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“The Largest Rose Tree in the World, Santa Cruz”

By Frank and Jill Perry



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Located beside Monterey Bay in central California, Santa Cruz has long boasted of its year-round mild climate. In the early 1900s, a large rose growing in a Santa Cruz garden was used to promote tourism and attract potential home buyers—not just for Santa Cruz, but for California in general.

Introduction

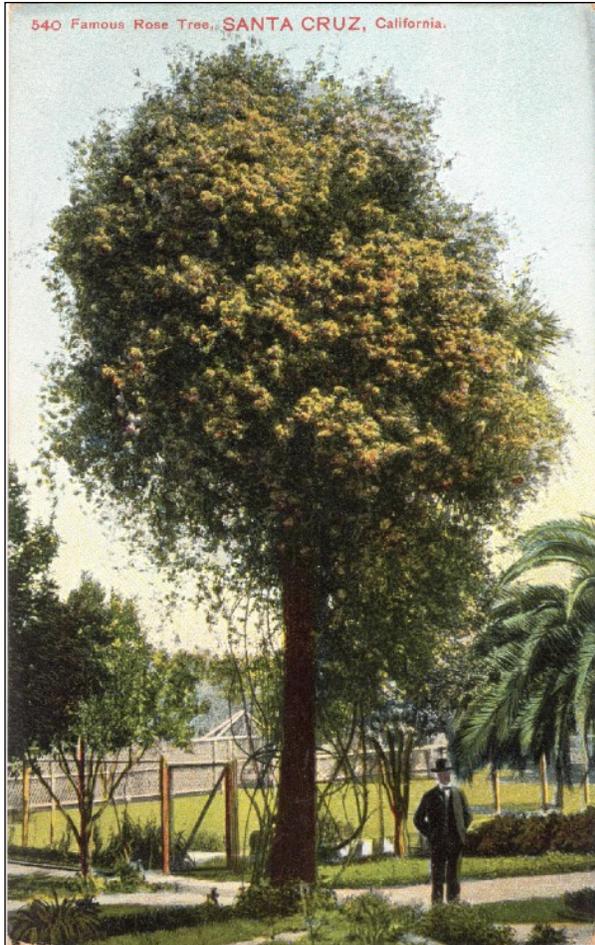
In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Santa Cruz promoters boasted of the region’s many features. It is “the center of a region endowed with a great variety of resources and attractions, notable among which is a climate that in many respects has no equal on the Pacific Coast,” said a 1908 brochure.¹ It goes on to brag how the physical conditions contribute to “bodily comfort and health,” and how the landscape in general “affords an esthetic outlook to nourish and invigorate the mind.”

Early-day advertisements and brochures often made extraordinary claims. Some of the nearby redwoods were said to be the oldest living things on earth. Water was the purest. Farm goods were of the highest quality. Even locally-made lime was “unsurpassed.”

In 1890, Camp Fairview was “the most charming of Pacific Coast resorts.”² The site is now Capitola’s Jewel Box neighborhood. In the 1930s, Rio Del Mar had the “largest freshwater pool on the Pacific Coast.”³ This referred to the mouth of

Postcard titled “Beautiful California - The Largest Rose Tree in the World, Santa Cruz.” Published by the Pacific Novelty Company, San Francisco, circa 1908.
Printed in Germany.





Postcard titled “Famous Rose Tree, SANTA CRUZ California.” Published by Charles Weidner, San Francisco, circa 1908. Printed in Germany. Weidner’s postcards were highly regarded for their exceptional quality.

Aptos Creek. The list of such hyperbolic claims could go on and on.

