

Old Santa Cruz

8-21-55 ● ● By Ernest Otto

(Editor's Note: The late Ernest Otto, famed and beloved waterfront correspondent for the Sentinel-News and writer of the "Old Santa Cruz" column, left a number of columns written before his recent death. They will be published weekly by the Sentinel-News.)

Getting to the top of a hill in the old days was much different than it is today. Because there were hills on both sides of town, surrounding the plateaus in the middle, and because there were other hills beyond a second plateau such as the one on High street and on the DeLaveaga park, the hill-surmounting problem was quite a bother to the residents.

One outstanding method of reaching the top of the hill was on Beach hill at the foot of Pacific avenue. First there was a narrow walk up the side of Bowman's hill, cut out of the chalk rock formation. Half of this was cut away over the years, and when it was widened the lower part of the walk was planks with a railing. Subsequently it was given a lime-rock retaining wall above a paved walk.

There also was a viaduct high over Pacific avenue—about eight feet wide. It started just below what then was the Cottage saloon and went north of the Yale hotel. On either side was a lattice work railing.

Well constructed steps led up to the viaduct walk from the dirt street below. There were two sets of steps with a resting place for the tired pedestrians in about the middle of the stairways. Some pedestrians still followed the old narrow walk on the sidehill except after heavy rains which left impassable mud.

Most people then walked to the beach, particularly during the era of the one-horse cars which made their turn below the beginning of the walks to the viaduct. It skirted one of the warehouses at the foot of the park bounded by Washington and Second streets and Pacific avenue.

From the foot of the park there was a sidewalk—of planks—in the center of the street. Nearby was the car line. There were no sidewalks.

In order to reach the sawmill, the lumber yards, the Centennial flour mill and the shingle mill (which is the only building of that era still remaining), many would leave the walk at the top of the Pacific avenue hill and go down a path which wound through patches of wild blackberries and some willow trees.

Later, a double step-walk with a landing in the center was built.

At the top of the hill where the beach walk started toward the avenue was a vacant lot which reached to what was the Captain Smith residence and later the palatial Major McLaughlin residence was built. When the lot was bought by G. Bowman and he started building his home, only the framework was erected before a heavy gale wind blew it down to the ground.

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