

Soquel bridge repairs done

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SANTA CRUZ — The covered bridge is long gone. The trolley no longer travels its narrow path and horses no longer trot over the San Lorenzo River.

It may not be quaint, but the modern Soquel Avenue bridge is stronger than ever. The bridge's \$11 million seismic upgrade and flood-control project was declared complete at a dedication Monday.

It marks a new chapter in the long history of the bridge to downtown.

The bridge's historical significance has been memorialized by a bronze plaque depicting the 800-foot covered bridge that, if still standing, would be the longest covered bridge in the state. The plaque will be placed on the bridge.

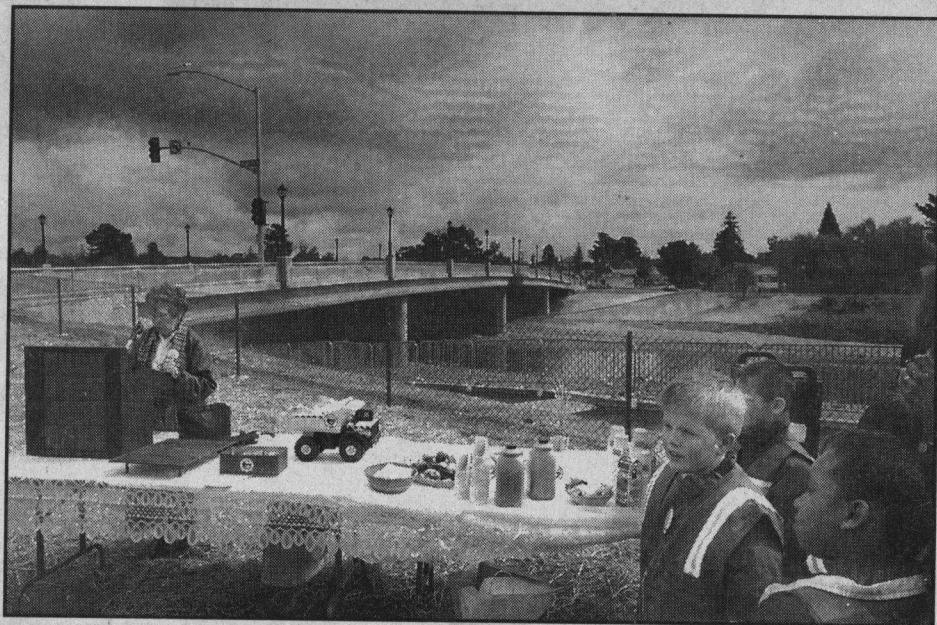
"I think the historical part of this will enrich people's lives," said Grant Wilson, who lives near the bridge. "It's important to remember what came before."

Mayor Katherine Beiers gave a short talk to about two dozen people, including other city and county officials; at the bridge-side ceremony.

Before 1874, the bridge was built for foot traffic. It would wash away during storms and floods, according to Santa Cruz historian Ross Eric Gibson, who also spoke at Monday's ceremony.

Sometime after the Civil War, downtown merchants got together to build a sturdier bridge, but were dismayed when flood water raged and destroyed it once again.

The increase of winter business while



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Students from Gault School listen to Mayor Katherine Beiers.

the bridge was up pushed them to redouble their efforts. They pooled their money again; learned from past mistakes and, finally, built the covered bridge, Gibson said.

The bridge performed well and in 1890 a horsecar line was added. Later, it became a trolley line.

In 1921, the bridge was torn down in favor of a concrete and steel-girder bridge.

In 1967, the bridge was expanded to four lanes but in the 1982 flood, the debris-filled river collapsed part of it.

Construction began on the new bridge 20 months ago. The city paid \$2.2 of the \$11 million cost and the federal government paid the rest.

The new four-lane span includes decorative street lights, pedestrian overlooks, sidewalks, bike lanes and a levee path undercrossing.

The work to help the bridge withstand earthquakes reduced the number of support piers in the river to allow better water flow. It also raised the bridge about three feet.

It is also the latest in the city's efforts to improve flood control capabilities downtown.

Previously, the city completed work on the Water Street bridge and the Riverside Avenue bridge. Work is now under way for a \$5 million retrofit of Laurel Street bridge.