

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

HABS _____ HAER _____ Ser. No. 0118-04C
UTM: A 10/712670 3906420B SHL _____ Loc _____
C _____ D _____

IDENTIFICATION

1. Common name: Revelation
2. Historic name: Tower Building/H.M. Warden Building
3. Street or rural address: 842-846 Higuera Street
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 County San Luis Obispo
4. Parcel number: 02-425-04
5. Present Owner: Paramont Cleaners & Laundry Address: 1021 E. Boone
City Santa Maria Zip 93454 Ownership is: Public _____ Private X
6. Present Use: Office/Commercial Original use: Office/Commercial

DESCRIPTION

- 7a. Architectural style: First Renaissance Revival w/ Classical Revival overtones
- 7b. Briefly describe the present *physical description* of the site or structure and describe any major alterations from its original condition:

The Tower Building at 842-846 Higuera is a large, two story, irregular shaped, yellow brick, commercial building. The structure has a flat roof with a massive cornice and is straight-fronted, with features of the Roman-Tuscan mode of the First Renaissance Revival. Two voluted "gargoyles" crown the facade corners of the roof. There is a centrally placed ballustrade above the cornice. The building is further accentuated by rusticated quoins, dentils, and double brackets on the fascia under the roof ballustrade. The ground floor entrance reveals distinct classical overtones. A centrally placed pediment crowns the semi-circular arched main entrance. Two narrow, sash windows on the second floor are placed above the ground floor entrance. The four remaining upper story windows are massive, each with a fixed center panel and flanked by sash windows. Elongated, rectangular fixed glass panels top each of the four main upper story windows. The first floor has lost much of its original integrity due to store front remodeling. The upper level, however, retains much of the early character which conveys a sense of formality, boldness and symmetry.



8. Construction date: Estimated 1904 Factual _____
9. Architect Unknown
10. Builder Unknown
11. Approx. property size (in feet)
Frontage 100' Depth 85'
or approx. acreage _____
12. Date(s) of enclosed photograph(s)
October 1982

13. Condition: Excellent ____ Good X Fair ____ Deteriorated ____ No longer in existence ____
14. Alterations: The first floor has been extensively modernized
15. Surroundings: (Check more than one if necessary) Open land ____ Scattered buildings ____ Densely built-up ____
Residential ____ Industrial ____ Commercial X Other: ____
16. Threats to site: None known X Private development ____ Zoning ____ Vandalism ____
Public Works project ____ Other: ____
17. Is the structure: On its original site? Yes Moved? ____ Unknown? ____
18. Related features: ____

SIGNIFICANCE

19. Briefly state historical and/or architectural importance (include dates, events, and persons associated with the site.)

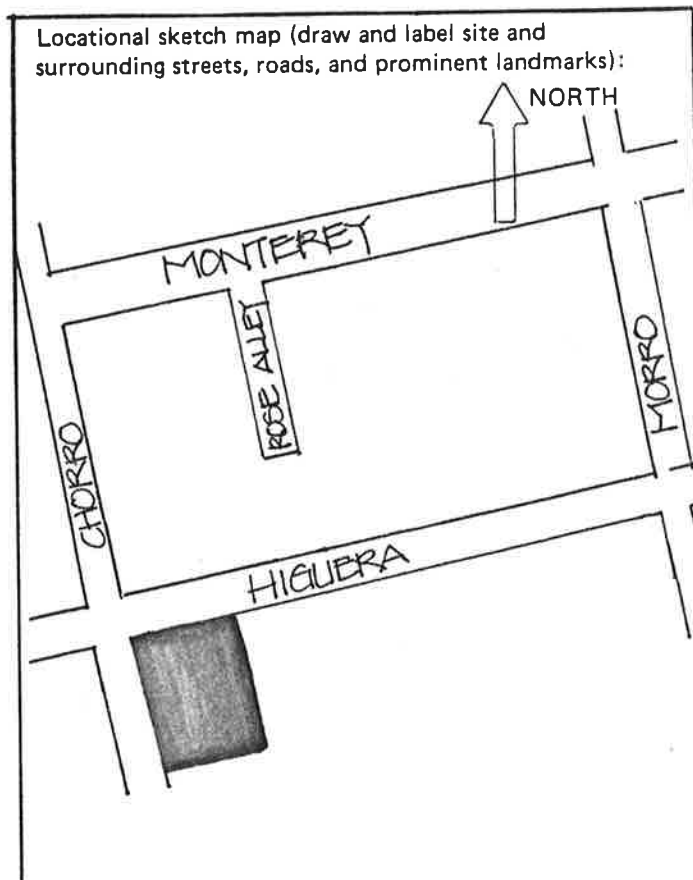
Originally known as the H.M. Warden Building, the Tower Building was constructed around 1904 as an office building. The primary significance of the structure lies in the relative purity of its original architectural design and the quality of its craftsmanship. To a lesser degree it is also important because of its close association with H. M. Warden, a leading businessman in San Luis Obispo at the turn of the century. At one time a large clock tower crowned the roof of the building. It was removed after a severe earthquake hit Santa Barbara in 1925. Fearing that a similar fate could strike San Luis Obispo, many citizens in the Central Coast removed embellishments from both commercial and residential structures in the late 1920's. The name was changed from the Warden Building to the Tower Building when it was sold shortly before World War II. The structure currently houses a combination of offices and commercial businesses.

