

leave nothing to his own children. It was Margaret Whipple, her father's sister, who talked Chester into leaving his money to Shirley. He wrote his will to provide enough for his wife Ida, but the remainder of his estate would go to Shirley. Chester died April 8, 1947. At first Shirley refused to accept the inheritance, because she wanted to prove that she could support herself, but she was eventually convinced by others to do so. The inheritance enabled her to buy a twenty-year old Pasadena duplex, with a large backyard properly zoned for the operation of her nursery school. She could now live alone and be less dependent on her parents.

A couple of years after Shirley moved into her duplex in 1951, her father's construction business relocated to Fullerton and her parents moved in order to avoid a long commute. They assured her that she would always be welcome to live with them, but this was obviously what Shirley was trying most assiduously to avoid. Her parents must have known that she was going to have a hard time maintaining her home, but her self-confidence was bolstered as she began selling her novels to publishers and stories to various magazines and newspaper syndicates.

Shirley rented one half of her duplex at 532 North Molino Avenue (Shirley's half was 530) to Ruth E. Allen, employed as a typist at the Pasadena Public Library. Shirley and Ruth became fast friends and Ruth gave her much practical advice, such as the following:

You will be an emotional cripple unless you accept your handicap and stop recoiling from stares, mirrors and the word *cripple*. Remember the old saw, "It's not what happens to you that matters, it's what you do about it."³

Shirley wrote that she gradually began to adjust to her limitations and to control her temper, which she finally realized was just as damaging to her as her physical handicaps. And gradually she became more independent and more competent.

One theme that ran throughout Shirley's entire life was the importance of mobility. Obstacles to independent mobility severely limited the things Shirley wished to do, and all her life she struggled to overcome her physical limitations, utilizing a variety of means. Shirley used various kinds of

automobiles, three-wheeled bicycles, motorized scooters, or deck chairs with casters. All of these aids to mobility acquired such a practical and symbolic significance that many photographs of Shirley (as an adult) show her in some sort of vehicle. Friends reminisced about Shirley's adventures and misadventures in these vehicles. They sometimes characterized their passenger role as being along for "wild rides."

When Shirley first left home she was only semi-independent. It was apparent that she needed transportation as well as income. Although she would have liked to have had an automobile, that was precluded by her physical limitations and her finances. The first vehicle she settled on was a battery-powered golf cart, which would get her around Pasadena. At first, there were arguments with her parents, especially her mother, probably because they feared for her safety. With the golf cart Shirley was no longer dependent on others for transportation. She enjoyed the freedom of movement, which she had long cherished. It was an important milestone in her life. The golf cart also extended the range of her baby-sitting jobs and Christmas card sales, important sources of income for her. Like all her later vehicles, the little green electric car had a name, now forgotten.

During the 1950s Shirley went back and forth between Yosemite's Foresta enclave, where she spent her summers, and Pasadena, where she spent the rest of the year. She had deep roots in Pasadena, and became active in the local Sierra Club. During 1957 and 1958 she wrote the "Pasadena Reports" (sometimes titled "Pasadena Group") column for the *Southern Sierran*, newsletter of the Southern California Chapter of the Sierra Club, written with her usual humor. Shirley wrote enthusiastically about various chapter events. Other members took over the column during the summer months, when Shirley was in Foresta. The July, 1957 column noted Shirley's absence in the first sentence: "Shirley Sargent wasn't there—missed you, Shirley."

THE BANKRUPT BUNKHOUSE

Shirley achieved a measure of success in her plan to live alone in Foresta during summers. Eventually she was able to buy two lots and finance the building of a cabin of her own, with the aid of a loan from her parents. Her father, her brother-in-law, Gary Davies, and her cousin, Paul Schoeller, helped build the two-storey 18 by 24 foot cabin. It was less than 200 feet from the Gundersons' cabin, and her water came from their well. Shirley dubbed her new house "The Bankrupt Bunkhouse." The bestowing of this name appears to be another instance of Shirley's well-known sense of humor. She seems to have owned her Pasadena duplex outright, so the proceeds from its sale should have been enough for her to acquire the cabin. It was probably the fact that her income was still meager, that she still worried about her finances, that led her to choose this name. But Shirley was never close to declaring bankruptcy, and managed her finances so well that she was solvent to the very end, largely by means of hard work, frugality, and good financial management.

The Bankrupt Bunkhouse had a boardwalk (known as the "Redwood Highway") to the garage, wood storage area, and the outhouse. The latter, known locally as the "chick sale,"⁹ was a two seater, built to accommodate small children who were in a big hurry. There were always many children around. Although the cabin had plumbing, it was rarely used, except during the winter months. Shirley preferred to use, and wanted the guests to use, the outhouse. The cabin, indeed most Foresta cabins suffered from a perpetual water shortage. The use of the outhouse conserved water and allowed Shirley to save money by not having to have the septic tank serviced so often.

