
DEMOLITION MOMENTS

Demolitions are marked by events or incidents that are not a necessary or logical part of them. Something important happens, but that “something” has a random relation to the logic of whatever is otherwise underway. There were several important “moments” of this kind during the demolition processes. I want here to relate the more salient of them.

In addition, some significant moments **were** integral parts of demolition processes that deserve more recognition than has so far been given. These are also reported in this chapter.

I present these moments in more-or-less the sequence they occurred. I say “more-or-less” because some are grouped, or the time-order otherwise changed, for the sake of brevity and/or clarity.

1) GAPING ROOMS

Over the eleven days the back wall was down but the main structure remained, I heard a number of people who paused at the site express sentiments such as these: “We are looking at history.” “Think of all the people who stayed in those rooms.” “Think of all the living done here.” There was something eerie and haunting about looking into banks of open and gaping hotel rooms that were partly smashed but still much intact. The sight prompted a wistful, reflective mood, a sadness about all those wash basins used so many times over several decades that would never be used again (Fig. 13.1)

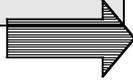
2) SHOP FAREWELLS

As reported, four businesses operated on the first floor of the G Street side of the building. From north to south, these were The Natural Foods Works, The Wardrobe, The Hair Chalet, and La Esperanza. The first two opposed demolition and wanted to remain in the building. Grace Chen ran the third. The proprietors of the last appeared to support the demolition and hoped to return to the new building.

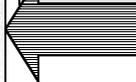
These differences regarding demolition were expressed in the signs each posted indicating their closings and new locations. Fig. 13.2 shows the sheet of paper posted by Grace Chen. La Esperanza had a similar note. In contrast, the other two stores put up elaborate and colorful closing notices. Their respective windows have already been seen in Figs. 10.11 and 10.12. A more detailed aspect of the contrast is provided in Fig. 13.3.

In this same vein, in Chapter 10 (Fig. 10.14) we see the Wardrobe roof sign in the process of its careful removal as a treasured memento. This action was notable for its contrast with the treatment given the Hair Chalet's equivalent sign. Its owner simply left it behind on the roof of the shade structure. It got battered about in the debris of the hotel for some weeks until it was finally smashed. Fig. 13.4 is a picture of it I took on Day 37 (October 24).

13.1. A gaping room in which the wash basin has been used for the last time.



13.2. Farewell door sign of the Hair Chalet.



13.3. Portion of the Farewell door sign of The Wardrobe





13.4. Hair Chalet sign in the Terminal Building debris on Day 37.



13.5. John Sheehy, excavator operator, truck driver, and rescuer of the Terminal Cafe cash register.

3) JOHN SHEEHY RESCUES THE TERMINAL CAFE CASH REGISTER

Fig. 13.5 reproduces a photo I took of John Sheehy, who was the person who actually loaded and hauled away the great bulk of the Terminal Building. Stan Bowers ran the show, did the showy smashings on various days, and performed many other tasks. But John did the steady, detail work of loading, hauling, and dumping.

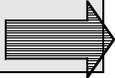
Formally, John simply drove the truck Bowers was renting to haul away debris. According to John, he was supposed to be waiting around while the truck was loaded. But, years ago, Bowers had taught him to run the excavator and started to pay him extra also to load rather than just wait. So, John was working two jobs each day he was involved in a Bowers demolition.

When a demolition was underway, he was also willing to work every day a local landfill was open and accepted loaded trucks. So it was that he was working some Saturdays and Sundays and, in particular, Sunday, October 1 (Day 14).

On that day, he was operating the excavator near a gash in the ceiling of the still intact basement chambers of the building. Looking down into the basement he saw a variety of objects, including file cabinets and other office furniture. On one shelf, he spotted a large, very old cash register. Descending into the basement through the gash (Fig. 13.6), he worked his way through the debris (Fig. 13.7) to the cash register, picked it up, and threw it through a basement window onto the outside sidewalk. (It weighed at least a hundred pounds, so we know he was quite fit and strong.)

