

Loleta--Self-Sufficient Dairy Town

Famed For Fishing And Milk Products

By CHET SCHWARZKOPF
PHOTOS BY DICK RYAN

Twelve miles south of Eureka, where Highway 101 drops down from Table Bluff hills into Eel river valley, stands the town of Loleta. One of the first impressions the visitor gets from Loleta is that it is a community sufficient unto itself. Even its main business street is not located on the highway—a trait almost unique. Nor is it on the old coast highway that formerly skirted the east boundary of the town.

Loleta's Railroad avenue, where most of its businesses are located, parallels the Northwestern Pacific Railroad. That, together with the depot in the midst of town, and the large Golden State Creamery plant, gives an impression of compactness that is pleasing. And it is reminiscent of the days when the railroad, rather than the highway, was the main mode of passenger transportation.

Loleta is a one-industry town—not alone in its creamery, which is quite the largest in Northern California, but in the dairy farms which surround it, and whose owners regard Loleta as their trading center. All of it hinges about the one fundamental industry—milk production . . . and of course, steelhead and salmon fishing! In that last, no one can regard himself as a true resident of the town if he doesn't get down to Eel river with rod and reel when the big ones are running. And at the height of the season, Loleta is a rendezvous for sports fishermen from all over the state.

LONG TIME ON JOB
Let's drop into the Bank of Loleta and meet Robert Dickson, who founded that institution in 1910, and has been its president ever since. Again you get that impression of self-sufficiency, for the bank is an independent one, and has held to the even tenor of its ways for almost two generations. Noticeable is the fact that Banker Dickson is known to all the town as "Bob," and is that plain-spoken type of man who knows everyone by his or her first name, and their families before them. There is an air of kindly interest about him that attracts.

Loleta has a population of some 575, Bob says. The influx of new residents that has poured into Humboldt has stimulated the town's growth somewhat, but the Golden State creamery has influenced the situation more. Bob points with justifiable pride to numbers of attractive new homes, built in the past ten years—and still building—that house many of the big industry's personnel. As he talks, you realize that here is a man who has lived what may be called the ideal American life; helping in the development of his town and growing with it. Thousands of his type, scattered from coast to coast, have done their part to make ours the democracy that leads the world. May the day never come when America no longer has its Bob Dicksons.

FISHERMEN'S RENDEZVOUS
Grant Meng owns the town's hardware and fishing tackle store, which is headquarters for visiting and local Waltonites. Through his activities, Grant has done much to make Loleta one of Eel river's sport fishing centers—for the famed Dungan and Fulmor pools are close by. Prominent among Loletans who have made angling history—and who may be met in Grant's store—is "Mickey" McClelland, of high repute in the sports fishing fraternity. A modest-spoken man, Mickey will let Grant and the boys tell you about his exploits, but it is obvious he knows his river and tackle as few people are privileged to do.

A number of sportsmen from over the state make Loleta their headquarters each season, Grant says. Among them are Johnny Vergez and Bill Kenworthy, both formerly of the Oakland baseball team, and Bud Richards, also of Oakland. And Pasadena's noted jeweler, Glenn Box, and his sidekick, Courtland Elliott, also are among the Loleta clan during steelhead season.

The view from Loleta's heights across Eel river valley is one you will remember, but Grant Meng looks at the river's wide ribbon swollen from recent rains, and shakes his head. "Afraid it's all over for this season," he says. "But we're glad to see an old-fashioned Humboldt winter again. That'll mean bigger salmon and steelhead runs in years to come. It's time the fish had a break."

THE RAILROAD DEPOT
There is something about Loleta that is as American as July Fourth, and nothing heightens that impression more than the depot, situated smack in the middle of the town's business district. A glimpse into its office, with the

traditional pot-bellied iron stove and clattering telegraph instruments, is a glimpse into the America we grew up in, for it is as much a part of Loleta's main street as the drug store and Meng's tackle shop. And Agent Sam Grant, who has been there ten years and is a statistical analyst and Humboldt historian, realizes that fact well.

Loleta, Sam says, is an important meeting spot for trains, because it is at the bottom of the hill the railroad must climb to leave Eel river valley and drop down alongside Humboldt Bay. And there are times when trains are so heavy they must "double up" to get over the grade.

