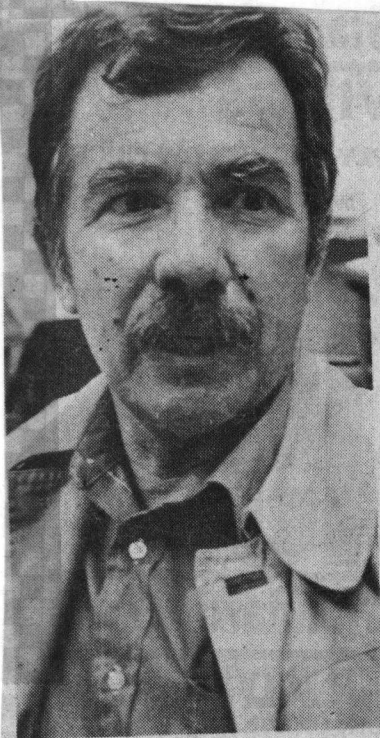


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Watsonville, the

city with a past



Professor Kenneth Cardwell, UC Berkeley professor of architecture, whose methodology for a city's building inventory was introduced in Watsonville. He and his wife, also an architect, spearheaded the year-long study.

By BETTE BROWN

An eight day stroll taken in April of this year by eight UCSC researchers covering the 63 miles of streets and byways inside the city limits of Watsonville uncovered a wealth of data about indigenous structures.

Probably no other city can match the Watsonville boast that it knows . . . really knows . . . what its physical attributes are, architecturally speaking!

The unprecedented walk was taken to satisfy many purposes and its findings will be valuable to many persons for years to come.

Not only did the researchers inventory the entire city's structures on every street, lane or byway, but photographs were also taken of the exteriors.

Within a few days the year-long study and research project will draw to a close.

In July of 1975 a three-hour planning and historical preservation conference was held at Pajaro Dunes involving city, county and state planners and historians who went away with renewed interests in preservation projects.

Among the inspirational suggestions was the observation by William Padgett, State Department of Parks and Recreation, who said, "Watsonville should launch an immediate survey of its community to make an inventory of significant cultural and historical sites, buildings, and architectural treasures. Then, through research, identify

them, protect them, and finally, restore those sites. This will protect the neighborhoods from future encroachment."

By December of 1975 the Watsonville city manager learned of the interest of Kenneth Cardwell, professor with the department of architecture at U. C. Berkeley, who had written the local planners about a building inventory program.

Professor Cardwell wanted to test his concept of a methodology that would expedite the building inventory process and would lead to preservation planning.

The city was willing. A state grant of \$1,500 was awarded to the professor and his wife, who is an architect, which they used to cover the costs for the inventory surveyors.

The university contributed the Cardwells' time, supplies and transportation costs.

The Pajaro Valley Historical Association arranged for room and board at Pajaro Dunes.

The Watsonville city planners participated, offering time and facilities.

Working closely with the survey team is Charles Rowe, senior planner for Watsonville, who has been with the department for two years.

"It is interesting to note that it was outsiders who suggested the inventory of Watsonville's buildings and it is outsiders who are conducting the survey in the main," Rowe observed.

The planner said this is typical of most communities whose citizens fail to view their neighborhoods with the same perspective as visitors.

Working in the lower levels of city hall in a windowless room banked with the library's surplus books, Professor Cardwell and his wife come into Watsonville twice monthly now to evaluate the survey team's findings. Strewn about the large antique oak table in the center of the room are index cards, survey sheets, photographs, the state historical forms, and researchers' notes.

At first glance, the table appears to hold cluttered materials, but a closer examination reveals the careful attention to detail and the precise system employed, a system that will be held up to the other California cities wishing to launch similar surveys.

A single 3 inch x 5 inch index card is the primary key.