Knowing I was interested in Davis history, he explained that he had thrown it out for me and I could have it if I wanted it. I did. Fig. 13.8 shows it sitting in my minivan. (Subsequently, I donated it to the Hattie Weber Museum of Davis, where it became part of its permanent exhibition.)

13.6. John Sheehy climbs down into the Terminal Building basement, exploring for salvageable items.



13.7. View through a street-level window of the still not completely-collapsed basement.



4) WHERE DO YOU PUT AN ENTIRE BUILDING YOU DO NOT WANT?

With the building smashed down on September 29, Bowers' next problem was where to put all the pieces he had created. John Sheehy loaded his truck for the first time that day, but to where was he to go? Both men knew there was a "dump" in Yolo County, but neither knew where it was.

I was standing with them when they realized they had this problem, so they asked me where it was. Perhaps I should have been a die-hard preservationist and not told them, but I did. Worse still, I rummaged through the glove compartment of my minivan and located a AAA map of Yolo County that I gave them and on which I drew the route to the Yolo County Landfill.

Curious about exactly what happened at the landfill, I went with John one day and photographed an unloading. The key point in the process is shown in Fig. 13.9. In that picture we see that the truck bed tips up. With the rear gate open and the bed tilted up, the driver pulls forward and the contents slide out by gravity, leaving a thirty or so foot trail of debris

To the right in Fig. 13.9, one can see a caterpillar bulldozer. It was about to push this new debris into existing debris just left by garbage deliverers. The hotel, as such, would then be merged with garbage in general. In that way, the Terminal Building disappeared into the stream of Yolo County rubbish.

More broadly, the answer to the question, "Where do you put an entire building you do not want?" is: Smash it up and bury the pieces.

5) THE SECOND AND THIRD LOADS OF SALVAGED BRICK

The first load of bricks on pallets left the site on Day 10 (September 27). I previously treated their departure as an aspect of the failure to freeze demolition (Ch. 11, Figs. 11.37 through 11.39).

After that load, laboriously and over several weeks, Bowers' single but reliable brick cleaner eked out two more truck-loads of brick. The first of these left on Day 28 (October 2, Fig. 13.10). The second went out on Day 54 (November 10, Fig. 13.11).

This made a total of some twenty-five pallets of red brick salvaged from the building.

6) THE BRICK CLEANER

As reported, Bowers desired to have twenty people or more cleaning bricks at the site. But, efforts to recruit them were unsuccessful. He appeared to settle for what could be achieved by a single, older Mexican man who had worked for him on previous projects.

The work itself consisted of using an iron bar to knock mortar off a brick, a process called "cleaning." This was an extremely monotonous task, which explains why Bowers had trouble recruiting even laborers at the bottom of the hired-by-the-day work force. At the bottom, cleaning bricks was apparently the rock-bottom.

Bowers paid ten cents a brick and required they be stacked on a pallet—a pallet consisting of 500 bricks. An ordinary brick cleaner might do somewhat more than one pallet a day, thus making a little more than 50 dollars a day (which would be in the neighborhood of fifteen thousand dollars a year).

13.8. The rescued, perhaps Terminal Cafe, cash register sitting in the back of my minivan, Day 14 (November 1).



13.9. Dumping a load of smashed-up bits of the Terminal Building at the Yolo County Landfill.



Bowers called the brick cleaner "Jose," and spoke to him in single English words or very simple sentences. Jose did not appear to speak English or to understand it very well. Save for the occasional fellow brick cleaner present in the early days, he never interacted with anyone at the site except to respond as best he could when addressed by someone in English. (I never observed Bowers or any of his workers speak Spanish or seem to understand it.)

The sun was often out and day-long exposure to it was punishing. The old man used a stray sheet of plywood to devise a shade structure, as shown in Fig. 13.12.

Beyond cleaning, he had to tote the clean bricks to a pallet and stack them in an interlocking pattern. In Fig. 13.13, we see him starting a new pallet.

