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✓ Wilder Ranch

Wanted: a few good ranch friends

Take a walk on the Wilder side



Led Englesman, left, has worked at Wilder Ranch for 56 years.

Take your family, friends, picnic and camera, but no pets, to the Wilder Ranch open house Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. And be prepared for tours, exhibitions, demonstrations and live entertainment. The ranch is two miles north of Santa Cruz along Highway 1. The event will be sponsored by Santa Cruz Historical Society and Friends of Wilder Ranch in cooperation with the state Parks Department in honor of Historic Preservation Week.

Historic dairy ranch will be open to the public

By MARYBETH VARCADOS
Living Section Editor

LED ENGLSMAN, cowboy, has strong feelings about what's not being done to preserve the buildings at Wilder Ranch.

"This yard's going to hell in a handbasket," growled the rough man who, at age 15, was taken in by the Wilder family and "sat at the table with them for 50 years."

The sun was bright, the wind was biting the afternoon Englesman gave a tour around the usually deserted compound. Its several thousand acres roll from mountains to sea, prime land just north of Santa Cruz along Highway 1.

This land could tell stories of Indian burial rites, of the Mexican land grant holder Joaquin Castro, of the inventive Wilders and of sometimes-wild schemes people have dreamed over it.

The houses and barns could tell stories, too. But their own story took an unhappy turn when the state parks system bought the Wilder Ranch almost a decade ago and the buildings fell into disrepair.

"I love this place. I have a feeling for it," came

Englesman's voice from under his wide-brimmed hat. The sun warmed the redwood and chipped paint of the Victorian-era barn where the faithful ranch hand parks his Jeep, alternate transportation to his two quarterhorses. He leaned against the rugged vehicle and his blue eyes hardened as he looked over the yard.

More weeds than grass surround the water-powered buzz saw on the lawn. It's just one of the unusual machines the Wilders incorporated in their operations.

Deloss D. Wilder, who created the early dairy "village" in 1871, harnessed the stream uphill into a reservoir, the ranch's independent source of water. It still is tapped at a constant 90-pound pressure. When his son, Melvin, came back from Stanford University with an electrical engineering degree, he created an electricity generator for the place, making it the first ranch "up the coast" to have electricity when there was no commercial power.

"When I first came, all the little light bulbs were pointed up. They hadn't learned they a light bulb isn't like a candle flame and you can point it any direction," he said.

Englesman was hired to stay on as part-time help after the state took over. He settled his gaze on the rusting buzz saw. "When I was only 18, I built that side frame and bottom with wood salvaged from trestles. I just rebuilt the top, 50 years later. If anybody'd told me that would happen, I wouldn't have believed it."

Then he got on the subject of the horse barn roof. In days when the ranch was a ranch, that blush of rust would have been removed straightaway. But now, with the state as owner, sure the corrugated iron was ordered and delivered two years ago, but it's still in storage, he complained.

"Jackassary," he spat, then slowed, "I'd better watch what I say ... but, they're afraid of me. They (state officials) approach me gingerly. They come from Sacramento and say let's take the cattle off the land ... look what would happen." He pointed to a grazed area where the grasses are low, then to an ungrazed field where shrubbery is taking over.

Not long ago, cigarette and cola industries filmed commercials at Wilder Ranch, and Englesman became a TV image for a flickering second. "I've had three calls from people who've seen the com-

mercials," he reported.

The image was Englesman strolling out from the barn, icy cola in hand.

CYNTHIA MATHEWS, president of Santa Cruz Historical Society, stood nearby as Englesman talked. She and others hope to increase public concern over the historic buildings and their state of disrepair.

