

## Libraries - 1980-1985 Old newspapers provide spicy historical detail

### Volunteer organization indexes county periodicals

By CANDACE ATKINS

**S**ARA BUNNETT spends every Thursday with Santa Cruz pioneers. She knows all about their families — who was born, who married, who died — as well as the daily concerns they shared before the turn of the century.

"You have a feel for each individual," said Bunnett. "They're just your people."

Bunnett heads a small group of people in a Friends of the Library project indexing old Santa Cruz County newspapers. Story by story, the papers are read for local information that could be valuable to historians and those tracing family history.

"So much is the same today as in 1897," said Bunnett. "We have the same problems, we haven't solved them yet. They seem to go away and come back."

Volunteers read the papers for stories and announcements that contain historical information, and fill out index cards for either a subject or an individual.

When the task is finished, the information Bunnett types from the cards will be sorted by computer to develop a printed index. The index will be copied and put in all Santa Cruz City-County public libraries, plus Cabrillo College and UC-Santa Cruz. The newspapers are on microfilm at the main Santa Cruz branch.

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accused of jumping out of the bushes and shooting her estranged husband, Charles, in the arm. She supposedly aimed for his heart.

The Surf explained the following day, "Happiness did not reign in the household. It is claimed by some that it was a case of too much mother-in-law."

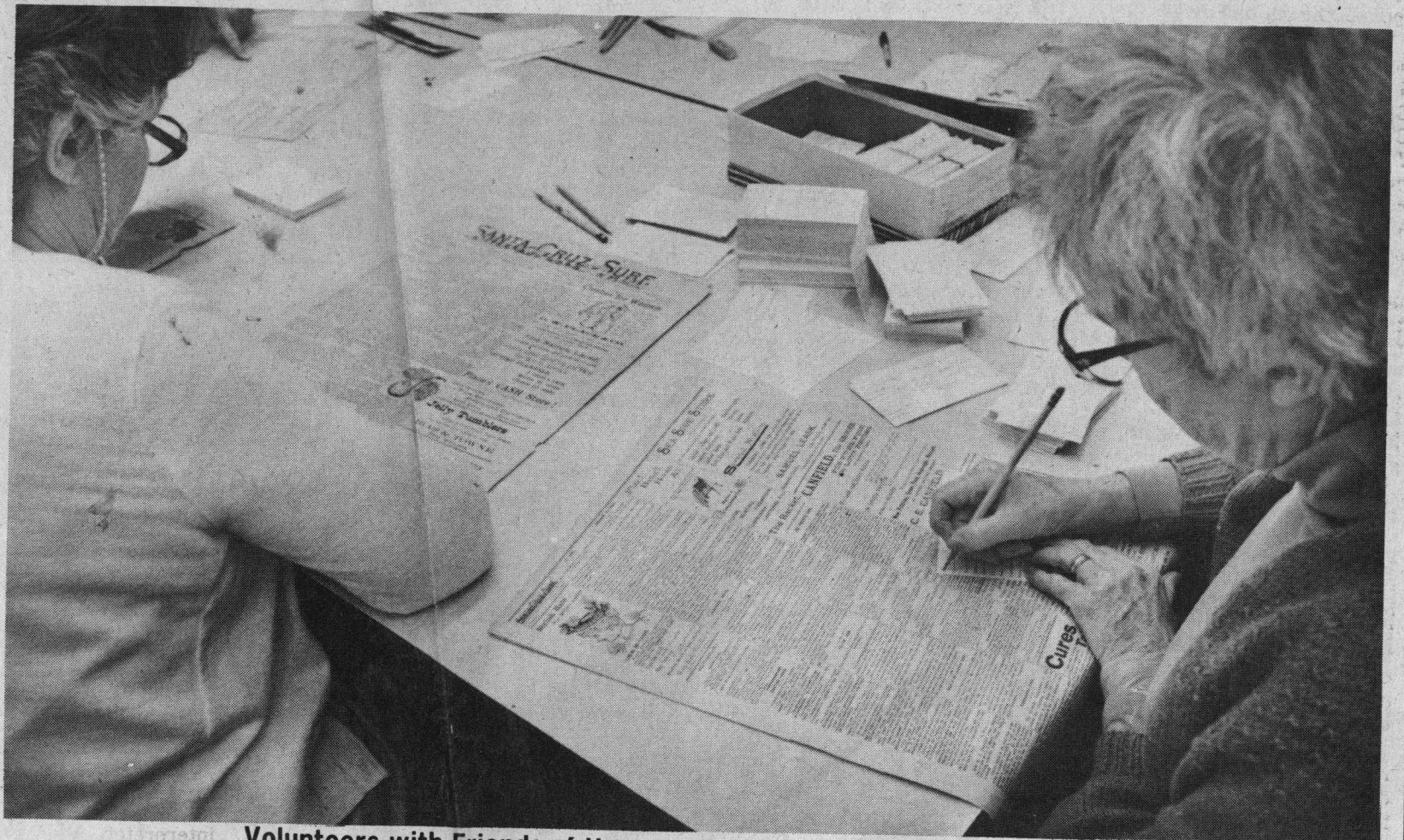
The following day, the Surf carried an interview with Charles. "The separation between myself and (my) wife was caused by her. I had endured agony for five years," he said. "My wife has repeatedly told different parties that she would kill me; this, too I can prove in court ... I have, and have had, ample grounds for divorce but I have never applied for one. My wife's ungovernable temper and unreasonableness, which, I think, amount to insanity, have made my life unbearable ... I do not propose to stand up and be a target for anybody's pistol."

