

1967 Here Today; Gone Tomorrow?

Santa Cruz Potatoes Financed Ornate Home

Editor's Note: This Sentinel series on old houses and buildings of Santa Cruz and surrounding areas appears each Sunday. It is written in conjunction with efforts by SCOPE and the Santa Cruz Historical Society to spark interest in local history and the preservation of the area's historical buildings.

By Margaret Koch
Sentinel Staff Writer

From a cabin on the Santa Cruz beach to one of the town's most ornate homes on a hill.

Thomas J. Weeks made the leap in about 40 years. That is a long time. And Thomas worked hard for his wealth and his fancy home.

This stalwart State of Maine man was born in Wayne, Kennebec County, in 1829. He learned the stonemason's trade and worked at it in Boston before coming to California in 1849.

Weeks came from the East Coast around Cape Horn in a sailing ship and the difficult voyage took six months. He thought he was headed for an easy fortune in the California gold fields.

But in the mining country he soon became disillusioned with the "ease" of picking up a fortune in gold. He also, many years later, expressed his opinion of the high cost of a bare existence in the gold fields. He left for Santa Cruz, arriving here late in 1849 or early in 1850.

Instead of gold from the Golden State, Weeks was destined to grow rich from potatoes grown in the rich California soil. When he arrived in Santa Cruz the town was up on Mission Hill, an assortment of adobes and frame houses clustered around what remained of Santa Cruz Mission. The big, two-story adobe, later known as

with a family; he could build himself a house.

He didn't do any of these. Instead, he and his partner, Abram DeLong, salvaged the cabin off a wrecked schooner on Santa Cruz beach. The men "camped" in this crude shelter while they planted potatoes down on the flat.

The potatoes were sold for a fancy price in San Francisco, then shipped to the mines. The partners' first year crop yielded 400 sacks to the acre. In two years they had \$10,000 apiece in profits.

At first Weeks rented the potato land from Judge William Blackburn for \$15 per acre per year. Later, with a canny eye to profits of his own, the judge raised the annual rent to \$100 per acre. Weeks wisely invested his profits in land, until he owned 86 acres.

Two Arrested On Drug Charges

A routine check-out by police Friday afternoon resulted in the arrest of two people on charges of possessing marijuana and dangerous drugs.

Officers stopped Gerald Lee Handy, 23, of San Francisco, and a 17-year-old Ben Lomond boy while they were walking in the vicinity of Mission street and Van Ness avenue. Officers said they thought the boy might have been a run-away.

A check showed Handy was wanted in Sacramento on a felony forgery charge. The two were brought to the police department for booking and officers found what was identified as marijuana in their clothing. They also found 18 tablets thought to be the drug LSD. Handy was placed in jail and the youth was taken to juvenile hall pending further investigation.

