

Home is where the schoolbell rang



Ocean View School, Bonny Doon, 1938

Rydell collection

By BARBARA BURKLO
Sentinel staff writer

WALLS OF OLD schoolhouses are made of more than wood and plaster. If the thousands of sounds they store could be played as recordings, they would sing with the voices of hundreds of children, reciting their lessons and chattering at the end of the day. If the thousands of pictures they hold could be developed, the prints would fill scrapbooks beyond price.

Because of the silent echoes, rich memories and sentimental feelings connected to old schoolhouses, no one really wants to tear them down. And so, many are saved, and turned into homes.

In Santa Cruz County, a number of people are living in these old structures. A series about some of the schoolhouse-homes and their occupants begins today.

According to information from the Santa Cruz County Historical Museum, 16 remain intact in the Pajaro Valley — some as private residences. Carlton, Calabasas, Green Valley, Ferndale, Eureka Canyon, Hazel Dell, Negro, Browns Valley, Larkin Valley, Railroad and Oakdale are among those converted to homes.

Roache School is used as a recreation room for a church and Amesti School is a children's nursery school. Pleasant Valley School has had several commercial uses and also has been used as a polling place. Casserly School is a clubhouse and community center. San Andreas is in commercial use.

Bonnie Stibbe, an associate planner assigned to Santa Cruz County's Historic Preservation Program, provided several others in the area — Pleasant Valley, Mountain, Bonny Doon and Burrell, all private residences. Seaside School in Swanton is a residence-business combination.

Most of the buildings were erected in the mid-to-late 1800s and were in use until the 1940s, when school districts consolidated and built large, regional facilities.

The Rydell home

By BARBARA BURKLO
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BATHING in School Creek, waking in the night to see moonlight streaming through a hole in the schoolhouse ceiling — these are some of the long-ago memories shared by Roy and Frances Rydell, who bought the old Ocean View School in Bonny Doon 39 years ago and have been living there ever since.

There was no running water in the main building and the bathrooms were in small, adjacent structures when the couple purchased the school for \$1,500 in 1949.

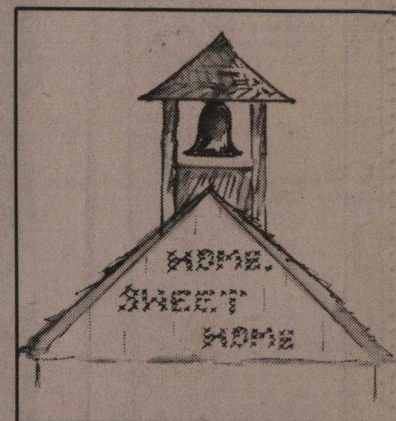
That was a lot of money for a budding architect and his wife to plunk down — especially when so much work was needed to make the school into a real home.

According to Roy, when Ocean View School was built in 1884, the surrounding forests had been logged off and it actually had an ocean view. Now, majestic trees stand between the schoolhouse-

When the county began consolidating school districts and the school was closed, a local family purchased it, hoping the community would want it for a center. But little or no interest was shown, so the family sold it to the Rydells, who were living in Santa Cruz at the time. Roy had launched the architect's career that he enjoys to this day, and Frances was working as a legal secretary. A few years later, she became one of the first employees at UC Santa Cruz, working for campus architect Jack Wagstaff.

"We fell in love with Bonny Doon," Frances recalled. "There was a nice scale to the school," Roy added. "We bought it through Charles Hall, son of M.C. Hall, as Realtor, and we're still friends."

When they purchased it, the schoolhouse was sitting on redwood logs instead of a foundation. The Rydells had the house rotated, so the longer side would face the south, and a foundation put in.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Where schoolkids' pensive gaze once wandered to the sun-filled play yard, living room window in converted Ocean View Schoolhouse now opens to Rydells' old-fashioned garden outside.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

School/ Handy architect knew his ABCs

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To hear the couple's story, fixing up the old school was almost more fun than work.

"An aunt and uncle of mine would come up from Southern California to help," Frances said, "and they always brought food. My aunt and I took all the square-headed nails out of the old lumber — nothing was wasted.

"We lived, slept, ate, and stored the building materials in this room," she said, looking around the original schoolroom which became the living room. "Friends would come on weekends, bring their sleeping bags, and help. We had stacked wallboard we used as a table.

"I can remember sleeping under where a part of the roof was off, and seeing the moonlight.

"We had no water, so we took our baths in School Creek, which is on the property. There was a little waterfall where we got our water to drink. Occasionally, there were little crayfish there."

Finding a permanent water source was easy.

"We had a neighbor, Mr. Ford, who was a water witch," Roy said. "He witched a location for a well, and when we dug the hole, we hit water at just a few feet. Later, we had a drilled well."

