



THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY OF
WILSONIA
WAS DESIGNATED A HISTORIC DISTRICT
AND LISTED IN THE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
ON MARCH 15, 1980
BY STATE OF CALIFORNIA NCP 1000000000

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 #7 November, 2022

In this issue:

- A brief story of the founding of the Wilsonia Community
- A Link to the Historic Wilsonia Video produced to celebrate the establishment of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust
- An update on the new Wilsonia Directory published by the Wilsonia Historic District Trust
- Information on two wonderful books about Wilsonia and the environs surrounding Highway 180 from Fresno to Cedar Grove.

The Founding of Wilsonia, 1918

Originally inhabited during the warmer months by Native American people, the area of present day Wilsonia is a portion of a parcel homesteaded by Daniel M. Perry in the late 1880s. On October 1, 1890, the government of the United States of America dedicated land surrounding present-day Wilsonia as the *General Grant National Park*, protecting the General Grant Grove of giant Sequoia trees from the active logging (cont. on page 2)



Wilsonia, circa 1925 Looking northward from intersection of Park Road, Cedar Lane, and Lilac Lane. Left side of photo is present day “parking lot.” Note large oil painting of then U.S. President Wilson visible to visitors entering the then “General Grant National Park,” and gasoline station to its left.



Wilsonia, 2022 Looking northward from the same intersection of Park Road, Cedar Lane, and Lilac Lane. Left side of photo is present day “parking lot.” Cabin on the left was originally the fire station. The Wilsonia dumpsters are located just out of view to the right side of this photo.

WILSONIA WILL BE CITY IN GEN. GRANT NATIONAL PARK

Beautiful Summer Resort to be Built by Valley People Who Desire Summer Homes in High Mountains

Having learned that an interesting and quite novel movement, launched by Visalia and Fresno parties, is now well under way, to create permanent holdings for parties who seek recreation in the beautiful regions in the heart of General Grant National Park, the "Times" editor made request upon one of the promoters of the enterprise, Andy D. Ferguson, of Fresno, for detailed information in regard to the tract which will bear the name of "Wilsonia" in honor of President Wilson Associated with Mr. Ferguson is Dr. A. D. Patterson, of Visalia.

WHAT IS PLANNED.

Said Mr. Ferguson in his letter to the "Times" editor:

In response to your kind invitation I am setting down a few points about the new summer town which Dr. A. D. Patterson and I are about to offer to the nature-lovers of the valley section.

"Wilsonia" can not properly be called a real estate scheme. Our primary object is to give valley people an opportunity to own their camp sites in heart of nature. To use a hackneyed expression, "to fill a long felt want."

Wilsonia is an idea, materialized. The scheme for a back-to-nature town was evolved by me. The name, like Topsy, "just grewed." We bought the land in General Grant National Park because it is beautiful and because we wanted to own, actually possess, a piece of Nature's own outdoors in a region forever set aside for folks who like to take their vacations in the woods. We are subdividing it in order to let other valley folks gratify a similar desire. To know that the summer camp which one has established for himself will be his the following years and until he chooses to part with it is, in my experience, based on 20 years labors in the interest of the outing public, a most satisfying feeling; and to acquire such a spot is a very common desire. True, there are places in the National Forest where one can lease a camping spot and thus feel fairly secure in its possession, yet most people, and particularly Anglo-Saxon people, like to own the place they cherish.

IDEAL LOCATION

Wilsonia is located within a few hundred feet (less than 600) feet of the superintendent's headquarters, the postoffice, store and the hotel in General Grant National Park. It is wholly surrounded by the park lands. The elevation is about 6,500 feet. It is beautifully wooded and the main road into the park runs through the tract. In plotting Wilsonia, we have allowed for a 60 foot highway where

the existing road is now about 20 feet wide. This, in order that should the government choose to make the road through the park a paved boulevard, it will be of uniform width.

Two lovely meadows are within the boundaries of the Wilsonia tract. These we have reserved from sale and are to be parks within a park—everybody's flower gardens. In these meadows tiger lilies and other mountain flowers grow waist high.

SEEK TOWN CHARTER.

Whenever the time comes that the lot owners of the tract shall secure from the legislature a charter for a summer town government, then we will deed these meadows to the corporation. In the meantime we propose to keep them inviolate from wandering stock and give the flowers a chance.

In keeping with the out-of-doors idea, we have called our streets "lanes." Thus: Cedar lane, Willow lane, Pine lane, Manzanita lane, Laurel, Lupine, etc., lanes, while President's lane, the main artery through the tract is sufficient notice for all time that the tract was named for our great President. By the way, we beat the rest of the country to it in the way of naming the first town in the President's honor.

We delayed filing our plat with the Tulare county board of supervisors two or three months while searching for a name. The name must be euphonic; it must be in keeping with the fact that the tract is in a national park; it must be distinctive; it must be new; finally, "Wilsonia," just naturally spelled itself across our map.

NEEDED RESTRICTIONS.

We are making every effort to bring it about that our summer town will not be an offense to the park idea. We are putting restrictions in our deeds against cutting any living timber except with the consent and under the supervision of the superintendent of the park. We likewise restrict the use of lots in Wilsonia to residence or camp purposes and we are careful to sell lots only to good, moral people.

