

Former DA gets probation, fine

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A former Santa Cruz County District Attorney was sentenced to three years probation and ordered to pay a \$1,080 fine yesterday — ending a criminal case that began 14 years ago in Watsonville.

Richard Pease, 68, who was District Attorney from 1962 to 1966, was charged in 1977 with stealing \$23,500 entrusted to him by clients involved in a real estate purchase.

Pease, then in private practice, disappeared shortly before an arrest warrant was issued and didn't resurface for 13 years. He surrendered to Santa Cruz county authorities last August.

Pease spent the missing 13 years working as a baker — a trade he learned from his father as a boy — and living in a 10 by

25-foot trailer in Laramie, Wyoming.

District Attorney Art Danner, who personally handled the case, said he didn't disagree with the decision by Superior Court Judge Bill Kelsay to not send Pease to jail.

"He is an old man who has lost everything, including his family," Danner said this morning. "Under the circumstances, I don't disagree with the sentence."

The case began in January 1977 when Pease was asked by Richard Lee Sum to represent him in the purchase of the Four Corners Market in Watsonville.

As part of the transaction, Pease handled the money from the sale of Sum's former market, the Serv-U market in Freedom.

Over several months, Pease was

given over \$40,000 that should have been placed in an escrow account and then paid out to complete the purchase of the Four Corners Market for Sum.

Pease paid some of the money owed but several checks written on his personal account bounced.

Investigators for the District Attorney's office seized records from Pease's office and bank and found that \$23,500 was missing.

Pease disappeared on July 23, 1977 and six days later, an arrest warrant was issued.

Pease apparently went first to Lake Tahoe and then dropped form sight, ending up in Laramie, where he led a quiet and crime-free life as a baker.

"Those 14 years of exile have taken a toll," County Probation Officer James M. Vaughn said in

describing Pease's life in Wyoming. "He lost his wife, his profession, and lived a very lonely, miserable existence during these years."

Danner concurred with the probation officer's assessment.

"The worst part of the offense," Danner added, "is that victims trusted him and he betrayed their trust."

Tragically, Danner said, "at the point that he was in trouble with the money, there were a number of people who might have helped him if he had come to them.

"But he couldn't deal with the embarrassment that he had done something criminally wrong. That is probably why he left."

Pease, Danner said, has made full restitution to his victim, including interest.