

COTTONWOOD—ON THE SOUTHERN BOUNDARY

The third principal town of southern Shasta County is situated four miles south of Anderson just inside the Shasta-Tehama County line drawn at Cottonwood Creek. Although Cottonwood has not grown to the size or industrial importance of Anderson, it predates its northern neighbor by some twenty years.

In February, 1852, Cottonwood became the second post office in two-year-old Shasta County. At that time the county had a population of 3,700 made up of 3,448 men and 252 women. The town had formed around a ferry crossing on Cottonwood Creek licensed in 1852 to Marcus J. Clanton. Although it did not receive a postal designation until 1852, this crossing was recognized as a spot on the map by the mid-century. Myrtle McNamer, in her thorough-going Cottonwood history *Way Back When*, reported an interview with a William Pepperdine who traveled to California in 1849. Pepperdine declared that the crossing at Cottonwood Creek stood out in his memory and he characterized the settlement as: "A little store where one could buy a plug of tobacco and get a bite to eat in 1850." Although this bit of civilization lay on the south side of the creek, it was within Shasta County, the southern boundary of the county in 1852 crossing near Red Bluff to the coast mountain range.

In 1856 Tehama County was created and Cottonwood became a part of the newly formed county. It would remain a Tehama County hamlet until 1872. Across the creek to the north of the town was the Olive Branch Hotel and Ranch operated by William Lean. This ranch dated back to a year previous to the establishment of the town in 1852. In addition, Lean operated his own ferry across the Cottonwood Creek at the point of the Shasta-Tehama Road.

As the town grew south of the creek, it served as a center for the surrounding area. In November, 1852, P. B. Reading was attended by a Dr. A. S. Baldwin of Cottonwood. During 1854 the Shasta *Courier* of September 30th stressed the town's importance as a reception point for immigrants from the east. This article declared:

We are all informed that all the portion of the valley in the vicinity of Cottonwood is literally covered with tents, wagons and cattle belonging to the immigrants . . . We are informed that the number coming over the Noble route this year is quite large . . . We are also happy to state that the proportion of females is quite large, thereby giving much comfort to the forlorn and long sorrowing bachelors of the Upper Sacramento.

In 1861 there was a flour mill in Cottonwood and it was listed as a Tehama County post office and stage station. The first Cottonwood school was established in 1863 as the Union School with an enrollment of twenty pupils. Also in 1863, W. H. Brockway defeated William Lean for Justice of the Cottonwood Township by a 9-1 decision. By 1866 the town was described in a contemporary newspaper article as a "Tehama County hamlet of 50-100 inhabitants." The *Alta California* described the Cottonwood Creek area as the home of a tribe of Indians who "did much of the farm work, lived in cabins and could speak some English." In 1867 the Clanton property, south of Cottonwood Creek, was sold to J. A. Brown. Included in this transaction was a hotel, stage barns, a feed stable, a toll bridge (which had replaced Clanton's Ferry), and a blacksmith shop. This property was resold in 1872 to John Barry who converted the hotel into a country home.

Meanwhile, activity on the north side of the creek was paving the way for the establishment of the present town. In September, 1859, Jacob Foster, a Bavarian immigrant, purchased 240 acres on Cottonwood Creek from Isaac Boggs. In the early 60's Foster built a hostelry on his property. This hotel was located on a road which ran between the American Ranch (Anderson) and the Prairie House (north of Red Bluff). Not only was Foster a businessman, but also an enterprising farmer, who by 1880 had 100 hogs, 75 cattle and 25 horses.

In 1872 the Central Pacific Railroad bought two strips of land from Foster. A depot was built on the side of the present Cottonwood depot, and Jacob Foster became the first railroad agent. On September 20, 1872, the Cottonwood post office was moved from Tehama County to the Foster's Hotel. This new Shasta County village consisted of the railroad depot, the hotel and livery stable, Grey's Blacksmith Shop, the Schuman and Price Store, and several dwellings.

