HUMB. CO. COLLECTION C.2
Fieldbrook
LIBRARY, HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

Fieldbrook--A Lilt Of Ireland Stays

The Christie home is a Fieldbrook landmark.

Hidden Valley of Lindsay Creek Rich In Erin's Lore

By CHET SCHWARZKOPF
Photos by Dick Ryan

Fieldbrook is located in the upper end of Lindsay creek valley, some seventeen miles from Eureka. Thus it is described in prosaic words. Actually, it is a cloistered community in a hidden valley whose beauty—like many another Humboldt scene—beggars description.

To get to it, you turn off Highway 101 onto the Blue Lake and Redding road, just north of Arcata. At Lindsay creek bridge, some three miles up Mad river valley, you turn left where a modest sign says Fieldbrook. And then, in a hundred yards, you leave the world behind. Thenceforth, for several miles you travel through sylvan scenery as the road winds through woodlands where surely the elfin fays must hold moonlight tryats.

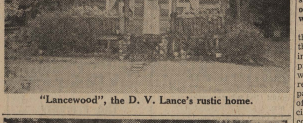
A number of rustic and lovely homes are in the glens along the road. The all-protecting hills rise in back, while you get an occasional glimpse of the rolling sweep of Lindsay creek valley across the way.

Much remains to be done here the road needs work, and some of the places could do with a bit of improvement. But the over-all picture is breath-taking. For here, within a few minutes' run of Eureka and Arcata, is a secluded paradise that awaits only the touch of the homebuilder who appreciates natural environment. Here could be another of those suburbs that make life so attractive in Humboldt. Land with all manner of trees, together with tiny trickling streams, is still available. There's many a site where a person could put up a small dam and create his own trout pond. And what more could you ask!

"Lancewood", the D. V. Lance's rustic home.

HISTORICAL NOTES

Fieldbrook is comparatively new, having been started in 1902. But the activities in Lindsay creek valley date back many years before then. The valley was originally owned by a man named Bill Lindsay who, according to old-time residents, was there in the 1860's, and who was drowned in Lindsay creek while looking for Indian war relics. In fact, in the days before Fieldbrook, the valley had had its share of Indian troubles.



The Glenn Timmons' comfortable ranch home.

In the first 1870's, John Vance, who did so much to develop the redwood lumber industry in Humboldt, bought out the Lindsay interests, and started a mill in the lower end of the valley, near the present Blue Lake highway. Three houses that he built still stand along that highway, below Lindsay creek bridge. Vance later built a railroad from Arcata to his mill, but by 1875, operations were under way.

Those were the days when they hauled huge logs over skid roads by ox team power. What a sight that valley must have offered, for it towered one of the heaviest stands of timber found on earth! And down its middle, between the great trees, trickled a cold, clean stream that swarmed with speckled square-tail trout. The trout were big, too, according to early accounts; and during high water, runs of salmon and steelhead came up from Mad river. Busy though men were, they realized that this was an elysium. And maybe that was why it attracted so many Irish!

The Louis Smith residence has individuality.

THE LILT OF IRISH LAUGHTER

Before the turn of the century they started coming in—those sturdy young men and their brides, from the north of Ireland. And they contributed a romantic chapter to the days of John Vance, and later, when Hammond's and the Dolbeer-Carson company took over.

There was Alex Christie, who first worked for the Vance interests in the early '90's, and then took off for the Klondike gold rush in 1898. Four years he was in Alaska. Then to Humboldt he returned, bought an 80-acre ranch in Lindsay creek valley—and went back to Ireland to claim his bride!

Sarah Christie still lives on the family ranch, near Fieldbrook, where she and Alex ran a fine dairy for many years and raised their family. A gracious lady, she is, with a bit of old Erin engraved in her speech and a hospitable welcome to the caller who would ask questions about Fieldbrook.

"I came here in 1902," she reminisces. "Fieldbrook was just getting started, then, and a lively town it was. For it was being settled by both the Irish, and the blue-noses from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Poland's shingle mill was running, and Carsons had started logging in the upper valley. So Fieldbrook was the center. At that time it was being advertised as the coming factory town of Northern California, and lots were selling right and left.

Oil? Fieldbrook's well is down 1500 feet.

"There was quite an Irish set here—most of us from North Ireland. There were the Jim Hutchinsons, Hugh McCurdys, Charlie Watson, and the Jim McCloskeys, Mahans, Doyles—and Mike Levy! Sure, and he was Irish, too!"

