

# Historic Redman House to be Moved this Month

## Rebuilding Foundation is First Step to Restoration

by Michael Thomas

For years, a banner strung up on the dilapidated Redman House has beckoned drivers on Highway 1

to "Help Restore This House." Now the historic building, which sits in a patch of farmland near the highway south of Watsonville, is about to take the first step towards eventual restoration as a landmark visitors center.

In December, the entire house will be jacked up onto steel beams and moved over about 75 feet to make way for construction of a new foundation. The non-profit Redman Foundation bought the house and the surrounding 14 acres for \$1.9 million almost two years ago, launching an ambitious effort to restore it to its original architectural glory.

Organizers hope that moving the building will jumpstart fundraising so that a new foundation and basement can be built in the spring of next year.

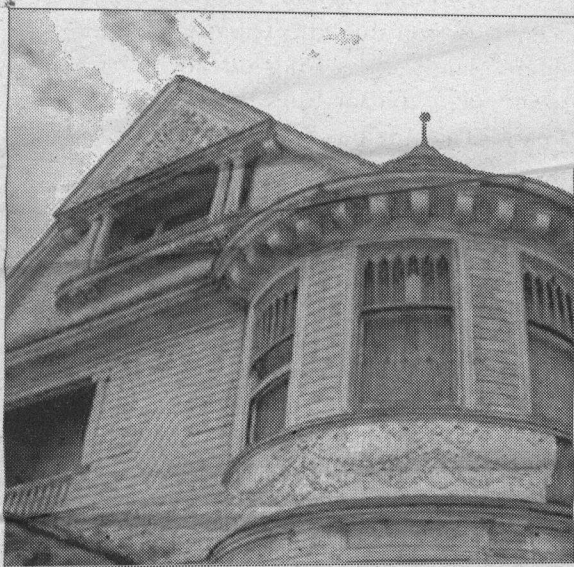
### Crumbling Landmark has Rich History

To some, the Redman House today looks like a crumbling eyesore. But for a group of area contractors and renovation experts, the old farmhouse's dramatic architecture has an unrivaled allure.

It was red-tagged by Santa Cruz County following the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, but Foundation vice-chair Dean Coley, who designs and builds wooden architectural components, says that the structural elements are surpris-

ingly well preserved.

"It was built with virgin-growth redwood timbers and they haven't deteriorated at all," Coley explains. "It's in very good shape, although you couldn't tell from looking at



the outside of it."

Coley credited Foundation members Geoff Scurfield and John Skinner for initiating the whole effort.

The two-story Queen Anne Victorian was built for James Redman in 1897, with a design drafted by William Weeks. Weeks designed many of the County's most impressive buildings from the era, including the Boardwalk Casino.

Finished at a cost of \$3,843 at the time, the house was resplendent with ornate trim in eastern oak, bird's eye maple and other hardwoods. In the 1930s, the home and property were sold to the Hiraharas, a prominent Japanese family who operated the land as a farm.

During World War II, the Hiraharas were forced into internment camps, but somehow managed to hang onto the house. When they returned following the war, the house sheltered several local Japanese families.

After the earthquake, a group of investors bought the land and house from the Hiraharas, but plans for development languished and the surrounding fields were leased for strawberry production.

"Ever since the earthquake, it's been neglected and vandals have come in," Coley said. Now that's about to change.

### After Nine Years, the Real Work Begins

Moving the house this month represents a culminating moment for Foundation supporters who have been pursuing renovation for nine years. During that time, the house has

been listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places.

"It's very exciting," Coley said.

The entire restoration could cost upwards of \$5 million. Not too much hard cash has been raised so far, but organizers hope that making some initial progress will spur grants and fundraising.

Fresno House Movers, a local firm, has signed on to do the relocation work. According to Coley, the present foundation is little more than sandstone blocks, and they've been slowly sinking into the rich, soft floodplain soil.

However, there's enough crawl space to get steel beams underneath the house, jack it up and pull it to its temporary resting place. There it will sit on stacks of timbers until a foundation is completed.

The County has permitted the relocation, but the founda-

continued on page 15

### redman page 4

tion will require further permits, not to mention money. Eventually the house will return to the same spot, only elevated about five feet, making room for a basement extending six feet below ground.

"Adjoining that will be a sunken courtyard where we can have events to help sustain the property once it's finished," Coley said.

The plan is to continue leasing 10 of the 14 acres for organ-

ic agriculture. Organizers then hope to establish a park on the other four acres, with the house open as a regional center for education and visitors.

A replica water tower will house restrooms on the grounds.

In the coming weeks, the brick chimneys will be carefully removed and preserved for later reconstruction. The move has been tentatively scheduled for Dec. 9 or Dec. 16. More information about the project and the house's history can be found at [www.RedmanHouse.com](http://www.RedmanHouse.com). ■