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6500 Soquel Drive Aptos  
California 95003

# SESNON HOUSE

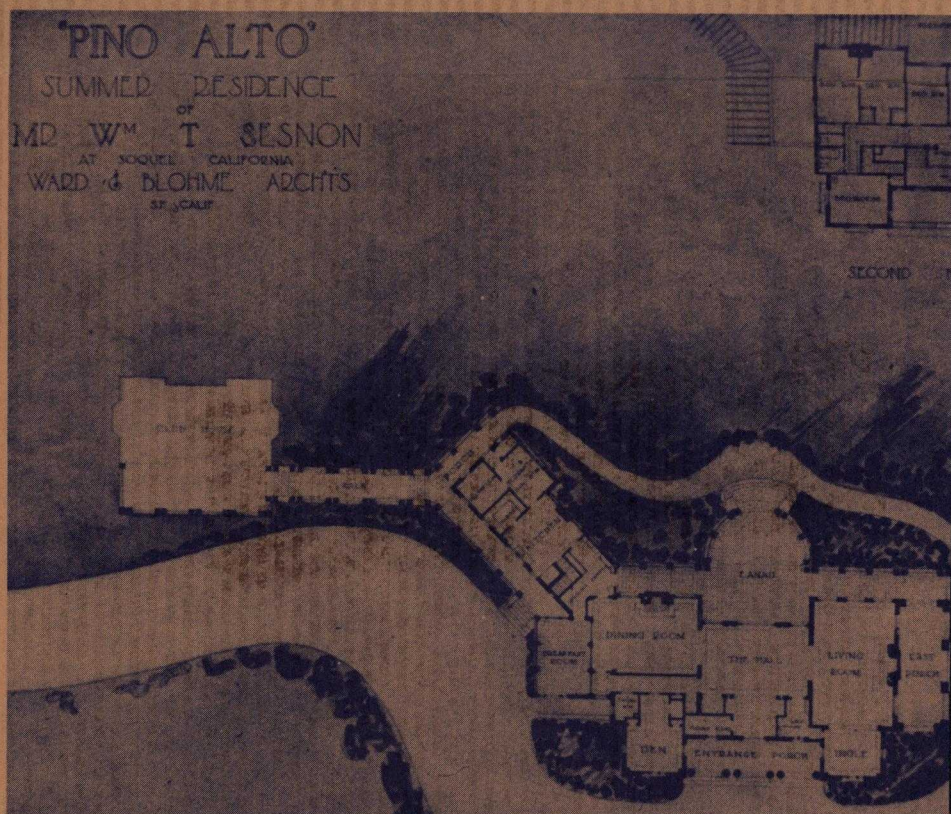
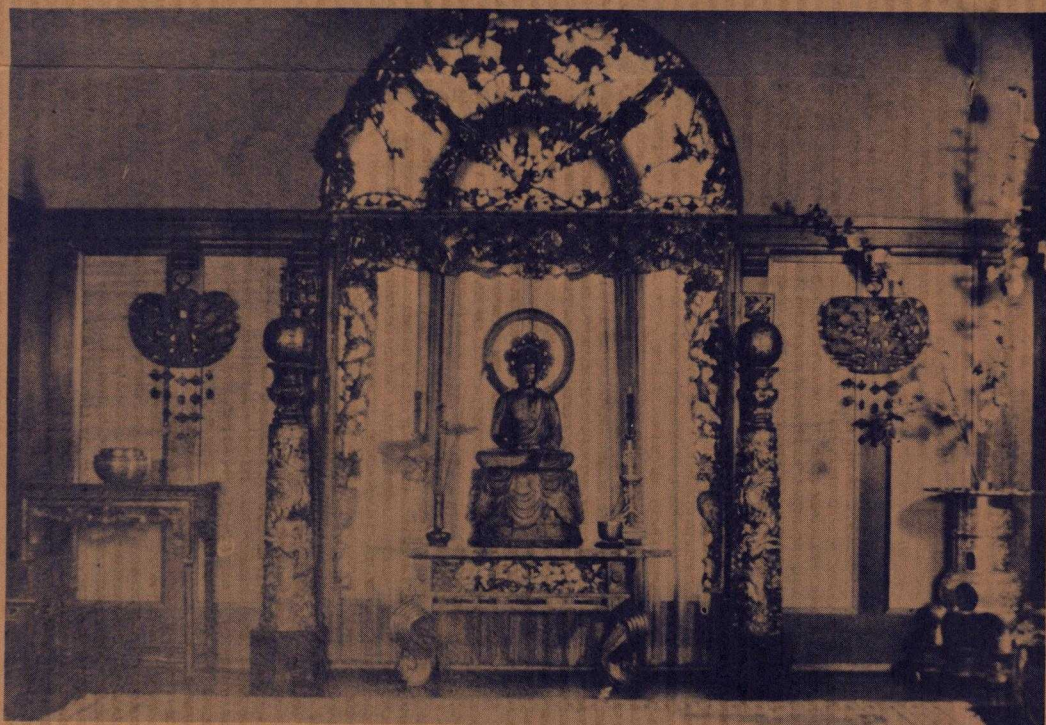
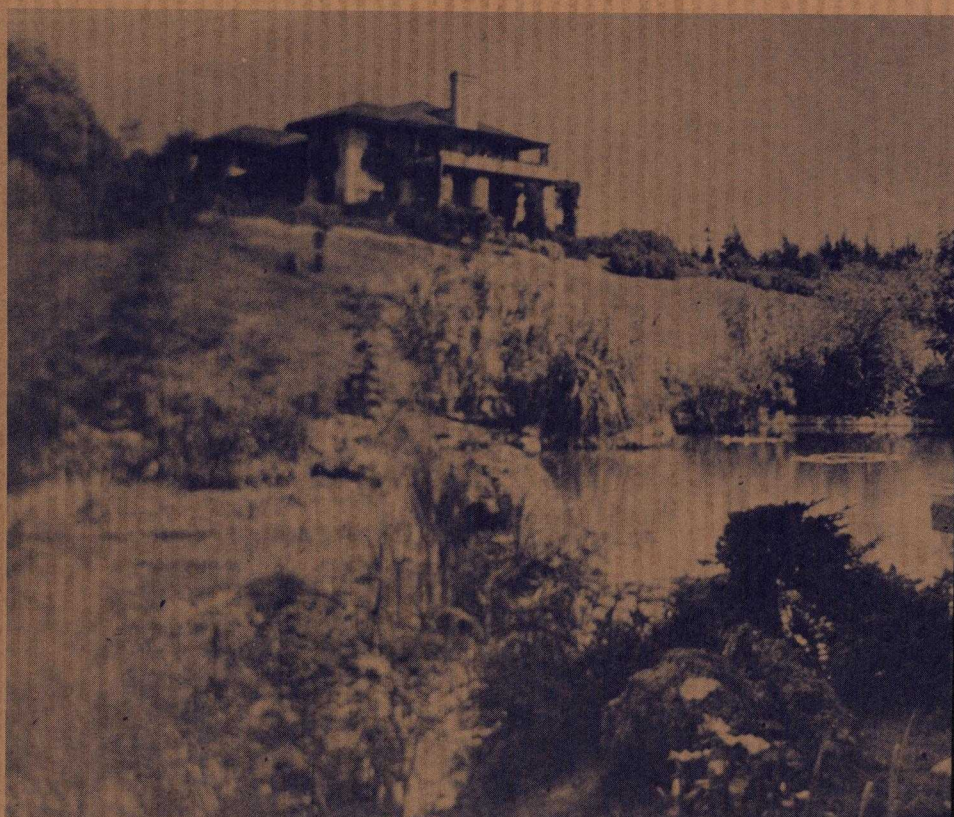
New Home for Cabrillo College  
Community Education  
Campus and Community Facilities Use  
Ticket Sales  
Public Information  
plus  
The Cabrillo Music Festival  
The Santa Cruz County Symphony

You  
Are Cordially Invited to  
attend an  
Open House  
from  
Four to Seven O'clock on  
Monday December third at the  
Sesnon House  
on the  
Cabrillo College Lower Campus  
for its inauguration as a  
Community Education Center  
featuring  
Historical slide lectures by  
Sandy Lydon at 4:30 & 6:00  
Chamber Music  
by members of the Santa Cruz County Symphony  
Hors d'oeuvres & punch  
by the students of Tom King's  
Food Services Technology Program  
We Hope You Can Join Us!



