

# The Mansion House has been hard to miss for 116 years

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**W**ATSONVILLE — The Peach Presence on Main Street here, known as the Mansion House, is neither a house nor, correspondingly, a mansion.

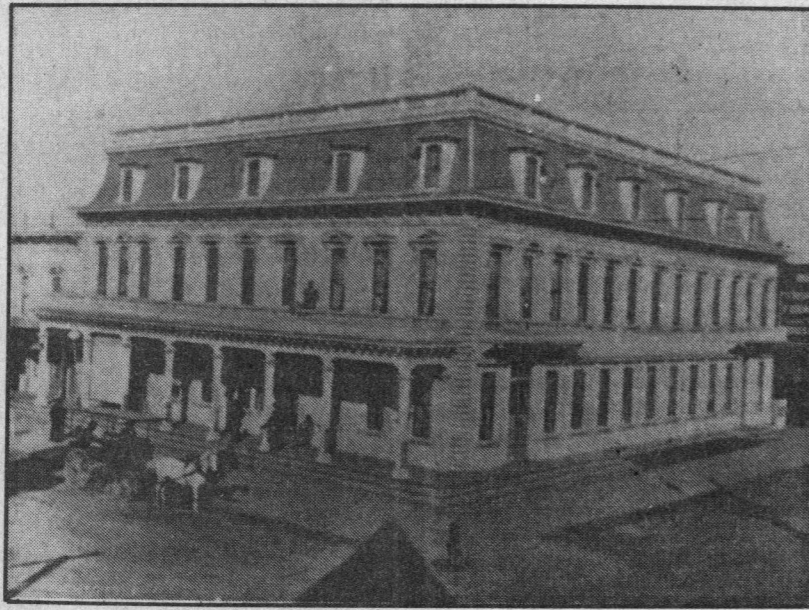
It once was a hotel, but it is no longer that either.

Today, the 116-year-old building, painted peach with green trim on the outside, is the most conspicuous structure in downtown Watsonville. It currently houses a restaurant and 11 offices.

And a grand history.

The building was designed by one Thomas Beck in 1871, when Watsonville was only a small village. Beck was a local architect and builder who would later become a state senator and, later yet, secretary of state for California, according to Betty Lewis, a local historian and one of the present owners of the building.

The new three-story hotel was erected on what is now the corner of Main and East Beach streets. It was even then a noteworthy sight, with its mansard roof — four steeply rising sides with dormer windows marching around the perimeter. The Mansion House had 65 rooms, a broad porch that ran across its width and a veranda on top, where hotel



The Mansion House thrived in the horse and buggy days.

guests could watch Main Street below.

The hotel cost \$25,000 to build.

**G**UESTS in the first years could purchase five baths for \$1. In 1900, a room cost \$2 a day, said Lewis. All 65 rooms had hot water, supplied from a tank in the back of the hotel, and gas. The hotel was wired for electricity in 1891.

According to Lewis, the building had many owners before it was moved to its present location, one parcel adjacent, in 1914. The move made way for the new Lettunich Building, which still stands on the corner of Main and East Beach.

In its new — and present — location the Mansion House got a facelift and a new name — the Royal Hotel. The hotel's restaurant was

called the Royal Grill.

Nearly a century after its construction, the old hotel seemed to reach the end of line in 1969, when the city condemned its second and third floors and the Royal Grill.

The old building continued to deteriorate until 1978, when local Realtor Marty Sglav, representing the owners of the property, saved the hotel from becoming scrap lumber by donating it to the Pajaro Valley Historical Association.

The Historical Association then sold the 15,000 square-foot building for \$10 to Hoffman Associates — two local developers, Jeff and Roger Hoffman. The transfer was made with the understanding, said Lewis, that the "historical integrity" of the building be preserved.

**T**HE Hoffmans completely refurbished the old hotel, giving it its current distinctive coloration and painting the interior of the restaurant mostly in greens. The upper two floors were made into

offices — The Sentinel has its south-county office in one — and an elevator was installed.

But the restaurant reportedly did not do well, ever: though it won an award for its design, and boasts a landscaped patio, wide-ranging menu and historical paintings, a tapestry and photographs from the city's past.

The Hoffmans were replaced by

Lewis Associates — mainly Betty, her husband Monte and their son, Michael.

The 42-table restaurant is now leased to a new owner — Raoul Nunez — and current management says it has lowered prices to make the menu more accessible to county residents.

Who, in the main, probably know where to find it after 116 years.