Shirley enjoyed her freedom and independence, was self-confident and strong, and was determined not to return to Pasadena and submit once again to parental control. Her mother was adamantly opposed to her moving away for good, and Shirley was just as adamantly determined to do so. And so by 1961 she closed the Topsy Turvy Nursery School and moved permanently into the Bankrupt Bunkhouse.

Shirley was ecstatic about her new situation. She delighted in the beauty of the area, the accessibility to Yosemite Valley, the friends and neighbors, the swimming hole at Cascade Beach, and all the social

activities centering around the Bankrupt Bunkhouse, like picnics, songfests, barbecues, and campfires. She resumed a productive work schedule, periodically relieved by conviviality and fun. As she became better acquainted with her surroundings, she began to head in the direction of historical writing.

Shirley never lacked for company or for people who could help her. She would meet people at various places and events, and invite them to her home in Yosemite, often developing a family-like relationship with them. If she liked someone, she would do anything for them, and they in turn, would do the same.

Shirley's parents visited her on weekends and regularly provided needed goods and services, and generally cleaned up the Bankrupt Bunkhouse. Shirley was an inveterate host, on one occasion hosting forty-five overnight guests at her home!

It was not until they were eight or ten years of age that her nieces began visiting Foresta without their parents. They would travel with their grandparents, but would not stay together. The eldest, Kathy would stay with Shirley, Nancy would usually stay in the grandparents' cabin and Susan, the youngest, would usually remain at home in Arcadia, where Rosalie ran a preschool. When the girls were young the adults never seemed to want more than one girl at the same house at the same time, whether at Shirley's or at the grandparents'. Later on the three nieces would spend a considerable amount of time at Flying Spur.

As a child, Kathy seems to have been the liveliest of Shirley's three nieces. She is perhaps the niece most like Shirley, sharing much the same interests, and also having a strong personality that sometimes led to friction between them. Kathy also liked to explore mines with her grandfather or go hiking or exploring roads with Shirley. Nancy also enjoyed hiking with her grandfather and shared an interest in birds with him. All three nieces loved their time with Shirley, especially backpacking to the High Sierra Camps from Tuolumne Meadows.

Brother-in-law Gary's father was a social climber, focused on his own life, who desired to make money. Fortunately, Bob Sargent became like a second father to Gary. He did things with him like taking him hiking, which Gary discovered he liked. The fact that both men were engineers probably contributed to their compatibility. Gary was always helpful with

FLYING SPUR: THE EARLY YEARS, 1964-1969

ROBERT AND ALICE SARGENT MOVE TO MARIPOSA

Not long after Robert Sargent retired in 1961 he and Alice moved from Fullerton to Riverbank, a suburb of Modesto, presumably to be closer to Shirley. Later they moved to Mariposa, on property acquired from prominent Mariposa County Superior Court Judge Thomas Coakley. The Sargents had been longtime friends of the Coakley family. In 1962 Shirley helped sponsor a bridge party to raise campaign funds for him. On another occasion she was honored at an autograph party at his home for her *Mother Lode Narratives*. The Sargents and the Coakleys were also very much involved together in the Mariposa Museum and History Center. Actually, the museum had been the place where they met and became friends.

Judge Coakley owned hundreds of acres of land in Mariposa. Bob and Alice decided to purchase a lot from him across the street from the John C. Fremont Hospital. In 1968 they built the house in which Shirley was to spend her final days. Alice thought that some day she would have to care for Shirley, and it would be a good idea to be close to the hospital. At that time the location, at 5204 Hospital Road, was actually out of town. There was very little development nearby, just the hospital and a few nearby houses on Smith Road. Alice became active in the hospital auxiliary. As it turned out, Alice spent her final years in the Ewing Wing, the well-regarded nursing care facility at the hospital, and it was Shirley who would go across the street to visit her mother.

SHIRLEY DISCOVERS FLYING SPUR

When Shirley moved into the Bankrupt Bunkhouse over the 1961 Memorial Day weekend, she thought she had made a permanent move, but three years later made one more move, this time to Flying Spur. This was the most famous and most

beloved of her residences, and where she was to live for more than three decades.

It is difficult to overemphasize the historical, practical, symbolic, and emotional importance of Flying Spur to Shirley Sargent. This land parcel, a mile from the inholding of Foresta, is in Stanislaus National Forest, just outside Yosemite National Park. Jutting out over the Merced River Canyon and looking out over Big Meadow below, this homestead seemed to Theodore Solomons, its first resident, to be flying out in space. By the time Shirley first visited the ruins of the place, Solomons' achievements as explorer and planner of what later was to become the John Muir Trail, were almost completely forgotten.

