

13.

Dog Racing

FOR SOME RESIDENTS of the San Francisco area, the 6900 block on Mission Street is remembered for its part in a colorful chapter of history. In the words of Ann Kahle, "When we pass Jefferson Union High School grounds and see many folks watching a football game, a few of us recall that on that site there was once the Union Coursing Park. It was large and surrounded by a seven foot tight board fence and several rows of eucalyptus and cypress trees that were used for windbreaks."¹

In this coursing park dogs chased live rabbits while the patrons sat in the grandstands near the corner of School Street and Railroad Avenue and cheered for their favorite greyhound. "Everything was first class," wrote a reporter. "The hounds were grand and the hares were strong."²

Another reporter wrote that the coursing park "is the finest on the coast," and he wrote, "Mr. Spreckles, it is stated, is head mover in the concern, which practically guarantees its success, and that together with a double track, which it is rumored the Electric Railway proposes laying in the spring, will boom things in Colma."³

Mrs. Kahle remembers that the grandstand was very large and decorated with pennants. To reach their seats, sightseers and gamblers alike came from San Francisco on the Electric Railway to School and Mission Streets, then transferred to another car that ran along School Street to the entrance.

Races were held on Saturdays and Sundays with thirty or more courses each day. Sunday courses started at 11:30 A.M. while Saturday's races began at 1:30 P.M. Admission was twenty-five cents with ladies admitted free. At this price the races attracted so many people from San Francisco and other places, the people of Colma and its environs found it difficult to see the races that made their town famous.

The records show that the proprietors of the park were so determined to make their races the best in the west they went to London, England to find E.J. Bull, Esquire to serve as judge of the races.

Today many people who remember the Union Coursing Park recall with George Kirchhubel that "as each event began and ended, the gold and silver changed hands. When the last pair of dogs had broken from their slips, and the chase was ended, the morning and racing came to an end. Now it was time to 'wet the whistle' and put on the 'nose or feed bag,' so the great majority of them proceeded to Mission Street to their favorite saloon."⁴

In 1904 a wave of public sentiment brought a law that made coursing races illegal and brought the activities in the Union Coursing Park to a sudden halt. Still, dog racing in some form or another continued in the area, culminating in the race course that became the chief industry of Bayshore.

This venture was so popular it attracted crowds from all over the San Francisco Bay area, just as the Union Coursing Park had done thirty years before. Like the earlier park it was forced out of business in a wave of sentiment against dog racing and the gambling that accompanied it. In 1939 the attorney general ruled that such activities must stop. And stop they did.



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