GOLDEN STATE CREAMERY
First started as the Diamond Springs co-operative in the 1890's by local farmers, Loleta's Golden State creamery was later sold to Swift & Co., and finally to Golden State Company, Ltd., who have improved and added to it until it is now their Northern California headquarters. Employment is somewhat seasonal, according to district Manager Sid Nielsen, of Eureka, but the industry will average some 250 people working there.

During the war, Loleta's creamery turned out 30,000,000 pounds per year of ice cream mix for the armed forces, and shipped their output all over the world. They still make this product, and in addition turn out powdered cream and sweet milk. The creamery also is local distributing center for Golden State ice cream, and is constantly doing research and development work in their line.

THE SENIOR CITIZEN
Loleta's oldest living citizen is Walter Dickson, whose parents brought him to Eureka in 1868 from Nova Scotia, when he was a child of three. He went to Loleta in 1888 to become the town's first station agent for the new Eel River and Eureka Railroad. He remembers John Vance, Sr., and William Carson, who built the railroad, as if it were only yesterday. Now retired, Walter enjoys reminiscing.

There were no dairies in Eel river valley then, Walter says. Potatoes and grain were the principal crops. His father, C. C. Dickson started the first dairy in the region, and it proved so successful that others quickly turned to the new farm enterprise. Loleta in 1888 had one house only, and was a shipping point for ranch products and fish from Eel river. These were hauled over the hill to Fields Landing and shipped away by sea—for there was no railroad through to San Francisco until 1914.

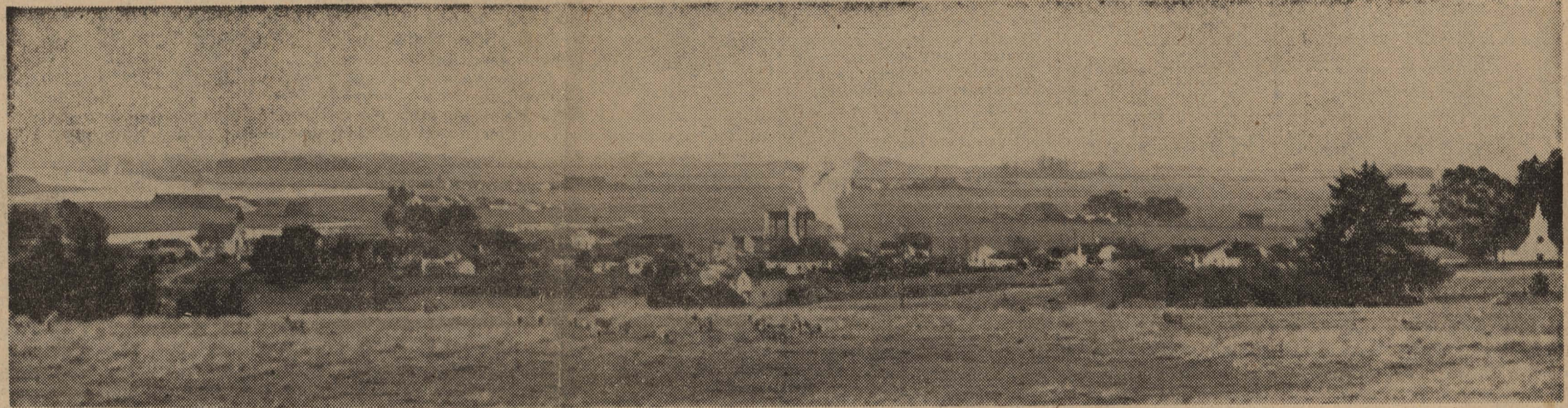
Meanwhile, Walter Dickson built a store while station agent, and employed Mose Poyfaire to run it for him. In 1895 Walter sold the store to his relative, Robert Dickson—now the bank president—and moved back to Eureka, where his father had founded the White House store. Incidentally, Eureka's White House, and Daly Brothers' department store, both were started in 1888, but the White House is some six months the older, Walter says. It opened in the spring of that year, while Daly's began in the fall.

In 1913, Walter Dickson sold the White House to George Ryan and moved back to Loleta, where he has resided continuously since.