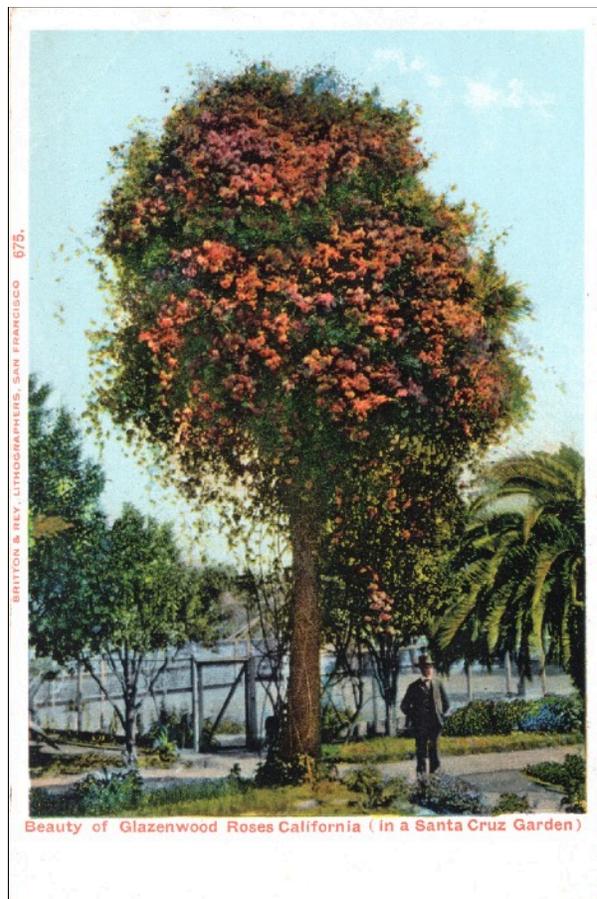
There were also assertions that the healthful climate contributed to a long life. When Native American Justiniano Roxas died in 1875, he was said to be 123 years old (an age later disproven).⁴

Consequently, it is not surprising that the extraordinary rose shown on page one was labeled the “largest rose tree in the world.” The same photo appeared on at least six different postcards back in the first decade of the twentieth century. Most of the postcards said it was in Santa Cruz, but one stated only that it was in California. Still another claimed that it grew in Southern California. What kind of rose was it? Was it really in Santa Cruz? If so, where was it? Was it the world’s largest?

Fortune’s Double Yellow

Old postcards refer to the rose as Beauty of Glazenwood. This variety is better known today as Fortune’s Double Yellow, but it has had still other names: Fortune’s Yellow, Gold of Ophir, Jaune de Fortune, San Rafael Rose, and San Raphael Rose. Its currently accepted scientific name is *Rosa odorata* variety *pseudindica*.⁵

It can be pruned into a bush, but usually is grown as a climber. Given the opportunity, it can reach heights of at least 50 to 60 feet. It is hardy and fast-growing, covered with blossoms each spring. In Santa Cruz, peak blooming occurs in April. An account from 1905 described it as having “large golden blooms, washed with pink and apricot.”⁶ While extolled for its beauty, it is beauty with a price. “It is without exception the most cruelly prickly, thorny rose I know—every dainty twig, every shiny leaf being armed with ferocious



Postcard titled “Beauty of Glazenwood Roses California (in a Santa Cruz Garden).” Britton & Rey, Lithographers, San Francisco, circa 1906.



The thorns are sharp and more curved than those of most other rose varieties..

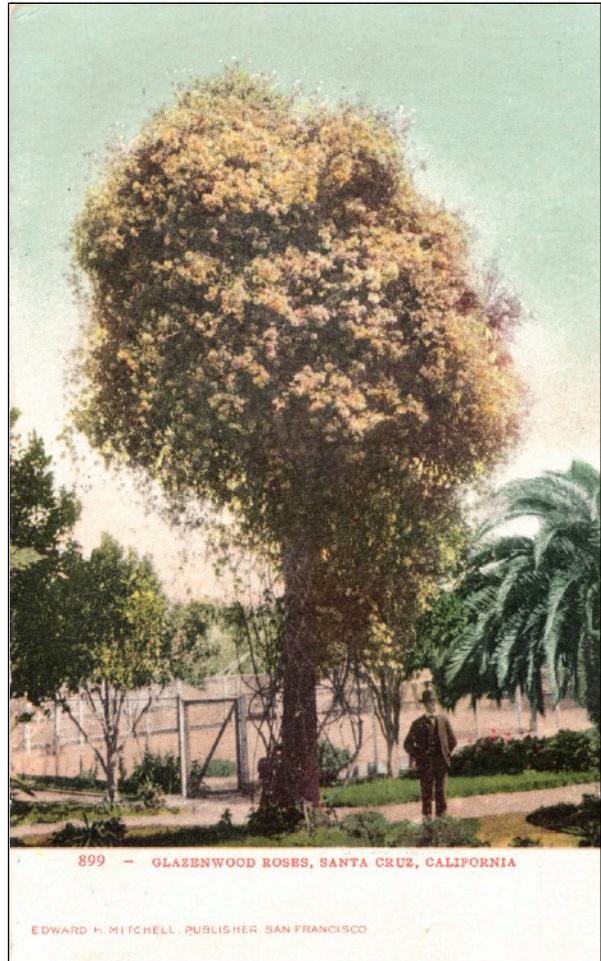
fishhooks,” said a writer in 1907. Others have simply described the thorns as “evil.”⁷

