



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 #14 December 2025

In this issue you are invited to:

- Read about our efforts to bring additional Wilsonia cabins into “historic contributor” status.
- Read a story about the troubled times 1969-1979 when Wilsonia’s existence was threatened.
- Respond to an invitation to share your cabin stories for publication in our newsletter.
- Participate in our Video History Project to preserve Wilsonia stories.

Historic Status Update

Wilsonians who can remember Wilsonia during the 1960s and 1970s recall the period of tension that developed between many residents of Wilsonia and the National Park Service. Until 1969, Wilsonians greeted rangers at the Park Entrance, simply said, “Wilsonian,” and were quickly waived through without question. Then things began to change.

“In 1969, things in Wilsonia began to change.

In 1969 Congress established the Opportunity Inholding Program, specifically designed to purchase private lands within certain national parks. Many Wilsonians believed that Wilsonia’s survival as a mountain cabin community was in doubt, saying, “It felt like a dark cloud had moved in over Wilsonia.” Over two decades later, hope began to return with the designation of the *Wilsonian Historic District* listed in the National Register of Historic Places on March 14, 1996. We are forever grateful to pioneer members of the *Wilsonian Historic District Trust* board - Fern Tripp, Jim and BJ Spitz, Francis Preston, Milton and Kay Miner, Lawrence Headley, Richard Johnson, Karen and Bert Boothroy, Karen Sledge, Gus and Barbara Collin, Robert Dean, Jim Sorensen, and so many Wilsonians for their tireless efforts to make the dream of the Wilsonia Historic District a reality.

The Wilsonia Historic District application was originally approved by the California State Historical Resources Commission in 1995. Led by Gus Collin, an amendment was approved in 2010 and in February 2026, a final amendment application will appear on the agenda of the Commission. When approved, this amendment will extend Wilsonia’s “Period of Historical Significance” to include the years 1918-1978, bringing the total number of contributing properties from 77% to 81%.



The Cosart Cabin – from “The Cabins of Wilsonia” by Jana Botkin

1969-1979 A Troubled Time for Wilsonia

Many Wilsonians may not be aware that a land acquisition program was initiated by the U.S. Congress in 1932 to purchase privately-owned properties within the country's national parks. Though for years it had little impact on the Wilsonia community, this program was reinvigorated in 1965 with the passage of the Land and Water Conservation Act, which provided funds for the acquisition of privately-owned property within federal public lands, such as national parks. Such non-federal property surrounded by federally managed public lands are known as "inholdings."

Another Congressional push came in 1969 with a program to establish a "willing buyer-willing seller" arrangement whereby homeowners would sell their property to the National Park Service at fair market value. The National Park Service sent letters to all inholders within national parks, including property owners in Wilsonia, advising them of the new legislation, and encouraging them to sell their private property. In Wilsonia the pace of land acquisition was slow at first, as property owners generally resisted pressure to sell. Approximately a dozen Wilsonia properties were acquired by the National Park Service through the program from 1969 to 1973.

The current Wilsonia Historic District Application Amendment team, (Drew Sorensen, Bob Foster, BJ Spitze, Carley Metcalf, Sheri Parkinson, Rick Carlstrom, Bob Preston, Joe Cote, Doug Bartsch) worked in collaboration with the Historic Resources Group, a California-based firm dedicated to historic preservation. This amendment application includes a description of the events 1969-1995 resulting in the establishment of the Wilsonia Historic District. Thanks to Kari Fowler of the HRG for her research and writing of this historic narrative.

This is an abridged version. The complete story can be found at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y8vLbBEef0aH1AHu9xOK-c2HqAeqHtrR/view?usp=sharing>

"It felt like a dark cloud had moved in over Wilsonia."

Frustrated by the lack of transactions, the Division of Land Acquisition issued a 1973 memorandum calling for increasing the frequency of contact with property owners (every six months); more rigorous enforcement of applicable health and safety codes; and restrictions on any new development in the area, all in furtherance of the National Park Service's ultimate goal of "total acquisition of Wilsonia." These tactics appear to have been effective, as the National Park Service negotiated the purchase of thirty-four lots in 1974 alone, with ten more the following year. By 1975, some 96 Wilsonia properties had been sold to become National Park land.

