

newsletter Arcata

HISTORICAL SITES SOCIETY OF

History of the Arcata Trail Corridor Part 1

By Jerry Rohde

The Humboldt Bay Trail is the backbone of Humboldt County's envisioned regional trail system, linking the cities of Arcata and Eureka. The project will divert bicycle and pedestrian traffic away from Highway 101, State Route 255 and Old Arcata Road and provide a safe route between Humboldt County's two largest cities. As we watch the trail being built, Jerry Rohde offers a look back at its corridor in the historical report required for construction.



The project area lies along or near the right-of-way of the former Northwestern Pacific Railroad (NWP), running from near a location once known as Normal Junction, adjacent to the state "Normal" School, which later became Humboldt State, south through the city of Arcata and ending at the highwyside business district known as Bracut. The history of railroads in the Arcata area is long and tangled, but a review of the relevant literature reveals that the right-of-ways of at least four other rail lines intersected, and in two cases ran parallel to, that of the Northwestern Pacific. It is thus possible that the project area may include remnant elements of these other rail lines. In addition, four features along the NWP right-of-way have been identified as objects of interest: the bridges over Jacoby Creek, Gannon Slough, and Butcher Slough and a siding remnant north of Gannon Slough. No information was located that would allow dating these features, but it is possible that they contain elements constructed no later than 1901. If the project ultimately uses the alternate route that bypasses the Butcher's Slough railroad bridge, it will run on part of the right-or-way of the Arcata and Mad River Railroad and also past the site of the log dump of the Emerson-Berg Mill. Site inspections have found no evidence of remains of other of these features within the alternate route project area.

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Mark your Calendar



The Bair-Stokes House at the corner of 13th and I Streets has a

lovely horseshoe porch entry. Jerry Rohde has agreed to give us a glimpse into Tom Bair's life at our **Annual Meeting on Saturday, April 13, 2019**. Edith and John Stokes, long time members of HSSA, lived in this beautiful home and raised their four children there. It is the most photographed house in Arcata.

Other 2019 Dates

Sept 7-8 Fiber faire

Sept 14 Phillips house sale

Annual HSSA Holiday Tea



HSSA always looks forward to Ann McClary serving tea in a variety of cups. Thank you to Carolyn Fernandez for the invitation design and Carolyn Otis for the mailing. Such a team!

Kel Loughmiller brought her lovely pink cup to share with us. More photos from the tea on page 3



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Mission

Historical Sites Society of Arcata promotes recognition of the cultural heritage of Arcata and its environs, identifies historical and architecturally significant structures and sites within Arcata planning area and encourages their preservation.

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President's Message

I am sitting at my desk on this windy rainy day, thinking over our past year at the museum, I first wish to thank each and every one of you for being a part of the Phillips House Museum and Historical Sites Society of Arcata. You make the Museum a fun place to be and make it possible to share it with the community.

The National Trust and the Road Ahead Partnership are dedicated to preserving America's Mother Road, Route 66. It was the connector between the east and the west, and as other highways were developed, Route 66 became neglected. It has national treasures of bygone years. How many people drove it their airstreams? If you have taken that route in the past or present, I would love to have your stories to share in this newsletter.

Edie Butler, an archivist who serves on the HSSA board, supervised two interns this fall, and she said they "inched ahead on chronologically sorting incoming correspondence and some of Ruth Horel Caskey's notes". Edie and her volunteers have sorted and shipped numerous boxes of ephemera off to other institutions and still have many boxes to go.

Fiber Faire is on Saturday and Sunday, September 7 and 8, 2019. At our last Board meeting, we decided to continue to sell rug hooking wool and patterns, knitting needles and supplies related to the fiber arts. When Karole Ely and I went to rug hooking camp in Mendocino, we met two rug hookers from Redding and invited them to come and participate in the HSSA booth this year, along with our local rug hookers. If you have craft supplies you no longer need, remember us.

We are planning to have our Vintage Clothing sale on Saturday, September 14, 2019. I love planning ahead in order to prepare for our next event. As this winter progresses and on those rainy and windy days and as you go through your closet, please set aside items for this sale. Thank you.

The rehabilitation of the Chapman House at the corner of 10th and J will be finished in the early spring. I am looking forward to touring it and seeing how the owner, Sandy Hunt, furnished the house. We are so pleased that Sandy has consented to allow HSSA to conduct a tea and tour as a fundraiser there.

If you have fund raising ideas, please let us know.

Alex Stillman

HSSA Holiday Tea



Claire Hanlon
Hashem and Kira Weiss



Karole Ely and Ann McClary

Above: Our "MailChimp" expert, Claire Hashem-Hanlon in the center, visits with (left) Dr. Nadia Froehoing and (right) Dr. Sawar Young-Tripp. Within minutes Tamara Wolski (straightening photograph joined their table. Intern Michele Summer is in the doorway with Sherry Eaton looking at Tamara and Claudia Israel chatting with Linda and O'Rourke Swinney.



