

# Greater Rio Dell--a United Community

## Progressive And Growing Town Coming Into Own

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PHOTOS BY FREEMAN ART

Rio Dell is a community that "just grew," and it is doing a surprisingly good job of it. Located on a wide gentle slope, bounded by the hills on one side, and Eel river on the other, it occupies one of the finest natural townsites in Humboldt. And by a well-planned merger of the Belleview section, old Rio Dell, and new Rio Dell—formerly Wildwood—it has taken full advantage of that asset.

Greater Rio Dell now extends from "bridge to bridge," as its boosters proudly point out. The town's south boundary is the bridge over Eel river, that separates it from Scotia. Its north boundary is the structure that spans Eel river as Highway 101 leaves the Belleview area—a distance of some three miles. Thus the community's boundaries are well defined both by nature and the handiwork of man. And in between are hundreds of homes, most of them new, or built within the last twenty years. To the traveler passing through, it presents a picture of a new town just getting into its stride. Which impression is heightened by its prosperous appearing business district as you approach the Scotia bridge, for there have been many new additions in recent years.

Most impressive of Rio Dell's later day improvements is the widening of Highway 101 through its business district, and the new highway cut-off about in the middle of the town which, when completed, will give Rio Dell a broad sweep of straight main street for nearly half its length. Needless to say, Rio Dell merchants and property owners visualize an ever-greater business district along their principal thoroughfare as population continues to pour in. For Rio Dell has shown one of the fastest growths in Humboldt since 1940, and is continuing.

The original Rio Dell business section stands about in the middle of the greater Rio Dell community. Development, however, has shifted definitely toward the center of Scotia bridge, and the old business district soon will be relegated to a side street, when the cut-off is finished, for Highway 101 no longer will pass through it. Which is not an un-

mixed blessing, as Rio Dell people see it, for the community's fine school is there, as well as the post-office and a couple of stores, and congestion will thus be avoided, cutting down hazards for children.

### SCHOOL AND SURROUNDINGS

Principal Glenn Waldner can well feel proud of his Rio Dell school. It is a modern structure, built in 1940, and has a large playground which is well patronized. But already Rio Dell's school has outgrown its facilities, for its attendance has jumped from less than 150 in 1940 to over 250 now. It has five rooms and an emergency room now, and an addition of four rooms is being planned as soon as state funds are available. Seven teachers and two part time music teachers are on its faculty, and it has been necessary to run the school on split shift since 1944, so rapid has been its increase in attendance. Principal Waldner hopes to have a school large enough to handle present, as well as future, needs, by 1950, and is planning ahead with justifiable enthusiasm.

From a youngster's standpoint, as well as grownups', Rio Dell offers an ideal out-of-doors. On one side of it are the timbered hills, always inviting exploration, as well as beckoning to amateur trappers and hunters. On the other side, the Eel river makes its great bend through the famed Scotia bluffs hole—a prime fishing place from season to season. Trout are always available, and in the late summer, the first steelhead and salmon runs start. And, 'tis said, there are several huge sturgeon living in the deep hole, which can be seen occasionally—to the observer's thrilled delight. And of course, when Eel river warms during the summer, the swimming and picnic facilities are unexcelled.

### ABOUT INCORPORATION

Since its merger into greater Rio Dell some three years, there has been much talk of incorporating the community. For Rio Dell has outgrown its old hit-or-miss days, when Wildwood was a separate district that got its name not alone from the wilderness of old, but from later day whoopee. The new community has put on long pants now, and wants its place in the sun. And justifiably so. For its population has passed the 1500 mark, and its trading area is well over 2000—which puts it among Humboldt's "first three" towns, excepting Eureka.

A. C. Edwards is president of Rio Dell's chamber of commerce and, along with secretary Angelo Barsanti, looks ahead to the time in the not distant future when Rio Dell will have its own city hall, together with the increased benefits of municipal government. "That is our main project," Edwards says, "and with the population we now have, we feel it is a must. For a starter, we are getting an improved street light system in the business district, which will help."

