

## Modern Day Haggles, But...

# Capitola's El Salto Has A 'History' To It

By DENISE SIEBENTHAL  
Sentinel Staff Writer

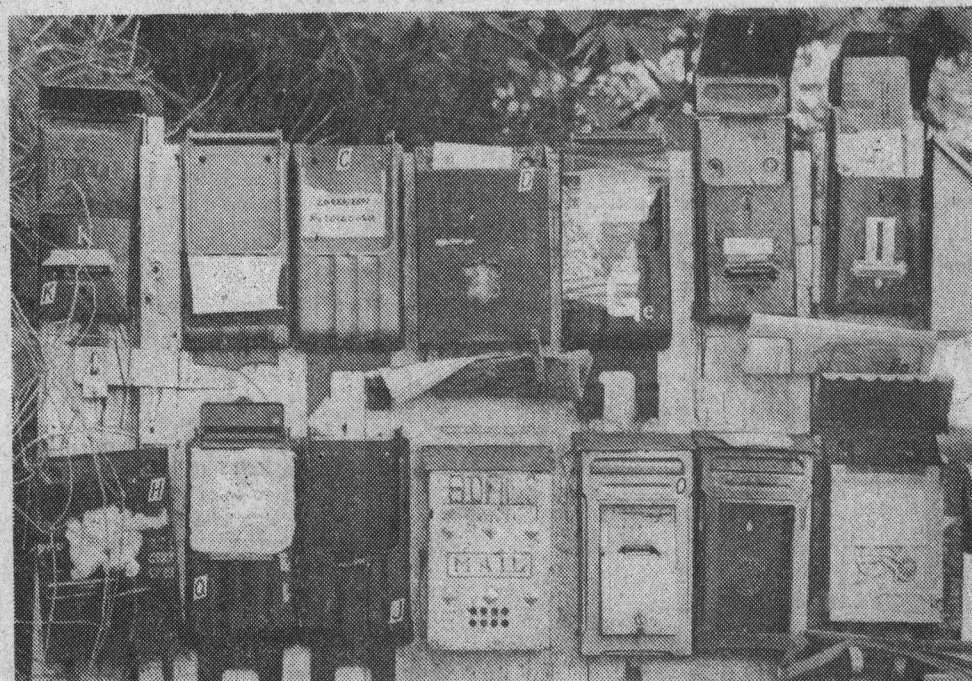
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Victorian-style houses at Capitola's El Salto Depot Hill was owned by oil-rich millionaires and Hollywood stars. Resort tell of times when the secluded area atop



This "classic" group of mailboxes tells the story of El Salto's present day residents and the disarray the resort has fallen into as it waits to be told of its future.

A place sometimes has more history than the people who lived or visited there.

The El Salto resort atop Depot Hill in Capitola is such a place. Its past has seen oil-rich landowners, Hollywood stars such as Mary Pickford and possibly the likes of Al Capone.

Even its present is tied closely to its memory-filled past. In a recent controversy over the zoning of the five-acre site and the wooded gulch behind it, Depot Hill neighbors argued against zoning that could possibly bring 55 houses to the area. They wanted to keep the rural atmosphere of the place, they told city officials.

The resort's current owner, Elizabeth Blodgett, pleaded for a multiple-residential zoning, saying she wanted to build more cottages on the site and return it to the popular resort it once was.

The controversy ended with the Capitola council taking a wait-and-see position on the resort's future. Such uncertainty over the area didn't crowd the mind of Frederick Hihn, first owner of the land which is now known as the El Salto Resort and Escalona Gulch.

In 1888, he filed Capitola's original subdivision map which shows Depot Hill divided into a neat grid pattern of streets. The hill, Hihn planned, would overlook a town which he hoped one day would become the state capitol and which he appropriately named "Capitola."

Hihn's plans for Capitola and for Depot Hill never materialized completely. Roads were dedicated only halfway across Depot Hill, with the back portion eventually becoming today's El Salto Resort and Escalona Gulch.

