

Old Santa Cruz

• • By Ernest Otto

(Editor's Note: The late Ernest Otto, famed and beloved waterfront correspondent for the Sentinel-News and writer of the "Old Santa Cruz" column, left a number of columns written before his death. They will be published weekly by the Sentinel-News.)

Many streets in Santa Cruz gained their names from trees, and gained them correctly although that may be hard to believe today as so many have fallen before the woodsman's axe.

Maple street, for instance, was lined for a couple of blocks with water maple trees. These probably came from the river bottom nearby originally, but they were fine large trees with big trunks.

When the dirt roads were changed to bitumen, the trees were left, with a parking spot between them and the plank sidewalk, and behind them were the dracema palms. But when the street was paved, all had to go.

At the corner of this street and Center street, the only buttonwood trees in town spread their branches as shade trees. These were found also in front of the picturesque Imus farm house on Potrero street where the Farmers Cooperative exchange now stands.

There is no question that Church street in the old days had the largest variety of shade trees.

On this thoroughfare were the tallest and the largest black walnut trees in the city. They were in front of the old Congregational church, now the Methodist church; the S. Drennan, Charles Bern, Peter Andresen and Boston family houses, and the McPherson residence.

Quite a row of locust trees also was in front of Hihn home.

In front of the Boston place was probably the largest shade tree in the city. It was a majestic Cedar of Lebanon which most people thought was a Monterey pine. It had been brought to Santa Cruz by ship from Palestine. It is likely no other tree in the city was as valuable as this one.

There were other walnuts beside the black walnut in the city. They were a little different from the black, having a smoother skin.

In Otto lane was a border of alders, water maples and another variety of maples which had been planted in the early days.

Close to the walk on the Boston property and the Hihn place were the only hawthorn trees in the city. These had been grafted to pear trees.

The first lemon and orange trees in the city appeared in Church street gardens.

The writer remembers a single locust tree on Locust street at the Pacific avenue corner.

A row of poplar trees lined the dirt walk along Pacific avenue between Walnut avenue and Lincoln street.

This writer remembers also sitting on the porch of the Osterhus home at the corner of Bridge street (now Soquel avenue) and Pacific avenue and watching the explosion of firecrackers in the trees as part of the Chinese New Year celebration in Chinatown before it moved to Front street.

A monster sycamore stood on a Walnut street corner until it was decided the mammoth of the forest was blocking traffic. Blocks cut off after it was felled were used as chopping blocks by butcher shops.

Front street, which then extended only to Soquel avenue, had water maples along the edge of its dirt walk in front of the C. Foster blacksmith shop at Front and Cooper streets, and another row of the same trees was in front of the Maple house.

Poplars were along the west side and around the corner in front of the Dr. F. E. Bailey home.

Walnut avenue had a few black walnut trees and a few English walnuts. The latter were in front of the J. N. Besse and A. Baldwin places, while many other homes had the Normandy poplars, one of the most popular shade trees in the city.

Among the finest stands of the latter variety was on the Kron tannery property on River street where the towering straight trees often were snapped by photographers.

Other stands of the variety were on Ocean street, beyond Water street, and bordering the walk on the south side of Plymouth street, on Ocean View terrace and on Lincoln street.