

Preserving our history

JUST ABOUT EVERY week on the calendar has been designated to recognize this cause or that purpose. This week of May 8-14 is no different in this regard, but we think one of the subjects being highlighted these seven days — historic preservation — deserves special recognition for the value it has to our county.

The cities and county here have become nationally recognized as leaders in historic preservation. Through both private and public ventures, efforts to protect important homes and commercial structures have been realized.

Some of the buildings which have been included in the National Register and Historical Places include County Bank in downtown Santa Cruz, the Camp Capitola superintendent's house at the corner of Monterey and Capitola avenues, and the Mansion House in Watsonville.

"Preserving our past" allows the citizenry to appreciate diverse and handsome buildings, while at the same time lending stability to our neighborhoods.

It is encouraging to see that over the past eight years, cities and the county have made a commitment to cooperate in rehabilitating so-called older homes, especially in a period when the demand continues to grow for adequate housing.

Since it became seriously involved in a housing rehabilitation program at the end of 1975, the city of Santa Cruz has upped the allocation of housing and community development funds from about \$100,000 a year to \$500,000 to \$600,000.

No money from the city's general fund is used in the program, in which qualified low-income individuals or families who wouldn't qualify for conventional loans are given the opportunity to upgrade properties with interest rates beginning as low as 3 percent. New U.S. Housing and

Urban Development criteria, for instance, allow a family of four with an income 80 percent (\$21,600) of the established \$27,000 median to be eligible to participate in the program.

Eighty-one rental units and 160 owner-occupied dwellings have qualified for the program in the city of Santa Cruz since 1975. Most of the improvements involve "health and safety" construction such as electrical, plumbing, roof or foundation work.

The county of Santa Cruz in the past eight years has placed 142 units under a similar program. Watsonville records show rehabilitation improvements have been made to 138 units since 1976, and Capitola reports 37 dwellings have been refurbished since 1979. Scotts Valley hasn't become involved in the housing rehabilitation program, but private interests who saw the value of preserving our heritage made a concentrated effort to upgrade the Scott House so that in 1981 it was declared in the National Register and Historic Places.

Several property owners have improved older homes here in recent years, but the majority of housing rehabilitation through the public sector hasn't involved fancy Victorians; rather, most of the homes receiving rehabilitation attention were constructed in the 1920s and '30s.

Both these private and public efforts are to be appreciated for they preserve history on the one hand, and will allow us to recognize more of it in the future. Taken individually, they don't have a great impact, but we are beginning to recognize the importance of these efforts on a collective basis.

Preservation and rehabilitation are preferable to demolition.