

The Old and the New

Elegant Grande Dame of Yesteryear ...

By MARGARET KOCH
Sentinel Staff Writer

Many Santa Cruzans don't think twice about the city's wealth of Victorian homes. They take them for granted ... after all, they grew up with them and the homes have always been here.

Sort of like the proper Bostonian lady of venerable years and Victorian dress, who, when asked where she bought her hats, remarked with great surprise "Why my

dear, we don't buy them, we HAVE our hats."

Many of these Victorian homes until recently have been passed down through several generations of the same family. But in the past few years the family patterns have changed. Many younger localites wanted something different. They were tired of stained glass and marble tops. And they found there was a ready market for the old family homestead. Newcomers to Santa Cruz were intrigued with the idea of living in an old Victorian, and they were willing to pay for the privilege.

Progress, however, is a coin with two sides. The same new residents who are eager to preserve and restore, are arriving in such numbers that they have created a market for new businesses, for more roads, schools and services of all sorts.

Very often the old houses are caught in the resulting squeeze, and down they come, victims of progress and the wrecker's bar.

Victorians bloomed and thrived in Santa Cruz like crazy. The best examples date from the prosperous years of Yankee finance. The Spaniards and Mexicans had mostly relinquished control of the land; the New Englanders had taken over and started lime kilns, foundries, lumber mills, grocery and dry goods stores. They prospered and they built substantial homes.

One of the most striking examples of Santa Cruz's Victorian architecture has just changed hands and chances are it will be preserved. Halsey House, at 207 Mission Street, formerly owned by Mrs. Hillis Mieuli of Campbell, was sold to Mr. and

Mrs. W. W. Morris of Half Moon Bay.

Sale conditions followed the special wish of Mrs. Mieuli that the beautiful home be preserved for the future, as it is. She had conducted a laborious and faithful restoration even to the fine details like hand-painted borders on ceilings. Ray Miller of Wilson Brothers handled the transaction for Mrs. Mieuli and Bob Voris represented the buyers, Mr. and Mrs. Morris are interested in retaining the old mansion in its fine restored condition.

It is as it was, to quite a degree. When Mrs. Mieuli acquired the house it had suffered very few unfortunate changes: original light fixtures were long-gone, a lavatory had been tacked on. She put it back together as nearly as possible as it was in the early days of the Halsey family's residence.

The Halseys came to live in Santa Cruz in 1892. Alice Halsey, her mother Juana Barbara Wesche Halsey Stock, and Alice's step-father, John Stock. They purchased the house (from whom I don't know), moved in, and Alice proceeded to attend San Jose (State) Normal School. She graduated in 1899 and started teaching locally at Grant School. From 1907 to 1938 she taught at Mission Hill.

When the step-father and mother were both taken very ill (again a mystery) in 1910, another sister, Clara Halsey Taylor, was called home to help serve as nurse. The two sisters continued to live in the big old house and teach school here, long after both parents were gone.

Alice was tall, sharp of eye, pug-nosed, and wore her gray

hair pulled up and squashed flat on top of her head in a pancake. She never gave the impression of being a light-hearted person, rather she always seemed to be looking for a fly in the ointment. In those days with 35 to 40 third graders to a room, there were always plenty of flies. And Alice usually caught them.

Clara was shorter, smaller and softer where Alice was prickly. Clara was quieter too. Alice had definite opinions and voiced them frequently and a bit plaintively; Clara kept hers quiet if she had them.

The sisters lived quietly, dressed in somber tones, and

walked to school daily no matter what the weather. They lived on at the big old house, closing off parts they didn't need like the big parlor and extra bedrooms. They lived in the kitchen and dining room.

