



The Wilsonia News

Published six times a year by the Wilsonia Historic District Trust for all Wilsonia cabin owners and their families and friends.

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To contact us, send an email to WilsoniaNews@Wilsonia.org

FROM THE EDITOR

This being our first issue, your Editor will start by outlining our central objective which is to serve as a frequent means of communication amongst all five of Wilsonia’s groups: the Wilsonia Historic District Trust (the publisher), Wilsonia Village Inc., the Sierra Masonic Family Club, the Wilsonia Advisory Team, and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. We wish to be a reliable source of information regarding upcoming events offered by all five of these groups. We also will provide a platform for those who wish to tell the stories of their cabins and of their families’ early years in our central California area. Further, we invite articles written by any cabin owner or NPS employee that the writer believes our readers might find interesting such as almost anything on our area’s flora, fauna, history, caverns, trails, etc. Finally, those offering products or services of possible interest to our readers are encouraged to advertise here at rates that have yet to be set but will, we expect, be nominal.

While there are five groups involved in Wilsonia, there is just one Wilsonia. *The Wilsonia News* and its publisher, the Wilsonia Historic District Trust, firmly believe that we must all work together for the greater good so that this marvelous place we all love will be here for our children’s children, for generations to come. We very much hope the open, frequent, and easily accessible means of communication provided by *The Wilsonia News* will help in this regard.

Jim Spitze, Editor

Wilsonia Historic
District Trust

Wilsonia
Village Inc.

Wilsonia
Advisory
Team

Wilsonia Partner
Organizations

Sequoia and
Kings Canyon
National Parks

Sierra
Masonic
Family Club

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

In 1991 there was a high-turnout meeting in our clubhouse. Most of Wilsonia was there. We all knew we were at a turning point. For several years the Park Service had been buying Wilsonia cabins and swiftly removing them so not a trace remained. Wilsonia was vanishing before our very eyes and it was clear that unless we did something pretty quickly our beloved community would soon be history.

Fran Preston stood up and outlined an idea that might save us; the transformation of all of Wilsonia into a nationally designated Historic District, a program of the US Department of the Interior. No longer would the Park Service be our enemy. We would be sister organizations working together for the greater good. Our cabins would be protected as historic treasures, protected by law from demolition - for our children’s children, for generations to come.



Wilsonia Clubhouse- 1933
Illustration courtesy artist Jana Botkin

What Dr. Preston (a Santa Barbara based M.D.) outlined would take time, money, and considerable effort. In view of the already much too visible consequences of doing nothing, others quickly volunteered to help. A meeting was held in the Wilson cabin. Fern Tripp borrowed someone's hat, asked everyone present to put in a large donation, and passed the borrowed hat. In short order, \$3,000 was raised.



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

Milt Miner found us a knowledgeable lawyer who helped us create the Wilsonia Historic District Trust, a 501(c)3 organization that would be the required *home* for the yet-to-be created Historic District. We became well informed regarding the application process that we had to follow to achieve Historic District status. A consultant was hired who prepared a massive survey of every single still existing Wilsonia cabin. With the survey in hand, we started working with the Historic Resources Group, a Los Angeles based firm that had extensive Historic District experience. They proved to be exactly the right choice.

In early 1995, we were on the agenda for the next regular meeting of California's Historic Preservation Office and several of us drove to Sacramento to attend the meeting and present our case but only if we had to since if no one objected in advance of the meeting, we would be on the "Consent Calendar" and our application would be automatically approved and forwarded on to Washington, D.C. and the Department of Interior's Historic District Program.

At the last minute, one Wilsonia cabin owner objected and we were moved to the "for discussion" part of the agenda which was scheduled for the afternoon. We went to lunch a bit worried. When the afternoon session began, your Editor, then the President of the Wilsonia Historic District Trust, stood up and answered a few surprisingly friendly and supportive questions. The answers seemed to be well received and the Chairman asked for a vote: unanimous approval!

