



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

Lud McCrary, 83, explains how to cut a shake out of a redwood Friday at Big Creek Lumber in Davenport. McCrary made 100 to 200 shakes by hand to fix the roof of the Felton Covered Bridge.

# Historic bridge to get skin graft

Swanton resident donates hand-made shakes

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Covered  
Bridges

By KIMBERLY WHITE

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✓ DAVENPORT — It's like slicing up a loaf of bread or carving a turkey, and looks just as easy. But shaving slices off old-growth redwoods requires tools a little more substantial than a knife and cutting board.

Standing a 3-foot slice of redwood on its end, Lud McCrary places the edge of the L-shaped shingle froe, or wood-cleaving tool, near the edge. He then uses a mallet to pound it into the wood.

The split appears grudgingly, but becomes more compliant the deeper it goes, until he's able to guide the froe by hand along the grain. Seconds later, a plank yields and falls off.

McCrary demonstrated how he created more than 100 redwood shakes out of old-growth redwoods that had lain for decades on family-owned land in San Mateo. Using a chain saw, he cut them into 3-foot segments, then set to work slicing off the shakes that eventually will be placed on Felton's historic covered bridge.

The bridge was built in 1892 and is believed to be the tallest covered bridge in the country, according to the State Parks Department. It served as the only entry into Felton for 45 years, then in the late 1930s became a pedestrian bridge. In 1973, it was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

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Lud McCrary uses a froe and mallet to split off a shake from a cut of redwood Friday at Big Creek Lumber in Davenport.

## GRAFT

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Clark Beattie, the county recreation superintendent, said the new shakes will be used to patch up a section of roof on the south side of the bridge closest to the park that was damaged by a fallen tree.

Once they're in place, McCrary estimated they'd last for 40 to 50 years.

When Beattie started looking into making the repairs, he decided to contact McCrary, who co-founded Big Creek Lumber in 1946 with his brother, father and uncle.

"We were prepared to pay for them," Beattie said, but McCrary spoke with the rest of his family and decided to instead donate them to the effort.

"It's really important to preserve because there's not many historical buildings left" in a state constantly ravaged by storms and wildfires,

McCrary added.

Using tools his grandfather created, he only spent a couple of days creating the shakes, which measure a quarter-inch-thick, 6 inches wide and 36 inches long.

The most time-consuming part of the project was finding the right trees. McCrary explained that lumberjacks cut down the redwoods he used decades ago, and it wasn't until they'd already been felled that they realized they had deformities that made them unusable for lumber. Then McCrary came along to find the best among the rejects.

"The big problem is they have knots or some of the wood is really tough," he said. "The big thing is picking out the right tree ... The grain has to be just right."

Beattie picked up the shakes on Wednesday, and hopes to receive a grant to pay for design and installation work.

"I really was just taken by the fact that he made them himself," he said.



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Lud McCrary runs his fingertips along the large fibers of a cut of redwood Friday at Big Creek Lumber in Davenport.