



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 #11 May, 2024

In this issue you are invited to:

- Mark your calendar to attend the Wilsonia Nature and Wildflower Walk on June 29
- Join us on July 20 in the Clubhouse for a WHDT *Meet and Greet* and some fun Wilsonia History
- Enjoy a story by Sheri Parkinson about the neighbors and neighborhoods of early Wilsonia
- Make a donation to strengthen Wilsonia’s status on the National Historic Register
- Share your cabin stories for publication on our website and in our newsletter
- Participate in a new Video History Project to preserve Wilsonia stories
- Remember and honor our friend, Jim Spitze, the first president of the Wilsonia Historic District

You are invited to the annual
Wilsonia Historic District Trust
All-Wilsonia Meet and Greet
July 20, 2024, 4:00-5:30 PM
at the Wilsonia Clubhouse
Near the corner of Lilac and President’s Lanes
in central Wilsonia

*Beverages and appetizers will be served
(you’re welcome to bring something if you’d like :0)*



The Wilsonia Clubhouse from The Cabins of Wilsonia by Jana Botkin



Wilsonia Nature and Wildflower Walk
Saturday, June 29 at 10:00 a.m.
Meet at the Wilsonia Clubhouse

Wilsonia, Several Communities in One - Sheri Parkinson



The Fleutsch Cabin (now Francis) from The Cabins of Wilsonia by Jana Botkin

Early Wilsonia was not only a community itself, but it was made up of many smaller communities. These smaller communities were formed out of our necessity to help one another, provide entertainment, prevent boredom, and to create a safe space. It was not unusual to find families owning several cabins close together and clusters of cabins owned by people who were neighbors in their hometowns. The Fleutsch cabin next to the Buckmaster cabin on Tyndall and Sierra were owned by families who were next door neighbors in Ventura!

The feeling of community was especially important because most of the early cabin inhabitants were women and children with their husbands/fathers coming up to Wilsonia only when their



work permitted. Neighbors helped each other and shared with one another. Those fortunate enough to have a well or access to a creek were very popular on wash day when women would gather to wash their clothes (and kids) together. Potluck meals were always enjoyed when a neighborhood community would get together, with the women making their specialty dishes, and everyone's food pantry would stretch that much farther. Neighbors would go fishing and contribute their catch to be cooked and enjoyed by all at a good ol' fashioned Fish Fry. Some people would cook their dishes outside in their black pots while others would cook inside on their wood stoves. There would be "Happy Hour," horseshoes, and card games for the adults, while the kids played Tag, Kick the Can, Hide and Seek, and had downhill wagon races. The evening would culminate with a campfire. Stories would be told and retold, songs sung, and popcorn or roasted marshmallows would be an added bonus. Sometimes the adults would get "all cleaned up" and "go calling" on their neighbors just to visit and have a good time.

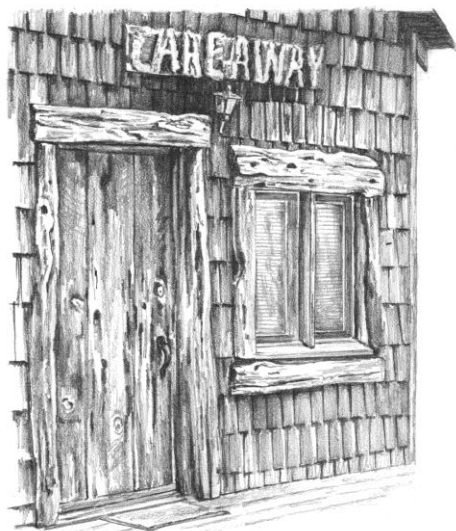
One unique evening activity enjoyed by the neighborhood at Tyndall and Sierra was "**Flying Squirrel Watching.**" Every evening neighbors would accumulate on their front porches in anticipation of the event. At about dusk, as if on cue, the squirrels would start performing. They would "fly" from one tree to another, sometimes covering long distances and providing quite a spectacle. Since flying squirrels are nocturnal, many people have been in Wilsonia all their lives and have never seen one. To see one is truly special. I saw my first one about two years ago, on Pine Lane.

