

# UC Santa Cruz

## Library Staff Presentations and Research

### Title

Frederick Augustus Hihn: His Political History (1869-1870)

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/33q0g195>

### Author

Stevens, Stanley D.

### Publication Date

2012-10-07

Prepared for Presentation to the Boundary Markers and Border Crossers Session  
Frontiers of Profit: immigrant entrepreneurs and the economic development of Northern California  
**“Frederick A. Hihn and the Personal Politics of Regional Economic Development”**  
Sunday, October 7, 2012, Grand Hyatt Denver, Colorado  
Western History Association – 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference

**Frederick Augustus Hihn: his Political History (1869-1870)**

by

**Stanley D. Stevens**

Librarian Emeritus

Coordinator, Hihn-Younger Archive

University Library, Special Collections

University of California at Santa Cruz

**Introduction.**

Frederick Augustus Hihn stood with his fellow members of the California Assembly on Monday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1869, in the brand new Assembly chamber. This was the first Legislature to meet in the new Capitol in Sacramento. He was sworn-in to represent Santa Cruz County for the Eighteenth Session of the California Legislature. He took his seat with seventy-nine other Assemblymen. He was one of three members to identify themselves as Independent. There were sixty-seven Democrats, ten Republicans and three Independents, for a total of eighty.

He was born in Germany; his family's surname was Hühn. He immigrated for the Gold Rush in 1849. He was naturalized as a U.S. Citizen only thirteen years before his election to the Legislature.<sup>1</sup>

He was a capitalist. He was conservative. He was against unequal and excessive taxation. He was well respected. He was loved and he was hated. Power and wealth breed contempt. Hihn earned more than most.

This was a period of rapid growth in his economic and political influence.<sup>2</sup> In 1867, he was the third highest taxpayer (of 196) in Santa Cruz County.<sup>3</sup> He had moved up from thirteenth place the previous year.<sup>4</sup> Fifteen years later, 1883, he was the top taxpayer.<sup>5</sup>

**Hihn was no stranger to political life.**

Almost immediately after his arrival in 1851, Hihn became an active commercial and political citizen of Santa Cruz. His competency was obvious to anyone who met him. He spoke German, French, English, and Spanish.

[see Appendix 2 for: F. A. Hihn's most important commercial, political & social events.]

He was no stranger to the legislative process.

In September, 1861, he was elected County Supervisor for District 3, which included more than half the county. He won the election by a 71% majority over Judge William Blackburn, one of the earliest settlers and at-one-time the Alcalde of Santa Cruz. Two years later Hihn was elected as Chairman of the Board. At the next election, 1864, he was reelected for a *second* four-year term.

The Union Party (Republican) nominated him with this unanimous endorsement:

"Mr. Hihn, as a Supervisor, has always commanded the respect and friendship of his conferees, because of his inexhaustible fund of *correct* information concerning every portion of the County and every branch of business in it, and because of his great ability as a business man, his integrity and his indomitable industry."<sup>6</sup>

### **Hihn's Short Career as an Assemblyman**

In early August 1869, Hihn had been urged, begged, and endorsed by thirty prominent business and tradesmen to run as an independent candidate for the Assembly.

The Democratic Party of Santa Cruz County also endorsed him unanimously to run on its "People's Ticket" as an Independent.<sup>7</sup>

Hihn accepted the nomination, pledging himself to the voters of Santa Cruz County that, if elected, he would guard the interests of the County and State to the best of his ability.<sup>8</sup>

In his published acceptance, which occurred a week before his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, he said: "I would like to represent this county as a business man. To lighten the burdens of taxation, to give to the citizen, as near as possible, an equivalent for his taxes, to look after and take care of the material interests of this county and State—that is my platform. It may be Democratic or Republican, but I am an Independent."