Shirley became greatly intrigued by the life of Solomons, and by the place which was to become inextricably linked to these two illustrious owners for all time. When she first viewed the site of Solomons' cabin, she had no idea of its fascinating history. One of Shirley's most treasured memories dated back to June, 1953, when her father gave her an old acetylene lamp that he had found among the burned-out ruins of a cabin near Foresta. Always the romantic, she was intrigued by this relic and motivated to visit the site. She drove down the road as far as possible, where it was blocked by thickets of manzanita and small pines, and crawled the rest of the way, where she found the ruins of a fireplace and chimney.

Later, local cattle rancher Horace Meyer told her the place had belonged at one time to a writer named Solomons. Upon further investigation, Shirley found out that the owner, Theodore Solomons, had been the first to photograph the Tuolumne Canyon, and the summits of Mounts Ritter and Banner. He also discovered and named the peaks around Evolution Basin. However, his major mountaineering achievement had been to travel, survey, and map most of the route that later was to become the John Muir Trail—the route from Yosemite to Kings Canyon. Although old issues of the *Sierra Club*

two canyons and even rose above clouds that could fill them, Theodore named the place Flying Spur. He had explored and named far more magnificent places, but Flying Spur was to become a heart-holding home and haven for him, and eventually for four generations of the author's family.²

Theodore spent much effort overcoming bureaucratic obstacles but finally obtained his homestead, and began to build. By the spring of 1913 the house was unfinished inside, but was habitable. However, it was not until the early 1920s that he began to spend summers there with his children, who were enchanted with the whole place.

On September 12, 1936 the house burned down in a 3,000-acre forest fire that also destroyed part of the McCauley ranch. Solomons first learned about it from a postcard sent by Fred McCauley. Neither the Park Service or the Forest Service had tried to notify Solomons of the fire. Shirley describes its aftermath:

Photographs taken a year later revealed that the chimney, bathtub, toilet, parts of the wood stove, and the rock foundation were all that remained of the house. Nothing but ashes were left of his paintings, books, files, and other lares and penates.³

Amazingly a number of sky-reaching pines, but not the oaks or cedars, had survived relatively unscathed. That was scant comfort to Theodore. The ten- to fifteen-foot-wide firebreak they had maintained for years would have been only a slight deterrent. Fire insurance had been prohibitive for so remote and hazardous area . . . Age, emotion, and finances precluded any thoughts of rebuilding. The Berkeley fire [September 17, 1923] had destroyed most of Theodore's personal treasures, but that house had been a rental, not a home he had designed and built in surpassingly beautiful surroundings, not a place of refuge and love for over a quarter of a century . . . Theodore made only two more trips to Yosemite, both in 1940. He never mentioned visiting Flying Spur, but his son Leon felt sure he must have driven out to see the ruins.⁴

SHIRLEY MOVES TO FLYING SPUR

Shirley's father and Henry Gunderson, his former supervisor at the Bureau of Public Roads, who had retained a love for Yosemite in retirement, jointly bought the 21-acre Flying Spur property from Solomons' widow in 1961. Henry took a third of the property, Shirley's parents took a third and deeded the remaining third to Shirley. There was also 1/3 of an acre with a spring that was common property. Solomons' children visited Shirley and showed her things they recalled from their childhood, and later their grandchildren visited the property. Shirley was able to get the original plans for Solomons' cabin from them, and tried to follow them when she had her own cabin built. It turned out to be a much larger residence than the small, primitive Bankrupt Bunkhouse.

In June, 1962, while her permanent house was being built, Shirley put three boys aged eleven, fifteen, and sixteen to work on a log cabin at Flying Spur. They followed the instructions in a "How to Build a Log Cabin" book. Shirley gave a detailed description of the building process in her *Christian Science Monitor* article "Would You Like to Build a Log Cabin?" She also reported the work in her *Foresta* column of June 28, 1962:

"Daniel Boone" Sargent and young "pioneers" Tim Smith, Eric Stone, and Kit Killian are cutting and peeling trees for a 10 by 12 lot cabin on the old Solomons Ranch outside the Park. Besides working and eating, the boys play horseshoes, scrabble, and listen to Kit's banjo.

Shirley dubbed the original log cabin down the hill with its adjoining meadow "Walden No-Pond." When the cabin was finished and furnished she was able to lived in it part time and wage a "daily battle" again with her typewriter.

Shirley's parents built a unique V-shaped cabin nearby in 1967 and Henry Gunderson built his cabin in 1971. Henry liked to buy old dilapidated or abandoned cabins which the Park Service sold at auction from time to time, which he disassembled and took to Flying Spur, thereby leaving piles of doors, windows and scrap lumber all over the place.

