

Capitola Sunset

CAPITOLA HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Spring 2012

NEWS, EVENTS & INFORMATION

My Favorite Year

By Carolyn Swift

Capitola Begonia Festival's theme for its 60th birthday is "My Favorite Year," and it's coaxed me into digging up notes that Minna Hertel and I collected for the 1992 book, "By-the-Sea: A History of the Capitola Begonia Festival."

In the archive are descriptions of the earliest stunts and storylines, ironic twists, and risks that, if attempted now, would land the performers either in jail or on a hospital gurney.

So even though the last twenty fun-filled years are not included in the book, I easily made a list of my own favorites.

For instance, the 1952 event was a water carnival organized by Peggy Slatter Matthews. The official festival title had not yet been bestowed, but the basic elements of today's celebration were there. One stunt no longer practiced occurred on the evening of that 1952 show when Don Patterson, the famed "Mighty Bosco" of the Santa Cruz Boardwalk, was set on fire as he plunged off the Stockton Bridge. Wait—how deep was that water?

In the first years after Capitola's incorporation in 1949, organizers were bold in their use of trial-and-error to distill and polish the community's signature end-of-summer celebration.

In 1955, ambitious organizers added frames filled with flowers called "magic carpets," that were anchored along the creek bank. The next year, the

carpets had been given the brush off, but the nautical parade was staged two days in a row. Given the rate that Begonias deteriorate, it's no surprise that idea too, died in the water.



In 1954, the Hayford sisters made up the first festival queen and her court. Jeanette is the queen, serving with sisters Caroline and Barbara. They were relatives of Malcolm Hayford featured in the story on page 3.

My best-loved choice is the 1962 festival, the tenth annual event. It was Hawaiian-themed with an eclectic show mix that included a 50-piece military band. The extraordinary aspect, though, was how festival planners carried on through a series of mishaps.

First, Denton's Inn, the chosen site for a kick-off dinner, burned to the ground. Then the queen's float was accidentally incinerated during a city clean-up drive. This was followed by a faux pas at the coronation where the wrong contestant was named festival queen. When it seemed nothing else could

go wrong the day of the nautical parade dawned with foul and biting cold weather. The young swimmers who were supposed to push the floats in the creek flatly refused to get in.

At the very end of this string of 1962 catastrophes came a real doozie—a street dance with the Esplanade jam-packed with a thousand twisting teenagers. All was going well until the locals picked a fight with the visiting military band. A riot started, overwhelming the police force of four officers. Firefighters saved the police by turning hoses on the crowd, “scattering the rioters like wet bees” as one reporter aptly put it.



Soquel Creek was deep enough during the 1957 Begonia Festival that speed boats towed the floats that year. Crowds filled the Stockton Bridge, lagoon and river bank to see the colorful floats.

Lastly, I’m fond of 1972 where organizers were honored at the end of the parade by a banner slung from the trestle reading, “They Said It Couldn’t Be Done.” This festival is also memorable for me as it was the first one I attended. Assigned to cover it for a local newspaper, I had to hitchhike from Westside Santa Cruz (*not* my favorite way to go) after my VW bug broke down. It turned out the trip was worth it.

This happened to be the only year that festival organizers—learning that the water level was too low to support a nautical event—simply gave up and walked away. A handful of business owners including Carin Hanna and John & Pat Bakalian, along with a few artist “long-hairs” pulled the entire festival together within a planning schedule of days instead of a year. Thousands of spectators, including myself, experienced an unforgettable afternoon.



On the Horizon

Each year, museum visitors ask if we have any of those popular “little brown books” that are being published, it seems, for every little hamlet and borough in the entire nation.

What they are looking for is a Capitola edition in the series offered by Arcadia Publishing. This company is presently the leading local history publisher in the United States. Since 1993, it has produced more than 7,500 titles with hundreds of new ones coming out every year. Covered in the series are geographic locations, railroads, aviation, sports, postcards, campus history, corporate history, and “then and now.”

It’s best-known for its iconic, *Images of America* series, the sepia-toned books that show views of hometown America. Each book has more than 200 vintage pictures illustrating people, places, and events that define the local community.

Capitola Historical Museum has weighed the advantages and disadvantages of attempting to compress resort and city history into Arcadia’s template format. Last fall, the Trustees decided the time is right. The museum, its board, and staff have the resources, historical knowledge, and the willingness to get a book done with a 2013 production deadline.

This means we must immediately identify and scan to Arcadia specifications at least 225 good, high resolution Capitola photographs dated between 1875 and 1975. We already have many of the pictures needed in our collection. What we’d like—and this is where our supporters can help—are rare, crystal clear images that will completely define the historic Capitola community.

If you have a really good merry-go-round picture, shots of a landmark ball game, dramatic beach and camping scenes, or perhaps some neighborhood action photos—images that would be a terrific addition to this book—we’d like to consider them for the book.

Malcolm Hayford: Memories of the Hotel Capitola

By Gordon van Zuiden

I recently had the privilege of interviewing a member of one of Capitola's oldest families. Malcolm Hayford, 90, currently resides in the state of Washington but he fondly remembers his life in Capitola. I captured some of those wonderful memories in my interview that follows.

Gordon van Zuiden: I understand that you were around when the historic Hotel Capitola burned down in 1929 – what are your memories from that December evening?

