

# Historical site in midst of renovation

*Valencia Hall and Post Office designated for public enjoyment*

By BRIDGET MENDOZA

STAFF WRITER

APTOS — In the best of circumstances, it's difficult for a piece of living history to remain standing. But in the hills above Aptos, two structures from the 1880s have weathered mud slides and earthquakes to become a historical reminder of the early settling of Santa Cruz County.

Valencia Hall was built by Frederick A. Hihn in the heyday of the area's logging industry. It was a place for families to meet, children to graduate, and folks to worship.

Aptos resident and Valencia project coordinator Pat Manning requisitioned the use of the hall in 1980 for the Day Valley 4-H club to meet in. She started the lengthy process of renovation by simply wanting to upgrade the electrical system in the hall. "We wanted to be able to make a pot of coffee during meetings," said Manning.

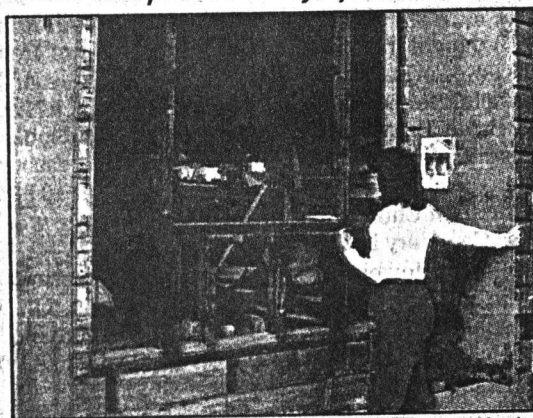
But her ambition, along with that of fellow Aptos Chamber of

Commerce Woman of the Year Carol Trengove, snowballed into much more than new wiring. It started with a new roof for the hall, and the designation of the hall in the National Register of Historic Places.

With time, though, comes deterioration, and the hall was closed in 1986 after being deemed unsafe.

"It was very precariously close to the creek," said Manning of the hall's original location on the south side of Bear Valley Road at Valencia. She pointed out where rows of pine trees had stood between the hall and the creek's banks. Now, after years of erosion, only one row of pine trees still stands.

Sensing that it was a matter of



Bridget Mendoza

Pat Manning shows that there is a lot of work to be done on the Valencia Post Office and General Store before it is opened as a museum.

time before the hall followed suit into the creek, it was moved across Bear Valley Road in July 1997. At this time, the volunteers discovered that the building had been resting on a foundation of redwood stumps.

See VALENCIA, page 10

## VALENCIA

From page 1

Inside of these stumps, Manning found old Sunday school papers dated from the 1890s.

The county stepped in to help with the next project — removing the back end of the building that was added in the 1930s. It took two weekends last year to tear it off, and the new addition that took its place is now near completion.

The contractor is building two handicap-accessible bathrooms and a kitchen, which is expected to be done by February.

Inside the body of the hall, construction is being done on a small stage with portable risers, new windows, and general upgrading of the structure is being done to meet current building codes.

Construction on the front porch

Volunteers will spend this winter planning how the museum that will be constructed in the post office is going to look.

is expected to begin after winter, and painstaking measures are being taken to ensure that the hall is returned to its original details.

Manning visited a "living history" general store in Woodside, and saw that the same kind of idea could be used on the Valencia Post Office and General Store, a small building built much in the same fashion as Valencia Hall.

The post office, which was incorporated in 1893 and turned into a private residence in 1909, sustained severe damage in the 1989 earthquake and was deemed unsafe. This building also travelled some 150 feet to its new site, next to Valencia Hall.

Volunteers will spend this winter planning how the museum that will be constructed in the post office is going to look. Manning expressed gratitude over the fact that the post office/general store project is being undertaken solely by volunteers.

And when the buildings open once again on their new park site, a parking lot to accommodate 32 cars will welcome visitors. As in the 1880s, social events and fellowship will be shared behind the buildings' walls, but with a 1990s twist — the learning experience that comes with being a part of living history.