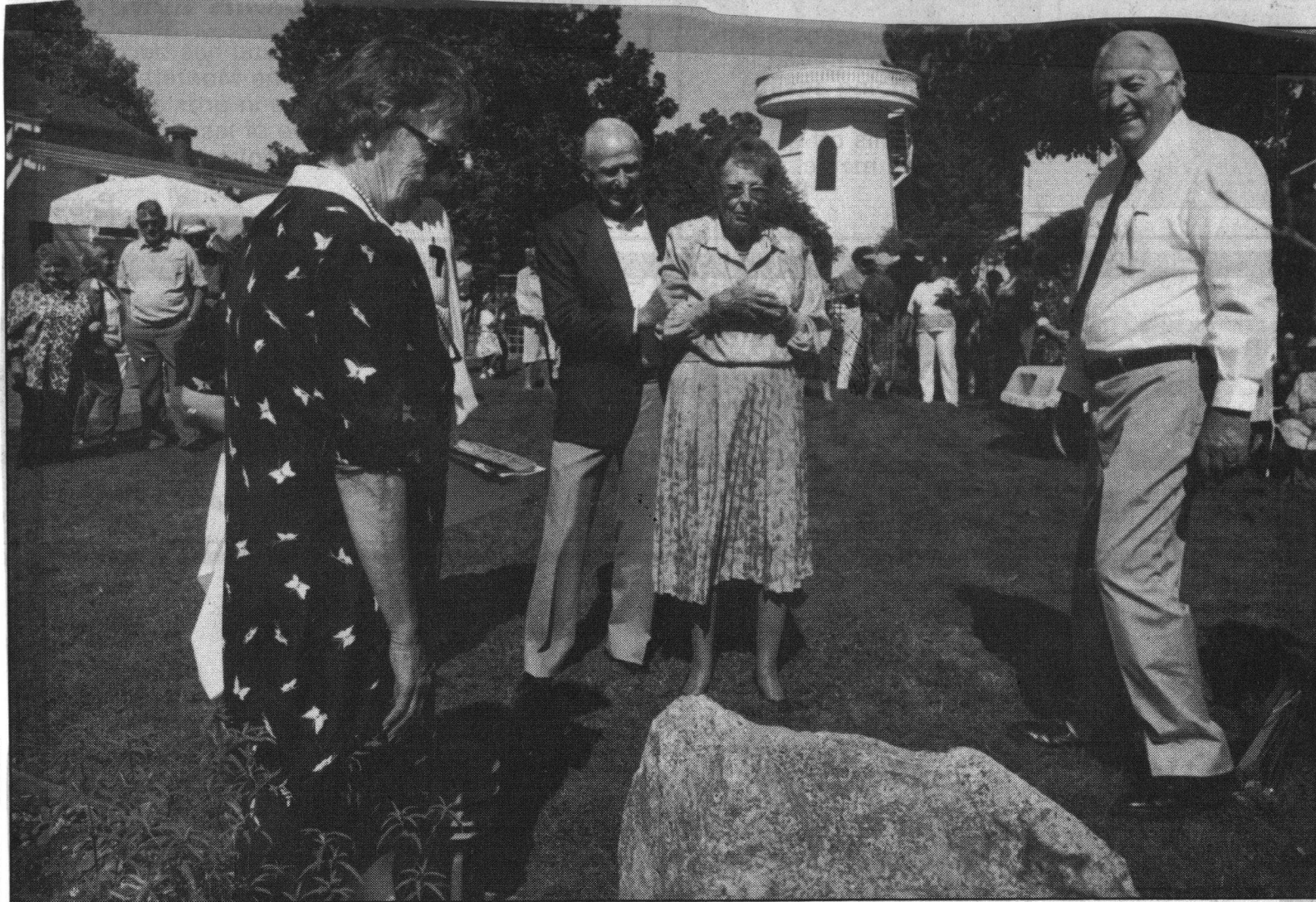


Grateful community honors generous donor for gift of historic estate



Zoe Ann Orr Marcus, center, reacts with surprise after dedication of plaque commemorating gift of estate. Supervisor Ray Belgard holds her arm.

Pajaro Valley Historical Association President Marilyn McLachlan is at left, association member Jim Arnerich is a right.

Kurt Ellison

Mary Okamoto, housekeeper for the Orrs for 40 years, continues weekly upkeep of the estate for the Historical Association. Her son is the caretaker.

The Bockius-Orr house is an apt home for the museum, itself having been added to the National Register in 1870. Marilyn McLachlan, Historical Association president, said the association's offices will move into the estate's first floor rooms, and a costume collection, endowed by Mrs. Thomas Porter, will be housed upstairs.

"I think we have one of the best costume collections anywhere," McLachlan said.

The nearby Volck house has been home to the Historical Association and its museum since the 1960s. But the building, for sale since January, is no longer adequate for the group's needs.

