

SANTA CRUZ YESTERDAYS



CAPITOLA 50 YEARS AGO

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

Here is the heart of Capitola back in the days when old Dobbin still provided the principle locomotion for private transportation. This is a younger Capitola, with its chief social center the great Hotel Capitola, which here dominates the background.

The expansive, magnificent and popular caravansary belonged to the elite of California's "grand hotels" of the turn of the century period which produced a literal chain of huge wooden temples of comfort for the traveler which sprung up along the Pacific coast. The Capitola, like the Sea Beach in Santa Cruz, definitely was in the class of the Vendome in San Jose, the Arlington in Santa Barbara, Del Monte across the bay and the Coronado close by San Diego (which classic example of an era still is "in there pitching").

Boardwalk Days
In the leisurely period when

the picture was made a broad boardwalk served all pedestrian traffic along the Capitola beachfront. The styles of the period will doubtless amuse today's readers—near the outer edge of the walk (center) is noted a trio of straw hats, worn by a man, woman and boy, possibly a family of three. Man, woman and youth all are covered by the same type hat!

The shake-roofed board and bat cottage behind them across the street, is one of the pioneer buildings erected in what was originally F. A. Hihn's Camp Capitola.

To the left of this the four "look-alike" two-story structures were then quite new, and though re-located in the days of the H. Allen Rispin 1920 changes, remain today about a street-width distance northeast of the original site.

Electric street railroad service from Santa Cruz had not yet arrived on the beachfront thoroughfare which later became part of the Capitola "loop" around which the local cars rolled, past the hotel entrance and then back to Santa Cruz.

F. A. Hihn's Dream
Frederick A. Hihn, a foremost

Santa Cruzan in the early days, was mainly responsible for development of the original Camp Capitola as a seaside resort in the late sixties. His promotion was developed on a stretch of beach extending from old Soquel Landing, at the mouth of the Soquel creek, eastward to the bluffs. What was then called China Beach, where orientals had a small fishing village, lay beyond.

Descending from this original development was the famous 160-room hostelry, which had been preceded by a 30-room two-story hotel and dining room. Two auxiliary enterprises in those days were a skating rink and livery stable. The former rink became a widely known and popular dancing place known as "Hawaiian Gardens."

In 1895 Hotel Capitola was completed and entered upon a fabulous career which was destined to end abruptly on the evening of December 16, 1929. Fire entirely destroyed the great structure at a time when the hotel had been closed for the winter.