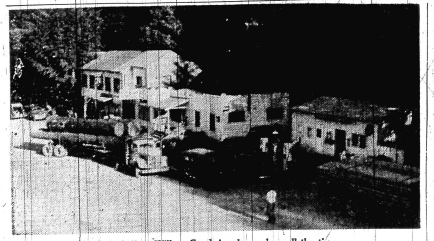
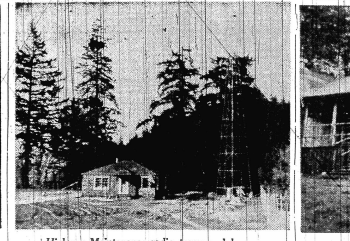
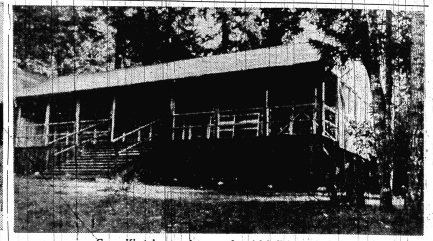
Willow Creek--Mountain Vacationland



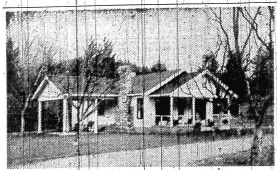
"The Forks" at Willow Creek is a busy place all the time.



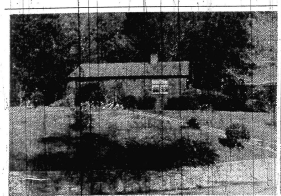
Highway Maintenance radio tower and house.



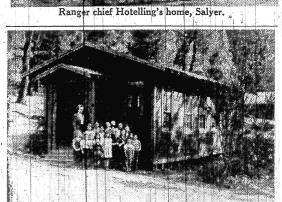
Camp Kimtu's commissary and social hall is newly built.



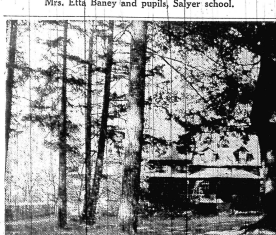
R. L. Hornbrook's new home, Hoopa road.



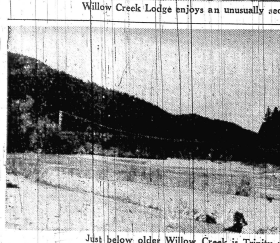
Ranger chief Hotelling's home, Salyer.



Mrs. Etta Baney and pupils, Salyer school.



Willow Creek Lodge enjoys an unusually secluded setting.



Just below older Willow Creek is Trinity river bridge.

Trinity Valley Town Combines Homes, Ranches and History

By CHET SCHWARZKOPF

Willow Creek is located in the Trinity River valley, some 51 miles from Eureka, via Highway 299. It is one of the older towns in Humboldt, having got its start in the Trinity mining excitement of the early 1850's. And you can still see traces of that era in some of its older buildings.

In fact, Willow Creek more nearly resembles the Sierras in its surroundings, for there are no redwood trees in the well forested mountains that surround it. Fir and pine predominate, as well as oaks, maples, madrones and—along the streams—willows.

But Willow Creek is no ghost town, as are some of the Sierra's historic places. Willow Creek with its rugged mountain scenery and rolling valley, is a noted resort center, and has a permanent population of 400, according to Postmaster Ernest Robinson.

The town is not incorporated, hence its limits are more or less optional. Roughly, it extends from the highway bridge over the south fork of Trinity river to a point some four miles up the Hoopa road—thus giving the community about eight miles frontage on the Trinity river. In this generous stretch, numbers of new homes have been built, and more are planned, as people learn the advantages of living in an out-of-door mountainland.

Trinity river, which comes down from the Trinity mountains, is a famed fishing stream, for up it come the runs of steelhead trout and salmon in the fall. Part of the year, it is sadly muddied from mining operations upstream. But from July to December, the stream flows emerald clear, thanks to an agreement with the miners who respect the rights of vacationists and sportsmen in this area.

A LOOK INTO HISTORY

Willow Creek was a pack train stopover, and later a center, in the days when gold mining was going full blast in the New river country, according to Bill Gallop, who has lived there for 35 years. And as such, it is today one of Humboldt's historic mining-day towns. Originally, it was called China Flat, due to the numbers of Chinese employed in nearby mines who lived along Trinity river near the present Gambi's resort, Bill says. About the turn of the century the post office's name was changed to Willow Creek by the federal government, and the town followed suit.

Paul Brizard, of Arcata, whose father founded the pioneer merchandising firm of that name, enjoys reminiscing about Willow Creek. "Charlie Brown started the old Willow Creek hotel back in the late 1860's," he says, "and it is still running, although additions have been made since then. My father, Alexander Brizard, bought the pioneer Willow Creek store from Tom Campbell in the early 1870's.

