

Capitola Sunset

Spring
2024

410 Capitola Avenue

News, Events & Information

New Museum Landscape & Native Plant Garden

You may have noticed changes in the museum’s front landscape lately. Much of this was the result of a project by Eagle Scout candidate Owen Lawson and a crew of 20 Scouts (Troop 674) and family he recruited for the purpose.



Owen, future Eagle Scout (center), guiding his crew.

The volunteer crew cleared the area for our fledgling Native plant garden and Capitola Public Works repositioned the museum sign and the Frank Hill photo-op. The museum plans to continue work with the Amah Mutsun Land Trust to plant more Native plants. Our first planting was soaproot.



Indigenous people devised many uses for soap root. Their descendants continue to cultivate and use the versatile bulb. When baked overnight it produces a sweet-tasting food. When mashed and boiled it becomes an excellent soap while its fibers are used to make brushes.

The museum gives a special thank you to Lisa Carrier and other representatives of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust who attended our 2024 museum reception in March. Ms. Carrier shared with us local indigenous history, the Land Trust’s origins and details on their ongoing programs.



Thanks to all the folks who attended our opening reception for the 2024 exhibition, “Little City Under Canvas” - The 150th Anniversary of Camp Capitola.



The admission free — Capitola Historical Museum at 410 Capitola Avenue, next to the railroad trestle, is open every Friday through Sunday from noon until 4:00 p.m. till December 29th
831-464-0322

capitolamuseum@gmail.com

Past newsletters available on our museum website

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, June 8
Capitola Rod & Custom Car Show in the Village
9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Thursday, June 13
Capitola City Council Camp Capitola 150th Proclamation 6:00 p.m.



The Curator and Museum Board of Trustees would like to thank Rob Cuthrell, formerly of the Amah Mutsun Land Trust, for providing the museum with information and guidance on Native plants and their uses.

Museum Volunteer Accomplishments & Opportunities by Dave Peyton

Ten years ago, when I began as a museum volunteer, the primary responsibility of volunteer greeters was to keep the museum open during the ten month season, March through December. There were about 50 volunteers of whom most could be counted on to work at least one two-hour shift a month.

Duties were basic: the open sign, the flag, the bathhouse and two hours spent answering questions and chatting with visitors. Today, the basics are the same, but we have a few more switches to switch and keys to turn and our dedicated volunteers (still about 50) show up faithfully Friday through Sunday.

These volunteers, who support the museum's goal of showcasing Capitola history were rewarded with record visitor attendance in 2023. Attendance nearly reached 9,000 (summer months contribute half) representing a 10% increase from the previous year which was a near record, after a slower post Covid 2021. Our dedicated volunteers put in approximately 550 hours covering the museum each season.

Recently the museum Board of Trustees identified the need to accelerate volunteer recruitment in an effort to open additional days/hours during summer and special events, and other high volume occasions. Though museum volunteers remain responsible for keeping the museum open, today the museum volunteer has many more options.

Volunteers are needed to support the outreach effort that brings the museum closer to the community through participation in major citywide events, like the Capitola Classic Car Show and Capitola Art & Wine Festival. This past year, museum volunteers engaged in designing,



Volunteers Patrick White & Dave Peyton

building, and piloting a float for the Beach Festival Lighted Nautical Parade. The intrepid volunteers, led by the curator placed third and are planning an encore this year. Each of these events requires long-term planning, creating and setting up displays, staffing information tables with multiple volunteer shifts and manning the museum throughout the weekend.

Expanded volunteer opportunities include care of the indigenous landscaping in the new Native Plant Garden thanks to an Eagle Scout project. The new areas, along with the existing plantings will require regular care and watering. Volunteers are also needed to assist the curator with behind the scenes activities that include cataloging, filing, sorting, and storing of artifacts and collections. Flexible volunteer opportunities like these often take place when the museum is closed, which may be ideal if you are unavailable during weekends.

