



RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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A BRUSH WITH THE PAST: THE HISTORIC ART OF THE HEALDSBURG MUSEUM

by Daniel F. Murley • Page 9



Adobe House, Dry Creek - Rosinda Holmes

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

THE MIGHTY 1921 HEALDSBURG AVENUE BRIDGE

by Holly Hoods • Page 6

I REMEMBER: OUR FAMILY'S FITCH MOUNTAIN SUMMERS OF THE 1930'S

by Walter Selover • Page 13

TRAIN CROSSING SIGNALS

by Charlotte Anderson • Page 4



In This Issue

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*The Official Publication of the Healdsburg
Museum and Historical Society*

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Earlier this month in going through my files I came across an article written by Walter Selover that brought back many memories of my visits to Healdsburg and the Russian River during my youth. I am grateful to our research curator Holly Hoods who encouraged Mr. Selover to write about his remembrances and submit the article to us. I am happy we can share these happy memories with our readers, particularly during these warm summer months. Mr. Selover, a retired engineer, still resides in San Francisco. Thank you, Walter, for being willing to share these remembrances with us.

The Healdsburg Museum houses many artifacts that tell about Healdsburg's past. However, I was not aware of the many beautiful historic paintings rendered by local artists that help to retain a pictorial history of the many landmarks that make up Healdsburg and its surrounding area. Our curator, Daniel Murley, for this issue took on the assignment of researching the history of the paintings and the artists. A colorful and most interesting aspect of Healdsburg's past.

Crossing the Russian River took on many forms over the years - a ferry service shuttling paying customers from one river bank to another, to a first wagon bridge, to a modified truss bridge, to the current 87 year old 1921 Pennsylvania Petit truss bridge which is still serving Healdsburg. Research curator Holly Hoods has given us a well researched and most interesting account. However, as she points out, the future of the 1921 bridge, an historic and beautiful structure, is unknown at this time.

Charlotte Anderson, our very faithful contributor, has come up with another interesting topic, one, more than likely, not many have thought about - train crossing signals. Her article about railroad barrier crossings is full of historic significance, from crossing gates in the early days to the present automated signals.

Hopefully we will see the return of train traffic and the need for the warning of the signals.

We hope you enjoy the latest issue of the *Recorder*. Have a wonderful summer.

Arnold Santucci

Editor



4 Train Crossing Signals

by Charlotte Anderson

A history of train crossing signals and how they evolved.

6 The Mighty 1921 Healdsburg Avenue Bridge

by Holly Hoods

Crossing the Russian River, its many forms and the final completion of the 1921 and current bridge, a Pennsylvania Petit truss bridge.

9 A Brush with the Past: The Historic Art of the Healdsburg Museum

by Daniel F. Murley

Accomplished local artists who chose as their subjects many historic landmarks.

13 I Remember: Our Family's Fitch Mountain Summers of the 1930's

by Walter Selover

Recounting vivid stories of his family's vacations at a Fitch Mountain cabin.

TRAIN CROSSING SIGNALS

by Charlotte Anderson

HISTORY

In the early days of the railways, a great deal of the road traffic was horse drawn or included livestock. Therefore it was necessary to provide a real barrier when a train was approaching. Crossing gates closed the entire width of the road and when they were opened to allow road users to cross, the gates were swung across the width of the railway. This prevented any pedestrians or animals from getting onto the line. The first U.S. patent for such crossing gates was awarded on August 27, 1867, to J. Nason and J.F. Wilson of Boston, Massachusetts.

With the appearance of motor vehicles, this barrier became less effective. Many counties substituted the gated crossings with highly visible barriers and relied upon road users following common sense and associated warning signals to stop. At level crossings on less important roads, the railway lines were often "open" or "uncontrolled". At these crossings there may be only a CROSSBUCK, the "X," reading RAILROAD CROSSING, upon a standing post. An advance warning may be an "X" with an "R" on either side painted on the road or a circular yellow sign with a black "X" and two "R's." These circular warning signs are the only U.S. road signs with this shape!

Many crossings were protected by a WATCHMAN (usually a retired or disabled railroad employee) who warned of an oncoming train by swinging a red lantern in a side-to-side arc, which in universal railroad sign language means "stop."

For safety's sake, the train itself was required to have a bright headlight and ditch lights (short-thrown bright lights located below the headlight), a working bell, and a whistle or horn that had to be sounded four times (long-long-short-long or the letter "Q" in Morse Code) as the train approached a crossing.