In 1975, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), undertook a study of the National Park Service's land acquisition policies and found that "for the most part, complaints of NPS harassment were isolated to Wilsonia." As detailed in the GAO report, in late 1975 the Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park's acting superintendent acknowledged that the strict enforcement of building codes and county standards was a "deliberate attempt to hold down prices and force sales....Since no work could be done without a permit, NPS expected that the

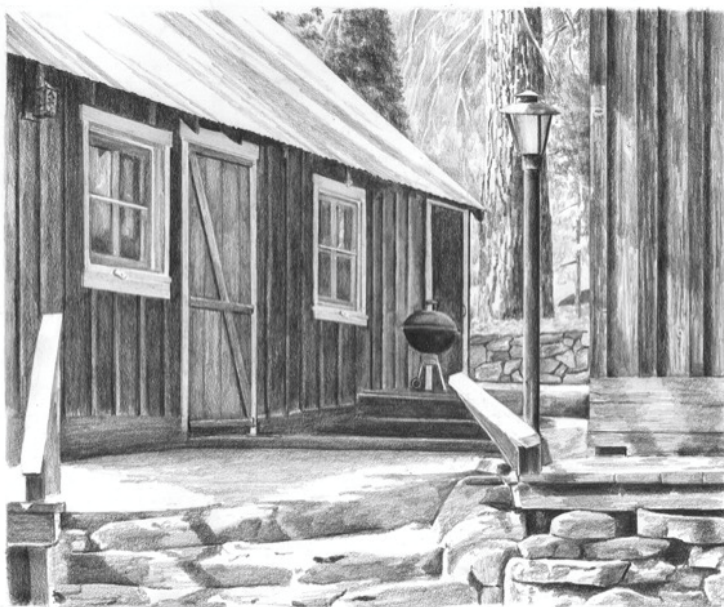
costs of needed repairs eventually would exceed the value of the property. NPS then planned to offer to buy the property from the inholder.” As owners were unable to maintain or improve their properties, cabins would fall into disrepair, having the dual effect of depressing its fair market value and incentivizing its sale.

In late 1975, the National Park Service appeared to ease up on some of its policies in the Wilsonia area of Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park because of inholder opposition. However, in late 1977, the National Park Service escalated its land acquisition program and began enforcing strict new regulations on land use within all inholdings. The new policy stated that inholders would not be allowed to build on undeveloped property within the park system, and that anything more than a minor improvement to an existing building would constitute grounds for federal condemnation.

In April 1978, more than 60 Wilsonia property owners attended a Tulare County Board of Supervisors hearing to express their frustration with the National Park Service’s latest posture toward inholdings. In response to the hearing, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors issued a statement in May 1978 opposing the National Park Service’s land acquisition plan.

Finally in November 1979, after a nearly 10-year battle with inholders over property rights, the National Park Service announced what was being described as a “new enlightened policy” for acquiring properties within inholdings throughout the park system. In a dramatic reversal, NPS Director Whalen told a park system advisory board that the stronger acquisition guidelines adopted last year were a mistake, and that the new policy would emphasize the rights of property owners.

Despite this new development, the impact on the community of Wilsonia had been substantial, and Wilsonia remained in a state of gradual decline overall. In July 1991, a group of cabin owners met at the Wilsonia Clubhouse to discuss a strategy for moving forward. Soon



The Spitze Cabin – from “The Cabins of Wilsonia” by Jana Botkin

thereafter, the Wilsonia Historic District Trust was established, with the goal of pursuing historic designation for Wilsonia’s remaining structures. In September of that year, James Spitze reached out to the National Park Service on behalf of the Trust, asking for an “open and friendly dialogue” about historic preservation in Wilsonia. In response, Dr. William C. Tweed replied that the National Park Service would be “delighted” to join in such a dialogue, stating that the NPS’s goal was “to preserve Wilsonia in private ownership as a low-density residential community” and welcomed the opportunity to “support your goal of creating a Wilsonia Historic District.”

We Are Wilsonia, A Video History Project



Collecting family cabin pictures and stories will continue in 2026. When you see Wilsonians Isaac Palmisano, Drew Sorensen, and Doug Bartsch walking around with camera equipment, they may be on their 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.

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Welcome to WHDT's Website: Fall 2025

This website serves as a resource to learn about the purpose, history and activities of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust

Many thanks to the Wilsonia Community and particularly to our donors for ensuring a successful funding campaign. We are proceeding to work on an amendment to our historic designation which we hope will increase the number of "Contributing Cabins".

[Learn about our Book of Remembrance on our History Page](#)

[Home](#)

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[Our Newsletters](#)

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In 2022 we celebrated 25 years of Wilsonia being an Historic District.

