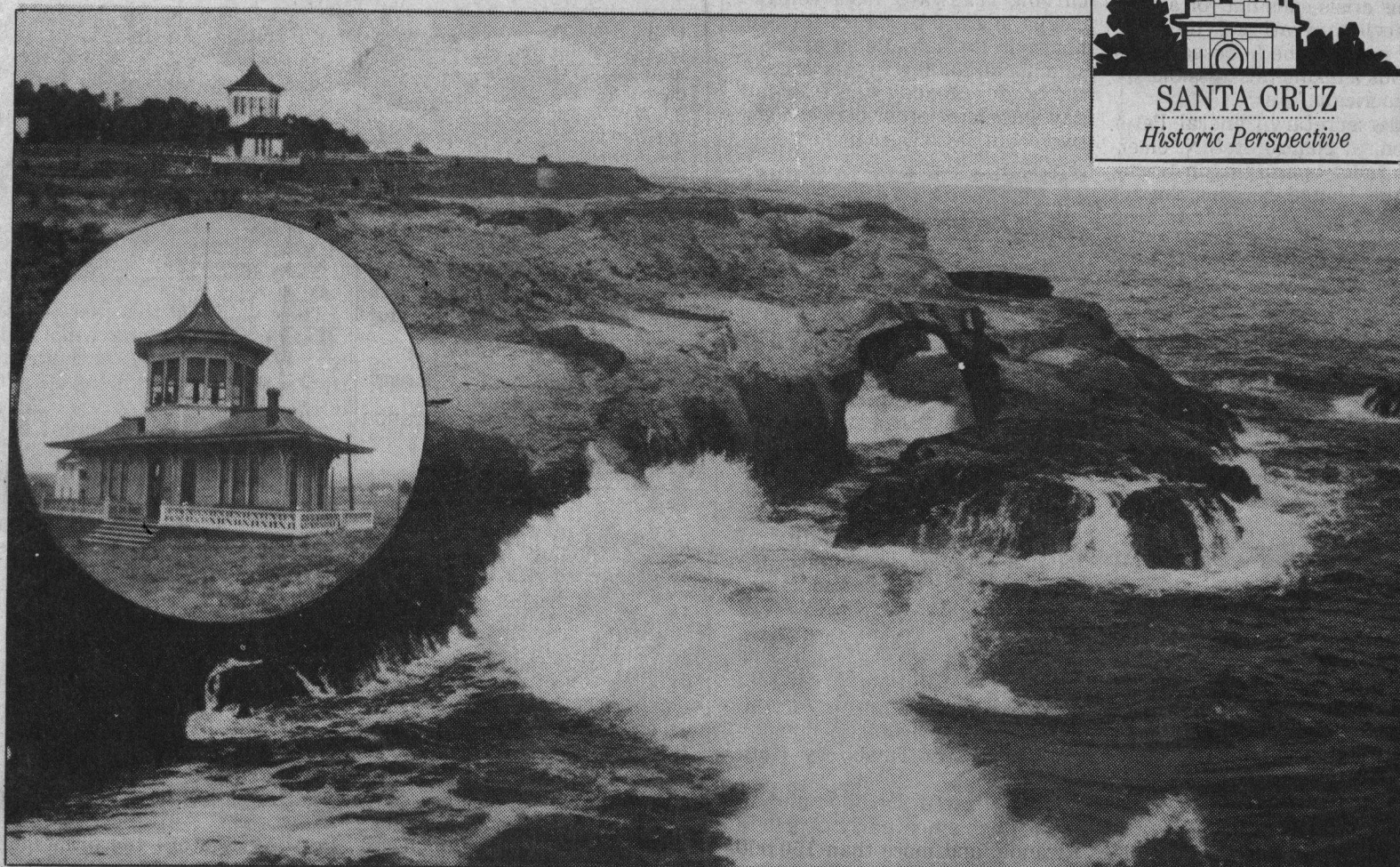
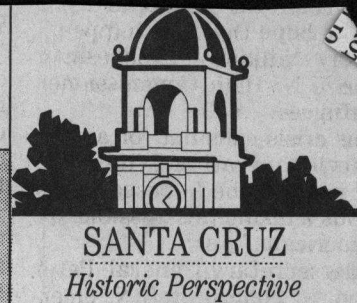


CASINO Sights along the trolley route

SJMN 7-28-94



R.E. Gibson collection

A pagoda-like Cliff House was built at the trolley's cliff terminal on the barren coastline at Woodrow and West Cliff Drive.

