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SANTA CRUZ CALIFORNIA 95063

REFERENCE

Abandoned SC Structure

(Pete Amos)

Fire Destroys Limestone Quarry

Fire raged through the historic limestone quarry building on Spring Street in the Westlake area of Santa Cruz early this morning.

City firemen, responding to the alarm at 11:57 p.m., arrived to find the mammoth wooden structure fully involved in flames. They were still on the scene at mid-morning putting out hot spots.

The three-story tiered building on a hillside has been abandoned since early 1971 when Pacific Limestone ended its quarry operations.

Because the building had been abandoned, firemen believe the blaze was touched off, either intentionally or accidentally, by someone camping in the old structure. "It was not going to start by itself," Chief Officer Dave Alsip said this morning.

Because of its remote location, the blaze did not threaten any of the numerous expensive homes which have been built around the quarry property.

The building, Alsip said, was fully exposed, making it too dangerous for firemen to fight the

blaze inside. "All we could do was stand back and pour water on it" as the structure burned to the ground. The building, he said, was of no monetary value and has been "an attractive nuisance" to neighborhood children since the quarry operations were abandoned.

When in use, the building housed the limestone processing operation. Limestone rocks, formed through eons from compressed layers of sea shells, were taken from the quarry and transported to the top of the building by conveyor belts. The rocks were crushed as they progressed down through the building.

For years after the quarry was opened in 1869, the limestone was sold for use in road construction. Shortly after the turn of the century, limestone was discovered to be useful in steel and glass manufacturing, but was quickly replaced by another scientific discovery.

In 1921, the quarry was purchased by Fred M.

Johnson, who turned limestone into a mineral-rich diet supplement for livestock and grit for poultry. Johnson found that the limestone's calcium carbonate built stronger eggshells and traces of minerals in the limestone improved the overall health of birds.

In later years, the quarry was operated by Johnson's grandson, Jim Conover, who continued to market the grit by the brand name, KalKar.

In its last year, the quarry was the only one in Northern California that still sacked its product for distribution to some 30 feed dealers in the area. Other plants supplied by bulk shipment. Some 3,000 tons of limestone and limestone products left the KalKar plant each month.

Since the quarry closed, the property has changed ownership a number of times. Proposals for use of the land has ranged from a 200-unit housing development to the most current proposal for a 70-unit cluster housing development by the Hawaii & San Francisco Investment Co.

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
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History



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Santa Cruz firemen this morning battled a fire that completely destroyed the abandoned limestone quarry on Spring Street