

Davenport



ANN PARKER

Whales, Cement, Glass and Sticky Buns

by Ann Parker

NORTH OF Santa Cruz along the coast about 10 miles lies the modest town of Davenport: "Population 200, elevation 80," according to the sign on Highway 1.

Someone with a taste for history could weave a tale of whaling and wharfs, Swiss landowners, cement, an empty jail — all about a town that has moved once, burned twice and refuses to die.

A marine biologist might point to the scores of California gray whales which pass close to the Davenport cliffs during their annual 6,000-mile migration.

A married couple might remember the honeymoon spent at the charming inn which literally forms a cornerstone of the town.

An art lover could gush over local studios.

A thirsty visitor might report with astonishment on the twelve kinds of fresh juice in the gas station/bakery/mini-mart.

And some 200 people, myself included, might describe Davenport with one word: Home.

The town owes its name to a Rhode Island whaling captain, John Pope Davenport, who moved here from Monterey about 1869 to build a 450-foot wharf a mile or so north of the town's present site.

The bustling village of Davenport's Landing soon grew up in the cove above the wharf; by 1875 the town included a livery stable, several hotels, two saloons, a blacksmith's shop, a shipyard and two stores.

In the 1880s, the whaling business collapsed; the wharf, abandoned, fell into disrepair. Davenport moved into Santa Cruz in 1885 to become a justice of the peace and real estate agent, and most of the remainder of Davenport's Landing was destroyed by fire in 1915.

As one industry declined, another grew — one which thrives today. In 1905, the Santa Cruz Portland Cement Company built its plant on

land purchased from the area's major landowner, Central Coast Dairies and Land Company, an Italian-Swiss corporation.

At the same time, Coast Dairies and Land started developing the city of Davenport in its present location, including homes for plant workers and a Swiss-inspired church which still stands.

One of Davenport's historians, Alverda Orlando, lived in the town from 1947 to 1975. She tells a tale about "New Town," a group of houses built for upper-level plant personnel and still in use, just north of Davenport.

Apparently, Santa Cruz Portland Cement's major owner/investor, William Dingee, ran off to Paris in 1908. As Mrs. Orlando said: "He absconded with \$20 million.

"So," she continued, "for three months, the workers received no wages, just notes from the company. After three months, *everyone* walked

continued on page 38

Davenport

continued from page 37

off: workers, foremen, superintendents." As she explained it, New Town was built to discourage another strike by putting space between the workers and foremen.

As for Mr. Dingee, "Mr. Crocker of Crocker Band went after him — all the way to Paris — and brought him back. Dingee was tried in San Francisco, and lost everything; he died working as a night watchman."

Everything in Davenport is within walking distance. Starting north, the deli part of Arro's Country Store and Deli is decorated with photos of old Davenport. Owner Philip Arro is friendly and informative, and the "snowflake" cookies bring back childhood memories.

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Binoculars and bundling are suggested for whale-watching comfort.

Less than a block away, the Davenport Jail is one of the town's oldest remaining landmarks. Built in 1914 with cement from the nearby plant, the tiny, two-cell jail saw little use; it now houses written and pho-

tographic information on the area, and is open most weekends, noon to 4 p.m.

Most of Davenport's historical buildings, including the old d'Italia and Ocean View Hotels, were destroyed by fire. The original Davenport Cash Store, which carried "everything from gingham to gunpowder," burned in the early 1950s.

On that same site is the New Davenport Cash Store, a popular restaurant and pottery/jewelry/folk art gallery built by owners Bruce and Marcia McDougal in 1978. The all-local wine list is impressive, the cinnamon buns legendary.

Those sticky buns and other delights are baked a few doors up the street at the Ocean View Bakery, run by the McDougals' son Kristin. The family also owns the Whaler Tavern and have turned one of the town's oldest buildings into part of the New Davenport Bed and Breakfast Inn.

Marine View Avenue is artist/artisan territory. Lundberg Studios is located in the old Davenport Bakery. Jim and Steven Lundberg ship their exquisite hand-blown glass all over the world. The studio is open Monday through Saturday, but the best time to visit is during the annual Christmas and Mother's Day open houses, when you can see demonstrations of the fiery art.

Just beyond Lundberg Studios is Aeolus Boatworks, housed in the former livery stable of the Hotel d'Italia. Bill Grunwald is the longtime owner of this wooden boat business named after the Greek god of the winds.

Another nearby Davenport artist is David Boye, whose fine handcrafted knives, with their etched blades and exotic hardwood handles, demonstrates a blend of art, function and beauty.

Across Highway 1, Davenport's dramatic cliffs offer a breathtaking view of the Pacific Ocean. It pays to respect the cliffs and ocean; careless lives are lost here every year.

Alvin Gregory was born in Santa Cruz 72 years ago, and lives there now. But his family moved to Davenport when he was three years old and his father worked as a fireman

continued on page 41

Davenport

continued from page 38

for the cement plant. During his time in Davenport, including 54 years as owner/operator of Gregory's Country Store (now Arro's), he became a respected historian of the town.

Gregory notes that the town's immigrants have ranged from Italian/Swiss landowners, early Spanish and Portuguese farming/whaling hands and Greek cement workers to Mexicans, Filipinos and Italians who came to farm and work in the cement plant.

And why do I live here? Because Davenport has a special sense of connection and community, aspects I grew up with in Georgia. During a recent bout with the flu, my next-door neighbor came bearing chicken soup and a thermometer.

It seems very appropriate that Odwalla is here, with "Juice for Humans" as a slogan. For such a small town, Davenport has a lot of "juice" and it's very human. □