



**SINSHEIMER BROTHERS MERCANTILE, 849 MONTEREY STREET, EARLY 1900S.** One of the city's most appealing and interesting structures from a bygone era is the 1884 Sinsheimer Brothers building on Monterey Street. Built by three German-born brothers—Bernard, Henry, and "A.Z."—the elaborate construction remains a stunning example of a classic 19th-century mercantile store. Oakland-based architects, Veitch, Knowles, & Company, designed the two-story Italianate building, which cost \$8,600 to construct. Made of locally manufactured brick, the 4,000-square-foot rectangular structure had a flat roof and thick walls. Six pairs of elongated, double French entrance doors complemented six Islamic, segmental-arch windows to create a formal and symmetrical storefront. Scalloped awnings with tiebacks above each entrance door protected the mercantile from the late afternoon sun. A magnificent cast-iron, first-floor façade, consisting of classic columns and fluted pilasters, gave the building its most amazing feature. Manufactured by Iron City Works in San Francisco, the façade was shipped to Port Harford—now Port San Luis—and then was brought over land in sections to San Luis Obispo. Heavy iron window shutters at the rear of the building provided protection against fire and theft.



**SINSHEIMER BROTHERS, STORE INTERIOR, c. 1890.** Cast-iron columns standing in the building's interior allowed the store to span a width of 40 feet, an architectural feat in the 19th century. Long wooden counters reached the length of the building and customers sat on stools while clerks filled their orders. Gaslights hung from the high ceiling, where a "Lampson" money carrier—a forerunner to the later "zip tube"—was connected to a conveyor belt. Clerks put the sales slip and the customer's money into a small wooden cup and pulled a cord that sent the cup to the back office. Office workers put the proper change in the cup and sent it back to the clerk. (Courtesy of the Baird Collection.)



**SINSHEIMER BROTHERS, STORE INTERIOR, EARLY 1900s.** The Sinsheimer brothers attracted customers with a wide variety of merchandise and their willingness to trade goods for gold dust, beans, grain, and cattle. Known as "the place to go if you can't find it anywhere else," the mercantile sold grocery staples, ready-made clothing, textiles, and tools, as well as heavy equipment kept in a brick warehouse behind the store. (Courtesy of the Baird Collection.)

# HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY

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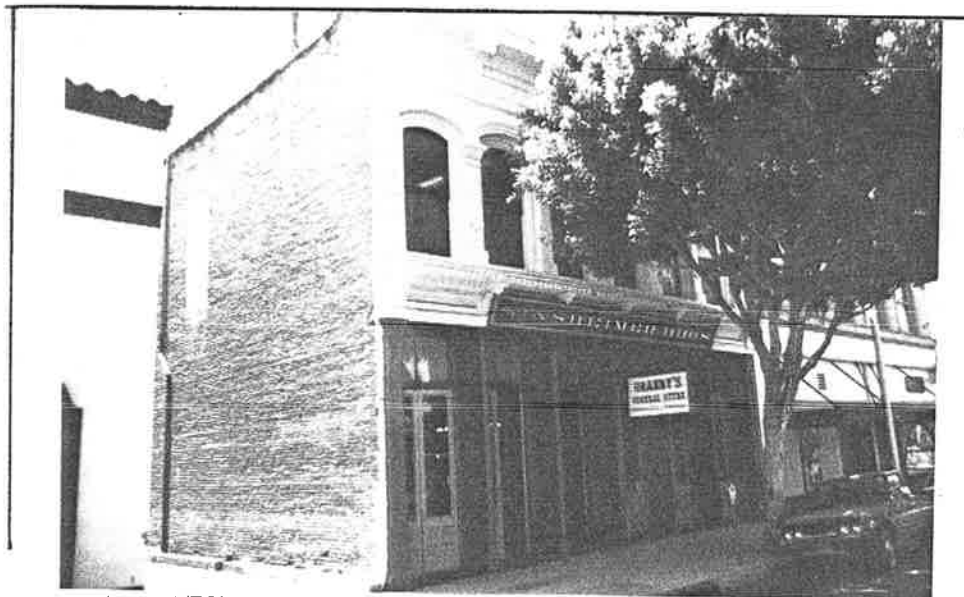
## IDENTIFICATION

1. Common name: Granny's General Store
2. Historic name: Sinsheimer Building
3. Street or rural address: 849 Monterey Street  
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 County San Luis Obispo
4. Parcel number: 02-425-02
5. Present Owner: Sinsheimer Brothers Address: P.O. Box 31  
City San Luis Obispo Zip 93401 Ownership is: Public \_\_\_\_\_ Private X
6. Present Use: Commercial Original use: Commercial

