

Crannell-Big Lagoon--Modern Logging

Town And Camp Combine Effort On Far-Flung Job

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PHOTOS BY DICK RYAN

Hidden in the hills, some two miles inland from Highway 101, and twenty miles north of Eureka, stands the town of Crannell. It occupies a beautiful setting, at the upper end of that valley where Little river comes down from the timber glades and dawdles on its last lap to the sea. And at one time it was the most active mill and railroad center on the California coast north of Humboldt bay.

Now, as a link in the Hammond Lumber company's north coast operations, it is a residence town for a population of some 500 and a transfer point from truck to rail. Gone is the big mill that at one time was the center of Crannell's activity—for in later days it was found more practical to haul logs to the company's headquarters mill at Samoa. Gone is the railroad that, until recently, climbed out of Crannell into the headwaters of Maple creek and Little river in its rugged journey after redwood logs . . . gone because of the carelessness of a couple of hunters who did not put out their fire. Only the railroad that runs to Samoa remains, and monstrous trucks now bring the logs down from the hills.

History strides through Crannell's steep streets—drama, the vision and dreams of men . . . and the fateful year of 1945, when fire destroyed much of the Little river watershed and the heart of Hammond's railroad. Twice tragedy struck during that period, for Len Hammond crossed the Great Divide and an understanding heart was gone.

THE WILL POWER OF MEN
The workings of men may be destroyed, but not the workings of their minds. Before the hills had stopped smoking, they were at it . . . men like Earl Birmingham, Waldron Hyatt and a legion of determined co-workers. All the high trestles that made railroad-ing possible were gone. The cost of replacing them was prohibitive. Very well, then—they would tear up the remaining rails and convert the right-of-way into roads. For the day of the diesel engine was here. Steam was no longer rex magnus. Long ago, diesel had proved its case in the woods. Now it would do the heavy hauling of the railroad.

And it was done. No longer does the bark of locomotive echo through Little river and Maple creek canyons. The rumble of the diesels has replaced it—each a unit unto itself, now, instead of a locomotive and a long string of cars. Let one truck be disabled and the rest of the operation carries on. No longer can a derailment—the curse of logging railroads—hold up the job. And so the changeover has had its compensations, albeit the song of the rails lingers in men's minds.

But at Crannell, the change back to rails takes place. There, a diesel-driven donkey rig lifts huge redwood logs off trucks as though they were toothpicks. It swings them through the air and lays them gently upon flatcars, where they are made fast for the final journey to Samoa and the sea. Fifty or 60 cars are loaded in a day, and twice daily a train of empties comes up for more. But the locomotive doesn't wait. It hooks onto a long string of loaded cars and winds down Little river valley and away—a single power unit hauling the loads from half a hundred trucks—while back into the hills scuttle the smaller carriers to gather more loads. And you derive a certain satisfaction in knowing that King Steam still rules over part of his domain in this era of overthrown dynasties.

Crannell got its start soon after the turn of the century when Levi Crannell and associates, of Toronto, Canada, began operations there as the Little River Redwood Lumber company. The town originally was called Bullwinkle, after a pioneer who had homesteaded in the fertile Little river valley before the lumber industry came in.

The Little River company purchased much of the Bullwinkle lands but two of his grand-nephews, Jack and Bill Balke, still live near Crannell. About 1930, when the Crannell interests were expanding farther, the town's name was changed.

Levi Crannell's death, according to local information, occurred in 1927. The depression all but stopped operations and in 1931 the Hammond Lumber company purchased the Little River company's holdings—town, railroad, mill and all—and the enterprise became known as the Hammond Little River Redwood company. Later it was changed to Hammond Lumber company.

A LOOK AT THE TOWN
With its picturesque background, which includes a fine fishing stream right through its middle, Crannell would seem more like a resort town than a hub of industry. Rows of neat white houses look down upon Little river and across at the wooded hills. And in its very center, to which all streets go, stands the rather impressive Crannell store.

Although Crannell's population is stationary, its store is a trading point for the surrounding area as well, and it carries a wide variety of merchandise. Its owners, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Gregory, who formerly operated the business for the Hammond company, feel justly proud. Associated with them are their son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Einar Tanner, as well as several on the sales staff.

Einar Tanner, who has been in the merchandising game only since returning from service during the war, is a man who likes his job, town and countryside. "The more I saw of the rest of the world," he says, "the better Humboldt looked. This is as far as I go . . ."

"The store? We have everything—clothes, drugs, bakery, market—and if we don't have it, we'll get it, but fast."

Crannell's school is on a hillside, overlooking Little river valley. It has 157 pupils, according to Principal Kenneth C. B. Williams, and 5 teachers, including himself. Principal Williams also is in charge of the school at nearby Trinidad, which has an additional 75 pupils and 2 teachers.

"We are planning a big new school at Trinidad," Williams says. "When it is completed, this school and Moonstone Beach will merge into the new institution, with a bus service for all the surrounding countryside."

Crannell is a company-owned town and only Hammond employees live there. Most of the men work in the woods, many as far up as the Big Lagoon operations. The railroad formerly operated a train from Crannell back into the hills, where logging operations were under way, but now most everyone goes by company-run buses that run in and out of town over much the same route.

BIG LAGOON CAMP
As logging operations shifted ever farther north—particularly after the 1945 forest fire—Hammond's new community at Big Lagoon has taken an stature. By highway, it is some 16 miles from Crannell. The Hammond company, however, does all its hauling over its own and shorter road, rebuilt through the hills from the former railroad right-of-way. This route is closed to public travel.

