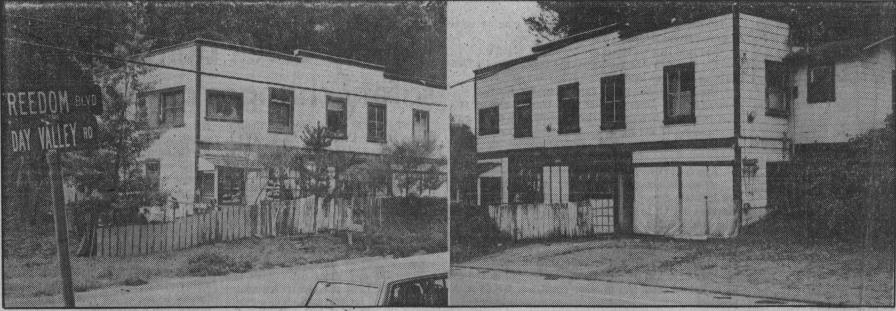
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Two views of the 'Soven Mile House' which historians believe was built in 1868.

Landmark status looms for Seven Mile House

By JAMIE MARKS
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — The legendary stagecoach driver Charley Parkhurst might not recognize the old Seven Mile House these days.

The two-story road house was built in 1868, seven miles from Watsonville on Freedom Boulevard. Since then, subsequent owners have added their touches — a second-story wing here, a rickety-looking fence there, and various coats of paint.

But if architect Jeff Oberdorfer and owners Eugene and Dolores Ferrari have their way, the house will become a national landmark.

"We think it's one of the oldest rural uildings in the county," said Oberdorfer. Already, according to Oberdorfer, the even Mile House has passed one hurdle nits way to status as a county landmark: 's been approved by the county Historial esources Commission and is headed to e Board of Supervisors for final accepnce.

Last week, the board took another tion which should help historians like Ferraris resurrect these architectural asures throughout the county.

The board adopted the State Historic ilding Code, which gives renovators are flexibility in bringing old structures ack to life, said county associate planner on Lauritson.

According to Lauritson, the state has ad the law on the books since January 76. The city of Santa Cruz adopted it ars ago, and the county has been inrmally using it for a while, he said.

If the Seven Mile House obtains "hisic" designation, then it will be be added the 120-odd sites in the Historic Retrice Inventory of the county's General an, he said.

Lauritson said the Seven Mile House is "good example" of how the historic uilding process works. It's also inicative of how the State Historic Building ode will help preservationists.

The first step in designating a site historic" begins with poring over the nd deeds and title holdings "to prove it's storic." he said.

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Parkhurst was a locally well-known gecoach driver, who probably used the en Mile House as a stopping place on run from Watsonville to Santa Cruz.

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Parkhurst gained national notoriety when, upon death on Dec. 29, 1879, it was discovered "he" was actually a "she."

Her tombstone reads, "Death in cabin near 7 Mile House, revealed one eyed Charlie (sic) a woman, the first woman to voted in the U.S. Nov. 3, 1868."

To friends of the tobacco-chewing, whip-lashing Parkhurst, the revelation came as a shock.

An account of her death in the Carson Appeal, Jan. 1880, reads, "When Hank heard the report that Charley had turned out to be a woman, he was so overcome for several minutes that he gasped for breath, and drawled out: 'Jehosaphat! I camped out with Parkie once for over a week, and we slept on the same buffalo robe right along; wonder if Curly Bill's been plain' me the same way."

Oberdorfer said he plans to restore the Seven Mile House to its original size, ripping off the wings that have been added over the years. Doing so will enhance the solar access, he said.

The new building code is "very specific" about what kinds of alterations are allowed, said Oberdorfer.

Sometimes, the state laws are so specific Oberdorfer has found himself at odds with them.

For instance, when Oberdorfer was working on the Felton Covered Bridge (circa 1892), he proposed putting in 20 windows. They would have allowed natural light on the bridge, but the state nixed the idea.

After more research, Oberdorfer was able to prove that four windows were part of the original scheme, and the state allowed them.

The new regulations will give the architect some flexibility in keeping the walls and floors authentic. Instead of having to pull apart the walls to bring the house up to code on electrical and plumbing standards, the renovator will be able to use the existing structure and add to it.

Oftentimes, the standards of today's codes mandate such small alterations as changing the height of a railing a few inches.

If the house had to be brought up to the uniform building code, then the cost of restoring it would have been prohibitive, said Oberdorfer.

He added the savings from the more flexible rules will be put back into the home in the form of authentic materials.

The Ferraris, who have owned the home for approximately 15 years, will most likely try to renovate the Seven Mile House into a home because land-use zoning laws mandate a residential use, said Oberforfer.

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No one knows exactly what the building s in those days, said Oberdorfer. But as back as 1876, the Seven Mile House s listed as a business in the "Natural sources of California."

Oberdorfer thinks the floor plan incates the house was a tavern, and torian Margaret Koch has written that rkhurst "kept a stage stop where ses were changed while travellers etched their legs and got a cup of coffee or a nip of something stronger."

he relationship between Parkhurst and Seven Mile House enhances the build-'s historic significance. Oftentimes, the standards of today's codes mandate such small alterations as changing the height of a railing a few inches.

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In exchange for their efforts, they will

get a tax write-off, he added.

"This kind of thing is happening more and more," offered Oberdorfer. "As housing becomes more scarce, and people become more attuned to preserving the character of old houses, the idea of historic preservation catches on."

Now, as a result of the county's adoption of the state's building code, Oberdorfer and Lauriston hope to see more homeowners seeking historic designations for their architectural treasures.