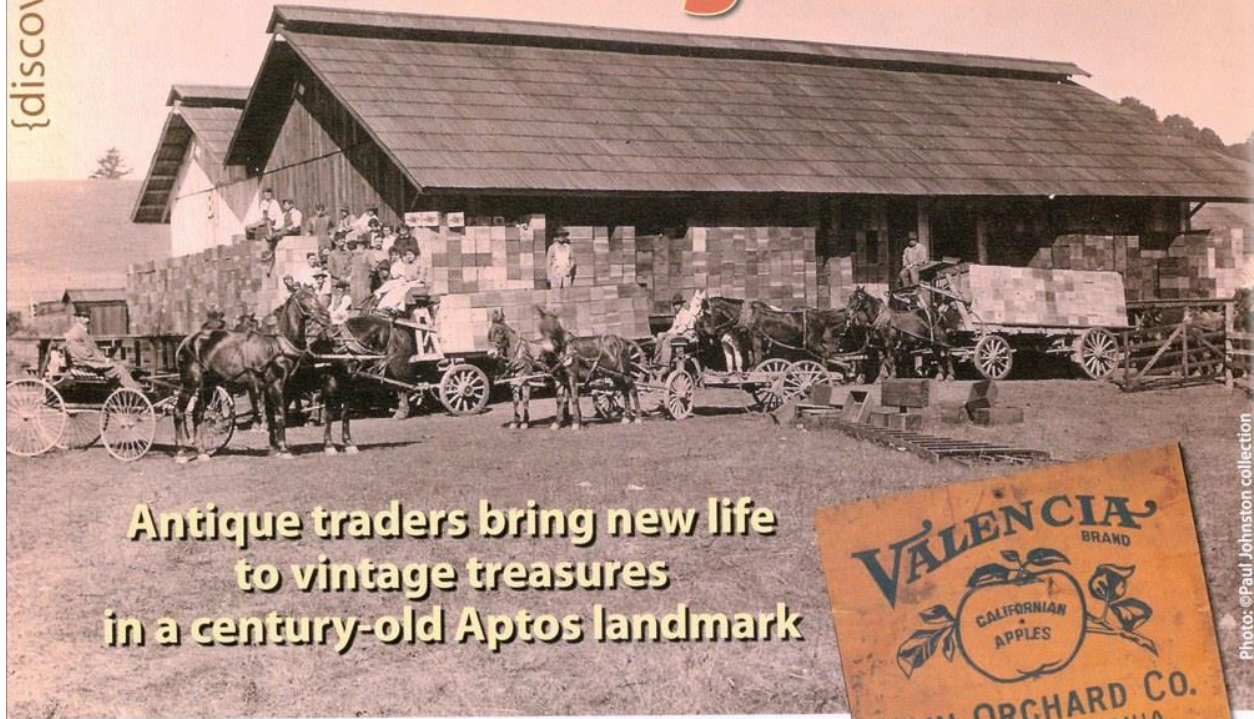


{discover}

Barn again



Antique traders bring new life to vintage treasures in a century-old Aptos landmark



Photos: ©Paul Johnston collection

By Kirsten Fairchilds

It may be difficult to believe in this day and age, but it's still possible to buy a cup of coffee for 25 cents in Santa Cruz County. It's also still possible to stroll through a building erected in the early 1890s in what was once a bustling Aptos Village, known far and wide for lumber, apples and the railroad. Throw in the opportunity to browse well-constructed furniture and other collectibles from that same era in said historic building, and it could easily add up to a perfect day at Village Fair Antiques, housed in the Aptos Barn.

The antique collective — named by Country Homes Magazine as “one of the six best antique collectives to visit in the United States” in 2001 — is open to the public Thursdays through Sundays. Antique vendors currently lease space in the barn, which was constructed in either 1890, 1891 or 1892, depending upon which source has been

consulted. Much more certain is its builder: Renowned developer and businessman F.A. Hihn is widely credited with building the barn for use as a packing shed for apples.

“When Frederick Hihn and Claus Spreckels essentially brought the railroad to Santa Cruz County in the 1880s, it opened up a way to transport lumber, so they cut down virtually all of the redwood trees in Aptos,” said John Hibble, curator of the Aptos History Museum. “When they were done cutting down trees, Hihn paid his lumberjacks to plant apple trees. When they were done planting, he sold the apple orchards to the lumberjacks. However, they had to ship the apples to market on his railroad, which today is where Valencia Road is located. The apples were packed at his apple barn, the Aptos Barn, under the Valencia brand apple label.”

