



Historic Wilsonia

The Newsletter of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust

Published by the Wilsonia Historic District Trust for all Wilsonia cabin owners, their families, and friends. Issue #8 May 2023

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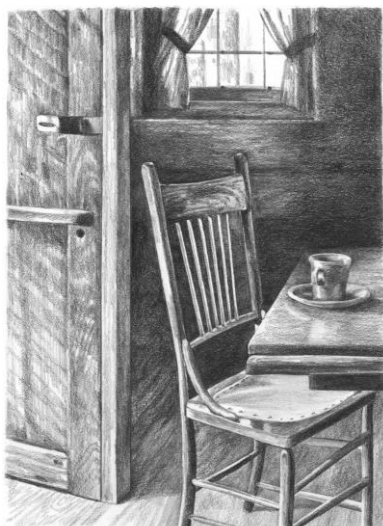
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The comforts of home

Illustrations by Jana Botkin,
from *The Cabins of Wilsonia*

Many Wilsonians treasure a simpler life in their mountain cabins among the pine, fir, cedar, redwood, oak, and dogwood trees, away from the complexities of life at home. Though often more rustic than their primary homes, Wilsonia homes feature many of the comforts of modern life. But life in Wilsonia was not always this way.

For centuries, Indian tribes from the Valley floor and foothills inhabited the area of today’s Wilsonia during the warmer months. Visitors from California’s Great Valley and beyond visited the area during the 1870s and 1880s. During the early 1890s, loggers felled many of the large sugar pine trees that grew throughout the 160-acre property and milled them at the sawmill today we know as “Big Stump.” In 1900, a Visalia attorney named E.O. Miller became the third owner of the property and soon opened the area to campers at reasonable nightly or weekly fees. The Miller Campground became popular among visitors from the Valley as a place to escape the summer heat, some staying for the entire summer, a few into the fall. Some families returned every year and built wooden platforms upon which to set up kitchens and tents, bringing the most basic of the comforts of home to their mountain retreats.

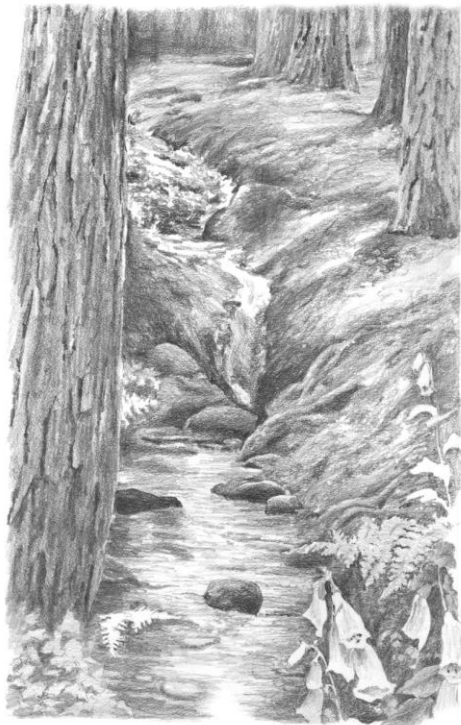


In 1918, Andrew D. Ferguson and his wife, Arza Patterson Ferguson, partnered with Dr. and Mrs. A.D. Patterson of Visalia to become the fourth owners of the property for a purchase price of \$2400. Soon, Andy Ferguson led the work of creating a network of lanes and subdividing the property. Many of the new village’s first families began their life in Wilsonia as campers. They too, built wooden platforms for their tents and cooking areas, and soon began to build their cabins.

“...By the late fall (1920), my parents, my aunt, and Karl arranged to buy a total of four lots in the southeast corner with park land to the south and undivided Wilsonia to the east. I think the price was about \$200. My parents wanted to be out of doors as much as possible and built a permanent outdoor kitchen and a separate fireplace with a curved bench surrounding it. We had tents to store our things in and to dress in but most often slept outside....finally in the late twenties they built a one room cabin with porch to store our belongings in over the winter. Mother and their six children spent ten weeks each summer at Wilsonia while dad came up on weekends and during his vacation.

From “Azalea Glen,” the Mitchell Summer Home in Wilsonia by Dorothy Stevens Mitchell included in *Wilsonia, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow – A Scrapbook* compiled by Fern Trip, 1989

The comforts of home - continued



During the early decades of life in Wilsonia, it was not uncommon for some to spend the entire summer in their mountain homes. Some of today's Wilsonians tell of the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, of packing up and heading to Wilsonia the day after school was out for the summer, and only returning to their valley homes when school reopened in September. It was common in many families for mother and the children to stay in Wilsonia while dad worked in the Valley during the week, returning to Wilsonia every weekend with supplies and laundry.