For those who enjoy sharing their love of Capitola and the important role the museum plays in providing a future for our past, volunteer opportunities abound. Please get in touch!

Calling Volunteers ! - Help Us Make Our 2024 Capitola Beach Festival Float



Volunteer Owen Lawson & Museum Board members Emmy Mitchell-Lynn and Brian Legakis aboard the 2023 float.

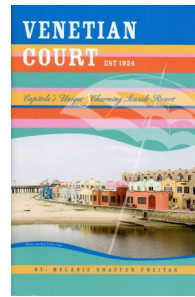
We plan to enter a float once again in the Capitola Beach Festival Lighted Nautical Parade this September 28th. We were so proud to have won Third Place in last year's event. We are determined to do even better this year and want to start the float planning and construction a little earlier this time.

Making the float last year was a lot of work, but also a lot of fun. We all felt a great sense of accomplishment. If you are interested in helping make the float and/or to be aboard the float, please contact Curator Deborah Osterberg at dosterberg@ci.capitola.ca.us

Donations

A BIG THANK YOU to those who gave generous donations to the museum in the first quarter of 2024:

- | | |
|--|--|
| Margot & Jeffrey K. Bauer | Robert M. & Molly Ording |
| Jack & Shirely Brain | David Peyton |
| Steven & Diane Burbank | Barbara Reding |
| Brenda Collins | Ken & Michele Svane |
| Fredric Fletcher (IDA)
c/o Wm F. Honsal | Pájaro Valley Historical
Association |
| Family owned Capitola Bowl | The Sand Bar Capitola—
Jeff Lantis & Baharale Najin |
| Carol Fuller | |
| Marvin Jensen | |



We were honored to have Melanie Shaffer Freitas, author of the book, *Venetian Court - Capitola's Unique & Charming Seaside Resort* speak at the March opening reception for our 2024 exhibition. Her book is available at the Capitola Historical Museum for a suggested donation of \$12.

How You Can Help

MUSEUM DONATION ENVELOPE—Inside each quarterly newsletter we mail out, we provide a donation envelope. You may specify a donation for either our ongoing museum projects or the Capitola Wharf Enhancement Project wharf timeline sign.

Our ongoing museum projects include continued work on the museum landscape with installation of a brick patio, further planting in the new Native plant garden, and the purchase of museum quality storage cabinets and containers for our artifacts and archives. Donations to the Capitola Historical Museum may be made anytime. We thank you for your support!

Venetian Court Quilt by Heidi Strahm Black



Stop by and take a peek while it's here

The museum is pleased to display the beautiful Venetian Court quilt by Heidi Strahm Black.

Curator Deborah Osterberg spotted the quilt (voted the Public's Favorite) on display at the 2024 Pájaro Valley Quilt Association Show and immediately got in touch with the maker to see if she would place it on loan for display through this June to help us celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Venetian Court. Thankfully, Mrs. Black said yes.

The City of Capitola—Celebrating 75 Years by Deborah Osterberg



In 2024 as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Camp Capitola resort, it is important to note that through half of its history, Capitola was unincorporated. That all changed in 1949 when the residents of Capitola voted to become the third incorporated city in Santa Cruz County. But the road to incorporation was not without its bumps.

From its beginnings as a seaside resort, Capitola was happily seen by its visitors as a place with a disregard for conventionality. In an 1884 *Santa Cruz Surf* article, one visitor declared “*When I am completely fatigued with the strait-laced conventionalities of Santa Cruz I shall retire to the entirely unrestricted freedom of Camp Capitola...*” As time went on, that freedom was great for visitors but not so good for full-time residents.

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City of Capitola—Celebrating 75 Years — Continued from Page 3

Capitola in the 1920s

According to historian Carolyn Swift, *“Prohibition was getting out of hand in the Village, where the Plantation House (formerly the Lewis House hotel near the depot) and the Hawaiian Gardens (in the center of the Village) both had reputations for serving and permitting liquor on the premises.”* Since Capitola had no police department and the beach was rarely patrolled by sheriff deputies, Capitola venues were Prohibition-era favorites. The Hawaiian Gardens nightclub often welcomed as many as 9,000 visitors on weekends. Nearly each morning empty hip flasks were fished out of the fountain in front of the popular nightclub.