A sidebar to the front page story gives what reporters hear to be her side: Charles was a cold-hearted swindler. He could have even shot himself to make her look bad.

Details like that won't be found in county records, said Bunnett.

"It's nice to know you're helping make local history available," said Bunnett. "The index won't be perfect, but it will be better than what we had, which was nothing."

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Volunteers with Friends of the Library index Santa Cruz Surf.

Photos by Kurt Ellison

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1890's, combing every story for local information can get tedious. Bunnett, who has worked two years indexing, used to take the papers home and work alone at night. During the past two years, some 25 others also helped read and index papers at home. She said it became too "oppressing" to sit alone and





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Santa Cruz official records, said Bunnett, aren't always complete in the 19th Century, which makes the newspaper accounts of vital statistics even more valuable to local researchers. In addition, they often provide a lot of biographical information not included in official documents.

"It gives you some meat to put on the bones of those family skeletons," said Bunnett. "It's such a treat to find something out about your family."

Historically, the stories are a clue to local attitudes and values, she said.

For example, on June 14, 1897, one Mrs. Johnson was

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Though the job is enormous, the volunteers obviously enjoy themselves. They gather around a large table in

the back of Branciforte Library every Thursday, and each takes a separate edition.

Bunnett said when they read something entertaining, they share it with the rest of the group. That makes for a running conversation most days.

One Thursday, it was found:

✓ On a June afternoon in 1897, an octopus with "500 sucking discs" washed up on Seabright Beach.

✓ A road crew found a tin can of gold coins on Mission hill in April, 1890. It was buried by a man who suffered the fate of marrying a trollop, who was unfaithful. The man buried his money and went to

Alaska. He didn't make it back. When the crew dug into the can, coins flew everywhere, then mysteriously disappeared.

✓ An unknown citizen swiped the rain gauge in Boulder Creek during the terrible winter of 1890. Law officials figured the person decided if the rain gauge was gone, the rain would have to stop.

✓ Pearl and Phil, a couple in Capitola, had a colorful, bawdy lifestyle that the Surf covered like a soap opera.

"The journalistic style is fascinating," Bunnett said. "It's obvious everyone knew everyone, so they often leave out that last little splash I'd like to know about. But they assumed everyone knew."

In addition, writers had a tendency to exaggerate a bit, said Dean Reynolds, volunteer.

"This account says two sharks followed a boat for two miles," she said. "I take that with a grain of salt."

Reynolds, a Soquel resident since 1946, is writing a book on Soquel history based on newspaper stories.

"They're nothing items by themselves," she said, "But put together, they form a whole picture."

Although newspapers were only about four pages in the

1890's, combing every story for local information can get tedious. Bunnett, who has worked two years indexing, used to take the papers home and work alone at night. During the past two years, some 25 others also helped read and index papers at home. She said it became too "oppressing" to sit alone and read the small, old print by regular house light.

The weekly 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. group meetings are still on trial as an alternative to working individually. Those interested in helping with the project either on a regular schedule or on a drop-in basis, can call Bunnett, 423-3852, for more information. Bunnett also needs help with the computer printout.

**R**IGHT NOW, Bunnett and her group are indexing the Santa Cruz Daily Surf, a newspaper that was published from 1883 to 1919. The paper promised to be "dashed against your doorstep at high tide every evening (except Sunday)."

There are four volumes (of three months each) left until the group reaches the 1900s, said Bunnett. She hopes to move into the 20th century by May, so she can report the progress to the Friends of the Library at the organization's annual meeting.



Reading newspapers for detail can be entertaining.

"From there," she said, "We'll just plug along. There are no deadlines."

"I work the whole time (every Thursday)," said Bunnett. "I've just dedicated my Thursdays for awhile."

But, she added, for four hours a week, she spends time in a world where a "modern house" sells for \$300, fabric is a nickel a yard and the price of tea in China is really important.