

More About The Wilder Ranch

By MARGARET KOCH
Sentinel Staff Writer

There's an ancient adobe . . . a wisteria vine as big as a tree . . . an old ranch house, a Victorian house . . . a horse barn, a blacksmith shop.

Sound like a village out of the past?

That's almost what it is. It is Wilder Ranch, "up the coast," just four miles beyond the Santa Cruz City limit. It was developed — all except the adobe building — over a period of 101 years, by the Wilder family, a family interested in preserving and using the land wisely, which they did.

The family owned the ranch from 1871 to 1968, although ranch history goes back to the days of Mission Santa Cruz and Mexican Land Grants. Wilder Ranch was part of Rancho Refugio, a 12,000-acre grant made to Joaquin Castro which passed to his three daughters, Maria, Jacinta and Candida.

The adobe is said to have been the home of Candida and her husband, Jose Bolcoff, and the Wilders believe it was built as a dowry or wedding gift for Candida. Dates of construction vary — with 1781 being a pretty good guess.

The rancho was divided up and portions were sold to

Moses Meder and Joseph Majors. In 1871 Levi Baldwin and Deloss D. Wilder acquired part of Meder's land and Major's portion, a total of more than 4000 acres. In 1885 Baldwin and Wilder dissolved their partnership and divided the land. On his share of 2,330 acres, Wilder developed a dairy ranch, creating his own "village" as he did so. The old adobe served as the hub for the wheel of ranch buildings, including the family home.

At one time, 350 cows were milked there and a ton of butter was produced in one day, most of it going to San Francisco, and much to the old Palace Hotel. At the same time Wilder ran three milk routes in Santa Cruz.

A progressive dairyman, he was the first in California to install a cream separator on his ranch.

Deloss D. Wilder died in 1906 leaving the ranch to two sons, Deloss and Melvin. Melvin was a graduate electrical engineer but he took over management of the dairy ranch, installing modern electrical equipment. He also worked with radio as a hobby and his ham station was known all over the world.

In 1945 Melvin died and his son Deloss R. Wilder took over management of the ranch. Times were changing

and by 1937 the dairy was out and beef cattle had been installed on the pastures. Other portions were planted to various crops.

The ranch also bred fine quarter horses for riding and roping and acquired a young foreman by name of Led Engelsman. Led recalls that the wisteria was "only as big as my thumb when I came to the ranch."

"We were very proud of our blood lines," Led said concerning the quarter horses.

Led has been on the ranch ever since 1929 except for "three years, six months and 11 days" when he was in the U.S. Air Force during World War II. He counted every day — that is obvious — almost every minute, until he could get back to his job on the ranch, the horses and the Wilders.

"They have given me a wonderful life here," he says.

Although the ranch has been sold, Led is still there and will be as long as it's there, he says. A champion roper, he won the 1946 championship of the Rodeo Association of America, and wears a silver belt buckle trophy. In 1958 the Wilder Ranch produced a Grand Champion gelding, a beautiful animal.

Led tells the story of the two pepper trees, and it is

fascinating. Mrs. Melv Wilder (Letitia Anderson) planted the two pepper trees when she came to the ranch as a bride in the mid-1890s. They thrived. She loved her formal gardens and planned and planted until it was a real showplace.

In 1955 Mrs. Wilder died suddenly. The first pepper tree also died; it just withered and quit living. Then in 1968 when the ranch was sold, the second pepper tree died. Interesting coincidences.

Led is interested in all phases and aspects of the ranch history — even the pre-civilization period. He found an Indian burial site once when the bones were accidentally uncovered. They proved to be bones of a woman — he calls her "Abigail"; she was buried with a periwinkle necklace about her neck, in the fetal position, facing West, he says.

Much of the ranch machinery was hitched up to water power provided by a dam on Wilder Creek. Wood was cut for the many stoves and fireplaces with a saw run by water power; churns, coolers, a lathe, planer, bench saw, grindstone and lights in the cow barn, all were operated by water power. Mel Wilder had electricity in his house before anyone else "up

the coast." A water wheel operated the generator. Most of the old machinery still works and Led likes to run the wood saw to demonstrate its efficiency.

Over the years, as the adobe started to melt under the pressures of age and weather, the Wilders had it repaired and preserved. Two concrete buttresses and a partial concrete wall support it. It's an interesting adobe, built the way the original Mission Santa Cruz adobe was constructed, with "chalk rock" foundation stones in the walls, under the adobe bricks. The roof is tiled.

Five generations of the Wilder family lived and worked on the ranch, using the land in a productive way, but not allowing abuse of it or depletion of the wild life. But taxes started to rise . . . and rise . . . and rise.

