

History in motion



Tarmo Hannula

The Palmtag house on Front Street has been cut into two pieces and placed on steel beams as Fresno Movers, under the guidance of Ron Campbell, owner of Fresno Movers of Felton, prepare to lop the giant home into quarters.

Historic houses - South County Palmtag house relocated for family

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STAFF WRITER

WATSONVILLE — As towering cranes swing over a 126-year-old home today, a piece of Watsonville history finally changes location.

The Palmtag house, located at 18 West Front St., was the home to generations of two families who were able to preserve the two-story house throughout the century. As it is quartered and moved to a site closer to the coast, local residents welcome the house to the 21st century and a new family.

County residents Dayle and Julie Bowen have been overseeing the deconstruction of the house for the past week and will be watching its reconstruction from a temporary trailer on the house's new four-and-a-half acre site at the corner of Sand Dollar Drive and San Andreas Road.

"It's a beautiful house," said Julie Bowen, whose dream it's been to save a house from demolition and restore it. "It's like a dream come true."

Bowen's dreams are finally coming to fruition, as she watches the house being quartered and prepared for relocation. She said she and her husband — as well as their two sons, Christian, 5, and Nate, 2 — can't wait to move in.

"It's going to be our home-
stead," Bowen said, adding that she plans to live in the house for the rest of her life and maintain



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the tradition of keeping the house "within the family."

Built in 1872 for German silk dyer Christian Palmtag, the house has been on its site, known as the Angelina Zanelli Muzzio property, for 126 years.

Christian Palmtag settled in Watsonville in 1868. Immigrating from Baden, Germany, Palmtag came to California by ox team, settling first in the mining community of Dutch Flat in Placer County. He and his wife, Fredericka, moved into the

house shortly after it was built.

The "Italianate" Victorian was designed by Thomas Beck of Watsonville, and was across the street from Palmtag's Pajaro Brewery, which was torn down in 1920.

Palmtag was a prominent name in the Watsonville community for generations, with six bankers in the family — Charles A. Palmtag, one of Christian's four children, was once city treasurer. He died in December 1932 of a heart attack.

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A photo of the Pajaro Brewery, previously owned by the Palmtag family, circa early 1900s. The brewery was located across the street from the Palmtag house and was torn down in 1920.

PALMTAG

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Angelina Muzzio bought the house in 1918 and the house remained under the Muzzio name until 1997.

Muzzio raised her family in the house, partially supporting them with a catering service she ran from home. She was famous for her ravioli, which she would serve at 20-guest parties in her home.

Marina Muzzio of Watsonville, Angelina's daughter, said all of her memories growing up in the house are happy ones. "It's been my home all my life — it's home, and it's a beautiful home," she said. "I'm happy that it will remain a beautiful home."

Muzzio said she is satisfied with the outcome of the sale and is confident the Bowens will take care of the house. "It pleases me very much to know that the home will be with them," she said.

The Watsonville Redevelopment Agency unanimously approved the sale and removal of the Victorian house last September with the expectation that it would be moved by the end of November.

Seven months later, the house is finally on the move. Bowen said that

most of the setbacks were due to relocating the house to a site that falls under the supervision of the agriculture and coastal commissions.

She had two hearings with the Agriculture Commission regarding her project. "It's not like they didn't want to see the house moved," she said, "they're just anti-anything when it comes to moving something."

The Bowens submitted a proposal for the house last summer, which was reviewed by city officials and Ray Hoffman, president of the Pajaro Valley Historical Association.

Hoffman said there were several proposals submitted, and that he was asked to review the final three. "The other proposals were good, too, but they weren't as extensive," he said. In their proposal, the Bowens included drawings and renderings of what the house would look like (inside and out) on its future site. "They went to a lot of trouble," Hoffman said.

Bowen's brother, Darin Bell, did the renderings.

One of the proposals outlined an objective to make the house a bed and breakfast. The Bowens proposed to keep the house as one for the family. "This one is going to be a family home, and that meant a lot to me," Hoffman said.

Their proposal was approved, and they purchased the house from the city of Watsonville in early September for \$1.

According to the agreement between the city and the couple, the Bowens had to submit their schedule of work to the city as well as a written update of their work every two weeks. They also had to submit a list of personnel who would be working on the site to proceed with the removal.

"I had to research it until I was sure I was ready to do this," Bowen said. "Now that we're doing it, and everybody is proud of what (we're) doing, I'm ecstatic about living here."

Cypress Construction of Watsonville was the company chosen to dissect the house and put it back together on its new lot. Fresno House Movers of Felton will be responsible for the actual relocation of the two-story house when the process begins this week.

Jim Rector, owner of Cypress Construction, said his job is a challenge and that a lot of care goes into treating each house as a special case.

"Every house I've gone into that is 90 or 100 years old has some kind of quirk to it," he said. "They all are a challenge... It's the nature of the

structure."

Rector and his crew are separating the house in quarters, as well as setting aside all the decorative trim for reassembly. "The trick is taking them apart without butchering it," Rector said. "We're disassembling it carefully so that we can put it together cleanly."

Another trick to the job, he says, is working from the outside in when refurbishing a historic home such as Palmtag. "We're doing everything backwards," he said. "We're working from the inside out."

Rector said that contrary to popular belief, the house was not severely damaged by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake; in fact, he said the house was in pretty good shape.

"It's mostly just cracks in the plaster," Rector said. "There's nothing underneath termite-wise. Even though (the house) isn't up to code structurally... it's a very strong assembly."

All of the roofs had to be torn off due to damage caused by termites, including the roofs over the front and back porches. Once the house has been moved to its future site, Cypress Construction will install plumbing and electricity as well as bring the structure up to current codes.

"When we're through with it, the

house will have another 100 years to go," Rector said. "It will certainly outlive me, that's for sure."

The Bowens will be doing all of the aesthetic restoration to the house on the inside, including wall-papering, tiling and painting.

"The Bowens have real wonderful artistic talents and they're up to the challenge," Rector said. "They have a talent for doing restorations."

Bowen has big plans for renovating the inside of the house, including a low-relief sculptural motif to match the outside. "I want to be able to walk into the house and feel I'm back in 1872," she said. She has been getting ideas from skimming through old and current catalogs as well as touring other homes in the Italianate style.

Bowen has also been frequenting antique shops, where she has already bought antique pictures and light fixtures to mount on the 12-foot-high ceiling. She is also expecting to install an original marble fireplace that has been in Marina Muzzio's personal storage. "It'll be nice because it'll be back in the house," she said.

Though it will cost at least \$200,000 to make the house livable on its new site, Bowen isn't worried. "It could probably cost more than that," she said. "But I'm going to be living here for the rest of my life."