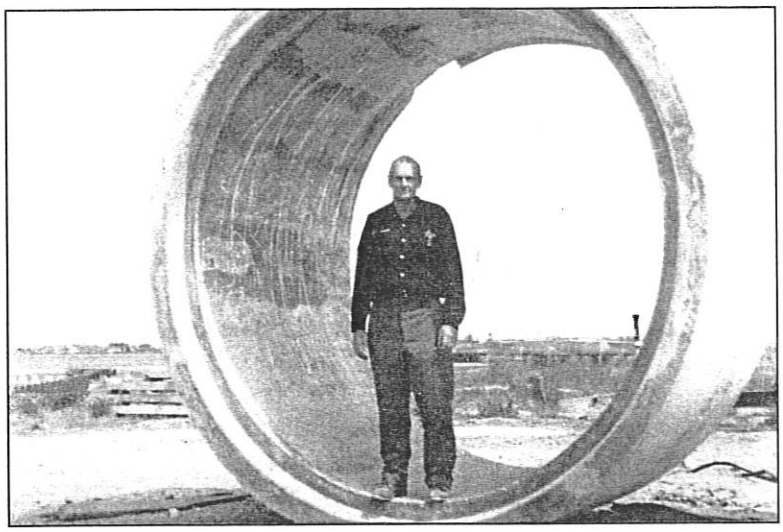


Harold Otto Hilfiker

Humboldt's Premier Pipe Maker

By William Kent (Bill) Hilfiker

Harold Hilfiker expanded & modernized the Pipe Company, founded by his father in 1902, and now owned by a fourth generation of Hilfikers.

My father, Harold O. Hilfiker, was born May 6, 1902 to John and Christine Hilfiker at their home on Searles Street in Eureka. Harold grew up in Eureka and attended Eureka High School, where he played tackle for the Loggers. At school he got his nickname, Pickles, because he liked them so much. It was later shortened to Pix. He graduated in 1920, attended University of California at Berkeley for one year, then returned to Eureka and worked as an electrician for his brother John Henry, owner of Hilfiker Electric in Arcata.

Harold's father, John Hilfiker, had suffered a stroke in 1919, which made it difficult for him to continue to operate the Hilfiker Concrete and Tile Works. Harold purchased the business from his father in January 1926 for $9500, with $500 down and $100 per month.

At that time the plant was very crude with very little mechanical help. They manufactured concrete roofing tile, septic tanks, culvert pipe, drain tile, concrete silos, hog troughs, pre-cast stair steps, wash trays, concrete vases and flower boxes, well curbing, chimney blocks, foundation piers, burial vaults (the only product that increases in volume in the winter), and lawn rollers. If it could be made of concrete, John made it. The plant consisted of a wooden building with a bucket elevator that lifted the gravel to an overhead screen. The screen separated aggregates and dropped them into overhead wooden bunkers with a gate at the bottom, allowing the aggregates to drop to the floor. The sand and gravel was apportioned by counting the shovelsfull into a wheelbarrow, which was dumped into the concrete mixer with the correct amount of sacked

John Hilfiker making concrete flower boxes and vases. A Hilfiker cousin, Rudolph Matter, helps. Circa 1918.

cement to make the desired mix. The wet concrete was transported via wheelbarrow to the tile machine or pipe yard. The larger pipe was made by hand in steel molds. Concrete was shoveled into the molds in layers and hand-tamped. The men used a ¾-inch steel pipe with cast iron tamper heads cast on the ends, a small head on one end for the small pipe and a larger one on the other end to consolidate the concrete in the larger pipe. They placed two 10-gauge wires in the pipe to help support the green pipe when the mold was stripped from it. A cast iron ring was pounded onto the top of the pipe with the tampers to form the tongue end of the pipe. The form was then stripped from the new pipe and the process was repeated. The next day the pipe was turned on its side with a 4 x 4 and rolled to the curing area where it was sprayed with water to complete the curing. There was no mechanical equipment to move the pipes, so the men had to move them by hand. They rolled pipes up wooden planks to stack them or to load them on a wagon or truck. There were no easy jobs at the pipe plant.

