

SANTA CRUZ YESTERDAYS



BURNED-OUT COURT HOUSE AFTER '94 FIRE

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

When daylight came on Sunday morning April 15, 1894, this was all that remained of the once proud and handsome Santa Cruz county court house, built in 1867, approximately on the site of the present one.

Opposite to this ruin stretched a scene of desolation northward almost to the Hihn "flatiron" building at the junction of Pacific avenue and Front street. From Pacific avenue to Front street was swept clean, plus the east side of the latter for most of the block from Cooper street up to the lower plaza. The city's greatest conflagration had left only here and there tottering brick walls.

The county's proud seat of justice was a towered, brick-faced structure, reminiscent of New England, which had served for 27 years. On its completion it had been referred to as "one of the neatest, most convenient, best proportioned and at the same time, perhaps the cheapest public building in the state."

Set By Embers

Flying embers had ignited the wooden tower early in the fire, which had started diagonally across the street near the corner of Cooper and Front streets before midnight Saturday. Low water pressure had handicapped the firefighters, who fought valiantly to stem the holocaust.

No other structure on the south side of Cooper burned. To the right, partly visible in the picture, Ely block (No. 1), facing Locust street, escaped damage, as did the present Hall of Records, and the old City Hall around the corner on Front street, where the Court House Annex is today.

Where stands the stark brick skeleton in the picture had been a most prideful addition to the community's downtown area when late in September, 1867, the coun-

ty's first court house had been turned over by its builders. Of it, a writer in the columns of this paper said:

"The design has been carried out in all its details, and when we consider the usefulness, capacity and arrangement of the interior, with the decoration and fanciful display of architectural taste, its beautiful cornices, splendid roof, its tastily and finely proportioned cupola, we can point to it as an edifice deserving unrivaled admiration."

Built By Tom Beck
Construction had been under

the superintendence of the architect, Thomas Beck, who was responsible for many building projects here in the early days.

The brick work had been installed by Contractor McMillan, Lynch and Gragg handled woodwork and carpentering, painting and graining was by Otis Longley. Tin work was by Lucian Heath, gas fixtures by Santa Cruz Gas company.

On the first floor were offices for the sheriff, treasurer, district attorney, assessor and one jury room (24 x 24 feet). The other offices on that floor were 20 x 24. There was a hall 12 x 60. Height of the ceiling 15 feet.

Upstairs was a 36 x 60 ft. courtroom, a clerk's room (24 x 24), a 20 x 24 supervisors' room and a hall 13 feet wide. The ceilings here were 18 feet. The cupola, ten feet square at the base, was subdivided into two sections, the first being square, the other octagonal.

Height of the building to the top of the dome and vane had been 80 feet, the dome being 29 feet higher than the main building.