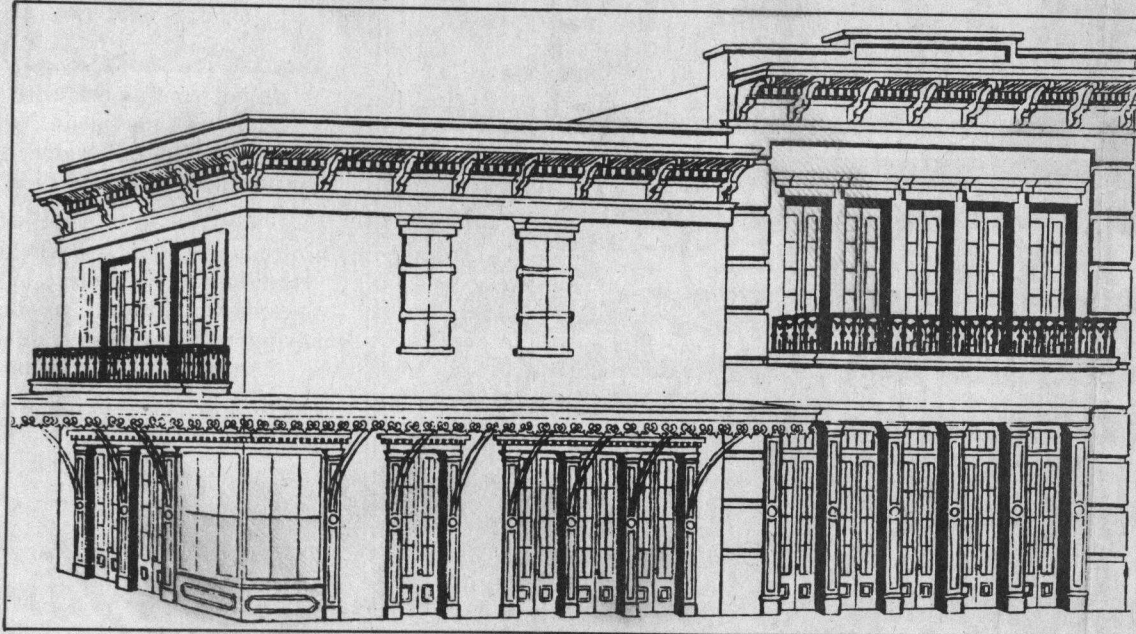


Historic Buildings

# First 2 brick buildings altered Santa Cruz politically, economically

SJMN OCT 10, 1995



DRAWING BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON

The 1859 flatiron and how its Pacific Avenue facade looked in 1886. Hugo Hihn annex is at right.

BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON  
Special to the Mercury News

**T**HE FIRST two brick buildings in Santa Cruz changed the political and economic arrangement of the town. And until the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, they remained among the community's most historic landmarks.

When F.A. Hihn's store was destroyed in a major San Francisco fire, he and another burned-out businessman came to Santa Cruz in 1851 to build Hihn & Hinch General Store, where today's Pacific Avenue and Front Street meet. It was constructed out of packing crate lumber, conforming to the near-triangular shape of the lot. This kind of wedge-shaped building was commonly called a flatiron, for it resembled the boxy clothes irons of that



**SANTA CRUZ**

*Historic Perspective*

name, which had a tall chamber for hot coals.

This wasn't quite the center of things, located on the flood plain around Elihu Anthony's 1848 industrial development called the American Plaza. But it was the best Hihn and Hinch could afford after the fire. The heart of town was little better, just up the hill

See **HISTORY**, Page 2B

# First brick buildings changed Santa Cruz

## ■ HISTORY

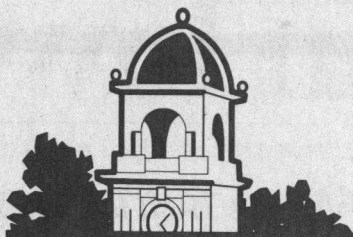
from Page 1B

at Mission Plaza, which was a partly residential area interspersed with adobe ruins. Then, in 1852 and 1853, the high price of potatoes filled the downtown with potato farmers. A boom town of cheap business structures on Front Street remained after the boom went bust in late 1853.

After the depression of 1855, Mr. Hinch wanted to move the business back to San Francisco. But Hihn's money was tied up in local land, so the partnership was dissolved, and Hinch departed. To make his real estate easier to develop, Hihn helped establish the town's first water company and stocked construction supplies in a small lumber yard he opened behind his store. Hihn realized greater profits were available in harvesting the lumber as well. So he brought his brother, Hugo, from Germany to run the store, while Hihn focused on starting a

The 1857 Leslie building, after its 1866 firehouse remodeling, on Mission Street at the southeast corner of Mission Plaza.

DRAWING BY ROSS ERIC GIBSON



SANTA CRUZ

Historic Perspective

logging company.

In the meantime, the county courthouse had been conducting business since 1852 out of a part-adobe structure on Mission Plaza, where the mission replica now stands. The county had outgrown these quarters in 1857, but couldn't afford to build a new structure.

County government looked with envy at the handsome brick building which James Leslie was constructing on Mission Street at the southeast corner of Mission Plaza. It was the first brick building in town, thanks to the new brickyard established that year at Highland Avenue and Laurent Street. The county wanted Mr. Leslie to rent his second floor for the courthouse, but Leslie already had plans to live upstairs.

Hihn realized if he provided the second floor of his building for the courthouse, it would move the center of government into downtown and strengthen downtown business. This was naturally opposed by Mission Hill property owners, who realized it could destroy their dwindling business center.

Hihn's shack-like flatiron building was not sufficient bait. So Hihn offered to replace his structure with a two-story brick flatiron building, and design the second floor for a courthouse, at no expense to the county.

Hihn's strategy succeeded, and the brick flatiron building was constructed in 1859. It had iron balconies facing American Plaza and Front Street (then called Main Street).

Fireproof iron shutters and cast-iron pilasters at the entrance of the new building were made at Anthony's Foundry across the plaza. The courthouse stairs were reached from the front of the building. The courtroom had high ceilings and oil-lamp chandeliers, with the judge's bench on a stage behind a polished-wood Greek railing. From 1862-1864, Calvary Episcopal Church held services at the courthouse on Sundays.

Leslie's Store went from being the leading business at Mission Plaza to the only business there. By turning down the county, he not only gave up the opportunity to be the business at the heart of town, he now found himself on the outskirts of downtown. In 1886, the Leslie building was enlarged to house the "relief" fire company, with the facade remodeled to include a castle-like fire bell tower. This was removed in a 20th-century stucco modernization.

In 1866, a new courthouse was built at Cooper Street, and downtown businesses abandoned Front Street for Pacific Avenue. So the flatiron's stairs were moved to face Pacific Avenue, with the second floor housing the newspaper offices of the "Santa Cruz Journal."

Hugo Hihn moved his store into an 1866 brick building he constructed beside the flatiron building. His old store soon became Tanner's Pharmacy, with the town's first soda fountain, decorated in polished wood, marble and Tiffany shades.

Local historian, architectural consultant and author Ross Eric Gibson writes a weekly history column for the Santa Cruz/Monterey edition.



Store

Stairs