

REMINISCENCES OF A TOWN
WITH TWO NAMES:
GREENWOOD, KNOWN ALSO AS ELK



GREENWOOD. MILL BEFORE 1906

BY WALTER MATSON

of the 1914 type and had many adventures in it. He particularly liked to chase jackrabbits which was OK if the rabbit stayed on the road; but Brandy would follow them out among the stumps and disaster was the result. The gas tanks on the Model T were under the front seat and flowed by gravity to the carburetor, so a nearly full tank was necessary to get over the steep hills.

The Company Superintendent had a Hudson Super-Six driven first by "Speed" Desmond and later by Bob Ray. Superintendent Collins was driving it when it rolled into the gulch behind the schoolhouse. His two boys were with him. They were thrown out on the first roll near the top but were not injured. The smashed body was stripped off and "Speed" sat on a makeshift seat and took off for San Francisco to get a new body. It looked like a racer and speculation was high among the kids as to how long it would take "Speed" to 'wheel her' to S.F. No one could believe it when he made the trip in six hours.

Matson and Buchanan had the agency for Model T's until 1921 when they sold Maxwells. In 1925 Chrysler bought Maxwells and Chalmers, so Chryslers and Plymouths were sold here. The Model T's and Maxwells had to be driven from San Francisco, and not over 20 to 25 miles per hour as they had to be broken in easy and gradually so that the motor would not be ruined. Some boys were driving Model T's at the age of nine. There were no speed cops or driver's licenses in those days. There were many older cars: E.M.F.'s, Chalmers, Chandlers, Clevelands, Saxons, two Minomonee trucks (for the Company store). All had been trade-ins and were lost in the fire of 1926. They had a Garford (which Jack Dearing still works occasionally on his ranch) that was used for household moving, wood hauling and garbage pickup from the hotel. The garbage was always used for pig feed until the advent of safety razor blades which were thrown in with the hotel garbage. Pigs couldn't seem to digest them and died by the score, until someone performed an autopsy.

Now in 1979, the best part of Greenwood, seventy-eight acres, from the Highway bridge to the ocean and from Greenwood Creek to Li Foo Gulch has been taken by the state for a day use park. Campers and Winnabagos will be parked on the mill site, the dam site and the lumber yard. Fishermen will attempt the rocks on the wharf site. We hope they will respect the ocean as we always have, and also respect other people and their property rights as we have in the past. We hope we won't hear too often that old refrain "You don't realize what you have here and don't know how to take care of it." After five generations of living here, there must be something about Greenwood we like and care for.

GREENWOOD FISHING, 55-60 YEARS AGO

Greenwood Creek was dammed across the mouth when the mill was built in 1890. There were no salmon or steelhead runs until about 1920 when the fish and game authorities forced the Goodyear Redwood Lumber Com-

pany, who had bought out the L.E. White Company in 1916, to put in fish ladders on both dams in Greenwood Creek. In the winter the salmon and steelhead would gang up by the hundreds in a big hole below the dam. After the ladders were put in there were a few fish that made it through the ladders which were not efficiently built — more a token job.

The mill pond and upper stream were full of native trout (brook trout) and afforded daily fishing, after school and all day Saturdays, for the town boys who were the only ones who did any fishing. Workdays were ten hours, six days a week, so few men had any desire to do anything but rest on Sundays. The limit was fifty trout which was easy to obtain. The game warden for the entire coast lived in Fort Bragg. His name was Holmes.

Two or three times each winter several of the men would take a lumber wagon at night after work, drive to the mouth of Elk Creek where, with about two sweeps with a large seine, the wagon would be filled with silver side salmon. A year's supply of salted, smoked and canned salmon for the family was involved.

