

Here Today; Gone Tomorrow?

This Man's Castle Also Is A Home

Editor's Note: This series appears in conjunction with efforts by SCOPE and the Santa Cruz Historical Society to foster interest in old and interesting structures in Santa Cruz County.

By Margaret Koch
Sentinel Staff Writer

Robert Howden's Ben Lomond home was his castle, and his castle was his home.

He called himself an "every-day Scotsman." But his one desire above all else was to live in a castle.

Howden selected a beautiful bend on the San Lorenzo river in Ben Lomond, a place where he had spent vacations camping in a tent.

There in the early 1920s, with the help of Ben Lomondites he hired, Howden built his castle. And he patterned it after Scottish castles he remembered from his boyhood in Scotland.

The Ben Lomond castle went together slowly, although it was to be much smaller than its average Scottish counterpart. Every stone was hand-picked and hand set. Howden's regular home and business were located in Oakland where he operated a factory that manufactured all kinds of tiles. The Howden building was located there at 17th and Webster streets.

But Howden's heart was in the "highlands" of Ben Lomond. He even wrote poems about it in his leisure hours. Four of these, from the collection of Alice Earl Wilder, give us insights into Robert Howden, castle builder.

In 1922 he wrote: "Ben Lomond, nestling 'mong the heights, Above fair Santa Cruz, Your peaceful quiet my soul delights, Your charm awakes my muse . . ." — "I love the music of your stream, Along its winding ways, While on its face the pale moon beam, Makes dazling, dancing rays."

In a 1931 poem Howden reminisces about Scotland: . . . "Land of the mist, the storm and flood, How strong the ties

that bind To each man of Scottish blood . . ."

In that same year, after a hard day's work lifting stones, he wrote: "A day of usefulness I've learned, Is honest work to pleasure turned . . ."

Apparently all Ben Lomondites weren't in accord with Howden's idea of building a castle. Because in this poem one line states: . . . "Crazy they thought me to thus embark, And build on such a site; 'Tis a foolish scheme, was the one remark, To be heard on every side . . ."

Howden built his castle on one level, completing it in 1926. A native Scot, he was born in 1863 and spent his early life in Scotland and the U.S. as a stone carver. In Ben Lomond he used his talent to etch panes of glass windows in his castle using a hammer and chisel. They depict Scottish scenes and poems of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns.

