

“Memories Of Helen”

Anderson & Vandiver

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“Memories Of Helen”

by
Barbara Anderson
and
Garland Vandiver

About the Cover —

Helen's Main Street about 1912. Note the fairly new building to the right. This was the Mountain Ranch Hotel located on the site of our present Unicoi Hill. A very attractive tourist haven and very popular, it burnt to the ground in the early 1940's. The entry gate shown to the right led into pasture for cattle and horses.

The dirt road which was Main Street curved toward the river and a ford for vehicles such as those one sees in front of a boarding house. These are horse drawn carriages and wagons, which was the main item of traffic at that time.

The sidewalk to the left led down to a swinging footbridge, or sometimes referred to as a “foot-log” — this being of course, for pedestrian traffic.

Written in reply to many questions from our tourist friends as to the beginnings of Helen. It is our opinion that Helen has shown itself to be a true pioneer since its beginning as a lumbering center and today as a replica of a Bavarian town.

We hope the photos will be of added interest, even tho' some are rather faded with age, all of them having been around for the past sixty years at least.

so-called antique furniture that is now coming in from overseas wasn't made from hardwood milled here.

The location of this enterprise took in practically the entire area of what we refer to now as "the island" commencing with the Helendorf Inn. During the peak years one could see from four to five acres of lumber stacks. In the beginning the lumber would be pulled out by a team of horses, but later this was replaced by a T-Model truck with solid rubber tires. This was the lumber that was stacked for drying before being run thru the planing mill.



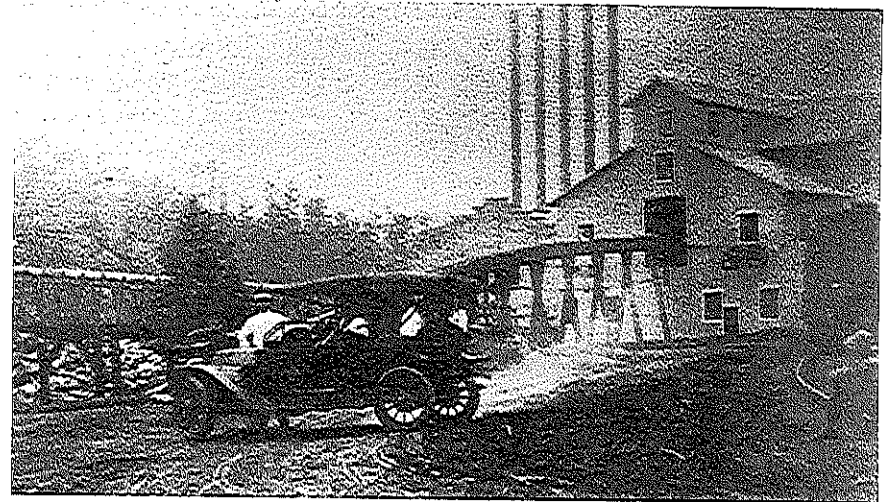
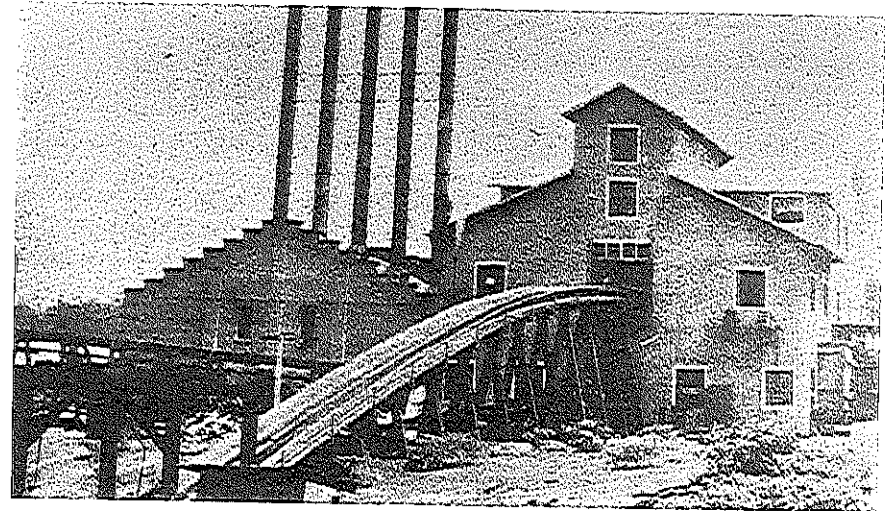
One of many lanes of stacked lumber which often would cover an area of five acres. The foundation for the concrete and oak blocks on which the lumber is stacked was made of oak lumber. This was necessary because of the metal wheels of the "buggies" used to transport the lumber to the field for stacking. In wet weather the "buggies" could not have been used because of the metal wheels and the wet slippery clay which would have made it very difficult to maneuver a heavy load of lumber.

