

Tidings



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Timber Cove Foundation is a 501c3 nonprofit public benefit corporation founded in 2017. We support civic improvement including forest management, fire abatement, and water resources development. We promote the improvement, maintenance, and safety of Timber Cove easements, including private hiking trails through the forests and coastal areas of our community for the benefit of all residents, and promote social interaction, dialogue, and cohesion by supporting community events and publications. The Foundation can facilitate other board approved community improvements by accepting targeted donations for specific projects to address emerging needs in the community

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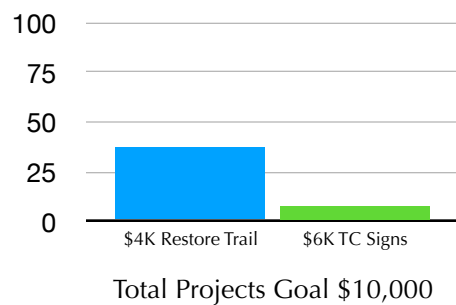
OUR NEW PROJECTS AND DONORS!

Cemetery Creek Trail

We are already making plans for our next Trail Work Days in April 2025. Our new project is a trail long used by residents that follows and crosses Cemetery Creek. It connects Umland Circle to two locations on Ruoff Drive. [See Map of Cemetery Creek Trail.](#)

We have had a special request from **Gabriella and Yarow Drake** to restore this trail and they have generously donated \$1,500 to start us off. Thanks to them!

We need a total of \$4,000 to complete this trail project. Please help us reach that goal by donating to the Trail Restoration Fund



Restoring Timber Cove's Signs

Our Timber Cove signs are representative of our community. The original sign placed on the north side of our subdivision, perhaps in 1961, has been neglected for many years. It was made of redwood in the original style of Timber Cove letters chosen by Richard Clements. Only seven of the original letters remain.

Another monument, truly a work of art, was designed and installed by Tom Giacinto in 2019 at the end of Ruoff Drive and Highway 1. Tragically it was vandalized twice, we believe by the same person. Let's restore this work of art and protect it with a surveillance camera.

We estimate the cost of both signs at \$6,000. Please help us show home town pride by restoring these reflections of our community.

Forest Management

Also many thanks to **Margaret P. Dufford and Jonathan Yormark** for their generous donation (on behalf of **Ray Seto**) of \$3,000 for Forest Management!



Then (in 1961) and Now



Then (in 2019) and Now

Black bear sightings have increased in recent years. The North Bay Bear Collaborative estimates that there are now about 70 bears in Sonoma County.

Black bears are shy and elusive, and prefer to avoid people. They are experts at hiding in forests and marking trees with their backs and other body parts.

Black bears are omnivores that eat fruits, acorns, bay nuts, insects, certain native flowers, and grass. They can also eat fawns, birds, and other



animals.

Black bears have been roaming beaches, forests, scrubby woodlands, and chaparral for thousands of years. Black bears are generally not a threat to humans or pets, but they can be attracted to human areas by food, garbage, toiletries, and anything with a scent.

If you see a bear, give it plenty of space, avoid surprising it, and do not run. Speak calmly to let the bear know you are there, and back away slowly.

Cougar (aka mountain lion or puma) numbers have declined in Sonoma County this year, with no fewer than five collared cougars dying of bacterial pneumonia last spring. According to the Audubon Canyon Ranch:

...Sightings of mountain lions on a network of 150 trail cameras across Sonoma County have declined in 2024. Researchers are asking the public for help determining if the decline is related to a cluster of mountain lion deaths in Sonoma Valley.

If you have wildlife cam video send it to



Audubon Canyon Research :

Sonoma County Regional Parks estimates that there are 75 lions living in the county.

They eat meat and are opportunistic, preying on mice, raccoons, coyotes, and occasionally pets and livestock left outdoors unprotected. Deer make up 75% of their diet. A lion may eat one deer a week

What to Do if You Face a Mountain Lion

Living with Lions in Sonoma County



The Gold Standard

Many Timber Cove property owners keep their grounds cleared of flammable debris. At top left and right we see a property that is cleared of ladder fuels. Yet the efforts of this property owner may be negated by the neglect of neighbors.

On an adjoining undeveloped lot, low hanging branches, fallen limbs, and brush are left to dry, becoming flammable ladder fuels that might help ignite a crown fire.