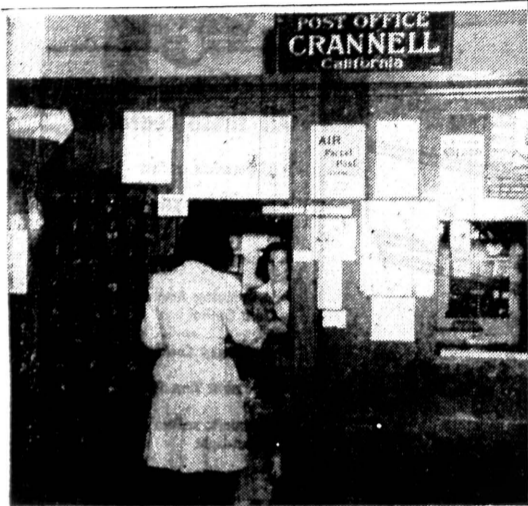
At one time there was talk of gradually shutting down Crannell and building an entire new town at Big Lagoon. Due to the excellent road facilities between the two places, however, that plan has been abandoned, and the two operations are linked together as a unit comprising the total north coast woods activities.



Crannell and background afford a beautiful view from hillside above town.



One of Crannell's scenic and sylvan homes.



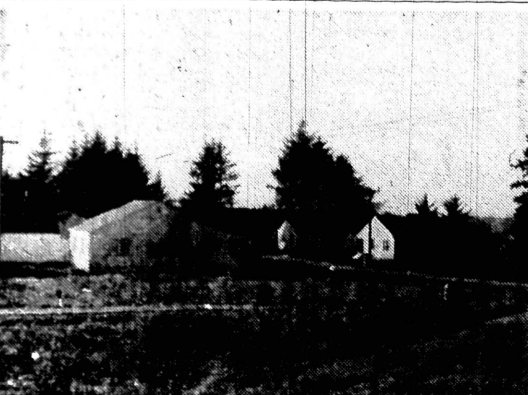
Postmistress Helen Heitman on job, Crannell.



Tony Gabriel, Big Lagoon Camp's famed chef.



Students Jesse Kuffel (left) and Raymond Figueroa mark basketball court, Crannell school.



Hammonds are erecting good modern homes at Big Lagoon camp

areas. The camp contradicts its name, however, for it is a very permanent appearing enterprise.

Along its main street are the company office, mess hall, and a group of 24 four-room bachelor cabins. On side streets nearby are nine new modern homes of five and six room capacity, and more are to be built during the coming season.

Just beyond the office and residential part of the camp is a large shop, completely equipped for maintenance work on the fleet of diesel trucks that haul logs from the woods. The road to Crannell intersects at this point.

On what was formerly a meadow used for pasturing cattle down by the lagoon, a great dike has been built. Behind this is a log pond, fed by the waters of Maple creek. This is used as a storage reservoir, and in it some 40,000-000 feet of logs can be held until needed. Thus, there is always a reserve for the mills at Samoa.

A LOOK AT BIG LAGOON
Superintendent of the Crannell? Big Lagoon operation is Waldron Hyatt, while Fred Georgeson is in charge of the camp's office. The entire logging job, from tree to mill, is done on Hammond's property, Fred says. No Hammond log truck ever "sets foot" on a public highway. All the heavy-duty hauling is done over the company's own roads. In fact—and for that reason—the trucks are too large to travel on highways. And, of course, from Crannell on, the hauling is done by the company's own railroad. Thus, the public traveling on highway 101 never sees a single Hammond log from the north coast job.

"We're logging some 250,000 feet per day now," Fred explains, "and we will raise it to 500,000 feet during summer. If we tried to haul all that over the highway—well, you can imagine what a jam it would be. We couldn't do it, that's all . . ."

Logging is going on about three and a half miles back in the woods from Big Lagoon camp, Fred says. Buses not only transport employees into the woods, but also to Samoa and Eureka daily, via Arcaja. These vehicles stay with the woods crew all day in case of emergency, and bring them to camp for lunch.

The company estimates about 35 years of redwood logging in the Big Lagoon area. There are heapy stands of fire there also, and it is planned to log these perpetually, on a sustained basis.

BEST FOOD IN STATE!
Men who work hard on woods jobs want food—good food and plenty of it. And Tony Gabriel, who is in charge of the commissary at Big Lagoon, knows how to supply just that.

A veteran chef, who has been with Hammond's since 1920, and whose father retired in 1931 after 23 years' service as chef at Samoa, Tony can be called a past master at his profession. In other words, Tony knows his stuff—as a pair of hungry newspapermen who were treated to a delicious lunch, can testify.

The mess hall at Big Lagoon Camp will feed as many as 120 men during summer, and is feeding some 60 now. You have heard the expression "clean as a dairy lunch." Well—you should see Tony's kitchen. And everything in it is right up to the minute, with mechanical gadgets to peel potatoes and carrots, mix doughs, batter, and mash potatoes—as well as the best in automatic dish-washing machines. It is out of this world.

When a visitor raved over a pie crust that fairly melted in his mouth, Tony smiled indulgently. "Well, they say it is as good as any in Humboldt," he replied. "But—" "Humboldt?" interrupted his guest. "Man, you're modest. That's the best in California!"



Interior view, Crannell store, showing scope of merchandise.



More like a vacation resort than town—street in Crannell



Big Lagoon Camp's log pond holds a half year's reserve



Clean and well-kept bachelor cabins, Big Lagoon Camp.