

Clock Ticked Away History Of Old Laurel School

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Sentinel Staff Writer

A Seth Thomas clock which once hung in a pioneer schoolhouse 13 miles north of Santa Cruz is keeping time for a new generation of elementary grade students at Brook Knoll School, Scotts Valley.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was just beginning the first of four terms in Washington, D.C., and Adolph Hitler had just been granted dictatorial powers by Germany's Reichstag, when school trustees in the mountain village of Laurel decided in 1933 to buy a new clock for their picturesque one-room schoolhouse.

Until 1947 the clock marked the minutes and hours for students in grades one through eight in a common classroom where Laurel boys and girls had been learning the three "R's" since 1882.

Merger of the Laurel school district in 1947 with the Scotts Valley Union Elementary school District brought about closure of the pioneer schoolhouse, but the clock followed some of the transferred students to Scotts Valley School.

The clock's diligent performance of its duties for more than 17 years was less happily rewarded, however, than that of the students it had served.

At some unknown moment in time the clock was relegated to the dustbin of history, there to lie silent, its oil congealing, its worth unrecognized, until it was spotted quite by accident some five years ago by Robert McGowan, then Scotts Valley School principal.

"I thought it a lovely clock," said McGowan, who is among the more than 50 per cent of today's Americans who were yet unborn when the clock was bought by Laurel district trustees Robert L. Dodge, D. A. Mancarti and Walter P. Castle.

But the clock lay silent, its oil still congealing, four years longer despite McGowan's admiration of the old wooden case

and the crisp-numeraled dial.

"Estimated costs of restoring the clock to usefulness were impossibly high," McGowan explained. "One repairman estimated the work would cost around \$200. Naturally, we couldn't afford that."

Last year, however, the clock was examined by Philip Strayer administrator - principal of Mountain School District. Strayer decided the clock simply needed a cleaning. He did the work for a token fee of \$10, and the clock has not missed a tick since.

For county history buffs, and for Mrs. Christine Carniglia, a teacher's aide at Brook Knoll School, the clock evokes with every tick remembrances of an age when only "lunatics" thought man would ever walk on the moon.

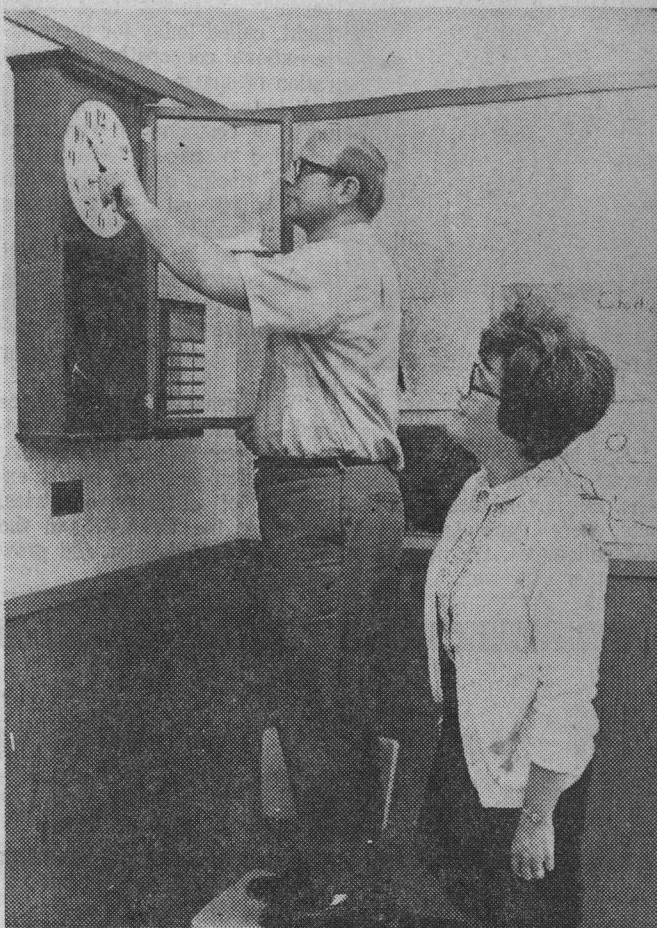
Mrs. Carniglia recognized the clock the day it was first restored to usefulness in the Brook Knoll School office. She recalled that as a grade three student in the old Laurel schoolhouse she had waited daily for the clock to turn her loose for play and roaming in a scenic mountain community that is today less known and appreciated than it ought to be.