Two carpenters from the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. worked weekends for six months, then two weeks during their summer vacation building Shirley's house around the remains of Solomons' chimney. One of the carpenters, Bob Lake (personal communication) recounts an incident that took place during the building:

Shirley was much more active than most people were aware of. I was on the ridge of the roof nailing on roofing and I heard a noise behind me. Shirley had climbed the ladder, moved across the roof, and up to where I was. She said, "Boy, you can see all over from up here!"

Shirley moved in permanently in July, 1964. Unavoidably there were complications in her new residence. Although her father did not want Shirley to live alone in Flying Spur, he knew she needed a way to communicate with others. To his chagrin, he had trouble having a phone line installed. He told the telephone company he had a disabled daughter and if she had trouble because of unavailability of a phone, they would face a big lawsuit. The phone was installed two days later.

DAILY LIFE

After twelve summers and three winters in less remote Foresta before moving into her home at Flying Spur, Shirley had learned to adjust to survival in this sometimes harsh environment. At Flying Spur she might be snowbound for weeks at a time during the winter, or isolated when rain or snow made the roads impassable. Also, power failures were frequent during storms, making it impossible for her to work on her electric typewriter, and it was too hard for her to go back to typing on the manual typewriter she kept for emergencies.

When Shirley first started living at Flying Spur, she was lonely sometimes, but in time came to appreciate the solitude and the opportunity to spend more time reading. She had a telephone, which she answered "Hello, Flying Spur!" unless it was snowing, in which case she said, "Hello, flying snow!" The telephone was a boon to business partner Hank Johnston, who lived three miles across the canyon (but thirty miles by road). Hank was too

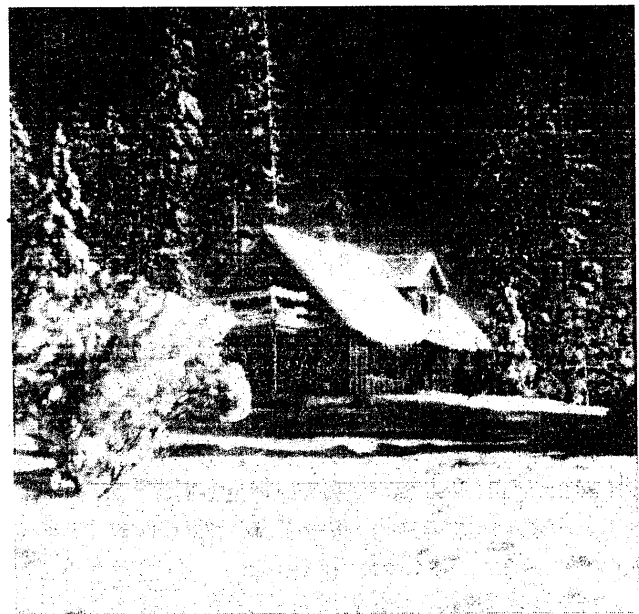
remote from telephone lines, and communicated with Shirley via CB radio. Hank's moniker was "Incline" and Shirley's "Three Wheeler."

The solitude of Flying Spur allowed Shirley to write without interruption. At first, there were no nearby neighbors, and it would be a few years until her parents and the Gundersons built their cabins. Here again she followed her usual fairly rigid, but productive routine, writing daily until 2:00 p. m., after which time visitors were welcome.

Weather and road conditions permitting, friends would come year around. Some would cut a cedar sapling on Shirley's land for a Christmas tree in her living room. For many years, a fire in the fireplace, dinner among friends, the cabin warm and cheerful with the lights of the newly decorated Christmas tree, initiated the holiday spirit for many friends. (Mary Vocolka, personal communication). By 1966 Shirley had spent six winters in Yosemite.

Under the rigorous living conditions at Flying Spur, Shirley's faithful adherence to her exercise program kept her mobile. Indeed, she exercised daily from her thirties on through her sixties. Of course the specific exercises changed over time. Shirley would exercise upon arising and at varying intervals throughout the day.

About twice a year, Shirley would drive to Los Angeles to visit Margaret Rood, her physical therapist. Roody checked Shirley's physical status



A Christmas card winter at Flying Spur.
(Kathy Chappell Collection)

6

FLYING SPUR: THE LATER YEARS, 1970-1989



Flying Spur ca. 1970. (Kathy Chappell Collection)

In the 1970s Shirley Sargent was headed toward the pinnacle of her life's work: her books were selling well, she was a well-known writer and sought after, and had enough money and friends to ease her arduous lifestyle. Those years when Shirley's health was better and she was established in Yosemite were undoubtedly her golden years. She was very happy, never really alone. For example, her kind neighbor, Henry Gunderson kept her lifeline open in winter, and was always available in case of emergency.

