

# The Treasures Of An Old Courthouse

By Margaret Koch  
Sentinel Staff Writer

Treasure hunters look sharp! There's treasure—of sorts—in the old Santa Cruz County Courthouse, that is about to be abandoned and demolished.

The "treasurers" will no doubt be put up for grabs—that means for bid. The first-est with the mostest will reap the rewards.

The old courthouse is empty, except for Superior Court Judge Gilbert Perry and County Clerk Tom Kelley, both on the second floor. Other offices are dark and empty.

The treasure exists all about the building, in the form of marble slabs on walls, ancient safes that kept guard over county

monies for 72 years and mellow old captain's chairs that rested the posteriors of the mighty and the meek alike.

It looks shabby and dark and dusty now, the old building. Its only glory rests in its solid oak doors, handsome brass hardware, carved courtroom rails, newel posts, roll-top desks and acorn-carved swivel chair.

But it's glory enough, to the mind of antique collectors and decorators. They know that amazing things can be done with an old curleycue iron stair balustrade. With this in mind, SCOPE (Santa Cruz Organization for Proress and Euthenics) asked Kermit Darrow to assess the building's fittings.

The old courthouse was built

in 1895 to replace the brick one that burned in the big fire of 1894. This one originally had a tower—an imposing box-like structure that proved more menace than ornament during the quake of 1906. So it was removed.

But the rest of the old

building is as solid as Gibraltar. It rests on brick arches supported by H section wide-flange iron beams. Steel ties help strengthen it even more, according to Darrow, and it is a unique bit of architecture.

Being in the courthouse cellar is like being in an ancient

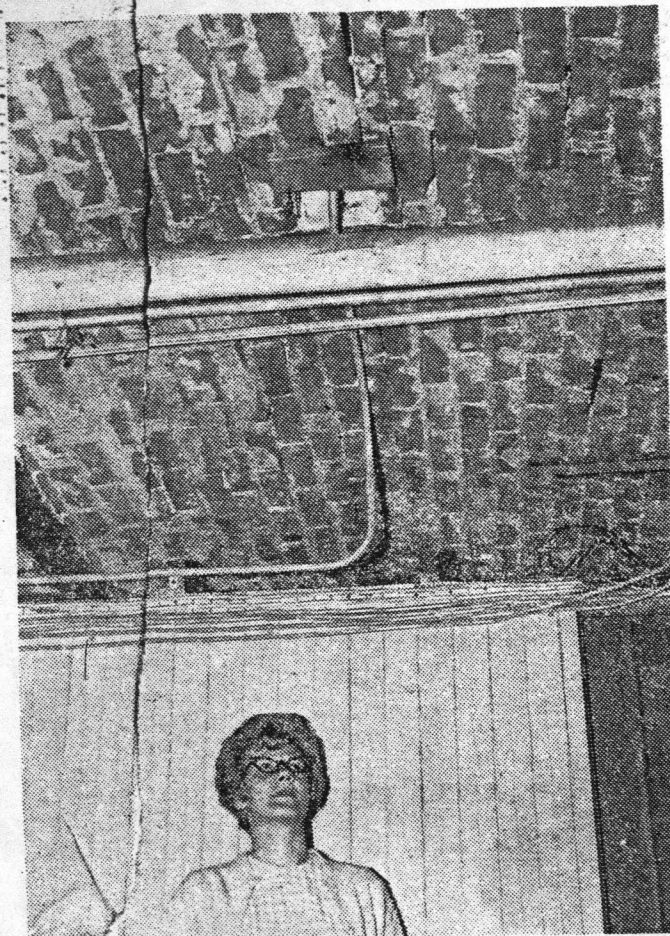
European win cellar. Pictures don't do it justice. You have to stand under the concave arches, built of old Santa Cruz brick, put together with lime mortar, and realize that the county fathers, of 1895 built solid, no matter how else they may have failed.

Up in Kelley's office there still exists the old measuring stick. When a citizen came to register to vote, he was backed up against the stick and his height was recorded, along with such pertinent facts as "lacks left arm" or "has only one eye" or "has scar on side of face."

When the combination marble wash stand and drinking fountain was put in (exact date unknown) it must have been a real innovation—a real step forward in county annals in the days of tin dippers and buckets.

Outside, there are curved iron grills over ventilation openings, a stone cornice around the entire building, and carved decorations. The front entrance porch is lined with slabs of pink marble.

From the leaded plate glass windows on either side of the main entrance, up to the "newspaper holders" in the law library, there are treasures to be mined from the old building before it is demolished.



Janis Hageman of Tom Kelley's office looks at the



"Expecting a flood maybe?" No one knows why this old hall's safe was placed so high in the wall, above the lower one. J. E. Pimental, six years with the county, doesn't know either.



County Clerk Tom Kelley rests in one of the 15 old captain's chairs that date from the first courthouse that burned in 1894. Originally there were 19 of them so the grand jury could use them, too. Over the years, four have disappeared. Tom says he's had at least a few calls regarding the old chairs.

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"This is still my building." So says Harry Held, 10 years a custodian at the old courthouse. Harry sweeps out the tripple-doored safe.



Lillian Ehle of Tom Kelley's office won't be getting many more drinks of water from this old combination marble fountain and washbasin.

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