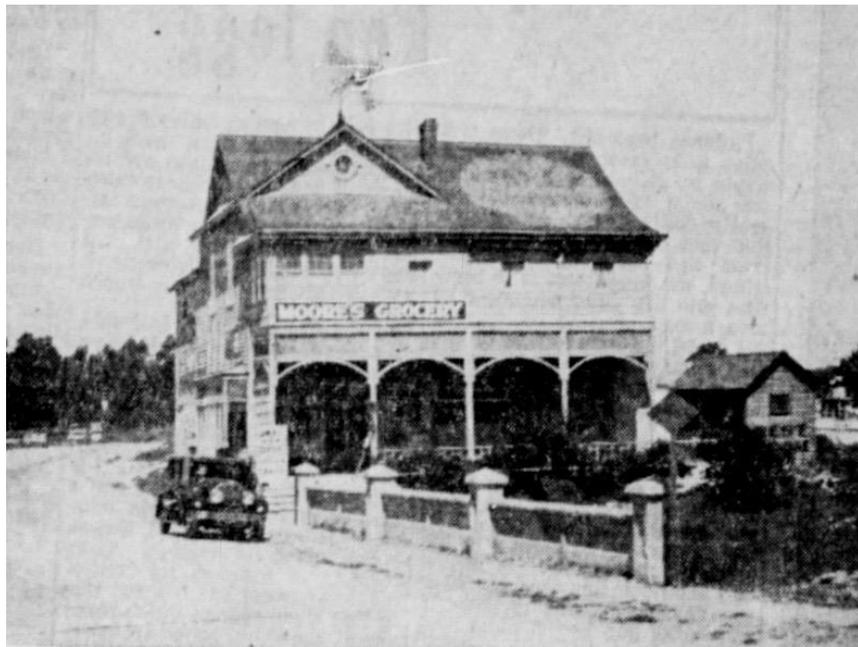


Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Distinguished Professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.

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THE WILD WEST SIDE- Monkeys, A Casino and Horse Racing



Moore's Grocery on West Cliff Drive at Garfield Avenue

The Free Museum on West Cliff, at the end of what is now Woodrow Avenue, had several names over its nearly 40 years of existence depending upon the owner. These included the Cliff Museum, Moore's Museum, and Moore's Free Museum. But in the words of Sandy Lydon, it was really more of a curio shop for dead things that washed up on the beach than a museum.

But the Moores also had some live stuff. In April 1905, a Mr. Rankin, who was working to acquire a right-of-way for the group expecting to build a road along the coast from Santa Cruz to San Francisco (which wasn't completed until 40 years later), picked up a baby seal on the beach at Waddell Creek. He brought it to Santa Cruz and gave it to some boys who then promptly sold the animal to J.A. Moore at the Free Museum. All I can say is that probably wouldn't be viewed too favorably today.

The museum also had an indoor aviary for birds, but the big draw was apparently the monkeys. Lots of people had memories of the monkeys, and where else but in Santa Cruz would you have live monkeys in a Free Museum on the coast?

The Museum would later become a lunchroom, then Moore's Grocery. John Moore and his wife lived upstairs for many years until they both died in their home. In John Alonzo Moore's obituary on July 7, 1934, he was described as originally coming from Illinois, and that he was affiliated with the Santa Cruz Commandry of the Knights Templar of the Mason's Lodge. I'm not sure just what that signified in 1934 as I thought that group disappeared sometime in the Middle Ages.

The Moore's daughter and son-in-law operated the business for a few more years, until it was sold to a San Francisco family in 1938, only to burn down a year later.

Another fascinating bit of local history was reported in the local paper on June 15, 1901. Albert Major, the proprietor of the Curio Store at the Cliff Museum, received a letter from President McKinley thanking him for the "handsome mother-of-pearl double ink stand and also the hand-painted moss book, with large and fine specimens of sea-moss and views of the coast". You don't get a personal

letter from the President of the United States every day for sending stuff made from abalone and beach moss.

The corner of Woodrow Avenue (Garfield Avenue in those days) and West Cliff was a pretty exciting place in the late 1800s and early 1900s. In addition to the Museum and the Victorian Vue de L'Eau streetcar depot, there was the Vue de l'Eau Casino on the opposite side of Garfield at the corner of Pelton. J.P. Smith, a wealthy businessman came to Santa Cruz in the 1890s with the idea of lining his pockets with gold, and was described as a wheeler-dealer and promoter.

He was involved in the building of the trolley line to the end of Garfield, and as part of that promotion, he built the casino, which was advertised as a "wholesome family resort", with a restaurant and lounge on the first floor and a ballroom on the second. The trolley line had the somewhat grandiose name of "Santa Cruz, Garfield Park and Beach" line. Thus the West Side thus had a Casino some 10 years before the original Neptune Casino at Main Beach in 1904.

While not much seems to have been written about the nature of the casino and how this fit into the wholesome family resort, it never was a booming success. Within ten years the family resort and casino was torn down to make way for a real estate subdivision.

Another odd bit of local coastal history, in 2005 the Vue de L'Eau Casino building was part of a zoo project for the area, which served for two seasons as the winter quarters of the Norris and Rowe circus. Norris and Rowe were initially very happy with the winter quarters for the animals and said that in one or two more winters this will become one of the show places of the Pacific Coast and is already the

“Queen City of the West”. I’m not sure why that didn’t come to pass but the circus was gone in two years.

As if all that wasn’t enough to entice people to jump on the old trolley and come out to the edge of town, for some years there was also a baseball diamond very close by called the Vue de L’Eau Field just to make this nexus even more attractive. This is where the “Electrics” reportedly played a superior brand of baseball. Their odd name came from W.H. Ely who was the manager of the trolley line. Santa Cruz High School’s first football games were also played on the field in 1895.

OK, I didn’t get to horse racing but that’s coming.