

HISTORY

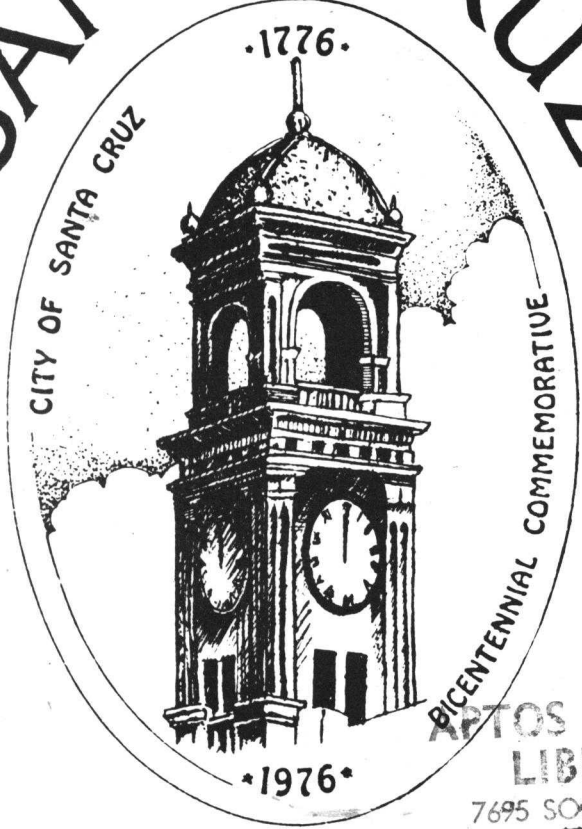
Reference

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TOWN CLOCK

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The Citizens of Santa Cruz thought it would be handy to have a town clock--down on Pacific Avenue where everyone could see (and hear) it. The year was 1874. Citizens gave donations totaling \$1000 and the clock was built on top of the Odd Fellows' Building.

For 25 years the handsome, New England style clock ticked away and rang the hours. Then in 1899 a fire broke out in a clothing store beneath the Odd Fellows' Hall, and while firemen fought the blaze, the old clock still kept on running and ringing. Finally, two hours after the fire started, the Odd Fellows' Building gave way and the burned clock stopped.

Before the clock's untimely end in blazes, it had shone forth with another kind of light--electric. In June of 1896 the clock was draped with strings of electric lights powered from the Big Creek Power Lines, promoted by Fred Swanton, the town's promoter and go-getter. Visitors and natives came for miles to view the spectacle--600 electric bulbs all blazing at once, the band playing, and the Venetian Water Carnival was being held on the San Lorenzo River which had been dammed for the occasion.

The present brick Odd Fellows building and the town's second clock were built as soon as the ashes of the fire cooled. New England style again, it kept the hours and even chimed the quarter and half hours--for a few years.

But in 1929 the patrons of the Palomar Hotel and the St. George Inn complained that the bells kept them awake. They circulated petitions and got the clock bell silenced.

By 1939 the clock was feeling its age and was stopping frequently. The town jeweler and clock repairman, Dell Williams, inspected it and announced that it needed about \$250 worth of repairs. The City fathers were budget-minded and turned the estimate down. In 1948 the clock finally stopped. It upset the whole town: shoppers complained, merchants demanded to know why. And Tom Williams, who had taken over the clock job after his father Dell Williams died, told the town fathers that the clock now needed about \$800 worth of repairs. It was tired and worn.

In January of 1951 the clock stopped again and Williams cleaned it and tightened its bearings, refusing to say how long it might run without a major overhaul. A few days later it stopped again to the tune of \$335.

In October 1951, the clock was finally electrified. The Odd Fellows paid for it.

In April 1964, the clock stopped again; and by July of that year, the Odd Fellows had it removed during the remodeling of their lodge building. The clock, in pieces, was carried out to Santa Cruz City Museum where it rested for a few years. It was removed from the Museum to Harvey West Park several years ago, where it now awaits a face lift and a new location on Pacific Garden Mall.

A committee is at work on the original mechanical works which will be encased in glass so everyone can look up and see the wheels and cogs turning as the clock ticks away the hours. Hopefully, the bell will be restored too, and the unique timepiece will sing the hours once again.

Margaret Koch

*Leaflet prepared by
The City of Santa Cruz
Bicentennial Committee*