With an active chamber of commerce, backed by such progressive businessmen as the Bianchi brothers, Al Grundman, Gene Pott and others, many new projects are approaching fulfillment. It was the chamber, for instance, that promoted the series of town meetings that resulted in the greater Rio Dell merger. And now they are planning a municipal recreation field, complete with baseball diamond and everything, and will build a new dance hall and community center to replace the building lost by fire a couple of years ago. They are an ambitious crowd, these young Rio Dell businessmen, and they are taking a long range view of their town's development.

Among other assets, Rio Dell has a volunteer fire department of some thirty members, whose chief is Albert Abare. They work in conjunction with the neighboring Scotia department, and are negotiating for a new fire truck at the present time.

"We are growing up," says Gene Bianchi, who with his brother Mingo, came to the Rio Dell area as a small child in 1915. "The great mills at Scotia assure permanent employment to a majority of the town. Rio Dell has



Air view of part of Greater Rio Dell, showing community's beautiful setting and strategic area for future growth. Photo by Jerry Simmons.

little to fear from economic troubles."

### BUSINESS PROSPECTS

With its primary economy based upon a steady payroll, Rio Dell's business district has grown in direct proportion to the numbers of new homes that have been built, and are building there. It is one of the largest centers of Italian descent people in Humboldt, and many of the elder generation were in Europe. But Rio Dell is as American as Washington's birthday, with a touch of the picturesque that lingers on from old country tradition, plus the hustle of post-war United States.

Needed now, the younger business men agree, is a bank. That will come, however, when the community is incorporated, they say. Meanwhile, many new businesses have been attracted to Rio Dell as the town has expanded. There is a fine new furniture store, right in the midst of the developing downtown area, and an electric shop and hardware store recently have started. There are four service stations, as well as garages, body shop, hotel, restaurants and taverns. More accommodations for tourists are needed, however.

Alleys are being planned to run in back of Rio Dell's stores—an asset that was overlooked in its earlier days, but which is needed now to help in the town's efforts at traffic control.

Let's drop into Al Grundman's store, where he sells shoes, men's wear, fishing tackle, boats, guns and sundry gear.

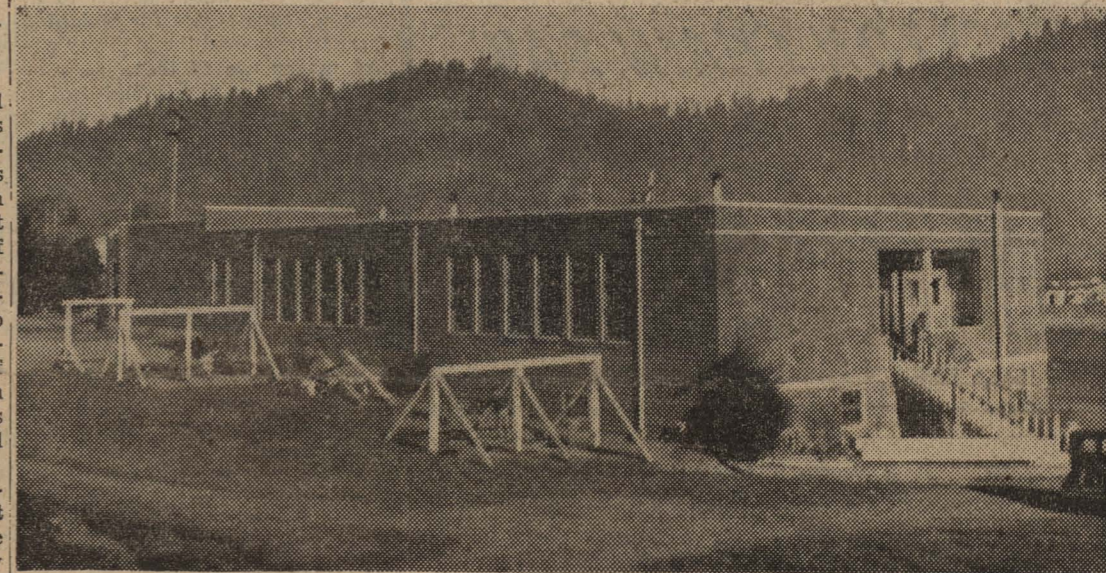
Al is a surprisingly young appearing man who came to Rio Dell back in its Wildwood days, some ten years ago, and set up a small shoe repair shop. And then proceeded to grow with his town and provide another success story of the type that can only happen in America. Al is proud of his growing family and commodious store, as indeed he has right to be. "Rio Dell has been good to us," he says, "and I'm trying to give Rio Dell its money's worth. We could use a larger store already. This town is hitting into its stride, and we are going to get all the things we want to make it one of Humboldt's best. And it won't take long, either."

