

Fall 2021

# Arcata

HISTORICAL SITES SOCIETY OF

## What's Next for the Plaza?

Alex Stillman recently shared a few photos of current activity the iconic Arcata Plaza. Here are some photos of the plaza over the years.



Some former plaza residents before McKinley, and the Plaza before his arrival (photos from HSU photo library Ericson photo collections).



McKinley arrives in Arcata



1950s?



Snowy day in 1916



A recent photo (*Northcoast Journal*)



What next? Photos of steps and their excavation and new concrete waiting to be installed. (photos courtesy of Alex Stillman)





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## Mission

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

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## President's Message

Board Member Tamara Wolski was in touch with Pauline Blanks about the Falk Mansion's mantel. Pauline wanted it returned to Arcata and it is now installed in the display room of the Philips House Museum. Photos have been posted on Facebook. *Mad River Union* featured a photo in an October edition of the crew that bought it to Arcata.

The base for the McKinley Statue and granite steps were removed and as I write this message, the supporting infrastructure is gone. There is a dirt circle in its place soon to be covered in concrete.

With the COVID Delta variant in full swing, the HSSA Board felt it was important to close the museum on Sundays in order to protect docents and visitors. We hope to reopen soon.

I received Pam Mendelsohn's annual fund raising letter to honor Peter Palmquist and his involvement in the preservation of historic photographs. This led to books on local photographers. Peter luckily acquired the glass plates of A. W. Ericson's. He reproduced photographs from the collection and many of them are on display in the Arcata Hotel. There was also a photograph of Ericson standing in the doorway of his shop. (see page 5). An article written by Edith Butler, HSSA board member, about Mr. Ericson is also included in this newsletter.

Thank you to Sandy and Scott Hunt for the careful renovation of the Chapman House and welcome to the new owners Shannon and Joel Yodowitz. Shannon graduated from HSU and is glad to be returning to this area

Dan Hauser is in the process of putting the Nixon House on the National Register of Historic Places. It's another Arcata jewel with an interesting story.

Summer has quickly passed, and fall is upon us. Shelley Mitchell informed me that she has time to publish the newsletter because her favorite golf course is closed for reseeding.

Alex

*If you  
haven't already done so, it is time to  
renew your HSSA Membership. Please  
use the form on*

*page 6*



## The Eureka Trolley System

*Bob Felter shared this story from the blog on the Clarke Museum's website (<http://www.clarkemuseum.org/blog/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-eureka-streetcar-system>). It seems "right on track" since there are historic communities who are in the process of restoring their trolley lines to help combat climate change--Alex*

Early Eureka was a small place, locked into its location by the bay on one side and a dense forest on the other. People could walk or ride their horses wherever they had to go. But as the town began to grow in population and physical size with the logging of the neighboring forest and the construction of levees on the bay, a new alternative had to be found for those traveling to the city center from further and further away.

The first streetcars to move through Eureka were horse drawn ones in 1888. The line ran from H Street from fifth out to J Street and was said to be a very popular line. It was operated by an elderly man named Collins. An editorial reminiscing about the line stated that Collins would irritate passengers in the wintertime with "the odor from [his] lunch, particularly the coffee in the thermos bottle. Mr. Collins paid no attention. In 1894 a line was built from 5th street along E street out to the city limits, which at the time was Trinity Street. The streetcar company, named the Eureka Street Railroad Company, came upon tough financial times and on March 30 1897, the horses and rail cars were sold to people in Eureka. However, public transportation was still needed as the area continued to grow. The rights to operate a streetcar line were auctioned off to the highest bidder, who happened to be George Henderson of Oakland.

In 1903, George Henderson was the Vice President of the newly formed Humboldt Transit Company and announced that three electric trolley cars would be arriving in Eureka to whisk the townspeople into a new era of travel. They were described as attractive cars with glass windows on the sides and no windows on the front and back of the cars, allowing the flow of fresh air through the cars, which could seat 50 and supposedly hold a maximum 150 people. The electric streetcar line began operating September 16, 1903 with only slight difficulty. Two cars jumped the tracks on the first day at California and Summer streets. Regardless on that first day of operation, 3000 people, out of a population of 11,000, rode the trolley cars. Talks began almost immediately about adding a line out to Arcata.



Henderson's concern was to continue expanding the trolley lines in Eureka, a concern supported to a great degree by lumber companies in the area, who had built their mills on the far sides of town and needed to be sure that workers would be able to get to the mills for work each day. Within a month, the streetcar line on California was extended from Wabash to Harris Street. Within a year, the E Street line was extended to go from 2nd street to Harris Street. The street lines also ran from Bucksport to Harrison Avenue and from California and Harris out to E Street and from Harris to Sequoia park with a spur on J Street. There were plans to build a streetcar line connecting Arcata and Eureka along the Old Arcata Road (a route that had been surveyed by J. N. Lentell of *Lentell Map* fame. However this route was shot down by the Eureka City Council in fear that the streetcar would interfere with already operating passenger service on the California and Northern Railroad along the Bay. There were also talks about having a line from Eureka to Ferndale.

