

Renovation at The Octagon to bring back original ceiling

By DENISE SIEBENTHAL
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — They've hit the ceiling at the County Historical Museum, commonly known as The Octagon.

No, they're not mad. Members of Friends of the Octagon are having the ceiling of the 101-year-old, eight-sided structure at Cooper and Front streets revamped to its original splendor.

The museum will be closed until June 26.

Down came the water-stained tiles and fluorescent lights which made up the flat ceiling put up in the 1970s, revealing a high, pointed ceiling crowned by a skylight.

The skylight, installed when the building was constructed in 1883 as the County Hall of Records, will provide the only natural light except for a small window on the museum door, said Museum Director Al Schadel.

The museum displays will be illuminated by a specially-designed, octagon-shaped track lighting fixture suspended from the ceiling by airplane cables.

The lighting system, designed by Peerless Electric, will allow the lights to be adjusted to shine directly on individual exhibits, according to Schadel.

The \$25,000 project is being totally funded by Friends of the Octagon, a few individual donations and a donation from The Questers, a local organization. The architectural firm of Rosekrans and Broder Inc. designed the new ceiling.

"The Friends are investing in a county-owned building. Because of their love of the museum, they are willing to invest in a public facility," Schadel noted.

Anyone interested in donating can send a check to Friends of the Octagon, c/o The Octagon Museum, Cooper and Front Streets, Santa Cruz, 95060.

Workers from Reese Construction Co. are busy rejoining the ceiling. Sheetrock will be placed over the exposed wood and then the lighting fixture will be hung.

The idea to restore the ceiling to its original state began with the Friends of the Octagon decided to raise funds to put in new lighting. It was then decided related, that the ceiling may as well be replaced too, Schadel said.

The majority of the money was raised through various fund-raising projects put on by Friends of the Octagon, a sub-group of the Santa Cruz County Society for Historical Preservation Inc.

The society as of July 1 will be taking over administration of the museum under contract with the county, Schadel said.

When the museum was formed in the early 1970s, the society was put in charge of its administration. But over the years, this task has fallen back into the hands of the county Parks, Open Space and Cultural Services Department.

It was suggested during the county budget hearings last summer that the administration be put back into the hands of the society in order to save the county money. It's taken a year to negotiate the change-over, Schadel said.

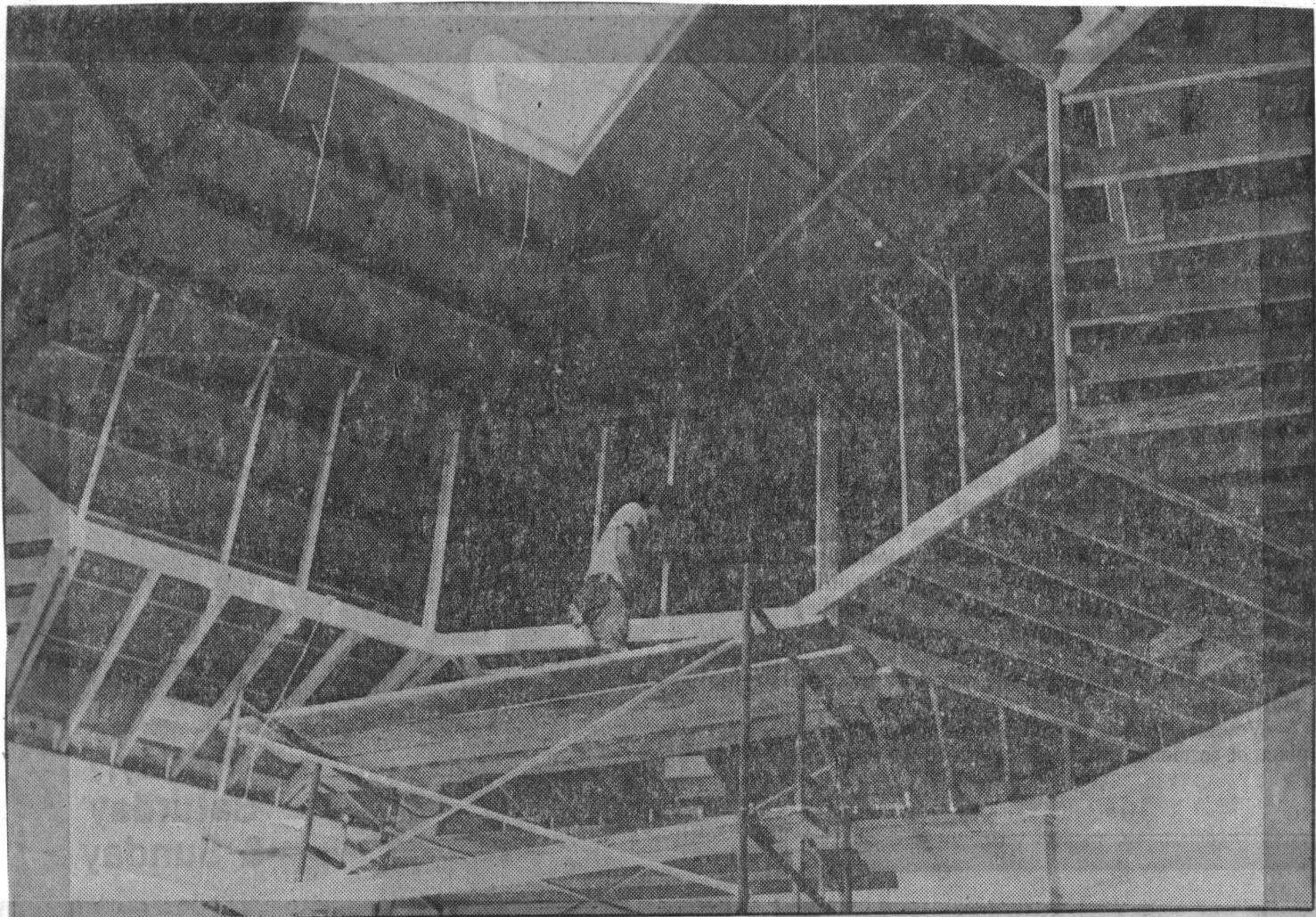
It's being recommended the society be given a \$48,022 "bare bones" budget for supplies, museum staff salaries and the maintenance of the adjoining Abbott Square for fiscal year 1983-84, Schadel said.

"This budget is a bit less than what the county has been spending and will require the society for the first time to think creatively about fundraising," Schadel stated.

Other historical and archaeological groups at first were annoyed the museum's administration was being placed in the hands of the society, according to Schadel.

But the controversy was smoothed over when the society directors agreed to expand the membership on their board to include representation from other groups, Schadel said.

Society directors also agreed to make sure all the various geographical areas of the county are represented on the board, he added.



Construction worker Allen Hasty works on new ceiling.