

Santa Cruz to dedicate 'flatiron'



A ribbon-cutting ceremony Saturday on Pacific Avenue at the intersection of Front and Water streets downtown will mark the opening of the new "flatiron" building, left, that replaces the city's oldest structure, above, that was severely damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. The original two-story landmark, built in 1859, was Santa Cruz's first brick building. It was triangular in shape reminiscent of an antique clothes iron.

TOP: MERCURY NEWS FILE PHOTOGRAPH
LEFT: JUDITH CALSON — MERCURY NEWS

Victorian-style structure replaces historic landmark

About the new building

The new, 15,000-square-foot building at the intersection of Front and Water streets was designed by local architect William Bagnall. It includes:

- Victorian-style architecture
- Ornate dome with scalloped copper sheeting
- Copper statuettes of the California bear along the upper perimeter
- Pieces of the original structure, such as the front door posts, as part of the decoration

A ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled for 1 p.m.

BY JOHN WOOLFOLK
By Mercury News Staff Writer

Downtown Santa Cruz will celebrate another milestone in its recovery from the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake with the grand opening Saturday of a new, copper-domed "flatiron" building where the city's oldest structure once stood.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled for 1 p.m. in front of the white, three-story building on Pacific Avenue at the intersection of Front and Water streets — the doorway to what was once called the Pacific Garden Mall.

"It's really significant to have the entrance to downtown finished," said Chris Quinn, interim executive director of the

Downtown Association of Santa Cruz. "It's a milestone for the redevelopment because of the building's history and location."

The original two-story landmark, built in 1859, was Santa Cruz's first brick building. It became known to locals as the Flatiron Building because its triangular footprint was reminiscent of an antique clothes iron.

The building housed Santa Cruz's first Wells Fargo stagecoach station, served as a county courthouse and acquired several scars of the Wild West. A hole in its wall from a bullet fired in 1862 by Judge Joseph H. Skirm in a quarrel over a woman became a renowned attraction. Other bullet holes followed during an 1871 shootout between Sheriff Charlie Lincon and the gang

of bandit Tiburcio Vasquez.

The Flatiron Building was among the few downtown structures to survive a devastating fire in 1894, and it went on to withstand a beating from the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

During repairs, the building's red-brick facade was plastered over, and by the 1980s extensive remodeling had left few of the Flatiron Building's historic features intact. But its prominent location made it a hangout for locals who would gather at the Plaza Bakery and The Teacup Chinese restaurant.

The Oct. 17, 1989, earthquake ruined 29 buildings in downtown Santa Cruz, including the Flatiron Building. See **BUILDING**, Page 2B

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Pacific Ave

New 'flatiron' to be dedicated

■ BUILDING

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ing such cherished landmarks as the St. George Hotel and the Cooper House, another former courthouse built in 1894 and later converted to boutiques and restaurants. A third of the district's businesses folded, while others struggled to hang on, operating in the first few years out of tents amid the rubble.

The old Flatiron Building was damaged beyond repair. It was razed three years later after it was determined that restoration would be too costly and would accomplish little, as most of its few remaining historic features would have to be replaced.

In the following years, the Rittenhouse family, which owns the building, battled with City Hall over its replacement. City officials wanted an ornate landmark at the doorway to downtown, while the Rittenhouses argued they should not be forced to lose

money building a grandiose monument during a recession.

The new, 15,000-square-foot building, designed by local architect William Bagnall, features Victorian-style architecture and an ornate dome resembling a bowler hat plated with scalloped copper sheeting. Copper statuettes of the California bear line the building's upper perimeter, and pieces of the original structure, such as the front door posts, are incorporated as decoration.

The building's bow-like shape and sparkling white exterior have already earned it a new nickname among some locals of "Titanic," because of a resemblance to the famed ocean liner.

The first commercial tenant, Jamba Juice, a fresh-drink chain based in San Francisco with a sister store in Capitola, opened Aug. 1 on the ground floor. The upper floors will be leased as office space, a badly needed commodity downtown, Quinn said.

At Saturday's ribbon-cutting, Louis Rittenhouse, who served on the city council from 1990 to 1994, is expected to dedicate the latest addition to downtown as the Emmett L. Rittenhouse Building, named after his father, who died last year.

Local
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architect
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William
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Bagnall
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designed
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the
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building.