

# Ben Lomond House Sheds Evidence Of Violent Past

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If houses had memories, a certain 91-year-old residence on Ben Lomond's Brookside Avenue could think back about long-ago days of grandeur and about an all-too-recent past of violence and murder.

The two-story home on Brookside Ave. was built in 1887 as a splendid summer home, but by 1977 it had become the site of a murder and had gained the reputation as a hang-out of transients and drug-users.

But 1978 marked a new life for this old house, with an industrious couple, Rosalie and Ralph Howlett, buying the home and restoring it to its original glory.

The house is up for sale now, shiny and bright and ready to fill its four bedrooms with a happy family. But when the Howletts purchased it for \$65,000 a year ago, the house was completely delapidated, and gunshot holes in the walls were evidence of its violent history.

"This house was an absolute disaster," Ralph, responsible for most of the renovation labor, said.

It made the front pages of local newspapers on March 2, 1977 when gunfire erupted from the house, leaving 25-year-old David Salsbery dead and 24-year-old Robertson Grand Apsey wounded.

The prime suspect in the shooting, Michael Pillsbury, 35, committed suicide later the same day in a shoot-out with police in Salinas.

Sheriff's detectives admitted at the time there were drug

overtones in the case, but they wouldn't elaborate.

This tragic course of events ended the saga of the ill-reputed house. It was soon bought by the Howletts, and its new life began.

Rosalie explained that the house had a reputation as a drug drop-off point and that neighbors were afraid of its occupants.

A woman had rented the home and divided the many large rooms into small sleeping quarters for transients. Even the wide veranda along one side of the house had been walled in and turned into many small

sleeping cubicles, Rosalie said.

"Yes, the house was well-known not only for transients, but also for locals who used the place," a sheriff's department detective said. Locals would get in trouble, and we'd automatically go over there looking for them."

The house was so notorious in law enforcement circles that it had a nickname — "The Pines."

"The house is just right around the corner from Mill Street (the main street in Ben Lomond)," the detective said. "Mill Street used to be a

gathering place for young people a couple years ago. They used to stand around 10 to 20 deep just waiting for something to happen."

"It was 10 times more rowdy than it is today," the detective continued. "When we arrived and they'd split into the brush and they'd split off to that house."

"It's part of the bygone era of hippies and street violence in Ben Lomond," he added.

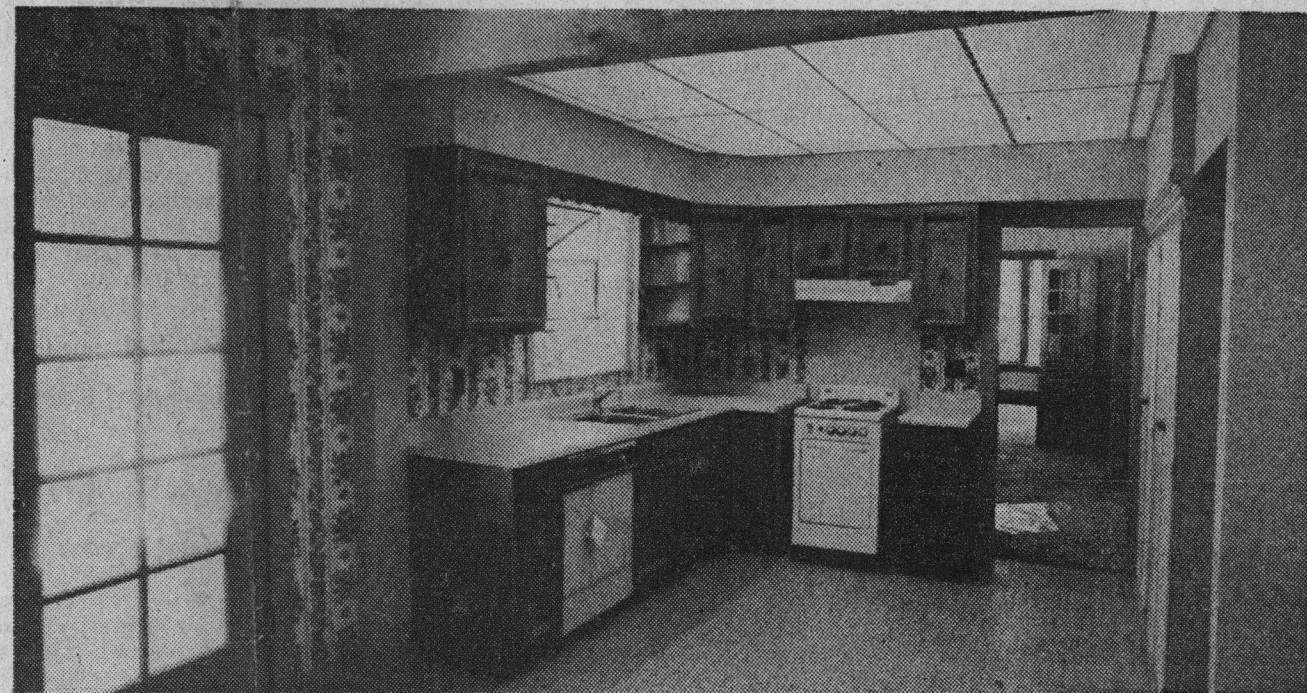
But that era is gone, and the house returns to what it was basically meant to be — a spacious, grand dwelling on the banks of Love Creek.

The house was built by a Mr. Corbett in 1887, according to Alice Earl Wilder, Ben Lomond's resident historian. The Corbetts and several other families from the Merced area bought property along Love Creek when the acreage was subdivided by the Ben Lomond Land and Lumber Company.

Corbett, from what the Howletts ascertained, owned a redwood mill and built his vacation home out of solid redwood. Even today, the house is still known as "the first two-story house built in Ben Lomond."



The home's exterior treatment brings back a bygone era.



Kitchens were never like this when the home was built in 1887.