Phillips House
Museum on a recent
misty winter morning

From our Intern

During the 2018 fall semester at Humboldt State University, I completed an internship with the Phillips House Museum. As an intern, I mainly worked with Edith Butler an HSSA board member diving into the letters of Ruth Horel Caskey, a previous resident of Arcata who gave HSSA furnishings from her family home, the Horel House and a collection of boxes containing the history of her life. In my first week, we unloaded ten boxes from the upstairs storage closets. The boxes contained documents, pictures, and letters that Ruth Caskey had kept. I organized the letters according to the decade they were received by Ruth. We got to understand aspects of her life, her career, and her friends while she lived in Humboldt County, southern California and Tucson, Arizona. While going through the letters, Edith wanted me to consider what was worth keeping, and possibly using in a future exhibit or logging onto online collections; all documents are logged into the Online Archive of California (OAC). Using the OAC has helped me to understand the online archiving aspect of researching history. I also became a docent, guiding visitors through the Phillips house. Being a docent required a lot of research and memorizing information about the house so that I was prepared to answer questions that visitors had. Another important aspect of the museum was fundraising. The second Friday of each month, the museum participates in Arts! Arcata. I joined HSSA board members in raising money by pouring wine at these events, and we took time to promote the museum; I shared my experiences as an intern and I gave a brief overview of the history of the museum to pique people's interest in visiting and donating to the museum. I also participated in the annual Vintage sale, another fundraising event. The museum collects donations of clothing, jewelry, and kitchen supplies to sell. I was a personal shopper and helped people find items they were interested in; I informed visitors about the importance of the museum and how their contributions help to preserve one of the oldest houses in Arcata. These events allowed me to meet more members of the community and HSSA, and hear about their experiences. I plan on continuing to work at the museum, researching for new exhibitions for the entry hall display case, and being a docent on Sundays. I am very grateful to be on the team that keeps this museum running.

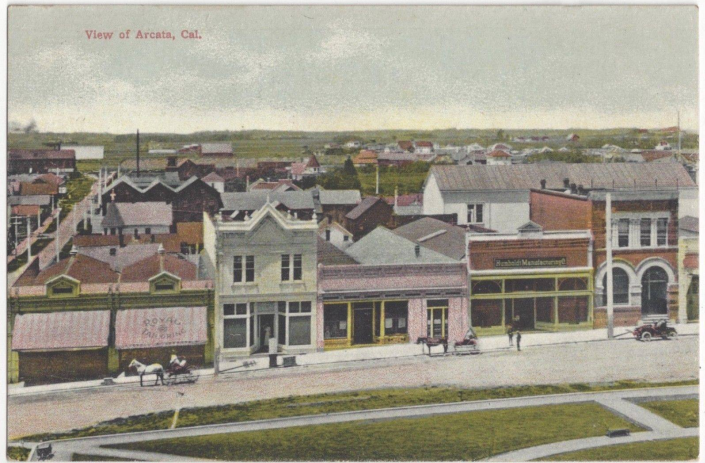


Michele Summer, Fall 2018 intern.

History of the Arcata Trail Corridor (continued from page 1)

A collection of landseekers called the Union Company arrived at the north end of the bay in April 1850 and found a townsite that offered “several natural advantages. To wit:

“It was situated on a beautiful plateau at the head of the bay, and was surrounded by good agricultural and timber lands; but most important of all, it was the nearest point on the bay to the mining district, and therefore offered the greatest promise as the desired shipping point to the mines.”



The town, which was called Union, was one of four founded that month on the shores of Humboldt Bay. By the summer of 1850, Union had 190 residents, including 58 women. The following year, the town finished second to Weaverville in the election for the seat of newly formed Trinity County, as Union divided the coast vote with Eureka and Humboldt City. Near Union, especially to the west and north, were agricultural lands. They “were occupied by permanent settlers as early as 1853”. The town prospered as a shipping center, having developed “good trails leading to both the Klamath and Trinity mines, and was soon without a rival as leader in the packing trade”. By “1854, Arcata [Union] had twelve or fourteen stores carrying large stocks of goods, besides saddle and harness makers, jewelers, gunsmith, tin shop, and several blacksmith and wagon shops all doing an active and lucrative business”.

In 1853 Humboldt County had been carved from the flank of Trinity County. After a couple of elections, Union became the new county’s seat...but not for long. In 1855 Eureka’s Casper S. Ricks defeated Union’s incumbent assemblyman, A. H. Murdock, and a third contender. Almost as soon as the new legislature met in 1856, Ricks



introduced a bill to move the county seat to Eureka. The bill was promptly approved, and Union found itself bereft of the county offices and no longer the center of many activities. Over the next two decades Union/Arcata saw a decline in the packing trade as mining subsided, while Eureka, with easier access to shipping, a greater number of sawmills, and the county facilities, became ever more ascendant. By 1880, Eureka had 2,639 residents, while Arcata (by then no longer Union) could claim only 702. The issue of which was to be Humboldt County’s prime community had long since been decided.