From the beginning, one of the most basic of needs was water. None of the early cabins began with running water. The first sources of water were the creeks and springs that flowed from the rains and melting winter snows. Early in the development of the village, developer Andy Ferguson provided for the drilling of community wells. Wilsonians hiked with their pots and buckets to and from the wells every day.



“Ed (French) began to think about a special gift for his daughter (Annie). In 1929 he built the French cabin on the highest point in Wilsonia (on Manzanita Lane). For eleven summers Annie and Franklin spent their vacation in the wonderful one room cabin.... The cabin had no well, so each morning the robust, barrel-chested Franklin strode down the steep road to fill two buckets with water for the day's use. To demonstrate how strong he was he would swing the buckets in a great arc just as he reached the top of the hill. Never did he spill a drop as his daughters cheered his success.”

From “The Cabin on the Rock” by Martha J. Everhard, included in Wilsonia, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow – A Scrapbook compiled by Fern Trip, 1989

Eventually, private wells were drilled at most cabins. Given that electricity did not arrive in Wilsonia and Grant Grove until 1947, wells were equipped with hand pumps, a luxurious step forward!

During the period that they stayed in the tent, the Jones' shared the Fleutch's water well. When asked whether or not they had running water Merle Jones would always say, “Yes!” In the early days since the two families lived across the way from each other, after she pumped the water bucket full at the Fleutch's, Merle would “run” it back across the road, over the stream and up the hill to her tent kitchen. That was her “running water.”

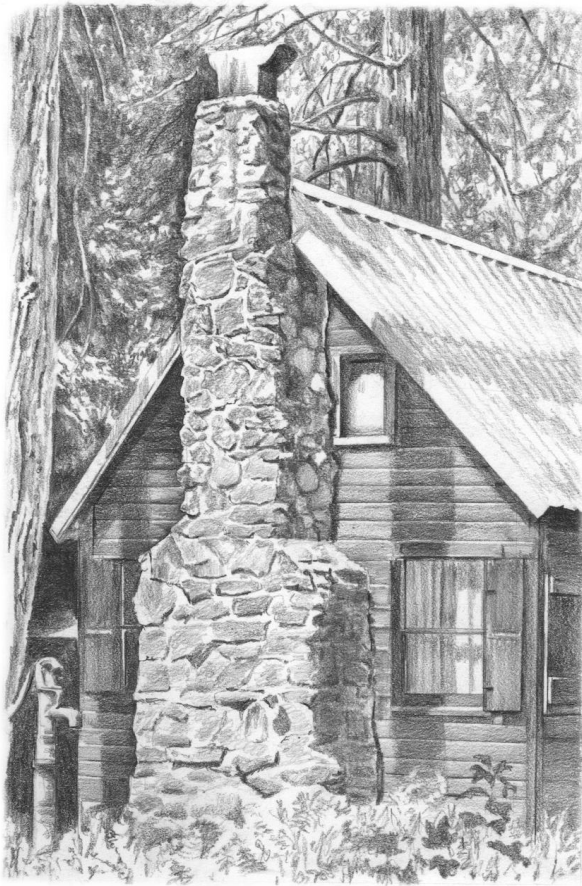
From “Jones Cabin” by Mrs. Merle Jones and her family, included in Wilsonia, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow – A Scrapbook compiled by Fern Trip, 1989

Keeping food fresh was a comfort of home not available without a local icehouse or electricity. Many families used the icy water of Wilsonia's creeks to cool their fruit and vegetables, milk, eggs, and milk. Some brought ingenious evaporative coolers up from the valley. These were burlap-covered boxes made of wood and metal screen. Families periodically poured cold water over the cooler to soak the burlap covering. As the water evaporated throughout the day, temperature inside the box lowered dramatically.

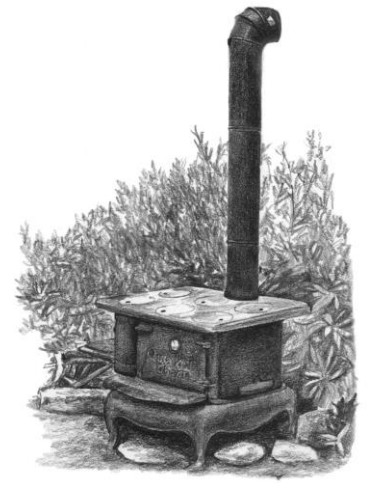
“We had a tank house. They would use a hand pump to pump water into the tank up on top. They had one pipe coming in from the tank and had one sink inside the cabin with one faucet...with cold water. That's all the water we had. The tank house is close to 20 feet high so that gave them about 40 pounds of pressure.

