

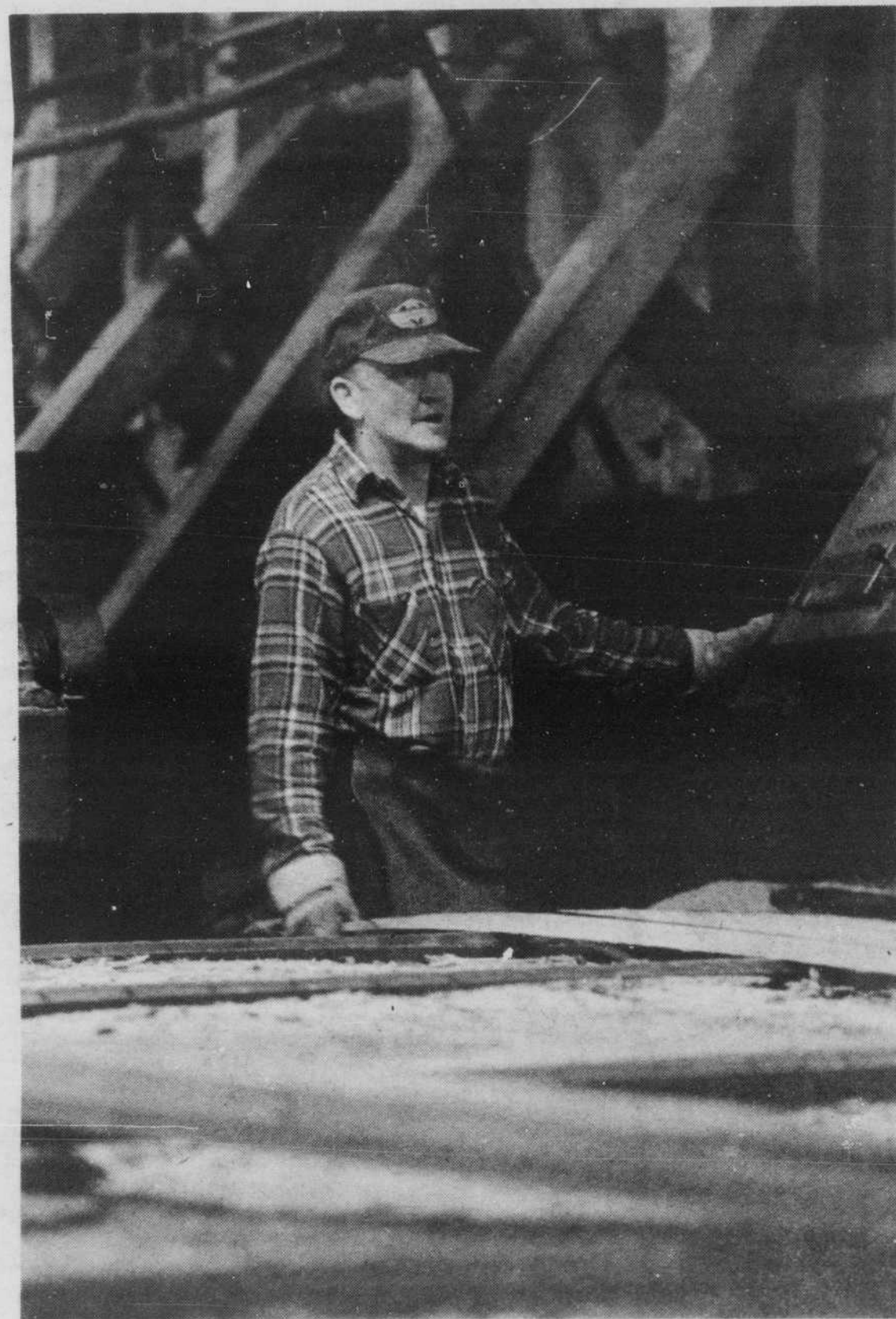
Kinza, Wheeler County



# When the company goes, does the town go with it?

Stories and Photos  
By PATRICK SULLIVAN  
Of the Emerald

Editor's note: Northwest Research Center of Eugene helped Patrick Sullivan on the following articles by providing research data.



Some of the sawmill's older workers with seniority hope to move on with the company when it opens a fully-automated mill 65 miles east of Kinza.

Life in Kinza, nestled in the Blue Mountains of northeast Wheeler County, Oregon, revolves around the sawmill there. The mill and the town are owned by Kinza Corporation, which makes it a company town and a dependent community.

