

Historic Houses

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Old Santa Cruz

● ● By Ernest Otto

(Editor's Note: The late Ernest Otto, famed and beloved waterfront correspondent for the Sentinel-News and writer of the "Old Santa Cruz" column, left a number of columns written before his death. They will be published weekly by the Sentinel-News.)

The oldest frame building in Santa Cruz likely is the one known as the Alzina house on Sylvar street opposite the Upper plaza.

The frame building is of an era which is marked in Santa Cruz history by few remaining adobes. They include the two on School street. There also is the one known as the Gardner on Union street and the one at the corner of Branciforte avenue and Goss street. Gone now is the Perez adobe near the edge of town not far from McIntyre boulevard.

Another, a short distance outside the city, is at the Wilder ranch back of the residence. It is the only one remaining with a tile roof. All the others have undergone numerous changes to modernize them and alter them from their original status.

The last to be razed was the Perez adobe. It was on the old Perez farm near the foot of Garfield street and was the Thomas Armstrong home for many years.

The Alzina residence underwent few changes from its original form. It possibly was built in the late 1840's.

It has a long porch across the entire front. Inside are numbers of relics of the early Spanish days. Among these are some old leather trunks and religious pictures in oils which were brought across the Atlantic from Spain as Francisco Alzina was brought.

In excavating in nearby yards it has been possible to unearth items which once were a part of nearby adobe homes.

Early frame structures can be recognized when they can be found, by the clapboard style construction which was used in Santa Cruz and elsewhere in California in the '40's, '50's and the '60's. The majority of the old clapboard style houses are gone.

A few of the clapboard houses still remain on Mission hill—which was the first location settled by those who followed the early Spanish settlers.

An outstanding early day structure (built in the early '50's) is the almost perfect replica of a New England residence with cellar and cellar doors. It is now on Cedar street at the foot of Sycamore street. At one time, it was surrounded by the large Blackburn orchard which reached up to Pacific avenue and up to Center street. A small lagoon was in the area also.

Another outstanding farmhouse, which was built in the early '50's was in the center of the Dreher ranch, where Mrs. Katherine Wessendorf, the mother of Lester Wessendorf, was born. That home also was surrounded by an orchard. The house was on the farm between Center and Washington streets, and the residence, greatly changed over the years, now stands at the corner of Center and Elm streets.