

Historic Bldgs

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# Old Santa Cruz

● ● By Ernest Otto

Another large Beach Hill holding was the Sunshine Villa, owned by James P. Smith. His wife had visited here several years before the family became property owners, and was among several prominent visitors who came annually to Santa Cruz.

Smith was an importer of choice groceries, with establishments in New York City and Paris, France.

Their purchase was what had been known as the Kittredge House. On the south end of the property was a grass grown vacant lot. Around the site was the present rock retaining wall. Across the property a stone walk was laid and dracena palms were planted in rows on the three sides.

The two-story front of the hotel was altered by adding a mansard roof and the whole building was painted vermillion. Many guest rooms were off the lobby, and across the front was the long porch.

Sato, a Japanese gardener, was placed in charge of the large section of land at the front. He planted terraced lawns, and about the stone wall also was the lawn. He used the large vacant section much as he would have in Japan. A small pond was constructed to harbor lilies and other flowers which are adaptable to water. From rock gardens such as those which might be found in Japan, Sato had miniature maple trees growing, some in flaming reds. He also had low cypresses and cedars. A few bronze garden pieces were strewn about along with several jars with a finish like lacquer.

Sato trimmed cypresses to represent deer, birds and other wind life. Much of the garden might have been transplanted directly from Japan. There were locust trees and weeping willows.

During the Smith family's residence here, the city had its first "Venetian Carnival," an affair which attracted statewide attention. Smith was the head of the carnival committee and for months devoted much of his attention to the production.

The queen of the carnival was Anita Gonzales, a daughter of Mrs. Smith. She was a truly regal queen when the queen's barge sailed up the San Lorenzo river with the queen on her throne and surrounded by her attendants.

Below the throne was a section in which gondoliers in striped Venetian costumes played and sang. The barge moved gracefully along the river under a canopy of lights to the music of Roncovieri's band from San Francisco.

During the festivities there was royal entertainment in "Sunshine Villa," with artists from all over the state and from other states, as well. The carnival closed with a grand ball led by Queen Anita and her attendants. The carnival pavilion extended from Pacific avenue to Front street along the Laurel street extension. The interior was covered with graceful draperies in carnival colors of golden and white. The city has never seen such a brilliant affair. The grand march was dazzling.

The huge pavilion remained for three years and was used for several large dances and on a large stage plays and other elaborate affairs were presented.

Eventually, however, like so many buildings erected for only temporary use, the pavilion caught fire—and what a fire it was! The building was only a shell, and in a short time, all that remained was ashes.

From their first arrival here, the Smith family became a part of the community and its life, and Santa Cruzans were included in many of their social affairs. What was the J. P. Smith "Sunshine Villa" now is the McCray hotel on Beach Hill overlooking the city.

Another family which came to make its home here was that of James Enright, a prominent Santa Clara county orchardist. The family bought one of the earliest and most attractive homes in the city, the Jones residence at the corner of Third and Cliff streets, and immediately became a part of the community. One member of the family, Mrs. Gene Prolo, a granddaughter, still resides here.

All of the prominent families occupying these attractive homes here had their special stables and coachmen, and those were the days when people would stop on the sidewalks to admire the handsome open barouches and the teams as the occupants were transported up the avenue.