

# Remembering Cement, Tolenas and Tidewater Railroad

By Nancy Dingler

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One day in 1900, representatives of the Steiger Terra Cotta and Pottery Works of San Francisco visited local rancher A.A. Dickie. The Steiger people had learned that Dickie had a rich deposit of lime on his property. It turned out to be a very rich find indeed, the consequence of which a company was formed, called the Eureka Portland Cement Co.

It raised \$1 million in capital, purchased the land from Dickie and planned to build a \$250,000 plant to process cement.

Evidently the venture seemed so promising that the Pacific Portland Cement Co. made an offer to Eureka the following year that it couldn't resist.

Portland Cement purchased the 140 acres for more than \$47,000, giving Eureka a profit in excess of \$25,000.

When Pacific Cement took over the property, it added to its holdings by purchasing the Knox property that was adjacent to the Dickie place, to enlarge the original Eureka Co. works under construction.

On Aug. 9, 1902, the first machinery was set in motion for the manufacture of cement, and by December the town of Cement came into existence.

This was a company town that boasted the most modern of facilities to accommodate the approximately 350 workers and their families. Streets were laid out, 50 cottages erected, and a hotel, school, post office, butcher shop, ice plant, hospital and several stores were included in the "town."

In a mining project of this size, trains were used to move the mined cement into the batch plant, as well as to move the finished product to the market. The Cement, Tolenas and Tidewater Railroad was born.

The CT&T Railroad boasted three locomotives. Engines number 2 and 3 were electric and ran on standard gauge. They were called tank engines and their wheel arrangements were 0-4-0 and 0-6-0.

These little engines hauled the raw material in the ore cars from the mining operation to the plant's holding bins. On one occasion, the engineer lost control on a downgrade, causing the ore cars to teeter precariously before turning over, dragging the locomotive with them.

The CT&T also had a fine "teakettle" of a steam engine. On the locomotive manifest it was listed as No. 4, a switcher 0-6-0 with slope tender. This engine ran from Cement to Suisun, crossing the Sacramento Northern's (Vallejo Northern) and Southern Pacific tracks. CT&T's route ran down Claybank Road, where the Tolenas Depot for the Southern Pacific used to be located.

The school children of Cement would either get a ride on No. 4 or walk the tracks down to the Sacramento Northern to catch the electric trolley to attend Armijo High School. The Cement School provided classes for elementary only.

Originally the school was in a nice two-story building, but when the new plant opened, the one-story company office building was swapped for the school building. From then on, students attended a two-room, one-story school.

The mill, erected in 1902, produced - at full capacity - 1,600 barrels of cement per day. The production, over time, became unable to keep up with growth and demand. The company went through another reorganization in 1905 and raised \$3 million to build a new plant.

The increased production depleted the limestone on site, so a new source of limestone was needed by 1909. Portland Cement acquired a quarry site on the Middle Fork of the American River, in El Dorado County, about 7 miles from Auburn. The company constructed another town for its employees, calling it, Mountain Quarries.

A crushing plant was constructed and a standard gauge railroad to Auburn. This rail line connected to the Southern Pacific, where the crushed limestone was hauled to the CT&T at Cement.

The "fired" kilns required their fires to be stoked around the clock. Coal was the preferred fuel and was shipped in, being hauled to the plant by steam engine No. 4, which also stoked its fires to keep the boiler going with this coal.

The town, plant and steam engine all needed water. A good and plentiful supply was pumped several miles over the hills fr

om Vacaville, where a series of wells were sunk on a tract of 120 acres acquired for this purpose.

The new plant at Cement produced 4,200 barrels of Golden Gate Portland cement per day, requiring the use of 11 short kilns, varying from 80 to 100 feet long.

From the Mountain Quarrie rock pile, the limestone was hauled in ore cars by the small electric motor cars (numbers 2 and 3) to large bins at the upper end of the mill and dumped. Clay and low-grade limerock were being mined on site. The clay was put through a disintegrator for the removal of stone and other foreign material and then stored in bins.

Proper proportions of limerock and clay were drawn from the bins to obtain the correct chemical content, which was then automatically conveyed to the dryers (steel cylinders somewhat smaller, but of similar construction to the kilns).

When the product was completed and ready for shipping to market, Engine No. 4 would haul its cargo to the Southern Pacific rail line or to Suisun to be put on a barge to San Francisco.

The support and scope of the operation at Cement was huge. The town and plant had electric lights, which could be seen for miles around. There were well-equipped machine shops to not only keep the machinery in the plant running, but the locomotives as well.

The hotel held dances and social gatherings. California Gov. Hiram Johnson, who ran for president in 1920, made a point of campaigning at the flourishing company town and its well-known hotel.

The hotel also boasted "smokers," which were boxing matches. Not only was steam engine No. 4 engaged as one of the daily work horses, but it served to haul guests and passengers, as well.

Special thanks to Marvel Little and Walter Wright, sister and brother who spent their childhood at Cement and have an invaluable collection of photos and anecdotal stories which they graciously shared. Both Marvel and Walter are hopeful that this collection one day will grace the "Solano County Museum," a hope many of us share.

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