[View the Video here.](#)



1997 photo from Plaque Dedication

Donate



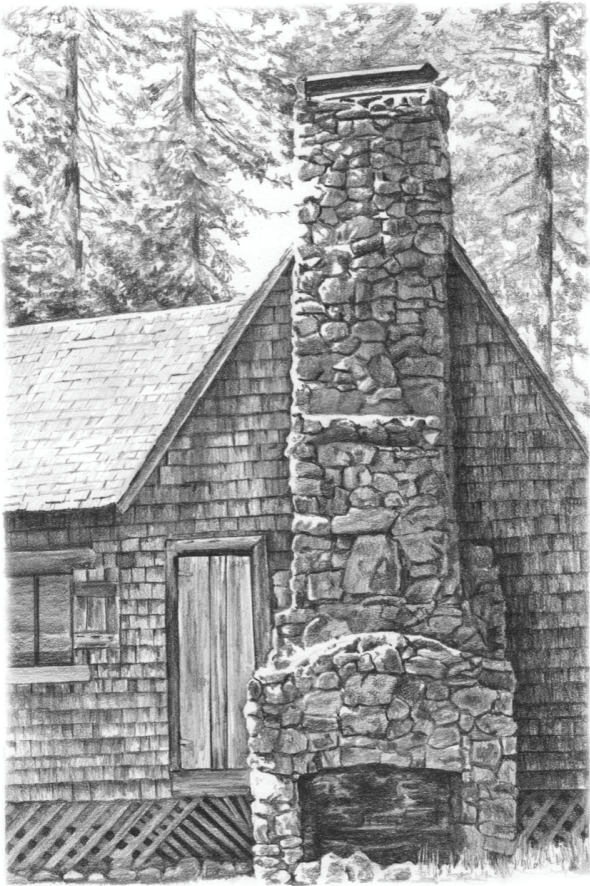
WHDT welcomes donations - our only source of income



Please Visit our Website:

www.wilsonia.org

Our website is a resource to learn about the Wilsonia Historic District Trust, our purpose, history, current activities, Wilsonia history, and historic preservation guidelines. 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.

The Wilsonia Historic District Trust Directory

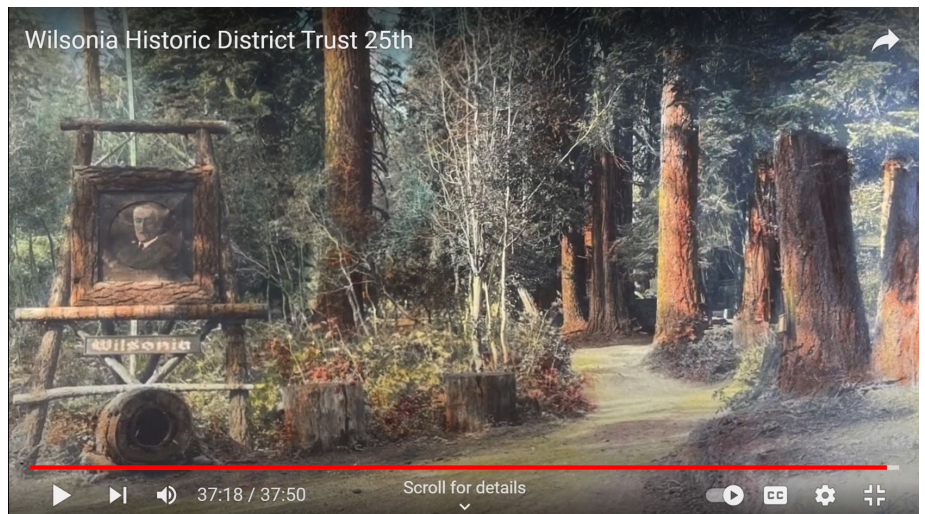
Under the leadership of board members Carley Metcalf and B.J. Spitze, our directory has been completed and most Wilsonians have received their directory. The aim of our directory is to allow cabin users to communicate in case of an emergency, and to foster



community. Thank you to everyone for your support of this project. A second edition will be available this spring – more details to come. If you have updates, corrections, or questions/comments, please contact Carley at carley.metcalf@wilsonia.org or 559-573-4700.

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 National Register of Historic Places. You may view this entertaining and informative presentation by going to

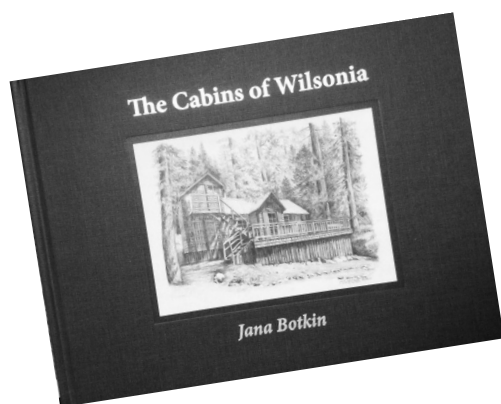
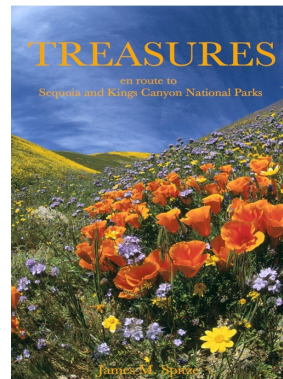


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJXATI5c-EM>

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, 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 - \$35 (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

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