The rose was named for Robert Fortune (1812-1880), a Scottish botanist and explorer who traveled extensively in China and introduced an estimated 280 plant species and varieties to Europe, India, and the US.⁸ In the 1840s, he discovered the rose “in the garden of a rich mandarin at Ningpo. It completely covered an old wall in the garden, and was in full bloom at the time of my visit; masses of glowing yellowish and salmon colored flowers hanging down in the greatest profusion. . . . It is called by the Chinese the ‘Wang-jang-ve,’ or ‘Yellow Rose.’”⁹ He shipped a plant or plants (probably potted) back to Europe and soon it was widely propagated. The rose was not a new species, but a hybrid that had sprouted up sometime in the distant past, perhaps as an accident. Rose hybrids do not breed true from seed and can further hybridize on their own.

In 1875, a Mr. Woodthorpe introduced Beauty of Glazenwood from the Glazenwood Gardens in Essex.¹⁰ It was said to be slightly different from



Fortune’s Double Yellow (aka Beauty of Glazenwood) growing in the authors’ garden in Santa Cruz, April, 2020. The young blossoms are pale yellow with orange towards the center. The petals develop pink edges as they mature. This is why old postcards show varying colors.



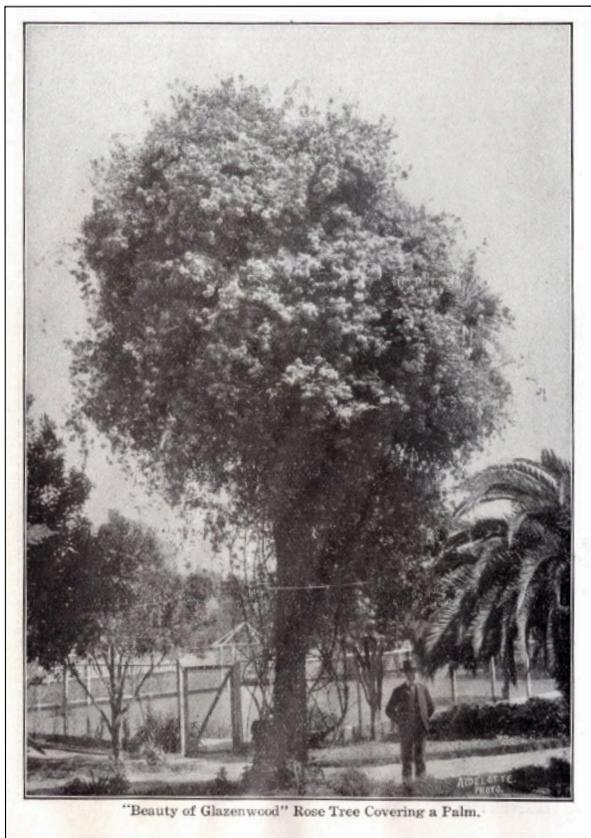
Postcard titled “Glazenwood Roses, Santa Cruz, California.” Published by Edward H. Mitchell, San Francisco. circa 1907.

Fortune’s Double Yellow, but the London Royal Horticultural Society considered them to be the same rose.¹¹ Today, they are synonymous.

Rose Culture in Santa Cruz

While roses had been cultivated in Santa Cruz gardens since the Mission Era,¹² interest picked up in the 1880s with the introduction of annual rose fairs. “The object of this fair is to bring together roses and other choice flowers for the purpose of comparison, studying the roses, increasing an interest in rose culture, and showing what Santa Cruz can produce with comparatively little effort,” said the *Santa Cruz Weekly Sentinel* in May, 1882.¹³ By Spring of 1891, the *Santa Cruz Surf* had noticed a “vast improvement in rose culture.”¹⁴ It attributed much of this progress “to the influence of the rose fairs and flower festivals.”¹⁵

The “Rose Tree” was in the garden beside the Hihn mansion in downtown Santa Cruz. This is where City Hall is today. This variety of rose is not capable of growing unaided as a tree, but by climbing and blanketing an existing tree, the rose achieved a tree-like appearance. From, *The City of Santa Cruz and Vicinity, California*, published by the Santa Cruz Board of Trade, 1905.



