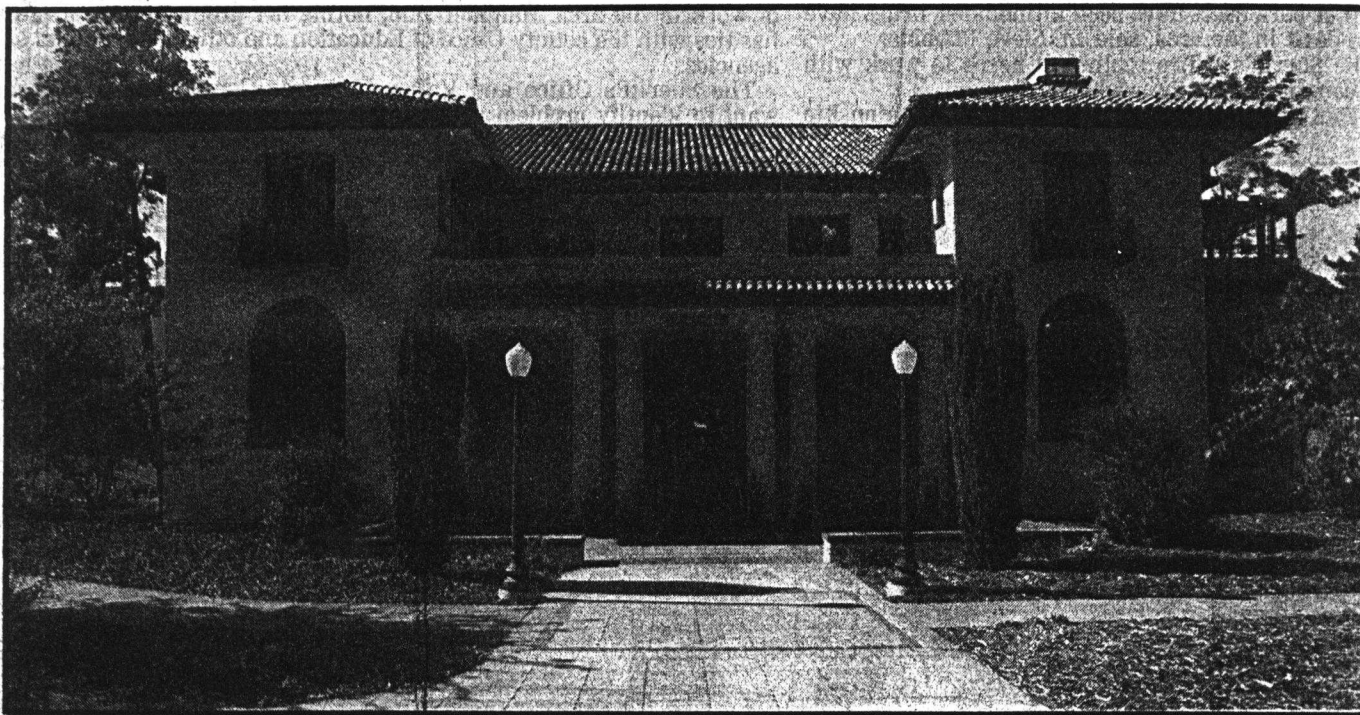


'Worth the wait'



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

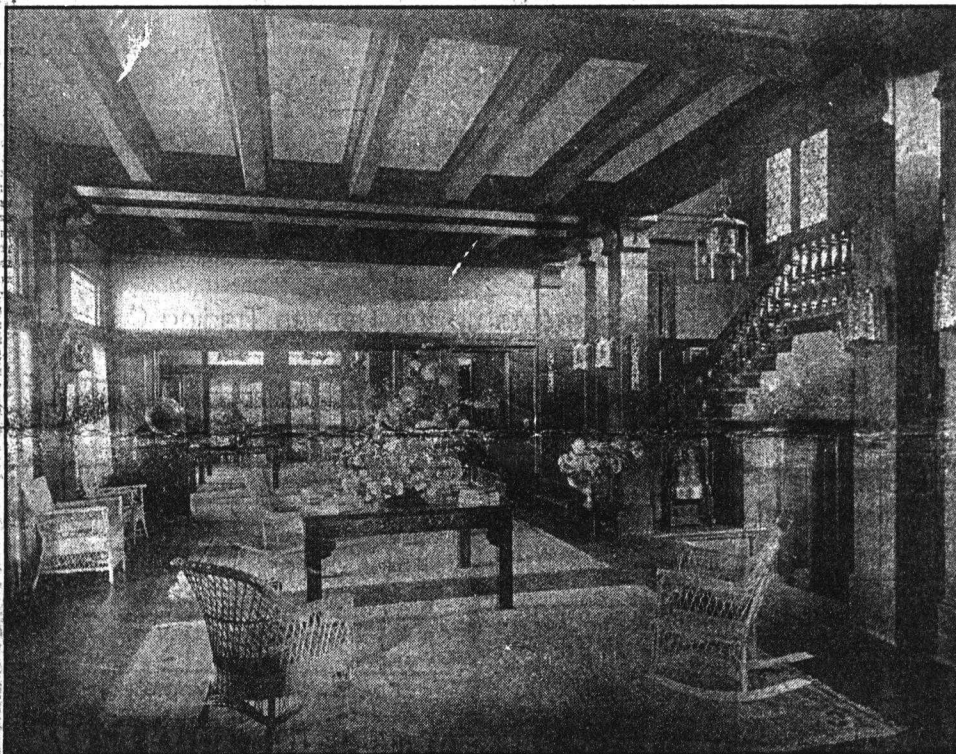
The Sesnon House is restored, seven years after the Loma Prieta quake badly damaged it.

