

Humboldt Ferns And Greenery Big Sellers In Cities To South

Eureka and Del Norte Men Have All They Can Do to Fill Heavy Demand

By CHET SCHWARZKOPF
Photos by DICK RYAN

There is an industry in Humboldt which—like Topsy—has "just grown," until it now employs 75 people most of the time, and brings in a gross revenue of better than \$250,000 per year.

That industry is the business of gathering ferns, salal, and choice redwood sprigs for the wholesale florists in Los Angeles and San Francisco. For Humboldt and Del Norte counties, with their abundant greenery in both the mountains and valleys, have proved an inexhaustible source of just what is needed for decorations of varied types in the two big cities. Here indeed is a "natural."

The business—like most unique ventures—started slowly. An enterprising group of Italians, headed by R. "Rosy" Rosaia of Eureka, first experimented with the idea as far back as 1923. They shipped a few hales now and then by water, and gradually the idea took.

Before long, the demand increased, and it was found that rail shipments were more prompt and got the greenery to its destination in better shape. Well and good—the railroad did the hauling.

Then, with trucks and highways developing ever better, Rosaia and his associates decided to do their own hauling and delivering. So in 1930, they started their first truck

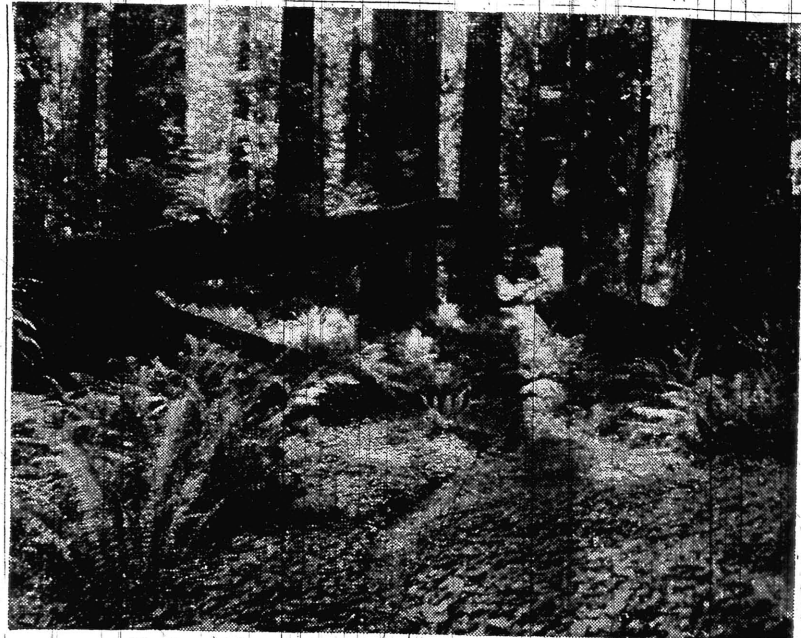
service from Eureka to San Francisco, with transfer to Los Angeles.

Now, the business has grown so big that the several partners and producers find they have all they can do to keep up with their orders. So a truck line from Santa Cruz—Dean and Woodward—hauls all their product from Eureka direct to any destinations in the state without transfer.

Twice a week the big diesel rig call at Rosaia's storage depot on the southwest corner of Sixth and A streets, and load an average of 10 tons of baled ferns, salal, and redwood greens. And more than 25 pickup trucks converge there to deliver cargo.



John Marcuz carries bale of valuable salal out of ravine.



The fern pickers work amid beautiful surroundings out of doors.

WHAT AND WHERE

Everyone knows what ferns and redwood are, but what is salal? The boys pronounce the word more like "shell-all," and no dictionary could give a clue. Sure, a number of Humboldters recognized the plants when shown them—it looks like orange or lemon tree leaves—but how to spell the word, they didn't know. But Botanist Joe Tracy, at the Belcher Abstract company, solved the problem.

"It is a contraction of the Indian name for that shrub," he explained, as he spelled it out for us. "That's why the pronunciation threw you off. Its beautiful waxy-green leaves do not wilt so readily as citrus leaves, hence it is much in demand. . . . So now you know about 'salal.' Pronounce it any way you like!"

The greenery is tied in 100-pound bales, secured by light rope, and very expert the boys have become at gauging weights out in the hills or fields. The precious salal and ferns are protected by an outer coat of redwood—or if that is not available back in the hills, the bales are wrapped with smaller-leaved shrubs that are comparatively valueless, except as a protector.

"We have lease agreements with the Hammond and Pacific Lumber companies, the California Barrel company and others, as well as with several private landowners," Rosy explains. "We harvest all the way from Scotia to Crescent City, as well as many miles back in the mountains. We pay as we pick, you might say, and we have paid as much as \$18,000 for a year's picking rights. "Ferns and redwood we get along the coast—much of it at big Lagoon. But for the salal, the boys have to go quite a ways back. Here, I want you to meet Al Manighetti. He's one of several partners who ship their greenery out of Eureka. He can tell you more . . ."

Grey-eyed, husky Al Manighetti is glad to oblige. "Most of our output goes to Los Angeles," he explains. "It is so dry down there that almost none of this kind of green stuff will grow. We sell to San Francisco, of course. That's where we got our start. But they can get considerable greenery around Santa Cruz so, as I say, most of our trade now days is with Southern California. "We use our own light trucks to gather the stuff up here. You can't get big rigs back where we have to go. Meet us tomorrow on the Dewey Dorf ranch, and we'll show you how the job is done."

