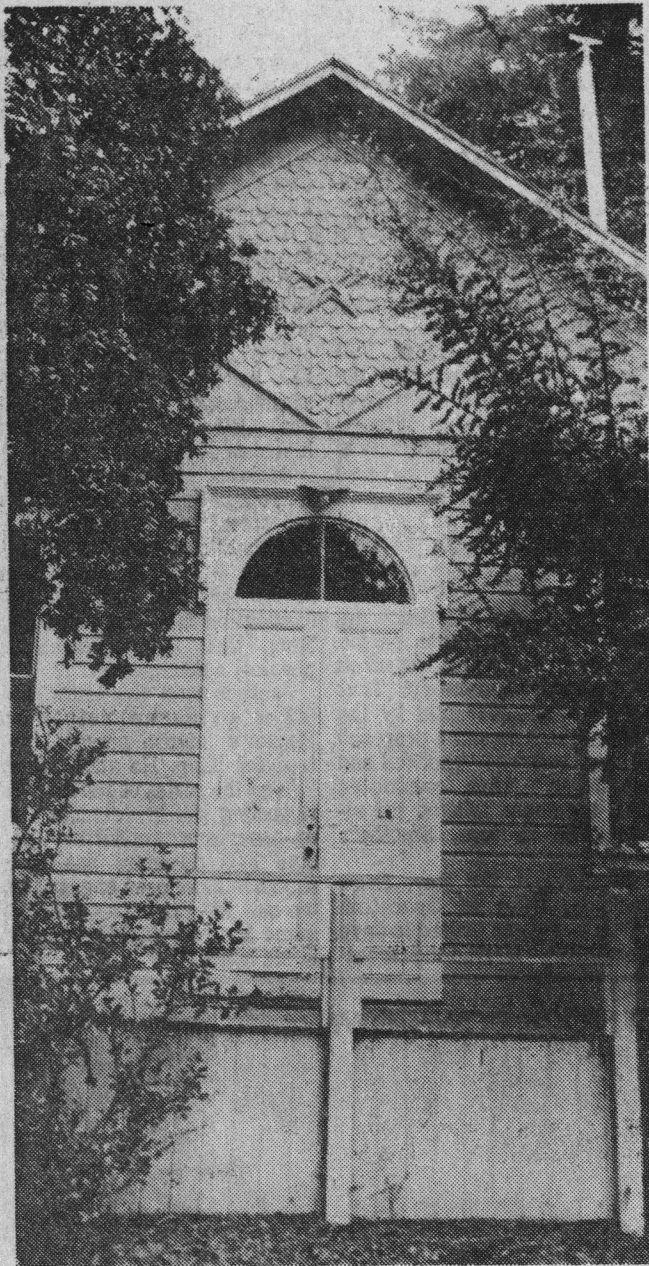


After 100 Years, A First For Valencia Hall



The question for Valencia Hall is not exactly "To be or not to be?" but to be where it is, or someplace else?

By DON RIGHETTI
Sentinel Staff Writer

Another meeting has been held in Valencia Hall.

The same way they've been holding meetings there for almost 100 years.

But this time the session was a first: to decide whether any more meetings will be there.

Or if there even will be a hall. Turns out there will be. For awhile anyway.

Farm bureaus are comprised of members who are the direct descendants of the people who built this country out of wilderness. They're not flighty or apt to rush off in the first direction that comes to mind.

They consider a decision even more carefully than local politicians. Because it's their own property that's at stake, not somebody else's.

So the Valencia Farm Bureau only decided during its Tuesday night session at the hall that it wouldn't make a decision until it absolutely has to.

The bureau owns the hall, but not the land it stands on — only the width of Aptos Creek away from the intersection of Cox and Valencia roads in the Aptos Hills.

John Newell, a Santa Clara property holder, does own the land. He showed up at the Tuesday meeting to talk to the farm bureau about what he plans for the land. He seems to love the venerable old structure almost as much as does the Farm Bureau, and he said he wanted the bureau to keep meeting in it.

But the hall is on a 20-acre section of his land, and he needs to sell it, he said.

So the bureau, hesitant to come to a snap decision about its building, decided to wait

until Newell does in fact sell the land, and then it will decide what to do with the building.

The bureau was given the hall by Theresa Hihn, daughter of F.A. Hihn, the early-day high roller who built and sold the original Capitola and some other stuff.

Theresa received title to the hall when her father died in 1918 or 1919.

Valencia Hall and the home of Mr. and Mrs. Mark Lawshe across Valencia Road from the hall are the only two remaining structures of the one-time community of Valencia, which was an important lumbering site.

Both buildings, especially the hall, are important examples of the kind of architecture that was being constructed at that

time, according to Albert Schadel, curator of the County Historic Museum.

Valencia is on what was the original Castro Soquel Augmentation Rancho. In the old days, Hihn had a railroad eight miles long built from the area to the present-day Aptos Village vicinity to haul lumber out of the hills to the main rail connection.

That's the kind of thing he did when he wasn't busy helping to develop downtown Santa Cruz and helping arrange for a railroad between Santa Cruz and Watsonville.

Hihn's Valencia lumber mill turned out 143,000 board feet a day — a rival to the whole area's other leading producer, the nearby Loma Prieta mill.

With that kind of woody production in the offing, Hihn decided he ought to have some place for his lumbermen to live. That's how Valencia happened.

