

The Shape of Santa Cruz, part 2

The Evolution Continues, from 1846 to 1866

By Carey Casey

This article aims to study historical factors that have shaped the physical environment of Santa Cruz, California into what we see today, and to find which parts of the city's shape are inherited and retained from earlier days.



Figure 1: By the time this photograph was taken in 1860, Santa Cruz no longer resembled the bucolic settlement of 1845. (Santa Cruz Public Library)

Introduction

Part 1 of this series looked at our area's history up to 1845. Part 2 takes up the story at that point, continuing into 1866. By the end of 1845, the first question about the shape of Santa Cruz had generally been answered: where to put it? Although the focus of commercial activity was about to shift a few hundred yards, Santa Cruz today is mostly where it was then.¹

Indigenous peoples had long ago found this area to be a congenial place to settle, finding all of the things they needed nearby. For the same reasons, Spanish missionaries built Mission Santa Cruz here, and also because that's where they found the most natives available for conversion to Christianity (and for labor). Others settled near the mission to provide skilled labor and services.

Later immigrants tended to settle near already-established settlements (at least initially), and the area around Mission Santa Cruz became one of those established settlements that attracted immigrants. Newer arrivals, however, changed more than just the settlement's size. They created new streets, built new buildings, and moved the commercial and institutional center of Santa Cruz down to the riverside floodplain area, where it remains today.

From 1846 to 1866, a number of major statewide and national events influenced the evolving shape of Santa Cruz, including:

- The end of rancho land grant awards as a result of the 1846-48 Mexican-American War. One of the last was Rancho Cañada del Rincón en el Rio San Lorenzo, whose boundary later became part of the town limits. Santa Cruz has expanded since then, but the old rancho boundary remains the city limit on River Street.
- The opening of overland wagon routes from the east, increasing the pace of Americans moving to California.
- The war brought California under control of the United States. Many ex-military men stayed on, including some in the Santa Cruz area.
- During the 1846-1850 period of military government, most local Mexican *alcaldes* were replaced with governor-appointed Americans, who made "town grants" and land sales, mostly to other Americans.
- Unrest in other countries during the 1840s increased emigration to the United States
- The 1848 discovery of gold in California brought rapid increases in both population and wealth in Santa Cruz.
- California statehood in 1850 changed legal and political institutions to forms determined by (and better understood by) U.S. citizens. A different system of land-use law, in particular, had large effects in Santa Cruz.
- The beginnings of industry in and near Santa Cruz led to new roads and other infrastructure.
- Architectural styles brought by immigrants from their native eastern states changed the look of Santa Cruz buildings, while U.S. governance and land ownership laws, along with demographic changes, changed the types of buildings constructed.

Changing Demographics

The last Mexican-era area census, conducted in 1845, found that the local population included 56 *extranjeros* (the term literally means “strangers” and referred to un-assimilated immigrants, although some of them were California-born wives and children).²

Five years later, the 1850 Santa Cruz County poll list included 213 names. Of that number, 150 were non-Hispanic.³ Four years after that, an 1854 County poll list had 318 names.⁴ Of that number, 280 were non-Hispanic. Caveat: a poll list is not a census, and we don't know how many residents are missing from the poll lists, so this comparison is only intended to show the increase in numbers of non-Hispanic residents. It's quite likely that some of the remaining former-Mexican-citizen residents did not participate in the early days of the new government, whether by choice or not.

In the following years, the shape of what is now the City of Santa Cruz was increasingly determined by the rapidly-increasing number of immigrants, especially from the eastern and mid-western U.S., but also by significant numbers of Europeans. The 1860 census counted 4,944 residents in Santa Cruz County, including 1,078 from “Foreign Countries” (the Census summary doesn't break down county numbers by country of origin).⁵

Several historical events in the years from 1846 to 1850 brought surges in Santa Cruz population growth. A common factor is that all of those events enabled/encouraged immigration to California from eastern states and elsewhere. Some of the immigrants ended up in Santa Cruz and became part of its evolution from a sleepy ranching/farming town to a regional urban center. The town grew large enough to support various merchant, service, and real estate development businesses; and some of those new business owners prospered to become landowners with buildings, streets, and subdivisions named after them. A number of Santa Cruz arrivals during these years came overland from eastern states.

1845-47 Overland Immigration

In 1843, a party led by veteran frontiersman Joseph Walker crossed the Sierra Nevada into California. Four Williams brothers were in that party, and they eventually settled in the Santa Cruz area, where brothers James and Isaac bought a large parcel of former mission farmland.

