

11-18-56

SANTA CRUZ YESTERDAYS



CIRCUS ELEPHANTS ON PACIFIC AVE.

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

More than forty years have swept down the river of Time since a camera "stopped" this herd of elephants in a circus parade moving south on Pacific avenue near Elm street.

It was the day of great interest in the annual visits of the railroad circuses. At that time the "big show," complete with menagerie and side show and "added attractions," apparently was set up on the Leibbrandt tract at the then lower end of Leibbrandt avenue, between the railroad embankment and the San Lorenzo river.

The parades usually took off down Laurel street and Riverside to Leibbrandt, thence to the grounds, followed by many Santa Cruzans, young and old, intent on viewing the "big free show" on the circus grounds, "immediately after the parade."

The sideshow and freak shows usually "cashed in" on the early comers to the grounds. "There's plenty of time before the big show," hacked the barkers.

Old Circus Grounds

Several times circuses showed at what is now the High school athletic field, later at the Barrett tract, off River street, at Encinal. And one time, at least, at Califor-

nia and Bay streets! Water street at Branciforte creek was another location in later years.

Six pachyderms can be counted in the picture, with two or three more following, probably the Sells-Floto Circus herd. All are bedecked with local business banners, such as: "Get Your Pianos or Sheet Music From Fred R. Howe. Nuf Ced."

Several times Sells-Floto spread its canvas on the Leibbrandt acres near the beach, as did other circuses. Buffalo Bill Cody brought his Wild West and Far East show there in 1910 for the first time. Later he was here in conjunction with Sells-Floto (1914), appearing at the high school field, then locally known as Bush League park. In 1915 Cody made his real farewell appearance at the beach show-grounds.

Until street and housing developments rendered the area no longer available, the beach circus grounds had been used, both spring and fall, for some 25 years.

"Greatest Show"

The huge Barnum & Bailey's "Greatest Show on Earth" spread out in all directions there on two occasions: September 20, 1905, and September 7, 1910. Ringling Brothers' "World's Greatest Shows" was there six times from 1900 through 1909.

The circus girl, complete with parasol, riding the howdah of the lead elephant, seems to be gazing at the Bonner Stables, popular down-the-avenue livery stable, later swept from the local scene by the gasoline wave. Replaced by a new building the old Bonner es-

tablishment was in the approximate location of today's Santa Cruz Bowl.