13.10. The second load of salvaged brick, Day 28 (October 2).



13.11. The third load of salvaged brick, Day 54 (November 10).



13.12. The brick cleaner improvised a shade structure, under which he sat and "cleaned" bricks.



13.13. The brick cleaner begins to lay the first layer of a new pallet of bricks.



7) SCRAP METAL

The building contained a number of metal "I beams," metal plates bridging the tops of windows, and diverse other metal objects. Bowers could have sent this scrap metal to the landfill along with everything else. He saved dumping costs, however, by giving it to a man who worked for him occasionally, who put it on his flat-bed truck and sold it to a scrap metal dealer. Bowers told me the load shown in Fig 13.15 fetched the man about \$60.00. He opined that this was not much, but "its sixty dollars he didn't have before."

The I beams were too long to fit onto the bed of a pickup truck, so they had to be bent. In Fig. 13.14, Bowers is in the process of bending an I-beam with the excavator.

13.14. Bowers in the process of bending an I beam so that it will fit in the bed of a flat-bed truck.



13.15. Load of metal scavenged from the building.



8) THE BUILDING'S FAMOUS CORNER POST

Virtually every photograph of the Terminal Building contains a view of the post holding up the overhanging second-floor corner at Second and G streets. It was, in fact, a very heavy metal pipe. It became a piece of scrap metal kicking around in the debris of the site.

Although it had been there from Day 1, I finally noticed it on Day 18 (October 5). “Ah,” I said, “an artifact to save!” I asked Bowers if I could buy it from him. He told me the price was “free,” although he was willing to negotiate. So, I had only to take it away.

The problem was: to where? It was more than ten feet long and weighed perhaps two hundred pounds. What does one do with such an object? I consulted various history-minded people in Davis and got the same reaction from all of them: forget it. It is too big, heavy and presents too much of a storage problem.

So, I relented. It went off on a pickup truck with the other scrap metal (Fig. 13.16). At least occasionally, though, I think I made the wrong decision. This was particularly so when, many months later, I met a member of the Belenis family who had many fond memories of swinging on the post as a child and dearly wanted it saved.

13. 16.
Portion of the iconic corner post of the building loaded as scrap metal. (The white arrow points to it.)



9) THE FENCE SIGN BROUHAHA

When The Natural Food Works and the Wardrobe closed, each had student customers who had left Davis for the summer. On returning, they would find that the stores had literally disappeared. Therefore, each store wanted to put a notice at the former location that directed returning customers to the new location.

Problem: The fence around the site was the obvious place for signs, but the Chens claimed the fence as their own and refused to give permission for its use. There was, indeed, acrimony on the matter, with charges that signs that were put up had been torn down and thrown away.

Two solutions were devised. One, The Natural Food Works placed a free-standing A-frame on the public sidewalk every day (and took it away every night). It is seen to the left in Fig. 13.17. Two, Heather Caswell enlisted the Executive Director of the Davis Downtown Business Association, Laura Cole-Rowe, to negotiate with the Chens for permission to have a fence sign. This agreement was achieved, but included the requirement that Ms. Cole-Rowe had personally to participate in placing the sign on the fence. In Fig. 13.17, we see her (on the left) fulfilling her agreement on the rainy Saturday afternoon of Day 41 (October 28).



13.17. Laura Cole-Rowe, Executive Director of the Davis Downtown Business Society (left) and Heather Caswell, owner of The Wardrobe (right), attach a sign announcing the store's new location to the demolition site fence.

10) THROWING BRICK

Bowers did not expect the brick cleaner to hunt through the debris for the bricks he cleaned. Instead, using the excavator, he (Bowers) would lift and smash pieces of the brick walls, creating piles of bricks that could then be cleaned.

Also, many smaller clusters of bricks and single bricks themselves were scattered through the rubble. In order to retrieve these bricks, one had carefully to climb onto the debris, bend over, pick up clumps or single bricks, and throw them into a clear location or into the "bucket" of the excavator.

From time to time, Bowers assembled his crew of four occasionally employed workers to engage in this process of "throwing brick." His initiating declaration would be: "Let's throw some brick." Fig. 13.18 shows this crew on Day 44 (October 31, Halloween). By this day, bricks had fallen into the partially excavated basement level, making "throwing brick" all the more challenging.