Soon after the advent of the automobile, speeds were increasing and the popularity of closed cars made the concept of "STOP, LOOK

AND LISTEN" at railroad crossings a difficult one. So something else had to be done. It was presumed that a mechanical device that mimicked the movement of the watchman's swinging arc would catch the eyes of approaching motorists and give an unmistakable warning.



The new design utilized alternating electromagnets pulling on an iron armature. A red steel target disc, slightly less than two feet in diameter, serving as a pendulum was attached. A red light in the center of the target illuminated, and with each swing of the target a mechanical gong sounded. This "new" model combined sight, motion and sound and was dubbed the MAGNETIC FLAGMAN.

Three mechanically identical versions of the magnetic flagman were produced. The "upper quadrant" signal was mounted directly atop a steel pole and waved the target above the motor box, intended for use where space was limited. Since the target no longer served as the pendulum, a cast iron counterweight opposite the target was used. The "lower quadrant" version waved the target below the motor box and was intended to be above traffic on a pole-mounted cantilever.

The third and least common version was a pole-mounted lower-quadrant signal suspended above an octagonal steel frame that surrounded the target. Dubbed the "peach basket" because of the protective framework, the apparatus was crowned by another visual warning, the traditional X-shaped "RAILROAD CROSSING" sign, or crossbucks.

All crossings in the U.S. are required to be marked by at least a crossbuck; most crossings that intersect rural roads have this setup. As traffic on the road crossing or the rail crossing increases, safety features are increased accordingly. More heavily trafficked crossings have automatic warning devices (AWDs), which feature alternately flashing red lights to warn automobile drivers and a bell to warn pedestrians.

Continued on page 5



Additional safety is once again attained through crossing gates that block automobiles' approach to the tracks when activated.

HEALDSBURG CROSSINGS

As Healdsburgers well know, one cannot enter the city unless one crosses a railroad track! (The exception is if one is coming from Calistoga through Alexander Valley, and that is a long way to go to avoid Healdsburg's tracks!) Coming in from the north, the first crossing is at Lytton. After that it would be Dry Creek, Grant, North, Matheson, and finally the five-road intersection at Healdsburg Avenue, Mill Street, and Vine Street! This, of course, was the intersection where the 1952 crash occurred! Upon leaving Healdsburg at the south end, the last crossing would be Front Street at the Russian River. At most of these intersections there are still the remnants of the "wigwag" signals or lights (which replaced "retired" wig wags), and always the crossbuck.

The first "wig wag" signal in Healdsburg was installed on Grant Street. In 1913 at a meeting of the Business Men's Association, O.G. Wagers called attention to the need for danger signals at several of the railroad crossings near Healdsburg. "At the crossing of West Grant Street," said Mr. Wagers, "since the building of the Miller Packing House, it is difficult to see a train coming until you are almost on the track. Trains approaching from the north usually come at a pretty good speed, and the crossing is a dangerous place." (*Healdsburg Tribune*, August 14, 1913, p.1:6) The crossing of North Street and at the Healdsburg Preserving Company's cannery were also spoken of as dangerous places. A committee of O.G. Wagers, Ralph Williams and Harold Rosenberg were to take the matter up with the railroad company and endeavor to have electric warning bells placed at the crossings.

Thus it came about that a year later a wig wag type signal was installed at the Grant Street crossing, this signal being "one of the

latest type of danger warnings" and costing approximately \$500. (*Healdsburg Tribune*, August 27, 1914, p.1:4.)

It wasn't until 1936 that the wig wags were installed at Mill Street and "Highway" (Healdsburg Avenue) This particular crossing had been guarded by a watchman who, upon hearing an oncoming train, would come out of his "shack" to wave a warning to motorists. (His shack would have been near where the Chamber of Commerce building is now.) Now, finally, in 1936 "four signals will be installed, one on each side of the highway coming in from the south, one in the middle of the pavement at the gore (a small triangular piece of land) of Mill and West (Healdsburg Ave.) in front of the Auradou Service Station, and the fourth on the west line of West Street. Besides the wig wag signals, flood lights will be installed which are designed to throw lights on the crossing in such a manner that a train will be thrown into relief.



"It is understood that serious objection has been registered with the city council against location of the signal post at the Mill and West street gore, by I.A. Iversen, owner of the service station near that point, and by Clem Auradou who leases the station. Possible change in the location of this signal is predicted if the state railroad commission consents." (*Healdsburg Enterprise* April 7, 1936, p.1:1.)

The signal parts that remain are now minus the electrical and moving parts which are costly to keep up. However, if train traffic is ever reinstated, Healdsburg would be well on its way to accommodate the crossings!

