

Friendly Felton — 100 Years Old



Felton's famed covered bridge . . . site of an outdoor art show today, is town's historic treasure. This photo from the Roy Boekenoogen collection was taken about 1937-38, shortly before the bridge was replaced with a sturdier concrete structure to the north.

By MARGARET KOCH
Sentinel Staff Writer

Some of Santa Cruz County's most famous redwood trees . . . A nationally famed covered bridge . . . Historic site of the first power sawmill on the West Coast . . . Ancient church turned-into-library . . . Old-timers with hearty handshakes and warm smiles.

Felton has them all.

The little town in the San Lorenzo Valley also has a recent innovation — Roaring Camp and a real honest-to-goodness narrow gauge railroad ride.

For a town that got its start in 1843 as a rough and tumble pioneer lumber center, Felton has come a long way. The town was laid out in 1868 by Edward Stanley and was named for his lawyer, Charles Felton.

Felton celebrates its centennial in August this year, dating from Stanley's town plan. A series of events will take place starting today with a "June Happening" sidewalk art fair.

It's a short drive to Felton from Santa Cruz—but a long leap back in time and events . . .

As lumber mills blossomed in the Santa Cruz Mountains north of Felton, the town developed as the terminal point of a 14-mile flume that brought logs down from Waterman Gap. From Felton the lumber was hauled across the river and down Graham Grade (Graham Hill Road today) to Santa Cruz wharf where it was loaded aboard ships.

Graham Grade was the only road to Santa Cruz. It was named for Isaac Graham, the roistering mountain man who, with partners, took over Zayante Rancho in 1841. The rancho had been originally granted to Joaquin Buelna in 1843.

Graham established his power sawmill in 1841 where Zayante and Bean Creeks join, today's location of Mount Hermon Redwood Camp. Peter Lassen built the mill machinery before traveling north to be ambushed and killed by Indians near Honey Lake. In 1842 Graham moved his mill to the San Lorenzo River, opposite Fall Creek.

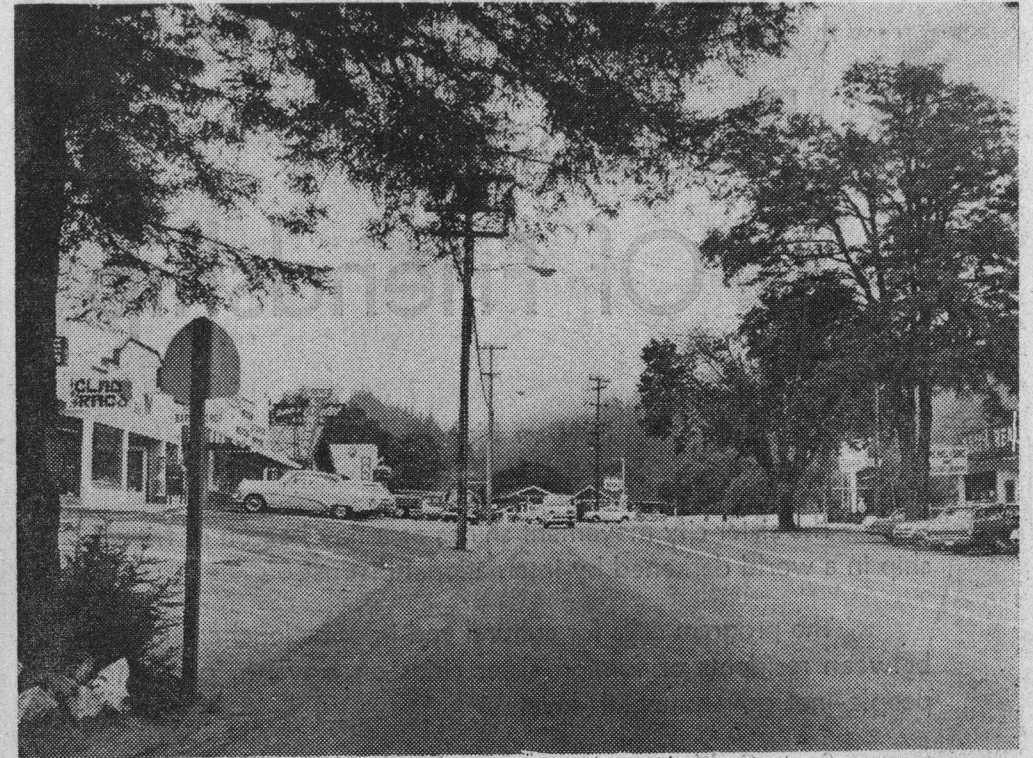
From 1892 to 1938, traffic entering Felton from Camp Evers, Scotts Valley and Santa Cruz came in over the picturesque covered bridge. It was built by Charles Cotton in 1892, a 141-foot span that cost \$4677.

