

SANTA CRUZ

Historical buildings recognized by MAH

Historic Buildings
Museum names
nine historical
sites in county

By Calvin Men
calvinmen@santacruzsentinel.com
@calvinmenatwork on Twitter

SANTA CRUZ » When Marla Novo drives in the car with her kids, they play a game: Find the blue plaque.

The plaques, given by the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History each year for the past 30 years, designate a building as historical landmarks in the county.

"It's really the easiest way you can learn about history," said Novo, curator of collections for the museum. "You can be driving or walking by or riding your bike by a home and learn little tidbits about people in Santa Cruz through these structures."

Saturday, the museum will honor nine more historical landmark buildings in the county at the Blue Plaque Awards at 1 p.m. at the museum, 705 Front St. in Santa Cruz. Among the list is the Ben Lomond Library and Club House, the Pioneer Cemetery in Watsonville and the Rio Theatre in Brookdale.

"This award is really for educational purposes," Novo said. "It's not something that, after you receive a blue plaque, you wouldn't be able to alter your home."

Others on the list are the F.W. Swanton Cottage in Brookdale, the Tuttle Mansion in Watsonville, the Lamborn House in Watsonville, the Howe House in Santa Cruz, the Daniel Williams family residence in Santa Cruz and Smith's China Shop in Santa Cruz.

A historical landmark

BLUE PLAQUE AWARDS EVENT

What: The Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History will award plaques to nine historical sites in the county

When: 1 p.m. Saturday

Where: Museum of Art & History

Details: Visit www.santacruzmah.org/learning/history-awards

Sites: Daniel Williams family residence, Rio Theatre, Howe House and Smith's China Shop, all in Santa Cruz. Pioneer Cemetery, Tuttle Mansion and Lamborn House, all in Watsonville. Ben Lomond Library and Club House, F.W. Swanton Cottage in Brookdale.

committee at the museum, comprised of local historians and preservations authorities, decides which buildings receive the awards. The committee has designated 80 structures in the past 30 years, Novo said.

The basic criteria for buildings to be considered for the annual award is that they be at least 50 years old, have some sort of historical or architectural significance and be in reasonably good condition. Each plaque has a brief history of its building printed on it. Owners are asked to display it prominently for the public to read and learn.

"Of course it's just a plaque and we can't put all the information on it," Novo said. "But hopefully it piques somebody's curiosity and makes them want to learn more about our area and the people who used to live there."

One of Smith's favorites among this year's field is Smith's China Shop. The building was built in 1940 and was designed by Orpha B. Smith and her husband Irvin M. Smith, the



SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

The Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History is honoring the Rio Theatre with a historical landmark award.

original owner of the store, Novo said. The Smith family still owns and manages the store, with the grandchildren of the Smiths behind the counter.

"It's a great testament to people shopping locally and the store's great online presence," said Novo. "It's one of the businesses that have persevered over the years."

Lisa Robinson, a member of the museum's landmark committee and president of the San Lorenzo Valley Historical Society, commends the owners of all the historic buildings that were recog-

nized this year for preserving them and highlighting their significance. Robinson is familiar with the history of the Ben Lomond Library and the F.W. Swanton Cottage, century old buildings that look remarkably like their original design.

"It's so easy to go in and gut the interior of older buildings," she said. "These buildings have not had that done. They stand just as they did 100 years ago."

For information or to nominate a building, go to www.santacruzmah.org/learning/history-awards.