



Boxes upon boxes of old court records, many of them confidential according to Superior Court Judge Gilbert Perry and County Clerk Tom Kelley, lie scattered about in the basement of the old Cooper Street courthouse. County crews failed to destroy the records as ordered, Kelley says.

Confidential Old SC County Records Carelessly Discarded

By WALLACE WOOD
Sentinel Staff Writer

Want to find a little "dirt" on the past of some Santa Cruzans?

All you have to do is stroll over to the old county courthouse and offer to buy some files from the firm clearing out the building for its new owner, Max Walden.

You not only would get the old file drawers and cabinets, but the files they contain.

Inquest records, for instance, into the cause of death of various persons are available from 1945 on. How about some commitments for interperance (drunkenness)? They're available up to 1954, at least.

There are many, many others, too numerous to list. But they're all down in the basement, scattered like so much trash. Much of it, sorry to say, has actually been dumped into the trash by the scavenging firm and may be a little hard to find.

Of course, most of the files are confidential, or should be. "They should be destroyed," says Superior Court Judge Gilbert Perry. "I believe that's up to the county clerk."

County Clerk Tom Kelley, who has the legal responsibility for the files, said he did order them destroyed. "I asked that county crews take them out and burn them or destroy them. They certainly are not public."

The files are just some of the items being carted out of the old building.

When the courthouse building and property was sold to Walden for conversion into a series of shops, the county sold the furnishings to a salvage firm for \$180.

This included virtually everything the county had not already set aside, and that meant the confidential records as well, it seems.

Walden, in fact, said he

bought some furnishings back from the salvage firm to keep for his restoration.

Presumably, the county still is keeping three oak desks, the law library bookcase, some wooden filing bins, the railing from the courtrooms, a voters' measuring stand, and some old metal storage cabinets.

This reporter saw what appeared to be part of a courtroom railing torn up and waiting to be hauled away.

Judge Perry has kept many of the items from his old courtroom, including his former judge's bench. He made sure the items wouldn't be lost by moving them out of the old courthouse two years ago. Many of the more handsome pieces are now used in Perry's new courtroom.

One comforting thought about the old records: Kelley says they have all been microfilmed and are still on record. So nothing really has been lost. Or has it?

Want a little piece of information about old court records? These files all were full when this photo was taken. A salvage firm which purchased all the courthouse furnishings from the county has been dumping the records and keeping the file cases.



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