Around 1974 when her niece Kathy was planning to marry, Shirley wanted to find out if dystonia was genetic, that is, if it could be passed from parent to child. Could Rosalie, for example, somehow pass

her disorder to one of her daughters who would then pass it on to her children? Shirley's friend, Claire Kopp, arranged for her to have a consultation with a geneticist at UCLA. At that time medical geneticists believed that dystonia was caused by a mutation of a recessive gene. What this means is that both parents of the patient "carry" the same mutant recessive gene. (Everybody has recessive genes—think of brown eyed parents who have a blue-eyed child, which could only happen if both parents have the recessive gene for blue eyes.) When at Shirley's request, Claire tried to explain recessive genes to her mother, Alice denied she could be a carrier of a gene mutation. (In fact, most of us have

FLYING SPUR FOREVER, 1990-



There were three homes at Flying Spur before the fire. (Shirley Randolph Collection)

THE ARCH ROCK FIRE AND ITS AFTERMATH

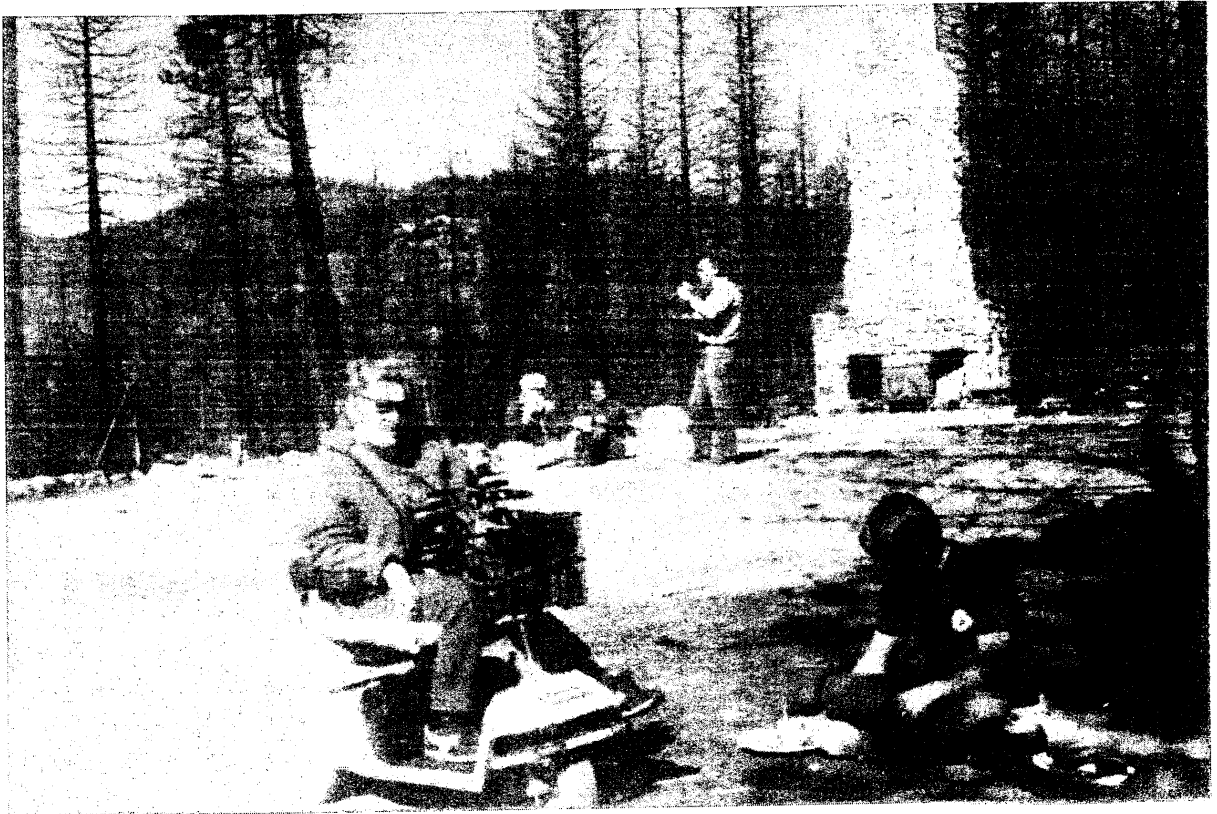
ONSET OF THE FIRE

As the ninth decade of the last century was drawing to a close, one of the greatest tragedies of Shirley Sargent's life struck. This was the Arch Rock fire of 1990. Acutely aware of the fire that had destroyed Theodore Solomons' home in 1936, Shirley had taken great pains to have the brush cleared a good distance around her property. In addition, she had often talked to her neighbors about clearing trees and brush to create fire-safe, defensible areas around their houses. Some listened; others ignored her advice.

