

# New life for old hall

## Coalition celebrates 20-year restoration

By APRIL JOHNSON  
Sentinel staff writer

APTOS — Three years of old-fashioned elbow grease is finally paying off for century-old Valencia Hall and its team of renovators.

Today, the hall's doors will swing open to the public for the first-time since disrepair forced its closure in 1986.

For a quarter of a century, the Valencia Hall Restoration Coalition has pounded nails, poured concrete and slathered paint in anticipation of the hall reopening as a community center. The volunteers even moved the building across the street, in 1997, to save it from Valencia Creek, which was creeping dangerously close to the old hall.

"This is not something we ever really thought we could finish," volunteer Pat Manning said. "But we did it piece by piece."

Manning and other volunteers began working to improve the hall 20 years ago when they were 4-H leaders, Manning said.

"We couldn't make coffee without blowing a fuse," she said.

That rewiring project eventually grew into a coalition that would work to restore the building.

The hall was built as a general store in 1882 by legendary timber man and businessman Fredrick Hihn.

Hihn had transformed the area in the Aptos hills into a booming logging town and the general store and post office was soon converted to a community center. At night, dancers from Watsonville and Santa Cruz entertained the town's lumberjacks and smoothed the floor boards with their fast-moving feet.

However, by the end of the 1890s, the community logged itself out of existence and the Hihn's sawmill closed down. Apple trees grew where the once majestic redwoods had stood and the town turned to farming. The hall became a meeting place for the Valencia Farm Bureau.

The hall was deeded to the county in 1976 and became a historic landmark before its closure in the mid-1980s.

Since then, the coalition of community volunteers has worked most every Saturday to re-open the hall as a place where youth groups can meet. In addition to the people power, the restoration was made possible by a combination of Measure E earthquake repair money and state Historic Preservation Office grants.

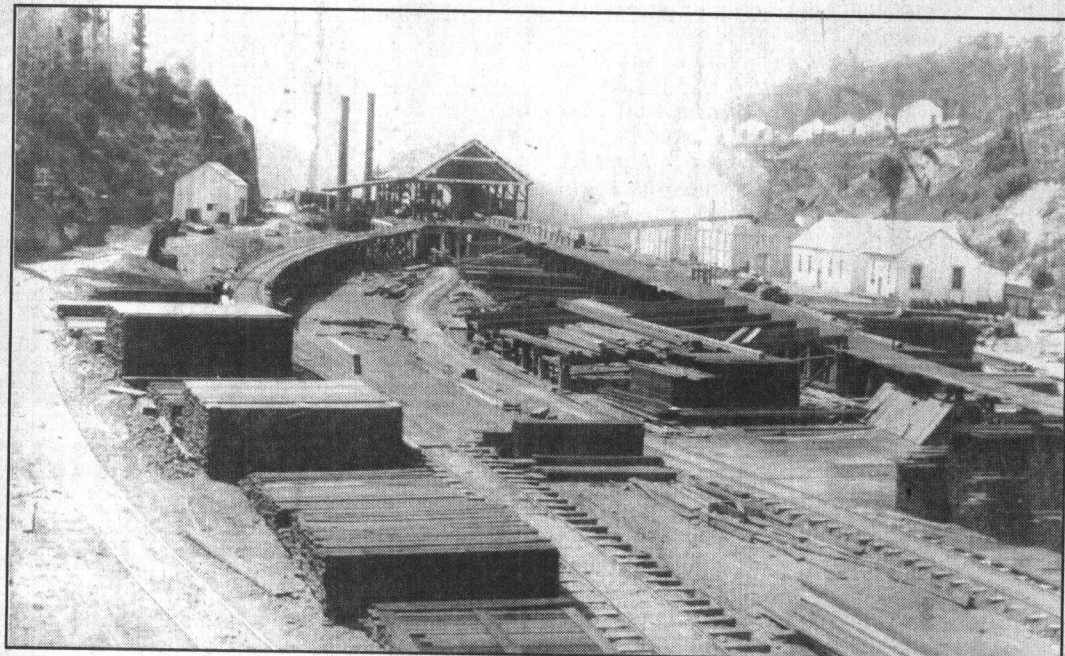
Today's grand re-opening will begin with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 10 a.m. State Sen. Bruce McPherson, R-Santa Cruz, county Supervisor Walt Symons, and a representative from Assemblyman Fred Keeley's office, D-Boulder Creek, will be on hand to honor the volunteers.

A Halloween party will follow tonight.

Valencia Hall is at 2555 Valencia Road between Bear Valley Road and Cox Road in Aptos.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel



Carol Trens-gove, above, works on the Valencia Hall landscaping in preparation for today's ribbon cutting, while Mark Lael passes by on a tractor. At left, the Valencia area at the turn of the century.