

Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Director, Institute of Marine Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.

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A Castle on the Beach



The Castle on Seabright Beach during the 1950s under winter wave attack.

Seabright is probably the widest beach in Santa Cruz, but it wasn't always that way. Before the jetties at the harbor were built in the early 1960s even the summer beach here was quite narrow. Most visitors parked their blankets and umbrellas in the cove across from the City Natural History Museum, as this was one of the few areas where dry sand could be found.

Old photographs and postcards often depict a narrow fringe of sand against the bluff in the summer months, a much different beach than residents and visitors enjoy today. Without a protective beach, winter waves crashed against the bluffs and took their toll on the cliff and East Cliff Drive as well. That hasn't happened for the past 50 years, however.

Seabright has long been a unique neighborhood with a personality and character that has survived for well over a century. It was considered to be out in the country by Santa Cruz standards when it was first developed as a seaside resort in the 1880s. F.N. Mott bought 12 acres, laid out streets and sold lots.

Named after Seabright, New Jersey, the area soon had its own Post Office (now occupied by La Posta Restaurant), as well as a small station on the Southern Pacific Railroad line between Santa Cruz and Watsonville. Seabright Avenue was formerly known as Railroad Street.

Another local pioneering family, the Pilkingtons, also left its mark. Pilkington Gulch is a small intermittent stream running from the general area of Seabright Avenue and Woods Street to the Seabright Cove at the foot of Mott Street.

Thomas Pilkington, who was born in England in 1815, migrated to Mexico where he established a cloth printing company in 1841. He served in the American army during the Mexican war, and then moved to California during the Gold Rush of 1849.

He ended up in Santa Cruz in 1853 where he became one of the early settlers in the Seabright area, obtaining the land between the San Lorenzo River and Twin Lakes and stretching half a mile inland from the bay to Pine Street. This area was hayfields at the time and Pilkington bought squatter's rights after securing U.S. patents to the land.

For years, a rather makeshift footbridge over the San Lorenzo River was the main route into town. Each winter it was removed to keep the river from washing it away, and Seabright residents had to walk across the railroad bridge, considered dangerous at the time, as there was no pedestrian walkway as there is today. The only road to Santa Cruz from Seabright in those early days was a narrow lane along the edge of the bluff, which went through the Pilkington property. As the Seabright population grew the residents wanted a more direct route to town so Thomas Pilkington donated a strip of land along the bluff for what would later become East Cliff Drive.

In the 1880s, Pilkington also built one of the first summer camps in the area, Camp Alhambra. One of his two sons, T.B. Pilkington, subdivided the family property in 1891 and named the streets, Pilkington, Alhambra and Brook.

Thomas Pilkington's other son, James, built the Seabright bathhouse in 1899-1900 on the west edge of the Seabright Beach Cove. The bathhouse was built to look like a castle and is the source of the original name, Castle Beach. It is unknown whether there was any connection between the 13th century Moorish castle and fortress in southern Spain, the Alhambra, and the castle on Seabright Beach and Alhambra Avenue.

In 1918, Conrad Scholl and his son Louis took over management of the bathhouse, and in later years added a dining room and renamed it the Scholl-Mar Castle. Another era for the castle began in the 1940s, when it became a restaurant named

Casa del Mar. In the 1950s and early 1960s the castle saw new life as an art gallery.

Throughout its history, prior to the construction of the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor and the subsequent widening of Seabright Beach, the waves attacked the bluff, including the castle, nearly every winter. In March 1967, the Castle was demolished, leaving behind a very wide beach with a curious name and an interesting history.