

The Tuttle Mansion story

By BETTY LEWIS

"All branches of work in connection with construction and furnishing of M.B. Tuttle's handsome new home on Lake Avenue have been completed, and Mr. Tuttle and family are now occupying it. They have a home in which they can take pardonable pride, and which is one of the most finished and complete residences in this county or near-by districts . . ."

—The Pajaronian, Jan. 18, 1900.

1899 saw a building boom in the town of Watsonville as houses and building blocks sprang up like mushrooms and the city's boundaries were pushed further out. Architect William H. Weeks, who lived in Watsonville at the time, was responsible for many of these structures including: the Lewis Block, Railroad School, Moreland Notre Dame Academy, Stoesser Building on West Third, and residences for A.N. Judd, Kelly-Thompson, George Martin, John T. Porter, Dr. P.K. Watters, L.V. Willets, Warren Porter — all either finished or under construction in 1899 and, last but not least, was the Morris Tuttle home at 723 East Lake Avenue.

Tuttle had commissioned William Weeks to draw plans for his new home back in the winter of 1898 and construction began in the spring of 1899. Bids for the carpentry work on the house were opened in March with B.F. Owsley of San Jose the lowest bidder at \$5,147. The hardwood finish for the interior was provided by the Santa Clara Mill and Lumber Company at \$2,500 and other contracts let were to A.P. Beck, plumbing; F.R. Bradbury, painting; W.A. White, electric wiring and Charles Ford Company, furnishings.

"The woodwork for the interior of M.B. Tuttle's Lake Avenue residence is from the Loma Prieta mill in this city. It turns out work equal to that of any mill in the State."

—The Pajaronian, Aug. 31, 1899

By the end of the year the large and commodious house was receiving its finishing touches and the magnificent structure provided the passer-by with quite a sight — the rounded porch with its stone pedestals and strange gargoyles; the circular tower, balcony and many ornamentations around the plate glass windows. As one entered the house past the mahogany door and into the large entry hall, the beautiful inlaid oak floor caught the attention. To the right was the parlor whose walls were finished in rare crotch mahogany. The mantle over the fireplace was of special design by architect Weeks and the inlaid floor boasted of oak and rosewood.

Other rooms on the lower floor consisted of a bedroom, living room, library, lavatory, kitchen, servants room, pantry and porch. In the kitchen were speaking tubes which connected with the upper floor and in the dining room one could summon the servants by pushing the electric bell. Up on the second floor were six bedrooms finished in white cedar, pine and birdseye maple. There was also a lavatory, bathroom plus medicine and linen closets.

"The attic has been floored over and is being used as one large room. It is a playroom for the children on unpleasant days and a billiard table with complete equipment shows that the head of the family finds it a place for recreation . . ."

—The Pajaronian, Jan. 18, 1900



Architect W.H. Weeks at home, circa 1900.

And how about the head of the family, the man who had this beautiful home built for his family? Where he could entertain his business associates and friends? Morris Burns Tuttle was born in Iowa in 1858 one of nine children born to Owen and Mary Burns Tuttle. The family came to the Pajaro Valley in 1872 by train just one year after the Southern Pacific had laid track from Gilroy into Pajaro across the river. A brother of Owen, Daniel Tuttle, met his relatives at the station and they all bundled into a hay wagon and made their way to Daniel's ranch out in the Beach Road district near the Pajaro River. Soon afterward, Owen purchased land out on East Lake Avenue and moved his family into a new home.

Morris, along with his brothers and sisters, attended local schools and was to become very knowledgeable on farming and horticulture. In 1878, at the age of 20, he went over to Hollister where he managed a farm owned by his father — two years later he married a Hollister girl by the name of Mary Ingles. The young couple moved back to Watsonville several years later and lived in a small home on East Lake Avenue, which was later moved to 21 Carr Street. Tuttle became the owner of 300 acres and raised apples and hops.

"M.B. Tuttle has put in a horse power pumping plant at his farm on the Salsquedes Creek and is irrigating his hop yard. The pump is running day and night, and is intended to give the yard a good soaking. This is a new departure in the hop business in Pajaro Valley."

—The Pajaronian, April 26, 1894

Morris and Mary Tuttle were the parents of Warren, Lee, Owen, Mabel, Gladys, and Adele. Mary Ingles Tuttle died in 1926; Morris Tuttle died in 1937 and the last of their children, Gladys Tuttle McSherry, died last year. At Tuttle's death the local paper noted:

"Morris Tuttle grew up here, watching the progress and development of a thriving community. He raised hops in the early days and was one of the first orchardists here. Mr. Tuttle also was for many years director of the old Bank of Watsonville . . ."