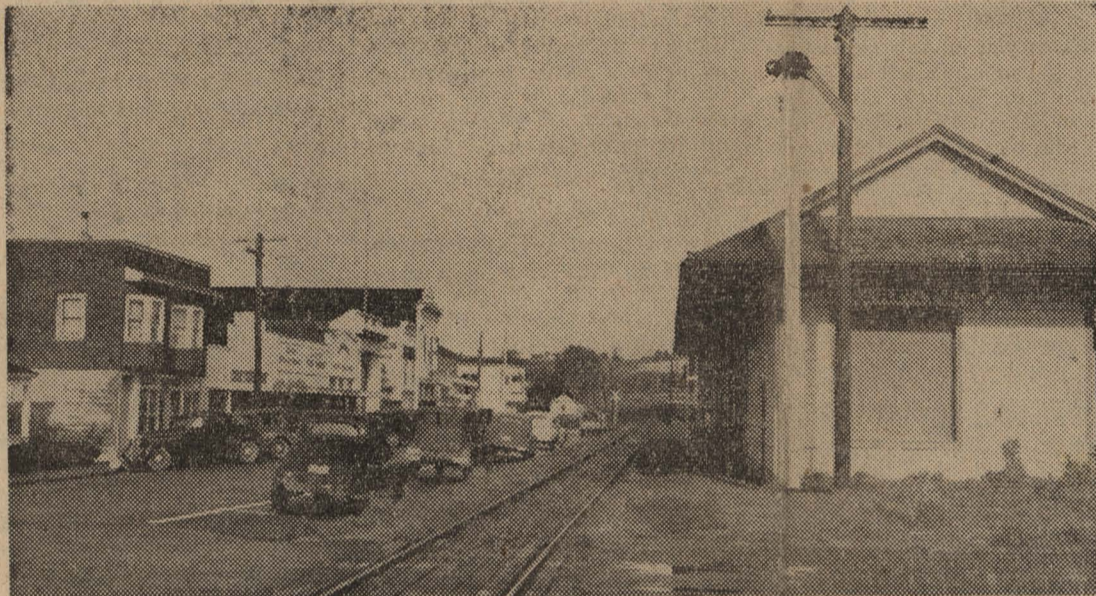
Loleta's greatest growth, according to Walter, came when the railroad finally went through to San Francisco. Going back to the place's beginning, Walter says the townsite was owned by a man named Whitten, who settled there in the 1860's. After Whitten's death, his sons sold the 160-acre holding to William Perrott who out the present town.

Romance entered Walter Dickson's life when Miss Mary Mott came from San Francisco to teach school in Humboldt. They were married in San Francisco in 1895—thus celebrating their Golden Wedding anniversary three years ago. They have two daughters; Mrs. Elliott Shaffer of Loleta, and Mrs. Eleanor Sanborn of Sausalito.

DOWNTOWN LOLETA
With its hilly setting, fine views,



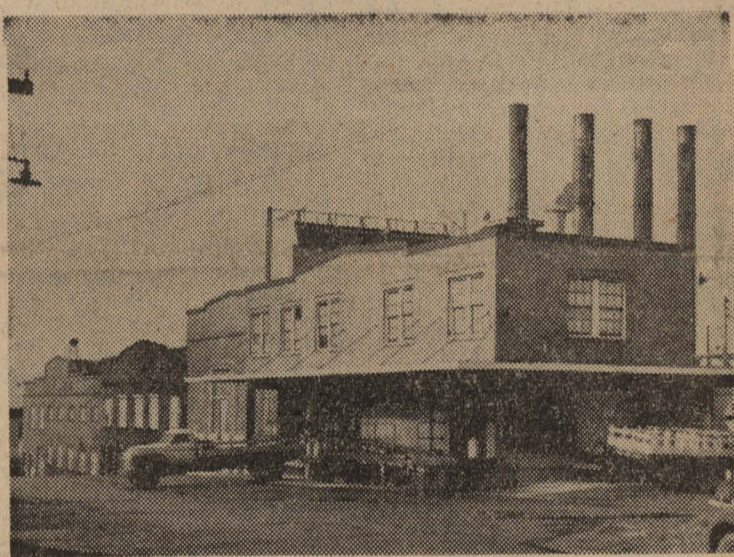
Panoramic view from hillside in back of Loleta, showing town, Eel river valley, and river in distance.



