



# National Register of Historic Places Inventory: Nomination Form for the Mission Hill Area Historic District

## **Excerpt: Section 8 - Significance**

Form prepared by Doni Tunheim, Vice President  
Santa Cruz Historical Society  
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## **Statement of Significance**

### **1. Statement of General Significance**

Mission Hill is the birthplace of Santa Cruz, the first permanent European settlement in Santa Cruz County. Until the gold rush Mission Santa Cruz was the religious, commercial, industrial and agricultural center of the county. Its only rival, the secular community of Branciforte, was not viable, and became no more than a place-name.

When Thomas Larkin established a branch of his Monterey trading post in Santa Cruz he selected an adobe building on the Mission quadrangle. When William Blackburn arrived in Santa Cruz he operated his hotel on the Mission quadrangle. The reasons for their choice was clear - there was no other location in the county that would have supported their business.

Preeminent in the county during the Spanish and Mexican periods, the Mission neighborhood remained important during the American period.

A list of important businesses and institutions that established themselves in the neighborhood in the three decades after statehood would include the following. The Methodist Episcopal Church, the first protestant church in Santa Cruz (1850). The Mission Hill public school (1856). Thomas Fallon's hotel and saddlery building, 1849 (purchased by the county in 1852, and used as school, courthouse and finally poor house). Temperance Hall (1860), the early day community and social center of Santa Cruz. The Sisters of Charity Girl's Academy (1862). James Leslie's store (1860 and possibly earlier). Jackson Sylvar's saloon (1872). The jail building (1854 and 1864).

Holy Cross Church, the successor to the Mission continued to be important replacing the ruins of the adobe chapel with a wooden church in 1856, and replacing the wooden church with the present brick one in 1884-1887.

The development of Mission Hill can be summarized as a gradual transition from the center of activity at the start of the Gold Rush to a predominantly residential district by the turn of the century.

This pattern of development is unusual as commerce usually tends to crowd out residential uses in a city neighborhood. This has been the fate of the neighborhood immediately west of Pacific Ave. in downtown Santa Cruz and replacement of buildings from earlier periods.

Perhaps the greatest asset of the Mission Hill Area is its undisturbed character. Except for the construction of a few structures, the area is relatively unchanged from the early 1900's. Few cities in California have a mission district which is as unchanged. Architectural styles range from the Mission Era to the Colonial Revival. This variety is even more unique when you consider the relatively small area in which they are located. Historically, the area is also vital to the history of the City of Santa Cruz as well as California. As one of the California mission sites, the Mission Hill area has a wealth of history. Perhaps most indicative of this history, is the fact that the Neary-Rodriguez Adobe has been continuously occupied from the Spanish Era to the present. Few buildings in California can claim this distinction. The local importance of the Mission Hill area is best attributed to by the fact that all but nine lots of the proposed district, are in a Special Use (Historic) District. This district is intended to minimize change and insure what change occurs is compatible with the area's historic character.

Recent residents of the area have increasingly recognized its importance and have carried out many sensitive restorations. This new life has proved of great benefit to the entire community by showing the value of preserving the past in practical everyday terms. To quote Millys Peck, "When the life of a community can be seasoned with tradition, an awareness of the contribution of its past citizens - the benefit extends far beyond the momentary." A more specific outline of the area's significance is discussed in the following paragraphs.

## **2. Archeology – Historic**

Certain properties in the proposed landmark district contain subterranean artifacts from the Indian settlements which once existed near the mission site. Other properties contain evidence of the original Mission ruins.

## **3. Architectural Significance**

The Mission Hill district contains several buildings of special architectural interest.

1. The Calvin Davis house, 207 Mission Street. A light and delicate treatment of the Stick style as a surface applique to an Italian Villa form. It is the best preserved most important work of Charles Wellington Davis who was a major architect in Los Angeles and San Francisco, as well as Santa Cruz.
2. The Henry Willey house, 105 Sylvar St. for the unusual treatment of the projecting dormer/bay in its attic, curving out above the porch, and carved with acanthus and anemones.
3. The Reynolds house, 123 Green St. for the two-story bay window on its south facade, sharply and precisely detailed, the best stick treatment in the city.

4. The Louis Schwartz house, 222 Mission St. for its most effective use of bargeboards in connection with a central gable, for a strong but simple design.
5. 127 Green St., the Otis Longley house for its integration of Gothic and Classic elements.
6. Holy Cross church for its painted ceiling, and spire, perfectly sited to serve as a landmark for the entire city. The Mission centennial granite agate in front of the church is the most impressive display of the stone cutter's art in the city.
7. The Francisco Alzina house, 107 Sylvar St. as a pioneer building type now rare in the state.
8. The Amos-Rodriguez adobe as an uncommon building type, the only building to survive from Mission Santa Cruz and one of only two adobes in the city.