Malcolm Hayford: I remember, as an 8-year-old, sitting up on the hill by the Lent's old home (near the corner of Prospect and Wharf Road) looking down at the hotel burning in the village below. Back then it was an all volunteer fire department and they only had a couple of pump trucks that would pump water out of the ocean to fight the fire. One of those fighting the fire was my father, Thomas, who was the assistant fire chief at the time. At one point during the fire, the fire chief actually fell through the ceiling of the old hotel and my father was able to rescue him! Back then Capitola village only had about 300 people living in town during the winter and I would guess that about 50–100 of them were helping put out the fire that night.

Gordon: Any idea what may have caused the fire?

Malcolm: No one knows for sure but there has always been speculation that it may have been set for insurance purposes. Remember that this was the start of the Great Depression and the financial motivation was there. The owner of the hotel was Teddy Woodhouse and he used to play cards on a weekly basis with my brothers Lyle and Frank at what is now the Paradise Grill. My brother's used to kid Teddy that he should burn down the hotel for insurance purposes – but it could never be determined that was the cause of the fire.

Gordon: How did visitors get to the Hotel Capitola?

Malcolm: They often arrived by train from San Francisco and different parts of the Sacramento

valley. They would get off at the old train station (where the Inn at Depot Hill is now) and they would be met by attendants with carts that would walk with them and their luggage down Monterey Avenue to the hotel. They would often stay two to three weeks at a time—or whatever they could afford.



The Grand Hotel Capitola, in shown here in 1929 the summer before the fire. Completed in 1897, it featured 160 rooms. The palm tree, seen near the main entrance still stands today. It was transplanted in the early 1920s from its original site at the entrance to Depot Hill.

Malcolm also recounted the days when he worked at the old dance hall and of his uncle who ran the original Capitola theater on San Jose Avenue. The original theater burned in 1933 and the dance hall became the Saba Club and burned in 1957. Malcolm also recalls boarding up his house during WWII for fear that the Japanese would land on Capitola beach and think that someone was home! All these stories will be told in future editions.

The following donors have generously enriched the museum collection:

Suzanne La France, Live Oak School photos, a book of postcards, historical publications and textbooks related to California history.

James King, 1969 Begonia Festival Fishing Derby Trophy
Steve Westen and **Richard and Elana Shaffer**, aerials from the collection of Keith Shaffer

Ron Dymesich, 1942 "Coast Pilot" book

Minna Hertel, Capitola posters and photographs

Carin Hanna, numerous copies of Capitola posters to be offered for donations

Christian and Jack Kisling, 1992 Begonia Festival Pin

Malcolm Hayford, copies of family photographs

Mick Routh, Capitola memoir written for his grandchildren, Annika and Alexis Routh

Stephanie Harlan, antique radio.

Volunteer Spotlight: Fran Albrecht

Not many people have their names engraved on a plaque permanently mounted at the front door of the Capitola Museum. Soquel resident, Fran Albrecht does. Her appearance on the plaque honors Fran as our 'Garden Designer.'

What the plaque does not say is how her tireless effort to create, plant and maintain the museum's landscaping continues to this day—a task that she has been doing for almost two decades.

Fran first met Museum Director, Carolyn Swift back in the early 1990s while working together on a project to restore the gardens at the Rispin Mansion. Fran enjoyed Carolyn and the instant sense of community she felt volunteering with her and others on the project. That led to Fran volunteering one day to paint the museum building. With the help of a local Sea Scout troop she got that job done.



Fran is constantly changing the plants and keeping color alive in the window planter boxes in front of the museum. All of the potted plants in our garden owe thanks to Fran's labor of love.

With a passion for plants and a desire to plant a public garden somewhere in Capitola, Fran's next museum task came naturally. She offered to design and plant a garden in front of the museum.

Fran's mother enjoyed coming to Santa Cruz from the family home in Menlo Park. As a nine year old child, Fran remembers riding the train called the Suntan Special through the Santa Cruz Mountains to the Boardwalk with her mother, brother and sisters. She recalls all the soldiers that were on the train back then as World War II had just ended. She also

remembers swimming in The Plunge, the heated indoor salt water pool that used to occupy the casino building where the miniature golf course is now.

She says, "I still remember the smell of the humid, salty air that filled the building. And, I remember the water slide. I, like so many other kids, had a love/hate relationship with that giant slide!"

Today, Fran runs a landscaping business called, "Cottage Gardens in Miniature." For Fran Albrecht, plants and landscaping are a passion, a profession, a life style and a labor of love.

Acknowledgements

The Capitola Historical Museum Board wishes to thank the following people for their generous donations:

Lorie Bross	Al & Marian Carlson
Emil Edgren	Rick Feldner
Ron & Diane Graves	Robert McLean
William & Anna Mork	Ettamae Shaffer
Larry Smith	

On March 3 we hosted a volunteer training session to familiarize our volunteers with the new exhibit. Thank you to those who came. The Capitola Museum Board would also like to give thanks to the following volunteers for staffing the museum in March and April:

Bob Anderson	Marcia Biancalana	Al & Marian Carlson
Judy Craig	Minna Hertel	Niels Kisling
Ann & John Nicol	Paul Parsons	Roy Pendley
Bill Roberson	Ettamae Shaffer	Kathleen Sullivan
Steve Swift	Sandy Wadhams	Marilee White
Dorothy Whitmore	Vicki and Ken Wood	



Published by the Capitola Historical Museum
410 Capitola Ave., Capitola, CA 95010

Website: www.capitolamuseum.org

Email: cswift@ci.capitola.ca.us Phone: 831.464.0322

Museum Director: Carolyn Swift

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