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Santa Cruz Yesterdays



NEVER A STAGE COACH STATION

(From the Preston Sawyer Collection)

Despite the legend which has grown up that the little group of primitive buildings in what is now known as the County Big Tree Park was once a stage coach station, there is nothing to substantiate it and known facts make it unlikely.

The old lumber hauling road that extended south from Felton and the road which ran north from the powder works were joined as a toll

road in 1867. In December of the same year Joseph W. Welch of San Francisco bought the heavily timbered tract from Edward Stanley for \$8500.

Welch, who had amassed a moderate fortune handling the circulation of the Alta, the early day leading newspaper of San Francisco, recognized the possibility of the grove of big redwoods as a resort.

Built As A Resort

The larger of the buildings now standing was erected in 1868, either by Welch or by a lessee. It was intended as a resort, with a central room as dining room and kitchen and sleeping rooms along each side which opened to the outside.

When the South Pacific Coast railroad began operating its narrow gauge trains over the mountains in 1880, the Big Trees were made a "whistle stop." The owners of the grove built a little sheltered platform for passengers and picnic excursion parties by special train came from as far away as San Francisco and Oakland.

Two more buildings were put up in 1885 by Joseph W. Ball, again a lessee, who had been conducting a hotel in Felton and later operated the Boulder Creek House in that town.

Ball Added to Buildings

Ball made the older structure a store and dining room. One of his

new ones, a saloon, three or four decades later suffered a picturesque fate. One of a trio of trees known as the Three Sisters fell. It immediately became known as The Fallen Sister. Its fall landed it squarely across Joseph Ball's old saloon building.

Prior to Welch's purchase and the opening of the west side thru road to Felton in 1867, all traffic between Santa Cruz and Felton was over the old Graham grade, the lumber-hauling path which climbed the hill from Felton, followed the level to what is now Pasatiempo and crossed it to Branciforte creek, down which it came into Santa Cruz. That the buildings in the Welch grove ever were a stage coach station is more than doubtful.