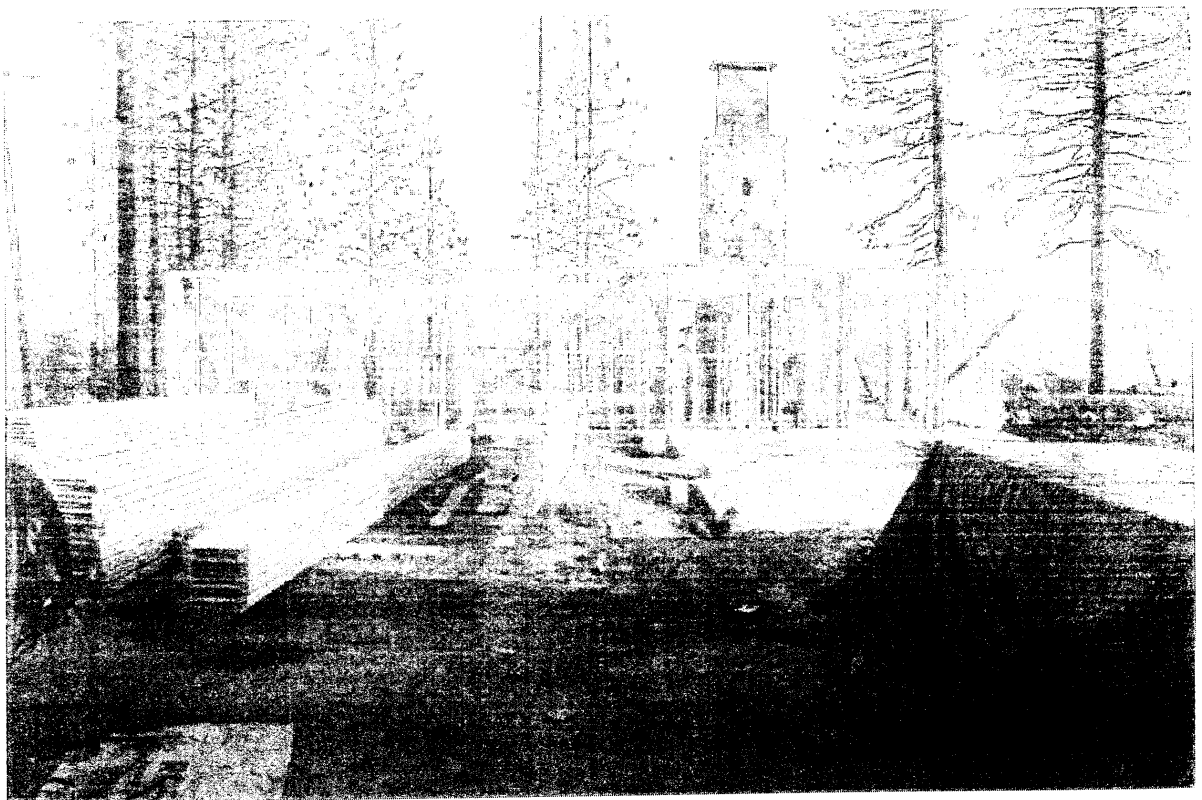
The brush around Foresta had been building up for decades, and some thought the great buildup of

fuel was a disaster waiting to happen. Therefore it is not entirely surprising that when fire came to the area, it was indeed a major disaster. The fire started on Monday, August 7, 1990, when a couple of dozen lightning fires broke out on the western edge of Yosemite National Park. Looking out over the Merced River Canyon, Shirley saw flames and smoke. The next day the flames reached the McCauley Ranch and Big Meadow.