20. Main theme of the historic resource: (If more than one is checked, number in order of importance.)
Architecture 1 Arts & Leisure ____
Economic/Industrial 2 Exploration/Settlement ____
Government ____ Military ____
Religion ____ Social/Education 3

21. Sources (List books, documents, surveys, personal interviews and their dates).

City/County Directory (1908, 1909)
Discovering San Luis Obispo County,
1971, Telegram-Tribune, 4-9-1936
4-23-1936

22. Date form prepared 20 June 1983
By (name) Historic Res Survey Staff
Organization City of San Luis Obispo
Address: P.O. Box 321
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401
Phone: (805) 541-1000



History and Description:

The Tower Building, originally the H. M. Warden Building was built in the summer of 1904. The building, at the time of its design was supposedly the largest, most elegant building between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The now non-existent tower with its four clock faces was a landmark of San Luis Obispo. The clocks were a convenience that were enjoyed by all who shopped or worked in the downtown area. In 1925, a severe earthquake hit Santa Barbara and caused many citizens of San Luis Obispo to be concerned about earthquake safety in their own town. As a result, around 1930, much of the ornamentation that decorated buildings were removed for reasons of safety. Some ornamentation on the roof overlooking Chorro Street was removed at this time as was the clock tower.

The Warden Building was sold just before World War II and it was then that the name was changed to the Tower Building. It was then a commercial building, as it is presently, prior to that time it was an office building.

