

NUGGETS FROM THE PAST
Interview with Mildred DeMaria
By Norman McLeod

On May 5, 1980 someone from the Placer County Historical Society in Auburn interviewed our Mildred DeMaria. The following are choice bits from Mildred's memory centering on Foresthill and its environs:

Before the advent of the Foresthill school bus our students attending Placer High School usually roomed and boarded with residents in Auburn. Some student even boarded and schooled themselves in Sacramento.

The beginnings of our school bus transportation system started in 1930 when Matt Langstaff Sr. placed in service an old white panel truck with no side windows but with an inside bench along each side. In wintertime the truck was unheated so students' parents solved this problem partially by heating bricks on stoves and giving them to their children for use on the bus. The bus left Foresthill at 7:00 a.m. and returned at 5:00 p.m. – in good weather. During winter, when it snowed, the bus usually forced its way as far as Spring Garden where it was met by Caterpillar vehicle (tractor?), that towed it to Foresthill. The students often didn't arrive home until 8 or 9 p.m. The bus normally held about 32 students and each of them paid \$1.00 per round trip. The bus driver Matt used to drive by the old Freeman Hotel where people congregated and would yell out, "Do you want a ride to Foresthill?" In this way people other than students rode up the Divide for a dollar.

In the early part of this century the old Rea Hotel in town was a popular place. It stood directly across from the Forest House on Main Street. Today a vacant lot marks the spot. It was a two-story building with three entrances and a plank porch in front, about five feet above ground. Its main attraction was a springform dance floor. With music playing and the dancers really swinging, the floor's springform took over. In your dance rhythm if you bounced up while everyone else bounced down you truly felt the resulting jolt that some folks said, "rattled one's bones". The hotel burned to the ground about 1932. That left the town without a dance hall. It already was without a funeral parlor. So some town leader suggested that Foresthill have a Community Hall and a dance hall, both in the same building.

Up to this time all funerals were held in the Oddfellows Lodge Hall on the second floor of the Boardwalk building downtown. A steep lengthy flight of stairs climbed to the lodge hall and it was necessary to hand carry heavy caskets up the stairs. In time many funerals were held in private homes. Almost immediately fund raisers started by a group of town leaders (mostly women), raised sufficient money to construct a safe underpinning for a floor with a wood rail around it for dancing.

Later, after much hard work (mostly donated) the Community Hall was finished with its fine dance floor. The girls danced free of charge but it cost the men and boys \$1.00 each. Dancing usually began at 9:00 p.m. with a stop at midnight for refreshments. These dances were supposed to be over at 3:00 a.m. but if the crowd was having a good time, the men would "pass the hat" and collect enough for the band to play on, usually to 5:00 a.m. The dances were not only noted for the good times, but for the local courting as well. In addition to the Saturday night dancing the town offered: card and bingo parties; wrestling matches; roller skating and plays. Mildred says there was something going on all of the time. She thinks the Community Hall was free and clear of debt by 1950. All the above affairs were held in the hall.

Up until 1939 cows ran loose in town just like dogs. Residents had the hooped critters in their yards, so nice lawns didn't remain so for long. During the 1930s the population of Foresthill hovered around 300. Everyone walked in town to their various lodges and parties. We all felt safe on the streets. The last time Mildred walked to her lodge meeting the Deputy Sheriff followed her home. He advised her not to walk along at night. Mildred considered Foresthill a nice place to live, there were no problems. In winter time the grocery store was usually robbed once – that was all. This was the time when most men were out of work and some of them would run short of food.

In those days we looked forward to our Saturday night dances. They had no radios or television. During school's summer vacation the students never worried about what to do with their time. Usually one of the girls who knew how to drive would borrow her father's car and a bunch of her friends would crowd into it and they would drive out to Big Reservoir and swim most of the day.

The Half a House on Soap Street was financed by John and Violetta Lauer. Their son actually built it but that was all they could afford at the time. He intended to finish it but instead, he found a job in Sacramento in the fire department as a fireman.

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