By the 1880's Cottonwood was the county's largest shipping point for cattle, hogs and wool. Around the town lay an agricultural area of grain farms and orchards. Regular religious services were begun in this embryo village in 1880, although Cottonwood had been served by circuit ministers since the 60's. This event was described by a Cottonwood correspondent to the *Courier* on May 1, 1880:

Last Sunday our people assembled at the school house to attend worship, a previous announcement having been circulated through the neighborhood. . . . Having arrived there we found that quite a large crowd had preceded us Immediately after the adjournment of church, Mr. Howard organized a Sunday School and elected its officers, who are active young men of the neighborhood. The school promises to be a success.

The town was plotted in 1882 by Charles Crocker. Foster had begun selling lots during the 1870's. To summarize the progress achieved by the town, a *Courier* correspondent in 1883 stated:

Business is quite lively. We have two stores of general merchandise which are well fitted with a choice stock of just such goods as our country requires To speak of our stylish hotel would be useless. The traveling public is well aware of the excellent accommodations of the Foster house The interest taken in the education of the young is of no small importance. The people are sending their children to school very regularly and were at the schoolhouse on Saturday evenings hearing their children spell, or take their part in the exercises of the lyceum, while on the Sabbath day, Sunday school is well attended by pupils and citizens of both districts. Our friends on the Tehama side of the creek are a very important part of our meetings.

By 1885 a Shasta County map of Cottonwood showed five principal streets in the town, all on the west side of the railroad tracks, and a local paper described the place as "a compact little town . . . (with) a number of neat business and dwelling houses." Growth was evidenced in 1887 when the Butterway Addition to Cottonwood extended the city's boundaries northward. In 1889 unimproved land in the Cottonwood area was selling for \$4- \$10 per acre, while improved acreage sold for \$10- \$30. At about the same time the *Shasta Index* listed six advantages of Cottonwood living for prospective settlers. These advantages ranged from the "natural adaptability" of the soil for a variety of crops, to the pureness of the Cottonwood air. In fact, the Cottonwood climate was recommended in the following exuberant terms:

A more healthful location cannot be found anywhere on the Pacific Coast. Consumptives and those with lung trouble find our climate is better than medicine. Rheumatism and all diseases caused by damp and foggy weather are unknown here. It is often remarked by strangers that the people all have a ruddy complexion, are robust, happy, healthy and contented.

Despite the uninhibited presentation above, another newspaper clipping of 1889 vintage displayed perhaps a tinge of inconsistency, or at least a bit of omission in the *Index* article. Acknowledging the warmth of the California sun, even in Cottonwood, the writer proclaimed:

Hot weather is upon us and with it colic, cholera, morbid dysentery and diarrhoea. The only safe way to combat these diseases is to have some reliable remedy in hand and all who have tried Chamberlain's Colic, Cholera and Diarrhoea Remedy will admit that it is the most prompt, reliable and successful medicine for these complaints. It costs but 25¢ or 50¢ and may be the means of saving you, or your family much suffering, if not life itself, before the summer is over.

The Knoll School District, which had been formed from the Oak Knoll and Union Districts in 1875, had a school in the town in the 1880's. In 1889 a large brick school replaced the first brush surrounded building at a cost to the school district of \$5,000. At this time the railroad fare from Cottonwood to Redding was 70¢. W. W. Felts of Sacramento had begun the city's first newspaper in 1885, and in 1889 the Cottonwood Register declared that the town's prospects were good. To prove its assertion, the paper listed an impressive list of Cottonwood businesses. Three general merchandise stores, a shoe store, a harness shop, a tinshop, two barber shops, three blacksmiths, a drug store and four insurance agents were included in this business register. In addition, a tri-weekly stage operated between Cottonwood and Shingletown, and one could subscribe to the local paper for \$2.50 per year. Some Cottonwood rivalry against its northern neighbor was shown

in a local editorial on September 4, 1890, entitled, "Some People Want the Earth." This voiced a vigorous protest because Anderson had eight county officers as compared with Cottonwood's two, and Andersonites were warned to "watch your points on election day." At about the same time the editor of the Cottonwood *Register* stoutly maintained that:

There is more business done in Cottonwood to the square inch than in any other town in the state. Our people are a race of hustlers and we stand ready and able to wager our new school house and a tenth interest in the *Register* office that any business man in Cottonwood can knock "hard times" out in one round.