I mention "throwing brick" as one type of demolition moment because it was such exceptionally hard work. The workers clearly disliked it because, among other reasons, it required precarious bending over while standing on unstable and uneven materials. Unsurprisingly, most of the four were upright as much as they were bent over during these sessions (Fig. 13.18). (And, Bowers operated the excavator and exhorted the crew as much or more than he "threw brick" himself.)

11) OWNER VISITS

From time to time, Grace or Lee Chen visited the site. Grace Chen visited on Day 44 and told Bowers she was interested in buying enough Terminal Building brick to build a mailbox in front of her house. She also wanted to know the name of a mason who could construct such a structure. When she asked these questions, she was standing on the G Street sidewalk and Bowers was in the excavator atop a mound of rubble about 75 feet from her. In an impressive feat of memory, without pausing Bowers shouted the name and phone number of a mason to her. Not to be out performed by him in front of several onlookers (including me), Mrs. Chen loudly repeated the name and number and indicated she could remember both without writing them down.



13. 18. A session of "throwing brick," Day 44 (October 31). The "claw" of the excavator is configured as a bucket into which the five people working the site are to "throw brick." The black oval shows Bowers and his helpers rummaging for brick at the basement level.

During this same walk-about inspection of the site, Mrs. Chen chatted with the brick cleaner (Fig. 13.19). This was likewise an accomplishment since he did not speak Chinese or English and she did not speak Spanish.

In addition, she had a private conversation with Bowers. After she left the site, Bowers told me that she had said to him: "See that old man? [She pointed to me, some distance away.] He is against us and gave us trouble." Bowers took this to mean that she did not want him talking with me. But, he shrugged his shoulders and declared "I don't care about Davis stuff."

12) ONE PLAQUE RETURNS

Recall that on July 27, the two metal plaques attached to the Arch Mural were observed missing (Chapter 10, Figs. 10.19-21).

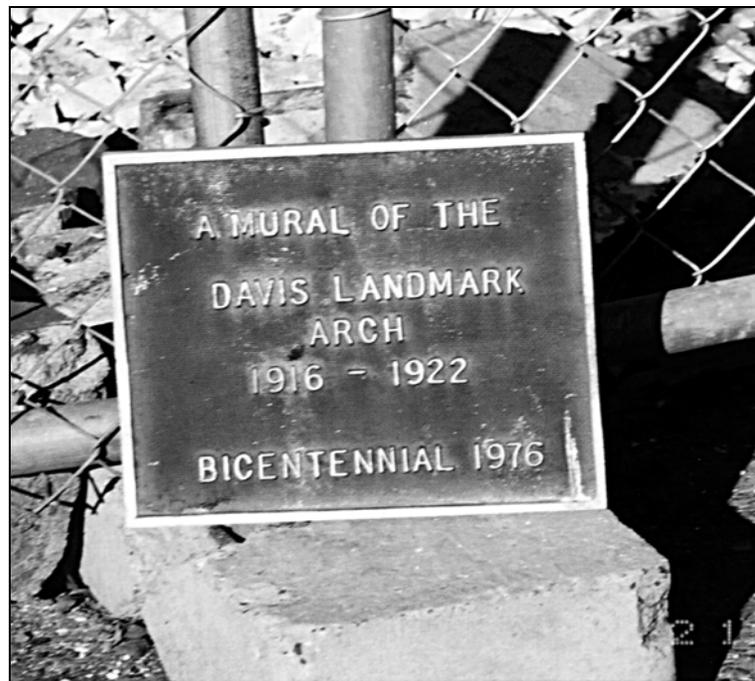
October 28, Bowers told me he thought he knew what happened to both of them. Then at the site on November 1 (Day 45), he handed me one of them, saying that he had not been able to locate the other and he had been told that it was broken and therefore of little use.

Because Bowers' demolition contract gave him ownership of everything on the site, in his view, the plaque belonged to him. (The City had long ago abandoned ownership of the mural.) He was clear that he was giving it to me personally and that I could do with it what I pleased.

