

Calreta Court/Piedmont Court—260 High Street

By Margaret Koch

This impressive Mission Revival apartment house was built in 1912 with William Bray as architect. It was called Piedmont Court, and when built was described as "Moorish in design, with an elaborate interior court with fountain." Especially notable are its twin towers and twin espadanas, which are decorated with variations of the quatrefoil.

Santa Cruzans sat up and took notice when they heard that a 50-room apartment house was to be built. In a day when most homes were heated with wood fires and many people were still pumping water by hand, it was understandable that a building with steam heat, electricity, and hot and cold running water throughout would be impressive.



Piedmont Court

Work began in August 1912, and no expense was spared in creating the finest apartment house in town. John Church was construction superintendent, George Cardiff supplied cement, and T. F. Costella was in charge of all cement work.

The man with all the fancy ideas and the money to carry them out was a wealthy native of Sonora, Mexico, Don Pedro Chisem. He "discovered" Santa Cruz about 144 years after the first Spanish explorers had marched through, but, as with each new "discoverer," he believed that he had found a truly unique place. He was impressed with the climate, the beauty of the town, and the financial possibilities. He had a wallet bulging with Mexican banknotes, money which came from his interests in silver mines.

But before the stately Piedmont Court was finished, political upheavals in Mexico caused Don Pedro's silver flood to dwindle to virtually nothing, and his ventures in Santa Cruz had to come to an end. The apartment house was completed with money put up by Frank G. Wilson and Bruce Sharpe, local businessmen.

In 1952 the handsome building was purchased by the California Retired Teachers Association. They gave it the name "Calreta Court" and today Don Pedro's dream is home to a group of retired educators.

Sources

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