"I first went to Willow Creek in 1888. At that time there was no road. We went in by horseback over the Lord-Ellis trail, which later became the Lord-Ellis road. That was named after William Lord—Oscar Lord's father — who had the Orleans store, and Ed Ellis, who had a store in Blue Lake. The two men were partners in pack train transportation."

The first road into Willow Creek and Orleans did not follow the Lord-Ellis trail, however. It was built about 1890, and went via Bald Mountain, through Berry's ranch, and by way of Three Creeks, according to Joe Tracy of the Belcher Abstract company, of Eureka. The Lord-Ellis road—now highway 299—was not built until 1920, and its original founders did not live to see its completion.

THE DAYS OF GOLD

In later days, Paul Brizard had charge of the Brizard pack trains into Willow Creek, New river, Orleans, Somes Bar, Hoopa, and Weitchpec; all of which places had Brizard stores. "I took over that job in 1908," the pleasant-spoken elder Brizard says. "The gold fever days were still in force, then But by 1920, new roads made it easier to bring goods in by truck, and we discontinued the pack trains. But my father was just about the pioneer merchant back there in the gold days of the 1870's."

Paul Brizard first went to work in his father's Arcata store in 1891, as a youngster. He remembers the days when the firm used to send bulk gold shipments from the Trinity mines to the U. S. mint in San Francisco, after weighing the precious metal at Arcata.

"Records of early days in Willow Creek are scant," Joe Tracy says. "Many mining claims were filed there in the 1870's, but one of the first settlers we have record of is James A. Kidd, in 1858. Frank Martin was there in the first '60's, near the present highway 299 bridge, and his son, John Martin, still lives there," Joe adds.

"Other old-timers were Tom Brett, who later ran Charlie Brown's hotel, Frank Bussell, a miner, whose descendants still live around Willow Creek, Berryman Lack, who had the present Graham ranch, and Harry Waterman, who was justice of the peace for many years. And that isn't all of them . . ."

WILLOW CREEK TODAY

When the highway was built through in 1920, the new town center at "The Forks," where Hoopa road enters in, was started. The general store at The Forks is owned by C. Ostrander, and the garage by William Gaby. The cafe, tavern, and service station are owned by Chris Solbein, who came from San Francisco three years ago, and who is manager of the Willow Creek baseball club. Needless to say, Chris has become an enthusiastic Willow Creek booster, as have so many who have moved into there from outside points in recent times.

Recognizing Willow Creek as a strategic point, the Standard Oil company has set up an agency in charge of Charles C. Roberts, who has been at Willow Creek 14 years. Charlie is one of the region's most successful fishermen, and is an authority on Trinity river's possibilities.

Willow Creek also boasts of an auto body and paint shop, owned by Oswald Bussell, a grandson of the original pioneer. And the state division of highways has erected a radio communication station and new house at The Forks. All of which adds up to a prosperous and coming business district in the new part of town.

At Hoopa road a half-mile, and across Willow Creek's bridge—the stream whence the town got its name—you come to the old settlement. Here stands the original Brizard store, now managed by Edmund Knudsen who came there from the Weitchpec store in 1940.

And here, across the road, stands the historic Willow Creek hotel, now owned by the J. W. Jamison Corp., of Los Angeles, who also own the Clover Flat ranch. J. W. Jamison, you're told, purchased this large holding to develop into a resort, but died before his plans were completed. So this picturesque reminder of horse and wagon days dreams on, under its shade trees.

THE SCHOOL SITUATION

The Willow Creek school is a part of the Trinity Valley joint union district, whose other school is at Salyer. It is an old building, and interested residents, inspired by Bob and Laura Gardner, are trying to get sufficient state aid to build a new Willow Creek building. A teachers' residence was completed last year, Laura Gardner says. Needed now is an up-to-date schoolhouse, and the picture will be complete, for attendance at Willow Creek has increased materially in the past few years, as new families have come in from all over the United States.

There are 48 pupils at present in the Willow Creek school, according to Principal Marjorie Lindsey, who is assisted by Hugh Simar. The school sets in beautiful and spacious grounds, well removed from the road—an excellent site for a future construction.

The Salyer school has twenty-five pupils, in charge of Mrs. Etta Baney. This is a pretty building, set amid the orderliness of the Six Rivers National Forest station, along highway 299.

RESIDENTIAL AREAS

One of Willow Creek's choicest ranch-residence sections is that one across the Trinity river bridge near the town's center. Here is a veritable Eden, through which two roads lead. Rolling woodlands and fine homes please the traveler's eye. Here is where the Bob Gartibers' ranch is located. And Frank Graham, justice of the peace, Postmaster Ernie Robinson, Jim Patterson of Circle P ranch, Clem Bussell, Duncan McIntosh, M. S. Shore, and the Henry Seeley estate . . . as well as a number of newcomers, all are there.