Horses were a big part of early Wilsonia life. George Burgess tells the story of the early women in his family coming up from the valley in a buckboard, pulled by horses. They would then use those same horses all summer for riding. Many families brought up horses and either had their own corral, shared a neighbor's, or used the community corrals.



The Wilsons would bring up very gentle horses and a donkey, and loan them to kids who didn't have their own. Kids and adults would often join up and ride, sometimes going on an all-day adventure. One group was called The Wilsonia Riding Club. Hiking groups were also popular with the "Bat Cave" above Sierra and Tyndall being a popular destination. Many times these groups would just form from those interested around the neighborhood.

There were even tennis courts in the early days close to the community entrance for those inclined to play.



The Care-Away Cabin from [The Cabins of Wilsonia](#) by Jana Botkin

Opha Davis, who had Care-away Cabin on Hazel Lane, made dolls for the kids in her neighborhood. She also made puppets and would stage Puppet Shows which the kids enjoyed immensely. A platform with a canvas top was built next to the Ferguson cabin to accommodate programs by Wilsonians for Wilsonians. Families and neighbors would practice and put on shows for each other.

A good example of neighbors helping neighbors was when the Fleutsch family lived in a tent cabin with a floor while their cabin was being built. When the construction was completed, the tent structure was dragged across the road to the Jones' property for them to live in while their cabin was being built.



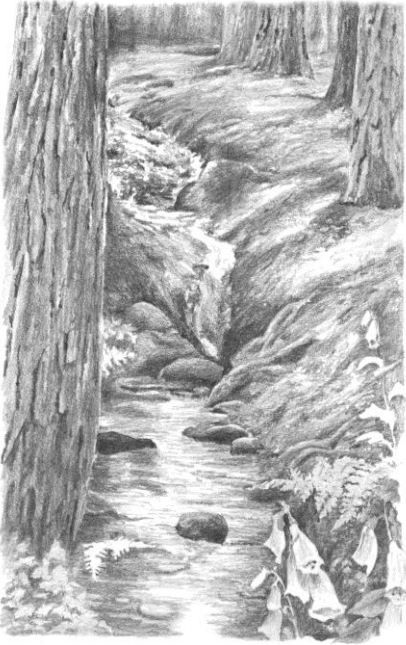
The Fraser-Simmons Cabin from [The Cabins of Wilsonia](#) by Jana Botkin

Another example was when the Fraser-Simmons family was living in a tent before their cabin was built. One day, without explanation, the Fraser-Simmons family moved into their neighbor, Mrs. Durfey's cabin. The kids later found out that a mountain lion had killed a fawn about fifty feet from their tent!

A sure way to bring a community together quickly was to do something in the neighborhood that was not a routine everyday activity, things like building or tearing down something, sawing a tree or digging a well. Suddenly, all the neighbors would start watching, then helping, and then of course start giving advice whether it was wanted or not. One story is that when Steve Richardson wanted to oversee some roof repairs, he tied a rope around himself and attached the other end to an inanimate object. He then proceeded to climb on the roof and imitate Spider Man. It didn't work and the family was amazed at how quickly neighbors showed up to help and give advice on how best to get him down from his very precarious position.



Mrs. Durfey was known for baking delicious cookies. She had her neighborhood kids "trained" to get her mail or groceries and would reward them with cookies. Another woman didn't start her car often enough to keep the battery charged and sometimes when she wanted to use it, the battery was dead. She would put out a call for help, and neighborhood kids came running to push the car downhill until it started. They would then jump on the running boards, ride the car down the hill, and she would stop at the store for a thank you ice cream treat.



From *The Cabins of Wilsonia* by Jana Botkin

Kids lucky enough to have a creek nearby would have big dreams at the beginning of the summer of damming up the creek and building a swimming hole. They would start piling rocks but even with more water in the creeks in the early Wilsonia days, no one ever got a swimming hole. It usually ended up more like a wading hole, but it was always good for boat races and other water activities.