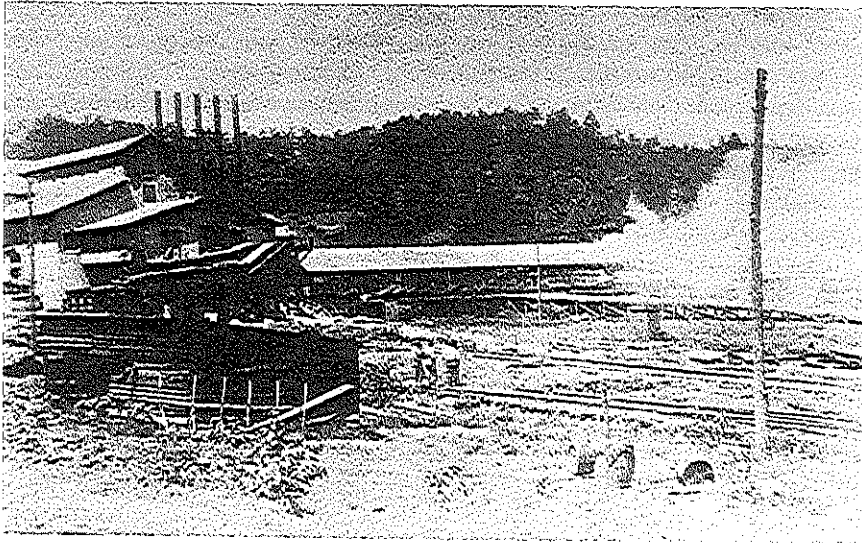
What appears to be concrete blocks are partly oak blocks and some concrete poured for this purpose at the mill.

Now came a whole new concept of living for the average family. Up to this time, wages for labor were unheard of — a person grew his own food, material was woven by hand for the family's clothes and a little bartering took place for other necessities. Now, suddenly it was possible to hire out at wages that started at fifty cents and went up to a dollar a day. At that time, this was good money. Prior to this time the live-in population consisted of a few farming families. Suddenly, there was an increase to three hundred

Two views of the mill which was located in the general area of the Helendorf Inn. In front of the mill was the millpond into which the logs were dumped as they came in on the log trains. The purpose of this was to wash the debris from the logs before they were put on the conveyor chain and went on in to the mill. If you will look closely you will note a difference in size of the entry for the logs at the top of the conveyor chain. The top portion as seen in one view is missing in the second. This was due to one mammoth sized log which called for considerable adjustment to the entry before it could be put in for cutting.

Note the T-Model Ford and if you look carefully to the right the rear of a log train engine.



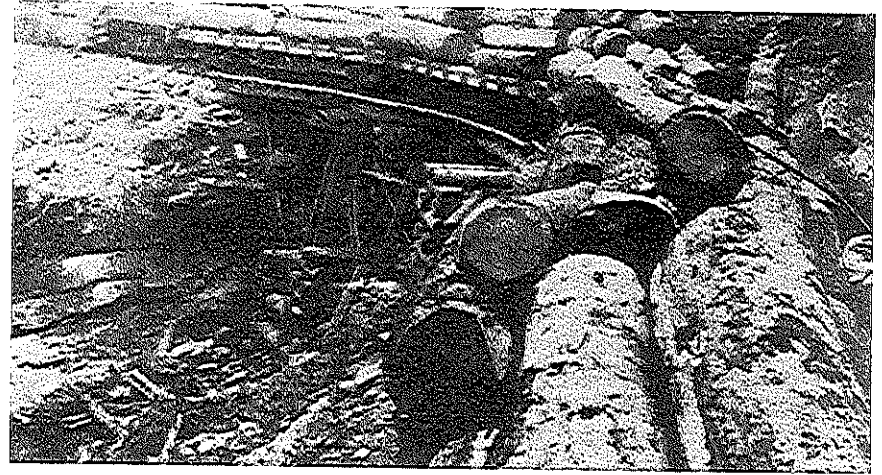


This is a southern view of the sawmill showing a dirt road at the bottom of the photo which led into the town. The building at the left was used to dry sand for the tracks on which the lumber trains ran. During wet weather it furnished friction for the engine wheels. Beyond this site was that portion of the mill that manufactured cross-ties which were supplies to other railroads. The shed-like structure to the right was the conveyor for the sawed lumber from which the partially loaded buggies are heading for the stacking field. The cloud of steam to the right is from the dry-kiln that was used to dry lumber at the planer and flooring plant which was off to the right of this photo. As far as energy was concerned this was a self-contained plant.

residents! And along with that a transient working crew of fifty to a hundred workmen who came in each day from six surrounding counties!

Now, with a railroad and of course a depot — there had to be a name. A Mr. McCombs, who was given the dubious privilege of surveying and laying out the town, was also given the task of choosing a name for the town. He had a daughter, whose name was “Helen”. You’ve guessed it — he named the town after her.

So, from an area of a few small farms, suddenly there was a thriving, bustling town, with all the problems and difficulties that arise from sudden growth. For the next fifteen years the area boomed. Thanks to virgin timber of a very choice grade and in plentiful supply, the lumber industry thrived. Just imagine, if you can, a log from which the center cut resulted in a board measuring from four to six feet across, large enough for a table top. Or a trainload of poplar logs from one tree and this cut by two men on a long cross-cut saw.



A narrow gauge log train or “dinky” as they were sometimes called, coming out loaded with logs for the mill. Note the trestle built by local labor, one of many trestles throughout the cutting areas. The trees being cut in most cases were virgin timber and very large. One such log train came in one day loaded with logs from one poplar tree!

However, as is often the case, along with the booming economy came the other side of the coin. When Friday night of each week rolled around, all the “wood-hicks” would come down out of the mountain camps where they had been working all week and descend on the town. This was a time when all women and children stayed close to home.