Those of us there that day knew what this meant: Wilsonia was saved! Our children's children for generations to come would enjoy this special place.

There was one last step, approval from Washington. After what we were told might take five or six months, approval came in a letter that I received in April, 1996. The letter, dated April 22, 1996 is sitting on my desk as I type these words. It starts, "Dear Mr. Spitze: The National Park Service is pleased to inform you that the Wilsonia Historic District, Tulare County, California was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on March 15, 1996."

Thus, next year we will celebrate Twenty-Five Years as a National Historic District.

OUR QUARTER-CENTURY CELEBRATION

From Wilsonia Historic District Trust's President, Drew Sorensen:

In 1996, after much effort from a group of cabin owners interested in saving Wilsonia in perpetuity, we became a National Historic District and were listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Of the 212 cabins, 130 (66%) were evaluated as being contributors to Historic District designation. Fast forward to 2011 when WHDT reapplied, 20 more cabins became eligible and were added to the Historic District. To be eligible, cabins must be 50 years old and "substantially unchanged". Now, 163 cabins are designated as historic out of a possible 211 total cabins. (77%). This coming year, 2021, will be our 25th year as a Historic District and we are planning a great celebration on July 3 at the Clubhouse! Please see page 4 for details, **SAVE THE DATE!** and plan to attend! For more information on the Wilsonia Historic District Trust, please visit our website at www.wilsonia.org

A LETTER THAT MEANT A LOT

By early September, 1991 the Wilsonia Historic District Trust had been formally created and it was time to get some kind of reaction from our then supposed adversary, the National Park Service. A letter was sent to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks outlining what we were doing and inviting the parks response. Their response came in a letter from William Tweed dated September 17, 1991:

Dear Mr. Spitze:

In response to your letter of September 7th, the National Park Service will be delighted to join in an "open and friendly dialogue" about historic preservation in Wilsonia.

Although some Wilsonia cabin owners apparently still harbor concerns that the National Park Service secretly intends to abolish Wilsonia, this is not our goal. As our land protection plan clearly states, our target is to preserve Wilsonia in private ownership as a low-density residential community. Since these also seem to be the aim of the WHDT, our interests seem to be substantially compatible.

I will be happy to meet with you at your convenience to discuss how the National Park Service can support your goal of creating a Wilsonia Historic District.

Sincerely,

Wm. Tweed

Bill Tweed's letter was an enormous relief. As some had told us but few of us believed, obtaining Historic District status would change everything. Bill's letter suggested that this was already true at a very early point in the process. His letter gave us the courage we needed to push forward - and we did.

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LOOKING FORWARD

Listing on the National Register is not forever. The percentage of Wilsonia cabins classified as Historic must not drop below 67% and we must send the federal Office of Historic Preservation a status report every ten years or so with that report being close to a full re-survey of every cabin. We have used the services of the Historic Resources Group twice to prepare and submit these updates. It is time consuming and expensive, but it keeps us on the National Register so it's worth it.

A BENEFIT NOT TO BE IGNORED

The WHDT is a 501(c)3 organization. Donations to it by Wilsonia cabin owners and others are tax deductible by the donor to the full extent permitted by law. The WHDT can, in turn, use those donations in any way allowed by its Articles of Incorporation and its Bylaws. This includes sponsoring educational events, providing seed money for community luncheons and dinners (such as the potlucks and blackpot cookouts), and maintenance of the Wilsonia Clubhouse.



Celebrate the 25th birthday of the Wilsonia Historic District

Mark your calendar asap. If the COVID-19 vaccine has the impact many are now expecting, on the 3rd of this coming July, we will celebrate in one grand event:

- **the 25th birthday of the Wilsonia Historic District** with a *Special Tribute* to Woody Smeck, our much beloved former Superintendent of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. There will be speeches (short) and a magnificent Birthday Cake.
- **the 24th birthday of our nation** with a super-splendiferous Parade (horses, floats, kids in costumes, and much, much more) followed by a traditional Grand Potluck, along with an immense Silent Auction of *fantastically rare and sublimely exotic* items contributed to this festive event by your Wilsonia friends and neighbors.

