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Arriving in style

Lewis E. Hanchett brought the family yacht — the *Sinaloa* — to Capitola in celebration of July 4, 1928. The boat sailed Monterey Bay during its 10-day stay,

and then returned to San Francisco. According to Burke Hanchett, the yacht sank after an explosion in 1931 in Sausalito. The three-master was later raised, repaired and made into a two-masted yacht.

A lady reminisces about childhood days in Capitola

By CAROLYN SWIFT
(First of two parts)

By 1900, Camp Capitola had grown from a seasonal tent community to a fashionable coastal resort—easily accessible, yet secluded; neatly designed, cool and attractive to both middle-class and wealthy tourists.

It emulated Santa Cruz as the pride of the county vacation industry. Capitola sported a skating rink, bath house, permanent cabins, somewhat reliable rail service from San Jose and by 1904, a trolley line from Santa Cruz that ran to the steps of Frederick A. Hihn's elaborate 160-room hotel.

Most visitors came for the season—just till the breezes returned to the state's interior valleys. Only a few built permanent retreats, and fewer still had summer estates.

Among those very few who maintained large summer residences were five San Francisco families who were all friends. They were the Paul Pioda family, the Tillman-Mangels, the Porter-Sesnons, the C.C. Moore family—and the family of Lewis E. Han-

chett, who bought the "English Cottages," of Capitola and renamed the homes "El Salto."

Roughly translated, El Salto means "the leaping-off place," although the Hanchetts may have had something else in mind when they chose the name.

In a way "El Salto," is appropriate for the little clifftop settlement. No one is known to have jumped from Lover's Lane, but there was a good deal else that slid, fell or crumbled into Monterey Bay—mostly dirt, rocks, trees, fences and here and there a bit of garden along with a sizable portion of Grand Avenue.

Until about 1910, people thought blue gum (eucalyptus) trees were healthy things to keep around. They planted them all over the county to protect themselves from disease. It was a nice idea, but it didn't work too well, and by the time the Hanchetts purchased El Salto, the blue gum was losing its popularity.

El Salto had some blue gum and pine planted in three rows near the cliff. They were a part of the resort's charm at first, but the family gradually realized it

was the tearing of the trees at the cliff edge during winter rain and wind storms that caused the erosion.

During nearly four decades, the Hanchetts watched the bluffs retreat across Grand Avenue toward the El Salto fence. In the mid-1930s, the cliff edge came so close that Hanchett had the remaining trees chopped down.

According to the 1975 Capitola General Plan, the erosion rate between Capitola Beach and New Brighton along the coastal bluffs is now .6 to 2.9 feet per year.

Lucy Hanchett, now Mrs. Vincent K. Butler Sr. of San Francisco, was born in 1900 and recalls several visits to Santa Cruz County before the family first rented a house at El Salto in 1909. With her parents and sister Alice, she had been a summer guest at the Mangels Ranch in Aptos and in 1904 had vacationed at Hihn's hotel in Capitola. These visits, she said, prompted her father's later interest in the English cottages on Railroad (Depot) Hill.

Her father, Lewis Edward Hanchett, had been involved with

family operation of two mines in northern California until about 1905. He then acquired interest in development of electric streetcar lines in San Jose, Saratoga, Los Gatos and Alameda. Hanchett's rail line was eventually purchased and reorganized by Southern Pacific.

In 1906, Hanchett was in San Francisco while the rest of the family was away in Santa Barbara. On April 6 he saw their belongings and the family's apartment on Bush Street disappear during the earthquake and fire in San Francisco.

His wife died later that year, and Hanchett and his young daughters moved to San Jose until housing was again available in San Francisco. He became involved with real estate developments in the San Jose area, and one of the tracts there became known as "Hanchett Park"—with streets named after friends that included the Tillman-Mangels family.

Hanchett returned to San Francisco in 1908, and the following year became engaged to Mary

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El Salto: Jumping off place

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Corbet of the city. He rented a summer home for one month at El Salto in 1909, and the family later called this cottage "House 1."

Mrs. Butler said the El Salto resort was initially a summer retreat for two English families—the Robertsons and Rawlins—who came here during the summer from Hanford, near Fresno. They built two houses for themselves, another for a grandmother in one family and a small Victorian for the caretaker. The cottages were built shortly before 1900.

"When Father rented the house," Mrs. Butler said, "The place hadn't been used for years, and had only a caretaker-gardener. It was really run-down."

El Salto then consisted of the four homes plus a barn, boat-house, watertank, clay tennis courts, a croquet lawn and possibly a hot house for vegetables. Grand Avenue circled around to connect with Railroad (Escalona) Avenue, and El Salto was enclosed by a fence.

There was a path leading down the gulch and along the railroad tracks that was a favorite beach route of Mrs. Butler and her sister. The entire beach from Capitola to Aptos, she said, was then known as "China Beach," because of the shacks occupied by Chinese fishermen near the cove at New Brighton.

Hanchett married Mary Corbet in 1910, and for the next two years the family continued to rent El Salto. He bought the entire resort about 1912—and began planning changes necessary for a growing family.

Mrs. Butler and Alice Hanchett became familiar with Capitola, and were provided with a two-wheeled "governess cart," and a pony which stayed at El Salto year-round. The girls swam at the cove and purchased fresh fish directly from the nets when the boats returned with a day's catch. Sometimes they would cut through property they knew was off-limits to the general public, such as "the Fallon Estate," which bordered on the Porter-

Seson lands. This estate was involved in a court litigation, Mrs. Butler said, and was managed by a caretaker.

Although the family kept a four-cylinder Cadillac at El Salto, most of the time they used the railroad for local travels. Groceries came from Angel's market in Soquel, and both ice and meat were also delivered by wagon.

Household and cooking chores at El Salto were performed by staff that traveled with the Hanchetts, but for several years they sent the laundry home to San Francisco—where it was cleaned and returned by express train the following week.

Mrs. Butler remembers a man who lived alone in a shack near the outlet of Aptos Creek, known to the Hanchetts as "Captain Clam." He regularly made visits to El Salto to deliver large sacks of fresh clams for the family and their guests. In the winter, an Irishman named John Smithwick and his wife, Margaret, were caretakers for the homes and garden.

Improvements were stepped-up with the birth of twin brothers, Lewis and Burke Hanchett, who are today San Francisco residents that still spend their vacations in Santa Cruz County.

"One of the first improvements was to run a telephone wire to the Southern Pacific Station at Capitola," Mrs. Burke said, "So Western Union messages could be telephoned to us, which saved the station master having to bring them up."

Gradually, electricity and telephone service were installed, bathrooms were updated, porches and additional sleeping quarters were built, and two kitchens had stoves that heated water for the bathrooms on cold days.

Lewis Hanchett, one of the twins, said eventually the entrance to El Salto was through a gate on Sacramento Avenue, and this portion of the resort was used as pasture land for cows and horses.

(More about El Salto and early day Capitola next week).

This is the way the cliffs in Capitola looked in the 1920s before the top started sloughing away.

