

# Walk the West Side to find 'real' Santa Cruz

By SANDY LYDON  
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*Second in a series*

**M**OST VISITORS to the West Cliff area of Santa Cruz spend their time watching the surfers, the sea lions and the stunning view of the wharf and coast to the east. This walk is designed to turn you around 180 degrees and plunge you into the rich, savory history of what many consider to be the Real Santa Cruz.

The walk is a bit on the long side (3 miles without the Kitchen Brothers option) and the terrain is flat and allows a leisurely pace, with appropriate stops for reflection, the walk won't take more than three hours or so.

But then, what's the hurry?

**No. 1. Lighthouse Field Parking Lot.** Park somewhere near the public restrooms off West Cliff Drive just north of Lighthouse Point park and lock your car. (A friend suggested that this series should be titled "A Walking Guide to Public Restrooms" because of my apparent fetish with public plumbing. I learned long ago that interest in history declines sharply as bladder pressure increases). Cross West Cliff Drive, turn left and walk north on the paved pathway on the cliff top. The traffic on the path is a mixture of bicyclists, joggers, roller skaters, walkers and dogs-on-leashes, so be attentive. The rule of the road seems to be that walkers keep to the far right and wheels pass on the left.

Sit down on a bench and absorb the view of ocean, wharf, Boardwalk and city. The water immediately before you between the cliff and the wharf is Steamer Lane, a name referring back to the time when steamers came in and out of Santa Cruz.

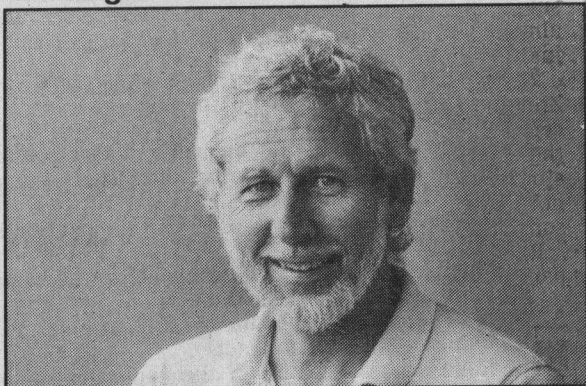
What makes the Lane good for surfers made it bad for steamers. Santa Cruz has no natural harbor. Before the construction of the first wharf in the early 1850s, goods came into and left Santa Cruz through the surf. A number of Santa Cruz's pioneer mothers and fathers were dumped unceremoniously on the beach by the same waves that the surfers love so much. Even with the later wharves, shipping at Santa Cruz was a dicey proposition.

The wharves were also critical to the success of the Italian fishermen who came to Santa Cruz in the 1880s. An ingenious use of winches (davits) on the wharves made it possible for the fishermen to pull their boats out of the water, and harm's way, when storms threatened.

The wharf before you is the last of the series. Constructed in 1914, the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf eventually was eclipsed by more dependable shipping over land using trucks. When the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor was opened in 1963, the last of the commercial fishermen moved off the wharf.

OK, time to walk. Continue north on the pathway, only now begin watching to your left. The row of stately houses facing you across West Cliff Drive represents Santa Cruz's function as a summer getaway for wealthy San Francisco Bay area entrepre-

## Hindsight



Sandy Lydon

neurs. The best examples of summertime Santa Cruz gentility begins with the gray, towered building on the corner of Santa Cruz Street and West Cliff Drive. Named Epworth-by-the-Sea, the house was built in 1897 and eventually purchased by a family who made a fortune in Colorado cattle. Note the specimen trees in the yard.

Next (315 West Cliff Drive) is a William Weeks, designed early 20th century Mission Revival building. Now a bed and breakfast inn named the Darling House, it has accents of red trim and tile roof that give the house a warm, almost erotic look. The third house, across Gharkey on the corner, is a pale blue bungalow built around 1905. Like a row of elegant old dowagers sitting on the lawn, the three houses gaze dispassionately at the egalitarian parade before them.