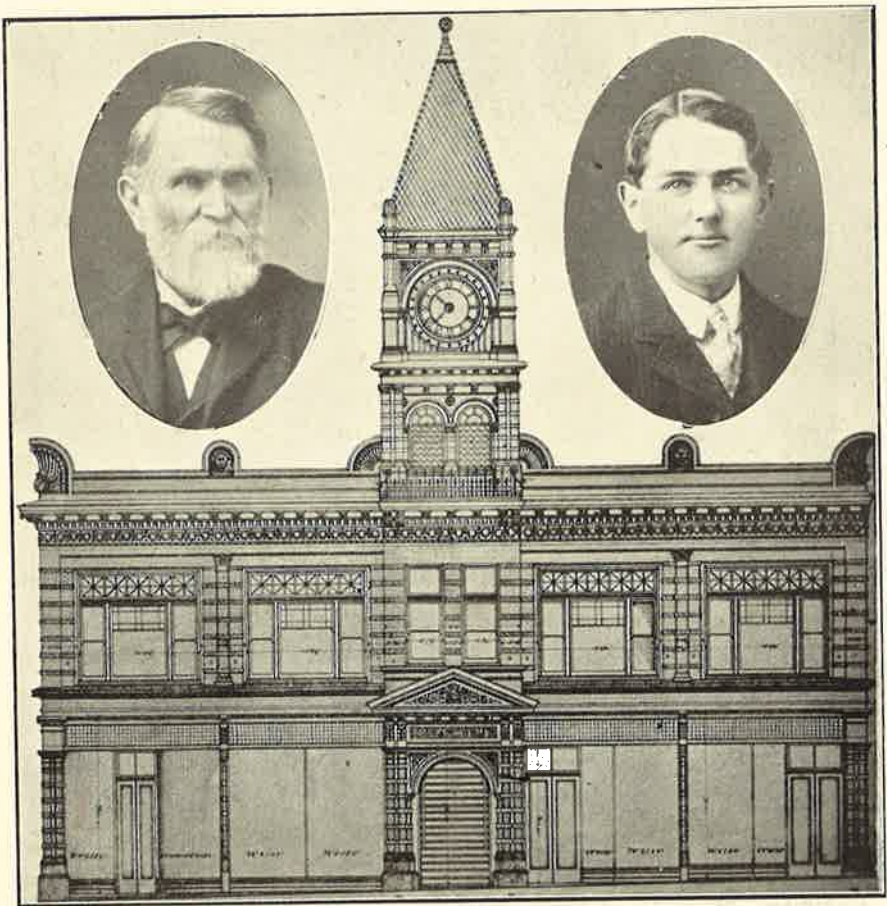
The two story building was primarily made of exposed yellow brick on the exterior. After it began being used for stores and small business the building rapidly began losing its character. A row of windows at the first floor ceiling level has been completely stuccoed over. The entire first floor exterior has been done over with billboards, stucco, and bright red paint. The interiors of the first floor are now separated into five different places of business, each taking remodeling into his own hands for maximum monetary advantage. The second floor, both inside and out, still retains much of the original design. A long straight stairway rises from Higuera Street to a mezzanine with a twenty foot ceiling height. A row of clerestory windows run around where the clock tower once was. The upstairs rooms, though now used as small businesses, remains in much the same way as when it was built. The interior of this floor is entirely of wood and plaster. Brick was apparently used only on the exterior walls.

Sources:

Louisiana Dart, Curator, San Luis Obispo County Historical Museum
Mr. Robert Corcoran, owner of Corcoran's Restaurant
The Warden family

H. M. WARDEN.

H. M. WARDEN, JR.



WARDEN CORNER.

Photo Fitzhugh.

This illustration represents only the front elevation of a magnificent structure now being erected by Mr. H. M. Warden on the corner of Higuera and Chorro streets. When completed this will be the largest, most imposing and conveniently arranged business and office block between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Mr. Warden is a pioneer resident of San Luis Obispo county and for many years has been a leader in all progressive public affairs.

Besides this beautiful and useful addition to San Luis Obispo, Mr. Warden owns much other valuable property in the city, among which is the Warden Block on Higuera street, filled with commodious stores and offices. Mr. Warden's enterprise and ambition has not been confined to the accumulation and development of city property alone; he also owns one of the finest, most elegantly improved and well-kept ranches in San Luis Obispo county. Here Mr. Warden resides and devotes much time to breeding and raising thoroughbred stock of all kinds.

Horatio M. Warden

Historic structures are calling cards that invite learning more not only about the building or home, but also the builder and occupants. As magnificent as Mount Vernon reflects a bygone era, the residents are even more interesting. Simply having George Washington sleep somewhere...let alone in his home...is an occasion of historical interest.

Locally, the two Warden Buildings attract many admirers, but, more importantly, the essential question is who was the builder? Just what happened in time to cause one man to envision two of the most notable buildings in the city?

Here's the story.

Horatio Moore Warden left life in San Luis Obispo just over 100 years ago but began his journey here in 1828 in Ohio, born into a large family (one account says 11 and another 13) of "old colonial stock of high rank." Possibly tales of ancestral heroics (his father was a captain in the War of 1812) captured the young man's imagination as at 19, he and his older brother, Lew, sought their own fortunes providing cattle to the burgeoning Chicago market. It was not to be their first venture into the world of commerce and both leaned success in more than ambition. Within a few years, the brothers were in Placerville undoubtedly lured by the fantastic tales of riches available to the enterprising in the golden soil of California.

