

Beach Hill Mansion

The Major's House: Open For Tour

By MARGARET KOCH
Sentinel Staff Writer

The Major's house, famed Golden Gate Villa, will be open to the public on Sunday, October 29, as part of the current Santa Cruz Victoriana program being conducted by UC Extension.

The house, noted for its architecture and the fine restoration job which has been carried out recently, was awarded the California Heritage Council's Certificate. It is owned by Mrs. Earl Wilkinson, who has supervised the restoration and repairs with a great degree of tender loving care.

"I always dreamed of owning it, even when I was a little girl," she explained. Her grandmother and mother had been guests in the house during its heyday as a social center. Indeed she herself entered it once as a child.

Today, Major Frank McLaughlin's stately home is converted into apartments.

It has been said by several tenants that "friendly ghosts"

also inhabit the elegant mansion. Whether or not this is true is a matter of opinion. However, even the women who say they sensed "presences" are not planning to leave; they love living there. (For "ghost story" see The Santa Cruz Sentinel of Sunday, October 15, page 21).

Of special interest to tourgoers on Sunday will be the mansion's former main parlor, or living room. Mrs. Wilkinson has just completed restoration work—all except the finely molded plaster ceiling which calls for a special artisan—and will open it for the tour.

The large room contains a beautiful onyx fireplace and gold-plated chandelier and wall lights. The lighting fixtures all were wired for electricity and piped for gas also, Mrs. Wilkinson noted.

There is much gold trim in the room, with a wide border of classic trim. The stained glass windows are especially fine; they were ordered from Italy and were made to the

Major's specifications and artistic requirements which were of the highest in that period—1891.

Mrs. Wilkinson has furnished the room with her own antiques and Belgium rugs that blend perfectly with the mood and decor.

The house was built by Major and Mrs. McLaughlin in an era of lavish entertaining. He was a noted mining engineer and a figure in California politics, being urged to run for governor at one time which honor he refused.

His greatest engineering feat was to be the diverting of the Feather River from which he planned to extract gold and platinum. The platinum was to be for Thomas A. Edison's electric light filaments—the Major and Edison were good friends, and Edison is reported to have financed the Major to the tune of a half-million dollars.

The Major built a huge wall for the river diversion. When the project was finished and

