

HIST The (S.C.CITY) Pacific Avenue 'campus'



FROM THE COLLECTION OF ROSS ERIC GIBSON

Chestnutwood's elegant college is between the Santa Cruz Academy at left and the Santa Cruz Seminary on the right, behind the tree.

College-town roots go way back

BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON
Special to the Mercury News

Santa Cruz was known as a college town long before 1968, when the University of California established its Santa Cruz campus on Cowell Ranch. The term dates locally to 1884, and the "campus" was Pacific Avenue itself.

John A. Chestnutwood was a professor at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, the first college in California. But he envisioned a progressive business college that was more accessible to the public.

His colleagues were amused at his radical concept to eliminate classes and semesters, and enroll students on any day in the year. The curriculum would be followed by each student at his or her own pace, repeating each portion until successfully completed. And while UOP had been advanced in creating a Women's Department in 1852, Chestnutwood felt colleges should be completely co-educational, with women admitted to all departments. At that time, higher education for women was not encouraged.

No one took Professor Chestnutwood's idea seriously, so he decided he would establish the school himself. He went to Santa Cruz in 1884, feeling its tourist trade would help attract more students. He rented a ground-



Interior of the co-educational study hall shows the college bank and post office at right.

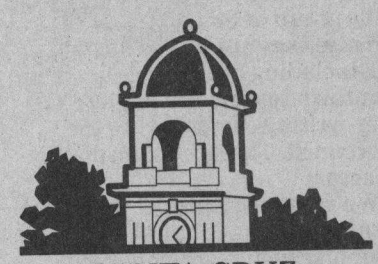
floor location at the town's finest hotel, the Pacific Ocean House — today's old PG&E building — and opened his college with seven students.

When the college outgrew its quarters, local developer F.A. Hihn realized it was exactly the kind of cultural institution downtown Santa Cruz needed to improve its image. Hihn built a three-story brick, mansarded

home for the college. The building, south of Pacific and Walnut avenues, was called the Augusta Building after his middle name.

The school was soon attracting students from all over the state, and in four years outgrew its building. Eager to keep the college downtown, Hihn built one of the largest and most elegant buildings in town.

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On the corner lot next to the Augusta Building, where Woolworth's is today, Hihn put up a three-story San Francisco East-lake brick building with corner towers. Visible throughout the city, it was named the Alta Building, because it was the tallest structure downtown. It was also known as the Post Office Building because of its chief tenant downstairs. The architect was Edward Van Cleeck, who moved his offices into a second-floor suite; and his work came to define the elegant look of the new downtown.

The area soon became known as College Corners. The Santa Cruz Academy moved into the Augusta Building, where students learned to use the typewriter, among other things. Next to the Alta Building on Walnut Avenue was Quincy Hall, where Mrs. Gamble's 1878 "Santa Cruz Seminary" had moved. At the opposite end of the block at Pacific and Lincoln, the 1867 "Young Ladies Seminary" resided in Pioda Hall.

The new Chestnutwood's school had its own post office, and a college bank where parents could leave an account for a student, to be paid out in annual amounts. The college bank issued scrip, whose bills were legal tender for small amounts. Chestnutwood's even included a Business Law Academy, a Normal School (to educate and accredit teachers), and an Art School.

The college had its own dormitories, a gymnasium, a baseball team, and held dances and graduation ceremonies. It used the Walnut Avenue Library in the Alta Building, run independently by Dorothy Pinelli. The college debate team was popular



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College Corners included the Hihn corner building on left and Heald's College on the right.



SANTA CRUZ

Historic Perspective

entertainment, tackling controversial issues such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, women's suffrage and gunboat diplomacy.

Chestnutwood sold the school in 1898 to E. Cox and J.H. Janson, who expanded the school into the Augusta Building and

established branch colleges in San Jose and Fresno. They were acquired by Heald's Pioneer Business College in 1906.

Once again, the Santa Cruz branch needed a new home. Len Loehlmann offered to build a three-story brick building on his corner lot across the street. He hired Van Cleeck to design it, and named it "The Trust Building" after his wife.

Amelia Hagemann and Duncan McPherson owned lots north of this site, and proposed building a hotel and meeting hall as support facilities for the college. Van Cleeck suggested he expand the design of the Trust Building to include the Hagemann/McPherson annex as well. As the only neo-Colonial building downtown, Van Cleeck had add-

ed colonial touches to his East-lake Italianate design, so the structure would evoke an East Coast Ivy League college.

The resident student population of the business schools and teetotal seminaries brought many soda fountains to College Corners, and they became popular after-school hangouts. This even included a candy factory on the ground floor of Heald's College, where Frazier Lewis invented the world's first candy bar in 1910. With the demolition of the Elks Building last month, the last vestige of our educational roots was lost forever.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a history column twice a month for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.