

Rodgers house to move to fairgrounds

Historical Houses - South County - 19
By VICTORIA MANLEY

STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — The Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds Board of Directors approved the relocation of the historic Rodgers house to the entrance of the fairgrounds Saturday, ending a long period of confusion and debate as to the fate of the 130-year-old structure.

The house, currently located at 832 East Lake Ave., had to be relocated by the end of this month to allow construction of a 16,700-square-foot Rite Aid pharmacy.

"This is a huge undertaking — it's going to be a lot of work, but it's going to be fun," said Santa Cruz County Fair Manager Dimitra M. Smith. "It's exciting to preserve something that has such a huge historical importance to the community."

Owner Melanie Kett had been searching for a future site for the house for months before agreeing to move it to the fairgrounds. She was unavailable for comment.

Though what the house will be used for is still being discussed, Smith says the location will give the house great exposure as motorists drive past it on Highway 152.

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Historical perspective on the Rodgers House

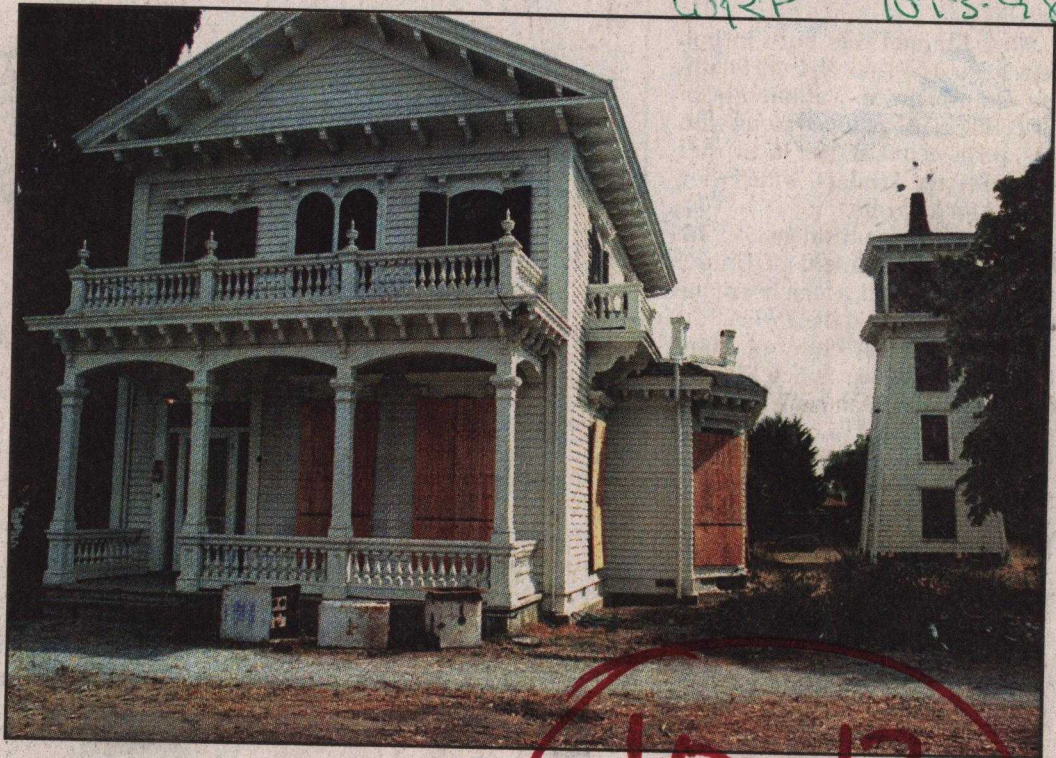
By BETTY LEWIS

LOCAL HISTORIAN

"Next we visited the residence in course of construction, belonging to Mr. J.M. Rodgers. It is all finished outside, the main part being two stories in height, 21 by 32 with two L's, one 20 by 12 and the other 32 by 16. In this house there will be ten rooms below, and four large rooms above. The house will be elegantly finished, and the rooms large and high and all the arrangements very convenient.

"In front of the main part is an elegant verandah, and when the L part of the east side of the house is raised higher another verandah will be constructed of the same pattern. The windows are French and on the west side of the house are two ornamental balconies. The house is very firmly and carefully made. All the timbers being strong and well traced. When finished, it will be a

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The Rodgers house and adjoining water tower, 832, East Lake Avenue, are being boarded up Monday for their move to the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds.

RODGERS

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Smith said she expects the move to begin at the end of this month, as the moving date is tentatively set for Oct. 26.

The house will be cut into five pieces in order to make the move, and will sit at the entrance of the fairgrounds where there is currently a ticket booth. "It's going to be the main focus of the facility," Smith said.

Kett has been in ongoing discussions with city officials and various agencies for months as to the future of the house, and several ideas had been brought to the table — including making the home an agricultural history park and mini-farm on land near Larkin Valley and Buena Vista roads, and a musical or art center on the Elks' Club property,

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— Dimitra M. Smith,
Fair Manager

located at East Lake Avenue and Martinelli Street.

Kett didn't commit to any of the ideas, however, and repeatedly stated she wanted the best use for the house and a prime location.

The Watsonville City Council rescinded the historical designation on the Rodgers house this summer, allowing for relocation. Watsonville Mayor Dennis Osmer had expressed concern over "Kett's indecision" for months, but said he is satisfied the house will be preserved.

"The whole point from the very beginning was to preserve the house," Osmer said. "We certainly would have rather have had the house closer to the city, though."

The fair is currently seeking community members to volunteer their time to help preserve the house and help find an appropriate use for it. Smith said she is hoping a committee will be formed that will attempt to raise funds for the house, as well as help with some of the labor of restoring it.

Anyone interested is invited to call Smith at 724-5671.