

History

The Germans liked their beer

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SANTA Cruz was a strict temperance town from its early Yankee beginnings. Elihu Anthony, the Methodist circuit rider preacher, set the tone when he preached some of the town's earliest Protestant sermons in the 1840s.

But, as is often the case, the community was made up of individuals who had ideas of their own. The earliest European settlers — the Franciscan padres, Spaniards and Mexicans — enjoyed their convivial glass of wine and sometimes a nip of something stronger. And not all the Yankee settlers who came later agreed with Elihu.

Little one-horse "stills" sprang up like toadstools in the redwoods from time to time. (They were more formally referred to as distilleries.) The San Lorenzo Valley had its share as late as the Prohibition era of the 1900s; distilleries thrived in the mountain areas.

In earlier days, Isaac Graham operated his first still at Natividad, then moved it to the Zayante area of the San Lorenzo Valley. However, in spite of Santa Cruz's later temperance atmosphere, a number of saloons and beer gardens flourished to quench the thirst of a number of local citizens.

One of the most popular beer gardens bloomed "under the apple tree" down on lower Pacific Avenue, near Beach Hill. It was named "The Cottage Saloon"

and there really was an apple tree right by the front door.

Carl Beck and a partner operated this business to which they added a beer garden and bowling alley. The building, a white painted cottage, looked innocent enough to house somebody's granny and perhaps it had before it became a beer garden and saloon. The building had two entrances, one with the traditional swinging doors for the macho crowd, the other a regular door which opened into what was called "the sitting room." Probably it was for the more conservative businessman who got as thirsty as the rest of them but preferred peace and quiet with a degree of gentility while he downed his liquid refreshment.

Wine was advertised at 40 cents a gallon. A glass of wine or beer was five cents. Yes — that's what it was.

Beer gardens were just that, copied from the traditional German models. They featured an outdoor garden with flower beds, sometimes trees, tables and chairs and latticed summer houses. Some also had a dance platform and musicians, accordion players were popular — they called them concertinas, too.

Beck's Cottage even had a watering trough out front near the apple tree where the thirsty horses of his thirsty customers could quench their thirst while waiting.

When Beck first arrived from Germany he worked for Henry Bausch, another German brewer who had settled in Santa Cruz.



Theo Beck perched on a beer barrel for this view of his registered distillery on Granite Creek Road.

Before long, however, Beck started his own business, married and had several children. A son, Herb Beck, became an active civic figure in Santa Cruz for many years.

Beck Sr. also operated his own brewery on Market Street, then considered out on the far edge of town. He called it the Big Trees Brewery.

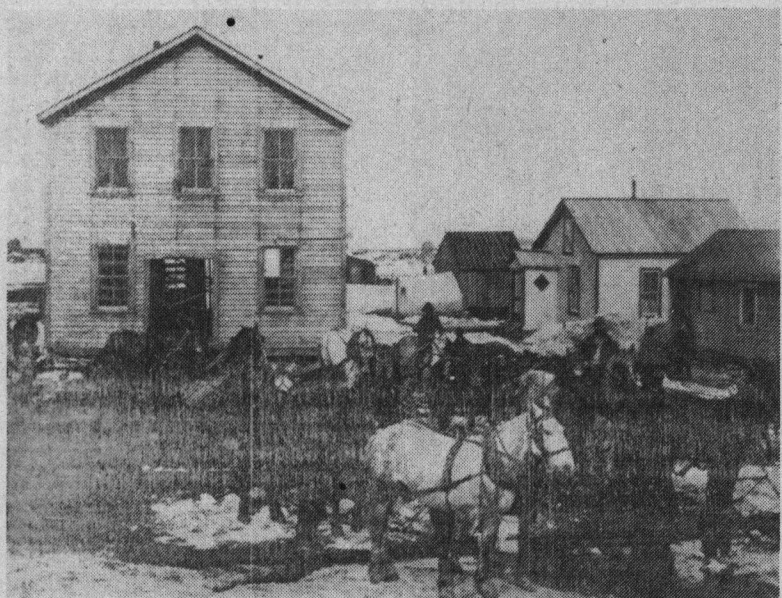
Breweries were visited regularly by members of temperance families, too, but not for imbibing. On Saturday mornings numerous youngsters could be seen walking to one or another of the town's several beer establishments with pails in hand. The pails were filled with brewer's yeast; the young errand boys then trotted home with it so Mom could bake the family's bread.

The Cottage saloon thrived from the 1880s and '90s. In later years the cottage was moved from the site by teams of horses shown in the photo from the collection of Lila Dowell Ricketts, a native Santa Cruzan who now lives in Arkansas.

Speaking of changes, note the two photographs accompanying this story. The glimpse of bare sandy hill behind the building being moved by horses today is Bay Street, lined with homes.

The other photo shows Theo Beck, another member of the family, at his registered distillery out on Granite Creek Road. There was a difference — a big difference — between a "still" and a distillery. One was illegal, the other was legal. They both made whiskey, and the end result was about the same.

A glance at history



Teams of horses provided the power when Carl Beck's Cottage Saloon moved from its lowr Pacific Avenue location.