Many citizens fondly recall hearing the whistles of the trains as they came through Healdsburg. Also coming to mind with reference to railroads and trains was the old riddle: "Railroad crossing, look out for the cars; can you spell it without any 'r's'?" Ah nostalgia!

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THE MIGHTY 1921 HEALDSBURG AVENUE BRIDGE

by Holly Hoods



1921 Bridge, newly constructed.

Although it was not Healdsburg's first bridge, the steel and concrete bridge of 1921 (and today) was by far its mightiest. Boasting stronger materials and design than the Howe truss and modified Pratt truss of its 1871 and 1893 precedents, the 1921 bridge was the first structure engineered and built to carry automobile traffic. The double-span, two-lane bridge was designed by Sonoma County Engineer J.C. Lewis. Built by the American Bridge Company under the supervision of contractor A.W. Kitchen, it has served as Healdsburg's southern gateway for 87 years.

EARLY DAYS

Before the San Francisco and North Pacific Railroad reached Healdsburg in 1871, the City had no bridge of any type over the Russian River at the south end of town. During winter floods, the town and outlying valleys would often be cut off for days at a time. During the 1860s, enterprising landowners Thomas Hudson and later J.D. Grant operated a ferry service near the current Healdsburg Avenue Bridge site, shuttling paying customers (and their crops) between the river banks. When the railroad arrived in 1871, its utility eclipsed the ferry.

THE FIRST BRIDGE

The first wagon bridge—a Howe truss—was built and paid for in 1870 with \$11,000 of County funds and a \$5,000 contribution by the San Francisco and North Pacific Railroad. In 1871, the *Russian River Flag* described that first bridge as:

14" x 14" inch wood timbers bolted together and

spiked down with three to four foot-long pieces of iron to two supporting piers that were sunk twenty feet into the gravel.

“STOP THEIR INDECENT SPORT”

The bridge opened the southern end of Healdsburg to travelers of the “Santa Rosa and Healdsburg” Road (which later became the Old Redwood Highway). This prompted a few local changes. The *Healdsburg Enterprise* observed tartly in 1876:

Large and small boys bathe in the Russian River under the railroad and county bridges in broad daylight. There is considerable travel over the Santa Rosa Road near those points and several residences are in close proximity thereto. If the boys have not sufficient self-respect and sense of shame to desist, the local authorities should interfere promptly and stop their indecent sport.

THE SECOND BRIDGE

In 1893 a modified Pratt truss bridge replaced the first wagon bridge across the Russian River. Under the direction of Doe, Hunt, and Company, a crew of fourteen built a bridge with three cement piers, each 24 feet high, 25 feet wide and 7 feet deep. Reinforced by iron needle beams, this bridge cost the County \$22,000 and served for 28 years. During this time, the sandy shore of the Russian

Continued on page 7

River between the two bridges developed into a popular hub of recreational activity. This included uses as a boat launch site, picnic area and occasional public seating for riverside festivities, such as the annual Water Carnival.



Water Carnival

“LAKE SOTOYOME”

The yearly erection of a summer dam in the Russian River near the Healdsburg bridges created a body of deep water that was ideal for boating and swimming. Locals honored this seasonally- created lake with a historic name: “Lake Sotoyome,” (for the “Sotoyome Rancho,” the Mexican land grant owned by Henry and Josefa Carrillo de Fitch within which Healdsburg is located). At the turn of the (20th) century, Healdsburg boosters promoted tourism with scenic color post card views of rowboating and fishing on beautiful Lake Sotoyome.



1934 Russian River passenger boat.

The Russian River ferry boat was discontinued in 1871, only to reappear in a new form decades later. In the 1930s, the Sbragia family opened “the Ark,” a popular Italian restaurant on the shore of the Russian River at the former ferry site (on what is today Kennedy Lane). Merryland Beach became the hotspot just across the river. Seventy-five years after the first ferry ended its service, a new paddle-wheel-powered ferry entered the local waters. For ten cents a ride, patrons of Lenard Avila’s “Russian River passenger

boat” could get transportation from Merryland Beach (now Memorial Beach) to the dock at the Ark.

THE 1921 HEALDSBURG BRIDGE

Healdsburg’s 1921 current bridge is a Pennsylvania Petit truss bridge, built by the American Bridge Company. The most common bridge truss form in the United States (and California) is the Pratt truss, a design invented by Thomas and Caleb Pratt in the mid 1840s.

