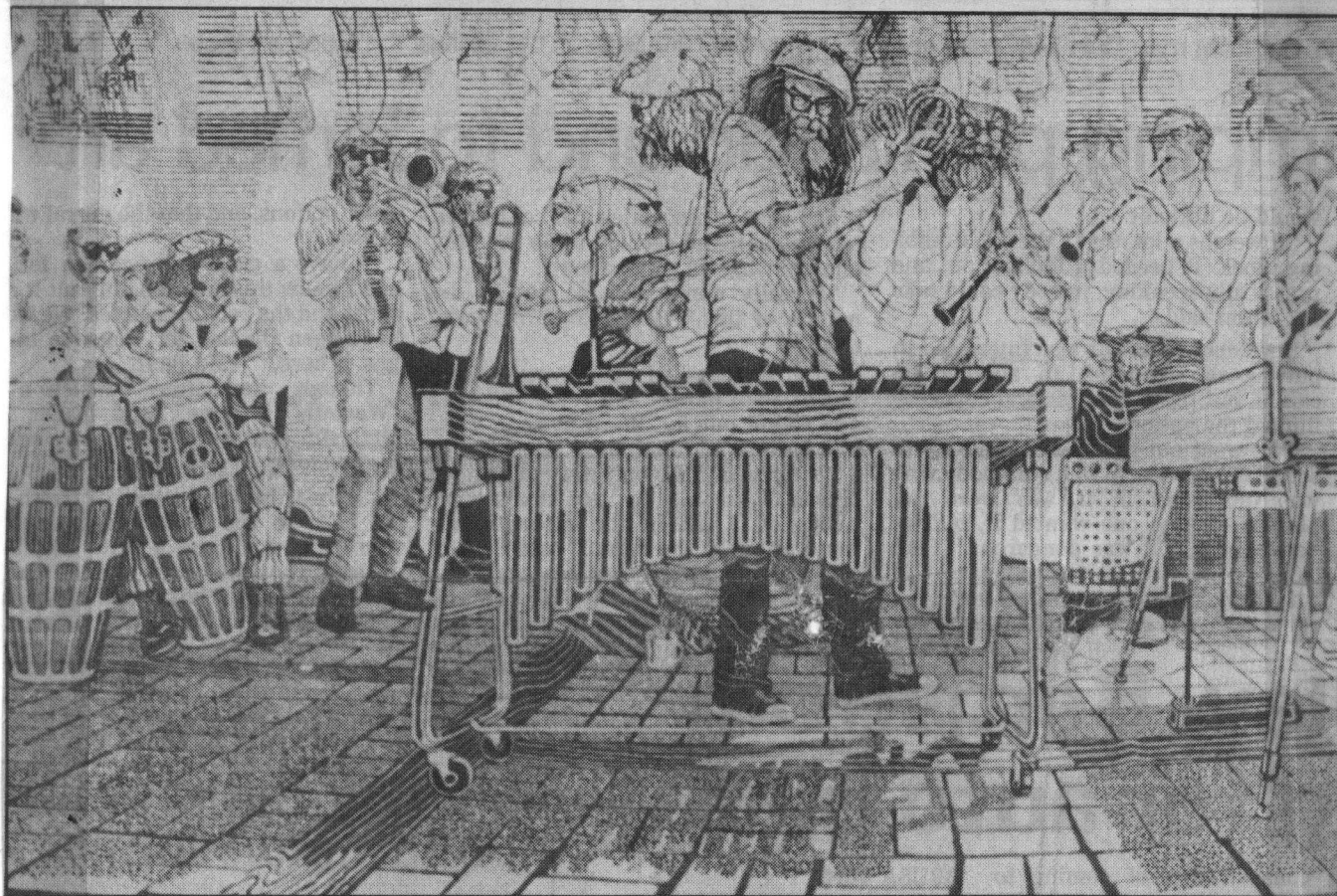


Off-the-wall ending



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

The renowned mural decorating the Cooper House now belongs to the ages.

Familiar mural lands in dump

By CLAY EVANS
Sentinel correspondent

SANTA CRUZ — The disappearance of a dozen jazz musicians from downtown Santa Cruz has aroused surprisingly little suspicion, but there are those who wondered where they went.

A black-and-white mural entitled "Jazz Musicians" that stood outside the Cooper House since 1976 was removed during the recent renovation of the historic building on the Pacific Garden Mall. A familiar sight to local residents, the enormous painting depicted members of the jazz band

"Warmth" that has played at the Cooper House for years.

As it turns out, the missing mural has been destroyed.

It was the daughter of "Warmth" leader Don McCaslin, who brought up the question of the mural and its whereabouts.

"I was real sad. I wanted to get it someplace safe," McCaslin said. "I feel like it's a part of Santa Cruz history."

With the piece missing in action, McCaslin began to ask around at the Cooper House to find out where it had gone. Security guards said it had been hauled away. Others said it had been

destroyed. McCaslin finally let her investigation drop.

"Nobody seems to know where it is," she said.

When developer Jay Paul bought the Cooper House in April, he hired local contractor Michael Bates to remodel the old house. Structural engineering consultants determined that both the 5-ton mural and a glass-paneled atrium in front of the building were dangerously out of date in terms of safety.

"The structure, the way it (the mural) was designed, had the engineers very concerned for safety in case of an earthquake," Paul said.

Eventually, both the mural and the atrium were removed and put into storage. With the musicians' portrait gone, some local merchants began to take an interest in placing it in a new location.

"There was some interest in displaying the piece," said Downtown Business Association Executive Director Rick Kuhn. Kuhn brought up the mural's fate at a meeting, but even those interested in saving artwork knew it would be difficult.

"It weighs a lot, that's the big stumbling block. It needed a foundation, and practically speaking, nobody could take it," Kuhn said.

Developer Paul was also interested in putting the monolith in another location, but the same practical concerns limited the options.

"We went out into the community to sound out groups, to find somebody who was interested in it. We were not pleased that no one wanted it, but we had been told it was dangerous," Paul said.

In August, after the mural had been removed, even Paul didn't know where

it had been taken. Bates had contracted its removal, and seemed to be the only one knowing its whereabouts.

"I really don't want to get in the middle of this," Bates said. "No comment."

After being asked what became of the mural, Paul himself did some checking and found out for the first time what had become of "Jazz Musicians."

"It turns out the only way to remove it was to break it up, and that's what happened. I assume the subcontractor threw it out at the dump," said Paul.

With the mural resting in peace at the county dump, virtually all of the interested parties admit there were no

other options, and that the mural will be missed.

"I have a great appreciation for art, and I know this must be difficult for the artist and the people depicted. We would have been thrilled for someone to say 'put it here,'" said Paul.

Though the stony depiction of "Warmth" is gone, band leader Don McCaslin said there is a happy ending to the story.

"Here's the good news: Warmth will be here in the flesh every day this month. It made me a little sad, but I haven't thought about it that much," McCaslin said. "We're still here, and that's the main thing."

REFERENCE

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

The mural depicting "Warmth" is gone, but front man Don McCaslin and other members are back in the flesh at the Cooper House.