### RIO DELL HAS ROOM

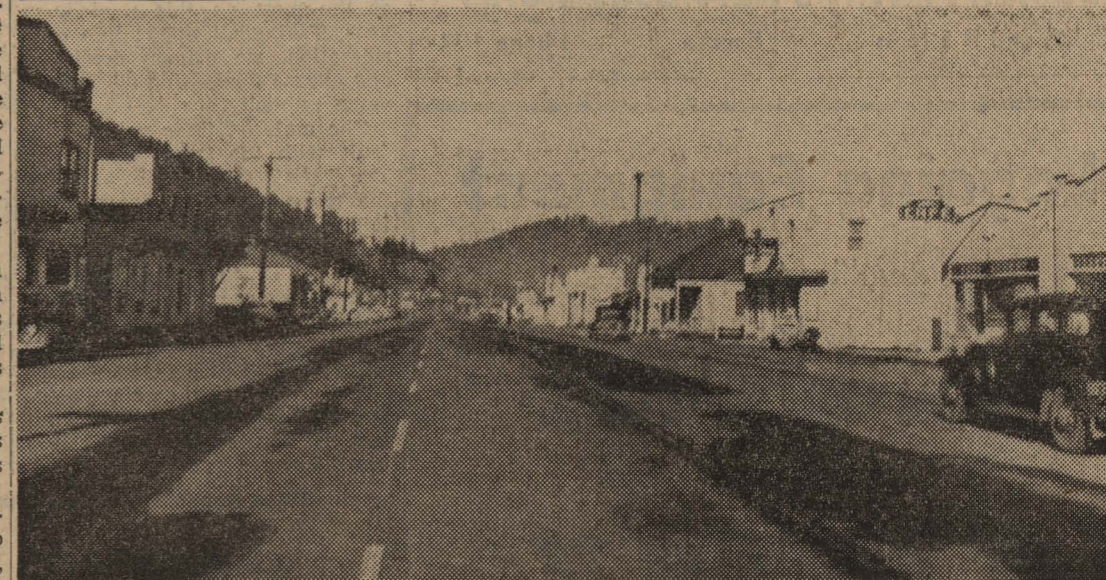
As you drive toward Eel river on Rio Dell's gentle easterly slope, you see a number of older farm homes, and a couple of dairies still in operation. Some of the former farm lands have been divided and sold for building lots—as many a street of new homes can show—but the community still has a considerable area in which to grow, which is fortunate. Acres of future homesites are still available, and in a pleasant location surrounded by hills and stream.

Nelson Davis, who has lived in Rio Dell since 1895, formerly owned a 35-acre dairy and hay farm, but has now sold off most of it for building lots.

"Most of the growth has come since 1915," Davis says. "But it really started after 1940. The change has been great. When I came here, there wasn't much except the old Rio Dell center. But



Rio Dell's modern school, which is to be enlarged soon.



Main street of Greater Rio Dell, looking north from bridge.

we still get some fine hunting and fishing hereabout, so I am quite pleased with all that has taken place—even if I do not operate much of a farm any more. I'm just enjoying life."

You wonder why the railroad, instead of clinging precariously to Scotia bluff, didn't go through Rio Dell in the early days, for that would seem much the easier route.