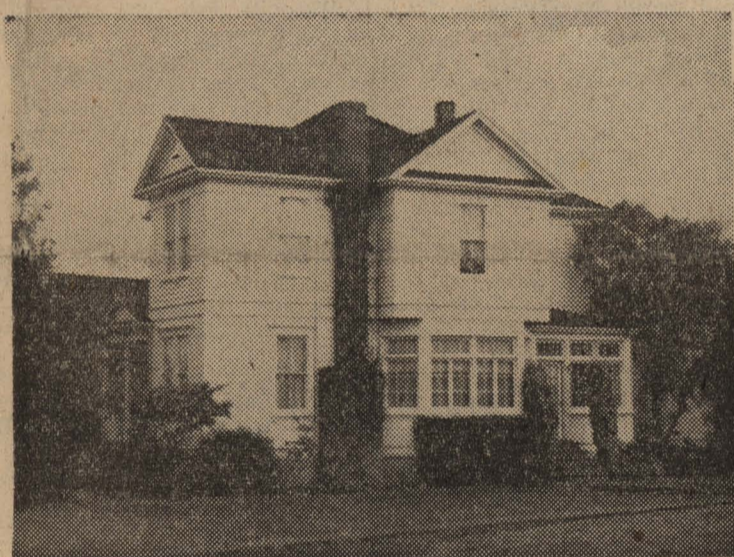
Railroad Avenue, Loleta's unique main business street.



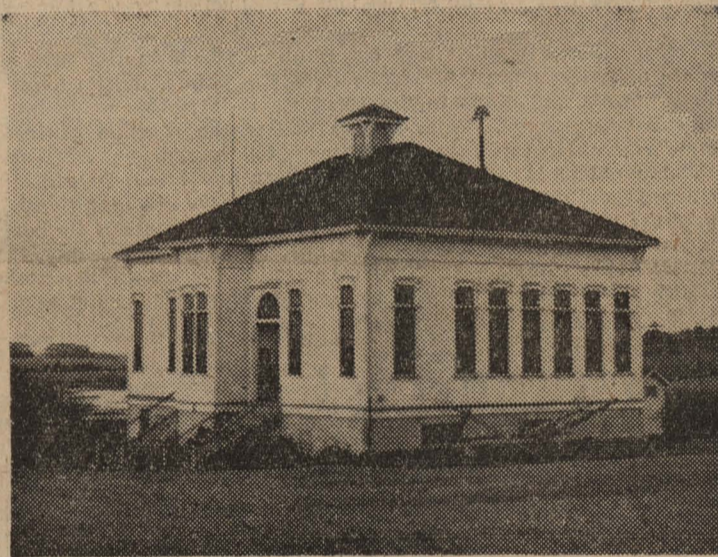
Frontal view of Golden State Creamery, facing Main street.



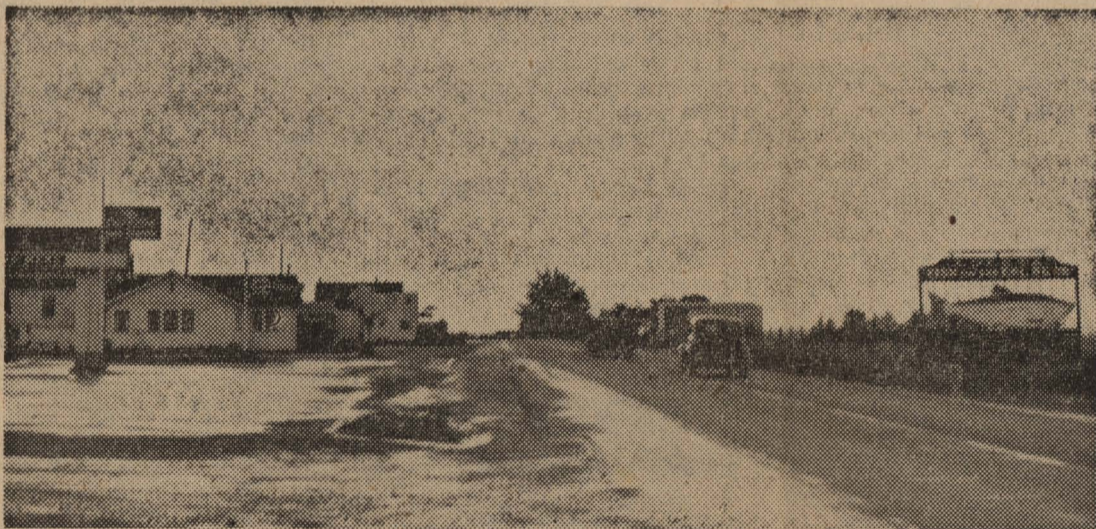
Creamery's steam plant is a big one.