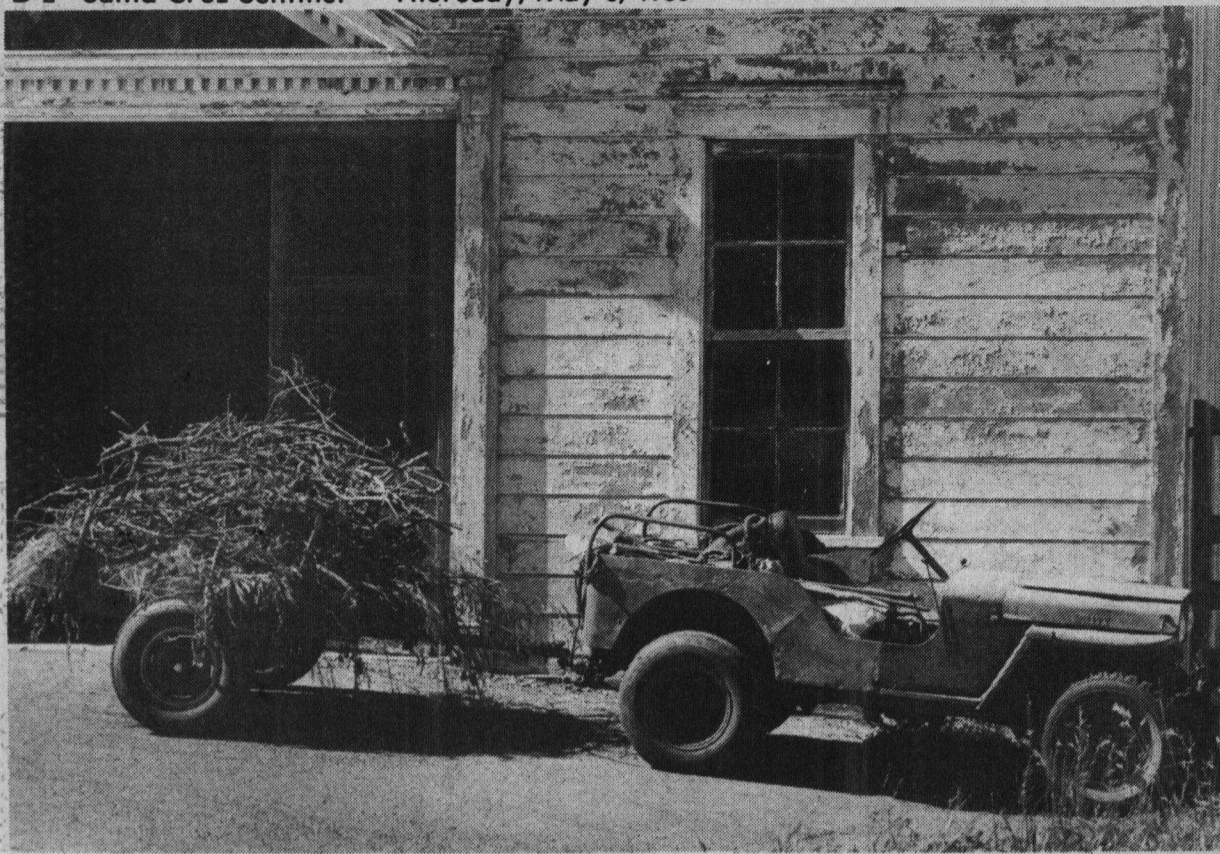
A move failed last year to open Wilder Ranch to the public for a day. This year, they were successful and the ranch, two miles north of Santa Cruz, will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

"We hope to put pressure on the state," said Mathews. "If they don't maintain this ... well, the buildings are witnesses of their own. Look around."

Swallows dart in and out of the bunk house, where the blacksmith and metal shops are located. The Pelton wheel, which uses hydraulic power to run the machinery, lies still under spider webs and dust.

The horse barn — or, carriage house as it's been renamed — is rife with restoration possibilities. The sun slanting through a barn window, landed in a burst

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Leed Englesman's Jeep is a lone work horse.

Photos by Bill Lovejoy

Math prof

DEAR ANN LANDERS: As a professor of mathematics at Georgetown University, I would like to comment on your column on gambling. It is a mathematical fact that there is no possibility of winning when the odds are in favor of the house.

In simple roulette, if you bet a dollar on red, you will win a dollar about 48 percent of the time and will lose a dollar about 52 percent of the time because of the two greens.

Suppose you decide to bet one dollar at a time on red, until you have lost \$50 or have won \$50. You will lose your \$50 over 98 percent of the time, and win \$50 less than 2 percent of the time. While this is a simplified form of gambling, the same principle applies to more exotic systems: That is, the more you gamble the more you will lose.

You will make on the average over 1200 bets before you lose your \$50. Therefore, if you view your losses as entertainment expenses, you may feel it is worth it. I personally do not find that throwing my money away is entertaining.

Walk on the Wilder side

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of gold on hay piled inside a stall. Woodwork inside the barn is ornate; its brilliant, Victorian style paint job is barely distinguishable. Every detail of the construction shows quality, from cedar sidings on a house to the original, sturdily built dairy building.

"It was once a gorgeous farm that now needs attention," said Mathews. "It is genuinely frustrating."

RESTORATION of the Wilder Ranch will happen, said state park ranger Chic Gordon whose family has resided 11 years in the ranch's Victorian-era home. Gordon oversees the property.

During Saturday's open house, he said, the state's plans for the ranch lands will be outlined for people to study.

The first step is planned for Sept. 1 when the Gordon family will move into a recent vintage home in the compound and restoration will start on the Victorian house. Next, the bunkhouse will be restored. And a campground is to be developed up the coast at Four-Mile Beach.

"The focus I'm interested in is the cultural preserve (the ranch buildings)," said Gordon. "As soon as the Victorian house is restored, it will be open to the public." Then, he continued, other buildings will be restored and opened. A visitor center and parking lot will be constructed at the top of the rise where the road leads to the cultural preserve.

