

Historic Houses -- South Co.

# Watsonville adobe will be razed

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WATSONVILLE — Time has run out for a reconstructed adobe cottage that was badly damaged in the October earthquake, and it will be torn down.

But the property owners, Ruby and Thomas Polfus, said Wednesday they will try to salvage as much of the building as they think is of historical value.

"We'll put whatever we think is historical with the Pajaro Center (in Pajaro) or the Pajaro Valley Historical Association," said Ruby Polfus. "We are donating it to the public."

The Polfuses have owned the adobe cottage since 1957 and have rented it out over the years. Mrs. Polfus said that many times, they have had to make extensive repairs on the old structure to maintain it in a habitable condition.

But the shaking of the 7.1 earthquake proved too much for the building. Cracks creased the adobe bricks from the inside out, and mangled the chimney.

"We left it as it was from October to February, and in that time we tried every way possible to find someone who wanted to restore it," Mrs. Polfus said. Failing to find anyone who said it could be repaired, the Polfuses decided to begin demolition.

Their demolition work prompted an outcry from local building designer Will Maertens, who says the structure can and should be restored. It is one of the oldest adobe buildings in the Pajaro Valley, Maertens says, and is of great historical significance.

Maertens succeeded in winning a four-day reprieve for the building. Last

week, City Attorney Luis Hernandez issued a temporary order to stop demolition until Monday, while he reviewed pending state legislation for historical buildings.

The adobe is not on the National Registry or local registry of historic buildings, and does not have protection under the law. Hernandez said he had no grounds to stop the demolition and he let the red tag expire.

Maertens has continued to press his case. He asked the City Council Tuesday night for ideas on saving the adobe.

The Polfuses have maintained extensive historical records on the adobe. They don't believe its historical value is as great as Maertens says it is. "It's reconstructed from a flour mill," said Mrs. Polfus.

The adobe on Blackburn Street is a

reconstruction of an adobe flour mill that once sat on the old Vallejo Ranch on San Juan Road in North Monterey County. The property was called the Rancho Bolsa de San Cayetano.

Mrs. Polfus said the original building, a two-story structure, was built about 1822. It ended up in the hands of Dr. Saxton Pope, who decided to move the adobe to Blackburn Street after the 1906 earthquake left it irreparably damaged.

Pope removed the tiles and adobe bricks, and had them hauled by cart to his back yard, where he rebuilt the adobe into a playhouse or study, said Mrs. Polfus.

It has since been enlarged to make it into a small cottage.

The Polfuses hope to build a new dwelling on the lot where the adobe has been. They plan to retire there some day.