Samoa--Between Bay and Sunset Sea

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Where Ships Call From World Ports

By CHET SCHWARZKOPF
PHOTOS BY DICK RYAN

Nearest neighbor to Eureka, as the crow flies, is the town of Samoa, which occupies part of the peninsula on the seaboard, or "San Francisco" side of Humboldt Bay.

Headquarters for the far-flung Hammond Lumber company operations in the northern Redwood Empire, Samoa looms against a sunset sky with the rumble of a somber Pacific ocean at its doorstep—a man-made entity to symbolize the Land of the Giants. And the boom of the great Samoa whistle across Humboldt Bay is as much a part of the metropolitan area as the bay itself . . . while weather-wise fishermen keep an eye on the smoke direction from the tall Samoa stack as a sure barometric indicator.

Out of some 1150 people employed by the Hammond Lumber company in Humboldt county, about 850 work at Samoa—the rest are scattered from the Van Duzen logging operations to Big Lagoon, with 130 at the Bayside mills in Eureka.

Samoa is strictly a one-industry town. It is all-Hammond, and its 130 homes are company owned—with a long waiting list for rentals because of desirable living conditions. The town's population is therefore stationary, with about 600 living in homes and another 100 in the lodge, where single men may get board and room.

With a total population that barely exceeds the number of men employed there, it is obvious that numbers of people must commute back and forth to Samoa. A fast and, efficient ferry service across Humboldt bay make 14 daily round trips to take care of those who live in Eureka. Many drive to and from Arcata, while others live in the North Samoa area, between the two towns. This section has grown rapidly in recent years.

A BIT OF HISTORY

Samoa got its start in the early 1890s when Edgar and Albert Vance built a railroad onto the peninsula to establish a shipping point for their mill at Essex, on Mad river. A mill was soon built and the operation had assumed fair proportions when A. B. Hammond bought the entire enterprise in 1900. Thus began the present redwood division of the company.

In 1931, the Little River Redwood company of Crannell merged with Hammond's, and more than ever, the center of operations was focused at Samoa. And in 1937, the holdings of the Humboldt Redwood company—Eureka's familiar Bayside Mill—"went Hammond" to increase again the activities at Samoa headquarters.

With the death of A. B. Hammond in 1934, his son Leonard C. Hammond took over as head of the company. "Len" as he was known to his host of friends and associates, expanded the activities of the company in many directions. His unexpected passing in 1945 was a blow keenly felt by all the Hammond personnel, as well as the redwood lumber industry.

When World War I broke out, Len Hammond did not wait for the United States to get into it, but went to Europe as an ambulance driver. Before long, he was a member of the LaFayette Escadrille, and when America entered the war, had become an ace flyer. Those were the days when airplanes were not yet equipped with machine guns. Flyers fought pistol and rifle duels while maneuvering bamboo and canvas "flying box kites," and rarely had altitude enough for a parachute jump—even if their parachutes worked. When the American flying corps got started in France, Len transferred to it, and finished his service under the stars and stripes. A modest man, he rarely discussed his pioneer aviation experiences—although he was one of the earliest American airmen to fly over wartime Europe.

LEGENDS OF LEN

Typical of Len Hammond's later exploits was the occasion when, as head of the Hammond Lumber company, he happened into a highway dining room where a group of Hammond employes were giving a party. Press of business kept him from staying for the occasion—much to his regret—and he went his way.

Later, when the employes' committee asked for the evening's bill, the dining room proprietor only grinned. "Your money is no good tonight," he informed the astounded delegation. "Mr. Hammond has taken care of everything. . . ."

When World War II broke out, Len was no longer able to enter military service. Whereupon he got into the war effort all-out through his ability to supply lumber. "Never mind if we lose money," was his refrain. "Deliver the Goods!" And throughout the war, every stick of available lumber—even to cargo battings—cleared the Hammond yards with speed and dispatch.

