

The Formation of Humboldt County, California

Humboldt County was formed in 1853 from the coastal section of Trinity County, the rapid settlement of that part making it necessary. The county seats have been Uniontown, now Arcata, 1853, and Eureka since 1856.

Humboldt Bay on which Eureka is situated was first discovered in 1806. The American crew from the ship O'Cain of the Russian American Company headed by Captain Jonothan Winship in search of sea-otter discovered its obscure entrance. Later the O'Cain sailed into the bay and dropped anchor opposite to where Eureka now stands. Because of the many Indian villages on the shores of the bay the party named it "Indian Bay".

After the discovery of gold in California there were gold mines operated on streams flowing west in Trinity and Siskiyou Counties. Hauling supplies overland was both tedious and expensive so several expeditions were fitted out in San Francisco in the hopes of discovering a coastwise connection with the mines. One of these expeditions under the command of Captain Douglass Ottinger of the "Laura Virginia" rediscovered the entrance to the bay in 1850 and on the following day, April 9, 1850 two small boats were launched and went over the bar. Humboldt point seemed the most central location so here "Humboldt City" was founded, named for the naturalist and explorer Baron von Humboldt. The same year Eureka was founded on Humboldt Bay about three miles from the entrance.

Eureka could be reached from the outside world by overland stage from San Francisco. It took three days in summer and four in winter; there were also two steamship lines, but most people preferred the overland route as the entrance to the bay was dangerous and there was many a disaster suffered by ships "crossing the bar". Mail came by pony express whenever the roads did not permit the stage to travel.

In 1852-53 Fort Humboldt was established on Humboldt Heights, a high bluff about a quarter of a mile back from the bay. This was established to afford protection from Indians. Captain Ulysses S Grant served here from October, 1853 to April, 1854.

There was no courthouse until the move to Eureka. The first Courthouse was of brick, but we do not find any record of the date it was built nor any description of it. The first section of an elaborate Courthouse was built in 1885-86; the second section in 1886; the third in 1887. This third section had statues on the roof, Minerva on the extreme top of the tower, four Justices, two Flora, Goddess of Flowers and Gardens, two Ceres, Goddess of Corn, two Fortunio, Goddess of Chance, two Juno, Goddess of Marriage and Birth. These statues were made of zinc, coated with heavy gray paint and sprayed with gray colored sand to give the appearance of stone. The fourth section built in 1888 added nothing to the exterior of the building but provided for the finishing of the interior, plumbing fixtures, stairways, heating plant, radiators, window frames, tiling floors, painting and all the work necessary to have the building ready for occupancy. The clock was added in 1893. In 1950 the tower had to be removed for safety.

Often a county or a county seat has a personage or a building in it which, while not directly connected with the Courthouse, does add to the total picture and for that reason should be included. This is true of a house in Eureka. There is in that city a famous Victorian house, pictured in about every book on Victorian houses that was ever published. It was built by William Carson of the Dolbeer-Carson Lumber Company. In 1885 the lumber business was going through a period of depression and William Carson was hard put to find employment for his men for whom he felt responsible. He decided to build a new home, "a mansion that would represent something of the dignity, the grandeur and the character of the redwood country, a mansion, moreover, that would be a credit to the city on Humboldt Bay, which he and his family had helped to build."

The house is solidly built, each wall, inside and out is supported by a separate foundation, the entire outline of the framework can be seen in the basement. There are three stories and a full basement. Its eighteen rooms include besides the usual compliment of rooms a large ballroom on the top floor as well

as a billiard room. The exterior of the house is redwood with fir timbering, the interior of redwood, oak, Philippine mahogany and Primavera wood from South America. For this last Carson sent one of his ships to bring back a cargo of 97,000 feet. This wood was widely used in the interior, each piece elaborately carved. The house also has many stained glass windows. There are two massive front doors, each of which has a stained glass panel with life sized figures from Shakespearean drama. There are two onyx fire places in the house, light in color, almost flesh color, partially translucent. According to legend the onyx came from Mexico. The garden of the house covers two city blocks.

William Carson lived in the house until his death in 1912, then J M "Milton" Carson and his family lived there, he dying in 1941 and Mrs Carson in 1944. After that the house was carefully maintained by M and Mrs La Boteaux. Today it is the home of the Ingomar Club, and organization of Humboldt business and professional men whose principal purpose is to retain and maintain the house.

Sources: The following sent by the County Clerk:

"Early History of Eureka," prepared by Eureka Chamber of Commerce and Humboldt Board of Trade.

"The Carson Mansion." Distributed by Eureka Chamber of Commerce and Humboldt Board of Trade taken from Humboldt Times, March 12 1950.

"The Construction of Humboldt County Courthouse at Eureka, California." 1883-1889. Howard B Melendy. January 1953 for Humboldt County Centennial.

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