These “wood-hicks” were a hard-working, rough lot, who, armed with a good supply of bootleg whiskey, wound up many an evening of hard drinking with a shootout. I remember one incident that involved a shooting that fortunately wound up on the humorous side. It seems as if one man resented another man’s attention to his wife and, being pretty well inebriated, pulled out his gun. The threatened man tried to protect himself by hiding behind the door leading into the room in which the party was taking place. However, the area behind the door was not safe enough and he was shot. The bullet, fortunately, just grazed his head leaving it somewhat gory and bloody. He slumped to the floor with fright, and the man who had done the shooting, figuring he had really done himself in, flew thru the door and was never seen in these parts again. The man who was shot stumbled out of the house and as he passed another member of the party who had somewhat passed out by the side of the house, he cried “I’m shot! I’m shot!” His nearby audience was heard to mutter somewhat dazedly, “That’s nothing, I’m half shot!”

Helen’s law enforcement at this time consisted of one policeman, which

was really quite sufficient due to the fact that the local citizens did not mind getting involved in an emergency. Most of the time, whoever happened to be on the scene of a fracas would take matters in hand and have the culprit subdued and held for the law when he arrived. We were fortunate to have a person over the years serving us as a policeman whom we all respected and liked. He was married but never had any children. He did raise a nephew who was one of my closest buddies growing up. He was an active member in the local church, had a good voice, and sang in the choir. The young people in town liked and respected him, at the same time furnishing a certain amount of aggravation with forbidden fireworks on the 4th of July, or a stray outhouse on Main Street on Halloween night. The jail was a frame building located in approximately the same location as that of the Gingerbread Haus. It was built up off the ground with a crawl space underneath. The sheriff's office was on the second floor. The jail itself was not occupied too often, but its last occupant, we all came to feel, probably did it in. With the help of an ax brought in by a member of the family, the prisoner cut his way out thru the floor. Very shortly thereafter a stick of dynamite permanently demolished the structure. From that time on all offenders were lodged in the county jail in Cleveland.

Growing Up:

Growing up at this time was pretty wonderful. We never lacked for entertainment, even if it was often mischievous. We really had a good deal to work with and we knew it. Besides the usual church dinners and picnics, swimming in the Chattahoochee on a hot summer afternoon, there was always a variety of other pastimes. Skinny-dipping for us boys was a jealously guarded private time. Our favorite spot was in the area round the bend from what is now the Helendorf Inn, but which at that time was behind the sawmill. There, all the local boys would gather and swing out on grapevines to dive into the deeper waterholes around the "Big Rock". The opposite sex knew better than to butt in on our territory there. There was another swimming hole where everyone gathered which was located behind the Hofbrau Haus. This was also called the "Big Rock" and was a very popular spot for everyone. As many as thirty young people would gather here on a hot summer afternoon.

And then there was family camping. As many as three or four covered wagons loaded with camping supplies for that many families would take off on a Friday to camp out in the mountains until late Sunday.

It would, of course, be a slow, leisurely trip up, with some of us just walking along, keeping pace with the wagons which were pulled by a team of horses. The roads in most cases were merely trails and in some places mighty rough. Oftentimes our trips would coincide with a farmer coming down late in the fall with his cattle which had been on open range in the mountains all summer. And in the fall of the year our trips would always include chestnut gathering. I can remember a time when eight bushels of chestnuts were gathered up on Unicoi Gap over a weekend.

And then there were the times when three or four of us boys would put together supplies for a week of camping and hunting. Supplies usually consisted of approximately 10 lbs. of flour, a sizeable chunk of sidemeat for bacon, a fry pan, salt and pepper, 5 cans condensed milk, a box of shotgun shells and a good supply of fishhooks. With our guns and fishing poles, we had a week of gourmet dining and camping. If we were lucky we had a wide range of menus to satisfy any appetite. Good fishing meant trout, good hunting brought squirrel, wild turkey and a grouse or two. Good eating!

Baseball was a very serious sport. The mill sponsored the Helen team, which was made up of college boys working for the summer with the lumber mill. Our ball diamond was located behind Brown's Standard Station, taking in all that area of public housing that is there today. In its natural form, it was a perfect bowl shape with the playing area below the viewing members of the audience who spread out on all sides of the hill surrounding the diamond. Each small town in the county had its team and the playoffs drew large enthusiastic crowds. Johnny Mize, who played with the Yanks later, started playing with our team while attending college in Demorest.

Later, due to his contribution to both professional football and baseball, his name came up three times for the Hall of Fame and was accepted this year.

Our local teams playing the neighboring teams from the nearby small towns with the winners playing the county lineups, became a way of life for us in the summer months and everyone got in the act.

Of course, we occasionally became ambitious enough to hire out at the mill. At one time I was making the grand sum of 17½ cents per hour, applying a stencil with paint by hand to each cut of lumber which read, "Morse Bros. Lumber Co.". And I was also part of a three piece group consisting of a fiddle, guitar and banjo that furnished music for the square dances at the Mitchell Ranch Hotel during the summer months.

At the time that the lumber industry was just setting up as a new enterprise, there was naturally a great deal of curiosity and excitement among the teen-age boys that had to do with this big operation. One day, while prowling around in the area, this curiosity almost proved their undoing. They were inspecting the rail lines that had been laid from the mill toward the Nacoochee Valley and were particularly interested in the distance that had been covered up to that time. As they walked in that direction they noticed a flat bed car loaded with rails but chocked appropriately to prevent it rolling downhill to the end of the line, which was some distance away. Feeling quite confident as to their ability to apply the necessary brakes on the downhill stretch, they pulled out the chocks and hopped aboard. When the trip wound up disastrously a few miles down the line, with the flat car over the end of the rails, the boys scurried on home, hiding behind every nearby bush so as not to be seen coming from that direction, meanwhile imagining the law right on their heels even to the point of hearing bloodhounds in the distance! They kept their adventure a secret until many years later when they were able to laugh about it.

