

# Transplanted mountaineer sends gifts to furry friends

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IT'S THAT time of year when the holiday mail brings the usual greetings from old friends and enemies — but sometimes it brings a surprise. Just such a surprise arrived a day or two ago: A heavy, compact, securely wrapped and taped package that came from San Francisco and cost an arm and a leg to send.

It was from an old Santa Cruz Mountain dweller who now lives in San Francisco but looks back with affection and nostalgia on his boyhood years in the redwood country.

Arthur Borland grew up in Santa Cruz County before going up to "The City" to become a city cop. He probably wouldn't use that term and it does sound a bit disrespectful.

He went to the little one-room school and lit the candles on many a Christmas tree during his school years in the mountains. He learned to swim in the old hotel pool (a novelty at the time), he rode horses on the trails and sampled the "rotten egg water" from the mineral spring nearby.

Today, Art is long retired, but in his day cops were policemen, they wore immaculate dark blue uniforms and were looked upon with great respect by law-abiders as well as the crooks.

Whenever my grandmother wanted to consult her "eye doctor" in San Francisco she usually got escorted across Market Street by Art or his brother. I can see it now — Art holding back the impatient traffic with one upraised white gloved hand while he escorted the little old lady through the pitfalls of streetcar tracks and honking autos. The whole of Market Street had to stop and wait for "Aunt Maggie." (No relative, but an affectionate term always used.)

Anyhow, along with the box from Art Borland, the mail brought a letter. In it, he explained that he wouldn't be making his usual annual trip to the Santa Cruz Mountains this year to provide a Christmas feast for his "furred and feathered friends." Instead, he was sending a box which I was to distribute.

"I want you to act as my agent," he wrote. "You being newspaper people probably are used to being targets of oddballs and kooks. But I do not consider my request to be in that category ..."

I opened the box:  
— seed for small birds,  
— sunflower seeds for the chipmunks,  
— walnuts for the squirrels,  
— carrots for the rabbits,  
— hard-boiled eggs for the raccoons!

"If the postal authorities wouldn't object, I'd send a bale of hay for the doe who lives in the upper pasture and has twins every year," he wrote.

Instead, he sent a check for a bale of hay and worried that it might not be enough. He isn't conversant with hay prices these days, being trapped in San Francisco where he has no need for hay.

He wrote: "Why I remember when I went with my father 80 years ago in the spring wagon for a load of hay at the old Thompson ranch in Scotts Valley..." (It was later owned by the Frapwells who had a dairy there.)

"Also, 70 years ago my brother and I went for hay at the Clausinius place with your grandfather's horses..." (All this happened before I was born.)

## A glance at history

He ended his letter with "I promised to be concise but it has turned into an old man's nostalgia binge..." And then: "P.S. My E.S.P. tells me there's an old doe in the upper pasture and her hair is all matted from hunching down in the wet leaves while escaping the wintry blasts. Her twin fawns will be born in February..."

Note: Art Borland's "furred and feathered friends" are having their Christmas feast.

Art's letter and package brought back a fond memory of the last "candle tree" at the little one-room schoolhouse up here in the hills before it closed to join the big schools down in the valley.



Holiday mail to the Santa Cruz Mountains in the late 1800s brought handmade Christmas cards. At left is a watercolor picturing a country cottage. The accompanying greeting was 'Merry Christmas, 1889.'

It was no doubt strictly against all the insurance rules and regulations, but no one thought of that. Or cared.

The tree was usually a Douglas fir, long known as the "traditional Christmas tree" of California. But sometimes it was a redwood, although the redwood's branches dropped perilously under the slightest weight. It was usually donated by a neighbor who had a stand of wild growing trees. And it was looked upon with awe and a slight degree of worship by the students who nailed cross-pieces of wood together to serve as a stand.

After the tree was up, the decoration process began and went on for several days with kids' gluey fingers and paint-stained clothes giving ample evidence that they were hard at work. No tinsel or glass ornaments in those days, but plenty of popcorn and cranberries to string, and a flock of colored paper ornaments and cornucopias filled with little hard candies.

Sometimes walnut shells were glued together and painted gold or silver. The final step was the placing of tiny candles in clip-on holders — tin holders — on every branch. The fully decorated tree was a magnificent sight indeed and every kid in the school felt that he or she had played a personal and important part in the final result.

On the evening of the Christmas play — there was always a play along with individual acts of songs and poems — the candles were lit and the whole tree shimmered and flickered like an alive thing.

On the more practical side, the teacher had taken the biggest boy (also the most trust-worthy one) aside and told him to glue his eyes to the candles. When one burned too low he blew it out and removed it before it could catch the tree on fire. It always worked — year after year. Maybe Saint Nick was watching over them too.

Memories like this stay with a person, even when he's far away, living in a big city where the neon dazzles his eyes every night of the year.

But — there's something about those mountain memories, something that won't let go, even when that person reaches his 80s or older. Like Arthur Borland, they never forget.



Callista Martin taught these mountain students 70 years ago. The little Borland boys wore knickers, the older ones appeared in suits.