

Corralitos Man's Memories Of Way It Was In

Editor's Note: Malcolm McLeod just turned 90 years old. He is one of the very few people left in this county who grew up in the Santa Cruz Mountains and is with us to describe his youth. On his 90th birthday Wednesday, he received telegrams from President Gerald Ford and California Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr. in congratulations.

His niece and nephew, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Johnson of La Selva Beach, held a Boulder Creek reunion birthday party for Malcolm last Sunday at which he was re-united with some friends of his youth.

By PAUL BEATTY

Sentinel Staff Writer

"Thinking back . . . sure, if I could do it all over again, I would chose to be raised in Boulder Creek at the turn of the Century, just as I lived it."

Malcolm McLeod (pronounced "McLoud") is sound of limb and his handshake is strong, more than a memory of a lifetime of hard work.

Running his hand through a full head of iron-gray hair, he responds carefully to questions about his youth in the masculine lumbering world of early Boulder Creek—a town that rebuilds in the flavor of its colorful past.

Malcolm McLeod was 90 years old Wednesday, born on Feb. 11, 1886.

He lives in Corralitos, but from 2 to his early 30s, he lived in the lusty, brawling timber town of Boulder Creek.

He remembers the town when prime redwoods still stood in towns' center, even though broad sweeps of timber had been clear cut in the valley; he remembers when

Boulder Creek had far more bachelors than family-folks and when Saturday night was the night to shake out the sawdust and grime of the forests and mills and raise a little hell.

"Seventeen saloons, three warehouses and a few general stores made up the town," McLeod recalls, "but it was a time when a woman could walk the street, day or night, without fear."

He amends that statement, "Except on Saturday night when all the lumbermen and millmen came to town and got drunk, then the women just normally stayed home; it was a tough town."

The streets were wide, as they are now, "to accommodate the large wagons," McLeod recalls.

Bachelors, in the large majority, lived out of town in small cabins around the mills, and the married men and their families lived in town.

There was an exception to this rule.

"There was one mill though, Dougherty's Mill, that had separate cabins for men and women and we called it 'he-town' and 'she-town'."

"The winter time population of Boulder Creek was about 800, but in the summer there would be about 1,200. 'It was known in the summer as a 'picnic town' and the people would come to spend the day in the trees."

His memories go back to before his days of labor in the timber, to his nine years of schooling in the small four-room, double-decker, Boulder Creek school house.

"Readin', writin' and 'rithmetic, you learn by the rule of the hickory stick."

"That was the little chant we had, and there was a good deal

of truth to it," he said, "I remember welts from the teacher's 'hickory stick' that you could lay your fingers between."

McLeod said that to the best of his memory, the girls were never punished by the hickory stick, but "they were punished, probably, by being sent to the library."

Classrooms were not segregated for the sexes, but the playgrounds were.

"All the first to third grades students played on one side of the school and the older boys played on the other side."

"The girls were always kept on the young students side of the school, to keep them away from the rough boys," McLeod recalls.

Despite his "welts," he was a good student and "I always managed to do well enough to avoid having to take final examinations."

"It was good schooling, better than they have now."

Malcolm was the youngest of four children, with brother William and sisters Tina and Etta making up the family that arrived in Boulder Creek around 1888 from La Honda in San Mateo County.

The parents, Malcolm McLeod and Katherine (McPhail) McLeod came to the United States from Cape Briton in Nova Scotia.

His parents' parents came from Scotland.

"My father and mother didn't speak English, they spoke Gaelic," McLeod said, and then for the benefit of the reporter rattled off a string of Gaelic, which he describes as sounding "like Chinese."

His father was a laborer in the mills—"All the men were just laborers in those days, making as low as 10 cents an

hour." He was 14 years old at the turn of the Century, during the years when Boulder Creek was the fifth largest timber shipping port in California.

He was there when the upper valley's lumber was taken down to Felton from above Boulder Creek by a wooden flume "owned by a Mr. Dool, but I don't recall his first name," McLeod said.

"Then the trains came in to ship the timber, at the rate of two trains a day and those were the big timber producing years," he remembered.

McLeod recalled, "We used to do a lot of hunting for quail, gray squirrel and later for deer now and then."

And, the steelhead fishing was very good.

After graduating from

Boulder Creek Elementary-Junior High School, McLeod attended Santa Cruz High School for a year-and-a-half.

He had to travel 14 miles to get there, many times by bicycle "through 10 inches of dust, or mud" down the old road to town.

He also used the train later on to get to school.

"But then things got tough, and I had to drop out of school and go to work."

"Men were earning 10 cents an hour, sometimes up to 15 and 25 cents an hour, but what could you do with 25 cents an hour today, except to starve to death."

He went to work.

After a time in timber, he earned enough to save a fortune of \$200 and enrolled in Heald's Business College in Santa Cruz.

McLeod completed the college, "but I never followed it up, even though I had chances for business; like a damn fool."

He recalls going to "Cress and Moody" livery stables in Boulder Creek to rent courting rigs—horses and buggy in which to take the local ladies riding.

"But I never made it with any of the Boulder Creek girls, I didn't like them that much."

He opined, "Things today are just sex and drugs, but in those days it seemed there were so many other things."

"But, I have to admit, that with the girls, there was always that thing, there was always an amount of that," McLeod said.

He played baseball with the Boulder Creek town team in his early 20s, "and some of the games got a little hectic; there were fistfights after some of the games," he said.

McLeod played right field and pitcher around the the

years of 1908, and play was mostly with the Ben Lomond, Santa Cruz and Felton "Woodpecker" teams.

In his early 20s, also, he worked as a clerk in the S.H. Ramble and Co. general merchandise store in Boulder Creek, one of the three large general merchandise stores scattered among the taverns.

Then from 1914 to 1916, he ran a pack team of Mexican mules in delivering grapestake wood to Santa Cruz.

"We'd carry the split stuff out on the small Mexican mules with a horse leading them," he remembers.

Before leaving the timber town, he had purchased and been the owner of five acres in Boulder Creek, an amount of land that would be quite highly priced today.

Then in 1917, at the age of 31, he moved from the timber country and up to Oakland.

While there, he was drafted into the armed services to fight in World War I, but "when I went to report for duty, I found that the town of Oakland was celebrating the end of the war," McLeod said.

"I married late, when I was 42, but I made up for it by marrying three times."

He was left a widower three times and now lives alone where he manages very well to take care of himself.

Only recently, he refused to take the "meals on wheels" program, telling his nephew, "I feel as though I'm taking it from someone who needs it," the nephew, Walter Johnson, told the press.

Malcolm McLeod's memory is very clear of the bright, forest-green days of early Boulder Creek and the days when "not everything was sex and drugs" but the days of



Malcolm McLeod, Santa Cruz County native now living in Corralitos, who spent his young years in San Lorenzo Valley, looks over a letter he received from President Gerald Ford on his 90th birthday Wednesday.

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'Tom Sawyers' wandering in the Santa Cruz Mountains, swimming in Boulder Creek and San Lorenzo River, avoiding the hickory stick at school and breathing the free air of a young America.

"Sure, I'd like to live it all over again; to live it just the way it was then," Malcolm said on his 90th birthday.