

Restoration work begins on Valencia Hall

By BRAYTON TOMPKINS

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APTOS — After a 20-year wait, Carol Trengove and a host of volunteers finally began the project that she had fought so hard to initiate.

The first stage in the restoration and relocation of the historic Valencia Hall began Saturday morning with the demolition of an addition in the rear of the house. The hall, which sits on the corner of Day Valley and Bear Valley Roads, is the last remaining marker of what used to be the town of Valencia.

"I feel good about it," said Trengove, a photographer who helped start the campaign to renovate the house in the early 1980's. "We're actually moving on it, and we're finally going to get something done."

Built in the 1880's by millwright Fredrick Hihn, the hall sustained structural damage in the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989, and has since stood unused.

The earthquake also damaged the banks of Valencia Creek which runs parallel to the house. Barry Samuel, director of the County Parks and Recreation Department, said the building is in danger of falling into the creek if more erosion occurs.

As a result, the hall will be moved to the other side of Bear Valley Road and placed next to the old Aptos Post Office. The campaign for restoration worked hard to secure the land through the county, which plans to move the building by June 1997.

However, these plans are somewhat anticlimactic to restoration workers such as Trengove and restoration organizer Pat Manning. They believe the county has been negligent in taking care of the building, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

"They promised us the world and then they abandoned us," Trengove said.

Mike Bethke, Commissioner for the Historic Resources Commission, said the earthquake forced the county to assess and repair other projects, and since the damage to Valencia Hall wasn't as severe as other cases, the building was left unattended.

But the mood on site was upbeat Saturday, and all differences seemed to have been set aside as around 30 volunteers scurried to and fro tearing down the old stage and kitchen that composed the rear addition.

Harry Gregg, an 80-year-old retired Capitola resident, was busy tearing out nails as workers

demolished the roof above him.

"I volunteered just for the heck of it," Gregg said in a drawl. "I've lived in the area since 1939, and we used to come down here all the time for meetings."

Trengove said that although the county might have seemed disinterested, the community and local businesses were more than happy to lend a hand. She said that most of the volunteers are attached to the building, with its chipping paint and worn wood. Some, including 23-year-old Aptos resident Bret Hansen, consider it a part of their lives and memories.

Bret Hansen was just 10 when he and his 4-H club petitioned the county to put the building on the Historic Resources Register. He fondly remembers gathering with his friends in the building to conduct meetings.

"Aptos needs more historical places," he said. "I'm surprised they haven't done this sooner."

Trengove said she wasn't surprised and still fears that a change in county officers might affect the completion of the project.

"I won't feel relieved until we open it up," said Trengove. "When it's opened up and kids are running through it again, then the job will be finished."



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Volunteer Janice Hanson pulls nails from old timbers at Valencia Hall in Aptos Saturday.