

1972: A look back at changing face of the Santa Cruz Hotel

Hotels and Boarding Houses

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Sentinel is celebrating its 150th year in 2006 by reaching into our archives to republish some of the noteworthy stories of the past. The following story, titled "Hotel Looks Back Nearly a Century," was printed in the Santa Cruz Sentinel on Jan. 16, 1972.

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The Santa Cruz Hotel, famed for its tasty raviolis and thirst-quenching libations, has a new paint job.

The old gal got a snazzy face-lift including new shutters at the windows and a look more in keeping with her age — which is roughly about 95 or 100 years. The old facade which was cracked and peeling is now smoothly repainted in a pleasing shade reminiscent of yesteryear. New carpet warms the interior.

Yesteryear was a long time ago for the Santa Cruz.

It was first built as a hotel by Robert K. Whidden who owned it for years. He also owned the former Farmers and Merchants Bank corner which became the

Wells Fargo bank and is now the Que Pasa? Shop, at the junction of Locust and Pacific Garden Mall.

Where today the handsome old gray stone Que Pasa? is located, was in Whidden's day an undistinguished frame building with a pointed barn-like roof. One of the first families to take up residence in Whidden's hotel at the corner of Locust and Vine (now Cedar) was that of Captain John Davenport, after they moved from Davenport Landing.

Then for years the hotel was popular with working men and was known as the Germania Hotel. The innkeeper was Frank Pratchner, then J.P. Krieg. The hotel catered to the German-speaking population of the town and was the yearly rendezvous for the Fusiliers, a military company from San Francisco, and for the San Francisco Scheutzen Verein, an athletic group.

In the 1870s, the town of Santa Cruz enjoyed a wide open atmosphere that provided 55 saloons for its 5,000 inhabitants, plus three variety shows where liquor was served by girls — a most daring innovation here, and 10 houses of ill

repute, according to the late Ernest Otto. There were no gambling laws.

However, the Germania hotel was always a genteel establishment, catering to families and workingmen who ate their meals seated at long "family-style tables" and who did their drinking discreetly in another room.

Later it catered to railroad men and for a time was named the Railroad Hotel. That was in the 1880s when there was a small depot waiting station on the railroad line, at the tunnel which today still runs under Mission Hill. A round house was constructed there at the junction of Park and Cherry streets — and a station. The train engine was trundled into its house on a small turntable operated by hand.

Those streets, by the way, are long-gone, lost to progress. So is Vine street. Union is one of the original street names retained in the old depot area.

The railroad men roomed and ate their meals at the hotel, and for a few years gave it its name of Railroad hotel.

In later years, casual citizens have confused the present-day Santa Cruz hotel

with the older Santa Cruz House, which stood on Front Street and burned to the ground in the 1870s.

And in more recent years the confusion has been compounded by frequent change of ownership of the Santa Cruz hotel among and between John Righetti, Louie Facelli, Al Castagnola, Amigo (Fried) Arevalo, Don Stefani, Stella Pera, the late George Goebel and Anton Suk.

Today it is owned by Annie Righetti and Arevalo.

Annie also operates a ravioli business which reaches into surrounding counties, spreading the gustatory fame of the Santa Cruz hotel. John Righetti tends bar.

In 1964 the hotel opened its Annex a modern, comparatively unattractive building (compared with the hotel itself, that is), that seats about 100 persons.

In 1962-63 the hotel initiated a series of dinner-theaters that proved successful with the public but too much for the hotel so they were discontinued.

Today the old hostelery is content to rest on its laurels — ravioli and minestrone and dozens of other Italian and non-Italian goodies.