

'It's (Live Oak) kind of been off the radar screen for most of its existence.'

ROSS GIBSON, HISTORIAN

Volunteers preserve Live Oak history

By **SORAYA GUTIERREZ**
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This community of 30,000 is often overlooked as people travel back and forth between Santa Cruz and Capitola. But there's enough history here to make people stop and take note, a neighborhood group believes

The Live Oak History Project, a volunteer group of five, formed in April 2004 in an effort to conserve the area's rich history.

The project involves researching and documenting properties with historic value in Live Oak to keep them from being wiped out by development.

Volunteers gathered information on 75 historic properties and placed them on a "wish list" to be considered as national landmarks. However, because of budget restrictions, the consultant reviewing the properties asked that the list be cut to 25.

Historical researcher Phil Reader has been involved with the project since it began. He says he wants to maintain a degree of the historical presence that existed when Live Oak was part of the Rodeo Ranchos of the Rodriguez family, originating about 1800. Otherwise, he says, "Live Oak will be a memory."

Reader and other members of the Live Oak History Project researched sites that played a significant role in history, such as old farmhouses and cottages.

Norm Poitevan has researched and photographed properties for the project and says the group's priority is to save history.

Photos of properties with historic value are on display at the Live Oak Family Resource Center on Capitola Road.

The 1906 San Francisco earthquake cabins are among the sites included in the display. These single-room cabins were built for homeless survivors of the 1906 earthquake and were moved to 330 Ninth Ave. in 1923 for use as camp cabins. Of the 5,343 built, 19 earthquake cabins remain in Live Oak, Poitevan said.

Historian Ross Gibson says he hopes the list of properties is adopted and presented into the inventory of historic properties.

By allowing development in any style and buildings that look like "characterless tract housing," he says, "completely destroys any sense of the place."

Gibson, a Santa Cruz native, got involved with the project to help reinforce the area's heritage and help put Live Oak on the map because, he says, "It's kind of been off the radar screen for most of its existence."

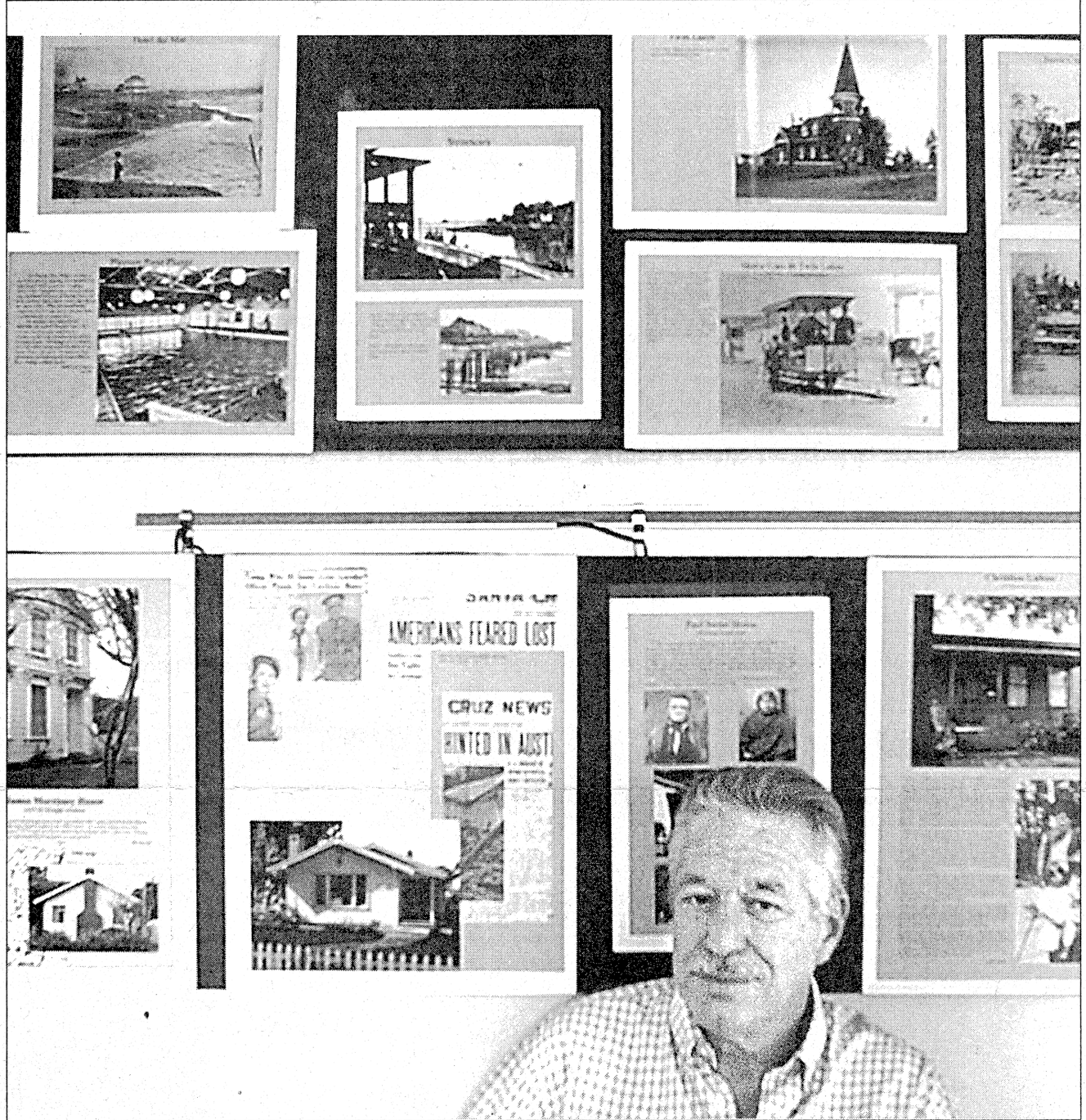
County Supervisor Jan Beautz said there has never been an extensive survey of historic properties in Live Oak to determine what properties are worth saving. The county redevelopment agency helped fund the survey with \$21,000.

"I hope we can reach a good list that really zeroes in on properties clearly worth preserving," Beautz said.

Beautz appointed architect Terri Fisher to the historic resources commission, the group responsible for making a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors based on a report expected Sept. 4 from the consultant, San Francisco-based Circa: Historic Property Development.

"We're working hard to include some new and important structures in the county (on the historic resources inventory)," Fisher said.

Public hearings will be held, but the board has the final say on what properties meet the criteria.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

Norm Poitevan's research helps keep the Live Oak History Project alive at the Live Oak Family Resource Center.



A 1906 earthquake cabin on 9th Avenue in Live Oak.

Beautz agrees that the community's character is at stake when new buildings replace old ones, but says a good reason must exist to save a building, other than

because it's old and charming.

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National Register criteria:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association, and:

- That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Properties eligible for listing in the National Register are at least 50 years old.

Source: National Parks Service