

The best way to discover Santa Cruz' past is with your feet, using the tour map on page 19 as your guide to the landmarks of downtown and the Mission Hill district. We've made it easy: the numbers on the page match the numbers on the map and the trip should take about an hour and a half. Start on a Sunday morning, that way you'll avoid the crowds and traffic, and if you're hungry for even more facts than we've provided, take along John Chase's invaluable *The Sidewalk Companion to Santa Cruz Architecture* (Paper Vision Press, \$9.95), available at local bookstores.

**1** Begin your sojourn at Chuck Abbott Square, the well-maintained and never crowded little park tucked between the Cooperhouse and the Octagon Museum. Sit on one of the handsome park benches and gaze at the facing wall of the Cooperhouse. Try to imagine a parking lot in its place. That was its fate, when in 1970, Max Walden was able to rescue the old beauty by a harrowingly narrow one vote margin at the City Council. Max and Chuck Abbott have a lot to do with the way Santa Cruz looks today, and Chuck's story is a tribute to the perseverance of an individual in rescuing a dying city.

In 1914 Chuck Abbott was a surfer in Honolulu and his wife, Esther, was in theater. Both became successful photographers in Arizona, doing calendar art for the state's glossy publication, *Arizona Highways*. They decided to retire in Santa Cruz and bought an old house in the downtown area, which was then known as a slum. No strangers to beautification projects, the Abbotts began improving their own property, passing on the incentive to their neighbors with gifts of young trees. Gradually they bought up surrounding Victorians in various states of decay, tackling the immense job of restoration.

Pacific Avenue at that time was in a state of decay and Chuck went to local merchants and bankers to raise money for a study about creating a mall. He put together a slide presentation about other cities that had gone through revitalization by improving a dying main street. He began having 7:30am meetings with merchants to get the idea of the mall passed — it did, by a 60 percent majority.

Absentee landlords and conservative thinking made this more difficult than might be expected. The original Mall (now expanded to include the transit center) ended where the resistance started. Then Abbott approached architects Roy Rydell, Kermit Darrow and Art Hyde to travel throughout California touring existing malls to determine which ones worked and why.

**2** Now it's obviously time to go take a good look at the Mall — so leave Abbott Square and walk to the Mall, crossing to the gazebo in front of Leask's. Now look down Pacific Avenue and notice how wide it is. This street used to carry horse and buggy traffic, plus a streetcar line. A real mall accommodates only pedestrian traffic but some merchants on Pacific had no rear access, causing delivery problems. Others worried that customers would not patronize them if there were no storefront

