

Old Santa Cruz

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The road down Laurel street hill was steep and narrow in the early days, sticky with adobe soil and pulverized chalk rock.

North of it was a pond back of one of the two Kirby tannery dams, bordered with tules and cat-tails which the boys dipped in kerosene to make torches. Below the dam was one of the tannery buildings and directly below that was a much-pictured water wheel which stood until the modern street was made about 35 years ago.

At the top of the hill, south of the road, stood the old Feliz adobe. The site still bears some of the Feliz family plantings of mission grapes, plums and Castilian roses.

Hillside Dug Away

The hill was dug away on the south side of the road where now stands the Babbling Brook eating place, originally built by Mabel Place, an actress, later enlarged by Peter Rovnianek and still later by the Countess de Chandler. Laurels, bays and other native California trees still grow on the hill back of it.

Instead of flowing through a culvert under the paving the stream then was bridged with plank. It flowed back to the tannery sheds. Where the Babbling Brook dining place stands was a two-story residence usually occupied by the foreman of the tannery. One of the last occupants was James B. Harris, whose wife later was long a matron of the Rebekahs' home at Gilroy.

Trout In Dam Pond

Across the road near the dam were a number of cottonwood trees. Trout could be caught, especially near the outlet of the culvert where the stream made a waterfall. Rovnianek, when he occupied the house, planted steelheads which he fed regularly.

In the pond in the early days small boys caught minnows to carry them home in jars and cans and put them in glass globes.

In the stream along the roadside grew watercress, used both in salads and in decorations. The stream was also the home of French frogs.

The turn in the road was sharper than it is now. Drivers feared a runaway down this steep slope; and at the bottom trucks and wagons often had to be dug out of the mud.