Books on Santa Cruz County History: a List by Year of Publication

Compiled by Frank Perry

Over 260 books on the history of people, places, and events in Santa Cruz County history were published between 1879 and 2022. Here, for the first time, is a list of these books arranged by year with a brief analysis of the reasons for the increase in rate of publication starting in the 1960s.

Introduction

The number of books about the history of Santa Cruz County, California, has grown to over 260. This is quite extraordinary, given the small size of the county. Santa Cruz is the second smallest county in the state in area, with San Francisco County being the smallest.

The county certainly has a rich past, due in part to the diversity of natural resources, including timber, mineral, agricultural, and marine resources. These contributed to the development of many different industries, which attracted a variety of immigrant groups. The region’s natural beauty has made tourism another important industry.

The number of local history books published each year started climbing rapidly in the late 1900s. Just five books were published from 1880 through 1899, while 69 were published from 1980 through 1999. So far, the year with the most was 2013 with thirteen.

Of course, there is much more history to write about today than there was in the late 1800s. Also, the county has many more people. It has grown from a population of 12,802 in 1880 to 270,861 in 2020. By population, Santa Cruz County is twenty-fifth out of the fifty-eight counties in the state.

Although the population grew through the first half of the twentieth century, there was no steady increase in books on local history being published during this time. As summarized in the table on page 2, the number of books did not start to rise dramatically until the 1960s. The county’s population continued to grow during this period, too, but the increase in publications is too great to be accounted for by population growth alone.

Several factors likely contributed to the rise between the 1960s and the present. *Santa Cruz Sentinel* writer Margaret Koch liked to write about local history and authored numerous newspaper articles on this subject from the 1960s through the 1980s. She also gave publicity to local history events and wrote several books during this period. Betty Lewis (in Watsonville) and Carolyn Swift (in the mid-county area) wrote newspaper articles and books starting in the 1970s. Betty Lewis also did a radio program. Promotion of local history through such media, even though some of the tales were anecdotal, enhanced public interest in history and in some cases inspired budding historians (such as this author) to start doing their own investigations.

Another significant factor was the opening of UC Santa Cruz in 1965. Under the direction of founding University Librarian Donald T. Clark, the library began collecting local history resources such as photographs, maps, and books—in part to help connect with the community. One early and important acquisition was the Preston Sawyer collection of old Santa Cruz photographs. The library also began conducting oral histories. UCSC resources were advertised as being available to the public.
In the middle 1970s, Sandy Lydon of Cabrillo College began offering his two-semester evening course on the history of Santa Cruz County (later expanded to the Monterey Bay region). This popular class attracted many older adults and over the next few decades greatly elevated public interest in the region’s past.

The number of organizations, museums, and exhibits devoted to local history has increased from practically none in the early 1900s to over twenty today. Most of these originated in just the past fifty years. They were partly in response to increased interest in regional history. In turn, they helped to further promote the topic.

Lastly, the digital revolution—especially online research materials, personal computers, and print-on-demand technology—has had a profound impact on history publishing. In the past, histories of small towns and specialized topics (with the inevitable small audiences) were greatly hindered by the economic necessity of print runs in the thousands. Now it is practical to produce just a few copies of a high quality book, with the option of printing more as needed. Many of the recent books on local history have been produced through Arcadia Publishing, which uses print-on-demand technology.

Not only has the number of books published each decade on Santa Cruz County history increased, so has the level of scholarship. Many are the result of extensive research and document (through footnotes) the sources used. Examples include Sandy Lydon’s Chinese Gold (1985 and 2008) and Martin Rizzo-Martinez’s We Are Not Animals (2022).

Criteria

In deciding what to include on the list, the compiler attempted to adhere to the following criteria:

Definition of a book. To be included, a book must have been printed on paper, bound, be either available or have been available for purchase by the public, and be accessible through public libraries. Length must be 25 pages or more.

Scope. The book must be about people, places, events, or other subjects in Santa Cruz County. A substantial part of the book must involve Santa Cruz County, and the emphasis must be on history. Some of the books from the late 1800s and very early 1900s include only a little “history” but are nevertheless included because the content has become historical due to the book’s age (i.e. Santa Cruz County Illustrations, 1879).

Geographic area. This list covers the entire county, including Santa Cruz, the mid-county area, Pajaro Valley, North Coast, San Lorenzo Valley, and the summit area. It does not include that part of southern San Mateo County that was within Santa Cruz County from 1850 to 1868.

Biographies. Biographies and memoirs of long-time county residents are included even if some of the story took place outside of the county (i.e. California Caravan by Margaret Hecox, 1966). If a biography is about a person who only lived in Santa Cruz a short time and the book hardly mentions the county, it is not included (i.e. James Graham Cooper: Pioneer Western Naturalist by Eugene Coan). Biographies and autobiographies of recent residents are included if published prior to the year 2000 or if about a time period before 2000.

Second editions. These are listed as separate publications if there have been substantial revisions (i.e. Corralitos by Judy Pybrum Malmin, 1982, revised 1998). Later printings without revisions are
not listed separately, but editions in other languages are.