Continue on West Cliff, passing the Sea and Sand Motel. Recently refurbished by the Seaside Company, the motel has fresh paint; its geranium garland and human scale give it an inviting and intimate feel. Not so the building next door.

**No. 2. The Dream Inn.** Dream Inn-bashing is a popular sport among Santa Cruz residents, and I hesitate to indulge in it. But the darned building is just so stark and out of place. Waikiki? Maybe. Miami? Probably. Even moderate Santa Cruzans were angered by the building and I believe that its construction set loose many of the political forces that have shaped Santa Cruz since 1972. You want to know why there's no convention center at Lighthouse Point? Here's one of the reasons. Politics and aesthetics aside, the Dream Inn offers some killer views from its Compass Room lounge and rooms on the upper floors.

Cross West Cliff at Bay and follow Bay on the right hand side, past the parking lot (site of the old Sister's Hospital) and across from the recently completed 200 Bay condominium development. There must be something in the ground around here that makes buildings grow BIG. Didn't I just say that the Dream Inn made Santa Cruzans vow, "Never Again?" Go figure.

*Please see WEST SIDE — B3*



# West Side walk uncovers multicultural layers

Continued from Page B1

In the 19th century, the property occupied by the 200 Bay was owned by Henry Cowell. He had a warehouse on top of the cliff and a long, sloping wharf below off which he shipped the lime from his kilns, on what is now the University of California campus. Thousands of barrels of lime came down Bay Street with the ox teams doing their best to keep the loads from running away. Cowell refused to allow anyone to cross his property to the cliff views beyond, so the route for pleasure walks and rides went up Bay and then left on Lighthouse.

Continue on past Lighthouse and once you pass the mobile home park and houses, you'll be able to see Neary Lagoon through the trees to the right. Continue up Bay until you get to Laguna, cross Bay (carefully) and turn left onto Laguna.

**No. 3. La Barranca.** You are now entering "La Barranca," the home of Santa Cruz' Italian fishing community. Geoff Dunn in his touching tributes to the Italian community in his book, "Santa Cruz is in the Heart," estimates that there were 60 families clustered between Lighthouse Avenue and the Circles. Many of the descendants of those pioneers from Riva Trigosa still live in the neighborhood.

Continue up Laguna for two blocks. At the corner of Santa Cruz Street, Laguna suddenly widens into a boulevard, changes to Delaware Avenue and sweeps away in a long curve to the right.