The old span claims fame as the tallest covered bridge in the nation. It is one of three remaining in Santa Cruz County which, by the way, is the "county with the mostest" covered bridges in the U.S.

Feltonites — never asleep where their beloved bridge is concerned—watch it with an eagle eye. They gather on it annually for a covered bridge breakfast to raise funds for its repair and preservation. Latest use for the handsome bridge is a series of public summer art shows. One is in progress there today.

The Felton Library is housed in the town's 75-year-old Presbyterian Church at the foot of Ice Cream Grade. The library was made possible by the gift of Nick Belardi in memory of his wife. Before the church was bought and converted by Belardi in 1956, the library was maintained in a coat closet at the Community Hall.

Felton's Big Trees Park was a tourist attraction in the days when mammoth redwoods were dropping like toothpicks under cross-cut saws, all over the county. Somehow this magnificent grove was saved. Capt. John C. Fremont camped there in a hollow giant in 1846. The grove belonged to Edward Stanley, then to Joseph Welch. It became known as Welch Big Tree Grove from 1867 to 1930, when the coun-



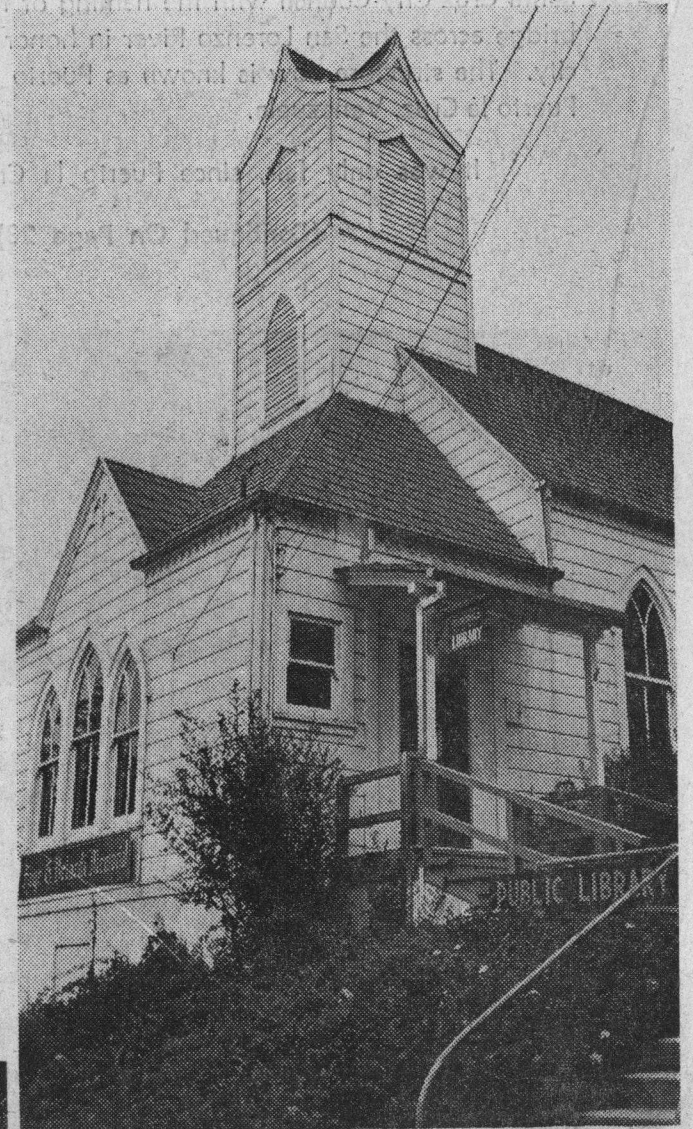
Highway 9 is Felton's main street, an easy-going thoroughfare where trees grow and friends stop to pass the time of day. Below, the Presbyterian Church-turned-library.

ty purchased it from Welch heirs. On August 15, 1954, Big Trees Park officially became the Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park.

