

# Live Oak developed its identity during

# Depression years

(Fifth in a series)

By CAROLYN SWIFT

Santa Cruz and Capitola have always been eager to brag about special distinctions — their unique "consciousness," and the ability to attract a seasonful of summer complaints — but Live Oak has never boasted about the character of its community or the qualities that set it apart for so many decades.

Live Oak has been quite modest about its pride of community, yet the people who have lived there for years are proud. They have known the 3,000 acre-section of the county as a place where all kinds of people can be found — where there is poverty and success, a sense of honesty and lack of pretention, and where there is

fragmentation, yet a down-to-earth unity that marks an independent farming community.

A good deal of this identity developed in Live Oak in the years after World War I and during the Depression, when the population grew with an influx of newcomers who generally shared a similarity of interests.

By 1921, Live Oak School was crowded and hurting for more classroom space, and the problem then was one that has returned to the district schools an average of once every five years since — and is all too familiar in the 1970s.

Trustees discovered after World War I that while classes were cramped, daily attendance generated too little revenue to

provide funds for new construction. Attendance worries were magnified by irregular enrollments and a tendency for students to travel to another school in a neighboring district.

Early in 1922, a bond election bid failed and the clubhouse once again became a classroom. A second attempt that year was successful, and two rooms were added to the 1914 brick school. Two more rooms were constructed in 1926, and the brick building became an eight-room facility after 1935.

In 1946, the school was again overcrowded, with 333 pupils attending a facility designed for 200. Again, the clubhouse (now also the cafeteria) was used for classes. Plans for a new building

were drawn up with anticipated cost of \$1,594,795.

In a survey of rural schools, the county superintendent noted in the late 1940s that most were suffering an equal pressure from cramped classes.

"We have tried for government quonset huts, paper-covered buildings and officers quarters with no success," the survey reported, "We are afraid we will have to try for hollow redwood trees."

Live Oak had obtained a three-room quonset hut in 1941 from Fort McQuade, "to help house the influx of war personnel children." The hut served baby-boom children until 1959, when it was sold to a farm labor camp in Watsonville.

Classroom additions were made again in 1949 and 1951. That year, the county office of education bought one of the 1935 additions to the 1914 brick building, and moved it to property adjoining the school grounds. It was used for county mentally retarded classes, and eventually was used again by the school.

In 1955, the 1914 school was demolished except for one room used for a kindergarten. A new cafeteria was built behind the clubhouse. The club building — and the original 1873 school — were torn down in 1957.

Community development in the 30 years between 1920 and 1950 also had a theme of reconstruction. In 1921, the Live Oak PTA and Improvement Club helped the community obtain a site at 17th Ave. and the railroad tracks for relocation of the Southern Pacific Railroad depot.

The Live Oak depot, known as

"Cliffside," became an impromptu resort in the 1920s and 1930s, when traveling hobos slept in cardboard houses and cooked meals over "canned heat," while waiting for trains that stopped in Live Oak when passengers waved a flag.

When the Farmer's Co-op Exchange in Santa Cruz built an extension for the bulk sale of feed and supplies, it provided the Live Oak community with a needed service within district boundaries.

In the late 1920s, the co-op purchased the Santa Cruz Milling Company grain mill near 17th Ave. at the railroad tracks. Eventually the exchange included receiving sheds, feed mill, sack and feed warehouse and hay warehouse, with a later addition of nine storage tanks.

By the mid-1920s, competition in the annual egg-laying contests included hens from New York, Michigan, Missouri, Arizona, Washington, Oregon and California. In 1923, the winners were Mr. and Mrs. L.A. Thornewill, local residents, whose 10 white leghorn thoroughbred pullets laid some 2,816 eggs in 12 months — a new world's record that year.

Chicken ranching continued as a major industry until the late 1950s, when rising land values and large corporations drove out the smaller ranchers. Narrow lots and a few sheds remain today — along with an odd-shaped land pattern and "anything goes" zoning ordinances that resulted when developers attempted to squeeze other uses onto chicken-ranch-sized parcels.

There was still very little commercial business in Live Oak by the mid-1930s. There were four or

five small grocery stores along major roads at 7th Ave., Twin Lakes, and later on Portola Drive. There were two candy operations in Live Oak in the 1930s. One originated at the Frazier Lewis home on East Cliff Drive, where Lewis mixed secret ingredients for the "Victoria" candy treat. In 1936, Buckhart's Candies moved from Watsonville to settle on a former bulb ranch on East Cliff Drive.

In 1928, Los Robles Company Florists were located on School Lane. By 1936, Antonelli Bros. Begonia Gardens were

established on Capitola Road, not far from the school. Schaffer Tropical Gardens were established by Mr. and Mrs. Keith Shaffer on 41st Ave. in 1930. Along with Brown's Bulb Ranch, these businesses are now surrounded by tract homes, mobile home parks and regional shopping centers.

A part of the changing landscape during the 1920s and 30s were the disappearing sand dunes that vanished during heavy storms, and cliffs that dropped away from the edge near Twin Lakes — taking away the remnants of the electric car line. Land along East Cliff Drive and near Villa Maria del Mar was still known as "Lillydale," because of a flower industry devoted to calla lilies. A huge watertower that once stood as an area landmark is now incorporated as part of a home off 17th Ave.

In 1932, Santa Cruz County furnished funds to purchase the right-of-way to the Union Traction Company electric car line, which had been known as "division street," and later "Capitola Drive," right-of-way. Construction of the road that became Portola Drive was among the first CWA (Civil Works Act) projects in the northern California section during the Depression years.

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Information for this article was compiled with assistance from longtime Live Oak residents, Mrs. and Mrs. Robert Teteriller, Mr. and Mrs. Emilio Maggolo

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