A Century Atop Arcata’s Western Skyline, Part 2
Down the Timeline and the Road

By Sean Kearns

Down the timeline, and the road

During the Depression, the Creamery and the barrel factory, right across 8th Street, kept many Arcatans employed; and, during World War II, the Creamery provided tons of powdered milk to the military.

After serving in the U.S. Army in World War II, Ben Spini, now 93 and living in McKinleyville, returned home and hired on with the Creamery, driving a milk truck from 1948 to 1952. Spini, who just might be the last living person to have worked at the facility, mostly drove the Bayside-Freshwater run, picking up full 10-gallon milk cans from the “milkhouses” and bringing them to the milk-receiving station.

“There were also two routes in the Arcata Bottom,” Spini said recently. “And one in McKinleyville/Dow’s Prairie/Crannell, and one out West End and Blue Lake, and one truck went clear to Orick.... “We could haul something like 80 to 90 cans. During the spring and early summer, when there was a lot of milk, the heavy milking season, I’d have three or four rows of cans on top of
**President’s Message**

*From Alex Stillman*

2017 has flown by, yet there is always something to do to spruce up the museum and raise funds to continue its operation. So, we are planning another sale. This time it’s a **Cultural and Crafts Sale on Saturday, February 17th from 10-2.**

When I traveled, I would buy an outfit, CD’s, postcards, jewelry, books and other souvenirs. I have them in a closet and decided it was time to offer them to the community along with quilting patterns. The list goes on and on. It has inspired others HSSA members to look deep into their stash and come up with items for this event. It will be eclectic and interesting.

The Holiday Tea is always special with wonderful tea goodies and company. Ann McClary enjoyed pouring the tea, and she made sure everyone got their special cup of choice from my teacup collection. Jaffa Dugan used a lot of elbow grease to make the tea service sparkle. Thank you, Ann and Jaffa.

A much-needed museum roof repair happened recently. The roof area between the kitchen and dining room has been completely patched and sealed. The kitchen was a later addition to the house and had started to pull away from the main house. We thank the City of Arcata for the repairs they made two years ago to the foundation.

Madison Hazen, our HSU intern, will continue to assist HSSA this next semester through independent study. She recently met with Andy Alm, our web master, to learn how to add additional photographs to the walking tours. HSSA has photographs of downtown Arcata since the 1970s, and Madison will be adding them to that tour. If you have photographs of homes listed within the three-neighborhood walking tours, please share them with us. Madison will add them to the website and return them to you.

We have a docent training in February. Tamara Wolski and Renee Menge will be joining Ann McClary, Nancy Atkinson, Sherry Eaton, Dan Hauser, John Barstow and Madison Hazen as docents. Our docents, with their knowledge of the house, furnishings, artifacts and local history, make the museum a very special place to visit.
Down the Timeline and the Road (continued)

the other cans.” Any spillage? “Not actually--unless you hit a bump. Then the cans at the back of the truck would bounce up a little and lids would go up and you’d get a spray,” he said. “But we knew our routes and you knew where the bumps were.”

As the drivers picked up the milk every morning, Spini said, they also left the morning’s newspaper on the front porch or in the milkhouse for many of the dairy families who were off the main roads. And, because “the water wasn’t so good out on the Bottom,” every Monday the drivers would also deliver “four, five or six cans of hot, boiled water,” freshly sterilized by plant’s hoses streaming jets of steam into the cans just before the dawn’s departure. They also dropped off orders of butter and cheese for the ranch families; but the drivers were there mainly to pick up milk and deliver it to the plant.

“It was unloaded on the west side,” Spini said. “It’d go on a conveyor belt, and go up the chain, make a right turn, and get dumped into a loading tank. They’d weigh it, take samples, flush it into holding tanks. Some of it would go to several huge butter churns—to make butter—and some of it was made into powdered milk…. Sometimes I’d finish off the day loading 60-pound blocks of butter into refrigerator trucks, and off they’d go to San Francisco.”

The offloading, Spini said, was overseen by Archie Bernardi, who started at the Creamery right out of high school, in 1933, worked there for 26 years, and later became Arcata’s fire chief. Archie’s brother, Emory, “more or less was in charge,” Spini said, and the milk had to pass muster. “We called the inspector ‘The Mugman,’” he said. “If the milk didn’t pass the test, they’d put blue food coloring in it (to mark it unsuitable), and we’d take it back to the ranch, and it’d be given to the pigs and such so it wouldn’t be wasted.”

To power the powderization of milk, wood chips from the barrel factory were conveyed on a belt to the top of the boiler tower, where they were mixed with a diesel-like oil to create a fuel that was burned to turn water to steam—used for power, heating and sterilization. High up inside the factory’s tower, newly conveyed milk was released, left to gravity to fall past “evaporators” that lined the wall. Consisting largely of steam-blasting jets, they instantly transformed the milk cascade into a shower of fine white dust: milk powder. Outside the building, however, the power behind the process emitted a black, oily smoke that settled around town, along with ash from a smattering of teepee burners.

Meanwhile, the emptied milk cans, Spini said, “would go through a revolving can-washer, get hit with steam, and come out the other end clean, and we’d load them back on the truck, ready for the next day…. And we’d wash our trucks daily because all the milkhouses were next to the barns. At some of them, you had to drive right through the barnyard to get to the milk—and you know what that means.”