School, of course, was also a part of our life, but in a rather limited way. Attendance at school was only during those months of the year when you were not needed for planting or harvesting crops. The first one-room schoolhouse in Helen was a very small building located at the end of River Road at the location of the Alpine River Lodge. However, being so close to the river, it afforded easy access to the river during classes and whether this was the reason for moving its location, I wouldn't know, but a larger more permanent building was built on the property, which is now the location of the Chattahoochee Motel. The new building served a double purpose, a school during the week and a church on Sunday complete with a belfry and a very large, loud bell. Even the new privies at this new school, located next to the river, were updated to two-holers. This building was enlarged to a two story and stayed in use until 1940 when it was replaced with a modern block structure on Escowee Drive at the site of the present Orbit Manufacturing Co.

Another source of education was also open to us in the early part of the

century until it burnt to the ground. This was the Nacoochee Institute in the Nacoochee Valley, and was a large educational plant serving both local and boarding students and stressing higher educations for the rural child. Of the students attending from this area, some walked long distances, some rode horseback and later a T-Model bus served as transportation. Following its destruction by fire it was moved to Rabun Gap and is now known as Rabun Gap Nacoochee School. Another option we had were the A&M schools operated by the state which we could attend for a small fee. A number of young people who grew up here, of course, were graduates of the University of Georgia and Georgia Tech.

With rail service to Helen out of Gainesville having been established, we now became a popular spot for tourists. We were particularly attractive to those from the lowlands and coastal areas who wished to escape the heat during the summer months. A favorite spot for these travelers was the Mitchell Mountain Ranch Hotel which catered to a very select clientele and was very popular as far back as I can remember until the late 1940's when it burned to the ground. It was located on what is now called Unicoi Hill in the center of town, and had everything to offer a visitor. There was a nine hole golf course, tennis courts, swimming pool and a pavilion for dancing. The building was a large, attractive, rustic structure with porches all around the outside well furnished with rockers, a central room with a huge fireplace and dining room. Incidentally too, the food that came out of that kitchen was quite a drawing card too.

Growing Years:

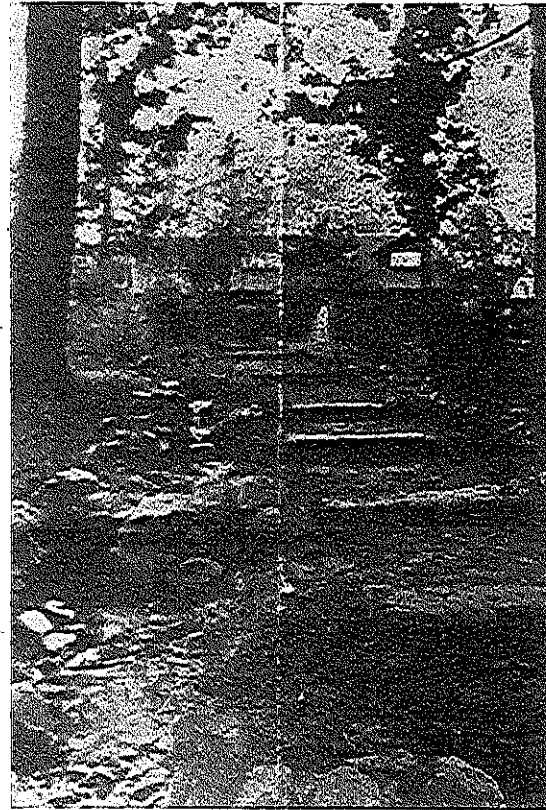
Slowly, but surely, during these years that I was a small child and then a teen-ager, the town of Helen spread out. The residential area of Main Street still has many of the original buildings that housed the various executives connected with the lumber company. These were all built about 1912. The Strudel Haus goes back to that same era as does the other buildings in that same area. The large residence at the farther south end of town named "Fern Cliff" was a combined office and residence.

Additional housing sprang up across the river from what we refer to now as "the island". These were small, roughly put-together structures built to answer the needs of "wood-hicks" and their families. In the rear of each was an outhouse with a shallow pit for waste disposal located on the river bank. Where plumbing did exist in the better homes, a very shallow pit in the ground served as a septic tank or, if possible, the flow was piped down to the river. Many times during those years the Chattahoochee would overflow — with disastrous results! With the sudden increase in population during this time, one wonders how the area escaped a serious epidemic.

Of course, the better residences and the Ranch Hotel had indoor plumbing. The hotel had the first water toilet to be seen in the area and that on



The Mitchell Ranch Hotel. We were very proud of this summer resort which catered to tourists from the coastal cities of Georgia as well as the surrounding lowlands during the hot summer months. It was a privilege to be part of the working force and a definite plus to be part of any social activity taking place there.



A view of the stone steps leading from Main Street up toward the Ranch Hotel. The last few remaining stone steps are still in evidence at the foot of Unicoi Hill.

each floor! The water for this purpose was furnished by the lumber mill from a reservoir on top of a nearby mountain. The mill also furnished electricity to all company houses in town by means of a steam engine. However, when lights started flashing at 9:55 p.m., one had better start preparing for total darkness at 10:00 p.m.!

