

# Another downtown aftershock

## Register of Historic Places may drop Pacific Avenue

By **ROBIN MUSITELLI**  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — A city noted for preservation of its historic buildings is about to be quietly stripped of its listing in the prestigious National Register of Historic Places.

It's just one more aftershock of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake that demolished so many of the city's historic buildings.

The State Historic Resources Commission, meeting in Sacramento today, is expected to act to remove the five-block Pacific Avenue Historic District from the National Register.

The commission's recommendation will then be forwarded to the National Parks Service, keepers of the national register, for formal action.

If it is removed, it would be the first time in memory that a historic district has been bounced from the national list, according to Cynthia House, a historian with the state Office of Historic Preservation.

House and state officials maintain the action would be appropriate since the buildings that composed the historic heart of the district were destroyed by the quake.

The quake, and demolition afterward, knocked 16 of the 35 historically significant buildings to rubble, including the St. George Hotel and Cooper House, said House.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Peggy Coats of the Historical Trust stands before the old County Bank facade.

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What remains, primarily on the east side of Pacific Avenue, doesn't meet the standards for national ranking as a district, she said. Nine of the buildings, however, may qualify for individual listings on the register.

City officials were warned more than a year ago that removal from the list was likely.

Preservationists were outraged, charging that the city, already dealt a hard blow by the earthquake, was being kicked while it was down.

In response, the state commission granted a one-year delay to allow individual buildings to be nominated for the register.

That year is up.

And city officials are indifferent.

"They have their rules about what makes a historic district," said Santa Cruz Mayor Don Lane. "Why fight it? We have more important things than to try to comply with somebody else's regulations."

"That I know of, nobody has said boo about it except me," said Danielle Uharriet, a city planner who requested the one-year delay. "I would say the city doesn't care. Neither does the community. They want to move on and do other things."

According to Lane, listing on the National Register has is primarily a matter of civic pride, with marginal public benefit.

The main benefit has been to individual building owners who are eligible for tax credits.

However, each of the 54 buildings in the original district was also given some protection from demolition and some exemptions from current codes, said Sara Boutelle, Santa Cruz Historical preservation commissioner. Losing those protections, she said, could make it easier to demolish the old buildings, she said.

Listing in the National Register also attracts tourists who are interested in the social and architectural history of the area, said Boutelle.

"The basic thing is it makes it kind of a tourist attraction if you're a historic district," she said. "Santa Cruz had a lot of people

who were crazy about it because of the way the town is, I mean, was."

It was in Santa Cruz in 1972, that preservation-minded citizens launched efforts to save the historic McHugh and Bianchi Building, formerly known as the Arlington Building. Their efforts failed and the modern World Savings building was erected on Pacific Avenue, said Ross Eric Gibson, of the Santa Cruz County Historical Trust.

The fight ignited efforts to have city historic preservation ordinances adopted, he said.

In the process, Santa Cruz also become one of the first California cities to get on the preservation bandwagon, said Boutelle.

"Now we have a restive population who wants to rebuild something, no matter what," Boutelle said.

According to Peggy Coats, of the Santa Cruz County Historical Trust, removal needn't dent that tourist draw.

"I don't think it will," said Coats. "A lot of it will be a matter of marketing the history of the downtown in a different way."

Regardless of the national listing, Coats said the city is rebuilding the mall with history in mind. "The most important thing, when you look at the downtown, is that a lot of rebuilding going on is focusing on the historic character, even though the buildings themselves couldn't be saved," said Coats. "There's a good attitude out there."

The reconstructed Palomar Hotel, for instance, is historically correct. The building is in the initial stages of being added to the National Register.

The Leonard building, located on Front Street across from Hobee's restaurant, also is applying to the Register.

The facade of the former County Bank has been saved. And the Veterans Memorial Building is expected today to join the neighboring U.S. Post Office on Pacific Avenue on the National Register.

Lane said it makes more sense to preserve the buildings that remain than to challenge the state's action. "We're trying to let this go. It doesn't seem worth fighting," he said.