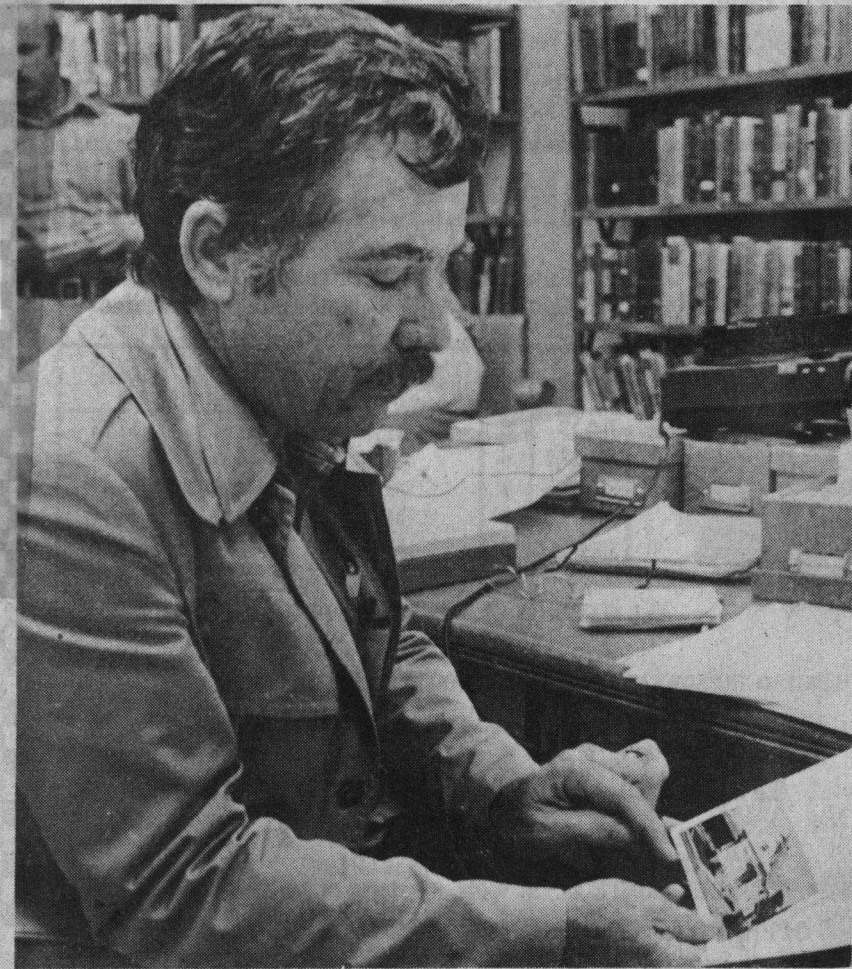
It has room for the surveyor's factual information such as: location, year of construction, architectural form, materials used, values and condition.

The years cover 1850 through 1970.

Of special significance were those houses or business structures deemed valuable in terms of architectural uniqueness but which were also in disrepair or unsound.

Rowe said that 700 units out of the 5,000 surveyed were substandard, requiring updating or renovation. The city is already engaged in a rehabilitation program.

Seen from the Berkeley professors' point of view, Watsonville has a "split personality" as evidenced on its Main Street where the lower half of the commercial buildings have been modernized and the

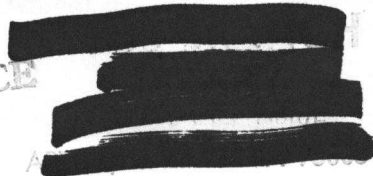


Cardwell holds typical state historical resources form with photograph. It is being prepared for city, county and state.

Photos by
Sam Vestal

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upper half retains its original architectural designs.

The architects don't particularly like the modernizing techniques used, claiming it "looks tawdry!"

However, the two were kinder in their critique of the city as a whole.

"Watsonville has a stability about it. You can tell the people care about their homes, whether they be modest or grand. There are so many well-tended gardens and yards," Mrs. Cardwell said.

Architectural styles from 1890 to 1900 reflect the William Weeks influence and the city has many extraordinary examples of his work, now commanding more attention than in previous decades.

Cardwell said the era from the 1920s to 1935 is reflected by good examples of Spanish colonial revival and Spanish colonial stucco houses derived from European classic styles. He said the house at 505 Brewington represents a "good international style."