The southern end of Main Street took on the commercial aspect of a business district. The Bank of Helen, of which John D. Mitchell of Mitchell Mountain Ranch Hotel was director, was located in the building that now houses the "Bombay Shop". Next door was the drug store and where one sees a bakery today, was our post office for thirty years. A general store owned by Charles Maloof was in this same block of buildings as was the town barber shop and Vandiver's garage, which is now "Chief's". The barber shop on a weekend was a very popular spot — it furnished the only shower in town plus a haircut! On down the street, south, were numerous hotel, boarding houses, and on across the river where one sees Paul's Steak House, was the company commissary, the railroad depot and more boarding houses.



The town barber. This is not the latest in headgear, but a very practical, close haircut! The barber shop was the center of social life for the men of the town. Very few women ever visited a barber shop. It was here that the men exchanged the latest gossip, which was passed on to the wives.

Regardless of all these changes however, the town retained its rural aspect. Livestock was always very much in evidence. Cows were pastured during the day in the area of the ball field and during the late afternoon owners would come to collect their cows and lead them on home for milking. Horses were also pastured nearby. They were a very valuable asset and were hired out for plowing, etc. Pigs were penned up in the rear of each residence as were chickens. This brings to mind a very damaging flood that resulted in a good deal of chaos along the riverbanks, particularly to chicken houses which were not too stable a building anyway. The morning following this particular flood, while searching for property along the riverbank in the vicinity of Nature's Storehouse, I heard a rooster crowing and looking up to the top of a very tall tree, there I found a rooster in the very top. He had survived by finding refuge in the top of a tree as the water swept him along.

Besides the "wood-hicks" housed in Helen there were numerous camps located throughout the forest for miles around. During the week these crews worked long hard hours with long cross cut saws, hauling logs that were cut,

by teams of horses to the log trains which ran all thru the forest. The first log trains used called for a wide gauge track, but later it was decided to reduce this to a narrow gauge thereby using less roadbed. The procedure to reduce the width was turned over to our local machinists whose native ingenuity was as apparent then as it is now. If one wishes to use as an example, the transformation of buildings in Helen to a Bavarian exterior — this all done today by our local craftsmen.

Many of the roadbeds laid out at that time for the logging trains are very much in use today. The next time you make a trip to the head of the Chattahoochee River — you are using a roadbed built for a logging train. Another logging road can be seen on the southeast side of the Union Baptist Church.

The working crew in the various camps were responsible for laying the rail lines at the point of cutting, also building trestles — some that measured approximately sixty feet high and one hundred feet long. As an area was cut over, the rails were lifted and moved on into the new cutting locations.

The men were lodged in makeshift camps which contained a dining hall and kitchen, all of these being temporary buildings which could be uprooted and moved easily to the new locations. And incidentally, the feeding of these crews presented a few problems that had to do with supplies in large quantities.

Some of this need was answered by my father who grew various food products on a large plot of ground at the south end of town. This was done on a very large scale to answer the needs of the increase in population at the camps as well as in town. In connection with this there was also a large slaughter pen where the butchering of cattle and hogs took place to furnish the meat for the camps and commissary.

And, of course, all of these work forces were under the control and management of the lumber company operating in Helen. During all those years of road building, rail laying, timber cutting, trestle building, there were very few accidents and it may be noted that a good deal of the work was done by inexperienced men who eventually became experts in their particular field. Those who built the roads for the rails made some very good road beds that are still being used today.

As the logs finally arrived at the mill, they were unloaded to a large pond located right at the site of the present Helendorf Inn. The purpose of this was to wash the logs clean of loose dirt. Reaching from the side of the pond with hooks on the end of a long pole, the men in charge of this area would guide the logs to the conveyor chain which would bring them on in to the sawmill to be cut and stacked for drying. There were many times when one could see an area of four to five acres of lumber stacked for drying before going thru the planing mill.

During these years there were other smaller industries that sprang up to answer the needs of an increased population. Just a short distance outside of Helen in the Nacoochee Valley was a dairy farm consisting of about fifty

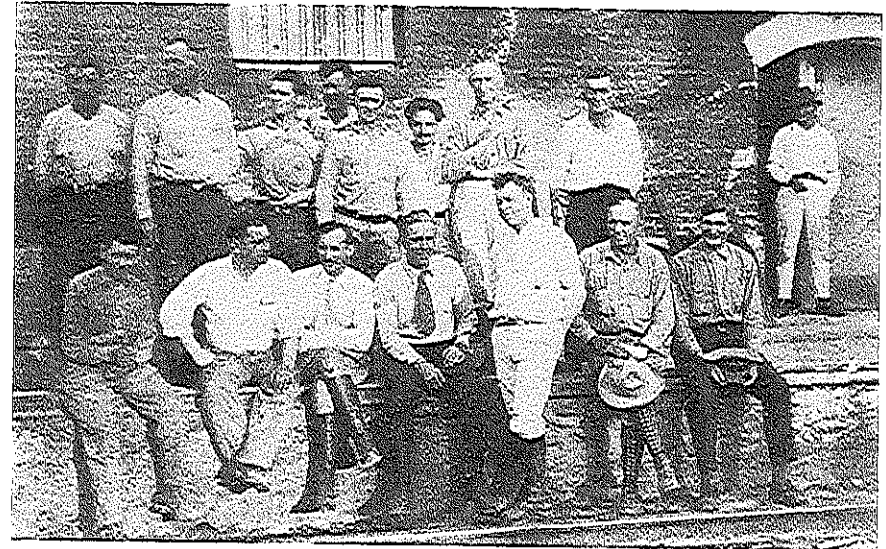
Jersey cows. This was a fairly large project furnishing milk, cream and butter for areas as far away as Gainesville and the surrounding towns. The milking process at first, was all done by hand, but later electricity took over. The electricity was furnished by Nora Mills nearby. All of this was part of the large Hardeman estate Farms which covered a large number of acres, part of which can be seen at the junction of Hwy. 129 So. and 17. The Indian Mound with the picturesque gazebo is all part of this estate and sits in the center of the grazing area used during that time.

