

Historic area homes earn museum honor

By **TODD GUILD**

SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

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The Gordon house stands near Mission and Highland streets, where traffic rushes by at most hours of the day. It's flanked by several other houses in a tightly packed neighborhood on Santa Cruz's Westside.

Despite the hectic nature of the area, the Eastlake-style home at 110 Escalona Drive has weathered more than a century in the same spot, standing sentry as Santa Cruz has grown up around it. The outside of house has remained much the way it was when it was built around 1885 by master carpenter John McPheters. A small porch bordered by white columns welcomes visitors, and the only nod to the present is a new mint green paint job.

"We just love living here," said Sonja Reetz, who has lived with her husband in the two-story house since 1976. "It's wonderful to be a part of the history of the area."

The home was recognized Saturday along with eight other Santa Cruz County buildings by the Museum of Art and History in its annual Historic Landmark Blue Plaque Award ceremony.

"We worked on getting the history of the house for quite a while," said Judy Steen, a historian with the Museum of Art and History. "I've researched it for many years."

The house was purchased by Judge Seraphim Meyer in 1887, and sold a few years later to Maryanne Smith, a retired governess who had moved from England. She lived there with her sister and brother-in-law, Frances and James Gordon and their children. The Gordon family lived at the property until 1942.

The house was physically moved in 1888 from its original location at St. Lawrence Street (now called Highland) to where it now stands on Escalona. This was common practice, according



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Al and Sonja Reetz have lived in their Escalona Drive home since 1976. The home received a historical marker Saturday.

to Steen.

"If someone bought a piece of property but wanted a different house, they would simply move the old one," she said. "It was a part of the construction industry at the time, to pick up and move houses."

Since 1973, the Museum of Art and History has presented its Blue Plaque certifications to homes, churches, farmhouses and other buildings of architectural and historical significance in Santa Cruz County.

The certification goes to buildings that meet a list of eight criteria, one of which states that the original style of the structure cannot be altered.

Reetz said Thursday that the only change she's made to the exterior of the house was the new coat of paint, which took a surprising amount of work.

"My husband would want you to know that he has scraped every inch of this house," she said.

She added that he removed at least 11 layers from previous paint jobs.

The Reetz family refurbished the kitchen and the downstairs bedroom, which has been converted into a library.

The Reetzes have also built a deck in the back yard, covering the spot where past owners parked their horse and buggy, according to Reetz.

It was Steen who asked the Reetz family if they would be interested in receiving the historic landmark plaque. A retired UC Santa Cruz librarian, Steen says she has a passion for research, and has made a mission out of delving into the history of the old houses of the area.

"Because I live in this neighborhood, I am particularly passionate about saving it," she said. "I'm always researching several houses."

She added that years of such research have allowed her to

Honored buildings

FORMER SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH: 1106 Lincoln St., Watsonville.

GORDON FAMILY HOME: 110 Escalona Drive, Santa Cruz.

GEORGE'S LOG CABIN, FORMERLY GRAZIANI FAMILY BAR & RESTAURANT: 5755 Highway 9, Felton.

COLONIAL REVIVAL STYLE HOUSE: 126 Jordan St., Santa Cruz.

MAC'S PLACE AND LOGGER'S SALOON: 13164 Highway 9, Boulder Creek.

MINTIE WHITE HOUSE: 104 E. Beach St., Watsonville.

MORRIS ABRAMS BUILDING: 1129-33 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz.

EASTLAKE COTTAGE: 1005 3rd St., Santa Cruz and Mountain Echo Newspaper Office, 13110 Central [Highway 9], Boulder Creek.

gather several boxes of research material.

She also credits her research to Santa Cruz historians, who started in 1856 to index information from newspapers like the Santa Cruz Sentinel and the now defunct Santa Cruz Surf.

"It's amazing what you can find," she said.

Steen says she looks for obituaries while delving into old newspaper clippings. This often yields the names of descendants, some of whom are still living in the area. "That's when you hit a gold mine," she said.

She added that an important part of the research process is to get the history of the people who lived there.

"Once you can put people into the house, it becomes a lot more interesting," she said. "It's a way to make history visible in the neighborhood."

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