Timber Cove has a severe problem because undeveloped lots comprise half of the properties in some areas. A mechanism to address neglected properties exists, a legally enacted Fire Abatement Ordinance that has not been enforced since 2018.



My husband and I ran into John Howland and Hannah Clayborn at a local pub in Vallejo, California, where we live. We knew them for many years because of John's architectural business. They realized that I lived on the Timber Cove properties and worked at the Timber Cove Inn from July 1969 through September 1971. Hannah explained that she was currently editing and publishing a local Timber Cove newsletter. When our conversation drifted toward the circumstances of how I, along with my boyfriend, Bob, ended up at TCI, she asked me to write my story that describes the events leading to this memorable employment.

It all started with a most unusual party. It is said that, "History Repeats Itself." However, I am not sure that there will be another party like the Celebration of the Manned Moon Landing that occurred at Timber Cove Inn on that historic day, July 20, 1969.

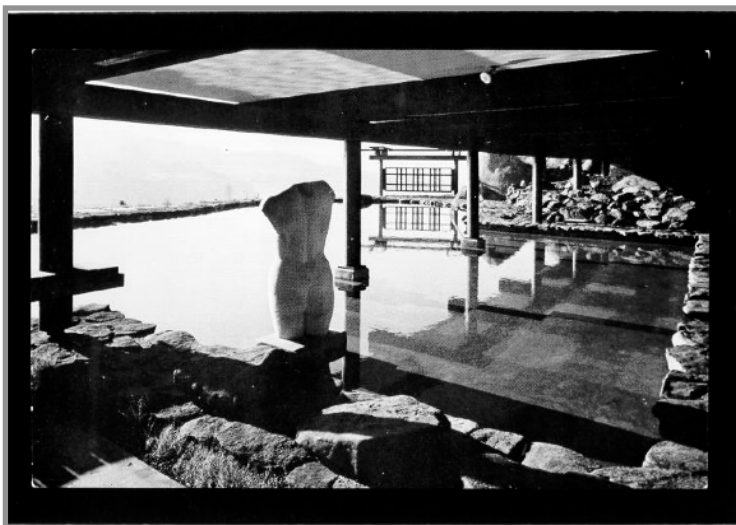
The Timber Cove community stretched from Jenner north to Stewart's Point, including the residents all along the Coast, the Seaview Ridge, back into Plantation, and up to Annapolis.

Houses and businesses were few and far between within this "stretch" with Native American folks outnumbering long-time white dwellers and newcomers to the area like us. We lived in Jenner.

But the "word went out" earlier in the week before the Sunday scheduled touch down that Timber Cove Inn was providing TV coverage of the landing!! How that invitation was spread up and down the Coast, I cannot remember. No one that we knew had telephones or televisions. Maybe the Postmaster at the Jenner Post Office spread the word as that was the location that provided a great deal of local news. We made sure that all our neighbors in Jenner were aware of this gathering.

We did have a car to drive up from Jenner. We had no idea what to expect, as we had never been to TCI before. We had been living on a shoestring in Jenner as our summer "hippy budget" was very tight. So, what we encountered at TCI was a real surprise! Many folks from all sorts of backgrounds, were gathered in the main room of the Inn. There were two or three black and white TV's set up for viewing complete with "rabbit ear" antennas and 12-inch screens! We quickly met new people, some of whom became lasting friends.

As the TV coverage of the landing was underway the party at Timber Cove was in full stride. There was an extravagant buffet and an open bar!!



**Original Swimming Pool and Sculpture
Timber Cove Inn, circa 1965**

There was lively conversation amongst the guests. There did not appear to be anyone in charge except perhaps the bartender. It was more hospitality than we had encountered all year, and for poor scrubs like us it was free and flowing continuously. We took advantage of all the pleasantries.

As it turned out, the "Host" was the bartender, Mr. Tom Coulter, who was General Manager of TCI at the time. There were no other owner/operators present. Mr. Coulter was making some wild exceptions to a traditional party plan.

The crowd hushed when the actual landing neared and we all heard the immortal words of Neil Armstrong, *That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.* We all listened as President Richard Nixon conducted his phone call with the astronauts in real time. All the televised and telephone events were absolutely mind blowing!!

As the coverage wrapped up and the party toned down, the hard core revelers continued their celebration in the partially constructed guest rooms at a lower level below the main lobby. The Inn has since been remodeled and the layout has expanded. The free festivities continued into the night!

