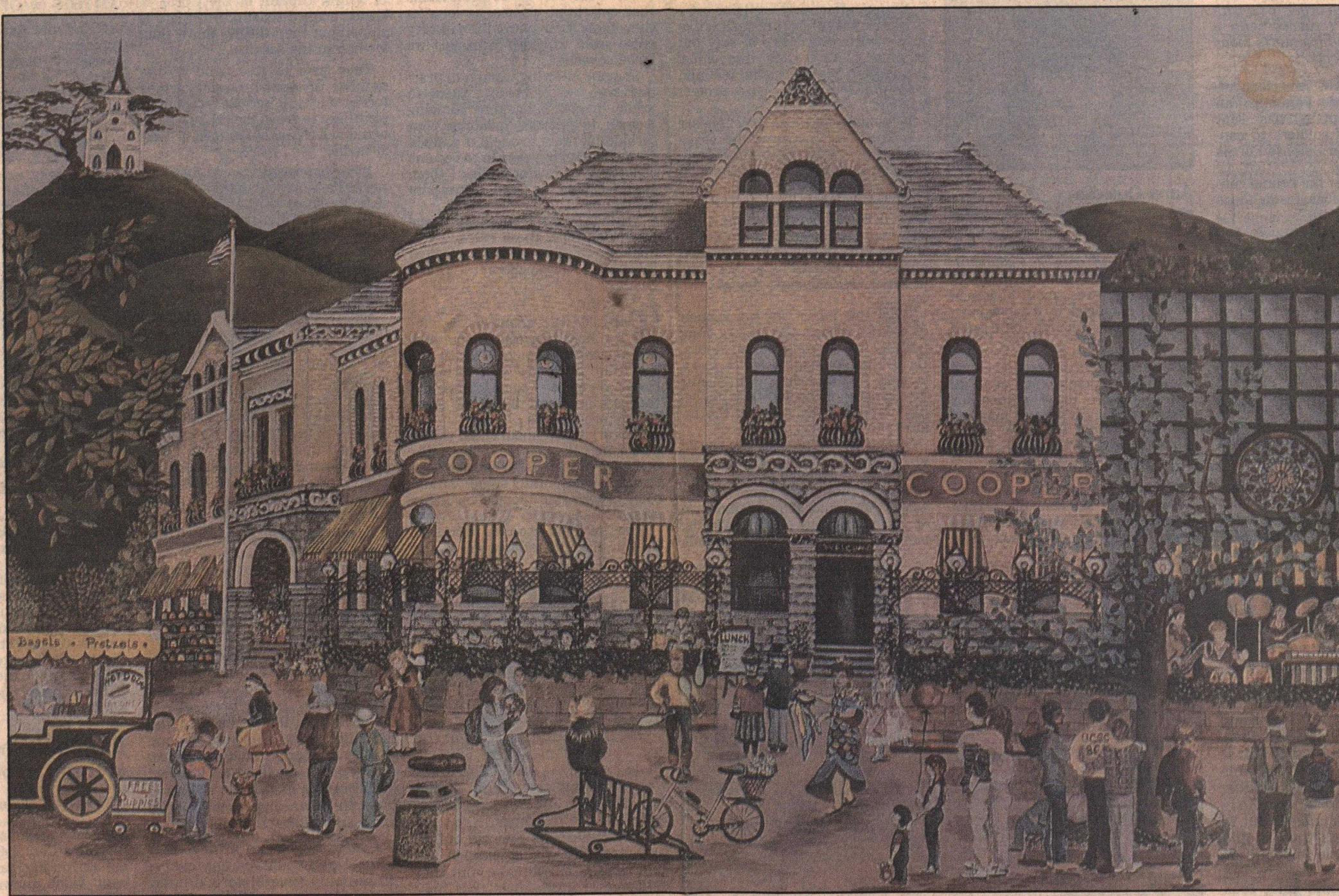


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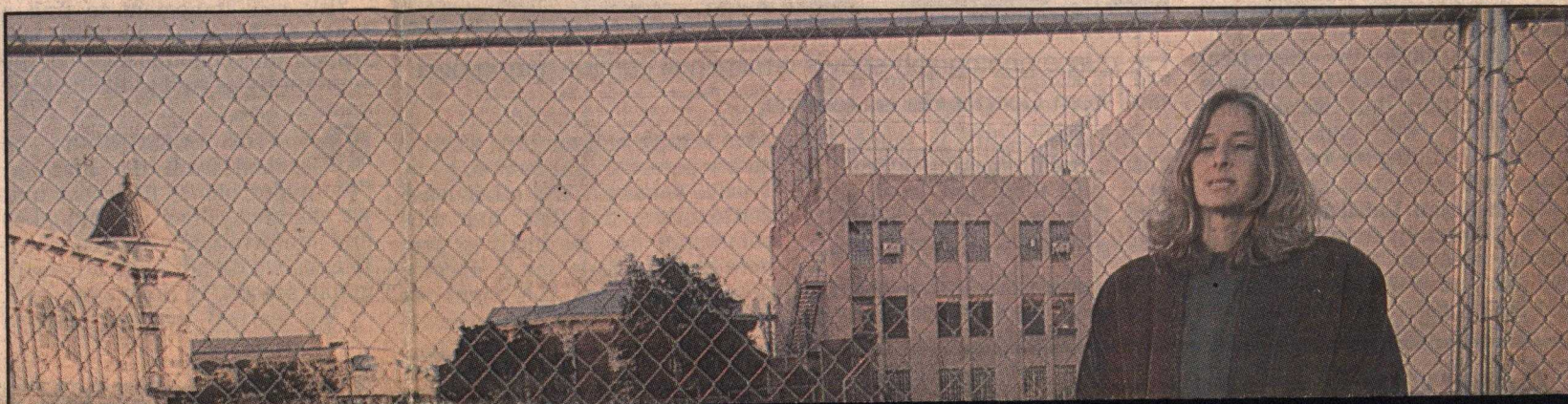
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'Cooper House,' oil rendition by Jacque Baker, 1986

So long, friends



so too does history

By GREG BEEBE
Sentinel staff writer

SOME OLD FRIENDS died the other day. A robust gal named Cooper. A distinguished gray gentleman named Hihn. Another cohort, a saintly big guy named George, is on his deathbed, weakly clinging to life.

We worked with them, we played with them. We drank and danced the night away together. Sometimes, we even slept together.

Ain't it sad when old friends pass away?

Photographs, memories and gaping holes in the ground are all that's left of the Cooper House and the Hihn Building, two of Santa Cruz County's most famous historical icons. The Oct. 17, 1989 earthquake took a dear toll on these stately, 100-plus-year-old structures, and may have finished off the St. George Hotel, which is tentatively slated for demolition.

When these Santa Cruz buildings crumbled, so did a chunk of local history, said Steade Craigo, deputy state historical preservation director.

"It is an irreplaceable loss. It can't be reconstructed. Once they're gone, they're gone forever. Very unfortunately, we've lost a large number of historical buildings not only in Santa Cruz but in Watsonville and Hollister as well.

"The Oct. 17 earthquake had a disastrous impact on the historical resources in California. The actual extent of that disaster, we haven't yet had an opportunity to ascertain," Craigo said.

"ANYBODY who has spent any time in Santa Cruz had a sense of security about the community," said state Assemblyman Sam Farr (D-Monterey). "It was aesthetically pleasing. By and large it was a comfortable feeling — and we're not accustomed now to gaping holes. You look up and it's not there any more," Farr said.

"It's a disappointment to see something so important to the community be lost. People are often nostalgic," said Kathryn Burns, director of the western regional office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation,

the largest agency of its kind in the U.S.

"I was very shocked by the sense of loss in Watsonville," Craigo said. "The downtown area there is devastated. I think people get attached to buildings — they have a sense of association and identity with buildings — and the Cooper House is one of those that a lot of people had that identity with. And when it's gone, there's a feeling of loss almost like you've lost a loved one."

Santa Cruz City Councilman John Laird "felt a personal loss" when the Cooper House was deemed unsafe and demolished.

"I went down and stood in the crowd for a while as the wrecking ball was knocking it down and it was real tough not to well up (with tears) while it was happening.

"It was mostly quiet, as if it was a funeral, like part of the family went."

