

Early version now changed.

COPY OF JOHN EHN STATEMENT

Johan (John) Henry Ehn was born in Violet, a temporary logging camp near Gould City in Mackinaw County, Michigan on September 15, 1897. His mother was born in Helsinki, Finland and his father in Stockholm, Sweden. The Ehn family ran a lumbering operation, farmed and owned a commercial fishery at Scotts Point, Michigan.

On April 2, 1921, John married Mary Leota Esther Gonyon. They had four children: Clifford Bell, Louise Joy, Lorraine Ann and Rosemarie.

Between 1921 and 1941, John was employed as a bounty hunter and trouble shooter for the field and game department of the state of Michigan. Between 1929 and 1934, the family lived in Florida, where John and his partner Snake Johnson trapped alligators and snakes. Mary helped skin and stretch them.

In 1937 John began writing and publishing a series of ten correspondence courses: How To Snare: The Best Kept Secrets of Trapper John. John mailed these out with scents and trapping supplies till his death. ~~His family continues the mail-order business today.~~

In 1940 John contracted a spinal inflammation and was forced to give up trapping. The Ehn family moved to Roscoe (Sun Valley), Southern California and opened a motel in 1941. It was later named 'Old Trapper's Lodge' to reflect his former occupation. In the 1950's John began to wear Western clothes to advertise his rental and trapping businesses. He grew a goatee and pierced his ears.

After watching sculptor Claude Bell working at Knottsberry Farm in 1951, John hired the sculptor to construct a portrait of himself as a trapper. After three days, John learned the techniques he needed to know, and began creating the sculptures which were to become 'Boot Hill Cemetery' in the front yard of the motel. This was his main occupation for the next 15 years.

Intended as a memorial to his family, all the statue heads were taken from life masks John made of family members. The bodies came from stories that John enjoyed --Mormon Biblical History, tales of the Old West (the dancing girls are John's daughter's Louise and Lorraine); folk songs (John's grand-daughter Judith and Son Clifford form the tableau 'Clementine'). Each tableau has a tombstone epitaph telling the story of the demise of that particular character. A friend of John's occasionally helped him with the signage, but otherwise, John constructed the cemetery single-handed.

Each of the sculptures is formed over a strong wire armature and then covered with cement and other materials. The 'Texas Bed Bug' is a real turtle shell (which one of his children brought back from Mexico) covered with cement.

John's motto was 'Waste Not Want Not'. A life's collection of everything saved went into the Museum display. Animal skins, tools and other memorabilia decorate the motel walls. Artifacts came from all sources. If they were free or scavenged, all the better. The motel office is filled with trapping paraphernalia, a collection of bibles, some of John's many guns, photo-montages, assemblages and a memory board which is a collage of important items from the lives of John's family.

Old Trapper's Lodge was named as a California State Historical Landmark #939 in May 1981. A plaque allocated by the State Historical Resources Commission was unveiled in March 1985. John died on December 26, 1981. The family has repainted the sculptures and is maintaining the property.