

Doomed adobe reprieved

Watsonville man eyes restoration

By JAMIE MARKS
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WATSONVILLE — A reprieve has been granted to save an 1800s adobe cottage damaged in the Oct. 17 earthquake that was slated for demolition.

Through the effort of Watsonville building designer Will Maertens, the city has agreed to temporarily stop the property owners from demolishing the adobe on Blackburn Street, at least until Monday.

Maertens hopes enough community support can be found to save the cottage and possibly move it to a new site.

"For the public, it would be great if it could be dismantled and rebuilt somewhere," Maertens said Thursday. "This building is the only

Please see ADOBE — A4.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Will Maertens scans inside of shaken 170-year-old adobe in Watsonville.

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thing left of our Mexican heritage."

Maertens, who lived in Bolivia for 10 years restoring adobe structures, became interested in the cottage about two weeks ago when he noticed the roof was being taken off.

"At first I thought, 'Great, they're restoring it,'" he said. Later he learned the owners, Thomas and Ruby Polfus, had decided to demolish the cottage.

Maertens contacted a representative from the state Office of Historic Preservation on Wednesday, who in turn convinced City Attorney Luis Hernandez to halt demolition until Hernandez has a chance to review pending state legislation designed to protect historic structures.

The adobe is listed on a city inventory of local historical buildings that was compiled by UCSC professor Kenneth Cardwell, said Marilyn McLachlan, a member of the Pajaro Valley Historical Society.

It's also on a state historical inventory, but it isn't on the National Historic Registry nor is it designated a historic site by local ordinance. Because of those omissions, the adobe doesn't have the kind of protection afforded an officially designated historic building, according to Dickie Allen of the city Planning Department.

According to local historian Betty Lewis, the adobe was moved



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Historical preservationist Will Maertens checks out a wall in the Blackburn Street adobe Thursday.

from its original site on the Rancho Bolsa de San Cayetano in north Monterey County where San Juan Road runs, after the 1906 earthquake.

Lewis has never pushed to have the adobe protected as a historic building because, she said, "it isn't original."

The 900 square-foot cottage contains 3-foot walls of adobe and grass, and wooden beams that appear to be hand-hewn, but it's actually a reconstruction of a two-story ranch house, built anywhere between 1820 and 1870. Accounts vary

as to its construction date, but the lintel over the door to the living room carries the inscription "Jesus Vallejo 1820."

Ruby Polfus, who has owned the adobe since the late 1950s with her husband, Thomas, said it was moved brick-by-brick to its present site. Reading from an account by a historian, Polfus said it took 24 wagon loads to carry the adobe bricks and 12 more cartloads to carry the earth tiles.

In early 1907, it was bought by Dr. Saxton Pope, who reconstructed the cottage, placing it

on a 2000 square-foot lot behind his home at the corner of East Beach and Blackburn streets.

Polfus said the cottage has been empty since the earthquake and has been inspected twice.

"We would have thought about trying to restore it, but the federal guy said there's no way to do it," she said. "The cracks run from the outside to the inside."

The damage assessment hasn't deterred Maertens. He's contacted several local adobe experts and is convinced the building could be restored.