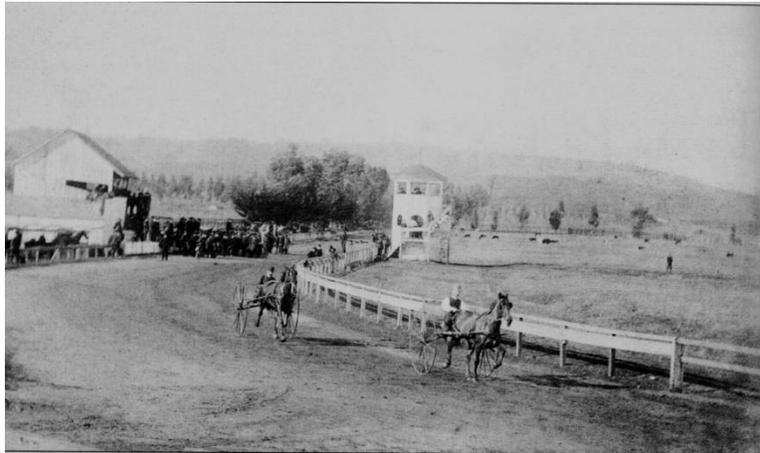


Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Distinguished Professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.

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THE WILD WEST SIDE- Horse Racing and Airports



Harness racing on the old Bay View Trotting Track on the lower west side of Santa Cruz in the 1880s



1931 aerial photograph

The flat uplifted marine terraces that characterize much of the west and east sides of Santa Cruz have provided ideal conditions for both urban development and agriculture. They also were seen early on in our local history as perfect settings for horse racing and even a planned airport.

Horse racing in Santa Cruz began very early with the Spaniards who laid out a mile-long, flat track along what is now Branciforte Avenue over 200 years ago back in 1796-97. Watching the horses race was a popular weekend event for families and the last Branciforte race actually took place as recently as 1905.

In the late 1800s an oval track was laid out on the wild windy west side of Santa Cruz between Swift Street and Fair Avenue. The track extended from just above Jeter Street on the north to about Wanzer Street on the south. The existing bend in an otherwise north-south trending Fair Avenue between Oxford and Sunset was the curve of the old track. Aerial photographs from the late 1920s into the 1940s show oval shape of the race track as preserved in the trees planted around the edges of the track.

There was even a hotel near the track on Fair Avenue at one time. It was later moved to the corner of Rigg and Weeks Street, near the high school baseball field, where it became a residence.

First called Ocean View Track, it was later known as Bay View Trotting Track and was primarily for harness racing. Horse racing seemed to have been a popular local activity at the Bay View Track in the latter part of the 1800s. One newspaper account from Thanksgiving 1874 described each race and the results in

considerable detail, including: “Everybody that ever witnessed the horses and taken any interest seemed to be here and willingly backed their respective horses both by talk and money...”

There was even a man versus horse race held one day, with the horse traveling around the track twice to the man’s one trip. The winner was the horse by a narrow margin.

Another little known bit of west side history that I learned from a good friend and long-time resident, Bob Bosso, was that there were even plans for an airport on the flat terrace land adjacent to Delaware Avenue.

When the west side was subdivided, the new streets were all named after those hot Central Valley towns (Modesto, Sacramento, Auburn, Chico, Stockton and Merced) with the hopes of convincing those valley folks to buy their own piece of cool, ocean-side paradise. Not much happened out there for decades and many of the owners apparently lost interest and became delinquent on their property taxes.

Some locals had the idea of buying up the tax-delinquent lots in what was known as the Swanton tract and building an airfield. In 1941, Mayor C.D. Hinkie reported to the city council that plans were being made to investigate some 50 tax-delinquent parcels that he believed could be obtained at a cost of only about \$5 each in order to build the city’s own airport.

It appears as though the city was successful. The 1947 parcel map for Santa Cruz shows the area on the south side of Delaware extending west from Swift Street to

Swanton Boulevard, and extending south as far as the former Natural Bridges School site, as the Santa Cruz Municipal Airport.

No airport was ever developed, however, and in 1957 the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution encouraging the city to sell the lands they had required for the proposed airport along Delaware Avenue. The City followed up and then used that money to purchase Skypark Airport in Scotts Valley.