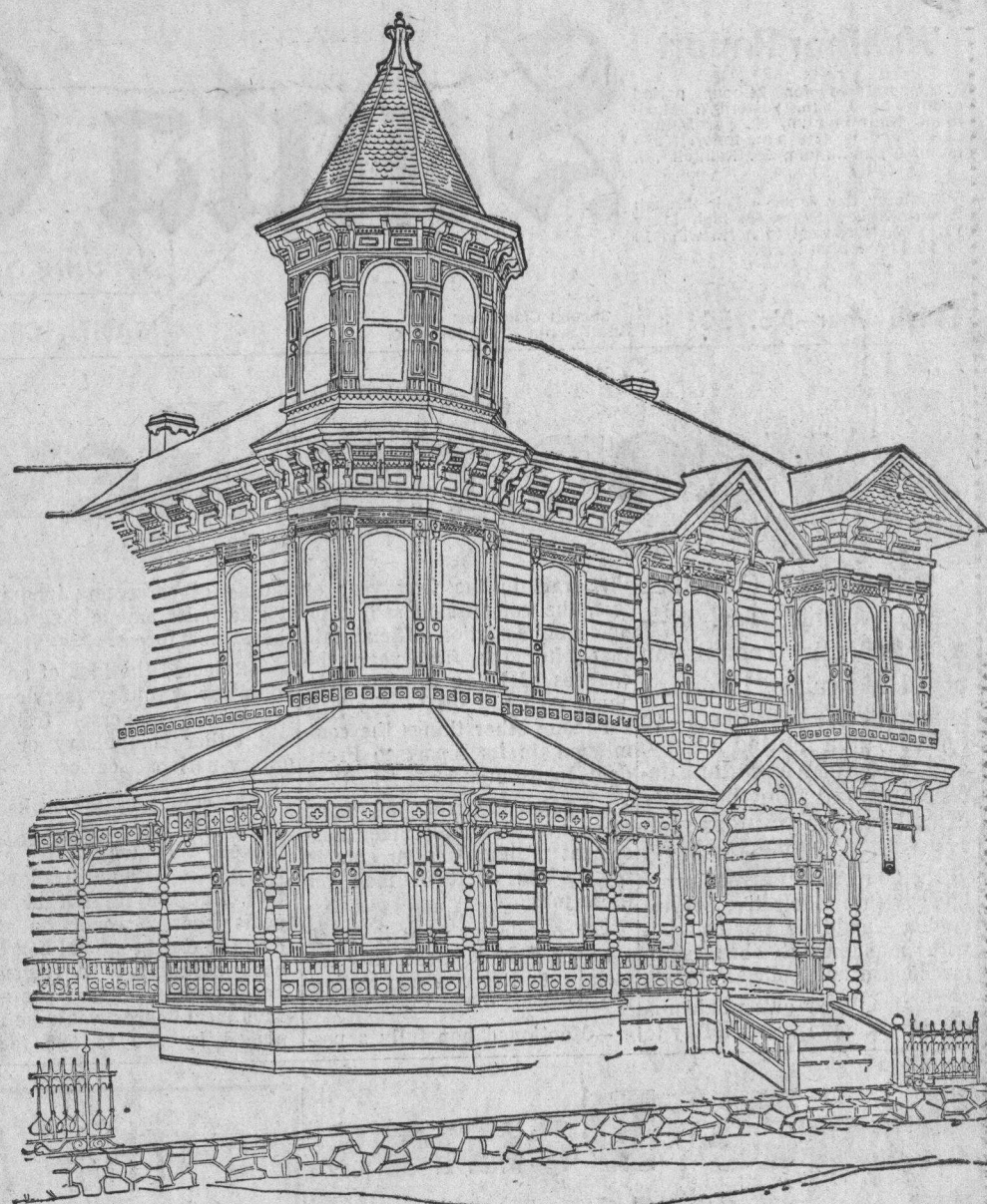
His property took in Walnut avenue hill, on which Santa Cruz High School is located, and an area between Laurel, Chestnut and Mission streets.

In 1854 Weeks married Margaret Morgan, a niece of Judge Blackburn. It is doubtful if Weeks took his bride to the old ship's cabin. They had a house somewhere. But it wasn't until 1890 that they built the elaborate home which stands today at 724 California street.

Complete with cupola, scrolls, dados, flutings, swirls, curls and every imaginable intricacy of the carpenter's art, the house was moved after 1913 to its present location. It formerly stood out on the brow of the hill, overlooking the town, about where the Santa Cruz High School science building now stands. The present walkway leading from Lincoln street and bordered by stone retaining walls, was the Weeks' drive. Weeks also demolished an older home which first stood on the property.

By the time Weeks built his large new home (either in 1886 or 1890 — reports differ), he also had established a thriving 25-acre fruit orchard and a prosperous teaming business.

Potatoes, which gave him his start, couldn't be GIVEN away after the first three or four years Weeks raised them. The potato market was glutted when every farmer in the county started raising spuds.



SHEPHERD

Artist Will Shepherd had quite a time capturing every curlicue and whirligig on the old house, in his pen and ink sketch. The house is located at 724 California street.

Easter is early and so are we