

Reminiscences of Seabright: Excerpts

By Elizabeth M.C. Forbes

[About Miss Forbes: In Seabright, near Santa Cruz, lives Miss Forbes, a cousin of Sir Archibald Forbes, who is a shining light as a real estate woman dealer of that section of the country. Miss Forbes, like all brainy people, is exceeding individual, and is celebrated for a keen wit and ready tongue. In appearance she looks and dresses like a man. She has short, gray hair, wears a nondescript sort of a garment, clumping boot in memory of her beloved England, but is possessed of great magnetism and is very attractive. Threatened with consumption in England, she came to Arizona, lived on a pony for two years in the open air, has entirely recovered her health, and become a justly celebrated 'business woman' as well."]

Early History of Seabright

The history of this portion of the county dates from Thomas Pilkington—father of J. A. Pilkington, T. B. Pilkington and Mrs. Gray—who bought squatter rights after securing United States patents. His land extended from what is now known as Pine Street to the bay and from the ravine to the river. Mr. Pilkington came to California from Mexico, where he had in 1841 established the first calico printing establishment, that having been his business in England. On the breaking out of the Mexican war he entered the American army under Gen. Scott and served as interpreter and quartermaster. After the war was ended he rode horseback across Mexico and took boat to San Francisco, arriving in 1849. He built Camp Alhambra about 1880, and ran it himself two years, when he leased it to Captain Hall and his daughter, Mrs. Green, for seven years, after which it was divided into building lots and sold.



Seabright, circa 1890–1899. A horsecar, passing Wood's Lagoon (now the Yacht Harbor) on Atlantic Avenue. From the Library's collection.

My first recollection of Seabright was in the early eighties, when what is now known as Seabright was open field and Camp Alhambra was the only place of resort between Santa Cruz and Capitola. Camp Alhambra was a long, low building in a large grove of cypress trees, extending over what is now known as Pilkington and Alhambra streets. Numbers of small cottages were built among the trees, and in those days people did not require the modern conveniences without which they seem now unable to come to the seashore. Quite distinguished people came, among them Professor King of the San Jose Conservatory of Music, who brought his piano, and, as his cottage was too small to accommodate it, had the front of the wooden case on hinges so he could practice out of doors. The Caledonian Club used also to come from San Francisco every year, bringing with them their pipers. At night the Caledonians would assemble around a large bonfire, the pipers marching among the trees, the evening interspersed with song and story, and ending with "Auld Lang

Syne." It was quite lively till one unlucky night, when a W.C.T.U. enthusiast did the "Carrie Nation" act. The clans without the whisky, of course, could not exist, and the Caledonians marched away, never to return.

Things were primitive in those days; no road except a lane on the hill above the river, then gates thru Mr. Pilkington's farmyard; no water except what we pumped from a well at Camp Alhambra. I had a barrel on a sled, and drove over for water two or three times a week. Tenants then were a good natured class, and always helped in the pumping. About that time other houses were built, notably the one of Drs. Morgan and Lyons. Soon after they came one of their patients, a Scotch lady, gave birth to a son; and as every event in those days interested the neighbors, a grand reception to the youngster was planned and a pretty pin presented to fasten his little bib. In gratitude thereof the parents gave a grand christening, and the unfortunate child was burdened with the name of "Clifton Lorenzo," as well as the ancestral Scottish names necessary to his well being. I wonder if he is still alive.

F.M. Mott, another forty-niner, bought twelve acres of Mr. Doane, who in turn had purchased from Mr. Woods, the latter having acquired government patent. Mr. Mott laid out Seabright in the early eighties, giving it its name from Seabright, N.J. He built the hall for the amusement of himself and his old-time friends, Seabrighters of course, but outsiders did not go to the hall without a standing invitation. We on the east cliff were among the fortunate ones. Whist was played in the evening, there was dancing by the young folks, and at 10 p.m. taps. Before the building of the hall we used to have large bonfires on the beach, there being unlimited quantities of driftwood. Stump speeches and songs were the entertainment, and some of the speeches were very clever. Mr. Mott put up a windmill and tank and supplied his colony with water. [pp. 3–5]

How the Road from the Beach to Twin Lakes Came to Pass

About this time the dwellers on the east cliff decided that it was time for them to have a more direct road to Santa Cruz, and numerous meetings were held to devise ways and means. The first thing was to purchase the right of way down the hill to the foot of the Ocean Villa property. This was done by the property owners on the cliff assessing themselves on each lot and so raising the amount required. Mr. Kimble, who owned the land where Twin Lakes now is, became very much interested, and offered to build the bridge across the Woods lagoon at his own expense. Mr. Hihn offered \$250 for each bridge we would build. T. B. Pilkington donated the right of way along the cliff west of the Seabright beach. Every one gave liberally. Some citizens, notably L. K. Baldwin and Z. Karner, offered the money without solicitation. When the road was finished to what is now Twin Lakes we had a grand picnic, and all the contributors processed over it and gave their opinion that they had received the worth of their money. One old pioneer of Santa Cruz by the name of Judge Rice expressed himself as very much disgusted at the opening of new roads and pleasure drives. Every one then had horses and any excuse for an outing was eagerly seized, so it was determined that the judge should be taken for a drive over the new road. Being always ready for a lark, he fell in with the idea, and quite a number of the old settlers agreed to accompany him. Mrs. Raymond was to go as historian and Miss Carrie Anderson to illustrate the journey. The meeting place was Beach Hill, where the judge arrived, gotten up regardless of expense, and with a livery stable carriage and horses. We had lots of fun, and ended up with a grand picnic dinner at my cottage. It was a gala day. Alfred Imus cooked delicious beefsteak over the coals in the fireplace, and Uriah Thompson helped bravely in the cooking. [pp. 6–7]

