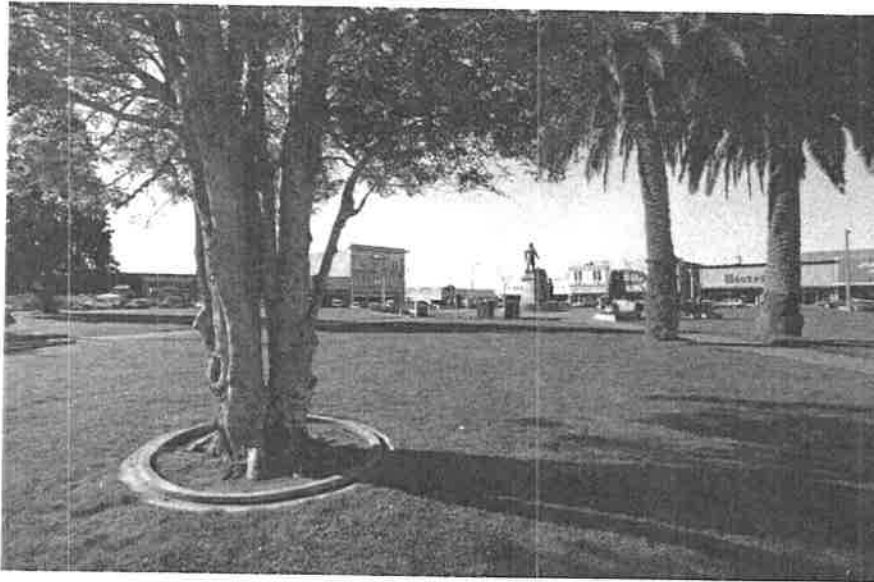


## THE PLAZA



Date 1850

Location Block 167 — AP# 21-107-01

Owner City of Arcata

**Description** One block bounded by "G" and "H" and 8th and 9th Streets; center of downtown business district; bounded on all four sides by sidewalks; central paved area with William McKinley statue facing west; radiating sidewalks from central area to each corner and to the middle edge of each side; flagpole in sidewalk running north from central area; W.C.T.U. drinking fountain in middle of west edge; brick and concrete flowerbed borders; brick, concrete, and wood benches around central area; two palm trees on either side of northeast corner sidewalk; evergreens, flowering trees, and flowers in season.

As the commercial and often social center of Arcata, the Plaza is of especial historical importance to the community. At the time of settlement by the thirty-member Union Company in April, 1850, designation of a public park, Block 167, seemed appropriate and later generations have always agreed. Called the Park or the Plaza, but never the Square, it is a "village green" encircled by Arcata's downtown business district.

Frame and tent residences, along with commercial structures, sprang up around the Plaza as the first arrivals settled in Union. Mule corrals, however, may have been more prevalent since the primary purpose of settlement was to supply the interior mining districts and only mules could negotiate the rugged mountain trails between Humboldt Bay and the mining camps on the Klamath, Trinity, and Salmon rivers.

The Wharf and its connecting railroad to the Plaza were completed in 1855. Transported over this first California railroad, supplies were delivered to the Plaza's commercial establishments from the steamers which called at the town's deep-water port. Thirty-or-more-mule packtrains, loaded and ready for the long trip inland, were a familiar sight on the Plaza in those early days.

Another familiar sight was the local livestock which ran loose and enjoyed grazing on the Plaza. Candidates for the town's Board of Trustees in 1901 ran on a pound-law issue as the community undertook a Plaza beautification project. Pound-law supporters were voted in; cows were voted out and the Plaza Improvement Committee set about raising money and making plans to beautify the Plaza. Among the first projects were the handsome little bandstand in the Plaza's center and a fine white-painted fence around its borders. A note in the *Arcata Union* of June 28, 1902 announced that "barriers" were coming down from around all the yards in town as the cows were banished from the streets.

In anticipation of the arrival of the McKinley statue, which was to replace the bandstand, the city planted palm trees on the Plaza in the spring of 1906. Arcata's best-known personality, the William McKinley statue, was commissioned by prominent Arcatan George Zehndner and cast in San Francisco under the direction of sculptor Haig Patigian. Despite San Francisco's earthquake and fire in April 1906, the bronze McKinley survived and upon its arrival in Arcata in May 1906, was hoisted to its present place of honor in the Plaza's center.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union drinking fountain at the west edge of the Plaza was built by local craftsman, James Davidson in 1912. The flagpole, benches, colorful flower gardens, evergreens, flowering trees, and towering palms are all part and parcel of the Plaza. In past years it was the site of parades and festivities as local fraternal organizations celebrated special occasions or the community went all out in the annual Fourth of July celebration. Today it is a place where people gather on sunny afternoons to eat lunch and visit. Craft fairs, sidewalk sales, high school rallies and parades, and lots of socializing take place on the Plaza — the focal point of Arcata's 129 year old history.