

Cooper House

Sunday, Oct. 29, 1989 — Santa Cruz Sentinel—A-7

Don't rush into demolition, preservationist urges

By JAMIE S. CACKLER
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Cooper House, the beloved downtown landmark demolished this week, couldn't have been saved from its earthquake damage, said a national historic preservation official who visited the city Friday.

"It was hard for me to learn (Thursday) that the building was coming down," said Kathy Burns, director of the San Francisco regional office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. But, she said, after reviewing the study done before demolition, she concluded that officials made the right decision.

Still, she said, after meeting with city and county leaders and historical societies Friday, she hopes demolition of other historic county buildings will proceed slowly.

"It's been the trust's policy in general that in a crisis state we should try not to be forced into making too-rapid decisions without solid information and the technical expertise for dealing with these buildings," she said.

Burns withheld any criticism of the decision to tear down the golden brick landmark that was once the county's courthouse.

And she encouraged county residents not to be bitter about the loss, but to look ahead to preserving what is left.

"It's important to move forward now on saving resources that are important to your community and to your economy," Burns said.

"That was not the only building in town."

Santa Cruz County residents and leaders should focus on saving the rest of the downtown, for the entire district is registered as a historic place.

She said "a lot of good things came out" of her meetings with local officials Friday, including proposals to bring in outside ex-

perts to further weigh the chances of saving other landmarks from the Cooper House's fate.

Engineers and inspectors who are experts in landmark building preservation are available to study damaged buildings in Santa Cruz County, she said.

"You want to have a heart specialist for your heart, and not a dermatologist," she said.

A team of two architects and an

engineer from the National Park Service and the state Office of Historical Preservation will arrive in Santa Cruz Monday to help local officials assess the damage to historic buildings, she said.

The National Historic Register will go to court to stop needless demolitions of historic buildings, Burns said.

If she had believed the Cooper House's destruction foolish, the

trust might have considered helping local activists go to court for a temporary restraining order stopping the wrecking ball, she said.

"That was certainly a consideration of ours. But with the Cooper House, I was convinced" destruction was weighed carefully.

She did add that the National Historic Register would only lodge a lawsuit to stop demolition if local activists were leading the action.