The Hawaiian Gardens nightclub which burned in 1933.

In 1928 a Capitola Police Protection District was formed in response to resident complaints of *“young hoodlums”* using the streets for *“drinking bouts and disturbances.”* Though the new police district was beneficial, the district’s boundaries did not match the community’s boundaries and there was a growing desire for better central control. Over the years Capitola residents grew more concerned over the County government’s minimal response to their needs.

The Spark that Ignited Incorporation Talk

Only a few years after Capitola suffered the devastating loss of the Hotel Capitola to a fire in 1929, another even more widespread disaster hit the small community. On February 18, 1933, a blaze broke out on the west side of San Jose Avenue, initially engulfing the Hawaiian Gardens and the neighboring Chinese Garden. The fire moved onto Stockton Avenue, consuming most of the block which consisted of wood frame buildings. Capitola’s volunteer firefighters fought as best they could but suffered delays in trying to siphon water from Soquel Creek. An hour passed before fire crews arrived from neighboring communities. The only building on the block to survive was the Canepa Capitola Fish Market on the corner of Stockton Avenue and the Esplanade.

In addition to the Hawaiian Gardens, other businesses lost included Sneath’s Grocery Store, Frank’s Place, The Blue & White Restaurant, The Blue Bell Restaurant, Casey’s, Dickinson’s Curios, and Harry Hooper’s Real Estate office. Total business losses totaled over \$150,000 (in today’s money that would be 3.5 million dollars). As historian Carolyn Swift put it, *“... the fear of economic disaster aimed Capitola toward a whole new blueprint for its future.”* Throughout the 1930s many incorporation discussions took place in the Kozy Koffee Cup café at 126 San Jose Avenue (today’s Craft Gallery).



The two-story building (on the right) which survived the 1933 Fire was the Canepa Capitola Fish Market (today location of Polar Bear Ice Cream).

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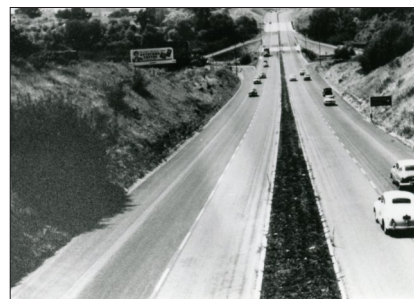
Though major concerns were raised about fire protection, no progress was made on incorporation in the 1930s. During World War II gas rationing and blackouts virtually curtailed Capitola's nightlife. After the war the topic of incorporation surfaced once again. Controversy over whether buildings constructed on Capitola Beach should still be allowed as well as a series of "petty squabbling" derailed the initial incorporation effort in 1946.

A New Highway & New Thoughts of Incorporation

For a short time in the late 1940s there was talk of combining Capitola and Soquel. With construction of Highway 1, which physically separated the two communities, such talk quickly faded. The impending new highway, along with prospects of post-war growth, spurred new talk of Capitola's incorporation. The Capitola Improvement Club (the 3rd since the 1920s) was formed in May 1948. Though it only lasted a year, the organization laid the foundation for incorporation. Flyers were pasted up around the Village declaring

Capitola could well be the 'gem' of the ocean cities but to beautify, we must first have local control. Then only can we control the quality of new growth. Do you like weed grown lots? Do you like the 'Sometimes Lighted' globes hung on telephone poles? Are you proud of the litter on the streets and beach that is such a joy to rats and consequently fleas? The Capitola Improvement Club is a group of people who really want to do something about it!

