

Family traditions continue At historic McCrary ranch

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TRADITION GOES BACK a long, long way for the Lud McCrary family of Davenport — their ranch has been in the family for 115 years.

And, at Christmastime, tradition grows stronger than ever.

Reaching into the community, the family has for a number of years observed the tradition of preparing 100 apple pies to be served at the annual Grey Bears Christmas dinner.

This year, the dinner will be Christmas Eve at the Civic Auditorium, and a day or two before, Lud and his wife, Barbara, their daughter and son-in-law, Susan and Butch Huff and other daughters, Ellen and Janet, will fill most of their moments with peeling and mixing and rolling dough and baking those pies.

Some of the apple peelings will be a treat for the McCrary's horses — horses which figure so strongly in the family's trail-ride activities.

One of the family customs each Christmas is to ride out on their ranch, scout out the nicest Christmas tree they can find and tie it onto one of the horses for delivery back to the ranch house.

Another custom has been to find their own version of a yule "log" — in their case, one of the huge manzanita roots to be found out on the shale ridges of their property.

The root burns slow and hot, with a Christmasy crackle and pop that the McCrarys thoroughly enjoy.

Lud McCrary has almost reverent feelings about the land for which he and his brother, Bud, are responsible.

The two brothers are owners of Big Creek Lumber Co. and they and their families, along with their mother, Agnes McCrary, have lived on the ranch all their lives.

For his part, Lud says, "I don't think of the ownership part of it. I feel I have a responsibility to care for it while I'm here. When you have a succession of generations on the same property you feel more like caretakers."

The ranch, which originally was 160 acres, now includes several thousand acres. There are cattle, and the forests, with ongoing reforestation, provide some of the lumber for the family company.

Sitting by a blazing fire in their comfortable, much-lived-in living room, Lud and Barbara talk about the ranch and their way of life.

The family and the land came together in the mid-1800s.

Joshua Grinnell, Lud's maternal great-grandfather, sailed his whaling ship from his home port of New Bedford, Mass., out to Monterey Bay. Here, he met his friend, Captain John Davenport.

Grinnell sailed home again — only to return. Within a few years, he purchased the original 160 acres. Family lore has it that Joshua, while scratching around for gold in Gold Gulch, over by Felton, found a nugget big enough to have made into a brooch for his wife. Grinnell was his wife's second husband — she had been left a widow with children, and Grinnell became their new father.

Lud's other maternal great-grandfather, John Staub, came to this area from the midwest.

He and his wife and five children settled the Staub ranch, about half a mile from the Grinnell property. John's wife died — and he sent for another — who came from Switzerland, sight unseen, to be his new bride.

John and his second wife had five more children, one of whom was Lud's grandmother.

Here's how the two families got together:

Lud and Bud's father, Frank McCrary, was raised in Alaska, where his father had gone during the gold rush. In the 1920s, Frank traveled to the Davenport area to visit his brother, who was working there at the time. When Frank got off the train in Swanton, he met Vid Trumbo, one of Mrs. Grinnell's children by her first marriage. He was at the station, waiting for the daily newspaper. Vid gave Frank directions to find his uncle, and, as they walked along, they passed the Grinnell place where Frank saw Agnes Trumbo, Vid's daughter, working in the garden on their ranch.

As Lud says, she "took his eye" and they were later married.

Thus, ultimately, the ranch took on the McCrary name.

Lud and Barbara met on the ranch, as well. Their first date was a horseback ride on the property, and Barbara says Lud picked out a "spooky" horse for her to ride — to test her horsemanship.

She passed the test.

Her own roots go a long way back in this area.

Barbara's father, John Harlamoff, was a Russian immigrant who settled in Soquel. He and a partner bought a chicken farm out on Glen Haven Rd. Wanting to learn more English, he decided to associate with more people by attending the Congregational Church of Soquel.

There, he met his future wife.

On Christmas Day, Lud and Barbara and their families will join Mr. and Mrs. Harlamoff and their son, Eugene Harlamoff and his family for a traditional holiday dinner.

Christmas Eve, all the McCrarys and their children have a get-together around the tree.

In relating the family history, Lud sums it up this way: "Our families were caught up in the westward migration. And this is as far as we can go."