This page from a 1908 promotional booklet is unusual in that it shows the famous photo with the name of the photographer in the lower right.: Aydelotte. Several of Charles L. Aydelotte’s Santa Cruz photographs were made into postcards. The postcard lithographers began with his black and white photographs and added colors during the printing process. From, *The City of Santa Cruz and Vicinity, California*, published by the Santa Cruz Board of Trade, 1908.

The same 1891 *Surf* article appears to be the first to mention the rose in Santa Cruz: “On Church Street a magnificent sight is the ‘Beauty of Glazenwood’ rose vine at A. M. Peterson’s. The glorious sunset colors of this blossom are absolutely unequalled.”

This was not the “rose tree” on the postcards, however. The photograph above, proves not only that it grew in Santa Cruz, but shows exactly where. It was in the garden of Frederick Augustus Hihn (pronounced heen), located where Santa Cruz City Hall is today.¹⁶ The photograph is from a Santa Cruz promotional booklet dated 1905 and clearly shows Hihn’s distinctive residence in the background.

It is uncertain just when this rose was planted, but it and the “dracena palm” on which it grew do not appear to have been planted yet in 1879, based on an illustration of the Hihn mansion published that year.¹⁷

The first mention of Hihn’s giant rose came twenty years later in the *Santa Cruz Surf*: “A sight worth beholding is a Beauty of Glazenwood rose bush in the garden of F. A. Hihn on Locust street. This beautiful climbing rose is in full bloom and completely entwines a tall dracena palm. The effect is fine.”¹⁸

It wasn’t long before the rose attracted the attention of photographer Charles Leon Aydelotte (pronounced AYE-da-lot), who settled in Santa Cruz around 1900. Aydelotte took numerous photographs of scenes popular with tourists, such as along West Cliff Drive.¹⁹ Some of his photographs were made into postcards, one of the best known being a scene of ocean spray titled “Old Man of the Sea.”



Fortune’s Double Yellow (aka Beauty of Glazenwood) growing in the authors’ Santa Cruz garden, April, 2020.

Aydelotte’s picture of Beauty of Glazenwood, along with several of his other photographs, was published in *Sunset* magazine in March, 1902 in an article by Arthur A. Taylor titled, “Santa Cruz By The Sea.”²⁰ Taylor was publisher of the *Santa Cruz Surf*. Since the rose does not reach full bloom until April, Aydelotte likely took the photograph the previous year—in April of 1901.

In April 1904, the *Sentinel* reported, “The palm tree in the gardens of F. A. Hihn, which is covered with the Beauty of Glazenwood rose, is now very attractive, the roses being in full blossom.”²¹ The following year, a photograph of the rose was framed and displayed in the California Building at the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition in Portland, Oregon.²²

Popular on Postcards

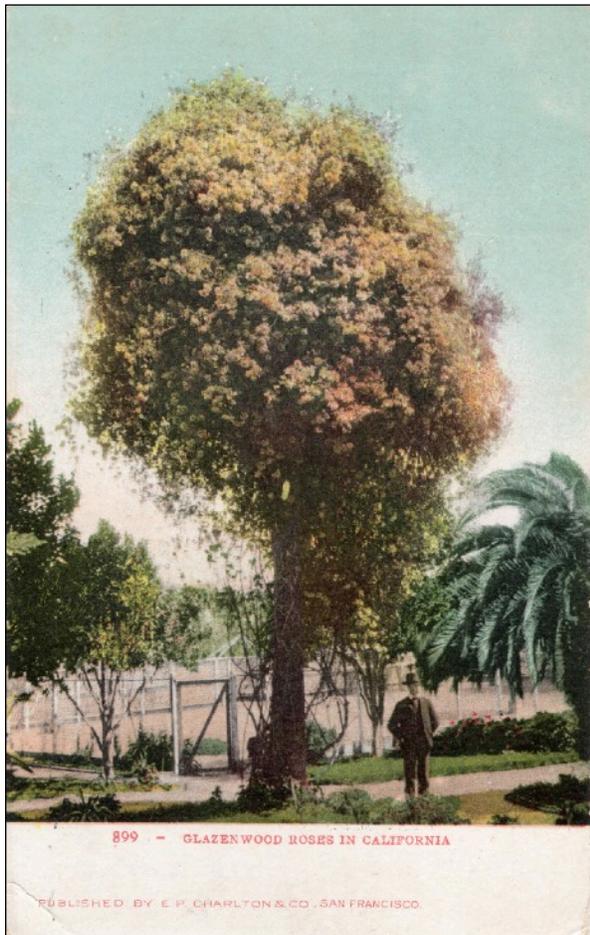
Aydelotte sold a number of his photographs to postcard publishers, including his picture of the Beauty of Glazenwood in the Hihn garden. The period from about 1905 to 1912 was the heyday of the picture postcard. Changes in postal regulations a

