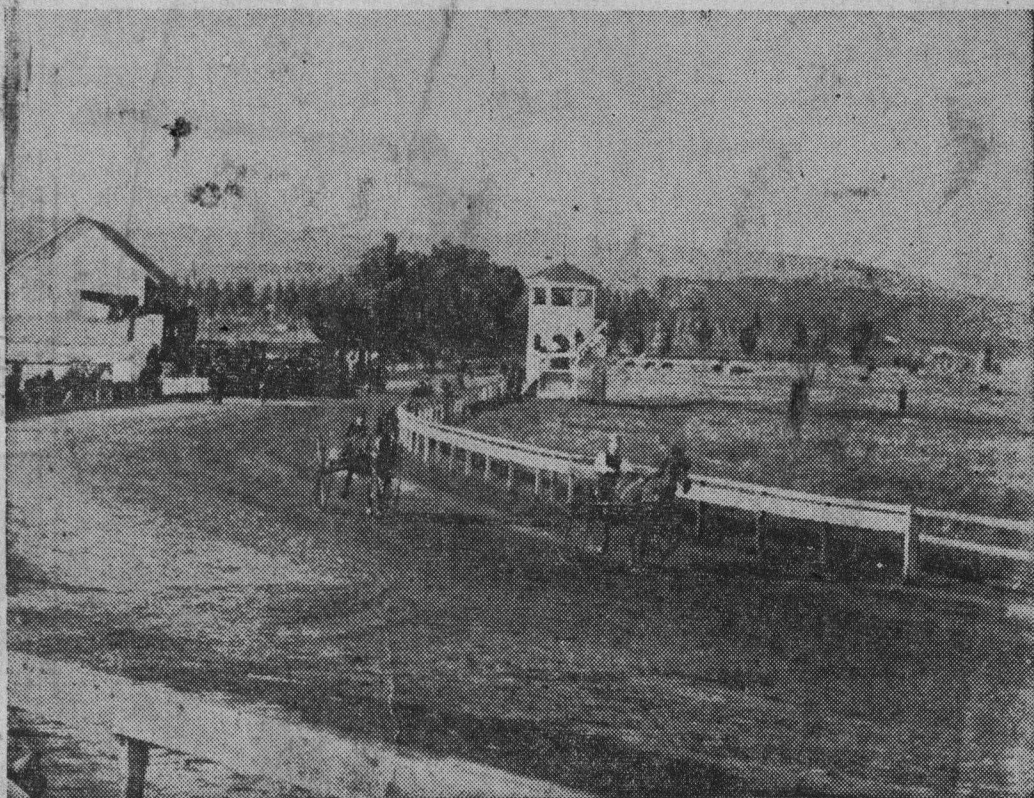


10/30/55

# SANTA CRUZ YESTERDAYS



**HORSE RACING TRACK HERE IN 70's - 80's**

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

Sports existed in one form or another here from the earliest days.

Perhaps the most popular with the natives in the days far distant in time's annals, and reaching up to the fifties, were the bull and bear fights. These were held usually on Sundays after church, near the plaza.

Across the river, in Villa de Branciforte, there was developing a mile long straightaway devoted to horse racing. This extended into the nineties and was popular with the Americans who supplemented the original Indians, Spanish and Mexicans. Today this once famous racing horse speedway is Branciforte avenue, from Soquel avenue to the DeLaveaga Park hills.

## First Oval Track

About three miles away, on the west side, an oval track was established in 1870, when horse racing was going great, being held regularly at many California towns and ranches. The track here was considered very good.

Ocean View Driving Park, subject of today's picture, was set up late in '70, between what is now Mission street, far out, and the cliffs. (There was no Cliff Drive then). Today's Fair avenue follows the route of a road which led to the gate.

Here the ocean air was bracing and racing was popular. Booming of the surf could sometimes be heard between the cheers of the race followers. Surf and cliffs were about two blocks away. If you didn't have your own horse or carriage you probably rode Dan Madeira's horse-drawn omnibus to get there. This predecessor of the horsecar lines left the big downtown Pacific Ocean House near lower plaza every hour. Each ride was ten cents.

The late Ernest Otto, beloved local historian-native, often told of how as a boy, he would hitch rides on the backs of carriages with other youngsters, to go to the races. There was a high board fence around the track, he said, but back of the grandstand there was almost always somebody on the top to lend a hand to strain-

ing kids trying to climb over.

Betting and gambling games went on in the large room under the grandstand. A long bar where drinks of all kinds were dispensed, ran the entire length of the room.

## Trotters and Runners

The inaugural series of races at the "driving park" took place on November 15-18 inclusive, 1870, Tuesday through Friday. Season tickets to the series of trotting and running races were available for "a gentleman and lady" at \$3.

At the first race run on the track County Supervisor P. F. Dean's trotters won \$50 for the Watsonville man.

Elias J. Swift, when proprietor of the Pacific Ocean House, raced his horses at the track, when it was called Fairview. From him comes the name of Swift street back of the old site.

The oval was done away with in 1887 in favor of real estate development and street building. Today, with industry near by, and new homes and streets everywhere, there is very little "open country" left in the area.

In the rare old picture above, taken in the late seventies while a trotting race was in progress, the view is northwesterly with the now much built up hill area behind the Linda Vista district in the far background.