By the end of the 1950s, Golden State Milk Products was bought by Foremost Dairies, Inc., and the Arcata plant became little more than a regional collecting site where milk was transferred from small trucks into tankers and sent on its way to the main plant in Loleta. By 1959, that reduced role had been milked for all it was worth; and the Creamery complex was sold to the Norris Brothers, a firm of two local lumbermen siblings, Bill and Dick Norris, and their father, Don Norris.

For about 14 years, through the ’60s and into the ’70s, the complex housed various entities, including a truck maintenance and repair shop, building painters, and—most notable to the youth of the era—a roller rink on the ground floor of the former factory building. As tenants shuffled in and mostly out, the structures became used increasingly for storage. (to be continued in the next issue)
Remembering Jessie Turner Woodcock

By Madison Hazen

Sherry and I were passing a slow, chilly Sunday afternoon at the Phillips House Museum nearing three in the afternoon, when, in an attempt to entertain ourselves, I asked if I might look through the books being used as decoration on the dining room table. To our surprise, when I opened them, they turned out to be scrapbooks documenting the fascinating life of a woman named Jessie Tuner Woodcock.

The first scrapbook held Jessie’s parents William and Annie’s marriage records. When they married, he was 24 and she was 16. The record dated to 1892. By now, my interest was peaked, as this was the oldest document I had ever held with my own hands.

Throughout the following pages, Jessie’s life and accomplishments were clearly laid out in a collection of photos, newspaper clippings, and handwritten notes.

Born in Caspar, California on April 1st 1896, Jessie grew up moving around California as her father found work as an engineer on various railroads. She had an older brother, Dewey, and two younger siblings, a brother, William Jr., and a sister, Julia. In 1917 she graduated from the Humboldt Normal School (now Humboldt State University), where she met her husband, Leighton Woodcock of Eureka. Leighton spent the first years of their engagement deployed in the US Navy.

Jessie’s first job was teaching at a one-room Spyrock schoolhouse, located in the remote Eel River Valley. However, as Jessie noted, this was not just her first teaching job, but her only teaching job. As she explained in her oral history interview, she took the job because of limited career paths available to women, “It just seemed like women had to be teachers in those days.”

During the first World War, she accepted a position at the Willits Post Office as a mail deliverer, earning the title of first female mail carrier in the West. While working as a mail carrier she created controversy not only as one of the first women allowed to enter saloons, as she had to deliver their mail, but because she was one of the first women to begin to wear pants. In conversation with the Los Angeles Times in 1986, she said that she couldn’t stand all the dust her dress kicked up so she decided to sew her own uniform with pants.

After Leighton was discharged from the Navy in June of 1921, he and Jessie settled in Humboldt where they were married in June of 1922. While Leighton worked as a butcher for the J.C. Bull Company, Jessie began her long service to Humboldt State.

In 1920, Jessie started working at the newly named Humboldt State Teachers College and Junior College, which shortly afterwards became Humboldt State University, as a Secretary to President VanMatre. However besides being secretary she also handled the budget and registered students.

While working at Humboldt State, Jessie was instrumental in the creation of the Alumni Association in 1924. Under President Swetman, in 1927 Jessie chose to become Financial Secretary, which she devoted ¾ of her time to, and the other ¼ she devoted to her duties as Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds. She later became Comptroller in 1930.

Throughout her time at Humboldt, Jessie went above and beyond her duties, often coming into work on Sundays to “help the janitors get the beds ready.” She was at every student event (sport, drama, music) selling tickets.
She briefly quit her job for six months in 1946 in frustration with the lack of support but was virtually begged to return. During those six months Jessie took a job in town as a bookkeeper, but constantly received calls from the college asking for her help. Eventually she agreed to return.

In 1947, under President Gist, she became Business Manager, which remained her position until her retirement from HSU in 1951. As she wrote in her scrapbook, Jessie was the first woman to hold that position in the state college system.

She proved an invaluable employee to Humboldt State. In fact, she disclosed in her oral history interview that Mrs. Gist still wrote to tell her that she saved the school from closing after the Depression. When Jessie retired, she received an honorary bachelor of the arts degree in Business Administration.

Jessie remained incredibly active after her retirement from Humboldt State in 1951. She worked as a bookkeeper for various local businesses, including the Arcata Union newspaper and the city of Arcata, where she also served as City Clerk.

In 1966, she began to design and build her home in Trinidad where she and her husband resided for the rest of their lives. In her interview with the LA Times, she said that if she had the time to go back to school then, she would have studied architecture.

Jessie was also involved in Order of the Eastern Star for over 50 years. Following her move to Trinidad, she began to serve on the Trinidad Civic Club. Jessie remained involved with the Alumni Association and in 1962 was given the “Who's Who” award, the third alumnus to receive the honor.

When speaking with Alex Stillman, HSSA President, about the scrapbooks and the story they held, I was surprised to hear that prior to being used as a prop in the dining room of the Phillips House the scrapbooks were being stored on the lower shelf on the rolling TV cart.

It is a series of amazing coincidences that brought Jessie’s scrapbooks into my hands. I hope to shine light on the fascinating and accomplished life she led. From her early job as the first female mail carrier to the years of service she dedicated to Humboldt State in order to help it grow into the institution it is today, as well as her many other contributions to the community, Jessie Turner Woodcock is a figure deserving of celebration.

Link to transcript of Jessie’s oral history interview (lots of interesting stuff about politics of early HSU as well as her own life)
http://humboldt-dspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/142108/Turner_Woodcock_transcript.pdf?sequence=1
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