Nearly all of the historic buildings were

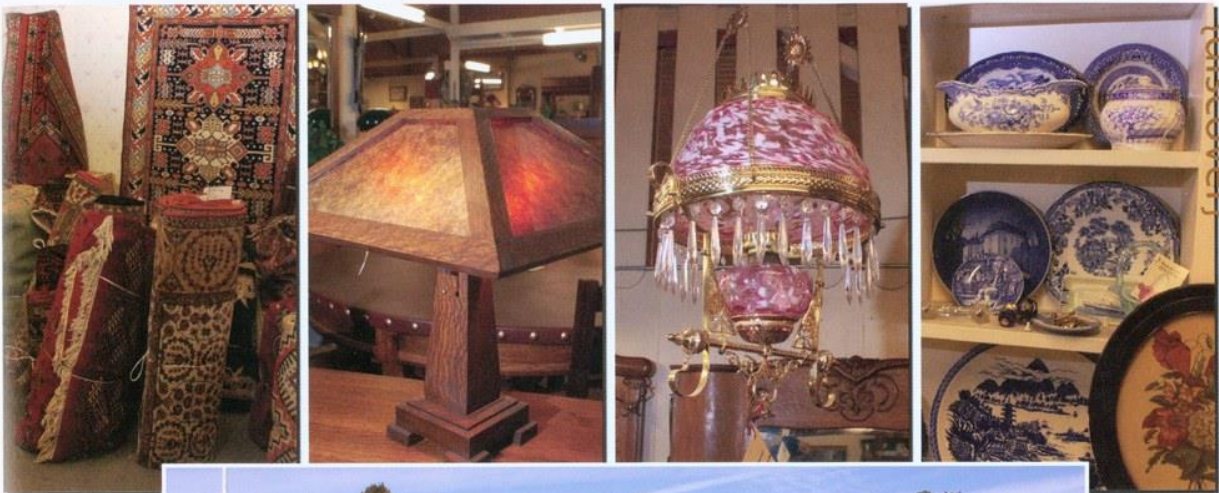
knocked down in the 1960s, Hibble said. The few that remained standing included the Aptos Barn and the Bayview Hotel. Aptos resident John Lamanuzzi moved his business, John's Antiques, from Santa Cruz into the Aptos Barn in 1977.

“In 1964, it started as a flea market here at the barn, but it became more upscale through the years,” said Lamanuzzi, during a recent tour of the high-end 1890s American oak and walnut furniture he sells. “The unique thing about the setup here is that each dealer is running his or her own business. Most collectives have a management, and the dealers

(Top) The Hihn Packing House 1905, Fred O. Hihn (F. A. Hihn's son) in buggy on left, who was in charge of the Hihn apple operation until his death in 1916. (Inset) An original Valencia Apple box.

PHOTOGRAPHS MICKEY CARROLL

Graphic: ©Aptos History Museum



FOLSCOVERY



(Top) The Village Fair's antiques range from vintage carpets, mission style furniture, lighting fixtures and porcelain china. (Below) Today, the Hihn apple barn is home of Village Fair Antiques.

that have booths in them work one or two days a month and let the management run their business. That's not the case here."

Ben Lomond resident Darlene Thomson of Thomson's Antiques also sells high-end American oak furniture, specializing in Morris chairs, which she described as "early recliners." Thomson set up shop at the Aptos Barn in 1986.

"This building has the largest selection of American oak furniture in Northern California," Thomson said. "The draw for anyone who loves anything really old is that this is such a great place to just walk through. When you think about all the apples that were in here long ago, this barn has basically been a big part of the history of Aptos."

Hibble couldn't agree more. Purchased by Barry Swenson Builder in February 2007, the 16,290-square-foot building has been incorporated into the approved Aptos Village planned development, which is expected to include approximately 75,000 square feet of commercial space along with more than 60 residential units and a village green.

"The Aptos Barn is a big deal," Hibble



Robert Azensky of Robert's Antiques and Fine Art sorts through his inventory of original paintings that encompass styles from California regional plein-air to modern art.



said. "The developer wants to make it part of the town square, which would require it be turned 180 degrees and put in the center of the square. I think it's a great idea because I'm not sure the barn could withstand another 100 years, either physically or economically, without a major renovation. That said, if I had my druthers, I would like to see the building continue to live where it is. It's one of the last remaining visible historical elements of the Aptos Village."

Mary Gourlay, development manager for Barry Swenson Builder and the development project manager for Green Valley Corporation, said in a January email that the barn will be "relocated to the heart of the project and refurbished." Gourlay said the new location will be adjacent to the future village green.

"The structure will be highly visible and celebrated," Gourlay added. "Interpretive displays and signage will be incorporated to recall its history within Aptos. The Apple Barn [is] the only remaining building in Aptos associated with F.A. Hihn and the economic era of the apple industry."

Gourlay also said that 19 vendors were currently leasing space in the barn. The Hihn Apple Barn is anticipated to be a specialty grocer, she said, but an exact date has not been set for moving the structure.

"Our ability to break ground is contingent upon the timing of public improvements along Soquel Drive, including the railroad crossings," Gourlay explained.

Santa Cruz resident Sharon Burnam and her husband Clayton have operated Strictly Mission Arts and Crafts in the barn since 2001. Burnam said she has been told by a representative of Barry Swenson Builder that she would have the opportunity to lease space in one of the new buildings. She said her current lease is month to month and includes

Just a sampling of the restored furniture in one of the Village Fair shops. The barn has the largest selection of American oak furniture in Northern California.



verbiage which states that she must be given 60 days notice as to when she must vacate the building. She said that to her knowledge none of her fellow vendors has been given a date as to when the collective must leave the barn.

"I'm going to have my business as long as I can — I just don't know where that will be," said Burnam, serving a 25-cent cup of coffee to a visitor from behind the old-fashioned luncheonette counter where breakfast and lunch were once served. "I'm afraid we're never again going to have a building where you will find so many shop owners in one place. Logistically and financially, it's an old business concept that looks like it's on its way out.

"I keep telling my customers 'We don't know about the future, but make sure to

Shanna O'Brien of from *Time to Time* and *S & J Antiques* searches coast to coast for her collection of beautifully restored wood furniture.

come back soon because this won't be here forever," Burnam continued. "I say 'Enjoy it while you can.'" ♡

If you want to explore

Village Fair Antiques
417 Trout Gulch Road, Aptos
(831) 688-9883
Store Hours: 10 - 5 Thursday - Sunday