# PINO

SUMMER RESIDENCE



Design by  
J. L. B. O.



# ALTO

## RESIDENCE OF MR W<sup>M</sup> T SESNON AT SOQUEL CALIFORNIA

### the SESNON HOUSE A BRIEF HISTORY

**J**ust off what was the old Santa Cruz-Watsonville County Road (now known as Soquel Drive), dwarfed by eucalyptus and pines, sits the Sesnon House—Pino Alto. When first constructed in 1911, the two-story house loomed above its surroundings just as the accomplishments of the Porter and Sesnon families had loomed so large in the Soquel area during the previous half century.

Located on the easternmost edge of the Soquel Rancho, Pino Alto is flanked by Porter Gulch which drops out of the Santa Cruz mountains on its way to Monterey Bay, about one mile to the south. In 1853 a tannery was built along this stream, using the hides of Mexican cattle and tanbark from nearby stands of oak. The owner, J. K. Forcade, sold the tannery one-year later to an enterprising 24-year-old Yankee named Ben Porter. The price was \$600.

Benjamin Franklin Porter came west to California in the winter of 1850-51. Since New England held little attraction for ambitious and energetic young men, Benjamin, with his cousin George K. Porter, booked passage down the Atlantic coast, then walked the Isthmus of Panama and made passage north on the Pacific Coast to the new West. Although gold had recently been discovered in California, it was not gold that lured the cousins to the west, but business and land opportunities. Ben Porter stayed in California to forge out a livelihood as a lumberman and tannery owner. In partnership with George K., and employing another cousin (Frank) as superintendent, the Porter Tannery was a mainstay of the Soquel economy from 1858 into the 1880's. In 1860, the Porter Tannery ranked second in the county, turning out green hides and unfinished leather, most of which was shipped from the Capitola wharf to leather processors in New England.

In the 1860's Ben returned to New England and married his boyhood sweetheart, Kate Hubbard. In 1872 Ben built a two-story frame home overlooking the ocean. The home symbolized the growth of both Ben's finances and his stature in the county. In 1872 he became a founding director of the Santa Cruz County Bank of Savings and Loan, which later merged with the Santa Cruz County National Bank to become County Bank of Santa Cruz. Property acquisition for farming in southern California and business in San Francisco enabled Ben and George K. Porter to leave the waning tannery business in the 1880's and devote their attention to farming on a large scale. The Porter property, by that time stretching from the foothills to Monterey Bay, continued to be Ben's home, but he spent much time looking after his interests in other parts of the state.

In December 1896 Ben's only surviving child, Mary Sophia, married William T. Sesnon. They made their first home in Sacramento where he was Deputy Secretary of State. Prior to this time he had served as Secretary to the California Railroad Commission, now known as the California Public Utilities Commission. It was shortly thereafter that he became associated with and co-founder of a milling and manufacturing business—The American Milling Company—which did a great deal of business with the Hawaiian Islands. Later, during the earthquake and great fire of 1906, this business was burned to the ground and was never restored.

After Ben Porter died in 1905, William T. and Mary Porter Sesnon began planning a summer home on the Soquel property in honor of his memory. However, the 1906 earthquake diverted the Sesnon's attention, and it was not until 1909 that they announced the plans of a summer home on the rise beside Benjamin Porter's original home. They named the project "Pino Alto."

