

Sc vac Guide

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OLDEST HOUSE

BY MARIAN GOODMAN, SORRENTO OAKS PARK

For years the neat but unpretentious home at 109 Sylvar (across Upper Plaza Park from the Mission) has been pointed out as the oldest wooden frame house in Santa Cruz.

One would never know, it

looks much like many other houses which have rectangular plans under their A-roofs. The rear part follows the New England tradition of the continuation of sloping roof, an entirely American feature which began with the

humble "lean-to" and then became a definite part of the house. Often this area was known as the "summer kitchen," where food could be cooked without heating up the whole house.

The house on Sylvar is known as the Alzina house, for its adventurous builder, Francisco Alzina. He ran away from his native island Minorca way back when and stowed away on a U.S. ship bound for America. The ship happened to be "Old Ironsides", the USS Constitution, a frigate launched in Boston in 1797. It fought bravely in 1812 and is now a scenic attraction in Boston Harbor.

When safely away at sea Alzina made his presence known: he was running away to avoid military duty. This ship was headed for Norfolk, Va. and before it docked

he witnessed a near mutiny.

For seven years he worked as an aide in the U.S. Naval Hospital in Norfolk, and it is notable that during this time he refused work on a southern plantation because the owner (Senator John C. Calhoun) kept slaves.

The young man made a trip back to Barcelona (perhaps he was homesick) and on the way back, on the USS Delaware, the ship nearly sank. It was carrying an immense statue of Columbus, so heavy it was loaded in five pieces, and its weight and location on the ship made sailing precarious.

Soon we find Alzina at sea again, but for the last time. He shipped out aboard the Ada, bound for Mazatlan and California. This ship brought him around the Horn, famous for its treacherous storms and currents. Probably he decided then and there he'd had enough ocean travel, for when he arrived in Monterey in 1846 he investigated the area and decided the town of Santa Cruz was for him. He became a clerk in Judge Blackburn's court.

Two years later he married Maria Gonzales and began their home. Lumber for it was hauled down the coast from Rancho Pescadero, which was owned by the bride's father, Juan Jose Gonzales. The date is not certain but the house is credited with being about ready for occupancy around 1850.

Maria came from a big family, and the Alzinas followed the pattern, raising 14 children. Francisco was a trusted interpreter between English and Spanish-speaking people, and he became the first sheriff of Santa Cruz County.

One son, named Enoch, born in 1877, resembled his father in his search for an adventurous life, and became a deputy county sheriff.