

Ferndale— the town and its people

Editor's note: The author of this article and her husband recently took members of the Historical Society on a "tour" of Ferndale via a slide show and commentary. Her remarks relative to that program follow.

by Irene Jorgensen

To me, first, Ferndale is special because my roots are there. I was born, raised and married there.

Second, it is a small town with old Victorian homes and has a history that goes back to 1854 when Seth Shaw and several others saw this place with an abundance of ferns and called it *Ferndale*. The valley is filled with dairy farms and at one time, milk was hauled from the dairies to the creameries in large milk cans to be processed. At that time history shows us there were numerous creameries and Ferndale was called the "Cream City,"

Third, I think the people are what make Ferndale special—ready to help the tourist with walking tour maps and information they might want about the stores, history of the area, and families who came from the different countries.

To arrive at Ferndale one goes over Fernbridge, called "The Queen of the



The Gingerbread House was built for Dr. Hogan Ring in 1898.

Bridges." It was built in 1911 and recently a 75th Anniversary celebration was held there. Many attended and there was some discussion of the bridge's replacement. The bridge has survived many floods. After testings, it was found that the arches and foundations were in good shape and the nearby communities were very relieved to learn that this Humboldt County landmark can be saved.

Ferries were used to cross the Eel

River prior to 1911 and Gregg's Resort was located at Fernbridge when the bridge was built.

Main Street in Ferndale is a long street and contains the business district. If you were to look at a 1900 picture of the town, you would find very little changes in the architecture. The Pythian Castle, which was a three-story building on the north at Shaw Avenue and the large American Hotel, formerly called the Pixley Hotel, have been re-

The Fry family

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versity has been favorably passed upon, and the young lady will take her place in that grand institution at its next opening."

8 Sept. 1894: "H.L. Fry of east Arcata has received news that his daughter Winifred had passed the final examination for admission to the Stanford University."

12 Jan. 1895: "Our local weather observer Mr. H.L. Fry kindly informs us that while absent from his home, an inquisitive youth examined his rain gauge and replaced it upside down. The gentleman had secured the rainfall for the period from the observer at Eureka and next week the report will appear as usual. The youth has promised not to ere again."

27 April 1895: "H.L. Fry is agent for a celebrated brand of Cylon Tea..."

8 June 1895: "Mrs. H.L. Fry, her daughter Winifred, and son Donald, re-

turned home on the Pomona from Palo Alto. Donald graduated at the Stanford University as an electrical engineer."

28 Dec. 1895: "Miss Winifred Fry arrived home Sunday to spend the holidays with her parents. The young lady is studying to become an M.D. and is making rapid progress in the study of her chosen profession."

11 July 1896: "D.H. Fry arrived in Arcata Thursday. Donald graduated from Stanford last year as a civil engineer, but has been engaged in art work since that time. His cartoons have appeared frequently in the San Francisco Wasp."

21 Nov. 1896: "Donald Fry, who graduated from Stanford two years ago as an electrical engineer, is employed by a well known electrical house in the storage battery department. Donald operated an engine at the late Mechanics Fair and is at present obtaining some practical work in his chosen profession."

17 April 1897: Town Election: "On the ticket for library trustee appears the

name of Mrs. H.L. Fry. Mrs. Fry has taken an active part in the reorganization of the library and its improved condition is as much the work of her industry and good judgement as of any other person. She has spent her life among books and authors, has the time and inclination to serve the library and the Union hopes to see her elected."

7 Aug. 1897: "If the person who took the raingauge from Mr. Fry's land in east Arcata will return it, no questions will be asked. It is of no value to anyone else and the Union will not be able to furnish rain reports in the future unless the gauge is returned."

2 Oct. 1897: "Mr. H.L. Fry was fortunate enough to recover his rain gauge which was taken from his yard some time ago. The rainfall for the storm ending Thursday, amounted to 80-100th."