Unfortunately, Kinza Corporation announced in January that it will halt production at the mill when its current log supply is used

up. The company gave no specific date, but the Emerald has learned that June 1 will be the last working day for the mill's 160 employees.

Those 160 workers represent one-fifth of the workforce in Wheeler County, which is already considered "economically lagging" by the state. The effect of the closure goes beyond statistics though, because some of the 150 Kinzans count two generations of workers at the mill.

Ray Cody and his wife have lived in Kinza for 22 years, nearly half of the town's life. Ray worked in the mill while the couple raised a son, Otis, who now drives a log truck for the company.

The mill's impending closure leaves Mrs. Cody sad. "We feel pretty bad. We've worked hard on this place," she says.

The Cody's attachment to the town is understandable. The shrill steam whistle atop the mill's boiler room has been waking them up in the morning and sending them home in the afternoon for a long time.

The Cody's home, like all of the 50 numbered houses that perch on the hills surrounding the sawmill, is rented from the company. Rent ranges from \$45 to \$65 a month.

In 1968 a timber industry publication described the town as "one of the few remaining company towns in the U.S....one hundred miles from nowhere...with just about everything most little towns have and a heckuva lot more than most."

Everything the town has is owned by the Kinza Corporation, which is owned by a group of wealthy Seattle businessmen.

The town's block-long, dusty main street contains a U.S. Post Office, a general store, a gas station, a tavern, and a restaurant. The tavern becomes a rollicking dance hall on Saturday nights. A one room wooden church and an eroding basketball court complete the core of Kinza.

Just outside the town is a rundown schoolhouse that used to be supported by the company and farther north is a company-owned lake and 6-hole golf course.

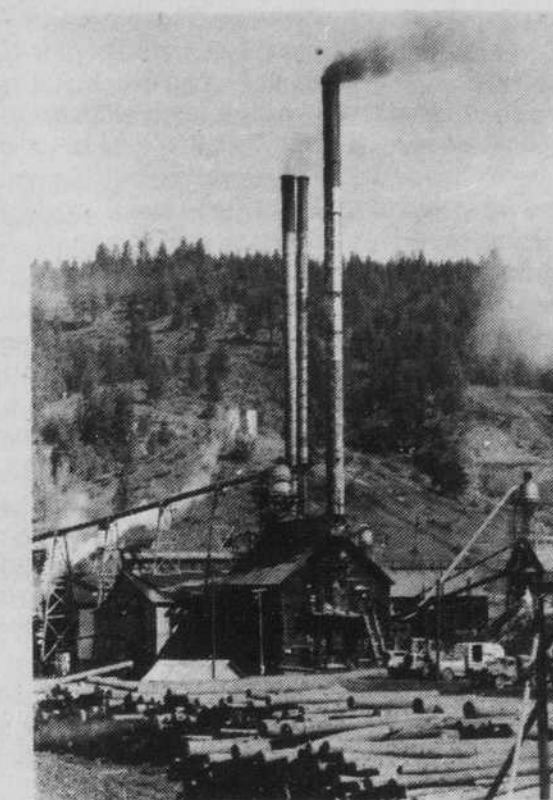
The town's charm certainly captivated Otis Cody when he was a youngster. Cody began constructing a scale model of Kinza when he was 12.

For seven years he worked on the project in the backyard of his parent's home overlooking the mill. The smokestacks of his mini-mill puffed out smoke and tree branches he cut served as the log supply. He brought miniature trucks to fit the mill and built small houses to surround it.

Cody, now 22, moved out of his parent's home a few years ago and the miniature town deteriorated.

Today, only the model mill remains, its three smoke stacks askew. Deer from the surrounding forest have trampled the other buildings.

The broken wood and crushed homes are a strange foreboding of the town's fate.



## DEQ ignores sloppy sewage system

"You want to know how they get rid of sewage in Kinza, (Oregon)," asked Steve Gardels of the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), "they put it in barrels and bury it under the creek (above town)."

Gardels, Oregon's eastern region manager of the DEQ, admits that his office has been aware of the irregular sewage system for the past five years without forcing the town's owner, Kinza Corporation, to comply with sewage disposal standards.

He explains, "Five years ago Kinza Corporation confided in us that it would be closing the mill there. If the mill had wanted to stay open permanently they would have had to comply."

The mill will be closed June 1 and the company has said it will maintain services to the town of 150 for about another year. The company has provided fire, water, sewage and

power services to the workers living in homes surrounding the mill since 1953.

One of the reasons given for the closure is "environmental considerations."

The mill's boiler has been in violation of Environmental Protection Agency standards in the past but a recent renovation of the power source has lowered the air pollution to legal levels.