There's a shower in the tank house. We had a five gallon can with a rubber hose coming out the bottom with a little spout that you could turn on and off. You'd fill it with water, hang it in the sun to get it warm, then you'd hang it up in shower.”

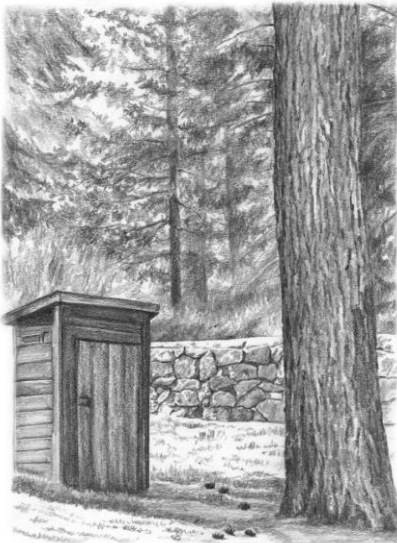
From an interview with Gus and Barbara Collin, 2022



Prior to electricity, cabins were built without power tools. Cooking was done on campfires, then fireplaces, gas camp stoves, and indoor woodstoves. Wilsonians warmed themselves by their campfires and fireplaces, woodstoves, and gas heaters. Light during dark forest nights came from campfires and fireplaces, candles, and kerosene and gas lanterns. At least one cabin was built in the early 1930s with a lighting system that piped butane gas throughout the house to wall-mounted gas lanterns from a pressurized tank in the basement.

