

# WAWONA'S YESTERDAYS



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by  
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## FOREWORD

For years, I had driven by Wawona on frequent trips to Yosemite Valley, Big Meadow, or Tuolumne Meadows with only brief twinges of curiosity. In 1960, I began asking questions of Yosemite Valley old-timers and learning that prior to the arrival of the motor car in 1914, Wawona was to them remote and relatively unknown.

Though there was a seemingly endless amount of writing on Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, few words were devoted to Wawona. Wawona was mentioned just as an over-night stop. Just? I was challenged and began a quest for information by prowling around the area, interviewing residents, writing early settlers, consulting official records, newspapers, manuscripts, locating photographs, listening to tape recordings, reading letters and even poems.

The results of this quest were a fascinating hodge-podge of history and anecdotes about colorful personalities which I sorted, sifted and set down in this history.

Often, a research writer is pictured as a lonely figure slumped at a table in a library, museum or courthouse studying books, newspapers, ledgers, manuscripts in search of a few pertinent facts. For me, this picture wasn't true, for there were friendly people to suggest sources, where to find answers and to give me encouragement.

My special thanks go to Ruth Glass, Doug Hubbard and Keith Trexler of the Yosemite Museum; Mary Isabel Fry, Rita Thurman and Carey Bliss of the Huntington Library; Ruth Allen of the Pasadena Public Library; Bertha Schroeder, Mariposa researcher; Yvonne Robinson Solomons, Mary and Bill Hood, fellow Yosemite devotees; Carl P. Russell, Yosemite historian; Virginia Alexander, typist extraordinary; Tim Smith, young mapmaker and Laurence Degan, Hattie Bruce Harris, Jay C. Bruce and Clarence Washburn, Yosemite settlers.

Shirley Sargent

May, 1961

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## A Short History of Yosemite National Park

Until 1954, the accepted date for the discovery of Yosemite Valley, when the Mariposa Battalion, in pursuit of "marauding" Indians, first viewed the great gorge, was March 25, 1851. Dr. Lafayette Bunnell, battalion surgeon, recorded the date and chose the name "Yosemite" for the unmarked wonder. Later, a diary kept by Pvt. Robert Eccleston of the Battalion was unearthed which changed the discovery date to March 27, 1851.<sup>1</sup> Now even that date has been replaced. A diary kept by William Penn Abrams,<sup>2</sup> a gold seeker, clearly states that between October 7 and 17, 1849, he, with his friend, U.N. Reamer, looked into Yosemite Valley, probably from a spot near old Inspiration Point. The two men, working out of Savage's trading post on the South Fork of the Merced, were tracking a grizzly, became lost, and stumbled upon the stupendous sight of Bridalveil Fall, El Capitan and Half Dome, which they called "Rock of Ages."

While historians still quarrel as to whether the Walker party looked down into the Valley on their 1833 crossing of the Sierra, the long-obscured 1849 date is now recognized as the first sighting.

Dates and disputes aside, Yosemite Valley, with its magnificent granite cliffs and domes, grassy meadows and waterfalls, received scant attention until James M. Hutchings visited it in 1855 and began to write and speak of its wonders in a colorful and persuasive style.

Attracted by his descriptions, persevering visitors came by foot and horseback, stopping overnight at Clark's Station (Wawona), about half way from Mariposa on the only trail into the Valley from the south.

By 1864, the Valley and the Mariposa Grove became a public trust of the State of California. From 1864 to 1905,

these two prized areas, 35 miles apart and containing some 20,000 acres were administered and protected as the Yosemite Grant — a California State Park.<sup>3</sup>

Galen Clark, of Clark's Station, served as the state's able guardian of the Grant for thirteen years. One of his first and thorniest problems was to clear Yosemite Valley of the private holdings of Hutchings and other pioneer homesteaders.

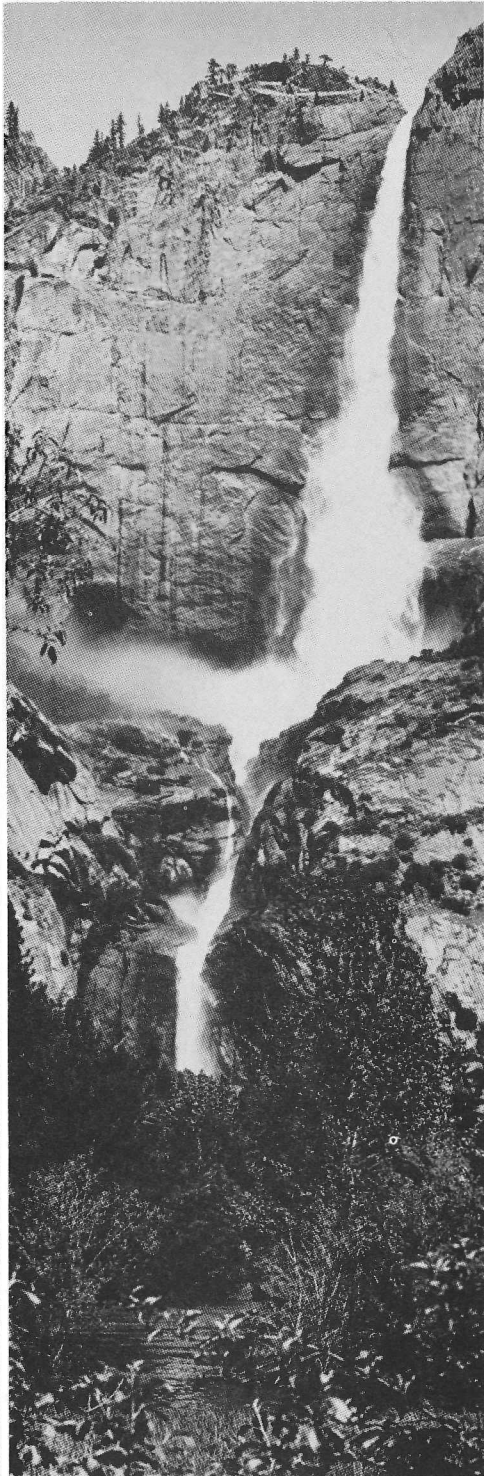
Meanwhile, thanks largely to the inspired and intelligent efforts of John Muir, Yosemite was made a National Park in 1890.<sup>4</sup> The conservation of scenic, scientific and historical features was assured forever.

The State of California continued to manage the Mariposa Grove and Yosemite Valley while the remainder of the new park was governed by the U.S. Department of the Interior with Army cavalry units carrying out its protective role. Despite the conflicting, dual control of a park within a park, conservation progress was made as sheep, cattle, loggers and hunters were permanently evicted.

Wawona, which was private property surrounded by State and National Park lands, was Army headquarters. From there, troopers patrolled extensively, exploring, building trails and mapping the terrain.<sup>5</sup>

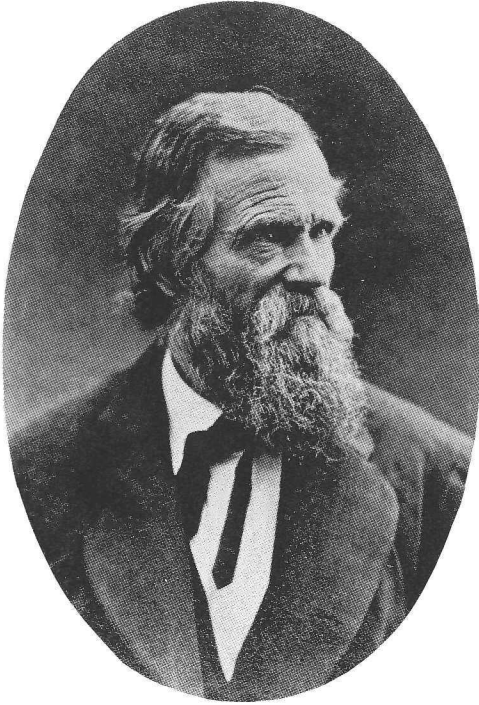
California receded the Mariposa Grove and Yosemite Valley to the Nation in 1905,<sup>5</sup> but appropriate administration was not possible until 1916, when Park Service rangers succeeded Uncle Sam's soldiers on a year-round basis. The Army left in 1914 and until the National Park Service was organized in 1916, Yosemite was, for the two intervening years, under the summer jurisdiction of a handful of college boys and the watchful eyes of two reliable forest rangers during winter.<sup>7</sup>

After 1916, the congressionally designated National Park Service took over its job, to conserve, interpret, explore and administer all of Yosemite's approximately 1200 square miles for the fullest enjoyment of its millions of owners.



Yosemite Falls

# Wawona's First Settler



Galen Clark

Galen Clark was the "grand old man" of Yosemite and founder of Wawona, which he called Clark's Station. He had come to Wawona in 1856 to homestead and spend his last years, as a doctor had told him he did not have long to live; he was suffering from consumption. He was then 43, and lived to be 96.

At his ranch, he went about barefooted and bareheaded in a determined search for health. However, although his lungs healed, Clark was far from robust, and, in 1870, wrote a letter to a niece that he couldn't pay a debt to her father "due to fourteen years of sickness and financial reverses."<sup>8</sup>

Evidently, death was often in his thoughts; for twenty years he prepared for it. An early-day Yosemite visitor,

Pinkie Ross, wrote, "I was riding . . . by the (Yosemite Valley) graveyard . . . and I found Galen digging a grave . . . We stopped and asked him who had died. He said, 'I'm digging this for myself, for then I will be sure of being buried here.'"<sup>8</sup>

Later, Clark dug trenches around the grave and scattered pieces of broken glass on its edges to discourage rodents. About 1896, he planted six sequoias around his eventual burial place. Next, he dug a well, installed a hand pump to draw water to the trees (four of which survive), then selected a granite rock as a marker and carved his name in it.

An anecdote about Clark illustrates his quiet, but humorous nature. Assaulted with questions from a woman visitor, he told her that his way with words was "not of the artesian type," presumably referring to the vocal John Muir, but that he "could be pumped."<sup>9</sup>

Clark was born near Shipton, Canada, on March 28, 1814, the third of six children. His early personal life was tragic. His marriage to Rebecca Marie McCoy of Missouri ended when she died in Philadelphia, February 16, 1848, after having borne three sons and two daughters. None of the boys lived to be thirty. Solon McCoy Clark drowned, Joseph Locke Clark was killed at Bull Run, and Galen Alonzo Clark, who came to California to be near his father, died in 1873 while studying for the law in San Francisco. Alonzo died at Wawona, but was buried in Mariposa.

In 1853, gold-fever seized Clark. He left his children with Eastern relatives to go to the gold fields, traveling to California by steamer. Climate and gold lured him to Mariposa County where he worked as a miner, packer, camp-keeper and hunter. He camped at the Wawona meadows in 1855, returning there in 1856, after hemorrhage of the lungs. He went to Wawona "to take my chances of dying or growing better, which I thought were about even."

While recuperating on a 160 acre homestead, he built a rough, overnight lodging place for tourists. His ranch



was a logical stopping place for travelers, as it was about halfway between Mariposa and Yosemite Valley. The Indians called Clark's Station "Pallah-chun," meaning "a good place to stop."

