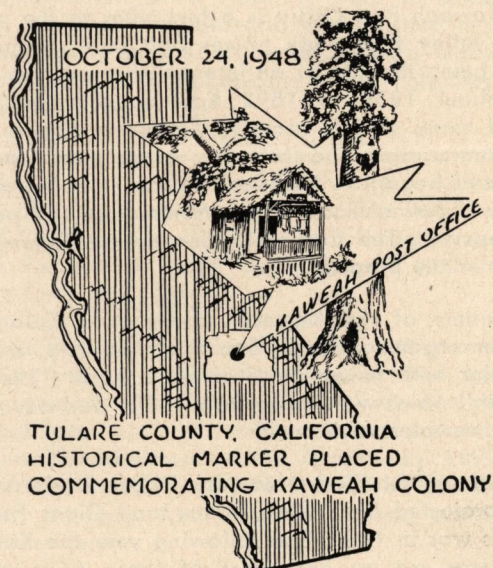


CALIFORNIA CENTENNIALS COMMISSION

TULARE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



DEDICATION OF HISTORICAL MARKER AT KAWEAH POST OFFICE OCTOBER 24, 1948

Registration of Colony Members, descendants, friends.

Welcome to Kaweah John L. Spence, Postmaster

Greetings from California Centennials Commission
..... Joseph R. Knowland, Chairman

What Local History Means to us
..... Roscoe L. Patterson, Supervisor, Third District, Tulare County

The Kaweah Cooperative Colony
..... Guy Hopping, Retired Ranger Sequoia National Park

The Kaweah Post Office
..... Mrs. Ida Mayer, Retired Kaweah Postmistress

Informal Discussion

Dedication of Marker
..... Harold G. Schutt, President, Tulare County Historical Society

The cut on this page is a reproduction of the cachet placed on mail posted at Kaweah on this day. It was designed by Carroll Barnes of Three Rivers. Requests for the cachet have been received from collectors in all parts of the country.

STORY OF KAWEAH

Just before one enters Sequoia National Park there is a sign saying that Kaweah Post Office is a few miles to the north. Located in a narrow valley filled with homes and small farms, it gives no indication of being the site of an interesting experiment in colonization. From about 1886 to 1892 Kaweah attracted international attention and many settlers came to California hoping for a utopia that did not materialize. The little post office marks the area where the Colony land began. A historical marker is being placed by the Tulare County Historical Society to commemorate this period of California development. The California Centennials Commission is also taking a part in the program.

The founders of the Kaweah Cooperative Colony had been active in labor organizations in San Francisco and apparently had become familiar with Lawrence Gronlund's book "The Cooperative Commonwealth" which was published in 1884 and advocated a plan such as was attempted at Kaweah.

The group at first filed claims for timber lands and organized a pool and projected the Tulare Valley and Giant Forest Railroad Company. This was in 1885. The following year the Kaweah Colony organization was set up and most of those filing timber claims assigned them to the Colony.

The philosophy of Kaweah was socialist and the intent was that participants should enjoy benefits based on the labor that they contributed. A system of time-checks served as currency. It was intended that there should be many fields of endeavor but the greatest effort was put into building a road to the timberlands so that a mill could be operated. This work started October 6, 1886 and continued for several years.

A newspaper was established and probably had one of the best shops in the county. The Kaweah "Commonwealth" was well printed and had a wide circulation. In addition to news it was, of course, a propaganda organ.

Memberships in the Colony cost \$500.00. \$100.00 must be paid in cash and the rest in installments or in goods or might be contributed in labor. There were many non-resident members, especially in the East, and some in Europe. Funds from these members were a big factor in keeping the colony going. Total membership was not over 500. Actual residents including families of members in the various settlements of Kaweah probably did not exceed 300. There was some farming, stock raising and similar projects but apparently not sufficient was produced to provide for the needs of the colonists—the road to the mountains was most important.

Troubles arose almost at once. The U. S. Land Commissioner withdrew from entry the timber lands filed upon because he was

suspicious of the fact that several applicants gave the same San Francisco address and some were aliens. This might have been cleared up but the publicity given the project was great enough to arouse interest in the formation of a National Park to preserve the "Big Trees." About the time that the road was finished in 1890 and the mill started operation on a small scale, Sequoia National Park was formed by Congress and any possibility of the Colonists securing their timber claims was past.

For many years efforts were made to have the Government compensate the Colonists for the road which was probably worth at least \$125,000.00, but without success. The road, with an extension from the "Old Colony Mill" to Giant Forest, was the only one into the Park for vehicles until the "Generals Highway" was constructed about forty years later.

There were internal troubles too. It is not necessary to detail them, but petty jealousy, poor bookkeeping and general lack of discipline contributed to the gradual break-up of the Colony. Unsympathetic publicity, much of it unfounded, may have been a factor in the complete abandonment of the Colony. By 1892 most of the settlers had moved away, largely to the nearby San Joaquin Valley which was just changing from a grain growing prairie to irrigated orchards and vineyards.

The principal leaders of the Colony were Burnette G. Haskell and J. J. Martin. Haskell was an attorney "of some eloquence and imagination" and also had had some experience in the magazine publishing business. He edited the "Kaweah Commonwealth." Martin was secretary of the Colony and for years after its dissolution endeavored to secure compensation for the road and was an ardent advocate of the Kaweah philosophy. Probably others deserve mention but because of their official positions Haskell and Martin appear most frequently in the records.

Most of the literature about Kaweah—there isn't very much—seems to be written from a prejudiced point of view. Probably the best in a master's thesis by Ruth Ronnie Krands at the University of California (Berkeley, 1942) but it has not been published. Ira Cross, "History of the Labor Movement in California" discusses the part played in San Francisco by some of the founders of Kaweah. Wm. Carey Jones wrote a short contemporary account of Kaweah for the Quarterly Journal of Economics, Volume IV, 1892. Ansel F. Hall, in his "Guide to Giant Forest" (1921) has a few paragraphs, written by George Stewart, about Kaweah. Kathleen Small, "History of Tulare County," covers the subject briefly and in a general way. Carey McWilliams, in "Factories in the Field" (1939) compares the Kaweah Colony with the big land empires in California. Most of the rest is source material such as official reports, newspaper references, etc. The papers of the Secretary of the Colony, J. J. Martin, are in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, along with a file of the Kaweah publications.

KAWEAH POST OFFICE

The first post office used by the colonists was called "Advance" and was located at the settlement of that name about five or six miles up the North Fork of the Kaweah River from the present post office. In 1890 the office was moved to the Taylor ranch ("Apple House") and the name changed to Kaweah Post Office. There were several minor moves until the picturesque building now used was built in 1910.



A number of Kaweah and Three Rivers people have made contributions toward publishing this program. The Society thanks them sincerely.

ARCHIE McDOWALL

Kaweah

BARTLETTS DAIRY

Kaweah

RAYMOND BISCONER

Bar B Bar—Kaweah and Tulare

Greetings from the Postmaster

Kaweah

CARROLL BARNES

Sculptor

Three Rivers

RIVER WAY RANCH

John F. and Sue Hoyt Van Leuven

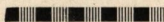
Three Rivers

SEQUOIA CIDER MILL

Three Rivers

THREE RIVERS WOMEN'S CLUB

Three Rivers



If you are interested in collecting cachets, send stamped envelope for list. '49er Cachets, P. O. Box 928, Lindsay, California.



The Tulare County Historical Society invites those interested in local history to apply for membership. Dues are One Dollar per fiscal year. Please apply to Miss Annie R. Mitchell, Secretary, 701 Watson Avenue, Visalia, California.