

Watsonville mansion free to someone who'll finish its restoration

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WATSONVILLE

FREE TO GOOD home: Magnificent, two-story Italianate mansion, constructed in 1872, blessed with an elegant design, a sturdy construction and a colorful history.

The owners of the old home at 18 Front St. are looking for someone to take on the project of moving and restoring the earthquake-damaged structure, and they're willing to give it up for free to anyone who will take it off their hands.

Time is of the essence, as the Watsonville City Council authorized the purchase of the property at its last meeting and is preparing to raze the structure to make way for a proposed city park.



Muzzio

As a young widow, she raised her family in the house

"It would make a perfect restaurant, or a bed and breakfast," said J.J. Crosetti, one of the current owners, running his hand up a curved, carefully crafted wooden banister.

The home was designed by Tom Beck, the architect of Santa Cruz's Cooper House, which was destroyed in the Loma Prieta earthquake. Originally known as the Palmtag House, its first occupant was Christian Palmtag, a silk dyer from Baden-Baden, Germany. Palmtag had the home built in 1872 and took over the lively Pajaro Brewery and Saloon

on Front Street, right across the street from his new home.

Crosetti hopes someone will step forward the way Darrell Darling and Brian Denny did to save the Thurwachter House, an abandoned Midwestern-style farmhouse on Beach Road. The home was moved to San Andreas Road, where it is being converted to a bed-and-breakfast inn catering to tennis enthusiasts and other travelers.

The project is not for the faint-of heart — or pocket-book. While the sturdy old home survived the earthquake of 1906, the Loma Prieta earthquake dealt it a

particularly vicious blow, destroying the beautiful marble fireplace and knocking the plaster from the front room walls on the lower floor. The entire house lists to one side, requiring that the owners nail the massive front doors closed.

But there's ample evidence of the home's happier days, when renowned cook Angelina Muzzio entertained private parties with her famous ravioli and other elaborate recipes from the home's vast kitchen.

Muzzio's husband died young, leaving her to fend for herself as she reared their three daughters. She supported the family by hosting gatherings in the elegant home and providing the luscious, home-cooked meals to fans from all over the Monterey Bay area.

"Even the chefs at Del Monte Lodge were guests here," said Marina Muzzio, one of Angelina's three daughters.

And adding levity to the always special occasions was Angelina's insistence that wine be served at her meals — regardless of Prohibition.

"It was one of the few places you could get a glass of wine during those days," said Crosetti, the son of Angelina's eldest daughter, Theresa.

She wasn't concerned about the legal or social repercussions, said Marina. "She always said, 'If they're talking about you, that

means they're leaving someone else alone.'"

A Corralitos bootlegger who lost his fortune once paid his debt to Angelina by giving her his ranch; she let him live out his days there, a move characteristic of her generosity. Crosetti recalls in his younger days walking into the back porch area, where a table was set up for hungry passers-by.

"There was always a hobo at the table with a plate full of food," said Crosetti. There was even a room full of cots' upstairs where they were allowed to spend the night.

"I think this was Pajaro Valley's original homeless shelter," said Crosetti.

The woman known to her daughters as "Nana" and to hoboes as "Mama" would have marked 70 years living in the house had she lived to see the earthquake that ravaged it. As it was, she lived there with Marina until her death in 1985.

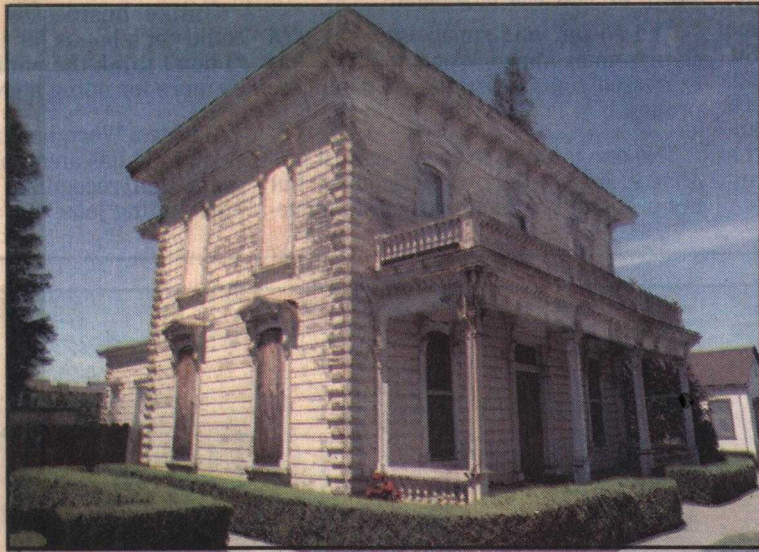
And if the family and the city parks department have their way, she will live on. The family has proposed that the tract be turned into a city park named after Angelina Muzzio.

