

## BARN RAZING



Firefighters let this barn on Browns Valley Road in Corralitos burn out Friday because it wasn't threatening other structures.

Joseph Lenchner/Photos special to the Sentinel

# FIRE GUTS HISTORIC CORRALITOS BARN

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**CORRALITOS** — The charred hulk of a vintage well-drilling rig, a tangled pile of pipes and remnants of farm implements were all that remained of a piece of Corralitos history Friday.

Nothing could be seen of the large redwood barn that was built around the turn of the last century and still used to support apple production in the surrounding orchard on Browns Valley Road.

The barn, owned by apple grower William Jensen, caught fire late Thursday. Firefight-



ers allowed it to burn to the ground for safety and environmental reasons.

"It's so hard to let a piece of your life go," said the owner's daughter, Heidi Jensen-

Scurich, as she walked away from the ruin Friday.

A century-old redwood barn on Browns Valley Road burns through the night after catching fire late Thursday. The blaze is under investigation.

See **BARN** on **PAGE A10**





Joseph Lenchner/Special to the Sentinel

Firefighters watch flames consume a century-old barn owned by William Jensen, a local apple grower.

## Barn

Continued from Page A1

Neighbor Joseph Lenchner said he awoke around 11:30 p.m. and saw a glow through his bedroom window.

"Flames were shooting up about 100 feet, easy," he said, adding it didn't take long for the whole thing to be engulfed.

Firefighters from the Pajaro Valley Fire Protection District arrived a few minutes later, and called for assistance. Watsonville Fire Department, Aptos/La Selva and Central fire districts and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention in Corralitos responded.

But the intensity of the blaze forced firefighters to back off.

"The barn was fully involved," said Pajaro Valley Battalion Chief Greg Estrada. "We geared up for an offensive attack, but in the best interest of safety of the firefighters we

decided to let it burn itself out."

Estrada also said firefighters didn't know what was inside and were concerned that the barn might contain chemicals. Adding water could have created "a larger issue with runoff," he said. Since the fire was contained, and isolated from other structures and wildland, it didn't pose any danger, he said.

"There was no need to rush into it because it wasn't impacting anybody," Estrada said. "Rarely do you have a fire that allows you to do that. Something in close proximity makes us have to go to work."

Estrada said no water was put on the fire until first light Friday. The fire was declared out about 9 a.m. The cause of the blaze is still being investigated, but Estrada said foul play isn't suspected.

He said the owner estimated damage at \$500,000.

Jensen-Scurich said it was difficult to stand and watch the barn burn. The flames were intense, she said. Checking on the damage

Friday, she was amazed to see partially melted aluminum ladders.

She recalled packing apples and making juice in the barn as a teenager. For her father, she said, the well-digging rig was a symbol of self-reliance, that he could take care of just about anything on his ranch.

Jensen-Scurich said she believed the barn had been built by one of the original Pajaro Valley apple growers. Her father, a fourth-generation Pajaro Valley grower from Danish immigrant stock, bought the property in 1974 and called it Dickie Ranch after the previous owner.

The barn was built of virgin heart redwood, cut from local stands, she said. The floor was made from wide planks, and was built 3 or 4 feet off the ground to ease loading into horse-drawn wagons.

"It would have been a fantastic place to hold a barn dance," Jensen-Scurich said.

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