Though the announcement of the project came in September 1909, the house was not completed until almost two years later. From its inception it was to be no ordinary house. Designed by a San Francisco architectural firm, the plans called for the excavation of a large basement and a solid foundation. The square design of the house gave it four distinct entrances, with long sleeping porches to complement the seven upstairs bedrooms. Though it is not apparent today because the trees have grown to form a thick screen, Pino Alto originally was an ocean view home, with both the upstairs sun porch and the lanai on the ground floor providing expansive views. A pergola connected the new structure with Ben Porter's original home, then relocated to the east side of Pino Alto, which was used to house guests.

Pino Alto was built to last. Choice woods were used throughout—from the polished oak floors to the massive oak bannister leading to the second floor. The tile roof weighed 97,000 pounds, and the rain gutters and downspouts were of copper. The editor of a Santa Cruz newspaper commented that the house "would endure forever, as far as living men may know." Costs for this permanence were estimated between sixty and seventy thousand dollars.

The grounds adjacent to the house were landscaped extensively, and the stream in Porter Gulch was diverted to create a chain of two lakes connected by a waterfall and used as reflecting pools. A variety of ornamental trees and bamboos were planted around the lakes.

Today, only a small Shinto platform and torii gates remain to give a clue to the Oriental theme of the grounds and furnishings. The interior of the house was replete with grass cloth on the walls, teakwood cabinets, brass lamps, Oriental rugs and a large Buddha in the niche on the north side. When asked to name the architectural style of the home, one of the architects described it as a combination of Moorish, Mission and American, which together he dubbed "Californian".

Finishing touches were put on the home during 1911, and the following summer saw a series of parties celebrating its completion. Approximately 100 people came by train from San Francisco and Oakland to meet many other guests from local areas at the first housewarming in June 1912. They enjoyed a grand weekend embracing a Spanish type of barbecue, replete with the traditional Bull's Head, fireworks and an amateur vaudeville show. The family took over the Capitola Hotel to house the large number of guests.

Following the completion of the house, William T. Sesnon became increasingly involved in business and civic projects in San Francisco. Elected president of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce in 1913, Sesnon was also selected to be on the Board of Directors of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition that same year. His banking interests led to his selection as a director of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco several years later. Though the family business was now headquartered in San Francisco, the Sesnons entertained many of their business associates at Pino Alto, particularly during the summer months.

Throughout it all, the Sesnons always maintained an abiding interest in the Soquel Area. When approached by the Soquel Ladies' Improvement Club in 1911, William T. and Mary Porter Sesnon not only agreed to help raise funds for a new Soquel library, but also donated the property upon which to build it. In July 1912, soon after Pino Alto was finished, the Sesnons put on a gala public party at the home to raise funds for the Soquel library and with the donated services of the family architects to design the building, the Soquel Ladies' Improvement Club had the funds to build the library. In January 1913 the library was dedicated to the memory of Benjamin F. Porter, and Sesnon spoke at the dedication celebration. For years afterward, Sesnon would drive past the library and, if it needed groundskeeping or a coat of paint, he would see that the librarian received the necessary funds to keep the library in top shape.

William T. and Mary Porter Sesnon died six months apart; he in June 1929 and she in January 1930. And, with their deaths, the family spent less and less time at Pino Alto. A groundskeeper saw that the grounds were kept up, and the fields north of the house were leased to farmers, but the family business and social interests turned increasingly to the Bay Area and Los Angeles. During the thirties, the house was more often empty than occupied, and when the family was approached by the Salesian Society of Watsonville during World War II, they decided to give up Pino Alto.

For the next thirty years, the Salesian Brothers and then the Salesian Sisters occupied the house and immediate grounds. The ornate Oriental decor in the house was replaced by more severe decorations befitting a religious order—porches were closed in, and the open veranda on the south side glassed in. The original Benjamin Franklin Porter house constructed in 1872 was torn down at this time and a dormitory built on the site.

