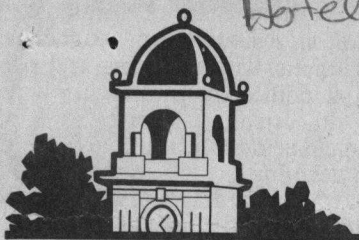


Hotels and Boarding
Houses SJMA AUG 22, 1995



SANTA CRUZ

Historic Perspective



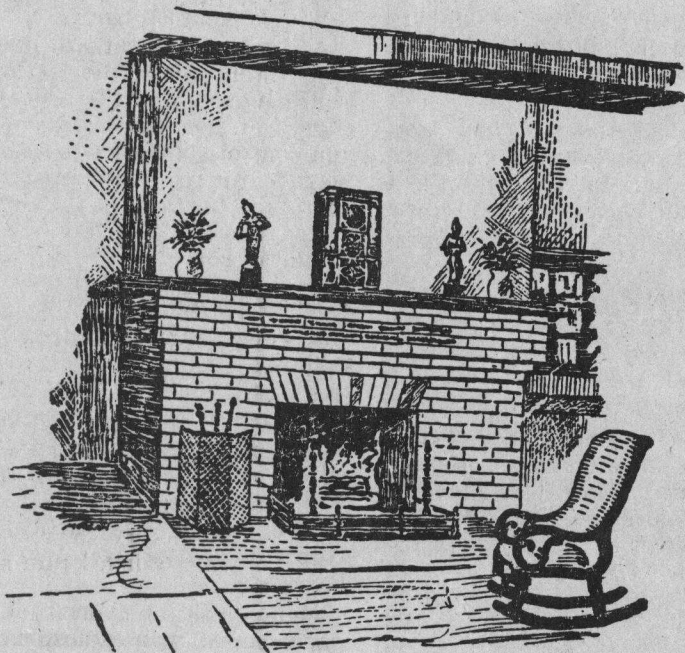
BEACH HILL INN

Santa Cruz inn was hideaway for film stars, world leaders

BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON

Special to the Mercury News

A MAJOR LANDMARK that fell swiftly from public memory was the Beach Hill Inn, a rambling "seven gables-style" seamen's inn, at the northeast corner of Main and Second streets atop Beach Hill. It was a last reminder of the old waterfront in Santa Cruz, when sailors and dock workers served the mast-



ROSS ERIC GIBSON COLLECTION

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The Beach Hill Inn was originally a sailors' boarding house.

Beach Hill Inn had modest start

In 1912, a Pasadena woman bought inn and transformed it into showcase

■ HISTORY

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ed ships filling the port.

After the turn of the century, this modest workingmen's boarding house was acclaimed a "world renowned resort," and "popular hideaway for Hollywood stars, and visiting royalty."

The junction of Main and Second streets had been the busy entrance to the 1863-vintage Steamship Wharf that arched over Beach Street. The wharf and two large warehouses were removed in 1882, eliminating freight traffic and revealing a panorama of coast and mountains. In 1884, retired pilot Zachariah DeVoe built a two-story, nine-room home there for \$3,000, in whitewashed Greek Vernacular style. Lacking a pension, he boarded sailors in the spare rooms, as did his wife, Sarah, after his death in 1898.

In 1912, the first-class Sea-Beach Hotel burned down just across the intersection from the DeVoe House. Alice Porter, a Pasadena innkeeper, decided she could provide quality rooms on Beach Hill, with the same view, to take advantage of the sudden room shortage caused by the loss of the hotel. She purchased the DeVoe House, enlarged it to 40 rooms, and renamed it the Beach Hill Inn.

She decorated the modest rooms in the style of historic seaside inns, furnished with antiques. The effect was quite rich, but antiques were actually the cheaper way to go. Some were family heirlooms from her great-grandmother's Southern plantation. Some came from Mexican bazaars, collected when she lived in Pasadena. Most were bought from local junkmen as second-hand furniture. Yet her furnishings were praised as "one of the finest single collections of rare antiques on the Pacific Coast."

She had furnishings from Gen. Jose Castro, military governor of California; Gen. Mariano Vallejo, last Mexican gov-

ernor of California; and J.V. De Laveaga, the Mexican philanthropist of Santa Cruz. All the main rooms had beamed ceilings and redwood trim. The lobby had a massive river stone fireplace, oak staircase, and blue and wheat colored tapestry wallpaper.

The music room offered sweeping ocean views, and a sandstone fireplace decorated with a menorah. The room featured a harpsichord, melodeon, harmonium and large German music box. As a graduate of the San Jose music conservatory, Porter gave concerts for her guests, with fellow musicians Lena Duthie of Scotland and Irma Sheehan. Dances were held. A solarium led to the 100-seat mission-oak Dixie Diner, named to highlight the Southern cooking of its all-black staff.

Every guest room was different, furnished in Spanish, New England, French, or Victorian style. The inn had a homey quality, with a billiard room and library, tennis and a putting green in the landscaped garden. It was only a block from Cliff Street, which had the beach and boardwalk at one end, and at the other end the stairs to the river for fishing or boating. Porter opened an office in San Francisco to publicized the inn, keeping it booked during the winter as well.

This was a remarkable achievement for a frail young woman who only six years earlier left home with her horse and a cow, seeking a better climate for her health. She was excluded from all the local men-only business clubs. Several neighbors lodged nuisance complaints to try and close her inn down, and she had difficulty of producing witnesses, none local, who could praise how the inn was managed. She invited city council members to be her guests, and they went away impressed.

Her low profile turned into one of her greatest assets when Hollywood discovered the inn in 1916 during the shooting of a movie in town.

Picturesque Santa Cruz

"Where Sea and Mountain Meet"

AND

Beach Hill Inn

Santa Cruz, California



Open the Year Round

The Only Hotel Overlooking the Beach

ROSS ERIC GIBSON COLLECTION

This 1921 brochure for the Beach Hill Inn advertised its delights.

Actors and directors found that the inn provided the perfect hideaway in the middle of things, without the prominence given to guests at the main hotels. Movie stars came and went unannounced up through the 1950s.

During the San Francisco conference to establish the United Nations, royalty, presidents and prime ministers took a break from the national spotlight to visit Beach Hill Inn.

In 1960, new owners demolished the inn, planning to build a seven-story skyscraper. Porter's antiques now draw tourists to Monterey, while the inn site remained free from development for 30 years.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a weekly history column for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.