A leader of this push was Harry McBain, developer of the Opal subdivision and president of Monterey Bay Builders, Inc. When McBain passed away during the campaign, other Improvement Club leaders — Jack Rosensteel, Joe Tabacchini, John Battistini, and Brad Macdonald (who paid for most of the campaign's advertising) led the gathering of signatures for a special Incorporation election.



The Rob Roy to Santa Cruz/Capitola portion of Highway 1 was completed in 1949, the same year as incorporation.



Harlan P. Kessler



Brad Macdonald

The Vote

By far the most pressing issue was replacement of the 50-year-old Hihn sewer system, already condemned by the Health Department.

The incorporation vote was held on January 4, 1949, at the Capitola Ballroom (site of Esplanade Park today). The vote, 297 yeas and 243 nays, made Capitola the third incorporated city in Santa Cruz County (after Santa Cruz and Watsonville). The same vote also elected a new five-member City Council. Since Brad Macdonald received the

highest number of votes (258) for City Council, all assumed, including the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, that "Bradley Macdonald to be City's First Mayor." But the first City Council voted 3 to 2 to make 63-year-old realtor and insurance agent Harlan P. Kessler (who received the third highest number of votes 226) Capitola's first mayor. The Council felt that 27-year-old Macdonald was "too young" to be mayor.

Protests Erupt

Some Capitola residents were furious. Upon hearing the decision, a crowd of several hundred threatened to march on Kessler's home, and were dissuaded only by the pleading of Macdonald, Rosensteel, and the local police. A January 11th meeting drew 365 attendees and 75 protest letters. Several dozen

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Lumber, Lime, Leather... Potatoes? by Emmy Mitchell-Lynn

When you think of Santa Cruz County agricultural history, potato farming probably isn't the first thing that comes to mind. But would you believe me if I told you that potatoes were the foundation of agricultural success in early Santa Cruz County history? Fueled by the gold rush, potatoes were the initial reason for the development of the economic infrastructure that helped settle this area— the first wharf, the first warehouses, the first hotel, and even the first customs house, all owe their origins to the popularity of the potato.

The first recorded local potato crop was planted in the spring of 1849 by Michael Lodge and Martina Castro Lodge on the Rancho Soquel, in the area now known as Noble Gulch in Capitola. Shortly after planting, they headed to the Calaveras County gold fields in hopes of striking it rich, leaving their potato crop in the hands of Henry Hill. Though their prospecting attempts proved fruitless, the sale of the potato crop brought in \$20,000. This was likely because the demand for non-perishable food items was so high that a single potato sold for as much as \$1.00 in the mining camps. In 1850 Elihu Anthony planted a large crop of potatoes on the alluvial floodplains of modern-day downtown Santa Cruz. Upon harvest he chartered a schooner to transport his crop to San Francisco where the price reached an all-time high of \$0.15 per pound. He invested in local infrastructure including building an inclined wharf at the end of Bay Street in Santa Cruz which acted as a chute for easier loading of potatoes onto ships. This structure became the first wharf in Santa Cruz and was sold to Davis and Jordan Limeworks (eventually Cowell Lime Works) in 1853 for the shipping of lime. Meanwhile in Capitola, then known as Soquel Landing, a large warehouse was constructed in 1851 on what is today Depot Hill. The first significant building in Capitola, the warehouse was constructed solely for the purpose of storing— you guessed it— potatoes.

In 1851 another notable figure jumped on the potato bandwagon when Judge Blackburn planted a crop of potatoes in the flats of Laurel Street. At a yield of 20,000 pounds per acre, the crop brought him \$100,000 of profit that year, and newspapers picked up on the massive agricultural potential Santa Cruz had to offer. Blackburn began leasing his land for \$100 per acre to other aspiring potato farmers who flocked to the area in hopes of breaking into the potato market. Santa Cruz grew up almost overnight as the lure of the potato trade brought new successful people demanding nicer accommodations and more convenient trading opportunities.



Before founding Camp Capitola in 1874, Samuel Alonzo Hall was a well respected potato farmer. *Santa Cruz Weekly Sentinel* Dec 20, 1873.