The Accommodating Street-Car; Miss Forbes as a Purveyor of Scenery; How Private Road Became Public

Mr. Ely felt that the time was ripe for a street car. Subscriptions were raised all along the line, but Mr. Mott objected, saying that Seabright people were "carriage folk" and did not need street cars. But the street car came—a leisurely conveyance which required the rest cure very often and sometimes for months at a time. And as to coming out at night, it would not unless you made arrangements beforehand and guaranteed a certain sum for the trip—and even then it was uncertain. But when you did get it, it was a very accommodating street-car. If you wanted to buy anything along the

road or talk to a passing neighbor the horse and the driver were equally willing to wait until your bargain or your gossip was finished. "Mañana" was the motto in those days.

While Mr. Ely was still in control of the car service he had built a street-car engine which was quite unique. It resembled a large black box. It had, if I remember, a stovepipe. Quantities of sparks used to come out from it, and the noise it made in running was something terrific. Horses seeing and hearing it, took to the tall timber, leaving their drivers scattered.

I, among others, remonstrated with Mr. Ely, who told me that if my horse objected I had better get another, as he did not purpose to spend so much money for a machine only to listen to the objections of horses—or I suppose he would have liked to have added, asses. But soon the supervisors objected, and the fearful contraption was retired to private life. Having an exceptionally good horse, I thought I could make money pleasantly by taking tourists out driving and showing them the beauties of the county. Mrs. Judah, mother of the San Francisco railroad official, was remarkably kind in directing a nice class of people to me. I had, however, some funny experiences.

A friend of my old friend Miss Lennebacker came out to stay with her. Miss Lennebacker placed her in my charge to show her everything worth seeing. The lady had cousins living in my old neighborhood in Canada, so I had additional reason to be very anxious to enthuse her about California. I took her to the Big Trees and around the cliff drive; also to our prettiest canyon scenery—but she did not enthuse worth a cent. All her remark was, "It's very nice"; until one fortunate day when we drove down the hill by the winery, when she rose in the buggy and exclaimed, "What a beautiful field of pumpkins! I never saw finer."

Another amusing experience was with an old lady from Honolulu, who, with her son, two granddaughters, an English and French governess and a retinue of Kanaka servants, was staying at the Peakes house. A message was sent asking me to take the old lady for a drive. When I arrived there was quite a grand procession; Mr. Peakes came first, then the old lady leaning on the arm of her son, then the granddaughters, then the two governesses, and in the rear the Kanaka servants. The gentleman asked me to take every care of his mother and to show her the fine views of Santa Cruz. So, thinking the finest and most comprehensive view was from Judge Logan's, I drove her up there, going by the reservoir. When we arrived I said, "I hope you were not nervous coming up the grade." She put her hand on my knee and said with such an air, "My dear, I have never opened my eyes since I left the Peakes house." Such were some of my experiences in showing off the beauties of our scenery.

My driving people about led to an increase of settlement on the east cliff even before the road was made, and to some of these we owe in great measure the making of the road. Mrs. Brutschy, Mrs. Eshbach and Mrs. Nettie Murray were among our first settlers, and were foremost in all the improvements planned and carried out. Mrs. Murray was one of those big hearted, generous Irish women, with a sense of the ridiculous which made a go of anything she undertook.

As I look back at the building of the road from East Cliff to Santa Cruz there were very many amusing things connected with it. There was an entire absence of red tape. Mrs. Green and I collected the money, E. H. Robinson and Captain Hall were managing directors, and Mr. Hihn and Mr. Kimble and everybody else consulting engineers and advisory committee. Two or three snags we ran up against with regard to right of way. Some of the committee would say, "If I see that person I'll arrange matters satisfactorily." Those of us who had tried were anxious they should make the attempt. At the next meeting, he or she would return with feathers laid. The meetings were quite informal and whenever two or three were gathered together. When the road was finished the county refused to accept it, till one fortunate day when a washout took place at Arana Gulch and John Jarvis, the supervisor at that time, told us they must use our road. He was informed that unless the county accepted it a gate would be put on the Woods lagoon bridge. And so it became county property, fortunately for us, as the following year a big freshet carried away part of the bridge at the foot of the Ocean Villa, as well as part of the road on the bank of the river. [pp. 9–12]

Sources

- *Description of Miss Forbes: "Business Women of California," by Lucy Baker Jerome. Overland Monthly. January 1905. p. 64.*
- *Article excerpted from Reminiscences of Seabright by Elizabeth M. C. Forbes.*

The content of this article is the responsibility of the individual author. It is the Library's intent to provide accurate local history information. However, it is not possible for the Library to completely verify the accuracy of individual articles obtained from a variety of sources. If you believe that factual statements in a local history article are incorrect and can provide documentation, please contact the Webmaster.