An unofficial “Williams Lane” was laid out along the edge of the Williams land, which was later given the official name of Lincoln Street in 1866 (presumably named to honor President Lincoln, who had been assassinated a little over a year before). Across from the Williams land, what is now the oldest church in Santa Cruz was built in 1865 - Calvary Episcopal.⁶

It was mostly young single men on horseback such as the Williams brothers who made it overland to California in the 1840s. Another such was William Blackburn, who came to Santa Cruz in 1845 or '46. Within ten years Blackburn had acquired a large parcel of low-lying land bordering Neary Lagoon. Blackburn met his 17-years-younger wife Harriet Mead after coming to Santa Cruz.

Harriett outlived her husband by fifty-three years, becoming a major Santa Cruz land owner/developer after his 1867 death. The farmhouse they built in 1854 remains today as the centerpiece of an apartment complex, and one of the oldest wood-frame buildings in town. An entire neighborhood developed around what is now Blackburn Street.



Figure 2: The Blackburn land, as shown in a detail from the 1866 Santa Cruz town map.
(Carey Casey)

The long nearly-straight border of Blackburn's land on the north side (away from Neary Lagoon) helped to define the shape of Santa Cruz in a different way. In December of 1865, the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* described the course of a major new road, to be named Laurel Street. It was to run from "Willow Street" (renamed Pacific Avenue six months later) ". . . on Judge Blackburn's north line . . .," up the hill and ". . . intersecting the coast road [Mission Street] at Kirby's tannery." The editorial makes no mention of the creek, but does note that the new street would lead ". . . to Fleck's mill . . ." (which was powered by the creek).⁷

Prior to United States control, existing mission-era roads shaped many of the private property boundaries. When the federal/state system of surveying, recording boundaries, and subdividing land was instituted after 1848; the situation was reversed: new roads were often laid out along property lines, so parcel and subdivision boundaries came to play an increasingly important role in determining the placement and routing of new streets. Within subdivisions, developers themselves planned most new streets.

1847: Elihu Anthony Created Downtown

Santa Cruz architect Mark Primack noted in 2025 that: "Our downtown sits in a flood plain and [seismic] liquefaction zone." He asked, rhetorically: "Whose idea was that, anyway?"⁸ The answer to that question is Elihu Anthony. Downtown's floodplain development followed actions by 1847 immigrant Elihu Anthony, but he would have built on higher ground had any such land been available to him.

Born in upstate New York, Elihu Anthony came overland from Indiana to Santa Cruz late in 1847. Looking for land to locate his blacksmith business and residence, he found that the only available and/or affordable land suitable for his purposes was on the San Lorenzo River flood plain, down Mission Hill from the existing settlement concentrated around the former mission plaza. He got a good price on land considered worthless for development by hilltop residents who knew that the low riverside areas were periodically flooded during rainy winters. The land Anthony bought included a strategic location where five roads came together, and that's where Anthony built his blacksmith shop, general store, and residence.

The location soon became known as the "lower plaza," attracting other new businesses and creating a new "downtown" (literally down in elevation from the mission area).

Adjacent to Elihu Anthony's land was an example of how some property boundaries were determined by mission-era roads. The parcel is labeled "CASE" on the map below, possibly indicating that the parcel was owned at that time by local resident Benjamin Case. The lot had a narrow triangular shape because two mission-era roads (today's Pacific Avenue and Front Street) diverged leaving the "lower plaza" junction.

Anthony subdivided his land to create a number of business-sized parcels which, along with that triangular parcel created by two forking roads, soon became the commercial center of Santa Cruz. Below is a detail from the survey map he commissioned.

