

Elegant old lady has aged gracefully

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SHE SITS AT the corner of High Street and Highland Avenue, the architectural dream of a wealthy Mexican businessman who never saw his dream completed.

Piedmont Court was Santa Cruz's most modern, attractive apartment house when it was built in 1912. Reinforced concrete, fireproof, with an inner court and fountain, it also boasted steam heat, pull-down beds and hot and cold running water. No exaggeration — that was a day when many Santa Cruzans still heated their homes with wood stoves and felt lucky to have cold water piped into their kitchens. As for pull-down

Piedmont Court, now recognized as one of Santa Cruz's historic buildings of importance, was built in 1912, the architectural dream of a wealthy Mexican businessman who never saw his dream realized.

beds! That was somebody's pipe dream.

The Moorish style building was to cost \$50,000 and was designed by William Bray. Footing the bill for all this magnificence was Don Pedro Chisem of Sonora, Mexico, who owned silver mines that had made him a very rich man. Don Pedro was so enamoured of Santa Cruz that he brought his family here. He also purchased the old Farmer's Union Building (downtown Bank of America location today) and was planning a four-story hotel there.

But before Don Pedro's Piedmont Court could be finished, a revolution erupted in Mexico that dried up his silver mine income. He took his family and retreated to his native land. His financial ventures in Santa Cruz were ended.

Two astute Santa Cruz businessmen took over and put up the money to finish the apartment house. Realtor Frank Wilson and banker Bruce Sharpe came up with \$3,000 apiece so the elevator could be installed and apartments could be finished. A \$30,000 mortgage was held by another localite.

Wilson and his bride, Mildred Tanner Wilson, moved into one of the apartments and lived there for several years. Sharpe and his wife, Maude, settled in another. Emma Goodspeed Wilson, the realtor's



Moorish design, potted palms suited early residents.

mother, leased one of the larger apartments. Dr. and Mrs. Stanley Dowling had another. Piedmont Court was THE place to live — if you happened to be an apartment house dweller here.

After a few years, Wilson and Sharpe sold their interests for considerably more than they had paid for them. Meanwhile, the 25 apartments always were filled and a dining room had been set up by a former landlady of realtor Wilson's, which

proved a popular eating place.

More years passed, the Court passed from one owner to another, and in 1952 the California Retired Teachers Association of Central California purchased it for \$150,000. They re-named it Calreta Court and it became home to a number of retired teachers.

Today, the former apartments are individually owned condominiums...old Don Pedro would not believe the changes.



Mrs. Bruce Sharpe and Mrs. Frank Wilson were reading in the foyer of Piedmont Court when a photographer took this shot in 1913.