By 1900 three churches had been established. The first was the Congregational founded in 1888, to be followed by the Wesleyan Methodist in 1889 and the Baptist in 1896. A town dramatics society flourished before 1900, and as far back as 1879, the Cottonwood Plowboys had met the Shasta City team in a baseball encounter. Cottonwood not only had a baseball team that represented the town in weekly games, but in 1885 the ladies were also provided for recreationally by a Woman's Croquet Club. The GAR had a local contingent from 1898 to 1902. Dances were held at several places in Cottonwood, and picnics, especially on the Fourth of July, were special events to the local citizenry. That not all was tranquility in this budding western community was evidenced in a Cottonwood *Register* article of July 18, 1889. The writer declared:

There have been several little "slouging matches" in town recently; among the latest was Tuesday evening last whereby Mart Galliher, an employee in the Laffoon and Westlake stable, knocked the latter (Westlake) into the middle of next month. No one is to blame but Mr. Westlake himself, as he was on one of his "high horses" and abused Mr. Galliher in the most shameful style by calling him all names imaginable. The result was Mr. Westlake was knocked down and lay unconscious for nearly an hour. Dr. Clark was called to render medical aid.

In 1900 the *Shasta County Directory* called Cottonwood "one of the county's important towns." The *Directory* described the town as the center of a farming and fruit area. It also emphasized Cottonwood's importance as a shipping point for lumber and shakes, as well as cattle and wool.

By 1910 the *Anderson Valley News* was able to describe Cottonwood as a progressive town where the buildings and streets were improving and a new flour mill was near completion. When finished this mill produced seventy-five tons of flour per week. During this time Cottonwood's prosperity was derived partially from its position as a central shipping point for some of the Shingletown and plateau area sawmills. The Cottonwood *Enterprise* of August 10, 1901, stated that: "All available teams in the country are busy hauling lumber from Shingletown to Cottonwood. Cottonwood is one of the largest shipping points north of Sacramento and business is still growing." In addition to its flour mill, a creamery processed local milk products. Around Cottonwood lay some excellent tracts of land which proved productive alfalfa and fruit land, especially after the coming of the Anderson-Cottonwood Irrigation District. Winter range land was also available in the town's hinterland.

Life in Cottonwood during the early 1900's evidenced an interesting combination of easy-going rural existence and a growing awareness of technical change. Social life centered principally about the church, school, political party and community centered recreation. Besides their regular services, including Sunday School and two church services on Sunday, as well as a Wednesday night prayer meeting, the local churches offered a variety of additional activities to their members. Special programs on Easter and Christmas, singing lessons offered to the youngsters, pound socials, church fairs, presentations of plays and educational lectures, as well as all manner of charitable ventures came under religious auspices.

The local school, located in the present Grange Hall building, was also a center of community interest. Projects to repair the school, heated discussions on matters of education in the local paper, and regular reports on the status of each pupil in his class evidenced the town's interest in the learning of its children. One Cottonwood *Enterprise* article of March 31, 1906, indicated that not all was peace and harmony on the local education scene, however. It declared:

Eight scholars walked out of the Cottonwood District school in a body Wednesday. The school is just across the line in Tehama County. What the troubles can be that

would call for such audacious actions upon the whole school . . . is a mystery . . . The parents may do a little "striking" and send them back to school when they are able to sit down.

Vitality characterized the participation of Cottonwood citizens in political matters at the turn of the century. During these times state political aspirants made their way to the small towns, as well as the large. For instance, in the heated gubernatorial race of 1910 both the Lincoln-Roosevelt candidate, Hiram Johnson, and the Democratic nominee, Theodore Bell, presented their programs from the vantage point of the local railroad station platform. About Hiram Johnson the Cottonwood *Enterprise* declared: "Johnson has a pleasing, impressive personality and would make a good governor." Regarding the reception for Bell, the paper asserted:

The largest political rally ever seen in Cottonwood in honor of any candidate was held here last Saturday. It was a Democratic rally . . . With the ringing of bells, the flash of fireworks, the music of the band, the clapping of hands and cheers from the crowd, the special car containing Mr. Bell came to a stop and Bell . . . made a short speech.

