

Watsonville landmarks will fall

By JAMIE MARKS
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WATSONVILLE — Some of downtown's treasured landmarks, badly damaged by the Oct. 17 earthquake, will fall to the wrecking ball beginning Monday, city officials said.

But at least two pieces of nostalgic value will be saved. The clock above the gabled roof of the Oddfellows building on East Beach Street was carefully removed by a huge crane last week. And the steeple at St. Patrick's church will be cut into portions and removed some time Monday. The fate of the

church structure remains uncertain.

Whether the shattered downtown will ever recover from the jolt of the 7.1 earthquake remains to be seen.

City officials estimate downtown brings in about \$1 million in sales tax annually, and employs some

1,400 people, most of whom have been out of work since the quake struck.

Many of the downtown businesses and offices are already relocating to the shopping centers on the outskirts of town. Ford's department store, the anchor of

See LANDMARKS — A28

10/29/89

EQ '89 - Wats.

A-28—Santa Cruz Sentinel — Sunday, Oct. 29, 1989

Landmarks/ Wrecking ball looms

Continued from Page A1

downtown, has found three temporary locations — two of them in new buildings near Green Valley Road and Main Street.

"The main thing is to make downtown Watsonville attractive enough that they'll want to return," said City Councilman Tony Campos.

Campos and Carol Wix, of Pajaro Valley Bank, said the Chamber of Commerce is beginning a disaster-relief fund for businesses through Pajaro Valley Bank. Wix said she hopes the fund can generate enough money to pay the initial costs for businesses that want to rebuild downtown.

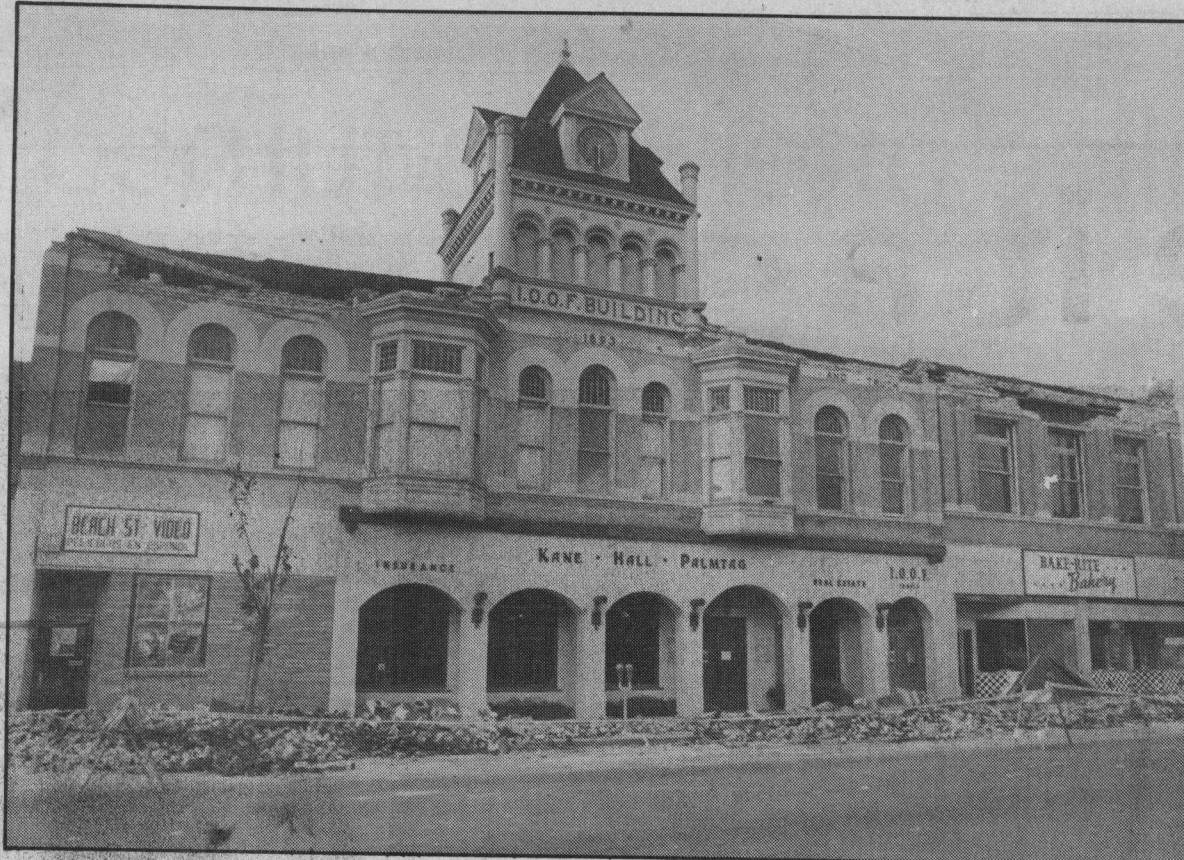
"If we can pay the design, engineering and permit costs for a business, then they can go to FEMA and SBA (Federal Emergency Management Agency and Small Business Administration) and get loans for rebuilding," Wix said. "Sometimes it's those initial costs that stop a project."

Campos said he'll also seek an urban planner to help the community design a whole new downtown, possibly with a different alignment of streets and store fronts.

"We need people in leadership positions that understand where we can get the grants to put the downtown back together again," Campos said. "The past days of the good ol' boys are gone."

Traffic through Main Street in downtown Watsonville has been banned since the big temblor hit, creating gridlock along Union Street, East Beach Street and Riverside Drive.

But officials gave motorists a break Friday by opening the Front Street bridge into Pajaro in North Monterey County for the first time in a week.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The classic clock atop the I.O.O.F. Building has been spared from demolition.

City officials have released a partial list of buildings destroyed by the earthquake. They estimate \$150 million damage was sustained to residences and an additional \$175 million to commercial properties, bringing the total amount of damage to \$325 million.

Most of the downtown businesses, which employ as many as 1,400 people, have been off-limits since the earthquake. City officials will not reopen downtown until they bring down the most severely damaged buildings. Some 32 Main Street businesses are on the list of destroyed buildings.

Slated to come down Monday are the Masonic Temple at Union and Maple streets, and the Hildreth Building on Main Street.

Both of these buildings adjoin the Fox Theatre, which will be spared unless it's damaged by the removal

of the adjacent buildings.

Tearing down the Hildreth Building without hurting the Fox will be tricky, Chief Building Inspector Neil England said, because there is a common wall between the two. But city officials have vowed to take pains in the demolition.

Across the street, most of the 300 block of Main Street will be torn down, from Second Street to the wooden Watsonville Jeans Store. Ace Hardware in between may also be saved.

The Oddfellows Building on East Beach Street will have to be demolished, as much of its brick exterior has already crumbled from the earthquake and aftershocks.

The Lettunich Building at Main and East Beach may have fared better than first believed. The structural engineers have found no serious damage to the foundation

or main supports.

However, across the street, the massive \$7 million Ford's department store, the biggest in downtown, appears to be a total loss. After uncovering the facade on the newer portion of the building, inspectors found large cracks in the concrete supports.

The E.B. Lettunich Building near the door will be removed. It houses Western Auto and a couple of other stores. And the Novcich building which contains the Chamber of Commerce and Jolley's Jewelers, listed as destroyed.

On the 500 block of Main Street the city has listed from Johnson's Drug Store up to the Miramar Restaurant as destroyed, which means they, too, will fall to the wrecking ball.