IT'S NOT UNUSUAL to grieve for a building, said Andrew Carman, a local psychologist. "One thing about grieving is that it's important that people do grieve and acknowledge the loss in order to clear them up to move on to what's next," Carman said. "In general, if people haven't grieved about the loss of something they carry a certain baggage of sadness with them that makes choosing the next step more complicated.

"I could imagine if you have, for example, a lot of unexpressed frustration about the (demolition of the) Cooper House and someone's wondering 'Was it necessary?' and they've heard a rumor that this building didn't need to come down and they haven't got those questions answered, they're going to be carrying that frustration. They're still holding on to the Cooper House. It's important that people's questions about the old buildings are

'I went down and stood in the crowd for a while as the wrecking ball was knocking it down and it was real tough not to well up (with tears) while it was happening.'

— City councilman John Laird



Historical Preservationist and architect Sara Kane: 'It's been very frustrating not being able to save more buildings.'

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

answered so that the future planning process be as cooperative as possible," Carman said.

AS PART of the healing/planning process, the city of Santa Cruz has started a weekly lecture series which addresses rebuilding the downtown area.

The series, which runs through March, continues at 7:30 Wednesday night at the Loudon Nelson Center with William H. Whyte Jr., a New York City author and social observer, speaking on "Public Spaces Reconsidered."

AT THE TIME of the great earthquake, most of downtown Santa Cruz's Pacific Garden Mall — more than 50 buildings in all — was designated as a National Historic District by the National Register of Historic Places.

Along with that designation come tax and bond incentives which could be lost if the district is "delisted," Burns said.

"There is a potential for delisting," she said. "If the historical qualities of that district are lost, it is no longer considered a historical district."

Craigo said his office hasn't been able to evaluate the district's historical status because

"we've been very busy trying to save buildings that are still standing. It's caused us to redirect our staff.

"When things begin to settle down, we'll survey the historic districts in Santa Cruz as well as Watsonville. We'll see the extent of the demolition and what impact it has had on the integrity of these National Register districts. We're interested in determining if those districts still have a sense of 'time and place,' a sense of history," Craigo said.

AFTER A DISASTER such as the earthquake, tough decisions need to be made when the fight to preserve "a sense of history" collides head-on with business interests and municipal concerns for public safety.

The dilemma plainly frustrated architect Sara Kane, whose tenure as chairperson of the city's Historical Preservation Commission ended Wednesday night.

"I'm happy to step down as chair," she said. "It's been a very stressful situation and it's been very frustrating not being able to save more buildings.

"There was a big hurry in the beginning to tear down buildings — 'Sign here, there is nothing we can do.' In retrospect, they did what a lot of people would have done. I think the city is sincere, but they're listening to their attorneys. They face a terrible liability problem."

Kane likened the weeks following the quake to a "panic situation." The ground was still shaking. Nerves were frazzled

'A classic case of a real loss'

IN THE aftermath of the great quake of 1989, at least five structural engineers inspected the Cooper House. Four of the five engineers agreed the building was unsafe, unrepairable and had to be demolished.

The lone dissenter was Michael Krakower, a Pasadena-based structural engineer with 10 years experience in the preservation and seismic-retrofitting of historical buildings. Krakower is currently assisting the California Preservation Foundation in assessing quake damage to historical buildings in Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Salinas, Los Gatos, Oakland and San Jose.

Krakower inspected the Cooper House the Thursday after the big quake. "I certainly didn't feel uncomfortable going into the building."

Although he acknowledged the Cooper House suffered heavy damage, Krakower believed the building could be saved, and let his opinion be known.

"We were given the opportunity to present our viewpoint. I think the officials had a sense of my opinion and possibly other opinions and took a consensus, which was probably to knock it down. I think we were given the opportunity to air our opinions."

Sara Kane, a local architect

and former chairperson of the city Historical Preservation Commission, said "I think the decision was made too hastily on the Cooper House. I think it should have waited until they looked at it more carefully."

Kathryn Burns of the National Trust for Historic Preservation said "I guess my sense is that I don't want to relitigate that one. The building came down. It was a classic case of a real loss. It was a building with a tremendous identity."

Cynthia Matthews of the Santa Cruz County Historical Trust said, "Personally, I have confidence that the city made the decision with a great deal of thought and care, and my own sense is that the decision makers in the city are committed to trying to save historical structures whenever possible."

