



Friday April 14, 2006

Another life for Moraga Barn

After a complete restoration, the town landmark will house a construction company

By Brooke Bryant
STAFF WRITER

The Moraga Barn is getting yet another new lease on life -- a life that has already stretched over nine decades and countless incarnations, including hotel, mercantile, post office and saloon.

In fact, about the only thing it hasn't been is a barn.

This time around, the building on Viader Street will serve as office space for the local building firm Canyon Construction.

The company plans to shift the building about five feet south, give it a new foundation and structural repairs, and restore the building to its original appearance.

The building is a local landmark, said Moraga Historical Society member Les Krames. "That's been here before the town was here," he said.

Exactly how long the building has been there is open to debate, since most accounts cite 1914, but the Historical Society says there are some references to 1911.

Krames was hoping that when crews lifted the building in preparation for moving, they might find some evidence of the building's date of origin. It has long been rumored that the date is written on the building's foundation -- but even after one society member crawled underneath the structure, no evidence surfaced.

The crews did find a few old artifacts that will be donated to the Historical Society, including lithographed wooden slats from old produce boxes and an old bottle of oil.

Krames said he never visited the bar -- but does recall that St. Mary's students and the 49ers football players who used to practice at the college had "a lot of good nights there."

In early photos, the two-story building sits almost alone at the corner of the Bryant-Moraga Highway (now Country Club Drive) and Railroad Avenue (now Viader Drive). In those days, it was the Moraga Hotel, with five upstairs rooms that opened onto Spanish-style balconies, built to help promote planned subdivisions in the area.

It became a general store, and then after Prohibition, the Moraga Bar. An "n" was added to make it the Moraga Barn to comply with a 1935 state law prohibiting the word "bar" in outdoor advertising, according to

the Historical Society. Along the way, the building also served as a post office, a telephone exchange and a butcher shop.

The Barn closed in 1995 due to undisclosed financial reasons, and was subsequently listed for sale at \$225,000. Since then, several people have tried to reopen the popular saloon as a bar and grill, and the town granted a use permit in 1997 that never panned out.

When finished, it will mark the first time in more than 10 years that the Barn will be open for business.

Brooke Bryant covers Moraga. Reach her at 925-943-8042 or bbryant@cctimes.com.