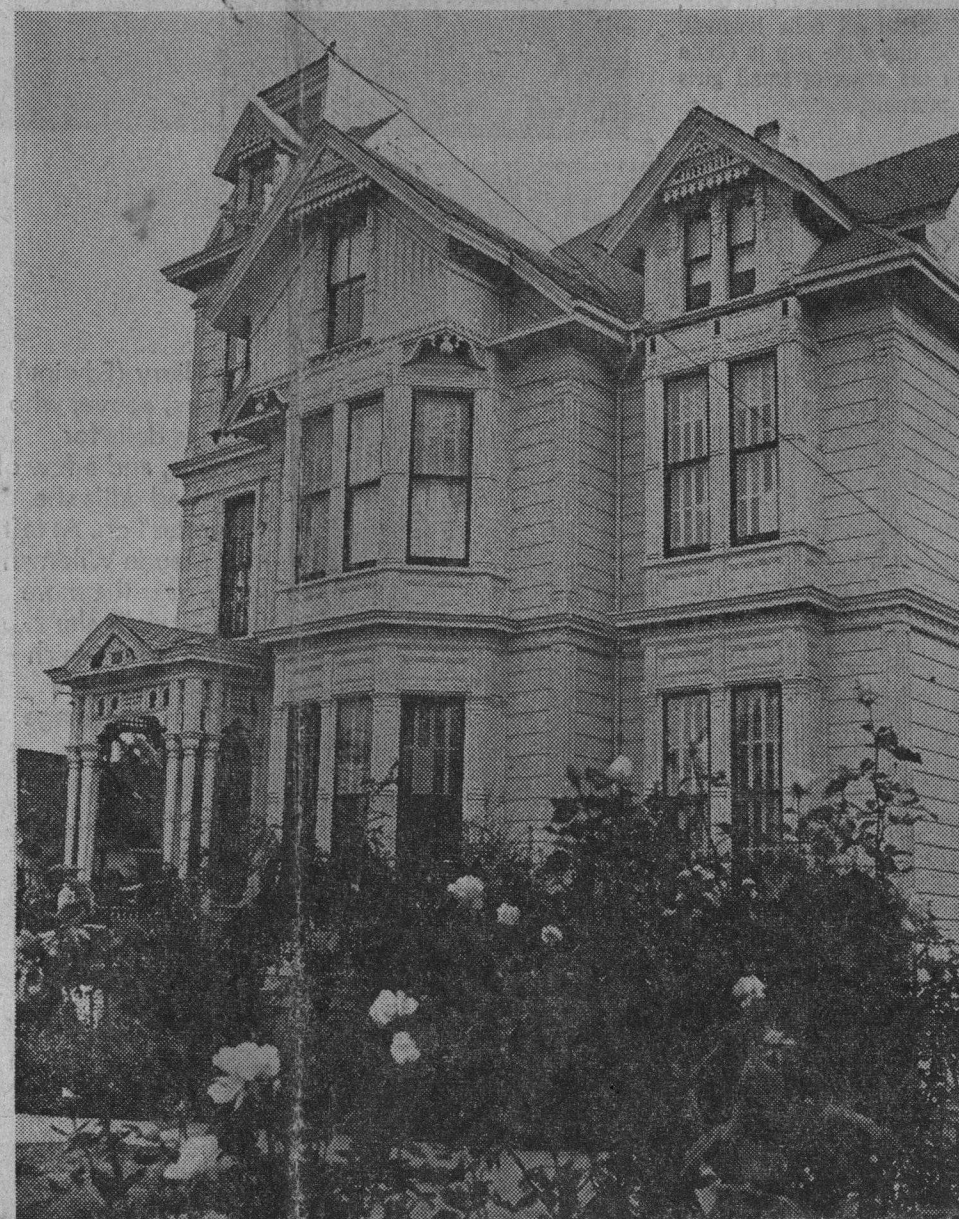
Gradually over the years the red plush upholstery, damask drapes and lace curtains of their mother's era got dusty, faded and shabby, even though the girls kept the front shutters closed tight. They never changed a thing however, except to replace old gas lights with electric, and outside "plumbing" with inside facilities.

Even the garden remained

the same. Huge old camellia "trees" bloomed red and pink in the front yard near the carved entry doors. Out back, a path was kept open to the carriage house but in later years the weeds ran wild.

In 1936 the sisters retired from teaching and lived quietly in the house for many more years. The changes taking place in the world passing their doorstep must have startled them at times.

In 1961 they died as quietly as they had lived. Clara went in January, Alice followed in July. The house then passed to Clara's son, Clarence Taylor, who lived there until he died.



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Gingerbread — a three story tower — Halsey House, at 207 Mission Street, has so far survived threat of freeway and has been lovingly restored.

Original shutters are still in windows at Halsey House, so are the old claw-footed bathtub, red glass door panels with tiny stars on them, front entry carved doors and other treasures of Victoriana. Kitchen is modern but retains old wood, old atmosphere—and original towel rack. Above the full attic floor is the third story tower, reached by ladder.



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