

This stately Beach Hill home is the site of a murder-suicide. The owner senses 'strong spiritual energy' there.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

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1-22-91
THE REPORTS of odd goings-on and an exorcism this month at Brookdale Lodge are only the latest in a long list of local hauntings. Santa Cruz has its share of ghost stories, believe them or not: the White Lady ... young Sarah Cowell ... Padre Andres Quintana ... the McLaughlin murder...

Start with the story of the priest at the Santa Cruz Mission, Father Andres Quintana, who was murdered by Indian neophytes in 1812.

For safety reasons, priests were forbidden to go out alone at night. But the other priest was away in Monterey on church business and Padre Quintana was alone in the Mission. When two Indians came to him with a request for help for a dying comrade, he went with them. They led him down the hill into the orchard then growing behind today's Holy Cross Church, killed him, then returned the body to his bed in the priests' quarters in the Mission. When it was discovered, everyone (except the killers) thought Quintana had died a natural death. He had been in poor health. The plotters had left no visible signs of violence on the body.

The truth came out several years later when the wives of the murderers were overheard during an argument. The Indians were tried and found guilty.

The reason for the crime, according to them, was the Padre's cruelty; they claimed he had whipped them.

Today, Padre Quintana lies buried in a stone coffin beneath the floor of Holy Cross Church. Oldtimers said his ghost roamed the orchard hillside, seeking revenge.

DOES A GHOST roam a historic Beach Hill mansion? Former apartment residents there said they'd seen ghostly goings on, but Patricia Sambuck Wilder — owner of Golden Gate Villa, once the scene of a murder-suicide — says the house isn't haunted. But, she says, that there

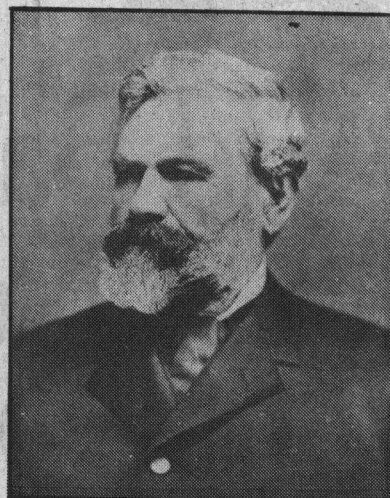
is "strong spiritual energy" in the house, which includes apartments as well as her home.

It once was the home of a wealthy mining engineer, Major Frank McLaughlin, his wife and her daughter Agnes by a former marriage. They came to Santa Cruz in the late 1890s, and, charmed by the town, they built a huge home on Third Avenue in 1891. Golden Gate Villa had a cupola, an "elephant room" with real elephant hide on the walls, a gold room with gold-plated chandelier, and a ballroom. There also was a huge stained glass window in the stairwell that depicted Agnes; strands of her hair were embedded in the glass.

The major was a true bon vivant, a nationally known sportsman, politician and successful mining engineer. He liked to live well. The great house was often filled with distinguished guests who dined on fine china, drank from costly crystal and enjoyed gourmet food and scintillating conversation. The McLaughlins lived elegantly indeed, with servants to tend to their every whim and fancy.

But life has its twists and turns, not all of them so pleasant. The major bankrolled a project to re-route the Feather River to recover overlooked gold nuggets on the river bottom. Oldtimers on the river watched a costly dam and walls go in, but neglected to tell the major that years earlier, the 49ers had done that project, and there was no gold left under the water.

Broke, alone after his wife died in 1905, McLaughlin brooded for



Margaret Koch collection

Henry Cowell

Did his iron will aid a haunting?

several years and couldn't face being poor. He also didn't want stepdaughter Agnes to be poor. Sixteen years after he built the Villa, he went upstairs one day to Agnes' room and shot her as she slept. Then he went downstairs and drank a poison cocktail. He also left a note asking whoever found them to "please put our poor old cat out of her misery." The double tragedy rocked Santa Cruz.

The mansion passed through several hands, became known as the Monte Carlo when it was a restaurant, and finally in 1968, was bought by Patricia Sambuck Wilder, who had long admired it. She renovated the two upper floors to make apartments and

she lives on the ground floor. She notes several coincidences, but no ghosts as far as she knows.

"When I moved in, I had a dog named Lena. I didn't know it at the time, but the McLaughlins had a servant named Lena who was their favorite. They left her a fine fur coat and some jewelry."

In selecting the color of the paint for Agnes' bedroom, Wilder ran into another coincidence. She had no way of knowing what the original color had been, but she chose a pale lavender-blue. Later, the painters stripped the old layers of paint and she discovered she had selected the identical color Agnes had probably chosen.

Wilder's restoration work on the first floor was recognized by the California Heritage Council with a plaque and certificate. Wilder has had a complete history of Golden Gate Villa and the McLaughlins written, and she says, "There are no bad vibes in my house."

SARAH COWELL was the youngest of Henry Cowell's five children. Henry's Santa Cruz investments brought the family great wealth but great tragedy too. Henry was a despot who ruled his children with an iron hand. They weren't to marry — prospective mates could only be after their wealth, for example. The Cowells were cold, almost unfriendly and they shunned publicity of any kind.

After developing Henry Cowell Lime and Cement Co. locally, and other properties statewide, the Cowells moved to San Francisco

to live. They maintained the ranch home (the property is UC Santa Cruz today) but seldom visited it.

