

# 'Everything and More'

## A Dickensian tour of Santa Cruz's historic homes

Historic Homes - City

by Laurel Taylor

I have been looking on, this evening, at a merry company of children assembled round that pretty German toy, a Christmas Tree. The tree was planted in the middle of a great round table, and towered high above their heads. It was brilliantly lighted by a multitude of little tapers; and everywhere sparkled and glittered with bright objects. There were rosy-cheeked dolls, hiding behind green leaves; and there were real watches (with movable hands, at least, and an endless capacity for being wound up) dangling from innumerable twigs; there were French polished tables, chairs, bedsteads, eight-day clocks, and various other articles of domestic furniture (wonderfully made in tin) perched among the boughs, as if in preparation for some fairy house-keeping; there were jolly broad-faced little men, much more agreeable in appearance than many real men — and no wonder, for their heads took off and showed them to be full of sugarplums; there were fiddles and drums, there were tambourines, books, work boxes, paint boxes, there were trinkets for elder girls far brighter than any grown-up gold and jewels; there were baskets and pin-cushions in all devices; there were witches standing in enchanted rings of pasteboard, to tell fortunes; there were teetotums, humming tops, needle cases, pen wipers, smelling bottles, conversation cards, bouquet holders, real fruit, made artificially dazzling with gold leaf; imitation apples, pears, walnuts, crammed with surprises; in short, as a pretty child before me delightedly whispered to another pretty child, her bosom friend, "there was everything and more."

— Charles Dickens,  
A Christmas Tree

**T**HERE IS A RUMOR GOING about town that Santa is coming early this year, to the McPherson Center immediately following the downtown Candlelight Tour of Victorian Parlors on the evening of Thursday, Dec. 15. Conceived as a celebration of light and holiday cheer by the volunteer chairperson of the museum's house tours, Sonja Taylor, the tour will benefit the History Museum, while bringing an inexpensive way for families to enjoy the festive spirit of the Victorian holiday tradition. Tickets are \$10, and children get in free!

Taylor, who is also an owner of one of the Victorian homes taking part in the tour, has always loved the Victorian poem, "'Twas the Night Before Christmas," which helped inspire her to create a theme for the seven houses — all located within a few blocks from each other on Lincoln and Walnut Streets:

"'Twas the week before the Holidays  
And all through the neighborhood  
Lights were twinkling and fragrances  
were good  
The houses were sparkling with a  
certain flair  
In hopes that many would soon enter  
there



A typical Victorian family admires their Christmas. The candlelight tour will attempt to recreate the ambience.

Candles glowing and holly berries so red  
Anticipation and wonder looming ahead

Beckoning us to hurry and see  
All the festive decorations and magical trees

When suddenly in my imagination appeared  
Seven houses like eager excited reindeers:

There's Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, and Vixen  
There's Comet, Cupid and last of all, Blitzen."

"Well, there were only seven houses so I had to drop one of the

reindeer, I chose Donner, and forgot Rudolph. He didn't even come along until the '50s!" she explains laughing. For those who might be slightly disappointed that there are no real reindeer, a horse and buggy ride will be available for transporting guests between the homes.

Though each of the houses are Victorians, their parlors and holiday decorations will be distinctly different — expressing the personalities, heritage and interest of their eclectic owners. And all of the decorative traditions that will be on display are not necessarily Victorian either. Paper and candle luminaries which will greet visitors on the outside of the homes are a Mexican tradition. After the tour, a bowl of wassail will be shared by the adults while younger revelers greet Santa, drink eggnog and munch on cookies and enjoy caroling back at the museum. We know that the wassail tradition dates back way past the Victorians; Shakespeare instructed us, "The king doth wake tonight and takes his rouse, keeps wassail."

At the heart of the holiday traditions is the quest for light during the cold, dark, days of winter, an expression of abundance during the season of the year when nature herself taxes us heavily. For many of us, that light embodies the best of the human spirit, our capacity for laughter, friendship, imagination, generosity and dreams.

The Candlelight Tour of Victorian Parlors takes place 6-8 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 15. Buggy rides take visitors to and from houses, 6:30-7:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$10. Children get in free. Pictures with Santa are \$5. Call 425-7278.



The Carl E. Lindsay house is one of the homes that will open its parlor for holiday viewing this month.