#### **4. Relationship to Santa Cruz**

The Mission Hill district is representative of the early Santa Cruz cityscape, in that it was developed lot by lot, house by house, over a period of years.

Before the turn of the century, Santa Cruz developers laid out subdivisions that could accommodate many homes, but almost never built any more than two or three houses in any one location.

Nineteenth century Santa Cruz developed by in-filling between widely-spaced houses or lot-splitting. There has never been an entire neighborhood dating exclusively from any one decade or period in Santa Cruz. When the range of styles in the period since 1850 is considered, it is not surprising that this infilling has resulted in a highly variegated cityscape.

In addition, every decade since statehood has seen the demolition of, and replacement of buildings from earlier periods.

The Mission Hill district is no different from other Santa Cruz neighborhood in these respects. What is special about Mission Hill is that the process of demolition and infilling was largely complete by the time the building boom of the mid-1880's was over. By that time, it was already being described as a desirable [sic] and attractive residential area in local newspaper accounts.

The particular importance of Mission Hill is its position as the largest geographically contiguous area made up of buildings of architectural and historical interest. These older buildings dominate the few newer intrusions in the district.

No other neighborhood in Santa Cruz can claim such a good representation of buildings in each decade from 1850 to 1900. No other neighborhood can claim such a variety of historic uses (church, courthouse, school, saloon, store, residential). No other neighborhood can claim so many historic sites - first courthouse, first jail, first brick building, oldest frame house, oldest church building, oldest rectory building, mission building, etc.

## **5. Agriculture – Commerce**

As the center of Mission Era Santa Cruz, the proposed landmark was the focal point of the area's commerce. The Mission had more than 4,000 head of cattle, extensive vegetable gardens and a grist mill. The mill was presented to the Mission by Captain George Vancouver who visited it on December 2, 1794, to buy fresh vegetables. The Mission also had more than 8,000 sheep, and 900 horses by 1828. Herds roamed and grazed from near Pajaro River up to New Year's Point, a distance about 42 miles.

Santa Cruz County's first hotel was an old Mission adobe, two stories and an attic, with porches running around it. It stood on the southwest corner of School and Emmett Streets, facing the Plaza where Holy Cross Elementary School is today. No record exists as to when it was built, and the first transaction regarding it dates from 1848 when Job Francis Dye sold it to Joseph L. Majors.

When Santa Cruz County was created by the Legislature on February 18, 1[850], its first courthouse business was conducted in the old Eagle Hotel.

In 1852, the new county paid Thomas Fallon \$3,500 and moved into his combination home, store and hotel which stood just across School Street from the Eagle.

By 1860, it was obvious that "town business" was moving down on the flat, in the former Mission vegetable garden. By way of incidence, Judge John H. Logan, whose house was in the Mission Hill area, in 1890, discovered something unusual in his garden: a cross between a native blackberry sprout (Auginbaugh) and the Red Antwerp Raspberry. He sent samples of the hybrid cross to a firm in Salem, Oregon, where it created great interest. The new berry was named the Loganberry in honor of Judge Logan.

## **6. Community Planning**

Perhaps the best concise statement of the Mission Hill Area's significance is contained in the City of Santa Cruz Open Space and Conservation Element:

"The spire of Holy Cross Church serves as the visual focal point of Santa Cruz, as well as the center of the City's Mission Area. The Mission Hill Area includes the Neary/Rodriguez Adobe, the last remaining building from the Santa Cruz Mission, and numerous Victorian homes. Portions of this area are now included in a Historical Preservation District and efforts are now under way to enlarge the area of the district to include the remaining building of historical significance on Mission Hill."

The wealth of architectural variety is now being appreciated by an increasing number of Santa Cruz residents and visitors. Efforts are also now underway to restore the Neary-Rodriguez Adobe.

## **7. Education**

The Mission was the site of the first school in Santa Cruz County and today is still the site of two schools operated by the Monterey Bay Diocese.

## **8. Landscape Architecture**

The Plaza Municipal Park was originally the Mission quadrangle and has always served as public ground. In 1884-87, the Plaza was landscaped by R. G. Ulrich and remains essentially unchanged today.

## **9. Military**

The Neary-Rodriguez Adobe, it is generally agreed, served as the Mission guard house, with the commander of the guard and his family in one side and his subordinates housed in the other. This is the only guard house attached to the Missions of California that remains in California.

## **10. Religion**

Since the original founding of the Santa Cruz Mission in 1791, the Mission Hill Area has served as a center for religious activity in Santa Cruz. Today, the Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church stands on the site of the Mission Chapel and serves as a focal point for the entire City.

## **Source**

Copied as reproduced in Appendix C of *Construction Chronology of the Site of Holy Cross Church* by Edna E. Kimbro, originally prepared for the Historic Preservation Commission as part of Holy Cross Parish's application to build a new Parish Hall.

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