In 1853 at the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations in New York (America's first World's Fair), Blackburn's four pound potatoes were declared the "finest potatoes ever known" and put California on the national map as an up-and-coming agricultural mecca.

Joshua Parrish of Soquel caught wind of all this and in 1852 settled in Soquel Valley where he grew a large crop of potatoes on land he rented from Thomas Fallon (land Fallon inherited from Martina Castro Lodge by marriage to her daughter, Carmelita). Parrish purchased the land the following year and, like Blackburn, began leasing his land to other immigrating potato farmers.

They were the lucky ones, because by the end of 1852 the massive influx of potato producers and purveyors resulted in an oversaturation of the potato market. The potato bust had arrived

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as the bottom fell out of the market, first dropping to \$0.10 per pound, and eventually to \$0.03 per pound by 1853. Only those who leased their land to others made it out relatively unscathed, quickly replanting their fields with more reliable cereal grains as well as apples, cherries, lemons, avocados, and other produce we still see grown here today.

The warehouse at the bottom of the bluff in Soquel Landing went on to store the town's unsold potatoes from 1853 until 1861 when it was torn down. Amazingly, the potatoes still had not decomposed, and the rotting spuds were spread at the base of the bluff. Rumor has it the smell was detectable for miles, but the potatoes remained there for another decade, on the exact site where F.A. Hihn would eventually build the Grand Hotel Capitola.

Po-TAY-to, po-TAH-to; however you say it, the fact endures that potato farming is at the heart of agricultural history in Santa Cruz County.

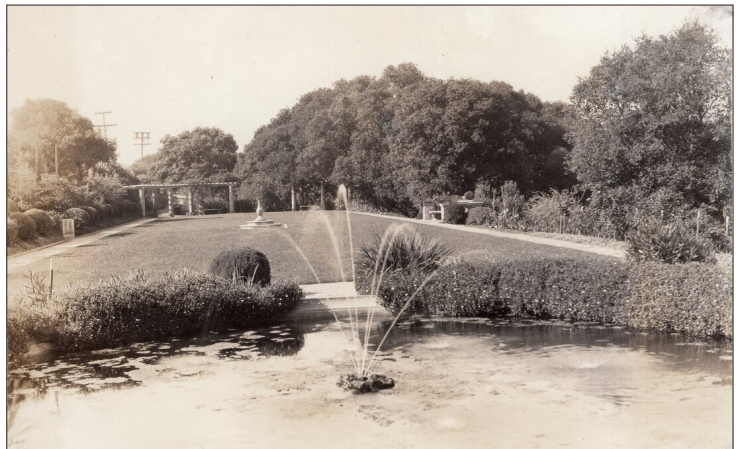
From Private Mansion to Public Park: The Rispin Mansion Garden by Juliette Thompson

The new Park at Rispin Mansion finally becomes reality! After years of waiting, the property of Henry Allen Rispin's mansion will be rescued from its dilapidated state and be transformed for public use. Rispin was the man credited with turning Capitola into the charming seaside town we know it to be today. Rispin bought the property from F. A. Hihn's daughter and set about modernizing the resort.

The idea for his mansion preceded even his move to Capitola. Groundbreaking started in 1919 and by 1921, the mansion was complete; a gorgeous, two-story Spanish Colonial-Revival style building hidden amongst the foliage alongside Soquel Creek. However, its splendor was not to last. In 1941, the Rispin mansion was sold to the Poor Clares, an order of cloistered nuns. The nuns then sold the mansion in 1957, and it was left abandoned for many years before eventually falling into the hands of the City of Capitola when they bought it in 1985. At this point, the mansion was in a state of serious disrepair and had been ravaged by time and vandalism.

