



THE TSCHIRHART HOUSE

Owners: Ima and Leroy Seal

Records in the Medina County Courthouse show Jean Baptiste Cordier as the first owner of this property. On September 14, 1847, he sold his town lot "with the messuages, buildings and construction of whatever nature thereon" to Jacob Biry and Stephen Ahr - for \$32! Mrs. Eugenia Tschirhart bought the place in 1906 for \$360 and it has remained in the family ever since.

The house is a typical Alsatian home of the 1840s, built of native rock and hand-hewn cypress beams and rafters. The beams beside the fireplace attest to the native craftsmanship. Ima and Leroy Seal moved to Castroville in 1970, and restored the old house. The restoration work, completed in 1975, made no attempt to modernize the original house. For example, there have never been any doors between the rooms; iron hooks suspend the curtains that are used instead. The steep stairway leads to the upstairs room that was traditionally the sleeping quarters of the younger generation. A space in the dining room was converted into a "pie safe."

In 1979, the Seals decided that they needed more space. An additional bedroom, bathroom, and utility room were added to blend in with the older portion of the home. D'Hanis tile flooring, an old pine door, and a stained glass that came from the original D'Hanis Church that burned down in 1968, were incorporated into the new rooms.

Ancestors from Ima's mother's family had donated the stained glass in the mid 1800s. It was made in Germany and has a colorful story behind its design. St. Elizabeth, who is the central figure in the stained glass, was a very kind, compassionate person who was married to a king, a cruel and wicked man. Elizabeth was very concerned for the many poor, starving people in the area. She would wrap food in a cloth and take it to feed the hungry. The king ordered Elizabeth to stop feeding the poor because he felt that behavior not becoming of a queen. The king threatened to behead her if she did it again. She bravely continued her work despite the threat to her life. One day as the queen was leaving the castle, the king stopped her and opened the cloth. Instead of finding food, the king found roses. God had turned the food into roses, thus saving her from a wicked death. God later called St. Elizabeth to Heaven at an early age to save her from the wicked king.

The granddaughter and current owner of the home, Ima Jean Tschirhart Seal, is a fourth generation descendant of Nickolaus Tschirhart. Nickolaus Tschirhart came to America in 1845 on the ship *Norwegian*. In 1846, he married Katherine Meyer, who had sailed to the United States from Alsace-Lorraine on another ship. Together the couple had 11 children. The family toiled to survive against the rigors of life as it was in the tiny settlement of Castroville.

Sebastian Tschirhart, one of the sons of Nickolaus and Katherine, lived in what is now the Medina Lake area and married Eugenia Beck. They had three sons: Linus (Pine), Gabriel (Gabe) and Ferdinand. The family moved to Castroville when the boys reached school age.

Gabe Tschirhart continued the family heritage. Despite losing his left eye while playing with some dynamite when he was five, he was an avid reader and was nicknamed "The Thinker" by his family. He spoke three languages - Alsatian at home, was taught in German at school, and later he learned English.

In 1927, Gabe married Theresa Clara Tondre, of Atascosa County and they had three daughters, Joyce, Elaine, and Ima Jean. Theresa, who was the daughter of Nick Tondre and Josephine Kempf and was of Alsatian descent, is now 85 years old. Gabe died in September 1970.

Ima and Leroy Seal currently live in the Alsatian home which is furnished in antiques. This house has the PCH Marker and a Texas State Marker, and is recorded in the National Register.