

history



Marlene Wiley's Mountain-History Archive
The North Coast
Marlene Wiley

Driving north up Highway 1 from Santa Cruz, you may have enjoyed the scenery, visited wonderful parks, walked around Davenport and Pescadero, eaten at Duarte's Restaurant, or parked and climbed down to a secluded wild and often windy beach.

We learned more about North Coast history on July 2004, when Neil and I took a bus tour with Sandy Lydon, the "History Dude," and Cabrillo College historian emeritus.

The jagged coastline dictated the path of the early road that followed arroyos inland until they could be crossed, then returned to the coast. Sandy told us that a wagon trip of eleven miles between Davenport and Santa Cruz could take half a day. The road had 126 curves.

Our first stop was at Laguna, a settlement built where the road crossed Laguna Creek inland over an arroyo that carried water year-round. Sandy pointed out the Laguna Inn, a time-worn structure built in the 1800s. For many years, it was a hotel and the social center for the coastal communities.

Our next stop was the town of Davenport. The cement business developed in 1906 because of the nearby source of lime and kilns. One of the original companies, Santa Cruz Portland Cement Company, was bought by Pacific Coast Aggregates in 1956. Later, the company built Newtown upwind of Davenport for company managers. The cement company property covered 6,000 acres.

In 1923, Santa Cruz Portland Cement Company installed a narrow-gauge electric railroad to carry limestone from the quarry to the plant. In 1934, they built tall storage silos at the plant, and a 2,300-foot welded-steel pier with pipes to carry cement to waiting ships. After World War II, the plant was shipping 700,000 barrels a day. It was one of the largest cement plants in the world.

Davenport earned the nickname of "cement town," because cement dust covered everything, infiltrating each nook and cranny, and creating health problems for people and animals. In 1955, Davenport



residents held a town meeting to discuss their options. Eventually, a series of lawsuits were filed for damages totaling over one million dollars. The settlement decreed dust-arresting equipment to reduce emissions.

While in Davenport, Sandy talked about the process of straightening Highway 1 that occurred in the 1950s. When the railroad tracks were laid, the arroyos were filled in and high spots cut down to create a relatively level bed.

To move the water that normally flowed through the arroyos to the ocean, engineers created tunnels under the road.

On our walking tour of Davenport, we stopped at the jail. Small and seldom used, it now belongs to the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History.

The most distinctive landmark in





Davenport is the beautiful St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church. Louis Morretti, last of the Italian-speaking Swiss family, donated the money to build the church that opened in May 1915.

Leaving Davenport, we took the Old Coast Road north through Newtown. We passed the site of Davenport Landing, a 450-foot-long wharf in the 1870s at the mouth of Agua Puerca Creek. The small settlement that grew around it handled milled lumber, cordwood, and posts. Most of the town was destroyed by a fire in 1915.

We continued up Swanton Road away from the coast to Waddell Bluff at the San Mateo County line. Reaching Pigeon Point Light Station, we stopped for lunch. Tours inside the lighthouse were discontinued because of deterioration, but the outside is



still worth seeing.

Pescadero was our last stop. In 1868, the state legislature moved 90,000 acres, including Pescadero, San Gregorio, and Half Moon Bay, from Santa Cruz County to San Mateo County. The reason: the three small communities were more isolated from Santa Cruz than San Francisco.

In the early days of Pescadero, it was a tourist town with two excellent hotels. Visitors came by the Ocean Shore Railway to fish for steelhead trout in Pescadero Creek and for salmon in the Pacific Ocean. Hunters came for fowl, deer, and grizzly bear. Added attractions were redwood

forests, berries, and wildflowers.

Pescadero was described as a “friendly, funky, rundown” town, but this unincorporated rural agricultural community is undergoing gentrification. The values of homes and property in Pescadero have risen dramatically, a situation that has caused hard feelings between longtime families and newcomers.

We enjoyed a walking tour of town along Stage Road. The shops appeal to tourists, especially the one selling custom-made furniture. Duarte’s Tavern founded in 1874 by Frank Duarte, remains a special attraction, known for its wonderful soups.