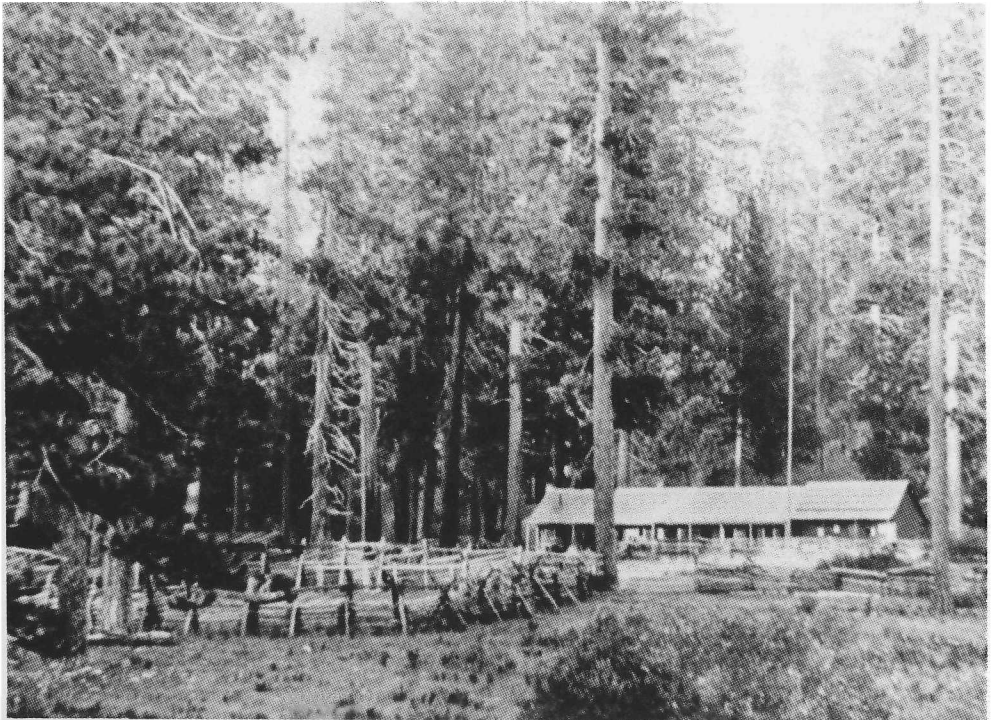
Travelers thought so, too, and one, Charles Loring Brace, described Clark's Station and its owner thus: "This ranch is a long, rambling, low house, built under enormous sugar pines, where travelers find excellent quarters and rest in their journey to the Valley. Clark, himself, is evidently a character; one of those men one frequently meets in California — the modern anchorite — a hater of civilization and lover of the forest — handsome, thoughtful, interesting, and slovenly. In his cabin were some of the choicest modern books and scientific surveys; the walls were lined with beautiful photographs of the Yosemite; he knew more than any of his guests of the fauna, flora, and geology of the State; he conversed well on any subject, and was at once

philosopher, savant, chambermaid, cook and landlord."<sup>3</sup>

Brace was among many notable horseback tourists to Yosemite Valley who stopped at Clark's Station. William Brewer, Clarence King and Josiah Whitney of the State Geological Survey visited there as did I.W. Raymond, Jessie Fremont, and Horace Greeley. These educated, far-seeing people recognized the need to preserve Yosemite for the public and had a great deal to do with its creation as a State Grant in 1864 and a National Park in 1890.

Clark was well-loved for his erudition, gentleness, integrity, independence, modesty, and devotion to the wonders of Yosemite. He was the second white man to see the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees<sup>4</sup> and publicized it to an amazed world. 'There are over 600 mature sequoias in the Grove, several of them over 3500 years old!'

At the Grove, which was eight miles from his ranch, Clark built a small cabin where he stayed while guiding awed



Clark's Station, about 1861.

tourists through the big trees. Today's Mariposa Grove Museum occupies the old cabin site.

Clark, the self-assigned godfather of the Grove, became, in 1864, the state-appointed guardian of both the Mariposa Grove and Yosemite Valley.

For all his many virtues, Clark was not a businessman, and in 1869, was forced to take in "Deacon" Edwin Moore as a full partner. The following year they mortgaged their ranch for \$6000 at 2% interest to pay for a sawmill and defray \$12,000 Clark had sunk into the building of the Chowchilla

Mountain stagecoach road.<sup>7</sup> Clark was concerned about his debt, but optimistic that the next tourist season would pull him out of his financial hole.

The improvements, partnership and "woman's touch" of Mrs. Moore helped business, but in December 1874, Clark and Moore sold out lock, lodging house, and good will.<sup>13</sup>

Clark's part in Wawona's development was at an end, but he had forty years more of vigorous service, as guardian, author, interpreter and friend of Yosemite before his death in 1910, at a venerable 96.<sup>14</sup>



Wawona Hotel-about 1890. Left to right are the Main building, built in 1879; Long White; Small White (manager's cottage), built 1885. The cupalood structure was called the Small Brown and was built in 1886.

# The Washburns

There were fourteen Washburn brothers and half brothers in Putney, Vermont. Three of them came to California to seek their fortunes and found modest ones in a mine and general store at Mormon Bar, near Mariposa, and at Bridgeport. Edward, John, and Henry Washburn were stalwart, bearded men with pioneering, adventurous spirits. Their mine and store weren't challenging enough, so they improved the Chowchilla Mountain Road from Mariposa to Wawona and, on December 26, 1874, purchased the stopping place then known as Clark and Moore's.<sup>16</sup>

Wawona was known at different times as Clark's Station, Clark and Moore's, and Big Tree Station, but was named permanently Wawona, the Indian word for Big Tree by Jean Bruce (Mrs. Henry) Washburn in 1884.<sup>16</sup>

The Washburns bought the lodging

house itself, the open bridge, which they covered, irrigation ditch, sawmill, barn and 160 forested acres. The original hotel burned to the ground in 1878, but, undaunted, the brothers proceeded in 1879 to erect a new 140-by-32 foot hotel building, called the Long White. By the time President U.S. Grant visited later that year, cedar trees had been planted and a large fountain installed.<sup>17</sup>

Partnerships with William Coffman, E.W. Chapman, Charles and John Bruce were short-lived, as the three brothers made a good, aggressive team. They not only ran the hotel and operated a winter ranch near Madera, but also built the Wawona Road to Yosemite Valley in 1875, and ran the Yosemite Stage and Turnpike Company, which they formed in 1882.<sup>15</sup>

Because of its isolated location, the hotel had to be self-sufficient. A post office was established about 1886; telephones came after 1905, electricity in 1908. Springs, wells, a lengthy irrigation ditch supplying water for cattle, hogs, sheep, and horses, as well as crops of hay and timothy in the extensive meadows were developed. There was a



The Washburn brothers; Julius, Henry, John, Edward.

store, a saloon, a truck garden, an apple orchard, and a bear cage that was used occasionally as a jail!<sup>15</sup>

In his 1886 book, *In The Heart Of The Sierras*, James Hutchings described the Wawona scene eloquently. "The very instant the bridge is crossed, on the way to the hotel, the whole place seems bristling with business, and business energy. Conveyances of all kinds, from a sulky to whole rows of passenger coaches, capable of carrying from one to eighteen or twenty persons each, come into sight. From some the horses are just being taken out, while others are being hitched up. Hay and grain wagons; freight wagons coming and going; horses with or without harness; stables for a hundred animals; blacksmiths' shops, carriage and paint shops, laundries, and other buildings, look at us from as many different stand-points."

The Washburn brothers superintended all of this together, but each had a few specific jobs. Henry ran the stage lines and was the contact man, making frequent business trips and arranging publicity. Edward P., the bachelor brother, kept the books and superintended the help, meals and rooms in such a way as to make guests happy, comfortable and eager to come back another time. John S., who greatly resembled General Grant, did the bookings and ran the outside — gardens, ice, water, firewood, etc. Clarence Washburn, John's son, remembers that the brothers "all pulled together as a team and each could and did handle any hotel job."<sup>15</sup>

Wawona was their main money-making concern, but the brothers had a financial finger in Glacier Point, almost all public transportation, and owned the Wawona stage road, a toll road. By their energy and vision, they helped put Wawona, as well as Yosemite, on the map and in people's hearts and minds.

The Washburns were considerate employers with loyal help including some who worked for them for over fifty years. When the hotel was at its peak in the early 1900's, twenty Chi-

nese worked in the kitchen, garden and laundry.

Ah You was chef for half a century and was famed for his delicious pies. Most of the Chinese help lived upstairs in a building near the smokehouse. At first, when they were moved to a larger, newer building, with a bathtub, near the laundry, Ah You, Ah Louie, Ah Wee and the others complained of its large windows and spaciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Noted as fine, generous hosts, the Washburns gave turkeys to their numerous employees at Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's. Hattie Bruce Harris remembers, "We smoked our own hams and bacon from a hog given each family, scraped and ready for pickling down, and along with this were big boxes of tenderloin and milk cans full of sausage. I spent weeks gathering oak bark for the smokehouse."<sup>18</sup>

Charlotte Bruce Gibner wrote in 1955 that, "Wawona was famous for its food. It had its own garden from which all its vegetables came; they killed their own meat; they fished the rivers; milk came from their own dairy and, in game season, there was venison. A typical Wawona breakfast consisted of fruit in season, beefsteak, ham and eggs, hot cakes and cornbread with home-made preserves. This was not to give the diner a choice, but to be eaten in its entirety. The rate for room and board was \$4.00 a day."<sup>19</sup>

For years, fresh trout was served at dinner; in the early days, Indians caught them in the nearby river and streams. Jay Bruce accounted for 32,000 fish in two seasons, but the most consistent fisherman of all was young Clarence Washburn. He was so busy catching from 75 to 300 fish a day he didn't have time to think up fish stories. Several years, he went back to college with \$400 clear after paying for his horse's summer feed.<sup>15</sup>

The Bruce's were intermarried with the Leitchs; Bruce M. Leitch was a justice of the peace; and to the Baxters, in whose family was Ed Baxter, a State Assemblyman. Both Leitch and Baxter



Wawona Hotel Store in 1914. At one time, the store housed a saloon.

were friends of the Washburns and worked in the curio shop at the Mariposa Grove.

Thomas Hill, noted painter of the Yosemite scene, was closely associated with the hotel from 1885, when his daughter married John Washburn, until his death in 1908.

Aside from such family connections, the Washburns employed many Mariposans and Chinese for their hotel and turnpike company.

Tourist season — April to November — was hotel season; during the winter, when their own operation was snow-bound, the Washburns spent a month or so at San Francisco's Palace Hotel. In season, they lived on the main building's second floor.<sup>15</sup>

The hotel had charm, atmosphere and luxury. There were three fountains spaced across the grounds, one in front of Hills' studio, another which still cascades in front of the main building and a third in back of the main hotel building.

Most of the hotel buildings front on the lovely, serene meadows which appear today much as they did in 1856 or 1910, although the golf course has tamed the lower end. In his book, *Yosemite Trails*, published in 1911, J. Smeaton Chase wrote that the "Wawona Meadows themselves might be called the Sleepy Hollow of the West. It is the most peaceful place that I know in America, and comes near being the most idyllic spot I have seen anywhere . . . Here is an unbroken meadow, green as heaven, a mile long, waving knee-high with all delicious grasses and threaded with brooklets of crystal water. It is surrounded with a rail-fence that rambles in and out and around about and hither and thither in that sauntering way that makes a rail-fence such a companionable thing . . ."

All the hotel buildings had names. The Long White, just to the right of the present main hotel building, was built by the Washburns soon after an 1878 fire destroyed the original lodging

house they had bought from Clark and Moore. About 1885, the Main Hotel building was built on the site of Clark's original home and rude hotel. Today, it is a gingerbread, wide-porched, many-windowed building, little changed in appearance from the 1880's. A high-ceilinged dining room and kitchen were added to it in 1917, and the Washburn's apartments upstairs have been turned into guest rooms. The building may not possess any particular architectural merit, but its old-fashioned "western resort" style lends a kind of charming elegance and character unmatched in more modern hotels.

The Pavilion, Hill's studio, was built in 1884, and stands now as a recreation building. It was restored in 1968 to the approximate appearance at the time of Hill's death. In 1900, the Small White, now called the Manager's Cottage,<sup>60</sup> was built and, for years, rented summers at a handsome price to a family from Los Angeles.

Hutchings wrote that the Washburns gave a true "New England welcome" to their guests and it is a matter of record that many of them came back season after season.

One satisfied visitor in 1911 was Jackson A. Graves, who wrote, "Wawona Hotel is pleasantly located. It is an ideal place to rest in. There, inertia creeps into your system. You avoid all unnecessary exercise. You are ever ready to drop into a chair and listen to the wind sighing through the trees and the river singing its never ending song . . ." <sup>21</sup>

Over the years, the hotel grew from one building to eight, the grounds from 160 acres to 4,000. Guests arrived in horse-drawn stages, at times using over 700 horses a day.

