

Sawyer, Preston

Santa Cruz Yesterdays



"FRANK" RODRIGUEZ — PATRIARCH OF FELTON

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

One of the colorful characters of the Santa Cruz hinterland in the past was "Frank" Rodriguez of nearby Felton.

For 60 years he was part of the community, a flesh and blood landmark, known through the years to the many who passed his way from the outlying regions. As the town barber, storekeeper, and operator of an ice cream parlor for years on end, he served many others than his neighbors.

Frank settled in Felton in its boom days as a railroad center, when thousands of board feet of redwood lumber were shipped from the southern terminus of the San Lorenzo valley lumber flume there. That was before the railroad went northward into Boulder Creek.

He was there through the lush lumbering days, saw the village decline, witnessed the advent of autos and better highways, the rise of vacation traffic—but passed before Felton's re-birth.

Son of Real Pioneers

By some he was known as "Spanish Frank", because of his ancestral background. Deep were his roots in early California. Actually he was only the second generation from the Spanish soldiers which constituted the real pioneers of this state.

Born Jose Francisco Rodriguez,

he was a native of Monterey, where his father conducted the Washington hotel. His mother was Dolores Galindo of San Francisco before she wed Jose Antonio Bernave Rodriguez, Frank's father. Baby Francisco arrived on the scene just before the gold rush and the entry of California into statehood.

Frank often told of being "drummer boy" with the California Volunteers, a force of native-born Indian fighters in California and Oregon during Civil War days.

Had Two Hobbies

During his long residence in Felton, Frank found time to indulge in two hobbies, namely his dog and his drawing. For the latter, his medium was mainly crayon, on cardboard. Though his subjects were varied, flowers in fancy vases predominated. Of various sizes, his sketches were always inscribed "J.F.R. Arts" or just "JFR". He never was backward about producing a box of his drawings for customer viewing and it was his wont to remind his auditors that he "never took any lessons".

His dog Jeff was perhaps his chief interest. Teaching Jeff new tricks whiled away many a quiet afternoon in the Felton sunshine. All the new tricks when learned were added dutifully to a written

list, numbering over half a hundred, which Frank kept to display to his friends. Great was his pleasure in showing Jeff's "newest tricks". There was quite a routine, starting with: Lie down; roll over; bark; play dead; hold up paws, etc., done on command.

In the days when motion picture companies sought local back-grounds many a Hollywood troupe shot scenes in Felton, some of them in front of Frank's stores, and of Frank and Jeff.

Burned Out in 1917

When a \$10,000 fire struck Felton early Sunday morning, September 30, 1917, starting in Quistorf's blacksmith shop, the flames spread to Frank's establishments, and he was wiped out. He saved most of his barber equipment, some of his personal effects, but other loss was severe. Another building was moved to the site and he re-established, to continue in business another 15 years or more.

Today's picture, showing Frank and Jeff, was taken in front of his temporary store, just east of Sinnott's stable, shortly after the fire.

A beloved and kindly man was removed with the passing of part of Felton itself, on December 30, 1935, when Frank died at 87. He lies buried at Felton cemetery.