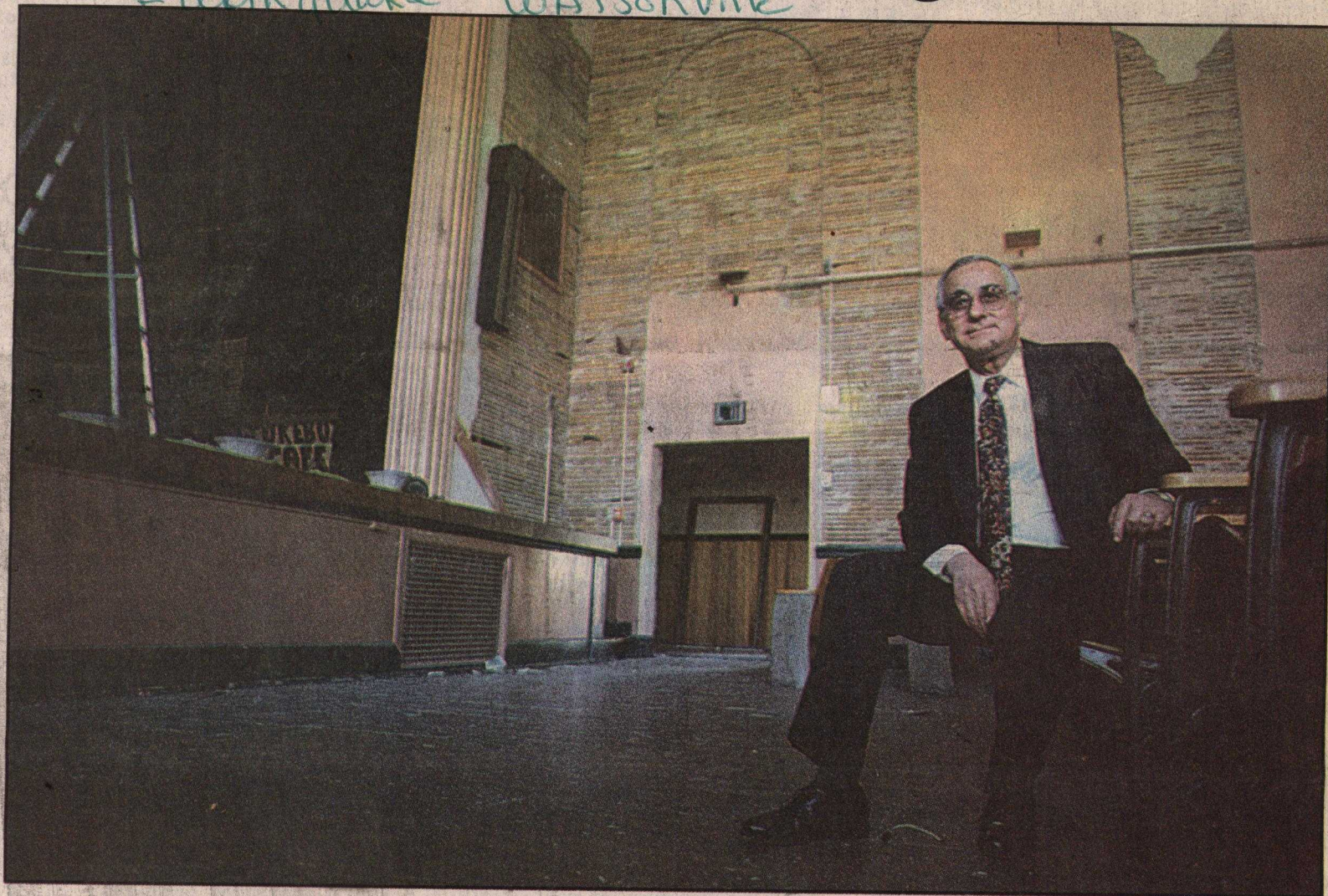


Ready for the wrecking ball

Earthquake - Watsonville



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Former principal Tony Calvo sits in main auditorium of historic, soon-to-demolished 1917 building at Watsonville High.

Watsonville High set to come down

"This is without a doubt the finest high school building of its capacity in the state and one taxpayers can look upon with pride for its completeness of appointments, beauty of design and the substantial character of its construction." — Baby Manzanita yearbook, Watsonville High School, 1917.

By **ROBIN MUSITELLI**
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — The hand-turned red-wood pilasters are gone. Plumbing fixtures, doors and windows have been stripped. Boxes of books and papers, dredged up from the basement, are stacked by the front door, some headed to the dump, others to be salvaged.

The halls where generations of Watsonville residents giggled and gossiped, crammed for tests, flirted and fought, are covered with a film of plaster dust.

Signs advising that "Hard hats must be worn" are tacked to its doors. Watsonville

'I went here. My kids went here. I hate to see the old building go.'

— **Sam Powell**

High School has been readied for the wrecking ball.

If the Pajaro Valley Unified School District Trustees approve bids this Wednesday, as expected, demolition work could start Monday, June 24, according to Richard Meyer, director of new construction for the district.