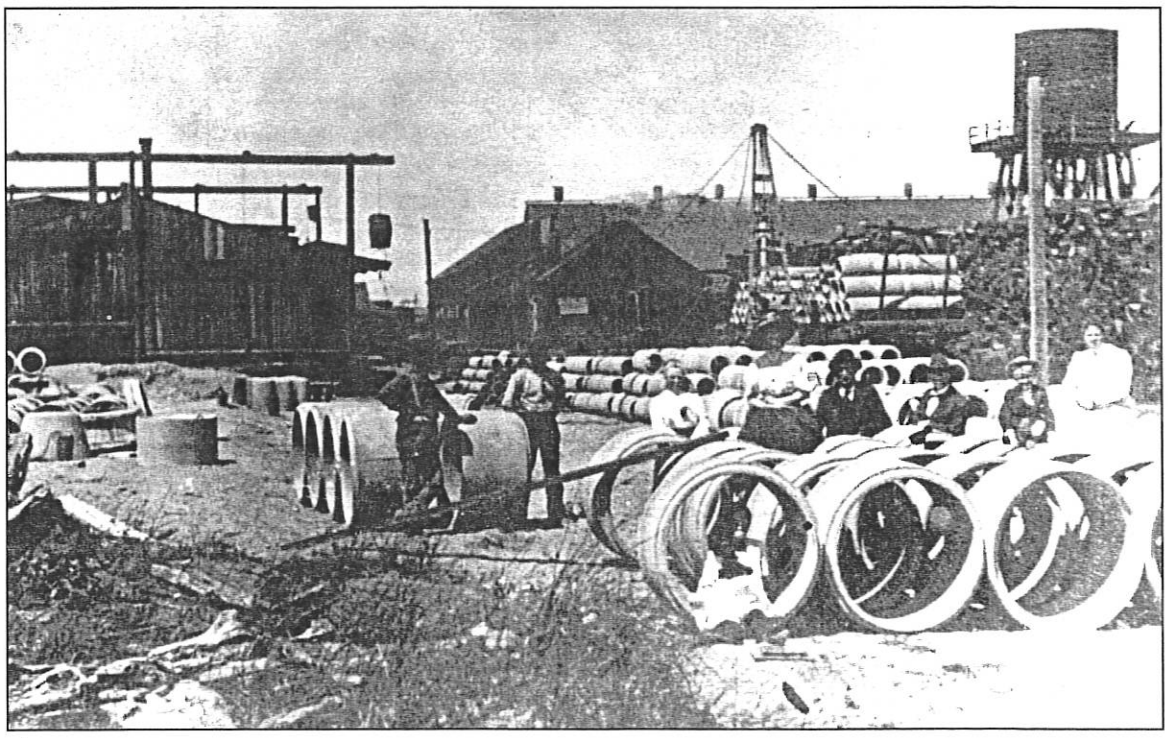
The only mold left from the original plant is a birdbath. We still make a few for tradition. Most of them are given away for charity auctions; however, they can be purchased at the plant.

In 1927 Harold married Louise Ingalls, four years his junior. In the 1924 Eureka High *Sequoia,* Louise is quoted: "I do will my love of pickles to myself."

Harold Hilfiker with his parents and siblings, circa 1912. Back: John Hilfiker with son John. Front: Harold, Christine (mother), older daughter Christine, and Ruth.

They were happily married for fifty-three years, until Harold's death in 1980.

Harold purchased a used Tuerck McKenzie pipe machine in 1928 for $1200. Oscar Tuerck came down from Portland to supervise the installation. This machine was designed to produce concrete pipe 4" to 30" in diameter, 36" long, and it could also make reinforced concrete pipe. It was later modified to make 36" diameter pipe. The pipe machine consisted of a pug mill concrete mixer, which had a stationary



The original Hilfiker pipe plant at Press Shingle Mill, Bucksport, 1908. John Hilfiker rented here before buying property nearby where he built a new plant. Standing from left: John Hilfiker, Sr., unidentified employee, Mrs. Seamore, Christine Sophie Hilfiker, Henning Seemann, Mr. Seamore, young Harold Otto Hilfiker sitting on pipe, and Christine Charlotte Hilfiker. Front: Ruth Susan Hilfiker sits in the pipe.