Henry Washburn died in 1902, Edward in 1911, John in 1917. Clarence, who had been assistant manager and active in the hotel management since 1907, became general manager. In 1917, he added the Hotel Annex and Sequoia building, a swimming pool, a golf course in one end of the meadow, and a landing field in the other.<sup>15</sup> He

could and did accommodate 300 guests, half of them "repeaters." At peak times, tents were used for the overflow.

Motor stages came into general use at the Wawona Hotel in 1916, principally Thomas Flyers and Pierce-Arrows. In the first, tire-blowing years of automobile travel, Huffman's garages at Wawona and Miami Lodge had a busy trade. They repaired cars so they could chug on into Yosemite Valley; then, if they made it back to Wawona, fixed them again for the onerous trip to Fresno. The hotel, of course, benefitted by the enforced overnight stops of the cars' passengers.<sup>15</sup>

Two Army pilots made the first aircraft landing at Wawona December 8, 1925. Soon after that, Frank Gallison, a Mariposa native, made daily flights from Merced, and hotel guests had mail and San Francisco papers with their breakfast coffee. Also, Gallison flew guests over Yosemite Valley for \$7.50, giving them thrills now forbidden by law.<sup>15</sup>

Clarence Washburn married Grace Brinkop in 1913, and their daughter, Wawona, was born at the hotel the following year. An only son died in youth, leaving no one to take over the family business. For that and other reasons, Clarence sold the Washburn holdings, 3,724 acres, to the Park Service in 1932.

The hotel furniture and fixtures were purchased by the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. for whom Clarence managed the hotel in '33 and '34. After that he moved to Indio, where he became a leading citizen and managed the Hotel Potter for years.<sup>15</sup> He died in 1972.

An era had ended at Wawona. Since 1934, the hotel and its facilities have been managed by the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. Tennis courts have replaced the garage, two of the fountains are gone, Stella Lake is no more — yet the old time atmosphere is still there.

The charm, compounded of sunny meadow, surrounding forest and timeless peace remains, making the hotel as it was in Galen Clark's time, Palla-chun — a good place to stop.

# Homesteaders

Galen Clark was among the first homesteaders in the Wawona basin, claiming his 160 acres for "agricultural and grazing purposes" March 19, 1856. Although he was first to prove up and have his land patented, William H. Leeper, Davis Potts, James C. May, and Hiram Cartwright had filed 160-acre claims earlier that month. The men had surveyed the Wawona basin and, excepting Cartwright, had each filed a land plot in the Mariposa County Recorder's Office. In 1862, John T. Banton

claimed a quarter section and Jarvis Kiel filed for another 160 acres "near Galen Clark's house" in 1868.

Hundreds of acres were homesteaded and patented in the 1880's and '90's. The Albert Bruces, Van Campens, and Washburns accounted for most of it, but Bruce Leitch, Roscoe Greeley, John E. Hammond, Archibald C. Stoddart, John Green and others received patents. An Emily V. Dodge had 480 acres patented to her in 1891, while Thomas Hill and his wife, Willeta, homesteaded 160 acres each, for which patents were issued in 1891.<sup>22</sup>

Homesteaders had to be hardy in Wawona's winter wilderness, and the Albert Bruces were. Hattie Bruce Harris, one of eight children, remembered that the good old days were rough. Her parents "fenced and cross-fenced, plowed, sowed and reaped . . . Mother Bruce raked hay and canned everything she could . . . The winter of 1888, the snow piled six feet on the level, the hay gave out in the barn, and it took



The Bruce homestead about 1900. It was destroyed by fire in 1950.

from four o'clock in the morning till ten at night to get the team to the Washburn barn," about a mile and a half distant.<sup>23</sup>

The Bruces raised wheat and children on their 320-acre homestead. The wheat grew ten feet high, and a heavily-headed shock of it stood in the Bruce parlor for years as a symbol of strength and fertility and ownership.

All the Bruces who were able worked on the homestead. One time a group of Scots and Englishmen passed by on their way to Chilnualna Falls and saw the toiling family. On their way back to the hotel, a horrified Scotsman told Albert Bruce, who had finished haying for the day, "I saw what I never thought I would see in America — a brute of a mon out in a field, his bonny wife raking hay." Bruce muttered something but did not acknowledge that he was the "brute of a mon."<sup>23</sup>

The Bruce homestead, patented April 1884, six years before Yosemite became a National Park, had one

boundary line in common with the Park.

Year after year, the superintendent's report to the Secretary of the Interior stressed that all private lands in Yosemite, especially at Wawona, should be purchased.<sup>5</sup> Year after year, Congress failed to appropriate funds for this purpose, and administration of the lands became more difficult.

Fire was the most dreaded problem, with water rights and sanitation becoming increasingly critical as the original homesteads were subdivided into numerous small lots. Privately owned acres still exist at Wawona, and independent commercialism is represented by motels, guest cabins, grocery stores, and a gas station.

In August, 1932, 8,785 acres were added to the Park. The Washburn Hotel Company's 3,724 acres and 5,061 of public domain acres were acquired for a total cost of \$376,600, half of it donated and half appropriated by Congress.<sup>24</sup>



Wawona, when haying and logging were the main commercial activities.





Brothers and sisters; Susan (Sukie) and John Lawrence and Sally Ann and Johnny Dick. Sukie married Archie Leonard, one of the two first civilian rangers in Yosemite.

## Indians

The Nutchu Indians were camped peacefully at Wawona when they were "surprised and captured," in March, 1851, by the Mariposa Battalion led by James D. Savage.<sup>3</sup> Partly because the various tribes of the Yosemite region showed their natural resentment of the white gold seeker's intrusion into their lands by plundering and killing, and partly because the whites coveted their lands, the Mariposa Battalion was organized to subdue, capture and herd the Indians to the reservation on the Fresno River.

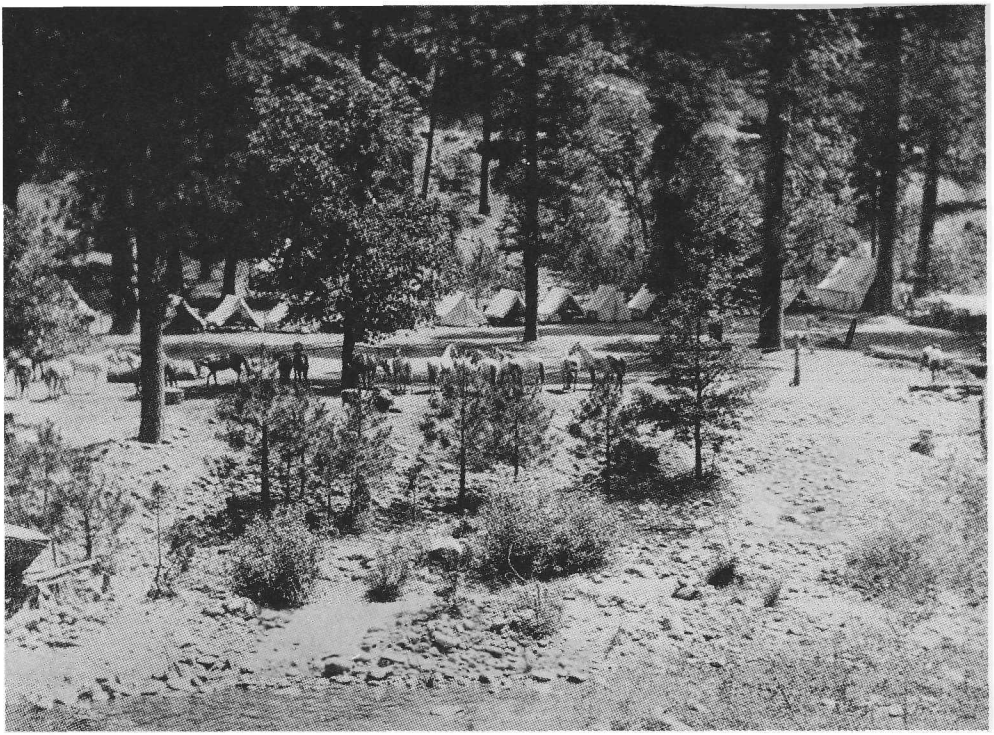
The Nutchu Indians escaped en route to the reservation, but were captured again, in 1852.<sup>3</sup> Numerous campsites, marked by potholed granite, attest to their long occupancy of the Wawona area.

Samuel Kneeland, zoologist, reported his Yosemite trips in *The Wonders Of The Yosemite Valley and California*.

He described an Indian sweat house observed in Wawona in 1871 as "... about eight feet long and two feet deep; over this is a heavily-thatched dome-shaped roof, plastered with mud and leaves; on the mud floor is placed a circle of rounded stones ... (on) which, when highly heated, water is poured ... raising an abundance of very hot steam ... a primitive but effective Russian bath."

A handful of Chowchilla Indians lived at Wawona during its development as a resort. They were halfbreeds with such Americanized names as One-eyed Bullock, Short and Dirty and Bush-headed Tom.

Galen Clark wrote that the Indians in Wawona and Yosemite Valley "... caused very little trouble."<sup>11</sup> There was a much-discussed case in June, 1889, when a white man caused trouble and justice was not done. That was when Jimmy Lawrence, a squaw-man, shot and killed Bush-head Tom Hambridge at Wawona, yet was discharged for lack of "sufficient evidence" the following week in the Mariposa Court.



Camp A. E. Wood in 1891.

## Camp A.E. Wood

For sixteen summers, sleep-shattering sounds of a bugle playing reveille resounded at what is now the public camp ground at Wawona. From 1891 till 1905, the level ground between the Wawona road and the South Fork, now filled in summer with campers' tents and trailers, was an Army encampment, Camp A.E. Wood.

When Yosemite was created a National Park in 1890, Congress ordered the U.S. Army to administer it. This control was complicated from the first because it was not complete. Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees, areas 35 miles apart, were administered by a board of commissioners as a California State Park, and after 1890, became a Park within a Park.<sup>3</sup>

There were other frustrating points to hamper smooth-running supervision. The Cavalry units assigned to Camp A.E. Wood from the Presidio in San Francisco were there only from May to October most years and were not given funds for developments.

Despite handicaps, the Army mapped and built miles of trails still in use, planted fish in remote lakes and rivers, eventually rid the Park of trespassing cattle and "hoofed locusts" that persistent shepherders brought in, and were responsible for such physical improvements as telephone lines, roads and trails. Many lakes in the Sierra were named for Army personnel.

Camp A.E. Wood was the well-ordered hub for all these activities. Captain Abram Epperson Wood was the first acting superintendent of Yosemite National Park, serving in this responsible post from 1891 to 1894. His efficiency was undermined by a pain-

ful, debilitating cancer of the tongue which killed him in 1894.<sup>2</sup>

The camp had its gay times, notably the Field Day of August 7, 1896, when Companies B and K of the 4th Cavalry put on minstrel shows, military exercises and many track and field events.<sup>67</sup>

Over the years, there were a few untoward incidents at the Camp, a couple of accidental shootings, a desertion, a prowler and a drowning, but the overall discipline record was consistently good, and the cavalrymen were liked by their Wawona neighbors. Mr. and Mrs. Albert Bruce were known as the "Father and Mother" of the Troops, thanks to their generosity with food and entertainment.

Major John Bigelow was acting superintendent in 1904 and ambitiously began an arboretum, a museum and a library. He succeeded also in having a small superintendent's office built

which now stands at the Pioneer Yosemite History Center.