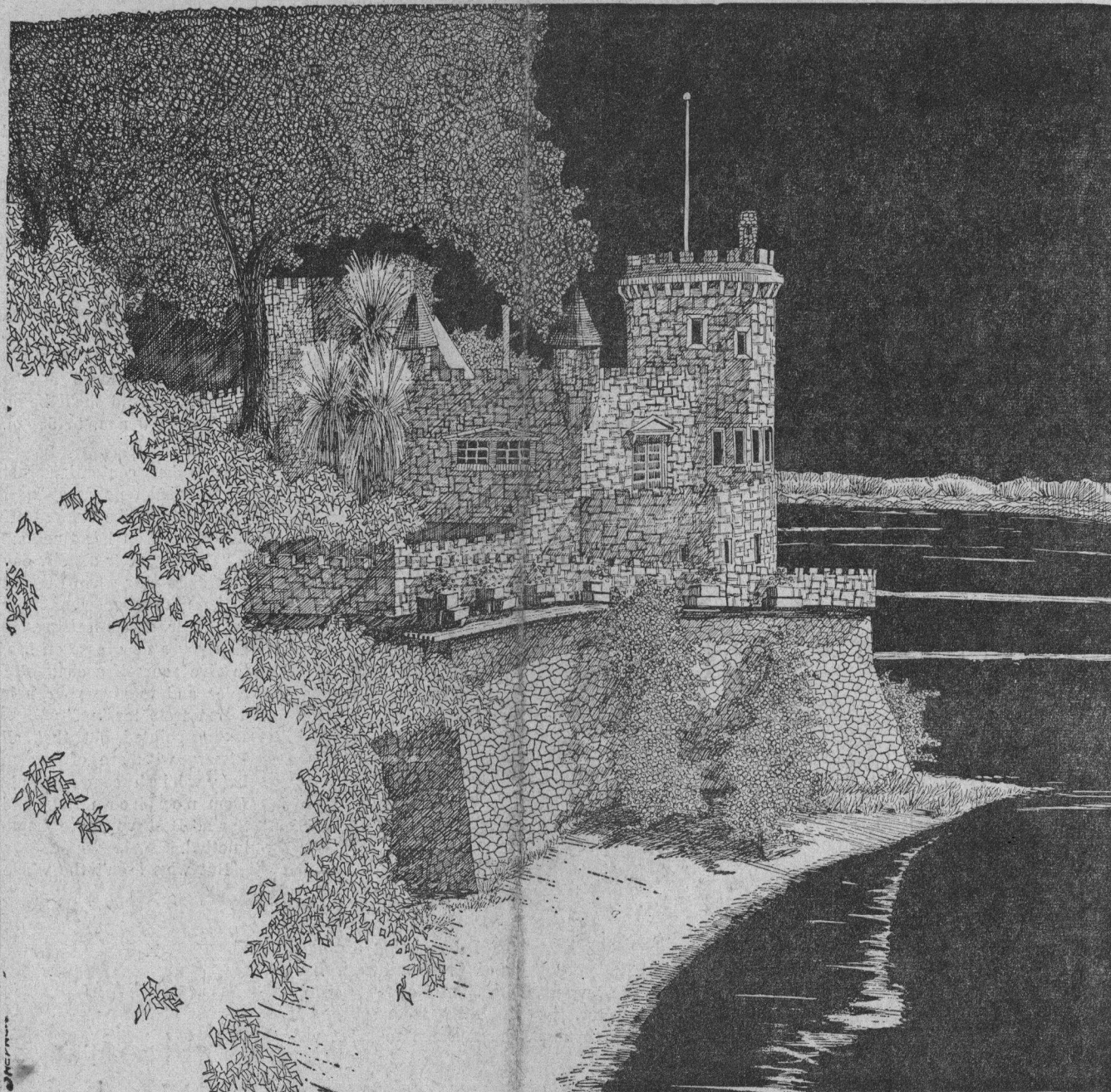
Howden kept his castle until 1937 when he sold to Dr. and Mrs. Norman Sullivan of Santa Cruz. The Sullivans made extensive improvements on the castle, modernizing and enlarging it.

In 1940 the castle passed into the hands of Verne D. Jester who almost immediately sold it to Mrs. Pearl Atkinson of Sacramento. She opened it to public tours in 1941.

In 1944 the castle was sold again to Mr. and Mrs. C. A. Beatty of San Francisco. By that time its fame had spread far and wide. Photographers and artists traveled miles to see it, photograph and paint it.

Two years later it was sold to the late George B. Weatherly and his wife, Ivy Lee. Mrs. Weatherly lives there yet and allows tours, for a small fee, on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

The Weatherlys were antique collectors and they have filled the castle with rare and beautiful objects from all over the world. They also remodeled extensively, adding a dining room, party room and food storage cellar. They also



Artist Will Shepherd, in his pen and ink sketch, has caught the mood of Ben Lomond's famed Castle. It dates

from 1926, and was the dream-come-true of an Oakland tile manufacturer, Robert Howden.

tore out partitions to make small rooms larger, and put in sizeable retaining walls in the garden.

Every owner of the castle, even when it was changing hands at a rapid rate, loved it and added to its charm.

Today it contains about 15 rooms, "some of them quite small," according to Mrs. Weatherly.

"It takes me about five hours to get everything ready for the tours," she explained.

One item that takes readying is her flock of 12 cats.

"Other castles have rats and bats, but mine has cats!" she quipped.

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