

# Miss Forbes loved her octagon home

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**T**HERE is one still standing for sure, and perhaps another in a backyard behind a larger more conventional house.

Once, years ago, Seabright had a handful of octagonal summer cottages, but the years and progress have taken their toll.

The eight-sided structures were the brainstorm of one woman, a very interesting woman, Miss E.M.C. Forbes. Today she would be called a "character." She was of the old school, formal, and no one addressed her other than "Miss Forbes." Few friends or neighbors even knew that her given name was Emily.

Miss Forbes was in her mid-50s when she settled in Seabright in the early 1880s. She immediately threw herself into one project after another — all of them intended to improve something or other.

Seabright was separated from Santa Cruz by the San Lorenzo River and in the 1880s that meant a long, round-about ride or walk to cross a bridge at Water Street. There was no East Cliff Drive. Tourists wishing to view the beaches and bay and cliffs had to pass through Thomas Pilkington's farmyard gates and over his property.

Water for Seabright summer tents and cottages was hand-pumped from Pilkington's well, then hauled in barrels on a horse-drawn sled. Miss Forbes had her own horse and sled and went for water two or three times a week.

All these primitive conditions were fertile ground for improvements and there were several determined women to do the improvements, Miss Forbes included.

They got Pilkington to donate a strip of land which became East Cliff Drive. They talked residents and F. A. Hihn into extending Santa Cruz water pipes to Seabright. They got a footbridge built across the San Lorenzo River; it was used only in summer and was removed each winter.

**B**Y 1890, when Seabright residents wanted to shop in Santa Cruz they had only to walk a few blocks and take a horse car for a nickel. Two years later, electric cars replaced the horse cars and ran until 1926 when buses took over. Sometime along there, Railroad Avenue became Seabright Avenue.

The busy women, always eager to improve life mentally as well as physically, formed The Eclectic Club, arranged for monthly Chautauqua meetings and founded the Seabright Library. Seabright's was the first branch library in Santa Cruz County.

By 1904 they had organized the

Seabright Improvement Society with Miss Forbes as one of the directors. Her staunch ally, Miss S.A. Tyrrell, who "had money," and was always lending it for worthy causes, was the president.

Backyard outhouses were the style in Seabright until a group of year-around residents and the women finally got a sewage system line from East Santa Cruz. It took them five years of agitation to get it.

Once, one long-time resident of Seabright recalled with a grin that occasionally Miss Forbes would enter her outhouse and neglect to shut the door. She would sit there quite awhile, oblivious of any spectators, admiring her view of Monterey Bay.

However, with all her pet projects, Miss Forbes' octagonal house idea was probably closest to her heart. She had one built and lived in it contentedly, setting an example she felt more people should follow. All the while she extolled the virtues of the octagonal structure.

Square corners in houses were "wasteful."

Hard to arrange furniture efficiently.

Harder to heat (most Seabright residents had wood stoves.)

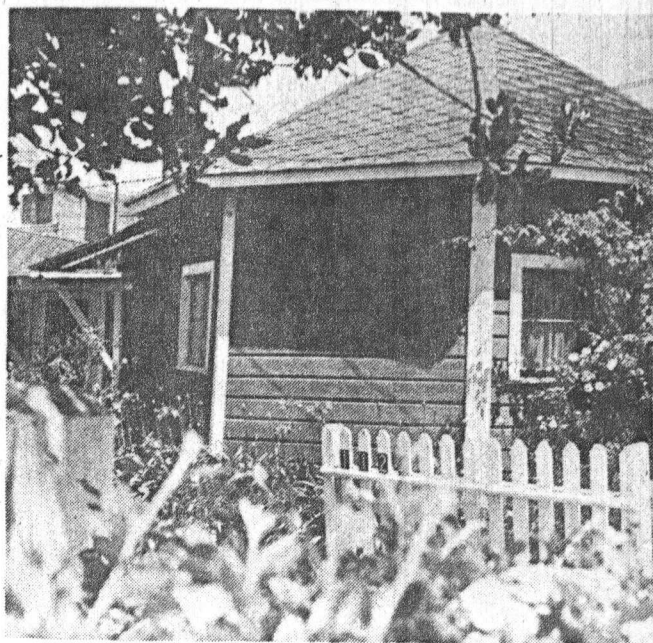
Oh, she had a long string of reasons why people should live in octagonals. And a few were actually built.

Miss Forbes, as sort of an unofficial chamber of commerce for Seabright, had her own horse and buggy and was often called upon to drive visitors around to see the sights. She would take them up the San Lorenzo Valley to the Big Trees and around West Cliff Drive to view the natural bridges, as well as up Walnut Avenue to inspect the inefficient mansions of Santa Cruz civic leaders.

**O**NE summer she and Miss Tyrrell even edited a little newspaper in order to help Seabright Library finances along. She noted with pride in later years that they had been able to pay the printer and come out with \$30 to the good.

Along with all the projects, Seabright residents found time to have a lot of fun and sociability. Camp Alhambra was a social center for years. There were beach bonfires, evening parties, dances, and always lectures and skits. The Caledonian Club of San Francisco came down every year, complete with kilts and bagpipes. They would assemble around a campfire with the pipers marching around piping and an evening of song and story would follow.

One unfortunate evening when they were there, some of the drier Seabright residents put on a Carrie Nation skit complete with smashed bottles. That was too much for the Scots who believed (more or less)



This octagonal home still stands in Seabright.

## A glance at history

that whiskey was the breath of life as well as of the Scottish economy. They were so shocked that they marched away, never to return, according to Miss Forbes.

The Improvement Society was probably the first Santa Cruz County organization to provide life-saving equipment on the cliffs. Members constructed a stout box and put it at Seabright Point with a life line and preserver in it.

The ever-busy Miss Forbes was a daily part of the Seabright scene. Everyone knew her and she knew everyone. She wore her gray hair cut short under a black felt hat and was usually covered from neck to heels in a voluminous cape.

She loved Seabright which she termed "a dear little place," and she spent many happy years there in her octagonal cottage. Before she died she wrote a brief account of her activities in her beloved Seabright.



The octagonal cottage Miss Forbes called home.



DRIFTWOOD ALONG BEACH 1891

Seabright Beach after the storm of 1891