Camp A.E. Wood was abandoned in August 1906 when the Army units were moved to Yosemite Valley. California had receded its twin grants of Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove to the United States in 1905. Yosemite National Park was now a single, cohesive whole administered by the Army until 1914, civilian rangers until 1916, and thereafter by the National Park Service.<sup>5</sup>

The sounds of the deserted camp after 1906 were no longer of bugle and marching feet, but of river and wind. In 1922, Camp Hoyle was established on the site and remained until 1932.<sup>36</sup>

The Hoyle site was used as a public camp ground from 1933, but was extended, improved and modernized in 1951 when it regained the name Camp A.E. Wood.



F Troop, 6th U.S. Cavalry on Fallen Monarch in the Mariposa Grove.

# Major Bigelow's Arboretum

Yosemite was an odd place for a couple of troops of cavalry and a handful of officers to be stationed each summer. The Army's "war" was with the sheepherders and their grass-eating "troops," but aside from that military-like action, the Army served in a caretaker role.

Perhaps the most unusual of all actions taken by the Army was the establishment of an arboretum across the river from Camp A.E. Wood in 1904.

Major John E. Bigelow, Jr., Ninth Cavalry, was acting superintendent from May until September of that year, when he retired.<sup>29</sup> During his five months' command at Wawona, he attacked his trail-building, sheep-chasing, park-protecting duties vigorously, but still had time to worry about the trees and flowers of the region.

For a soldier, Bigelow showed a remarkable vision as a naturalist. He wrote that Yosemite should: "... provide a great museum of nature for the general public, free of cost ... to preserve ... trees ... flora and fauna ... animal life, and the mineral and geological features of the country comprised in the Park."

Under his ambitious direction, 75 to 100 "timbered, hilly acres," almost directly across the South Fork of the Merced River from the camp, were developed as an arboretum. A sturdy foot bridge was built across the river

under Bigelow's supervision. Trails were constructed; rustic benches were built, sixteen native trees were labeled in English and Latin on wide plank-boards; photographs were taken; plants identified and a careful list was made of nineteen additional trees and plants to be transplanted. The work was done by First Lieutenant Henry R. Pipes, who was the Assistant Surgeon and an amateur botanist, with the help of a non-commissioned officer and a private.

Bigelow and Pipes went to painstaking lengths to preserve the natural features of the arboretum. The inch thick 9x11 inch plank signs were painted buff to blend with the tree trunks and nails attaching them were recessed so that their heads could not cause rust stains. Two Indian mortars in the area were appropriately labeled.

Unfortunately, the fledgling arboretum was abandoned, about as quickly as it had begun, by Captain H.C. Benson, acting superintendent from 1905 to 1908. In his annual report to the Secretary of the Interior in 1905, he reported that the arboretum had been started on patented land that had been thrown out of the Park by the boundary revision of 1905, and furthermore, surveyors for an electric railroad (never built) had knocked down many of the identifying signs. These were good official reasons, but it could have been that Benson, a notably relentless and ultimately successful foe of the sheepmen, had little sympathy for such an unarmy project.

Bigelow's short-lived arboretum anticipated by 16 years the first guided nature walks in any National Park. Bigelow felt, too, that Yosemite should have a museum and a library.<sup>29</sup>

The arboretum acreage was returned to the Park in 1932, and while the Army footbridge across the river exists only in memory and on film, any interested visitor can roll up his pant legs and wade the river in mid-summer. Once across from Camp A.E. Wood, turn slightly to the left and look for weathered signs identifying the trees first labeled in 1904.



Wawona supply wagon.

## Roads and Trails

Soon after enthusiast James Hutchings began escorting sightseers to view Yosemite Valley in 1855, Andrew, Milton and Houston Mann built a 45-mile toll horse trail from Mariposa to the already-famous Valley via the South Fork; mainly, they followed the old Indian trails. It was opened August 1, 1856, and operated as a toll route until 1862 when Mariposa County purchased it, declaring it a "Public Highway." Until then, tolls were: man and horse each way, \$2.00; pack mule or horse, each way, \$2.00; footman, \$1.00."<sup>31</sup>

In 1869, Galen Clark organized a stock company of eight men to build a wagon and stage road from Mariposa as far as Clark's Station <sup>22</sup> (Wawona) which was used as a toll road from 1870

until 1917. As early as 1870, Clark had a survey made for a wagon road from his lodging at Wawona to Yosemite Valley. This road was begun by Chinese laborers under the direction of John Conway and Edwin Moore and finished by Washburn, Chapman & Company in July, 1875.<sup>36</sup> Most of the 16-foot wide road was constructed during severe winter weather. The era of the stagecoach, which was to continue in jolting dusty fashion for forty years, began for Yosemite-bound visitors.

By mid-April, 1875, the rough road was passable for stagecoaches except for a narrow, 300-yard section under construction near the old Inspiration Point. To the passengers' temporary inconvenience and amusement, they walked the unfinished stretch while their quickly-dismantled stage was carried in pieces by hand, then re-assembled, harnessed up, reboarded and driven off with considerable aplomb.<sup>32</sup>

The Yosemite Stage & Turnpike Company (Washburn brothers) ran stages from Merced to Wawona via Mariposa, where it operated a livery stable.

The road from Raymond to Wawona generally followed the route of the present State Highway 41. The stage route from Mariposa, called the Chowchilla Mountain Road, exists today, rutty, dusty, and little changed from its 1870 route.

The Wawona Hotel was a logical and popular overnight stop for stage travelers and the Yosemite Stage & Turnpike Company, operating two stage schedules, saw to it that their passengers traveled speedily and safely, though dustily.

In 1865, 369 hardy, saddle-sore travelers visited Yosemite. In 1875, traveling mostly in stagecoaches, 2,423 visitors saw the Valley; 2,590 in 1885; 8,023 in 1902; and in 1914, when auto-

mobiles were allowed on the Wawona Road, 15,154. Travel doubled in 1915 when 31,546 visitors chugged in; 209,166 came in 1925; and 498,289 in 1932,<sup>33</sup> the last year of Washburn ownership.

The Wawona road accounted for a number of Yosemite "firsts." The first automobile to enter the Valley traveled it in 1900, and 32 miles of it had the honor of being the first paved road in the Yosemite region in June, 1902.<sup>34</sup> Mud and dust were tamed!

Soon increased automobile traffic made oiled roads a necessity and, in 1932, the new, modern Wawona Road was completed from the South (Fresno) Entrance to Yosemite Valley.

After 1932, one South Entrance Station replaced the three stops maintained by the Turnpike Company. Traffic to and from the Washburn domain had been checked from that time until it became part of the Park in 1934.



Stage and four approaching Wawona.

# Stages and Drivers

The jingle of harness bells, the stomp of hooves, the whapping noise of a whip, grinding wheels and an all-enveloping cloud of dust were the familiar sounds and sights for forty galloping years as stagecoaches rolled to and from Wawona.

The mountain stage coaches, first with leather springs and later with steel, were of local design and construction. Excellent examples can be seen by the covered bridge and in the Wagon Shop of the Pioneer Yosemite History Center. The early traveler also saw freight, spring and "mud" wagons and even a classy buggy or two.

The Yosemite Stage & Turnpike Company employed twenty to forty drivers and had some forty stagecoaches and buggies that were pulled by 700 horses.<sup>15</sup> In the height of the summer season, as many as eleven stages a day ran from the Raymond train station to Wawona, Yosemite Valley, Glacier Point and the Mariposa Grove. The teams had to be changed every few miles, so the Washburns kept stage stations at nine places between Raymond and Kennyville (now the site of the Ahwahnee Hotel).<sup>15</sup> A great deal of hay and other provisions were hauled in by lumbering freight wagons with five-ton capacities pulled by a ten-mule team. The mules were driven by jerkline — one line — by a man riding one of the wheel animals. One man who did that was called simply "Jerkline Jones."<sup>36</sup>

The trip from Raymond to Wawona, 44 dusty miles, took ten hours, including a lunch stop at Ahwahnee.<sup>37</sup> After passengers had rested overnight at Wawona, they spent six more jolting hours on the 27 miles to Yosemite Valley.

Dusters or shielding coats of some

kind were more of a necessity than a convenience to stage passengers. Summer dust was thick, and so covered passengers that vigorous use of feather dusters at hotel stops was needed before they could be recognized as to race or sometimes even sex.

The swift trips were frightening, occasionally injurious and usually hard on nerves and soft muscles. At all regular stops, the stagecoach was drawn up to a wooden platform so that passengers could mount and dismount from their high seats with relative ease. The stages were said to look like boats on the outside, sardine cans on the inside with passengers jammed together.<sup>38</sup>

The operation was remarkably safe. There were few accidents and no fatalities to passengers during the Washburn tenure. There were holdups, though.

The *Mariposa Gazette* reported six stage robberies between 1883 and 1906. After one robbery, a group of passengers told their exciting experience when safely back at the hotel. An office employee asked a little old lady how much the robber had taken from her.

"Twenty-five dollars," she replied.

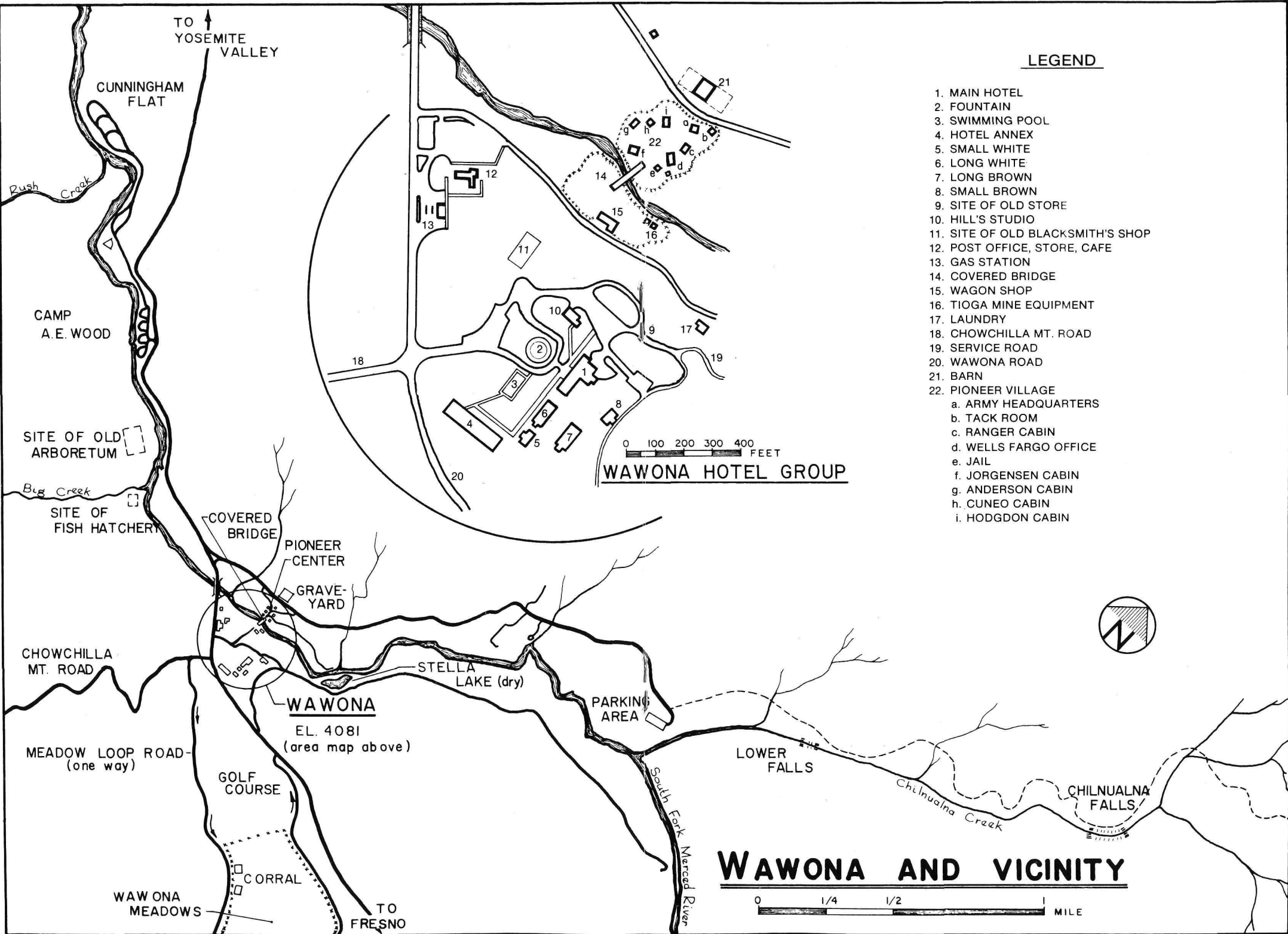
"Oh, that's a shame," the clerk sympathized.