Harold built this new plant in 1939 on Highway 101. Circa 1948.

half-barrel with rotating paddles to mix the concrete. The mixer had a door that would open, dropping the mixed concrete on the floor. Then the concrete had to be shoveled by hand into the pipe machine's overhead feeder. It took two men shoveling to keep up when making larger pipe. The machine had a turntable that rotated the jacket (outside mold). The machine operator placed the jacket on the turntable, lowered the core (inside mold), and started the machine. As the mold rotated on the turntable, the feeder filled it with uniform layers of concrete, and as it passed the mechanical tamper, the tamper consolidated the concrete with much more force than a man could by hand. When the pipe was finished the operator raised the core, the stripper came with his pipe cart and removed the pipe in its jacket from the machine, and the process would start over. As the next pipe was filling, the stripper would remove the jacket from the fresh pipe and return it to the machine. The next day the small pipes were carried to the curing yard with a modified hand truck, and the larger pipes were turned on their side and rolled by hand into the curing yard.

Harold and Louise had a son, William Kent, who was born on Louise's twenty-fifth birthday, July 25, 1931. He was quite a problem. Louise didn't have enough milk to satisfy him and cow's milk didn't agree with him. Goat's milk was the only thing that would do. Hugh and Fannie Slater had a ranch near Iaqua Buttes with goats. Fannie loaned Harold a fresh goat named Nannan, and she went everywhere with us. Nannan rode in a cage, which Harold built on the running board of his Dodge sedan. When we went to the Slaters' or camping on the Van Duzen River, she went with us. A second son, John Loring, was born in June 1935. He wasn't near the problem that William was.

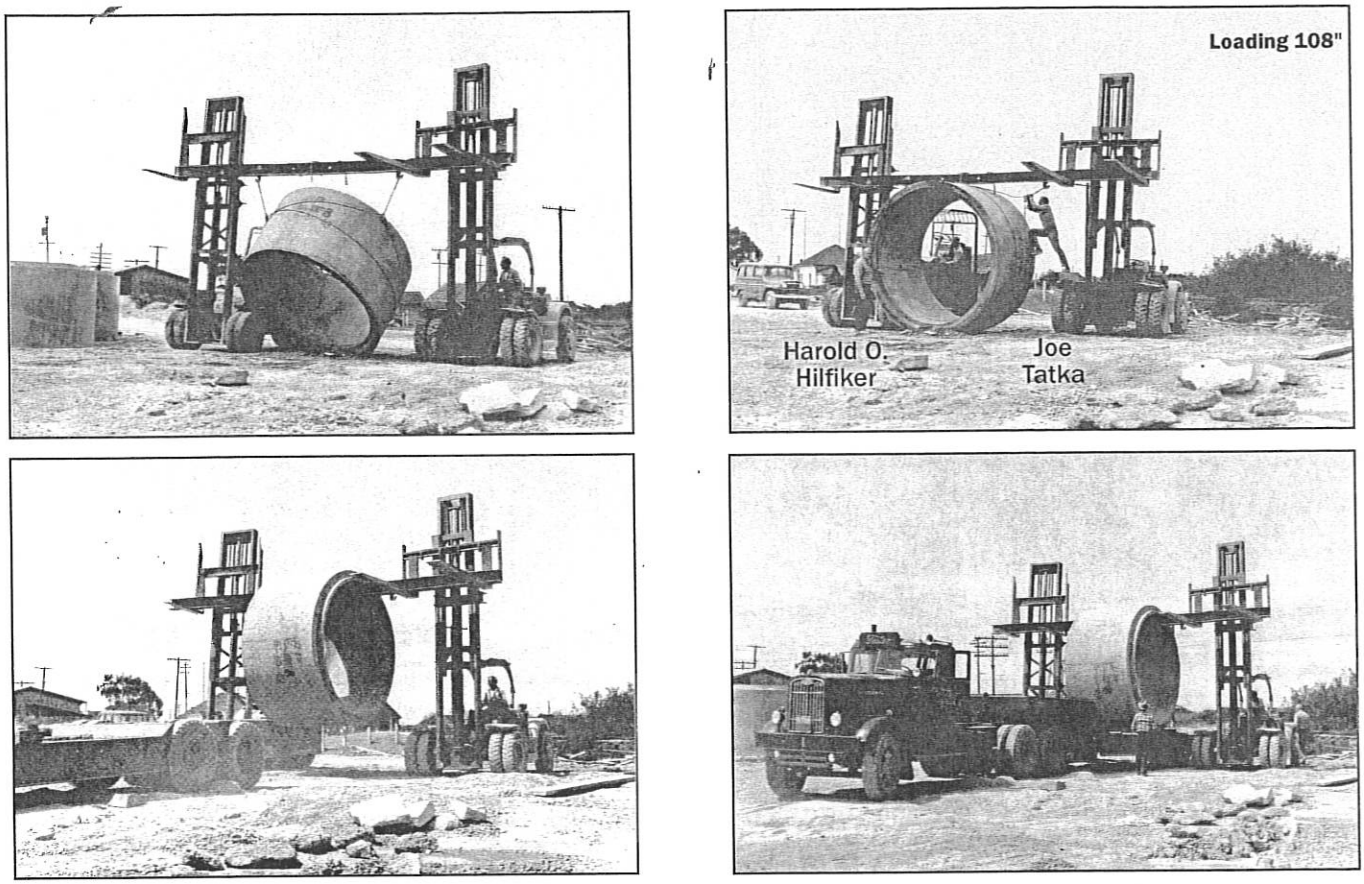
Harold loved to hunt deer at Slaters.' He hunted with a 30-30 Winchester rifle, cutting a notch on the stock for every deer he killed. He also hunted ducks on Humboldt Bay and built his own scull boats. A scull boat is a small, low-freeboard boat with a long front deck, where the hunter can lie down on his back and propel the boat with a scull oar out the stern to sneak up on resting ducks.