By the 1880s this basic Pratt truss design was further strengthened by adapting it to all-metal construction. The light metal diagonals of the combination truss were retained, but the wooden members were completely replaced by heavier metal components. Economical, well-tested, and suitable for most crossings of 150 feet or less, the Pratt truss was built in large numbers throughout the United States. For wider crossings, engineers devised variants of the common Pratt system in order to increase the load capacity.

A Pennsylvania Petit truss is a Pratt truss with a polygonal top chord and sub-struts and sub-ties for reinforcement. The half-length members reinforce the diagonals to better resist stresses. Work on the new bridge started on the first day of June 1921. The *Sotoyome Scimitar* announced in August that “the new steel bridge which will span the Russian River on the highway near Healdsburg is fast approaching completion.” Nine carloads of steel for the bridge were delivered in late September. At the time, the bridge builders were having difficulty placing the central pier. During the sinking of the cofferdam, the planking caved in several times, because of the “peculiarities of ground conditions of the river bed” that were encountered. The contractors requested 30 days additional time to complete the bridge. This request was grudgingly granted by the Board of Supervisors. Locals worried that the bridge would not be finished before the arrival of winter heavy rains and high waters. Racing against time, the contractors placed reinforcing steel and poured concrete in early November. All of the steel work was completed and the big spans were in place. In mid-November when they finally poured cement for the floor, many breathed a sigh of relief.

The bridge was accepted by the Board of Supervisors in late December 1921. Since the painting of the structure had not yet been completed, the sum of \$2,000 was withheld from the final payment. The contractors agreed that the work would be finished within six months.

It is a beautiful bridge with a raised walk at either side, outside the truss work, for pedestrians, and a wide

Continued on page 8

floor inside for vehicle traffic. At either end, set at both sides, are massive concrete walls, in each which is set two decorative light posts. Other lights are set at regular intervals on both sides of the bridge.

According to the *Healdsburg Tribune*, March 1922, the City agreed to furnish the power for the ten light globes that lit up the County bridge. The Chamber of Commerce agreed to keep the lights in repair. Julius Myron Alexander, the head of the Chamber of Commerce, welcomed the new bridge with an exuberant poem in its builder's honor. Alexander had championed the cause of dedicating the new bridge as a memorial to the fallen soldiers and heroic veterans of World War I. The stately palm trees that were planted along Healdsburg Avenue after the bridge was built were also his idea.

FUTURE OF HEALDSBURG AVENUE BRIDGE

The County bridge # 20C-65 became the City of Healdsburg's responsibility when the south section of Healdsburg Avenue was annexed to the City in 1988. A roar of protest from Healdsburg residents and local historians greeted City officials when they announced plans to replace the bridge in 1990 and again, when they revived the attempt in 1993. In 2008, after minimal and deferred maintenance, the City of Healdsburg is weighing options that will determine the future of Memorial Bridge.

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J. M. Alexander circa 1925

"To our Friend, A.W. Kitchen, Contractor and Builder,"

By Julius Myron Alexander, 1921

The Building of a Bridge

And then, he came from out this western land,
With conquering will and strength at his command.
The task was his to build and belt with steel,
That winter storms that come its strength might feel.
And go their way, as conquered from their lust,
To batter and to leave a crumbled dust.

And there beneath the solid rock of earth,
Foundation fashioned there, of nature's worth;
And then, like pyramids of ancient years,
For all of time he builded mighty piers;
With giant beams and heavy stanchions steeled,
He bolted all and in their strength he sealed.

A road he built upon the waiting floor,
Like Apian Way—to lead from shore to shore;
And there for gentler kind who walk beside
A path he made for those who do not ride.
Like battleship that fights the ocean's storm,
In colors grey he touched the massive form.

He conquered, and for strength he builded best
A steadfast structure for this glorious west;
Though tempests come and winds may fiercely blow,
Not waves nor wild of storm can overthrow.
And so, the river bending to his will,
Shall go its way, unharmed as a rill.

'Twas nature made of man a puny thing,
Till mind proclaimed for him a mighty king.
From all unconquered things it took with skill,
And leashed as slaves to do a master's will.
So out of mind, of labor and of thought,
This giant strength—this mighty bridge was wrought.