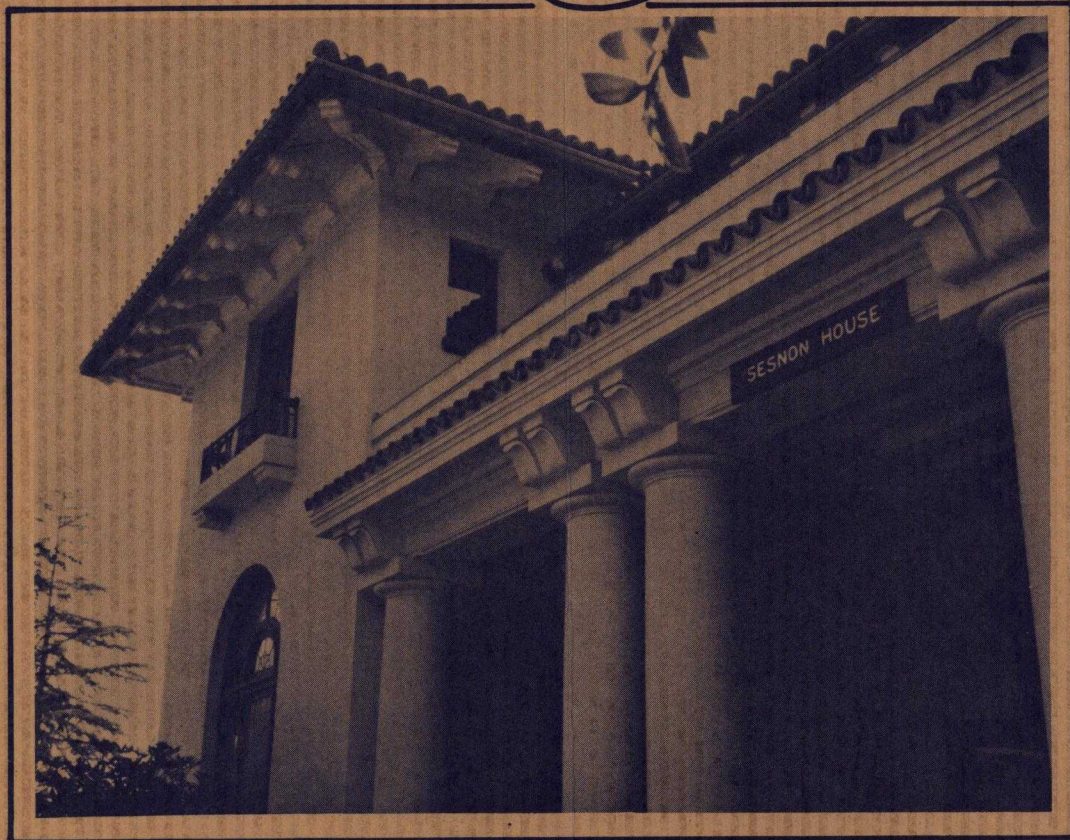
Cabrillo College acquired the home and adjoining lands in 1973, and has proceeded to build the Regional Occupation Training Center on the grounds south and east of the home.

Pino Alto still commands the area, however, and in restoring Pino Alto, Cabrillo College not only honors the memories of William T. and Mary Porter Sesnon and their contributions to the county, but also honors Benjamin Franklin Porter, in whose memory the Sesnon's dedicated Pino Alto in 1911.





# Cabrillo College Community Education



The term "Community Education" embraces those functions of Cabrillo College that are especially oriented toward the part-time user of the campus and its services: credit instruction in the evening college, at the off-campus centers in Santa Cruz and Watsonville, and during summer session; non-credit, fee-supported courses, conferences, and other activities; community cultural services; and community use of the campus. To name only a few, examples of such services include the Cabrillo Summer Theatre, the extensive non-credit movement and dance program led by Roberta Bristol, the Cabrillo Threshers led by Ted Bockman, the Cabrillo Suspense Writers' Conference, and the extensive use of the campus by community groups for everything from football games to public hearings.

These activities are uniquely the job of community colleges throughout California and the nation, and Cabrillo—from its inception—has been among the leaders, year in and year out.