Harold made friends wherever he went, and when some of them heard he had started collecting guns, many old-timers gave him their old guns. He also bought some interesting guns and had quite a collection at the time of his death.

On November 6, 1938, Harold purchased the adjacent five-acre property fronting on Highway 101 from Daniel Shanahan for $5000. He sold half of it to Bob Mathews for the Caterpillar agency, in order to recoup his cost.

His and Louise's daughter, Elizabeth Jill, was born in December 1938. Now they had a Jack and Jill.

In 1939 a new plant was built on the new property on Highway 101 and the equipment was installed.

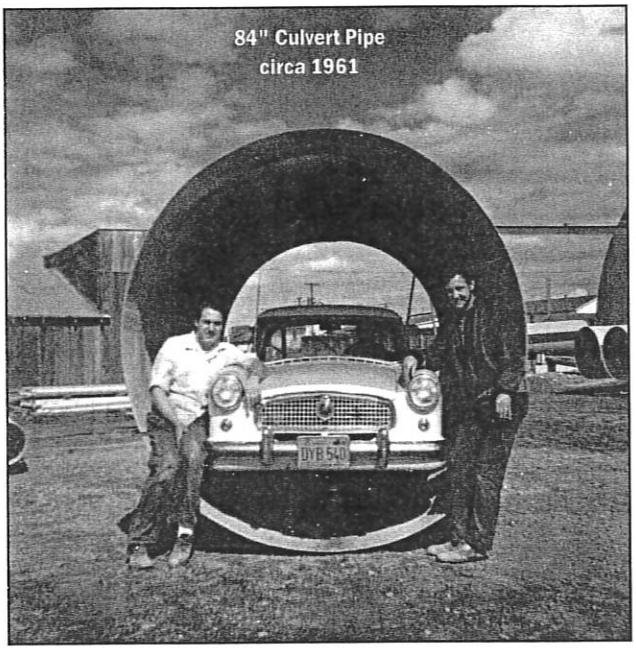


Loading 108-inch RCP, 1963. The bridge cranes in the plant were not strong enough to lift these big pipes. It was necessary to make them in the yard and use fork lifts to load them.

