



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

For a quarter century, the converted Carlton school has been home for John and Dixie Keith.

Country quiet still lingers at the old Carlton school

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ALTHOUGH A SENSE of delicacy forbids revealing true identity, the fact remains that several very prominent Watsonville area names, (oh well, like, well, like Marinovich and Rogers) carved into what were once the restroom buildings at the old Carlton School, are still faintly legible.



Dixie and John Keith, who have lived in the schoolhouse out in the Watsonville countryside for 25 years, use the old buildings for storage — and chuckle a little at the “historic” carvings.

The Keiths raised their five children in the restored schoolhouse. Two of their sons, two grandchildren and Dixie's mother live with them at present.

The school was built in 1908 and was in use until 1946, when the Carlton School District was consolidated into the larger Salsipuedes School District at the fringe of the foothills east of town.

William Weeks, the Watsonville architect who gained fame and fortune throughout California for his public building and residential designs, was architect for the two-room structure.

“Older couples stop by here and say, ‘We went to school here,’ Dixie said, proudly.

Several very prominent Watsonville area names are carved into what were once the restroom buildings at the old Carlton School.

She and John grew up in the same Watsonville neighborhood near First Street. They attended E.A. Hall and Watsonville High schools together. They've lived in Watsonville all their married life,

Please see **CARLTON** — E2

87

Carlton/ School is home

Continued from Page E1

except for a brief period in San Jose.

Dixie has been a Licensed Vocational Nurse at Watsonville Community Hospital for 22 years. John, who retired from his work as a plasterer, is now plumber for the Pajaro Valley School District.

According to the Keiths, Carlton School was converted into a residence by the first owners, the Ford family, in the late 1940s. About a year later, the Fords sold it to the Waddingham family, and the Keiths purchased it from them.

Through the years, John and Dixie have added their own remodeling touches — including getting rid of the bees that inhabited the attic when they bought the place.

"We've been working on it ever since we moved here," Dixie said.

The rooms are basically the same

as they were when it was a school, although what was once a cloakroom is now two bathrooms. The kitchen is in the old supply room. The three bedrooms were classrooms and the living room was once the assembly room.

The Keiths have added a deck outside.

"The kids loved it," Dixie said of her family. "It was so quiet and peaceful."

The structure and its pastoral setting are still quiet and peaceful, as though slightly removed from the present and viewing the world through the eyes of another time.

Childrens' voices continue to echo through the rooms and the spacious yard, though, because the Keiths have five grandchildren and several nieces and nephews who like to visit.

"It's a schoolhouse. We'll always have kids around," Dixie said.