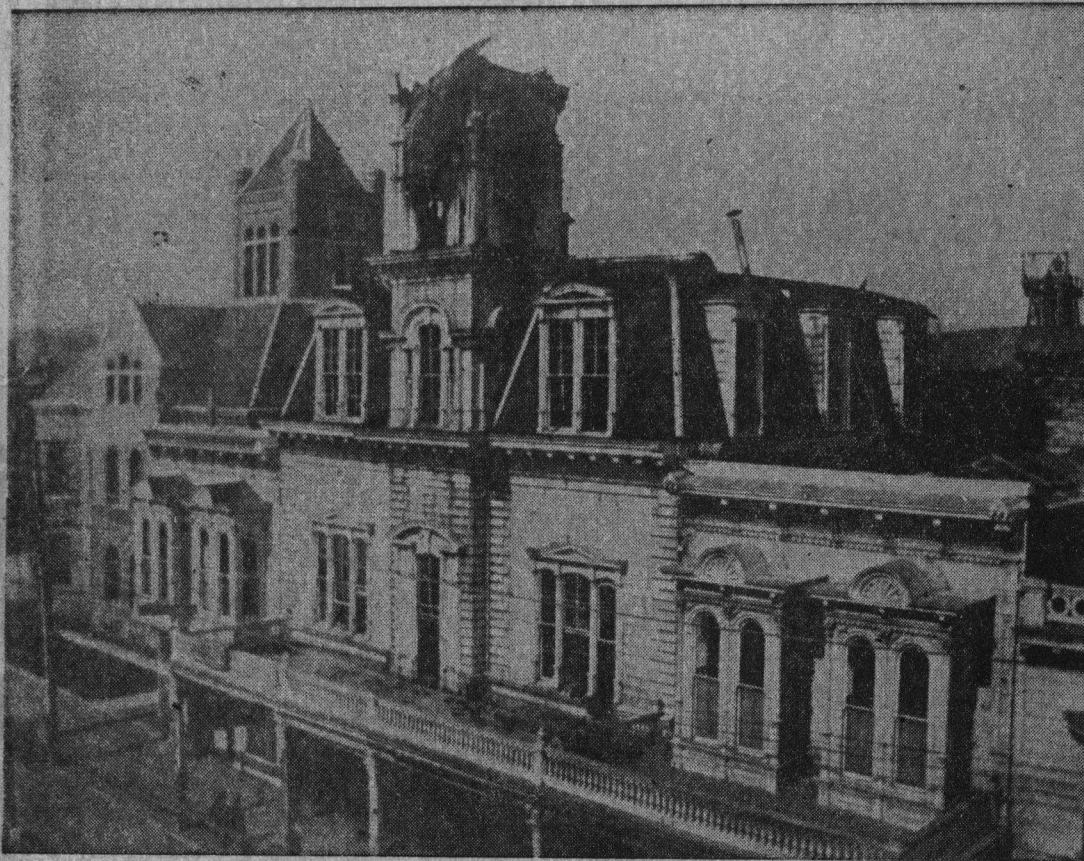


10-17-54

# Santa Cruz Yesterdays



**AFTER THE TOWN CLOCK FIRE, MAY 7, 1899**

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

Wounds of the "big fire" (of 1894) were not all yet healed, when, a little over five years later, another bad blaze hit downtown Santa Cruz.

At 11:40 o'clock Saturday night May 6, 1899, dense smoke was seen issuing from I. Fleisig's clothing store in the Odd Fellows building.

Despite efforts of local firemen to subdue it, the fire found its way through the ceiling to the second

floor and soon leaped through the roof. By this time (12:15 a. m.) the occupants of adjoining buildings became alarmed and began moving their goods into the street.

Although the building was deluged with water the fire resisted control until after the firemen had had a hard battle of two hours.

At 1:30 the flames were licking the inside of the tower containing the town clock. Two streams of wa-

ter were poured on the tower. Flames again and again leaped through.

The streets were thronged with people. An old hook and ladder truck was pressed into service.

## Long A Landmark

For a quarter of a century the familiar clock had been the community's favorite timepiece. Since 1874 it had been performing its duty, by day and by night, meas-

ing the minutes and striking the hours. In sunshine and in rain, and now in heat, fire and terror, the clock moved steadily on.

While fire was raging below, the clock kept working. The bell rang out the midnight hour. The fire crawled closer and closer. And the firemen beat back the flames.

But each time the fire returned, with new energy. One o'clock arrived, and loudly, clearly, with a tone of defiance, the great bell, literally ringed in flames, rang the hour, for the last time.

Between the flames and the force of the water, the clock was doomed. For another half hour, despite the battle, the clock slowly ticked away the seconds and minutes. Inside the tower was a seething mass of flames. At 1:30 the clock gave up its struggle for existence. The hour hand had made its final circuit.

## Clock Is Silenced

What the merciless fires had left unharmed, the water finished. Even washing away the figures. The clock had been silenced at last.

The flagpole fell at 4 a. m.

As can be seen in the picture, when the fire was out, only a burnt out shell of a building remained. And seemingly the clock tower had become a sort of chimney.

The clock had been installed with funds raised by public subscription, costing around \$100,000. Loss to the Odd Fellows was some \$20,000. And to lodges and tenants, damage was considerable.

The town could not be without its clock — and its main lodge hall. So little time was lost in replacing the fire-damaged structure with the present one, which itself has gone through two serious fires. But brick construction proved its worth and the structure was saved to come on down to the present.