Also built during the same period were Spanish baroque or provincial structures that were similar to those built throughout the western states.

The survey team was particularly looking for clues to a New England style employing heavy timber shipped to California.

"We have not actually identified any buildings specifically that have this aspect, but we strongly suspect this town has a good representation of the New England timber," Professor Cardwell stated.

Not only did the inventory include specific details on exteriors, location, and period of construction, but the specialists see the earlier structures as being representative of a "lot of energy." They refer to the artistry and craftsmanship of earlier builders as contrasted to the current building trends.

The sociological factor of the isolated agricultural community is more stable when measured against other American communities and this is dependent upon the continuing attitudes of city dwellers here, they believe.

Encouraging signs are the shifting of houses from one site to another, instead of bulldozing them into rubble.

"Watsonville is unique. It is true that you might find similar neighborhoods in San Francisco or Berkeley, but in a city of 5,000 units, it is unusual," Professor Cardwell said.

Professor Cardwell also agrees with the urbanologists who are critical of the American residential planning of subdivisions for people of similar interests and incomes. There is a growing realization that this subdividing has led to "division of cultures rather than homogeneous communities."

"Watsonville has a delightful mix of both modest and larger residences within range of each other and all the occupants appear to be concerned about appearances. This diversity is good," Professor Cardwell said.

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The inventory will be directed to both the city and state planning departments. In Watsonville the planning department

will have a full set of the 5,000 index cards bearing the description of the exteriors and the accompanying photograph attached to the card. Rowe says this will be an invaluable resource for the city's present and future planning, and preservation and rehabilitation projects.

Betty Lewis, researcher for the Pajaro Valley Historical Association, has been meeting regularly with the survey team, borrowing from her own notes accumulated over the past four years. In many instances, she is the only one able to identify the year of a building's construction.

The master index list goes to the city, while a duplicate set will go to the state department of parks and recreation, and Cardwell will retain the third set for his own use.

The methodology is expected to be used now by other special interest groups in other cities, or by other small towns, the professor explained. It is his belief that the system is a valid one and "will preserve worthwhile neighborhoods."

Another bookkeeping task has been the filling out of the state historical resources inventory sheet. A complete set with photographs will be forwarded to Sacramento. Another goes to the Santa Cruz County Historic Resources officer, Al Schadel, and the third remains here.

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Cardwell has the additional challenge of screening the 5,000 units, looking for those with the most significant value either historically or architecturally, or both.

As of this week, the choices were narrowed to 120 buildings.

This list will be further condensed until the most attractive or valuable reflections of the various periods have been chosen.

The criteria are:

Its eligibility for the national register of national historical sites.

Its local significance.

"Our judgment has nothing to do with interiors," Cardwell said. "We don't know what the inside looks like."

He and his wife disagree on some of the potentials for varying reasons, but both are entranced with the city's abundant architectural styles.

To date, the state's inventory of historic resources includes seven Watsonville sites: the Rodgers property and Tuttle mansion on East Lake Avenue, the Hildreth block and Charles Ford Department Store on Main Street, the Martinelli Bottling and Cider Works plant on East Beach Street, the Wiley residence, and the Gilman home on East Lake Avenue.

Among the student interns assigned to the project are Elizabeth Rosewell and Vickie Thompson, both of Watsonville and students at UC Davis. They were responsible for the photographs and are working on the state forms. Also involved is Tom Marking, a Pomona student, an aide who also did some of the photography.

Within a few weeks the task will be completed and as Charles Rowe put it,"

They now know more about us than we know about ourselves!"

But that attitude is expected to change in time since the survey data will be made available to interested persons.

Rowe said the intensified interest should promote appreciation of Main Street.

"While I am supportive of growth, I happen to disagree with the man who did the Watsonville Post Office. It doesn't blend in with the area. It is my belief that we can build new structures that reflect the existing architectural qualities," the planner said.

There is one man in town who walked the streets in April too . . . Dick Jones, the city's building official. Rowe believes that "Jones is also sympathetic to the preservation program."



WATSONVILLE

Survey team at work in city hall basement room

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