

Capitola Sunset

Fall 2014

CAPITOLA HISTORICAL MUSEUM

NEWS, EVENTS & INFORMATION

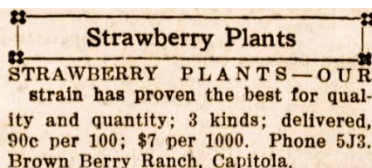
"Providing a future for our past"

Capitola Strawberries

By Frank Perry

Earlier this year I helped the Agricultural History Project in Watsonville put together an exhibit on the history of the local berry industry. While working on that project, I was surprised to learn that strawberries were once an important crop in and around Capitola.

Nearly a century ago, Brown Bulb Ranch—famous for begonias—was instead Brown Berry Ranch and grew strawberries. They also sold strawberry plants: "Our strain has proven the best for quality and quantity," said a 1919 advertisement. Although the Brown Ranch phased out berries in favor of begonias, others continued to grow strawberries in the mid-county area through the 1930s and 1940s.



In the 1950s California strawberry production exploded, as did production around Capitola. There was a berry patch where Nob Hill Foods is today and also at the old Capitola Airport site. A newspaper article from 1951 mentions some 60 acres of strawberries at Opal Cliffs.

Near the southeast corner of 41st Ave. and Capitola Road was Capitola Berry Farms, incorporated in 1952 by Joseph M. Reiter, George Swenson, and Robert Freitas. Reiter's father, Joseph E. Reiter, and O. M. Driscoll started their strawberry business in the Pajaro Valley in 1904.

Capitola production was so great that in 1953 pickers were brought from Hawaii to help with the harvest. For most of these young men, all Japanese-Americans, it was their first visit to the mainland. There was even a "Strawberry Lane" off of 41st Avenue. It was approximately where the Goodwill Store is today, but no longer exists. Capitola Berry Farms moved to the Año Nuevo area in the early 1960s.



Capitola Berry Farms strawberry pickers are pictured here in this photograph from the Santa Cruz Sentinel's May 7, 1953 edition.

Did you know that Capitola even has a namesake strawberry? In 1991, after several years of development and testing, Univ. of California researchers Royce S. Bringham and Victor Voth (aka Mr. Strawberry) patented a strawberry cultivar named "Capitola." Features included "large fruit size, symmetry, attractive appearance, and general flexibility in planting requirements." If any readers have tasted "Capitola" or know if it is still available, please let us know.



Early-day promoters sometimes exaggerated the size of California strawberries.

Begonias in the Mist

By Niels Kisling

Capitola was ground-zero for Begonias in the mid-1900s. Many of the 1600 varieties that exist today were propagated by Bulb Brown Ranch and Antonelli Brothers, along with another handful of other local growers here in Capitola and Live Oak.

Sometime in the early 1950s locals noticed that all the pretty blooms were being plucked and thrown away towards the end of summer. The growers didn't want the flowers, their business was to sell the bulbs after the begonias go dormant in the fall. Someone suggested saving the beautiful blooms from the landfill for one last fling before fall and thus the Capitola Begonia Festival was born!

Fellow Capitola Museum board member, Stephanie Kirby and I recently developed a new appreciation for Capitola's summer coastal fog and low clouds. Our typical morning fog allows coastal redwood trees to 'drink' water through their leaves, and it creates the great climate here needed to grow begonias.

Early on Saturday during the Capitola Begonia Festival, Stephanie, her husband Dennis, my son Jack and I, met before sunrise to head out to Marina to pick begonia blossoms for the museum event called *Begonias-to-Go*. Hosted the next day, this museum event features free begonia blossoms that are attached to hats, kids, dogs, scooters and bikes using floral wire 'stitched' though the bloom.



Capitola Museum volunteer and board member, Stephanie Kirby, proudly displays one of the many flats that she helped pick to support the museum's Begonia Festival event called; *Begonias-to-Go*.



Our mission that morning was to collect 400-600 flats of beautiful blossoms to give away the next day. The mission would not have been successful without the help of Boy Scout Troop 642 and Girl Scout Troops 10054, 11163, & 11137, organized by Rebecca Milburn. Both of these fine organizations picked more blossoms for us than we did.