In 1903 Sarah came down to spend a few days. With the family's housekeeper she started out one day in a buggy, to pick wild flowers for her mother, ill in a San Francisco hospital.

Sarah was driving a high-spirited horse that her father had warned her never to take out. In the meadow approaching the lime quarry, a wheel hit a rock, the horse bolted, the buggy tipped and Sarah was thrown out. She died of a broken neck.

From that day on, the two older sisters, Isabella and Helen, refused to set foot in Santa Cruz. They lived as recluses, inseparable, on a 22-acre estate in Ather-ton. When Helen died in 1932, Isabella had their house smashed flat by bulldozers, and she left it that way for years, surrounded by a padlocked fence. She went to San Francisco to live with brother Harry, last of the tribe, and died there in 1950.

Sarah's ghost now supposedly walks the meadow where she died, according to various students who have attended UCSC over the years. The stories are hard to pin down, but they surface from time to time.

AND THE WHITE Lady ... she sounded like a feature writer's dream come true. She was supposed to appear, shimmering and wraith-like, up past Salz Tannery near Paradise Park.

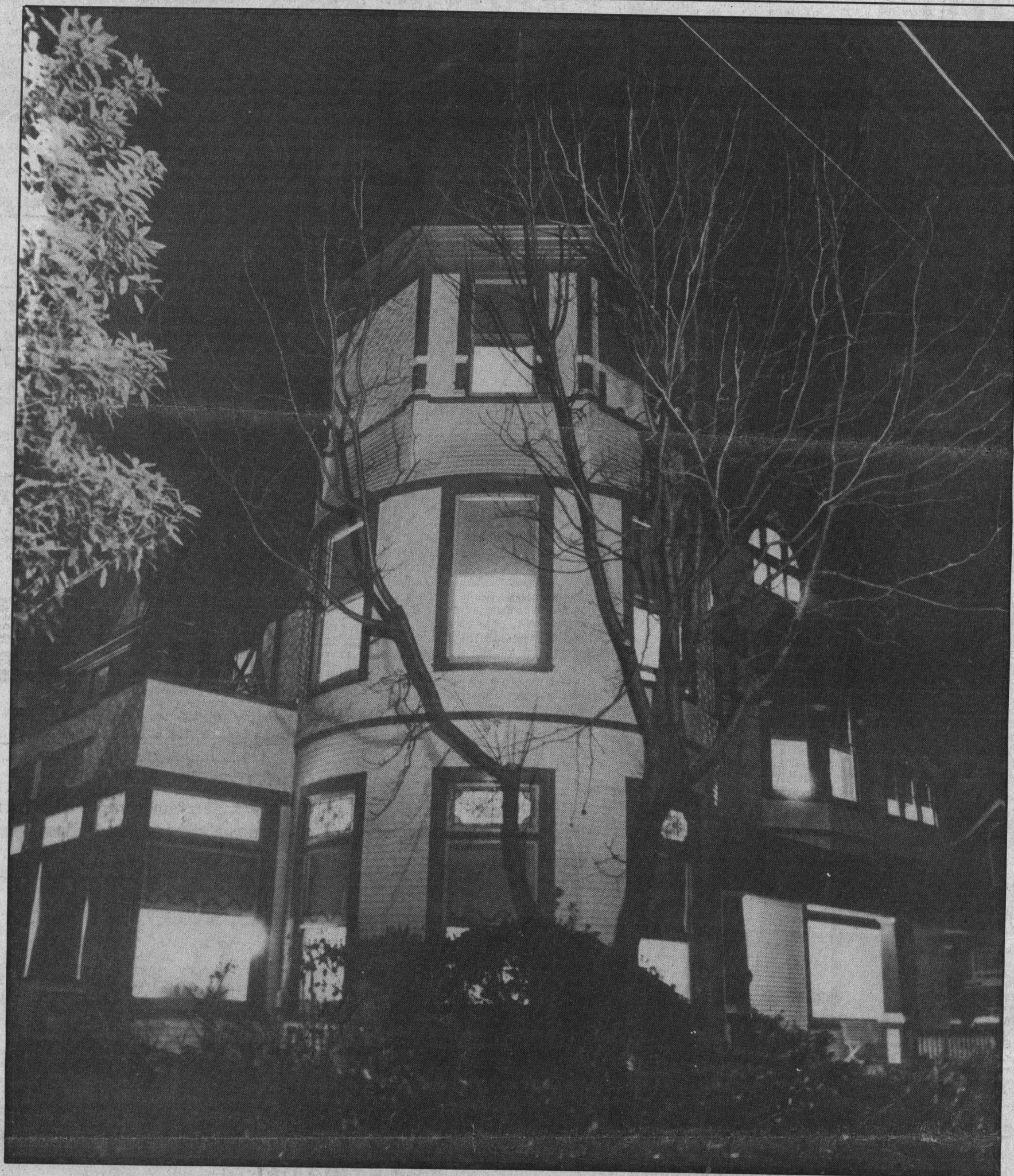
That area was the site of the California Powder Mill in the 1860s. The first smokeless powder on the Pacific Coast was produced there in 1864. A dangerous place to work, for sure. There were many minor explosions, and one huge one in 1898 that killed 13 workers. A perfect setting for ghosts. But The White Lady?

After some investigation, it turned out that she was the figment of some Boy Scout's fertile imagination. The Scouts used to camp out overnight up there and tell ghost stories around their campfire. The White Lady. Darnit. It sounded so good.

Historic Houses- Beach Area

Features

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