The lady spoke spiritedly, "I wouldn't have missed it for a hundred!"<sup>39</sup>

Former stage driver Eddie Gordon tells of the time a robber foiled pursuers looking for horse tracks by escaping on crude walking boards. (These "trackers" may be seen in the Wagon Shop at the Pioneer Yosemite History Center.)

Gordon drove his team, "a mighty good one," from Wawona Point, above the Mariposa Grove, to the Hotel in 45 minutes and, once, by changing horses, galloped the 29 miles from Glacier Point to the Wawona Hotel in three hours!<sup>40</sup>

The stage drivers were the envy of small boys and admired by most of their passengers. They lived in the men's bunkhouse, where the Sequoia Building is now, and had a special table in the back dining room. Pay was \$60 a month, plus room and board.



**LEGEND**

- 1. MAIN HOTEL
- 2. FOUNTAIN
- 3. SWIMMING POOL
- 4. HOTEL ANNEX
- 5. SMALL WHITE
- 6. LONG WHITE
- 7. LONG BROWN
- 8. SMALL BROWN
- 9. SITE OF OLD STORE
- 10. HILL'S STUDIO
- 11. SITE OF OLD BLACKSMITH'S SHOP
- 12. POST OFFICE, STORE, CAFE
- 13. GAS STATION
- 14. COVERED BRIDGE
- 15. WAGON SHOP
- 16. TIOGA MINE EQUIPMENT
- 17. LAUNDRY
- 18. CHOWCHILLA MT. ROAD
- 19. SERVICE ROAD
- 20. WAWONA ROAD
- 21. BARN
- 22. PIONEER VILLAGE
  - a. ARMY HEADQUARTERS
  - b. TACK ROOM
  - c. RANGER CABIN
  - d. WELLS FARGO OFFICE
  - e. JAIL
  - f. JORGENSEN CABIN
  - g. ANDERSON CABIN
  - h. CUNEO CABIN
  - i. HODGDON CABIN

**WAWONA HOTEL GROUP**

**WAWONA AND VICINITY**



Most drivers were natives of Mariposa: Tom Gordon, Henry Hedges, Sam Uren, James Warner, John Stevens, C.K. Salmon, J.K. Ashworth, the Skelton brothers, E.W. Church, "Bright" Gillespie, Hy Rapelje, Johnny White, Ernest Stevens and Charles Fobes.

Some stagecoach drivers were deservedly famous. In an article called "The Passing of the Sierra Knight," in the July 1903 *Overland Monthly*, Ben C. Truman wrote "After an experience of nearly 40 years, and having never known another such all-round reinsman as George Monroe, just as there are the greatest of soldiers and sailors, artists and mechanics at times, so there are greater stage drivers than their fellows — and George Monroe was the greatest of all. He was a wonder in every way. He had names for all his horses, and they all knew their names. Sometimes he spoke sharply to one or more of them, but generally he addressed them pleasantly. He seldom or never used a whip, except to crack it over their heads."

Although automobiles were in common usage from about 1905 on, Yosemite officials didn't seem to think they

were here to stay. They weren't permitted in the Park at all until 1913, on the Wawona Road until 1914, and were not allowed general use of the roads until 1916.

There were some 60 annoying regulations protecting horses that motorists had to obey. Until August 8, 1914, automobile owners had to leave their cars at the Wawona Hotel and continue to Yosemite Valley by stage.<sup>41</sup>

One frustrated motorist who made the trip in 1911 wrote angrily, "On July 16th, we took our places with some other victims of this piece of transportation idiocy, on an open four-horse stage to Yosemite (Valley). The going was very slow. It was hot and dusty and we soon got irritable and uncomfortable. Why the traveling public should be subjected to this outrage is beyond me."<sup>31</sup>

In May 1916, "Stonewall Jackson" Ashworth "cracked the last whip" as he drove the final Washburn stagecoach from the Valley to Wawona.<sup>12</sup>

The automobile was here to stay, replacing the horse and ending the romantic but rugged era of the stagecoach.

## Culture

Wawona was a cultural oasis from the time Galen Clark settled, bringing to the area an educated mind and a library of books on many subjects. Cultural pursuits developed naturally with the Washburn brothers, who had been well educated in Vermont and had varied interests. While the hotel scheduled no regular entertainment, much was happening, from impromptu musicales and plays to the Big Tree Literary Society that debated, among other topics, Thomas Paine.

Music was ably provided by Estella Hill (Mrs. John Washburn), a practiced soprano, and Azelia Van Campen

Bruce, an excellent organist and former singer with the San Francisco Opera Company.

Thomas Hill's studio was a regular meeting place for various vocal and inquiring residents, among whom were two accomplished poetesses, the Bruce sisters. One poem by Fannie Bruce Cook appears in Hutching's *In the Heart of the Sierras*; several of Jean Bruce Washburn's poems were printed in the *Mariposa Gazette* and some of her work appeared in a slim book, *Yosemite and Other Poems*, issued by a San Francisco publisher in 1887.

Galen Clark, in his nineties and a resident of Yosemite Valley, had published two books on Yosemite: *Yosemite Valley and Vicinity*, 1904, and *The Yosemite Valley, Its History*, 1910.

In May 1891, Mariposa County creat-

ed the Wawona School District. School opened on July 27, 1891, in temporary quarters near the men's rooming house. The Washburns had wanted the school on the hotel grounds so that their children and those of employees and visitors could attend. It had to be moved, though, as its proximity to the stage coach drivers' quarters allowed the learning of readin', writin', 'rithmetic, — and oaths!

Some confusion exists as to who was the first teacher at Wawona. According to County records, Miss F.M. Hall was the first to receive pay for the job — the period covered was September 10, 1891, through April 19, 1892. She may have taught also during the summer of 1891, and may have been paid by a separate account, or even by the Washburns.<sup>76</sup>

James Hutching's daughter Gertrude (Cosie) instructed summer sessions during 1892 and 1893. Among the early students were Bert and Jay Bruce, the

Leonard twins, Clarence Washburn, an Indian boy named Joe Ann, the Bruce dog, and frequently the hotel peacocks!<sup>45</sup>

The parents of these children were making Yosemite history. Azelia and Albert O. Bruce were homesteading 320 acres under pioneer hardships; Archie Leonard served notably as the first Yosemite ranger; and the Washburns were running the Wawona Hotel.

After 20 years, the school had a building to itself which stood until 1960 to the south of the road, just above the covered bridge. School moved to a brown-shingled building on the Chilton Road and was held there until 1971; jet-aged subjects were added to the standard reading, writing and arithmetic. But in 1971, the one room school succumbed to the school bus and the multicurriculum of the Oakhurst school.

But no peacocks.

## “Pike”

Pike was the town character of Wawona in the 1890's. Earlier he had been the town character in the Valley. It was supposed that Nathan Bennett Phillips earned his nickname from references to Pike County, Missouri, but he was born in 1839 in Tennessee and there is no record of his having lived in Missouri.<sup>48</sup> He was known simply and widely as Pike, and gained a reputation as a colorful character from his actions, stories, and appearance.

He had long, yellowish hair, a mustache, and a chin-enveloping beard of the same hue. Customarily, he wore boots, Levi's, a heavy blue shirt with white buttons and a broad, white cowboy hat. Phillips drank heavily, swore frequently and had a gruff, whispering voice. An attack of diphtheria had so injured his vocal cords that he could

speak only in a hoarse, guttural whisper. No one had any trouble understanding him, though, and his favorite reply, when questioned as to how he lost his voice, was a husky, offhand, “telling lies to the tourists.”<sup>48</sup>

His “lies” were repeated by and to appreciative listeners, and even in an 1882 San Francisco newspaper. There was the one about a bear that chased Pike up a pine tree and out on a limb. At the top of his damaged vocal cords, Pike whispered fiercely, “Get back, you fool, or we'll both be killed!”

Pike lived later in Yosemite Valley for many years, and when asked how long by tourists, he replied that he had lived there ever since “they were hauling in the dirt to build it.”<sup>46</sup>

One bear story Pike liked to tell on himself concerned the time he was on foot, without a gun and being chased by a bear. “That bear had the downhill pull on me, and soon caught up and was about to grab me.” As open-mouthed as his pursuer, Pike's listeners

would ask breathlessly, "What did you do to save yourself?" "Why, I turned around right quick, shoved my arm down the bear's throat, grabbed his tail, and turned him inside out."<sup>37</sup>



"Pike"

Still another story was of the time an Englishman found the guide playing cards in the hotel saloon and asked him to take him on a grizzly bear hunt. Pike refused with his characteristic growl. The Englishman told him to name his price and again the guide refused.

Unhappily, the Englishman asked, "Why won't you go?"

With verbal embellishments, Pike told the saloon audience that the last time he hunted grizzlies with an Englishman, he had been armed with an old musket with which he had wounded a grizzly. When the enraged bear turned toward Pike, "John Bull" dropped his own high-powered rifle and raced for the nearest tree. Pike threw himself on the ground, feigning death because it was thought that grizzlies would not harm a dead man. The bear came over anyway, rolled the guide over a few times, then whispered, "Pike, don't you ever go hunting with an Englishman again."

After all that, Pike agreed to guide the spellbound "John Bull" on a grizzly hunt.<sup>37</sup>

One memorable time he stayed in San Francisco's Palace Hotel as the guest of a Southern Pacific official whom he had met at Wawona. A bellman took him to the top floor in an elevator, then showed him to his room and the button to push if he needed anything.

No sooner had the helpful bellman left, when Pike pressed the service button and, upon the man's return, asked for a hatchet.

"A hatchet?" The man looked with bewilderment at Pike in his cowboy hat, Levi's, outdoorsman shirt and boots.

"Yes," rasped Pike, "I want to blaze a trail out of here."<sup>37</sup>

For years, Pike guided early horseback visitors to Yosemite Valley and Glacier Point. He was always oversolicitous of any pretty women in his party, having them ride back of him at the head of the line. This didn't set too well with the men or homely women.

One dusty trip, a snooty but plain woman who was a member of British nobility, became annoyed at Pike's inattention to her and called imperiously, "Guide, there is something wrong with my stirrup. It hurts my foot."

Pike dismounted dutifully, examined the stirrup carefully; then announced in his gruff, carrying whisper, "Lady, there ain't nothing wrong with that stirrup — your blasted foot is too big!"

That same day, he had a unique chance to redeem himself with "Lady Bigfoot." When the party was dismounting for lunch at Peregoy Meadow, Pike predictably was assisting a pretty girl from her sidesaddle. Lady Bigfoot became impatient, slid off her horse unaided, and her skirt, which had been draped around the side-saddle, caught on the saddle horn and there she stood with her back to the horse, her skirt up to her neck, exposed to wind, weather and eyes.

