

SANTA CRUZ YESTERDAYS



SANTA CRUZ LANDMARK—THE TOWN CLOCK

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

Although it has performed its duty silently for around 20 years now, the city's town clock labors faithfully on.

Newcomers call it quaint, while the average Santa Cruzan is so accustomed to it that it is taken for granted. After all, there has been one in the same location for 10 these many years. Eighty of them.

But it is a true landmark. Few are the California communities which can today point to a real tower town clock in the New England tradition.

When the Odd Fellows' lodge (IOOF) put up their first large building here back in the early seventies, it was complete with tower and clock of four faces.

The original clock figured in a historic event of great importance to this city when electricity first came to town. It was the memorable event of outlining the IOOF building and clock in lights. The night of June 15, 1896, saw the culmination of a power project whereby Santa Cruz was given electricity and at the same time, up the coast.

Swanton Brought Power

Big Creek Power company, largely promoted by Fred W. Swanton, had set up its plant, beyond Davenport, in 58 working days that spring. A total of 767 poles supported the 18 miles of wires extending from the powerhouse which, at that time, transmitted 500 horsepower.

It was carnival time here. The second of the famous Venetian Water Carnivals was in progress. The town was full of people who crowded the downtown area. They gasped in thrilled amazement at the lavish electrical display, when 600 incandescent light bulbs flashed on, bathing the structure and clock in light. And the band blared. Rows of lights followed the lines of the building clear up past the clock and along the flag pole.

Light As Day!

A Sentinel scribe wrote: "The town clock was made as light as day."

This first IOOF hall escaped damage in the great fire of 1894

which drew close enough to destroy the nearby first county court house building. Then around midnight May 6, 1899, came a dramatic fire of its own. The clock, which had been installed with funds raised by public subscription, and itself cost around \$1000, was ruined, as was the building.