



**Little River Museum**  
**8185 North Highway 1**  
**PO Box 273**  
**Little River, CA 95456**  
**Fall 2023**

## HUCKLEBERRIES ALONG THE MENDOCINO COAST



Black Huckleberries

Huckleberries (both local black types and blue types) are an evergreen bush, *Vaccinium ovatum*, and are abundant this time of year. These sweet berries have been eaten for centuries by the native peoples who pre-dated the European settlers arrival in

Little River in the mid-1800s. Naturalist Henry David Thoreau researched early huckleberry usage, and reported that in 1672, John Josselyn also noted the indigenous people in the east were drying “two kinds, black and sky colored, which is more frequent.... The Indians dry them in the sun and sell them to the English by the bushel, who make use of them instead of currence, putting them into puddens, both boyled and baked, and into water gruel.”

Here, along the Pacific Coast, the native peoples also used huckleberries throughout their lives, and helped develop tools for more quickly harvesting this important food source.



Blue Huckleberries

Northwest tribes made special combs of wood or salmon backbones to strip ripe huckleberries and blueberries more easily off the bushes. Later, the early settlers took the indigenous people’s tool idea and created berry combs (pictured lower right) that were sold to aid in harvesting huckleberries for both personal and commercial use. Then as now, the berries were easily found just a few feet outside many resident’s homes.

Commercial huckleberry picking also was an

important agricultural enterprise in the early 1900s in Mendocino County. The Mendocino Beacon reports in 1911 huckleberry growers were receiving 10 cents a pound for their shipped berries. Six years later the Beacon reported that Thomas Garibaldi, A. Moretti, and several others were shipping huckleberries from the Mendocino coast to San Francisco where the berries were in short supply, fetching 12.5-15 cents per pound. Huckleberry gathering is a labor-intensive process, and physically demanding. Picking site locations in the past were prized, as literally tons of berries had to be collected and processed, then delivered to market for commercial production to be feasible. Berries were either commercially canned, usually at some distance, but also shipped to San Francisco and other distant points as fresh wholesale produce. By the early 1930s, huckleberry harvesting was a new forest industry with a diverse market in both coastal and inland Pacific coast areas. It was not a long-lasting endeavor, and by the second World War commercial enterprises had passed into history locally, replaced by artisanal food operations which continue to this day. [Mendocino Beacon, var. years; A Social History of Wild Huckleberry Harvesting in the Pacific Northwest, by Rebecca T. Richards and Susan J. Alexander, 2006]



Huckleberry Comb

*The Museum is open with FREE ADMISSION to the public during the summer on Saturdays & Sundays*

## HISTORY OF THE LITTLE RIVER MUSEUM

Our building was constructed in 1885 by the Independent Order of Good Templars. This organization originated in 1850 in the United States as a fraternal organization for temperance or total abstinence, and used an organizational structure modeled on Freemasonry with similar ritual and regalia. The Good Templars admitted men and women equally. The organization had local lodges which worked to provide social facilities that served non-alcoholic beverages, and promoted education and self-help.

Our museum occupies the former Lodge #332 in a building which was constructed by the community in 1885 on land donated by pioneer Isaiah Stevens. For over 30 years, the Good Templars owned and operated the Lodge for their meetings as well as a community hall used for voting and similar community activities. However, temperance was their goal.



The prohibition movement was widely supported at the time, yet it was not until the U.S. entry into World War I that prohibitionists were able to secure enactment of national legislation to meet their goal. The 18th Amendment to the US Constitution legally prevented the manufacture, sale, and transportation of alcoholic beverages in the United States beginning in 1920.

The local Good Templars, undoubtedly believing their work was completed with the

enactment of Prohibition, passed the building to a community group of local women in 1920.

Improvement Clubs were formed across the nation in communities and were the 1880 term for Community Center. When Prohibition was ended in 1933, the ladies of the Little River Improvement Club continued to use the building for diverse community needs, including weddings, funerals, parties, post office, library, the first telephone switchboard, school house, and polling place. It continues to fulfill its community role now as a non-profit organization maintaining a free public museum to serve Little River and other nearby coastal communities.

## VAN DAMME HISTORICAL MONUMENTS

The historic Van Damme Monuments were located on both sides of Hwy One as the highway entered the north and south sides of the Charles Van Damme property, now Van Damme State Park. In 1933, before Van Damme was a park, the highway was widened and paved, and the Monuments were removed and dumped in the woods. The remnants are still there in multiple pieces, overgrown with brush and vines, with the name Charles Van Damme clearly visible. The original stonemason was Relman Smith who did much of the stone work still present in the park today. The community and the Museum are working together with State Parks to restore part of the monuments to Van Damme Park.



## LITTLE RIVER MUSEUM BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023

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## HOW DID CASPAR GET ITS NAME?

Siegfried Caspar was a German trapper who lived and trapped along a stream later known as Caspar Creek, and was the first European settler in the Caspar area of Mendocino County. He left the area as more settlers arrived in the 1860s, but his offspring remained and farmed the area for years. William H. Kelley and William T. Rundle bought 5,000 acres of forest land in the Caspar Creek basin and founded the Caspar Lumber Company in 1860. The pair built a second sawmill at the mouth of Caspar Creek. The road leading to the Caspar Lumber Company shipping point is shown in this early 1866 albumin stereographic photograph from the Library of Congress collection of Lawrence and Houseworth.



