

A crane lifts the top floor of the historic Thurwachter House while the bottom is rolled into place Monday. The Pajaro Valley landmark is slated to become a bed-and-breakfast inn that caters to tourists on the tennis circuit.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Historic house to become inn

By TRACY L. BARNETT

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WATSONVILLE — Maybe it's a sign of the times.

The historic Thurwachter House, once a bustling farmhouse that overlooked dusty fields of beans and potatoes, took a precarious trip down West Beach and San Andreas roads last week to its final resting place. The view is decidedly different: a hilly field of heather, with a picturesque peek of the Pacific down the road.

The kitchen that served up lively meals to hungry farm workers and served as a gathering place for Pajaro Valley locals is slated to open its doors

this fall as a bed-and-breakfast inn catering to tourists on the tennis circuit.

Run by tennis pro Brian Denny, the historic home will feature turn-of-the century decor with a '90s flair: clay tennis courts designed to attract enthusiasts looking for a slightly different tennis experience as they soak in the Monterey Bay experience.

On Monday, the children of the 125-year-old home's former owners documented the moment on video as contractors strapped cables around the second story of the old farmhouse and hoisted it to

its perch atop the structure's bottom half.

"Now the good times can come back — for at least another 100 years," said Roy Folger, a descendent of the original Thurwachters who once lived in the home. Folger and his sister Laura, a local artist, recalled their childhood days visiting the old ranch, where chickens nested in an old Pierce-Arrow and a flock of parakeets inhabited a cage on the front porch.

The robust but tiny Ella Thurwachter and her niece, Eileen West, were the proprietors of the ranch. Thurwachter inherited the home from her father, German immigrant Fred Thurwachter, and vowed to keep the farm afloat. Local newspaper reports of the day identified her as one of the best farmers in the valley.

"She was full of dynamo," said Roy Foster, laughing at the memory of his great-aunt sliding down the banister behind him at her 80th birthday party. "She ran the teams of horses and worked in the fields right alongside the field hands."

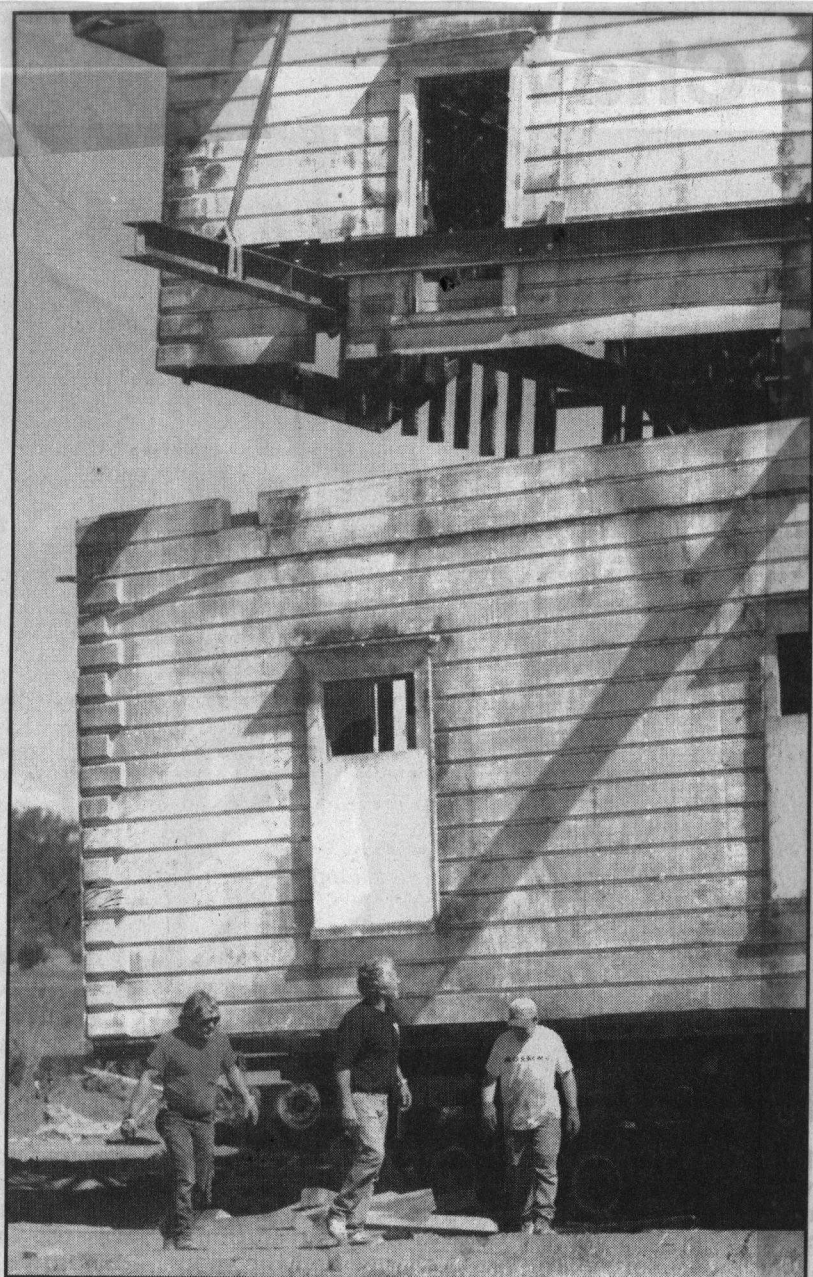
Laura Foster remembers the two women in their flower-print dresses, warmly welcoming them into a bustling kitchen. "There were tons of pies coming out of the oven, and a huge turkey — it was right out of a storybook," she said.

The kitchen will once again be the birthplace of memorable meals; Denny has reportedly hired a French chef who specializes in North African cuisine to serve his guests. He has contracted with Via Construction of Mountain View to rebuild the home, remodel the interior and build the tennis courts.

Denny originally went into business with Darrell and Karen Darling, who planned to work with him to restore the old home and run a bed-and-breakfast inn similar to the Darling House in Santa Cruz. But Darling sold his share of the enterprise to Denny, who will be running the operation now with his wife, Susan.

The Darlings, who are traveling in Croatia to commemorate the anniversary of their son Adam's death, could not be reached to comment on their decision to back out of the enterprise. Denny did not return calls Monday. The contractor, however, confirmed that the Darlings sold their share of the house to the Dennys.

To Laura Folger, the day was the culmination of a dream come true.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Workers watch the top of the house lowered into place.

'Now the good times can come back — for at least another 100 years.'

— Roy Folger

"It's just been languishing for 20 years," she said. "I couldn't bear to drive by it anymore; it was just too sad."

The sculptured topiary and gardens that once adorned the front lawn had given way to a run-down mobile home, and the broken windows and peeling paint were testament to the years of neglect. Now the home has been pared to its

bare essentials — 3,000 feet of old-growth heart redwood that make the old house nearly indestructible.

"It's the first really well-built house in Watsonville," said Ron Campbell of Fresno House Movers, who oversaw the home's 4½-hour journey down San Andreas Road. "It wants to get back to a final resting place."