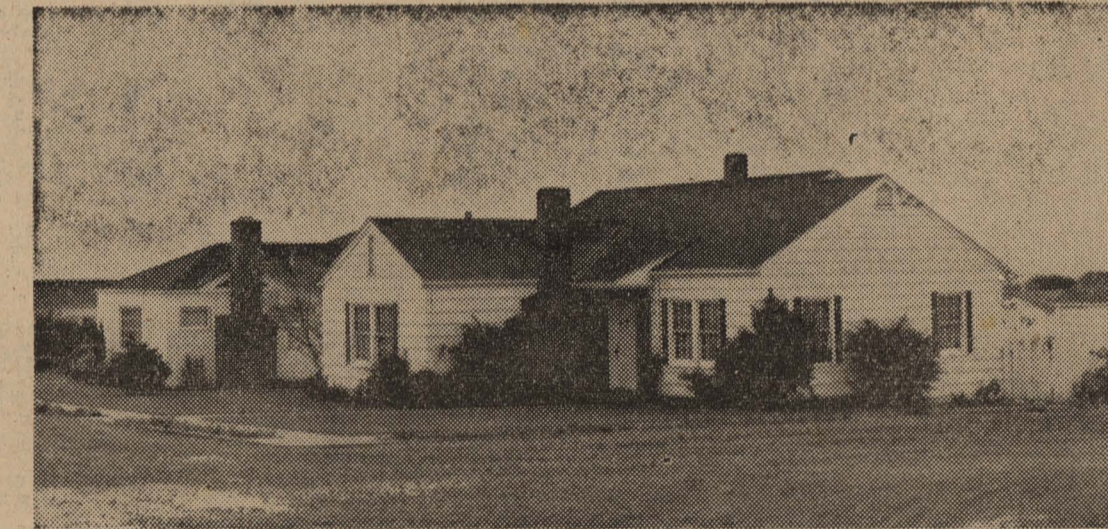
Banker Bob Dickson's pleasant home.



Loleta school, soon to be replaced.



Where Highway 101 passes by Loleta, showing motels.



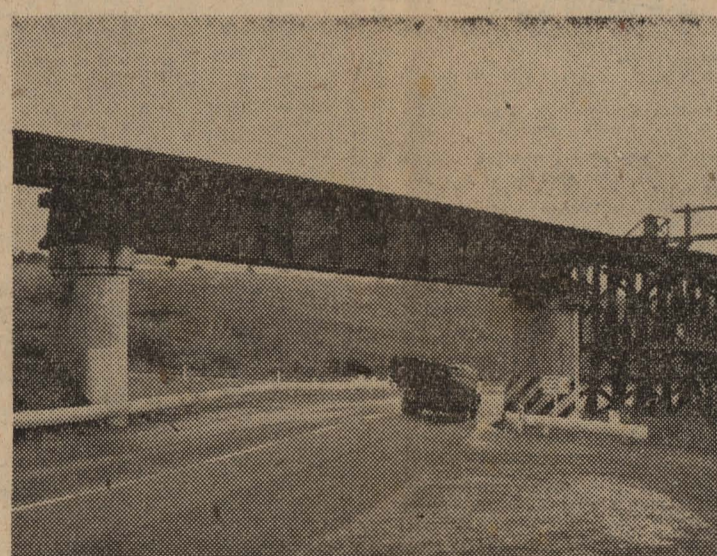
A street of Loleta's up-to-date modern homes.

beautiful older homes and attractive newer residences; its historic appearing business blocks and up-to-date big industry, Loleta presents both a contrast and a harmonious picture. There are two excellent markets, a hotel and restaurant, and various smaller businesses on its two blocks of main thoroughfare. And there's the drug store, formerly owned by Eureka's popular Jim Pemberton who sold out a year ago to M. H. Fleishman.