The combined Tribute-to-Woody (sponsored by WHDT) and Grand Potluck (sponsored by WVI) will be opened by the singing of our National Anthem and of our rarely heard National Hymn, both accompanied by a *made-for-this-event* recording of a large and well-played pipe organ located in one of our state’s most historic churches.

BUILDING A LIST OF GOOD SERVICE PROVIDERS

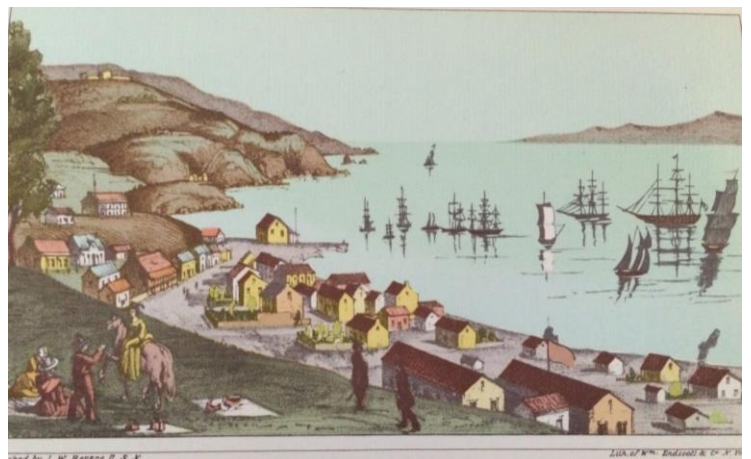
Our cabin owners sometimes need help from a chimney sweep, a septic tank service, a pump/well service, a building contractor, an electrician, a painter, etc. If our readers will send us their recommendations of service providers that they think are pretty darn good, we will build a list of such people and include it in subsequent issues of *The Wilsonia News*. Please send your recommendations including how to contact the individual to WilsoniaNews@Wilsonia.org.

SOME EARLY CALIFORNIA HISTORY

In California we speak English with an American accent. That accent came much closer to being British than many of us are aware of.

In the mid-1840s Mexican rule in its northern province of Alta California was weak at best. Military and Civil Governors, all appointed (not elected) by the Mexican federal government in Mexico City, changed sometimes monthly. Russia had sold Fort Ross to Capt. John Sutter in 1841 and France was busy with other things but the *Great Prize* that was California was still of much interest to both the United States and to England.

On June 7, 1846, the commanders of two fleets received almost simultaneous instructions to “seize the town of Monterey and all of California.” One was the British Pacific Fleet at San Blas, Mexico, under the command of Admiral Sir George Seymour, GCB, GCH, PC; the other was the US Pacific Fleet at Mazatlan, under the command of Commodore John Drake Sloat. Both sailed north.



From the log of the *Savannah*, Sloat's flagship:

June 7 - At 2 P.M. got under way for Monterey, California

July 1 - Stood into the harbor of Monterey, and came to anchor at 4 P.M.

July 2 - Thomas O. Larkin, United States consul, made a long call.

July 3 - Called upon the authorities.

July 4 - Ship dressed; salute fired. [The 4th of July]

July 5 - Divine service. [Sunday]

July 6 - Mr. Larkin spent the day on board, preparing proclamations, etc., for taking possession of California tomorrow.

July 7 - Landing forces; took possession; hoisted flag.