A BRUSH WITH THE PAST: The Historic Art of the Healdsburg Museum

by Daniel F. Murley



The Joseph Fitch House on the Russian River - Olive Gaddini Bacigalupi, 1947



The Little Geysers by Maude Needham Latimer, circa 1862

Rather than render the surrealistic scene of hissing steam vents and sulfurous vapors escaping from jagged cracks in the earth's surface, as she actually viewed it from her craggy rock bench, young Maude Needham Latimer placed herself and her companions in the paintings. Executed by the well-traveled woman from Wisconsin in about 1862, she had no way of knowing the fame her stepson or new husband would achieve in the history of California and Sonoma County. Presumably, the man standing to her right, in her work titled "Devil's Canyon," is her spouse Lorenzo Dow Latimer who had met Maude while a medical student in Wisconsin in 1850. Notable in the tale of the Latimer family art was the fact that Lorenzo Dow first married Maude's sister Harriet.

Harriet and Lorenzo were married back east and then came to California in search of gold. They had settled in Gold Hill in Placer County, where their son Lorenzo Palmer Latimer was born in 1857. Shortly after the blessed event, Harriet died and Lorenzo Dow married his first spouse's sister, Maude, whom he had also met while in medical school. Apparently tiring of the "wilds" of the gold fields, Lorenzo D. then moved his new wife and infant son to the more civilized city of Santa Rosa, where he handily switched from practicing medicine to practicing law. Regardless, he was

Continued on page 10



still presumably practicing a profitable profession. As shown in the artwork, the couple and their companions were financially established enough to be well dressed and could afford to take the long five hour stage ride to visit the Geysers Resort northeast of the town of Healdsburg.

Of note in this multimedia work (detail above) is that the visitors are carrying walking sticks called "Geysers' Ponies" which aided them in trudging over uneven ground. The men also have the "wind cords" from their hats, carefully secured in their lapel button holes to prevent the loss of a lid blown off in the gusty climes of the mountainous resort. Maude, with her husband Lorenzo Dow at her right, relaxes with her "pony," as her portfolio

Hill to Santa Rosa, would experience in his first six years not only the death of his biological mother but also that of his amateur painter stepmother/aunt. However, the successful law practice of his father, Lorenzo Dow, would soon bring him into a social circle of landed gentry in the burgeoning agricultural county north of the booming metropolis of San Francisco. Lorenzo Dow Latimer married Sarah Rich, the widow of wealthy landowner and fruit and grape grower John Rich, in November 1865.



Lorenzo Dow Latimer

and her lacy black hat lie nearby. Further to her right one of the men, possibly Lorenzo's brother Thomas, is apparently examining the geological composition of this unique area of natural wonder. Two of Maude's quaint and colorful works, done with pen and ink, colored pencil and gouache, are at the Healdsburg Museum but none of the watercolor or oil paintings of her famous stepson/nephew, Lorenzo Palmer Latimer, are in our collection.

Lorenzo Palmer Latimer, after moving with his family from Gold



Sarah Rich, circa 1880

The property eventually was purchased by the George Greeott family and much of it is now under cultivation by Chalk Hill Vineyards. Lorenzo Palmer Latimer studied at the California School of Design in San Francisco, and in 1899 was appointed to a teaching position there which he held for twenty years. During Lorenzo's tenure the school changed its name to the San Francisco Art Institute. Lorenzo often took students to visit and paint in the hills and along the creeks in Sonoma County as he believed in experiencing these natural subjects with easel and brush, and many students came to the Redwood Groves and quiet canyons

near his family home south of Healdsburg. In an article for *Overland Monthly* in 1899 Latimer spoke of an artist's challenge in approaching a subject such as our local Redwood Groves.



Mill Creek - Jane Raabe, circa 1898.

In this particular piece he was referring to the Bohemian Club Grove along the Russian River. He was a member when most of the club was comprised of artists, writers, musicians and poets:

In the midst of such grandeur, such sublimity of nature, how insignificant one feels himself to be. With awe and utter helplessness the rash artist begins the drawing even of the first line and as he goes on he becomes dissatisfied and discouraged, then he stops and stares, completely at a loss to know how to proceed. Nowhere does one find such depth of feeling as in a forest of giant redwood trees. I think the Creator never intended that anyone should represent on canvas these noble trees, as they really are, or He certainly would have made them simpler.

Many local Healdsburg residents, particularly women, accompanied Latimer, learning from the skillful young artist. Of the talented local women who followed in the style and painted lovely local landscapes interpreted by their teacher, were Jane Raabe and Alice Dixon. Fortunately, many of the works done by these women remain in the Museum's collection.



Olive Gaddini, "en plein air", circa 1920



Olive Gaddini in her studio, circa 1960

One extremely promising painter who worked with Latimer on his visits to the Healdsburg area was young Olive Gaddini. She was one who assisted Latimer in scouting new locations and on horseback, she discovered many appealing scenes to paint. Olive turned her gaze to other local subjects as is seen in her treatment of the historic Joseph Fitch house across the Russian River. Joseph was a grandson of Captain Henry and Josefa Carrillo Fitch.