The Hoopa road section has attracted its share of new homes. There you will find R. L. Hornbrook, retired Eureka merchant. Roy Aikins, while Harry Moore is building a residence now. The Bill Gallops have lived there many years, while newcomers from over the state have bought places in recent years . . . Mary Siemons of Los Angeles, the C. T. Knights and Fred Kaplingers, of Richmond, and many others.

Out toward highway 299 bridge over the south fork of Trinity river, several Eurekans have summer homes. Among them are Dr. S. P. Burre, Tony Krupka, and George Woodcock. Across the river are Ted Olander and Kenneth Sevier, while others are scattered over a wide area up and down the stream, each with his pleasant vacation site.

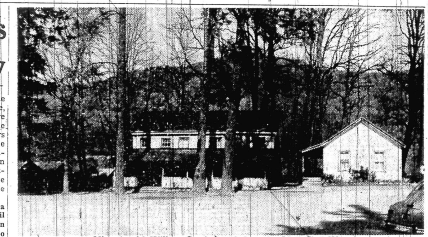
MANY FINE RESORTS

Among Willow Creek's most attractive summer vacation places is the Humboldt Camp Fire Girls' Camp Kimtu, located on U. S. Forest Service land along the Trinity river. Here, in a wooded glen just above Willow creek mouth, a fine project is under way. Buildings and residences have been completed, thanks to volunteer aid under the supervision of Harry Baldwin, of Eureka, and more improvements are being planned.

Near Willow Creek's center stands the tree-bowered Willow Creek Lodge, owned and operated by J. L. Woodcock for sixteen years. This is one of the prettiest places in a community noted for its unusual setting.

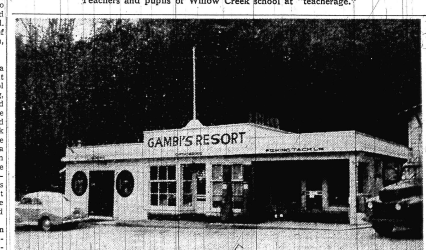
Along the highway toward Salyer is Wright's Camp, whose owner Warren Wright came from San Diego ten years ago. And J. L. H. Roth, recently of Santa Cruz, has purchased the former "Mac" Macchivello resort, while Beulah Farmer of Crescent City recently has taken over the Enchanted Springs Camp.

Pioneer of them all—except the old hotel—is the Gambi resort. Started in 1919 from unclear land by G. Gambi, formerly of Arcata, the place has grown in stature until its name is synonomous with Willow Creek. Here is located the noted Gambi black muscat grape vineyard, where the only wine from Humboldt-raised grapes is made. The Gambis have a bonded winery, and also a fine peach orchard.

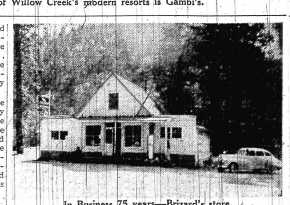


Historic old Willow Creek hotel dates back to Civil War.

Teachers and pupils of Willow Creek school at "teacherage."



Pioneer of Willow Creek's modern resorts is Gambi's.



In Business 75 years—Brizard's store.

(Continued On Page 19)

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WILLOW CREEK

(Continued From Page 17)

U. S. government like that connects with Blue Lake. What we need is a connection with Hoopa so we can call the coast direct, for it's there we do most of our business."

"That's right," Chris adds. "It takes three days at least to get an order of ice cream up here from Eureka by mail. One good pay phone here would pay for itself plenty—especially during the summer tourist season. This is too large a community to be cut off from the world the way we are . . ."

SALYER RANGER STATION

No mention of Willow Creek would be complete without a word about its neighbor across the river the Six Rivers National Forest Station at Salyer. Here is an attractive community with its own postoffice and school, as well as stores.

The present ranger station has been here some twenty-five years. District ranger in charge is Wes Hotelling, whose father was the first district ranger in the Orleans area. Under Wes are Robley Broderick and Glenn Spencer, on permanent duty, while a large crew of summer workers operates under their supervision.

The old ranger station, now used as a residence, is located near the Highway 299 bridge, and was built in the early 1890's after the U. S. Forest Service came into existence.

As you return to the coast, you realize you have seen another of Humboldt's varied attractions. For here is an area more like the Sierras than the coastal redwoods. Here is an area that has a change of seasons ranging from tan-forming summer heat to winter snows that occasionally block the roads.

Whatever it is you want—from sea to snows, from cool redwoods to sun-baked mountains—Humboldt has it!

TELEPHONE CONNECTIONS

One thing Willow Creek lacks is adequate telephone connections, Charlie Roberts and Chris Solbein tell you. The town's only phone is at Brizard's store, and a call to Eureka has to go via Weaverville, Redding, and San Francisco, to get to Eureka!

"It takes hours to call Eureka," Charlie says. "You can do about as well by driving there and back! In an emergency, we have the Forest Service and Highway Maintenance radios, of course—or we can go to Hoopa and use the