Bob and I returned to Timber Cove Inn the next day to continue our conversation with Tom Coulter. He was interested, among other things, about our plans for employment after the summer season was over. We had no concrete plans. Mr. Coulter offered us jobs as a *team of Chefs*, a position for which we were barely qualified.

However, we took the challenge, and underwent our trial period for three months, mainly relying on Julia Child's *The Joy of Cooking* as our guide. At trial's end we moved from Jenner to a Timber Cove A-Frame house [at 22000 Timber Cove Road] to be closer to our job. Mr. Phil Trowbridge was our landlord.

We experienced many memorable events during our run at Timber Cove. The Moon Landing launched our jobs, our residency, and we were rocketed into a Coastal experience over the next three seasons that few can imagine!

And as an epilogue to our short-lived career in commercial cuisine, Julia Child actually did visit the Timber Cove Inn while we cooked there, and even gave us a good review.

Due to all these events I can say that, in this case, *History will not Repeat Itself!!*

The Stewart's Point Murder Prologue

We met waves of new settlers looking to farm or transform Timber Cove's primeval redwood and pine forests into cash in our last issue. Stepping back a decade to set the stage for our next drama, we note the first Euro-American settlers to join the local Indian population on this land in 1851, Christian Frederick Ruoff and the Michael Kolmer family (often misspelled "Coleman" in early records). Their host, Wilhelm Benitz, was the new owner of the Muniz Rancho, stretching all the way from the Russian River at Jenner to Timber Cove. These immigrants formed the vanguard of a veritable German invasion that outlasted the earlier Russian occupation on our Coast. Benitz sent former merchant Ruoff and his father-in-law, wagon maker Kolmer, to join approximately 30 Kashaya Pomo on the northern border of his 17,760-acre Muniz grant. Benitz hoped they could hold off the squatters swarming into California.

In 1852 Ruoff applied for his own 160-acres on the strip of open public land just north of the Muniz boundary lines. This gave him a total of 300 acres to farm, roughly the area we now call Timber Cove. The next year his wife Franciska and children crossed the Isthmus of Panama and sailed up the Pacific Coast to join him. Christian Ruoff's untimely death in December 1854 left Franciska and three children under the age of eight alone in this semi-wilderness. With the help of neighbors, the family persisted.

As newcomers continued to seek land, timber, and jobs here, 40-year old widow Franciska Ruoff married 26 year-old Jesse Martin Blanchard, a native of Maine. Their marriage in 1857 would not last, but that is a story for another time. Christian and Franciska Ruoff's oldest daughter, Frances, who had stayed behind in Quincy, Illinois, followed with her new husband William Wilson Park and family and they rejoined the Ruoffs in Timber Cove by 1860.

Capitalists and Cannibals:

All over California, Spanish and Mexican land grantees fought to hold title to their ranchos through the U.S. legal system. The courts responded with delay, discrimination, and too often denial of those claims. Squatters streamed in to take advantage of the confusion. With a one-mile spacer of public land between them, the Muniz and German Ranchos when patented claimed about 33 miles of our coast from the Russian to the Gualala Rivers. Meanwhile pieces of the vast acreage were bought, sold and traded like baseball cards.



Timber Cove: southern portion of German Rancho at top and northern portion of Muniz Rancho at bottom, with a mile of Public Land between.
Detail from 1867 Map of Sonoma County by A.B. Bowers (Huntington Library)

By 1860 Michael T. McClellan owned the central portion of the German grant. McClellan did not initially occupy his land, but apparently sold or leased some to the Stewart family. Samuel Stewart was a 50 year-old farmer who had emigrated to Washington Territory in 1853. After being attacked by Indians the family traveled south and found a haven in 1857 at a spot known as Fisherman's Bay. During their occupation the Stewarts made the improvements required by pre-emption law. They built fences and bridges, set out an orchard, and built a dwelling house and barn. By 1860 residents and newspapers alike referred to the place as "Stewart's Point", and Samuel and his wife Sarah had the help of six sons and one daughter, aged 24 to 10 years old, at this busy boat landing.