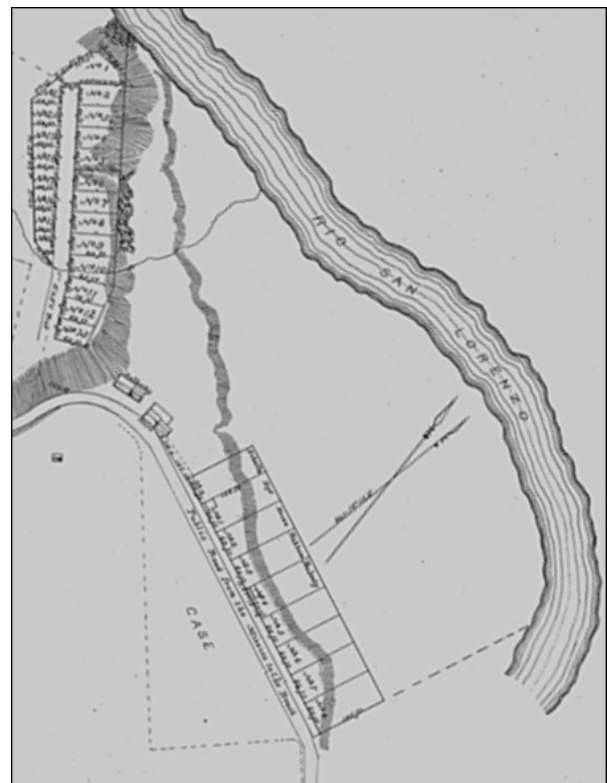


Figure 3: The Elihu Anthony subdivision

To the east (toward the river) of the "CASE" triangle, Anthony's map formalized the creation of the first block of Main Street (now Front). The Main Street route was previously part of the mission-era road connecting the San Lorenzo River ford first used by the 1769 Portolá expedition to the mission complex. The ford and most of the road leading to it have disappeared, but the straight one-block section forming one side of that triangle remains part of the shape of Santa Cruz, because it was made permanent by Anthony's subdivision map.

On the other long side of the triangle was the road (now Pacific Avenue, shown only as a dashed line on Anthony's map) connecting the mission to boat-landing areas at what is now the Santa Cruz Main Beach. Both roads and the triangular parcel between them were shown on the Coast Survey map (surveyed in 1853, published in 1854), but that map shows other details not seen on Anthony's map. The beginnings of the triangle's subdivision and a number of already-existing buildings can be seen. The third side of the triangle (not yet shown as a street on the Coast Survey map) soon became today's Cooper Street. Subdivision of the narrow triangle created a smaller narrow triangular lot at its pointy end. Building at the point of that lot, first in 1860, required a "flatiron" shape (see Figure 1). The current building on that site has the same unusual shape, dictated originally by the divergence of two mission-era roads.

1848: Mexican-American War Soldiers Became New Residents

As an outcome of the war that began in the summer of 1846, California became part of the United States. Although statehood and creation of Santa Cruz County didn't arrive until 1850, local institutions and government had already begun to evolve toward American forms. The area gained new residents as some of the military personnel stayed in California after the war; some temporarily as part of occupation forces, and others because they decided to stay permanently after mustering out. Because there were no military facilities in Santa Cruz County (unlike in Monterey), the changes here were brought about by individuals rather than by military organizations.

Jonathan D. Stevenson was one war veteran who tried but ultimately failed to make a big impact on Santa Cruz. Stevenson organized and commanded the 1st Regiment of New York Volunteers in the Mexican-American War. The regiment sailed to San Francisco in 1847, and was disbanded in California in October of 1848. It is unclear whether Stevenson himself ever resided locally after the war, but he was able to acquire approximately 1,000 acres of land in the western coastal area of Santa Cruz (including Point Santa Cruz) through petitions to alcalde William Blackburn, and by proxy through several men who moved to Santa Cruz after serving in his regiment, including his son.

Stevenson never followed through on his plans for the land, however, and the inactivity allowed others to occupy and split the vacant parcels. Those persons then sold the unofficially-created residential lots. The lots were sold and resold until the chain of title became hopelessly tangled. Stevenson then sought to reassert title to the land through a lawsuit. Stevenson ultimately lost his case, and the title disputes were settled in an 1868 court decision,⁹ but not before delaying by many years the sale of Santa Cruz Point to the U.S. government for siting of a lighthouse. The lighthouse was finally completed and lit for the first time on January 1, 1870.¹⁰

Changing to the more-structured American system of property law after the war and statehood eventually brought more stability to land ownership and parcel boundaries, and title confusion like that in the Stevenson case was reduced. Another big factor was that professionally-surveyed maps of property boundaries replaced the hand-drawn *diseños* of the previous era. With more stability and accuracy, post-war property lines were more likely to evolve into permanent streets. The John Dreher farm was one example of that phenomenon.

John Dreher was one of Stevenson's soldiers who settled in Santa Cruz, a German immigrant who volunteered in New York and came west with the regiment. Receiving his military back pay in a lump upon mustering out, Dreher came to Santa Cruz in 1849 and bought a 9-acre semi-rectangular farm parcel in what had once been Mission Santa Cruz croplands. Although most of the nine-acre farm was later subdivided into dozens of today's small residential lots, two of the original Dreher property lines survive as Washington Street and Laurel Street (the Laurel Street boundary was shared with William Blackburn). Washington Street, which follows Dreher's western property line, did not yet exist at that time. One block of the Dreher land resisted residential subdivision, becoming instead a school site that is today's London Nelson Community Center and Laurel Park.

1848: The Gold Rush and Statehood

When gold was discovered in the Sierra Nevada foothills, Santa Cruz became nearly a ghost town as men rushed off to stake their claims. The few who found gold didn't return for at least several years, and some never returned at all.¹¹ Others found that they could make money while staying home, by supplying miners with food and other goods.

