

Fire-gutted landmark may be doomed

BY PAUL ROGERS
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Fire crews and persistent rain doused the last smoldering embers of the 1910-era Trust Building Friday afternoon, leaving the once-proud corner landmark of downtown Santa Cruz almost certainly headed for the wrecking ball.

Nearly all the wood in the top two floors of the three-story building was destroyed in a suspicious fire Thursday night, including the roof, interior walls and rooms full of old office furniture.

That left three unreinforced masonry walls standing free, without any bracing, and in imminent danger of collapse.

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Stubendorff and other experts

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could not enter the building Friday, fearing it too dangerous. Instead, they climbed a 50-foot fire ladder and took Polaroid photos from above.

"My recommendation is demolition," said Stubendorff. "There's not much left to save."

Until the fire, the Trust Building stood as one of the belea-

guered city's few remaining historic landmarks that had not been destroyed by the Loma Prieta earthquake.

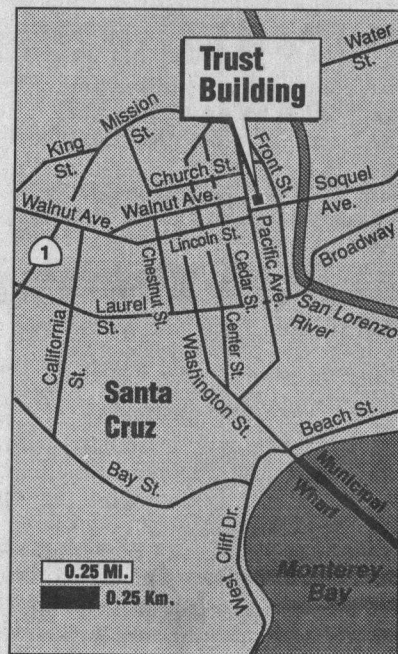
Fire inspectors looked for clues to the blaze's origin Friday, while the owners, the Kett family of Watsonville, weighed their options.

The building had sat vacant since suffering heavy damage in the '89 quake. But the Ketts were moving forward with plans to save it. Demolition work on the adjacent Elks building was to have begun within weeks, with a \$1.1 million retrofitting job on the Trust Building to follow.

"I feel stunned," said owner Shepard Kett. "It's so frustrating."

City Manager Dick Wilson ordered an independent contractor hired to evaluate the damage. The inspection should start Mon-

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CARL NEIBURGER — MERCURY NEWS

City inspector recommends demolition of Trust Building

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day. Demolition could occur within about 10 days, city officials said.

If demolition is necessary, Kett said his family will build a reproduction — complete with the same red bricks and familiar white windows as the old Trust.

Demolition work probably would include three buildings: the Trust, the Elks and the condemned green Ferrari Building connected to them. That would leave another gaping vacant lot in Santa Cruz, a depressing image

for residents who had recently begun to see promising signs of recovery.

Fire Chief Ed Ekers said no combustible materials were found outside. Witnesses reported seeing no one leave before the fire. Electricity was off when the fire started — ruling out faulty wiring as the cause.

Two factors pointed away from arson: few arsonists would set fire to a building during a rainy night, officials said; and most deliberately set fires begin on the ground floor, not the top floor, as with the Trust.