# Bringing History to Life

## A Walking Tour of Downtown Santa Cruz

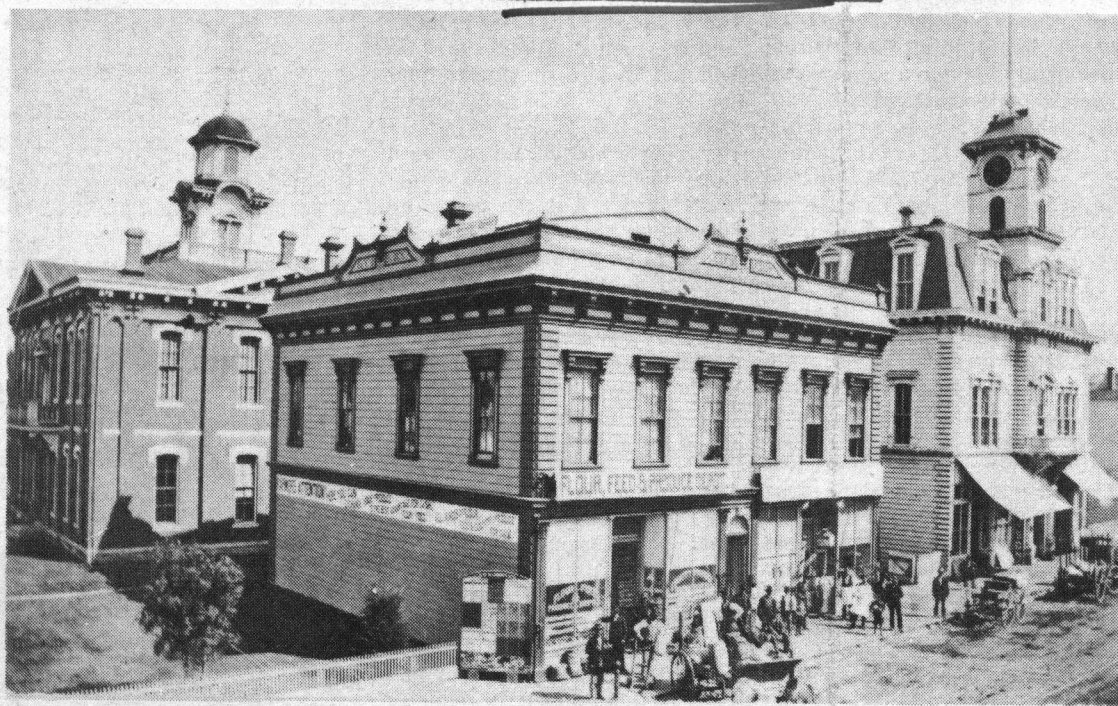


PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE SANTA CRUZ HISTORICAL MUSEUM

J U D Y S L A T T U M

**S**anta Cruz history is a tasty blend of cultures layered on land and sea, each leaving bits of both celebration and decay. These remnants have tales to tell, and Santa Cruz' story reads like a popular soap opera of violence, greed, passion and occasional visits from various celebrities. Local history buffs can be mesmerized by the mysterious murder of the vicious Mission priest Andre Quintana or dazzled by the celebrated visits of Teddy Roosevelt, Susan B. Anthony and Tom Thumb.

parking. A single, meandering lane slows traffic, and deliveries are limited to early morning and late afternoon.

Now look across the street at the Cooperhouse. This was the third County Courthouse, built in 1894 after fire claimed the previous one. The style is called Richardsonian Romanesque, which is known for its squat proportions and air of weight and bulk. In those days, a 14-foot bronze fountain in front served people, dogs and horses. Across the street is the County Bank Building, built in 1894. Prior to this staid incarnation, it used to be the site of tent shows, where the chief attractions were glass blowers and Millie Christine, "the two-headed woman who entertained with dual recitations and harmonies, one head singing alto and the other soprano."

**3** Now walk down the Mall until you are opposite the Palomar Hotel. On the way, you will pass through a small grove of Magnolias, the signature tree of all main intersections on the Mall. The Palomar Hotel was designed by the prolific architect William Weeks and constructed in 1928-29. The men in bas relief who peer down from above represent Spanish Conquistadores. The older buildings between the Hotel and the Cooperhouse were destroyed in the great flood of 1955. Now look beneath

you at the healthy flower box, maintained by Ken Hawkenberry, who varies the blooms three times a year. Species are chosen for their small stature in order to discourage pickers. Now, continue down the Mall until you are across from the Trust Building at the corner of Pacific and Soquel.

**4** The Trust Building, named for the family that owned the property, was built in 1910 along with the Elks Building next door. The Masonic Building just beyond predates them, having been constructed in 1887.

Now check out the gutters. These are a real masterwork of mall design because the architects had to encompass so many utilities and services in such a small space. For financial reasons, the original streets and sidewalks were not torn out, but merely covered over. This is why all the flower boxes are raised. Many of the stores had basements with street-level elevators, all rendered inoperative by the ravages of floods. Now, turn down Lincoln street taking a look at the older blue building on the corner. This was one of the many office buildings owned by the supercapitalist, F.A. Hihn, and built in 1894. More about Mr. Hihn later.