Unlike many others when the lure of Midas eluded them, they remained in the Golden State and established a stage line from Sacramento (not yet the State capitol) to stops in the gold fields named Yankee Jim's, Illinois Town, Michigan Bluff and Iowa Hill. About a decade later, the brothers went in opposite directions with Horatio heading south. "Struggles for a competency during the early manhood" of the young men would continue to pay handsome dividends.

Purchasing considerable acreage in Los Osos in the late 1860s, the Highland Ranch still is family owned property. It was not Horatio's last investment, but, at last, he had found a new – and permanent – home.

The ranch became another successful business being praised for its thoroughbred stock. By then, Horatio certainly understood it took hard work, common sense and some luck to succeed. However, he also understood a less rigorous pursuit of wealth was promised by using other's capital. To that end in 1872 with the help of the equally enterprising Chauncey H. Phillips, the Bank of Warden and Phillips opened its doors. It was the first in the county. Continued success led to incorporation as the Bank of San Luis Obispo and a building on the corner of Monterey and Court Streets.

Horatio did not ignore a personal life as he pursued various commercial enterprises. In 1856, while farming in Napa County, he married Maria Mercedes Villigran. There were no children and she died in 1881. His second marriage proved quite different.

Queenie Parr was 19 when she married Horatio on November 30, 1882. They had three children: Queenie, Horatio, Jr., and Mary Loraine, who died on March 17, 1902. An equally enterprising personality, Queenie is detailed in last January's edition of *Journal Plus*.

Who knows what energized the near 70 year old rancher/banker to venture into the construction business? In March 1897, a notice appeared in the *Tribune* offering to sell his buildings occupying 98 feet facing Higuera Street. The ground was to be cleared by May 15 to allow for the building of an “elegant brick building” according to Warden. “Distinctively modern, very handsome and elegant,” commented the newspaper. Equally important, the new addition was viewed as another “step forward” in the city’s progress. Plans detailed a two-story structure with four stores on the bottom floor and the second for “well-ventilated” offices. The architect chosen was W. C. Phillips of Arroyo Grande. A local contractor, Thomas Reed, and sub-contractors were also local residents. Cost was not to exceed \$12,400.

The *Tribune* provided extensive details about the largest business building yet erected in town using local rock with cornices of corrugated iron and a vestibule entrance ending beneath a skylight measuring 360 square feet. The ornamentation was specially designed with iron work provided by the newly formed Judson Manufacturing Company of San Francisco. “Sanitary facilities” on each floor included marble sinks in each suite. The entire building was wired for gas and electricity.

Having such a grand building simply led to the construction of an even more imposing one.

Five years later, local architect H. S. Laird prepared plans for another Warden building for a 70x90 foot lot on the corner of Higuera and Chorro Streets. The New Warden Block was hailed by the press as the “largest, most elegant building between San Francisco and Los Angeles.” Perched above the building was a four faced Seth Thomas clock...readily visible from anyplace in the downtown area.

Known in more contemporary times as the Tower Building, the imposing edifice opened in 1903. Built to last, the major construction materials were stone, brick, terra cotta and steel. The ground floor provided six rooms for stores or offices – all with the necessary “conveniences.” On the second floor, seven suites were accessible from a central entrance with a large skylight providing for illumination. The exposed yellow brick exterior contrasted with an interior of wood and plaster.

Sadly, fear of earthquakes that had wreaked havoc in Santa Barbara a few years previous resulted in the tower and much of the exterior ornamentation being removed in the 1930s. No longer qualifying for its name, it became the Horatio M. Warden, Jr. building so as not to confuse it with the original structure.

Warden with his “shrew business ability” did not have long to enjoy his new building as well as a community landmark as he died on February 14, 1912. At 84, he had grown progressively weaker and bed-ridden. Described as having an “active, upright, and honorable life,” one “filled with good deeds,” Horatio was laid to rest in the family plot. Another enduring memorial stands today as hundreds of thousands have passed the future he envisioned in the buildings he built.

The two Warden buildings and the Queenie Warden Bridge across the San Luis Creek are prominent landmarks in the “sense of place” that is essential for any community to thrive.

Source: Journal Plus Magazine, June 2015

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