The sewage system has always been a problem for the 49-year-old town because there is only six inches of top soil around most of area and non-porous soil lies underneath it, according to Gardels.

A septic tank system has been used in the past but hasn't worked because of the soil conditions.

The raw sewage from the town has had various disposal sites over the years. It used to be dumped into a creek bed in a ravine

outside of town, it has been buried in barrels and it has been poured out on the ground.

Gardels said, "The barrels in the creek and sewage on the ground works pretty well, depending on the weather."

The result of Kinza's irregular sewage system has been "some surfacing of sewage and some river contamination," according to Gardels.

Since 1973 Gardels says that when complaints came up about Kinza's system the DEQ was always assured that the town would be closed and there was no compliance required.

Harry Stuchell, an administrative assistant for Kinza Corporation, says the company never told the DEQ it would be closing the town.

Stuchell said, "During negotiations with the DEQ about the sewage problems, it (closing the town) was only an alternative mentioned."

Stuchell describes Kinza's sewage system as, "basically dry well...with a dispersal system." He refused to give a full explanation.

"I'd rather not have that printed (an explanation). We don't need to get into any more hot water than we are already in," he added.

Some Kinza residents have said they would like to stay on after the mill closes. If any do they will have to construct a sewage system that complies with DEQ standards. Each case would be reviewed separately, according to Gardels.

The cost of a sewage system for the town would be very high, says Gardels, who couldn't make a specific estimate.

He says, "I can't see a small amount of people paying for a system for the town."

## 'This town ain't dead yet,' says store manager

The fate of Kinza, Oregon is a much discussed topic now that the town's owner and operator, Kinza Corporation, has announced it will close its sawmill there June 1.

In this company town of 150 persons, the future is in the company's hands.

One resident says glibly, "Kinza will dry up and blow away with the wind this summer." Barry Startz, the town's tavern and restaurant manager, has a different prediction.

"Sure we'll be here after the mill closes, we'll keep it open," he says from behind the lunch counter of his 25-seat restaurant.

Startz can speak about what he would like to happen, but the decision makers are a group of Seattle businessmen who run Kinza Corporation and therefore run the town.

The company announced in January that it planned to maintain services to the town for a year after the mill closes. The question of the town's fate remains in the summer of '79.

Harry Stuchell, administrative assistant for Kinza Corporation, says the company will allow Kinzans to live in the town as long as it is "economically feasible."

Stuchell is pessimistic about the town's future because it lies in the company's timber management area and there will probably be cutting near the town soon.

Startz, a communications professor at the University in 1968, hopes the town can survive its problems.

"Kinza has an ailment, but it is not a dying sickness," he said as millworkers crowded into his restaurant to eat their lunches out of brown paper bags.

The prognosis for a recovery from Kinza's ailment was brightened recently when a

small logging firm contacted Startz. The company expressed interest in setting up operations at the mill left by the corporation.

Startz passed the letter on to Kinza officials, but worries the company "probably put it in file #13 (the wastebasket)."

Stuchell acknowledges receiving the letter along with a lot of inquiries about the company's plan for the town. He says, "The company doesn't intend on selling any land at this time."

Startz says the townspeople would like to run the town after the company moves out but are up against a company that refuses to bargain.

Regardless of Kinza's cloudy future, Startz envisions an altered but thriving town.

"Some people will have to move out of Kinza when the mill closes because they have small children and can't wait the two years it might take to attract a new industry here."

Startz gave up his professorship at the University and moved to Kinza because of the town's friendliness and solitude.

"You can wave to every person who drives by and they will wave back. And it gets nice and damn quiet out there."

A woman sitting in Startz's tavern added, "This is a good place to raise kids, there is no crime and few strangers."

The number of strangers and the noise level in town have changed recently as Kinza's plight has been reported in the Portland media.

"We had 60 or 70 tourists here last weekend," said Startz. Seventy tourists in

Kinza is comparable to 30,000 sightseers dropping in on Eugene.

Startz says the town survived the rush of people but residents are growing weary of the attention.

Kinza has also attracted the attention of elderly persons interested in moving into empty homes left by terminated employees. The future use of the houses is questionable

though, because of Kinza's irregular sewage system. (See accompanying article.)

Startz listened to this reporter review the uncertain future of his town as he relaxed in front of his restaurant and then exclaimed, "This town ain't dead yet."

A worker sauntering back to the mill after lunch responded to Startz.

"This town ain't kicking much though."



Barry Startz, former University professor, manages the company owned restaurant and tavern realistically called The Pastime.