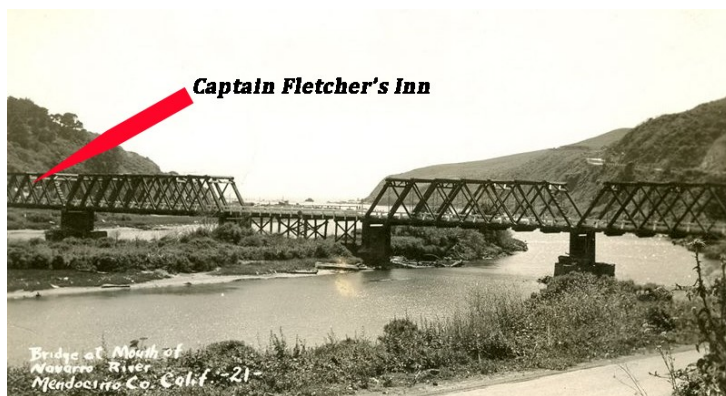
Road leading to the shipping point from Caspar Lumber Mill ca. 1866

## GLIMPSES OF THE PAST: NAVARRO-BY-THE-SEA

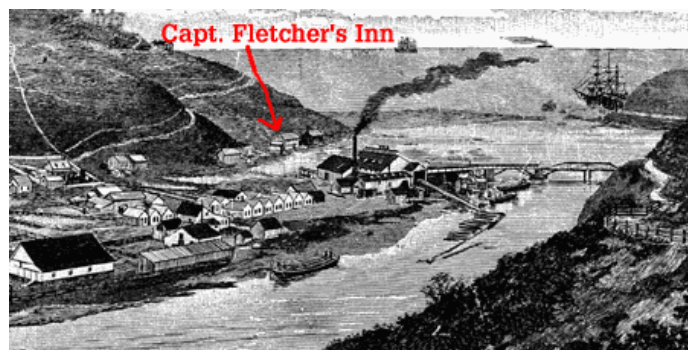
Bridges come and go over the decades, and the current bridge built in 1949 just upstream of the mouth of the Navarro River is shown in the aerial image below. But it is only one of a long line of bridges which have crossed the Navarro River since the pioneers first began to arrive in the 1850s.



Earlier bridges tended to use the small island in the middle of the Navarro River (shown in the aerial photograph above) as a midway point. An earlier 1941 postcard image of the Navarro Bridge, shown in upper right, has an island-based bridge as it looked then. A home built by Captain Fletcher is situated on the south side of the Navarro River, and over the years became a historic road house and inn. Captain Fletcher's Inn can just be detected in



the above image looking southwest from the north side of the Navarro River through the bridgeworks at the point of the red arrow at its location along the south bank of the mouth of the river. An even earlier image of the Inn and mill from around 1870 (image courtesy of Navarro-by-the-Sea-Center.org website) shows the sprawling mill on a wide flat area upstream from Fletcher's home along with a bridge-like structure connecting to the north side of the channel.





## HISTORIC LITTLE RIVER PIER REMNANT EXPOSED IN WINTER



*Little River Pier circa 1880*

Wharf they built extended from the cliff on the north side out 330 feet into the sea, and was one of the few wharves in the area. During its use it was well-maintained, lasting nearly 40 years into the new century. It provided economic benefit to the mill as well as the town as it brought passengers, goods, and freight in and out of the sheltered port. Depicted at left, it had two levels with rail tramways, the upper one for loading and unloading ties and freight, the lower one for lumber directly from the mill, which was located in what is now the entrance area to Van Damme State Park. The port is long gone, but buried beneath the sands of time are the remnants.

The winter season of 2023 was memorable with many road closures from high water, especially during our mid-March storms when roads were flooded or suffered landslides and collapses. The high flows in Little River also cut sharply through gravel deposited on the beach, exposing still intact remnants. In the image at right is what remains of one of the historic piers which served schooners in the 1800s as freight and passengers would land and disembark at Little River bay. Little River mill owners Silas Coombs and Ruel Stickney wanted to augment income, and so in 1872 applied for and were granted permission to build a wharf and collect fees for its use. The Little River



### From Summer Manager, Janet Eklund:

It has been another enjoyable summer season at the Little River Museum. Our Antique Train Exhibit has drawn many visitors to the museum. The 1930's Lionel train was donated to the museum by Stephen Sanor, the Great-Great Grandson of Isaiah Stevens. Isaiah brought his family to Little River from Maine in 1864, and built what is now the SCP Inn (previously Glendeven Inn), and donated the land for our building to the International Order of Good Templars. The Good Templar's Hall (now our Museum) was a community project completed in 30 days, and it is made of 2" thick planks of old growth redwood. The Good Templars gave the building to the women of the community who used it as a library and Improvement Club, the 1880 term for Community Center. The group became a nonprofit organization and continues to own and operate the building today. Isaiah Stevens' daughters, Etta and Rachel, each kept daily life diaries conveying the history of those days. Diary transcriptions are available in our library or you may purchase a copy on a USB drive. Etta Stevens married Wilder Pullen who built their farm house, now Heritage House, just a few miles south of Little River.

### From Executive Director, Ronnie James:

Summer 2023 has been our busiest year yet with visitor numbers up 50%. Our permanent antique train exhibit is expanding with antique train postcards and maps of local narrow gage trains that hauled timber in the 1800s. Young people who came to see the trains also especially enjoyed the hands-on local wildlife exhibit; others enjoyed the donations of 1920s clothing belonging to Elvira DeVries (Kent House) providing us with a Flapper-Girl dress display.

We are open by appointment through winter, when we will be cataloging our antique bottle collection and expanding the train exhibit. We will continue the photo-documentation of the Little River Cemetery and expansion of our genealogy files. Volunteers gratefully accepted—LRIC@mcn.org

The Museum building is a unique architectural structure, not the little cottage it appears to be, and it is also the last building standing in Little River with its full historic integrity intact. Admission is free. You, the community, are our membership, so we include a donation envelope and ask for your support. We look forward to sharing all our exhibits with you when we open again next summer.