

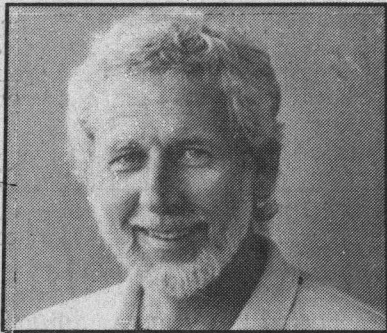
September was the time the county closed up

Lydon, Sandy
SEPTEMBER IS late this year. Oh, the calendar page turned right on schedule, but all the September sights and smells are still circling out there waiting to land.

Usually, by this time, the creek maples splash the canyons with dollops of yellow gold and the clumps of poison oak have turned a sinister, satin red.

Many of the apple trees in the Pajaro Valley are still bowed under the weight of fruit usually picked by now. And we've yet to have that burst of warm weather where the north wind brings the smell of redwood and fir down to the beach.

Hindsight



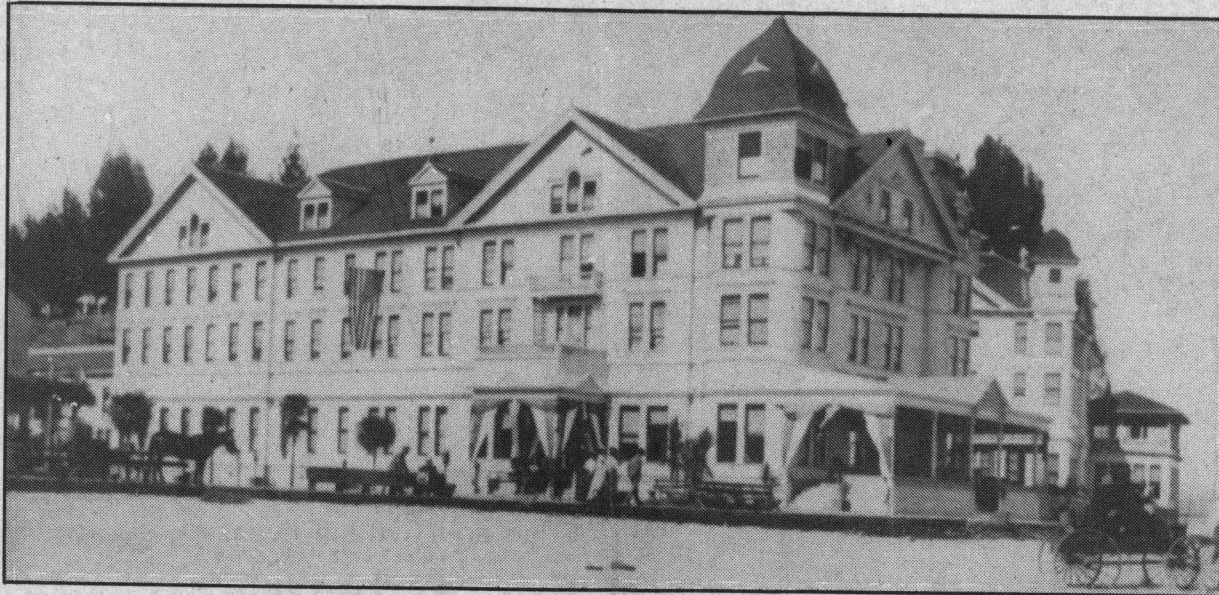
Sandy Lydon

I guess we can blame it all on the fog. The comforter of summer-time fog which rolls and unrolls along the coast

has been particularly deep this past summer, delaying the ripening of everything from tomatoes to chili peppers. The fog has been great for the redwood trees, however, and despite the low rainfall totals, the woods are still a dark, lush green. Notwithstanding the claims of New England immigrants ("you have no fall 'culah"), we do have seasons here, it's just that they are subtle, without sharp edges.

September used to be the month that this county closed up.

Tourist hotels such as the Capitola, the Sea Beach and the Aptos took in their outdoor tables, put sheets over the dining room furniture and closed for the winter. The Southern Pacific Railroad cut back its



Sandy Lydon collection

The grand old Capitola Hotel closed in September for the winter.

schedule, and the Boardwalk put up shutters and got ready for the winter storms. Logging mills speeded up for one last flurry before the winter freshets came to blow out the mill ponds.

Summer cabins were battened down (there is no odor like that of a damp, musty closed up Santa Cruz Mountains summer cabin in the deep of winter), and local college kids boarded the train and went off through the tunnels to Stanford and Berkeley.

The Chinese, Japanese or Filipino farm laborers headed south to those places where the seasons started earlier and lasted longer, and the fish canneries over at Monterey closed down, the fishermen pulling their boats up onto the ways for the winter.

Though Santa Cruz sometimes tried to attract the elusive year 'round tourist (winter flower festivals

and golf tournaments), the economic calendar in Santa Cruz County was long and lean between September and May.

Cabrillo College and the University of California helped change all that. The college student was seen as the answer to the out-of-balance economic wheel — the ideal off-season tourist. Fill up those summer rentals with students in the winter and then flush them out in May and triple the rents for the summer crowd. Symbiosis.

A classic seasonal migration.

Well, for all kinds of reasons, it didn't quite work as planned.

The students didn't always leave (why would they want to go back to Merced?), and when the voting age was lowered to 18 in 1971, they began to behave like

9-22-91
 residents. (They *were* residents.) And now, in September, the cross currents of students, faculty, tourists, commuters and farm workers are so intermingled that the human season of autumn is also losing its definition.

Before the coming of higher education to Santa Cruz County only nine percent of county high school graduates went on to college of any kind. That nine per cent rate was one of the lowest of any county in the state of California.

Nine per cent!

Higher education not only helped smooth out the economic wheel, it also helped transform the county's quality of life to a degree that makes Santa Cruz of the 1950s seem like a different planet from the Santa Cruz of today.

Autumn is my favorite time of the year. September means a new beginning, the start of the school year, another opportunity to try out new techniques and ideas for slipping, sneaking and wedging ideas and concepts into the minds of waiting students.

This September is particularly special for me because it was 30 years ago this month that I first walked into a high school classroom in Elk Grove, Calif. and began my teaching career as a history teacher and baseball coach.

I didn't know very much about teaching then, and I am not sure that I do now, (like medical doctors, we teachers "practice" our craft) but with each September comes the exhilaration of promise and hope. For the classroom teacher, September is the month when everything is possible.

It will work this time.

The maple leaves may be turning a little late this year, but all over this county there are classrooms filled with students turned toward the teacher, waiting. Expectantly.

Another beginning. September's here.

**Sandy Lydon is a lecturer and author on matters historical and a member of the history faculty at Cabrillo College.*