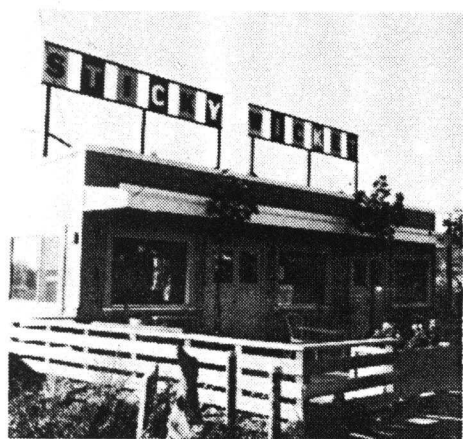


Bus-5 A TRIBUTE TO THE STICKY WICKET



The Sticky Wicket

Santa Cruz County has developed an inordinate pride in its cultural assortments. Here we have the enticing confections of whimsy and eclectic genius—avant garde theatre, original poetry, films and art; Shakespeare-on-the-lawn and symphonious notes of unrivaled composition. We tend to believe this is all due to the innate creative talent of the region itself; this is, after all, such a nice place to be inspired. We forget that a mere quarter-century ago this little chunk of the bay was totally prepubescent in its refinements; the only eggheads were in Live Oak hatcheries and the word “culture” had something to do with Watsonville farming.

Our maturity in artistic taste must be credited to two institutions without which we would still regard the Mystery Spot as a great source of community pride. These rescuers are, unsurprisingly, the halls of higher learning: Cabrillo College and UCSC.

Before Cabrillo was approved in the 1958 bond election, our favorite attractions were strictly the five-and-dime, pageant parade variety. Once the campus was established, however, young people tended to stay here longer and the census reflected a larger population of teachers and other professionals who possessed a sense of style and refinement. One of the college's first goals was to whet the county's growing appetite for artistic stimulation.

There is one preambulatory note to Cabrillo's success. The inspiration for its most successful projects came initially from some pretty off-beat sources. One of these just happened to be an English coffee house.

“Escape,” said the matchbook cover advertising the Sticky Wicket. And to it they did escape—here was a place unlike any other the county had known. It reeked with originality. Set just off the highway at Mar Vista Drive in Aptos, the building was painted a shocking pink. Inside, customers huddled against knotty pine walls decorated with abstracts by local artists. They chatted by the flames of many-hued candles dripping over Chianti bottles. They slurped espresso “Mocha Delicado,” or sipped at “Guava Nectar,” beer or wine. On weekends, a guitar-strumming waiter named Dick Bailey sang the lyrics of the Kingston Trio or Burl Ives.

How did the Sticky Wicket get to Aptos, and where did it go? The story is legend for patrons of the arts.

In June, 1958, a Londoner named Vic Jowers and his wife, Sidney, opened a Santa Cruz restaurant with the Sticky Wicket name. It served no hot meals, beer or wine, because it was too close to a church for a liquor license, and it had no kitchen.

“We served some mediocre sandwiches,” Jowers once said. “In fact, some bloody awful sandwiches.”

As one might guess, business was less than brisk. When the joint closed that May, the couple tried again at Aptos.

They took with them an odd blend of interests. She had been a physics teacher (they met at Haverford College, Philadelphia, where he failed the course), and he had recently done a stint as a reporter on the *Sentinel*.

The impetuous flavor of the Sticky Wicket attracted folks of all ages. Its notoriety as a beat coffee house brought out the curious—and then a strange thing happened; people from Watsonville mingled at last with those from Santa Cruz. They actually talked to each other. They listened to

the tunes of the stereophonic phonograph; they browsed in the reading room filled with paperbacks ranging from James Joyce to Jules Pfeiffer. There was even a book on “How to Read.”

Eventually, the “New Vic Theatre” was founded with plays, jazz concerts and improvisation held outdoors on warm nights.

The potential grew with the Sticky Wicket's popularity. Regulars included composers Lou Harrison, Robert Hughes and Ken Harrison. They met other locals such as Manny Santana, Sue Struck and Hal Hyde (one of the original Cabrillo board members). And from these friendships sprang the inspiration for what is now the county's best known institution and classic event—the Cabrillo Music Festival.

It is ironic that while the Sticky Wicket gave life to the college's cultural expression, Cabrillo itself was indirectly responsible for the restaurant's demise.

To appease the residents of both north and south county, a site for Cabrillo College was to be picked in between. The B.J. Porter Estate between the highway and the foothills was chosen. Once the campus was built, the status of the highway changed from limited access to a freeway. In a million dollar improvement program, two overpasses were constructed at Park Avenue and State Park Drive to ease the flow of traffic into the college.

Mar Vista Drive no longer connected with Highway 1. No one could make that quick turn to the Sticky Wicket. The business was killed by a chain link fence.

The coffee house closed in 1962. Jowers returned briefly to newspaper reporting before he himself became afflicted with a rare blood disorder, Aplastic Anemia, and died on Nov. 15, 1967. He was 39.

Today there is a memorial scholarship at Cabrillo College given in his name.

—Carolyn Swift