

President Harrison, parading through Santa Cruz in 1891. By appearing publicly as the guest of Southern Pacific Railroad baron Charles Crocker, Harrison strengthened his opponents' claim that he protected the industrial monopolies of the time.



ROSS E. GIBSON
COLLECTION

President Harrison's visit in 1891

A major first for Santa Cruz

BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON
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The first U.S. president to visit Santa Cruz was Benjamin Harrison. He visited the area in 1891 during a depression that his administration was accused of starting.

Harrison had unseated Democrat Grover Cleveland in 1889. Cleveland, a fiscal conservative and reformer, had won the popular vote but alienated many in the electoral college who opposed his regulation of railroad monopolies and his attacks on the patronage system and import tariffs. Harrison won the White House, and the victory was seen as a mandate for even higher import tariffs, which many called another tax.

Harrison arrived in San Francisco on April 27, 1891, and paraded down Market Street at 1 p.m., accompanied by Southern Pacific Railroad baron Charles



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Crocker. He was Crocker's guest April 29 at Southern Pacific's elegant Del Monte Hotel in Monterey.

After an early morning tour of 17 Mile Drive, he paraded down a tropically bedecked Alvarado Street. Then he picnicked at Cypress Point, where he generously overpaid a Chinese vender \$1 for a seashell souvenir. But paper money was scarce in the West,

and the vender didn't believe it was real, even from the President of the United States. So a silver dollar was substituted.

Despite his enthusiastic reception, he was undermining his campaign for his policies. Parading his friendship with a railroad baron strengthened his critics' charge that he protected the monopolies. Harrison had signed the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, the first legislation to regulate monopolies. But he also increased the hated import tariff on goods and materials, which protected the industrial monopolies of the Northeast, while hurting smaller manufacturers in the South and West.

On May Day, the president's train paused in Capitola for breakfast, then stopped at the luxury Sea-Beach Hotel at Beach and Main streets in Santa Cruz.

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Harrison suffered politically in 1891 visit to Santa Cruz

■ HARRISON

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He admired the hotel's lush gardens, then rode in a parade of open carriages to Third Street, then up Pacific Avenue, which was lined with crowds. Flags were everywhere, combined with bunting and ropes of evergreen. Everything was accented with hundreds of calla lilies, and thousands of roses lent their perfume that May morning.

At the Cooper Street Court House, an old Civil War arch was erected over the street and repainted in honor of Harrison. Children from every school in town stood on both sides of the arch and rained flowers on the president, covering the street with blossoms. In front of the Pacific Ocean House — today's former Pacific Gas & Electric Co. building — members of the Pioneer Society stood on one side of the street, and Civil War veterans and the Ladies Relief Corp stood on the other. The Hastings Band played from the hotel's balcony.

People had been lined up since before dawn. Many were surprised when their brief glimpse of the president revealed a short, balding white-haired man. But he



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— President Benjamin Harrison

won them over when he stood to speak.

"In all my journeying in California, I haven't seen anything so suddenly created, and yet so beautiful, as the decorations of Santa Cruz. This state's bounty

and splendor defy belief," he said.

Harrison was then presented with a polished redwood burl — painted with scenes of Big Trees, and West Cliff arches — framed in poppies. He was also given a booklet of local photos with a cover made from large polished oyster shells and pressed sea moss.

Harrison went to the Uptown Station — today's Goodwill Industries building — and took the train to Big Trees Grove to be greeted by Felton students. Harrison and 25 others crowded into the hollow Fremont Tree, then held hands measuring another tree's circumference. At 9 a.m., he left for San Jose and San Francisco.

During Harrison's administration, the U.S. Treasury surplus evaporated and Republicans lost many seats in Congress. Cleveland was restored to office and ended the import tariffs. Harrison passed into history as a tax-and-spend Republican.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a weekly history column for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.