At one time, a night shift was sorely needed at Samoa. But men simply were not available. So Hammond scouts scoured every jungle and skid row. Any man that could be poured onto a train or bus was hired. Somehow or other they managed to keep that night shift staggering along—with constant replenishments.

"Many of them never even got here," recounts Personnel Manager Oscar Nordquist. "And of those that did, their average stay on the job was 28 days. That was a headache, and we lost plenty. But every stick we could turn out helped, and Len never squawked. One of the things that killed him was the hard work he did in those days."

THE BIG MILLS

To the interested visitor, the Samoa plant presents a picture of close-knit and efficient operation. Heart-pulse of the enterprise is the power plant, whose 308 foot stack is one of Humboldt bay's landmarks. Here is where the mill' life-blood—steam—is generated. But they do not burn coal or oil. They burn "hog fuel" which is log waste that is run through pulverisers, or hogs. Thus, out of their discarded wood, the lumber mills get their power to operate.

But it is not the old-fashioned huff-chuffing steam they use. Most of it is run through modern steam turbines that, in turn, drive alternating current generators. The electricity from these is sent all over the mills and town, where it drives everything from the tiniest indicator card motors to the monsters that impel the huge band saw; that cut through redwood logs as if they were warm cheese. And in addition, the Samoa power plant supplies the town with light and heat, as well as being synchronized with the P. G. & E. circuit to help with overloads as needed. At maximum load, the Samoa power plant can generate about 5,000 kilowatts of electricity—or well over 6500 horsepower. Steam from the plant also finds many other uses, principal among which is furnishing heat for the dry kilns where lumber is seasoned, and power for the great "trams" that push logs through the saws on carriages.

Capacity of the Samoa mill is about 250,000 board feet per day, operating with one shift only and four main band-saws or head rigs.

LOGGING RAILROAD

To supply such an enterprise with logs calls for transportation on a heavy scale, and Samoa is the headquarters for the Hammond Lumber company railroad. Here is not only the roundhouse of familiar men, but also a complete machine shop equipped to do anything from repairing the most delicate gauge to actually building locomotives! And not alone that, but anything either in the mills or extensive logging operations can be repaired or rebuilt at the Samoa shops. Thus again Samoa is the center of operations, for if the trains and logging machinery are not maintained, the mills could not run.

But building locomotives? you say. Did they really? By 1916 the company had need of larger power than was then on their rails, and so the Samoa shops built the new historic "Number 11," and a good job she was. For many years the 11 was the most powerful locomotive in Humboldt, and on the job almost continuously. It would be interesting to speculate how many board feet of logs that engine hauled into Samoa in her day, but it is safe to say that the total will run into figures that look like the national debt—but on the right side of the ledger! Certainly it will run into the billions. Old 11's work days probably are over now, the boys say.

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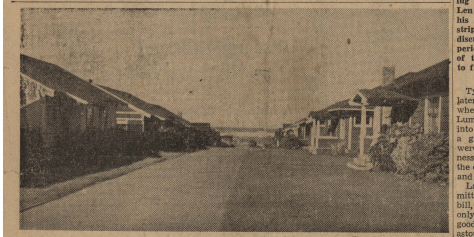
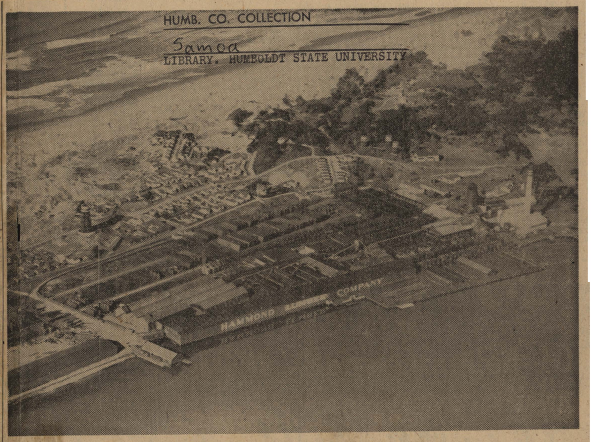
Where two generations of family lived—Samoa's Hammond home.

