

# The Coney Island of the West

BOARDWALK CELEBRATES ITS CENTENNIAL WITH  
A COLORFULLY ILLUSTRATED HISTORY BOOK

Boardwalk

5-27-07

*'While having fun, we provide fun'*

BOARDWALK MISSION STATEMENT

By **CHRIS WATSON**

*Sentinel staff writer*

It's time to test your knowledge of local history.

What local business has made it into the National Historic Landmarks survey four times since 1987?

Still scratching your head?

Let's make it easier.

What has 35 rides, three arcades, 30 games of skill, 40 food locations, an electronic shooting gallery, indoor miniature golf and gift shops with everything from beachwear to wetsuits and jewelry?

That's right — the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, the "last of California's original oceanside amusement parks," according to "The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk: A Century by the Sea" [Ten Speed Press, paper, \$18.95].

Conceived, written and produced by a large posse of folks — most notably, Kim MacLoud, Amy Sibiga, Bonnie Minford, Ted Whiting III and Marq Lipton — this coffee-table book isn't

## Find it online

Take it easy this holiday weekend and see if you can spot your favorite Boardwalk ride, game or snack in a video presentation at [www.santacruzsentinel.com](http://www.santacruzsentinel.com).

shy about tooting the Boardwalk's horn.

Why should it be?

Santa Cruz' pre-eminent attraction has weathered economic recessions, wars, stiff competition and changing lifestyles and *still* managed to attract new visitors, update its image and hold onto tradition longer than any other seaside park in the state.

And after all these years, the Boardwalk remains the first thing most people think of when they think of Santa Cruz.

That kind of celebrity, my friends, takes work.

Fred Swanton, developer and promoter back in the late 19th century, started it all.

## If You Go

**WHAT:** 'Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk: A Century by the Sea,' with contributors Charles Canfield, Marq Lipton and Ted Whiting, and special viewing of the DVD.

**WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. June 7.

**WHERE:** Bookshop Santa Cruz, 1520 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz.

**COST:** Free.

**DETAILS:** 460-3232.

**OTHER EVENTS:** Throughout the summer, the Boardwalk will sponsor a variety of special centennial events:

■ **JUNE 9:** 'Dancing Through Time,' a Cocoanut Grove Gala dinner and dancing.

■ **JUNE 16:** Birthday fireworks.

■ **JUNE 22-AUG 31:** Free Friday night bands on the beach.

■ **JUNE 25-AUG 28:** 1907 nights, 75 cent rides after 5 p.m. every Monday and Tuesday.

■ **JULY 8-AUG. 16:** Moscow Circus, a free performance (Sun-Thurs).

■ **JULY 25:** 'The Lost Boys,' an outdoor screening.

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The Neptune Casino has a Moorish style taken from the Alhambra Palace in Spain. In 1904, a fancy restaurant held the second floor, while on the beach, awnings provided shade. It burned in 1906.

Contributed photo



# SANTA CRUZ STYLE

## That was the park that was

A lot has changed at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk since the first portable bath sheds were lined up on the beach in 1866.

The Miller-Leibbrandt bathing plunge may have initialized development in 1893 but it paled in comparison to the attractions arranged by developer and promoter Fred W. Swanton.

After Swanton formed the Santa Cruz Beach Cottage and Tent City Corporation in 1903, local real estate prices doubled and tourists flocked to town.

In 1904, he built the Neptune Casino and in 1907, replaced the tents with cottages.

It wasn't long before the banjo-strumming musicians of 1889 were outclassed by a shifting array of rides, games and assorted concessions.

After the fire of 1906 destroyed the Casino and plunge, Swanton rebuilt with vigor, adding a theater and ballroom to the Casino as well as a penny arcade and ice cream parlor.

In 1904, a Pleasure Pier was built; in 1907, the saltwater Natatorium pools were added; and in 1908, the beach's first thrill ride — a roller coaster known as the Scenic Railway, opened.

After that, the game was afoot.

An aquarium was added, a roller rink, a shooting gallery, bowling alley and more.

In 1917, airplane rides were offered from the pier and Marini's began their long career in candy.

When the Giant Dipper was built in 1924, replacing the Scenic Railway, the Boardwalk's reputation was fully achieved.

A lot has changed since then.

The Wild Mouse and Jet Star rides have come and gone. The Fun House (1925) was demolished in 1971 and the yearly fireworks are no more.

No more scones. No more Laff-Land.

No longer can mothers sit in rocking chairs and dote on their children riding the merry-go-round as they once could.



Contributed photo

In the 1990s, a fireworks display celebrated the city's birthday. Huge crowds make firework displays today more difficult.

## Boardwalk

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"Swanton knew the beach and the weather was good but that it wasn't enough to bring people to Santa Cruz," Marq Lipton, vice president of marketing and sales for the Boardwalk, said recently.

"Swanton knew you needed a hook, an additional reason for people to come here. And it's more true now than ever."

One hundred years ago, Swanton promoted the Boardwalk by chartering a train and advertising the park's attractions at all the cities feeding into Santa Cruz.

ton and Littlefield, we sent out press releases and ads and I called the Washington Potato Board, then quoted the executive director as saying "That's a big potato."

Despite all the promotions, however, Swanton's Beach Co. went bankrupt in 1914, a victim of the economy and the competition from the California Expo in San Francisco.

It was, however, anything but the end of the story.

"In 1915, the Seaside Co. was formed and took over the park," Lipton said.

"Primarily a California corporation, its shareholders are largely

local families, primarily the Canfield family."

The influence wielded by the Canfield family, Lipton believes, is a major reason for the Boardwalk's survival.