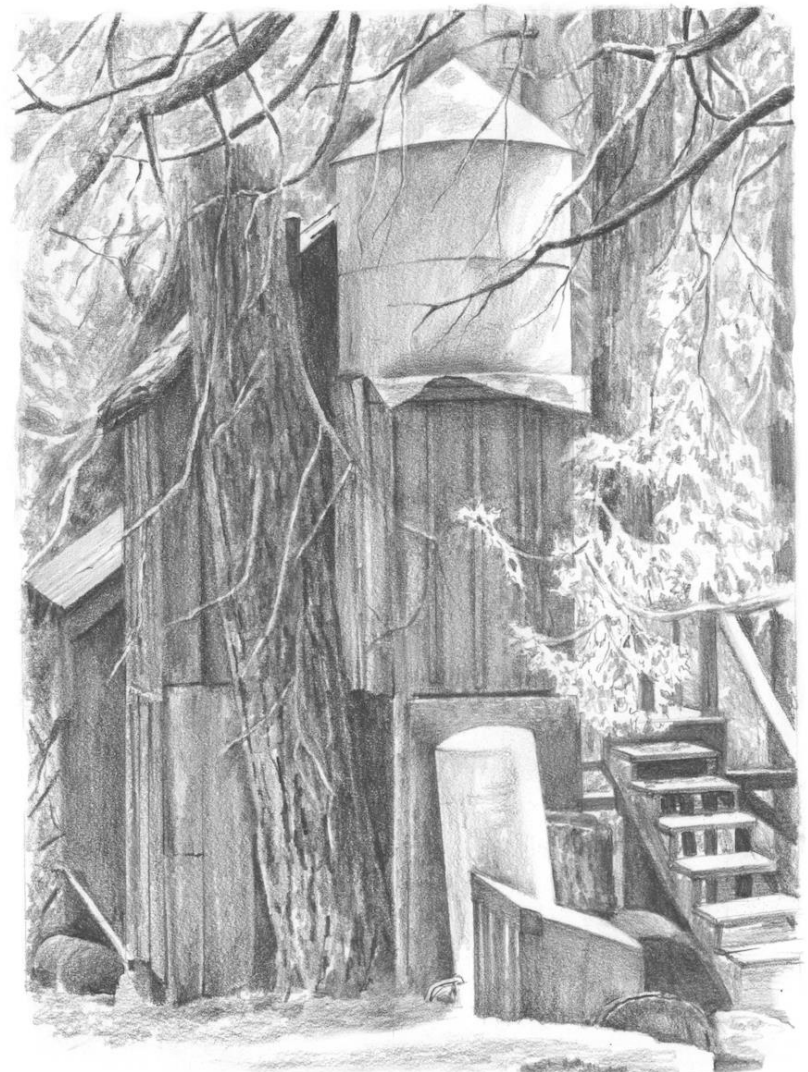


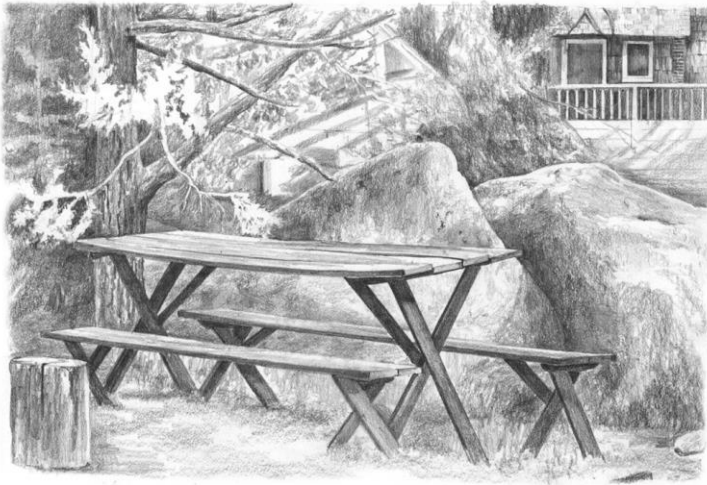
The arrival of electricity in 1947 began a new way of life in Wilsonia. Electric lights, stoves and ovens, heaters, radios, and record players found their way to our cabins.



With electricity came electric pumps for our wells. Beginning in the late 1940s and continuing into the 1950s, Wilsonians added indoor plumbing for their kitchens, water heaters, and indoor bathrooms!

Over the first century of life in Wilsonia many comforts have been added to our mountain homes. Even so, our lives in historic Wilsonia are still connected to the lives of those who were here before us. Reminders of those early days surround us and can be seen on every hike around our village.





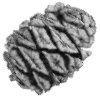
You are invited to the annual
 Wilsonia Historic District Trust
All-Wilsonia
Meet and Greet
 July 15, 2023, 4:00 PM
 at the Bartsch Cabin
Corner of Manzanita and Fern Lanes
 in northwest Wilsonia

Beverages and appetizers will be served.



Wilsonia Wildflower Walk – July 1 at 9:00 a.m.

This year’s rain and snow bring hope for a lush wildflower bloom. Meet at 9:00 below the Clubhouse at the intersection of Lilac and Presidents Lanes.

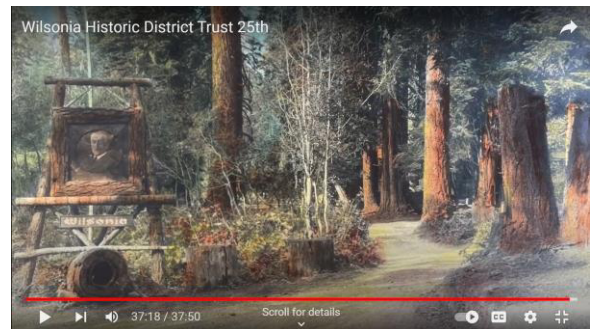


Please View our Website: www.wilsonia.org

Our website is a resource to learn about the Wilsonia Historic District Trust—our purpose, our history and our current activities. There you will find past newsletters and other items of interest.

Historic Wilsonia Video

To celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the creation of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust, the WHDT produced this video presentation that tells stories of life in early Wilsonia, and of the importance of its listing in the Federal Register of Historic Places to Wilsonia’s continued existence. You can view this entertaining and informative presentation by going to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJXATI5c-EM>



Historic Preservation Guidelines

The designation of Wilsonia as a Historic District is not permanent. A large percentage of our still-standing cabins must continue to be historic in nature. If a cabin is modernized so that it no longer has its historic appearance, it can no longer qualify as “Historic.” For information regarding guidelines for historic cabin preservation, go to www.wilsonia.org .

