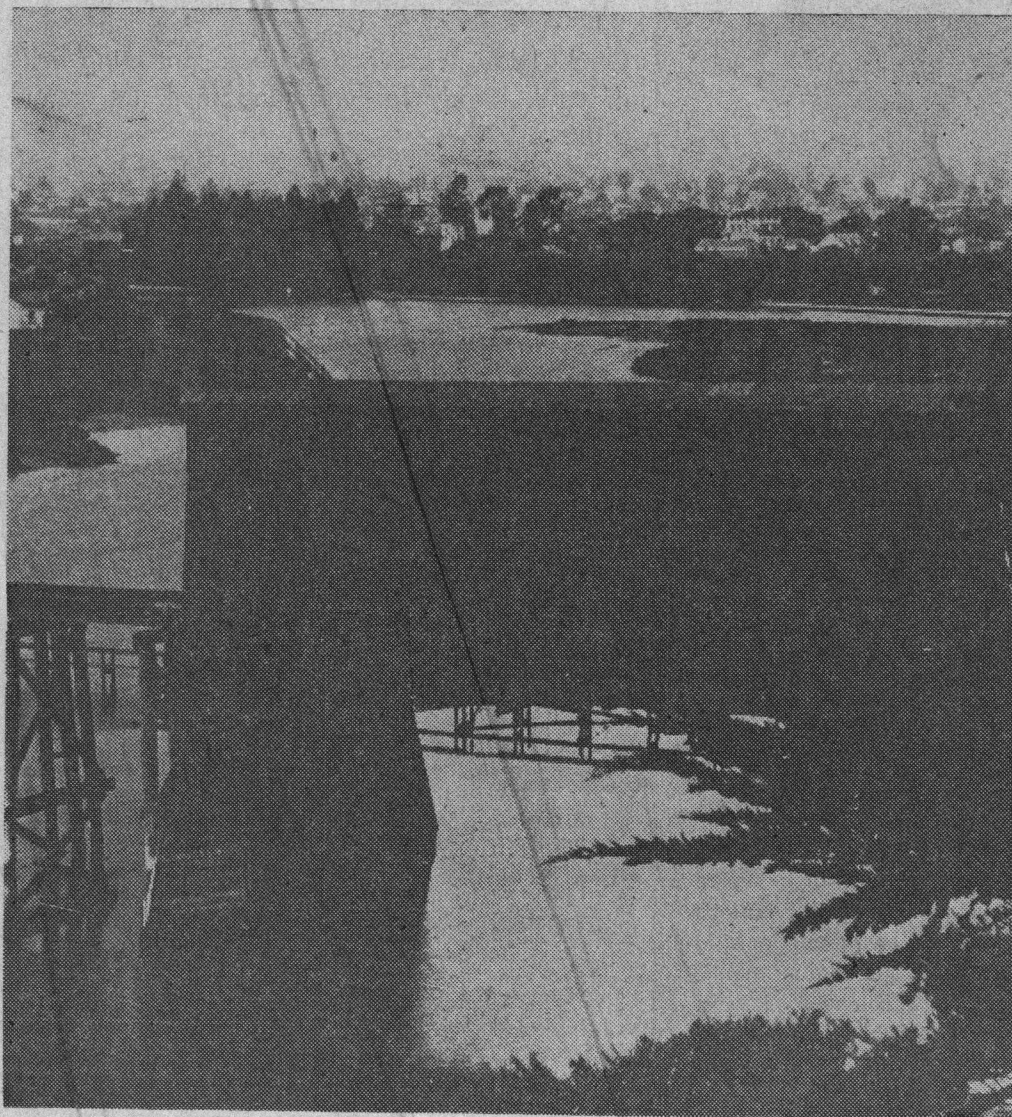
RAILROAD BRIDGE

The "cut-bias" bridge, as it was known to old timers, was built on property donated by Alfred Barson, owner of the old Riverside hotel. Until 1888 there was no vehicular crossing at this point on the San Lorenzo river. Several foot bridges were put up each spring, dismantled in the fall. The cut-bias seen here in the distance, got its name because it was built at a slight angle from bank to bank. It was completed in November, 1888. In 1930 the present concrete structure replaced it.