Olive executed this lovely, enticing watercolor in 1957 just nine years before fire destroyed the local landmark. Joseph's grandparents' expansive Victorian was known affectionately as "Fitch's Castle," and it was erected by Cyrus Alexander and the later efforts of Moses Carson. It had proudly stood since the 1840's but also met its demise in flames in a terrible fire in 1913.

Continued on page 12



Adobe House, Dry Creek

Another accomplished local artist who chose as her subjects many other historic local landmarks was Rosinda Holmes. Among the buildings which she chose to immortalize were the Carnegie Library, built in 1911, and which now houses the Healdsburg Museum, and the Peña adobe on Dry Creek which was built in 1844. Like the foundation for the Fitch "castle," this structure was built from local adobe bricks and was one of the first non-native structures built in Sonoma County. Constructed on the Tzabaco Rancho land grant by Jose German Peña, it was later owned by early settler Duvall Drake Phillips. He added the wood frame

second story which is evident in the delicate colorful watercolor work by Rosinda Holmes.

In December, 1906, an exhibition of Lorenzo Latimer's work was sponsored by influential residents such as the Raabe, Kelley and Lorenzini families in the Kruse building on the Healdsburg Plaza. Now in 2008 we are exhibiting many of the works done by the sponsors here in the Museum. The exhibit, **A Brush with the Past**, will be displayed in the main floor gallery and will remain through October, 2008.



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I REMEMBER:

Our Family's Fitch Mountain Summers of the 1930's

by Walt Selover



Walt Selover of San Francisco visited the Healdsburg Museum in the summer of 2005 after many years away from Healdsburg. At the Museum he met Research Curator Holly Hoods to whom he recounted vivid stories of his childhood family vacations at Fitch Mountain during the 1930s. Holly enjoyed his stories and urged him to go home and write down some of his memories, which he did. Walt's reminiscences of summers on the Russian River follow.

SAN MATEO ROOTS

I lived in San Mateo with my parents [Newton and Paula (Hall) Selover] in 1927, and that's where my older brother and I grew up. Two of my parents' best friends were physicians in San Mateo: Bill Murphy, an Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat specialist, and his wife, Jewel Booth Murphy, a pediatrician, who was our pediatric doctor. She, always called "Judy," inherited a cabin on Fitch Mountain from her mentor, Dr. Holdsclaw, who had it built in the late 1920's. Today the address is 2609 Fitch Mountain Road.

MURPHY (HOLDSCLAW) CABIN

Dr. Holdsclaw owned three lots that extended from Fitch Mountain Road to the river. She had the summer cabin built in the center of the property so that there would be some privacy. That area of the mountain came to be called "Del Rio Woods," and did develop some type of a homeowners' association. A small grocery store existed right on the road, called the "Del Rio Woods Store." It was easy walking distance, about a quarter of a mile down the road from the Murphy (Holdsclaw) cabin.

BEFORE THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE

My family's first vacation at the Murphys' cabin was either 1934 or 1935, and we had the cabin for two weeks. I remember driving from San Mateo to the ferry terminal which was near the Ghirardelli building in San Francisco. They would drive the cars onto the ferry, then across the Bay to the ferry terminal in Sausalito. The ferry trip

Continued on page 14

alone was pretty exciting for kids. As soon as we drove off the ferry, we were on vacation!

It was a long driving trip on the two-lane Old Redwood [now 101] Highway from Sausalito to Healdsburg through the middle of San Rafael, Petaluma: "chicken capital of the world," the Pengrove Hatcheries, Cotati and into Santa Rosa. I remember we always stopped there for gas, or something, and then headed off for Healdsburg. Once we passed Windsor, my brother and I would start looking for Fitch Mountain. It was very exciting! It was always a contest which one of us could spot it first. Once we saw it, we knew we were on vacation.

LANDMARKS AND VACATION RITUALS

We drove over the [1921 Healdsburg Avenue] bridge and into Healdsburg, past the square, out Matheson to Fitch Mountain Road. When we passed Camp Rose, we knew we were getting close. Then we would pass the Del Rio Woods Store, and drive uphill a bit to a sharp turn, (where the mountain road joins), and we were there! Below the cabin, down a path, past a huge redwood tree was the rocky beach on the river. Before unloading the car, we competed to see who would be first to put a hand in the Russian River. Then we would go back up to unpacking, putting the cots out on the porch, and hanging the canvas hammock on the hooks. [I remember] the old fashioned light switches and turning on the water heater in the kitchen.