**5** Now walk to the house just east of the Nickelodeon Theatre. As you can see by the sign

on the cheerful Victorian in front of you, this is the childhood home of stage, screen and television actress, Zasu Pitts, who began her career at Santa Cruz High School. From here she went to LA and made a sizable reputation as a stage actress. Her biggest film was Erich von Stroheim's *Greed* filmed in San Francisco and Death Valley. After many serious roles, Zasu became known as a comedienne and ended her career as a regular on the TV series *My Little Margie*. Across the street stands Calvary Episcopal Church, the oldest church in Santa Cruz. Built entirely of redwood in 1864-65 at a cost of \$3000, the early English Gothic-style structure has been the scene for many period films, among them a TV version of *East of Eden*. Now walk further down Lincoln til you are across from #413.

**6** Behind the innocuous house at 413 Lincoln, the last official hanging in Santa Cruz took place. Behind you, the perky red house with the healthy garden is the home of Esther Abbott, a dedicated, outspoken community activist. Esther developed P.R.O.D. (Private Rehabilitation of Downtown Santa Cruz), a group that lends money for property improvement. Next to Esther's home are five row-houses, an architectural style seldom found outside of San Fran-

cisco. Built in 1894, they were designed to house the maximum number of families in the minimal amount of space. Notice how the patterns on the houses are essentially the same but the details differ. The houses were in deplorable shape when the Abbotts took them on, and you can peek underneath and still see some of the original lime stone foundations (presently being removed). The dark lavender house at the corner of Chestnut and Lincoln across the street is the first house the Abbotts purchased. Now turn right on Chestnut, walking to Walnut.

**7** At the corner of Walnut and Chestnut is a beautiful home built by F.A. Hihn for his daughter as a wedding present. At various times, Hihn owned a ranch, some shops, a hotel, Capitola and Aptos. His own fabulous mansion stood where City Hall is now and was demolished at a time when renovation was not popular. Not one to mess with paltry presents, Hihn gave his son a home across the street to the north. Fortunately, the redwood trees he planted there shade the present, unimaginative building. Across on the left stands the present YWCA, constructed in the 1920s as a musical instrument store with a workshop on the second floor. The small building in back housed a perfume factory. The lush gardens across the street almost hide the well-preserved Queen Ann house, built in 1893 for a local banker.

The fascinating tree in front is called a Monkey Puzzle (for obvious reasons) and is native to South America. If you have some extra time, take a loop down Walnut Street and peruse some of the finest old houses in downtown Santa Cruz. If not, fix your stare on the hot pink bougainvillea draped over the towering redwood in front of you and walk the next block to the corner of Church and Chestnut.

**8** This area was the site of the Santa Cruz Mission Gardens and, later, a bonanza crop of potatoes that fed the miners heading for the gold fields of '49 and earned their harvester \$100,000. At 529 Chestnut sits a magnificent two and half story Stick/Eastlake-style house built in 1888 for a local architect. Across the street stands the present Santa Cruz City Parks and Recreation building (1871) on the site of a glue and soap factory. Now, follow Chestnut North around the corner to the base of Green St.

**9** Before you is the Mission railroad tunnel, built in 1875 and enlarged when the narrow gauge railroad was taken over by Southern Pacific. The depot sat where the Goodwill building is now on Union St. Above that were more of F.A. Hihn's offices. Two railroads met at the juncture: the Felton/Wharf line and the Santa Cruz/Watsonville line. The Felton line hauled lumber and cement to the harbor, important materials in the Gold Rush. Most dynamite for mining traveled out of the county on the rail. Later, in the 1930s, lumber railroad from Felton was shipped out from the Wharf to make the Golden Gate Bridge. Now walk up the steep grade of Green Street and imagine the Mission oxen carts trudging up and down this old hill.



**10** Stop at 123 Green St. This well-maintained and beautifully landscaped home used to be a Methodist church, built in the 1850s and purchased as a home in 1864 by carpenter/builder William Reynolds. Reynolds, together with his father, actually walked from Tennessee to California at the age of 17 to be part of the gold rush. He eventually got to Santa Cruz, bought the building, cut it in half, moved it to its present location and turned it sideways. The fence style is original, and you can still see the old hitching post beside it to the right. The cement block by the street is a carriage step.