In 1991, the Rispin Mansion was added to the National Register of Historic Places, and for a time it seemed as though the mansion would be made into a hotel; sadly, this was rendered impossible when the building mysteriously caught fire in 2009. Finally, in the early 2010s, the City came up with a plan to turn the mansion property into a public park and community center. Work began in 2016 with the construction of an ADA accessible bridge connecting both Wharf Road and the Nob Hill Shopping Center to the mansion property. It

took another eight years for the city to receive the funding for their proposed Rispin Park, but, after 105 years, groundbreaking is once again taking place. On the 22nd of April 2024, the city started work on the park itself, which will include picnic tables, seating areas, a water fountain, and an amphitheater, to name a few of the many improvements. The new Park at Rispin Mansion will be a place for locals and visitors alike to come and grow closer to each other as well as experience Capitola's history.



Rispin Mansion fountain c. 1930s

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CAPITOLA HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Our new postcard, now available in the museum bookstore, shows the Ann Thiermann painting, entitled, "The First People of Capitola" which we had the City of Capitola commission in 2022.

Since some of the most frequently requested items at the museum are postcards, the Museum Board of Trustees is working to produce additional postcards featuring historic images of Capitola.

MUSEUM CURATOR
Deborah Osterberg

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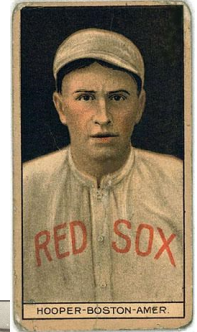
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speakers called for action against the new mayor. Several also spoke on behalf of Kessler, including one of Capitola's best known and most respected members of the community, former baseball star, real estate agent, and Capitola Postmaster Harry Hooper.

Hooper made a plea for "harmony" and stressed that the city needed to recognize that it had a legally elected mayor, a man who had worked eighteen years for the betterment of the community.

Hooper's words successfully lowered the temperature in the meeting room and the crowd dispersed. Later though, some disgruntled residents showed their animus over the election results by cancelling their insurance policies with Kessler. As it turned out, in the next election, Brad Macdonald would become Capitola's second mayor.

Harry Hooper (1887-1974) played for the Boston Red Sox from 1909 to 1920 and the Chicago White Sox from 1921 to 1925. The Boston Red Sox won the World Series in 1912, 1915, 1916, and 1918. Harry Hooper was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1972.

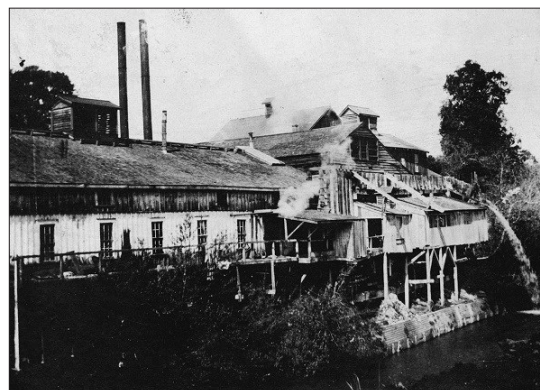


Before the 1933 Fire, Harry Hooper (right) had an office on the site of today's English Ales on Capitola Avenue.

Shipped From Soquel Landing

In addition to tracing the establishment and history of Camp Capitola, our 2024 exhibition also tells the story of when our community was known as Soquel Landing. Not only was F. A. Hihn's wharf at Soquel Landing a shipment point for redwood, leather, wool, sugar beets and other agricultural produce, but also paper. The South Coast Paper Mill, was established in 1879-1880 by Edward and Frank O'Neill. The mill once stood on Paper Mill Road, just below today's Soquel High School.

The mill which operated for 25 years provided up to 800 tons of paper annually. Locally grown straw was used to produce a brown "butcher's



Soquel Paper Mill—courtesy of the Soquel Pioneers

paper." During World War I, the Soquel mill shipped most of its paper output to China for use in the production of firecrackers. Later, mill owners experimented with converting rice hulls into paper and made pulp berry boxes. The plant ceased operations by 1931 and was demolished in 1934.