

SLV's at home with history

Historic Houses - North County

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Valley hosts weekend tour of historic houses

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Barbara Christianson uses a garden hose to blast away dirt and get things shipshape for this weekend's historic home tour in the San Lorenzo Valley.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel



BOULDER CREEK — San Lorenzo Valley is famously humble. It's the kind of area where someone can build a 23-bedroom getaway and dare to call it a "summer cottage."

Perhaps that modesty is why six of the valley's finest historic homes are closed to the public, with the exception of one bed and breakfast. Now, however, in the name of fund-raising, their doors will be flung open. A \$25 open-house tour will be held Saturday, raising money for the San Lorenzo Valley Main Street organization.

"I think a lot of people have been curious about those houses for a long time,"

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Historic homes

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said Bea Bushnell, a lifetime San Lorenzo Valley resident. "Once they finally get in them, they will be satisfied."

The homes aren't Hearst Castle, or the Breakers mansion of Newport, R.I. Don't expect restored Spanish villas, gardens stretching for miles, or Rembrandts nailed to the kitchen wall. They aren't even in the National Register of Historic Places, although they are protected under the county's own register.

But local residents will see homes that have unusual features, such as the Eggelston Home in Brookdale, with its original 1924 furniture. The house can barely be seen from Highway 9, staring down at passing trucks and cars. When it was built, it had fish ponds, decorative rocks and an estimated 900 species of rhododendron.

The homes also give clues to the valley's past.

"We were never at any time terribly affluent," said open house event chairwoman Barbara Kennedy. "There were affluent people from San Francisco or the East Bay who had summer cabins, but the normal residents were not a very wealthy community. There were wealthy people who owned the (timber) mills but that wasn't what we were all about."

Instead, fancy and modest homes existed side by side. "And they were all friends," Kennedy said. "It was a marvelous time."

Because of cheap lumber and land, people with relatively modest means could afford more spacious

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homes, she said.

None of these homes are built in an ostentatious way. In fact, several are all but covered up by redwood stands. So thoroughly hidden are some that organizers had a hard time just getting clear exterior photographs.

To get in the mood of the turn-of-the-century times, tour takers will be served tea and pastries and sample wine at Hallcrest Vineyards on Felton Empire Grade in Felton.

The mostly walking tour also will introduce some local characters.

The Dool Home was the dwelling place of Billy Dool, a butcher who sold meat from an open wagon and from a local shop. He became the first warden for the Big Basin recreational area, the oldest state park in California. The handsome Victorian home overlooks Boulder Creek. Dool built it for his bride.

Another eye-opening tour will take place at the Chateau des Fleurs on Highway 9 in Ben Lomond. Anyone who has ever munched on a Bartlett pear should know the Bartletts, the family that introduced this fruit to the area, once lived

there.

Assemblyman David Bowman built the home in the 1870s and named it "Kader Idris" for a mountain in Wales. The Bartlett family bought it at the turn of the century.

The Bartletts made their living with the fat, juicy pears that grew freely in the orchards. The neighborhood still has several of those original trees, which once supplied area fruit canneries.

Even after the canneries closed, Flora Bartlett was often seen in a green Ford V8, peddling pears up and down Highway 9. Her sons helped pick them. Even the culls were consumed in the form of pig feed.

Local residents can rest assured this won't be the last opportunity for an open-house tour. The homes are old but none are in a decrepit state. The Dool home was in disrepair but had a complete makeover.

And they aren't in danger of getting changed or knocked down. They are protected by county regulations.

"Nobody could go in and demolish them or change them into a fast-food restaurant," Kennedy said.

The Historic Home Tour will take place Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The cost is \$25 per person including refreshments. Tickets are available in Boulder Creek at Liberty Bank and The Country Home; in Ben Lomond at Liberty Bank; and in Felton at the Monterey Bay Bank. Tickets can be purchased the day of the tour at Hallcrest Vineyards in Felton and The Country Home in Boulder Creek. For more information, call 338-7368.