

1983: Memories of pre-war Santa Cruz

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Sentinel is celebrating its 150th year in 2006 by reaching into our archives to republish some of the noteworthy stories out of the past. The following column, titled "Where did the time go?" was printed in the Santa Cruz Sentinel on Feb. 16, 1983. It was written by editor emeritus Gordon Sinclair.

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EDITOR EMERITUS

The exceptional audience for television's latest blockbuster, the Winds of War, brings back memories of that pre-war era in Santa Cruz.

In 1939, Santa Cruz wasn't exactly booming. We were

still in the pangs of the depression and while things were a little better than they were in the mid-30s, times were on the tough side.

Employment was poor. It picked up a little in the summertime as the visitors were beginning to come back, but after Labor Day, you didn't exactly see too many people if you took a stroll down Pacific Avenue.

It was the big band era at the Beach and at Capitola where big names prevailed every Saturday night between the Cocoanut Grove and the Capitola Ballroom.

The Casa del Rey was the hotel at the beach, but it, too, had some problems in the win-

ter as did the hotel on the cliffs at Rio del Mar.

It wasn't as large as the Casa del Rey, but it could be devastatingly empty when the rains came.

Downtown one of the night spots was the Circle at the Palomar Hotel. Occasionally it would fill up, especially if there was a good show at the Del Mar Theatre, then a posh new movie house which had opened with great fanfare in 1937 with the premier showing of the China Clipper.

It wasn't too hard to remember those events for we didn't have them often.

On Sunday afternoon you

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could visit the baseball park and watch the Swiss Dairy ball club compete with top Bay Area semi-pro teams. It didn't cost anything, but you could contribute when they passed the baseball cap. You didn't need a 10-gallon hat to hold the coins.

Work was on the scarce side. There was the cement plant in Davenport and the Santa Cruz Lumber Company mills in the valley.

The schools weren't exactly crowded either. There was only one high school, Santa Cruz High, with less than 1,000 students.

There was also a small Catholic school, Chaminade, on the hill at the end of Paul Sweet road.

If you wanted to go to junior college, you took the bus to Salinas and Salinas Junior College (those were the days before Hartnell.)

You could buy a hamburger for a dime and a milk shake, too, although the chanced were it would be made of ice milk. For ice cream you paid at least 15 cents.

Alcoholic beverages were also cheap. The better

bars charged 25 cents.

And if you so desired you could get abalone at just about every restaurant in town, although the better places might charge \$1.50 for three or four slices. A martini was considered a well drink and was served straight up, no ice and drop of vermouth.

The boardwalk was still the boardwalk and you paid a little more for special items such as Lane's frozen custard, but a hot dog at "Hot Dog" Miller's was only a dime, mustard and all.

If you didn't have any money to spend, you could walk out on the wharf and watch the fishermen unload their catches from the lampara launches.

Once in a while the fishermen would find a run of albacore and astound the natives with the unheard of prices of \$100 a ton.

Occasionally someone would buy a new car and it was customary to drive it around to show your friends. If you drove too far you didn't have any more friends.

You could rent a house for \$30 a month, but 30 bucks was no small item in those days.

It was the year the war began in Europe, but in Santa Cruz it seemed far away at the time. For that matter it could take two days to drive to Los Angeles.