"It is based on money available, but they are planned and unless something terrible goes on, it will proceed one step and then on to the next."

But the wheels of government grind slowly. Will the Pelton Water Wheel rust before it's restored? "Priorities change, but we don't anticipate this happening," said Gordon.

He doesn't blame people for having negative feelings, he added. "It has taken a long time and not much has been done except by the people who live there (on the ranch)."

What can an interested person do? "Talk to (state Assemblyman Sam) Farr and (state Senator Henry) Mello, and the spokesmen in Sacramento along with our director, so the projects don't get penciled out."

Gordon takes a broader look at the restoration. "Most of my life, I have lived in historical places, and almost every place I live has meaning for me. The non-developing part hasn't hurt me at all. It has given me time to familiarize myself with the 5,000 acres. As this develops, it will open this area to more and more people as they discover what a grand thing we have our there, and there will be less protest."

Time-lines seem leisurely on long range state projects. Although the restoration will start Sept. 1, said Gordon, "realistically it will finish 50 years down the road. The campground will probably be in by 1988 instead of '87, and there will be additional campsites and trails, all done in phases."

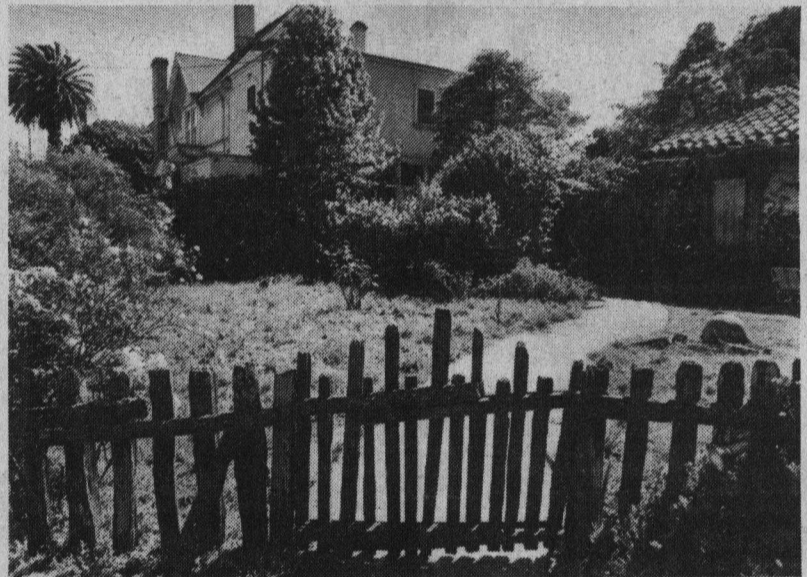
Those plans, he said, will be discussed Saturday during the open house.

SALE OF the Wilder Ranch to the state in 1974 came only after years of struggle between developers and open-space preservationists.

Not that others hadn't had an eye on that beguiling property. It has been used for farming; Brussels sprouts grow well there. Englesman breeds quarterhorses there. Its dairy products were the finest. The boundaries include a sand quarry, still owned by the Wilders.

There has been talk of protecting the ocean area as an underwater marine park. Someone once hoped to build an airport on the property. Someone else, a golf course. Fred Philbrick fruitlessly spent 30 years drilling for oil, but the best he came up with, recalled Wilder, was a lot of water and some gas.

In 1969, inflated taxes forced the Wilder family to sell most of its land to Moroto Investment Co. Ltd. (and partners), a Canadian land investment company, for \$4.5 million. Ex-



Wilder adobe, right, is one of the county's oldest.

'I am very disappointed in the lack of maintenance ... it's practically falling apart in appearance.'

— DeLoss Wilder

tensive building — 10,000 dwellings — was to take place, and a village developed around the cultural preserve. But environmentalists raised a powerful cry, and the land wound up in the hands of the state, with holding swelling over the years to 4,500 acres.

DeLoss Wilder, son of the engineer, Melvin, is saddened so far by the fate of his family's historic buildings.

"I am very disappointed in the lack of maintenance ... it's practically falling apart in appearance," he said. "We kept it up. Of course, there was my son, myself, Led and a gardener. Always four of us to keep it the way we wanted it. Now there's only Led ..."

His hopes were that the compound would become the state's dairy mu-

seum, as once discussed. But a few years ago the museum was included with the state agricultural museum in Fresno. "It would have been quite an asset. The property is beautiful."

He mused further. "Regrets? I've grown past that. I was pretty bitter at first ... that barn, and that old house ... my roots were there. I hated to move. But now we have a nice house in town.

"We realize," he added, "that the best thing happened that could happen ... the way things happened."

An advocacy group, the Friends of Wilder Ranch, has formed under auspices of Santa Cruz Historical Society, to pique legislators' interest in the renovation. Anyone interested in joining the effort may phone Jim Franks at 423-3481.