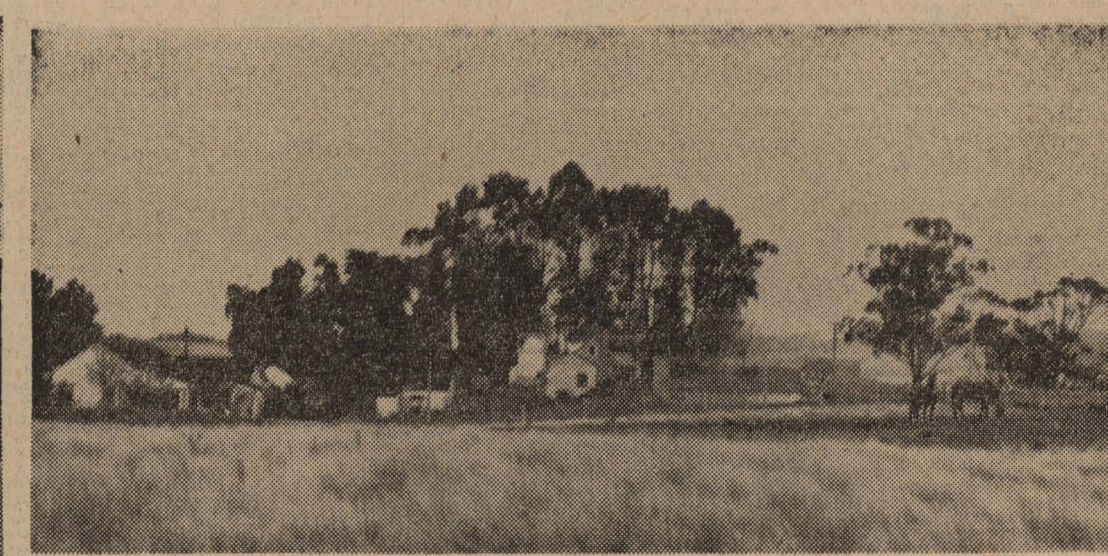
Fleishman's father was U. S. land commissioner at Arcata in the 1850's, and the Fleishmann redwood grove is named for him the way the family's name was spelled then. Fleishman had retired in the east, but became homesick for Humboldt, and returned here. He has held a pharmacist's license since 1897, he recounts with justifiable pride, adding that—"We sell everything but locomotives, and they go by the door!"

Loleta soon is to have a fine new schoolhouse, according to Henry Perrott. Bids are about to be opened, and the building will have a capacity of 150 pupils. It is to be financed by bonds and state funds.

The town is unincorporated, you



Highway 101 underpass where railroad crosses into Loleta.



Pastoral scene on outskirts of Loleta, showing typical well-maintained ranch property.

are informed, but there is a movement afoot to change its status. The chamber of commerce is headed by J. N. James, and has been very active in civic affairs. Loleta has a volunteer fire department, of which its deputy sheriff Robert Orsenico is chief. Four modern motels are located

in the town, where highway 101 skirts its southern boundary. And there are no more than enough to handle the fishermen's rush during salmon and steelhead season, for Loleta has had a large increase in its visiting sportsmen since the war's end.

PIONEER FAMILY
Besides the Dicksons and Per-

rotts, another Loleta pioneer family is the Herricks, who own a ranch of over 300 acres on Light-house road, Table Bluff hills. Rufus and Martha Herrick came to Loleta in 1876, when the place was known as Swauger. About the turn of the century, Mrs. Herrick suggested the town's name

be changed to Loleta—an Indian name meaning "Quiet Water." Ralph Herrick, widely known Humboldt sportsman and rancher, now lives on the property and is one of the family's third generation in Humboldt. His grandfather came to the county in 1852, and later served with the army at Fort Humboldt, finally being in charge

of Smith river Indian reservation before moving to Loleta. "Grandfather was one of the earliest Humboldters," recounts Ralph. "The day Bob Dickson landed in Loleta, granddad was surveying the right-of-way for the Eel River and Eureka Railroad and was an old-timer of thirty years' background!"