

A View Of Yesteryear

"We had such fun and such good times in that house," comments Helen MacFadyen, looking at an old photo. It is reproduced with this story.

Helen grew up in Santa Cruz as Helen Philbrook, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Philbrook. Her mother, Emily Philbrook, planned the house just the way she wanted it, then had her architect brother draw up the blueprint. The house was built in 1910.

"It's really earthquake proof — as much so as could be constructed in those days," Helen says. "The big 'quake of 1906 was still very fresh in my mother's memory. All the chimneys collapsed in the house we were living in at the time of the earthquake."

Believe it or not, a Santa Cruz housewife of 1910 could choose her own street and telephone numbers. Helen's mother chose 111 California Street for the house address and 424 for the telephone.

"She wanted nice even numbers that were easy to remember."

Another idea of Emily Philbrook's — she was an artist herself — was to have a "cabinet kitchen" with all built-ins, and NOT a lot of doors in her house!

"In our previous home there were seven doors to lock up at night," Helen comments. "In this house there were just two."

A solid slab of redwood made the fireplace mantel. A wood burning steam heat furnace was installed. All in all, it was a very comfortable house.

When Helen was small, the old mill wheel was still on the Laurel Street hill — that was the water-powered wheel that was a landmark for many years.

"I played on it. And there was a waterfall down by the log cabin. We were always in that creek catching minnows or something."

It was a formal day of ladies in rustling black or plum colored silk, driving up in their carriages (later in electrics and even later in gas models) to leave their calling cards. There was a set procedure for those — a sort of now-you-see-me-now-you-don't dance of elegant

manners and Victorian days-at-home.

"Mother usually had a large party or two every year," Helen recalls. "Musicales and teas were popular. Some lady would sing. Maybe someone would play a musical instrument."

As far as Helen's social life was concerned, her mother went everywhere with her as chaperone until she was in her late teens.

"My first high school dance — I'll never forget it. My mother wouldn't let me go without her so she went along, and the boy who had invited me to go, trailed along behind us," Helen said, laughing.

Young people were satisfied with much simpler pleasures in those days. A picnic in the mountains — a day at the beach — a clamming expedition — a visit to the snow at Ben Lomond — all these were considered real outings. And they all took the better part of a day because roads and speeds weren't what they are today.

Dr. Philbrook bought his first auto in 1913 and it took the family on many an outing, sometimes just out to Capitola to look at the water and take a walk.

Fathers played a stricter role in those days. Dr. Philbrook of course was a family doctor and he spent many a night with a patient who was deathly ill, or who perhaps was expecting a baby. When the great influenza epidemic of 1918-19 hit Santa Cruz, he went for days and nights without sleep, Helen recalls.

"He would make a sandwich and lie down for a brief nap on the windowseat in the living room, then start out again in a short while."

But he was home a lot and he also disciplined his children strongly, in the custom of that day.

"The only way I could have dates during the week was for the boy to come help me with my homework,"

Helen says. "We would be studying away and pretty soon my father would come in with his watch in his hand and a big scowl on his face. He'd say 'It's nine o'clock, sister!' And the boy would have to go."

—MARGARET KOCH



The Philbrook House as it looked shortly after it was built on the hill above the log cabin. The trees have grown up since to almost hide the house from this angle.

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REFERENCE