

Drawn to Wilder Ranch Park

Students map out buildings for history

By MARIA GAURA
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SANTA CRUZ — A cluster of four elderly buildings at Wilder Ranch State Park has been immortalized.

A crew of architectural students spent three months this summer creating detailed drawings of the ranch's granary, bunkhouse, cow barn and Victorian horse barn that will eventually be deposited in the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.

"These drawings are so detailed ... (that) if the buildings were to fall or burn down tomorrow, we could rebuild them exactly as they look today," said Jim Fife, supervising ranger for the state Parks Department.

"(The drawings) get down to the nailheads, and lines on the boards," Fife added. "It's almost like a photograph when it's done. They're really beautiful drawings."

The four students and recent graduates who did the drawings were sponsored by the Historic American Building Survey, established in 1933 by the National Park Service to compile a record of America's architectural history.

Christian Overbey, a recent architecture graduate from the University of Kansas, oversaw the Wilder project for HABS.

"HABS will only agree to do a project if the site is of national significance," he said. "When Wilder Ranch was a creamery, it was one of the best in the state. They were the best because they were innovative, they were always improving the quality of the product with technology."

"This was one of the first ranches to be electrified, and the Wilder family owned the first car in Santa Cruz County," Overbey said. "And when it later became a cattle ranch they held rodeos here every weekend. (This ranch) is an important part of state history."

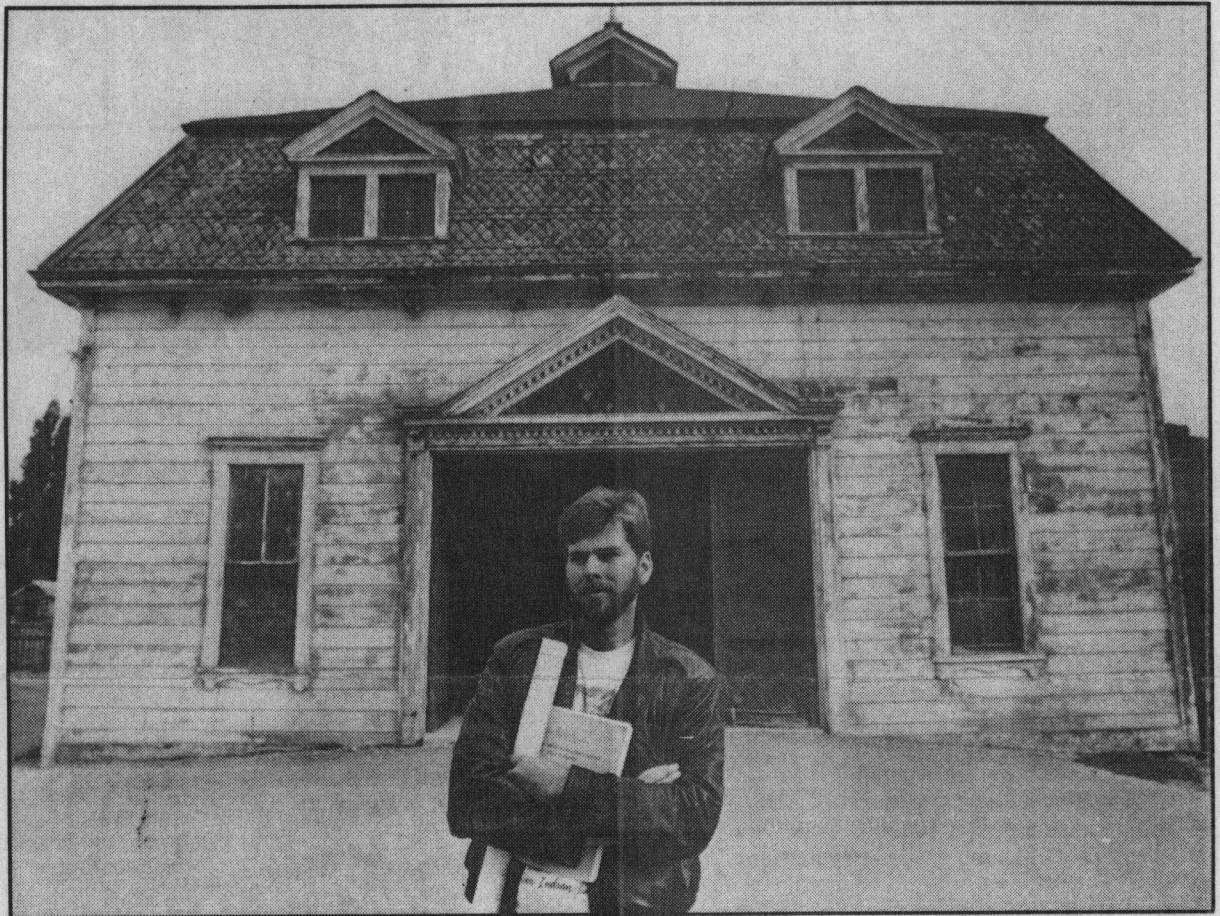
The Wilders also made extensive use of water power — it to generate electricity, fight fires and power the tools in the ranch wood shop.