For much older history buffs, the little village where the pioneer schoolhouse still stands is one of the major links with the county's past.

According to County Office of Education records, the land for the Laurel school site was granted to Laurel School district in 1868.

A narrow-gauge railroad was built through Laurel in 1879. On May 8, 1880, the first train of the South Pacific Coast Railroad came across the mountains from Alameda to Santa Cruz, steaming over precarious trestles, along rocky ledges and through great tunnels.

Laurel lies between two former railroad tunnels over a mile long. The tunnel to the north, which carried through the summit of the Santa Cruz Moun-



Principal Robert McGowan of Brook Knoll School puts a lot of affection into winding of Seth Thomas clock that once hung in pioneer Laurel

schoolhouse. Christine Carniglia, a teacher's aide at Brook Knoll, was a grade three student in the old schoolhouse, where the clock hung for 17 years.

tains, was more than 6,800 feet long. The tunnel to the west, which carried through a ridge between Laurel and the pioneer town of Glenwood, was 5,720 feet long.

These tunnels made it possible for San Francisco to rise "like a phoenix from the ashes of disaster" after the 1906 earthquake, as a Sentinel writer once put it.

Railroads to the north of San Francisco, which linked the city with the timberland in Northern California, were put out of oper-

ation by the earthquake.

But via the great tunnels in the Laurel area, trains could still be run between Laurel and Alameda by the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, successors to the South Pacific Coast Railroad.

Developer F. A. Hihn, Santa Cruz' first millionaire, used his big sawmill at Laurel to provide lumber to the stricken city at the Golden Gate.

Hihn's plant featured a Stearns mill, which had a steam-operated band saw and the capacity

to turn out 50,000 feet of lumber daily. Donkey engines were used to drag logs over skidways, an innovation that virtually eliminated use of oxen in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Hihn's logging operation was made possible by a relatively untouched stand of virgin redwood trees in the Laurel area. The devastation wrought by these operations has been concealed beautifully by nature in the intervening years.

Now the area is magnificently forested by second growth redwoods, madrones, evergreens. The ceanothus provide great splashes of blue in the canyon formed by Laurel and Soquel creeks. Just now, the Laurel air is sweet with the fragrance of madrone blossoms.

Operation of the great mill at Laurel ended a few years after Hihn's death in 1913. On Feb. 26, 1940, the last train to go from Santa Cruz over the mountains through Laurel, Train No. 33, marked the end of one of the most colorful eras in the county's history.

The famed tunnels remained open until 1943. Then the railroad tracks, which had been broad-gauged in 1909, were taken up and many of the tunnel timbers salvaged. Cave-ins followed the timber removal, but the mouth of the Laurel-Glenwood tunnel may still be seen by sightseers.

Throughout the rise and gentle decline of the village of Laurel, students in grades one through eight went up the knoll to the one-room schoolhouse which is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Leo Linck. Many who lived to see man walk on the moon got their first rudimentary knowledge of earth's relationship to other celestial orbs from such teachers as Mildred Nidever (Hall) who taught all grades from 1916 to 1923.

The last Laurel schoolhouse teacher was Mrs. Olva Curry Dodge.

Now, where children used to romp and holler during recess, dogs frisk about a lawn or rest under the schoolyard oak. Nearby, sheep and lambs chomp and bray in a barnyard.

All about the schoolhouse are modern homes, but because of its height and picturesque lines, the building dominates the setting with a grace that must be seen to be believed.

The restored clock, whose



Teacher Mildred Nidever (Hall) and her students in Laurel school had their 1917 Christmas picture taken before the Yule-decorated blackboard. Mrs. Hall is at left. Others are, left to right, Palma Del Dot, Pia Moroni, Zema Reddington, Annie Maranta, Joe Maranta, an unnamed visitor, Bruna Moroni, Merle Reddington, Rose Moroni, Mildred La Porte, Justus Moroni. Miss Moroni and Miss La Porte were grade eight graduates the following June.

Mancarti, Walter P. Castle.

But the plate could have said more had McGowan chosen to write it.

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when the school was closed. The schoolhouse is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Leo Linck.

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