

Questions Raised On What Are SC's 'Historical' Buildings

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Should the city's so-called historical buildings be mongrelized for further use, or should they be razed to make

way for new buildings tailored to meet the owner's needs?

That question could well be the hottest issue to come before the city council Tuesday.

Left over from the Aug. 14

meeting was action on a request by Gary Patton, an attorney, for appointment of an appeals board to review a demolition permit which was granted last year to Golden West Savings and Loan Co. to raze the old Hotaling (McHugh - Bianchi) building at the head of Pacific Avenue Garden Mall.

The Santa Cruz Historical Society, Council member Virginia Sharp and numerous city, county and out-of-state history buffs are battling to prevent demolition of the building, which is allowed under terms of the permit.

The society has given the building a plaque that hails it as an "outstanding example" of Victorian architecture.

But at the same time neither the society, Sharp nor any of the other history buffs has opposed publicly in any manner, the mongrelization of the old Southern Pacific Railroad Depot on Washington Street to convert it into a restaurant and bar.

Nor did any of them protest the gutting of one of Boulder Creek's most historic establishments, Mac's 100-Year-Old Place, to transport the oldtime saloon bar and an antique

mirror frame to the mongrelized depot building.

The question of what is or is not a historic building has never been answered by the council in more than a year of on-again, off-again contention over the controversial McHugh - Bianchi building, as the Hotaling building has come to be called in recent years.

Is a Victorian building still an authentic Victorian building if it is mongrelized into a kind of show-biz concept of how a Victorian building really should look?

Would the McHugh - Bianchi

building still be the McHugh - Bianchi building if its interior were wiped out and a new building erected within the confines of its oldtime facade and sidewalls, as has been suggested?

In other words, if buildings are changed beyond recognition as the buildings they used to be, can it be argued they are still historic buildings?

And what about a decrepit building that has been put onto a 1973 foundation, rebuilt or remodeled with 1973 materials and design features, given a tourist-snaring calaboose

entrance and equipped with furnishings and gimcracks unrelated totally to the building's oldtime function? May such a structure be called correctly an antiquity worthy of preservation as a memento of the city's beloved past?

The council has yet to come to grips with any of these questions, and it is not expected to do so Tuesday.

But indications are there could be a rousing community dispute this autumn and winter if the council decides what cannot be torn down, in the sacred name of History, but fails to say what

should not be destroyed through mongrelization.

Observers agree the council will have its hands full coming up with the answers, which would have to be based upon definitions of what does or does not constitute a historic building or structure.

But the observers also agree the city urgently needs these definitions and these answers, if only to prove to the world that a few people in town know the difference between the real and the false and that the city does indeed have an abiding respect for its heritage.