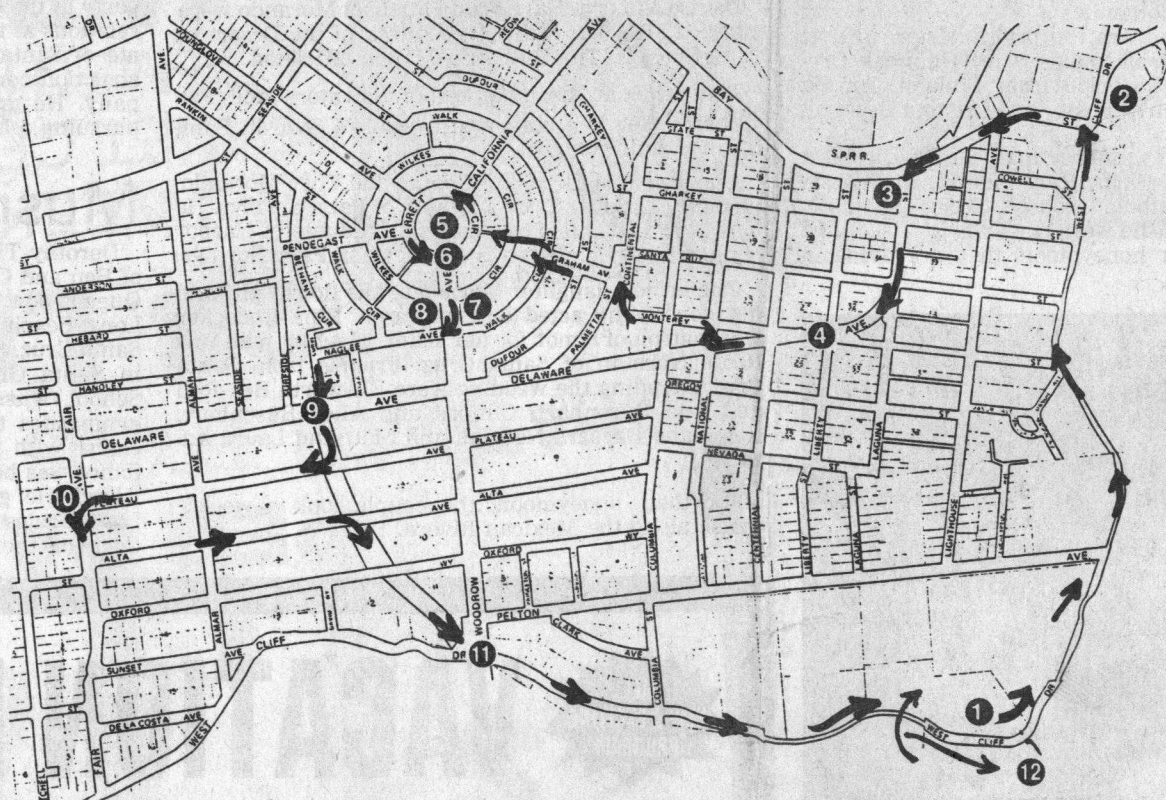
**No. 4. Delaware Avenue and the Ocean Shore Railroad.** Delaware is wide because it was once the right of way for the Ocean Shore Railroad, an unsuccessful effort to connect San Francisco and Santa Cruz along the coast. It was begun in 1906, but construction was halted by the April earthquake and the railroad never recovered. Eventually, the line extended from the top of the bluff above Neary Lagoon (Cowell would not allow the Ocean Shore to cross his property either), past where you are standing up the coast to Swanton where passengers got off the train for a 26-mile bus ride. At Tunitas, they reboarded another train to complete the ride to San Francisco. The trip was too awkward and the automobile too popular. The line sputtered and died and the tracks torn up in 1920 leaving a wide slash of Delaware Avenue.

Follow Delaware to Centennial and note the strangely shaped lots where the Ocean Shore diagonal



Carolyn Swift collection

This photograph of Vue de L'Eau at the end of Garfield (now Woodrow) and West Cliff was taken around 1900. The site since fell into the sea.



(now Woodrow) to its end at the sea. The street car line was eclipsed by the automobile and

on the two has been done by Nikki Silva and Davia Nelson (who called themselves the Kitchen

would like to hear from anyone with further information).

the intersection of Woodrow and West Cliff Drive.

**No. 11. The Vue de l'Eau.** There was a tiny gazebo-like building where the streetcar line ended at the cliff. Santa Cruz gave its own pronunciation to the French name Vue de l'Eau (ocean view). Instead of "voo de low," the locals said "view de loo," a pronunciation which must have caused visitors from Great Britain to do a double take. The building was closed in the 1920s when the streetcar line was shut down.

Like the bluff at Capitola, West Cliff is falling into the sea. In his book "Living with the California Coast," Gary Griggs indicates that over 40 feet of coastline have disappeared at the end of Woodrow since 1931. As you walk east back to Lighthouse Point, note the cracks in the walkway and the pipes jutting into the air, marking the inexorable northward movement of the coastline.

**No. 12. Lighthouse and Surfing Museum.** There has been a light of some kind as an aid to navigation on this point since 1870. (The point is actually Santa Cruz Point, but common usage these days refers to the lighthouse). The brick lighthouse there now was donated to the people of Santa Cruz by Chuck and Esther Abbott (Chuck Abbott was also the guiding light behind the Pacific Garden Mall) in 1967. Dedicated to the memory of their son, Mark, who drowned while body surfing in 1965, the building now contains the Surfing Museum.