21 May 1898: "Mr. and Mrs. H.L. Fry left for below on Tuesday. They will attend the graduation exercises at Stanford when their daughter Winifred will graduate."

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placed by other buildings. Also Brice's Stable at the far end of town was destroyed by fire. It was replaced by the Loleta Bank which has the Victorian style to match the town.

In early times, most of the buildings were cream or white colored but in 1962 a paint-up campaign was started on Main Street by George Waldner, Editor of the Ferndale Enterprise at that time. With the cooperation of a paint company and with the help of the people of the town, all the buildings were painted in colors which helped the tourist trade. Seen clearly now is the outstanding carpenters' work on the gingerbread trim. Cozine Kinzel was one of the carpenters of that era and is said to be an excellent craftsman. He is my great-grandmother's second husband.

A block north from the town of Ferndale, on the right, is the Seth Shaw home. It was built for Seth Shaw, beginning in 1854 and was completed in 1866. On most of the renown homes and stores are wooden plaques telling about their origins.

The former Village Club has a Gazebo which houses the plaque listing Ferndale as Historical Landmark No. 883. The dedication took place on Bicentennial Day, Sept. 12, 1976. The Village Club was organized in 1906 and became federated in 1907.

Because the Eel River Valley around Ferndale was very fertile, many dairies were started. People who settled here included the Danes, the Swiss, the Italians, Germans, Irish and the Portuguese. Each brought their cultures and traditions to the area and all were hard working.

Churches of the area include The Methodist Church, which was the first



This house was built for Seth Shaw beginning in 1854 and was finished in 1866.

organized church in Ferndale. The building was erected in 1871-1873. The church has many beautiful stained-glass windows. Inside the sanctuary is one of the best examples of pressed tin ceilings in the state and the ceiling fixtures in the center are patterned tin squares of historical significance. Behind the church is the Ferndale Cemetery which was started in 1877. The earliest grave is that of Blanche Francis, dated 1877.

The Congregational Church is on Main Street. The present building was constructed in 1881. The Rev. Phillip Coombe was the first pastor. He was married to Maggie Russ, the daughter

of the pioneer Russ Family. Mr. Russ donated the lumber for the construction of the church and a bell. In 1954, the church was remodeled.

Our Saviour's Lutheran on Shaw Avenue was founded in 1890 by the Danish settlers. They also started the Danish Hall which was dedicated on Oct. 10, 1929. The building was originally constructed by Arnold Berding in the 1880s for a storehouse for his merchandising business across the street.

The land for St. Mary's Episcopal Church was given by Mrs. Isabella Shaw. The church was organized in 1897. It still has the hand-hewn pews,

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3 Sept. 1898: "Mr. H.L. Fry has recently built a fence around the front of his home in east Arcata, which is a decided novelty, besides being an ornament to his property. The fence is built of redwood pickets, split out of wavey grained wood. The pickets were taken from the bolt camp of the Trinidad Manufacturing Co. and brought to Arcata where they were converted into a fence. Mr. Fry will call it his 'Hoo Hoo' fence because it looks like a straight picket fences does after a Hoo Hoo banquet."

3 June 1899: Letter from H.L. Fry, Arcata, May 26th, 1899: "Editor of Arcata Union—Dear Sir: I enclose a translation of a letter I received recently from Baron von Loeffelholz and I will be much obliged if you will publish the same. In asking you to do this, a few

words of explanation are necessary. Some months ago the school trustees at Trinidad received a scientific work printed in German, and entitled 'Der Drehungen der Exdkrusts in Giologischen Zeitraumen,' or 'The Movements of the Earth's Crust in Geological Periods,' by Carl Freiherr Loeffelholz von Colberg. On the fly leaf of this book was written: 'For the school library in Trinidad by an old Trinidadier' and then the signature. The book was handed over to me by Mr. Philetus Bell with the request that I would write to the Baron. This I did and I collected such news as I thought would be of interest to him and embodied it in a letter which I addressed to the publisher of above named work as I did not know his address. The perusal of the letter will no doubt interest many in our county, and here let me

