

The landmark that might have been

By MARGARET KOCH
Sentinel Correspondent

THERE WERE tears shed and curses uttered when the McHugh-Bianchi Building was torn down. A lot of bitter in-and-outfighting preceded the demise of the picturesque Italianate-style grocery store.

The lop-sided landmark, if still standing, would be 100 years old this year. It was lop-sided because it had to fit between two streets, Mission and Pacific. It stood on the Southwest corner, across from the main Post Office and kitty-corner from today's Town Clock location.

usually by choice, who followed the railroad lines, slept in box cars when they could, and swung their bedrolls aboard outgoing trains to steal rides to the next town.

Bindle stiffs — tramps — hoboes — burns — those were the terms. They didn't linger long here.

The Arlington, on the other hand, housed those down and out temporarily. No social security, no food stamps, no welfare for them. They did a few odd jobs when they could, and worked for a meal now and then, made a few dollars here and there. They lived on the edge of nothingness.

Like most of the buildings lining Pacific Avenue in the 1880s, Hinkle's Cash Store had an upstairs. Those second story rooms that looked down on "the avenue" served purposes that ranged from lodge halls to doctors' and lawyers' offices, from legitimate businesses to monkey businesses.

The rooms above Hinkle's became the Arlington Hotel, a kind of genteel rooming house at first. Down through the years it lost its luster as such places have a way of doing, and came to bear more resemblance to a flop house.

In those days Santa Cruz had "rooming house people" instead of "street people." Of course there were always a few of the homeless,

A glance at history

It was built by A.P. Hotaling, who also built the St. George Hotel and who peddled whiskey in San Francisco and became very rich. He descended on the fateful corner in 1886.

The landmark grocery was popularly known as the McHugh-Bianchi building for the last 25 years of its existence due to the proprietors of the last grocery store, Richard McHugh and Ernest Bianchi.

It stood on hallowed commercial ground — the site of Santa Cruz's very first general merchandise store located "down on the flat," a one-story frame building put up in 1851 by Charles D. Eldon. Everything before Eldon was up on Holy Cross Plaza which was the town's first center of business.

In 1858 Eldon sold his pioneer general store to the Cooper Brothers of Cooper House fame. When Hotaling acquired the property it housed a fruit store and saloon. He tore down the frame building and put up what was to become the McHugh-Bianchi building.

Then in 1894 a young fellow from Indiana opened a general store in the same building. He was C.D. Hinkle and he ran it as Hinkle's Cash Store, handling a wide variety of merchandise. You could shop not only for groceries and meats of all kinds, but also for such non-edibles as bicycles, farming tools, kerosene lamps and the kerosene that filled them, dress materials, needles and threads, shoes and boots.

Hinkle prospered. He ran two horse and wagon deliveries a day and employed four clerks. By 1929 he was so busy with his civic duties that he sold the store to two partners, Lease and Wettstein, who ran it until 1946.

Hinkle lived to see himself become a prominent, well-to-do city father who was elected mayor, a vice president of the Bank of Italy (Bank of America today), a member of the local school board and president of Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce. Heavy with honors, he died at an advanced age in 1959.

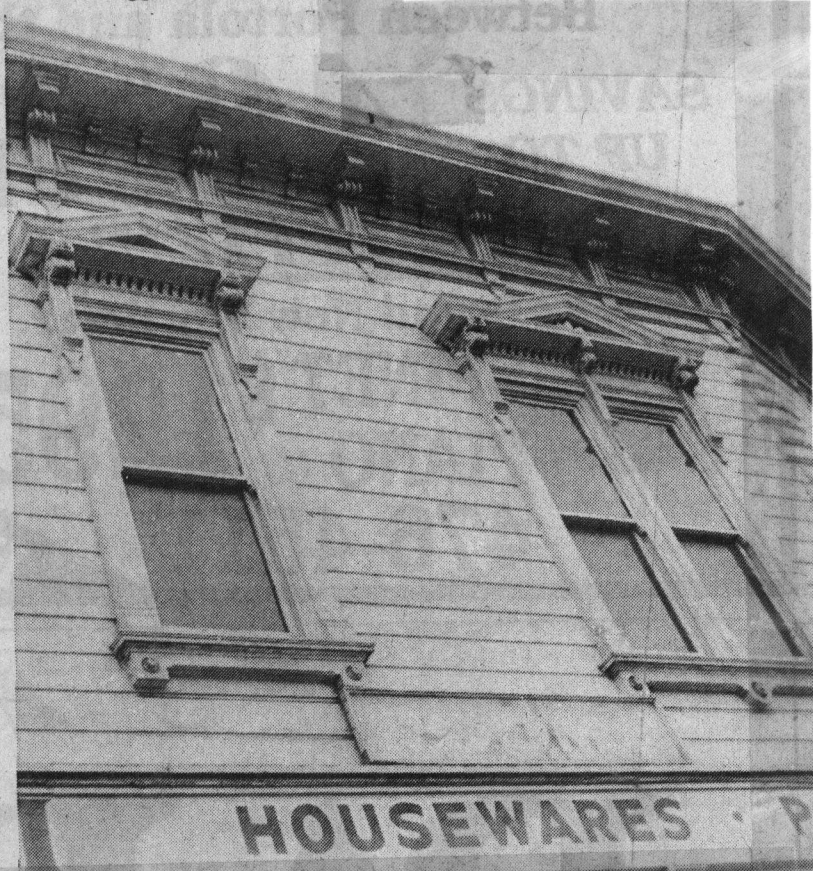
The interesting thing is that they were willing to work. Gardening, washing windows, anything to make a buck or two so they could pay the room rent. They cooked (you could call it that) on canned heat in their rooms — strictly against the house rules, of course, and not very safe. And I imagine (pure speculation) that old man Hinkle would dole out an overripe banana or a wilted head of cabbage once in awhile.

