

Santa Cruz Yesterdays

Capitola to 1959



AFTER THE BIG FIRE AT CAPITOLA, FEB. 8, 1933

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

One of the largest fires ever to visit Capitola occurred 20 years ago last month.

Starting shortly before 4 o'clock a.m., February 8, 1933, in the Chinese Gardens, it swept also the adjoining Hawaiian Gardens, a popular dance spot on San Jose avenue, and the entire block bounded by San Jose, Capitola avenue and the esplanade.

It was finally put down after a stiff fight by four fire department crews, from Capitola, Soquel, Santa Cruz and Aptos. Only one building, a 2-story apartment and store structure, itself partly damaged, escaped destruction, in the burned area.

Turns In Alarm

Lulu M. Dunn (now Mrs. G. R. Bigbee), who was then post-mistress, living diagonally across the street, where is the present S. H. Rodgers drug store, was awakened by the flames and smoke issuing from the new Chinese Gardens, and spread the alarm. Work had been in progress on the newer dance hall in preparation for an early opening.

Fortunately there was little wind stirring to spread the fire. Flames and embers moved southerly across the only open area adjoining the burning block.

Loss was estimated at over \$100,

000. Among the properties destroyed were the Carl Sneath grocery; Capitola Inn, in property owned by Frank Kasseroller, later of Soquel; Casey's restaurant; a photo studio; Echol's restaurant; Dickinson Curio store; Bud Choisser's refreshment stand and home; Harry Hooper's real estate office; Walter Coleman's shoe repair shop and home; Cox and McClintic, cigar store.

Dancing Was Fun

In those pre-television days dancing was most popular. "Let's go to Cap," always presaged a run to Capitola for the dancing at Hawaiian Gardens, where as many as 3500 paid admissions were sold in a single night.

Then operated by a syndicate of Santa Cruzans, the Gardens lost two baby grand pianos, a large quantity of valuable furniture and expensive fixtures, many hand-wrought. The maple dance floor in itself was worth several thousand dollars.

An immense stone fireplace which stood at the rear of the dance hall, after the fire loomed high in the debris, having withstood the intense heat. It had been a feature of the atmosphere of home-like friendliness there.

One Building Spared

In the picture above, which looks northerly toward the railroad

trestle, across the west end of the burned area, the fireplace, and tall brick chimney are plainly seen, and behind it the one building in the entire block which escaped, but not without some damage.

Across the esplanade at extreme left is the location of today's Circle Drug store.

In a \$50,000 fire a little more than three years before, the Capitola hotel had burned on the night of Monday, December 16, 1929.

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