



Gil D'Innocente sold out Hihn building coin.

Coincidence over coin

SANTA CRUZ Coin Club president Gil D'Innocente is still amazed. Generally, the club's annual commemorative coin interests a nice range of collectors. But this year, by virtue of it timing, this Coin Club's issue has become hot property.

"We've sold out. The 1,250 we had minted went like hotcakes," says D'Innocente, a local businessman.

The coin, minted in gold, silver and bronze, commemorates the 25th anniversary of Pacific Garden Mall and the Coin Club's 24th annual show, which was Nov. 5 at the CPDES Hall.

The day before the earthquake, Oct. 16, D'Innocente picked up the coin at the mint, expect-

ing to peddle them here and there. The next morning, Oct. 17, he dropped some off at various mall businesses, intending to go back that afternoon to make more deliveries.

Then came 5:04 p.m. and the earthquake.

As days passed and the dust settled, word came out that the Hihn Building on the mall would have to be demolished, and all of a sudden people were looking at the commemorative coins in a new light. The image on the coin is the now-gone Hihn building, erected in 1894, most recently called the Medico Dental building.

Needless to say, the coins sold out. "Now," marvels D'Innocente, "They truly are a commemorative."



Photos by Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Noel Patterson, almost 95, traces rescued 1938 map of downtown Watsonville for UCSC librarian Stanley Stevens. Map in foreground, drawn by Patterson in 1935, shows Hihn Railroad Grade out of Soquel.

One man's keen memory saved the priceless county records

By MARYBETH VARCADOS
Sentinel features editor

ONE MAN'S word saved the day for occupants of the Hihn building, which came down on Pacific Garden Mall the week of Oct. 29, 12 days after the fateful earthquake.

That man, Noel Patterson, knew the building better than anyone in town. Patterson will be 95 in May; his memory is so sharp, when someone refers to an event some month in his past, he fills in the precise date.

Patterson is Santa Cruz's oldest Realtor, but more than that, he's a link to a nearly obliterated past. His memory and concern for the town made it possible to save the contents of Hihn building offices, including Patterson's own priceless collection of maps and documents pertaining to the county's development. That collection now resides at UC Santa Cruz, under care of map librarian Stanley Stevens. Once it is in proper shape, it will be called the Noel Patterson Collection, says Stevens.

Patterson's history here began in 1913. In 1914, he began to work with the county's fourth biggest taxpayer, Frederick A. Hihn. Also that year, Patterson adds wryly, he appeared in the local water festival. Those were the good ole days, when the town's grand buildings were at their finest and a fellow like Patterson got paid \$7.50 a week.

The young Southern California native became Hihn's right-hand man and his mapmaker. Through the years he would assess land for many of the major county transactions and record those transactions via maps, documents and photographs.

Patterson's work as assessor is behind, just to name a few, Santa Cruz downtown redevelopment, the state park land parcels, the yacht harbor, UC Santa Cruz and Cabrillo College, Pajaro Valley schools and Chittenden Pass. His appraisals go back as early as the Swanton subdivision, and the surveying of the entire north coast for roads; it

then was called Seaside Road District.

A few years ago, Patterson offered the map and document collection to UC Santa Cruz for its archives, and a few items were handed over. The remainder were in a closet in his office downtown. That office, in the Hihn building, was red-tagged after the Oct. 17 earthquake.

Enter Gloria Hihn Welsh, F.A. Hihn's great-granddaughter and owner of the building.

"I was called to city hall on Oct. 24 and told the building would be demolished," she recalls. She thought of her own offices, and of the building tenants — three merchants downstairs, and a variety of professional offices upstairs.

Automatically, she went to Patterson. "I always go to him," she said. "I sit at his knee and listen."

Patterson was aghast; he knew the history of the building like the back of his hand. "I said, 'That's ridiculous,'" recalls the downtown veteran. "We've got some people in charge here who assumed too much."

Immediately, they set a process going. Welsh phoned a lawyer in San Jose and arranged for a 24-hour restraining order. Hihn building attorney-occupants Hermina Kaplan and Jack Jacobson went to Patterson and had him write an affidavit.

"I Noel Patterson declare that I am the only living person who knew F.A. Hihn, the original owner and builder of the building known as the Hihn building at 1211 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz, Calif.," it began. "I was present when the building was renovated in 1925-1926. I have been the manager of the building from 1925 until the present."

"Approximately 10 or 15 years ago Palmer Construction Company was hired to remodel the building. At that time they installed a new column and beams to take the weight off of the front foundation and the roof. This beam was braced to the existing structure. The purpose of this work was to strengthen the building against an earthquake ..."

In five legal-size pages, with large, clear printing, Patterson spelled out the strengths of the building

and the companies that worked on it through 1987. He ended with a description of the historical records promised to UCSC, explaining that the university wanted access to the items.

The next day, the attorneys and Welsh took the affidavit before Judge Tom Black in Superior Court. To Welsh's surprise, it was settled. The judge allowed an injunction, ruling that, under supervision of a building engineer, tenants would have 15 minutes to enter and recoup their valuables.

After inspecting Patterson's document, John Frazer accepted the job, and on Oct. 28, for two and a half hours he stayed in the condemned building while tenants came, gathered stuff, and went.

One tenant, Jeffrey Armstrong — aka St. Silicon and a furniture mover by trade — helped the others. And Frazer wound up helping to rescue the maps.

Librarian Stevens was waiting with his station wagon. "It was a major document recovery," says Stevens. The maps filled his station wagon from ceiling to floor, and the appraisal records equal 50 volumes, he estimates.

Stevens has been doing an oral history with Patterson, on the maps and appraisal work. As they talk, points in time come to focus.

About the Cooper House, Patterson says its stability was "questionable" for years. "I remember a meeting in the old supervisors' chambers, when there was an earthquake. When the top floor began to shake, we knew something was wrong up there." That was in the '50s.

Stevens found a Sentinel clipping in the bottom of a brown paper bag full of records. "It shows Noel in front of the old telephone building," he says, "with all the town's prominent people, including Fred Swanton, lieutenant governor W.T. Jeter ... it was from 1926, the phone company's 50th anniversary."

Patterson leans to listen, then adds, "It was August. August 1926."