

Here Today; Gone Tomorrow?

The Leftovers From Another Age

Editor's Note: This article appears in conjunction with efforts by SCOPE and Santa Cruz Historical society to preserve and maintain interest in early history.

By Margaret Koch
Sentinel Staff Writer

For years the house stood, tall and commanding, its imposing facade seeming to demand that all eyes turn to it as they passed by on Mission street.

Above the front door the white boards loomed up, up and up to a third story tower with windows all around it. I often speculated—it must be an enchanting place to sit and read or just look out over the town and bay. And I still wonder if anyone ever went up there to that magic crow's nest on top of the old house.

Huge camellia bushes—almost trees—bloomed each year out under the tall front windows. The windows themselves were precisely shuttered inside, in the old fashioned style which forbade the sun to fade the fine old red plush and garnet brocades.

The yard was as prim and proper Victorian as the house, except for occasional showers of red camellia petals. No oil stains marked the drive leading back to the carriage house; the sisters had no car—at least, not when I knew them.

They walked to the schools where they taught; Miss Alice Halsey to Mission Hill, and her sister Clara Taylor, to Bay View or Laurel.

The Halsey sisters were leftovers from another age. Fine women—both of them—in the Victorian tradition. Alice taught several generations of Santa Cruzans in her nearly 40 years in local schools.

Clara was here a shorter time since she had married George Taylor, lived in Mountain View and produced a son Clarence, better known locally as "Tank" Taylor.

The sisters lived quietly enough, spending their evenings correcting papers at the dining table (no one ever sat in the front parlor for ordinary occasions.)

They dressed in somber grays or blues or browns and taught the three R's with no nonsense. At least Alice did. Just once in class the hem of her long gray skirt misbehaved long enough to give a glimpse of bright green underwear.

Bright green! Imagine! As a third grade mouse, much in awe of teachers and their authority, I was intrigued. I never forgot that bright flash. And I pondered it for years . . . so quiet and prim and ladylike on the surface, but things were not always what they seemed. What thwarted warm unruly thoughts and passions lay buried behind the maiden-lady image? No one will ever know.

Except now, seven years after Alice and Clara died both in the same year, I find they had fine Spanish blood; at least the evidence points that way. And then I remember Alice's dark brown eyes—they had a snap to them.

Alice was born in San Francisco April 4, 1879, the seventh of eight daughters. Her parents



were Edward Halsey and Juana Barbara Wesche. Juana was the daughter of Juan Gerardo Wesche, German Consul at Mazatlan, Mexico. Halsey was a son of Judge Charles Halsey, one of San Francisco's first superior court judges.

Alice Halsey came to Santa Cruz in 1892 with her mother and stepfather, John Stock. They settled in the tall white house at 207 Mission street, facing Holy Cross Plaza. She had attended San Jose Normal school and graduated with the class of 1899. She started teaching here at Grant school, then in 1907 she went to Mis-

sion Hill. Alice taught first in the old wooden school which stood on the brow of Mission Hill, and when the school moved to its present site, Alice moved right along with it. And she taught there until 1938 when she retired.

But to go back . . . In 1910 the parents, John and Juana Stock, both were taken ill, and Clara was called back to Santa Cruz to live. She started teaching here in the 1920s. Clara and Alice taught, lived quietly, and took care of their mother until her death in 1936. She was 85. It was a familiar pattern of life in those days. And everyone

One of the most imposing of Santa Cruz' Victorian homes is this one at 207 Mission street. For many years it was the home of two of the city's well-known school teachers. Artist Will Shepherd records the house's unique lines in his pen and ink drawing.

said what fine girls they were. And they were.

Then in 1961, after years of teaching and correcting papers, then retiring to take walks and live quietly and drink tea in a world that was changing in such radical ways—the sisters died.

Clara went first, in January. Alice lived until July.

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