

Historic buildings

Local

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'Spectacular, tragic' fire draws crowd

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SANTA CRUZ — A towering and dramatic fire at the historic Trust Building didn't stop 150 movie-goers from attending a free screening at a nearby movie theater Thursday evening.

"They stood outside and watched," said Charles Shaw, manager of the Del Mar Theatre, which is just a few doors south of the building. "They filtered in when it started dying out." He started the movie a few minutes late to allow people to watch the blaze.

Three women with free passes, however, saw the fire start and decided to skip the movie.

"Would you go in there?" said Bunny Macfarlan, there with her daughter.

"It's the most spectacular thing I've ever seen," said Michelle Erickson. "But it's really tragic."

As the flames shot high into the night sky, residents gathered behind police lines to watch yet another major historical landmark go up in smoke.

"It's the prettiest building in Santa Cruz," said Santa Cruz City Schools board member Deborah Taylor.

"Every time we save a building, it burns," said local activist Glen Schaller, who said he could smell the smoke all the way to Bay and

Mission streets. "It's just one big thing after another."

"Too bad, they were going to rehab it," said local historian Cynthia Mathews.

Mathews' niece captured on videotape the flaming glory of the old brick building that was a prominent local landmark long before a tenacious brick clinging to the top of building turned it into a symbol of the city's post-quake recovery spirit.

Mathews had asked her niece to record downtown construction, to illustrate the transition downtown is going through.

But when the fire broke out, her niece grabbed the camera to record

the rapid transitions visited on the building by a raging fire.

"I knew you'd want it," she told her aunt.

At least four Santa Cruz City Council members were on hand as firefighters battled the blaze.

Councilwoman Katherine Beiers, who got her start with the city as a member of the Historic Preservation Commission, said the building was important as a prominent corner landmark.

"The larger question is ... if we want any bit of history in this county, we're going to have to work harder to invest in those ones we have left," Beiers said. "Invest time, energy and love."

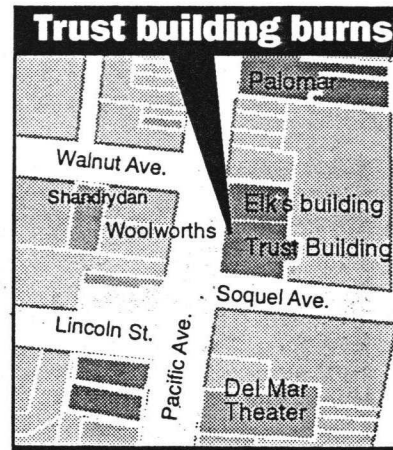
Also watching the building burn were Mayor Don Lane and Councilman Scott Kennedy. Beiers said Councilman Neal Coonerty had been at the fire earlier.

Maureen Lee, owner of Santa Cruz Jewelers & Gift store got a call that her Pacific Avenue business, immediately south of the Del Mar, was on fire.

Once on the scene, although relieved to see that her store was all right, she was upset by the shock of the evening's events.

"I'm still shaking," she said.

Late Wednesday night, an angry firefighter said, "I'm so damned tired of watching this town burn down."



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