

Old Santa Cruz

● ● By Ernest Otto

(Editor's Note: The late Ernest Otto, famed and beloved waterfront correspondent for the Sentinel-News and writer of the "Old Santa Cruz" column, left a number of columns written before his death. They will be published weekly by the Sentinel-News.)

Few in Santa Cruz today are able to realize that from Bay View school to the city limits at the creek in Moore's gulch, a distance of more than a mile, in the seventies there was only one street going toward the ocean from Mission street and that lone street did not reach the ocean because West Cliff drive interfered.

That street went down to the south end of the race track — an area which is familiar to most Santa Cruzans today because it is the site of the Wrigley company plant.

In that section in the seventies, however, not a single road left Mission street and went north.

On either side of Mission street were tall gates with high posts on either side. Between the gates were roads leading to the homes and ranches which filled the area between Mission street and the hillside to the north.

On what is now Fair avenue, except for the corner house, there was not a single residence until the entrance to the race track was reached.

The track itself was surrounded by a high unpainted board fence. This was more than 10 feet high — but it was not high enough to keep the boys of the town from scaling it when they played hookey from school to go to the races.

Early arrivals would put boards and pickets from fences against the main fence and boost themselves up on top. From there they would reach down to aid the late comers and help them get into vantage spots for the running. The writer, like most of the other boys, used to manage to sneak rides on passing buggies or drays

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and get to the race track and then either he helped over the fence or be among the early arrivals and help his friends over until all were inside the fence.

The usual place for scaling the fence was behind the grandstand. Once over the high fence we were as free as the air.

Around the inside of the board fence was a growth of eucalyptus trees, planted to serve as a wind-break, but serving equally well to shield the lads climbing over the back fence.

In the center of the enclosure was a race track which was recognized as one of the best in this section of the state. The soil available in Santa Cruz was described as being conducive to making a good running track. The track itself was surrounded by fence railings supported by posts.

Slightly down the coast was the lighthouse which, during the Hecox regime had visiting days about twice a week. People went as much to see the collection which was the museum of Miss Laura Hecox, a daughter in the home and the lighthouse tender for many years. Curios, especially of shells and rare marine life, dominated the collection.

The lighthouse itself stood at some distance away from the present location where the road runs. The bluffs continued to wear away steadily and a cave was formed beneath the building which endangered the structure.

The pounding of the waves, powerful and endless, was a challenge to early day inventors and two wave motors were attempted in this city — one along West Cliff drive and the other along East Cliff drive.

The sites chosen were cliffs with caves below. Holes were dug through the cliffs and towers were built above them. The force of the waves pouring into the caves would operate the motors, but the ventures never proved successful.

The treacherous waves along the coast have been responsible for the deaths of many fishermen. Black Point at the east end of Twin Lakes beach has been responsible for more deaths than any other place in this section.

Shortly after the completion of the cement plant at Davenport, three quarrymen, natives of Greece, were swept off rocks there when a huge wave rolled over them and carried all out to sea.