few years earlier made it possible for privately-printed postcards to be mailed for a penny—half the letter rate. The careful adding of color by the printers made the images quite beautiful and realistic in an era when most printing was in black and white. Postcards quickly became hugely popular, with millions printed and mailed each year. Some were holiday cards, but many were town scenes.

At least six different postcard publishers issued cards with Aydelotte’s picture of Hihn’s rose (all of which are shown here). Most credited Santa Cruz as the location of the rose. The one by E. P. Charlton & Co. of San Francisco just says that it is California. The one by Oscar Newman of Los Angeles, however, has the caption “A Tree Covered with Roses, Southern California.”

The Newman card did not go unnoticed up north. “Los Angeles. . .,” complained the *Sentinel*, “claims our Big Trees, our famous cliffs, and the big rose tree in the Hihn gardens, advertising them on postal cards as southern scenes.”²³

Before 1910, most American postcards were printed in Germany. The multi-colored blossoms of



Postcard titled “Glazenwood Roses in California.”
Published E. P. Charlton & Co, San Francisco, circa 1906.

the Hihn rose tree posed a challenge, even for the expert German printers. Should the overall color be yellow, orange, or pink? As seen in the examples here, all three were used.

Widely Planted

Beauty of Glazenwood was quite popular in Santa Cruz in the early 1900s and there were several other very large bushes locally, though none gained the notoriety of Hihn’s. In Soquel, a Beauty of Glazenwood climbed a tall pine tree near the Getzschmann’s hotel.²⁴ In the 1940s a redwood tree on Laurel Street in Santa Cruz was covered top to bottom with a Beauty of Glazenwood, transforming the redwood into another “rose tree.”²⁵ For many years there has been one growing at an old cabin site in the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park.²⁶

Despite its nasty thorns, Beauty of Glazenwood was often cut for floral displays at parties and other social events. One such example was a gathering held by the Society of California Pioneers of Santa Cruz County for an 1891 May Day dinner in Capitola. The Capitola Hotel dining room was “festooned with evergreen and magnificent bunches of roses, conspicuous among which were scores of the ‘Beauty of Glazenwood,’ . . . on all the tables.”²⁷ Hihn was president of the Pioneers.

World’s Largest Rose Tree?

Old postcards are notorious for being sources of misinformation. Captions are often incorrect, and sometimes publishers even doctored the images. Was Hihn’s rose tree the largest in the world? Historical claims that something was the largest, the tallest, or the first, should always prompt



Postcard titled “A Tree Covered with Roses, Southern California.” Oscar Newman Publisher, Los Angeles, postmarked 1908.

skepticism. There is no way to ever know for sure if Hihn’s rose was the biggest in the world at that time, but there are images of Beauty of Glazenwood from other areas around the same period that look just as big if not bigger. Most authorities agree that the largest rose today is a white Lady Banksia rose in Tombstone, Arizona. Planted in 1885, it covers nearly 5,000 square feet.²⁸ Hihn’s rose was nothing close to that, but it was impressive. At a time when Santa Cruz was increasingly turning to tourism for its economy, the golden flowers of Hihn’s rose tree presented a golden opportunity to promote Santa Cruz.

Acknowledgments

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All photographs are by Frank Perry; historical images are from the Perry family collection.

About the Authors

Frank Perry is curator of the Capitola Historical Museum. Jill Perry is curator of the Heritage Rose Garden, San Jose.

Note: Readers wishing to see a living example of Fortune’s Double Yellow can see one growing on the fence at Santa Clara University (Rose No. SC-33-4). The rose is part of the San Jose Heritage Rose Garden collection. <http://www.heritageroses.us/SCU.php> There is also one in Sacramento at the old city cemetery. For a list of nurseries that sell the rose, visit <https://www.helpmefind.com/roses/>.