Comic books were another way for Wilsonia kids to pass the time and foster community spirit. They always seemed to know when the latest ones would be delivered to the store and would rush to the store to buy them for a nickel. As soon as one kid would read a comic book, he/she would trade with someone



who had purchased a different one. Many hours were spent reading them, imagining being one of the characters, and even acting out parts of the story.

Snipe Hunting was a big family or community event, usually organized when "city slickers" or "newbies" to Wilsonia would come to visit. The hunters would gather at about dark, usually in a meadow. Everyone would be divided into "chasers" and "catchers", with the new people in the chaser group. The chasers were instructed to make a lot of noise anyway that they could which included yelling, hitting pots, pans and cans with spoons, whistles, etc. When the "spotter" would see a snipe, he would yell directions to the chaser group as to where to go, often directing in a zig zag pattern, to make U turns, and all sorts of intricate moves. This was in an attempt to herd the snipes into the catchers' bags, but the snipes were very smart and quick. After the hunt was over, whether anyone caught a snipe or not, the group would gather at an appointed campfire and share stories of the hunt.



Wilsonia is made up of many small communities even today. Each one is special and serves a purpose. Although we now have mobility and technology, we still need to simply connect with others in person, and there is no better place to do this than in Wilsonia. See you this summer on the porch!

We Are Wilsonia, A Video History Project

Collecting family cabin pictures and stories will continue in 2024. When you see Wilsonian Isaac Palmisano walking around with his camera equipment in May or July, he's on his way to sit on someone's front porch to film and record an interview. *If you want to share a story, please get in touch with us by contacting WHDT vice president Drew Sorensen dsorensen102@gmail.com*

An Invitation to Share Wilsonia Stories

The **Historic Wilsonia** newsletter publishes information about the history of Wilsonia, its cabins and owners. The WHDT Writing Team is gathering stories about Wilsonia, our people and our cabins. You are invited to share your suggestions, ideas, and stories with our writing team. These are our members and their email addresses. You're welcome to find their phone numbers and addresses in the Wilsonia Community directory as well.

Historic Wilsonia Writing Team

Sheri Parkinson teebars@yahoo.com

Jean Faszholz texasjeanfasz@gmail.com

Sue Speth sueaspeth@hotmail.com

Doug Bartsch doug.bartsch@fresno.edu

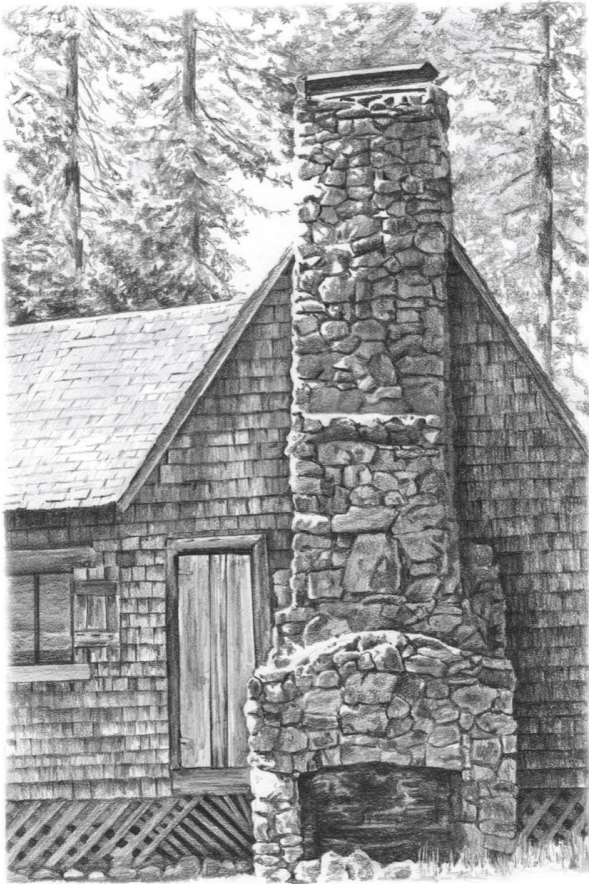
Please Visit our Website:

www.wilsonia.org

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

Historic Preservation Guidelines

The designation of Wilsonia as a Historic District is not permanent. A substantial percentage of our still-standing cabins must continue to be historic in nature. If a cabin is modernized so that it no longer has a historic appearance, it will no longer qualify as a "historic contributor." For information regarding specific guidelines for historic cabin preservation, and if you are considering a remodel or add on, go to www.wilsonia.org.



