A ‘Dining for History’ event will take place Thursday in the Sesnon House on the Cabrillo College campus. The house was built as a private home in 1911.

Dining for History

Talk focuses on history of Sesnon House

By KIMBERLY WHITE
kimberly@santacruzsentinel.com

APTO5 — Functioning almost as a mansion between Hearst Castle, Alto Pino once was a private summer home that hosted glamorous parties, complete with society belles dressed in chiffon dresses and black-tie business and political tycoons.

The guests were all friends and associates of the house’s owners, Mary and William Sesnon, who built the home in 1911 on land that her parents — Benjamin and Kate Porter — purchased in the late 1880s. According to newspaper accounts at the time, a huge celebration was held to commemorate the completion of the house, with fireworks, a vaudeville show and a bulls-head barbecue, with hundreds of guests arriving by train from San Francisco.

One hundred years later, that tradition of elegance continues at the historic mansion, with brides gliding slowly down an outdoor aisle, preceded by colorfully dressed bridesmaids, groomsmen and other assorted members of the wedding parties.

On Thursday, the Aptos Chamber of Commerce will host the latest in its Dining for History series at what’s now known as the Sesnon House. The building, which marks 100 years this year, has been owned by Cabrillo College for the past 20 years.

Brian King, the college’s president, will be on hand to speak at the event, which will include food prepared by students enrolled in the college’s culinary arts program.

Four white columns flank the entrance to the 16-room mansion, and its backyard features a wraparound terrace overlooking an expansive lawn that’s accentuated by orange Japanese tortoises, or gates of good fortune. The house cost between $80,000 and $100,000 to build and was designed by a San Francisco firm that incorporated elements of Moorish, Mission and American styles of architecture. Features include oak floors and balconies, a life roof that weighed 97,600 pounds and rain gutters made of copper.

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Sesnon

Sesnon House reopened in 1996, and has since been available for use as a community meeting place by private groups and nonprofits. In addition, the college’s Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management Program has operated there since September 1997. The Alto Pino restaurant is open for dinner three days a week and serves as a testing ground for culinary students.

Though the community groups that operated out of the building are no longer there, King said the foundation still has a presence there, and the college is now working to create a digital archive of historical photographs.