They had a skip to raise the concrete into the pipe machine feeder, eliminating the shoveling. Loading pits were installed in the front and back yards of the plant. Now trucks could back into a pit, making the truck deck level with the yard grade, and rolling pipe onto the truck was much easier. They still had to roll the pipe up planks if they wanted to double stack it in the yard or on a truck. Sand and gravel was cleaned, prescreened, and delivered by truck. It was stored inside the building behind the concrete mixers. Sack cement had its own storage room that kept the cement dry. Now they could buy cement by the rail carload direct from the Mt. Diablo Cement Company. Mt. Diablo was located in Walnut Creek, and we looked forward to the small sack of walnuts they sent with every carload of cement. Harold added concrete building blocks to the product list. The block machine had been the first thing set up at the new plant site, and the new building had been built around it. Now Harold had an efficient up-to-date pipe manufacturing facility.

Harold must have anticipated the shortages of the Second World War. He bought a new Ford car and also a pickup in the fall of 1942. He always bought his vehicles from Mickey Walund, who sold for Harvey M. Harper Co. During the war, with all the young men gone to the service, Harold ran the pipe machine with only Henry (Jake) Jacobson and Joe Susa to help. The three of them built the burial vaults, well casing, and pipe needed during the war. They furnished the storm-drain pipe for the new U.S. Navy Air Base at McKinleyville. Steel reinforcing for the pipe was unavailable, so they built non-reinforced, thick wall pipe. It wouldn't meet today's specifications, but it is still in place doing its job.

During the war Harold purchased five acres with a nice cottage and orchard at Camp Grant on the Eel River from a Miss Ferguson. When it came time to harvest apples, he built a special wheelbarrow with a pneumatic tire and a hook for a rope on the front. My younger brother Jack could pull while I lifted the handles, and that's how we got two boxes of apples over the gravel bar and across the river. This was how it was done before we got four-wheel-drive rigs. He also built a rowboat with double oarlocks to cross the river at high water. Jack and I got pretty good at rowing together and were able to run circles around Doc Holling with his motorboat. Later, on December 27, 1962, Harold was able to purchase the adjacent homestead with seventy-five additional acres from Doc Holling. Now the property is completely surrounded by lumber companies. The place got wet in the 1955 flood and the buildings and orchard were wiped out in the 1964 flood. Our entire Hilfiker family still uses the place.



Pipe Dreams. Above left: Darrell Tonini, Bill Hilfiker, Sr. at the wheel, and Billy Joe Forest, 1961. Above right: Three of Harold Hilfiker's grandchildren, clockwise from top: Billy, Arthur, and Harold. Circa 1966.

The Hilfiker Concrete Pipe Co. was a member of the California Concrete Pipe Association and The American Concrete Pipe Association. They had annual meetings and discussed the manufacturing and promotion of concrete pipe. Harold got a lot of good ideas that he incorporated into his concrete pipe plant.

After the war it seemed like there was a new freeway with concrete pipe to build every two or three years, which kept the pipe plant busy. The company furnished concrete pipe for highway projects in Humboldt and Del Norte Counties and as far away as Mount Shasta. In 1947 the plant began to produce concrete cribbing for the California Division of Highways, and furnished many concrete crib walls for Highway 1, along the ocean near Monterey. The plant capacity was increased in 1951 with a new 24" diameter x 3' long Tuerck McKenzie pipe machine and a 48" diameter x 4' long pipe machine replacing the old 36" Tuerck McKenzie pipe machine. Harold designed and built the 48" pipe machine he called a "Eureka." It worked so well he sold one to his friend Fred Spikerman who had a pipe plant in Lodi. Fork trucks were added to the operation, so they didn't have to roll pipe around any longer, and the loading pits were filled in. The wet concrete casting building with new bridge cranes was added onto the plant. We now could produce large wet cast concrete pipe from 54" up to 108" diameter. Most of the wet cast pipe were 8 feet long, the maximum we could haul crosswise on a truck. We made the 108" pipe only 6 feet long because it weighed 12 tons and it was all both our bridge cranes could pick up. It took two large fork trucks to lift the 108-inch pipe in the yard so a lowboy could back under it. The pipe was too tall (10.75') to haul on a standard truck.

