

Old Santa Cruz

12-17-50

• • • By Ernest Otto

Another big fill made in Santa Cruz was that by which 500 feet of trestle was made solid earth embankment at the west edge of the Southern Pacific bridge across the San Lorenzo. Much of it was done when parts of the trestle were washed out.

Beach street was another place which had to be filled in. Originally it was a narrow two way street, so sandy it was almost impassable. Along one side of it a narrow fill was made for the old horse car line which ran to the mouth of the river. At the end of the line a narrow plank walk ran from Starr's shell and moss store to the Leibbrandt river bath houses and Steve Washburn's boat rental landings.

The picket fence north of Beach street was covered with poison oak and wild blackberry vines. Along each side of it were pink briar roses.

This lower end of the Leibbrandt farm subdivision started to grow at Riverside avenue. The development extended slowly to the east. It was very low ground, always green with wild hay and other growths.

Annual Circus Ground

Before that section became a place of summer residences it was the annual circus grounds. Largest circuses were Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey. Most of the men, from the Ringling brothers themselves to the canvas men, looked forward to Santa Cruz where the tents would be so close to the beach.

Alf Ringling, his wife and son, Paul, liked this city. The family would come about four days before the performers. They became friends of the writer and daily would go with him to the beach. One season Alf gave the writer 16 passes. One time, after the return to winter headquarters, he sent the writer a book giving the season's itinerary and a short bit about each place visited. It showed Santa Cruz with the United States fleet in the bay.

Several lemons picked off a tree at the home of the writer by Mother Ringling went into the bottom of their trunk and the next year she told of enjoying the lemonade at their home.

Elephants Liked Water

The elephants were always taken to the bay to play in the water. After the show when the performers took to the plunge each group seemed to talk a different language. A kindly act much appreciated by the performers was by Miss Mollie Morgan, the well known teacher, who brought flowers to the tents and distributed them to the women.

The last filling at the beach was when the sand north of the railroad tracks was covered to make what is now a level parking lot, and picnic ground. About where Third street is now were green banks covered with the yellow blooming resin plant. Boys would stoop, undress, put on their tights and climb to the center of the pier.

The Leibbrandts had many small bath houses on the sand and at the Washburn landing were about 20 small boats. Along the river bank were several spring boards. The fresh water was warmer than that of the bay making it more popular with children.

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