By the time the gold rush began in 1848, Elihu Anthony was established in Santa Cruz and able to take advantage of opportunities to profit by supplying miners with essentials, including several dozen iron picks produced by his foundry.¹² Anthony later participated in the “spud rush,” when local farmers discovered that handsome profits could be realized by utilizing the rich soil of the San Lorenzo river-bottom land to grow potatoes for shipment to hungry miners.

To facilitate that business, Anthony and a partner named Penfield¹³ built a “wharf” in 1849 to facilitate moving cargoes (at first mostly sacks of potatoes) from land directly onto boats below. Dropping steeply from the coastal cliff at the end of today's Bay Street, the short, steep ramp/chute (shown on the map detail below) was more like an overgrown slide from a kids' playground, but apparently it got the job done.



Figure 4: The Anthony-Penfield wharf, as shown on the 1854 Coast Survey map. The number to the right of the wharf indicates that the water depth at the loading dock was 3 to 4 feet.

By the time California became a state in 1850, the previous four years of U.S. military government had smoothed some of the rough-and-tumble ways of the post-war period and Gold Rush, so the official transition to elected state and local governance was mostly a continuation of changes already well underway.

The most important local effect of statehood was to play out over the next two decades, as specially-created courts worked their way through property-ownership claims left over from the Mexican land-grant system. At the same time, ending the practice of land grants, along with a better system for recording and preserving land titles helped to prevent a recurrence of situations like the Stevenson affair.

A New Immigration Surge

Along with the pull of the Gold Rush, concurrent events in Europe and Asia pushed emigration to the U.S. from different countries than before. Violent revolutions across Europe drove emigration, especially from the many small German-speaking states. Famine in Ireland was another emigration driver. And in China, the forced opening of southern ports to foreign trade allowed labor contractors to bring workers to the Pacific Coast, where they found work in mining and farming, and later in manufacturing, service work, and railroads.

Along with Elihu Anthony, the shape of Santa Cruz in those years was most affected by the 1851 arrival of a German-speaking immigrant, Frederick A Hihn. Beginning as a competitor to Anthony with a downtown general store¹⁴, Hihn soon expanded into residential and commercial real estate development, and he partnered with Anthony to build a water system to serve downtown.

The first Hihn residential subdivisions were in the area enclosed by Vine Street (now Cedar) on the east, Williams Lane on the south, and the escarpment bordering the river-bottom “flats” to the north and west. Today's Union, Locust, Church, and Walnut streets were all created within Hihn subdivisions.

1853: The Coast Survey and Laurel Creek

As the U.S. government took over regulation of coastal shipping after 1848, a survey of the California coast was conducted, to create navigational charts that would help ships avoid coastal hazards.¹⁵ To help sailors know where they were by sighting landmarks along the coast, the survey included coastal land extending inland as far as the former Mission Santa Cruz. The resulting map (published in 1854) is a detailed snapshot of our coastal area circa late 1853, as well as being the first such map. Existing roads, structures, and physical features are shown, but only a few are labeled.

The Coast Survey map shows much more than roads and a few structures. Topography, land use, and natural features are also shown. One of those natural features is the stream known today as Laurel Creek. The mapped course of that creek reveals what may have been the first human alteration of a natural feature in Santa Cruz.

The Coast Survey map, published just before William Blackburn acquired his farm, shows Laurel Creek following a very different course than it does today. After descending what is now the Laurel Street hill, the creek did not turn sharply to the right as it does today to flow directly toward the closest part of Neary Lagoon. Instead, it meandered through the low-lying area soon to become Blackburn's farm before joining the lagoon at its lower end.

That wandering watercourse can be seen in Figure 5: an annotated detail from the Coast Survey map. The blue line labeled "1" traces the creek's course as shown on the map. The red line labeled "2" is the different course followed by today's Laurel Creek. To aid in orientation, the added green line shows the approximate path of today's Laurel Street.

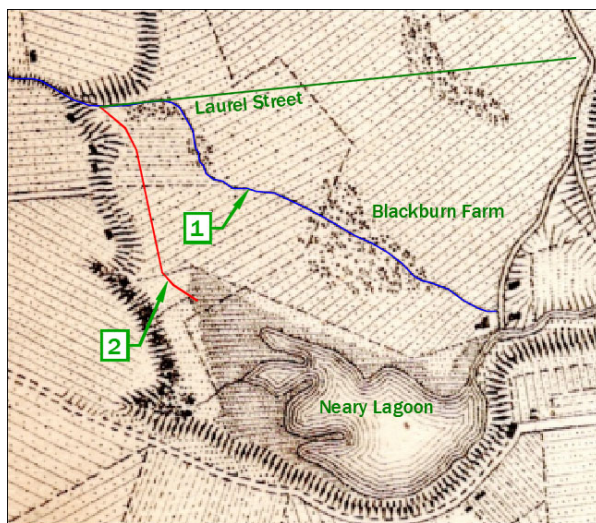


Figure 5: Laurel Creek then and now

Of course, the surveying of Laurel Creek for the Coast Survey map may have been inaccurate. Also note that today's Neary Lagoon has moved quite a bit up and to the left from where it appears on the Coast Survey map. Where the main body of water was shown then is now mostly the city sewage treatment plant. The lagoon itself is probably a relatively recent (in geologic terms) example of natural forces changing the shape of Santa Cruz.