Other buildings, Burns said, "will become focal points. You can't rush history and you can't throw it away, either. The buildings that are now standing that are tenuous — the St. George and the County Bank Building — you have to be careful trying to determine what the options are."

"Demolition is not a cure-all," Krakower said.

— Greg Beebe

Please see FRIENDS — E2

Friends/ Quake compromises 'a sense of history'

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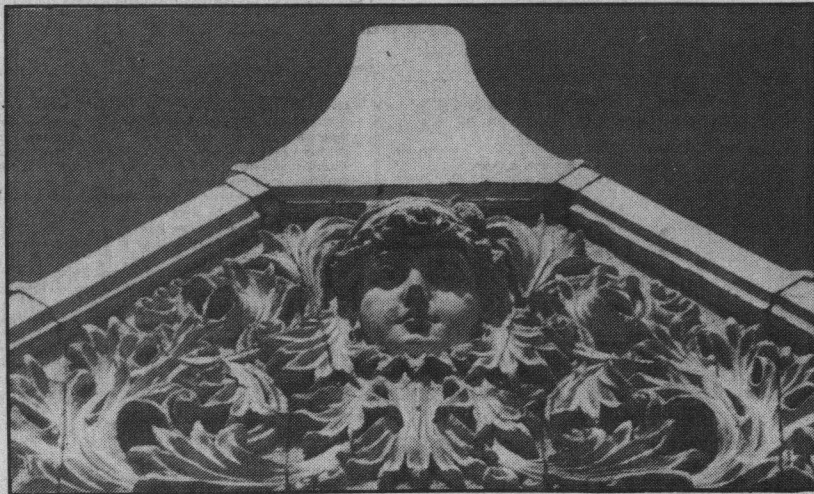
and downtown businesses were losing money as the Christmas shopping season approached.

"People see a lot of things going down and they look at their building with a few cracks in it and say 'Uh-oh, I better tear this down, too.' The Hihn Building and the Cooper House obviously were very, very damaged. But in a few cases I think they should have spent a little more time being sure."

The disaster, Kane said, took the "decision-making away from us" and gave it to city officials "because of issues of liability and public safety."

"People think the historical commission should be stopping all demolition, but we've done everything we can ... Nobody wants a building to be unsafe," Kane said.

Councilman Laird agreed that "it's a horribly frustrating situation because most everyone wants to save downtown historical buildings.



Robert Miltendorf/Sentinel

Pre-quake photograph shows ornamental cornice gazing over mall from Cooper House roofline.

"But the reality is many are unsafe and financially difficult to save, and there are legal problems that tie the city's hands in many instances ...," Laird said.

"It's one thing to say that a person can go into a building to

save things, and another when a safety person might have to go in to save someone. The other legal consequence is that the city sometimes has the right to prevent a demolition, but it doesn't necessarily have the right to order someone to make improve-

ments or renovations, and then you have what Coalinga has — shells of historical buildings standing years later completely unfixed," Laird said.

"In the earthquake a lot of crisis decisions were being made," Craig said. Emotions were running very high. Property owners felt 'let down' by their historic buildings.

"The thinking is that old buildings are not strong enough to survive and earthquake, but the evidence is quite clear that historical buildings can survive earthquakes," Craig said.

"It's real important to find a sense of balance, one that will respect the economic needs of the community as well as the historic past."

IF THE LESSONS to be learned from the disaster, "the major one is to accept that we will always have earthquakes and unfortunately unlike hurricanes we do not have an earthquake season," Craig said.

"We learned that we need to

plan for the earthquakes, and specifically, for historic buildings we need preservation ordinances and review procedures established *before* the crisis. But the most important thing to be done is to implement structural retrofitting programs for the historical buildings we have now, like they have in downtown Los Angeles and San Francisco."

Craig said there are "reasonable, less expensive approaches to not only save historical buildings but to reduce the expense to building owners. Owners of historical properties can use state historical building codes, which provide many alternatives to doing seismic retrofits, and maintain the same level of safety.

"I think that once the property owners and structural engineers and city building officials understand the state historical building code and the effectiveness of seismic abatement programs, that we will not have the kind of situation we are seeing in Santa Cruz," Craig said.