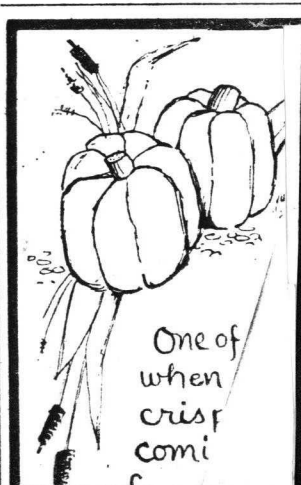
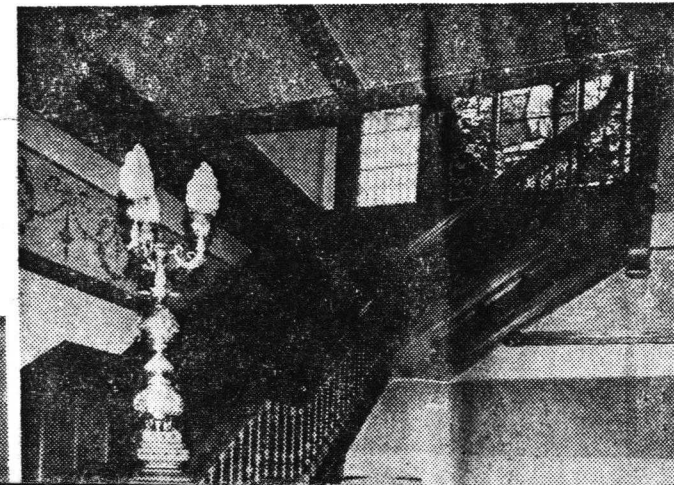
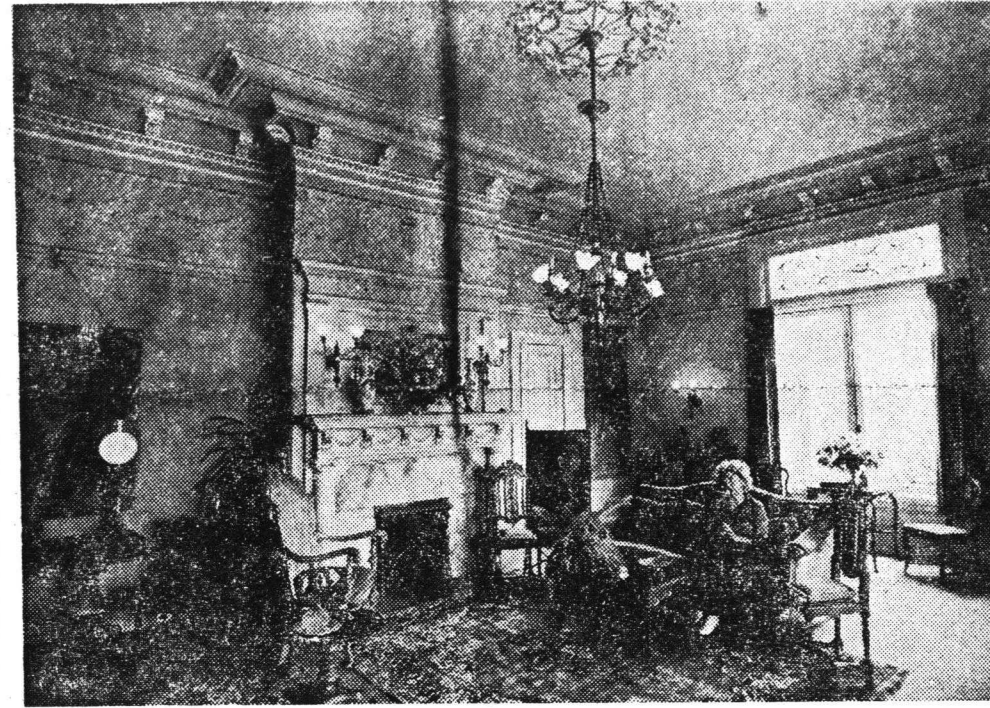
the river flowed elsewhere, he found the river bed to be barren of gold or platinum. In fact he found that the river had been diverted some years before by someone else. It was a crushing blow, not only to the Major's spirit but to his financial plans. He was faced with lonely old age and poverty—a thing which the dapper Major could not conceive as he always demanded and had the best of everything.

