

# Mostly about People

By Wally Traling



"No, mam, there are no atomic bombs stored in San Lorenzo Valley.

"I know, mam, there's a sign in Zayante that says, 'Western States Atomic Vaults.'"

The sign refers to an old Southern Pacific railroad tunnel, converted into the "world's safest storage for personal and business documents and valuables."

For years, the old tunnel, built in the 1870's, hadn't heard a whistle louder than a hoot owl's, and it sat there gathering darkness until someone with some imagination wandered into at darkness and said: "Ha!"

And by 1954, when the ribbon cutting was o'er, there stood a massive concrete and steel fortress 241 feet long.

It is advertised as being bombproof, fireproof, earthquakeproof, burglarproof and presumably trainproof.

Which makes it just about 100 proof.

You ring a bell at the face of the tunnel and more than likely Fred J. Armbrust, a retired army top kick, and chief guard, will peer out and ask your business.

The doors get thicker and heavier as you walk toward the storage area, the ultimate being a three-ton steel time vault that won't even open for "sesame."

Things seem very secure here. Armbrust is an artillery trained man, although there were no 88's in sight, and guards Frank Ernst and Dave Lorenzana, are both ex-firemen. Clerks Esther Armbrust and Fern Cummins help pretty up the place.

The two storied interior is under 92 feet of mountain. Redwood trees 150 feet tall grow up there.

Cement walls a yard thick keep a captive temperature of 62-63 degrees with a humidity of 45 to 55 which helps the longevity of just about anything.

A narrow corridor extends through the vault, seemingly into a slow curving infinity, between silver grided cells where the documents are kept.

Practically everything is micro-filmed. All the business records for Disneyland are kept here. IBM has a cell. Over half the counties of California keep its past paper work in the shelter.

The state of California has

entrusted its births, death, marriages, and other vital statistics dating back to the 20's to the vault. Which means you are there.

Armbrust explained. Each skinny file drawer contains, for example, 66 roles of 16 millimeter film 100 feet long. Each roll carries from 2000 to 4000 documents.

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A candy factory may microfilm its precious recipes and store them here so that should the factory be destroyed it can re-establish it self fast so as to not interrupt Crest toothpaste's cavity tests among the school kids.

Special machines are available which can speedily reproduce the filmed information back on paper again, or reproduce portions of the film itself for study at the home plant.

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Armbrust said an etching of "Benjamin Franklin in the Court of France," insured for \$50,000 was recently kept in the vaults.

There are classified sections in the tunnel where no visitors are allowed, and Armbrust is very tight lipped about the contents therein.

If you want to visit the place, best you call ahead and make an appointment.

It might save you from being squinted at suspiciously by a guard.

In case you're sensitive.

## Five To Attend Girl Scout Meet

Four local Girl Scout executives and Marylou English, senior scout will attend the National Council meeting of the Girl Scouts of the United States next week in Miami Beach, Florida. The meeting will be held Monday through Friday.

Delegates from the Santa Cruz area will be Mrs. Robert Timothy, president of the Santa Cruz county area Girl Scout Council, Inc., and Mrs. Milton C. Harrold, executive director. Also attending will be Mrs. Frank F. Orr, president-elect of the newly formed Monterey Bay Girl Scout council, and Mrs. George Markley.

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