

Davenport -- Whales and Wind and Hearty People

Davenport is a warm pocket of working people, willing to tough it out on their beloved, windswept north coast.

It is a little town of about 90 homes, face to the Pacific which lies restless below its cliffs, seen by the millions of tourists that exit and enter Santa Cruz along scenic Highway 1.

A look at the town, in passing, recalls scenes of "The Last Picture Show" with Davenport's general store still pumping gasoline, its local boardfront bar peculiarly named, The Whaler, and a large family restaurant that seats some of its guests along the wide picture windows that feature the every-changing sea.

A few of the 300-or-so townspeople till the fields of Brussels sprouts that lie atop the cliff, and produce the cement that in early years gave the town its gray coating of dust. Others work in Santa Cruz and in recent years the coastal community has drawn many craftsmen.

Built in 1906, the cement plant has been the mainstay of Davenport's economy, and today its clean operation has ended the image of Davenport as the "little gray town on the north coast."

The cement plant photo, lower right, shows it as a stack of geometric forms set above and to the north of town. It is one of the largest producers of cement in the state and nation, and today is owned by

He had developed shore whaling while at Moss Landing and in 1862 he processed 1700 barrels of whale oil. He continued this process when he moved his whole operation to the north coast in 1868, harpooning the great mammals from small boats and towing their carcasses back to the beach. Here the oil was boiled out in huge black kettles.

He also built a wharf where lumber, tan oak bark, dairy products and other produce were picked up by ships.

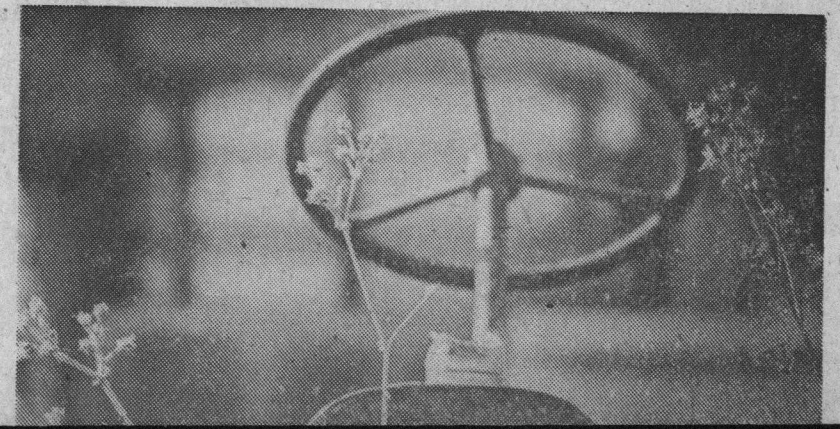
Today, the California Gray Whale is a tourist attraction, drawing thousands of cliff-hangers yearly to watch the leviathans migrating to their birthing waters off the coast of Mexico and Southern California.

The female whales, great with young, leave their Alaskan seas in winter, arriving off Davenport as early as mid-December; then return from mid-February to April, their pups in tow.

While Davenport welcomes its tourists, a small number of them have caused the townsmen their greatest headaches.

For it is the men of Davenport who are called out to rescue the unwary and the careless from the faces of the cliffs and the often merciless waters of the north coast.

They do their rescue work with little outside assistance and no outside funds.



Before cement and agriculture became so important to Davenport, it was whaling, lumber and dairying that founded and gave life blood to the original Davenport settlement which was a mile and a half north of the present town. The latter developed when the cement plant moved in.

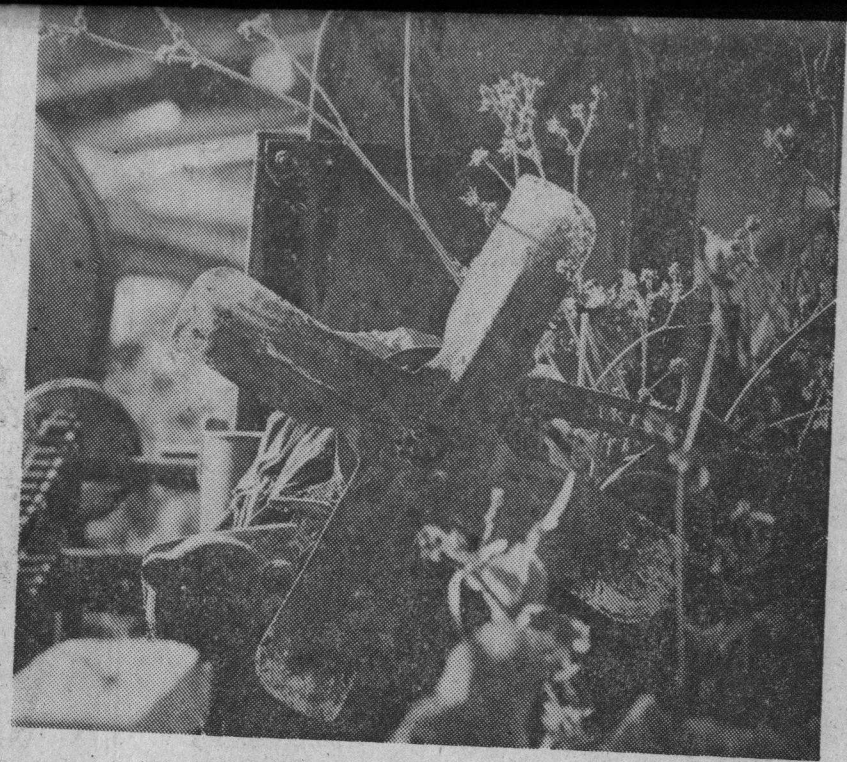
According to Davenport historian, Alverda Orlando, Davenport's Landing and the present town received their names from a whaler — Capt. John Davenport, formerly of Tiverton, R.I.

...the argument is made consistently that the north coast beaches are a state and national resource and the state should subsidize the brave work of the Davenport rescue squad.

The squad's work in 1970 — no different than any other year — won them the Men of the Year award from the Greater Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce.

Davenport is a very small town in the great expanse of the Santa Cruz County north coast; only its unique history and good works make it appear larger than it is.

—PAUL BEATTY



Photos by
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Trop'n'Sea
Living