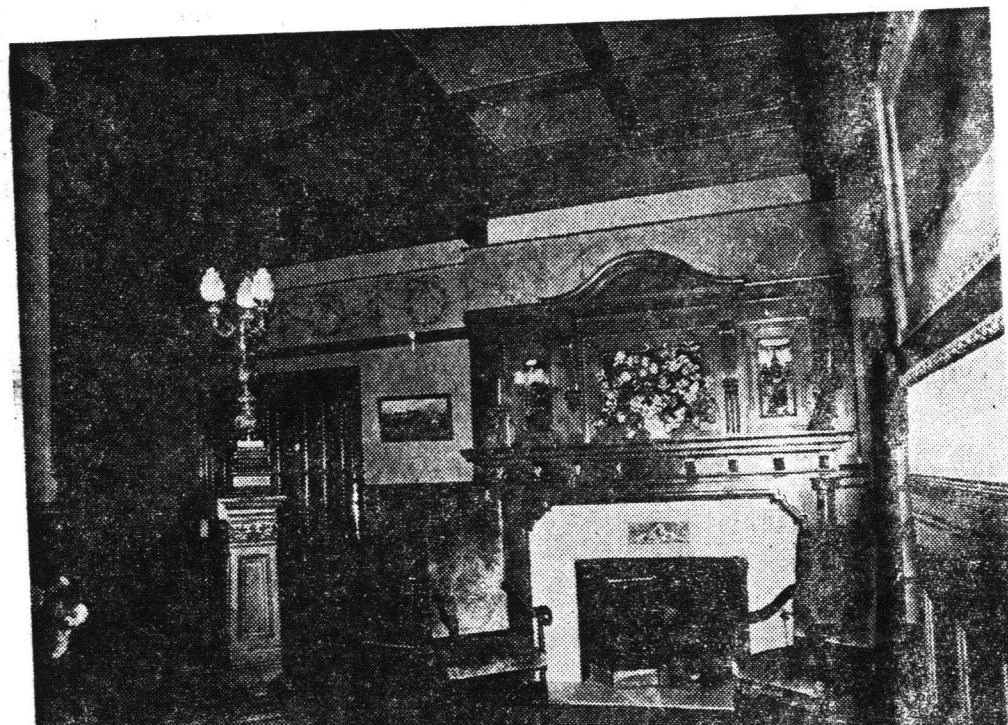
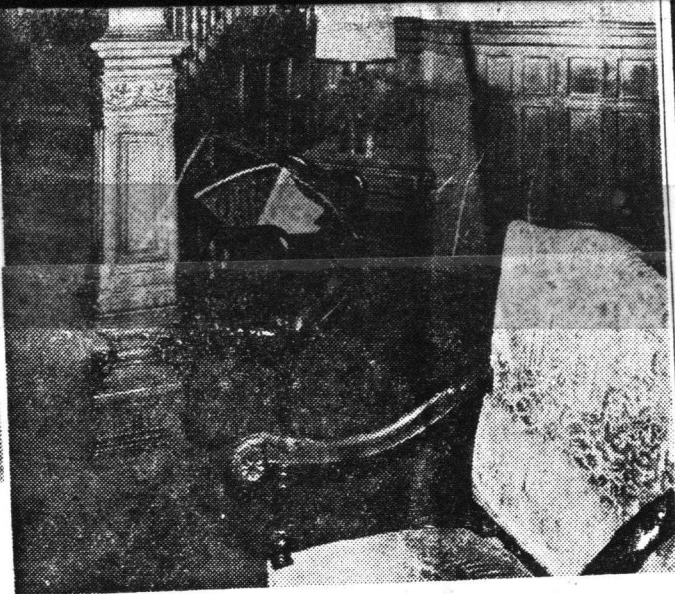
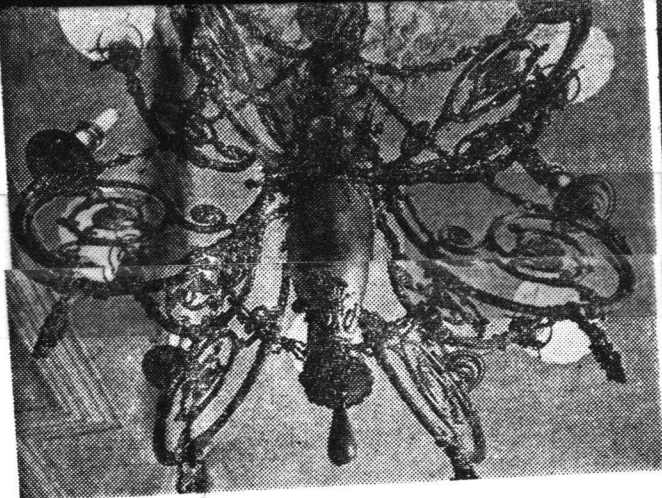
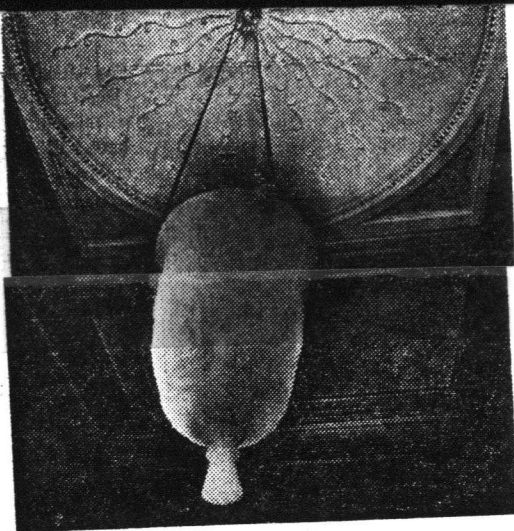
When financial disaster struck, the Major made his decision. He took his revolver, went to the room where his stepdaughter, Agnes, was napping and shot her. Then he drank a fatal poison cocktail.

His wife had died several years before. There were no other children. When he ended his and Agnes' lives, he ended everything.

Only the house lives on, a grand dame of yesterday, slightly mysterious in its appearance along with a high degree of elegance.

Historic Houses- Beach Area
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The elegant staircase, above, leads to landing where huge stained glass window is, and on to second floor. Gold-plated chandelier is in recently restored living room. Alabaster light fixture is the original entrance hall light; ceiling is painted intense shade of blue with gold trim. Below, at left, the entrance hall has its own fireplace of light beige tiles.

av

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