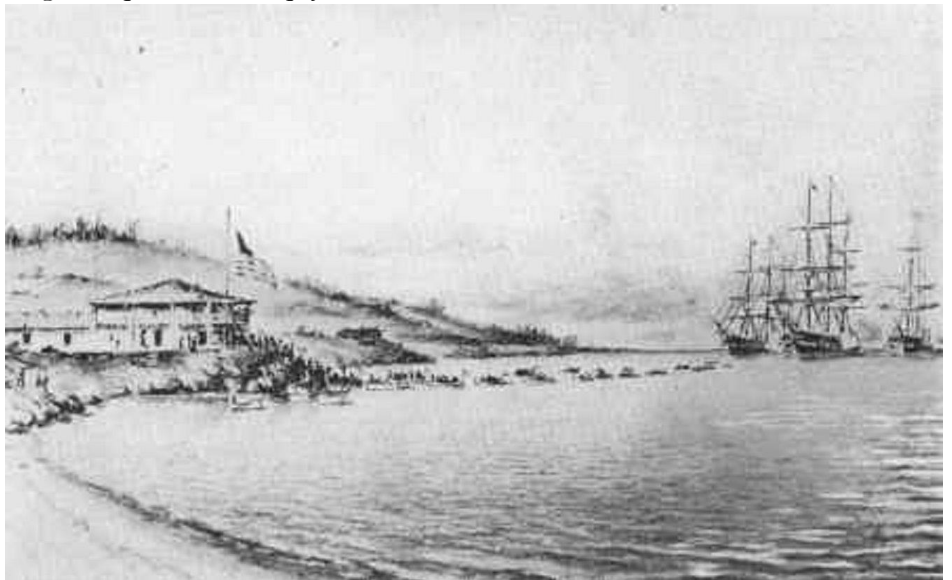


Commodore John Drake Sloat
US Pacific Fleet
at Mazatlan in 1846

While the above was happening, the *Collingwood*, the flagship of the British Pacific Fleet was also nearing Monterey. An officer on board that 80-gun man-of-war wrote down these words:

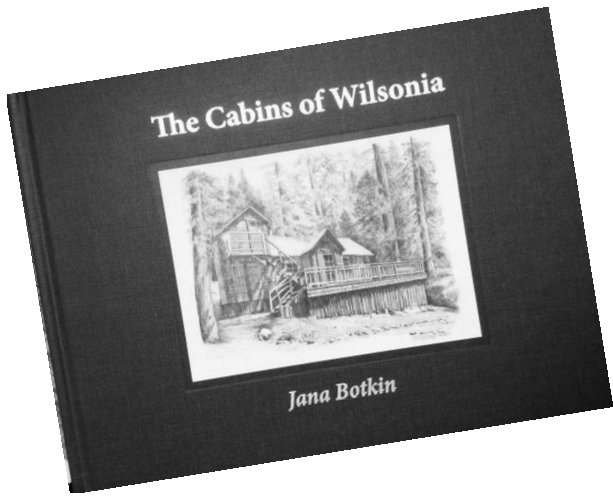
When we were near Point Pinos, the Admiral came on deck and manifested a great deal of anxiety and gave strict orders to the quartermaster, who carried the spyglass, to keep a sharp lookout when rounding the point.

As the Collingwood made the turn and was sailing in, the Admiral, in sharp tones, said 'Quartermaster, do you see a flag flying on shore?' The latter replied, 'Yes, sir, but I cannot make it out, sir.' The Admiral becoming more excited, kept repeating the question sharply, and received the same answer. At last, he said again, 'Quartermaster, do you see a flag on shore now?' The quartermaster, shadowing his eyes and stooping a little and getting a view under the fog, replied, 'Yes, sir, I see a flag very clearly now sir!' 'What flag is it?' asked the Admiral. The quartermaster replied, 'It is the American flag, sir.' Upon which the Admiral slapped his thigh, stamped his foot, and passionately exclaimed in disappointment, 'Then, by God, I am too late!'



Admiral Seymour and the English Pacific Fleet arrived in the harbor of Monterey on July 16, 1846, just nine days after the hoisting of the Stars & Stripes. With apologies to those who hate alliterations:

Sloat and his boat had won the race.



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

WE WELCOME YOU TO THE WILSONIA NEWS ...