Advocates of reform, especially the promoters of women's rights and temperance legislation, were also frequent visitors to the town. Regarding the efforts of the suffragites, the Cottonwood editor remarked:

Most women suffer enough now without the ballot in order to create more trouble. Women of the feminine gender as a rule do not want the ballot and it would not be safe to allow the women that "wear the breeches" to vote. That kind of woman makes enough noise in the world already.

In May, 1910, a Miss Ida Alexander of the Anti-Saloon League was in town addressing a large crowd of Cottonwoodites in a Saturday night street meeting, followed by a temperance discourse at the Congregational Church the next day. Regarding her efforts, the local paper commented:

She . . . drew a crowded house. She is circulating a petition which asks for an election to vote on "Shall Shasta County be dry?" It is dry enough here with this north wind, but the petition is endeavoring to give the people a chance to vote on whether the saloons shall do business or not in this county. Her petition was numerously signed about here.

In addition to the above mentioned activities, dances, horse races, baseball games, vaudeville shows and local theatricals enlivened the existence of Cottonwood residents.

Modern invention was bringing about additional change in the early 1900's. A Cottonwood *Enterprise* advertisement of November 21, 1908, announced:

At Carter's Hall - Saturday night, the 21st - Minnehaha Company - All the latest and best moving pictures. Admission only 15¢ and 25¢.

In regard to the automobile, a local correspondent declared in 1908 that: "The auto is becoming the principal means of locomotion now of many going camping and the big machines loaded with camping outfits are daily seen going through town." Undoubtedly some wished themselves back in the less complicated "horse and buggy" era after an occurrence like this one reported in the December 31, 1910, Cottonwood paper:

An automobile party of Anderson mistook the road at Cottonwood Creek bridge Tuesday night and ran into the creek. The old standby horse was secured from town and ranked them out of the wet.

Even the flying machine received notice locally as the Cottonwood paper recorded the frightful death of an aeronaut employed to demonstrate his primitive machine in the 1909 Fourth of July celebration at Redding. The Cottonwood editor described the fearful scene as follows:

After ascending about twenty-five feet on the start, the basket containing the small engine swung in such a position that the propeller blades cut a hole in the gas bag letting out the gas which came in contact with the sparks of the motor and caused a terrible explosion. Moore (the pilot) suddenly fell to the ground with the burning gas bag on top of him.

By about 1920 Cottonwood possessed, besides a flour mill and creamery, a new bank, two garages, a hotel and four stores. At this time farm land adjacent to the town could be obtained for amounts ranging from \$50-\$150 per acre. Despite the squabble with Anderson over the location of the high school, Cottonwood students were an important part of the new secondary school. By the mid-20's Shasta Brand Butter and Cottonwood Ice Cream from the local creamery had gained recognition for the city, as had the "Shasta's Best" and "Shasta Daisy" flours from the Cottonwood mill. In 1925 the honey industry was introduced to the city. A \$1,000 warehouse was erected where bee producers from all over the county obtained their hives and had honey extracted and packed. In the same year approximately 100 men were employed one mile north-east of Cottonwood in constructing a \$500,000 sub-station for the Pacific Gas and Electric Company. This thirty by eighty-two foot building housed four transformers, oil switches and other apparatus necessary to the conduction of electricity. Also in 1925 a new post office was erected. To climax this important year in Cottonwood's growth, the local baseball team won the Lassen League Championship by trouncing the Gerber club 18-0.

In 1927 Cottonwood could claim county leadership as a livestock shipping center. In 1929 there were 90 pupils in the local elementary school and a twenty-one pier bridge was completed across Cottonwood Creek. In addition, a new Catholic Church was erected in 1929. This sanctuary came as a gift of rancher James Barry and his sisters, and cost between \$7,000 and \$8,000. The Cottonwood Volunteer Fire Department was organized in 1931, but in the following year, despite the efforts of this group, the Cottonwood Flour Mill burned to the ground with a loss of over \$30,000.