After the Korean War, when I returned from the Air Force, I went to work for my father. We decided to build corrugated steel pipe in 1959. Harold bought a used Quonset hut, tore it down, and erected it at the back of the property near the old, original plant. We now used the old plant as a warehouse for steel culvert sheets. We purchased a 4-foot-wide culvert roll and riveters from the Burch Company. At this time we had the most efficient corrugated steel pipe operation on the West Coast. U.S. Forest Service timber sales provided a great market for our corrugated metal pipe.

After the 1964 flood, we built a concrete batch plant for the operation. We purchased a large fuel tank

Harold Hilfiker with a roll and two riveters for making corrugated metal pipe.

Above left: Harold Hilfiker's Mussel Feed 1967, held for the community at the Hilfiker plant. Harold loved big parties. Here Bill Hilfiker maneuvers a thousand-gallon tank full of steaming mussels with a fork lift, as Harold shovels the mussels into boxes spaced along the tables. Above right: Louise and Harold Hilfiker's fiftieth wedding anniversary.

from Standard Oil that was in their South Fork distribution facility, which they'd abandoned after it was destroyed by floodwaters. We had the tank cut in half, welded cones on the open ends, and voila, we had two cement silos, enabling us to use bulk cement and eliminate sacked cement. An old barge that was being scrapped furnished the steel plates for the gravel bins. We found a conveyer that we could buy in an abandoned rock quarry at Jacoby Creek. That was all we could scrounge, and the rest we had to buy new. With a belt gravel conveyer and a bucket elevator for the cement, we had a choice of two types of cement and three types of gravel overhead to choose from. The cement and gravel dropped into scales, to weigh the mix accurately, then dropped into a very fast pan-type concrete mixer, which is much like a huge kitchen mixer. It supplied concrete to the pipe machines and the tile machine, and dry mix to the casting department mixer where the water was added. Now the mixers and wheelbarrows behind the pipe machines could be eliminated. Harold had all this in his head. There were no formal drawings. Johnson Iron Works across Hilfiker Lane from us did the steel fabrication. Harold would go across the lane with a piece of soapstone and draw what he wanted built on the concrete floor for Larry Johnson to build. Harold said the most important thing to have was horse sense, and that a manager of a concrete pipe plant that came to work in a suit and tie wasn't going to last.

Harold and I redesigned and patented a larger improved concrete cribbing in 1970, that we called concrib. Then we designed and Dad built a machine to make the concrib. He also built this without drawings, but not without problems. We didn't know how to figure how much power it would take to vibrate the weight of the cribbing stretchers, so we asked a company that was in the business of building vibrating tables to build it. They got the power correct, but I don't think they had made any vibrating tables with that much power. Their table couldn't stand it, but it makes a very good welding table that we are still using. Harold and Larry Johnson built one that could take the punishment. Harold took it to Klamath Falls to get it stress-relieved and planed. Now we had a cribbing machine that worked and a cribbing system that could beat the Caltrans concrete cribbing, wood cribbing and steel bin walls.

The company purchased Warren's Court, an old run-down motor court across Hilfiker Lane with individual cabins. We wanted the land for storage, and the cabins were a nuisance we needed to get rid of. Some we were able to give away to people who would move them, and the rest we rented or eventually tore down. It was December, and Harold heard that the air pollution law was going to change after the first of the year, so he just torched what was left of the cabins to get ahead of the law. Nevertheless, a warrant for my arrest was issued for causing an air pollution violation. I was skiing on Horse Mountain at the time, however, and didn't know anything about it until I got arrested. I pleaded *nolo contendere*, the company paid the fine, and the problem was solved.

