

# All that's left of one man's grand dream

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**A** PART of one man's dream to own an entire town — its oceanside land, buildings and even its beach — still stands in Capitola today.

The gray concrete wall some eight feet high and running along Wharf Road is the lone reminder for motorists passing by. Beyond this formidable wall, the deteriorating Rispin Mansion stands — the dream-come-true for oil millionaire Henry Rispin some 50 years ago.

In the glory days of the early 1920s, Rispin owned 128 lots atop Depot Hill, the entire waterfront including the wharf and the exclusive Capitola Hotel, as well as acreage along Soquel Creek and Monterey Bay Heights. The latter included a country club and 18-hole gold course.

He had dreams of making Capitola the "Riviera" of the new world. The 22-room mansion, built at a cost of \$250,000 in 1923, was his palace.

His reign lasted only a half dozen years, though. The stock market crash in 1929 and the start of the Depression wiped Rispin out and he was forced to sell his holdings.

Today, the seven-acre mansion site is the dream of another man — developer Howard Dysle — who hopes to renovate the long-deserted

mansion and build a 100-unit residential care facility. Already, however, a grassroots group calling themselves, "Friends of the Rispin Estate" has formed to stop Dysle.

The mansion's glorious past is a story all its own.

Long-time locals remember the mansion as it was in the 1940s and '50s. The St. Joseph's Monastery of Poor Clares bought it in 1941 — after several owners had it in the '30s. Poor Clares used it as a retreat until they moved to their present Aptos location in 1960.

Since then, it has remained vacant. The beautiful formal gardens are overgrown with weeds, the mansion riddled with graffiti and peeling plaster walls. Yet, through it all, the splendor of the mansion's past is still visible.

Like the "Mystery House of Capitola," the mansion is a myriad of different floors and levels. It totals 9,000 square feet, although the way the 4½-story structure is built into the sloping hill overlooking Soquel Creek, it doesn't appear to be that large.

The long-rumored secret rooms within the mansion, however, are all true.

Down a narrow, dark passageway stands an eight-foot-wide concrete slab. A peek around the other side reveals huge hinges that were used to

"swing" the slab open or closed. Behind it is a 25-foot-long passage that would indeed store a lot of secret valuables.

Some say Rispin was a bootlegger with a hand in the illegal transport of liquor. The secret room, lined in solid concrete, would have made an ideal cellar.

Another secret compartment stands in what used to be a study. Behind built-in bookcases is a small four-by-five-foot area.

The living room, meanwhile, comes straight out of the southern plantation days of "Gone With the Wind." Huge bay windows offer a sweeping view of the dense landscape and creek, the 15-foot-high ceiling is made partially of solid redwood and a marble fireplace dominates the center of the room.

Nearly every room takes advantage of the view with bay windows or private balconies. One balcony still shows the remains of beds where the children could camp out on a warm summer evening.

Another level was used to entertain guests. There is also a series of small rooms that probably served as servants' quarters.

The dark, quiet atmosphere that remains today is an eerie reminder of a fortune won and lost.

