



*Published by the Wilsonia Historic District Trust for all Wilsonia cabin owners, their families, and friends. May, 2022*



Mark your calendar...  
**Celebrate 25 Years of  
Wilsonia's Historic Status**

July 2, 2022 at 3:00 p.m.  
Wilsonia Clubhouse

Join us at the Clubhouse for a celebration of Wilsonia's continuing status as one of our nation's historic communities. We will gather to enjoy refreshments, a multimedia presentation featuring some long-time Wilsonians who have experienced this special place through much of Wilsonia's history.

## **Introduction to the Wilsonia Historic District Trust**

The Wilsonia Historic District Trust (WHDT) was established in 1993 as a California nonprofit corporation and has 501(c) (3) status with the IRS. The entire community of Wilsonia became a National Historic District on March 15, 1996 - at which time Wilsonia was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The criterion for inclusion that Wilsonia met most specifically was "a building or buildings of distinctive characteristics." Within that criterion were two items: the consistent early 1900s "rustic" nature of our cabins; and the ongoing, vibrant, multi-generational nature of our community, the latter being described as almost "one of a kind" by California's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). In 2011 the documentation for the listing in the National Register of Historic Places was amended.

The specific purpose of the WHDT is to preserve the historic district and community of Wilsonia in Kings Canyon National Park through a comprehensive program of historical research and education, structures maintenance and restoration, and public participation. In terms of structures maintenance and restoration, Architectural Guidelines, with the endorsement of SEKI, are now in place for cabin owners who are wishing to make changes to their cabins in ways that allow them to maintain historic cabin status when submitted to SHPO. The WHDT engages in educational programs, cataloging of Wilsonia cabin owner history, fundraising, and projects such as the recently completed sound system for the clubhouse. Work is still underway to provide a Wilsonia Directory to interested Wilsonia cabin owners.



Preston Family Cabin, 1922 - Now owned by the Wilson Family  
Illustration courtesy artist Jana Botkin

## *A Brief History of Wilsonia*



Joseph H. Thomas was the first explorer to visit the grove of the sequoias now known as the Grant Grove Section of Kings Canyon National Park. Thomas, operated a nearby sawmill. He is believed to have discovered the sequoia subsequently named “General Grant Tree” in 1862. A survey resulted in the government’s interest in preserving the General Grant Grove. In 1880, the United States Surveyor General of California requested that four sections of land adjacent to the grove be preserved and protected from private ownership.

The government’s request to preserve four sections of General Grant Grove area as a national park was too late to restrict 160 acres of property within the area for which Daniel M. Perry had filed a homestead. When the State of California deeded the land to the federal government for park purposes, Perry retained title to his homestead. The parcel later became Wilsonia. In 1890 Congress created General Grant Grove National Park to protect General Grant Grove. The privately owned parcel within the park went through several deeds of ownership before being sold to Andrew “Andy” Ferguson in 1918. An ardent supporter of Woodrow Wilson, Ferguson named the tract “Wilsonia” in honor of the President and erected an 8’ by 10’ oil painting of Wilson in what became the center of the village. Ferguson created roads and subdivided the land into lots which were sold for summer home sites.

A California Fish and Game Commissioner, Ferguson stipulated certain requirements in the sale of the lots. No meadows were to be sold and no trees over 6” in diameter were to be cut without consent of the government. In 1918 Ferguson began negotiating to sell the northeast 20 acres of Wilsonia to a group known as the Sierra Masonic Family Club. Agreement for the sale of the Sierra Masonic Family Tract was made in 1919. Twenty-four cabins were built and remain in the Masonic portion of Wilsonia. From the outset, only Masons and their families have acquired membership in the Sierra Masonic Family Club and only members may own a cabin in the tract.

