

J.D. Hillard/Register-Pajaronian

Rodgers House Committee members envision the courtyard area as a possible location for small weddings as well as a pleasant place for tourists sit on antique wicker chairs while waiting their turn to view the interior.

# Pajaro Valley community enjoys finished Rodgers House

Historic Houses - South County

Historic home  
opened to the



Former Rodgers House resident  
decorated with original art

RP 10-2705



# opened to the public during 2005 Santa Cruz County Fair

By J.D. HILLARD  
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The Rodgers House at the gate to the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds was ready for visitors to the Santa Cruz County Fair in September and was applauded by many in the community.

Loretta Estrada, who has led the Rodgers House Committee in its effort to restore the house, gave the Register-Pajaronian a preview before it was opened.

In a quick tour, she showed off the most recent donations, including several from Rodgers relative Edgar Dethlefsen.

Dethelfson continues to donate pieces of art and photographs that either belonged to the Rodgers family or even hung on the walls of the house. The most recent donations included photography depicting a tree that stood next to the house in its former location near Tuttle Avenue. The photographs show before-and-after shots of the house and the tree, which was struck by lightning and fell, damaging the house. When the lightning struck, sparks appeared around a gold leaf crown on a wall in a bedroom, Estrada said.

Dethlefsen also donated a lithograph given to Esther Steinbeck Rodgers by her brother, author John Steinbeck.

Also standing at the house is a planter from Eloise Montgomery Rodgers' San Francisco mansion before it burned down after the 1906 earthquake, Estrada said.

The house has also been finished off with antique beds donated by Watsonville resident Wilma George.

Before the house's unveiling to the public at large during the Santa Cruz County Fair, the committee had already opened the house to tours organized by the Steinbeck Center in Salinas, Estrada said. The doors have also stood open during events at the neighboring Agriculture History Museum. The goal is to lead "as many tours as physically possible" this year, she said.



**ABOVE:** Loretta Estrada shows off a 19th century photograph of the Rodgers House's former neighborhood near Tuttle Avenue. **AT LEFT:** This photograph donated to the Rodgers House shows members of the James Martin Rodgers family: Arthur (from left), Charles, James, Mary, Maggie, Malvina, Lizzie and Luther.



**Trish Kett and Edgar Dethlefsen show a colorful area carpet that is part of a large collection of original artifacts and memorabilia being donated to the Rodgers House by former residents of the house.**

Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian



By J.D. HILLARD  
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Florence Dethlefsen takes care of her grandchildren in San Carlos now, but until 1952 she lived in the big white house that graces the entrance to the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds.

When Dethlefsen, who was born Florence Rodgers in 1930, was growing up, the Rodgers House stood on East Lake Avenue, where it currently intersects with Tuttle Avenue.

Her husband, Edgar, grew up on his father's lettuce ranch, which stretched between East Beach and the Pajaro River. Edgar was a visitor to the house as a child. It's Edgar who remembers how the house looked and where the paintings were hanging, Florence said.

So Edgar helped Santa Cruz County Fair volunteers decorate d the house in May with Rodgers family paintings and photographs, hung where they were when the Rodgers family live in the house.

Over the fireplace, Jim Rector, owner of Cypress Construction, hung a painting of the house, painted in 1870. In the painting, the Rodgers House looks just as it does today: stately, white and decorated with gingerbread. But rather than fairgrounds, sheep graze on fields surrounding the house. That year, the Rodgers family won a silver goblet for raising the best yew in the region, Edgar said.

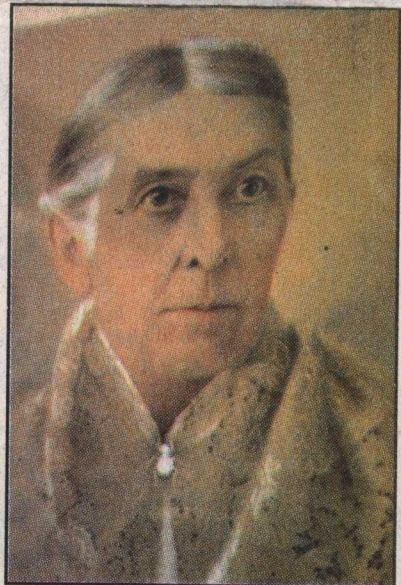
The house was moved to the fairgrounds in four pieces in 1998. Volunteers have been restoring the building in its new location at the fairgrounds gateway since then. This year was the first year the house was open during the Santa Cruz County Fair. The community was impressed with the wonderful resort of the work of so many people.

The restoration exceeded Edgar's expectations, he said.

"I think it's remarkable what they've done," he said. "It looks better than it ever did."

A box of first edition John Steinbeck books was donated to the house by Edgar. Steinbeck was Florence's uncle and a visitor to the house. In what is now a parlor, a bookshelf of Steinbeck's works once stood, Edgar said.

Under Edgar's direction, a portrait of Rodgers ancestor James Martin Rodgers, at the foot of the stairs, was hung. After hanging paintings, Edgar and Florence sat in the bay window of the former parlor and regaled Rector, Loretta Estrada and other volunteers.



J.D. Hillard/Register-Pajaronian

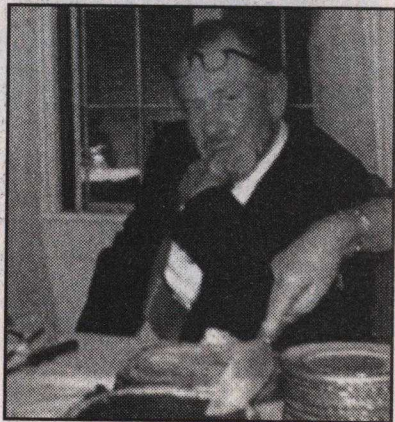
**A portrait of Melvina Rodgers, who began living in the house with her husband James in 1867, now hangs over the fireplace.**

with memories from the Rodgers House's past.

Edgar said he appreciated that the water tank tower was included in the restoration. He has a large draught-horseshoe that once hung over the doorway of the tower, he said.

The Rodgers House was not the most ornate of the residences built in Watsonville in the 19th century, Edgar said. The Redman, Peters, Rodgers and Tuttle families built homes in succession. Each family built their house to top the previous houses.

Work continues on the house, which volunteers aim to restore to its historical appearance. In the kitchen, a Roper gas stove stands with missing parts but with fresh black finish on several fixtures. The stove is nearly restored to the condition it was in when it belonged to Esther Steinbeck Rodgers, Estrada said.



**John Steinbeck is shown dining at the Rodgers House in a 1964 photograph.**