Up highway 299—the former "Lord Ellis" road—to the ridge at the headwaters of the north fork of Mad river. There you turn right, and in a good mile's running you arrive. The scenery is beautiful. There has been snow, and some of it lingers on neighboring ridges. The air smells clean and fresh from conifer woods, and you take deep breaths for the joy of it.

Al and his crew, John Marcuz, Louis Senini, and Vic Scuri, had left Eureka at 7 o'clock in the morning. Down the Barrel company's road, past Dewey Dorf's summer home, you hike. There you find them lugging bales of salal up from the draw below.

"Salal seems to be the stuff they want," pleasant-spoken John Marcuz explains. "We still sell large amounts of ferns—probably half—but the demand for salal is increasing all the time."

He pauses to wipe his brow. "Sure is a nice day, but in the winter we sometimes take a beating. Have to buck through snow, and get stuck in the mud. Yes, we operate the year 'round. Business has increased so much that we about have to."

"It's pleasant work, though," observes co-worker Louis Senini. "We're out of doors where it's healthy, and we do enough hard work to keep in shape, without killing ourselves. And best of all

—we're our own bosses. When we feel like knocking off for lunch, we do . . ."

"Last winter's cold weather has hurt the salal, as well as slowing down the ferns," John adds. "Look at this." He shows you a sprig of salal whose leaves are spotted with rust-like speckles on their under-parts. "That stuff is worthless. That's why we have to lug so much of it up from the draw. It was better protected down there, and the leaves stayed more green."

The pickers use a medium-heavy set of nippers to cut the stems off clean, and it is surprising how quickly they can gather an armful of shrubbery or ferns. "You get expert at it after a while, of course," Louis observes. "The problem just now is to find stuff that's fit to pick. A little later—say about June—and there'll be lots of it. One thing sure—we'll never run out. Both ferns and salal grow faster than ever we can pick them."

Most of the men who contract with the San Francisco and Los Angeles wholesale florists are from Eureka, you're told, but there are also several from Crescent City and Fort Dick who deliver to the Sixth and A streets' depot.

Among the Eureka contractors of greenery are: Nick Del Carlo, Joe Mori, Johnnie Gaggero, Joe Raffaelli, A. Sestini, Adolf Viviani, and others—as well as Al Manighetti and his co-workers.

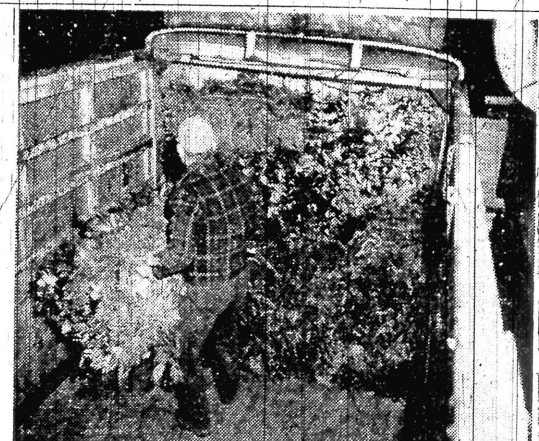
THERE'S MONEY IN IT!
And so, you've been introduced to another of Humboldt's varied businesses—one which has plugged along and grown into a worthwhile game with no promotion or publicity. They ship 20 tons of green stuff per week, for an average intake of \$5,000 per week—while out in the hills and woods, Nature more than keeps pace with them.

No one is the loser. No natural resources is being depleted. And a group of industrious men are making a good living working with their hands and heads. It is another of those limitless oppor-

tunities whose sum total spells America.



Onto the conveyor in Eureka warehouse.



And into the big truck for Los Angeles



Louis Senini (left) and John Marcuz load pickup truck back in hills.

RELIABILITY . . .

While age is not necessarily a criterion of quality, you will usually find that those that have served the public the longest, have learned how to serve best. Ocean View rendered its first service in December of 1891 and continues to serve an ever increasing number of Humboldt's families annually.

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LEGAL NOTICES

NO. 10238

NOTICE TO CREDITORS.
In the Superior Court of the State of California, in and For the County of Humboldt.

In the Matter of the Estate of MARY M. DICKSON, Deceased.
Notice is hereby given by the undersigned, Jessie D. Shaffer, as Executrix of the Last Will and Testament of Mary M. Dickson, deceased, to the creditors of and all persons having claims against the said deceased, to file them, with the necessary vouchers, within six months after the first publication of this notice, in the office of the clerk of the Superior Court of the State of California, in and for the County of Humboldt, or to exhibit them, with the necessary vouchers, within six months after the first publication of this notice to the said Executrix at the office of her attorneys, Messrs. Hill and Hill, 309 Professional Building, Eureka, California, the same being her place of business in all matters connected with the said estate of Mary M. Dickson, deceased.
Dated March 11, 1949.

JESSIE D. SHAFER,
Executrix of the Last Will and Testament of Mary M. Dickson, Deceased.
HILL & HILL,
Attorneys for Executrix.
3/12-20-27-4/3-10 (T)

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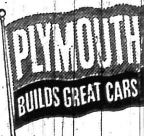
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