"Laurence Canfield kept us viable in the '50s and '60s when other parks were struggling. And by buying up parcels of land and building a parking lot, he accommodated the era of the automobile."

Not only is the Canfield family committed to reinvesting in the Boardwalk, but they care about the history of the park, Lipton said.

Where amusement parks like

## From peep show to pinball to laser tag

Nowhere is the Boardwalk's timeline more easily read than in the changing games of the arcade.

Kids today might save their dollars for laser tag, but old-timers were just as jazzed by the penny peep shows of their day.

For a single cent, one could watch a movie by turning a crank and advancing cards in rapid sequence.

Fortune telling machines were also popular as were machines that tested your strength.

And one could get love advice, have perfume dispensed on your hanky or be vibrated to improve your health.

During the '40s, one could insert a dime to get an Air-Mail Letter or shoot down moving airplanes. In 1956, a player could operate a crane shovel to scoop up beans.

The weirdest arcade game listed in 'A Century By the Sea' has to be the one that, for five cents, predicted how many babies you were destined to have.

While some of the old games — like Grama Fortune-Teller from the '30s — are still on the floor, most are stored deep in the Boardwalk's vaults where archivist Bonnie Minford keeps a watchful eye on them.

## A Boardwalk memory

The Wild Mouse, which opened in 1958, was the favorite Boardwalk ride of many thrill seekers.

And although the mini-coaster ride looked like a children's ride, it was anything but.

In 'A Century By the Sea,' longtime Boardwalk visitor Gloria Scurfield recalled her first mouse ride.

"We came across the trestle, and here was a new ride, right at that curve. I said, 'Oh, look. They've got a children's roller coaster.' All these years I've never been on the Giant Dipper. Never. Never. I can't take things like that at all. Anything that goes off the ground, I don't want any part of."

"So I said, 'Here's a children's roller coaster. I'll take you boys on it.' So Geoff and Greg are in a car, and it's called the Wild Mouse. I'd never seen it before — it was brand-new. It started up and I'm waving to Geoff and Greg up ahead of us, and it gets to the top — oh, my God, I thought I was dying! I thought I had a defective car for one thing, because it was rattling. Then when it went right out straight, and I thought we were headed for the sand, and then it made that abrupt turn. Oh-oh! I couldn't scream. And I kept saying, 'It's okay, Johnny.' And I was dying. I'll never get over it."

"I got off of that and everyone on the beach heard about it that day. I swear. And I thought it was a children's roller coaster. That was our introduction. I would never have gotten on that thing."

Frontier Village and Knotts Berry Farm have to develop a theme to attract visitors, the long history of the Boardwalk is its own theme; the park is kitschy and retro without trying.

But the work to attract visitors continues unabated.

"In the old days," Lipton said, "amusement parks competed for visitors' leisure dollars."

"Now," he said, "we compete for precious leisure hours."

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No more scenes. No more Land. No longer can mothers sit in rocking chairs and dote on their children riding the merry-go-round as they once could.

The Plunge was filled in and became Neptune's Kingdom, with miniature golf and table games.

The dance floor was turned into the Auto Speedway which became the Drive-A-Boat.

In 1961, the Cave Train and Auto-Rama were added; in 1962, palms were planted along Beach St.; in 1977, the Logger's Revenge replaced the Wild Mouse

Plus, of course, the Ferris Wheel, the Haunted Castle, and the Double Shot.

In all this time, only one thing has stayed the same.

Traffic.

## Great moments in Boardwalk history

Like a giant magnet, the Boardwalk has attracted families, Hollywood producers, athletes, circus acts, young lovers, thrill seekers and groups of kids looking for summer fun for over a hundred years.

They've arrived by horse and buggy, train, bike, automobile and on foot, but they've all come looking for the same thing: the spice that turns an ordinary day into an extraordinary one.

Attractions that have drawn crowds include the day in 1906 when Harley Davidson skated at the opening night of the Boardwalk's new roller rink. For the evening's thrilling climax, the Canadian speed skater leaped over five chairs.

Other early visitors included Roald Amundsen, Susan B. Anthony, Andrew Carnegie, Buffalo Bill Cody, Gentleman Jim Corbett, Brett Harte, King Kalakaua, Paderewski, Mary Pickford, Theodore Roosevelt and John Philip Sousa.

In 1920, the great Hawaiian surfer and Olympic swimming champ Duke Kahanamoku demonstrated his speed at the Plunge.

More recently, Vincent Price and Wilt Chamberlain came to ride the roller coaster.

Beach, sun and good weather also attracted a wide variety of acts to the Boardwalk.

The First Venetian Water Carnival was held in 1895; the state Republican Convention was held at the 'canvas' casino (after the 1906 conflagration) in 1906; Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet (with 50 ships and 14,000 men) dropped anchor in 1908; and the Royal Hungarian Orchestra arrived by train in 1911.

Games and contests have attracted their fair share of fun seekers too, some of the most memorable being: in 1924, when the Miss California franchise was awarded to Santa Cruz and held at the Boardwalk; the 1927

One hundred years ago, Swanton promoted the Boardwalk by chartering a train and advertising the park's attractions at all the cities feeding into Santa Cruz.

According to "A Century by the Sea," promoter M.C. Hall and Skip Littlefield continued promoting the Boardwalk by advertising its unique attractions.

From the Venetian Water Carnivals and the Miss California Pageant to Cuervo Gold Volleyball tournaments, Easter Egg Hunts and the Friday Night Summer band series, the Boardwalk has never rested on its laurels.

In the book, Lipton tells about one of the more unusual Boardwalk promotions — "Santa Cruz's Largest Potato."

"It was the off-season when a food concessionaire discovered a 10-pound potato," Lipton recalled recently.

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formed and took over the park," Lipton said.

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