Trouble arrived in the spring of 1860 when two Helm brothers, Lina Davenport and his brother Harmon Turner squatted at a camp about 400 yards from the Stewart cabin. Five of the 21 Helm brothers of Missouri came to the state for gold in 1849, but three of those had separated off to try their luck in Southern California. Growing friction between the Stewart and Helm families sparked into a dramatic argument between matriarch Sarah Stewart and Davenport Helm sometime in October. The Helm brothers often carried guns and in later court testimony one man described them, as *the hardest nuts he ever got acquainted with*.

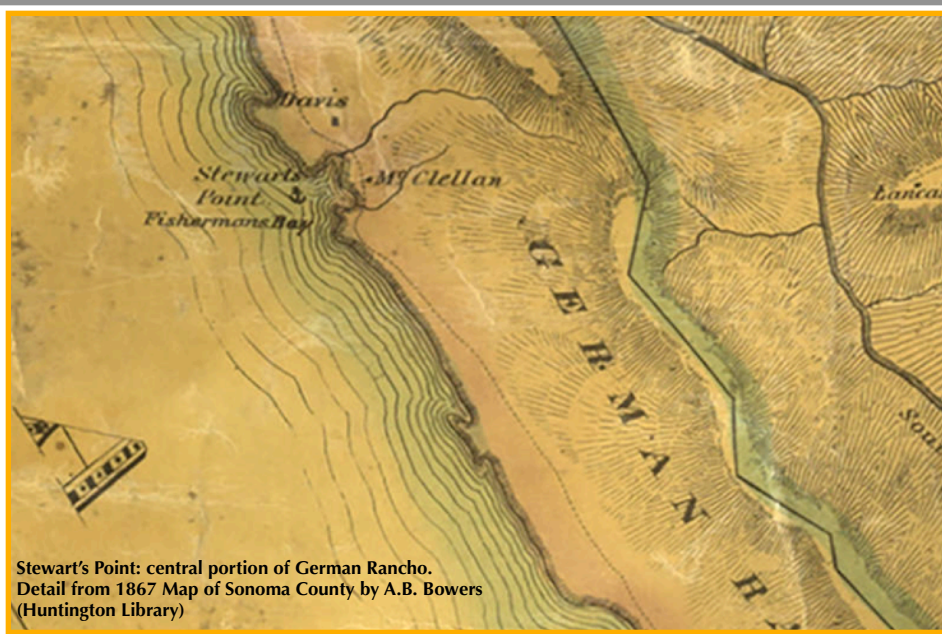
Little did Sarah know that the man she tongue lashed for being a "liar" was part of an outlaw family that was at that moment hiding their infamous cousin, Levi Boone Helm, (aka the Kentucky Cannibal) in the ancient redwood forest behind Stewart's

Point. There was a \$1,000 warrant out for Boone, a fascinating serial killer, who would exhibit an astonishing range of criminal behavior including feasting on friends and enemies alike.

As described in later court testimony, the loose-lipped Helm brothers began to boast that they intended to hold the claim against all comers, including the legal land owner, Michael McClellan. Two witnesses testified that they heard the Helm brothers say they would kill anyone who stood in their way and then beat a retreat into the woods. Learning of the squatters, McClellan and his wife journeyed to defend their property about November 14th. Mrs. McClellan ran into Turner Helm first, who warned her that they should not settle here or he would *make a hole through McClellan that a dog could trot through*. Nevertheless McClellan did finally arrive and the bold couple settled into their cabin without incident.

Tacking back and forth between these opponents was John Colt Fisk, who coveted Fisherman's Bay for his proposed steam mill operation. Testimony indicates that, like any practical Capitalist, Fisk apparently sided with whomever he happened to be speaking with at the moment, playing one against the other. He seemed to encourage the violent Helm brothers because landowner McClellan was already working with another potential mill operator from Sacramento, Russell Stevens.

On November 24, 1860, James Stewart, 24, stood talking, apparently peacably, to Davenport Helm and his associate George Curran. Without warning, Thomas Jefferson Stewart, just 19 years old, shot Davenport Helm from a distance of at least 50 yards as Helm sat smoking tobacco on a log. As the wounded Davenport stood to exclaim that



Stewart's Point: central portion of German Rancho. Detail from 1867 Map of Sonoma County by A.B. Bowers (Huntington Library)

he had been shot, James Stewart seemed surprised, saying, *Goddammit, you are not shot are you?* Davenport Helm walked a few feet, and then fell dead.