Manuscripts. Unpublished manuscripts, theses, and privately published books with very limited distribution (such as family histories intended for family members only) are not included.

Periodicals. Magazine articles are not included. The list includes the Santa Cruz County History Journals, but not the individual articles. Stand alone works that are part of a series are included (i.e. Native Americans at Mission Santa Cruz 1791-1934 by Rebecca Allen, 1998. Perspectives in California Archaeology, vol. 5).

Oral histories. These are not included unless available for purchase by the general public in printed book form.

Indexes. Indexes, such as those for local newspapers or separately printed indexes for books, are not included since usually only a few copies were printed and distributed.

Historical fiction. Works of fiction are not included (i.e. Santa Cat: Behind the Lace Curtains by Margaret Koch, 2001).

Children’s books. An attempt has been made to include coloring books and other books for children if they fit the other criteria. Children's books are followed by an asterisk.

The List

Although full bibliographical information is not provided, the title and author should be sufficient to locate a copy in a library, bookstore, or online. The Santa Cruz Public Library System, the Watsonville Public Library, and the UCSC Library have large collections of local history books as do the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, the Pajaro Valley Historical Association, and several other historical organizations. Entries are by year of publication and then alphabetical by title.

Every attempt has been made to make this list complete. If a reader believes a book fitting the criteria for inclusion has been omitted, please contact the author. This article may be updated in the future.


1880. Santa Cruz and Monterey Illustrated Handbook by Henry Meyrick.

1887. Santa Cruz County: Resources, Advantage, Objects of Interest by I. H. Raymond.

1890. Santa Cruz County, published for the Board of Supervisors by E[dward] S[anford] Harrison.


1896. Santa Cruz County, A Faithful Reproduction in Print and Photography of Its Climate, Capabilities, and Beauties by Phil Francis. (Cover title: Beautiful Santa Cruz County).

1903. History of the State of California and Biographical Record of Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, and San Luis Obispo Counties by James Miller Guinn.

1905. The City of Santa Cruz and Vicinity, California by the Santa Cruz Board of Trade.


1911. History of Santa Cruz County, California, with Biographical Sketches . . . by Edward Martin.


1915. Reminiscences of Seabright by E. M. C. Forbes.

1922. A Pioneer Mother of California by Elisha Brooks.


1933. Story of the Mission Santa Cruz by Henry Albert van Coenen Torchiana.

1934. One Hundred Years in the Pajaro Valley from 1769 to 1868 by Fred William Atkinson (also published in 1935).

1940. The Story of Old Sequel by Leon Rowland.

1941. Old Santa Cruz Mission by Leon Rowland.

1941. Villa de Branciforte by Leon Rowland.


1952. Watsonville: The First Hundred Years . . . by the Watsonville Register-Pajaronian.


1964. *Yesterday and the Day Before* by Margaret Koch.


1966. *California Caravan: The 1846 Overland Trail Memoir of Margaret M. Hecox* by Margaret M. Hecox, edited by Richard Dillon.

1967. *In the Beginning: A History of the Paradise Park Site*, compiled by Thomas L. Reedy and Alice M. Reedy (reprinted and expanded in 1974).


1968. *South Pacific Coast: An Illustrated History of the Narrow Gauge South Pacific Coast Railroad* by Bruce MacGregor.


1970. *Solomon’s House: A Self-conscious History of Cowell College* by various authors (the first four years).


1971. *“The Place on Laurel Street:” The Diary of Judge Edgar Spaldsby*, compiled by Viola Washburn.


1974. *They Called It Home* by Margaret Koch (stories of historic houses).


1979. *Ghost Towns of the Santa Cruz Mountains* by John V. Young.
1980. *California Central Coast Railways* by Rick Hamman.
1980. *Santa Cruz: The Early Years* by Leon Rowland (collection of his 1940s works).

1982. *The Natural History of the UC Santa Cruz Campus* edited by Sheridan E. Warrick (includes chapter on human history; revised in 2008).
1983. *Late Harvest: Wine History of the Santa Cruz Mountains* by Michael R. Holland et al.


1985. *We Are All Saints: the Story of the Episcopal Church in the Pajaro Valley* by All Saints’ Episcopal Church.


1986. *Mid-County Santa Cruz, California, Soquel 1890 . . .* by Willa Dean Reynolds.


1987. *Santa Cruz County: Restless Paradise* by Jennie Dennis Verardo, Denzil Verardo, and Rick Hamman (general history of the county).


1989. *An Outline History of Agriculture in the Pajaro Valley* by various authors.


1989. *Santa Cruz is in the Heart* by Geoffrey Dunn (collection of essays).

1990. *Every Structure Tells A Story* by the Santa Cruz County Historical Trust Publications Committee.


1993. *The Congregational Church of Soquel: The First 125 Years* by the Congregational Church.


1994. *A Brief History of Santa Cruz County* by Hulda Hoover McLean.


