

Only one thing wrong with Nelson Center — its name

By JENNIFER KOSS

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — There's only one thing wrong with the Loudon Nelson Community Center — it should be the *London* Nelson Community Center, according to center director George Stavis.

William Rubel, a member of Friends of Loudon Nelson Community Center, decided to research Nelson's name as a historical project, with help from community center members Barbara Sironen and Julie Minnis, and Historical Society President Cynthia Mathews. The study leaves "absolutely no question" of the error in Nelson's name, Stavis said.

Rubel said proof of Nelson's correct name will be presented to the county-city committee which oversees the community center. City and county officials contacted today said they would be open to changing the name. The information also will be given to the Santa Cruz City Schools Board, which named its headquarters the Loudon Nelson Plaza.

Loudon Nelson Center, formerly Laurel Community Center, was re-named in 1979 in honor of Nelson, an ex-slave who lived in Santa Cruz. He died in 1860, leaving his possessions — a six-acre parcel near the San Lorenzo River and about \$375 — to the Santa Cruz School District.

The error in spelling Nelson's first name occurred in an 1875 court record, Stavis said. "You can see, abundantly and clearly, the error in 1875."

Fifty pages of records and six publications of Nelson's name at the time of his

death spell it London, he said. The publications include a probate notice in the former Santa Cruz News, an obituary in the Santa Cruz Sentinel and a notice to creditors in the Weekly Pacific Sentinel.

Why the spelling in the 1875 records was so completely accepted as truth and prior records ignored remains a mystery. Even Nelson's gravestone in Evergreen Cemetery calls him Loudon, said cemetery buff Renie Leaman.

However, that gravestone wasn't erected until the 1930s, supposedly by the Daughters of the American Revolution, she said. And, because Evergreen Cemetery's records were destroyed in a fire

about that time, a mistake is understandable, she said.

"There are three different ways the name could be interpreted" from old records, Leaman said — Landon, Loudon or London. Nelson's probate will is handwritten in a barely legible spidery script, making "a's" and "e's" and "u's" hard to distinguish from each other. To make matters more difficult, it has been damaged by floodwaters, she said. Deed records are also handwritten.

"I don't feel that I have any firm proof that it's Loudon, or any proof that it is not," she said.

Stavis said "there's absolutely no question about the 1860 records, or of the error in the 1875 printed records."

Rubel also said he has no doubt of the name. "I feel that Mr. Nelson was an important Santa Cruz pioneer, that we honored his memory by naming the Loudon Nelson Plaza after him; we honored him by naming the center after him, and we should honor him by his given

name, the name his mother gave him."

Supervisor Gary Patton said that a name change is possible. "Ultimately, the board and the council would each have to vote."

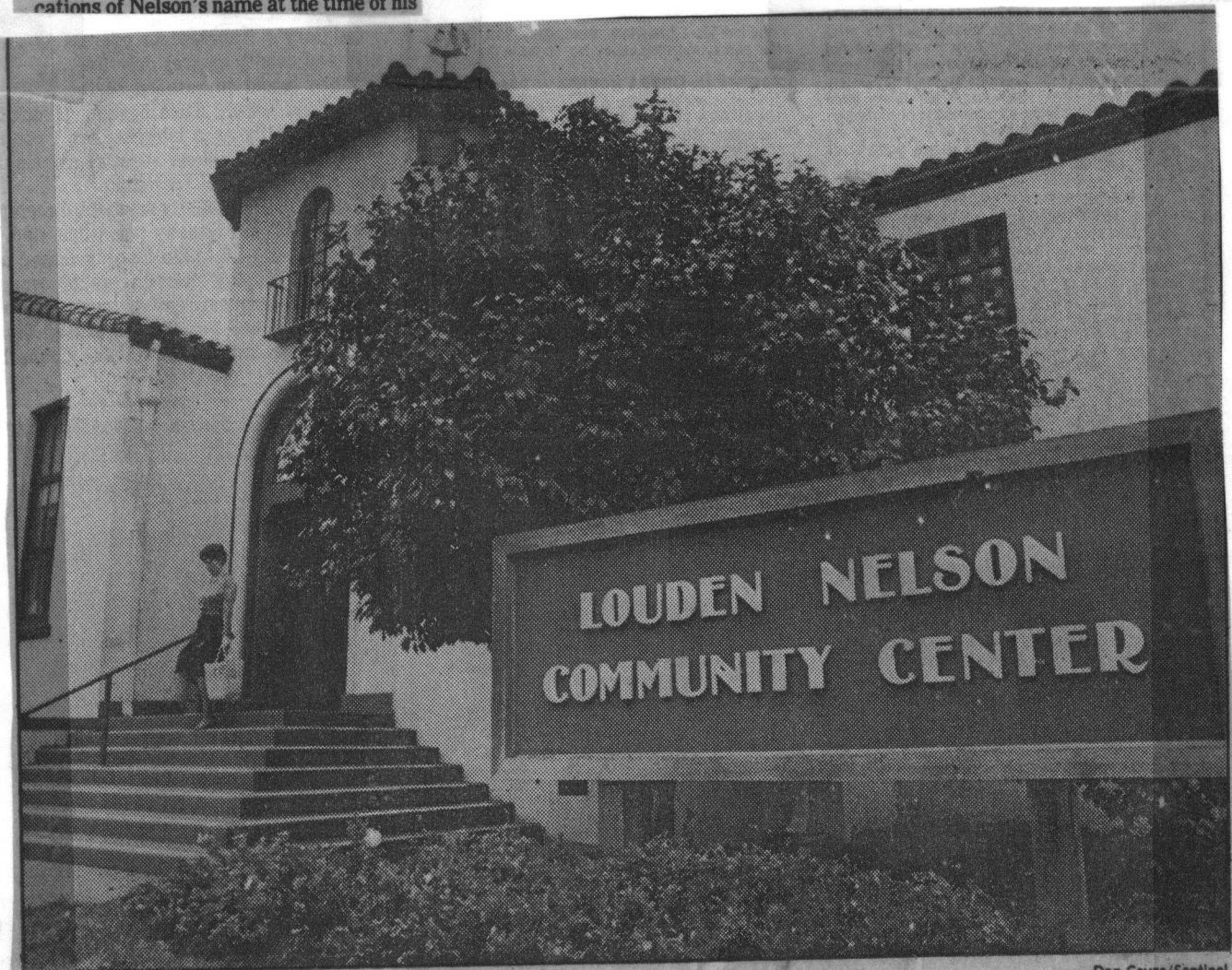
Patton said the vote would depend on the committee's findings and on opinions of the public. Changing the center's name would involve changing the center's stationery and the sign in front of the center, but would cost very little, he said.

The black community's drive to honor Nelson by naming the center after him was led by a man named Lowell Hunter, Patton said, with the idea "this would be a memorial and a heritage to him."

Councilman Spiro Mellis said he hadn't heard that the center's name was in doubt, but "if it's true, I'd have no problem voting for it."

Councilman Michael Rotkin said he would also probably vote for the name change because "I think it should be named after the guy it's meant to honor."

A decision on whether to change Loudon Nelson Plaza's name is up to the Schools Board, Patton said.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Loudon Nelson Center sign may have to be changed

REFERENCE

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