Sesnon House restored

By JONDI GUMZ
Sentinel staff writer

APTOS — Touring the house where they lived during World War II, the three grandchildren of William T. Sesnon traded stories about their grandfather, a gentleman with an imposing mustache and a taste for oriental design, and their grandmother, an artist who loved to entertain friends.

The Sesnon House, built in 1911 during an era of elegance, is now open to the community, restored to its former graciousness by Cabrillo College. Besides



Wood, stained glass and a gramophone grace the foyer circa 1920.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Sesnon grandkids Susan Dolkas, Boit Sesnon and Nell Cliff share memories of the building's elegance when they were growing up during World War II.

Sesnon

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serving as office space, it will be available for use as a community meeting place and even for wedding receptions.

"We're here today to celebrate," Cabrillo president John Hurd said Monday, adding, "We're not done yet."

The college must raise the money to complete the second phase of the project, rebuilding the kitchen, and the third phase, planting the gardens.

The home, purchased by Cabrillo in 1978, was badly damaged in the 1989 earthquake, which set off a debate about its future. Although rebuilding took seven years, Hurd said, "It was worth the wait because we've done it right."

Doing it right meant recreating historic aspects of the building, such as the polished woodwork, in addition to installing an elevator now required by federal law for disabled accessibility.

The cost so far: \$1.2 million, with half provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the rest from private donations. For example, the former living room, where the Sesnons had a stage for dramatic presentations, is named for Fred McPherson III, who headed the fund drive, and his wife Linda.

McPherson looked back fondly to the days when he was a student at Cabrillo and said, "It seemed like a good spot to give something back."

Other major donors include Nell Sesnon Cliff and her sister, Susan Sesnon Dolkas, who shared childhood memories of her grandmother's friend who came for a visit and stayed 20 years, the horse that wore rubber shoes to mow the grass, and a trunkful of costumes for dress-up performances.

Their brother, Boit Sesnon, now of Seattle, recalled their grandfather's temper when a ball of butter, which had lodged

Cabrillo must beat \$50,000 clock

APTOS — A phone call could be worth \$50,000 for Cabrillo College.

A family pledged that amount to rebuild the Sesnon House kitchen — if a matching amount can be raised in eight weeks — Cabrillo president John Hurd announced Monday morning. The donors have asked to remain anonymous.

If the college meets the challenge, there will be almost enough to finish the kitchen renovation. So far, \$117,000 has been raised but another \$118,000 is needed.

An estimated \$107,500 is needed to restore the gardens and create a patio for outdoor dining. For example, 300 shrubs are needed at \$7 apiece.

Plans are to have instructional programs operating at the Sesnon House, which Claire Biancalana, the vice president of instruction, called "very exciting."

The kitchen will enable the college to expand its culinary arts courses to include catering and operate the campus restaurant four days a week. Biancalana hopes this will generate new revenues.

Horticulture students are expected to plant the gardens, which have been designed by renowned landscape architect Roy Rydell in collaboration with instructor Lisa McAndrews.

— Jondi Gumz

Built as a summer place, it had no central heating but plenty of fireplaces.

on the ceiling during a childish prank, plopped down next to his china plate.

The house was imposing but not cozy. Built as a summer place, it had no central heating but plenty of fireplaces. Outside, the grounds were decorated by Japanese lanterns their grandfather got at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition.

What had been glamorous turned shabby after the war, when the house was sold to the Salesian Brothers, a religious order.

"I used to cringe at the way it looked," Cliff said.

The rooms were painted "lathrine green," added Dolkas.

Their father died in 1991, when the house was in shambles and its future uncertain.

Cliff thinks he would be

pleased to see it now. After the quake, he would often ask her, "What's happening with the old house?"

And Boit Sesnon is already planning to have his daughter's wedding there in April.

One mystery remains — the location of a mural depicting Point Lobos that hung over the living room fireplace. The painting, the artist unknown, can be seen in photos from the Sesnon family album.

"It's what I remember most of all," said Dolkas, who hopes to track it down and restore it to its rightful place.

Aptos resident Hilly Rose, visiting the Sesnon House for the first time Monday, was impressed with what he saw.

"Absolutely smashing," he said.