

Great Scott left name and home

SV group tries to restore historic home

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SCOTTS VALLEY — As soon as Hiram Scott hit Santa Cruz in 1846, he was a hunted man.

Scott, the son of a Maine sea captain, had served as second mate on a sailing ship that rounded the cape of South America and headed up the coast that year. Once the ship anchored in Monterey Bay, Scott apparently decided he'd had enough of frozen nights in Maine and stormy nights at sea.

He jumped ship. And hid until his captain and crew gave up their search for him.

Within a few years, Scott had made a fortune and bought 4,300 acres about six miles north of Santa Cruz. In 1853 he built a house on the land.

For more than 10 years, the Scotts Valley Historical Society has been trying to restore that house, which is listed on the national register of historical sites. About \$20,000 has been spent; it is estimated that completion of the project will cost well over another \$100,000.



Hiram Scott's home was built in 1853 might someday provide a tourist attraction.

Pete Amos/Sentinel

"A historic restoration can be pretty expensive," said Charlie Graham, one of the society members most involved with the Scott House.

"We had one city manager say 'why don't we just bulldoze it? We can build another one cheaper'," Graham recalled.

"But to me it's historic, not just old," he said.

A lot of people in Scotts Valley agree with Graham. Now, with the help of Seagate, an electronics firm housed in a building on Scotts Valley Drive directly in front of the Scott House, funding for the restoration is much closer to being realized.

Seagate recently offered \$50,000 in matching funds for the restoration; in other words, the company will match every dollar donated towards the restoration with a dollar of its own, up to \$50,000.

Hiram Scott would have understood the importance of raising money.

After his captain gave up the search and set sail, Scott worked as a shipbuilder in Santa Cruz for a time. Then came the California Gold Rush, and off went Scott. Apparently he had some success as a miner, then established the first ferry to cross the San Joaquin River. With the funds he made from that enterprise, Scott built a hotel in Stockton.

He then returned to Santa Cruz a wealthy man. He paid \$20,000 for what was known as the St. Augustine Ranch in 1852, and decided to import the rest of his family to sunny California from Maine. As they made the trip, he built a house on his new land.

Considering Scott was then the equivalent of a modern-day millionaire, the Scott house seems surprisingly spare by 1980s standards; about 1500 square feet, many of which were spread over a loft that served as the kids' bedroom. Two additional bedrooms were downstairs, along with a kitchen, dining room and parlor.

The building, now owned by the city of Scotts Valley along with five surrounding acres, was an almost identical replica of the Scott family house in Maine.

"In 1850 this was a pretty plush house," Graham said. Folks didn't just trot down

to their local lumberyard or dial their favorite contractor back in those frontier days. In fact, they didn't even use nails for most of the building.

The Scott House is largely put together of redwood boards fitted to each other; many of the pieces of wood don't even qualify as boards, they're just ragged rails of wood, obviously split off a log. The beams across the ceiling of the kitchen are all hand-hewn.

"This type of framing went out of style in the 1840s," Graham said. The framing and the house's architecture are just two of the reasons Graham and others want to restore, rather than renovate, the house.

"We don't want to restore it to its original state, though," Graham explained. "We want to keep the plumbing and electricity, but make it something like it was before 1900."

"We don't want a two-hole toilet out in back," he said.

What the Historical Society, the city administration and the city's Chamber of Commerce all want is a restored house that will capture some sense of local history.

One of the downstairs bedrooms is slated to be used as an office for the Chamber of Commerce; the rest of the house — which is near the new city hall — will be a museum. The kitchen will even be outfitted with a wood-burning stove so students can come experience how difficult it was to bake bread back in the good old days.

The Scott family, though, never baked a loaf at the house's current location. The structure was moved about 300 yards in 1936 when it began to get in the way of progress and, more specifically, the traffic on Scotts Valley Drive.

Scott himself didn't hang out around the original location to bake much bread anyway. He deeded the house to his father in 1856 and took off to Northern California to try mining silver, where he apparently promptly lost his shirt.

So he made his way back to Santa Cruz again and built a toll road to Los Gatos. Next he owned a livery stable and then tried his hand at politics, becoming one of



Pete Amos/Sentinel

The Scott House is historic, not just old, says Charlie Graham.

the county's first supervisors.

His relatives lived in the house until 1872.

The mining wanderlust never left Scott's blood. "He ended up going to Tombstone, Ariz., to try some prospecting," said Graham.

"He died in the back room of a bar he owned there, practically a pauper, prob-

ably a drunk," Graham said.

Still, this less-than-storybook ending to a colorful life shouldn't discourage those who want to help restore the one-time fugitive's abode to its proper state. Anyone wishing to donate money to the effort may do so by writing the Scott House Historic Park Project, Bank of America, P.O. Box 66749, Scotts Valley.