

Valencia center in peril

A near - century - old building that's played an important part in the county's history is in jeopardy, and a group of people is scurrying around to see what can be done to save it.

Esthetically, it's not the most imposing building in the county, but it is a sentimental favorite of many. It's the Valencia Farm Bureau Center building which sits shaded by a huge oak tree on the banks of Bear Creek at Valencia and Bear Valley Roads.

The Valencia Farm Center has been notified that it has until Jan. 28 to either move the old building, sell it for \$100 to the owner of the property on which it sits or to have it torn down.

Farm center members haven't the means to do the first — even if it could be done, and they don't like the other choices. So they're making an appeal to anyone who can help save the old frame structure and perhaps even restore it.

A last-minute cavalry charge by the county may be just the thing to accomplish that. At least Supervisor Dale Dawson is marshaling his troopers to have a try at it.

The building's plight was brought to light recently by Don Galbraith, president of the Valencia Farm Center. He took over the reigns of the organization when the former president, Col. Henry Berber, died in October.

The Valencia Farm Center owns the building. It was given to them by Theresa Hihn (Moore) in 1933. They were given the building, but not the land it sits on. The deed stipulates that upon 60 days notice, the center must move the building, or allow the landowner to demolish it.

The new landowner, John Newell of Mountain View, is exercising that option.

The building goes back to the 1880s, according to Rocky Lydon, history professor at Cabrillo College. It was built as part of the Hihn lumbering enterprise, being used primarily as a dining hall for loggers, some say. Across the street is a small residence which at one time was a general store and stage coach stop a bit before and after the turn of the century.

As it stands today, the building shows its age, but it should, for it's been in continuous use for all those decades. The Valencia Farm Center uses it for its meetings, of course, as well as for

other community get - togethers. The 4-H Club uses it, also.

Inside, it is one big room with 16-foot ceilings, a stage and cedar floors. It's an old-fashioned, well-used old building.

On Nov. 28 Galbraith got a letter from the lawyers of the new owner, giving the 60 days notice for removal, sale or demolition of the building. The owner, Newell, bought the land about a year ago.

Galbraith said that since he bought the land, Newell has been "very compatible," allowing the center to continue to use the building. But now, he wants it removed.

Galbraith said Newell told him he can't give the farm center the little patch of ground the building sits on, because the land is zoned for 20-acre minimum building sites, and to give up even the quarter - acre under the building would put the whole parcel below that limit.

Even so, Galbraith said the farm center doesn't have the money to buy any land.

Galbraith said that because the building is "historically significant," it should be saved. How to save it is another thing.

Moving it is not a practical solution, he said. "I'm a construction man, and I'd hate to have to move it," he declared. Besides which, he feels it "shouldn't be moved from its historical place. It should be taken over in a community way . . . it would be better for it to stay where it is and be improved."

There are problems involved in saving it, too. The building doesn't have a full foundation under it, there are limits to its being used as a place for public assembly, its restroom facilities are inadequate and the only parking is across the road on another man's property.

Still, it's well worth saving, Galbraith feels.