San Francisco's premier newspaper, the *Daily Alta California*, endorsed him:

"Mr. F. A. Hihn, of Santa Cruz County, has accepted his nomination as an independent candidate for the Assembly. Santa Cruz is fortunate in the probability of being represented by a gentleman so well suited in ability and social standing as Mr. Hihn. A Legislature composed of such men as he, could be relied upon for honest and intelligent service in promoting the general welfare, and protecting the State from the raids upon her treasury so constantly attempted."<sup>9</sup>

Hihn won the election by 58.26-percent (945 to 677 of 1,624 votes cast), and served one term.<sup>10</sup>

Edward S. Harrison wrote in his *History of Santa Cruz County*, that,

"In 1869 [Hihn] was elected to the State Assembly, and during that term he performed a prodigious amount of work, a few of the measures he originated and had charge of [,] being the following Acts of Legislature: A new charter for the city of Santa Cruz; a new financial system for the county of Santa Cruz; concerning estray animals; appointment of a commission to examine and survey Santa Cruz harbor for a breakwater; concerning roads and highways; authorizing a levy of district taxes for building schoolhouses; authorizing supervisors of counties to grant wharf franchises; providing for fees and salaries of State and township officers; authorizing supervisors to aid in the construction of railroads in their respective counties.

One of the most important measures he originated was that to refund the State debt, under which act about \$4,000,000 of State bonds were successfully refunded at a saving of a large amount of interest to the State."<sup>11</sup>

The Santa Cruz *Sentinel* published Hihn's appeal for voter participation in developing an agenda for the forthcoming Legislature:

“... every one interested should make known their views and wishes, to the member elect. He not only solicits but requests, every citizen, from all sections and localities in the county, to make known their various wants, either through the medium of the press, by letter or verbal communication. Mr. Hihn desires to represent Santa Cruz county to the best of his ability, irrespective of party, faction or clique, and he hopes to receive the cordial support of all, in his efforts to legislate for our own mutual interests; and to do so every voter and tax-payer must exercise his influence and aid in manifesting the wants of the county. To do this intelligently, Mr. Hihn invites discussion, solicits information and requires each one interested to give his views, now, at once, so that bills can be drawn up acceptable to the great mass of the people. It takes time and consideration to frame and mature bills, and immediate action should be taken, in the premises. ... Mr. Hihn will be the representative of Santa Cruz county—the whole county—and this county only in her special interests, and it therefore becomes the privilege as well as our duty to counsel and advise with him; render him your confidence and wishes, and our word for it, no complaint will afterwards be made against him as a public man and a legislator.<sup>12</sup>

The *Santa Cruz Sentinel* was Hihn's advocate and urged the public to support him:

"In the House, Hon. F. A. Hihn is quite active, showing an energy and capacity equal to the best of the old and experienced members.

"In the Assembly, Hon. F. A. Hihn has been appointed Chairman of the Committee on Fees and Salaries, and also placed on the Committee on Corporations; and also on the Committee of Ways and Means; three of the most important Committees in the Legislature."

"We need a railroad, and the county will no doubt liberally aid the measure. The road we require is the one than can be built on the most direct route to San Francisco.

"Let us drop all personal interest and work for the county in uniting on a main road, by the shortest route from Santa Cruz town to San Francisco. There is a novelty in being united. Let us try it."<sup>13</sup>

The *Sentinel* later complained about a negative report out of San Francisco:

"... *S. F. Bulletin* gives Representative F. A. Hihn an intended heavy thrust. At a time not many years past, this county was the rendezvous of a number of land-sharks, and there is evidence to prove that one of them was roughly handled by Mr. Hihn. The *Bulletin* has lost no opportunity to slur the present Legislature, not from political motives, but because one of its editorial staff, W. C. Bartlett,<sup>14</sup> once a citizen of this place, is bitter and unrelenting enemy of Mr. Hihn. The *Bulletin* admits the bill to be a good one.... ... The Legislature to which Mr. Hihn appealed is largely Democratic. Mr. Hihn was elected as an Independent—as a shrewd, calculating, business man, not as a man celebrated for long-winded harangues from borrowed manuscript. The Democratic party is said to be partisan. We admit it, as all parties are. To succeed, it was necessary to gain the support of the majority—not that of a minority. An appeal was made to the Democrats; it succeeded, and the Republican ... Hihn went and won, and did it honorably too. Labor without fruit, is time worse than wasted. ... The people know the *Bulletin* has succeeded, and we know the history of the unparalleled success of one of its editors while residing in this community. Let the virtuous cast the first stone—there will be none cast from the *Bulletin* office.<sup>15</sup>