All feed was raised on the farm. Local deliveries were made by means of a very picturesque stagecoach type wagon with a bell which the driver would start ringing at the edge of town. This was a sound I stood and waited to hear many a day, when I would be sent down to Main Street to stop the dairy wagon and get mother enough dairy products to supplement her supply for the boarding house dining table. The milk for sale was stored behind the driver in double containers packed in ice. While the train service from Gainesville was still in effect, there was no problem about a supply of ice which came up on the train and was stored in the ice house at the drug store. However, when the train service was discontinued, we did have a problem for a while. But then that was answered by the advent of the automobile. Up to this time the automobile had not figured in the lives of any of us, but suddenly there were two model T Fords in the family! My father had enthusiastically decided to buy not just one, but two in case of a shortage! Later, when he decided there would be a plentiful supply, he sold one to his neighbor.

I was in my early teens then, but it didn't take me long to get under the wheel. And so, one of my jobs was to drive to Clarkesville and pick up ice for the ice-house. Train service had discontinued for Helen, but was still in effect for some of the nearby towns. The roads at that time, of course, were dirt and in rainy weather one always traveled with a shovel or two.

During the years 1922-26 Helen also had an extract plant. The forests had an abundant supply of chestnut logs which were the result of a very serious chestnut blight that had completely destroyed the trees. The chestnut had been a very important part of the food chain in this part of Appalachia and had always been gathered and stored with other winter supplies. The blight felled every tree within this area and for miles around. The bark of the chestnut had been used for years as a tanning medium for leathers, furnishing the tannic acid used in the process. The extract plant was located on Escowee Drive to the left of the bridge and continued as an industry until the source of supply gave out about 1926.

It was about this time, too, that the inevitable happened. The supply of choice lumber gave out and gradually we all came to see the handwriting on the wall, which was the phasing out of the lumber industry. And we knew it would result in a whole new way of life. We, who were the original residents, were affected in many ways. Besides the economic pinch that naturally developed, there was the loss of our closest friends and members



A photo of a group of mill employees who followed the mill to Mexico where it was to operate a lumbering industry for a period of time.

However, shortly after they arrived, disaster hit — the mill was wiped out in a flood and at the same time an uprising took place with results that sent everyone to the local train station hoping to make a hasty exit home.

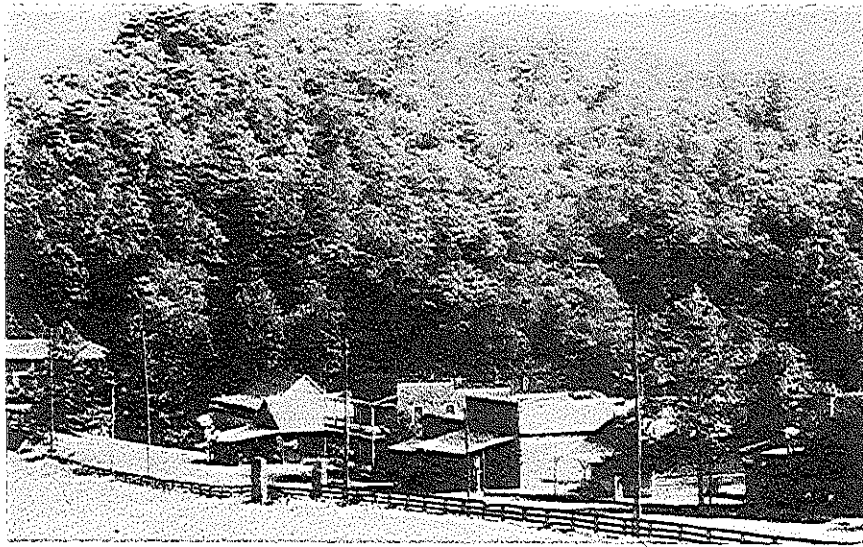
According to those who did make it back to Helen, the marks on the walls of the train station behind the group were the result of a prior skirmish with guns fired at the station.

On the far left, back row, is "Dad" Atkins, machinist, who was the brains behind the narrow gauge trains. Standing next to him is Vernon Dotson, a sawer, and Jones, a saw filer.

On the front row, third from the right, Underwood, a shop superintendent, and the last person on the right front, Chandler, superintendent of the lath mill.

of our families who felt it necessary to try for "greener fields" and day after day for a long while, we said our goodbyes to people who had come to mean a great deal to us. It was a very depressing time, particularly for the younger generation who were just forming relationships which were very important in many ways. A great many of these folks we lost touch with, but a great many turned up again in later years to renew their contacts in a part of the country they had learned to love and had not forgotten.

In a very short time, Helen became a sort of ghost town. At the same time, the depression years were upon us, with news of bank failures, the famous stock market crash and unemployment everywhere. Thru all of this tho, we were proud of one thing and that was the fact that our Bank of Helen paid off every depositor. I had had \$20.00 on deposit over a long



This is a winter snow scene of Helen taken in approximately the mid 1930's.

