

# Pride in the past

10-27-91



National Register of Historic Places lists the Boardwalk's carousel and 34 other local sites.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

Developer Michael O'Hearn puts a shine on historic landmark plaque at Sunshine Villa, the old McCrea Hotel.

## County is rich in history, poor in preservation

By KAREN SCHMIDT  
Sentinel staff writer

**S**HAME ON YOU, Santa Cruz County, says state historian Marvin Brienens.

"You people have not been very active (in historic preservation)," he scolded over the telephone.

He should know. He keeps the roster of historic landmarks and historic points of interest for each county in California.

Out of more than 1,000 state-designated landmarks, our county has eight. In the past 18 years Santa Cruz has gained only three, Brienens pointed out.

And of 760 State Historic Points of Interest, we have five. "This is not an outstanding record," he said. San Bernardino County holds the record with 116.

In a joking tone, Brienens asked: What's going on here?

Given the labyrinth of government agencies involved, it's not an easy question to answer. The bureaucratic red tape itself is one reason more historic places don't get designated.

Furthermore, the research costs behind the nomination process are as high as ever, while the returns are as low as ever.

### State historic landmarks in county

**O**UT of more than 1,000 historic landmarks in California, Santa Cruz County has eight. These locations have regional or state-wide significance, but aren't necessarily in their original condition. They are marked by the esteemed brass bear plaque and a sign on the highway.

1. **Castro Adobe**  
184 Old Adobe Road  
Watsonville
2. **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk**  
Beach Street, Santa Cruz

3. **Superintendent's House**  
201 Monterey St. Capitola
4. **Big Basin Redwoods State Park**  
Highway 9, Boulder Creek
5. **Felton Covered Bridge**  
Covered Bridge Road  
Felton
6. **Via De Branciforte site**  
Santa Cruz
7. **Glenwood site**  
Glenwood
8. **Mission Santa Cruz**  
Emmett and High Streets  
Santa Cruz

Honor doesn't pay the bills. Joan Brady, program manager for the county's Historical Resource Commission, said there's little financial incentive to designate more historic buildings because many grants for historic preservation have been cut.

"It's sad, but true," said Brady. "It's a real irony that we finally got the Castro adobe Historic Landmark status, and now it's sitting with a fence around it decaying be-

cause of lack of funds. It makes you think twice about putting resources into doing that."

Edna Kimbro, who owns the Castro Adobe and consults as an architectural historian and conservator, lives in a trailer next to the adobe and patiently cares for it as she searches for financial assistance to repair earthquake damage.

"Money has dried up at all levels," said Kimbro, "and things have slowed down."

Because of the county Planning Department's limited staff and resources, Brady said she's forced to take a more nuts-and-bolts approach to historic preservation. First priority, she said, goes to maintaining places already designated.

For example, Valencia Hall in the Aptos hills sits on a lot that is being eaten away by a creek. The county recently purchased the lot across the street, where the hall — listed on the National Register — will be moved and joined by the old Valencia Post Office. Project manager Dave Mitchell of the county's Department of Parks and Recreation said it hopes eventually to turn the area into a small interpretive museum and park.

Still, the county hopes to add to the current list of 35 historic places on the National Register. Six new nominations have been made: the Davenport Jail, the Porter Sesnon House in Aptos, the Bay View Hotel in Aptos, the Quail Hollow Ranch in Ben Lomond, the Veteran's Memorial building in Santa Cruz and the Benjamin Parrish House in Soquel.

Please see HISTORIC PRIDE — D2

# Historic pride lags in this history-rich area

Continued from Page D1

How does a building even get considered for a designation like the National Register? Or make it to the big time as a State Historic Landmark?

Organizations that recognize historic status exist on national, state and local levels, generally with appointed commissions. Their chosen sites vary and the criteria for inclusion on one of these lists, is vague at best. The first step often involves earning the "historically significant" label from the cities or county, who periodically hire consultants to survey their areas. Buildings on these lists are judged on a point system for their architectural significance (style) and their historic significance (people and events surrounding it).

The last major survey in Santa Cruz in 1986, for instance, tagged 600 buildings. A survey that same year listed about 200 buildings in the county's unincorporated areas.

Although no official plaques mark this local designation, some buildings on the list get recognition from the Santa Cruz County Historical Trust. Their six-member committee judges buildings and awards them the oval blue-and-white plaques seen around town. Director Peggy Coats said the panel has honored 120 buildings so far. Similarly, the Pajaro Valley Historic Association has given out six square blue-and-white plaques to selected buildings in Watsonville.

While it doesn't cost to be on the survey list, there is a down side to being recognized as "historically significant." Building owners must get special permission to make alterations.

In Santa Cruz, owners must apply for permits from the Historic Preservation Commission — a group of seven people appointed by the City Council to ensure that changes to a building preserve its historic integrity.

For buildings in unincorporated areas, the county has its own Historical Resource Commission. Five commissioners, one appointed by each supervisor, meet monthly to review permits for alterations. The city planning departments of

## The National Register of Historic Places

**S**ANTA CRUZ County has 35 listings on the National Register of Historic Places, all of which have maintained their integrity. Some may be marked by locally awarded blue-and-white plaques.

Old homes and buildings aren't the only places on the National Register. The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk's carousel and roller coaster are on the list, as well as areas like the Pacific Avenue Historic District, Mission Hill Area Historic District, Watsonville City Plaza and the Old Riverview Historic District in Capitola.

Watsonville, Capitola and Scotts Valley cover the job for buildings in their cities.

Danielle Uharriet, assistant planner with the city of Santa Cruz, said because of restrictions on alterations, many owners ask the commission to remove their buildings from the survey list.

But others who may want a shot at bigger and better designations, she said, ask to be added.

