

Historic Houses

Sunday, July 14, 1963

Santa Cruz Sentinel—

Adventure Abounds In 60-Year-Old Mission Street Garden

Long hot days and warm evenings of summer bring back favorite childhood memories to nearly everyone.

For many, summer-only breezes, smells and sounds reopen the impressions of carefree hours spent in grandma's garden, which as often as not was an adventure-filled hodge podge of flowers and shrubs to search for butterflies and bees; soft lawns to walk through barefooted or lie upon for sky staring; strong friendly trees to climb and shelter bird nests; and special secret places.

The cool damp shade of the summer house or gazebo was paradise where ferns grew lushly under ivy, trumpet vine, or grapes and a little earth scratching would turn up bugs, worms or even sometimes frogs or salamanders just ready to catch.

Santa Cruz has a few of these charming gardens which are little changed by the years. A prime example is that at 809 Mission street around a house now owned by Mrs. Geraldine Work, county librarian. Developers of the garden were Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Hammer, who purchased the house in 1902 from Marion B. Metcalf.

The Hammers are both gone, but the garden which they built into a showplace is still giving pleasure to the present renters, Mr. and Mrs. G. A. Rentfrow.

"It's a garden which was used a great deal," said Mrs. Vera H. Hammer, widow of Charles G. Hammer. Mrs. Hammer and her husband moved into the Mission street retreat of his parents in 1940, living there until last year and adding plants and bulbs to the garden all the time.

"In olden days, everyone had what everyone else had in the garden. It was a seed here and a slip there," Mrs. Hammer said. "Even as familiar as I was with the place, I wasn't sure just what would come up where."

The property is screened by tall hedges and trees and the house is nearly smothered under shrubbery foundation plantings. The front and back lawns and driveway are edged by flower beds, which have a continual cycle of growth and bloom through the hundreds of plant varieties growing there.

Walnut trees give shade to the rear lawn and the lath summer house, where the original Mrs. Hammer used to hold card parties on warm afternoons, is cool and shadowy in its lacework of ferns.

Mrs. Rentfrow said, "I stepped through that front gate and felt that I had stepped back 100 years in time."

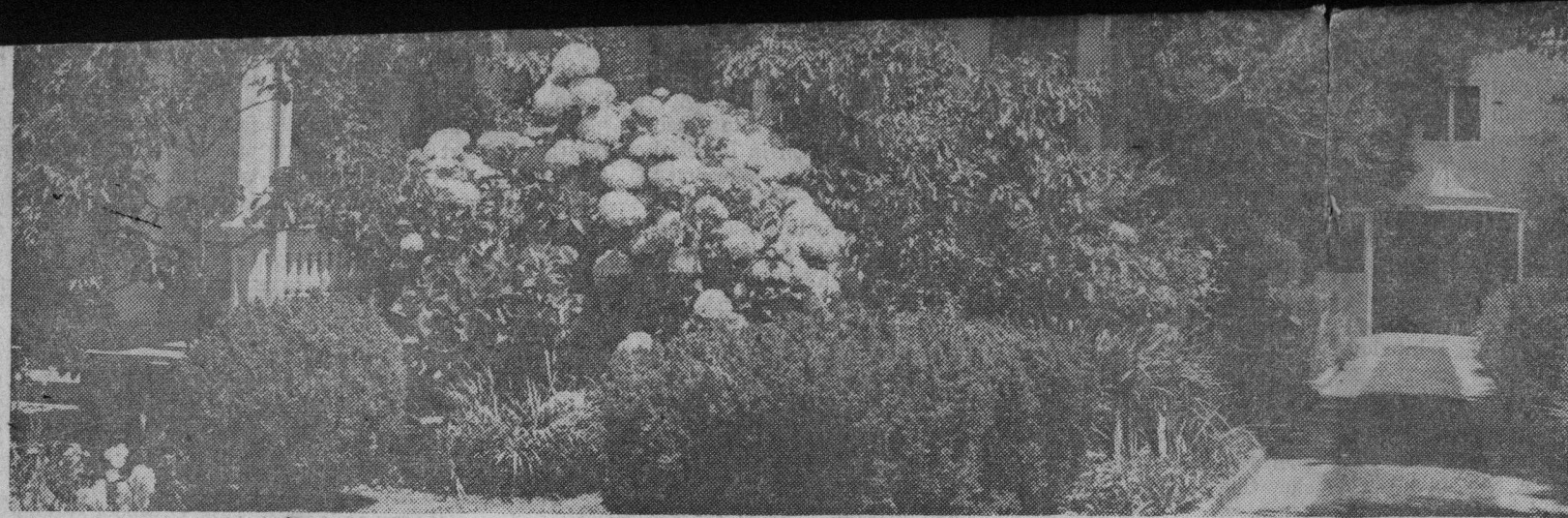
Although the Rentfrows are enjoying their garden fully, the real impact is upon her grandchildren, Marjorie, 6, and Alyce, 3, who are adding to their share of later-day memories with their garden adventures.

One of the biggest charms of the garden is its combined informal and formal treatment. Hedges, lawns, and flower beds show the once-precise and now softened clipped edges, and there is the billowy spill-over of plants and flowers from every side. The overall impression is one of friendliness and comfort.

The modern trends toward low maintenance gardens through stark decks, gravel or concrete areas, severe simplicity, and bare line interest may be fine for adults.

But to youngsters playing in the sun, new and precise gardens just don't match the backyard nature hunts possible in the fascinating nooks and crannies of the old fashioned garden.





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II Family Interest Section

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An old fashioned garden has great appeal to modern youngsters, often reared on concrete or wooden decks in low-maintenance gardens which have little room for exploratory adventures. In a garden which is over 60 years old on Mission street (upper right), Marjorie, 6, and Alyce, 3, children of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Fleshman, 1703 Delaware avenue, find joy in climbing a walnut shade tree. At left are shown the casual billows of flowers and shrubbery of the garden, developed by the late Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Hammer around the stately old home. Driveway leads to the old carriage house, now a garage. At lower left, Alyce runs from her favorite summer retreat, a lath summer house where ferns grow thick and lacy and it is cool on even the hottest days. The home and gardens currently are rented by Mr. and Mrs. G. A. Rentfrow, who are constantly surprised by new plants and shrubs bursting into bloom during the year's cycle.