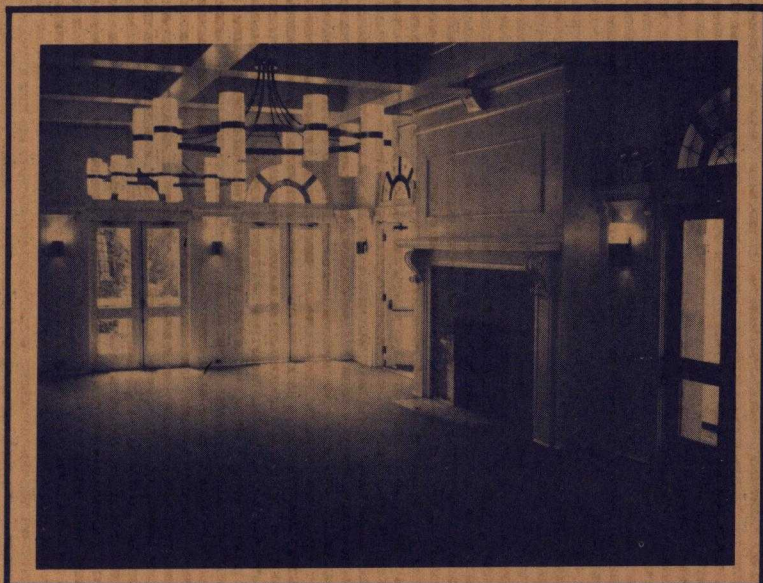
## USE OF FACILITIES AT CABRILLO COLLEGE

The Civic Center Act in California is a law which encourages public schools and community colleges to offer their facilities to the community when they are not needed for the credit class program. As a Civic Center, Cabrillo has made its campus an activity focal point for most of the residents in the college district. Community members from all walks of life find themselves on campus, dropping their children off to Little Leagues practice there, using the tennis courts, attending a Cabrillo Music Festival or Santa Cruz County Symphony concert, going to a meeting of the Radio Club or ACLU or Girl Scouts, to name but a few examples of the different community activities taking place at Cabrillo.

The guidelines for Civic Center use of Cabrillo are, in general, geared toward tax-exempt, non-profit, community-based organizations. Those interested in knowing how their respective organization might utilize Cabrillo as a Civic Center are urged to contact Community Education at 688-6466 or 425-6331.