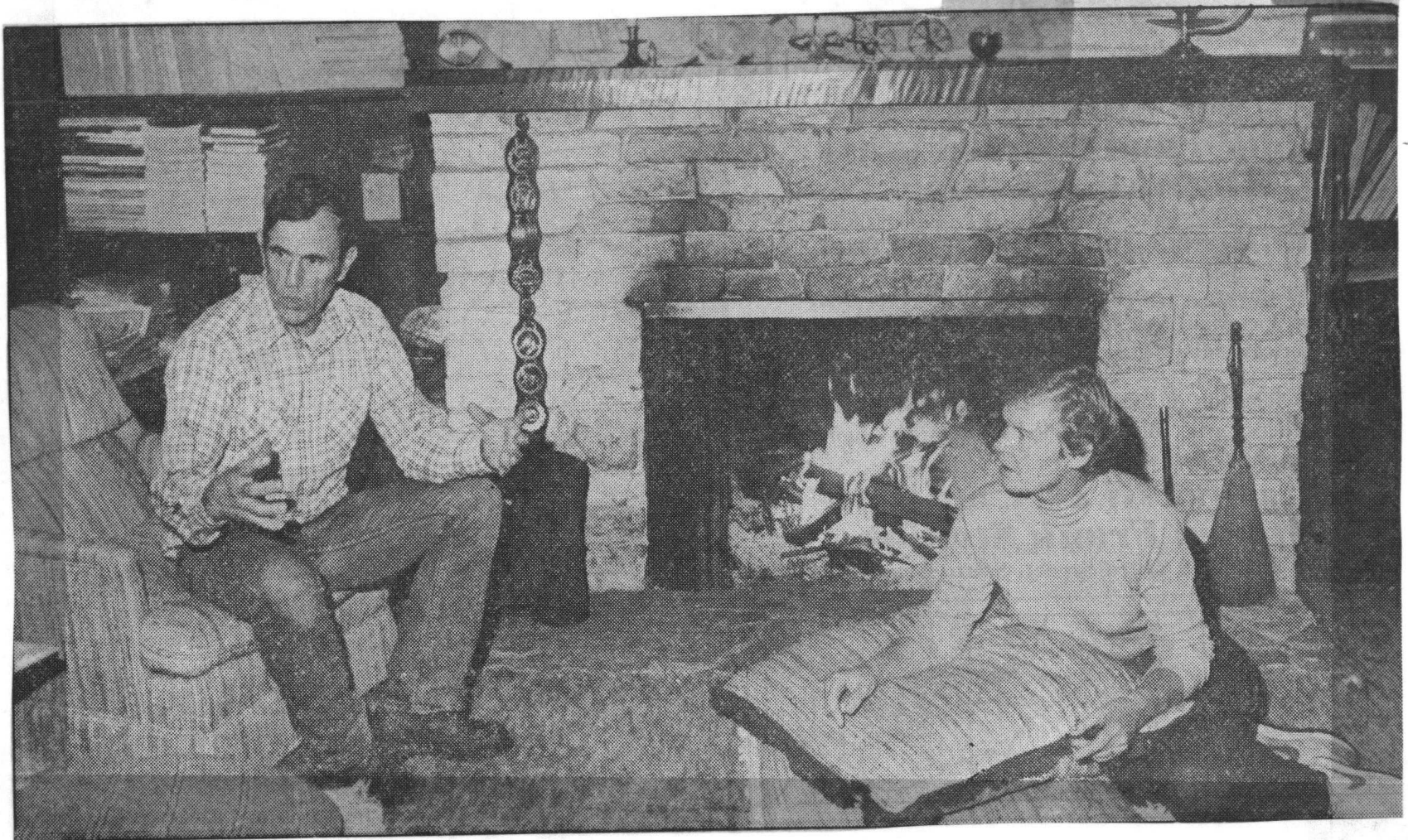


Lud and his wife, Barbara, and two of their horses bring home their Christmas tree, cut on the property. Barbara rides Courage, while Rufus carries the tree.

and, below, so do her parents, Lud and Barbara McCrary.



Janet McCrary relaxes by the fire —



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Lud McCrary, center, and his daughter and son-in-law, Susan and Butch Huff, peel apples for the family's annual pie bake. Below, Barbara McCrary finds her food processor a help in slicing the pie apples.

