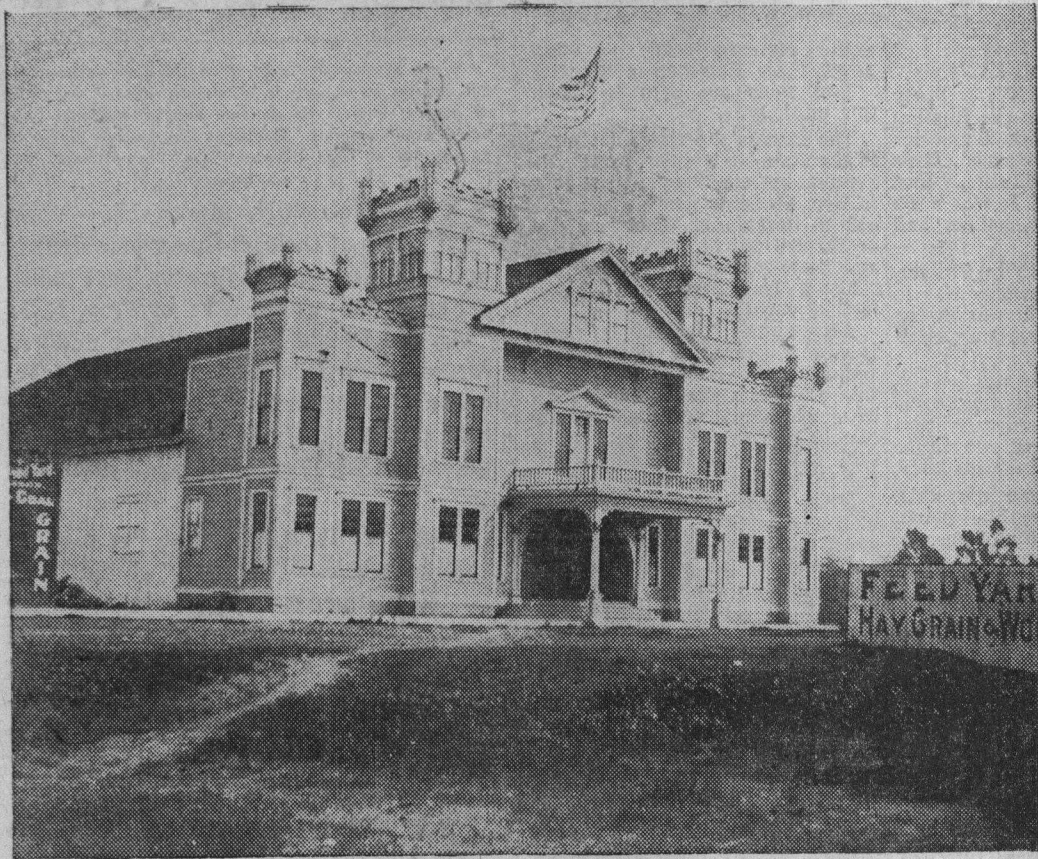


# SANTA CRUZ YESTERDAYS



THE OLD (NAVAL RESERVE) ARMORY, FRONT ST. (From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

Back in the early 1880's Soquel avenue at Front street bore little resemblance to the same spot today.

To begin with, Front street stopped short there. Naught but a jungle of willows, maples and underbrush cluttered the scene, from there to where Cathcart street joins Front today. Along the river was a similar "jungle."

The town's pride, the long covered bridge, by this time had been serving an ever-growing flow of traffic for a half dozen years. It was a well appreciated convenience for many to be able to travel out the Soquel road directly, without first heading north to Water street to cross the San Lorenzo river.

For many years Santa Cruz has been known as a city of flowers. Almost every magazine article printed in national magazines then on the subject of this community dwelt at some length upon the floral profusion and variety, in spite of enthusiastic praise of seashore and mountain attractiveness also.

## Fair Pavilion

It was only fitting then, that Santa Cruz should hold an annual flower show. To build what was to house the annual Rose Fair, first held in 1883, the Fair Building association was formed. They built a large pavilion at approximately the present southwest corner of Soquel and Front, facing north.

The "fair pavilion" became

what could be called the civic auditorium of that early day. Many great affairs were held there, such as holiday celebrations, political gatherings, rallies and grand balls.

Come 1895, with Front street freshly cut through to Cathcart, or as a part of the process, the great structure (100x150 ft.) was shunted backward in an arc, to rest on Front street, facing west. Much of it was supported by piling in its new location, with its "back yard" the San Lorenzo riverbank.

Here it received its turreted front and became the "Armory," when the local company of naval reserves became tenants. It was the scene of sporting and political events, merchants' fairs, etc., plus sporting events and was a "drill ground" for the "sailors."

## Had Many Uses

It was the official center for local registration for the World War I draft, and later for physical examinations of new service men. In 1911 (July) a memorable event was the "inauguration" of

George W. Stone as Mayor of Santa Cruz, by the then Governor of California, Hiram W. Johnson. The ceremony on the Armory platform was witnessed by a terrific crowd of Santa Cruzans.

For 37 years the Armory was the main uptown public gathering place.

Before daylight on the morning of Friday, January 16, 1920, most of the town was awakened by the clarion call of the old firebell. Crowds came from all directions, many choosing the old covered bridge as their vantage point, to watch the well-known structure go up in flame and smoke.

The conflagration lasted something over an hour, starting at 2 a.m., providing one of the larger fires of the past. When daylight came, all that remained upright was a small section of the northwest corner of the Armory.

Prominent in today's fine "portrait" of the historic old gathering place is the fancy "front porch," and the posts which contributed to its downfall, when a large horse-drawn truck tangled therewith. Sufficient damage was caused to bring the decision to do away with the porch entirely about 1897.