

DID YOU KNOW?

Historical notes from Big Butte Historical Society
Abstracted by Charleen Brown

LITTLE TOKEYO

After WWII ended in 1945, my family and I moved to Butte Falls from Silverton, Oregon. I was 8 years old. Our new home was a small 3-room cabin owned by 'Medco.' There were 8 or 10 cabins built in a row along an old railroad spur about two miles east of 'Town.' Men who worked for 'Medco' could rent these cabins and have the rent deducted from their wages. The cabins were packed close together and pretty shabby.

These cabins had been nick-named "Little Tokyo" by the people who lived in 'Town.' This was probably because the war had just ended and the cabins resembled pictures of the crowded living conditions in the slums of Japan. The nickname may have been meant to be a kind of put down toward the people who lived out there, too. Most of the people living there were transients who worked the summer in the woods and moved on when the bad weather lay-offs came. As kids we didn't notice or feel the prejudice but perhaps the adults did.

When we first moved into our cabin, the power lines stopped at Butte Falls so we didn't even have electricity. We used coal oil (kerosene) lamps for light and wood stoves for heating and cooking. We did have running water in the cabins because an intake had been built in Big Butte Creek upstream so the water could be gravity fed into the cabins. Even though we had running water, our bathroom consisted of a wash tub in front of the wood stove and an outhouse down the path in back of the cabin. The outhouse was a 2 holer and we shared it with the cabin next door. What indignity to suffer, not to even have your own private outhouse. However, the people in 'Town' were not much better off as most of the homes in Butte Falls also had outhouses.

We spent our first winter in that little cabin but the next spring, 'Medco' began building several new cabins. When they were completed in the fall of 1946, the families that had been there the longest could choose one of the new cabins. Of course my folks chose a new one because the rooms were slightly larger. As soon as we moved in, my dad began making improvements. First, he built a woodshed out of poles and hand split shakes to keep our winter wood supply dry. Then in the spring of 1947, he added a pole and shake room on the back of the cabin. It was unfinished inside and pretty rustic but my folks used it as a bedroom in the warm weather months. In one corner he built a little shower so we could give up our wash tub baths during warm weather, too. Next, he hand split pickets and built a fence around the front where he planted a huge vegetable garden and lots and lots of flowers. About this time, power lines were extended beyond Butte Falls and we got electricity. It was wonderful! My parents bought a refrigerator and a radio/phonograph combination. Now, we had really cold milk again and could listen to all our favorite radio programs. How many of these do you remember; The Shadow, The Green Hornet, Sky King, The Lone Ranger, The Cisco Kid and who could forget Inner Sanctum?

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