13.19. Grace Chen, left, speaks with the brick cleaner, Day 44 (October 31).



13.20. Photograph of the Mural Arch plaque taken at the site the day of its return, Day 45 (November 1).



Using Bowers' logic, I was now the owner of this bit of Davis history. I gave thought to holding onto it until I was satisfied that appropriate units of the City of Davis could provide proper custody and care. That is, in my assessment one City administration after another had been too casual about retention and custody of historical documents and artifacts. But on the other side of that, I could not provide it any great degree of security. So, I decided to donate it to the Hattie Weber Museum of Davis, which was about as insecure as any place I would keep it. (Fig. 13.20 shows the returned plaque.)

13) CONCRETE REMOVAL

It was not overly difficult to pull down brick, tile, wood and plaster walls and smash them into truck-loadable pieces. However, all these materials were sitting on a concrete foundation and, worse still, a poured concrete basement.

The basement extended the entire width of the site from Second Street to the Davis / Ace parking lot and about one-quarter the depth of the site. Removal required that that this mass of concrete be broken into loadable chunks.

At first, Bowers used the excavator arm as a pounding sledge hammer and/or a pulling concrete cracker. We see him so engaged in these activities in Figs. 13.21 and 13.22.

13.21. Bowers digging out basement concrete.



13.22. Pulling out the concrete foundation of the G Street wall.

But breaking up the deepest and largest portions of the basement required the additional and specialized large jack-hammer of a machine that is shown in Fig. 13.23. Like some giant, crazed woodpecker, it cracked the basement walls into chunks.

There was then the moving and loading of these heavy concrete chunks, as shown in Figs. 13.24 and 13.25.

13.23. Jackhammer machine breaking up a basement wall.



13.24. Pulling up a large chunk of foundation.

13.25. Loading a truck-sized piece of foundation/basement concrete.



14) FIRST "ARCHEOLOGICAL" ARTIFACTS

Working at removing some of the G Street wall foundation, on Day 40 (October 27) John Sheehy also struck a cache of long-buried trash. Shown in part in Fig. 13.26, it was mostly bottles, but also contained metal items, including a horse shoe. (The find was next to the site of the Place Livery, which was described in Chapter 2 and Fig. 2.5.)

13.26. Box of unearthed "artifacts" found near the G Street wall.



15) THE SEBASTOPOL DIGGERS

On Day 49 (Sunday, November 5), two men who told me they were from Sebastopol, California (a town some seventy-five miles from Davis) came onto the site. The older of the two (about age 50) had very long metal rods with handles that he pushed into the ground in various places in hopes of hitting solid objects. In one place, he hit something about six feet below the surface. The two of them began digging (Figs. 13.27 and 28).

The older man told me that he was an avocational California history buff who, when he had the time, visited demolition sites such as this in the hope of excavating historical objects, primarily bottles. His custom-fabricated and well-used probing rods, his purpose-configured shovels, the "digging suit" coveralls he wore, and other equipment he used, suggested, indeed, that this was an activity in which he engaged with some regularity.

Given that they were seeking to unearth Davis historical artifacts, I phoned Phyllis Haig, Curator of the Hattie Weber Museum of Davis, told her of the diggers, and suggested that she might want to come to the site and inspect what they were doing. She declined, explaining that she had obligations at the Yolo County Historical Museum in neighboring Woodland.

I showed the older digger the bottles John Sheehy had unearthed (seen in part in Fig. 13.26) and he commented in some detail on their styles, uses, and their places and periods of manufacture. For example, I was previously unfamiliar with such terminology as "pumpkin seed flask," "apocathary pot," and "Shasta soda bottle."

I observed as each of them switched off in digging—and I declined their invitation to help them dig. In Fig. 13.27, we see them at work. The hole they dug seemed to me quite deep. Each man was about six feet tall. At the point they stopped digging, the surface was above their heads when they stood upright in the hole (Fig. 13.28).

The long probe rods had given them faith they would come to something—and they did. A portion of what was thrown up out of the hole and laid out on the excavated dirt is shown in Fig. 13.29.

