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CHARLES HILLINGER

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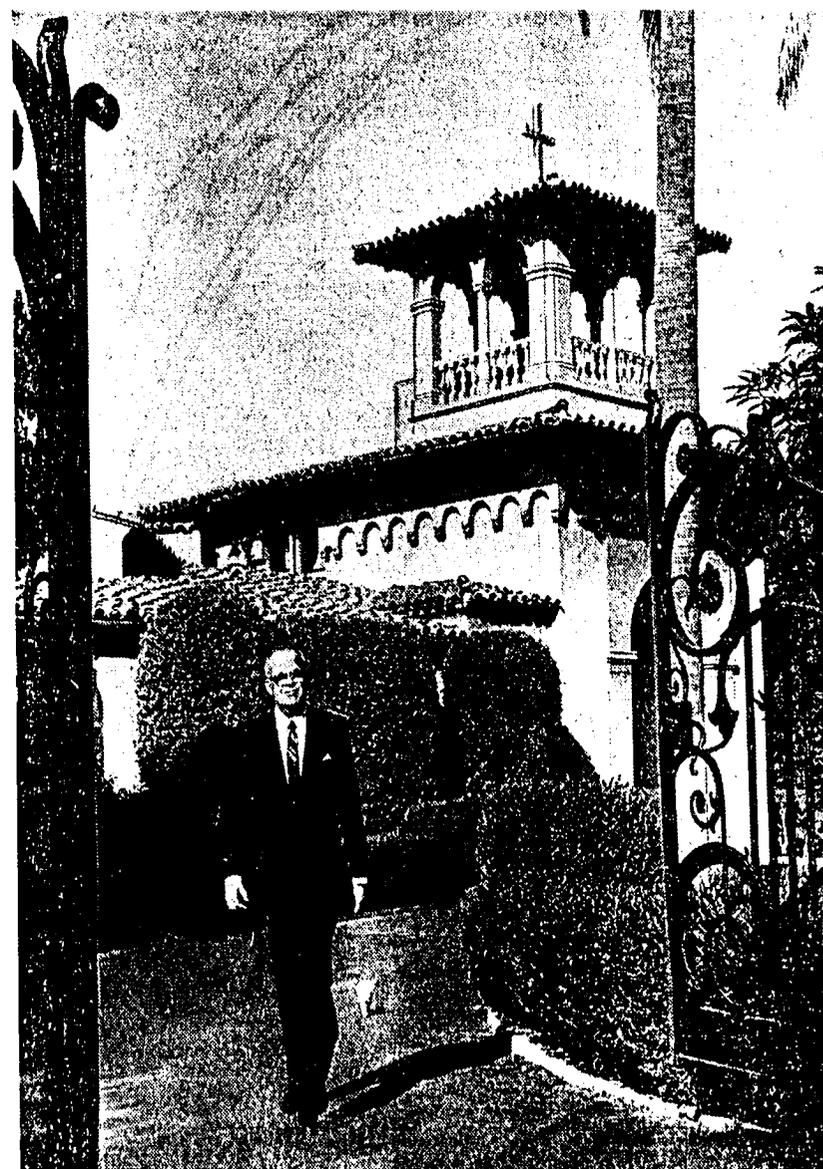
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**SOMETHING DIFFERENT**--This is a 1929 photo of mansion built by J. J. Haggarty in Palos Verdes.

Now this legendary 32-room seaside villa has become one of the most beautiful church structures

in America. The mansion that became a church is the Neighborhood Church of Palos Verdes Estates.



**MANSION TRANSFORMED**--The Rev. Albert F. King, minister, is shown at entrance to the Neighborhood Church of Palos Verdes, originally Haggarty House. Times photo by Cal Montney

## Storied Seaside Villa Becomes House of God

Haggarty House, Old Mansion of Nudes, Is Now Neighborhood Church of Palos Verdes

BY CHARLES HILLINGER

Times Staff Writer

High on a windy hill overlooking the Pacific 25 miles from downtown Los Angeles stands a million dollar mansion filled for years with one of the nation's largest collections of nude paintings and statuary.

Today this storied 32-room seaside villa is a house of God—one of the most beautiful and unusual religious edifices in all America, the Neighborhood Church of Palos Verdes Estates.

The house at 415 Paseo del Mar on the picturesque promontory had all the makings of mysterious storybook mansions featured in countless novels.

### Manor Cost Fortune

It was built by a rich New York and West Coast department store owner, J. J. Haggarty during the Roaring 20s.

Haggarty, founder of the exclusive stores that bear his name, invested a fortune in the manor.

He imported artisans and painters from Italy to create ceiling murals, to fashion carved railings and wrought iron gates within and without the magnificent residence.

He constructed a subterranean lodge and trophy room that led to a staggered stairway tacked to a 30-foot thick seawall—a fortress-like rampart that insures the security of the cliff for at least 100 years or more.

A 200-foot private pier led from the precipice into the sea.

There were a half dozen bedrooms, a lavish master bath complete with a huge ornate Roman tub.

### Seven Acres of Gardens

A score of fireplaces gave rooms a rustic touch.

The style was Italian Renaissance. Seven acres of gorgeous gardens surrounded the tile-roofed, tower-topped, splendid structure.

But Mrs. Haggarty preferred to live at the family estate on Adams Blvd. close in to the city. The family never moved into the lavish manor. Mr. Haggarty died in 1935. The house stood vacant. Years passed.

Haggarty House became known as the Haunted House of Palos Verdes.

Crashing waves gnawed at the pier, ripping it apart until today one small section of piling stabs the sea 100 feet from shore.

"It remained unoccupied until the war," relates Mrs. Gladys Towle, who with her husband, Howard, became the first residents of Palos Verdes Estates in 1923 and know well the history of the place.

### Sold to Inventor

"Then an English syndicate reportedly bought it, held it for a time and sold it to an inventor and manufacturer from the midwest who was a lover of nudes."

He hung life-size nude paintings in every room, trucked in statues of nudes

and placed them in every nook and corner of the mansion, in the gardens outside.

"All lamp bases were of nudes. You never saw anything like it. It was a museum of nudes," explains Mrs. Towle.

The inventor maintained his home in the midwest with his family and visited the mansion only on rare occasions. Then he died. The nudes were auctioned. The house was too big, too costly to maintain. Taxes were prohibitive.

### Rare Opportunity

Because Haggarty House, the mysterious mansion of nudes was to become a house of God, the Neighborhood Church of Palos Verdes had a rare opportunity to purchase the property for \$70,000 in 1950.

The 32 rooms were condensed to 13—with the sanctuary providing a breathtaking window to the sea. The main chapel still has the painted ceilings. It was the 29 by 61 foot living room plus the dining room, three bedrooms and three baths.

The Neighborhood Church of Palos Verdes got its start as early as 1924 when the first few families who lived on the peninsula organized Sunday School classes in their homes.

On Valentine's Day 1937, the church was formally or-

ganized, meeting in Malaga Cove School. Thirteen persons attended worship that day. Among them was Mrs. Towle who played the piano.

The church has grown immensely since. Today it boasts 1,100 members and has one of the finest youth programs of any church in Southern California. The Rev. Albert F. King is minister.

Haggarty House lends itself perfectly for a church home.

Every room in the mansion is put to good use as the sanctuary, Sunday School, offices, conference rooms.

The Neighborhood Church of Palos Verdes Estates (United Church of Christ) is a marvelous place to worship, to seek and achieve peace of mind in a setting difficult to match.

It's different from any church you will ever visit anywhere.