

Survey of Local Historical Surveys Confusing

IN Santa Cruz and all of California, any building more than 50 years old is deemed "historically significant." If the aged building was well made and has interesting architectural features, it is automatically a candidate for an award, perhaps national recognition.

Although noble in its pursuit, the phenomenon of historical preservation is confusing. Even to those actively involved, the maze of rules and regulations, categories and boundaries, organizations and groups that govern the process may seem a bit bewildering. To others, it is almost incomprehensible.

Eighty-eight structures are now recognized as historically valuable by the Santa Cruz County Historical Trust (formed when the Octagon museum merged with the Santa Cruz Historical Society last year), who sponsor the blue and white oval signs seen throughout the city.

The purpose of the awards is "to encourage preservation, research, and



Any building you recognize in this 50-year-old photo of Pacific Avenue (at the intersection of Soquel Avenue) would be considered a historic structure today.

public appreciation of local historic resources," and the prestige of flashing the signs does not prevent the owner from making any changes. Several plaques are awarded each year, the most recent being the Loudon Nelson Center and the Palomar.

The city's historical resources commission seeks to regulate historic buildings as well as honor and protect them. The commission's first (1976) survey identified 350 historical buildings, and another 200 were added last year.

Some homeowners balked at hav-

ing their suddenly significant structures bound by codes restricting development. But according to local historian Cynthia Mathews, the issue was blown out of proportion.

Homeowner fears

"There was a misconception going around last year that there was some sort of oppressive yoke on historical buildings," said Mathews. "Basically all the city and county ordinances say is that property owners will have to go through a design review process if they want to make significant exterior changes, or if they want to have the building demolished."

Mathews noted that the county, which has a similar ordinance on the books, will submit a list of "several hundred" new buildings to the board of supervisors by the end of this year.

Watsonville and Capitola also have ordinances, but neither exerts the authority of their counterparts in the city and county of Santa Cruz.

(continued on page 10)

(continued from page 8)

Watsonville's ordinance, adopted three years ago, regulates exterior remodeling, but participation is voluntary. To date, a dozen buildings are designated, with two more currently being processed.

Capitola has taken an even less restrictive tact: 230 structures have been identified and written about, but owners are bound by no regulations, despite the existence of a 4-year-old unenforced ordinance.

National recognition

The highest honor a building can claim is making it onto the national register of historic places and landmarks. Santa Cruz County has 27 stars on the national register, including the Octagon, Capitola's Hihn building, Scotts Valley's Hiram Scott house, Aptos's Valencia Hall, and the Watsonville city plaza.

Besides the prestige, being placed on the national register offers tax write-offs and puts no restrictions on remodeling. The only drawback is the

long and often expensive process of getting the building accepted.

Last month Santa Cruz came by its first two "national landmarks"—the roller coaster and the merry-go-round (which joined 1,760 other landmarks around the country).

Then, there are national "historical districts." The Pacific Garden Mall/Front Street corridor (which fits the bill of having two-thirds of its buildings labeled historically significant) are Santa Cruz' claim to fame, and Capitola named three districts last month.

A benefit (if not *the* benefit) of this designation is that the buildings within the district are exempt from costly compliance to federal flood control regulations.

Santa Cruz also has two local historic districts: Mission Hill (punctuated by Holy Cross Catholic Church and Green Street), and the downtown area west of the mall. All new buildings constructed within the district's boundaries must "fit in" with surrounding architectural styles, according to local statute. •

—Kevin Hanson