

HISTORIC HOUSES - SOUTH COUNTY
12-1 2083

Porter home is central to Pajaro's history

LOOMING like an island of left-over Victorian gentility in the farming community of Pajaro is the John T. Porter home. But unless you turn off onto Bishop Street after crossing the Pajaro Bridge from Watsonville's lower Main Street, you'd never notice the 23-room Queen Anne.

Every now and then, interest in the home is renewed and the public takes heed. It has been opened for home tours before, as new owners share their pride in restorations.

From 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, the Porter home, 29 Bishop St., again will be open to visitors for a Christmas gala sponsored by Watsonville YWCA. Owners John and Linda Swan will show visitors through rooms they have restored, and tea will be served. Piano entertainment is planned, with state Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, and County Fair manager Gil Mello as soloists. Art by Alyce Vestal Caudill, Linda Webb and Mary Ann Reimer will be on display along with Diane

Queen Anne-style home was moved to Bishop Street, Pajaro, by John T. Porter in 1864.



Varni's photographs of Weeks' architecture. Local history writer Betty Lewis will autograph copies of her new book "W.H. Weeks, Architect."

Tickets are \$7.50 and can be reserved through the YWCA at 724-6078 or purchased at Village Fair Antiques, 417 Trout Gulch Road, Aptos.

The home was built by John T. Porter, a native of Massachusetts who came to the California mining fields in 1850 and to Santa Cruz Coun-

ty in 1853. He was elected sheriff here four years later, then was appointed collector of the Port of Monterey. He helped organize the Bank of Watsonville, and was a founder and president of the Pajaro Valley Bank. His wife, Fannie Cumming, was Watsonville's first school teacher.

A Republican, Porter was a member of the first convention that nominated Leland Stanford for governor of California.

The original home at 29 Bishop St. was a six-room dwelling built by Ignacio Vallejo near the Pajaro River for his bride-to-be. But Vallejo was thrown from a horse on the eve of his wedding, and died.

Porter purchased the home and Vallejo lands in 1864, moved the home, and had it remodeled by architect Weeks to its present status.

After Porter died in 1900, the house was left to his children, Florence, who married Ferdinand Pfingst, and Warren R. Porter, who served a term as secretary of state. The place has many memories for Porter descendants, especially Pajaro Valley resident Bernice Porter and her daughter Diane Cooley.

Some owners have renovated it; others have let the place slip into disrepair. The Swans have considered moving the house, according to Lewis; the cost is about \$1,000 "for every telephone pole it passes."

— MARYBETH VARCADOS



Photos by Bill Lovejoy

Massive use of hardwood typifies interiors of Victorian era homes. Stairwell in the Porter home dominates one end of sitting room, which has been used as pool room by previous owners.