

Old Santa Cruz By Ernest Otto

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A large farm in the early seventies was the Blackburn place which was more like a ranch. It reached from Pacific avenue to beyond the Southern Pacific track on the west and at one time from Laurel street down to the Neary lagoon.

The Blackburn home, a typical New England residence, stands in the same place as it did in the fifties. Near the home was a large barn, the family barn, and another large one below the hill where the hay was stored. This was where the Depot restaurant now stands. The Blackburn orchard was the largest in the city and a great section was given to apple raising. A few of the old tall trees remain at present in yards in that section of the city.

A good portion was given over to raising hay and here, as on many farms, could be seen the horse drawn plow, then the horse drawn cultivators and a horse propelled reaper. Most of the hay was baled.

CHINESE GREW TRUCK GARDENS

On this farm in the rear of the home was a lagoon and swamp, sycamore and maple groves of native trees.

In the middle seventies the lower ends of center and Washington streets, West Sycamore and Blackburn streets were not laid out but were included in the Blackburn farm. Parts were subdivided and residence lots were sold. The Southern Pacific station grounds now occupy part of the old farm.

For many years Mrs. Blackburn leased on the lower end of Chestnut avenue quite an acreage to Chinese for their truck gardens. The water from the stream which crosses Mission and California streets was used to irrigate the gardens. The Chinese had the tall picket fence topped with peanut oil tin cans cut on top to a point to keep people from climbing over. These cans were from China. At one time part of this farm was occupied by the Centennial Flour mills, the Grover planing mill and a few acres given over to lumber yards with high piles of lumber with long lanes between them. A shingle mill was on a part of the ranch at one time. This is still standing, transformed into Micossi's Italian hotel and dining room.

ONE CHINATOWN LOCATED THERE

Later, after the big fire, on part of the farm just below West Sycamore street, Mrs. Blackburn erected a dozen or more two story houses for a second Chinatown. This group won out and got the joss house in its settlement. It was a short street flanked on both sides by rows of houses all alike. The more prosperous Chinese clung to the uptown. The hill from the station grounds to the Bay street viaduct was the southern end of the farm and was a hay field for years.

THURBER FARM CLOSE TO HILL

I. L. Thurber who opened the quarry on High and Spring streets, had a small farm around his place which extended from the slough to the foot of Beach Hill. Most of it was orchard. Now much of it is the Hebron lumber yard.

Front street now runs through what was the Thurber place.

LIEBBRANDT PLACE WAS IN HAY FIELDS

Beach Hill had its farm which like nearly all the farms mentioned, also were owned by California pioneers who clung a long time to their holdings.

The Liebbbrandt farm reached from Third street to the beach

and from Cliff street almost to the mouth of the river. This farming land has on it now the Casa Del Rey and hundreds of summer cottages. The old fashioned farm home was at what is now the corner of Third and Liebbbrandt avenue.

Then off from Third street a lane ran to the left of the house, by the farm barn to the beach. The father ran the farm and the three sons, John, Dave and Jacob, the Liebbbrandt bath house, later known as the Dolphin bath house. The sons assisted on the farm. Considerable of the acreage could not be cultivated and was alkali ground and covered in places with a peculiar marsh grass.

BASEBALL PARK WHERE CASA DEL REY STANDS

The part where the Casa Del Rey hotel and cottages stand was at one time enclosed by a high board fence. It was one of the best baseball parks in the state and when Santa Cruz was in the state league with a rattling good nine, daily baseball was played. The writer for a couple of years had to telephone daily by innings after the fifth to the Associated Press the results, so great was the interest.

For a number of years on a part of what was this farm, in a part back of the Neptune bath house, Ralph Miller had a wonderful collection of rare poultry and game birds which was always an attraction.

Now running through what was then hay fields and some orchards of the farm are Liebbbrandt avenue, Dolphin St., Trinity St., Lorenz St., Raymond St., Kaye St. Uhden street, Lower Third street, Riverside avenue, parts of Beach street Holden street. These streets were not in existence when it was a farm.

BARSONS HAD FARM WITH HOTEL

One farm near by still remains although it is a hotel. It is the Riverside hotel. The Barsons have always cultivated their property bordered by the San Lorenzo river and Barson street almost to Bixby street. There was in the seventies an orchard with cherry, pear, apples and other fruit. For many years it has been given over to pears, marketed in the east. They early planted lemons and oranges and have many of these semi-tropical fruits now. Vegetables and fruit from the farm and milk from their own cows and vegetables home grown and their poultry graced their tables known far and wide.