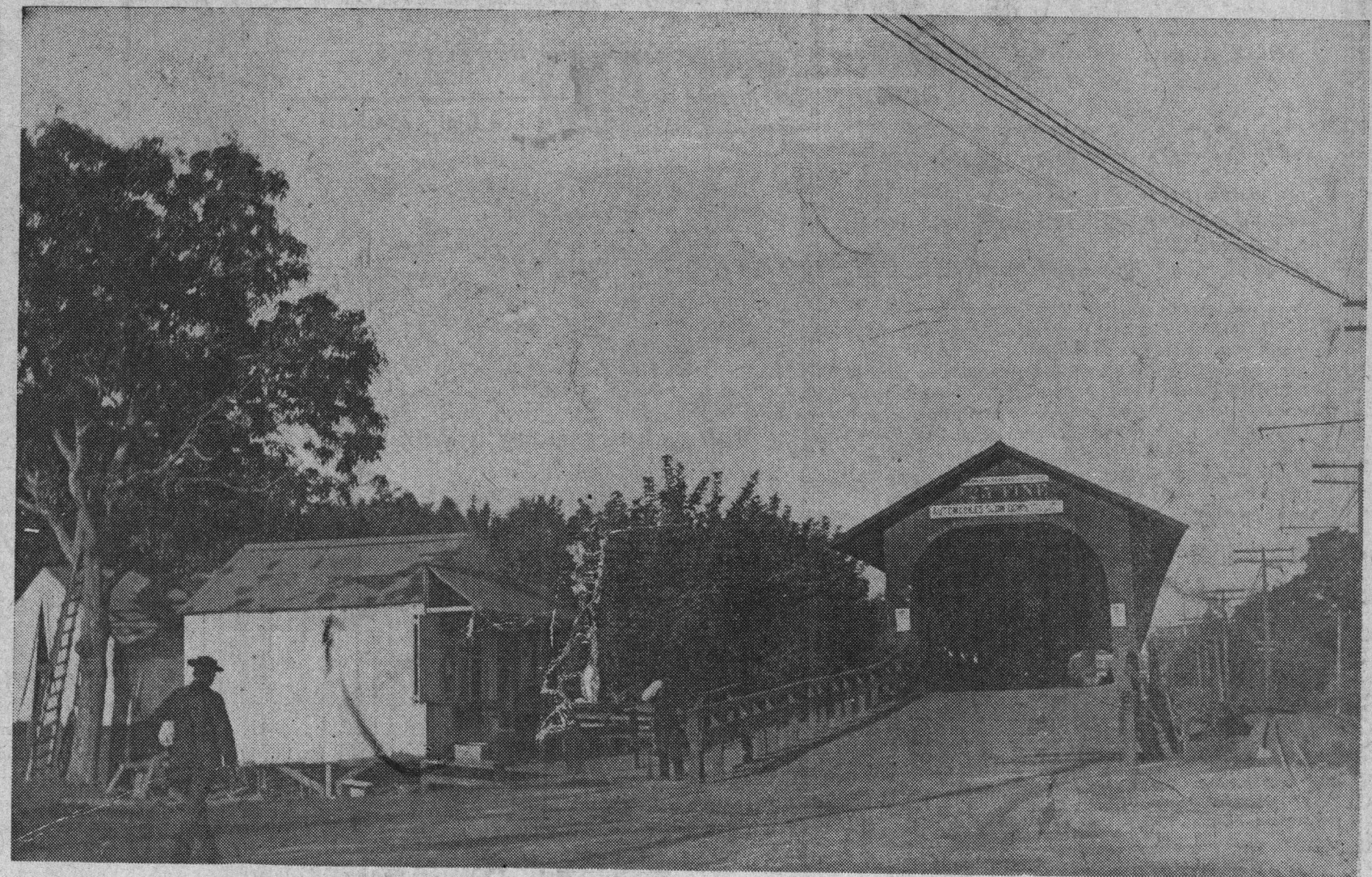
The railroad bridge at the mouth of the San Lorenzo river went out once.



'CUT BIAS' BRIDGE



The railroad bridge at the mouth of the San Lorenzo river had a partial roof at one time.



The Soquel avenue bridge was one of the longest covered bridges in the state. It was 800 feet total, with the roof extending over 500 feet of it. Built in 1874 it cost \$15,000. The present concrete bridge was put up in 1921. Amusing note: the sign above the entrance to the

bridge promised a \$25 fine for anyone driving over it faster than a walk. The shop on the left, (Riverside avenue end) was the shoe repair business of the father of the late Preston Sawyer, Sentinel historian.