The following excerpts relate to a conversation Earl had with long time resident Adrian Green. They talked about Ben Harris and his tall tales.

During our visit on his patio two years ago, Adrian recalled Ben Harris, the biggest liar in the canyon. “I may be one of the few living ones who have met Ben Harris in person,” noted Adrian when he related these stories. “One of the last times, Ben camped out just below where our cabin had been, down by the river...my brother and I—he was about twelve and I was ten, we heard about Ben being there so we went down and there he was, under those old greasy tarps, had his mules and horses there and so he came out and talked to us. I don’t know how he did, but he told us two classic lies.”

The wild oats were as tall as the oak trees!

The two tall tales Adrian remembered were oft-repeated classics in Ben Harris’ repertoire. The first one Adrian remembered was the time Ben took a short cut across the mountains and encountered a deep canyon. There was no way to ride down the cliff so he backed up his horse, Rosie, then ran her at the declivity at a fast gallop. With a mighty leap Rosie flew from the edge, but half way across Ben said he knew they weren’t going to make it so he wheeled Rosie around and jumped back to the same side.

Ben also told the boys the yarn about deer hunting with a friend out of Mineral King. Ben left camp early in the morning to find a nice buck. He hunted uphill four miles through brush for four hours, then spied a big buck asleep in the thicket. Using his tracking skills, he crept up close, grabbed its antlers for a swift kill, but the buck jumped up and bounded down the mountain with Ben on its back. Ben held on like a bronc buster and steered the buck with its antlers. He hollered to his friend, “Get ready, I’m bringing one in alive!” Ben ran the deer right through camp, threw one leg up out of the way and his friend shot the deer through the heart.

Ben Harris (1850-1934) moved with his foster family, the Hambrights, from Texas to Farmersville, California in 1853. The Hambrights moved to Dry Creek and so did Ben. The Hambrights and the Joe Homers were related by marriage so Ben had many foster relatives, including Paul Hunke of the central telephone exchange in Lemon Cove. It was said Ben earned money trapping gophers for the citrus farmers. He worked for a big lumber company on the Kings River for a while. Ben lived his summers in Mineral King where he did a little prospecting, worked as a packer and guide and hauled cargo in his wagon. Ben drove his wagon and team to the pioneer dinners.

My dad told about the time he invited Ben to speak at the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce. He said the hardest part was getting Ben cleaned up enough to be presentable. Ben told some stories, one about growing a fine field of corn on the Kern River (an impossible place to grow corn). He had just picked several sacks of big ripe ears when a mother bear emerged with her two cubs. The bear sat on Ben while her cubs shucked and ate every ear of that corn right in front of him.

Everyone knew Ben’s wagon and his horses, Rosie and Rodeo. He had a dog named Bigger because it was bigger than his other dog. As mentioned, and everyone knew, Ben was allergic to soap and water. When Ben was urged (or forced) to clean up a bit, he did it with Bigger’s help. Ben would smear bear grease on his face, hair and hands and then stretch out under a tree. Bigger loved bear grease and when Ben woke from his nap, he was cleaner than ever with a neat part in his hair.

Ben had a story for everything. Someone was talking about good feed years and years of drought. Ben said, well, the best he’d ever heard was when the wild oats were as high as the oak trees, but they lost a lot of cattle that year because they’d get lost in the grass and couldn’t get out to find water. Then another place, a bunch of cattle were grazing in oats over their heads and a big wind storm came, knocked over the grass and smothered them.

I’d ride with some old timers, like Ed Linnell, on Greasy and they knew all the Ben Harris stories. They said Ben was over in Kern River one time on a pack trip. In the morning, he couldn’t find the horses. After a week, he was still searching, didn’t have any food with him to amount to anything and was getting desperate. He knew if you find a stream and follow it you’ll eventually get civilization. So Ben followed the creek down out of the pines. All at once, he had this urge to go number two, very strange because he hadn’t eaten for days and days.

Continued on page 3
Editor's Corner
with Tom Marshall

Let's see what we can √ off our to-do list!

* √ Finishing touches on the Mineral King Room are done by the Mineral King Preservation Society. Signage on the front of the building completed and the room was opened in January.