say that should any of your readers be able to furnish me with any Indian words or sentences or can throw any light upon the fate of some of those about whom he inquires, I will gladly transmit such information to the Baron. Your readers will understand that Loeffelholz Creek is named after the father of the man whose letter I herewith submit. I féel suré the county will gladly send a good map in exchange for the things the Baron offers to the Trinidad school, and I will look after the rocks, shells, etc. Your truly, Hume L. Fry." (Letter from Abroad, translated by Hume L. Fry followed) *(Editor's note: This letter was printed in the May-June, 1985, Historian.)*

NEXT: The marriages of son Donald and daughter Winifred and the death of Hume L. Fry and his wife, Sophia.

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lecturn, pulpit and altar.

In 1906, the German settlers organized the St. Mark's Church and the present building was completed in 1939.

The Catholic Church is said to be one of the most beautiful churches in the county. It was built by J.W. Blackmore in 1896 at a cost of \$4,062. The Catholic Rectory that used to be next to it served as a rectory for 80 years and for 10 priests from 1884 to 1964. It was scheduled to be torn down in 1964 and replaced with a modern building, but was sold to Viola Russ McBride and moved to 563 Ocean Avenue where it has been restored to its 1884 elegance.

Probably the most photographed home is the so-called "Gingerbread House" which is now a Bed and Breakfast home. It is on Berding Street. It was built in 1898 and owned by Dr. Hogan Ring. It cost \$1,200 to build and the back section was added later. The home also served as a hospital in the 1920s. Dr. Ring's flu medicine was known nationwide during the flu epidemic of 1918 and was sent all over the United States.

At 455 Ocean Avenue, gum-drop shaped trees planted over 100 years ago, line the yard at the Berding home built by Arnold Berding in 1875. Family descendants still live here.

At the Casanova home at 300 Ocean

Avenue, Dora Casanova Damon lives in the home which was built in 1878. J. Dougherty, a wagon maker, was the original owner. Also of interest, Leonard Casanova was voted to the Hall of Fame in Football in 1977. He was raised in this home.

Other Ferndale homes of interest should be included in your tour of Ferndale:

The George Brice place is another lovely home. Mr. Brice was in the livery stable and stage business. The Nissen home on Berding Street should be noted as well as the Russ home built by Joseph Russ, II, in 1907-1908. The Russ Family owned large amounts of land and raised cattle.

The Frank Rasmussen home on Main Street is interesting. His father came from Denmark and was the first to engage in dairying in the Eel River Valley. The home was built in the early 1900s.

The Hart home on Main Street was built around 1896 and was owned by Mary Hart. She also built the Hart Theatre in Ferndale. Later at the Hart home, Dr. Bruner had a hospital and carried on his practice for some time. It was recently used in the television movie "Blue Skies."

The Smith home on Main Street was built in 1895-1897. In the 1920s Mrs. Smith had a florist shop and greenhouses here and her husband, Lucius, had a cooper shop.

Another place that should be seen is Fern Cottage near Centerville. It was

built by Joseph and Zipporah Russ. They were married in 1854. Mr. Russ was one of the pioneers of the area. The home was built in 1863 and several additions were made later. The Russ's had thirteen children and the house had 22 rooms. In 1867 a school was built in the orchard for their children and the employees' children. Recently we were on a tour of this fascinating home and its antiques.

On upper Main Street you will find the Francis Francis home. Mr. Francis owned the Francis Land and Water Company. The first farm was known as "Brook-Dale"—this is the second home built on the original site. Francis also donated the land on which the Ferndale Methodist Church is built.

The Masonic Hall on upper Main Street was dedicated in 1891 and still has the original woodwork and wallpaper in the dining room and entry. It is still in active use to this day.

