

Hall of Records

Cornerstone Laying At Hall Of Records

By Margaret Koch

On one side and across the river there rises to the sky a huge concrete skeleton — a new courthouse.

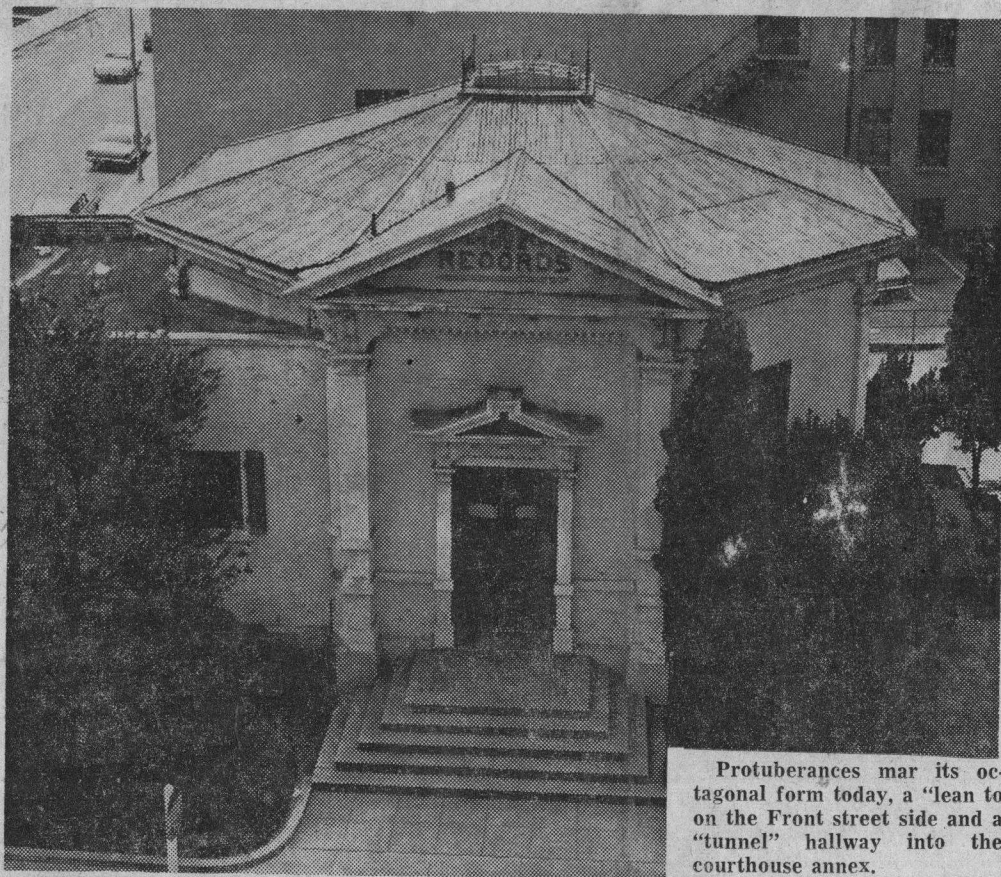
On the other side sits the old creaky courthouse, long outgrown.

In the middle, in more ways than one, is Santa Cruz' historic Hall of Records. An unusual octagon shape, constructed in 1882, the little brick building lives now from day to day. What will become of it when the old courthouse is demolished? Who knows.

The Hall of Records is worth saving, in the opinion of people who are aware of its interesting history. It was constructed, along with many others all over California, in the then-popular octagon shape. It was modeled after a \$50 gold piece minted in San Francisco in 1851-52. Only 880,000 of the coins were made and they are rare today.

And so are the once-plentiful octagonal brick buildings. One by one they have disappeared, been demolished and their bricks scattered. Santa Cruz is one of the few cities today still possessing one of the structures.

Trouble is, newcomers don't even realize it is octagonal and different, because back somewhere in the years since it was built, city fathers added to it a shanty lean-to on one side and a hallway to the courthouse an-



Protuberances mar its octagonal form today, a "lean to" on the Front street side and a "tunnel" hallway into the courthouse annex.

nex on another side.

The Santa Cruz County board of supervisors adopted the octagonal plan for the building in April, 1882. Bids were opened May 1. The California Bridge

company submitted the lowest at \$10,872.

The city fathers balked at the \$872 — the plan was modified just enough to bring total costs to an even \$10,000 and the little

building was completed in four months.

The cornerstone laying was quite an occasion. Santa Cruzans of those days took their public ventures very seriously. After

all, they were just emerging from a period when the local hoosegow had been a crude redwood frame structure out of which any prisoner could whittle his way with ease and a sharp pocketknife.

The Hall of Records was to be a permanent brick building. And its cornerstone was placed with great ceremony, pomp, oratory and brass band music. Bleacher seats were even built for the occasion.

Local Masons put on a ball that evening at the Ocean House ballroom. A five-piece orchestra tootled and blew.

The building was completed on time and started living up to its title: records of Santa Cruz births, burials, marriages, property transactions and deeds all are on record here. Microfilming has brought the process up to date in recent years.

The old building lived through the great fire of 1894 which swept the brick courthouse which stood next to it in those days. It got its toes wet in the turbulent flood of 1955, but survived. Today it may face an even worse battle — one with public apathy.

It is true that Santa Cruz has outgrown the old octagonal building. But it should be saved and put to some useful purpose. Backing its preservation are members of Santa Cruz Historical society and the California State Historical conference.



Yesterday it looked like
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this. Quite a few yesterdays ago to be exact — in 1882, the

year it was built.
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