Drawing from [The Cabins of Wilsonia](#) by Jana Botkin

The Wilsonia Historic District Trust Directory

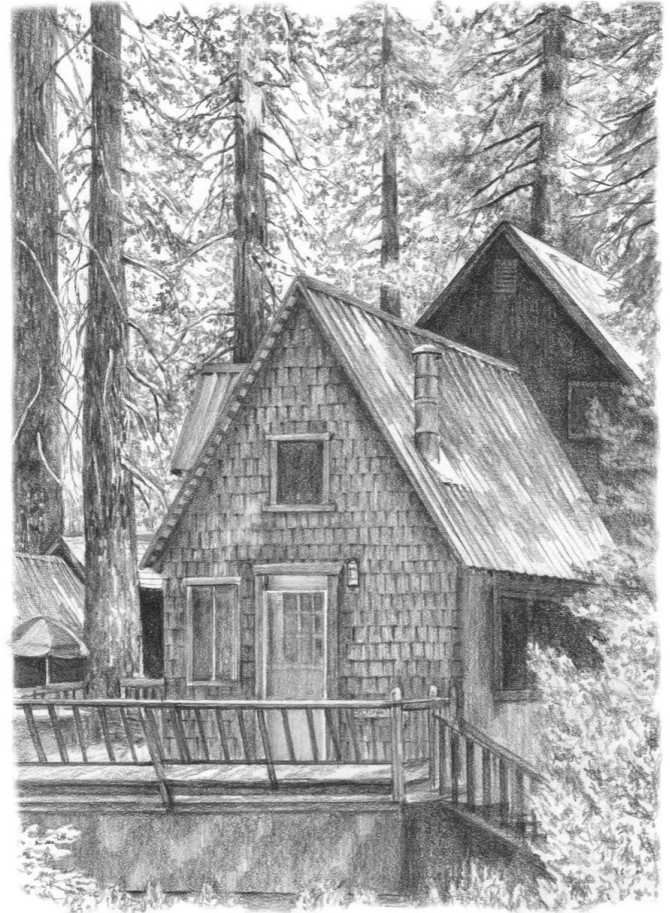
Under the leadership of board member Carley Metcalf, and with the diligent assistance of B.J. and Jim Spitze, our directory is complete! Many Wilsonians have received their directory. The aim of our directory is to allow cabin users to communicate in case of an emergency, and to foster community. Thank you to everyone for your support in this project. If you have updates, corrections, or questions/comments, please contact Carley at carley.metcalf@wilsonia.org or 559-573-4700.