Painting of Fortune’s Double Yellow by Alfred Parsons. From *The Genus Rosa* by Ellen Willmott, 1911.

Notes

- ¹ *The City of Santa Cruz and Vicinity, California* (Santa Cruz: The Santa Cruz Board of Trade, 1908), unpaginated.
- ² Carolyn Swift, *Historic Context Statement For The City of Capitola*, (Capitola, California: City of Capitola Community Development Department, 2004), 28.
- ³ Postcard in collection of the Aptos History Museum.
- ⁴ Geoffrey Dunn, *Santa Cruz Is in the Heart: Volume II* (Capitola, California: Capitola Book Company, 2013), 27-35.
- ⁵ *Help Me Find Roses, Clematis and Peonies: 'Fortune's Double Yellow,'* “Description,” <https://www.helpmefind.com/gardening/l.php?l=2.2808>, Accessed April 12, 2020.
- ⁶ Brent C. Dickerson, *The Old Rose Advisor* (Portland, Oregon: Timber Press, 1992), 211.
- ⁷ *Help Me Find Roses, Clematis and Peonies: 'Fortune's Double Yellow,'* “Member Comments,” July 14, 2017, <https://www.helpmefind.com/gardening/l.php?l=2.2808&tab=32>, Accessed April 12, 2020.
- ⁸ Alistair Watt, *Robert Fortune: A Plant Hunter in the Orient* (Kew: Royal Botanic Gardens, 2017).
- ⁹ Brent C. Dickerson, *The Old Rose Advisor* (Portland, Oregon: Timber Press, 1992), 211.
- ¹⁰ “Rose Beauty of Glazenwood,” *The Garden: An Illustrated Weekly Journal of Gardening in All Its Branches*, September 25, 1875, 256.
- ¹¹ Brent C. Dickerson, *The Old Rose Advisor* (Portland, Oregon: Timber Press, 1992), 211.
- ¹² Jill M. Perry, “A Rose Odyssey,” *Santa Cruz County History Journal*, Number 3 (Santa Cruz: Museum of Art & History, 1997), 145-146.
- ¹³ “The Rose Fair,” *Santa Cruz Weekly Sentinel*, May 13, 1882, 2:2.
- ¹⁴ “Roses,” *Santa Cruz Surf*, May 22, 1891, 3:3.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ For a biographical sketch of Hihn, see Stanley Stevens and Benjamin Schwantes, “Frederick Augustus Hihn (1829-1913),” *Immigrant entrepreneurship: German-American Business Biographies*, <https://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=23>, Accessed April 15, 2020.
- ¹⁷ For the illustration, see *Santa Cruz County, California, Illustrations . . .* (San Francisco: Wallace W. Elliott & Co., 1879), 4. An indexed edition by Leonard A. Greenberg & Stanley D. Stevens was published in 1997 by the Museum of Art & History.
- ¹⁸ “A sight worth beholding. . .,” *Santa Cruz Surf*, April 18, 1899, 4:2.
- ¹⁹ For more on his West Cliff Drive photographs, see Frank Perry, “From Natural Bridges to Bird Rock: An Exploration Through Vintage Postcards and Photographs,” *Online History Journal of Santa Cruz County*, July, 2015.
- ²⁰ Arthur A. Taylor, “Santa Cruz By The Sea,” *Sunset Magazine*, March, 1902, 419-433.
- ²¹ “The palm tree. . .,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, April 23, 1904, 3:1.
- ²² “Exhibits for Portland Fair,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, April 27, 1905, 6:4.
- ²³ “In Quest of Information,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, September 25, 1910, 5:1.
- ²⁴ Ernest Otto, “Come Back to The Soquel of 60 Years Ago,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, July 30, 1943, 5:3.
- ²⁵ “Rose Grows Around A Redwood Tree,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, May 18, 1944, 5:3.
- ²⁶ Seen by the authors in the early 2000s, but the area is so heavily overgrown that it would be difficult to know if it is still there.
- ²⁷ “The Pioneers,” *Santa Cruz Surf*, May 9, 1891, 6:3.
- ²⁸ The plant has its own museum and website, <https://tombstonerosetree.com/worlds-largest-rose-tree/>, Accessed April 15, 2020.