We'd get into our swim trunks as soon as allowed, and then head down to the river. My father was a good swimmer, and taught us well. My brother and I loved the Russian River, swimming to the other side, skipping the thousands of perfect skipping rocks - competing to see how many skips we could generate each throw. We hiked down the road to the Del Rio Woods Store to get milk or bread, to buy candy or popsicles or a morning paper for our parents. We loved Russian River and Healdsburg. We never wanted to go anywhere else for summer vacation--and we didn't. We enjoyed that cabin on two-week vacations every summer. If my father was unable to coordinate his vacations, he would always come up for the weekends with my mother, brother and me. Over the years, we got to know kids from San Francisco and the East Bay who had summer cabins around Del Rio Woods.

SOCIAL SCENE AT THE PALOMAR

One summer vacation we found they had built "The Palomar" bar and dance hall at Del Rio Woods. It was huge! Big bands played there Saturday nights. That was for adults and big kids, but it had a jukebox, so during the week, we could play great big band music on 78 rpm records, and dance to it for a dime. Lots of

teenagers we met on the beach each day were there every evening during the week. The Palomar was a terrific social scene.



DEL RIO WOODS DAM

In about 1936, the Del Rio Woods homeowners' association put up the money to create a dam in the river to make a wider, deeper swimming area at the down-river end of the Del Rio Woods beach. It was a dam that could be removed in the fall, and put in place in the spring. The foundation was 'permanent': there were upright posts about 10 feet apart so the whole structure was river bank to river bank. The posts had 4 inch slots from bottom to top to accommodate 4 x 12 inch boards 10 feet long. Eight to ten boards slid down the slots between upright posts to create a dam 8 feet or 10 feet high all the way across the river. For about 15 feet on the down river side of the dam, heavy boards received the water flowing over the top of the dam so the falling water didn't scour the river bottom.

DEL RIO WOODS BEACH

The dam increased the depth of the river upstream for at least half a mile. It improved swimming and boating significantly on this section of the river. The Del Rio Woods swimming area attracted hundreds more than before. A large pontoon-floated raft was moored in the middle of the river, which was a major attraction to the kids enjoying the beach. A restraining-roped area delineated the limits of shallow water for the very little kids. New wooden stairs were built to make it easier to get down from (or up to) the store, the road and Palomar level.

The Del Rio Woods dam made that beach the place to be every day for summer vacationers. Even guests staying at Bellevue Villa Resort, on the north side of Fitch Mountain, came to Del Rio Woods beach regularly. In the fall, the boards were removed

Continued on page 15

from the upright posts of the dam, so it would not be a problem in the winter rainy season. The boards were slid down the slots in the uprights in late spring to raise the water level again. The dam did its job for a number of years. It is not there now [in 2005]. It appears that the water is not deep enough to swim there anymore. The Del Rio Woods beach now has one lifeguard but, on a Thursday in mid July [2005], there was nobody else on the beach. Weeds are growing up where hundreds of people used to have fun.

BELLEVUE VILLA FRENCH RESORT

At least once in each two-week vacation, my mother, father, brother and I would go out to dinner at Bellevue Villa resort and restaurant on Fitch Mountain Road north [now Borel Road]. The resort sign said, "Pete Roquier, Proprietor." Before dinner, my brother and I would go to the duck pin court, set the pins and bowl a couple of games. That was fun.

The restaurant was very good, country French, with wonderful "vin ordinaire" My parents spoke French quite well and enjoyed conversations with Monsieur and Madame Roquier. The pâté was always exceptional. My parents allowed us to drink diluted red wine at dinner, and we were so proud. The entertainment was a terrific accordion player, Dino, a young Italian lad from San Francisco. He spent several summers there and was a favorite of all the regular patrons. He was an excellent entertainer and musician. His classic piece was "The Anvil Chorus" from Carmen. It was requested at every evening's performance. For good reason the Roquiers would not allow Dino to play it until all the glasses and utensils had been removed from the tables. The first few evenings he had played it; the diners had picked up spoons and knives to keep time with the music and had demolished several glasses and plates. Thereafter, we were only allowed to clap and hit the dining tables in time with the music. I have no idea where Dino is now and there no longer is a Bellevue Villa.

TEENAGE VACATION

In the summer of 1939, our parents felt my brother and I were old enough to spend a month of summer vacation on our own at the cabin. Judy Booth Murphy knew us well enough to let seven of us high school kids use the cabin for a month. We happily agreed to do some maintenance and repair projects on the cabin during that time. My brother and I invited five good friends to join us for the month.

