

## About the Louden Nelson Community Center



### **Mission Statement**

The Center's mission is to seek a balance between social, recreational and cultural services to the diverse communities of Santa Cruz. The Center strives to create a space that feels welcoming, comfortable, safe and accessible to all who use it.

### **History of the Center**

Our building, built as an elementary school in 1932, was designed by William Weeks in the Mission Revival style. Shortly after the close of the school in 1973, the idea of a multi-cultural community center took hold. Local activists persuaded City and County governments to jointly fund the project, and it opened in 1978 as Laurel Community Center and has served our community for over 30 years.

The name of the Center was changed to honor Louden Nelson, a former slave who lived in Santa Cruz in the 1850's. According to early accounts, Louden Nelson was a black man born in North Carolina in 1800. He came to Santa Cruz about 1853 with his master and was apparently freed at that time. He obtained land near the river where he gardened and cobbled. Louden Nelson seemed to be rather well known, selling his produce to many townspeople.

In 1860, during his final illness and prior to his death, Nelson made an oral will leaving his entire estate to the school district. The district had recently closed the school and Nelson had a high regard for education. Louden Nelson died on May 17, 1860. The Weekly Sentinel printed a remarkable and lengthy obituary, praising Nelson for his gift to the schools. He is buried at Evergreen Cemetery, near Harvey West Park.

There are binders available at the Louden Nelson front desk containing articles and probate papers that will provide history and background on this remarkable man.