



Kurt Ellison

Building designer Will Maertens stands in front of damaged adobe.

Fate of 'historical' adobe at issue

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STAFF WRITER

Watsonville city officials have agreed to temporarily halt the demolition of an earthquake-damaged adobe house due to the last-minute efforts of a local building designer, who says it has historical value.

But the building designer, Will Maertens, has run up against the owners' plans for a secure retirement, and that does not sit too well with them.

"It's a bunch of malarkey," Ruth Polfus, who with her husband, Thomas, bought the tiny house at 514 Blackburn Street in 1957 and have rented it out since then.

Maertens has convinced City Attorney Luis Hernandez to

send away the wrecking crews until the house can be examined for historical value. The crews have already removed the house's roof, but the beams and walls that survived the Oct. 17 earthquake are still standing.

Maertens says that the house is the oldest adobe building left in Santa Cruz County, and that its three-foot-thick walls and hand-hewn beams are restorable.

One of the beams has a name and date carved into it: Jesus Vallejo 1820.

Ruth Polfus said this morning that no one ever showed any historical interest in the house before, mainly because it's not an original and is not

listed on the National Historic Registry.

It was built in the early 1900s out of the bricks and beams of home that could have been first built around 1820. The original home was at a different site, and its parts were carted to the Blackburn Street lot after the 1906 earthquake by a Dr. Saxton Pope, Maertens said.

Polfus said when she and her husband bought the house, it had only two rooms. They added on the other two rooms and converted a sun porch into another room, so most of the house isn't even made from adobe bricks. The Oct. 17 earthquake destroyed most of the adobe bricks that are

there, with each aftershock further crumbling a chimney that formed the middle of the house.

From October to February, she said, the house was vacant and uninhabitable, and was subject to rain and other elements that further damaged it.

"When each individual brick is falling apart, what are you going to do?" Polfus said. "There's nothing there to work with."

Polfus said she doesn't think the house is anyone else's business. The lot is very small, she said. "But it's enough to build us a small home to live in — this was supposed to be security for us when we got to be the age we are now."

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