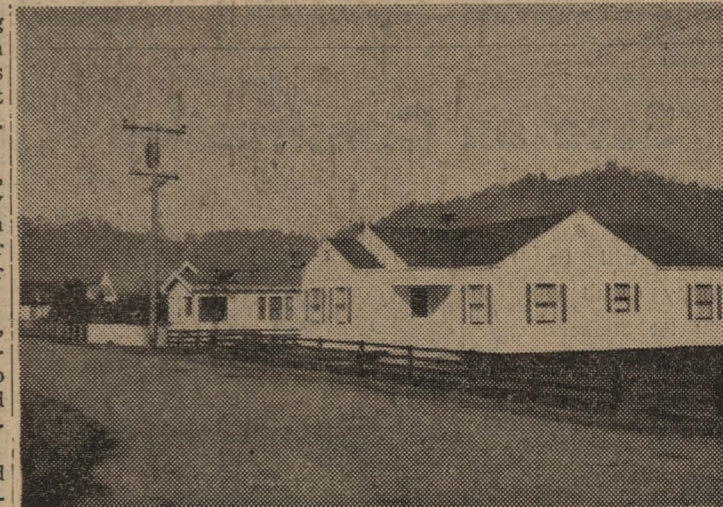
There's a story in back of that, you're told. Seems that the railroad very much wanted to go through Rio Dell, but was blocked by a landowner who wanted \$50,000 for a right-of-way.

So the railroad started to build along the bluff, while the landowner prophesied they never could make it and would have to come to him and pay his price, eventually. He watched construction and waited, sure of his stand.

But when the first train finally went through, the landowner saw his cause was lost. It was too much for him to take. Down to the river he went, walked in, and that was the last they ever saw of him. And so, disregarding the moral involved, that is why the railroad does not run through Rio Dell!

### THE BELLEVIEW AREA

No account of Rio Dell would be complete without a word about the Belleview section. Here,



One of the town's many new residential blocks that have been built in recent years.

around the community's northerly bridge, and toward the hills in back, a prosperous residential district has been built, and is building. Farthest removed from the business sector, this part of the town seems best suited for future development—as beautiful Eeloa Lodge, which is now there, can testify.

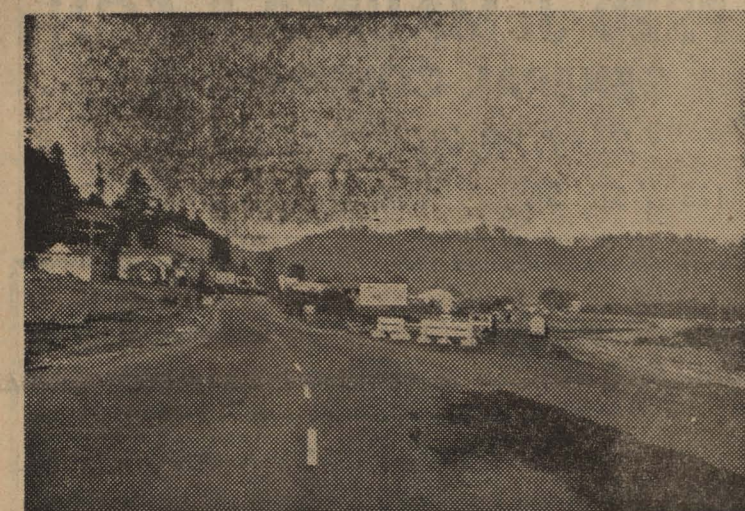
Real estate transactions have been active throughout all the community, realtor R. F. Spain at Eeloa says, while recent home building has reached a peak around Belleview and bids fair to surpass all previous records. As you leave Rio Dell and look back down its broad new thoroughfare, you realize that the community's boosters have a fine new town under way. They had a slow start, but the merger into greater Rio Dell has made them. And so, another up-and-coming town is slated to join the roster of Humboldt's incorporated cities.



Highway 101 bridge crosses Eel river north of Scotia and enters Rio Dell.



One of Rio Dell's clean-cut modern homes, on a hillside overlooking the town.



Where Rio Dell's new highway cutoff begins—white line follows old route.



View over the former Wildwood section of Rio Dell, from hillside, showing closely built-up residential area.



The deep hole at Scotia bluffs, where Eel river takes its great bend on its way down to the sea—fishing's good!