

Revisiting Lover's Lane and the Once Splendid El Salto Resort



The Hanchett family on an early visit to El Salto. Back row, l-r: Mary Corbet, Lewis E. Hanchett, Mrs. Burke Corbet, Miss Cook (housekeeper and nurse). Middle: Alice Hanchett, Mrs. Lewis J. Hanchett, Francis Corbet. Lucy Hanchett is seated with the family dog, Toodles.

D by Carolyn Swift
 delicately perched at the end of Lover's Lane on Depot Hill, El Salto Resort was once a handsome summer estate of charming cottages, a heart-shaped croquet lawn,

clay tennis courts and lush gardens. Owned by wealthy San Franciscans, it was carefully tended by a resident staff and sculpted to last for generations.

But now these generations have past. Lover's Lane has

crumbled into the bay years ago, leaving the shaven edge of Grand Avenue to peer at its own fate.

The eloquence of El Salto (named for the sea breeze) has also faded more swiftly in recent years. The cliff edge is closer than ever. The cottages, rented in years past, are often empty and in need of repair. One was claimed by fire. The original grounds have been trimmed by new construction; a new era is coming.

Built in the late 1890s, El Salto was the summer retreat of well-to-do owners for more than a half-century. Originally called "the English Cottages" after two British families that came each summer, the resort changed hands in 1912, when San Francisco businessman Lewis Edward Hanchett bought the haven as a family retreat.

His daughter, Lucy Butler, recalled in 1976 how El Salto had appeared to her as a child. She first came to Capitola as a summer resident in

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Lewis Hanchett chopped down the trees lining the bluff in an effort to keep their roots from dragging down more of the cliff when they fell. Circa 1912.



Cottages were freshly painted and divided into apartments with "kitchenettes" by the late 40s. The Tabacchinis kept the Hanchett family's landscape gardener and remained devoted to gardens of the estate.

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1909, when her family rented one of the houses for the season. At that time, the resort appeared "run down" without electricity or a telephone. Water came from a well. The first three cottages had toilets on screened porches.

The Hanchetts quickly invested in improvements and new amenities. As the family grew, so did El Salto: a new three-bedroom house, a laundry, a barn, four garages, a hot house, and fields for the children's pony, the horses and cows. Vegetables and fruits were grown on additional acres surrounded by eucalyptus.

Everything—visitors to weekly laundry—came by train to Capitola's Depot, although the Hanchetts kept a Cadillac on site for touring the countryside. Best friends

were the Sesnons and Tillman/Mangles families of Aptos and C.C. Moore, who kept a summer estate in Santa Cruz.

In 1923, the Hanchetts moved to Southern California, where Lewis helped build the Union Station streetcar depot in downtown Los Angeles. The Capitola property stayed in the family until 1946, when it was sold to Joseph Tabacchini for \$50,000.

The Tabacchinis had previously owned a gravel pit and auto camp in Los Banos. They wanted El Salto for a "first class auto court."

Joe picked out the best of the old Hanchett furniture, installed new stoves, modernized the kitchens and baths, and thought he did a pretty good job of renovation, although the Hanchetts later complained that the buildings "were painted a ghastly white where they were once a dark green with lovely red and

white trim, blending in with the flowers and shrubs..."

The Tabacchinis also cherished the gardens. Joe kept them manicured and learned all the species of insects, birds, trees and flowers that still flourished on the bluff.

As an active member of the Capitola Chamber of Commerce before cityhood, Joe was appointed to an unexpired term on the first Capitola City Council. During the next 11 years, he served on virtually every committee and served as mayor for six years.

The Hanchetts, the Tabacchinis and the most recent owners—the family of Elizabeth Blodgett—have all left compassionate impressions on the tiny estate of El Salto. It seems, however, that time and nature may finally leave the most enduring mark. Until then, the charm lives on in faded memories and what may still prove to be a brilliant new beginning. □



El Salto Resort Reopens

It seems that El Salto is destined to rise again. For the past eight months, current owners, Elizabeth and Robert Blodgett, have been working to bring buildings to modern standards and reopen the resort.

According to Daniel Kostelec, an official with the Capitola City Building Department, two years ago the city asked that the owners refurbish the buildings in order to abate hazards. "Electrical and gas repairs are being done, along with general maintenance," Kostelec said.

Robert Blodgett said that El Salto will be reopening on June 1. "We'll be back alive, a fully restored resort."

Blodgett noted that the resort will feature a variety of accommodations including cottages, studios and full apartments. The resort will host guests on an overnight or weekly basis, with services such as bed and breakfast.

"This will be a new resort but with the same character," Blodgett said. "It's being restored with antique fixtures and will have the same flavor it had 30 or 40 years ago." □