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Bio - N-O

Ernest Otto, 'Mr. Santa Cruz' Dies

Ernest And His Wonderful Smile



Brief Illness Fatal To Beloved Writer

Ernest F. Otto, 84, much beloved "Mr. Santa Cruz" to thousands and thousands of Santa Cruzans and visitors alike, died quietly in his sleep last night at the Sea View Nursing home.

Columnist and reporter for the Sentinel-News, he had been writing about Santa Cruz and its people for more than 70 years. His Waterfront and Old Santa Cruz columns were prize features of the newspaper.

He had been in the rest home for 11 days after suffering from a heart ailment. He was first stricken June 24, but recovered and was about for several days before being stricken again. Death was due to heart and blood complications.

It was the first serious illness of his long and friendly life.

Ernest Otto was more than just another newspaper reporter. He was an institution, in not only Santa Cruz, but the entire state of California.

He had the distinction of having the longest record of service as a newspaper reporter in the state, plus being one of the eldest. But it wasn't his long length of service that made Ernest Otto a legend in the newspaper world—it was his knack of never forgetting his friends, the common, everyday sort of people that make up the bulk of this world.

Ernest Otto came to work for the old Santa Cruz Surf in 1881 and joined the Santa Cruz Sentinel in 1919. A total of 74 years of service to the community of Santa Cruz.

Ernest did more than write his daily "Waterfront" column telling of the doings of the beach folks and their visitors. He also wrote a weekly historical column, "Old Santa Cruz," telling of the pioneer days of the community. And, most important of all, he daily walked six miles through the heart of the city gathering personal notes on the lives of its citizens.

It was the humanizing quality of his writing that endeared him to the Sentinel's readers. He never used the crisp, brief and impersonal style of modern journalism.

No detail was too small for his reportorial eye. He would report a flowering tree in a yard with the same effort and

ful fishermen, restaurant operators and thousands of vacationists.

He was a member of the Native Sons for 62 years.

After compiling enough notes for his column, Ernest would meander through town talking to his legion of friends and interesting strangers attracted to his friendly personality. Ernest daily turned in approximately 150 personal news notes that helped fill the Sentinel-News with local items.

Otto also covered the county clerk's office with a thoroughness that is still unmatched. No case was too small to merit attention, and his alertness gave the Sentinel-News many "beats" that would have otherwise been missed in the rush of covering the daily news.

Ernest, after completing his daily round, brought his copy to the Sentinel-News office. Not content with reporting local happenings, Otto would also peruse out-of-town papers in search of happenings that had local bearings.

The beloved reporter-columnist also was the Associated Press' correspondent for this area for 67 years.

While Santa Cruz was the center of his life, Ernest did not ignore the outside world. He was well-traveled and one of the big periods of his life was a six-week trip to the east coast in 1950. He traveled from Portland, Oregon, to Miami, Florida, visiting friends

Ernest Otto And Judge James L. Atteridge



Ernest Otto, Santa Cruz veteran newspaperman and columnist who died last night, is shown in a rare picture with Superior Court Judge James L.

Atteridge on the steps of the library. Otto, who covered the court house doings during his long career, had accidentally met with the judge when the

photographer took the picture in 1948. It was one of the few pictures taken of Ernest, who preferred to remain in the background and write the news.

Showing the famous smile for which he'll always be remembered, Ernest Otto, who died last night, is shown at the county clerk's office where he daily covered the legal doings of the county. This picture, taken several months ago, is believed to be the final photograph taken of the veteran reporter and columnist.

his reportorial eye. He would report a flowering tree in a yard with the same effort and love of detail as he would the biggest news story.

A teetotaler all his life, Ernest was not a blue-nose, and is reported to have come to the defense of a friend who was being berated for his tendency to drink with this thrust:

"Some people are better drunk than others are sober."

Ernest told his friends that his only experience with liquor came when he was 10, and was sent to the store for a bottle of vinegar, and by mistake took a bottle of port wine. He drank a large quantity of the wine on the way home and became intoxicated. He never touched alcohol again.

Otto was born just a few yards from the present office of the Sentinel-News in 1871. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. George Otto, were natives of Baltimore, Maryland, and of German stock. The father arrived in 1851 and Mrs. Otto in 1863.

There were eight children in the Otto family, five girls, Josie, Gertie, Grace, Minnie and Cora, and three boys, George, Ernest and Arthur.

Young Ernest attended the old combined Mission Hill grammar and high school and while still attending classes began his first job in the newspaper business. He never did any other type of work during his entire life.

His first task was delivering papers. At that time there were several Santa Cruz dailies and the San Francisco papers were sold here.

After several years of carrying papers he gradually began to write up the personal items he gathered on his routes and after an apprenticeship as a cub he became a full-fledged reporter on the Surf under the editorship of A. A. Taylor.

When the Surf went out of business, Otto joined the Sentinel as city editor. He received many offers to work on newspapers throughout the state but preferred to remain in his beloved Santa Cruz.

Ernest Otto was a deeply religious person—and a member of the Congregational church for 67 years.

He served 57 years as clerk of the First Congregational church here keeping the position until 1950. He was so highly thought of by other members of the church that in 1950 a "day" was held in his honor.

At that time a citation was issued him which read, in part, as follows:

"Ernest Otto stands as a splendid example of volunteer workers who make the Christian church the great institution it is. 'Of his faithfulness there shall be no end.' His life and work in Santa Cruz is living proof of the value of service and good life."

The Pacific, Congregational church state publication, said, in honoring Ernest in 1950, "He knows more about churches and ministers than almost any layman in our fellowship."

Ernest was a familiar sight on the streets of Santa Cruz. Daily he left his house on foot in the mornings and walked to his beloved municipal pier and its color-

traveled from Portland, Oregon, to Miami, Florida, visiting friends and relatives, plus attending a Congregational church convention as a delegate.

On his birthdays and during the Christmas holidays the Sentinel's mail was swamped with greetings and packages for Ernest from his thousands of friends.

He is survived by three nephews and three nieces: Robert E. Radke of Richmond, Harold Radke of Richmond, Mrs. Arlene Booth of Portland, Oregon; Mrs. Hazel Feverjon of San Clemente, Mrs. Eloise Thomas of Greenbrae, and George Radke of Santa Maria.

Funeral services will be conducted by Dr. William D. Pratt, superintendent of the Northern California Congregational churches in the First Congregational church Wednesday, July 13, at 2 p.m. Friends are respectfully invited to attend. Wessendorf mortuary is in charge.

Interment will be in the IOOF cemetery.

Contributions may be made to the First Congregational church building fund.