*the  
Sesnon House  
Today*



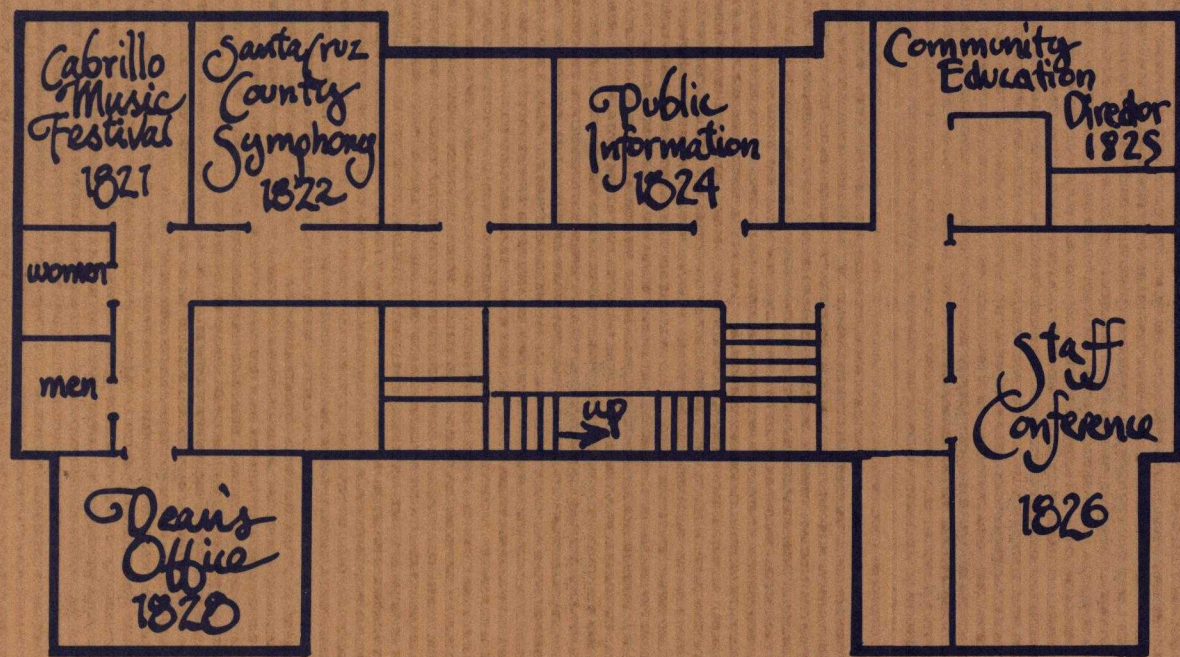
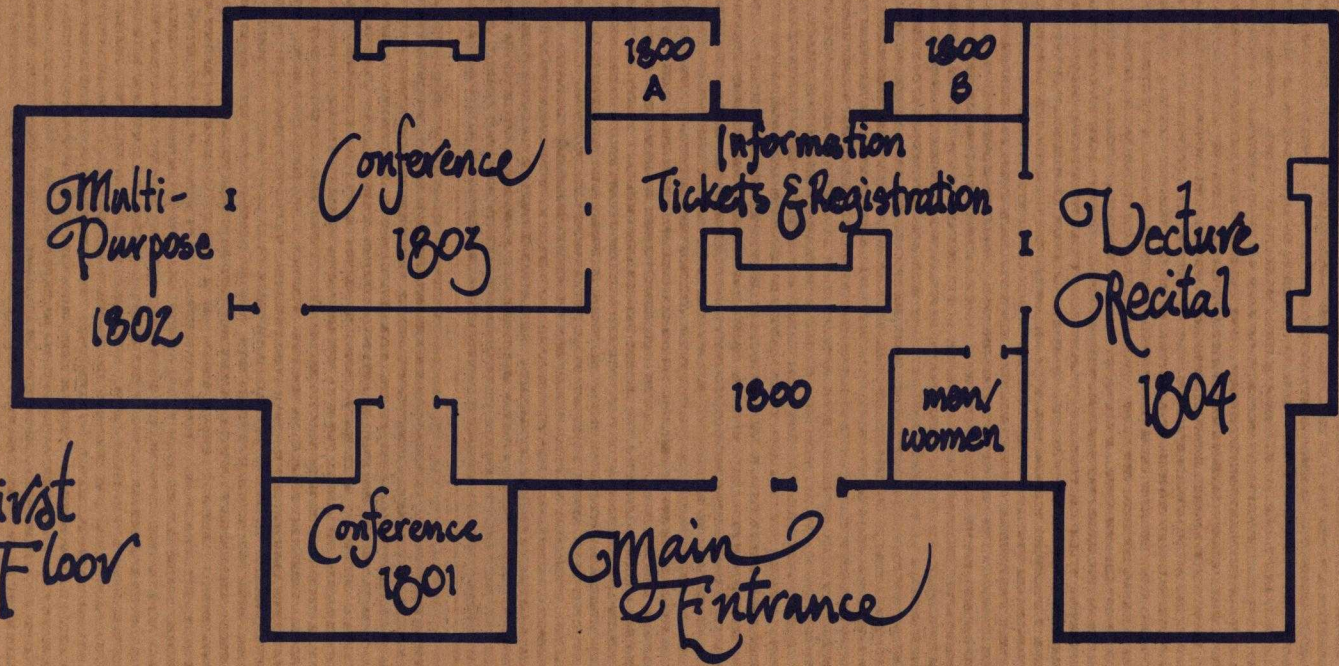
*This brochure was not printed at taxpayer expense.*



Monterey Bay

Map

First Floor



Second Floor

North