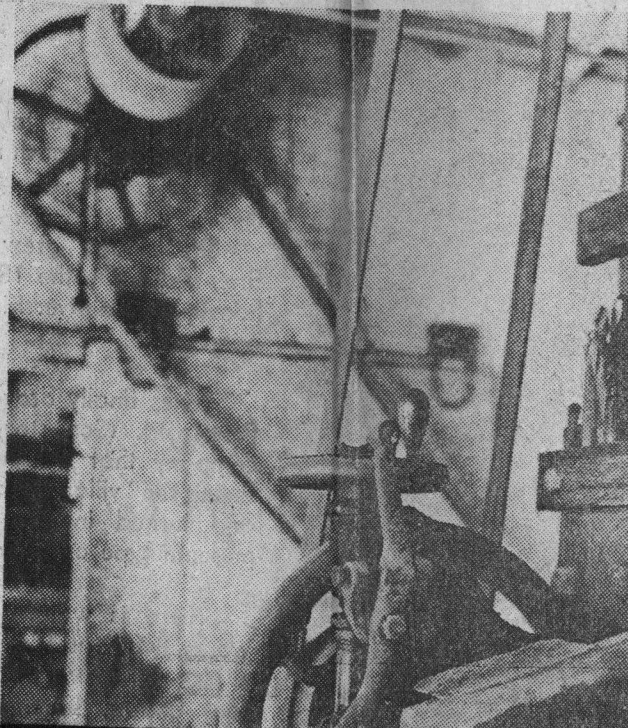
The day came when the family could no longer realize enough revenue from the ranch operations to cover all costs of taxes and living. That was a sad day for all of them, Led said.

It's a story that is being acted and re-acted today all over California and in Santa Cruz County.

They sold. And cut roots that went back almost a hundred years.



Abigail's skull, left, from Costanoan Indian burial on ranch.



Clothing Contributions Asked for School Children

Welfare mothers are asking the community to contribute good used clothing to help

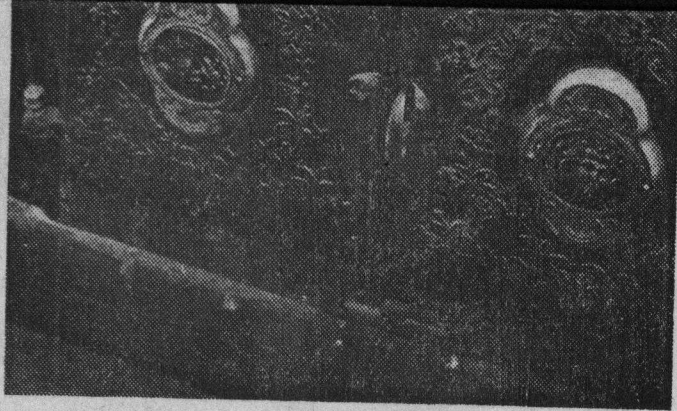
outfit their school children.

Pat Stotts, organizer of the plan, says it is very difficult for mothers on welfare to afford more than food and housing. "School children can't concentrate and learn readily if they are feeling inferior because of their clothing," according to Mrs. Stotts.

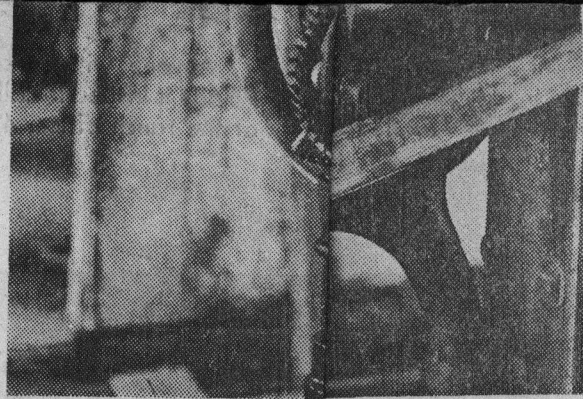
Drop-off points, in Santa Cruz are the YWCA, Walnut at Chestnut St., 2450 Mattison Lane (south of the freeway), and 208 Escalona. In Aptos clothes may be left at 231

Open House For Aptos Pre-School

St. Andrew's Pre-School of Aptos will have an open house on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 9:30 a.m. to noon at the school located at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church on Monroe Extension, Aptos.



Water-powered machinery, right, still works, saws wood. In early days it lit ranch and cow barn.



St. Andrew's is a parent cooperative, non-denominational pre-school for children from ages 2 years 6 months to 5 years 9 months. Jan Wagner and Karen Baird are the teachers.

For the first time St. Andrew's will have an afternoon session with classes on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 1 to 3:30 p.m. Morning classes have been filled. To register for the afternoon sessions call Dycie Velasquez at 688-1618.