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Felton at turn of century

The Russell & Ley General Merchandise building that for many years housed the Felton Post Office in the rear. According to Felton Fire Chief Ted Toft the Post Office was in this building as early as 1902.

Felton Post office to be 100 years old on December 14

The Felton Post Office will be 100 years old next Monday, December 14.

The date might have gone unnoticed were it not for Mr. and Mrs. Alice Umbarger of Boulder Creek, inveterate stamp collectors, who informed Postmaster Ken Burke of the centennial anniversary.

Postmaster Burke, aided by Valley Press researchers, the Felton librarian, and the memories of several Valley old-timers, made an attempt to trace some of the history of his post office. Burke said he would like to hear from anyone who can contribute to the fund of historical information.

The first Felton postmaster, in 1870, was a man named H.W. McCoy. It is uncertain where the post office was located at the beginning, but in the 1890's it was located in the back of the old general store that used to stand at the intersection of Highway 9 and Mt. Hermon Road. The building was called the Coolidge Building, and was torn down several years ago. The site is now occupied by the Foster's Freeze Drive-In.

In a pamphlet published by the Santa Cruz Historical Society, W. P. "Bud" Hendrick of Felton recalls his father's reminiscences of 1898: "This store (in the Coolidge Building) carried just about anything one could want from cough syrup to horse collars. The Post Office was in the rear of this building for many years."

Ted Toft, Felton fire chief and life-long Valley resident, also recalls the little post office in the back of the general store: "I guess it was around 1903. At the east end of the building, I think it would be. There was a small round hole there--you would just stick your head in and get your mail. It was the storekeeper's office."

Toft further recalled the arrival of the mail train: "The man from the livery stable had the job of picking up the mail down at the Felton S.P. depot--that's where Roaring Camp is today. The depot building is still there."

"There would be two trains a day with mail--one from the north, the Bay Area, and the other

from the south, Santa Cruz. One train at noon, the other at two. The livery stable man would come with his horse-drawn bus to pick up passengers bound for the hotel, and at the same time pick up the mail and take it to the general store."

A former postal clerk, who asked that her name not be used, remembers serving in the general store/post office: "I was there from 1921 to 1937. George Fetherston was postmaster then. We just had one little section of the store--general delivery and some boxes. There couldn't have been over fifty boxes. We knew all our customers by name. Felton was a small town then, much nicer than it is today. Jack Sinnott became postmaster after Fetherston, when the Democrats came in."

Centennial cover

one day offer

The Valley Press will supply a special commemorative first day cover (a commemorative Centennial cancellation mark) for collectors, announcing the Felton Post Office Centennial.

The VP will accept (mailed) letters received on or before 5 p.m., December 14, and have them cancelled by the Felton Post Office with the commemorative cover on December 14 only.

Mail letters-to-be-covered (cancelled) enclosed in an envelope addressed to The Valley Press, Commemorative Cover Department, Felton, California 95018.

O. W. Parkison of Felton now 85 years old, is the post office's oldest living postmaster. He served for 16 years, from 1941 to 1956, during a period of rapid expansion.

"During the war the town grew very fast,"

he said. "Housing was scarce all over and people poured into the Valley trying to find a place to live. We went from a fourth class post office to a third class, and then to a second class office--all within the space of three years."

"I remember we had a tiny board-and-batten shack, on the main street, just across the street from Roy's Market. There's a power pole there now, I think. It was just a little cubicle in the street. We outgrew the shack very quickly, and moved into the building behind it."

"In the beginning we had only boxes, but eventually we started rural route delivery. We originally covered Mt. Hermon and down to Santa Cruz, until they got their own post office."

Parkison's wife Elsie worked by his side as senior clerk during all his time in office. The couple has lived in Felton for 40 years.

"This place is so beautiful, everyone wants to come here," he said cheerfully, but with a touch of regret. "Sometimes I think they ought to charge a fee of everyone who wants to come. In some ways there's just too darn many people."

After Parkison, a succession of men filled the office: John Humbert served for six months as acting postmaster (Humbert is now a rural carrier); then Bob H. Kingham; C. H. "Dutch" Rengstorff was postmaster until 1966; then Harvey Reiter served as acting postmaster for two and a half years. Ken Burke became postmaster in November of 1968.

The office was moved into its present building on Gushee Street in 1962.

Burke has seen the Felton postal district, which includes Lompico and Zayante, grow from 5,100 to 7,350 during his time in office and one rural route grow into three.

"There has been a tremendous growth," he said. "It seems that a lot of what used to be merely summer vacation cabins are now being occupied year round."

Burke said that he would be interested in talking to anyone who can supply more information about the century-old post office.