Prototype for boardwalk casinos

Amusement park
built on West Cliff
to draw trolley riders

BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON
Special to the Mercury News

The first amusement park casino in Santa Cruz was built by Fred Swanton on West Cliff Drive and later served as the prototype for his boardwalk casinos of 1904 and 1907. Yet Swanton came into the amusement business by accident — he was trying to attract business for his new trolley line.

In 1883, the then-21-year-old Swanton brought Santa Cruz one of the West's pioneer telephone companies and with his father co-founded the Swanton House hotel (where the main post office is today). In 1889 he brought electricity to Santa Cruz, and in the 1890s he founded Big Creek Powder Company and the Santa Cruz Oil Company.

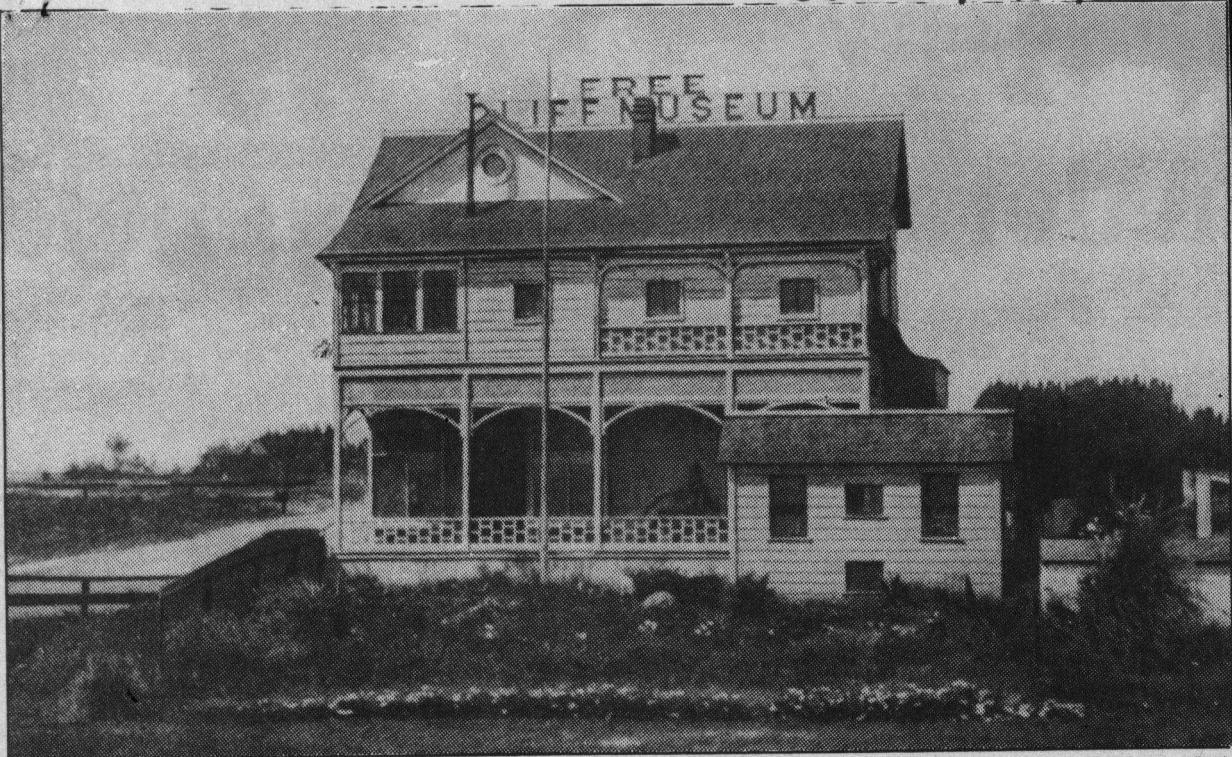
In 1890, after establishing his electric company, Swanton wanted to build an electric trolley line. He found a partner in James Phil-



R.E. Gibson collection

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The West Cliff Casino, built along the trolley route, offered games and amusement but no gambling.