The Editor of the Watsonville newspaper complained about how productive Hihn had been in the Legislature:

“The *Sentinel* of last week publishes Mr. Hihn’s Record! and says that during the short time he has been there he has “introduced twenty-six Bills, one Concurrent Resolution, and a Memorial to Congress!” Great Heavings, how ink and paper have been wasted! We cannot see the necessity of trying to prove that Mr. Hihn is a man of talent, or that he has earned his money. The people can judge for themselves as to whether he has acted honestly or not. It strikes us as not being in good taste. ... On railroad matters we have not been hand in hand with him, but have never questioned his industry, and furthermore think he has done as well as any member which composed the late Legislature. Out of the twenty-six bills introduced by Mr. Hihn, we would like to ask the *Sentinel*, how many have ... Governor Haight’s Signature?”<sup>16</sup>

An analysis of the *Journal of the Assembly* for the 18<sup>th</sup> Session, containing 1,113 pages, during Hihn’s tenure shows that he introduced twenty-six Bills, of which nearly twenty-seven percent (26.92%) were adopted by the Legislature and signed by the Governor. Not a bad record for a “freshman Assemblyman.” The Assembly had passed twenty three percent (23.07%).<sup>17</sup> However, fifty percent (50%) were postponed, referred, and otherwise killed by the Assembly or Senate.

One Bill, number 264, was the most controversial; it was titled “An Act to authorize the County of Santa Cruz to aid in the construction of railroads...,” — not among legislators, but back at home in Santa Cruz County. Although this Bill was shelved, ultimately Hihn did get taxpayers’ support and he built the Santa Cruz Rail Road from Santa Cruz to Watsonville.<sup>18</sup>

Hihn’s proposed legislation for a railroad in Santa Cruz was not an isolated effort.

An analysis of the journals of the Legislature will show that expansion of California’s railroads was one of the overriding concerns of the Legislature in which Hihn served; there were at least forty-nine Bills introduced in the Assembly and Senate during the 18<sup>th</sup> Session (see Appendix 1 for some examples).

Another Bill, number 451, titled “An Act to provide for the payment of the funded indebtedness of the State of California and to contract a funded debt for that purpose,” met with universal approval, and was signed by the Governor. It was alleged to have saved the taxpayers more than four-million dollars. It was viewed as “the most important act of the session.”<sup>19</sup>

But, there were always complainers; the Editor of the *Pajaro Times* asked of his readers:

**WHAT IS THE USE OF BEING A SUPERVISOR?**

That question is best answered by the following fact: F. A. Hihn (the Board of Supervisors) owns in Soquel nearly eleven thousand acres of the best and finest timberland in the State. It was assessed at 47-1/2 cents per acre, and was afterwards reduced by the Board of Supervisors to 27-1/2 cents per acre. Farmers, how do you like that? Taxpayers, will you sustain Hihn (the Board)... ?<sup>20</sup>

Hihn responded in a dignified but firm rebuttal:

“Editor Sentinel: — Having been attacked in the “Times” for more than four years without answer on my part, it might seem strange that the remarks of that paper, in its last issue, although it used my name in nearly every other line, could bring me out in the public prints. Nor should I take this course, because it is unpleasant to enter into newspaper

contest; and so far as my private character is concerned, I am perfectly willing to abide by the judgment of those who know me and with whom I have had dealings; and as to my public character, having looked after the interests of the county the same as if they were my own, I feel that I have done my duty, and having no political aspirations I can very well afford to let the curs bark, although I admit it is unpleasant to be barked at continuously, but when the attempt is made to attack other men over my shoulders, I am ready to face the music, attack them directly, and they can speak for themselves. ...