The horse barn, with its Victorian frills and innovative design, was Overbey's favorite building on the ranch. A ventilation system built into the barn's ceiling kept air circulating through the building to keep the horses healthy, but the barn also was designed to accomodate carriages and the automobiles eventually used on the property.

"It shows a transition between carriages, horses and cars," Overbey said, "as well as the transition between the use of loose hay and baled hay" to feed the horses.

The enormous cow barn is interesting because it is built across the top of Wilder Creek. Water from the creek was used to keep the dairy facilities sanitary. The cow barn used to be twice its present size, according to Overbey. The building deteriorated badly after the dairy business was abandoned, and at one point half the barn was torn down to provide wood to repair the other half.

In order to draw the buildings, Overbey and his



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The horse barn is Christian Overbey's favorite building, one now preserved on paper.

crew had to measure each structure accurately. This entailed scrambling across barn roofs 45 feet above the ground at one point.

"We climbed on the roofs and all over the insides with tape measures and line levels," he said. "It was pretty dramatic at times."

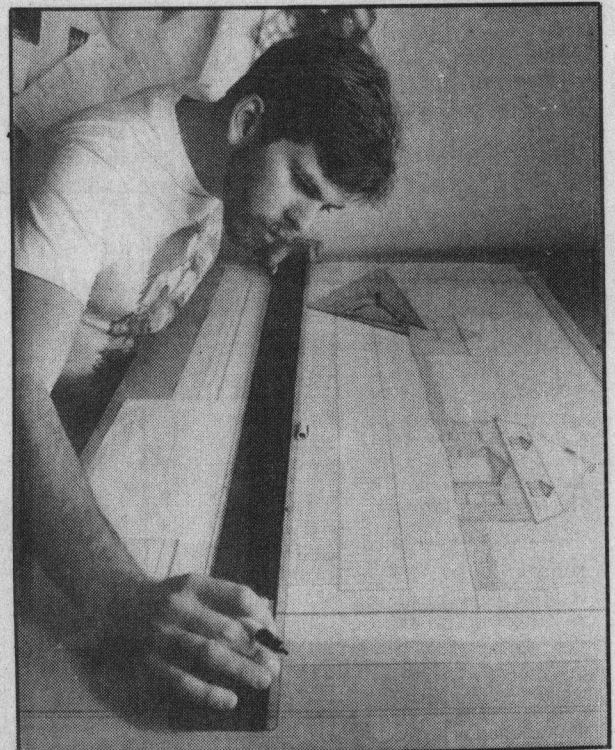
The drawings are "as built," according to Overbey, and include all deterioration and irregularities now visible on the structures. The final drawings are still being touched up, and must be reviewed by HABS before they are submitted into the permanent collection.

The HABS collection holds architectural and historical data on more than 16,000 buildings in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Wilder Ranch buildings were among 30 sites throughout the country chosen for the program this summer, and one of four sites located in California. The other California sites were Scotty's Castle in Death Valley, the Balcutha sailing ship in San Francisco Fisherman's Wharf, and Will Rogers State Park.

Copies of all plans in the HABS collection are available to the public and a list of the collection is available by writing to the Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540.

The local state Parks Office will have copies of the drawings too, although Fife is not sure when they will be available. For more information, call Fife at 688-3241.



Even nailheads were recorded in drawings.