Now walk across the street to the two-story Spanish Colonial revival home designed in the early 1920s by William Weeks. This is the Leask family home and is being restored. Now proceed north up Green Street by the old limestone retaining wall. Lime has historically been one of Santa Cruz major resources. When you get to Mission, cross the street (carefully!), turn right and walk to the corner of Mission and Sylvar.

**11** Across the street you see a magnificent Victorian in the Stick/Eastlake tradition, built from 1883-1886 for builder Calvin Davis. Right beside you is the lovingly restored Eastlake house built for \$5000 in 1887 for merchant Henry Willey. The wrap-around porch was added later. Gaze across at Mission Plaza, formerly the Mission Quad and try to imagine the stream that used to flow through here. For a short period some buildings stood here, but the area was reclaimed as open

space by locals when the structures burned. In early days quarreling couples were placed in stocks and chastised by the community.

**12** Now walk to 107 Sylvar, a clapboard saltbox house built of hand-split lath in the 1850s and referred to as the oldest frame house in Santa Cruz. It was built by Francisco Alzina, a Spanish draft dodger from the island of Minorca who stowed away aboard the *U.S.S. Constitution*, made his way to Santa Cruz, and married the owner of the adobe that originally stood here. Proceed to the front of Holy Cross church and take a seat on one of the brick walls by the entrance. If it's Sunday, you might hear organ music from the door, which adds to the mood of the moment.

**13** You are at the site of the second Mission Santa Cruz. The first was made of wood and located on the banks of the San Lorenzo River until it was flooded out. Mission Santa Cruz was the 12th mission to be established in the California system and was built in 1791 by Native Americans from Mission Santa Clara. Created very late, it was the least successful of all the missions in terms of conversions and baptisms. Although situated on a good site with plenty of arable land and water, it wasn't on the road to anywhere, and most of the local Indians had already been recruited by Mission Santa Clara. The goal of the missionaries was to create docile, Spanish-speaking, Catholic citizens, and after 10 years all mission property was to revert to the Natives, the Mission itself becoming a

church. Forty years after its inception, this still hadn't happened. The Mission was damaged by an earthquake in 1857 and remodeled as a grammar school before ending its days as a stable. Holy Cross Church was built on its foundations in 1885.

Now walk around behind the church on the left side. The planter box you pass used to be a fountain, and the original Mission tiles are still underneath. The priests' quarters stand on your left. Around back, you'll find a pile of dirt and rock near an old tin garbage can, all that remains of the original Mission walls. Beside it is the graveyard, very small because of the lack of consecrated ground. Historians say thousands of Indians were buried here. Take in the spectacular view from this position. You are looking at the pasture land of the Mission cattle herds. The tree line used to be much further back and you could see all the way to the ocean.

**14** Walk around the east side of the church to the Mission Replica on Emmet St. This little chapel was built in 1932 to resemble a painting of the original Mission, differing in that it is about one third size and is not painted red. Several citizens banded together to build the replica in order to have a home for the original Mission relics, which were fast disappearing, mainly to Carmel. Go inside and take a look at the statues above the altar (all original); the crucifixion piece is missing. The five paintings in the nave and the altar piece are also originals. There is a little shop next door that sells souvenirs.



**LOOKING BACKWARDS.** This photo, taken circa 1922, shows an early effort at gridlock in downtown Santa Cruz.

**15** Now walk around the corner to School Street. At the corner of Emmet and School stood the Mission Granary and one of Santa Cruz' first hotels; next came Holy Cross School from which the street gets its name. The adobe at the street's end used to extend all the way to this spot.

**16** Walk down to the adobe, the only building in the Santa Cruz Mission complex to survive. As you can see by the sign, it is currently going through an expensive, government-sponsored restoration project that had many of the local preservationists bickering about what exact stage in its history the adobe should be restored to. (Some of those involved are still not speaking.) Notice the bronze plaque on the side of the building. Despite what it says, historians no longer believe this building served as the Mission Army Barracks. It was probably used as housing for the Indians. Each of the seven rooms (there were 10 originally) had an adobe brick floor and a fire pit in the center for cooking and heating the sleeping loft above. You can see the smoke stains on some of the ceilings. The wooden floors, doors and glass windows were added in 1835 by settlers who stayed here. By that time there were a miniscule number of Indians left, most having been driven to the grave by Small pox, Cholera, and Measles.

