



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Kathleen Nitz is selling the historic Cope House on Walnut and Chestnut streets.

Cope with history

Historic Houses - Central Santa Cruz

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Well-to-do pioneers built historic house, now for sale

By **CAROLYN LEAL**
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

SANTA CRUZ

The streets have old-fashioned names like Walnut, Chestnut and Elm. They are shaded by large, leafy sycamore trees and many of the houses are guarded by iron fences.

These streets are the original neighborhoods of Santa Cruz and in the Victorian-era were occupied by the city's well-to-do pioneers. The Cope House, at 249 Walnut Ave., is one of the oldest houses in the area. It is surrounded by an iron fence with its name spelled out on the gate in front.

The Italianate house was built in 1877 by millionaire Frederick A. Hihn for his daughter Katie and given to her as a wedding gift when she married hardware merchant William T. Cope in January 1878. Cope was born in San Jose and came to Santa Cruz in 1868. In 1875, he opened a hardware store with his brother under the name of Cope Brothers on Pacific Avenue. Later, Cope became involved in real estate and was secretary of the F.A. Hihn Co.

Cope was described by historians "as one of the energetic, wide-awake businessmen of Santa Cruz." Katherine Cope, called Katie, was one of three founders of the Santa Cruz Chapter of the American

Red Cross in May 1898. The Red Cross ladies provided medicine, fruits and vegetables to soldiers based in Santa Cruz to protect the powder works. They also made bandages, hospital shirts, sheets, pillow slips, handkerchiefs and socks for soldiers bound for Manila, according to a Sentinel story.

Frederick A. Hihn, Katie's wealthy father, came to California from Germany in 1849 to mine gold. After various ventures, he arrived in Santa Cruz in October 1851 and established a prosperous general merchandise business. When hard times hit, Hihn still prospered. He exchanged his goods for wood, wheat, eggs and chickens, which he then sold at a profit.

Hihn married Therese Pagen, his niece, on Nov. 23, 1853, and they had six children. Hihn served in the state Legislature and was a member of the county Board of Supervisors. He was instrumental in developing the first city water supply, and he built the railroad from Santa Cruz to Watsonville.

The Hihn mansion was on an entire block bounded by Chestnut, Church, Locust and Center Streets. After Hihn's death, his heirs deeded the mansion to the city of Santa Cruz and it served as City Hall from 1920 to 1937, when it was torn down to make way for a new city hall.

The nearby house Hihn built for his daughter and son-in-law cost

\$5,000 to build, according to records unearthed by current owner Kathleen Nitz.

It was designed by architect W. H. Burrows.

A drawing of the Cope House appears in W.W. Elliott's Santa Cruz County Illustrations, published in 1879.

The drawing depicts the house sitting alone in splendor at the corner of Walnut and Chestnut, while a horse-drawn trolley travels down Chestnut Street. A conservatory is shown at the side of the elaborately gabled house. The house was described this way in Elliott's book: "W.T. Cope has a new and stylish residence in Santa Cruz. It is located on a corner near the railroad and street-car lines and its handsome design and substantial appearance attracts the attention of passengers." The house is listed with the Santa Cruz County Historical Trust and an oval plaque stating its historic status is mounted near the front door.

The house is painted in historically correct colors of blue, with white and rose trim. The architectural features include unusual arched window and door frames.

Outside, the house is surrounded by 100-year-old camellias that have grown into trees.

Inside, there are 12-foot ceilings with crown moldings. There is a double parlor divided by retractable doors. On one side of



Submitted photo by Homes Magazine
The interior of Cope House features a marble fireplace.

the parlor is a grand piano, where Kathleen Nitz teaches music and voice lessons.

On the other side, there is a cozy room with a marble fireplace and book-filled shelves.

"When I have recitals, I open the door, turn the couch around and add chairs," Nitz said.

She has painted the interior in shades of blue, yellow and dusty

See **COPE** on **PAGE E2**

Cope

Continued from Page E1

rose. The rose color in the dining room was inspired by a room in the White House.

"I did some research and the color of the dining room is the same color as the Treaty Room in the White House," she said.

Despite its age, the house appears to be in pristine condition. The conservatory, off the dining room, was removed at some point, Nitz said. She has added a deck accessible through double doors in the dining room.

Prior owner Richard Cutts did substantial restoration and prior owner Tia Baldwin added the iron fence and gate, Nitz said.

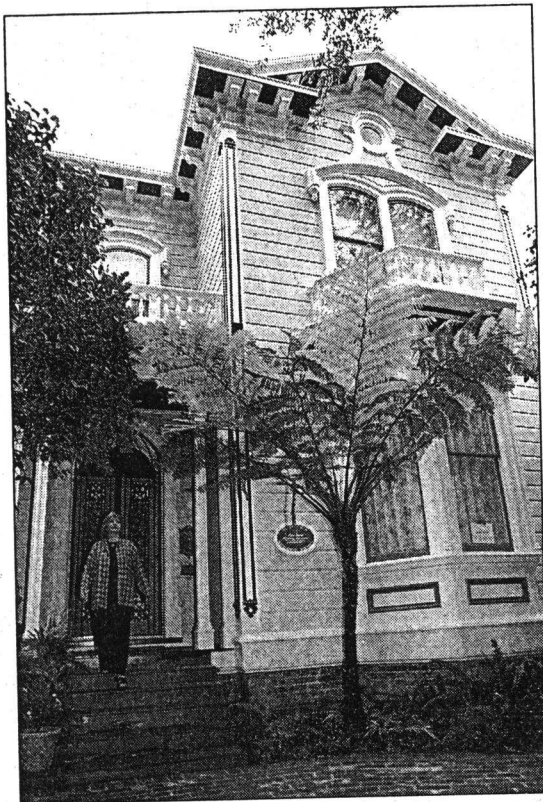
The house is filled with sunshine. A stained glass window above the stairway lets in a stream of light.

"It's a wonderful place to live," Nitz said. "It's a grand house, but it's also very homey and comfortable."

She has owned the house for five years and is selling because her children are grown, and she needs smaller quarters.

The four-bedroom, three-bath house has a spacious yard and a carriage house that has been converted into a studio with kitchen and bath.

The elaborate etched glass above the front door, showing a bowl of flowers, is original, as is the curved walnut stair railing leading to the second floor. Modern bathrooms and a kitchen have



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been added, although the first floor bath features an old-fashioned pull-chain toilet and a claw-foot bathtub.

An interesting feature are the niches in the walls of the stairs.

"They're called coffin corners," Nitz said. "There are in case someone died and had to be carried downstairs."

Contact Carolyn Leal at
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Cope House

WHAT: Cope House, built in 1877.

WHERE: 249 Walnut Ave., Santa Cruz.

OWNERS: Kathleen and Frederic Nitz.

INFORMATION: Donna Fulton, 475-8400, and Claire Sanders, 423-7979, of Thunderbird Real Estate.

PRICE: \$1.495 million.