With the various "New Deal" programs providing jobs around the Cottonwood area, the situation was much the same during this period as in Anderson. The Townsend plan received noteworthy attention, but Upton Sinclair's scheme was defeated by Cottonwood voters in 1934 by a 90-64 margin. Cottonwood was also affected by the severe winter of 1937-38, when the subway south of town was closed by high water.

In 1938 a bond election was held to build a six room elementary school. Carried by a 192-36 vote, this new school cost \$70,000 of which \$31,000 was granted by the government, and eleven-fourteenths of the balance was paid by local utility companies, principally the PG&E. In 1939 the town was reported to have the highest tax rate of any county residential area with \$4.03 per 100.

With the coming of World War II this hamlet took its place in the struggle against the Axis. These efforts were channeled through air raid warning stations, USO drives, War Bond sales, the formation of a Red Cross First Aid unit and similar activities. By 1945 Cottonwoodites had helped in seven War Bond drives, used ration stamps for goods ranging from gasoline to groceries and had sent many of their young men to serve in the armed forces.

During the post-war era in which her northern neighbor grew rapidly with an influx of new industry, Cottonwood also grew, but at a less accelerated rate. Soon after the announcement of the new Shasta Plywood Plant was made in 1947, the coming of the Gossett Brothers Remanufacturing Mill to Cottonwood was made known. This planing mill, designed to cut 100,000 board feet of lumber per day, was projected to employ fifty men per shift. In addition, in 1948 an improvement project at the local PG&E sub-station placed the value of that transmission point at \$3,000,000. In addition, by the end of the 40's a new four lane highway had been finished through the town.

In 1950 Cottonwood was reported to be the largest bee shipping center in the United States, and the eighty-two acre persimmon orchard owned by Moss Feigenburg was the world's largest. The town's importance as an electrical distributing point to both local users and to points as far distant as the Bay area was established and a few miles east of the town lay the world's largest salmon fish hatchery. At the mid-century point the Catholic, Baptist and Mormon churches were represented in Cottonwood and the city's list of civic organizations was impressive. Also in 1950 a group of civic minded citizens led by John Oliver laid plans for a local Community Hall. During the same year, Cottonwood water users displayed their dissatisfaction with the existing system, paving the way for a \$150,000 municipal district plan approved in 1955 by a 202-28 majority.

In 1955 a second elementary school building was approved locally by a 270-131 margin. The site of this West Cottonwood School was a thirty acre tract west of the town on the Hock Ranch. When school opened in September, 1955, local attendance had increased to 436 pupils. During 1956 ground was broken for a new post office, Cottonwoodites celebrated the completion of the Cottonwood Water System and the local Lions Club finished their own club house.

By 1957 Cottonwood's population was estimated at 1,611 and the town possessed a volunteer fire department of thirty-five members. Among its assets were a 500 pupil school, an assessed valuation of \$5,264,905, five motels and an eighty acre Scout park. Dairy and beef cattle, sheep, hogs, bees, walnuts, prunes, peaches and persimmons were the basic crops of the town's agricultural hinterland. A Dun and Bradstreet survey in 1958 pointed to a healthy twenty-five per cent increase in business listings for the town between 1953 and 1958. At the beginning of the 60's Cottonwood was a substantial, growing community which showed promise of a continued development within a productive agricultural area. By the mid-60's the number of people in the town was estimated at about 2,500 and the Cottonwood school possessed over 700 students. Main Street traffic was substantially reduced in 1964 by the completion of a new freeway by-passing the major section of town; nevertheless, Cottonwood continued to grow rapidly because of the influx of residents into several new subdivisions on the outskirts of the community. In addition, a new industry, the Shasta County Livestock Auction Yard, was completed north of town in 1966. At the same time work progressed on a community park west of Interstate 5 between Gas Point Road and First Street. The development of industry in southern Shasta County served to insure the continued steady growth of this century-old community on the banks of Cottonwood Creek.