Harold O. Hilfiker sold his stock in the Hilfiker Pipe Co. to me, William K. Hilfiker, on March 4, 1976, and semi-retired. He remained on the board of directors of the Hilfiker Pipe Co. and kept his office and desk until his death in 1980. When Harold O. Hifiker semi-retired, the Pipe Co. was manufacturing concrete pipe 4 inches in diameter to 9 feet in diameter, corrugated steel pipe 8 inches to 8 feet in diameter, and concrete cribbing. Harold added all of this to the little old primitive plant, which he had purchased from his father in 1926, making fifty years of innovation and achievement. At the time of his retirement, the company was the dominant concrete and corrugated steel pipe and concrete cribbing manufacturer in the area.

Harold served the community in many ways. He was a very modest and unassuming man. He never looked for the limelight, but he was ready and willing when something needed to be done for the community. He was twice master of the Semper Virens Masonic Lodge, president of the Eureka Rotary Club, member of the Bank of America advisory board, founding director and chairman of the Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District, and a founding member of the Ingomar Club (Carson Mansion) in 1950.

An avid sportsman, he built a 16-foot outboard-motor boat to ocean fish for salmon and snappers.

Harold continued to hunt deer on Slaters' ranch with his trusty 30-30 until they sold the ranch and retired. The 30-30 was too small and didn't have the range for pronghorn antelope or elk in Colorado, so he purchased a Winchester 270 with a telescopic sight. He gave his lucky 30-30 to his twelve-year-old grandson Arthur for his first year hunting. Arthur put us all to shame by killing a 3-point buck that was the heaviest killed on the ranch that year, and a 4-point buck with the largest horns, and he did it with only one shot each. Harold had the 4-pointer mounted for him.

I think Harold liked shooting a shotgun best. He hunted duck at the Humboldt Fish and Game Club on the McBride Ranch at Beatrice until his death. His favorite sport was trap and skeet shooting. He belonged to the Humboldt, California Indians, and the Shoshone Indians trap and skeet clubs. He was a crack shot: it wasn't unusual for him to shoot 100 straight without missing, until he had a problem with his eyes. Harold passed away in Winnemucca due to heart failure at age seventy-eight. He and Louise were driving home from a Shoshone trap shoot at Jackson Hole. His last score was 86 out of 100 shots, not bad for someone with bad eyes. It is a fortunate man that can enjoy his life as he wishes to the very end.

The Hilfiker Pipe Company started in 1902 by Harold's father John is now in its 113th year of business in Eureka, owned by the fourth generation, Harold K. and William B. Hilfiker.

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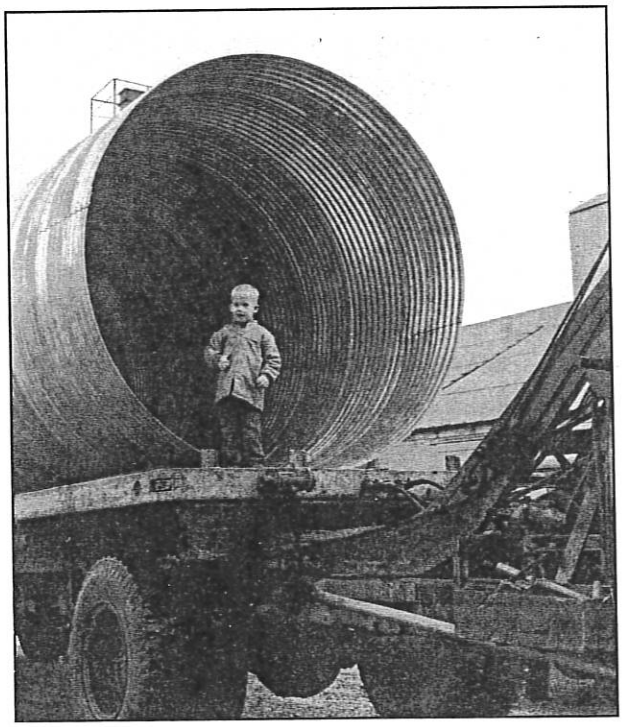
The Hilfiker plant when Harold retired. The building at top right is the old plant, now used as a storehouse. The Quonset hut just below it is where corrugated pipe is made.



Arthur Lee Hilfiker, the author's oldest son, seen here circa 1962, passed away in 1986.