



In his pen and ink drawing artist Will Shepherd has captured the charm of the Louis Wessendorf home at the southeast corner of Mission and Green streets. The

house, built in 1904, was designed by a well-known architect of that day.

Four Generations Resided In The Wessendorf Home

Editor's Note: These articles are appearing in conjunction with efforts by SCOPE and the Santa Cruz Historical Society to preserve and spark interest in local history.

By Margaret Koch
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The Louis Wessendorf home was designed by architect E. L. Van Cleeck in 1904.

Four generations of Wessendorfs had lived there before it was sold several years ago by Louis' son, Lester Wessendorf.

A graceful house which hints of French architectural influence, it sits at the southeast corner of Mission and Green streets. For many years its garden contained a large Japanese magnolia tree that was a town "conversation piece" when in bloom.

The corner lot was the site of Santa Cruz' first Protestant church (Methodist) and Wessendorf bought the property from Thomas Weeks.

When Louis Wessendorf had the house built, he had already become a prosperous Santa Cruz businessman. He was a native of Hamburg, Germany. He spent several years in Memphis, Tenn., where an older brother was in business, and in Baltimore, before coming west. Wessendorf arrived in San Francisco in 1875, looked up a wholesale furniture dealer and proceeded to inquire about a position.

The furniture dealer just happened to have on his desk a letter from George Staffler of Santa Cruz, telling of an open-

ing in Staffler's Santa Cruz store.

"How do I get there?" queried the eager young Wessendorf.

"Can you ride a horse?" countered the wholesale dealer.

Instead, Wessendorf took passage on a coastal steamer and arrived at Santa Cruz wharf. Here the bewildered young man found himself in the middle of some kind of celebration. A band was playing. A large crowd had gathered. A big Irishman named Mike Curry pushed through the crowd, shook hands with Wessendorf and introduced himself. He explained that it was a St. Patrick's Day celebration and invited Wessendorf to come along to the Catholic church.

"But I'm not a Catholic," Wessendorf pointed out.

"Oh that's all right; come along anyway," Curry replied. And away they went.

Wessendorf immediately went to work for George Staffler whose main business was a two-story furniture store. It was located about where Montgomery Ward is today. However, in connection with the furniture business, Staffler also conducted funerals, a process known in those days as "undertaking."

Funeral directing was done in a separate but adjoining building which fronted on Cooper street between what is now Santa Cruz County Bank and Santa Cruz Land Title Company. A short open passageway from Front street gave access through to the rear en-

trances of both places of business.

Five years after Wessendorf went to work, Staffler Sr. offered to sell out to him. Wessendorf accepted the offer, taking in George Staffler Jr. as a partner.

Business went well until the big fire of 1894 which leveled most buildings in the block. Wessendorf rented temporary quarters at the corner of Elm and Pacific until the burned block at Pacific and Cooper was rebuilt.

By 1924 the furniture business had been dropped for that of mortician. And the present Wessendorf building was constructed at the southeast corner of Center and Church streets by Louis' son, Lester.

Before Louis built the home on Mission street the Wessendorf family had lived on Maple street where Laurel School is now located.

There are three old houses still standing, which were homes of the Dreher family. Katherine Dreher was Louis Wessendorf's wife.

Katherine was born in the house on the southwest corner of Elm and Center streets. In the house next to it lived an uncle, August Dreher. And Katherine's sister, Mrs. Mathilda Becker, lived nearby in the house at the southwest corner of Laurel and Center streets.

Katherine's father, John Dreher, came to California from New York as a veteran of the War with Mexico.

"He was offered 10 acres of

free land because he was a veteran," commented Lester Wessendorf.

The Dreher family crossed the Isthmus of Panama on mules and sailed into Santa Cruz in 1848. His 10-acre farm took in the area between Center and Washington streets and ran down to the present day Southern Pacific Depot.

Louis Wessendorf lived in his Mission street home until he died in 1953. Katherine Dreher Wessendorf lived there until 1958. Lester Wessendorf lived there as a boy, and one of his daughters and several grandchildren lived there later, making the four generations.

San Juan Bautista Festival Today

The first wagon train in 100 years is to arrive in San Juan Bautista today at 1 p.m.

Four covered wagons and some 100 riders left Frontier Village at San Jose yesterday morning. The route was down El Camino Real, Highway 101, to a point just south of San Martin, where they made camp. The remainder of the trip was to begin this morning at 7.

Those aboard the wagons include Cottonseed Clark, Cactus Jack and Red Murrell, disc jockeys for Radio Station KEEN, San Jose, and Big Jim De Noon of Grand Ole Opry fame.

The San Juan Bautista Chamber of Commerce has arranged for a chicken barbecue for the riders and passengers, and diners will be available to the public at \$2 a person. The Charros, a Mexican-American group in full costume, are part of the train and entertain