R.E. Gibson collection

The Free Cliff Museum featured a live monkey, caged birds and sea-related exhibits.

The forerunner of boardwalks was a cliff-side casino, park

■ HISTORY

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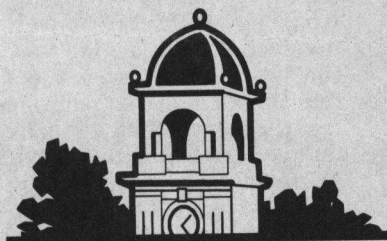
ip Smith, a New York millionaire who in 1889 converted the Kittedge Hotel on Beach Hill into his private mansion, called The Sunshine Villa. Smith was known as either "Silent Jim" or "Sunshine Jim."

When their trolley plans were ready in 1891, the Santa Cruz City Council worried that the project was too experimental and refused to grant right-of-way on Pacific Avenue.

Instead, Swanton built his trolley to run up Mission Street and down Younglove, to end on a barren coastline at Woodrow and West Cliff Drive. In only seven months the electric trolley was in full operation, with blue and cream painted cars, sporting blue-glass transoms, cupolas set with jeweled stained-glass friezes and metal destination pendants. A pagoda-like Cliff House was built at the cliff terminal, with an observation tower for viewing Light-house Point, the natural bridges and the water.

The electric trolley convinced the city council to grant Swanton right-of-way on Pacific Avenue. The West Side trolley was the first successful electric trolley west of the Mississippi . . . but it was a trolley to nowhere. The line ran from West Cliff to Garfield Park Tabernacle, whose Christian campground was laid out in circular roads.

To attract riders, Swanton built



SANTA CRUZ

Historic Perspective

a Trolley Park by the Cliff House.

Swanton built first-class attractions in keeping with West Cliff Drive's image at the time as "Millionaire's Row" and "the Newport of the Pacific." He named the park Vue de l'Eau, meaning "view of the sea" in French. Swanton published sheet music called "The Cliff House of Vue de l'Eau," which described in song the Trolley Park's attractions, and included trolley schedule information on the cover.

Plans called for a Del Monte-style "Surfside Hotel" to stretch along the coast from David Way to the creek by Woodrow Avenue, but it was never built. Instead, the Free Cliff Museum sat beside this creek, featuring a live monkey and caged birds. Its sea-related exhibits included souvenirs made of local seashells and pressed seaweed.

At the corner of Woodrow and Pelton streets rose the giant West Cliff Casino, which referred not to gambling but to games and amusements. Downstairs was a restaurant, soda fountain, and

penny arcade. Upstairs was a ballroom with a curved ceiling. Wide verandas ringed the casino, with dining on the upper deck.

The verandas overlooked Vue de l'Eau Athletic Park, which stretched from Woodrow to Columbia and from Pelton to Delaware streets. Here the trolley-sponsored team The Electrics played baseball, with "Electra" in Greek gowns as the team mascot. In 1895, Smith built a bicycle velodrome track around the field as part of his personally financed Venetian Water Carnival.

In 1905, the Norris and Rowe Circus chose Vue de l'Eau as its winter quarters and laid out its menagerie as Norris and Rowe Zoo at one end of the park. They added a new circus wagon to their collection, with a carved medallion of the nearby Cliff House and natural bridges, framed by classical dolphins and fish-tailed stallions.

The Cliff House burned in 1925, and a sea-cleft has eroded into the site. In the 1980s, it was suggested that instead of filling the cleft with boulders, it should be walled in as a basement for a new Cliff House museum. This followed the "museum without walls" concept of a series of small museums and kiosks to spread exhibits throughout the city.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a weekly history column for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.