All Is Lost

No one ever denied that Thomas was the killer. According to later testimony, Davenport Helm had recently threatened Thomas's life, and Sam Stewart, junior had gone all the way to Point Arena to warn his little brother. Deputies arrested several Stewart family members along with Russell Stevens at the scene of the crime, but Thomas and Sam Stewart had already fled back to Point Arena. One of the arresting officers traveled north, retrieving both brothers. When that party stopped to sleep overnight on the journey south, Thomas managed to escape, I suspect with cooperation from the host, who is not named.

The hearing against the Stewarts (minus Thomas) was heard two weeks later on the same day that a countersuit for conspiracy to murder was brought by miller Russell Stevens against Turner Helm, John Fisk, and three other Helm associates. In the first hearing James and the younger Sam Stewart were held on \$1,000 bail, but charges against them were never brought and they were later released.

In the second proceeding the judge also dismissed the conspiracy to murder charges even though there was compelling testimony that the Helm brothers had repeatedly threatened to murder both the McClellans and the Stewarts. One Marysville newspaper described a contemporaneous letter corroborating these death threats and also disclosed that the infamous Boone Helm (misnamed "Buck" in

the article), the Kentucky Cannibal, had been in hiding in the woods behind their camp, ready to aid his cousins in a massacre.

The only testimony that favored the Helm brothers came from Timber Cove residents Enos and William Park. William, who testified for the Helm brothers in the murder conspiracy case, had married Frances Ruoff, oldest daughter of Timber Cove's earliest German settlers, in 1857, and they lived here just south of the Ruoff Ranch. Only three months after they testified, on March 9, 1861, Enos Park was stabbed to death in Timber Cove by a party, *name unknown*. I immediately suspected a Stewart clan reprisal, but reports only describe a dispute arising from a card game.

Although Turner Helm and his Kentucky Cannibal cousin soon decamped to commit more mayhem throughout the West, things did not go well with the Stewarts in Sonoma County. As Thomas remained in hiding, his family lost their Stewart's Point land and improvements in a mortgage foreclosure sale in 1862.

Finally after four years in hiding, Thomas, still just 24 years old, turned himself in to law enforcement in December 1864 and was released on \$5,000 bail until the next court session. At that trial Thomas, who pleaded not guilty, was convicted of murder in the second degree in June 1865. His family members testified truthfully throughout. After a long homily, the judge sentenced Thomas to life in prison. The attorney's motion requesting a new trial on *points of law* was denied by the judge and young Thomas took up residence, *for the rest of his natural life* at San Quentin prison.

Redemption

Just when all seemed lost, three months later, Thomas's attorneys managed to get him a new trial and had the venue moved to Contra Costa County. And, lo, in April 1866, Thomas Jefferson Stewart was duly acquitted of all charges and released to resume his life. I suspect that the notoriety of the subsequent crimes of the outlaw Helm gang aided in this acquittal.

After so much turmoil and hardship the entire Stewart clan was living free and peaceably in Point Arena by 1870 and later in Fort Bragg, where they ranched at Ten Mile River and later in Fort Bragg proper. Samuel Stewart Senior died there in 1885, and his sharp-tongued wife Sarah in 1900.

Squatter Davenport Helm was the first burial in the little cemetery at Stewart's Point on November 24, 1860. Legal landowner Michael McClellan joined him there without protest in 1883.

Soon after his brother's murder, Turner Helm hastened to Borrego Springs to meet up with three other brothers. After more criminal romps through several states most of them had bullied their way onto claims in and around Warner Springs near San Diego by 1867, at that time on the edge of civilization. Turner was the youngest of his 20 brothers, but the only one who could read. He married two Native American women, had seven children, and died in the desert in 1901. Their serial-killer cousin, Levi Boone Helm, who hid out in our redwoods in 1860, continued his fantastically criminal career of murder, mayhem, robbery, and cannibalism until he was hanged by a group of vigilantes in Montana on January 14, 1864. He lies in Boot Hill Cemetery in Virginia City.

As far as I can tell, Thomas Jefferson Stewart lived happily in Mendocino County after his short stay at San Quentin, marrying Mary Jane McCabe in 1876. The couple had a daughter that year, Edna Christine Stewart Evans. Mary Jane died in 1918, but Thomas outlived them all. Noted in his obituary for his "amiable manner," Thomas died in Fort Bragg a lucky old man of 91 on August 21, 1932.

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The Kentucky Cannibal