The Surfing Museum (open Thursday through Monday from 1 to 4 p.m.) is an adjunct of the Santa Cruz City Museum and is dedicated to the history of surfing here in

Santa Cruz. Volunteers staff the building and provide the energy which has found that surfing can be documented as early as 1885 in Santa Cruz. This little museum had a startling 85,000 visitors during fiscal 1988, more visitors than all the other museums in Santa Cruz combined. A testimony not only to the interest in surfing, but also to the old real estate truism — Location. Location. Location. The lesson here is that if you want people to visit your museum (or art gallery), drop it where people are already hanging out.

**No. 13. Lighthouse Field.** The gnarled and ragged Cypress trees in the field are remnants of the era that saw Lighthouse Point, a summer home owned by the Phelan family (Phelan's other and more famous summer retreat was Villa Montalvo in Saratoga). The Phelans purchased the property in the late 1880s and laid out an elaborate garden. In the field near the restrooms, you can still see the edges of the salt water swimming pool.

James D. Phelan was mayor of San Francisco and a United States senator, building much of his political career on a strident platform of anti-Asian racism, directed particularly at the Japanese.

It is ironic and fitting that Phelan's garden withers and dies, while just a block away pulses a vibrant, multicultural, integrated neighborhood, mocking Phelan's vision of an all-white California.

The next in the series will be Aptos Village.

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Avenue.

Follow Delaware to Centennial and note the strangely shaped lots where the Ocean Shore diagonal intersects the right-angle streets. Continue to National, turn right and then left onto Monterey. Follow Monterey across Columbia and into the shaded block where it ends. Turn right onto narrow Continental and then left once you emerge from the trees on to Palmetta. You are now on the outermost orbit of the Circles.

**No. 5. The Circles.** Originally laid out in 1889, this circular subdivision was known as the Garfield Park subdivision. The Monterey Bay area had become a popular place for churches to establish summer encampments, and the Christian Churches of Northern California laid out the circular development for that purpose. The park was named for President James A. Garfield; the streets radiating out were named for prominent church officials.

Garfield Park Tabernacle was built at the development's bullseye. The huge, octagonal church, completed in August, 1890, seated several thousand people (accounts range from 2,000 to 4,000) and was the centerpiece of the church's summer retreats.

Since the building was only used for several weeks each year, standing vacant the remainder, the State Board of Christian Churches offered to donate the building and circular lot to the city of Santa Cruz in 1916 in exchange for the city paying off the remaining \$2,000 mortgage on the building. The city declined the offer. The tabernacle burned in a spectacular fire in August, 1935 and was replaced by the current building.

Proceed up Graham Avenue and note the number of simple bungalows that dot the neighborhood. On the left-hand corner of Walk Circle and Graham there is a false-front building, which was once the headquarters of a local fraternal society known as the Red Men. The Martial Arts Institute is now located there and you may hear the thump of non-violence coming from the building. Cross Walk Circle and proceed to the narrow alley (next to the Neighborhood Watch sign) and slip through the alley to Wilkes Circle, crossing through to Errett Circle and ground zero.

Follow Errett Circle in a counter-clockwise circle to the right. The brightly painted Circles Market is an opportunity to take a break.

**No. 6. The Santa Cruz, Garfield Park and Capitola Electric Railway.** Garfield Park was developed in concert with an electric street car line which opened in November, 1891, connecting the west side of Santa Cruz with Capitola. The rail line, Garfield Park and a similar Baptist development at Twin Lakes on Santa Cruz's east side, all helped to suburbanize Santa Cruz and spread it beyond the downtown core. The street cars were extremely popular, serving thousands of riders each month. The line came out Mission Street, turned down Younglove, turned around small part of Errett Circle and then down Garfield Avenue

(now Woodrow) to its end at the sea. The street car line was eclipsed by the automobile and was shut down in 1926.