Today, those names are a fundamental part of Humboldt—names that played their part in the Land of the Giants—the land of Red Bunyan!

There's Jim Hutchinson, now living in Eureka, who came here in 1894, on the old steamship Humboldt, and who first went to work at Minor's mill in Glen Essex. Later, he worked for the Vance brothers, and later for Carson's. Jim owned a ranch at Fieldbrook from 1905 to 1918, and it was there most of his family were born.

"I saw the first fires lighted at Samoa right about the turn of the century, when the Vances moved the Minor mill over there," Jim recounts. "And in 1897, we shipped a 15-foot diameter piece of redwood to England, where they made a table out of it. George Maxwell and Billy McQuarry cut that one. It had to be a solid and perfect piece of wood for the job."

After moving to Eureka in 1918, Mr. Hutchinson worked at Samoa until his retirement in 1937.

Jim and Esther McCloskey live in Lindsay creek valley, near Fieldbrook, on the ranch of their son-in-law, Glenn Timmons. They came to Humboldt from Ireland in 1888, and Jim worked for John Vance, and later for Hammond's.

"We had a grand bunch here in thos days," says Jim with a twinkle of a smile. "Those Irish lads, and the blue-noses, were hardy men. And John Vance treated his men right. We had the best cooks money could hire—and if anybody kicked about the chuck, we got a new cook fast!

"So Jim Hutchinson told you about that redwood they sent to England, eh? You know, those people over there didn't believe there was timber that big. An Englishman in Humboldt shipped it over to collect on a bet. He said they could seat 100 people around it. I don't know about that—but he collected!"

FIELDBROOK TODAY

Fieldbrook stands near the road's end in Lindsay creek valley. Most of the new growth and hustle that has hit Humboldt seems to have passed it by, but you get the impression that here is a place that is due to come into its own. It has everything—location, climate, environment. Some day, they tell you, the road will be put through to join Highway 101 at Dow's Prairie, and Fieldbrook's comparative isolation will end. They want that road, and its completion will mean much. For Fieldbrook in a way, remains undiscovered—but things are apt to happen!

For they are drilling an oil well near the community's center now, and if that should prove up . . . things WILL happen. Barnes and Shadrick, of Bakersfield, are doing the job, and they are down 1,500 feet now. They have had a rough time since the 1,200 foot level for they have had to grind through sheer granite rock. And that has been rough on a light rotary rig, driven by Ford V-8 engines. But they are through the rock now, and feel the worst is over.

Needed now is a heavier rig to plumb greater depths. Somewhere beneath Humboldt is a great oil pool. Geologists agree on that. The question is WHERE? The Fieldbrook well has hit encouraging gas pockets several times. And so, the community watches with baited breath.

Let's drop in and see George Abbott, who is an authority on Fieldbrook. Everyone in Humboldt remembers 'Tiny' Abbott, George's towering son, who won lasting fame as a heavyweight boxer by defeating Max Baer in Eureka before Max became world's champion. Tiny was born in Fieldbrook, and now is employed at Mare Island Navy yard, at Vallejo.

Fieldbrook once had three stores, according to George, and also a hotel which was built by John Vogt. Its first postmaster was Loren Yost, a Spanish War veteran now living at Troy, Ohio.

"There were three shingle mills and two logging camps—Carson's and Hammond's—here at one time," George states. "Fieldbrook was first known as Buckman Prairie, after a pioneer who was killed by Indians here. It was started as a town after the Hammond Lumber company bought out the Vance interests in 1901. A man named Murphy promoted it, and they were going to give away a $3,000 house and lot as part of the job.

"We had two passenger trains daily to Eureka and Trinidad, and there was a depot here. The railroad first was named the Eureka and Klamath, and later the Oregon and Eureka. But 'most everybody called it the Jim Buck. It came up from Arcata via Mad river valley, then over the hill to what is now Cranmell, thence to Trinidad. It's all gone now, but the old right-of-way is still used as a road. Part of that could be used now to connect Fieldbrook with Highway 101.

Do you remember the big redwood stump that was exhibited in the San Francisco World's Fair in 1915? Well, that came from this valley. One stump here had a diameter of 22 feet."

Buckman's Prairie, where Fieldbrook is located, was a natural clearing, according to Terry Anderson of Eureka, who was raised in Fieldbrook. For that reason, the site was selected for a town. And you can visualize what a promising place it must have appeared, with its depot, hotel, and stores—all of which have been torn down.