Quickly, Pike ran to her side, gallantly swept off his broad-brimmed hat and with it shielded her embarrassing state, at the same time unhooking her skirt from the saddle horn. There is no memory of what Lady Bigfoot said, if anything, as her skirt fell into place and Pike clapped his hat back on, but later, her grateful husband gave the guide \$20 for his presence of mind and hat.<sup>37</sup>

It was said that Pike made more money than any other guide of that time and once received a tip of \$40. From early tourists, he had learned the names of many plants and wildflowers, and for later parties, he interspersed that information with his tall tales.<sup>38</sup>

Besides guiding, story-telling, drinking, chewing tobacco and caring for his mule, Brigham, Pike had a number of useful talents. He hunted deer, bear and grouse, trapped and fished, did roadwork with a pick and shovel, and played a mean, memorable fiddle. Even this he did with an individual flair, using a homemade willow bow strung with black hair pulled from the stage horses' tails. One of his favorite pieces was "Ten Little Indians and One Old Squaw."<sup>39</sup>

Pike and his eccentricities delighted Wawona's small boys. Jay Bruce, later State trapper, was an impressionable, ambitious youngster who skinned rattlers and sold the skins and rattles to Thomas Hill for display in his studio. Hill paid him a dollar for skin, rattles, and unpleasant work; so Jay watched Pike speculatively as he spliced broken

sets of rattles together to make one truly impressive string.

Pike confided hoarsely that he was "fixing up some rattles for John Bull." He fixed up stories to match his rattles and, once, Jay witnessed him selling a long string to a credulous Englishman for a \$20 gold piece. Then Pike proceeded to treat all the barroom loungers to "a drink on John Bull!"

Jay "fixed up" rattles too, until his indignant mother discovered Pike's influence was corrupting her son.<sup>39</sup>

When he was about fifty-five, Pike died as he had lived — colorfully. In the summer of 1894, he took Al Bruce, Jay's brother, fishing and spent most of a day wading in the river. That night, his ankles began to swell and later he was treated at the Mariposa hospital. The *Mariposa Gazette* for August 11, 1894, reported that he was "threatened with paralysis from too much exposure in the cold water."

He was such an outdoorsman that, after his return to Wawona, he refused to move inside to the store attic, stubbornly insisting on sleeping as usual in his bed on the west porch. Even during the cold nights of October, though he became sicker, Pike continued to sleep outside, announcing on October 30 that he felt much better and would soon go back to work with the road crew. But suddenly, that afternoon, he died.<sup>40</sup>

An inquest was held the next day and the official findings were that "the cause of death was neuralgia of the heart, resulting from a sickness of about two months' duration."<sup>41</sup>

Pike was buried in the Wawona graveyard in a marked grave. The story goes that a young couple paid for the tombstone because once the guide had done something chivalrous for them.<sup>42</sup> Presumably, the wife was pretty! However, one Wawona oldtimer remembers that the generous couple was lady Bigfoot and her husband.<sup>40</sup>



## Steve Cunningham

History is not always made by notable events and people, but often by misadventures and wanderers. Stephen Mandeville Cunningham was an adventurer who claimed to be the second white man in Yosemite Valley. Born in New York state in 1820, he sailed around the Horn in 1849, prospected for gold, taught school, served as Justice of the Peace for Mariposa in 1852, and was associated in business with James Savage.<sup>48,49</sup> Whether he was the second non-Indian in Yosemite Valley or not, Cunningham built the first, steep ladders at Vernal Fall and helped construct the trail to the Fall.

During the Civil War, he served for ten months with the California Infantry and then returned to Yosemite Valley and later the Mariposa Grove, where

he served as guide, guardian, and curiosity seller. Frequently, when visitors stayed overnight to marvel at the sequoias, he would give them his cabin and sleep in a hollow tree.<sup>48</sup>

That Cunningham was intimately associated with the Wawona area is attested by the fact that he was Grand Marshal for a parade held July 22, 1875, to celebrate the opening of the Wawona road.<sup>51</sup>

In the 1870's, he filed many mining and grazing claims in Yosemite Valley, in Little Yosemite and above Bridalveil Fall. He homesteaded land at the mouth of Rush Creek which empties into the South Fork near Cunningham Flat in the present campground.

Cunningham built an 18- by 21-foot cabin there in the 1860's about 85 yards from the South Fork of the Merced. It was constructed with neatly notched yellow pine logs, had a shake roof and a granite fireplace. He had a wood lathe in it and spent his spare time

using it to make curios to sell at the Mariposa Grove.<sup>53</sup>

After Cunningham's death, the Washburns bought his land and held it until 1932. The rotting remains of the cabin were cleared from the ground in the 1940's for the Cunningham Flat Campground.<sup>54</sup>

Jack Leidig, Yosemite old-timer, liked to tell a story about the time Cunningham came into Mariposa for his winter's supply of groceries, among them a large slab of bacon, chunk of cheese, a ten-pound box of crackers, and a five gallon jug of whiskey. Driving down the Cold Springs grade on

the old Chowchilla Mountain Road, he hit a chuckhole and the demijohn broke.

As he watched the whiskey pouring to the ground, Cunningham moaned, "There goes half my provisions!"<sup>52</sup>

In 1883, a *Mariposa Gazette* columnist reported that Cunningham, then sixty-three, was working on repairing the road between Wawona and the Mariposa Grove.

On October 5, 1859, Cunningham entered the Sawtelle Veterans' Hospital in Southern California, where he died on July 3, 1899, and was buried, far from the pines and granite of Wawona.<sup>55</sup>

## Thomas Hill

Thomas Hill was not only a western artist of world renown, he was Wawona's own. His daughter, Estella, married John Washburn in 1885. Hill had a studio (now the recreation building), at the hotel from the year of her marriage until his death. A gushing fountain in front of a long porch made Hill's studio a lounge as well as a place to browse and buy.

In addition to his paintings, Hill displayed such curios as squirrel pelts, dried flowers and rattlesnake skins. His vine-covered studio was crowded with a splendid collection of Indian war implements, bear skins, and wasp nests.<sup>58</sup> Hill had a fondness for wild fowl and good cigars, dining frequently on quail and puffing incessantly on an aromatic cigar, though not at the same time.

Influenced by his studies in Paris under Paul Mayerheim, Hill's paintings were often somber, with lavish use of browns and yellows. He was a hard and prolific worker and seemed to be most

productive when his studio was crowded with friends and admirers. As many of the hotel's guests were wealthy and cultured, a number of his Yosemite landscapes were taken to the East coast and to England and Europe.

According to Hutchings, Hill was "... a very genial gentleman, who has been everywhere, almost — if not a little beyond — seen about as much as most men, and can tell what he has seen pleasantly, including haps and mishaps..."<sup>50</sup>

He was born in England, September 11, 1829, came to Massachusetts in 1841, and moved to California for his health in 1861; and later, established his summer studio at Wawona and his winter quarters at Raymond.

His wife, an invalid for many years, died in the early 1900's. They had 11 children and he was noted as a family man. He sought commercial success and gained it, but invested his money poorly and lost several small fortunes.<sup>15</sup> From 1900, Hill was in constant ill health, dying in Raymond on June 30, 1908.<sup>60</sup>

Hill's most famous painting, "Driving the Last Spike," had nothing to do with

Yosemite, but pictures the driving of the last spike to unite the transcontinental railway at Promontory, Utah, in 1869. Even painters were not safe from politics as Hill found to his dismay, long before he finished his huge painting.

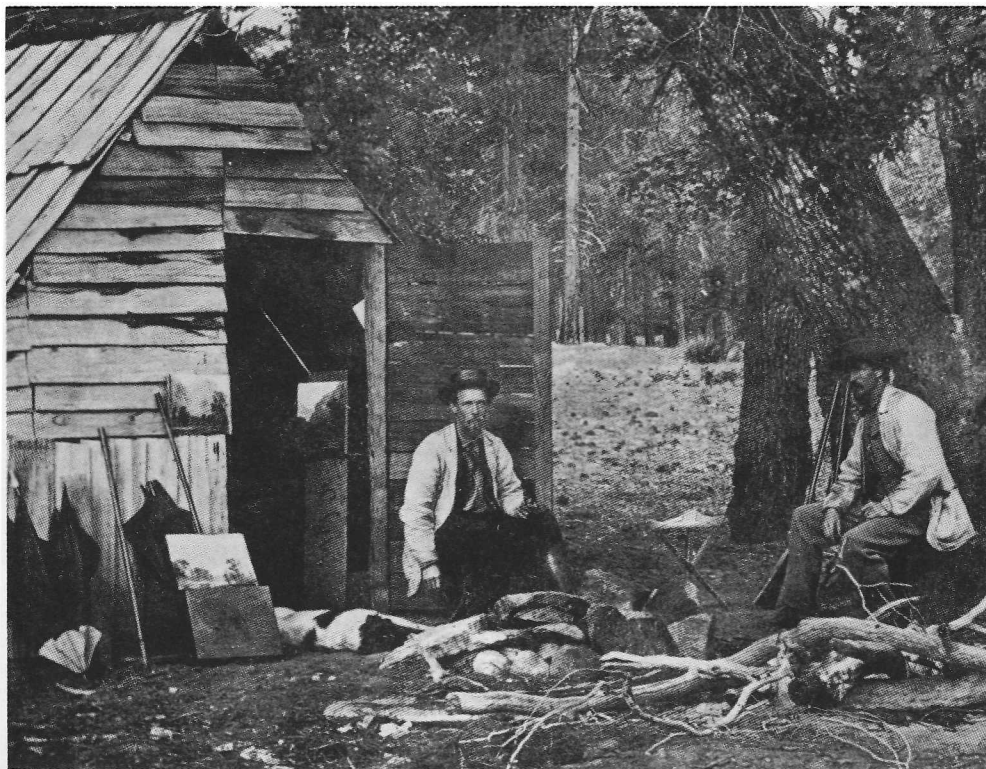
Leland Stanford, of California's famous Big Four, had commissioned the work for \$50,000, Hill said, but he kept having Hill rearrange the recognizable personages in it. Of some 400 people pictured witnessing the union of the two railroads, seventy were VIP's of the 1860's and Stanford decreed who should and shouldn't be displayed prominently.

When a powerful opponent objected to Stanford's own showy place in the painting, the rail magnate abruptly refused to pay for it. Hill was sick at

heart; he had spent four years of work and a substantial sum of his own on the painting, which financially had come to a fruitless conclusion. Despondent, he went east, but his health suffered from the rigorous climate forcing him to return to the land of sunshine.

Because of its historical significance, the disputed painting was purchased for \$10,000 after Hill's death by the E.B. Crocker Gallery of Sacramento, and hangs now in the California capitol building.

Deservedly, his fine landscapes won 36 medals and prizes as well as worldwide sale and written praise.<sup>66</sup> Some of them can be viewed in the Wawona Hotel and in the restored Jorgenson's Studio in the Pioneer Yosemite History Center.



Artists Virgil Williams and Thomas Hill.



President Theodore Roosevelt arriving at the Wawona Hotel in 1903.

## Famous Visitors

George Washington didn't sleep at the Wawona Hotel, but a number of presidents and other famous people did. As early as June, 1859, Jessie Benton Fremont visited Clark's Station, and Horace Greeley followed in August. James Garfield visited Yosemite and Wawona as a Congressman in 1875, six years before he became President of the United States.

Grant visited, as an ex-President, in 1879 at the end of a world tour. The Mariposa brass band accompanied him to the Wawona Hotel, where he spent

the night of October 7, before visiting the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees and the Valley.<sup>47</sup>

Rutherford Hayes visited Yosemite with a party of twelve in 1883, two years after his presidential term had expired.<sup>46</sup> He spent a night at the Wawona Hotel before visiting the Mariposa Grove.

Hattie Bruce Harris told an amusing story in connection with the visit of the William Jennings Bryan party to the Hotel. Mrs. Bryan wanted to go horseback riding, but didn't have the proper clothes. Jean Bruce Washburn (Mrs. A.H.) presented the problem to her sister-in-law, Azelia Van Campen Bruce, who took a new skirt of her daughter, Hatties, and seamed it up, making one of the first pair of culottes.<sup>36</sup>



# First Ranger

Archie Leonard's claim to fame in Yosemite lies in the fact that he was one of the first two civilian rangers assigned to protect the area from fire, shepherders, poachers — all enemies — natural or otherwise.

