



Mike McCollum

Artist Marta Gaines repairs mural accidentally damaged during renovation work on Watsonville's Lettunich Building. Below, Gaines is pictured as she painted the original mural 17 years ago.

Artist repairs damaged mural to be preserved behind a wall

By EMILIO ALVARADO
STAFF WRITER

A bit of Watsonville history is about to be sealed behind a wall.

Seventeen years ago Marta Gaines, a Santa Cruz artist, was commissioned to paint a mural on the back wall of the new County Bank of Santa Cruz branch office in the Lettunich Building. Gaines, with the help of local historian Betty Lewis, came up with a mural that depicted Watsonville early history.

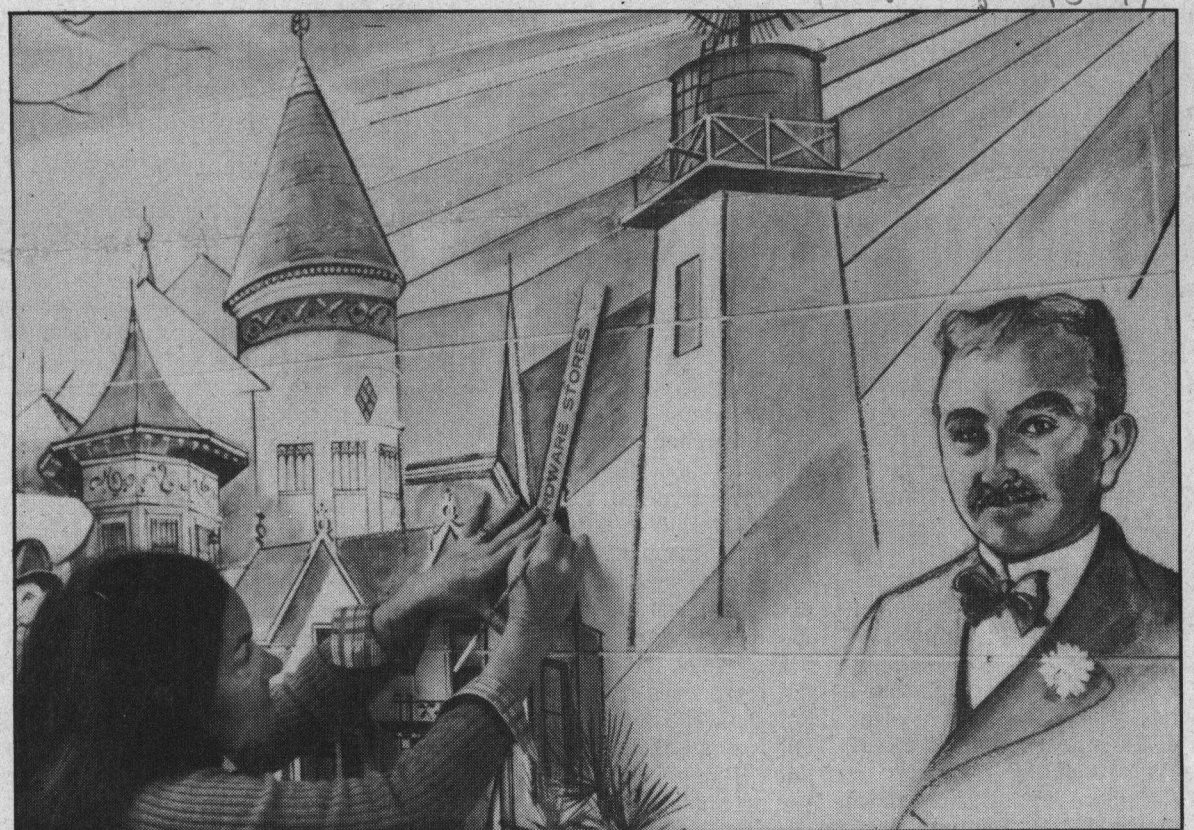
The bank closed its doors long ago and the mural collected a thin veil of dust. Marta had almost forgotten about it until this week when she got an urgent call from a contractor who is renovating the large office.

A construction crew recently moved into the former bank office and started renovations for a music store to open there in the near future. Workers were spray painting the ceiling when they accidentally covered part of the mural. Renovations called for covering the mural entirely, but when the building's owner found out about this plan, he summoned Gaines.

The owner was "very upset," Gaines said.

The new renovation plan calls for erecting a wall a few inches in front of the mural, thereby preserving the mural and a bit of Watsonville history.

Gaines, 68, said she feels "honored" that her mural will



be saved.

The construction crew has erected scaffolding in front of the mural in order for Gaines to do her work. Seventeen years is a long time and they have taken their toll on both the mural and Gaines.

"I'm a little more wobbly when I get up there," Gaines said.

The bank office, she said, actually opened before the mural was completed. She remembers working on the mural while customers came in and out of the

bank. Many stopped and watched her work.

"At first I got stage fright," Gaines said.

The mural shows early scenes of Watsonville everyday life and includes portraits of the city's founding members. It also includes a portrait of the building's architect, William Weeks, who designed the building about 75 years ago.

Gaines remembers people coming up to her as she worked on the mural. Some of them, she said, offered pictures of

their grandparents.

Gaines, a native of Fort Worth, Texas, said she has been an artist almost all her life. She has painted other murals, but she mostly concentrates on oil painting on canvas.

The mural in the Lettunich Building was one of the biggest projects she has undertaken. She never expected that it would one day be sealed up for posterity.

"I wouldn't have been surprised at all if it had been painted over," Gaines said.