

William Weeks — a photographer's view

ARCHITECT WILLIAM Weeks (1864-1936) once walked the streets of Watsonville, but unlike most of us who barely leave our imprint on a sidewalk, Weeks left his mark on many of the buildings that line the streets of the town.

"Weeks felt very comfortable in Watsonville," said Al Schadel, director of the Santa Cruz County Historical Museum, known as the Octagon.

"He had a home here and a ranch in Aromas."

The architect's ubiquitous hand in so many of the residences and commercial buildings in the county, and in all of Northern California, convinced Schadel that the time had come for an exhibit of photographs of the architect's work.

"We are hoping to encourage people to care for the buildings," Schadel said. "We are naturally concerned that the buildings remain intact."

Schadel advertised in various media for photographs of Weeks' work. When he got a call from Diane Varni, a photographer who had a collection of more than 150 shots of Weeks' buildings, he was thrilled.

"I was intrigued that she photographed the buildings without knowing they were Weeks'," he said.

Ms. Varni, who lives in the Salsipuedes area, started



Tuttle Mansion detail



Tuttle Mansion gargoyle



The O'Brien House, East Beach Street

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REGISTER, PAJARONIAN
February 16, 1984

photographing houses such as the Tuttle Mansion on East Lake Avenue and the Charles Palmtag and O'Brien houses on East Beach Street seven years ago.

"I've always been fascinated with them," the photographer said. "It's like a fairy-book fantasy from childhood."

Taking the pictures made Ms. Varni feel as though the buildings were a part of herself, and, she said, it's cheaper than owning one.

"I wanted to live in one until I found out how hard it was to keep them up."

By capturing the buildings when she did, the photographer managed to catch many of them in their original state.

"I noticed a few years ago people were remodeling and putting in things like aluminum windows," she said. "I feel as though I've documented the houses as close to the original as possible."

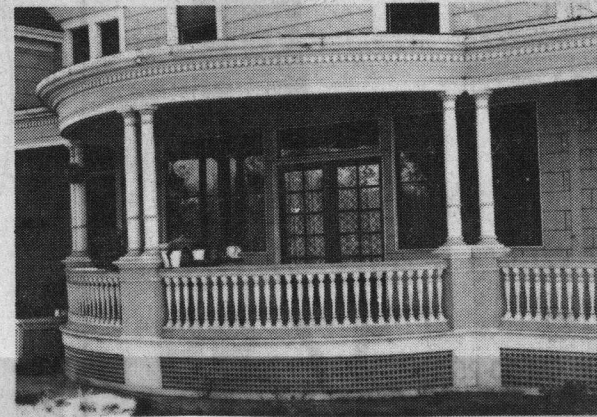
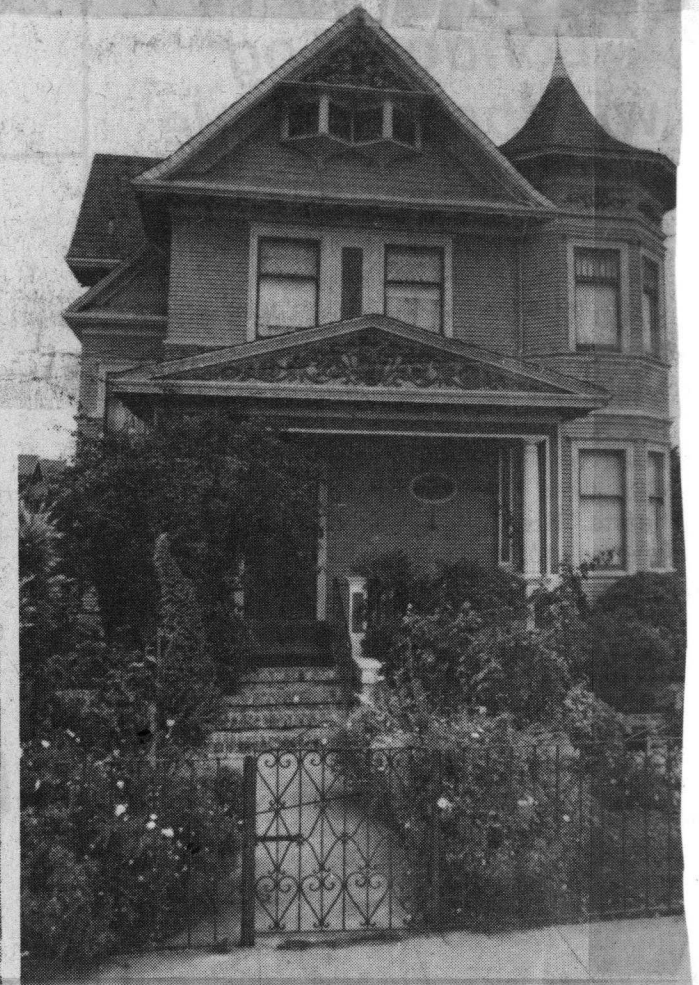
Local history writer Betty Lewis is the exhibit's honorary curator and has supplied bits of memorabilia to establish the historical ambiance of the period.

The exhibit will run through March 24 at the museum, 118 Cooper St., Santa Cruz. Admission is free and the hours are from noon to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

A reception for the event will take place at the museum starting at 5 p.m. on Friday.



The Green Valley School, at left; the Faustino House, Maple Street, at right; the porch of Porter House, Bishop Street, below.



'I've always been fascinated with Weeks' buildings. It's like a fairy-book fantasy from childhood.' — Diane Varni, photographer

Photos by Diane Varni