Protestations and offers of purchase were not enough to save another Solano County historic building from destruction.

Local historian Clyde M. Low wrote about Green Valley School for the Solano Historian in December 1993. Back in 1991, members of the Heritage Society of West Central Solano received support from then Superintendent of Schools Wendall Kuykendall. Together they formed a group to explore the possibility of preserving the structure from further destruction.

“The group recommended that the Heritage Society promote the project of preserving Green Valley School. Bud Ellsworth was charged with obtaining permission for the owners to allow covering the leaking roof to protect it from the coming winter rains,” Low wrote.

This was successfully done. A local roofing company supplied the material and volunteers set about securing the roof. “There was an agreement that before fund-raising could be started, a contract would have to be made between the owners and the County of Solano to work out a transfer deed which would provide living quarters in the back portion of the property for security and maintenance.”

The Green Valley School District was established in 1854. The description of the first one-room school house does not exist; however it is known that 38 students enrolled in its first year, ranging from ages 4 to 17. The “new” Green Valley Schoolhouse was an upgrade to a two-room structure, that accommodated 65 to 70 students in grades one through eight. The building sported a belfry on its broad roof and a very large American flag.

Calvin Webster, superintendent of schools around 1888, described the schoolhouse in detail in “History of Solano County Education.” He noted that the town of Cordelia and the “rich and famous” Green Valley sent their children to the little schoolhouse located at the foot of a hill that was surrounded by oak trees. “This is one of the oldest districts in Solano County, and is a first-class grammar school.”

The two classrooms were well furnished and furniture and apparatus. One of the largest and best selected libraries were housed within the school. In 1888, 91 children were enrolled. The teachers were paid $60 to $75 and taught for eight months.
Cordelia was described in 1872 as the center for large farming and stock-raising enterprises. At that time the population was about 300. There was a church, hotel, private boarding house, blacksmith shop, wagon shop, boot and shoemaker’s shop, law office, two dry goods stores, express office, post office, three saloons, upholstery and paint shop, livery stable, butcher shop, and a warehouse capable of storing 1,000 tons of grain.

Green Valley was known for grape growing and viticulture. Over 200,000 gallons of brandy and wines had been shipped between the years 1871 and 1872.

Cordelia had a large German immigrant population, consisting not just of farmers, but artisans and merchants from Hanover. Family names can still be found in the area, such as Siebe, Garben, Dunker and Glashoff, to name a few.

Bud Ellsworth not only was instrumental in securing the building’s roof in 1991, but he interviewed and provided anecdotal accounts of old-timers who had fond memories of the Green Valley school. “Buster” Dunker who graduated in 1919 recalled his teachers. There was Mrs. Ella Force, who taught grades five through eight from about 1910 until she retired in 1939 and Mrs. Floy Weeks, who was principal and teacher of grades five through eight from 1916 until she retired in 1956.

Mrs. Weeks commuted daily by railroad from Vallejo and later by Greyhound bus on Highway 40, which later would be widened and become Interstate 80. “The boys joked about the forceful principal, Mrs. Weeks, and the kind and gentle Mrs. Force.”

Dunker recalled the sound of the school bell summoning the students to class. The boys vied for the privilege of ringing the bell. When the bell rope broke, one “lucky” boy was chosen to climb up the oak tree (which is still there) to the belfry to replace it.

“According to Mrs. Mary Jean Gollinger, whose family lived in the former schoolhouse when it had been converted to residential use after its closing in 1926, the bell was removed from the old school in a WWI scrap metal drive. Mrs. Weeks rescued it from the scrap heap and secreted it in the basement of the school building, where it was rediscovered. It is now being safely stored until restoration of the building will permit its return to a reconstructed belfry.”

Sadly, this plan will never come to fruition, because the building is gone.

Stan Campi told Ellsworth that while attending the distinctive Green Valley School with its high side porch with its unusual X-braced stick-style screen of the 1880s. He talked about a dairy farm family that brought their five children to Cordelia with the milk delivery truck each day, leaving the milk at the train depot, then dropping the children
off at the school. In the afternoon, it was the reversal. There was a stable behind the school where the children who arrived on horseback could “park” their horses. Several times a month, local farmers brought hay to the school to feed the horses.

In the 1991 attempt to not just preserve the schoolhouse, but to restore it, the Solano Parlor 39 of the Native Sons of the Golden West was put in charge of the project. The fraternal organization sponsored the Thompson’s Corners Annual Benefit Softball Tournament and Exhibition in Suisun City’s Todd Park to raise money for the “Old Green Valley School Restoration Fund.” United Parcel Service, located (to this day) in Cordelia, conducted its annual benefit raffle in conjunction with the softball tournament to raise money as well.

In 1993 $4,000 was raised and negotiations with the owners of the property were under way to make it possible for public restoration and use of the schoolhouse. All the time and effort by dedicated people seems to have evaporated and as a consequence, the building fell further to ruin. In spite of its designation on the state’s historical registry, it seemed to be only a momentary impediment to its destruction and loss.