Having met the only definite charge against me in last week's *Times*, I shall not now refer to the other loose insinuations in that paper, but hold myself ready, publicly and privately, to refute each and every one of the slanderous attacks which may be brought against me, and which have only been made to get me out of the way, because while Supervisor of the county, I have stood guard by the public crib and would not allow it to be plundered; and to the truth of this statement I call as my witnesses, every member of the Board of Supervisors for the last six years. F. A. HIHN Santa Cruz, August 8th, 1867."<sup>21</sup>

Another example is the severe criticism from a newspaper editor in Watsonville. He was derided as a "... man, whose god is money...."

The primary complain was that taxpayers money would be spent on Hihn's Santa Cruz Rail Road, when Watsonville already had access to the main Southern Pacific line, just across the river at the Pajaro Junction.<sup>22</sup> Another major investor in Hihn's railroad was Claus Spreckels. He was just starting sugar manufacturing in Santa Cruz and needed the railroad to transport sugar beets to the mill and finished product to market.

The dislike of Hihn by some residents of Watsonville was not universally shared, Joseph Cottle, who established the *Watsonville Pajaronian*, wrote in 1868:

"On Monday, March 2d, the new county officers assumed the responsibilities of their respective offices. Those who have just laid aside the robes of office have served the county well and faithfully.... The two gentlemen who have just retired from the Board [including Hihn] have always had the best interests of the county uppermost in all their transactions; and we are by no means alone in this opinion. Whatever missiles of bad feeling may have been hurled at the late Board, and Mr. Hihn in-particular, we have failed to find the cause of ill-feeling, or to see wherein the aforesaid missiles have injured a single member. And at the same time we believe the gentlemen who have lately taken their seats, will fully sustain the credit of the Board."<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

- Hihn was no rubber-stamp legislator. He usually voted with the majority, but not always. As a freshman Assemblyman, he was one of the most prodigious and trusted.
- His locomotive, the *Jupiter*, is in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.<sup>24</sup>

- California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo, for which Hihn was a founding Trustee<sup>25</sup>, is the Number One ranked public university in the 2012 Best Colleges rankings.<sup>26</sup>
- Hihn's "Capitola By-the-Sea" is one of California's destination resorts.<sup>27</sup>
- Hihn cared more about his community than he did making a profit; unless you assume that building a railroad that connected Santa Cruz with the outside world was something that Hihn did solely for his own benefit.
- His contributions to the community outweigh the negative attitudes toward him.
- It is true that everything Hihn accomplished benefitted his wealth. He seemed to operate on a basis that "whatever benefitted the community, benefitted Hihn."
- His legacy continues to capture the imagination of Santa Cruz and Californians.

---

<sup>1</sup> Santa Cruz County, *Index to Naturalizations*, Book 1. 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 2 July 1870, 2:1. Editorial: "In looking over the Indexes to deeds in the County Recorder's office, it would seem that Mr. Hihn is almost monopolizing the pages under letter H, but the 'most' sales seem to have been made by him during the last four years."

<sup>3</sup> *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 8 May 1869, 3:2 "Income Tax."

<sup>4</sup> *Watsonville Pajaronian*. 15 June 1868, 2:3.

<sup>5</sup> *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 28 July 1883, 2:5. [Tax paid on about \$200,000 of assessed valuation.]

<sup>6</sup> *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 5 November 1864, 2:2-3.

<sup>7</sup> *Watsonville Pajaronian*. 12 August 1869, 2:1; & *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 14 August 1869, 2:1.

<sup>8</sup> *Watsonville Pajaronian*. 12 August 1869, 2:1.

<sup>9</sup> *Daily Alta California*. 29 August 1869, reported by the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 4 September 1869, 2:4.

<sup>10</sup> Santa Cruz County. Board of Supervisors. *Minutes*. September 6, 1869; & *Watsonville Pajaronian*. 9 September 1869, 2:1.

<sup>11</sup> Harrison, Edward Sanford. *History of Santa Cruz County*. 1892. 269.

<sup>12</sup> *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 11 September 1869, 2:1: "Local Legislation."

<sup>13</sup> *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 18 December 1869, 2:2.