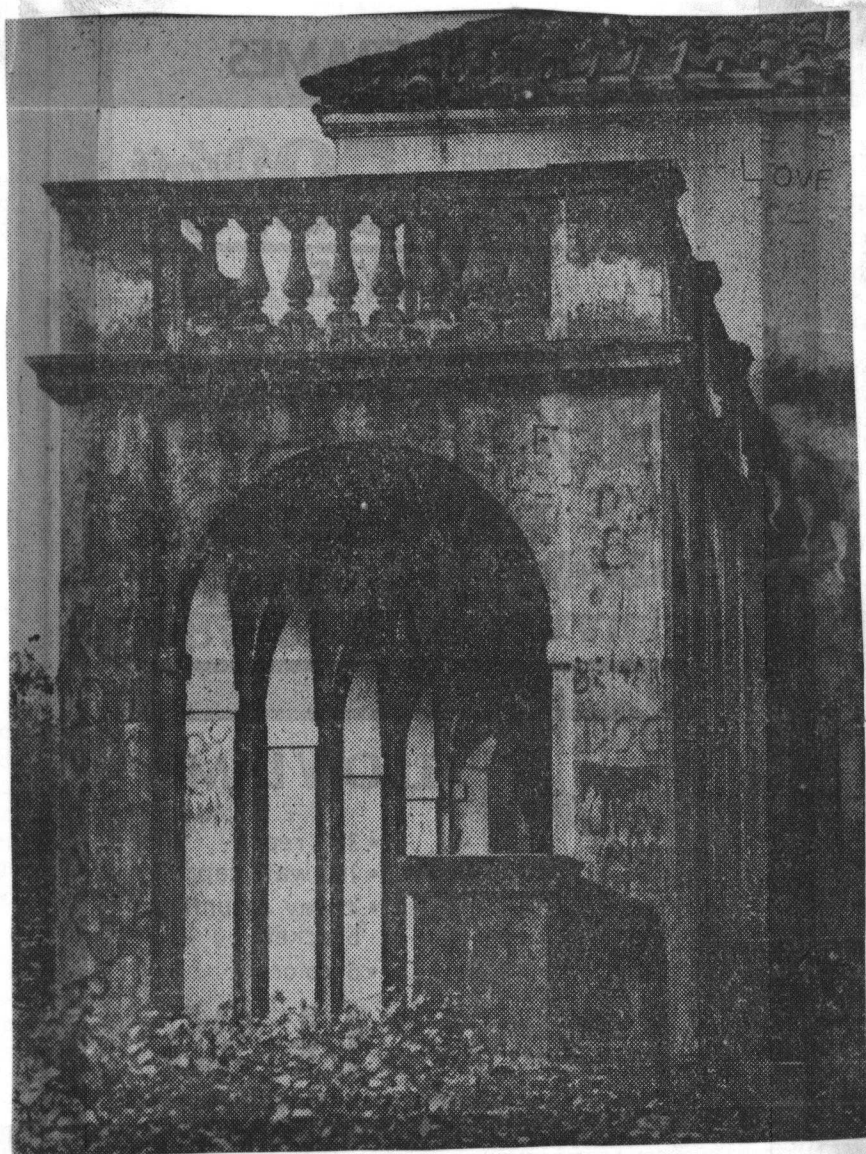


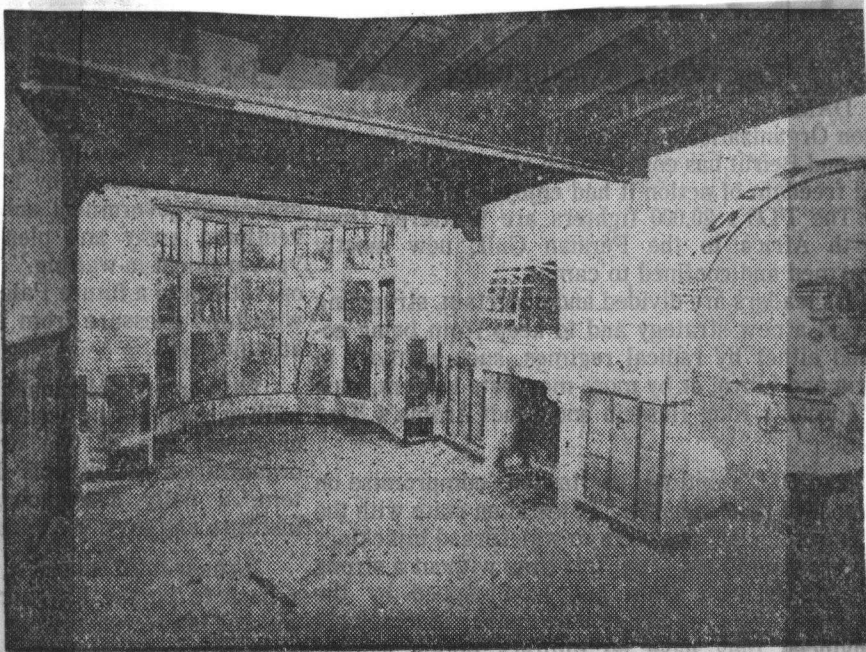
Photos by Pete Amos



The aging walls of the Rispin Mansion are a magnet for graffiti.







The Rispin Mansion (top) as it appears today and (bottom) as it looked in its heyday of polished floors and sparkling chandeliers.