Abetting Arcata’s decline was a series of three major fires that destroyed parts of the business district between the time of the city’s founding and 1880. Flooding then struck the city; in December 1861 a region-wide inundation washed away “four bridges on the stream near Arcata” while the contents of Ament’s storehouse on Daniels Slough (sometimes incorrectly referred to as McDaniels Slough in modern times), including an unspecified amount of hay and “some 250 sacks of potatoes, washed out into the slough”

While Daniels Slough may have been an unintentional conduit for various materials, Butcher’s Slough was purposefully polluted. In the 1870s it served as the city’s sewage outlet to the bay. T. Devlin’s Humboldt Bay Tannery, which began operations about 1866, sat next to Butcher’s Slough on Eighth Street west of the plaza. By 1888 it was processing up to 3,500 hides per year, using 46 vats in the process. Four years later, 115 vats were in use, and hide production had risen to more than 23,000 per year. A news article that energetically described much of the tanning process failed to account for the residue from the vats, but it is likely that the tannery’s

waste conveniently went into the adjacent slough.

The potatoes that washed away down Daniels Slough were probably the “Humboldt Red” variety, a commodity that reportedly made “several fortunes” in the Arcata area from 1868 to 1870. The fertile lands of the Arcata



CA Barrel Factory (Photo from HSU Collection)

Bottom produced yields of up to 300-plus sacks per acre.

Humboldt Reds captured blue ribbons at the state fair, and all went well until a potato blight struck that affected the Reds more than other varieties. Farmers switched to more resistant strains and an attempt to revive the Red in 1889 failed to return the species to its former status.

As packing to the mines diminished as part of Arcata’s commerce, lumbering advanced. Noah Falk headed a group that operated the Janes Creek Mill, located north of Arcata near Camp Curtis. The mill ran from 1869 to 1888, closing when it had cut all the company’s timber. In early 1870 Falk and Isaac Minor established

the Dolly Varden Mill. Falk and Minor then started the Jolly Giant Mill in 1874, which was located in the gulch of Jolly Giant Creek, just north of today’s Humboldt State University. The mill ceased operating in 1885. Of longer duration was the California Barrel Company, Ltd., which began manufacturing its namesake product in southwestern Arcata in 1902. When the company sold its Arcata plant in 1956 to Roddis Plywood, it had 1,125 employees. Roddis subsequently sold to Weyerhaeuser, which in turn sold to the Arcata Redwood Company.

The post-World-War-II housing boom proliferated lumber mills in Humboldt County; many of them were located in the Arcata area. As early as February 1947 Arcata reported “over 30 lumber operations in... [the] vicinity,” many of them in the area north of town along Highway 299 (Humboldt Standard 1947). The increase relentlessly continued so that by 1956, “in and around Arcata...[were] over 50 lumber mills and lumber processing and manufacturing plants that have access to one of the largest remaining stands of timber in the United States.” The timber, transformed into lumber, left Arcata at a dizzying pace: 28,371 railcar loads in 1953, “in addition to the thousands of truckloads transported over the highways.” Also big, in and around Arcata, was agriculture, with “approximately 275 dairy ranches operating within the adjacent area to Arcata, with acreage ranging from 10 to 160 acres.” Stock raising, poultry farms, grain production for stock food, and bulb farms rounded out Arcata’s ranching and farming activity. Still, few Arcatans were likely to quarrel with the city’s slogan: “lumber capital of the world”.

In time, though, the boom stopped booming, and the “lumber capital” saw its domain shrink. Today, less than a handful of mills still operate in the Arcata area—most of them along West End Road north of downtown. Remnants of other sites still exist, however—the most prominent being the levee-encircled marshes that were once log ponds. Other vestiges of Arcata’s past include a string of pilings from the old wharf in varying states of decay, which is best viewed at low tide; numerous large redwood barns that loom like wooden ghosts from the Arcata bottom, their numbers diminishing over the decades; the recycled engine barn of the Arcata & Mad River Railroad, which later served as the repair shop for the local Ford dealer; a cluster of well-maintained business buildings on and near the Arcata Plaza, one of which, the Jacoby Storehouse, saw service back in the pack train days. And, beneath many such sites, or in the nearby creeks and sloughs, the lingering legacy of industrial enterprise still seeps through the embattled environment.

Correction: In the article about fires in the downtown area, Francis Stebbins was identified as the owner of the Fuerwerker Building. The building was actually owned by Jeff Stebbins and his sister Stephanie Stebbins.



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