* √ Restoration of the Bequette House with some work to complete in the bathroom. Floors re-finished. Some pieces of the original furniture and antiques have been placed inside.

* The Barn project is by far the largest project the Society has taken on with a lot of planning and discussions taking place so far in the areas of design concepts, location and cost. We should know this spring how our grant requests are going and when we will be able to break ground.

Last summer we contacted the CA State Water Board to clarify a few questions regarding our water system to be used with the Barn project. We found out that the CA State Water Board has taken over all testing and classification processing of community water systems throughout Tulare County. So, after a few months of testing and lots of discussions we have been classified as a ‘community water system’ and are required to have regular testing of our system. I need to point out here that we were not singled out for this process as all public usage systems within California are going through the same process including all public water usage locations within Tulare County.

* We have a few artifacts donated by the Seaborn estate and have placed a wood carving of a mountain lion by Frank Treuting and a bronze sculpture of an eagle in flight by Lidabelle Wylie inside the museum. Outside in the front entrance area we are placing a 700+ lbs. sculpture of ‘Rocky’ the Raccoon holding a Crayfish, also carved by Frank Treuting.

* The back porch area of the museum building is our current ‘small project’. Relocating some items to make room for a few large artifacts coming from the Mineral King area which will be part of the Mineral King Room and the Mineral King Preservation Society. A partition will be put up to dress up the area from our ‘back porch.’

* The Kaweah Post Office model is being relocated to the front door area in place of the wood carving of the pack train which is going to the back with the Mineral King display.

* The Bequette House is an important part of our museum complex and a great deal of the history, including furniture, came from Rachel Caggiano and her sister Joan Thomsen. Joan passed away on Jan 12 and certainly will be missed. Here’s Joan on the right during the house grand opening in May 2017. The family has asked that in lieu of flowers, donations be made in Joan’s name to the Three Rivers Historical Society. Joan recently sent us a few poems that here mother wrote (Edith Perry, Jessie Bequette’s sister).

You will find one of them on page 3.

On Monday Jan 22 we finally were able to place “Rocky Raccoon” at the museum entrance.

The carving was done by Frank Treuting about 40 years ago and was part of the Peg Seaborn, Wells Ranch on the South Fork. Peg Seaborn moved to Bend, Oregon. Peg passed away last year and the estate donated several items to the museum including Rocky.

Become a Museum Docent

Are you or someone you know interested in the Three Rivers Museum’s collections, exhibits and events?

Do you enjoy learning and working with the public?

Are you seeking a rewarding volunteer experience?

Consider becoming a docent at the Three Rivers Museum.

An expert on local history or the National Parks is not required… just an interest in learning and a high level of enthusiasm.

New docent training will begin soon.

The program requires a weekly commitment of a 4 hour shift or a buddy system to alternate weeks and will run year round.

Call or email today so we can get in touch with you.

history@3rmuseum.org

559-561-2707

Stop by and visit with one of our docents

Carol Berryhill
Daryl & Julie Bruns
Deborah Condon
Louise Jackson
Rachel Katz
Shivon Lavely
Tom & Dody Marshall
Bill Miller
Nadine Steel
Christy Tomi
Susan Wolff

And You?

A short story about “the” Giant Sequoia

For 11 years Dody and I ran The Reservation Center in Three Rivers. Booking rooms for tourists from all over the world.

A history making booking was for a family from Tokyo, Japan. They wanted to see the ‘Giant Sequoia.’ A few days before their arrival the father called to cancel their trip. I asked why? And he said the tree fell so there is no reason to come. I assured him that a recent tree falling was only one tree in the forest. He still cancelled because “the tree fell.”
Ben Harris, continued from page 1

Finally, he just couldn't walk any further so he went up under an oak tree, dug out a little hole, pulled down his britches, squatted and waited a little bit. Then he felt the weirdest sensation pulse through his body. Ben said he looked around and beheld the strangest thing—"my system was so starved my puckin' string had turned wrong side out and was picking up acorns!"

