

KINS talk 1/19/17

Hello my name is Ben Brown and I'm the director/curator of the Clarke Historical Museum. The museum is hosting a tea party fundraiser on January 28th, please join us for an afternoon of music, good company and a special presentation by Spring Garrett a local milliner who will be bringing a selection of her hats to go along with a display from the museum's collection. Please email or call the museum at 443-1947 for more information or to purchase tickets.

For those attending the tea party, they will be the first to see the new exhibit on Humboldt County in the 1960s.

The exhibit will cover such topics as the installation of the PG&E nuclear plant, women's fashion, the 1964 flood, the Vietnam War, and the dedication of Lady Bird Johnson grove, one significant event that occurred in 1966 was the closure of the Eureka Woolen Mills.

During the years from 1890 to 1920, Humboldt County had a very prosperous and rapidly expanding sheep-raising and wool-producing industry. Thousands of sheep were herded in the great ranges in the southern part of the county, the Bald Hills area east of the redwood belt, and in the Eel River Valley. It is safe to say that fully a third of the area of Humboldt County was devoted to the industry with the county exporting 500,000 pounds of wool a year.

To capitalize on this booming industry, the Eureka Woolen Mills were constructed in 1901 west of Broadway at the southwest corner of Broadway and 14th Street. Led by A.W. Berr, and backed by John Vance, William Carson, Joseph Russ, and J.W. Henderson, the mill manufactured blankets and flannels, and was able to complete the entire process from wool to finished product and was known for its fine quality. This was a four-set mill powered by two large steam boilers and employed 100 people.

In the early 1920s there was a change in ownership and the mill began producing brown army blankets, gray prison blankets, auto robes, and thousands of yards of woolen cloth, which were shipped out of the county to go along with a retail office for local sales.

The mill reached its peak from 1930 through the 1940s with the mill employing 225 workers broken into 3 shifts that worked around the clock.

In April, 1949, Victor Egan, who was in charge of sales and shipping departments, left the Eureka Woolen Mills and built a new mill at 4300 Broadway, naming the plant the California Woolen Mills. But with the advent of many new synthetic fabrics, such as polyester and nylon, along with cheaper foreign products from Korea, Taiwan and other countries, the demand for woolen products fell off drastically. In addition, the cost of freight became very high and local wages were increasing (sound familiar?). All of these factors forced the local mills to close their doors for good in 1966. With no local outlet to sell wool to, many sheep ranchers were forced to sell off their flocks.

Please join us for the Clarke Museum's tea party fundraiser on 1/28.