

"In the Parks"

March 18, 2009

Fiddler time is coming, so early one morning after waking up the roosters I thought I would visit an old friend on the hill. On the way, I stopped for a moment to stretch my legs at the quaint gold rush town next to Forbestown Park on New York Flat Road. It was a yahoo old on the way fun stop.

As I started back on my way, the truck was cackling and I thought I would have a foggy mountain breakdown on the winding road as it climbed higher and higher



through the dense Sierra Noble-treed dirt road. When I finally neared the top, I spotted a familiar miner's cabin next to a crippled crik. The sweet sounds of fiddle music filled the air. There be the ol' sweet-and-sourdough Wagon Wheel Bill, playing on his ol' granpappy's fiddle. Wagon Wheel was a grub cook way back a-when. Now he mines his gold claim along the crik with his dogs, Hopsing and Ling Ling.

Wagon Wheel Bill's granpappy was named William. I've seen an old faded photograph of him - he looks a lot like Supervisor Bill Connelly. Wagon Wheel looks like a cross between O-Ville boys Junior Simpson and Gary Alt.

"Howdy do, Shark Boy," he said. "The last time I saw a mouth like yours was when I was a-fishin' in the crik and it had a hook in it. Hee hee," he grinned. "Yahoo!"

I walked up to him to say howdy back, but once Wagon Wheel Bill gets a-goin' there's no stopping him.

"I knew ya'd be here remindin' me 'bout the Old Time Fiddlers Oroville Blossom Special. And I know I can't wait to do some pickin' and a-grinnin'. There ain't nothin' better than camping down by the Feather River in one of them self-contained covered wagons. They be nice and warm! And I love jammin' with sweet ol' Bob Hedrick while he's a-ram roddin' and a-herdin' the fiddlin' jamboree. I said, I said, there ain't nothin' like them ol' fiddler-on-the-rooftop boys, pretty ukulele ladies, and youngins jammin' with their fiddles. You can't beat it. Everybody in that whole dang town'll be goin' up yonder to the ol' Muni barn dance on the hill. You can walk right in and you can set right down."

I stood back. Wagon Wheel was really rolling now. He was so excited about it.

"People'll be bringin' their fiddles and anything they's got. Guitars, jugs, banjos, mandolins, harmonicas, stove pipes. They even be playin' the ham bone. Heck, it's a hootenanny for three long days. Oooh-whee! The grub is pure country comfort by the queen of comfort, Madam Bonnie Lombardi. Lordy, lordy, lordy. Smellin' them vittles while hearin' fiddles - its' so mouthwatering the skillet lickers can lick it up before old Dan Tucker can get out of the way."

At that point Wagon Wheel Bill started to sing, "Ol' Dan Tucker, it's too late to get yer supper. Supper's over and the dishes are a-washed. All that's left is a piece of squash."

“But folks don’t need to be frettin’,” he added. “I hear tell there be wheelbarrows full of them vittles if you get there before the fiddle bow rosin is done used up. Fiddle dee dee. I wouldn’t josh you. It’s going to be a thrill on the hill in O-ville. I ain’t tellin’ no fiddlesticks, no way, no how. Fer those who are feelin’ like they’re walkin’ in the lonesome valley, they should come on up to the barn for sweet gospel singing on Thursday night. Swing low in your sweet chariot to hear some beautiful angels. And if they don’t come, they shouldn’t be a-cryin’ like an ol’ salty coon dog howling about how he lost his scent. You can be sure the devil will be goin’ to Georgia, so don’t be a turkey in the straw or sing the lost train blues.”

At that point I knew what he was going to do, so I said finally, “Let’s go, Wagon Wheel. One, two, three, four – Well look a yonder comin’, comin’ down the track. Well look a yonder comin’, comin’ on down the track. It’s the Oroville Blossom Special bringin’ the fiddlers back. Yahoo! Yeehaw!”

Quote

“The older the fiddler, the sweeter the tune.”
~ Pope Paul VI

“We do not quit playing because we grow old, we grow old because we quit playing.”
~ Oliver Wendell Holmes

Fun Facts

The California State Old Time Fiddlers Association (CSOTFA) was incorporated on June 24, 1969. The organization began as a local “jam” in the 1950s in Butte County. In the early “jam” days, it was a general “country music” affair and encouraged all instruments including accordians and singing. When this informal group became incorporated the emphasis shifted to old time fiddle music. Over the years, 12 Districts have organized throughout the state. In December 1992 the Articles of Incorporation were amended to emphasize the “fiddle” as the purpose of the Association. (from the California State Old Time Fiddlers Association web site, www.fiddle.com/california)



Upcoming Events

March 26-28. **California Old Time Fiddlers’ Open Fiddle and Picking Championships** at the Municipal Auditorium. Events include Old Time Fiddlers Gospel Homecoming, Fiddle & Picking Contest, and Opening Ceremonies. Call Bob Hedrick at 589-4844 or FRRPD at 533-2011 for more info.

April 4. Third annual **Wildflower and Nature Festival**. Booth space is still available! Call FRRPD at 533-2011 for more info.

See you in the parks!