Fishing in winter in Elk Creek for grilse with bamboo poles was great sport for youngsters. The Company store sold small bamboo poles for creek fishing for twenty-five cents and large poles suitable for ocean fishing for fifty cents. Such equipment was not the best for holding a ten to twenty pound steelhead that would occasionally take the trout bait. The fisher lad would lose his line leader, hooks and sinker which was a costly tragedy for him. One day a visitor showed up at our favorite fishing hole in Elk Creek. He fished for steelhead with hook and line. He caught several. That started all of us saving our money for steel telescope poles and reels and stronger lines. The poles cost about one dollar and a half. Prior to this demonstration, whenever we fished for the larger fish we caught them going up the riffles and speared them, often using a pitchfork. We also had spears made for us by the local blacksmith. We took in a worn pitchfork with the tines intact, and he would hammer out a spear in a few minutes — no charge.

A pole ten to twelve feet long would be given to us out of the picket room at the mill. We always tried to spear a fish in the head or tail so as not to spoil and tear the meat. Spearing was legal — both jack-lighting at night and spearing by day, until 1932-33. During the depression enforcement of game laws was rather slack. Jack-lighting on the small streams was done with a gasoline lantern wired into a five-gallon kerosene can for a reflector. On the Garcia River a boat was used with an iron strap basket hanging over the bow, filled with burning pitch. The boat had to be sculled to give the two spearers room to spear. It was always an exciting kind of fishing.

When fishing up stream in Elk Creek we could always count on a ride home on the section crew hand car. Frank Lagreen was the section boss, one of many who was always good and helpful to everyone, especially the younger folk.

Stevenson's Flat and Pigeon Hole were as far upstream as we fished on a Saturday on Elk Creek, and above the old mill to Camp A on Greenwood Creek. Later when we had cars we fished up Alder Creek for several miles to the falls where the steelhead ganged up. It was very interesting to watch them jumping at the falls. Some fish made it.

When the mill pond was drained periodically, trout by the hundreds were left stranded in the puddles and were picked up by the bucketful by those who didn't mind slipping and sliding around in the mud. The trout were so plentiful they were often used for bait for halibut and cod fishing outside, as deep water ocean fishing was called.

Outside fishing for bottom fish to supply the camps, cook-house and Company Hotel was done first by "Kanaka" John and later by Archie "Squiss" Olsen. "Squiss" had two set-lines with two hundred hooks on each line. The lines were soaked in tan bark liquid to prevent rotting. Bait used was shiners, a fish about the size and shape of a silver dollar. These fish were caught in the spring by making a circle from the beach with a large net. In one sweep you would bring in enough to last all summer for fishing. They were salted down in ten-gallon kegs.

"Squiss" used a rowboat and would row out about a mile before starting to fish after putting out the set lines. Before long he bought an outboard motor which made for a longer day's fishing as well as saving a lot of labor over the oars. He always had room to take a boy along. He was a good guy but a wild man when drinking. He was big and strong, over six feet tall and weighed about two hundred and twenty five pounds. His favorite sport, when drinking, was attempting to clean out the Italian bars in town.

On one Sunday trip, outside, a man named Charlie Peterson was one of the fishermen. He brought a large ling cod up on his line. As the fish broke water it shook the hook loose. Charley made a grab for the fish but unfortunately shoved his right hand in the fish's mouth. Cod have long, sharp teeth and it closed down on his hand. His reaction, of course, was to draw his hand back. It made a mess of his hand and he had to be taken to Dr. Sweet to have it dressed. On another trip out, after setting the set lines, a northwestern began blowing. It kept blowing harder, and he had to abandon one set of lines and make a run for the harbor. The next day it was still blowing, and the ocean was getting rougher. "Squiss" got a friend who kept a gasoline launch on the wharf to take us out to look for the set line. We never found it. The launch owner got seasick, because of the weather, and also he had spent the previous day and evening on Vinegar Ridge.

Abalones were plentiful. The only beach we avoided was the one back of the old schoolhouse, because of the closeness to home and the shortest pack. The limit was ten and seven inch size. We always took the larger ones because they were so plentiful. The blacksmith made our bars or allowed us to use the forge. The bars were about three feet long, flat on one end with a hook on the other end. Most of the abalones taken were pulled off with the hook end. No one so much as got his feet wet.