## DESCRIPTION

- 7a. Architectural style: First Renaissance Revival (North Italian Mode)
- 7b. Briefly describe the present *physical description* of the site or structure and describe any major alterations from its original condition:

The Sinsheimer Brothers Store at 849 Monterey Street is a two story, corniced brick structure. Typical of many 19th century commercial buildings, it shows a strong Italianate influence which was carried into the first Renaissance Revival period. The building, which rests on an elevated foundation, is rectangular in plan, exhibiting a definite symmetry and formalism. There is a flat roof with a double bracketed cornice and thick walls. Also characteristic of the North Italian Mode of Renaissance Revival are quoins and six Islamic, segmental arched windows on the second floor. The corniced facade shows some Classical detailing suggestive of Neo-Classic motives. One of the significant architectural features embellishing this structure is the first floor iron facade. It consists of seven iron Classic columns which frame six elongated double French entrance doors. Overall, despite minor alterations to both the exterior and interior, the building has remained virtually intact, thereby preserving the integrity of the original craftsmanship.

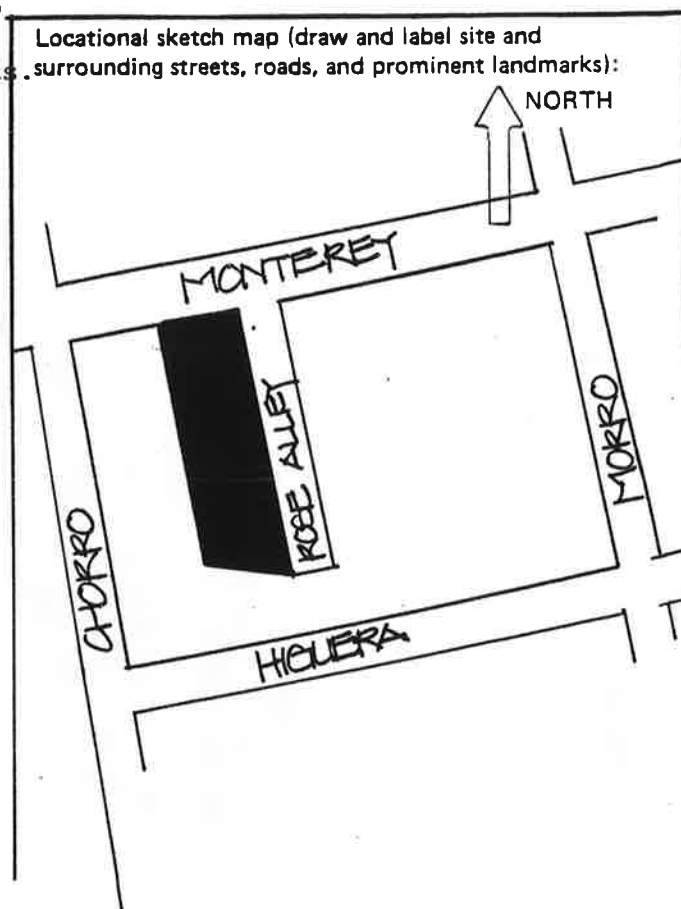


8. Construction date:  
Estimated \_\_\_\_\_ Factual 1884
9. Architect Unknown
10. Builder Veirch, Knowles and Co.
11. Approx. property size (in feet)  
Frontage 50' Depth 200'  
or approx. acreage \_\_\_\_\_
12. Date(s) of enclosed photograph(s)  
October 1982

13. Condition: Excellent ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated ☐ No longer in existence ☐
14. Alterations: Minor
15. Surroundings: (Check more than one if necessary) Open land ☐ Scattered buildings ☐ Densely built-up ☐  
Residential ☐ Industrial ☐ Commercial ☒ Other: ☐
16. Threats to site: None known ☒ 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.)  
Sinsheimer Brothers Store is significant because of both its architectural and historical merit. Founded in San Luis Obispo in 1876 by Bernhard and Henry Sinsheimer, the business was initially located in a small adobe structure near the Mission. In 1884, the store moved to its present site. The only known cast iron facade building on the Central Coast, the iron columns were manufactured in San Francisco by the Iron City Works. The castings were delivered by boat to Port Harford and then taken overland in sections to San Luis Obispo. The bricks used to construct the store were fabricated in the brickyard owned and operated by Ah Louis, an early Chinese entrepreneur in the county. Overall, the building is decidedly one of the most richly and purely designed of the very early commercial structures in the city. In addition, unlike many of the architectural trends that emerged in the Central Coast in the 1800's, its style was contemporary for the period in which it was built. A.Z. Sinsheimer stands out among the pioneer merchant class of San Luis Obispo who became highly successful. His son, Louis Sinsheimer, eventually purchased the gas works for the city and remained mayor for twenty years. Until recently, the ownership of the building remained in the possession of the founders descendents.
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 ☐
21. Sources (List books, documents, surveys, personal interviews and their dates).  
  
