

The History of Wischemann Hall and the Saucy Squares from 1974

By David L. Wischemann

Sometime before 1974, Joe Paul, the club caller, went out to sea on a fishing trip and drowned. The Club, out of grief, went dormant.

At this time I had just moved into the area from Hawaii and was dancing with the Singles and Pairs and still wore my Callers Badge from the Maui Mixers. Leaf and Will Roberts approached me and asked if I would help rebuild the Saucy Squares and call for them. I said yes and away we went.

At the time the club was using the small reception hall at the Methodist Church in Sebastopol. We danced there for about two years. When we could no longer use that facility we arranged to use the dining hall at Analy High School. The facility was quite roomy but many tables and chairs had to be moved out and then back in each evening. On more than one occasion we were notified about half an hour before the dance that we could not use the room as it was needed for a school function.

One evening I was talking to a square dancer from New York, and complaining about our problem. He told me his club had built their own building on Fair Grounds property, thereby not having the expense of buying property. A LIFHT came on so, Bill Marquering, Jerry Batty, Harry Sanders and I began to make inquiries to Mel Davis, the City Manager, about a possible site for a hall. "There is nothing available and he stated, BUT there is a vacant Camp0 Fire Girls hut up on the hill by our water tank. If it is large enough and if the neighbors will not object you could use that." Well it looked terrible from the outside, but inside it was lovely. There was a small kitchen, a beautiful big fireplace in the center, outside was some parking with beautiful trees around.

A public meeting was held with the neighbors and we explained our purpose. Later we were told the response was "NO" and our chins fell to our knees. The City Manager said we could have the building if we wanted it. Another light bulb went on—WAY DOWN at the other end of SOME TUNNEL and I approached the members of our club with the proposal of tearing down a building with no place to build another. So with nothing but blind faith in the GREAT GOD OLAF (The PATRON SAINT of SQUARE DANCERS), we said yes.

The Hut was about 1,000 square feet, built cottage style with redwood walls, vaulted trusses, ceiling and a wood floor. On a very cold day, THE GANG, started at 8 am to work. At noon the ladies of the club brought us a hot meal and by 5pm the building had been completely torn down and removed from the property. Harry Sanders used his horse trailer to move all of the materials to some extra land at his home where he stored it for the club.

ALL OF THE MATERIAL FROM THAT BUILDING IS IN Wischemann Hall. The half door to the office, the doors to the restrooms, the club signs on the West wall, the boards on the ceiling, the bricks around the stove, the seats and benches in the main "Hazel Hall," the trees by the main entrance, and the floor joists and the beams under the floor.

Photos in our archive files document the removal of the building, and the club owes a great deal to the people who participated in that ordeal, because they also continued to work loyally through out the building of the hall.

One day I stopped by to see Mel Davis and asked him again if there was not someplace left over on City property that might be available for a Hall and he said "go see Paul Schock, the City Engineer. We have the old garbage dump you can use if he gives his approval." Within 3 minutes I had a conference with the MAN, and he said IF we could build the floor at 76 ft. above sea level he would OK the structure, and the fire hydrant near our GARBAGE DUMP was 71 ft.

Bill Marquering and I went out with my transit and shot a grade. I said, "GEES Bill, we don't have to make it this tall, the water would NEVER come up this high. Bill just stood back and screamed at me, "Dammit Dave, it is going to be just as HE said." The archive photos show that 2 times the water has come up to just touch the under side of the sub-floor, and I have ridden to the front door of the hall in a row boat. Seams Bill and the City Engineer were right.

We began to raise funds by the sale of aluminum cans, rummage sales, no-interest building bond, and other devious methods. Hazel made a quilt that was raffled off for \$1,600. Singles and Pairs held a benefit Hoedown and gave all the proceeds to our building fund (\$350). The Clubs named on the South wall of the hall all made contributions to our fund.