1994. *Santa Cruz County History Journal Number 1* by various authors.


1995. *Santa Cruz County History Journal Number 2*, by various authors.

1995. *To Know My Name—A Chronological History of African Americans in Santa Cruz County* by Phil Reader.


1997. *Santa Cruz County, California. Illustrations . . . With Historical Sketch of the County* by various authors. (Reprint of original 1879 edition with introduction, index, list of buildings, etc. by Leonard A. Greenberg, Stanley D. Stevens, and Jill Miller Perry)


1998. *The Society of California Pioneers of Santa Cruz County (Santa Cruz County History Journal Number 4)* edited by Stanley D. Stevens.


2000. *At the End of Prescott Road: The Tale of a Historic Soquel Inn* by Murray J. Wright.


2001. *Scotts Valley: As It Was and As It Would Become* by Donald E. Seapy.

2002. *Almost a Hundred Years* by Hulda Hoover McLean (memoir).


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2002. *Santa Cruz, California* by Sheila O’Hare and Irene Berry.


2005. *Santa Cruz Spirituality* by Paul Tutwiler (history of the various religious groups within the county; revised editions published in 2007 and 2009).


2006. *A Legal History of Santa Cruz County: An Account of the Local Bench and Bar Through the End of the Twentieth Century* edited by Alyce E. Prudden.

2006. *Santa Cruz Coast* by Gary Griggs and Deepika Shrestha Ross.


2009. Pathways to the Past, Santa Cruz County History Journal Number 6 edited by Joan Gilbert Martin.
2010. The Endearing and Enduring Capitola Wharf and Environrs by Phil Walker.
2010. The San Lorenzo Valley Flume by Lisa Robinson.
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2011. Soquel by the Soquel Pioneer and Historical Association Book Committee
2012. APTOS WAS IDYLLIC A Kid's Eye View of APTOS, CALIFORNIA in the 40s and 50s by David Glass.
2013. APTOS by Kevin Newhouse.
2013. The Borina Family of Watsonville by Mike Wallace.
2013. CAPITOLA by Carolyn Swift.
2013. Felton Was So Fine by David Glass.
2013. Inside a Hippie Commune by Holly Harman.
2013. Santa Cruz is in the Heart II by Geoffrey Dunn.
2013. A Short History of the Early Years of Ben Lomond Quaker Center by John deValcourt.
2013. Sports of Santa Cruz County by Geoffrey Dunn.
2013. Venetian Court, Est. 1924: Capitola's Unique Charming Seaside Resort by Melanie Shaffer Freitas.
2013. Celebrating the Magic of Jim's Road by Barbara Thomas.
2014. Discovering Mission Santa Cruz by Sofia Nunes.*
2014. 50 Years of Safe Harbor: A Short History by Dan Haifley.
2014. The Founding of Ben Lomond by Lucia MacLean.
2015. La Misión de Santa Cruz by Sofia Nunes and Christina Green.*
2015. Santa Cruz Trains: Railroads of the Santa Cruz Mountains by Derek R. Whaley.
2016. Do You Know My Name? (Santa Cruz County History Journal Number 8) edited by Joan Gilbert Martin (biographies of historical figures).
2016. *Santa Cruz Memories: The Early Years* by the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*.
2017. *Between the Redwoods and the Bay: The Jewish Community of Santa Cruz County . . .* by George Fogelson.
2017. *Santa Cruz’s Seabright* by Randall Brown, Traci Bliss, and others.
2018. *Capitola History Coloring Book* by Frank Hill and Frank Perry.*
2018. *40 Years of Saving Our Shores* by Dan Haifley.
2021. *Big Basin Redwood Forest: California’s Oldest State Park* by Traci Bliss.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Not surprisingly, Santa Cruz County’s diverse and complex past has spawned an incredible variety of books on its history. Some are regional histories or histories of specific buildings or sites. Others are about people, industries, transportation, art, or culture. Quite a few are histories of schools, clubs, or religious organizations. While some are books that were done for hire or by the staff of institutions, the vast majority are by independent authors who were inspired to research and write about topics that interested them.

There has been a tremendous surge of interest in Santa Cruz County history over the past few decades. There is no reason to suspect that this will wane. In the future, however, it may well be that more authors will turn to publishing by way of blogs, websites, and e-books rather than through books printed on paper.
Acknowledgments

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About the Author

Frank Perry was born and raised in Santa Cruz County and has long been interested in the region’s natural features and cultural history. He is the author of several books and numerous articles on these subjects. From 2013 to 2021, he served as curator of the Capitola Historical Museum.

Notes


3 Although Margaret Koch retired as a Sentinel staff writer in 1981, she continued to write history articles into the early 1990s. See “Margaret Koch to Retire,” Santa Cruz Sentinel, June 28, 1981, 21:4-5.

4 Transcriptions of the Betty Lewis KOMY radio programs can be found in her book, Watsonville Yesterday (Watsonville: Mehl’s Colonial Chapel, 1978) 146 p.