The WHDT Wilsonia Directory

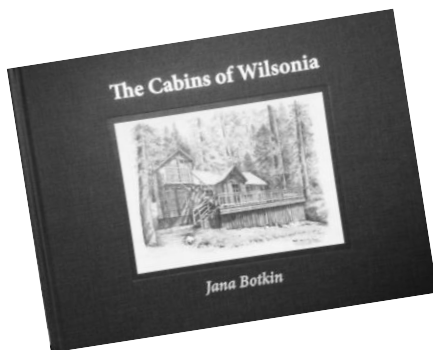
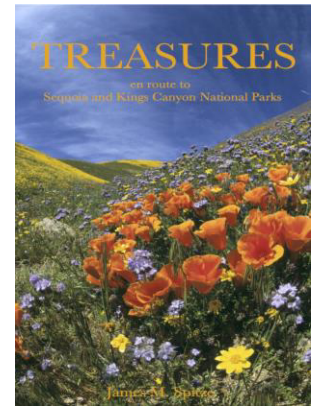


Under the leadership of our board member Carley Metcalf, WHDT is nearing completion and distribution of our directory of Wilsonia cabins this summer. The aim is to allow cabin users to contact other cabin users in case of an emergency, and to foster community. Only those cabins where interest has been expressed will be included. Thank you to everyone for your support in this project. Questions or comments should be directed to rustyacres93@gmail.com or 559-573-4700.

Add to your cabin library...

TREASURES en route to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

Wilsonian **Jim Spitze**, one of WHDT's pioneers and founding editor of this newsletter, has created this fabulous historical guide to our own Highway 180. Hardbound with almost three hundred pages and 142 illustrations, this book is filled with stories and fascinating information about the people and geography that surround our route to Wilsonia and the National Parks. Proceeds from the sale of this book go **Sierra Gateway Trust** at www.sierragateway.org. Copies may be purchased by contacting Carley Metcalf at 559 573-4700.



The Cabins of Wilsonia

by Jana Botkin

Available now - \$40.00 (tax included)

Visit the Wilsonia Village Online Store at

<https://wilsonia-village.square.site/>

or contact Doug Bartsch—559-799-1584

Wilsonia Historic District Trust

Mission: The mission of Wilsonia Historic District Trust is to preserve, interpret and perpetuate our community's history, unique quality of life, intense and long-term family commitment, and natural resources handed down over generations. Specific attention is given to the many cultural artifacts and natural resources which contribute to keeping Wilsonia a vibrant Historic community.

Goal: The goal is to manage the affairs of the District Trust including but not limited to finances, the unique cultural artifacts, and assure the continuation of the ten decades of community interest.

Finances: Wilsonia Historic District Trust is financed solely by donations. We are an IRS Code 501(c)(3) corporation. Donations are tax deductible. The Board of Directors is responsible for the administration of all funds.



*Historic Wilsonia water-cooled
"evaporative refrigerator."
Originally covered with burlap.*

Wilsonia Historic District Trust Board of Directors

Drew Sorensen – President dsorensen102@gmail.com
Doug Bartsch – Vice President, Newsletter doug.bartsch@fresno.edu
Bob Foster – Secretary sam186@aol.com
BJ Spitze – Treasurer bj.spitze@wilsonia.org
Carley Metcalf – Director, Directory rustyacres93@gmail.com
Rick Carlstrom—Director rickcarlstrom53@gmail.com
Sheri Parkinson- Director teebars@yahoo.com

Wilsonia Historic District Trust Annual Meeting July 2 at 10:00 a.m.
Sorensen Cabin on Hazel Lane, just south of Fern Lane.

From the President of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust

May, 2023

Dear Wilsonians,

Happy summer 2023 from the Wilsonia Historic District Trust! While we are not sure when we will be able to open our cabins, we all agree that we can't wait to get up the hill and enjoy the great outdoors.

We want to welcome those folks who are new to this email as well as a welcome back to those who have already received these in the past. A huge thank you to Carley Metcalf and BJ Spitze for their persistence in gathering working emails from cabin owners.

WHDT hopes that you will consider a donation to our **501 (c) 3** to help us with two projects. We have received a quote from NTM Productions (we purchased the sound/video system in the Clubhouse from them and they also installed it) for a portable sound system that we would purchase for our outside events such as the wildflower walk on July 1st and the All Wilsonia Meet and Greet on July 15th. You may remember that we rented a system last year and it was nice to know that everyone could hear at the Collin's cabin. The price is \$3200, and we feel very good about this knowing that we have worked with NTM in the past. Our second project is to engage the services of The Historic Resources Group to help us with our second Amendment to our Historic District application. They were quite beneficial to our first two submissions and are interested in helping us again. They will charge us \$1500, which we believe is an incredibly fair price for such expert assistance.

Please consider helping with these worthwhile projects by donating to WHDT on our Wilsonia.org website or send a check to:

BJ Spitze
1484 S. Frankwood Ave.
Sanger, CA 93657

We look forward to seeing everyone this summer in our beloved Wilsonia! Please reach out to any of our board members if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Drew S. Sorensen, president