I estimated that something like 200 objects—bottles in the vast majority—were dug up. Each of the men picked over their finds and placed what they wanted in their several plastic buckets. This done, there were about 75 objects they did not want and which they offered me.



13.27. Two men digging for artifacts on the site, Day 49, Sunday, November 5.

13.28. This man is about six feet tall and his head is below the surface as he stands in the hole he and this partner dug in a short period of time in this loamish Yolo County earth.



13.29. Bottles and a few other kinds of objects laid out on the side of a excavated mound of dirt.

I accepted them and placed them in several cardboard boxes I scavenged from the dumpster of a nearby restaurant. In Fig. 13.30, we see all the objects on a table in the patio of my home.

As wonderful as all these articles were, artifacts of this sort were (and are) not exactly my specialty, nor could I easily store and otherwise manage them. Seeking to find a proper home for them, I contacted the City of Davis Historical Resources Management Commission and the Hattie Weber Museum of Davis. In due course, I formally donated the collection to the City of Davis (save one small pharmacy bottle inscribed "J. W. Campbell, Davisville, Cal.")

13.30. Bottles and other objects dug up at the Terminal Building site (Photographed on Day 52, November 8).



16) SCATTERED PAPERS FROM THE BASEMENT

As the excavator lifted debris from the basement, it now and again grasped cardboard boxes filled with papers. Sometimes these boxes burst open and hundreds of sheets fluttered and scattered over the debris, as shown in Fig. 13.31.

Because the basement had also contained such strange objects as an early-model cash register, I hoped that by some miraculous act of neglect, I might stumble onto old Terminal Cafe and/or Hotel records. Stan and John were themselves curious about what might be found, so each time they struck boxes of paper, they paused and gave me time to scramble down into the excavation pit and scoop up the billowing documents.

Alas, I was not to be so fortunate as to find old Terminal records. The several thousand documents I examined all turned out to be merely the mundane business papers and commercial tribulations of an organization named Aggie Enterprises and other entities. (Oddly, some of the items were only about a year old, yet were being sent to the Yolo County Landfill.)

17) THE REDWOOD BEAMS FROM THE G STREET SHADE STRUCTURE

The posts holding up the ugly G Street shade structure and the frame of that structure were very large, redwood beams. In the early days of the demolition, a fair number of people coming by the site expressed interest in buying them. Each time, Bowers said the beams were already

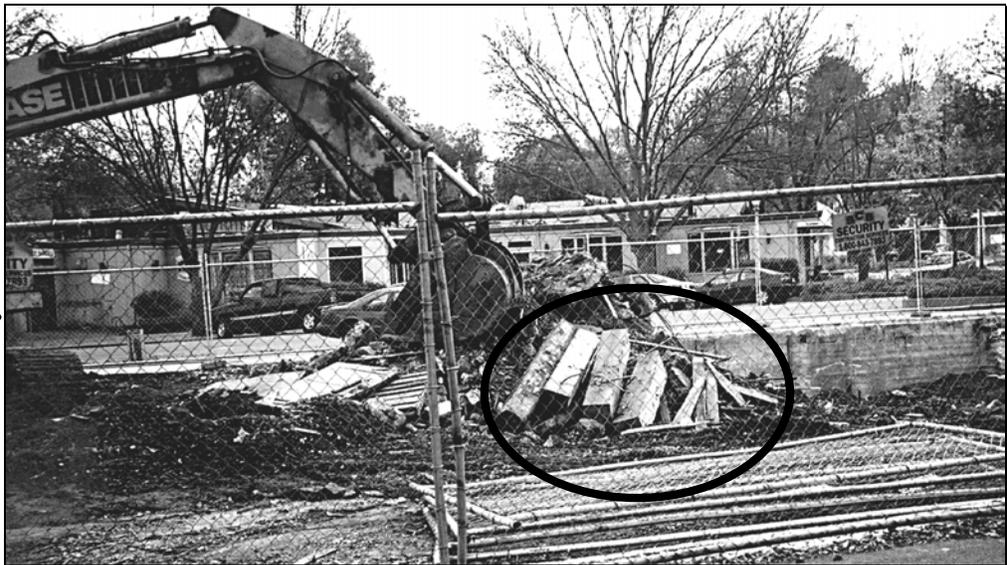
sold. I asked him who had bought them and he named a well-known Sacramento Valley developer.

