

Wharf Celebration

THE 267-foot Roanoke bumped against the side of the new wharf as smaller steamers bobbed in the surf like corks under skies heavy with clouds. It was Dec. 5, 1914, the middle of the rainy season, but 3,000 spectators turned out to celebrate the dedication of the city's newest wharf.

Marjorie Dellamonica was 12 that

day. She and her mother were among those crowding the platform, gaping at the beautiful ship that had brought the first cargo to the city's waters, craning for a good look at the officers and local bigwigs who got off the vessel to attend the gala banquet in the wharf warehouse.

Her mother was frightened. "She thought the wharf would give way be-



Wharf Promoters Hoped For Major Seaport

Early pier attracted tourists with its shipping, fishing activity

by Sheila Schmitz

Continued from Cover

cause it was so crowded, and the great ship kept bumping against it," said Dellamonica, now 82. "But I was happy to see the ship. It was so beautiful." Seeing the Roanoke again reminded her of the times she and her family took the ship from Eureka to San Francisco on their way to visit her grandmother in San Jose.

Skip Littlefield, 78, also attended the dedication ceremony. "Everyone in town wandered out there at least once that day," he said. "The merchants closed shop uptown."

In the days when the road to San Jose was a dirt track, the wharf was the "life blood of the city," providing the bulk of the area's transportation needs and acting as a major receptacle

for the area's goods. "It was seen as an absolute necessity," Littlefield said.

The new wharf was the fifth and longest in Santa Cruz. The first, built by Elihu Anthony in 1853, was only a short chute for loading potatoes onto ships. It was replaced in 1856 with a 1,000-foot pier constructed by lime manufacturers A.P. Jordan and Isaac E. Davis. The Pleasure Pier, built in 1904 as part of the development of the first Casino and Boardwalk, was torn down in 1962. The fourth, known as the Railroad Wharf but largely dominated by fishermen, sat about 30 feet west of the current structure.

Today's wharf, a half-mile long platform engineered by Henry J. Brunnier (also an engineer for the Bay Bridge between San Francisco and Oakland), was built with the aid of a \$172,000 city bond issue. The longer, higher pier enabled deep-

water vessels to dock here for the first time and allowed the transference of cargo between ships and local trains. Special bracing was added to support Southern Pacific's railroad cars.

Fishermen made themselves at home between the rail cars and cargo ships. They left in their boats early in the morning, often hitting rough weather, sometimes forced to row for miles on late return trips. "It was a hard life," Littlefield said. He remembers "intense Latin conversation" at the wharf, one of his daily hangouts. The fishermen, descendants of Spanish, Portuguese and Italian people, shared a peculiar tongue — a hybrid of their three native languages. "We called it Waterfront Latin," Littlefield said.

Soon, the fishermen's activity became nearly as much a tourist attraction as the Boardwalk. But wharf promoters had higher expectations

for their new beachfront structure. They dreamed it would turn Santa Cruz into a seaport of significance.

Firing those hopes was the completion of the Panama Canal in the summer of 1914, which resulted in more traffic between the east and west coasts. Speculation that the federal government would finance a breakwater in the Northern Monterey Bay also raised expectations. But the breakwater never materialized, and the wharf's commercial fishermen and shipping interests never attained the success of promoters' dreams. Shipping declined, and in 1922, railroad service to the wharf ended. The last cargo ship left Santa Cruz waters in 1937.

Many of the fishermen and their sons served in the Navy and Coast Guard during World War II and when they returned, they found that most of the deep sea bass, halibut and

albacore that had been their livelihood were gone — "fished out," Littlefield said. The snapper today's fisherman seeks was considered garbage fish in the good days, he said. "You couldn't get two cents a pound for it then."

A small fleet of commercial fishing vessels continued to use the wharf for some years but moved to the new Santa Cruz Small Craft harbor in 1963.

Tourism at the wharf continued to grow, however, and slowly, the small coffee houses that catered to fishermen evolved into larger restaurants and gift shops, and commercial fishing boats gave way to sport fishing charters. By the 1960s, recreation was the major focus of wharf activity.

Today, the offspring of the old fishing families are still here, Littlefield said, "But they are out selling automobiles and insurance." •



The Italian, Portuguese and Spanish fishermen at the Santa Cruz waterfront spoke a hybrid dialect, a "Waterfront Latin."

This 1910 shot of the old wharf, which sat just west of the current structure, shows the huge deep sea bass and the kind of wharf activity that made the local waterfront an early tourist attraction