According to UCSC coastal researcher Gary Griggs, the wide lower San Lorenzo River floodplain "... was very likely the former channel of the San Lorenzo."¹⁶

Other changes shown on the Coast Survey map are an increased number of roads not created to serve the mission complex. On Beach Hill (see Figure 6), several new streets testified to the increased importance of coastal shipping in the 1850s and '60s. Many of the earliest Beach Hill residents were retired mariners like William Hardy, and shipping-related employees like Francis Kittredge. In 1853, Kittredge was wharf manager for the Davis & Jordan lime business.¹⁷

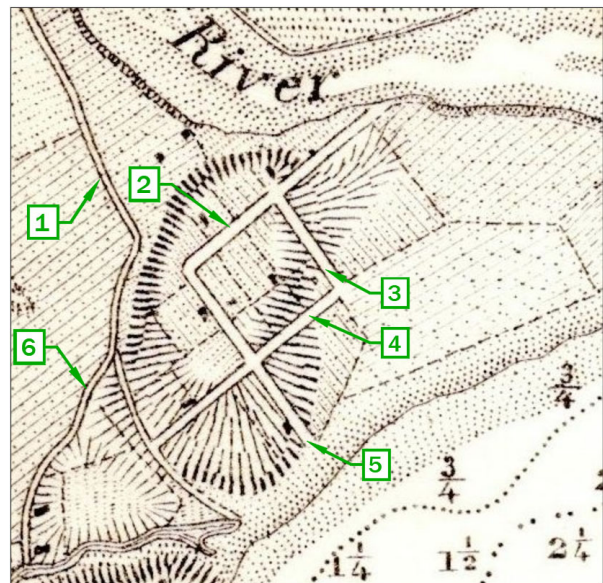


Figure 6: Beach Hill

Key to Figure 6, with today's street names:

1. Pacific Avenue
2. Third Street
3. Cliff Street
4. Second Street
5. Main Street
6. unnamed road now a Depot Park path

The map also shows the beginnings of another emerging trend that exploded in the next few decades; new streets created as large farm parcels were subdivided into residential neighborhoods. Falling into that category were streets such as today's Union, Locust, and King. Further on, we'll look at how an emerging industry created a new road.

Although the Coast Survey map shows that the general trend was for the routes first chosen for new roads to become permanent, there have been exceptions. For instance, the map shows the general location and direction of today's Walnut Avenue and Lincoln Street across the downtown area, but the paths of those streets have changed a lot since 1853.

In another example, a road shown running around the Neary Lagoon side of the Blackburn Terrace hill (key number 6 in Figure 6) later disappeared as a public way when the area became part of the railroad yards in the 1880s. However, with the 2005 opening of Depot Park, a section of the road reappeared as part of the route of a walk/bike path connecting the park to the beach area.

The 1850s: Changing architectural shapes

In addition to newly acquired wealth from the gold fields, some of the new Santa Cruz residents brought knowledge of eastern building styles and building methods that changed the shape of Santa Cruz. The 1850 Francisco Alzina house on the mission plaza is perhaps the earliest surviving example of wood “stick framing.”¹⁸ Built next door to his in-laws' 1840s adobe residence, the Alzina house signaled a permanent change to the shape of Santa Cruz buildings. In addition to the new framing method, any kind of “style” in buildings was a new thing in the 1850s. Earlier buildings were crude, plain, and barn-like, as were the even older adobe buildings like the Bolcoff adobe at Wilder Ranch State Park.¹⁹

Some of the older single-story adobe buildings followed the new stick-framed style in adding wood-framed second stories, in imitation of the “Monterey” style created (and still standing) in that city, but none of those hybrid structures have survived in Santa Cruz.

Wood stick-framing remains the most common method for residential and small commercial construction today, but larger commercial and institutional buildings are now of reinforced concrete.

