



**The Mahon House is “La Casa Grande” of San Rafael  
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Like many buildings in Marin, the Casa Grande building in San Rafael harkens back to an earlier period and invites us to learn more about its history. Originally known as The Mahon House, it was built by early Marin resident Timothy Mahon in the 1870s. Mahon, a native of Canada, came to California in the 1840s and was a San Rafael resident as early as 1851. According to a 1902 *Sausalito News* article, he served on the first grand jury in Marin on June 9, 1851. Early reminiscences and news articles credit Mahon with owning one of only two “country” stores in San Rafael with his brother Edward who would go on to become a Marin County Judge and County Treasurer. Mahon continued running the store and, within a few years, had purchased real estate all around San Rafael including the Timothy Murphy home at the corner of Fourth and C streets. That residence had been used as the County courthouse and Mahon sold it to the County in 1857. He was Postmaster of the town from 1863 to 1867. He was also credited with replacing the old adobe mission church that had fallen into ruin with a “neat little frame church.” Mahon lost his wife, Jane, in 1865 when she was only 35 years old and sold their large, 10-room home later that year.

The Mahon House, situated on the north side Fourth St. between C & D streets, was one of a handful of hotel options for visitors to San Rafael in its early days and had what was described as the city’s “most elegant restaurant.” It featured a Mansard roof with curved-arch dormer windows. This French Empire Style architecture allowed for more usable space and greater natural light in the attic rooms. According to local lore, The Mahon House earned the moniker,

'La Casa Grande', as it was considered San Rafael's most luxurious hotel. In describing the 40 room hotel, an 1876 *Marin County Journal* article raved about, "the superior building, large and elegant rooms that had stationary washstands, water and gas, fireplaces, and bells and indicators in the office so Mr. Mahon can render the stay of his numerous guests comfortably by attending to all their wants." For 30 years, Mahon worked as proprietor of the hotel while occasionally leasing it to other managers for a few years at a time. Later in life, Mahon suffered a number of financial setbacks contributing to an emotional and mental breakdown which led his family to place him in the state asylum in Napa. He died there in 1905 and was buried at Mt. Olivet cemetery in his adopted home of San Rafael.

Hotelier W.B Hess bought the Mahon House and changed the name to the Burchard Hotel Apartments. The date of the photograph above is from that period. Today, the beautifully restored building is home to 25 residential apartments on two upper floors and three retail businesses on the street level.

*(October 9, 2023)*