<sup>14</sup> William C. Bartlett, Editor, San Francisco *Evening Bulletin*. [William Chauncey Bartlett (1818–1907) was born in Connecticut but as a young man went to Ohio, where in the early 1850s he practiced law. In 1860 he moved to California and entered the ministry, serving as pastor of the First Congregational Church in Santa Cruz in 1860–64. He became a correspondent for the *Bulletin* in about 1867 and soon thereafter accepted an editorial position; ... he was also a

contributor to Harte's *Overland Monthly*. ("Veteran Journalist Answers Final Call," *San Francisco Call*, 9 Dec 1907, 4; "Dr. William C. Bartlett, Famous Pioneer, Expires," *Oakland Tribune*, 9 Dec 1907, 3). [Mark Twain Project: Samuel L. Clemens to Jervis Langdon, 29 Dec. 1868. Explanatory Notes-Textual Commentary.

<<http://www.marktwainproject.org/xtf/view?docId=letters/UCCL00212.xml&brand=mtp&style=letter#AN>> Viewed 28 Aug. 2012]

<sup>15</sup> *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 1 January 1870, 2:3: "Partisan Legislation."

<sup>16</sup> *Watsonville Pajaronian*. 7 April 1870, 2:1.

<sup>17</sup> *The Journal of the Assembly During the Eighteenth Session of the Legislature of the State of California, 1869-70. Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly*. Sacramento: D. W. Gelwicks, State Printer. 1870. [For details of Hihn's legislative history, Bills related to railroads, and Santa Cruz County, see Appendix Number 1.]

<sup>18</sup> *The birth of California narrow gauge : a regional study of the technology of Thomas and Martin Carter / Bruce MacGregor*. Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 2003. [In particular, see chapter Six: "Santa Cruz Supply Chain" which provides the history of Hihn's Santa Cruz Rail Road, the controversies over funding it, and his relationship to Claus Spreckels, an shareholder.]

<sup>19</sup> *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 2 April 1870, 4:2: A. B. No. 451 — An Act to provide for the payment of the funded indebtedness of the State of California, and to contract a funded debt for that purpose. (Passed.) [This is the most important act of the session. If it goes into effect it will reduce State taxes at least thirty-three per cent.]

<sup>20</sup> *Pajaro Times*. 1 September 1866, 2:1.

<sup>21</sup> *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. 10 August 1867, 2:4.

<sup>22</sup> *Watsonville Pajaronian*. 7 December 1876, 2:1: Editorial by C. O. Cummings. "Hihn Still Reaching for the People's Pockets." "... Now, this man, whose god is money, and who seems to be devoid of all consideration for his fellow man, issues a writ of mandamus commanding that the Board of Supervisors of Santa Cruz County, "issue to the Santa Cruz Railroad Company bonds to the amount of \$14,178," for construction of railroad ... By some, Hihn is called a man of enterprise; perhaps he is, but the people have supplied the money for every enterprise he has engaged in, and it looks to us that the people will pay the \$14,178 now demanded by this small railroad king."

<sup>23</sup> *Watsonville Pajaronian*. 12 March 1868, 2:1 "County Officers." Joseph Albert Cottle established the *Watsonville Pajaronian* on March 5th, 1868. This is the second issue.

<sup>24</sup> Smithsonian. National Museum of American History. America On The Move.

<<http://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/exhibition.cfm?key=38&exkey=45#gallery>>

[Viewed 28 August 2012]

<sup>25</sup> California State Archives F3638-3 C576. 124. Executive Appointments. Administration of Gov.

Henry T. Gage. *Trustees of the California Polytechnic School*. Hihn's first appointment was from

January 31, 1902 to January 31, 1905. He was reappointed to a second term, March 16, 1905 to

January 31, 1909. California State Archives F3638-4 C576. 28. Executive Appointments.

Administration of Gov. George C. Pardee. *Trustees of the California Polytechnic School*.

<sup>26</sup> <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/regional-universities-west/top-public>

<sup>27</sup> Swift, Carolyn. *Historic Context Statement for the City of Capitola*. Capitola Community Development Department. 2004.