By 1860, the first brick buildings had appeared, representing another architectural shape-changer. The image in Figure 1 shows three building types side-by-side. In the center of the image is a just-completed two-story brick structure, the so-called “flatiron” building owned by F. A. Hihn's brother Hugo. To its left, across Main Street (today's Front Street), is one of the first Santa Cruz hotels, stick-framed and multi-storied. It was called Santa Cruz House (built about 1851), and is the building with two windows under the roof facing the camera. To the right of the “flatiron” (across Willow Street, today's Pacific Avenue) are some of the pre-1850 one-story barn-style wood buildings. Many of the commercial buildings had raised wooden sidewalks along the street frontage, usually roofed. That “old west” look persisted until replaced by paved sidewalks and streets, beginning late in the century.

Many of those early brick commercial buildings outlasted fire-prone wooden buildings of the same age, but could not survive the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. In general, the longer useful lifetimes of masonry buildings served to slow down changes to the architectural shape of the business district; so much so that a NHRP-listed “Pacific Avenue Downtown Historic District” was created, thanks to those old brick buildings. The designation was removed after the earthquake doomed most of them.²⁰

1854: First Industrial Road in Santa Cruz

Lime production was the first industry to create waterfront infrastructure and road development in Santa Cruz, when Davis & Jordan began lime-making activities in 1853, including the acquisition and expansion of the Anthony-Penfield wharf.

Today's Bay Street, so named in 1866, was previously known informally as the “Lime Kiln Road” (the 1866 town map shows both names, with “Lime Kiln Road” italicized to indicate that the name has been officially superseded by Bay Street) It connected the Davis & Jordan lime works near today's main USCS entrance to the wharf on the coast. Isaac Davis and Albion Jordan built and/or acquired the lime works and began manufacturing ca.1853.²¹ The company also acquired property on the coastal bluffs containing Elihu Anthony's “potato chute,” lengthening it and installing a tram system on rails from a warehouse on the bluff above. The partners then connected the lime works to the wharf via the new road, and made other improvements to transportation and storage facilities for their operations.

A detail from the Coast Survey map (Figure 7) shows the short Anthony construction before its extension, and also shows (with dashed lines) the partially-completed new road from the coastal bluff to the road that is now Mission Street. The already completed road (solid lines) continues from there toward the lime works.

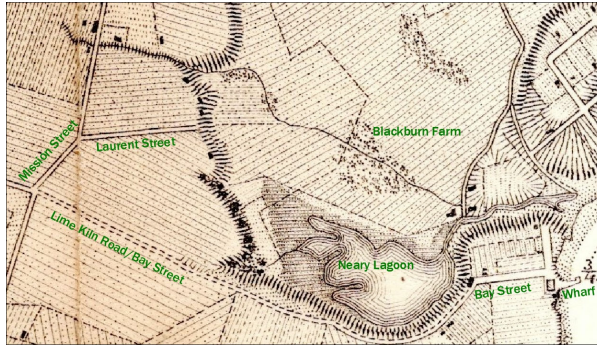


Figure 7: Lime Kiln Road/Bay Street under construction

The company established by Davis & Jordan, and continued by the Henry Cowell family, made Santa Cruz a leading lime exporter well into the twentieth century, and Bay Street dictated the future shape of adjacent development. The former Cowell family ranch is now the UCSC campus, an even larger and continuing shaper of today's Santa Cruz.

Shaping by Natural Forces

The Spanish mission builders responded to the 1791-92 San Lorenzo River rainy season flooding by moving to higher ground, but they couldn't entirely escape the Santa Cruz winters. Adobe walls that had worked well in dry climates further south could not endure too many wet years without constant maintenance, leaving them in a weakened condition. Secularization of the mission removed the craftspeople and indigenous people whose residence at the mission had provided most of the labor needed for maintenance, allowing most of the neglected mission complex buildings to crumble.

Then, in 1857, another natural force doomed the old mission chapel. The 1857 Fort Tejon earthquake, though centered far to the south, retained enough power when it reached Santa Cruz to topple the front wall of the chapel. The remaining structure was unsuitable for continued use as a place of worship, so a wooden church was built next door.

The new church joined other early 1850s wood buildings lining the plaza, including the Francisco Alzina house and the two-story Thomas Fallon building. The last adobe-walled building on the plaza was the *juzgado* (Mexican-era government building), which lasted until 1862. Off the plaza on School Street, the last remaining mission-era adobe building is now the centerpiece of Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park.

Down below Mission Hill, another natural event soon reshaped downtown Santa Cruz. In the wet winter of 1861-62, the San Lorenzo River rose and overflowed its banks just upstream from Elihu Anthony's property, flooding the "lower plaza" area. Anthony responded by building a "bulkhead" (retaining wall) along part of the riverbank adjacent to his land, angled to deflect flood waters (and the entire river) away.²² Subsequent infill behind the bulkhead increased the usable downtown acreage, as well as enlarging the usable portion of Elihu Anthony's land.

