

Old Santa Cruz

• • • By Ernest Otto

Some holidays, and some days which were not holidays, always stand out in the memories of students at the old Mission school. One of the greatest of the latter days was the visit of Governor George C. Perkins of California.

Dressed in his Prince Albert coat, the governor stood at the top of the stairs at the girls' entrance, surrounded by the trustees, the faculty and the principal as the children, in line according to class, march up to shake his hand. Each child carried flowers with the bouquets being put in a clothes basket. Each boy and girl felt highly honored to shake the governor's hand.

The smallest child, Dollie Jarvis, a daughter of George Jarvis and a sister of Robert Jarvis who now lives on Lincoln street, was lifted in the governor's arms and kissed affectionately by the state's top executive. That was about 70 years ago.

The week long racing season was a great time, especially for the boys. The races were held at the end of Swift street near the ocean on a track which was considered one of the smoothest and best in this section. The opening of the season always meant a dwindling attendance on the part of the boys, as most of them played truant or "hookey" as it was called then.

A racing season marked the first time the writer ever played hookey.

He remembers jumping to the rear of a carriage carrying passengers to the racing. At the entrance to the fence which surrounded the one-mile track, the extra riders jumped off the carriage and climbed a board leaning against the fence. Boys on top of the fence would reach down and give a helping hand to those climbing, assisting them in rising to the top from which they would jump down to the inside between the grandstand and the horse barns.

Once inside, the truants would gather along the track's railing near the judges' stand where the bell clanged for the start of the races. Both running and trotting races were on the program, and the jockeys and drivers were bright in their varicolored jackets of satin.

The schoolboys would gather around the long bars where bets were placed and then would be chased away because they interfered with the bettors.

The Dario Amaya family, noted Santa Cruzans, were in charge of the tamale concession at the racing and were busy peddling their wares from baskets.

Memorial Day, then known as Decoration Day, brought a parade in which nearly every school student participated, usually with several hundred of them bringing up the rear, each carrying a bouquet or loose flowers and marching more than a mile to the Odd Fellows cemetery where they paraded over the entire cemetery, scattering flowers on the graves. The students marched to the music of the Dead March from Saul, with the sombre music adding a serious note to the parade.

It is likely that Circus day was the most welcome for the schools which closed after the morning recess to allow children to watch the parade led by the band playing from a lofty red and golden bandwagon.

Some boys played hookey for the short morning session, arising about 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning to watch the arrival of the circus train and climbing the canvas covered wagons to peek at the wild animals. These boys later would get jobs carrying water for the elephants or doing some other work.

The writer and a chum, Jim Shaughnessy, on their way to school, were offered the job of carrying water to the steam calliope. We thought it a wonderful job as the man who hired us permitted us to ride in the parade with him on the calliope, escorted us to the sideshow, arranged for us to go to the big show, got us tickets for the night performance. We thought we were the luckiest boys in town, even though we did play hookey.

Even a Chinese funeral was a big occasion in those days. They usually passed the Mission Hill school as school was being dismissed. The transfer wagon headed the cortege, loaded with the clothes, bedding, the bed planks and all the belongings of the departed. All were burned and none were touched except by a cousin who was in charge. Once this writer saw a \$5 gold piece, in use then before the days of paper currency in the west, roll from a pocket of the brocaded silk blouse of the dead man. A schoolboy snatched it up and no Chinese even asked for it. They were superstitious.

When a Chinese of any standing died, a brown package with red papers covered with black hieroglyphics was placed on the grave. Once, the writer remembers an unroasted goat skinned with the horns left on, was placed on the grave. Always there were chickens, with legs and heads still on. There were sweetmeats, and the smell of burning incense, red candles, paper representing clothing and money, all a part of the ceremony of the kneeling worshippers.

The writer remembers asking a Chinese if the dead could eat the food and being asked in turn: "You put flowers on the grave, do the dead smell them?"

Just before the firecrackers were exploded at the Chinese funerals, each present received a silver half dime and bar of Chinese sugar candy. This was the most attractive part of the ceremony for the visitors, most of whom followed the procession for just this reason.

The Chinese New Year's celebration was another attraction for the boys as soon as school was dismissed. Here again they were given or grabbed candy. And they would learn when the next explosion of fireworks was scheduled.

The boys would listen for hours to the three piece Chinese band, composed of the barrel covered with deerskin which was used as a drum, the brass gong and the brass cymbals, nearly three feet across.

And these were only a few of the things, the boys of that day used to enjoy—all of them strange to the boys of today.

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