

## Landmark: What Now?

# The Octagon: A Success Story

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Architectural fascination had a lot to do with the preservation and restoration of the former Santa Cruz County Hall of Records.

Today it is the county's Octagon Museum and its future looks bright.

It seems that for a period of years in the 19th century, architects were intrigued with the octagon shape. And about 90 years ago a number of octagonal buildings were constructed in California, both of wood and brick.

The majority of them have gone the way of progress, probably demolished to make way for hot dog stands and supermarkets. But Santa Cruz County's brick octagonal will stay. It has earned the title of "architectural gem" — bestowed upon it by historians and architects alike. Today it is winning plaudits from just about everyone.

A few years back — less

than 10 — it was earning groans and sighs from overcrowded, hard-pressed county officials. As the Hall of Records, it was in use from 1882 to 1968 — about 86 years. And during the last couple of those decades it was sadly inadequate in space and facilities for the growing county.

But it was unique in design...

One of the first Sentinel articles calling attention to the Octagon and the importance of saving it when the Hall of Records moved out, was written by this writer in early 1966. At that time there were ominous rumbles as to the building's future.

Santa Cruzans had walked and driven past the building for so many years that they weren't "seeing" it anymore. They mostly took it for granted.

The new County Governmental Center was then under construction and the rumor was rampant that the brick octagon would even-

tually be demolished.

After the article appeared, Donald C. Biggs of the California Historical Society in San Francisco came to Santa Cruz to see the building for himself and assess its historical value. He immediately issued a statement that it was one of a mere handful of the unique octagons remaining in the state today, and should be preserved.

By November of 1966 the Santa Cruz Historical Society and SCOPE had gone on record as recommending the preservation and restoration of the building.

In 1969 a group of architectural historians from the Northern Pacific Coast Section, visited the then-empty structure to evaluate its importance. They were unanimous in approving its preservation as one of California's architectural treasures.

By the following year, a committee had been formed, bids were let and plans were underway by

Architect Francis Palms of Monterey with supervision by Jerry Hughes, county director of Parks and Recreation. A federal grant of \$25,000 for restoration came through.

The actual restoration was touchy work. Old photos were unearthed that showed how the octagon looked in 1882. The bricks, made here in Santa Cruz, were old and soft and had been painted several times. Special techniques were necessary in removing layers of paint in order not to wear the old bricks down to nothing.

It was decided that the building would make a fine, small county museum, to be used for displaying limited collections of documents, books, art and other prizes. An auxiliary organization, Friends of the Octagon, was formed to provide volunteer staff members and to conduct special fund-raising events. Al Schadel was appointed as museum curator.

A happy success story is the result of all these de-

velopments, with the useful future of the old structure assured. The Octagon's Festival of Trees is becoming an annual Christmas event.

Art shows and historical displays have drawn crowds — sometimes almost too many for the space.

The octagonal cost \$10,000 when it was built in 1882 by the California Bridge Company.

One old story goes that the octagonal shape was "borrowed" by bemused architects from the shape of the California octagonal gold coin of 1856.

That story might — or might not — be true. What is important today is that the building is here to stay with a bright role to play in the county's cultural and historical future...

An "architectural gem" of yesteryear that is making a successful transition to the 20th century.



## January at Cooper House

A public reception from 6 to 9 p.m. January 9 will open the January Exhibition at Cooper House. All artists will be there

Smith has painted since 1966 and has a B.A. in art from UC Berkeley where he also had two

developing for the past two years.

Dupont is a noted per-

