

## Here Today; Gone Tomorrow?

# County Hall Of Records Among Last Of State's Few Octagonal Buildings

**Editor's Note:** This is the third in the current Sunday series on old and historic buildings and homes in Santa Cruz. The series is appearing in conjunction with the efforts of SCOPE and Santa Cruz Historical society to preserve local history.

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Nineteenth Century architects were fascinated by it.

Folk lore says that its eight-sided shape was adopted from an early California gold coin.

It WAS built at a bargain price.

True or not, Santa Cruz county's Hall of Records stands as a unique brick octagonal building—a rarity in the state today.

The octagonal gold piece was minted in 1855-56. The Hall of Records was built in 1882. There may or may not be a connection between the two.

The building's rarity and importance were overlooked for many years by Santa Cruzans. After all, when you pass a building daily or almost daily, all your life, you can easily cease to think about it at all.

What thoughts there were about the old octagonal were mainly critical: "It's too small" — "We're too crowded" — "We need more room."

No one could argue these statements. And an ugly brick "lean-to" was added to the hall's east side.

When rumors began to circu-



It was a bargain; it was and is unique in architectural

late about a new courthouse and new Hall of Records, a few people started seeing the old octagon for the first time, really seeing it. The demolition rumors even flew as far as San Francisco to the historically-tuned ears of Donald C. Biggs.

Biggs was director of the California Historical Society. He had led the fight to save Portsmouth Plaza and the San Francisco Mint. And he was not at all reticent about let-

ting out a war cry in defense of Santa Cruz county's octagon.

"The octagon Hall of Records at Santa Cruz is a particularly fine example of the unusual octagon form that fascinated 19th Century architects," he declared. "Very few of these interesting structures remain. It would be a loss to the community and to the state if the building were destroyed."

The idea of a Hall of Records here was conceived March 11, 1882, when Santa Cruz county supervisors advertised for plans. On April 8, 1882, A. W. Burrill presented drawings and specifications. Bids were opened; lowest was California Bridge Company's for \$10,470.

But the county fathers drove a hard bargain.

They insisted the bid be reduced to an even \$10,000, before they would give the go-ahead. They also stipulated that the building was to be finished in four months.

The corner stone laying took place June 10, 1882, with San-

ta Cruz Masonic lodge officiating and Governor George C. Perkins as guest of honor.

Wooden seats were hastily built on the site to accommodate the crowds. The ceremony was followed by a dance with a five-piece orchestra tooting and thumping out tunes like "Darling Nellie Gray" and "Listen to the Mocking Bird."

Gentlemen in swallow-tailed coats swooped and dashed in genteel fashion about the dance floor with ladies in high button shoes and pastel silk gowns. It was quite a bash.

Three months later, on September 9, 1882, the supervisors graciously allowed Burrill one more month to complete the building.

On October 7, 1882, it was formally turned over by the builder and a county warrant was drawn to pay for it.

Santa Cruz county had its octagonal Hall of Records.

Santa Cruz county still has it. And Santa Cruz county could keep it.

