

The Rest of the Story Behind Names and Places



The Seabright Hotel and Station.

by *Nicolle Henneuse*

Whether you are a native Santa Cruzan or arrived just yesterday, there is a book that belongs in your home—*Santa Cruz County Place Names*. This weighty book, written by Donald Thomas Clark, librarian emeritus at UC Santa Cruz, will explain the history and solve the mysteries of, you guessed it, Santa Cruz County place names.

Clark, who has also penned a similar book covering Monterey County, recognizes that place names come in two flavors—those written on signs and maps easily found and recognized, and those that come in code, like a secret language between the locals.

For example, to find the Boardwalk would be a cinch for anyone; but what about Moore's Beach? Even most locals would raise an eyebrow of puzzlement. After all, nobody calls it Moore's Beach anymore. It's always referred to as the Red, White and Blue Beach, named after a star-spangled mailbox.

Now, supposing the mailbox were to disappear? Since this is not an officially recognized name, and names evolve over time, chances are the place name would die with the next generation of people that gave it life.

Sandy Lydon, history instructor at Cabrillo College,

gives an example of a particular fishing hole on Soquel Creek, located behind Nob Hill, that illustrates the mortality of a name.

"The fishermen used the diminutive form of Japanese, the three letter version (to name the fishing hole) because there was an old Japanese fisherman who sat on an orange crate and fished there all the time. He was always there and so all the old fishermen began to call it that.

"By the time I started fishing there in the 1960s, he had been dead ten years, but the fishermen still called it that. I would suspect that the number of people who know it as that now is very, very small because that's one of the names that will die out since there's nobody to keep it alive."

In this particular example, the name of the fishing hole is not based on the man's identity, per se, but rather on his race, since it was a white majority doing the labeling. Other similar examples occur throughout the county such as Spanish Flats, China Beach and Italian Gardens.

Names are also based on specific individuals, and natural and created landmarks. Then there are the specialty or "short hand" names, such as those created by surfers, fisherman or mountain bikers. According to Lydon, these names give the locals a distinct power

over non-locals and are used as code to protect turf and "change sometimes as fast as the people want to change them to always keep their edge."

One of the largest groups of non-locals who are kept in the dark are, of course, the tourists.

"We don't want to show them our heart," Lydon explained in frank terms. "We want to have them come and leave, drop their money some place and go home, which is tradition. It's always been that way here in Santa Cruz; from the very beginning of tourism there's been a love-hate relationship with the tourists."

But assuming you are not a tourist and have only recently moved to Santa Cruz County and want to figure out some of these established underground place names, how do you find out what and where they are? What about the "Circles" or "Fish Hook" or "Four-Mile Beach?"

Lydon offers three options. One, you can attempt to pick it up as time passes, going quietly along and sometimes pretending you know when you don't. The second is to submit, to humble yourself to public embarrassment, admitting that you are absolutely clueless and, horror of all horrors, are not a real local.

But wait, the third option rests between the blue covers of Donald Thomas Clark's