

Old Santa Cruz By Ernest Otto

Chinese Laborers Building Santa Cruz And Watsonville Railroad Tore Up Chestnut Avenue

As the writer first remembers Chestnut avenue it was a street all plowed up and on it were the railroad builders of the west, the Chinese construction gang of the Santa Cruz and Watsonville railroad. Several score of them were at work. They wore the garb of the Chinese workmen of that day, of the same material as the present day overalls. Most of them had a coat of the same material hanging over their waist. At the side of the road on the west side they had their fires; they cooked their rice in large metal bowls, also other Chinese food. They had a way of squatting on their two feet and with their chop sticks would eat their meal and then would smoke their cigarettes or the pipes with the long stems and fill the tiny smoke bowl with Chinese tobacco, get several whiffs and then refill it, and what an odor from this tobacco. The hats worn by most of them were the broad bamboo top hats, such as used in China by farmers.

The Betsy Jane

When the road was finished, what an event, with the small Betsy Jane engine, without a cow-catcher, driving wheels or sand-box, about as primitive as an engine could be. In later years to be followed by the Pacific and Jupiter, real engines. Along the street at the same time the company operated a street car line, using the same track, known as the "red line" as the cars were painted red. This started at the lower Plaza, went along Mission, Vine, Cherry street and then down Chestnut avenue. Then came more construction and the work was repeated on the Santa Cruz-Felton line and the two narrow gauge engines, Santa Cruz and Felton, moved along that street. Chestnut avenue in those days was a longer street than at the present time. It went along at where is about the freight house and to the very end, gave a turn, crossed the track and went through a cut, and along the road above the bank of the lagoon and came out on Pacific avenue, at the end of the present viaduct. The lagoon then was not filled in and extended to the beach, close to what is now the Pier Bath House.

Flood Water

To the west of the railroad track the entire length of the thoroughfare was a deep gutter to carry off the flood water in the winter to the lagoon.

The earliest recollection of that street, to the writer, is the starting on the east side of the large open air plank platform, which came almost to a point at Chestnut avenue, and at the turn from Park street, was a vacant lot. This was the baseball ground of the "depot gang" of boys. Here F. A. Hihn built three small cottages, still standing. Where the lumber showed on a couple of sides, it was the finished product, and on two sides where it didn't show was a rough and cheaper grade of lumber. Then came a small alley and from the alley in the middle of the block to Locust street was the Louis Hihn residence. He was a brother of F. A. Hihn. He was in the hauling and trucking business. His sons were Bert and Ed, who now live in Long Beach, and a daughter, Louise Prince, of Benicia.

Dirt Sidewalks

From Locust to the end of the street there were only dirt sidewalks on the east side and scarcely any walks along the west side.

There was a high board fence from Locust to Church, the back section of the E. Kunitz soap and glue factories. In the early eighties Mrs. E. Bowen constructed the large residence at the corner of Locust street for the family residence. From the south, she was an ardent Democrat and during the Democratic torchlight parades all the windows on the inside were illuminated with candles, especially celebrating Cleveland's victory. Later she erected the house at the corner of Church

Patterson and J. O. Patterson. In the late seventies in this yard was constructed the last gallows used here for hanging a prisoner. The boys would go daily to watch the progress of the work. Opposite Taylor street was an alley leading to Washington and a short distance beyond was a second alley leading to the same street. While the alleys were public to the pedestrians, yet they were private. At the corner of the second alley was what was once a barn and in turn was a store and residence.

Maple St. Was Yreka

A couple of small houses were between there and Yreka, now Maple street. At the corner of Washington street was the orchard and rear yards of the Butler place. Mr. Butler conducted the large Centennial Flour Mill on Lower Pacific avenue.

The writer remembers the building of two small houses, a double house next to the store buildings. There were no houses from Yreka to Laurel street. A good share of it was the orchard and back yard of the J. S. Green residence facing Washington street. Board fences were in that section.

The writer remembers the construction of the last house on that side of the street. It now stands at Laurel street corner and was the home in the early days of John Achorn. Then came more of the Blackburn orchard.

The east side of the street was mostly vacant property. Where the triangular park is now located bounded by Chestnut, Church and Rincon, was a barn yard at times rather smelly.

A. J. Hinds' Home

On the lot of the beautiful home built for the late A. J. Hinds, father of L. F. Hinds of the Farmers and Merchants National Bank, was the old fashioned home with large yard of the late Alexander McPherson, father of the late Duncan McPherson. Alexander Hotel block was named after the one who lived in the house. It was a small farm with garden, orchard, lovely old fashioned flowers and there was always an apiary, a long row of hives for the honey bees.

The two houses to the south now standing, were there then and the corner lot was a vacant one reaching to Rincon street. It was usually filled with growing tree mustard, a wild plant quite common in the early days, and grew to a height of about 10 feet. The boys gathered the tall stalks of the mustard, placed a shingle nail in the ends and used them for arrows, as nearly every lad had a bow and arrows, the bow usually made from hazel wood, a bush native to this section.

Lincoln Street Ended

There was no Lincoln street beyond the railroad track and from Walnut avenue to the present Lincoln was a large vacant field reaching to the top of the Walnut avenue hill, with a stream at the bottom of the hill, running across the field, and a bunch of willows at the Walnut avenue end. The field was used for pasture of the Hihn cows, for a baseball diamond and the first large circus to perform there was the Adam Forepaugh circus, as it

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Many Orchards

From Church street to Walnut avenue was only orchard property. At the lot where was afterward the Duncan McPherson residence, Cherry Court, the property was fenced with a board fence and at the corner of Walnut there was a picket fence. A house now standing on that section was moved from the corner of Pacific avenue and Lincoln street. Orchards again from Walnut avenue to Lincoln. The large residence, then a mansion, was built at the corner of Walnut, which still remains, and was erected for W. T. Cope, who married Katie Hihn, daughter of the late F. A. Hihn.

The house on the south corner of Lincoln, still stands, second from the corner. It was the home of M. S. Patterson, grandfather of Don