The Ferndale Fire Dept. was organized in 1897. The present fire hall was built in 1915. It is a volunteer Fire Dept. and they are known for being a speedy gang of firemen. The original Ferndale fire truck—Model T Chemical—was their first motorized piece of equipment.

Main Street architecture in Ferndale is very impressive. The Gazebo, which is near the middle of town was built in 1898 by G.W. Williams and W.F. Kausen. It has housed many different businesses. In the 1920s it was the home of

operations was out of print or perhaps never had been printed. They had to invent new ways to handle production as they worked. It took teamwork and a flair for improvisation to operate the plant with the oldest machinery in the industry. By the end of the war nobody else was still using belt-driven machinery. The other sawmills used the more powerful electric-motored machines. Somehow, however, the Holmes Eureka crew kept it all going by some masterful millwrighting, and they managed to compete on equal terms with the industry leaders. The crew, who doubted that the mill would ever be rebuilt if it ever burned down, and fearful for their jobs, would spring into action at the first sign of one of their frequent fires, sometimes putting it out with no loss in production whatsoever. The planing mill workers, with a minimum of machinery, also learned to improvise, producing any pattern of finished lumber some whimsical customer might want.

(NEXT: *Holmes Eureka's final years.*) **HH**

The Holmes Lumber Company

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required all workers to be members of the Lumber and Sawmill Workers Union and pay dues. Industry management, including Frederick Holmes, wasn't buying that and decided to take a strike.

The big strike started on January 14, 1946, and the mills were closed down. Some elements of the industry reopened their plants in the face of the strike and heavy picketing on July 15, 1946, but Holmes Eureka did not blow the mill whistle and reopen until August 15, 1946. The Carpenters Union apparently could not persuade individual carpenters, painters, electricians and plumbers around the nation to boycott redwood. Of 241 blue collar employees on the payroll when the strike began, 20 stayed at work through the duration of the strike, 54 reported back to work on

August 15, 1946, and 16 more old employees returned to work during the fall of 1946. Obviously Holmes Eureka had to hire many new employees to operate the plant.

The strike dragged on with fewer and fewer pickets until the pickets failed to show up on April 11, 1948. Holmes Eureka was different and the strike there did not have the intensity that it had at other operations. One of the picketers' occupations when nothing important was happening and no union bosses were around, was to tie fishing flies for Fred Holmes who they all knew. They passed completed fishing flies to him surreptitiously when he passed through the picket lines. Also, the company did not object to them throwing a crab pot off the Company dock. It is hard to imagine such activities on the picket lines at Samoa, Scotia or Fort Bragg.

When they were not striking (and two strikes in 56 years could hardly be called habitual) the Holmes Eureka crew was hard at work. They couldn't go by the book because the book covering their

the Red Star Clothing House, in the 1930s a paint store by Hall Jorgensen and Son was located there. The Candy Stick Studio was built around 1900 by Dan Branstetter. This store used to be called Burrill's Candy Store and later Mill's Candy Store where famous chocolates were made by Alma Jacobsen.

The Telephone Company used to be in the bright red building. Here operations of the Eel River and Southern Telephone Company began in 1911. A rate of \$1 a month was offered to local residents.

The Ferndale Enterprise office is on Main Street. The local newspaper was established in 1878. The files date back to 1878 and have been an invaluable source of information for historians.

The Ivanhoe Hotel was originally called the Ferndale Hotel. It was built in Sept., 1870, and in 1875 was destroyed by a fire. It was rebuilt on the identical plan. It was also damaged during World War II when gutted by fire. It is in use today as a restaurant.

Ring's Drug Store at 362 Main Street had been used as a drugstore since it was built in 1895 by the original owners and builders J.H. Ring and his father-in-law T.H. Brown. All the inside is original and the finish on the wood is Mr. Ring's formula.

Hobart Brown's Studio was built in the late 1800s. It was the original location of the Milwaukee Brewery Depot Saloon. It was owned by Calanchini and Comisto in 1887. It was later called Bartlett's Candy and Cigar Store Factory and later the 393 Club had a business there.

