

Guest Column: A tour of redwood's contribution to local architecture

May 23, 2022



Last time we talked about how a building's historic significance derives from its connection to events, such as a tsunami. However, historic significance can also be connected to people too, and a variety of circumstances.

Together in this column we are looking at the architectural style of our local buildings' and their contribution to the character and aesthetic of the region. The column's goal aligns with HABS, Historic American Buildings Survey's intention to, "represent "a complete resume of the builder's art."

Thus, the building selection ranges in type and style from the monumental and architect-designed, to the utilitarian and vernacular, including a sampling of our nation's vast array of regionally and ethnically derived building traditions." Only our vast array is contained within the region and boundaries of Del Norte County at this time.

From the late 1800's to early 1900's the Gold Rush brought many to the region with high hopes and in search of riches. For those who made it up the Lost Coast (1850s) logging redwood was better than striking gold.

This burst in extraction coincided with building and demand for redwood boomed (1945-1950). Homes, ranches, government and education institutions, and lumber mills.

What remains today is a testament to the times, the people that built and maintained them, the materials, tools, and technology available, as well as the intended purpose those buildings served over decades and in some cases over a century.

Local architectural styles evolved from federal and colonial to Victorian, to arts and crafts, to colonial, Greek, and Roman revival, to bungalows and craftsman. Drive through Crescent City from Highway 101 west to 2nd Street, to north to I, J, or H Street, then west 9th Street to Pebble Beach Drive to tour some examples.

The Crescent City Historical Museum is a fantastic resource and caretaker of all knowledge on local history including historic buildings. Please visit the museum at 577 H Street.

Many early buildings, both residential and commercial, in our region, are built with redwood. A unique feature rarely found in other parts of the state, country, or world. Redwood is pest and rot resistant, a hardwood known for its strength and beauty.

Besides being an accessible local building product at the time, I think, it was chosen to represent the local culture and environment, as a way to speak without speaking.

That, to me, is what makes architecture fun and local historic buildings exciting and intriguing. How they speak, the things they say, and don't say, the lives they held and stories they hold.

The redwood beams and ceilings also tell stories of their sacrifice, how extensive logging changed the landscape forever.

Fortunately, today we can learn from the past and design for future generations. Redwood is a superb building product. Its sustainable, locally (within 500 miles) sourced material, made from rapidly renewable young trees, and qualifies for green building credits in project certification.

Summer is almost here on the foggy coast, and if you're thinking about a home improvement project such as; a fence, deck, pergola, stairs, or garden centerpiece, choose redwood; it's a fantastic building product that lasts, and looks elegant and natural because it is. You can find a list of qualified suppliers at the Forest Stewardship Council.

In this series we invite you to look with us at local historical buildings in Del Norte County. If you own or occupy or know of a story about a building that you would like to share with our readers please contact us for your building to be featured in an upcoming column about local architectural interest and style. Call or email Jessica Robin jessica@sustainappeal.com or (707) 954-2096