City of San Luis Obispo Preservation Plan  
Telegram-Tribune, 4-20-66
22. Date form prepared June 15, 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 firm of Sinsheimer Brothers was founded in 1876 by Bernard and Henry Sinsheimer. The first location was in a little adobe on the corner of Monterey and Chorro Streets. The adobe building housed the city's first post office with Sam Pollard as the town's first postmaster. The Sinsheimer Brothers building was completed in December of 1884. In 1892, A. Z. Sinsheimer and family assumed control and the building has remained as originally constructed through the years with Louis F. and Otto Sinsheimer guarding its policy.

Through the years, the Sinsheimer Brothers building has required little repair work. The store belongs to the family of "iron front" which America brought forth in the middle of the 19th century. Prefabricated sections of iron were incorporated as facades for commercial structures beginning about 1840 in the Eastern states. The type of architecture is Venetian Renaissance. "Iron front" was a big step forward in the construction of steel structures. This type of "iron front" architecture went out in 1884. The group facade is of cast iron, which contrasts with the more traditional second story of stucco and wood with heavy cornice and moulding. The remainder of the building is of brick and the roof is made of tin. Iron was used in structural rows of columns down the center of the first floor interior. The front of the building was cast at City Iron Works in San Francisco. It is the only iron front building in the county.

The first floor was a general store dealing in dry goods, groceries, and clothing. There were offices at the rear of the building where the founders and their sons also did business in gold dust, grain, beans, and cattle. The second floor had suites for professional offices for a dentist, doctor, and a lawyer.

## Sources:

Louisiana Dart, Curator, San Luis Obispo County Historical Museum

Telegram-Tribune, October 8, 1959

Stores, National Retail Merchants Association, October, 1966

Mr. Carlton Winslow, History of Architecture Instructor, Cal Poly



# Sinsheimer building reawakens after

## Landmark enters second century with a new look

By Mark Brown  
Telegram-Tribune

Its rich 102-year history interrupted by a brief 32-month nap, the Sinsheimer Bros. building is set to reopen on Monterey Street in downtown San Luis Obispo where its 10 glass-paned front doors have received customers since 1884.

Things won't be exactly the same. The outhouse in the back alley has been replaced by a modern bathroom. The building has a new stairway and reinforced floors.

The Sinsheimer is going into its second century with style, said Warren Sinsheimer.

The building has stood vacant since February 1984, when Granny's General Store moved over to Garden Street.

"We've been real concerned with doing something that preserves as much as anything else," Sinsheimer said.

That's why Sinsheimer is glad that Country Classics — a store just across Monterey Street specializing in handmade goods and antiques — is moving in.

"That's a store that fits in very well with this building," he said.

The building sat vacant for nearly three years while the Sinsheimer Trust (composed primarily of Sinsheimer and his aunt, Anne Sinsheimer) determined what to do with the building.

A restaurant was contemplated for a while, but it looked to be financially unfeasible. Sinsheimer was still looking for a business to go in when the owners of Country Classic called him wondering if the building was available.

Beside choosing the right tenant, there was the matter of updating the 4,000-square-foot ground floor of the old building.

The redwood joists holding up the 100-by-40-foot floor had deteriorated in spots, and some of the fir floorboards needed replacing. That was all done "to make it last another hundred years," Sinsheimer said.

A second stairway was added to satisfy city fire codes, and the ground floor got its first indoor bathroom. Recessed lighting was added to fit in with the decor and new wallpaper, paint and other items were added.

Architect J. Michael Brady also had to conduct a study to make sure the building was structurally sound. The study "gave the building basically a clean bill of health," Sinsheimer said. "The building has turned out to be in surprisingly good condition."

The cast-iron front of the building was made in San Francisco. The red bricks were made locally in the Ah Louis brickworks. Sinsheimer especially wanted to preserve the cast-iron columns inside the building, put in 100 years ago to allow the building to be 40-feet wide, an architectural feat in those days.

All that work was just for the downstairs. The upstairs has been divided and re-divided in past years to make office space. It'll get another renovation after the first of the year to put in a half-dozen quality offices, Sinsheimer said.

But the upstairs also turned out to be a treasure trove for local historians.

"The family has generally not thrown away anything for more



Warren Sinsheimer, above, stands in front of his family's 102-year-old building on Monterey Street which has recently been remodeled with the help of carpenter Bill Fisher of San Luis Obispo, left.

Tony Hertz/Telegram-Tribune

than 100 years," Sinsheimer said. The papers, records and other items from the store will go to the Cal Poly archives to be pored over by historians.