Help Preserve Wilsonia for Our Children and Grandchildren

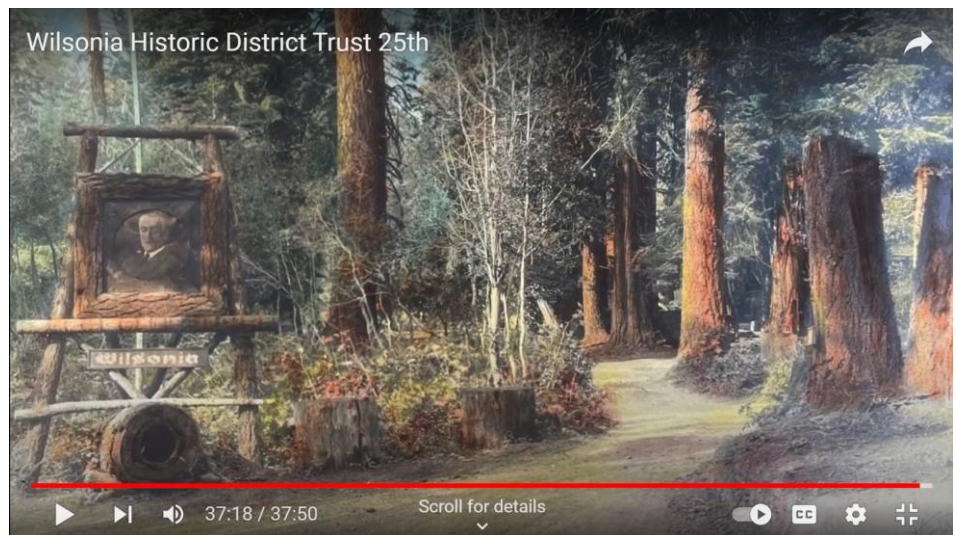
In the early 1990s, the dedicated work of a group of Wilsonians created the Wilsonia Historic District Trust, resulting in Wilsonia being designated as a “historic community” on the National Register of Historic Places. Today, 210 Wilsonia cabins remain, 162 designated as “historic contributors.” Historic contributor status is essential to maintain Wilsonia as a historic community. The Wilsonia Historic District Trust has begun the work necessary to designate additional cabins as historic contributors. We are nearly half-way to our goal of raising \$15,000 to support this effort. The Wilsonia Historic District Trust is a registered 501(c)(3) organization and contributions may be tax-deductible. You may donate via our website: <https://wilsonia.org/> or mail a check to the Wilsonia Historic District Trust:

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

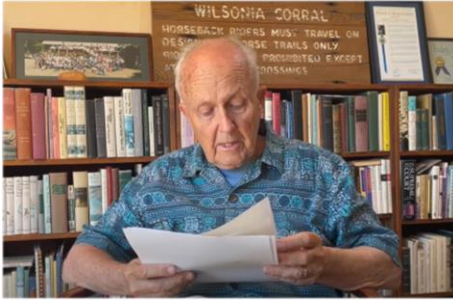


Historic Wilsonia Video

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust, this video presentation was developed to tell stories of life in early Wilsonia, and of the importance of listing it in the Federal Register of Historic Places. You may view this entertaining and informative presentation by going to



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJXATI5c-EM>



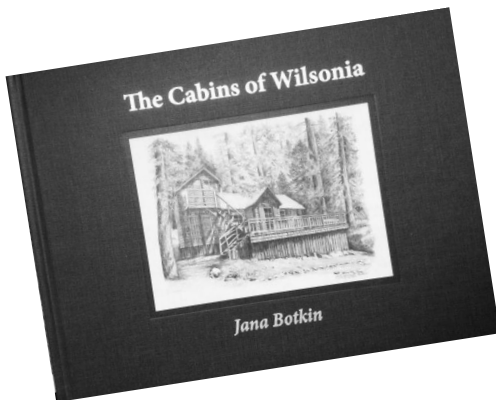
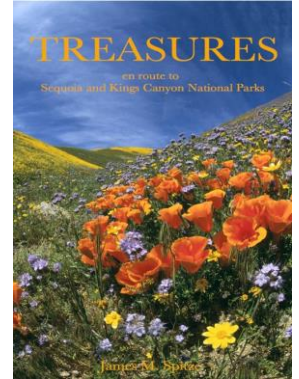
In Memoriam – Jim Spitze 1937-2024

Wilsonian Jim Spitze, first president of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust passed away on April 25, 2024.

Add to your cabin library...

TREASURES en route to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

Jim Spitze, one of our Wilsonia Historic District pioneers and the founding editor of this newsletter, has created a fabulous historic guide to 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 to the **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 (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.

Wilsonia Historic District Trust

Board of Directors

Doug Bartsch –President, doug.bartsch@fresno.edu

Drew Sorensen – Vice President dsorensen102@gmail.com

Bob Foster – Secretary sam186@aol.com

BJ Spitze – Treasurer bj.spitze@wilsonia.org

Carley Metcalf – Director, carley.metcalf@wilsonia.org

Rick Carlstrom—Director rickcarlstrom53@gmail.com

Sheri Parkinson- Director teebars@yahoo.com

