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# Tree 'n Sea Living

## She's 100 Her Adobe is Older Yet



"I came to live in this house on June 12, 1890," Cornelia Hopcroft says, looking around the parlor of her half of the School Street Adobe.

Cornelia will be 100 years old on Monday, November 27. Her home is at least 160 years old and perhaps quite a bit older than that. No one knows for sure. It is the only remaining structure of the Santa Cruz Mission compound which was founded in 1791.

Cornelia came to the historic adobe as a girl of 11 going on 12. She was born Cornelia Cecilia Lunes in San Bernardino, was orphaned at an early age and lived in Southern California with her grandmother until the old lady's health failed. Cornelia was then put into a Los Angeles orphanage.

"I was about three years old," she says.

A priest, Father Stopman, was her godfather, and when he heard from Father Adams of Holy Cross Church that a Santa Cruz family was seeking to adopt a young girl, he made arrangements for Cornelia to come here.

She came to the Rodriguez family which had owned and lived in one-half of the Mission adobe since 1838.

"I was to be a companion to Eloise Rodriguez who lived there with her brothers Ismael and Roman Rodriguez," Cornelia says.

She attended classes at Holy Cross School and says of the Rodriguez family: "They were good to me — I was treated like a sister."

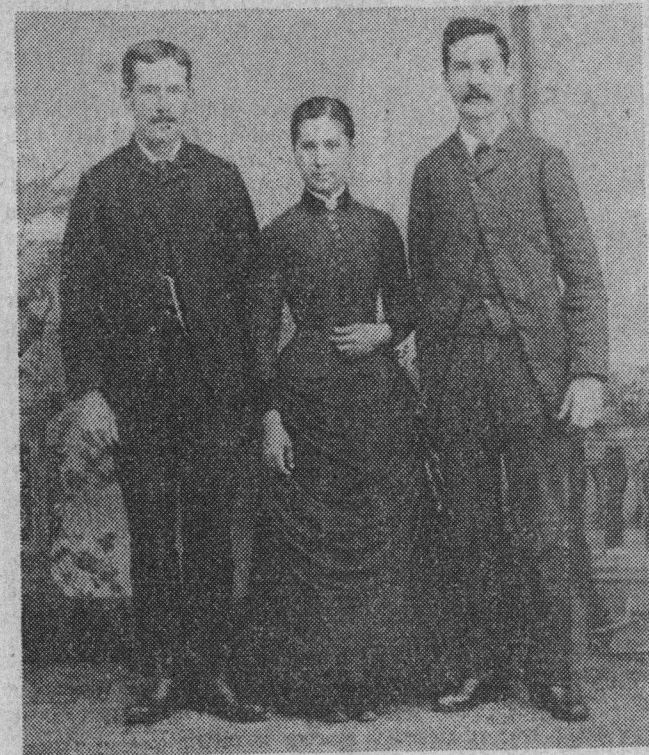
There was illness and tragedy in the Cornelia's adopted family. Eloise, who never married, died in her 60s after a year-long illness. Ismael, who worked as a machinist in San Francisco for a time and who was the oldest of the three, died as the result of an auto accident. Roman, the last of the historic clan, worked in a Santa Cruz foundry and died in 1936.

"Roman had inflammatory rheumatism," Cornelia recalls. "They were all born and raised in the adobe and they were a close and loyal family. Each generation took care of its elders."

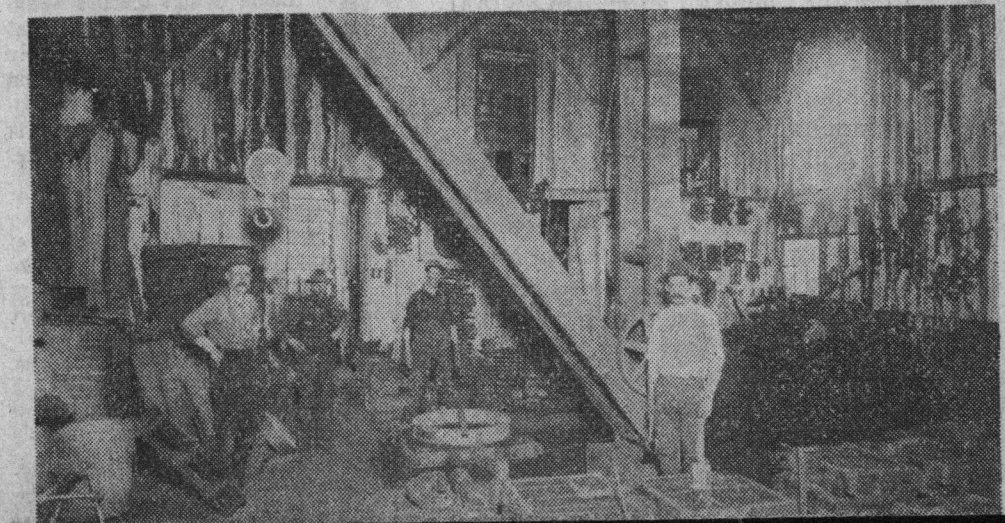
The Rodriguez family history goes back to 1798 in Villa de Branciforte (today's East Santa Cruz) which was founded as a civil settlement by the Spanish in 1796-97. Jose Antonio Rodriguez was one of several "invalidos" or retired Spanish Army officers who were induced to settle there, according to the late historian, Leon Rowland.