Janet Baird, who owns Country Classics with partner Kathie Lyon, said that this opportunity to expand

to 4,000-square-feet from the store's current 650-square-feet is just what the pair was looking for.

"It's a big jump, but we'll have it full," Baird said. Two warehouses are currently packed with items that they don't have room for in the

store.

The extra room will allow them to expand their line, especially in furniture and rugs, Baird said. Sinsheimer expects to turn the renovated building over to them this week, and Baird hopes to have a grand opening there Thursday night.





Ken Chen/Telegram-Tribune

Marion Sinsheimer accompanies Rabbi Harry Manhoff as he carries the Sinsheimer Torah under a chuppah (bridal canopy) to its new home in the ark of Congregation Beth David

Tribune  
SMT-SUN 12/15-19, 1982

# Sinsheimer gift

## Torah for Congregation Beth David

By Carl Nelburger  
Staff Writer

The oldest — and holiest — artifact of Judaism on the Central Coast became the newest addition Friday night to San Luis Obispo's Congregation Beth David.

The Sinsheimer Torah, brought to San Luis Obispo 104 years ago by Aaron Z. Sinsheimer, was presented to the temple by Marion Sinsheimer, widow of Warren B. Sinsheimer Jr., Aaron Sinsheimer's grandson.

The Torah is the first five books of the bible, handwritten in Hebrew on a parchment scroll.

Torahs are kept in arks — special enclosures in front of the congregations — in synagogues.

Friday night, at the start of the sabbath service, Rabbi Harry Manhoff and Mrs. Sinsheimer took the Sinsheimer Torah to the Congregation Beth David ark, carrying it under a chuppah, a bridal canopy.

"It's like bringing in a bride," the rabbi explained before the service. "It will live in the ark and we'll use it on special occasions."

Mrs. Sinsheimer said the Sinsheimer Torah has spent most of the last 60 years just sitting in its ark in a storeroom on the second floor of the Sinsheimer Brothers store on Monterey Street.

"I thought it was unfair to leave it just sitting there," she said. "It should be used."

Mrs. Sinsheimer said she is not Jewish herself and her children have not been raised in the faith, so, after consulting her children, she decided it should belong to San Luis Obispo's Jewish congregation.

"It's something that is part of their

heritage," she said. "I feel good about it."

Manhoff noted the rededication of the Sinsheimer Torah at Congregation Beth David occurred, appropriately, on the eighth day of Hanukkah, the festival celebrating the rededication of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Maccabees in 165 BC.

As he held the holy scroll, he told the congregation, "The power of this Torah oozes through your fingers. You can feel the power and the tension of this wonderful Torah."

*'The power of this Torah oozes through your fingers.'*

Aaron Sinsheimer brought the Torah to San Luis Obispo in 1878 when he came west from Vicksburg, Miss., to join his half-brothers Bernhard and Henry, said Norton Stern, president of the Western Jewish Historical Society, who was guest speaker at the special service.

The brothers were running a general store in an adobe at Monterey and Chorro streets. In 1884, they built the now-familiar Sinsheimer Building on Monterey Street, where their general store was operated by the family until 1973.

Aaron Sinsheimer had 10 children, including Louis Sinsheimer, who was mayor of San Luis Obispo from 1919 to 1933.

In the late 19th century, Stern said, San Luis Obispo had a significant and active Jewish population. He said that in 1881, when the city had only 3,000 inhabitants, it had 23 Jewish families, many of them leading citizens in the community.

"The Sinsheimer family," he said "has

had more effect on the history of this city than any other Jewish family.

"It's fascinating to realize that a town such as San Luis Obispo, which one might not think is intimately connected with Jewish history is so connected."

Stern said the Sinsheimer Torah, with a parchment only 13 inches wide, is very small for a Torah — "almost a miniature."

Like all Torahs, it is hand written. Manhoff said the Talmud — a compilation of Jewish law set down in the fifth and sixth centuries — prescribed how Torahs are to be transcribed, by whom and under what circumstances.

Because printing wasn't invented then, there was no alternative to writing by hand. "Nowadays," said Manhoff, "they read that passage (in the Talmud) and say that passage still applies."

Stern said that all Torahs are now produced in Israel, though, as recently as 25 years ago, they were written in other places such as New York City. He said an experienced scribe can produce five or six Torahs a year.

It is impossible, however, to determine who transcribed the Sinsheimer Torah, when or where because the scrolls are traditionally not signed or dated, Stern said.

He said the Torah was used several times a year in the late 19th and early 20th centuries at celebrations of Jewish holy days in San Luis Obispo.

Manhoff said he has been told that Congregation Beth David borrowed the Sinsheimer Torah for observances several times between 1961, when the congregation was established, and 1964, when it was given a Torah by H. Max Salter and his family.