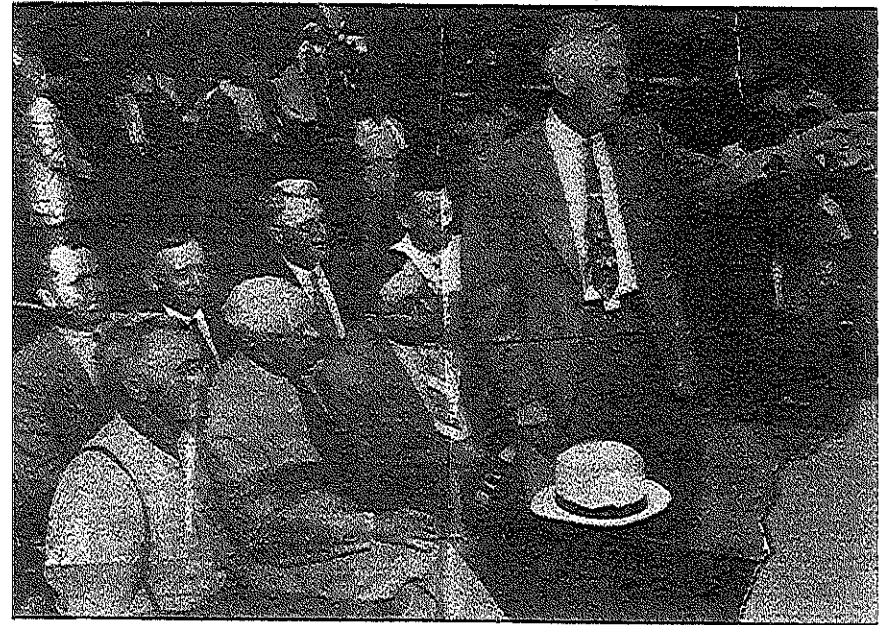
Note the fence and the two entrance pillars seen in an earlier photo, which is the entry to pasture land used for cattle and horses, but which is now our "island". To the far left and beyond the metal bridge is the commissary and depot. This location is now occupied by Paul's Steak House. The bridge seen here was removed later to replace a swinging foot-log at the foot of Hamby Street. Later, when a concrete bridge replaced this, it was moved to span the Chattahoochee at the end of the road leading to Nature's Storehouse.

Toward the right can be seen boarding houses and stores, the farthest building to the right is what is now Chief's garage and beyond that was a building that housed a short-lived movie-house for about a year.

period of time and when I withdrew it many years later for school expenses it had collected a nice bit of interest.

There followed some very lean years when everyone scraped the bottom of the economic barrel. However, along came a government project — the C.C.C. i.e.; Civilian Conservation Corps. Believe me, we who were left, came out of that little ghost town in a hurry and signed up.

Under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service, we were put to building dams, bridges, planting trees, and improving roads. Those of us who were considered to be experienced in any of these areas were given the distinguished title of LEM's or Local Experienced Men. It was during these years with the CCC that I learned a good deal that was practical and valuable. It was during this time that I learned to run a bulldozer. Wages were \$30.00 per month including board and clothes. It was a good time. We



The above photo is from a news item in the Atlanta Constitution covering the dedication of the present concrete bridge at the location of Paul's Steak House, during the year 1938. Here, we have a collection of prominent citizens to whom we owe the existence of the city of Helen. Reading from left to right, front row:

G. A. Vandiver — Landowner, farmer, butcher, and blacksmith. Also a politician, stockholder in the local bank and everyone's friend. He sold the land to the mill on which it was built and was one of the first local men hired by the company as a blacksmith. He was one of the group of men to whom Helen owes its beginnings and its present status.

Charles Miller — One of the superintendents of the mill. He left Helen when the mill moved to Mexico and settled in Virginia. However, he returned and formed a partnership with Charles Maloof and operated the circle mill which was located in the same area as the original mill.

Charles Maloof — A former native of Lebanon who arrived in this part of the country about the time of the operation of the lumber mill. Over the years, it was thru his efforts that the town was able to maintain its charter. He served as mayor many times in the later years without pay. He always had the future of Helen at heart.

Will White — Landowner, politician, a prominent citizen and one-time mayor of Helen.

Lat Vandiver — Our sheriff of White County at that time.

A friend — Unnamed.

Bud Allison — Another prominent citizen who always had the best interests of Helen at heart and to whom we owe a great deal.

felt very fortunate to be earning our keep and we were a close knit group that worked together for three to five years in the CCC. And of course, there were a good many laughs and incidents that come to mind.

I remember a day that one of our group had a terrible toothache and no dentist within miles. The pain became so intense that he finally begged someone with a pair of pliers to just pull it. It so happened that I had a small pair in my pocket and handed it to one of the other men who seemed willing to do the job. He had him stretch out on the ground — went into his mouth and came out with the tooth. It all took just a few moments and on we went to work a full hard day — my friend included — minus his tooth!

Then there was the day I was riding in a T-Model pickup with the head mechanic who was a man of about sixty years. He was very good at his job and proud of it. We were coming down a very steep grade on Tray Mountain behind one of the trucks belonging to our work crew. Suddenly I heard some strong language and realized we were without brakes and heading right into the truck ahead on the narrow road. I could hear the driver exclaiming “D--n! they’ll fire me sure enough! I’m going to hit” However, his maneuvering resulted in bringing our truck to a stop. We got out of that one O.K. — but he was very aware of his job which would probably have been on the line if the worst had happened and in those days a job was a very precious thing — too many people were waiting in line to grab yours. As the economy improved, the camps were phased out, but many of us



These Helen residents called it the biggest snowball in the country and it was a big one measuring 10 feet across!