The Ferndale Meat Market has served the people of Ferndale for over 100 years and is still going strong.

The Village Inn on upper Main Street is a good example also of Victorian architecture. It was built in 1890 by Ira Russ, a son of Joseph and Zipporah Russ. Joseph Russ came here in 1852, and is a brother of Bertha Russ Lytel, who set up the Bertha Russ Lytel Foundation. This building is the largest commercial structure. Bank facilities were originally on the ground floor and business offices were upstairs. It was considered nearly fireproof with walls of nine-inch thick redwood and it had an inverted roof which could be flooded.

All who come to Ferndale should see the Ferndale Library which was built with a Carnegie grant in 1908. In 1915 it became a branch of the Humboldt Co. Library. An addition was made in 1977.

Now called the Yancy Feed Store, the old Golden State Creamery still is in use.



The Village Inn, or Russ building, was built by Ira Russ in 1890. It is the largest commercial structure in Ferndale.

In the 1890s it was called the California Central Creamery and later became the Golden State Creamery. Here earlier, Aage Hensen and C.E. Gray attained an international reputation for quality butter and contributed a spray-dry milk manufacturing process which revolutionized the dairy industry. In Ferndale there are many farmers who are well known for their animals. The Coppinis are known for their Jersey cows and one of their animals, "Sunny King Berna," was featured on the "Today" show in a Bi-Centennial salute. This animal is buried at the Humboldt County Fairgrounds at Ferndale beside "Silken Lady's Ruby"—both record producers of butterfat. Some other well known dairymen are the Reglis, Giacomini, Boyntons and others.

The Humboldt County Fairgrounds is near Ferndale. The first fair was held here in 1876. Before that, fairs were rotated between Hydesville and Rohnerville. The Humboldt County Fair was established in 1896. The Lighthouse on exhibit there was started in 1868 at Cape Mendocino. In 1949 the Cape Mendocino Lighthouse replica was built at the fairgrounds as a memorial and to house the lighthouse lamps and operational equipment.

Reflecting back, many of the people I remember who used to be in Ferndale might ring a familiar sound to some: Dr. Ring and Ross and Meredith Ring, Dr. Bruner, the Calanchinis, the Valsecchis, Carl Marcussen, Rose Scott Mullady, Emory Brightman, Mr. Ferguson, Kurt Mathes, Dave Cohen, Sharkey, Louie Lanini, Joe Bognuda and others.

I also remember when Hamburger Charley had his little red wagon on Main Street during the fair. He made delicious hamburgers.

I recall at fair time how the entertainers performed on Main Street at night. The show was followed by street dances.

My dad used to work at the Brick Store at the same time Delphine Moranda Bellotti worked there. Saturday was a big night to go to town, a time when you paid your bill at the store and the kids were given bags of candy.

Another nice memory: When my husband and I were married in 1934, Mr. Marcussen gave us a lovely set of English china.

Maybe you remember when you were growing up and went to the meat market with your mom. You would be given a weenie from Mr. Brightman at one market or Mr. Sadewasser at the other one.

August 16, 1953, was a big day at the fair. The 15½-foot tall cake made by Primo Marca was served to all attending.

The Ferndale Museum brings past history to all. It opened on Sept. 30, 1979, with the cooperation and volunteer work of many people in the town of Ferndale. A grant of \$25,000 from the Bertha Russ Lytel Foundation aided the large restoration task at the old County barn, which was donated in 1977.

In closing the article, I think of Andrew Genzoli, a classmate of mine at Ferndale High School. He taught Humboldt History at the College of the Redwoods where we took a couple of courses which we thoroughly enjoyed. He did much for the County and Ferndale and helped people realize the importance of landmarks for future generations. He would often tell us that each of us is a part of history and that we each have a story to tell. He is missed. HH