**17** Now walk down to the end of School Street, following the sidewalk (don't worry, you're not trespassing). Sample some of the wild black raspberries on the way down the steps, taking advantage of the extensive view and noting the fastidious rooftops of the restaurants below. You are now on upper Pacific Ave. Take a right to S.C.O.P.E. Park at the corner of Mission and Pacific. If the energy feels too crazy there, walk to the town clock and gaze across the street. This little park was rescued by the Santa Cruz Organization for Progress and Euthenics when the expansion-minded property owners on the cliff above wanted to build a highrise apartment complex complete with elevator descending to this very park.

In the center of the park stands a statue of Tom Scribner that may be holding a large bouquet of flowers or serving as a coat rack for those who live in the park. Tom's likeness was created by Margie McMahon, a former UCSC student who now works for George Lucas Films. She did her own fundraising and had quite a difficult time getting the City Council to approve the handsome statue, because of Tom's politics. An old-time Wobbler, Tom worked in logging camps while writing for newspapers and was one of Santa Cruz' first street musicians. His skill in sawplaying resulted in the Saw Festival, which has only recently moved out of Santa Cruz. It's generally felt that Tom would have been proud to have his statue in the park of Santa Cruz' homeless.

If you're not already there, walk to the Town Clock, which in the 1880s used to stand where Webber's is now. Some community people

organized by Bob Darrow rescued the clock from storage where it had been since 1964 and raised the money to erect it here. The clock is all mechanical, except for the electric motor that winds it. Evelyn Morris gave the fountain, and the project was completed by the 1976 Bicentennial. Local residents ring in the New Year here, and it's also a popular spot for local protestors because of the high visibility of the four-way traffic.

**18** Cross Mission to Front to the Post Office, which has been the site of a blacksmith shop, butcher shop and hotel. The present building was constructed in 1911, the design based on a Renaissance foundling hospital in Florence, Italy. Go into the lobby and take a good look at the sparkling colors of the WPA-era murals on the far ceilings. The Veterans Building next door was designed in 1932 and is best described as Hollywood Spanish in style. Check out the weathervane on top in the shape of charging soldiers. This building was featured on all major TV network news shows a while back when our local Vietnam Vets Chapter challenged Reagan Administration policy in Nicaragua, went down to that country to say so and were promptly slapped with a lawsuit by the national VFW organization. The suit was settled out of court.

**19** Continue down Front to the St. George Hotel. This Italian-style building was constructed in 1912 and was the first home of the Catalyst. During that era the front was wildly painted in psychedelic colors in keeping with the current trends. In the opposite direction, under all those parking lots, sat the Chinese ghetto from 1870-1898. In an 1880 census, 97 men and one woman lived here. Fifty-six listed their occupation as laundry worker and the rest as cooks, domestics, gardeners and fishermen. In those days no one wanted to do the laundry, and it was often sent to Hawaii, a lengthy process indeed.

The Chinese provided services to a White community who saw them as disposable. There was much anti-Chinese sentiment in Santa Cruz, led by Santa Cruz *Sentinel* editor Duncan McPherson and Methodist Minister Elihu Anthony. A headline in an 1879 *Sentinel* read "Blow 'em back to China or Blow 'em back to hell." In 1879 the US government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first time a specific nationality had been excluded from immigration to the USA.

**20** Proceed to the corner of Cooper and Front. On one corner is the Michael Leonard Building of 1894, with bas relief grapes on the second story advertising the saloon once located on the bottom floor. Across the way is the Octagon Museum, formerly the 1882 Hall of Records. It is now the County Historical Museum.

**21** Congratulations. You have now expanded your knowledge, inhaled fresh air, plus indulged in some healthy exercise. Proceed to Kelly's Bakery and reward yourself with a giant croissant. ■