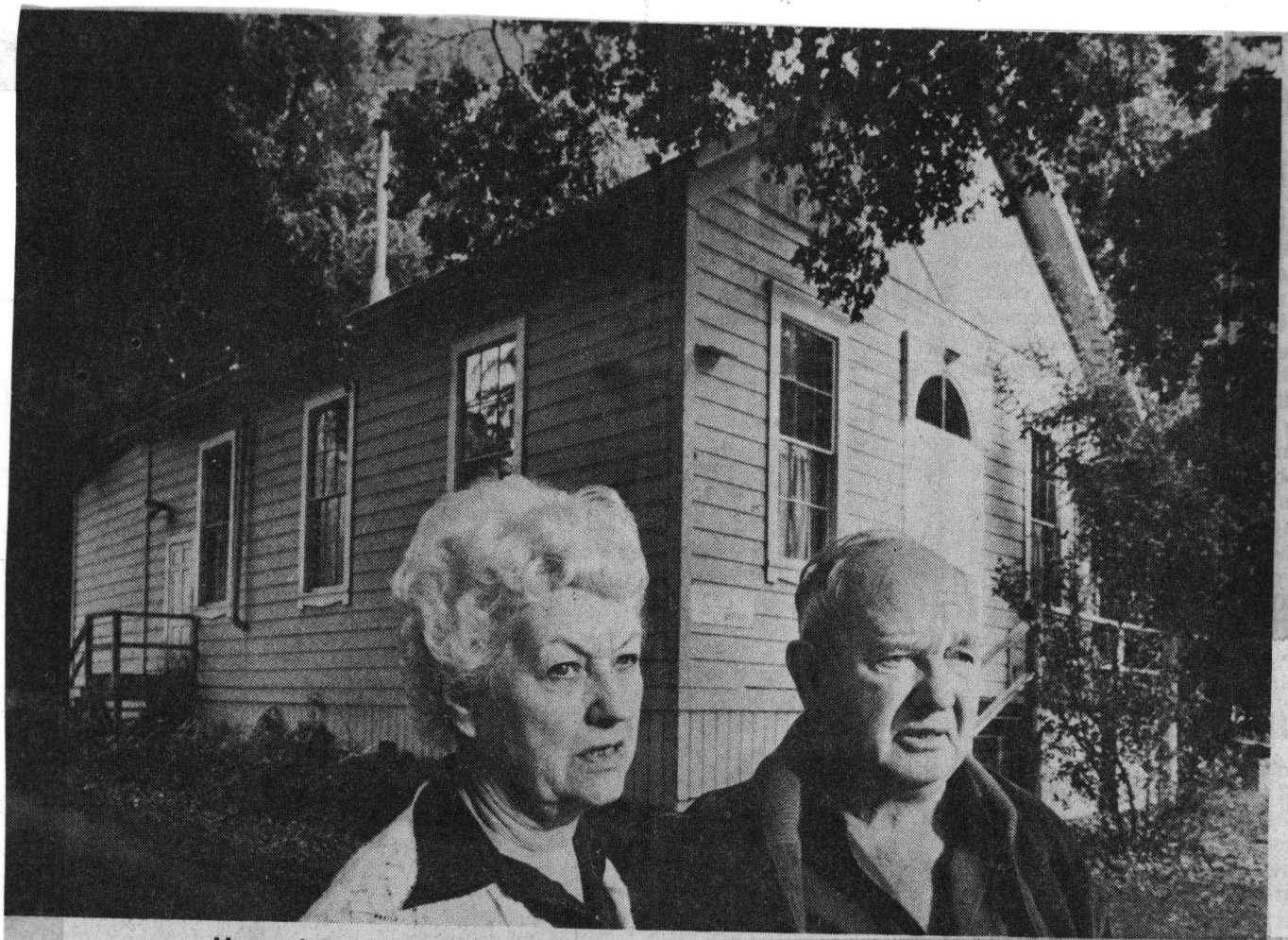
So does Jack Newell, another resident in the Valencia area. Newell — no relation to the man who owns the property — is sanitation superintendent for the county department of public works. It is he who went to Dawson to see what help the county might give.

Newell and Dawson met Monday, at which time Newell presented the case. As a result, Dawson called another meeting for today at which there will be representatives from the planning and parks and recreation departments "to see what they can do to help out."

"It was a big step to get them behind the project," Newell said. "It's nice to see they're willing to get in there and do some ball - carrying."

In the meantime, the Valencia Farm Center is sitting tight to see what develops. It has held one meeting to discuss the problem, and will meet again in January to see what has happened in the interim. All are hoping, of course, that today's meeting with county officials will result in the building staying where it is and serving the people for another hundred years.

REFERENCE



Mr. and Mrs. Don Galbraith are seeking ways to save the old building.