Hammond Lumber Co. store and offices on Samoa's main street.

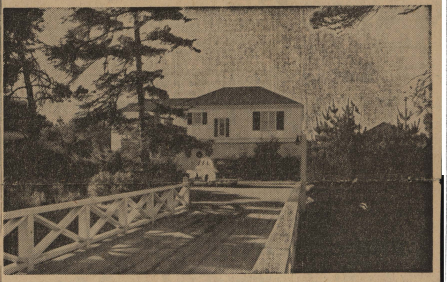


Residential street with Pacific Ocean in background; Samoa.

The sign that can be read across the bay—Samoa's waterfront.

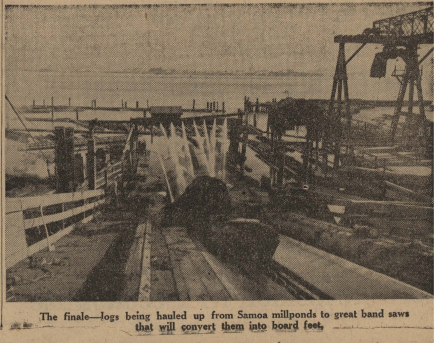


Air view of Samoa, showing bay and ocean boundaries of town. Merle Shuster Photo.



The residence of Vice President and General Manager Earl Birmingham enjoys an unusually beautiful setting.

Where the Arcata-Samoa highway passes through Samoa amid pleasant residential surroundings.



The finale—logs being hauled up from Samoa millponds to great band saws that will convert them into board feet.

SAMOA

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for she was retired cum laude a year ago.

MORE ABOUT THE TOWN

Samoa got its name in 1892 when a group of Eureka business men laid out lots in this area, and publicized its desirable climate. South Sea islands were much in the news then, with emphasis on their climate, and it was decided that "Samoa" sounded both picturesque and apropos. In later days, when mill development first took place, it was occasionally referred to as "West Eureka."

The Hammond Lumber company's main Humboldt office is located there, as is also an excellent company operated store.

A new playground is nearing completion, of which both the company and employes are proud. It contains swings, rings, see-saws and a slide for the children, as well as tennis and badminton courts for the grownups.

There is also a baseball diamond, recreation and dance hall, and a general meeting hall.

The Samoa school has between 90 and 100 pupils, and three teachers. It carries from the first to sixth grades, only. Pupils attending junior and senior high schools go by bus to Eureka, as the town is in the Eureka senior school district, despite the fact that its pupils must pass through Arcata en route. A number of Samoa young people also are attending at Humboldt State college.

Many of Samoa's residents have been there for a long period of time. In the company's Humboldt operations, there are 59 who have been with the company for 25 years or more, while one of the oldest in point of service is power plant engineer Tom Kennedy, who has been continuously with the company since 1900.

Further figures show that in the 20-to-25 year service group, there are 34 employes, while in the 15-to-20 year group there are 61, and in the 10-to-15 year class, 137—making a grand total of 291! The over-25-year employes soon are to be given a banquet, at which they will be awarded gold watches.

As the visitor concludes his tour about Samoa, he must be impressed by the spirit of self-respect and pleasant living that is so obviously a part of the place. "Nothing succeeds like success" the trite saying runs, and Samoa is a long-established and successful operation, both as a place to live and a place to work. The visitor does not have to be told these facts. They are self-evident.

LOOKING AHEAD

Vice president and general manager at Samoa is Earl Birmingham, who represents all the Hammond Lumber company's operation in the Redwood Empire. Widely known throughout Northern California, the company's distinguished appearing executive is popular with those who work with him as well. It doesn't take long to find that out as you go through Samoa. Earl is carrying on the traditions of Len Hammond, and doing a fine job.

"We are planning a sustained yield set-up in fir, with a turnover of approximately 100 years," Birmingham says. "In that way, and with selective logging in redwoods, the company's operations will be perpetuated, I am happy to say."