

# Epworth estate brought a touch of Monterey to Santa Cruz

Gibson Ross

**W**EST CLIFF DRIVE, from the railroad tracks to Lighthouse Point, was once known as Newport-of-the-Pacific for its resemblance to Rhode Island's famous row of mansions.

Each estate owned an entire block, and one of the first of these mansions was Epworth-By-The-Sea, recently restored and now for sale.

"Epworth," built on speculation in 1887 by ex-railroad officer C.C. Wheeler, resembled the Italianate Aptos mansions of in-laws Claus Spreckles and Claus Mangles.

This was before West Cliff Drive existed, when Lighthouse Avenue was the main road, and the windy west cliffs were jokingly called the "Pneumonia Belt." But the house had wonderful views of the harbor, and the property ran right to the cliff.

The house was bought a year later by Bishop Henry W. Warren and his wife, Elizabeth, of University Park, Colo. Elizabeth was known as the cattle queen in Colorado, being heir to the extensive ranch and mine holdings of cattle king John H. Iliff. She established the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, as a memorial.

Henry Warren was a bishop of the Episcopal Church, and saw this large West Cliff estate as a summer home, capable of hosting church conferences, picnic



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THEN AND NOW



Watercolor by Kay Skelton

The 1889 remodeling of the Epworth estate on West Cliff Drive was inspired by the Hotel Del Monte.

socials and the youth retreats of the Epworth League. He named the grounds Epworth-By-The-Sea after the birthplace of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism.

To increase the home's capacity for entertaining guests, Mrs. Warren oversaw (and most likely financed) a year-long \$3,000 remodeling job. Her inspiration

gerbread gables and flared eaves. He arranged the support structures in the manner of English mews, clustered around a courtyard.

Mrs. Warren also hired the Del Monte's renowned landscape architect, Rudolph Ulrich. German-born Ulrich had remained superintendent of the Del Monte grounds since 1880, even while setting up local offices in 1886, when appointed official landscaper for the city of Santa Cruz. In 1887, he turned Mission Plaza from "a fenced cow pasture," into a tree-lined park with lawns, serpentine trails, flowers and a fountain. In the meantime, Del Monte burned and was replaced with a larger hotel, which Ulrich landscaped.

The two sites already had strong similarities. Both were coastal properties bordering golf courses, with Jarboe Golf Links across Lighthouse Avenue from Epworth.

When West Cliff Drive was laid out, it was often described as the 17-Mile Drive of Santa Cruz. The estate was tree-lined to tame the wind, and included Del Monte-style floral medallions and tapestry flower beds. As he had done at the hotel, Ulrich divided Epworth's grounds into a great lawn on the ocean side, a croquet lawn in the back, and a cloistered garden.

Based on Ulrich's West Coast successes, he went on to landscape three world's fairs in 1893, 1897, and 1901, becoming an associate and then successor to the country's leading landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted. Ulrich's renowned Wooded Island at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair was proposed by Santa Cruz officials as a model for landscaping the is-

land at the San Lorenzo river mouth. But Ulrich died in 1906 without landscaping the river island.

Epworth was divided between the Warrens' children, with daughter Edna Iliff Briggs receiving the house and mews, and son William part of the Gharkey Street horse pasture. William built a concrete Spanish house facing West Cliff around 1905-1910, designed by Denver-trained Watsonville architect William Weeks. His sister renamed Epworth "The Breakers" after a Newport mansion, and hired Bobby Bradshaw in 1948, who remained the estate's gardener for 20 years.

Bradshaw was an eccentric, elfin figure, with a red bulbous nose and shorts worn either with black sneakers or rubber boots. In the 1960s, Rand Launer recalled, "He looked like he might have been 70, but acted like he was 12!" His only transportation was his bicycle or Indian-brand motorcycle. His health food views and organic gardening, which seemed so modern in the 1960s, were simply old-world traditions. Bobby swam in the ocean every morning off Lighthouse Point, gathering fresh seaweed, which he used on the plants to deter aphids.

The estate became Epworth again in the 1970s. By then, the second Del Monte hotel was replaced with a stucco structure, leaving Epworth a rare survivor of Del Monte-inspired estate.

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