Stephanie, Dennis, Jack and I drove to Marina on that foggy Saturday morning with visions of begonias dancing

in our heads. The Golden State Bulb Growers' fields are about a mile off of Highway 1 near the Dole food processing plant and they are not open to the public. It was a special feeling to be among the begonia festival participants and the dozen or so volunteers invited to help pick the blooms this year.

Our first view of the six acres covered in begonias was spectacular—all that color assembled in one place! The fog came in handy too, not only keeping the blossoms fresh, but keeping the temperatures low as we stooped and picked the flowers, filling hundreds of cardboard flats. Our job never would have been completed had it not been for the volunteer help of the dozens of area Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.



Acres and acres of begonia blossoms provide this colorful explosion of visual stimulation.

Officially, there are around 60 volunteers on the Capitola Begonia Festival Committee, but volunteers like the scouts are among the hundreds of people behind the scenes of the Begonia Festival who make it happen. These are people that attendees may not see or take notice to, but without them there would be no festival bringing smiles to the masses.

With our two vans loaded full of begonia blossoms just as the sun began peeking out from behind the clouds, it was time to make the drive home to Capitola. Our new mission now was to baby sit our bountiful harvest of begonia blooms so they would be fresh for the *Begonias-to-Go* event the next morning.

Parked in the shade all day Saturday with the windows open in the van, they pretty much took care of themselves.

When Sunday dawned gray and cool with a soupy, dripping overcast, I woke up with a smile on my face and a new appreciation for Capitola's summer fog and low clouds. I was sure that 'my begonias' out in the van were happy. A few houses down I swear I could hear the sound of my neighbor's redwood trees drinking up the fog. If trees could smile, I'm sure they would be grinning from limb to limb just like I was.

Interactive History Creates Interest

By Niels Kisling

At the recent Capitola Art and Wine Festival, David Shoaf and I once again discovered that history is most interesting if you allow the public to be the docents. He and I were only there to help guide visitors through their journey to the past. Many told us about the rich history we can all treasure just by living here in Capitola.

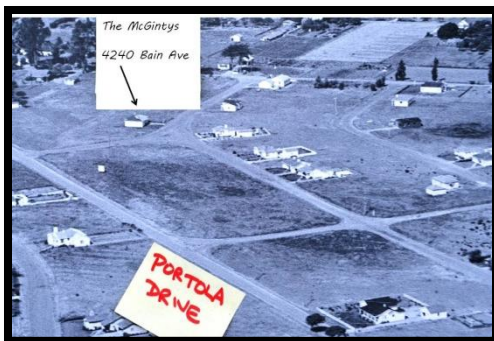


Our cartoon cutout was a big hit as usual and we also featured many photos depicting the past, but two of the images chosen by Museum Curator Frank Perry stood out.

These were aerial shots of Capitola Village in the 1960s and of the Opal Cliffs neighborhood in the 1940s or 1950s—we never established a hard date for this image.

Visitors to the museum booth were invited to try to guess the date based on clues that could be found in each image. For example, in the village shot the sand was missing from our beach. This places the date after the Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor was built in 1964, but before the groins were created in 1970. Also, the Harbor Lights motel was under construction when the image was taken.

The other image was trickier as most of the bluff along Opal Cliffs was undeveloped. Many people placed sticky notes on this image guessing the date to be in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. One family, the McGintys from Bain Avenue, found their house that they live in today on Bain Avenue. There were no other houses nearby when this image was taken.



All in all it was a great blast from the past that brought out the historian in many.

Debbie Vilotti

Museum Curator, Frank Perry, recently had the pleasure of meeting Harry Hooper's Great-Granddaughter on a recent walking tour called, *Harry Hooper's Capitola*. Debbie Vilotti visited Capitola from her home in Escalon. Her two sons, Harry's Great-Great Grandsons, accompanied her. John and Tom both returned home with a feeling of closeness to the community that Harry Hooper loved so much.

Debbie lost her mom in 1983 and consequently she became very close to her Grandmother, "Gram," who became a second mom to her. Gram's best memories of Capitola were of visiting the dance halls, drinking with her friends and being part of the action. Debbie told me, "My Grandmother Marie was a wild spirit—she was *always* the life of the party!"



(Left) Harry Hooper pictured with his daughter (Debbie's Grandmother), Marie was dressed up in a beautiful dress to celebrate her first birthday.

