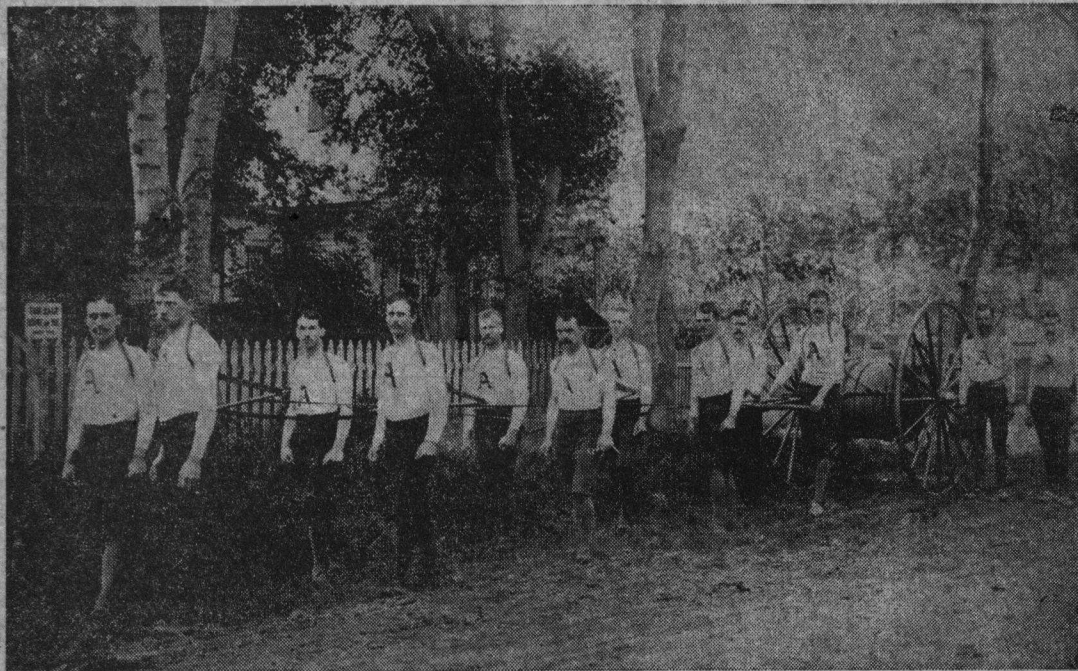


Santa Cruz Yesterdays



LOCAL FIREFIGHTERS OF A DEPARTED ERA

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

Back in the Eighties, Maytime was carnival time for a series of years, for the volunteer hosecart teams. Firemen's tournaments were held annually, alternating between Santa Cruz, San Jose, Watsonville, Salinas, and other central county towns.

Terrific interest was aroused in the contests; competition was keen; rabid partisans "bet their shirts" on their favorite teams, and the enthusiasts turned out for the occasion. For instance, in May, 1884, Agent Bassett of the local broad gauge railroad ran out of tickets when local fans numbering some 350 sought train transportation to Watsonville, scene of that year's tournament. Five hundred from here witnessed major events.

Usually the hose races, hook and ladder races — and even Junior hosecart events, were spread over three or four days, held in conjunction with the annual meeting

of the California Firemen's Association.

Practice For Races

The Santa Cruz Alerts and Pilots, rival town teams, in advance of the tournaments, practiced rigidly each night on Pacific avenue. Starting at the lower plaza (that would be opposite the post office today) the teams raced down the avenue over a regulation course of 400 yards.

Overall weight of cart and hose averaged about 1000 pounds. Twelve men made up each running team. It is said the "Alert" fans customarily lined up along the west side of Pacific, while the "Pilot" devotees claimed the opposite side of the avenue. The hydrant the boys had to hook onto was located at a point on the east side of the street just beyond the southern extreme of the Palomar hotel building.

The above team of fleet-footed

firefighters, photographed on tree-lined Church street in front of the Boston place, were west of what is today the Civic Auditorium location, in 1886.

Alerts Team

Probably out for a "warm-up" the twelve Alerts pictured are, left to right: Ed C. Lilly, Harry Cowell, Tom Witherly, John Ross, Ben Patterson, Enoch Alzina, Charles Ogden, Elmer Dakan Jr., Cornelius Crowley, Charles "Yank" Dennett, John Alzina and Frank Bartlett.

Cowell, second from the left, still living, is today as for many years, a resident of San Francisco. Senior member of the fabulous house of Cowell, well up in years, he stands today at the climax of his lifelong ambition — creation of Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, taking in hundreds of acres of family holdings up the San Lorenzo canyon together with the county Big Trees.