We started the forms for the foundation in June of 1978, with pick, shovel, and lots of sweat. The ground in that old dumpsite was harder than blazes but did give up TREASURES like parts of discarded toilets, bottles, bathtubs, and other secrets of the past. We used the 2" lumber from the removed Camp Fire Hut for the forms, and had just enough to complete the forms. We had \$450.00 in the construction KITTY, and used every penny to pay for the concrete. This scenario went on thru the whole building of the 36' x 48' dance floor area. This was the first phase. Later we added the dining room and later the kitchen, but by then we had some rental income and were not so hard pressed for money.

We now were ready to start the floor framing,, but no money to do so. Hap Kinney (our lady President at this time) was driving around one day by the old Navy Airport, south of West Santa Rosa, and noticed a large wooden building with all of the roof sheathing removed. She inquired about the ownership and found that it now belonged to the Bilingual Radio Station. The building had been the Navy Dining Room when built and was huge. We had been negotiating for some time with the NEW owners about acquiring the lumber from the rafters for our use, but to no avail. JUST when we needed this material for our floor joists, we received notice that we could have the rafters. They were 2" x 6" x 26' fir, but installed in 1942, so to be sure we could use them I asked the Sebastopol Building Inspector about the use for this lumber and he went to the trouble of going to the airport site and looking at the lumber and found a grade stamp on one of the rafters and OK'D the use of this material.

Bill Marquering rented a 18 wheeler from H.P., and on a Saturday morning about 18 of our men gathered for a DEMOLITION PARTY. These roof trusses were huge, so we young guys cut the trusses off with a chain saw, while others lowered them down to the floor, tore them apart, toted them out to our older experts who removed all of the nails and loaded the material on the monster truck, which was loaded to overflowing. This is all recorded in the photos in the archives. This material was sufficient (when cut up) to frame the floor, the walls and the roof.

The exposed trusses in Hazel Hall had to be engineered, and this was done by Paul Schock. His plan showed the black dteel gusset plates that you observe bolted on to the trusses. Part of this steel plate material came from the steel fireplace insert that was removed from the fireplace in the Camp Fire Hut. I cut and fabricated these GUSSET PLATES at my home after work.

While some of us cut the truss, others drilled the steel plates for the myriad of bold holes, and that was hard work (Saturday after Saturday) but at last we were ready to raise them. I had figured a GIN POLE with a block and tackle owned by our member Ken Lundquist, and we

actually raised one this way, but that was mighty scary. While discussing THIS subject at Square Dancing the following Tuesday, Jim Jones, one of our newest members came forth to offer his company crane to raise the balance of the trusses. The following Saturday he came, we raised, praised him from the bottom of our hearts and never saw the gentleman again.

At this time we were not able to use the High School, so we held the first dance at the Hall, under the stars, with the trusses open to the sky, a beautiful warm September evening, with power for the lights supplied from a small abandoned city building that was on our (now) parking lot. Joining us for this NOW auspicious occasion were 4,000,000 BUGS of all varieties, shapes and sizes. (photos in the archives)

We then started the RACE toward winter with sufficient funds available through the sale of bonds to complete the roof framing and roofing just as the first rain came in November. We, I recalled them the FAITHFUL, worked every Saturday, every holiday and some Sundays all winter. Harold Herrin, one of our members, was a plumber and installed all of the plumbing. Chuck Hazelhurst headed the electrical work, and when we built the two additions to the main building, Tom Binkley took over this assignment.

Funds became scarce again and the restrooms needed ceramic tile so on my way home from work I stopped at a tile store on Santa Rosa Ave and told them my TALE OF WOE, and the Manager said, "Back your pickup around to the rear door and your WOE TALE shall be answered." Oh Boy was it answered! A pallet and a half of ceramic tile of all kinds were STUFFED into my pickup, and with the front of the truck high and the back very low, I headed for the Promised Land. Felix Accomozzo and his Son sorted through the "assortment" and installed the tile in our restrooms.

We figured the amount of remaining redwood boards from the Hut, and we were short, so again the Great God OLAF answered our need in the form of the Coast Guard Training center. My Reserve Unit was assigned the task of removing the interior of the bowling Alley and part of this materials was the fiber glass ceiling tile. OLAF screamed, I listened, and the gold ciling tile that was still usable was ceremoniously loaded into that "Olde pickup of mine." That tile and the last of the Hut's redwood, completed the ceiling as you see it now.