They started rolling it on the hotel hill and let it roll on down toward the baseball field — this was the result!

stayed with the Forest Service in various capacities.

Sometime in the early 1930's gold came into the picture again. Gold has always been in the background of this part of the country. If you will recall, around 1830 a large gold nugget was picked up out of Duke's Creek and this created a “gold mania” that spread like a whirlpool into surrounding counties. A land lottery was held which resulted in the whole Cherokee territory being raffled off and the eventual removal of the Cherokee nation.

The first federal mint was established in Dahlonega in 1838, while the countryside for miles around was being mutilated and torn up by the method of hydraulic mining that was used. The fever lasted for about twenty years and then played out with the discovery of gold in California. A good many of our people left for those greener pastures!

Since then, there have been other episodes of mining in various ways, the last being in the early 1930's. A Mr. Hudson did some hydraulic placer mining south of Duke's Creek with some success. Some of his findings are on display at the Capitol in Atlanta. There were several more operators around at that time and quite a few big operations. However, the gold in most cases was of a very poor quality and so difficult to extract that the investments were losing ones. There is much evidence around Helen of the different types of operations, in the form of caves, air shafts, the remains of a pounding mill, etc.

Anyone who has lived here for any length of time and been exposed to the older natives of the area has heard stories that have to do with precious metals such as silver, gold, etc. Some of these are stories that have been handed down from father to son over a period of time.

Before the white man settled in the North Georgia area, the Cherokee Indians were well aware of the value of the gold and silver mines they operated and as they had contact with the white man, they used it for bartering.

When they were driven from their land they carefully sealed all their mine shafts and treasure caves and to this day the whereabouts of these locations are unknown.

In connection with all this there is a familiar story of a man to whom the Cherokees felt they owed a favor. Before being moved from the area they came to the man wishing to repay the favor.

Late in the afternoon, so the story goes, the man was blindfolded and led by an Indian for about a mile to a cave. There, when the blindfold was removed, he saw piles of silver ore and was told to take whatever he could carry out. He loaded his pockets and was again blindfolded and led back home.

For many years he wondered about the location of the cave and made attempts to locate it, but to this day it remains undiscovered.

As was true with the country as a whole, the war years brought an improved economy. It was during this time that a great deal of property changed hands, the largest portion being the small poorly built houses left over from the lumber era. I recall seeing some auctioned off for \$25.00

mainly to reclaim the lumber. There are still some standing on River Road that auctioned off at that time for \$300.00. All had running water but the inevitable outhouses were still in evidence in the rear of the house.

There was as yet a sawmill, but it was a very small operation that produced oak flooring. This, in time, moved to nearby Cleveland and became a large flooring mill which is still producing today.

The years following the war were quiet ones. We were still attracting tourists in a limited way. The Mitchell Ranch Hotel was no longer in existence and facilities for the overnight tourist were very limited. At the same time tho, our area offered excellent fishing during the summer months and very good hunting of deer, etc. in the fall of the year. Over the years we did gradually increase our summer population, many of whom built summer homes throughout the area.

There was one fairly large industry at this time, called the "Wilco Hosiery Mill" which produced a very fine wool argyle sock for many years. This was a very successful operation until the demand was lessened by the production of the stretch sock. However, it was replaced by the Orbit Manufacturing Company which is a very large enterprise employing a large group of employees and manufacturing ladies sportswear which can be found in many retail stores throughout the country.

Unicoi State Park also came into being in the mid-1950's in a rather limited fashion compared with today's Unicoi. But, it was a start, and the opening of the park and the publicity surrounding it, did much to bring Helen to the front as a tourist center.

Slowly, but surely, during the next fifteen years, tourism increased. Regardless of the unattractive, bare surroundings, there was a natural charm felt by newcomers which they could not explain. Some of these visitors attributed it to the setting of the little valley town with all its surrounding beauty, while others felt that the Helen citizens they had come to know while visiting each summer had a good deal to do with it.

I guess it was in the early fifties that a number of citizens collaborating with our then mayor decided we needed to improve some aspects of the town's appearance. Committees were formed and soon there were groups of ladies planting dogwood trees, bulbs, etc., down Main Street. Along with these efforts tho' attention was suddenly directed to pig-pens, chickens and cow barns behind residences in the town. The removal of these, I can assure you, did not happen overnight, but it was all part of our effort at that time to beautify and improve our surroundings.

Suddenly, in the mid-sixties, several businessmen who had gathered for lunch at one of our local restaurants dealt with the problem of rejuvenation of the town and how it could come about. Upon contacting an artist who lived nearby in Clarkesville, and who had spent a while in Bavaria, they found someone who had already given this some thought. It didn't take Mr. Kollock long to come up with some sketches showing what could be done to transform the then existing buildings into the Alpine style. When we were

given the details of the transformation that was about to take place we were all quite enthused.

Each merchant when presented with the artist's drawing that had to do with the changes that would be made to his particular building, gave his immediate approval. And may I say here, that each property owner was responsible for the cost of this remodeling to a Bavarian structure. There were no fund raisings, no applications for Federal or State funding, just a group of merchants and people working together.

So, with the expertise and guidance of John Kollock, the artist, our local carpenters started work in 1969, and as you have no doubt noticed, we are still growing.

There are quite a few of us with memories of that other Helen, so very long ago, the busy lumber industry, the aftermath that left us with a little ghost town, and what we are seeing now, we are quietly enjoying and feel that whatever the future holds, we can take."