My mother, along with the mother of two of the friends, came up to get us started properly. They arranged to pay Mrs. Amesbury,

who lived up the hill across the road from our cabin, to provide dinner for our group each day. We would make our own breakfasts and lunches in our cabin. Mrs. Amesbury, a year-round resident of Fitch Mountain, was brave enough to agree. Providing food for seven hungry teenagers was a daunting task, but she had come to know several of us kids in the years we had vacationed at the Murphy (Holdsclaw) cabin. She was wonderful and so was her food.

We had three cars among the seven of us. My brother and I owned a 1931 Model A roadster, with rumble seat. Another boy had a 1934 V-8 sedan, and we had a 1930 Model A station wagon. At least one of the cars was used to run into Healdsburg each day to get provisions, bread, milk, fresh fruit and ice for the icebox, plus other essentials like ice cream and watermelon.

We also had rented a canoe down river at the bridge. We had to draw straws to determine the two who were lucky enough to paddle up river to Del Rio Woods. The two carried it around the dam, and then, two of us would paddle the canoe from the Del Rio beach, so it would spend the night on the beach below the cabin. Each day two of us would paddle the canoe down to the beach by the dam, so it was available as water transportation. The other five of us would walk down the road past the store to get to the beach by the dam. Sometimes, several of us would swim from the beach below the cabin to the Del Rio beach. We'd even swim back up-river in the evening. We were in very good shape, and the rule was that we never swam alone.

Over the years we got to know Mrs. Amesbury's daughter, Mary Katherine. A graduate of Healdsburg High School, Mary Katherine was a student at Cal, in Berkeley during the school year. She spent most of the summer with her mother. MK was an older woman to us, a very lovely girl and danced with us on a few occasions. She had her own canoe and a steady boyfriend, Freddie Lyons from Windsor, whom she met at Cal. We got to know him a little because while he worked during school vacation, he got to Fitch Mountain on weekends. We heard that they married in the early 1940's.

MEMORABLE MILKSHAKES

All of us were fans of the [J. Lee Hoy's] Sanitary Dairy creamery on Healdsburg Avenue in the first block north of the Plaza. They featured what they called 'frozen milkshakes'. Spectacular! They filled the metal milkshake can with scoops of selected ice cream, the flavor syrup and a little milk. Then, instead of putting the can in the Hamilton Beach mixer, it was mixed by hand with a big spoon. The sides of the can would be frosted from bottom to top. The milkshake was so thick that we could turn it upside down for

Continued from page 15

a moment without spilling. We've never forgotten Sanitary Dairy frozen milkshakes in Healdsburg.

About 1937 or '38 Judy Booth Murphy was able to buy a real, if ancient, jukebox for the cabin. Its revolving turntables held just 12, 78 rpm vinyl records. We loaded-up the turntables with big band recordings and a song or two that were on the Palomar jukebox. We didn't have to put dimes in it, so, of course, we played it all day. We had to turn the records over by hand to play the songs on the other side. It kept us busy when we weren't at the beach. It was fun, because we were all big band fans; still are.

END OF AN ERA: WORLD WAR II

Vacations at Russian River came to a halt after 1941. All of who us who had vacationed at the cabin over the years were in the Navy, Air Force, Marines or Army for 4 years. Not all survived the war, including my brother.

In the early 1950s, I was able to bring my wife and two of my

children to Healdsburg, Fitch Mountain and the cabin at Del Rio Woods. We rented a canoe and swam lots. I worked as "tour guide" for my vacation experiences. Mrs. Amesbury was still living up the hill. We had a wonderful time. Also in the early '50s at the cabin, we entertained two couples who were our close friends when we lived in Palo Alto. They loved it, though it took a little time for them to learn the techniques of walking barefoot on the rocky beach. And the river was very good.

TODAY

Much has changed now, of course. There are other owners of the cabin at 2609 Fitch Mountain Road, and it looks well cared for. In the past, we were told that the wonderful redwood tree below the cabin is the largest redwood on Fitch Mountain. I would love that to be true, and perhaps it is. The Palomar looks to be in total disrepair. What a shame. And Healdsburg is quite nice, but missing is the Sanitary Dairy creamery. There is the Golden Gate Bridge now, which makes the trip from San Francisco to Healdsburg quite a bit simpler. The Del Rio Woods swimming hole is now a wading pool, but at least the Russian River is still flowing enthusiastically.