

SANTA CRUZ SENTINAL
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State Recommendation

Old Felton Church Will Be Considered As Historic Place

The old Felton Presbyterian Church, now known as the Faye G. Belardi Memorial, has been recommended for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places by the State Historical Resources Commission.

Constructed in 1893, the white, steepled church building overlooking Felton currently is occupied by the Felton branch of the county library system.

What does being named to the national register mean to the building?

First, the building will gain national recognition for its historical and architectural significance.

It also will be designated for preservation, making it very difficult for a wrecker's ball to ever crash into the quaint church.

Placement on the register also makes the building eligible for restoration funds under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Edith Fikes, former librarian at the building, is responsible for getting the church placed on the national register.

The Presbyterian church was built on land donated to the church in 1869. Its construction was inspired by the Rev. Alexander Eakin, a Presbyterian missionary to the Valley in pioneer days.

The church cost the congregation \$1,500 to build and was completed in 1893. The little chapel served con-

gregations for 63 years until January 1955 when the last service was conducted there.

The modern-day congregation needed a larger structure, so it moved down Highway 9 to today's Presbyterian United Church of Felton.

The historic building was abandoned and soon sold to Nick and Faye G. Belardi, Valley business people, who planned eventually to dismantle the structure and build a home on the site.

At the time of the Belardi purchase, Felton was faced with the potential closure of the small library housed in a cloakroom at the Felton Community Hall.

Townsppeople rallied ideas and it was proposed to purchase the church building for \$1,000 and move it from the site so the Belardis could build their home. The asking price, though small by today's standards, was not easy for a small town to raise.

In August of that year, Mrs. Belardi died in an automobile accident and her husband donated the building to the citizens in her memory. He stipulated that it should be used as a library or public meeting place and asked that it be dedicated as a memorial to his wife.

That is how the old Felton Presbyterian Church became the Faye G. Belardi Memorial and the Felton Library of today. A board of

trustees, comprised of Felton citizens, has administered the affairs of the memorial building ever since.

The city/county library trustees pay the board a minimum monthly rent for use of the building and citizen fund-raising efforts have paid for restoration over the years.

When the memorial was first dedicated, it was through the efforts of Fikes and her husband, Walter, that \$1,000 was raised from citizens for restoration. The Fikes promoted the movement through the pages of their weekly newspaper, The SLV Reporter.

The Felton Volunteer Fire Department and many community groups donated money and held fund-raising events through the years.

In 1975, when County Bank opened its new office in the Felton Faire shopping center, \$1,000 was donated in commemoration for the church's restoration. Also in 1975, the county gave \$3,000 to help shore up the church's faltering foundation. City/county library trustees also aided the project.

All these efforts over the years to keep the building standing will not be in vain if the church makes it to the prestigious National Register of Historic Places. Once on the register, the picturesque structure will be assured a spot in Felton for years to come.