He was an early guide in the region and, in 1881, ran a ten-horse pack train between Lundy and Yosemite for a day and a half trip that cost \$8.00 one way.<sup>3</sup> After 1875, he was foreman of the Washburn road gang until the Spanish-American War called away many of the troopers from their summer post, Camp A.E. Wood.<sup>70</sup>

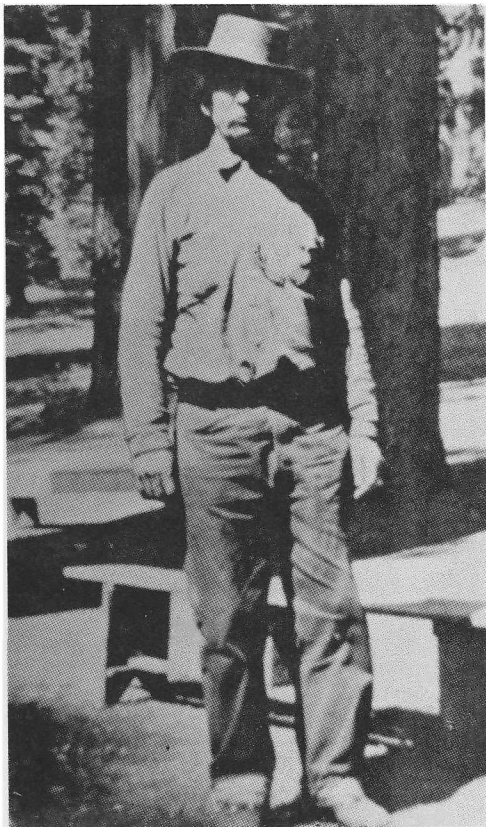
In 1899, Leonard and Charlie Leidig, first white boy born in Yosemite Valley, were appointed forest rangers by the Government. During the winter, they patrolled and guarded the vast, forested acres of Yosemite National Park and, in summers, guided and helped patrolling troopers.<sup>71</sup>

Leonard's efforts were appreciated and praised by various Army Acting Superintendents in their yearly reports to the Secretary of the Interior, and he continued to serve as a ranger after 1916 when the National Park Service took over administration of the Park.

Between 1914, when the soldiers left to guard the Mexican border, and 1916, when the NPS took over, Leonard, Leidig and seven summer "college boy" rangers guarded the Park. Alan Sproul, later president of the Federal Reserve Bank in New York went straight to patrolling the Mariposa Grove of Big Trees from his high school graduation and saw a lot of Leonard.

In his article published in the April 1952, issue of *Yosemite Nature Notes*, Sproul remembered, "... Leonard was not very communicative. He was always pleasant, and I should say tolerant of the 'college boy rangers' ... He

knew the park by long association and by years of travel over its trails, but he was too diffident, too inarticulate, too old to share much of his knowledge



Archie Leonard

with us ... His hair was gray and rather long, and his mustache drooped. His uniform consisted of dirty slouch hat, distinguished in its slouchiness, a grayish-colored shirt which didn't show a season's dirt, and overalls (now called jeans) worn low on the belt. He spoke in a soft, indistinct voice, surrounded by a pleasant smile. His badge couldn't lend him authority, but his recognized knowledge of the whole region did."

A Wawona old-timer says that Leonard lived in a rough, board house near the Indian camp with his half-Indian wife, twin sons and two daughters.<sup>70</sup> He died at Stockton, Calif., on June 19, 1921 after a career which added immeasurably to the preservation of Yosemite National Park.<sup>72</sup>



Stella Lake- Persian Wheel in operation.

## Stella Lake

To the north of Forest Drive, about a quarter-mile east of the covered bridge, are the remains of what appears to be a reservoir. This was called Stella Lake after Estella Hill Washburn, John's wife. It was a popular spot for walking, fishing, picnicking, swimming, boating, and at the secluded eastern end, for lovers.

Though used for recreation, Stella Lake had been built, by damming and diverting the river, for a practical purpose, for use as an ice pond. The Washburn brothers needed tons of ice to supply their hotel. By temperature tests, they found the coldest place along the river and, in 1886, dug a pond, roughly 150 feet wide and 1,000 feet long.<sup>63</sup> By early January, the ice on the lake froze to a thickness of some four inches. Once cutting began, it took a week "to market."<sup>64</sup>

The ice, cut by hand into large floating blocks, was poled to the dock and lifted on an endless belt from the lake, up and over an earth dam and into the nearby ice house. The belt was moved by a horse-operated "Persian wheel," the horse walking around a vertical axis which was converted by gear to a horizontal axis. A wheel at the end of this drove a chain on two sprockets which moved the belt that carried the ice blocks.<sup>64</sup>

The ice house had walls eight inches thick, filled with sawdust insulation.<sup>64</sup> Sawdust still can be found on the site of the building just below the vestiges of the dam.

John Conway, pioneer Yosemite trail builder, manufactured charcoal for the blacksmith shop in a pit near the lake.<sup>36</sup>

For years, Stella Lake was both pretty and practical, but after 1934, when the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. began running the hotel, refrigeration replaced "homemade" ice and the lake's banks were allowed to crumble, and sadly, after the flood of 1955, it became the memory it is today.



Logging operations near Wawona. Note the "donkey" engines.

## Logging

"Timber!" was a familiar cry in the Wawona basin area from Galen Clark's day on, as extensive logging was legal when the land was privately owned. Yet, a surprisingly fine though overly thick forest has grown up since the denuding.

The Washburns sold timber rights to their many acres to the Madera Sugarpine Company, which was responsible for most of the logging, operating from the spring of 1897 until the 1930's. The company had a large mill at Sugarpine, three miles south of Fish Camp, and many miles of narrow-gauge railway tracks. Logs were hauled to this mill on flat cars pulled by locomotives having geared drive wheels.

When large lumber camps were moved, the wooden houses were loaded atop flat cars and rolled to new locations.<sup>48</sup>

From the Sugarpine mill, rough milled lumber was carried seventy miles to Madera in an open flume.

Such logging accounted for the destruction of much of the fine sugarpine stands around Wawona and for a time, it severely damaged the watershed.

The Wawona Hotel itself consumed a great deal of lumber for buildings, stables, and shops. In 1874, along with the lodging house, blacksmith shop, and bridge, the Washburns had purchased a small sawmill from Clark and Moore.<sup>65</sup> Soon after, Albert Bruce built a water-power sawmill for the Washburns; this was crushed in the heavy snows of 1888. In the 1900's, several Wawona homesteaders established small mills, most of their production

going to the Washburns for construction.<sup>66</sup>

Four of the Bruce brothers took part in the sawmill operations in and around Wawona. Bert Bruce did the first selective cutting there, taking only mature timber and big trees on 60 acres of the Bruce homestead. He logged over two million board feet, almost all of it used in buildings at Camp Curry.<sup>67</sup>

Bert and his brother, Jay, built a circular sawmill which was powered by an undershot Pelton water wheel driven

by water from Chilnauvalna Creek. In 1913, Jay built another mill, furnishing \$4,000 worth of lumber for the building of an addition to the Hotel's dining room and kitchen. This mill was totally destroyed by fire in 1915.<sup>48</sup>

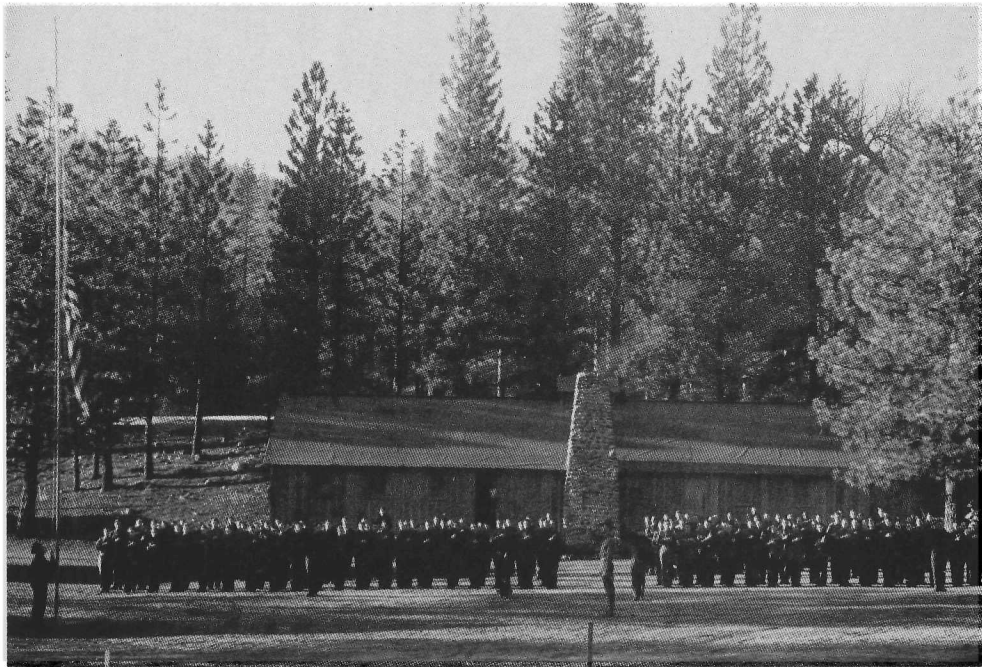
Bill and Robert Bruce ran the sawmill built in 1912 by their older brothers; their lumber was sold mainly to Camp Curry, although some of it went into the building of Camp Hoyle and some to the Sierra Lodge on the Scroggs property nearby.<sup>68</sup>

## Civilian Conservation Corps

The depression-born Civilian Conservation Corps benefitted jobless young men as well as the places they set up camps. From 1933 to 1942 the

3-C men at Wawona built roads and trails, removed stumps, dead trees, and debris from the forest, particularly along roads in the Mariposa Grove, and worked on control of blister rust.

There were three CCC camps at Wawona, two at the far end of the meadow and a large, well-ordered one above what is now the Pioneer Center.



CCC morning muster, Camp 6, Wawona.

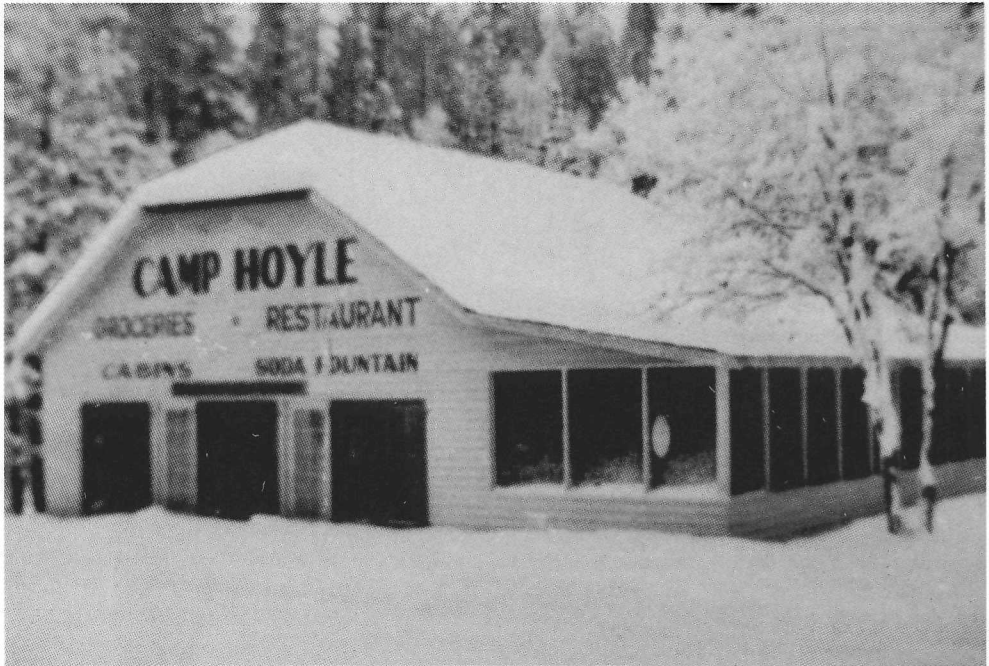
# Camp Hoyle

Hoyle's "gold" — what there was of it — came from tourists' wallets. His up-to-date camp afforded a dining room, fountain, store, six tents, six cabins and a gas station at rates below those of the Wawona Hotel.<sup>28</sup>

The camp catered to touring families who couldn't afford hotel lodging, fishermen, and — oddly enough — dogs.<sup>74</sup> Dogs were not allowed in the Park and there were no special kennels for them at that time so they were left in custody of the Hoyles while their owners explored the Park.