Following their arrival, members of the Rodriguez family received large Mexican land grants in what was to become Santa Cruz County many years later.

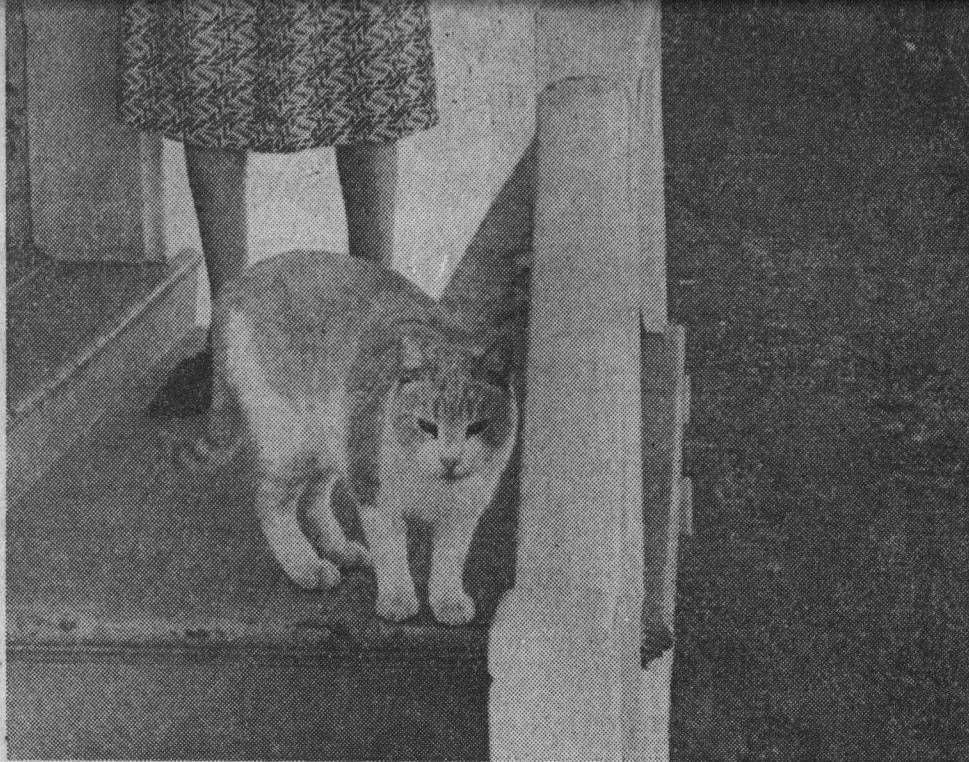
Cornelia relates an interesting family story regarding business travel in the early days. In order to settle papers on one of the land grants, the Senior Rodriguez traveled by wagon and ox team to Monterey, taking two days from



The back of the adobe as it looked when Cornelia was a young woman, here with Eloise Rodriguez; at left: family scene with Ismael, Eloise and Roman Rodriguez. Below, local foundry where Roman worked







Cornelia Hopcroft and Sassy, her remarkable cat, on the porch of her adobe home. Note sidewalk — originally paved with bitumen mined in Santa Cruz County. Top photo is Cornelia as a young woman

Santa Cruz to Watsonville area, then another two days from there to Monterey.

"No roads," she explains. And oxen move slowly.

When she was in her middle years Cornelia married an Englishman, the late William Walter Hopcroft. For about 10 years they lived in a home on Highland Avenue and the adobe was rented out, she says.

Hopcroft operated one of the early taxi businesses in Santa Cruz. His family history went back to Windsor Castle in England where his father worked and the family lived in one of the castle dwellings. Cornelia and her husband traveled extensively for several years, but she has really been away from her historic adobe home for very few of her 100 years.

Today she has several companions: an important one is non-human, a cat named Sassy.

"He really is Sassy, too," she says. "He thinks he runs the place!"

She likes to tell the amazing story of how the cat was stolen from her once in Fresno. Cornelia came home, mourning her loss, but four days later Sassy turned up at the School Street adobe, footsore and very, very weary.

"He slept for two days and two nights — and was he hungry!"



And so Cornelia lives in the most historic and oldest house in Santa Cruz, actually the town's first duplex. It was built as one structure, divided in half by a five-foot thick adobe wall. Some believe it was built about 1810.

The Patrick Neary family acquired the other half in 1864 and Alice Neary lived there until the State of California purchased the entire property in 1957 to preserve it as a state historical monument. Cornelia sold her half also, but was granted a life tenancy in her part of the building.

No one is sure what the adobe was used for originally. Some believe it was a dormitory for Indians, others say a barracks for Spanish soldiers, and still others say it could have been a Mission recreation center or storehouse.

Today there is no one to tell what it was.

The other oldest living thing on Mission Hill is a fig tree in Cornelia's backyard which was planted by an early Rodriguez. And it can't talk.

—MARGARET KOCH

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