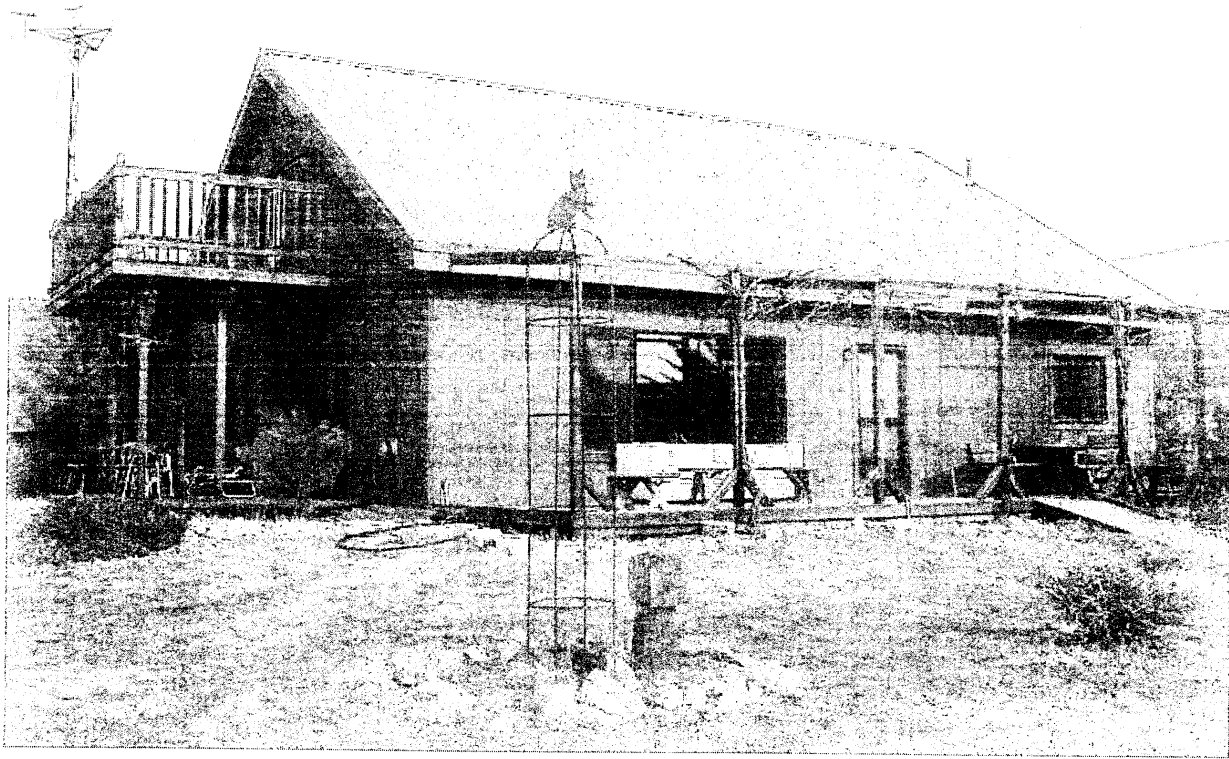
On Tuesday the residents of Foresta were told to evacuate. Shirley decided to stay behind with her housekeeper, Angie Lede. Her niece, Kathy, left the Park on an already planned camping trip with her children. Her husband, Doug, stayed to be sure Shirley and Angie would be all right. He also wanted



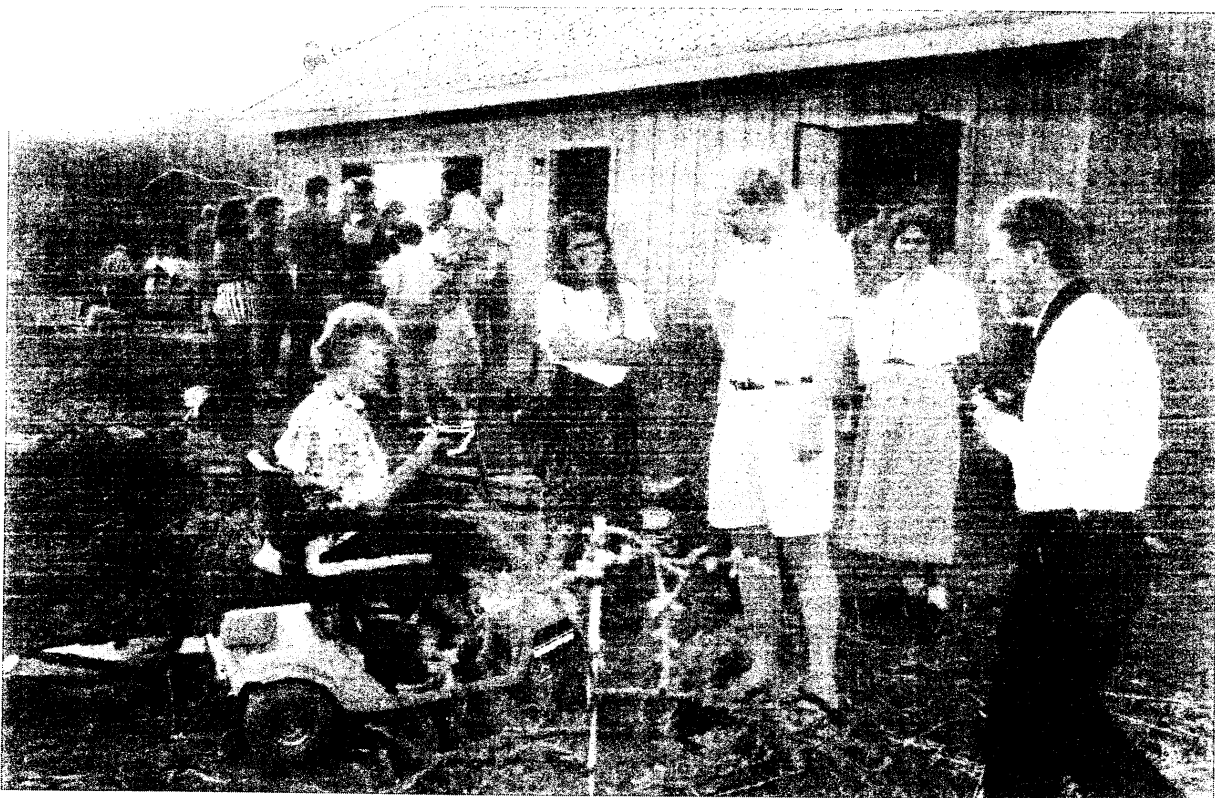
Cleanup has begun at Flying Spur. (Kathy Chappell Collection)