The hall was used for church services, community gatherings and social services, according to E.S. Harrison in his 1892 history of the county.

The Lawshe home across the street was the general store, stagecoach stop and post office.

There were a few other structures—mostly residences for the workers—which have disappeared over the years, Schadel said.

With such a strapping daily production, the community finally logged itself out of existence and gave rise to an apple raising region. One of the primary apple growers is Mrs. Daisy Cox on Cox Road. Now in her 90s, she still is a member of the Valencia Farm Bureau.

Schadel says the Valencia mill was at its peak in the 1880s and 1890s. The lumber went primarily to the Salinas and San Benito valleys. The mill turned out telegraph and electric light poles up to 60 feet long.

One of the options now available to the Farm Bureau, of course, is to have the hall moved and preserved someplace else.

Schadel hopes that won't happen. In another position, he pointed out, the structure still

would be an important example of old-time architecture. "But where it is is part of a community—that was an important community in the Mid-County. It may just die on the vine like Wright's Station and Laurel and some other communities that used to exist in the San Lorenzo Valley."

The hall was really built — the way they used to build things in the old days — Schadel said, and it doubtlessly would withstand the rigors of a move.

The Farm Bureau feels the way he does — and so, obviously, does Newell: The building should stay where it is.

Some of the Farm Bureau members are beginning to rival the hall in age, and three of the bureau's stalwarts — Roy Day, Harry Gundersen and Col. Henry Berbert — have died in the past year.

Don Galbraith took over for Berbert as the chairman of the Tuesday night meeting, which began with a moment of silence in Berbert's memory.

"Are we going to continue as an organization?" Galbraith asked. "There's been some interest, but it's been dwindling."

"We're at the tail-end of our existence where we don't know what's going to happen next."

He was talking to 25 people, about half of whom, he thought, made up the total current membership of the bureau.

The rest were there because they love the hall and what it means.

Two of them hadn't yet been born when many of the bureau members became eligible for old-age pensions. They are Mrs. Lawshe and Mari Huggins, who rent the hall from the bureau to practice ballet.

They wrote letters to all the bureau members they could remember, urging them to turn out for the meeting and find a way to keep the hall where it is to continue in community use.

Newell, who wants to sell the land but let the bureau keep the hall, pointed out that when he sold the property, the new owner might not feel as kindly toward the building and would tell the bureau to move it off within 60 days.

Newell had offered to buy the

structure from the Bureau for the token sum of \$100. Then he said, he would lease it free of charge to the Bureau for two years. The lease, he said, would take precedence over the deed to the land and would assure the hall's existence for at least two years.

But, the bureau seems to figure, any change at all has got to be a bad change. The bureau owns the hall, and it doesn't want to turn the title over to anybody else — even if it's to save the hall.

Newell said he'd be pleased to give the bureau the little plot of land the hall stands on. But the area is zoned in 20-acre minimum parcels, and he can't do it.

One of the aging and hard-nosed members of the bureau sniffed at the measly \$100. Newell had offered for the structure. He wondered if Newell were willing to pay something for the hall's priceless furnishings.

In reality, the bureau probably would have to pay \$100 to have the few pitiful furnishings hauled away — unless the roll-less old player piano is worth something.

It couldn't get much for the old-fashioned butane heater which stands against the north wall and refuses to keep the approximately 40x50-foot hall warm on a November night.

And the big old free-standing

wood burning stove in the corner doesn't help at all. Its chimney has been removed entirely and stands even further in the corner. So the stove has to stay cold.

The structure is a building inspector's nightmare. Not because of the skill used in the original construction: that's apparent even in the way the boards in the wood floor fit together. What's likely to set a government man's heart aflame are the attempts over the years to add some new-fangled civilization to the structure. Like the electric wiring, which is mostly tacked to the interior walls and ceiling.

Gladys Smith, another long-standing bureau member, said she had investigated and found the county would be very interested in preserving the building and its historical status.

So some talk resulted over the possibility of the county granting a zoning variance to allow the chipping off of the small parcel of land on which the hall stands.

The Central Santa Cruz County Water District has expressed an interest in moving the hall to its nearby land as a meeting place.

So when the bureau decided to stand pat for now, it also voted to consider the water district's offer if ever it is pushed into making a decision.

Thanksgiving Fete Set For Vietnamese

Vietnamese families residing in Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito counties and their sponsors are invited to share a Thanksgiving feast Saturday from 1 to 6 p.m. at Monterey County Fairgrounds.

Sponsors are asked to help in providing the turkeys and Vietnamese families are to bring other food.

Donations are needed for turkeys, according to Jeanine Tucker of the Tri-County Vietnamese Committee which is sponsoring the dinner. She may be contacted at Monterey 372-2567.

Greenland Slide Presentation Set

In celebration of the international World Mutual Service Week, the Santa Cruz YWCA is sponsoring a slide showing on Greenland Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at the Santa Cruz Public Library community room.

Ian Walter, preceptor of UCSC's Crown College, is the narrator and photographer.

SV Teachers To Review District's Math Program

The K-8 math program will be reviewed by teachers as a special presentation to the Scotts Valley school board when it meets Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at the district office, 155 Treetop Drive.

Superintendent Donald Slezak has been directed to bring further information and analysis on the district's projected financial

torate to approve either a bond or revenue increase measure on the June ballot.

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