Many purchasers and prospective purchasers are already planning summer dwelling which will be artistic and in keeping with the environment.

Easy of access and distant only two to four hours by auto from the towns and vineyard of the valley from Visalia to Fresno we hope to see many hundreds of valley people happily established each summer in the heart of the park woods, each family upon its own grounds.

The above seems to cover the idea. Make whatever you please of it. You will not overlook, I am sure, the fact that Tulare county has the first "Wilsonia" in America.

that had begun in the area. In 1900, Visalia attorney E.O. Miller purchased the property including present-day Wilsonia and opened the area to campers, largely people from the Valley seeking relief from the summer heat. In 1918, a portion of the Miller property was purchased by Andy Ferguson (California Fish and Game Commissioner), and his wife, Arza. Two months later, the Fergusons sold a quarter interest of their new property to Arza's brother, Dr. A.D. Patterson, and his wife of Visalia. Wilsonia cabin owner Clarence Fraser wrote in 1963, "It is said that Mr. Ferguson offered to sell the entire tract to the Park Service for \$5000, but the park Service was not interested as its budget was limited and did not have any money to purchase land."

In the fall of 1918, the editor of the *Visalia Daily Times* newspaper inquired of Andy Ferguson regarding plans to develop mountain property within the General Grant National Park as a new summer resort city. Ferguson responded with a letter that was later reprinted in the Exeter Sun newspaper (see full article on this page).

An Ardent Supporter of Woodrow Wilson, Ferguson named the tract "Wilsonia" in honor of the President and erected a large oil painting of Woodrow Wilson in what became the center of the village. Ferguson created roads, subdivided the land into lots, and drilled community wells. The lots were sold primarily for summer home sites. No meadows were to be sold and by verbal agreement, no trees over 6" in diameter were to be cut without consent of the government.

News of the sale of lots for \$75-200 spread by word of mouth. Most lots were purchased by residents of Valley communities including farmers, ranchers, businesspeople, doctors, teachers, attorneys, and government officials. Many planted giant sequoias on their property as none had been growing in Wilsonia previously. Many of these trees planted in the 1920s and 1930s are evident throughout Wilsonia today.



The Founding of Wilsonia, 1918

Sources:

- National Register Nomination for Wilsonia Historic District
- *Wilsonia, Yesterday, Today and Forever* – A Scrapbook by Fern Tripp



The Andy and Arza Ferguson Cabin

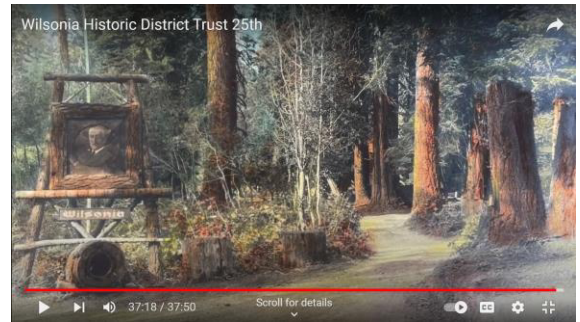
Located at the site of the present day Wilsonia dumpsters (at the intersection of Lilac and Cedar Lanes) this was among the first cabins to be built in Wilsonia. In the 1950s the cabin was purchased and expanded to become the Kings Canyon Lodge with guestrooms and a restaurant known as the “Touch of Holland,” owned and operated seasonally by a couple from Holland. The buildings were acquired by the Park Service and removed in 1978.

Please View our Updated Website at www.wilsonia.org.

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

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 an 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 continues to work on the directory of Wilsonia cabins. 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.

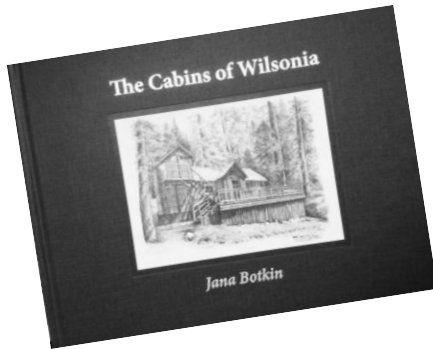
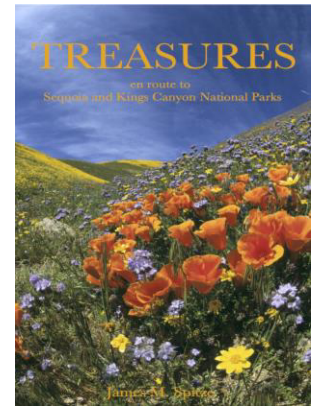
Current plans are to distribute this printed directory to those included during the 2023 summer season. We are still in need of some emails and phone numbers. We will be contacting these owners/users by email or mail in the coming months.

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. Copies are available for purchase from **Sierra Gateway Trust** at www.sierragateway.org.



The Cabins of Wilsonia

by Artist 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 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.

From the President of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust

We hope you enjoy the **Wilsonia Historic News** and the many great stories of our 100+ years as a cabin community. Please do everything you can to keep us historic! If you would like to contact any of our officers, you are encouraged to do so.

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