

## Sawtown Report V4 N6 - A Short History - The US Sawtown Version 2.1

Escaping teeming cities with no sewage, high unemployment, no unemployment insurance, no pensions, and no money, immigrants transverse the US on foot and horseback to give birth to Sawtown. The streets were mud, the houses damp and cold, but we had each other. Neighbors helped neighbor regardless of the sacrifice because our collective survival depended on each other.

In 1873 it was a three day trip to reach Roseburg a mere 85 miles away. It could be done in a day by 1906 after the rail line was finished. Next came the large lumber mills, buying up or forcing out the mom and pop family operations. The focus shifted from quality wood to production volumes. Local creameries and artisan cheese crafters were consolidated into larger and larger cheese factories reducing quality, local pride, and local tastes for a mass market.

When the national economy sneezed Sawtown was the first to catch a cold. Unemployment would rise as timber companies managed their balance sheets by shifting costs to workers. It did not use to be that way and still isn't in some places around the world. The Canadians understand better than we do that to reduce jobs in rural places undermines rural communities and families as well as re-creating in cities the exact conditions that our pioneer parents sought to avoid.

Wages after 20 years in the woods were virtually unchanged even though trains replaced oxen and mechanized saws greatly improved productivity. Then came the union. Oregon was the first state to proclaim a "labor day" in 1887. The IWW (Wobblies) and the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen (a government run union) help create the 8 hour day, occupational safety, better wages, the week end, and eventually pensions. In 1937, the CIO sent an organizer to Sawtown that gave birth to the International Woodworkers of America, the IWA.

With over 115,000 members on the West Coast we were a force for positive change against the timber and rail road barons. Our parents fought for public education, overtime limits and compensation, and a just society.

From 1945 to 1980 there was an informal agreement in the West. We workers would share in the wealth of new technology. The company got a share and we got a share. Companies thrived, rural communities grew, families sent their children to college for the first time, electricity and running water arrived, and we as workers thrived as well.

This social contract was broken in 1983. Instead of bargaining as one group, LP using a tactic in direct violation of international human rights, permanently replaced striking workers across the west. Weyerhaeuser followed the same game plan 3 years later.

***We look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression--everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way--everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want . . . everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear . . . anywhere in the world.***

***--President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Message to Congress, January 6, 1941***

Today, Sawtown is still smaller than it was in 1983. It has a lower per capita income and more families on food stamps. Manufacturing jobs are down although the volume of wood produced is near the same. Wealth is funneled from Main Street to Wall Street. The largest source of income for many in town is a combination of union pension checks and social security payments.

The federal government has abandoned its pledge of FDR's four freedoms. Our freedom of speech is monitored daily by the NSA, and now can be bought and sold by corporations who have just received the same right thanks to a twisted legal decision by an activist conservative Supreme Court. Increasingly government has intervened in our spiritual life: be it abortion, the right to die, faith based funding in the White House or censorship in the arts. Freedom from want has come full circle. When FDR delivered his speech over 39% of families were in poverty. At the end of LBJ's war on poverty families in poverty hit a low of 9.6%. After 30 years of union busting and increased corporate dominance the family poverty rate exceeded 19% last year with more than 39 million US families in poverty. Home ownership the foundation of the American dream is also a thing of the past for many.

Freedom from fear has also declined. Millions of unemployed Americans are fearful of where they will find their next meal, their next mortgage payment (if they still own a home), and are afraid every Friday that a pink slip will be in their pay check.

Since its inception until the largest mill closed in the late 1980's Sawtown was always a source of wealth for the nation, the state, and the community. As a nation we rarely produce wealth instead we move it. We move it from tourists to waitresses to bankers.

As a community we all understand that if we do not produce wealth we will not exist. The same is true of nations it just takes longer to happen. Our highways are deteriorating, our school buildings crumbling and our sewage plant routinely overflows into the river during winter rains.

We've been here before. The difference is that this time we have the technology not to be here again. We just lack the wisdom and the political will.

Our future, if based on our past will see us once again manufacturing in Sawtown, creating "green" jobs in the forest products industry, manufacturing wood products that store carbon and have low carbon foot prints, while providing shelter to our neighbors.