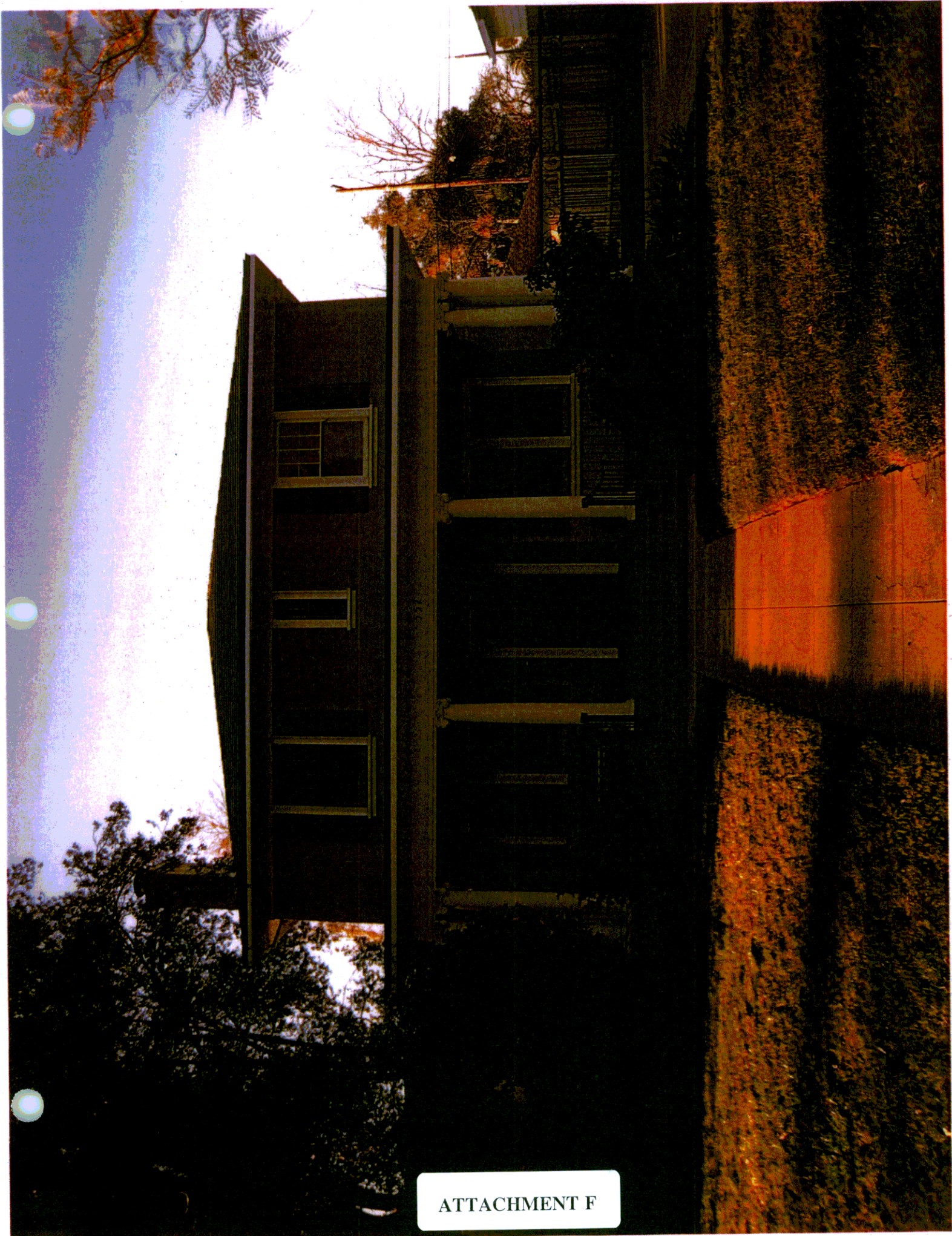
The new house is under way. (Kathy Chappell Collection)



The house is complete. (Paul Hall Collection)



Friends celebrating the homecoming. (Gene Rose Collection)



ATTACHMENT F