Except for the electricity and plumbing, Roy and his volunteer helpers did all the early work on the house. Final stage was com-

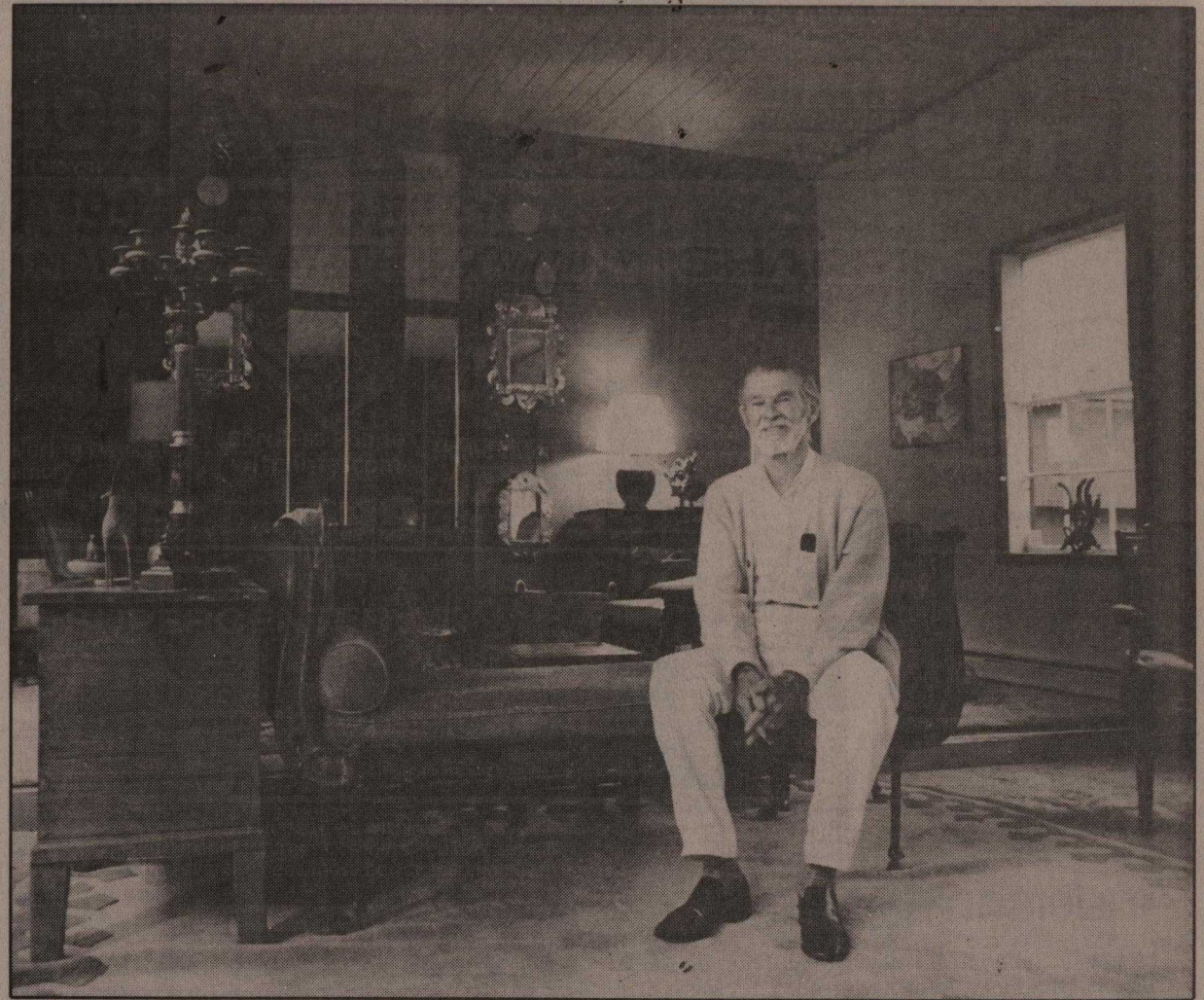


pleted in 1971.

In 1977, the Rydells were recognized by the Santa Cruz County Society for Historical Preservation for the schoolhouse restoration and for their rehabilitation of a Santa Cruz Victorian house.

The original Ocean View School had about 1,000 square feet of space; now, it's doubled. There are living room, dining room, garden room, kitchen, office, three bedrooms and three bathrooms. Outbuildings were converted into a studio and storage shed. Tranquil garden areas speak of Roy's ongoing expertise in horticulture.

The Rydell home today is a serene, quiet place — with no audible echoes of the hundreds of children's voices. Only the raised teacher's platform and 12-foot ceiling in the living room bespeak of another time, when young minds were filled with the required facts and figures.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Roy Rydell in his living room, the original schoolroom at Ocean View School. He sits below the teachers' platform on an iron "campaign bed" of the French Empire period, the sort of thing, he said, Napoleon's army carried around. A collection of tin mirrors decorates the wall behind the Franklin stove.