

The rebirth of Carmelita Cottages

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Déjà
view

The history of Santa Cruz's Beach Hill reads like a tangled, broody Victorian novel. The histories of some of the early families on Beach Hill include divorce, suicide, and even murder. There's some pretty heavy karma up there, so the dedicated folks who took up the Carmelita Cottages project in 1983 should have known they were in for a tussle. It goes with the territory.

Divorce seems to have been the tragedy of choice at the Carmelita Cottages property at 315-321 Main St. Most of the property's owners had failed marriages, including Thomas Fallon and Timothy Dame, but the last owner of the property, Lottie Sly, had a particularly brief and melancholy marriage. Lottie Sly lived on the property and managed the cottages as rentals until her death in 1955, at which point ownership passed to the city of Santa Cruz by virtue of her will.

The city took possession of the property when the last tenant died in 1977. The city decided to demolish the buildings in 1979, but historical preservationists came forward to help get a stay of execution, and in 1983 the Santa Cruz Hostel Society proposed the establishment of a European-style hostel on the site. Led by fanatical volunteers like Rick Hyman, who is also the group's official historian, the society negotiated the choppy waters of bureaucracy and economics.

Finally, 11 years later, after permits, loans, more permits and



Santa Cruz Hostel Society Collection

The Carmelita Cottages, one shown here in 1900, were bequeathed to the city of Santa Cruz in 1955.

new loans, the Carmelita cottages are being completed. Through the efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers, the gracious little buildings have not only been preserved, but given a new function. Next Sunday the hostel society will be holding its Grand Opening Celebration from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 321 Main St. up on Beach Hill. Go take a look at one of Santa Cruz's best-kept historical secrets.

If you have a favorite photograph you would like to see used in this column, or one that you would like some help in identifying, send a copy (never send original photographs) to Déjà View, Sandy Lydon, care of the Santa Cruz County Sentinel, 207 Church St., Santa Cruz, Calif. 95060. Sandy Lydon, author and lecturer on local historical matters, is dean of instructional development at Cabrillo College.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Above is one of the restored cottages, now used as a hostel.