The commissions at city and county levels also select historic buildings and districts from their surveys to nominate for National Register status. But Marlyn Lourtie of the state's Office of Historic Preservation said anyone can submit an application for state review.

Documented research, she said, must show that the place is at least 50 years old and is historically or architecturally significant. The hardest requirement to meet, said Lourtie, is integrity — that is, the building must look the same as it did when it achieved its significance.

Applications for National Register status are then reviewed by — you guessed it — another commission. At the state level, it consists of nine people appointed by the governor. If you meet the test and get the state's recommendation, Lourtie said, it's usually smooth

### National Historic Landmarks

Out of eight State Historic Landmarks in Santa Cruz County, the National Park Service has chosen for National Historic Landmark designation only one: the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk.

### World Landmarks

The United Nations chooses places worldwide for their World Heritage List. No landmarks in Santa Cruz County have been chosen yet for that designation. An example of one in California is Yosemite National Park.

sailing past the Keeper of the National Register in Washington, D.C., who has the final word.

This process can easily take a year, Lourtie said. Once on the National Register, however, a historic place qualifies for protection from federal projects that might otherwise wipe it off the map.

Kimbro said, "If you're concerned about the bigger issues, that something serious could threaten a place, the most important designation is the National Register of Historic Places."

Other advantages: Places on the National Register are subject to the more flexible State Historic Structures Building Codes, owners qualify for tax breaks, and grants to fund preservation — although now dwindling — are sometimes available.

Some historic places on the National Register, like Kimbro's Castro adobe in Watsonville, can also acquire State Historic Landmark status if they can prove to the state commission that the site has regional or statewide significance. However, because integrity is not required, places like Big Basin Redwoods and the Via de Branciforte site also qualify.

Lourtie said this is the most restrictive designation. "It really has to be pretty important because there's a real honor associated with state landmarks."

As part of this honor, State Historic Landmarks get the prized bronze bear plaque and a sign on the highway directing the public to the site. Honorees also receive limited protection from encroaching development projects by requiring environmental reviews. And Kimbro said landmarks get higher priority for scarce grant funds, although that hasn't yet helped her.

In contrast to the prized State Historic Landmark is the State Historic Point of Interest designation. Lourtie said it's the easiest to get because these places must demonstrate local significance only and don't need integrity. The state commission doesn't award plaques, but does put signs marking Points of Interest on the highway.

Enter the lofty world of National Historic Landmarks. These designations, Kimbro said, are "conferred from above and hard to get." There's no nomination process. The National Park Service chooses them "out of the air" from State Historic Landmarks. On an amusement park spree one year, Kimbro said, the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk got designated.

The National Park Service, said Kimbro, reserves some high powers. Owners of National Historic Landmarks must agree to maintain the site, she said, and the Park Service can periodically review stewardship and remove the status if they see fit.

But with increasingly higher status comes the promise of more grant money. Kimbro said she hopes the National Park Service will someday upgrade Mission Santa Cruz to National Historic Landmark status. Seven of the 21 California missions, including San Juan Bautista, have already earned this designation.

Ultimately, she said she hopes the entire mission system will get on the United Nations' World Heri-

## State Historic Points of Interest

**O**UT OF 760 state-designated Historic Points of Interest in California, Santa Cruz County is home to five. These places are considered locally significant and are not required to be in original condition. They are marked by a sign on the highway.

1. **Evergreen Cemetery**  
118 Cooper St.  
Santa Cruz

2. **Hall of Records Octagon**  
Front and Cooper Streets  
Santa Cruz
3. **Point of Discovery of the Redwoods**  
Near Pinto Lake  
Watsonville
4. **Hihn Building**  
201 Monterey Ave.  
Capitola
5. **Mountain Charley Big Tree**  
Near Glenwood

tage List, which will give them access to money from the World Landmark Fund and the Getty Trust.

Kimbro's vision stretches far into the future. Preserving historic places is her life's work. Needless

to say, she's frustrated by the current lack of support.

"The climate for historic preservation is not what it was," she said, regretfully. "I'm kind of afraid of what might happen. Historic preservation activity is at an all time low. It's hard to find anyone to stand up for anything these days. The community has just been beaten down after the earthquake."

Adding to Brienens' scolding of Santa Cruz County, Kimbro said, "If resources aren't identified and listed, we can't plan or manage them and the whole system breaks down. It will be a loss to all of us."

## Organizations help with preservation

For educational information about preservation issues, such as designations, legislation and financial incentives, here are some groups to contact:

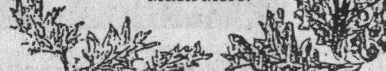
1. **Santa Cruz County Historical Trust**  
1543 Pacific Avenue, Suite 220  
Santa Cruz, Calif. 95060  
425-3499
2. **Pajaro Valley Historical Society**  
261 E. Beach St.  
Watsonville, Calif. 95076  
722-0305
3. **Scotts Valley Historical Society**  
4603 Scotts Valley Drive,  
Scotts Valley, Calif. 95066  
438-5593
4. **National Trust for Historic Preservation, Western Region**  
1 Sutter St.  
San Francisco, Calif. 94104  
(415) 956-0610

 **14th Annual**   
**Highlands Senior Center**  
**HARVEST BAZAAR**  
November 1st & 2nd  
Fri. and Sat. 10 am - 4 pm

  
**HIGHLANDS PARK**  
**8500 HIGHWAY 9,**  
**BEN LOMOND**

For Information: 336-8900  
Serving Lunch 11:30-2:30

Quality Crafts, White  
Elephants, Plants, Books,  
Christmas Gifts, and Much,  
Much More!



**BIG BAND DANCE CONCERT in the COCOANUT GROVE BALLROOM**

**Call**