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Otto Ernest

Old Santa Cruz

● ● By Ernest Otto

(Editor's Note: The late Ernest Otto, famed and beloved waterfront correspondent for The Sentinel 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.)

Many were the walks around the community in the olden days when there were fewer means of transportation available to the people.

One of the favorite walks was down to the beach. People, adults and children, would pass the long brick warehouse on Main street, filled with saltpetre from South America. It was at the corner of Second street. At the wharf, in front of the Pacific Coast Steamship company's warehouse, the path continued to the beach below.

People using the path generally would stop at a springhouse on the side hill to quench their thirsts. The springhouse now is covered by the Casa del Rey apartments.

In those days, children usually would go wading in the waters of the bay, enjoying this form of beach amusement. There were practically no concessions on the beach in that time.

If it was low tide, the waders would go on around about to Cowell's point, and sometimes even would go as far almost as Lighthouse point.

The youngsters gathered sea moss which had washed ashore. They would dry it by pressing it and use it for collections. Many had collections of shells and around Cowell's point lots of shells could be found.

Some of the elderly persons would enjoy boating around the mouth of the river, and at 4 p.m. when the steamer would arrive from San Francisco, young and old alike would rush to the wharf because the steamer's coming always was a big event.

At places in those days, the beach was covered with lavender and pink sand verbenas. In spots, these formed a mass of color. In only one place could be found a couple of sand dunes which were covered with yellow verbenas. This was the area now occupied by the Giant Dipper.

The children gathered these and the pink briar roses which were found in large patches toward the end of the beach and took them home for bouquets.

Children who lived across the river would walk through the Riverside hotel grounds and through the Uhden yard and down the lane to the beach. They also would go through the Leibbrandt ranch property by the farm house and the barns.

Another walk which was a favorite was to Woods lagoon usually down Ocean View avenue along a patch at the top of the bluff above the San Lorenzo river. This walk usually was followed by a stroll out on Lighthouse point along a path bordering the bay and the beaches.

There was a camp called Alhambra before Seabright was founded. The path continued from Seabright on what was between the bay, the railroad and a grain field, providing another walk which was much liked by the old and young of Santa Cruz in those days.