Anyone interested in taking over the Palmtag/Muzzio House may contact Pat Donohue at the city's Parks and Recreation Department, 728-6131.

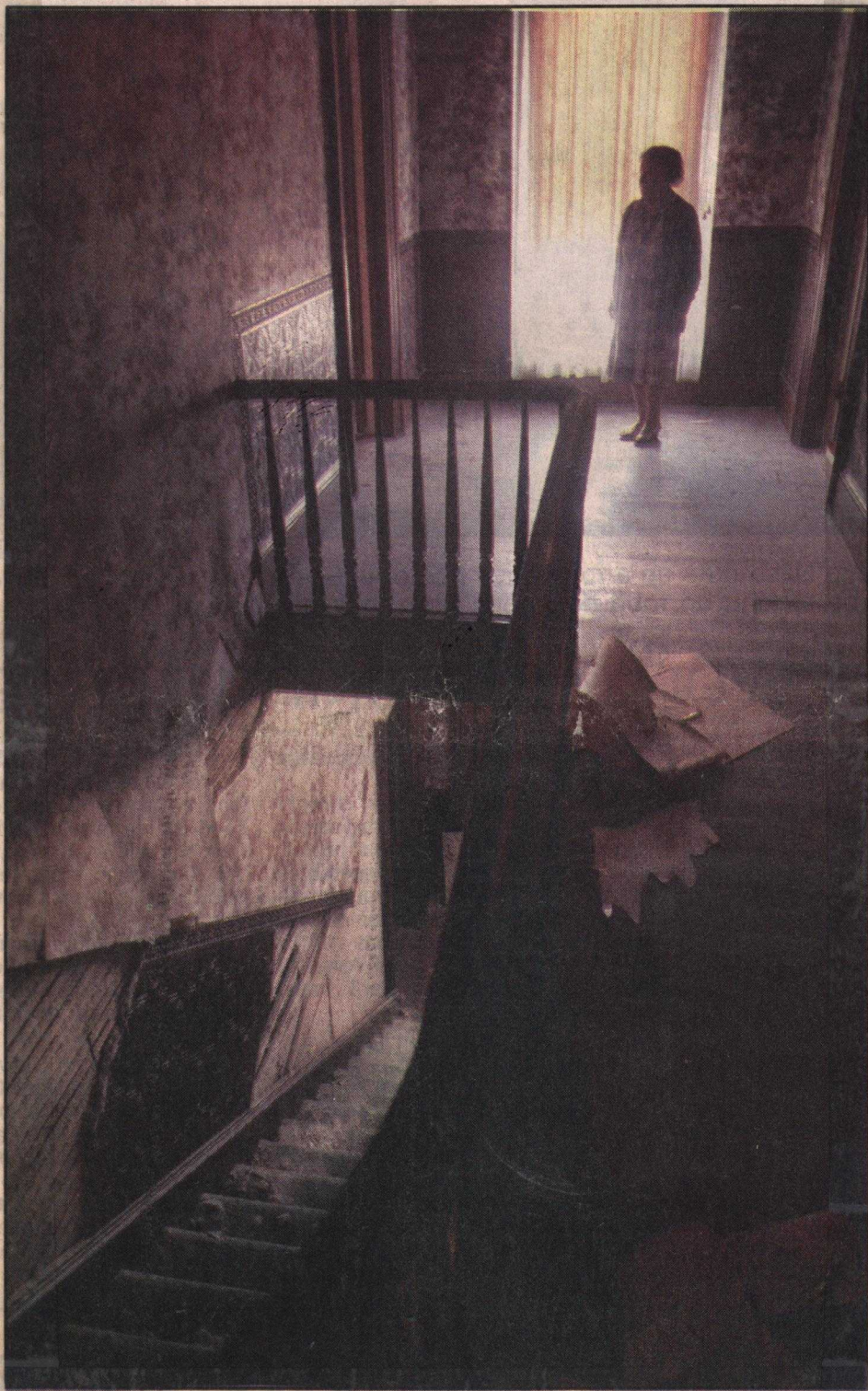


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The Muzzio house's elegant Italianate architecture offers a hint of its storied past.



The old Muzzio house on Front Street shows the wear and tear of earthquake damage. Despite its current state, it was once one of the grandest homes in Watsonville.



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