"One man lived in a huge, hollowed out stump," Terry recalls. "And the place must have been all elks' paradise before the white man came. We kids used to find their horns all over the valley. There was a big log pond in the lower valley, near the old Vance mill, and we used to get some walloping cut-throat trout out of there.

FIELDBROOK'S SCHOOL

Erected when the town was started in 1902, Fieldbrook's school is kept right up to the minute, and now has 49 pupils in attendance. Principal is Mrs. Sarah McCurdy, daughter of Mrs. Christie, and who attended the school as a youngster. With her is Mrs. Ruby Montgomery, and the two ladies handle all eight grades.

"Quite a growth has come to Lindsay creek valley since 1943," Mrs. McCurdy says. "We had twenty pupils then, but have more than doubled since the logging and mill activity resumed. There are more people hereabouts than you first realize."

Again, as is the case in so many Humboldt rural schools, the observer is impressed with the beautiful setting and the good fortune of the children who are having a chance to learn their three R's there, instead of being crowded into the cities.

Fieldbrook Community club was founded in 1924, according to Mrs. Regina Schneider, twice its president. The club is a ladies' organization and has taken an active part in community projects, and school improvement. Mrs. Scheitter came to Humboldt from Switzerland in 1894, and has lived in Fieldbrook since 1903.

TWO BIG RANCHES

In Lindsay creek valley, below Fieldbrook, Glenn and Otis Timmons own 2,000 acres of the most beautiful land in Humboldt. On it, they raise fine Hereford cattle and Dorset sheep. Through their ranch runs the old railroad right-of-way, now used as the ranch's principal road, while Lindsay creek riffles from pool to pool down their fertile meadows.

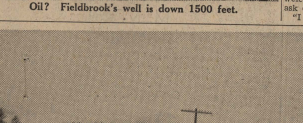
Happy men are the Timmons brothers, who purchased the holding from the Hammond Lumber company in 1942. "I came here as foreman thirty years ago," Glenn Timmons recounts. "That was right after I got out of the army in World War I.

"This ranch has one of Humboldt's finest climates. The hills to the west protect us from fogs and winds, and the result is about as healthy a place as you could ask for."

And as you look at the Timmons brothers' fine homes and many farm buildings, you realize that here two hard-working men have brought the fruition of a lifetime's work to a happy climax.

On the upper part of the Timmons ranch, the Sound Lumber

(Continued on Page 18, Column 6)



One of numerous pastoral scenes on the Fieldbrook road.

The John Vance mill, with log train, in 1879. The houses in background still stand. Photo courtesy Glenn Timmons.

Today! Fieldbrook's school kids and teachers make a happy picture.

Barns and silos on Timmons ranch are well kept and prosperous.

The Sound Lumber company's mill turns out a good day's work.

Looking down Lindsay creek valley from Timmons ranch road.

FIELDBROOK

(Continued from Page 17)

company is operating an up-to-date mill and logging job, under the supervision of young Bob Foster. This project is turning out better than 25,000 board feet, principally redwood, every day.

Further up Lindsay creek valley, above Fieldbrook, stands the famed Carson ranch, now the property of Mr. and Mrs. Wylie Mather, who purchased it late in 1945.

Wylie Mather, a movie director in the days of silent films, and later a Honolulu business man, tells you the story with a twinkle in his keen eyes.

"We used to own a home near Benbow," he relates. "So we knew about Humboldt—and loved it up here. All through the years, we planned some day to return.

"Then, I got a long distance call, while in Honolulu, that this ranch was for sale. So I bought it sight unseen! I would'nt have done such a thing any other place on earth—but I felt a man couldn't go wrong on Humboldt. I know it, now!

"Only thing that worried me was whether Mrs. Mather would like ranch life. Now she is more in love with the place than I am!"

And petite Mrs. Mather adds with a smile—"Hawaii is beautiful but—look out the window at those hills—Humboldt is paradise."

With the Mathers is one of their two sons, Dean, a veteran of the war with Japan, who adds an enthusiastic "amen" to his folks' project, and has ambitions for raising cattle on the 8,000 acre ranch.

Fragrant air touched with the coming of spring . . . cattle in the fields . . . pastoral and rugged scenery combined . . . good hunting and fishing . . . a bit of the lilt of Ireland still in Fieldbrook . . . no wonder people like that countryside! It has that to offer which no city can approach—pleasant and relaxed living.

+++