The streetcars operated without issues for a few decades, however, issues did arise. A girl was standing on the

**"Trolley" (continued)**

tracks one dark and stormy night and was hit north of Harris on E Street. She happened to be the daughter of the superintendent of Jetty Repair, Mr. Powers. He sued the company and won, however the case was appealed and settled out of court. A popular Halloween prank was to grease the tracks and wait for an unsuspecting trolley car. One year, cars went across greased tracks at Harris and Bucksport and the cars jumped the tracks and ended up "many feet beyond the end of the line".

*Thanks to Clarke Board Member and HSU Special Collections Librarian Carly Marino for sending over scans of the Susie Baker Fountain Papers for this article. The Susie Baker Fountain Papers are publicly accessible through the Humboldt State University Special Collections.*

*Thanks also to Morgan Harvey at the Humboldt County Historical Society for sending over the incredibly thorough and helpful Humboldt Historian article named "Streetcar System began with horse-drawn cars" by Lynwood Carranco and scans of tickets*

**Blue Lake Advocate**

**14 December 1912**

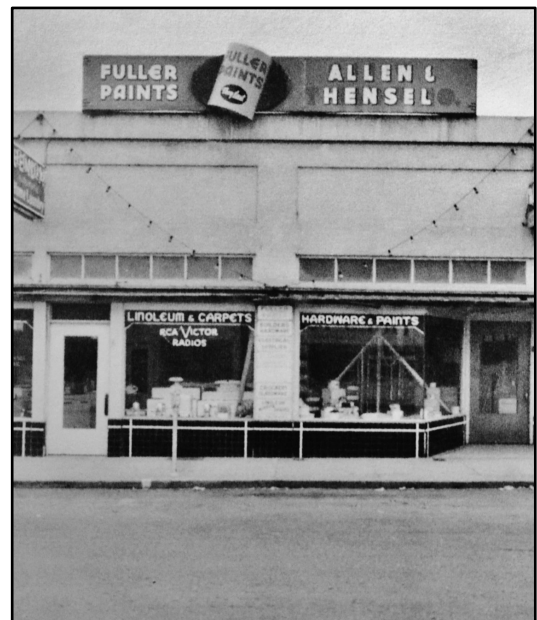
As the result of a riot at a dance at Arcata some two weeks ago when four young men were ordered off the floor for "ragging" and were later arrested for disturbing the peace, it is stated that one of the city trustees has requested A. J. Monroe of Eureka, city attorney of Arcata, to draft an ordinance prohibiting the disgraceful wiggle dances. Other California cities have recently legislated against ragging, Santa Cruz having been the last municipality to place the calisthenic dances on the shelf.

From [Lynette's NorCal History Blog](#)



Pam Ford Cavanagh shared a photograph of Mrs. Hensel's class on Facebook in *Arcata, Back in the Day*. Then it made me wonder if Mrs. Hensel's family owned Hensel's Hardware Store on the corner of 9<sup>th</sup> and I Streets before Pete Hess bought it. The store, pictured at right, burnt in the late 1990s and was replaced by the current building.

Alex Stillman





## A.W. "Gus" Ericson, Photographer

*Many of the historic photos in our newsletter are credited to Mr. Ericson. We recently found this article by Edith Butler, MA, C.A. that can tell us more about who he was.*

Augustus William Ericson (1848-1927) was born in Orebro, Sweden. When he was eighteen Ericson, without his parent's approval, left Sweden and came to the United States. He first took a job in Chicago and then found work in a logging operation in Michigan.

From 1869 - 1876 he lived in Trinidad while working in the Hooper Brothers lumbering enterprise and then in a retail store. Ericson's logging and mill experience gave him a familiarity with the industry that worked to his advantage when he later photographed woods workers, timberlands, and logging technology.

In 1876 he settled in Arcata and started a career as the proprietor of a series of retail businesses. The nature of products and services he marketed changed over the years; first it was pharmaceutical and stationery, later it was a printing service, and eventually it was solely photography. Family members joined the ventures. His brother Richard Ericson (1843 - 1924) joined A.W. upon his arrival from Sweden in 1882. Later Augustus' son, Edgar, (1887 - 1961) joined the business. As Ericson entered retirement Edgar and his sister, Ella Ericson Bryan, took over the business and maintained the Ericson And Company until 1955.

The publication Eureka and Humboldt County by the R.M. Thompson & Co., published around 1896 notes, on page 89, that Richard was also considered a photographer. Newspaper accounts in the Arcata Union during 1908 begin mentioning that Ed (Edgar) was also taking photographs. Earlier accounts noted that Ed accompanied his father on photo taking excursions and later accounts continue noting that Ed was taking photographs. Although Richard and Edgar did take photographs A.W. is the one credited with the vast majority of the images taken outside the studio and as the one with the artistic talent.

Ericson's work was widely published and appreciated during his lifetime. His images of industries, agriculture, and businesses were used for fairs and expositions, school books, literary publications, and civic promotional purposes. Ericson photography is the subject of two books authored by photohistorian Peter Palmquist. Extensive biographical information and northwest California cultural information putting Ericson's work in historical context is available in each, especially Photographers of the Humboldt Bay Region, A.W. Ericson. These works have provided most of the information for this brief biographical note and researchers will find considerable information by consulting these sources

*From the guide to the Ericson Photograph Collection, ca 1885-1930, Humboldt State University Library.*



Left: The crew that transported and installed the mantle from the Falk Mansion into the Phillips House Museum. Brother and sister Jay and Barbara Vanoncin Fields, their cousin Gary Costa and family friend David Armstrong.



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