The Cooper brothers also were famous for their charities to the few remaining Mission Indians who were in dire straits. Those old timers in Santa Cruz, prosperous and wealthy as they became over the years, never quite forgot their earlier struggles.

The Hotaling-Hinkle-McHugh-Bianchi tug of war created schisms yet unhealed in Santa Cruz. 1971 was the fateful year. The handsome old structure was purchased by Golden West Savings and Loan Association with the goal of tearing it down and erecting a new office building on the site.

An immediate groundswell of protest arose among a great number of citizens. A suggestion was made to at least save the facade of the building and paste it onto the new structure, but that didn't fly.

The citizens pursued their self-appointed task of saving it and in 1972 it became the second of Santa Cruz's buildings to be placed on the



The Italianate style building had elaborate detailing.

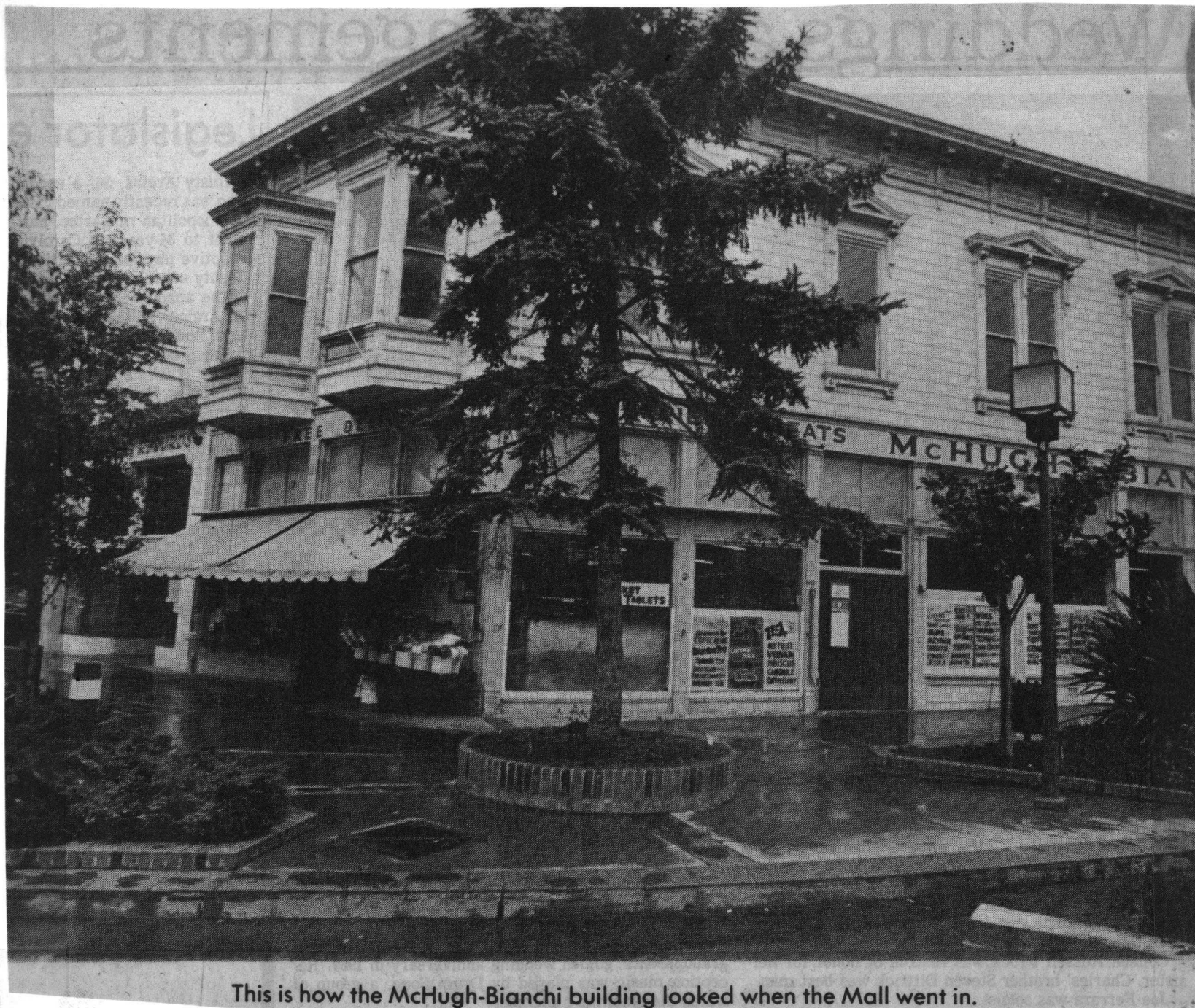
SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
May 4, 1986

National Register of Historic Places. Everyone breathed a little easier but even that honor wasn't going to save it.

Golden West hired a firm to make a feasibility study as an alternative to demolition. The firm came up with one answer: demolition. The building came down on August 20, 1974, and the present World Savings building was constructed on the site.

It was a long and bitter battle but history lost.

Today, perhaps the kindest comment one can make regarding the blocky structure hiding behind its lathe petticoat is that bushes can hide a lot. Thank goodness.



This is how the McHugh-Bianchi building looked when the Mall went in.