

# Capitola's architectural heritage

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The Capitola Village of yesterday can be seen in numerous houses and shops still in use today.

It's there in the beach cottages sprinkled throughout the city, in the more elegant homes on Depot Hill, in the Stockton Avenue bridge, the Capitola Wharf and the Southern Pacific Railroad Trestle.

Those structures are all included in a recently completed architectural survey now available in book form at Capitola City Hall. The book sells for \$8.

The survey was prompted as a way to bypass stringent federal flood-plain guidelines, which would have controlled reconstruction in the Village area. The city's plan was to create one officially designated "historic district" in the Village.

It was soon discovered, however, that remodeling and new construction rendered Capitola Village ineligible for that designation.

So the city settled for three smaller historic districts encompassing the Six Sisters houses and Lawn Way residences, the Venetian Court condominium/hotel complex adjacent to the Capitola Wharf, and about 60 homes and the railroad trestle in the old Riverview Avenue area along Soquel Creek.

No such designation was sought for Depot Hill, but that area is also eligible, said historical consultant Charles Rowe, of Rowe and



Ron Cockerille

House on Lincoln Street, built around 1900, included in architectural survey.

Associates, the Santa Cruz firm hired to conduct the survey.

With architectural historian Sara Boutelle and photographer Roger Hatheway, Rowe took a "walking tour" of Capitola to look for buildings to include in the survey.

It was an enjoyable experience, Boutelle said.

"Capitola is such a wonderful place," she said, "and anybody who gets involved in it gets intrigued and entranced by it."

The restaurants and cafes along The Esplanade all have a part in the city's historical past, she said, but the Bandstand is the most remarkable.

The restaurant took its name from the fact that there was once an actual bandstand on the spot, Boutelle said. Bands often played from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Those were the days when Camp Capitola vacationers arrived in town driving

teams of horses, she said. They could stable their horses for \$1 a month at the livery stables near the trestle.

Rowe said the 240 structures selected for the survey were constructed before 1935, with two exceptions. The Shadowbrook Restaurant and the Capitola Theater, both circa 1946, were included because of their local interest.

The cottages included in the survey are labeled "vernacular," which Rowe translated as being a style of construction particular to an area.

Many of Depot Hill's homes are cottages of a more elegant style than the humbler variety found in the flatlands, Rowe said.

Vernacular is the most common label found in the

CAPITOLA  
1980-1989

WATSONVILLE  
REGISTER-Pajaronian  
July 30, 1987



## Historic

Ron Cockerille

This unique house on Riverview Avenue is included in the Capitola Architectural Survey of historical sites. Constructed about 1920, the building, described as "vernacular," is on the site of the Camp Capitola Livery Stables.

survey, but there are also styles called "Eastlake Stick," "Moderne," "Spanish Colonial," "Victorian" and "Tudor."

The vernacular cottages date back to Frederick A.

Hihn's development of what are now the Depot Hill and Capitola Village areas into "Camp Capitola" in 1869, Rowe said.

The Riverview Avenue historic district "is one of the strongest representations of Capitola's vernacular architecture," he said.

Prior to development, Capitola was known as Soquel Landing. It consisted of little more than the Capitola Wharf, which was built around 1840 and is Capitola's oldest continuing landmark, with Hihn its earliest recorded owner.

Camp Capitola is recognized as California's first seaside resort community. It featured the 160-room Hotel Capitola and a number of cottages on land subdivided and sold by Hihn.

"It was born a resort community," Rowe said, "and that tradition continued through the (H. Allen) Rispin era.

"And that ended in 1929, 1930 with the burning of the Capitola Hotel to the ground," said Rowe.

Thus also ended the Roaring '20s era in Capitola, and the depression years began. Rispin lost everything in the stockmarket crash of 1929. His holdings were placed on the auction block, and Capitola ceased to be a company cottage town.

Capitola's year-round population in the 1920s averaged only about 500, Rowe said.

Many of the original Camp Capitola vacation cottages were eventually winterized though. By the time the city was incorporated in 1949, Rowe said, its stable population had risen to 2,000.

Capitola's population now hovers around 10,000, but its identity is linked to the historic past still seen in its architecture.