Tal Mather and I selected the Pine boards from the vast stock of Mead Clark Lumber Co. and the Gang installed the material on the walls of the hall.

Now we were ready for the floor and because our funds were really drained, we had thought that vinyl tile over the subfloor was all that we could afford. Just before the date of DECISION was reached, Hazel and I attended a Callers/Square Dance School at Pacific Grove and had danced on a beautiful oak floor. That convinced us that OAK was the only answer, and more effort in the guise of Rummage Sales and YOU KNOW NOT WHAT took place to raise the \$2,500 for the oak flooring.

The following Saturday six of us started laying the oak flooring using hammer driven flooring staplers. That day we installed about 4' of flooring across the length of the hall and for a week none of us could stand up straight. We repeated the painful scene for four more Saturdays, until at last "IT WERE DONE." We had the floor professionally sanded, we then finished the floor ourselves.

Our first renter was an auctioneer with antiques from England and our next renter was a Church that rented from us for many years, then along came a very successful Polka club that needed more room and by that time we had a few dollars, so Vern Doolittle (our President and a firm backer of Old Dave) talked US into building the Dining room area, and we again started the

whole process all over. That same Polka Club (later) became so active that they BEGGED us to add onto the building so that there would be a kitchen area and almost as soon as we drove the last nail there was an argument within the Polka Group and the whole thing blew up. They disbanded and we never saw them again.

The philosophy of Wischemann Hall has always been to provide a HOME PLACE for the Saucy Squares and to provide the facility, to rent at a reasonable rate, to others that are involved in a form of dance instruction.

So many hours of work were contributed by members of the club in the building of this Hall, that I simply cannot remember all of the names, but the class of 1978 was almost all involved in the 3 phases of this building. Outstanding names in the many hours of this construction were Ski Moroni, Kay Kishaba, Chuck Hazelhurst, Hal Young, Tom Binkley, Luthor Urton and never to be forgotten, Vern Doolittle and Tal Mather who never missed a single work party in each of the 3 phases of the construction of Wischemann Hall.

Not to be forgotten are the Gals of the Club (Hazel was the treasurer of the building fund through this whole time) who made curtains, put up wall paper, painted, and provided lunches for the workers.

The late summer of 1979 saw the first phase finished (the dance floor area and small kitchen) and at that time there were NO plans to add any more BUILDING, at least in my mind, so we had a open house dedication with the Mayor of Sebastopol presiding.

We had a Square Dance with Callers From The Floor. I was the Caller and Master of Ceremonies and as I was about to dedicate the building as THE SAUCY SQUARES HALL, I was interrupted by Bill Marquering and told to step aside, because ALL of the members had agreed that the Hall was to be called Wischemann Hall. There had never been any idea in my mind that the Hall would be anything but Saucy Squares hall and I disagreed, but I was overruled, so that's the facts.

SO many people put SO much effort, money, material and sweat into this building that we shall always owe them our eternal gratitude. I for one (as I would drive down to work on the building) would wonder if a work force would be there to help. The guys and gals never failed to show up, no matter how hot or cold the weather.

When we started the kitchen, a new member joined our club. His name was Nick Givens. Nick was a bearded quiet gentleman, who had been a SeaBee in WWII. He walked into our work [arty with a tool box strung over his shoulder on a rope. Nick was a professional carpenter who could do anything I asked of him without supervision. The photo cabinet, the double swinging doors (doors came from a Coast Guard Galley) and the storage cabinets were come of his contributions.

If you look up, just as you go into the dining room from the dance floor, you will see the sign/plaque "BUILT BY THE FAITHFUL."

Oh yes, my Wischemann child CAROL had her wedding in the Hall, my Son Steve had an auction there, my Daughter Trudy was the Dedication Photographer and the memorial service for Hazel was held in the hall. We have been honored.

David LaFavre Wischemann, Sebastopol Cal. June, Day One, 2003