—Register-Pajaronian, Sept. 30, 1937

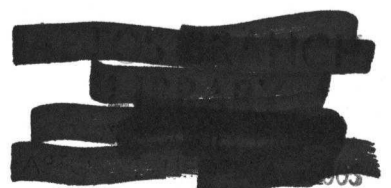
His son, Warren Tuttle, inherited the house and, in 1939, hired architect Ralph Wyckoff to draw plans for the remodeling of the interior of the structure making it into four "modern" apartments with a kitchen and garage for each tenant. Prior to this the house had been used by Dr. A. Ray Lawn, local chiropractor and diet specialist as a "Health Home."

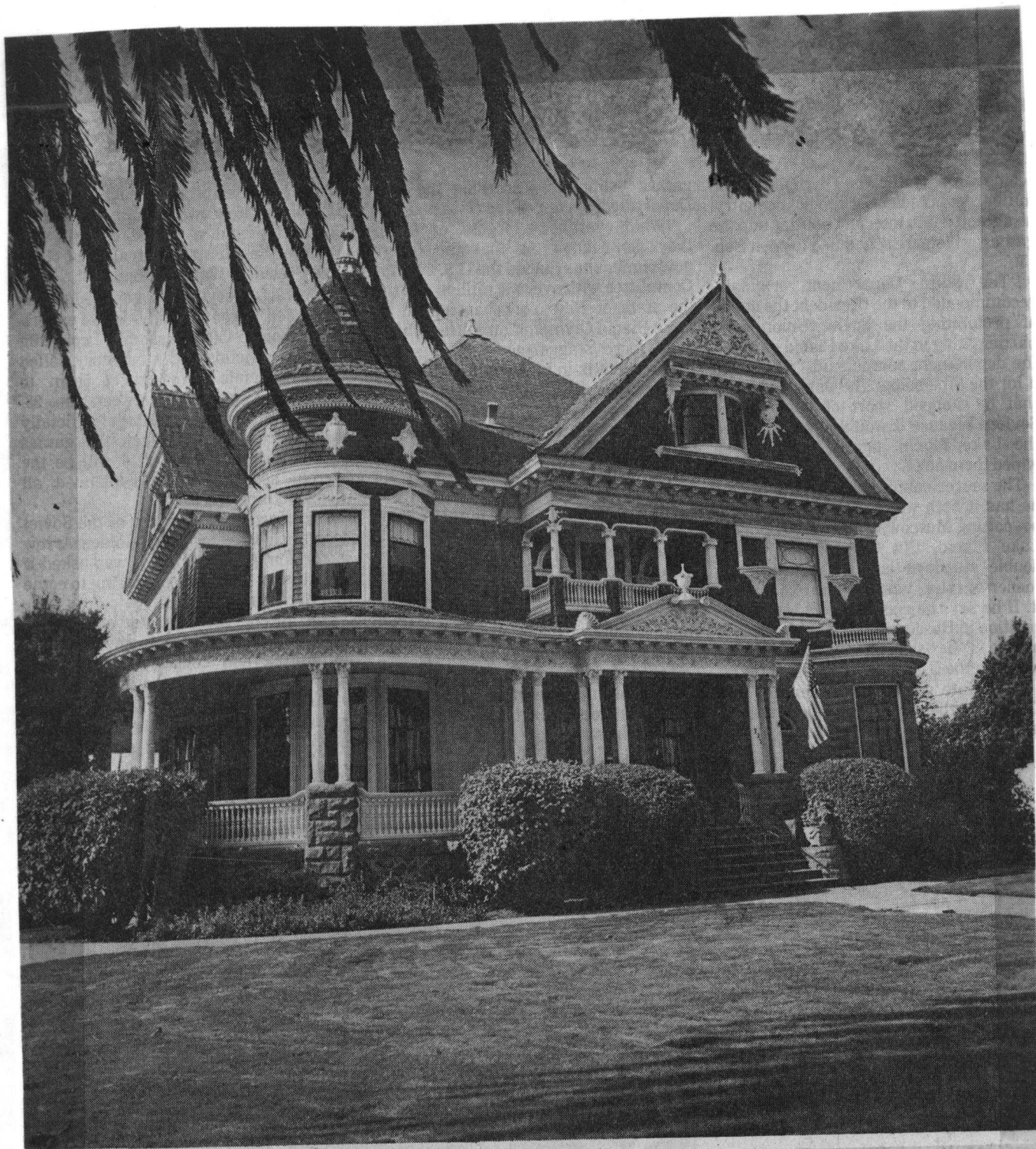
The Tuttle house was to change hands several times after going out of the hands of the Tuttle family and, in 1974, it was purchased by the present owners, Oliver Realty and Oliver and Campos Builders with the interior being remodeled into office suites.

This large and stately structure graces the eastern entrance into Watsonville, providing a gentle but obvious reminder of the city's past and the wealth that some of our hardy pioneers gleaned from the valley's fertile soil.

WATSONVILLE
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN
January 18, 1980

REFERENCE





The graceful mansion stands at the eastern entrance to the city.