

Early History of Davenport

By Alverda Orlando

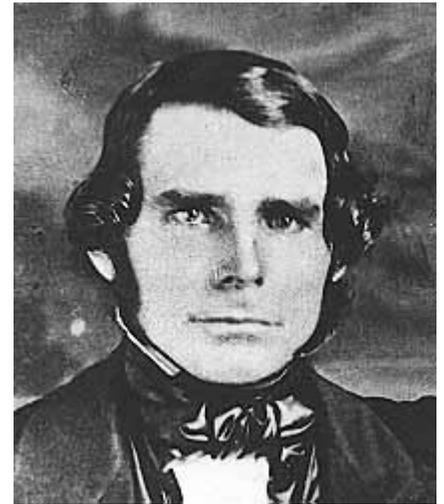
Davenport was founded in 1868. The original town was about a mile to the north of the present location near El Jarro Point. In the beautiful cove at the mouth of Agua Puerca Creek, Captain John P. Davenport built a 450 foot wharf. Timber, tanbark, cordwood, and cedar posts were loaded from the wharf onto small sailing vessels and shipped to San Francisco.

The wharf site became known as Davenport's Landing and was considered one of the best landings along the coast. A lively village grew up in the cove and the knoll behind it. There were several hotels, a livery stable, blacksmith shop, and general store. Whaling gear and the blubber melting pots were located near the wharf.

Captain Davenport was a sea captain from Tiverton, Rhode Island. Between 1845 and 1850 he captained a whaling ship that sailed in and out of California ports. In 1852, he married Ellen Smith and they moved from Rhode Island to California. They lived first in Monterey and then in Soquel Landing (what is now Capitola). In 1868 they and their children settled in what would become known as Davenport's Landing. Captain and Mrs. Davenport built their house on a high bluff on the right side of the Agua Puerca Creek cove. In that house, the last three of their ten children were born: Anna Bell, June 23, 1870; a boy who died at birth in 1872; and Harold Augustus, August 18, 1874.

The wharf at Davenport's Landing was abandoned in 1880 because of reduced volume of business and the high cost of operation. Captain and Mrs. Davenport subsequently moved to Santa Cruz. Captain Davenport died in San Francisco, in 1892, at the age of 74. Mrs. Davenport lived well into the twentieth century and is buried at Soquel Cemetery.

In 1906, the Santa Cruz Portland Cement Company started operation. The present town of Davenport was developed by the Coast Dairies and Land Company to house the workers at the cement plant. Most of the old landmarks from that period have been destroyed by various fires. Still standing is the old jail, which was built in 1914, and sits off the main highway on Center Street. Also still here is the St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, at the end of Davenport Avenue. It was built in 1915; its interior is beautiful and well maintained and is always a subject for artists and art classes.



Capt. John P. Davenport, circa 1852



The road in the middle of the photo is Highway 1. At that time, the highway ran through Davenport. The large building at the bottom is the Hotel d'Italia.

Photo of Davenport in 1910

Sources

- *Copyright 1995 Alverda Orlando. Article and photographs courtesy of Alverda Orlando.*

The content of this article is the responsibility of the individual author. It is the Library's intent to provide accurate local history information. However, it is not possible for the Library to completely verify the accuracy of individual articles obtained from a variety of sources. If you believe that factual statements in a local history article are incorrect and can provide documentation, please contact the Webmaster.