

Moving Out

Darlings hope to move, renew historic Thurwachter House

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Darrell Darling and the Thurwachter House on Beach Road. The house was built in 1872 as a replica of Abraham Lincoln's home in Springfield, Ill.

Historic Houses - South - Co

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WATSONVILLE

THE BROKEN windows, peeling wallpaper and cracked walls of the Thurwachter House will soon be just another part of its history, if Darrell Darling has his way.

Darling has big plans for the rambling historic farmhouse on Beach Road. After four years of having the project on the back burner, he's ready to bring it back to full boil.

With the help of partners Brian and Susan Denny, Darling plans to take apart the building and transport it to two acres at San Andreas Road and Sand Dollar Drive. There, he plans to refurbish it as a bed-and-breakfast inn — the first of its kind in the coastal area of the county south of Santa Cruz, according to Darling.

Darling already owns The Darling House Bed and Breakfast on West Cliff Drive. His latest ven-

ture was to be a joint project with his late son Adam, who died earlier this year in a plane crash in Croatia along with Commerce Secretary Ron Brown. "He was wanting to work with us on something using his hands," said Darling. "He always had a project going."

After the family bought the land and the house four years ago, Adam Darling began his work for the Commerce Department; the plans for the house bogged down in the county planning process, and the building permit expired.

This time, Joan Brady with the county Planning Department doesn't anticipate the project will run into any snags, since it's already been approved once — with the possible exception of the Agricultural Policy and Advisory Commission. That panel will vote July 25 on Darling's request for a reduced buffer space between adjacent farmland and the planned tennis courts.

Please see **THURWACHTER** — BACK PAGE

Thurwachter

Continued from Page A1

Brian Denny, a tennis pro and business partner who will manage the inn, is adding a personal touch: tennis courts with a clay surface — a special draw for folks seeking variety in tennis. The house will be advertised on the tennis circuit and draw from the area's tourism.

The cream-colored, neo-Georgian style house with green shutters has stood at the heart of the 133-acre Thurwachter ranch since 1872. An almost exact replica of Abraham Lincoln's home in Springfield, Ill., the home looks more like a transplant from a Midwestern corn field than the ornately decorated Victorian-style mansion common to the Santa Cruz area.

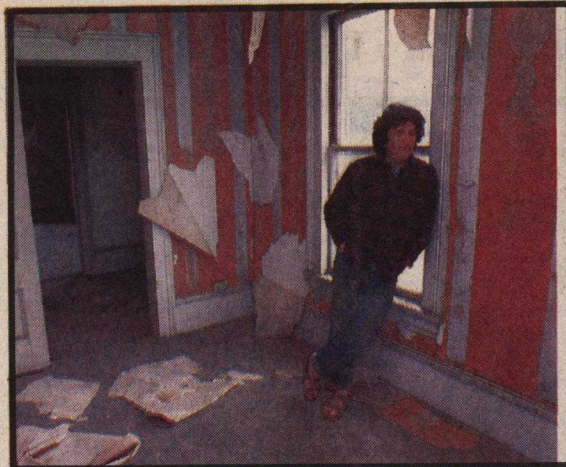
ONCE DISTINGUISHED by a row of topiary hedges engraved with animals and other figures, the house was the subject of numerous Ansel Adams photos. Now, it languishes behind a mobile home and a dusty road, uninhabited for 17 years. Ancient, embossed wallpaper dangles from the walls of what was once an elegant parlor. Birds coast along beneath the peeling 10-foot ceilings.

Just the lumber in the home — 3,000 feet of heart redwood — is irreplaceable. The house retains its original carved moldings along the ceilings and an enormous iron medallion around the light fixture in the parlor.

"It was quite the house," said Tim Folger of Folger & Burt Builders Inc., whose forebears married into the Thurwachter family. After college, he bought the house, where he lived until 1979.

He still remembers the days when the home was inhabited by Ella Thurwachter, daughter of the German immigrant who built the house. Acclaimed as one of the best farmers in the area, Ella Thurwachter "could handle a six-horse team with the best of them," according to her old friend J.J. Crowley, quoted in an October 1963 letter to the editor of a local newspaper.

"THERE WAS needlepoint furniture all over the place, and painted wood grain walls, a grand piano, tassled curtains, and that old rippled glass that put an antique cast on things. It was just a plain ranch house on the outside, but it was done



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Darrell Darling shows off the inside of the Thurwachter House.

up very elegantly inside."

The home became a gathering place for friends of the Thurwachters and for tramps who wandered in from the levee, Folger said. "They were very generous people," he said. "It became a warm and welcoming stop on the byway for a lot of people."

At the back of the house is what used to be a "mud room," where apple farmer Fred Thurwachter, along with his family and field hands, would clean up before coming into the kitchen for fresh bread and dinner cooked on the old wood stove. The spacious room, which still has a rusty meat hook hanging from the ceiling, will be converted to a modern kitchen. What was once the kitchen will sport an antique wood stove and will serve as a welcoming dining room for the guests.

DARLING NOW WALKS the dusty floors and sees a new life for the old house. He is particularly fond of the brick fireplaces in each room, which were designed by Kingsley King, father of the first Anglo born in the Pajaro Valley. King named his son Pajaro, after his new home.

"I'm happy to have been able to hold it, preserve it, up to this point," said Darling. "The Dennys have a real heart for it; they'll be good for the community, and good for the house."