The talk was about the heaviest rains they'd ever seen. Ben said he had an oak barrel at his camp in Mineral King that needed to be aired out—it had gotten sour. He unplugged the bunghole on the side, drained it and left it open in the sun for several weeks to dry. A storm arose, it got darker and darker, lightning split the black clouds, thunder cracked, and the whole sky fell at once. It came down so hard that before he could get to it, rain had pounded through the bunghole and knocked out both ends of that barrel!

Once Ben tried to make some money raising hogs up on Cherokee Flat. His herd was multiplying and doing very well until one terrible wet winter. The ground was so saturated the hogs sank into the sticky mud and it began to ball up on their tails. As the mud balls got bigger, the weight pulled their tails down and forced their eyes to stay open. They all died from lack of sleep.

Getting to the Sulphur Springs School was exciting
*Excerpts from an article about the Savage Apple Ranch from an article in the Fresno Bee, written by Virginia Williams Feb 25, 1968*

School days in the old days of Three Rivers were so much different that youngsters today would not be permitted to travel to school the way they did 50 years ago.

Most grown men would shudder at the thought of walking narrow swinging bridge over a swift river, but that is the way children on the North Fork used to get to school, and they thought nothing of it.

In the old days, North Fork youngsters had to walk a good two and a half miles and cross two rivers to get to the one-room Sulphur Springs School over on the east side of the Middle Fork. It would be considered a hair-raising adventure today. The bridge over the North Fork was only 12 inches wide. It was made of 11x12’s and hung from half inch cable by n i n e gauge galvanized wires fastened to 2x4 cleats. The bridge was suspended from a tree on each bank and dipped down close to the water in the center. There were no handrails and the kids could only hang onto the cable near the middle where it came down close enough for them to reach.

The bridge across the Middle Fork was "a real dinger." It was old and patched and a mere 10 inches wide.

Even the little tiny kids crossed on them and no one thought anything of it.

That school burned, was re-built and burned again. A third Sulphur Springs School was built near the present airport.

The Sulphur Springs youngsters had a reputation as being "a bunch of big bullies who will throw you out the window." Many of the boys were as big as men and were used to doing a man's work.

Discipline was a problem and a teacher seldom lasted long.

A new teacher was always the victim of pranks. "One favorite was for one of the boys to do something to divert that teacher's attention while the rest dived out the windows Another was to solemnly explain to the teacher if the wind stared to blow, that they had to get home because it was going to storm and school would be dismissed.

The rest of the article will be in the next newsletter………..

**Destiny Extraordinaire**
by Edith Perry

The honey drizzles from my spoon
I'm thinking of a day in June
As butter on my biscuit melts
I'm wondering how the flower felt.

A daisy with a golden heart,
Watched a bee around her dart.
Here I stand, my feet in sand
With just a bee at my command.

The bee around her gaily flew
Gathering nectar mixed with dew
She knew not that, the marauding bee
Could take her heart across the sea.

**Visalia Electric Railroad**
by Louise Jackson

The new edition of this popular book is now available in the museum gift shop along with our large selection of local author's books, all signed of course. These and all kinds of gift ideas are available.

AND don't forget most of our gift shop items are on line at https://squareup.com/store/3rmuseum
Established - December 1991
Museum Opened -October 2000
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Did you know that the Museum Gift Shop has over 75 titles from Local authors Historical Reference Stories for adults Stories for children In addition to all types of gifts, souvenirs and photography Most are also available at www.3rmuseum.org

2018 Museum Events

JAZZAFFAIR 2017
April 13-14-15
Jazz Memorabilia On Display At Museum

LIONS TEAM ROPING
April 20-27-28-29
Roping & Western Displays At The Museum Programs & Photos From Years Passed

REDBUD FESTIVAL
May 13-14
Arts & Crafts Show At Memorial Building

SENIOR LEAGUE YARD SALE
May 19, 9am - 3pm
At Memorial Building

HOT DOG FESTIVAL
July 14 - 10am to 4pm
At The Museum

NATIVE-AMERICAN DAYS
September 25-26-27
Public Welcome To Observe

Drive Thru Dinner Night
October 6, 3pm - 6pm
At The Museum

LIVING HISTORY DAY
Date To Be Announced
At The Museum

COMMUNITY CAROLING
December 1, 5pm-7pm
At The Museum