The narrow, winding and beautiful road from Felton down the San Lorenzo River gorge was not always there. At first, in the 1850's it extended from Felton to Gold Gulch. From Santa Cruz north, it went to Rincon, site of historic lime kilns. When the road was put all the way through with the two ends joining, it was a toll road for a number of years. Today it is one of the county's loveliest drives — but take your time on the curves. Don't use it if you are in a hurry. Midway, there is a turnout with a superb view of the rugged San Lorenzo canyon below.

Gold Gulch, just south of Cowell Redwoods Park, was the scene of frenzied gold mining in the 1850's and 1860's. Gold was actually found there in large enough quantities to keep a flurry of excitement going.

Today, Felton's gold is found in its park, its natural beauty, its heritage of friendliness.



Art In Felton

Art has discovered Felton . . . or maybe Felton has discovered art.

redwood burl, creators of redwood table tops, plaques, driftwood and mobiles.



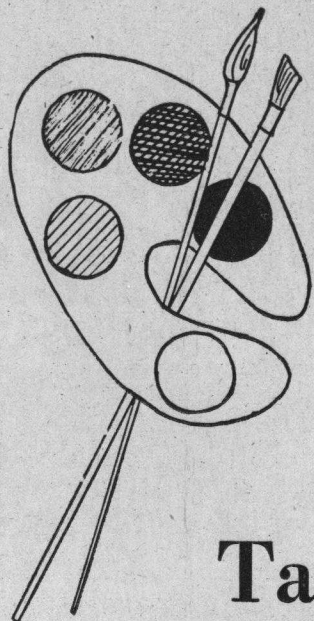
which ever way it is, it's a mutual admiration society. Artists like the friendly, casual air of the town. The town likes the artists and the interesting projects they bring there. Like the Sidewalk Art Fair. It is part of the "June Happening" of the Felton Centennial.

The Art Fair will take place all over Felton—from the flagpole south as far as the artists reach, according to co-chairmen Ellaine Shannon and Shirley Beneke. The Centennial is being sponsored by Felton's Businessmen's Association.

Artists, artisans and craftsmen will set up shop on the sidewalks. Included will be a Felton potter, workers in

Also taking part will be jewelry craftsmen and handweavers who will display placemats, ponchos and wall hangings.

The usual Sunday Covered Bridge Art Show will not take place today, due to the Sidewalk Art Fair. However, it will continue next Sunday and each Sunday thereafter, on the Covered Bridge, with artists in action as well as a display of a variety of paintings. The public is invited at no charge to both art events in Felton.



A place to meditate . . . a natural cathedral in the redwoods, is Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park just south of Felton. Trees have names like "Big Shell," "Bear Den Tree," "Neck Breaker."

Take A Sunday Drive

Take your time and drive to Felton on Highway 9 for a scenic trip of grand views, breathtaking closeups and rugged beauty.

The road enters a leafy tunnel of trees just south of Powder Mill Flat—or Paradise Park as it is known today. Smokeless powder no longer is made and test fired there but one of the county's three covered bridges still crosses the San Lorenzo River inside the park, and several concrete foundations of mill buildings exist. A couple of the homes

in the park contain portions of the old mill buildings.

Climb the hill past Paradise Park and round a turn where an open hillside is on the right. This is the site of the Rincon lime kilns. In the old days, the road ended here. It was part of the Canada del Rincon Mexican land grant.

Beyond Rincon the highway twists and curls along the sheer mountainside above the San Lorenzo River gorge.

Stop midway at a turnout point for a deep canyon look

at the water and rocks far below.

Toll House marks the point where travelers in the 70's and 80's paid their fare for using the completed road.

Gold Gulch was for real—gold was found there and a miniature gold rush resulted right here in Santa Cruz County in the 1850's-60's. They say that "color" is still found there in the creek—if you have a gold pan and a powerful arm muscle.

Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park is practically at the doorstep of the town of Felton. Don't hurry through it. You will miss what it is really all about, if you do. Take the time to walk through its magnificent groves.

At Felton's main intersection you may turn right to the Covered Bridge, Roaring Camp, Mount Hermon, Scotts Valley or Graham Hill Road which is a faster route back to Santa Cruz.

Or you may turn left, up the hill, to the church-library. From it you can drive

up the side of the mountain—another steep one—to Empire Grade. Turn left, continue down Empire Grade to Smith Grade, then down Smith Grade to the coast just north of Major's Creek. Either circle drive, with a stop at Felton, is guaranteed to make this Sunday a memorable one for you.

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