"Our archives are extensive," McLachlan said. "We have more than 10,000 photographs."

In conjunction with the museum's relocation, talks are also under way to use a small Watsonville High School building, just over the fence from the Bockius house, to house the archives.

By JUDY BRILL
STAFF WRITER

Friends and well-wishers gathered for an Indian-summer garden party in Watsonville yesterday to honor Zoe Ann Orr Marcus, an esteemed keeper of the flame.

In January, Marcus announced she would donate to the Pajaro Valley Historical Association and the community the historic Bockius-Orr estate. The 125-year-old Victorian, at 332 E. Beach St., has been in the family 105 years and occupied by three earlier generations.

The afternoon reception was held to formally dedicate the estate, and to present commendations to Marcus from the community, from Santa Cruz County and from the state Senate. It also afforded an excellent chance to partake of some local lore.

The valuable property will be the new home of the Historical Association's museum and offices, and will be available to the public for rent for weddings, receptions and business functions. Included in Marcus' gift is money to maintain the building and its richly landscaped grounds.

A plaque was unveiled, bearing the likeness of Marcus' two past Corgi dogs, Jenny and Gertrude, and the wish, "May the seeds of your kindness flourish forever."

Marcus, obviously moved, said she didn't have to give much thought to donating the estate. "It's a selfish thing," she insisted. "I wanted to preserve (the house). I know Watsonville. If I had put it on the open market, they would just cut down the trees and use it for affordable housing."

According to Jim Arnerich, who appraised the property a few years ago, the estate could

probably pull \$1 million if put on the market.

A head count of yesterday's crowd, chatting and snacking on the lush back lawn, might have reached 50 or 60. But the tally wouldn't have accounted for the many unseen souls also there to help say thanks to Marcus.

"He's floating up there, looking down and having a good time," Marcus said of her late husband, former Register-Pajaronian editor Frank Orr. His ashes are buried on the property, under an oak near one of two wooden gazebos.

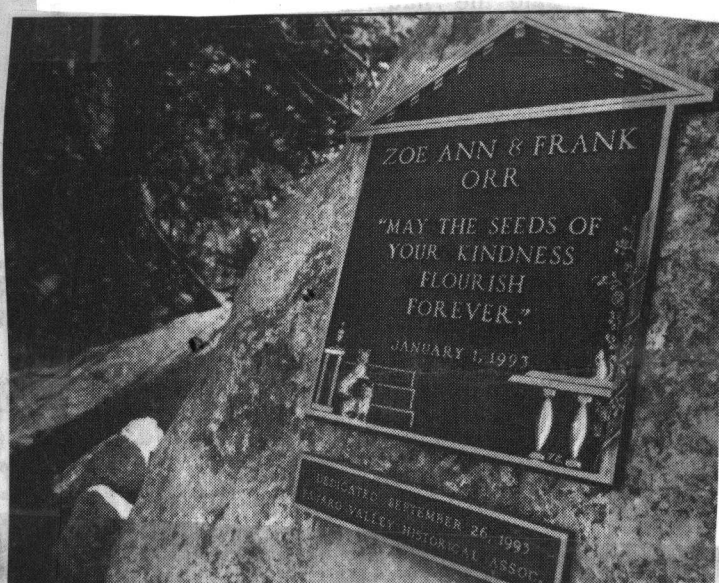
"Oh, the parties that went on here," said one guest, as she slipped from room to room in the elegant home.

The stately 11-room residence was built in 1868 by Godfrey M. Bockius, one of Watsonville's first Anglo settlers, and great-grandfather to Frank Orr.

Frank and Zoe Ann Orr took the house in 1946. "There was no plumbing then," Marcus re-

for an expedition. Claus Spreckles bought it, and Bockius bought it from him.

The room's large window looks onto the estate's front approach, including many tall oaks that Frank Orr once envisioned strung with lights.



The 125-year-old Victorian, at 332 E. Beach St., has been in the family 105 years and occupied by three earlier generations.

called yesterday, taking a few moments from the non-stop greetings and congratulations coming her way. "There was a toilet, in an outhouse off the back porch."

Gardens were added outside, but the Orrs tried to maintain the house's overall appearance.

The only significant design change was to combine a sitting room, small dining room and exterior porch into the current living room. In one corner now sits a piano, a magnificent carved-wood piece with mother-of-pearl keys, built in the 1850s

The woman gestures in a front parlor, a smaller room, cozy despite its high ceiling adorned with a cast medallion. "There was a giant chair here, and books all over," she said. "Frank would come in here and pontificate, getting his editorials together."

Marcus remarried a few years after Orr's death in 1985. She and her husband, Jerry, now live on Brewington.

The Beach Street estate had to be restored anew, after being twisted off its foundation in the 1989 earthquake.