

Inspectors assess ravaged mall

'Worst ever,' architect says

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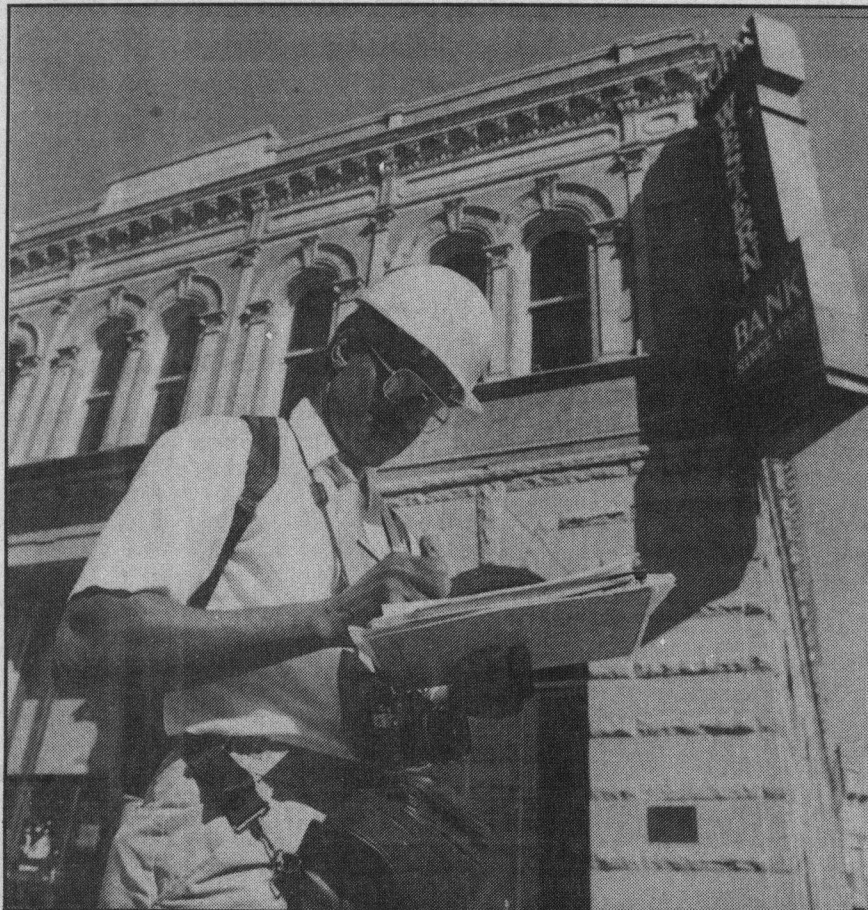
SANTA CRUZ — Government architects and structural engineers inspected historic buildings along the Pacific Garden Mall Tuesday afternoon, trying to decide how much repair buildings need or whether some can be repaired at all.

"I look at some of these buildings and they're very nice," said John Marsh, and architect with the National Park Service. "It's a shame if they have to come down."

But Marsh spoke in front of the lot of rubble that used to hold the historic Cooper House. And while he was studying the County Bank building across from that street, bulldozers were cleaning up the remains of the Hihn Building two blocks away.

Marsh is part of a team of state and federal engineers and architects who will be making a report on each of the buildings still standing downtown. The team also is touring and reporting on Watsonville. Their reports will then be reviewed by Federal Emergency Management Agency officials, who could decide to route some of the federal emergency funds marked for Santa Cruz County toward preserving historic buildings.

Marsh said that just about any building can be saved — if somebody wants to pay enough to save it. "Economics is



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John Marsh of National Parks notes County Bank Building damage.

going to be a big part of whether some buildings are saved," he said.

Another question will be whether it is

safe for workers to enter and building to work on it. Developer Jay Paul said one of the reasons he had agreed to the

demolition of the Cooper House was because it would have been too dangerous for workers to try and rehabilitate the building.

Marsh agreed that those risks are very real. "There's always danger in doing that kind of construction," Marsh said. "You've got to take that into consideration."

The team entered the St. George Hotel Tuesday afternoon, staring at the huge cracks that ran down the fireplace and at plaster from the ceilings that now covers the floors. They stepped gingerly up the stairway to the second floor of the hotel, walked through the hallways, past rooms that were abandoned as the earth rocked. Furniture still lay willy-nilly in many of the rooms, as if tossed inside some giant blender.

Still, as bad as it looked on the surface, Marsh said the St. George didn't look that bad in terms of its structure. "It's in very good condition," he said. "The number of partition walls in it really held it together."

As business owners who had been allowed on the mall for a limited time to retrieve possessions scurried to load up trucks and rented vans, the historical team walked along Pacific Avenue, pointing up at cracks in the Palomar Hotel, noting bricks that had fallen off one roof, videotaping the exterior of the County Bank Building.

Marsh stood next to the ruins of the Cooper House. It's his job to go around and appraise older buildings that have been damaged by disaster. He's used to seeing architectural history ravaged. Still...

"I think this is probably the worst I've