Today's levees have further constrained the river and expanded usable floodplain land, but Bulkhead Street remains to show where the bulkhead was built, marking the northern limit of downtown for many years after 1862. The 1886 Sanborn map detail in Figure 8 shows how by that time development was filling in the area protected behind Anthony's bulkhead. Land to the north remained flood-prone and mostly empty, labeled as "Low Land." To the right, Bulkhead Street leads to the Water Street bridge, which was completed in 1882.

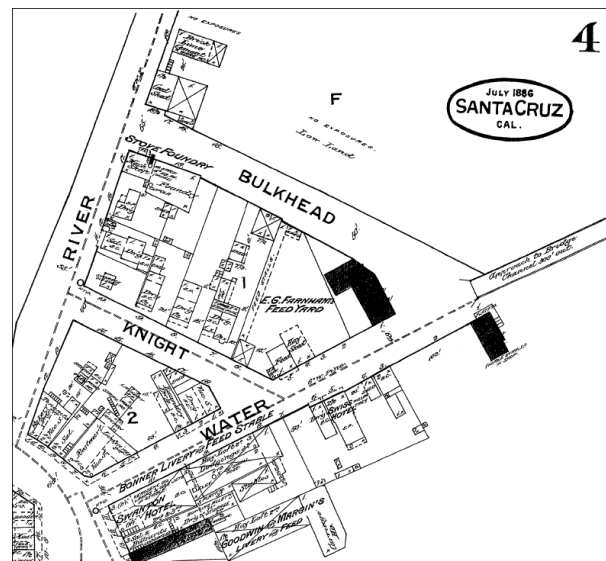


Figure 8: Bulkhead Street and the "Low Land"

Changes on the Waterfront

Before the 1850s, the Santa Cruz waterfront area was essentially undeveloped. There was little coastal maritime trade under Mexican rule, and there were no Santa Cruz wharves/piers where ships could tie up to load/unload. Cargo handling between ship and shore was men hand-carrying items out through the surf to small boats. However, the evolution of shipping infrastructure reshaped the area in the 1850s-60s.

The longer wharf built by Davis and Jordan after 1853 allowed ships to dock at Santa Cruz for the first time. The lime warehouse built on the bluff above was soon followed by other shipping-related construction along the waterfront, creating a need for workers to move, plan, and supervise cargo operations.

As noted previously, the adjacent Beach Hill area had already become a residential neighborhood for workers in maritime-related jobs.

A second wharf was built extending out from Beach Hill in 1856-57 by David Gharky, and was acquired by the California Powder Works in 1865.²³ Powder manufacturing was done at the company's complex along the San Lorenzo River a few miles upstream from Santa Cruz, but the finished barrels of powder were sent down to the wharf by wagon for shipment. A new and better road was built from Santa Cruz to Felton in 1868, which evolved into that section of today's Highway 9. The next installment of this history will show how wagon transport and seaborne shipping were mostly discontinued by the Powder Works in the 1870s when rail transport became available, but the '50s and '60s were busy times on the Santa Cruz waterfront.

Figure 9 is a detail from a "bird's eye view" drawn in 1870.²⁴ On the left is the Davis & Jordan wharf, and on the right is the Powder Works wharf. A number of ships are shown coming and going.



Figure 9: The waterfront, as depicted in 1870

Incidentally, this lithograph may be the only image we have of the first bridge crossing Santa Cruz Creek after it left Neary Lagoon. The building of that bridge (shown in the center of the Figure 9 detail) is another project attributed to Elihu Anthony in 1849 but, oddly, it wasn't shown by the 1853 Coastal Survey (see Figure 4). One possible explanation is that the low wharf-style bridge had been destroyed by winter storms before 1853, but was rebuilt in time for the 1870 drawing. By late 1875 the low bridge had been replaced by a truss-style wooden bridge, elevated so that the new Santa Cruz Railroad trains could pass beneath it.²⁵ Those tracks remain today, passing beneath a later (1918) truss-style wooden bridge that carries West Cliff Drive.

Conclusion

Although the Mission-era system of roads continued as the framework for the shape of Santa Cruz, the body around that frame underwent some major changes from 1846 to the first half of 1866. An American-style town center began to develop around the "lower plaza," as the importance of the original Mission Plaza area faded. Stable land-ownership and population growth transformed the former Mission farmlands and surrounding areas into new residential and commercial development, while export industries fostered transition to a shipping-oriented waterfront.

