

# Redwood Trees To Be Planted Saturday To Honor Pioneers In Santa Cruz Education

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Santa Cruzans will be reminded this Saturday that the pioneers had their school problems, too, when memorials in the shape of two young dawn redwood trees are dedicated at Harvey West park in the name of Mrs. Mary Case, Santa Cruz' first school teacher, and Loudon Nelson, an ex-slave who bequeathed his estate to the financially insecure school system then in its infancy.

Behind the tribute to the past are two local organizations — the Santa Cruz chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Santa Cruz Historical society.

The idea of establishing living monuments to commemorate early-day Santa Cruzans who played a part in the development of the community was conceived by the DAR. Mrs. Case and Nelson were chosen for the honor after considerable research by a historical society committee appointed for the purpose.

The project was begun after DAR officials heard of a standing offer made by Donley Gray, an Elverta nurseryman who grows the scarce species of tree popularly known as dawn redwood. Gray donates dawn redwood saplings to communities and organizations desiring them for purposes connected with early California history.

The committee which proposed Mrs. Case and Nelson for memorialization was headed by Harry Rutledge, president of the historical society. Rutledge told The Sentinel-News of the contributions made by each in those long-ago days.

Mrs. Case and her husband set out from their Vermont home in 1847 and made the arduous journey to California by covered wagon. In 1848 they reached and settled in Santa Cruz.

There were about a half dozen American families in the area then but there were no schools. Mrs. Case, who had two school-age children of her own, solved the problem by opening a school in the Case home, which stood near the present juncture of California and Trescony streets.

Eighteen or 20 pioneer youngsters took advantage of the homestead school in the next two years. When the Santa Cruz academy opened, Mrs. Case abolished her self-imposed task because the need for it had vanished.

It was a few years later, after the Santa Cruz academy had been succeeded by the area's first pub-

lic school, that Loudon Nelson appeared on the scene as a benefactor of learning.

Nelson, born in slavery in North Carolina in 1800, followed his master first to Tennessee and then to California, where he was given his freedom. Nelson found his way to Santa Cruz, where he opened a shoe repair shop on what is now Water street, at a point between the present post office and the San Lorenzo river.

To the income from his small business he added whatever he was able to realize from the sale of vegetables he grew in a garden to the rear of his shop. When the public school, the only structure in what was called Santa Cruz school district, opened in 1853 where the Plaza is today, Nelson was a neighbor.

The proximity of the school, and the daily passage to and fro of the students, aroused in Nelson a keen interest in the area's sole institution of formal education. And when, because of financial difficulties, the school closed somewhere in the mid-1850's, the former slave felt deeply the loss of opportunity such a catastrophe meant for Santa Cruz children.

He took steps to re-open the school and to see that it stayed open. He put up the money necessary to get the school back on its feet, and he drew up a will leaving all that he owned to the school system.

After Nelson's death, the board of education used the proceeds from his estate to purchase the land on which the board's administration offices stand today near the foot of Mission street. A three-story building financed by the Nelson estate stood on property until 1929.

Both Mrs. Case, who died in 1889 at the age of 89, and Nelson, who passed away in 1860, are buried in Evergreen cemetery not far from the spot where Saturday's dedication ceremonies are to be held. A marble stone marks Nelson's grave, but the exact location of Mrs. Case's final resting place is not known.

Gray plans to bring the trees, each reportedly 4-6 feet in height, to Santa Cruz on Friday. They will be placed in ground prepared by the city park department.

Ceremonies, to begin at 11 a. m., will be conducted by Dr. Evelyn Brisbane, regent of the DAR chapter. Mayor Tom Polk Williams Sr. will represent the city. The public is invited.