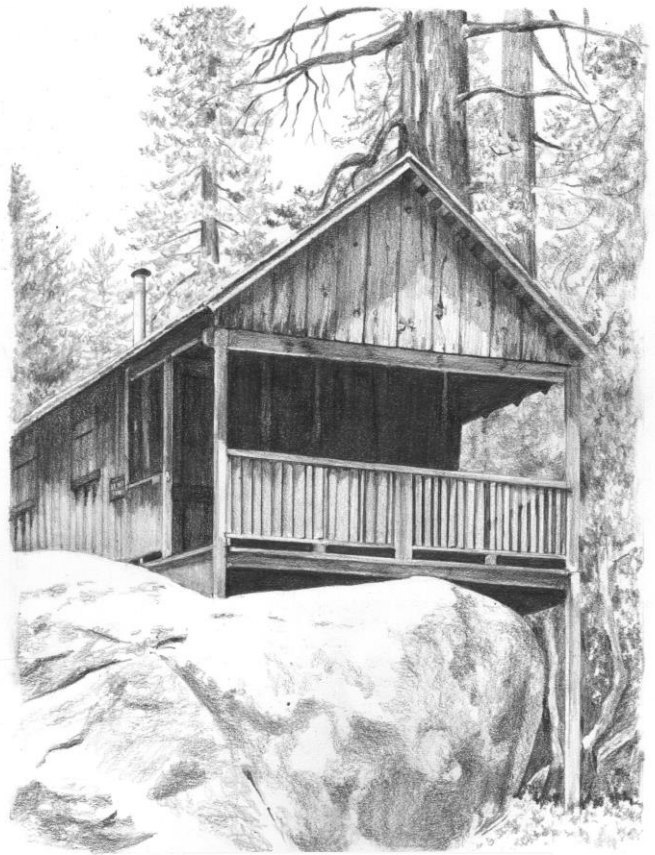


Illustration courtesy artist Jana Botkin

The majority of the original Wilsonia property owners lived in neighboring San Joaquin Valley agriculture communities. They purchased property in Wilsonia to build a second home where they could escape the summer heat dust and pollen of the valley. Wilsonia offered desirable health, spiritual, and recreational opportunities for its seasonal residents. The early Wilsonia property owners included individuals from varied professions, teachers, members of Congress, park rangers, and attorneys.

In the first few years, individual lots in Wilsonia sold for \$75 - \$200. News of the sale of land in Wilsonia spread quickly by word of mouth. Most of Wilsonia property owners already had ties to the Grant Grove area from previous camping visits or knew other Wilsonia property owners. Valley residents accessed Wilsonia by various means including automobile, horse, and wagon. From the beginning, Wilsonia property owners had a concern for conservation of the forest landscape and planted giant sequoias on their property. Many lot owners camped on their land before they built their cabins. Most early cabins consisted of just one room or one room and a kitchen, with no electricity or running water. Ferguson drilled community wells throughout the lower section of the subdivision and everyone carried water from the wells. Eventually, most properties had their own well.



Wilsonia Clubhouse- 1933  
Illustration courtesy artist Jana Botkin

There was an intense period of building in Wilsonia in the 1920's. By the late 1930's Wilsonia had 180 landowners and contained 150 homes. Most of the property in both the original Wilsonia Tract and the Mesa Addition (which was subdivided in 1921) had been sold by the end of the 1920's.

Many of the cabins were designed and built by the owners themselves. Many chimneys, terraces, and retaining walls were built of stones gathered by families in neighboring Big Meadows and Kings Canyon. The lumber used for cabin construction was often from the nearby Hume Lake area. In the early years lumber was brought in on wagons pulled by teams of mules. The cement for the foundations was mixed by hand. Over decades, running water and electricity were added to the structures; indoor bathrooms replaced outhouses; and cabins were enlarged by building new rooms around the original main room and kitchen.

In the 1930's the federal government acquired 60 acres of the original homestead, leaving Wilsonia a 100-acre enclave, including the original Wilsonia Tract, the Mesa Addition, and the Sierra Masonic Family Tract. Development continued in Wilsonia throughout the 1930's and into the early 1940's, when construction slowed during World War II. After having had park status for nearly 50 years, General Grant National Park was integrated into Kings Canyon National Park when it was created in 1940.



Cabins at Lilac and Hazel, Illustration courtesy artist Jana Botkin

Wilsonia still conveys a strong impression of a recreational mountain community. From the early twentieth century, it has retained the rustic charm of its buildings amidst the haunting beauty of the forest landscape.



You are invited to the annual  
Wilsonia Historic District Trust  
***All-Wilsonia Meet  
and Greet***

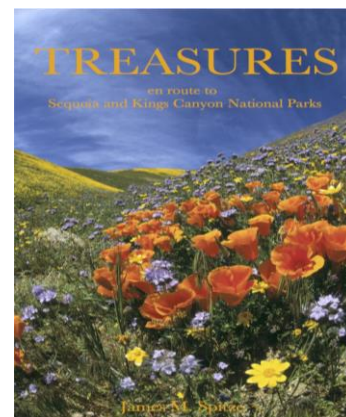
July 16, 2022 at 4:00 p.m.  
At the Collin Cabin  
Corner of Manzanita and Fern  
in northwest Wilsonia



## 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 300 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. Copies will be available for purchase at WHDT's anniversary celebration on July 2.



### **The Cabins of Wilsonia**

by Artist Jana Botkin

Available now - \$50.00 (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 totally 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.

### **Board of Directors**

Drew Sorensen – President [dsorensen102@gmail.com](mailto:dsorensen102@gmail.com)

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