

*Biog - Wagner*

## Men With Pizazz

# Memories Live On for Fred Wagner

By MARGARET KOCH  
Sentinel Staff Writer

"There never was a prettier drive, anywhere," Fred Wagner says of the run up to Boulder Creek.

"It was called the 'Road to the Redwoods' in the olden days, that road along the San Lorenzo River. We took many a drive up there, many a picnic party we had. It was an all-day affair in those days."

How long was all day, I wondered.

Fred scratched his head, then said, "Well, it kind of depended on the weather. But I'd say about three hours, one way, by horse and rig. Of course if the weather turned bad it could take a lot longer."

What does the modern term "pizazz" have to do with a man who will be 98 years old December 9?

You may be wondering.

Well. The term "pizazz" does not refer to age, race or bank account, really. It is something to do with an indefinable essence of personality. Fred has personality. He's a man who has never given up, even under difficult circumstances in life. He's a man who marched to his own set of drumbeats.

He's still marching, although at a much slower pace these days.

He was a mere boy when his father, John Wagner, sent him down to "clear out some 'Underbrush' in what was to become the modern Wagner's Grove, about 80 years later. Fred and his brother cleared out the brush and dug pits for bulls' head barbecues that became the talk of the town back in the 1890s.

Along with the bulls' heads, baked to a turn in the underground pits, went mugs of cold beer and accordion music which rang through the redwoods in the grove.

"I liked the jowls," Fred recalls. "You've never had a bull's head barbecue — what a pity."

Fred's father, who came from Germany to the U.S. in 1856, first worked in a tannery in Stockton.

When he heard about the tanneries at Santa Cruz he moved here and worked for Joseph Boston, then later opened a tannery of his own, with several partners, in Scotts Valley.

In 1874 he sold out, and took his profits to purchase an acreage from Nicolas Doderer which included a portion of the old Mission Santa Cruz Potrero. The potrero part of Wagner's 40 acres contained the grove of redwoods that became Wagner's Grove.

In the old days it was a lively place, with 10 or 12 bulls' heads roasting for one barbecue. Then, times and customs changed, and the grove was all but forgotten for a few years. From the 1930s on, Wagner's Grove stood silent and empty. In 1958 one man recalled what good times he and his family had enjoyed there, and he purchased the grove and seven acres to make Harvey West Park. Harvey West was the man. However, the old name, Wagner's Grove, was retained for that particular portion of the property.

Fred Wagner, son of John, was one of the town's early blacksmiths, a profession he pursued up into his 80s. He chuckles at the "return of the horse," as he sometimes calls it.

His blacksmith shop stood on Front Street before it was cut through to Soquel Avenue. When Fred started out as an apprentice blacksmith in Frank Chandler's shop to learn the skills, he made 50 cents a day. Later, as a journeyman, he got the magnificent sum of 75 cents a day.

"A day, in those days, meant 10 hours of work," Fred comments.

He then kept his own shop until 1911 when "the Model T put us out of business."

Maybe that's why he is so amused today, 65 years later, at the popularity of the horse.

From blacksmithing with horses, Fred went to blacksmithing with county equipment at the County Garage where he worked until he retired in 1947.

However, he didn't really retire. With an old friend, Ernie Kint, he started a "traveling blacksmith business" on a small pickup truck. The two covered the county and then some, wherever horses needed shoeing. And Fred kept that up until his health forced him to quit — in his 80s — late 80s.

So he is really the last of the town's old smithys.

Fred courted his late wife, Grace Amaya, in a horse-drawn buggy. Grace was an accomplished horsewoman, herself.

"Sometimes I look around and I hardly know my own town," Fred says with wonder in his voice. "Things have changed so much."

He says Highway 9 was built over the old dirt road that ran up the valley, so the views are about the same today, as beautiful as ever they were.

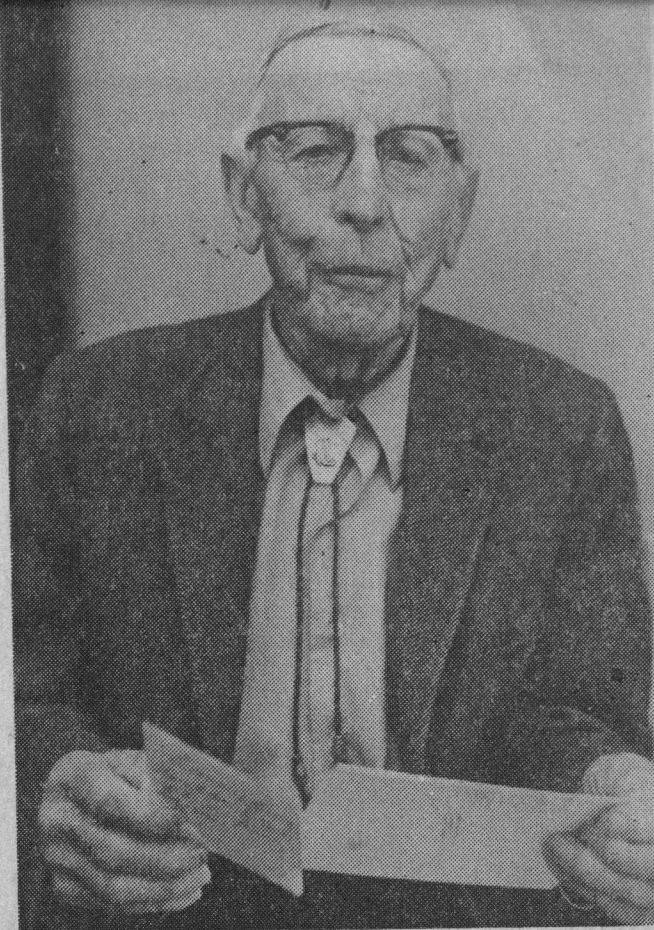
However, today one traverses in minutes what used to take hours. For example, the Odd Fellows degree team that visited Boulder Creek — 12 men with Bob Taylor driving the rig, coming home in the middle of the night.

"They had no lights, and the rig hit a stump at the side of the road and almost tipped over," he says. "There were some close ones on that road."

Cowell's bull teams are a vivid memory to Fred who lived, and still does, up on the old family property on Highland Avenue, near the Cowell property.

"Cowell had four or five teams hauling," he recalls. "All by command of voice. Those bulls had to be trained well. 'Gee' meant turn right, and 'haw' meant turn left. The bull team driver had a gorge — a stick with a steel tip on the end. He walked alongside the load and rode back on the empty wagon. They hauled eight-foot lengths of redwood to the lime kilns."

Fred has given all this information in more detail, to UCSC's oral history project and there is a book of his memories up there.



Fred Wagner looking over an old document. Below, Fred's wife's mother, Laura Amaya, in a hat made by Kate Handley. The Amaya family at one time owned much of East Santa Cruz.



One of Cowell's bull teams, above, in photo from Fred's collection of memorabilia. Picture at left shows Fred driving a four-seated rig home from a picnic at Boulder Creek.



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**SHOW TIME 1976** — A benefit show for Oblates of St. Joseph is planned for November 7 at 2 p.m. at Mission Hill Junior High School auditorium and the public is invited. Taking part in one of the many acts will be the Tinytots above, from left: Daiguri Boyd, Jonnell Yantis, Melissa Gates and Melany Britton. The two-hour show also includes Barbara Ellen Dancers, the Gymnastic Club, vocalist Sandi Stoltenkamp, Ladisla Pinheiro and Chris Comelli. For tickets call Enos Moro at 426-6430.