13.31. A cloud of papers billow from a cardboard box burst open by the excavator.



As the days went on, the beams were literally kicked around the site. At one point toward the end and with the beams still there, I asked Bowers when and how they would leave. He responded that the deal with the developer had fallen through and they were going to the dump. In Fig. 13.32, we see some of them in a pile ready to load for the Yolo Landfill.

13.32. The last of the G Street shade structure redwood beams assembled to be loaded for the Yolo Landfill.



18) THE YELLOW G STREET FACADE BRICKS

Recall that the Chens had bought the yellow brick Bowers was going to salvage from the G Street façade for use in the new building (Ch. 11, Figs. 11.15 and 11.29). (Interestingly, preservationists did not propose or especially support this idea. Some even opposed it,

regarding it as an empty gesture of "too little, too late." Others thought it was in bad taste akin to that of placing Lenin's embalmed body on public view.)

A little more than four pallets of yellow brick did, in fact, emerge from the building. These were removed from the site on Day 58 (November 14). Ace Hardware's forklift truck and driver were recruited for the task, as shown in Fig. 13.33.

Fig. 13.34 shows the four and a little more pallets stacked in the City's Corporation Yard. In front of them, we also see the saved remnants of the Arch Mural.

13.33. Davis Lumber forklift and driver load pallets of yellow bricks onto a City of Davis Parks truck, Day 58 (November 14).



13.34. Salvaged yellow brick and pieces of the Arch Mural in the City of Davis Corporation Yard (photographed December 8, 2000).

19) THE EXCAVATOR LEAVES, THE DEMOLITION ENDS

In other studies in which I have tried to fix the exact start and end of a social process, I have learned that this is a very tricky and inexact task and is subject to several reasonable but differing reckonings. This is also true for the demolition of the Terminal Building.

That understood, I found it most useful to use the arrival and first use of the excavator and its cessation and departure as the way to mark the demolition's beginning and its end.

Using this marker, the demolition began when the excavator was delivered to the site late on Sunday, September 17. However, it was first put to use on Monday, September 18. The very drama of that first use recommended September 18 as Day 1.

The machine was last used on Monday, November 27, which was Day 71. But the process was not quite over. A last load of debris was to have been hauled later that week, but Bowers decided it was not worth keeping the excavator there for such a small amount of work. By telephone on Tuesday, he told me that the machine was needed to demolish a Victorian in downtown Sacramento and would be moved on Wednesday. (Ever the kidder, he invited me to come observe the process, and tried to get my goat with detailed descriptions of the intricate historic decoration of the building he would be smashing.)

It left the early morning of Wednesday, November 29, which was Day 73. In Fig. 13.35, we see the gentleman who specialized in moving these kinds of machines (and who had delivered it to the site), slowly coaxing it onto the detached platform trailer of his special trailer-truck.



13. 35. The excavator barely fit on the deck of the trailer on which it was hauled.



Given the degree of interest the *Davis Enterprise* had exhibited in the Terminal Building matter, I thought it might like to cover the departure, so I alerted the editor. She sent photographer Alison Portello and that afternoon the paper ran the picture and caption reproduced as Fig. 13.36. (Note the inaccurately benign term "grade" used in the caption to characterize the work of the excavator.)

Finally, leaving Davis along Second Street and the frontage road north of Interstate 80, in Fig. 13.37 we see the ungainly but effective truck with the excavator on it entering I-80 at the Yolo causeway on-ramp.

Thus ended the saga of the Terminal Building's demolition.



13.36. Davis Enterprise coverage of the excavator's departure, Wednesday, November 29.



13.37. Its destruction work completed, the excavator left Davis on rainy and overcast Day 73—November 29, 2000.