**No. 7. Santa Cruz Missionary Baptist Church.** When you mention The Circles to longtime residents, they immediately think of the Santa Cruz black community. And rightly so, for it is here that the majority of Santa Cruz's black families settled after World War II.

There seem to be two reasons for blacks locating here. First, part of an all-black unit of the Coast Artillery was located at Lighthouse Point during World War II. The families of some of the men stationed at Lighthouse Point found housing here. The second reason that the black families settled in the Circles was that they were discouraged when they tried to live elsewhere in Santa Cruz.

The Santa Cruz Missionary Baptist Church was established during the 1940s. Take particular note of the north wall of the building facing on Wilkes Circle. It seems as if the architect tried to match the wall to the street's curve, but not the roof, creating a fascinating mixture of angles and curves. Walk across Woodrow (this street is wide because it had a trolley line in the center) to the library.

**No. 8. Garfield Park Library.** Completed in March, 1915, this sweet little building is one of the last Carnegie libraries still in active use in the region. If the library is open, be sure to go in and browse, noting particularly the fireplace on the south wall and Carnegie's portrait which slipped a bit during the Oct. 17 earthquake. If you have a moment, sit back and observe this genuine neighborhood library and the diverse, multicultural people it serves. Turn right when you leave the library and then turn right on Naglee and follow it two blocks, turning left on Bethany Curve.

**No. 9. The Bethany Curve Greenbelt.** Follow Bethany Curve one block, cross Delaware Avenue (listen for the whistle of the Ocean Shore) and enter the park. Now owned and maintained by the city of Santa Cruz, this delightful park with its sycamore trees and benches follows an old right-of-way. The creek gurgling down the park's center apparently has no name. Follow the park and No Name Creek to the next street which is Plateau.

**No. 10. Kitchen Brothers Optional.** If you have an interest in seeing one of Santa Cruz's true architectural wonders and have some energy remaining, turn right on Plateau and follow it west to where it intersects with Fair Avenue. As you approach Fair, a red brick spire will appear and at Fair the entire brick wonderland will open up before you. This area is known for its churches (there is a Jehovah's Witness congregation next door on the right), but this is like no church you've ever seen before.

This church-like building was constructed by one of the Kitchen Brothers. The oral history about the two brothers is as thick as the building before you is strange. To date, the most extensive research

on the two has been done by Nikki Silva and Davia Nelson (who called themselves the Kitchen Sisters because they were so taken with the story). One Kitchen Brother, Kenneth, was a brick mason and he started building the brick temple during World War II while the other brother, Raymond, was a stone mason who built an elaborate stone building further north on Fair just across the tracks (1211 Fair, now owned by Stoller Research).

According to those interviewed about the brothers, Kenneth built this brick temple at night, in the light of the moon. He also believed that there were German submarines off the coast and built an elaborate electronic device which he used to listen for submarines at night. The brothers were superb craftsmen and their work still stands throughout Santa Cruz. (The Kitchen Sisters are still working on the Kitchen Brothers. I

would like to hear from anyone with further information).

I am often asked if Santa Cruz was as tolerant as it seems to be today and I usually answer in the affirmative, giving the Kitchen Brothers and their projects as an example of the latitude the community gave people to follow their impulses. Santa Cruz always had room for artistic and even religious eccentricities. On the other hand, in light of the stories of the Chinese and black communities, ethnic and racial tolerance in Santa Cruz was generally low. I would also argue that Santa Cruz was much more tolerant of unusual ideas in the 1890s and 1940s than in 1990. The notion of "political correctness" is a fairly recent phenomenon in Santa Cruz.

Go one block south on Fair and then turn left on Alta and return to where Alta intersects with the Bethany Curve Greenbelt and turn right and follow the Greenbelt to