(Right) Harry's wife Esther Hooper, with her children Harry Jr. and Marie taken about 1920. Marie passed away on May 27, 2011, but not before Debbie got a chance to take her out for a last cocktail on the town.

About the current exhibit dedicated to her Grandfather "Pops," Debbie says, "I was just amazed at how much stuff you had! I am really drawn to Capitola more than ever and after seeing the exhibit I didn't want to go home again."

Her greatest memory of visiting Harry Hooper when she was young was of his passion for hunting and fishing. He was such an avid fisherman that he would cast a fishing line off the cliff of his oceanfront home on Opal Cliffs and fish during their visits.

Debbie loves Capitola and she promised to come back on November 8 to catch the lecture by Geoffry Dunn called, *Capitola's Cooperstown Connection*. The lecture will be held at 7:30 P.M. at City Hall and will be all about Harry Hooper's life in baseball and in our local community.

Volunteer Spotlight—Kristen Petersen

By Niels Kisling



Kristen Petersen rocks, but as back-up singer and a museum volunteer, she is also full of soul with some rhythm & blues thrown in for good measure. Her hobbies and interests include politics, playing guitar, volunteering, collecting tattoos and singing

in her mother's band, *The Roomshakers!*.

But wait, there's more....

Her day job as a Congressional Aid at United States Congress working for Sam Farr, steers Kristen's interest towards studying Global Political Communication at CSUMB where she will graduate from next May. She is a volunteer member of the Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County and has also served as a Santa Cruz County Election Official.

Additionally, Kristen has given her time to our community as an Event Volunteer for Planned Parenthood Mar Monte and she is an active Capitola Museum Volunteer.

About her diverse and exhaustive volunteerism, Kristen says; "I am very passionate about our community and hope to see more young adults volunteering, serving on non-profit boards, and being involved in their local government in general."

Her great-grandparents Walter and Lois Petersen, owned Petersen's Coffee Shop in the village in the late 1960s until the early 1970s. The coffee shop was located where My Thai Beach is now and Kristen says that one of the paintings in the Capitola City Council Chambers may have come out of her great-grandparents' restaurant when it closed down.

Kristen's grandfather, Herb Ross, worked with the Capitola Police Department for decades and brought the DARE program to Capitola schools. And, her uncle works for the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Department.

Come in and meet Kristen Petersen sometime and you can get to know the lifeblood of the next generation that is guiding us into the future. Kristen is proud of her body art and she says; "I am constantly adding to my collection of tattoos, which are all in honor of my family members and/or representative of my values and beliefs."

Recently, the following artifacts were generously donated to the Capitola Museum:

Rosemarie Styles: Collection of historical artifacts and memorabilia relating to local history.

Ettamae Shaffer: Painting of the Lodge House done in the 1960s by Capitola artist M. F. Hayzlett.

Glenn Hanna: Old Begonia Festival photos and poster for sandcastle contest.

Virginia Perry: WWI artifact.

Debbie Vilotti: Photo of Harry Hooper with teammates Duffy Lewis and Tris Speaker.

Ken Horner: Collection of vintage postcards and postal cards.

City of Capitola: 1994 photos of Rispin Mansion.

Capitola Museum has recently received generous donations from:

Anonymous: in honor of Paul and Judy Parsons

60th Wedding Anniversary

Dori and Bruce Arthur

Al & Marian Carlson

Al DaDalt

Emil and Lucille Edgren

Patricia Murphy

Jim & Barbara Reding

Karen Ruland

Nels & Susan Westman

Yvonne Zannis and Demian Sherinian



Fireworks came back to town for the first time since September of 2009 with The Monte Foundation fundraiser on October 11. This shot was taken from the unobstructed view of the railroad trestle.

Published by the Capitola Historical Museum

410 Capitola Ave., Capitola, CA 95010

Website: www.capitolamuseum.org

Email: capitolamuseum@gmail.com

Phone: 831.464.0322

Museum Hours:

Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday 12 to 4 p.m.

Museum Curator: Frank Perry

Board of Trustees: Linda Smith (president), Bob Anderson (vice president), Tom McGranahan (treasurer), Stephanie Kirby (secretary), Gordon van Zuiden, David Shoaf, and Niels Kisling