Camp Hoyle was established in 1922 on the site of Camp A.E. Wood by Bert Hoyle who filed three mining claims there.<sup>73</sup> He carried a flask of gold in his pocket to substantiate his claim, but Yosemite officials tried to make him prove there was gold or silver on it. Hoyle explained then that he had filed a claim for a granite quarry and, since literally thousands of granite rocks were part of the landscape, the officials let him alone.<sup>70</sup>

The Park Service bought Hoyle's interest in 1932, demolishing the buildings in 1933. Hoyle, his wife and two sons, moved to Long Barn in Tuolumne County where he "mined" more tourist gold with a hotel there until his death in 1937.<sup>28</sup> His former Wawona campsite became a public campground — again called Camp A.E. Wood.



The only known photo of Camp Hoyle.

# Wildlife

Today's Wawona campers may see deer and squirrels, perhaps a porcupine, raccoon, fox, wildcat, bear, coyote, or beaver and, rarely, a mountain lion.

Frequently beavers have been observed building dams in the small creek that cuts through the golf course, only yards distant from the present highway.

The Wawona area was a private "island" in Yosemite until 1932, and as such was good hunting grounds for Indians and white man. Jay C. Bruce, son of a Wawona settler and state lion hunter for 28 years, estimates that he shot 40 wildcats and 11 black bears around Wawona between 1915 and 1932.<sup>39</sup>

Two grizzly bears were killed near Wawona in the late 1800's. One skin, roughly eight by five, hung in Hill's Studio from 1887 until 1918, when the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California purchased it.<sup>44</sup>

It is kept in a refrigerated room for "long time preservation."<sup>45</sup>

Many men visiting Yosemite are interested, almost obsessively, in one thing — fishing! John L. Murphy, early-day guide, was the first to anticipate this popular, recreational demand by stocking Tenaya Lake in 1878.<sup>31</sup>

In 1895, the Washburns established a fish hatchery<sup>3</sup> at Wawona where Big Creek empties into the South Fork of the Merced. It was operated by the State and each spring for ten years Army troopers distributed thousands of trout in the streams, rivers and lakes of Yosemite National Park.

The hatchery was demolished in 1933 by the CCC<sup>46</sup> after it had been succeeded by a larger one in Yosemite Valley which in turn was razed when superseded in 1957 by the fish hatcheries at Moccasin Creek and on the San Joaquin.<sup>47</sup>

Today's fishermen owe thanks to these State Hatcheries that plant fingerlings each year in Yosemite, and to the tireless troopers who first distributed the breeding stock which has had much to do with the present fish population in the Yosemite back country.

# The Cemetery

The resting place for those whose days ended in the area is on the low hill a tenth of a mile north of the Pioneer Center. There are two parts to this rude, unremembered graveyard, each surrounded by a neat, brown fence of unexplained origin. There are no memories or markers for the smaller plot, just pine-needled ground and the mysterious fence.

When ranger-naturalist Jack F. Fry began putting in weeks interviewing oldtimers and searching Mariposa County records, he couldn't "find enough people to fill the graves that were obviously there." As the search

led to other sources, and accounts of whom is buried there, he found too many people for the graves!<sup>56</sup>

Three of the graves have wooden markers. Nathan B. Phillips (Pike), H.R. Sargent, and John L. Yates are so remembered. Reportedly, Sargent was a carpenter or a stage driver who died in 1878 or '79.<sup>42</sup> Yates was an Army private, stationed at Camp A.E. Wood, who drowned August 2, 1905, in the Merced River, trying to save a Mary Garrigan who drowned also.<sup>57</sup>

Presumably Bush-head Tom is buried in one of the unmarked graves, as are two suicide victims and possibly John Hammond and Homer or Jim Snedecker.<sup>42</sup>

Whoever they were, may they rest in peace.

# Chilnualna Falls

Yosemite visitors admire Yosemite Falls, Bridalveil, Ribbon, Vernal and Nevada Falls and even if they do not hike up to see the latter two, they can view them from Glacier Point.

Lovely, little-known Chilnualna Falls (pronounced Chilnoo-al-na) can-

not be seen from an automobile but those willing and able to take the 4.1 mile trail will be awed by the boisterous foaming series of cascades and cataracts that form the falls during the spring of the year. The upper trail, built by John Conway for the Washburns in 1895,<sup>69</sup> starts at the Chilnualna Park road, 1.6 miles east of the main road (see map).

Another short foot trail to the base of the lower falls takes off from the parking place 1.9 miles east of Wawona Road. This was built in 1870 by Albert Bruce, John Washburn and two Chinese on land that is still private.<sup>69</sup> The view, while well-worth seeing, is ordinary compared to the spectacular one afforded from the longer, steeper trail to the upper falls.

According to one source, Chilnualna means "leaping waters" and was so-named by the Piute Indians.<sup>69</sup> Another Wawona native insists that an Indian told him that Chilnualna means "many rocks," because the falls lie in a very rocky canyon.<sup>66</sup>

Thomas Hill did a pen and ink drawing of the falls in 1886 to illustrate James Hutchings' book *In the Heart of the Sierras*, and later painted them.

John Washburn had a preemption claim on the lower falls prior to 1885. There, he had tables, benches and a picnic ground, built a foot bridge out to a large rock, and made the area a regular stage stop for visitors. Thousands knew the lower fall and other thousands received postcards of it, then sold at the Wawona Hotel.

After Albert Bruce homesteaded the area, which in 1885 included the lower Falls, they were no longer a stopping place. People had so desecrated ferns and woodwardia there that Bruce posted no trespassing signs and wrathily stopped unwelcome, would-be visitors.<sup>69</sup>

The longer, upper fall trail is on Park property and the falls and cascades splash unconcernedly down, appreciated only by the exploring hiker or photographer, but remembered by all who have observed their singular, neglected beauties.



Chilnualna Falls, by Thomas Hill.

# Pioneer Yosemite History Center

The Pioneer Yosemite History Center is a collection of the living history of Wawona and Yosemite National Park. A walk through it begins at the covered bridge which has spanned the South Fork of the Merced River for 115 years. When it was first built by Galen Clark in 1857, it was a simple, open structure. It was covered by the Washburn brothers in 1875 as a reminder of their native Vermont, and to protect it from the weather. Until 1931, it carried all traffic — foot, horse, stage and car, while now only travelers on foot, horse, or bicycle pass through as a concrete bridge on the new Wawona Road carries the remainder.

After its back was broken by the damaging floods of 1955, the covered bridge was restored authentically and painstakingly by the National Park Service, even to the use of square nails.<sup>75</sup>

Today, it stands as the only covered bridge in any national Park and one of the few in the west.

On the north side of the river is a collection of authentic, historical buildings, some original Wawona buildings, some moved from other areas of the park and rebuilt, standing and furnished much as they were originally.

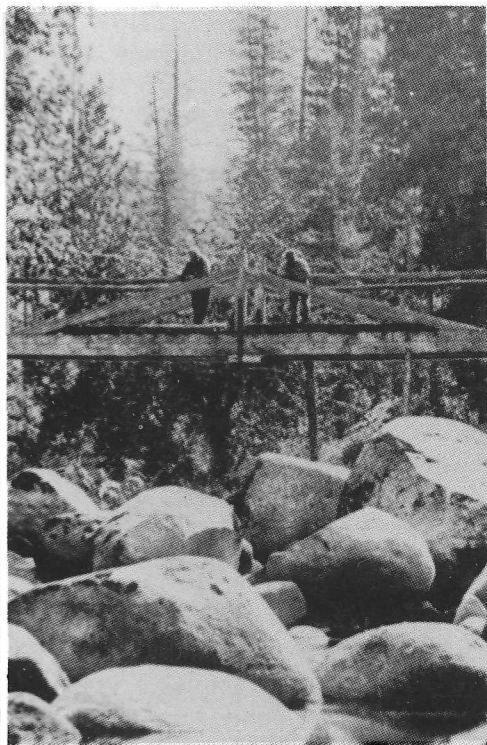
During the fall, winter, and spring, visitors will find recorded interpretive messages and explanatory signing. In the summer, a living history program is presented, through which costumed interpreters add a “living” dimension to the Center. A talk with the homesteader, cavalry trooper, and others conveys a feeling for the period and

enables one to explore in depth the development of Yosemite National Park and the National Park Idea.

A walk on the south side of the river takes visitors by the old wagon barn and a blacksmith shop. Coaches and wagons used in Yosemite’s stagecoach days are on display.

The Pioneer Yosemite History Center attracts as many as 6-7000 visitors a day, fascinated by its unique historical values.

It is significant that these old buildings are gathered together at Wawona where, beginning in 1856, the first pioneer activity of any scale occurred. A walk through the buildings with their informative tapes or period-dressed interpreters assures the visitor of sharing and understanding the history of Yosemite and its builders.



The original Wawona bridge in 1866.



## SOURCES

YNN — **Yosemite Nature Notes**, published by Yosemite Natural History Assoc.

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a.c. — author's collection

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- Page 7: Watkins (orig. at Stanford U.)
- Page 8: Boysen (Stereo)
- Page 9: Boysen
- Page 11: Unknown
- Page 13: H. B. Harris
- Page 14: Pidgeon
- Page 15: Fiske (courtesy L. Degnan)
- Page 16: U. S. Army
- Page 17: U. S. Army
- Page 19: Pidgeon
- Page 20: Unknown
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- Page 26: Bradey and Rulofson
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## WAWONA CHRONOLOGY

- 1851 Nutchu Indian camp at Wawona "surprised and captured" by Mariposa Battalion led by Major James D. Savage.
- 1855 Mann brothers built toll horse trail from Wawona to Yosemite Valley. Finished in 1856.
- 1856 Galen Clark homesteaded, established crude overnight lodging-house at Wawona.
- 1857 Clark built an open bridge over South Fork of Merced River.
- 1864 Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove of Big Trees granted to California as public trust. Administered by Board of Commissioners.
- 1867 Edwin Moore acquired half interest in Clark's Station.
- 1874 Washburn, Coffman and Chapman bought hotel, blacksmith shop, sawmill and open bridge from Clark and Moore, December 26.
- 1875 Stephen M. Cunningham grand marshal for parade celebrating opening of Wawona stage road from Wawona to Yosemite Valley, June 12.
- 1882 Washburn brothers formed Yosemite Stage & Turnpike Co.
- 1885 Artist Thomas Hill established studio at Wawona Hotel.
- 1888 Six feet of snow.
- 1890 Yosemite became a National Park.
- 1891 Army headquarters — Camp A. E. Wood — established at Wawona.
- 1905 Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove re-ceded to US to become part of Yosemite National Park.  
Camp A. E. Wood abandoned as troops move to Yosemite Valley.
- 1914 Army withdrawal. Replaced by civilian rangers.
- 1916 Yosemite under jurisdiction of newly-created National Park Service.  
Last Washburn stagecoach driven by J. K. Ashworth in May.
- 1917 Nine-hole golf course, air strip and hotel building added.
- 1922 Camp Hoyle built on site of Army camp.
- 1925 Airplane landed on Wawona field, December 8.
- 1932 Wawona basin, 8,785 acres, bought by National Park Service.  
Wawona Hotel operated by Yosemite Park and Curry Co.
- 1933 Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps established upper end Wawona Meadows.
- 1937 Flood.
- 1942 CCC discontinued.
- 1955 Flood wrecked Stella Lake and badly damaged covered bridge.
- 1957 Covered bridge authentically reconstructed.
- 1959 Old Yosemite buildings moved to Yosemite Pioneer History Center at Wawona.
- 1961 Pioneer Center officially opened.

