

Smallest 'big house' to reopen for tours

BY PAUL ROGERS
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Tiny Davenport Jail — built in 1914, home to only three prisoners and more like a walk-in closet than San Quentin — is finally getting some attention.

The 15-by-15-foot jail, believed to be the smallest "big house" in California, will be reopened to the public Sunday by the Santa Cruz County Historical Trust after two years of earthquake repairs.

The unimposing building is in Davenport (population 200), about 12 miles north of Santa Cruz on Highway 1.

It has two cells, boilerplate iron doors, a colorful history and a billy goat living out back.

"It may be modest, but it is as relevant as grandiose buildings," said Cynthia Mathews of the historical trust.

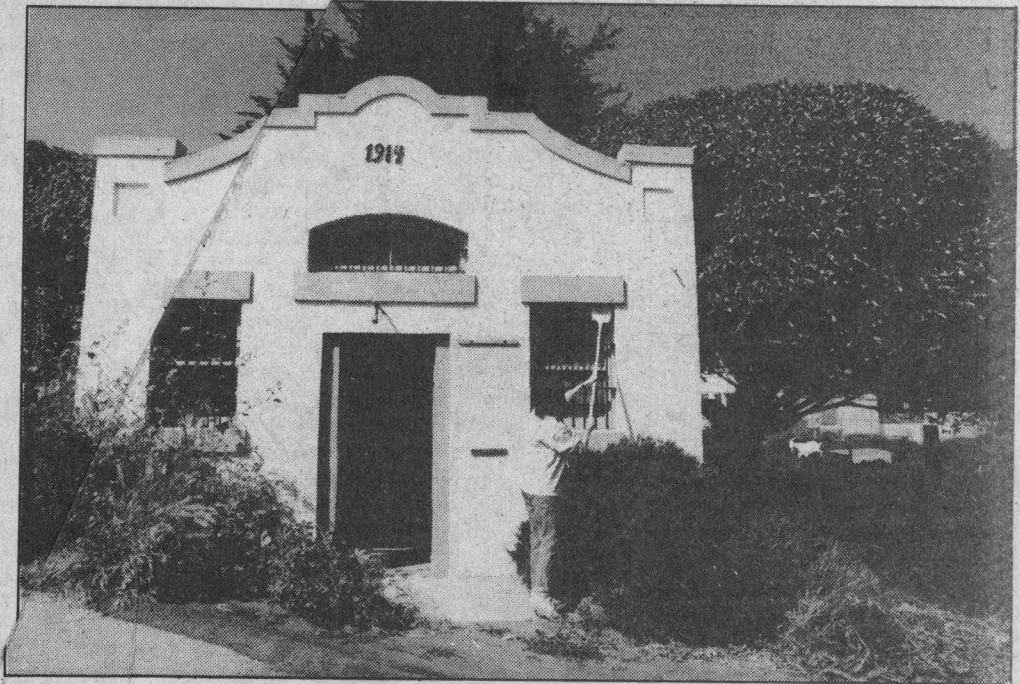
"We think it's important that every community have its landmarks — no matter how small."

The jail stopped housing prisoners sometime during the mid-1930s.

Built as an early centerpiece for a city that never really materialized, it held only three prisoners before falling into disrepair and use as a tool shed.

Two of the scofflaws were boys from San Mateo who spent the night there in 1914 after stealing a horse. The other, a local drunk, slept off a night of coast sloop-hopping sometime just before World

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JUDITH CALSON — MERCURY NEWS

The 15-by-15-foot Davenport Jail has held only three prisoners since it was built in 1914.

Repaired Davenport Jail will reopen for tours

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War I.

Like a sheriff who couldn't shoot straight, the jail had real problems from the beginning, says Alverda Orlando, a former 30-year Davenport resident who serves as the area's unofficial historian.

First, it was too small.

"You couldn't even fit a desk or a jailer in there," she said, laughing.

Worse, it had no plumbing, so prisoners had to use a slop bucket for a toilet. County deputies would just as soon ride a horse or drive a prisoner down the bumpy and winding coast road to the main jail in Santa Cruz than sit in cramped quarters and clean out the filthy bucket.

Back then, before Highway 1 was paved, Davenport was a company town. From 1907 on, most of its 900 residents worked



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for the Portland Standard Cement Co., farmed for Coast Dairies and Land Co. or worked in mountain timber mills.

Economic isolation and unbearably thick dust from the old cement plant eventually drove most residents south to Santa Cruz.

Today, the town is a sleepy collection of houses, the Lone Star cement plant, a few stores and tourist attractions centered

around whale watching.

The jail was donated to the historical trust in 1979. It had been run as a museum of rural north coast history until the Loma Prieta earthquake caused severe cracking.

After \$7,000 in repairs, state officials recommended in February that the building be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. When confirmed later this year, it will be Davenport's only structure on the list.

"Right now there's a new resurgence of pride in Davenport," said Orlando. "In the early years, there was a lack of self-esteem."

The jail reopening Sunday is part of local observances for National Historic Preservation Week, Sunday to May 16.

The following events in Santa Cruz also will be held. For infor-

mation, call the Santa Cruz County Historical Trust office at (408) 425-3499.

■ Saturday. Historic Homes Tour: Nine historic homes in Santa Cruz, mostly restored Victorians, will be featured from noon to 4 p.m. Costumed docents will describe area history at each location, including the centerpiece 1891 Golden Gate Villa at 924 Third St. on Beach Hill. Cost is \$15 advance or \$20 day of tour.

■ Sunday. Davenport Jail Reopening: Featuring exhibit of north coast history; 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Free.

■ May 16. Speakeasy Gala. Lavish "Roaring '20s" benefit for new McPherson Center for Art and History in downtown Santa Cruz. Starts at 7 p.m., at Seven Gables, 1314 Ocean St. Cost is \$125 per person.