

# RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Bridge Sounds and Memories

*by Nancy T. Conzett- 2007*

When I go out into the yard of my otherwise extremely quietly situated home, I hear (if the wind's blowing from the south) a constant drone of traffic on Hwy 1. As a very young child in the 1930s I spent summers at the cabin my grandfather, Jabez Churchill, had built in Salmon Creek. Two of the sounds I remember from those days were these: the clatter of the paddle-shaped hands when the wind blew (from any direction') and the two small men Grandpa had carved "fought" each other up on our roof... and the other was the thump-rattle of the occasional car passing over the SC bridge.



To enlarge on that second sound, sometimes my brother (13 years my elder) borrowed George McChristian's rowboat and took me and a sister or two upstream where we'd delight in rocking gently on the green water waiting for a car to pass directly over us on the bridge. When that happened the noise was very loud, each thump an accent to the scary-daring feeling in my stomach.

Decades later, in 2005, the Bodega Land Trust began sponsoring a survey of the Salmon Creek watershed and I was asked to recall the ancient days in the tiny community of the same name. Eventually it narrowed down to a specific interest; what I remembered about the bridge, and this led to a trip with Kathleen Harrison to the Annex building of the Santa Rosa Public Library where historical records are stored and examined. Tony Hoskins had found some old boxes in the warehouse pertaining to early county roadwork and we began going through them.

To my amazement, I found a report written in October of 1942 by R.J. about Bridge #206-30, the Salmon Creek bridge! In that, I found the bridge had been built in 1923 and that it's condition in 1942 was still suitable for traffic. However, the report noted, developing decay should be corrected, and the bridge would require "considerable maintenance and repair in the next few years" because some of the planks "were rotted" and were "scabbed with short stringers over them." Here's where another memory kicked in, one that had eluded me until that reading; of course!!! There were these shorter boards that stuck up when you walked on the bridge and I stubbed my bare toes on them (more than once, I'll bet) as we walked across the rough tar and gravel-surface! He concluded by noting "planks are generally loose and rattle considerably under traffic." Yup, my bridge!!

I thought that was the end of my research on that old bridge. Then, one day a few weeks later, I came across two photos, I'd made with an old box Brownie in the summer of 1950, pasted side by side in an album. One shows the old rattletrap bridge firmly sitting in the creek next to the new (current) bridge; the other, as I'd turned the camera to the left, is of a moored rowboat and old pilings that "have just always been there" in my memory.

The old pilings are the remains of the whatever early settlers or commerce caused to be built for ranchers' and stagecoach travel, according to an oral history made by the late Emil Valena, I'm told. So it all comes together: Salmon Creek has had three bridges.