About the Author

Carey Casey is a local history researcher/author who joined the MAH Publications Committee in 2014. Previous writing includes an article in Santa Cruz County History Journal Number 9, and two articles in the Online History Journal. He also revised and updated the 4th edition of *The Sidewalk Companion to Santa Cruz Architecture*, published by MAH in 2023.

Notes:

1. A concept labeled “path dependence” groups together theories and studies from many different fields regarding the ways that new things tend to follow previously-established pathways. In the context of this article, it helps us understand why today's oldest streets follow routes established long ago. Url = https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Path_dependence. Accessed February 5, 2026.
2. Robert H. Jackson, “The 1845 Villa de Branciforte Census,” *Antepasados* 4 (1980-81), 45-57.
3. E. S. Harrison, *History of Santa Cruz County, California*, (San Francisco, Cal.: Printed for the author by Pacific Press Pub. Co., 1892), 80.
4. Francis M. Kittredge *et al*, edited by Marion Dale Pokriots, Phil Reader, and Stanley D. Stevens, “Santa Cruz County Poll List of 1854,” *Santa Cruz County History Journal Number 2* (Santa Cruz, California: Santa Cruz County Historical Trust, 1995), 48.
5. “Population Totals by Township and Place for California Counties: 1860 to 1950,” *State of California Department of Finance: Demographic Reports*.
6. “The new Calvary (Episcopal) Church is in completion . . .,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, May 13, 1865, 1:6.
7. “New Streets,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, December 2, 1865, 2:1.
8. Mark Primack, “Santa Cruz: Will we ever be here now?,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, August 3, 2025, C7:1.
9. “Important Land Use Decision,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, April 11, 1868, 2:2.
10. “Let there be light . . .,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, January 1, 1870, 3:1.
11. Willa Dean Reynolds, “Michael Lodge, the Overlooked Pioneer,” *Santa Cruz County History Journal Number 6* (Santa Cruz, California: Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History, 2009), 9.
12. Elihu Anthony, “Thirty Seven Years Ago,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, January 9, 1885, 3:2.
13. W. W. Elliott, *Santa Cruz County, Calif. Illustrations, with Historical Sketch*, (San Francisco: Wallace W. Elliott & Co., 1879). Indexed Edition (Santa Cruz: Museum of Art & History, 1997), 29.
14. Frederick Augustus Hihn, “How I Came to Santa Cruz,” *Santa Cruz County History Journal Number 1* (Santa Cruz, California: History Museum of Santa Cruz County, 1994), 73.
15. “Santa Cruz Harbor and Vicinity, California,” Office of Coast Survey, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce. Accessed Dec. 15, 2025, at: <https://www.historicalcharts.noaa.gov/image.php?filename=T00444-00-1853>
16. From an email correspondence. Note that “the wide San Lorenzo River floodplain” does not include the narrow Santa Cruz Creek channel, which was never the river's main outlet.
17. For more on Beach Hill and its early residents, see *The Sidewalk Companion to Santa Cruz Architecture*, 4th edition (Santa Cruz: Museum of Art & History, 2023), chapter one.
18. *Ibid.*, 95. For an explanation of the term “stick framing”, see “The History of Stick Framing,” a4arch.com. Accessed January 11, 2026, at <https://a4arch.com/the-history-of-stick-framing/>.
19. Marion Dale Pokriots, “Don Jose Bolcoff,” *Santa Cruz County History Journal Number 3* (Santa Cruz: Museum of Art & History, 1997), 97.
20. “Pacific Avenue Downtown Historic District,” *Wikipedia*. Url = [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Avenue_Historic_District_\(Santa_Cruz,_California\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Avenue_Historic_District_(Santa_Cruz,_California)). Accessed December 15, 2025.
21. Frank A. Perry, Robert W. Piwarzyk, Michael D. Luther, Alverda Orlando, Allan Molho, and Sierra L. Perry, *Lime Kiln Legacies: The History of the Lime Industry in Santa Cruz County* (Santa Cruz: Museum of Art & History, 2007), 63-67.
22. “The Bulkhead,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, November 8, 1862, 2:5.
23. “Wharf Sale,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, November 18, 1865, 2:4.
24. “Bird's eye view of Santa Cruz, Cal. [graphic],” held by California State Library. A digital version is online [Note: the copy of the lithograph digitized for display online is dated 1880; however, the original was produced in 1870]. Url = https://delivery.library.ca.gov:8443/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE98237. Accessed January 11, 2026.
25. The Santa Cruz Railroad tracks from the San Lorenzo River trestle to the Cherry Street (now Union Street) depot were completed by late 1875 (See “Santa Cruz Railroad,” on the *Santa Cruz Trains* website. Url = <https://www.santacruztrains.com/2019/08/railroads-santa-cruz-railroad.html>. Accessed January 11, 2026).