The original map also shows that there was more to El Salto in 1888 than there is today. The resort sits atop a 125-foot cliff above Monterey Bay and some of the cliff shown on Hihn's map has fallen into the bay.

Grand Avenue, running along the coastside of the hill, today does not reach the resort. The map indicates it once went completely around the U-shaped bluff.

Geologists figure the resort and the rest of the hill is losing

about a one-half to three feet a year to erosion, Capitola Planning Director Pat McCormick pointed out.

But cliff erosion probably didn't concern the carefree residents of El Salto's past. The peaceful, wooded acreage actually didn't become a resort until 1946, when Joe and Mary Tabacchini bought the property for \$50,000. Owners before the Tabacchini's reserved the secluded area for their private use.

Many of the shrubs, trees and holly bushes throughout the resort came from England and probably were planted there by two English families, the Robertsons and the Rawlins, who bought some hill property from Hihn in 1911. The families built tennis courts and a few cottages on the hill, but the area really reached its heyday in the 1920's and '30's when El Salto was owned by the oil-rich Hanchett family, who bought the Englishmen out in 1923.

The Hanchetts brought class to Depot Hill, recalls Sidney Styles, longtime resident of the area. He remembers the days when the family would sail down from San Francisco on their yacht, followed by their luggage on a train.

They used the area as a summer place, Styles recalls. The wealthy family used to ride into town in a wicker pony cart.

The Hanchetts built 14 Victorian cottages and residences on the property, many which are still in use today. Distinguished visitors came to the "summer pace," including tennis champ Helen Wills accompanied by Mary Pickford, champion golfer Marion Hollins who started Pasatiempo, and, it is rumored, the ganster Al Capone.

Styles, whose house sits on

property once part of the resort, said he played as a child in the Escalona Gulch behind the resort. He said the gulch is the most northerly point in California where Monarch butterflies migrate.

He remembers when the woods were filled with deer and quail which have disappeared over the years with the coming of homes and the railroad to the hill.

The property has changed hands several times since the Hanchetts, but it still retains its secluded resort-like atmosphere.

Its potential loss of this rural atmosphere, Styles said, that brought Depot Hill residents out in protest of the RMLM zoning owner Blodgett requested.

The stately Victorian homes and quaint cottages on the resort are occupied now by young people who rent from Blodgett, with some cottages still open to vacationers. She says she has been misunderstood by the neighbors and emphasizes she wants to build more cottages to make the resort the vacation spot it once was.

Blodgett said she needs the RMLM zoning to be able to build more cottages and to financially support the area.

Many people still return to the resort year after year for a vacation, she pointed out. "There's a million dollars worth of property up there that should be open to the public," she stated emphatically.

Anyone can walk into the resort today and enjoy its grounds, she said, even the neighbors that are fighting her zoning request.

The city council gave the resort and the gulch behind it an A-R (automatic review) zoning, which means that no decision will be made on the area until use permits are applied for.

So, as modern-day man haggles over the future of the El Salto Resort and Escalona Gulch, the shady, secluded spot sits quietly atop Depot Hill still making its own history. Regardless of its future, the land will always have stories to tell from its past.

### County Paychecks Are Late

County government

### Parental Stress Contacts Listed

Parental Stress Consortium of Northern California is a newly formed group of community-based programs offering supportive services to parents.

Each program trains volunteers to provide 24-hour crisis line service, home visits, emer-

gency child care, and parent groups.

#### Picnic Scheduled

A beach picnic for Little Buddies is scheduled Oct. 2, 11 a.m. at Seaclyff Beach State Park. For details call 423-0554.

In the county the contacts are P. O. Box 1463, or 532 Soquel Ave., Santa Cruz, 95061, 426-7322; and in Watsonville, 406 Main St., No. 317, 722-1211.

The organization was set up to help parents and the children who need it.