In Watsonville, a one-high-school town where the venerable old building is unchallenged in the numbers of people who share its history, that's not going to be easy.

"I went here. My kids went here," said Sam

Powell, who watched the pre-demolition work at the school Friday. "I hate to see the old building go."

The 1917 building, so named for the year it was built, is a victim of the Loma Prieta earthquake. The two-story school was closed six months after the October 1989 quake when cracks showed that poor quality concrete had been used.

Engineers said the old building would cost more to repair than it would cost to build a new one.

The board of trustees swallowed hard and then approved demolition plans. Students and teachers were packed into portable classes and temporary quarters while plans for a replacement school were drawn.

When the 1917 building is gone — that should take about two months — a new \$6.5 million high school is to be built in its stead. It, too, will have 13 classrooms, administrative offices, a counseling and career center

Please see WATSONVILLE —



A worker removes windows from second-story classroom of 1917 building at Watsonville High Friday.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Watsonville

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Like the 1917 building, the new school will have an auditorium. But, it will be half-again larger than the old one, thanks to \$1.2 million of Measure E earthquake repair funds authorized by the city of Watsonville. Meanwhile, a community committee is working to pay for a stage and curtains, costs the state will not pick up.

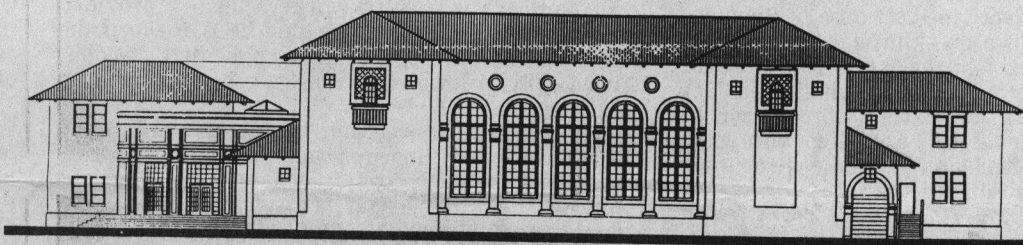
Construction of the school and auditorium is anticipated to last about 16 months, said Meyer. If all goes as planned, the first students will be seated in the new school by fall of 1993, he said.

Much of the new school, however, will be taken from the old, like memories grafted onto a new generation. Two dozen hand-thrown old-growth redwood pilasters will be used in the new building. Two large medallions have been taken from the Beach Street door entrances.

State officials, who feared the medallions couldn't be safely quake-anchored, wouldn't allow the original medallions to be reused on the new school, said Meyer. Architects hope instead to make molds from them, and cast new ones in fiberglass for use on the outside of the new building. The original medallions will be housed in plexiglass display cases in the lobby of the new building.

The effort to retain the flavor of 1917 building has become a mission to many involved in the planning. "We know we can't clone the building, but our mandate is to keep the flavor," explained Meyer.

Designed by William Weeks, the 1917 building is a mix of Spanish-Moorish architectural flavor — a red tile roof, stone trim and balconies — with oriental details. Elephants prance in the plaster above the entrance.



A sketch of how the new Watsonville High will look from Beach Street.

Built at a cost of \$90,000, the 1917 structure boasted vestibules with marble and tile floors, detailed hardwood cabinets and hardwood floors in the classrooms.

A 1917 Manzanita yearbook lauded the then-new quarters. "This building, in design, arrangement and construction, shows the perfection of the builder's art. The architect has given us a building beautiful in design, sound in structure and convenient in its appointment and one that will truly serve as a monument to the progressiveness of this community," wrote editors of the 1917 Baby Manzanita yearbook.

That was the year Watsonville Motion Picture Palace showed Mae Murray in "A Mormon Maid" and Williams and Biebrach suits were advertised for \$17 to \$21.

In their class will, the 36 graduates in the class of 1917 bequeathed the building "improved by our association with it, to be used by future generations as a grammar school."

Architect Thang Du, a student of Weeks' who has designed the replacement building, has pursued architectural continuity and has incorporated memorabilia from the old school in the new.

Old tiles from the sidewalk — the class of 1918 started the tradition — will be reused, for instance. It's rumored that graduates buried memorabilia under the concrete squares,

but nobody knows for sure, said Tony Calvo, who was principal at the school from 1982 to 1990. "We'll see," he said.

A large rock by the school library where generations of students have sat will be kept. About \$100,000 of lights, furnaces, plumbing fixtures, door and windows have been salvaged, said Meyer.

Nearly 70 years after the 1917 school opened, Calvo made it his mission to have the building renovated. While appreciative of the historic value, Calvo said the building had lapsed into dinginess.

"It was dismal looking, dark and somewhat depressing to work here," Calvo said.

Students were moved into an old furniture store while the \$3 million renovation was underway. New oak wainscoting lined the hallways. Additional lighting was installed in the downstairs hallway and simulated marble floors were installed in keeping with the original floor.

The students returned in September, 1988. The administrators moved back the next month. One year later, on Oct. 17, the earthquake hit.

When the wrecking crews come, Calvo said he expects to once again grieve for the old building. But the pride in the building that returned with the students in 1988 will be foremost in his memories of 1917.