

## JOHN EHN: OLD TRAPPER'S LODGE - CA

### BIOGRAPHY

1897 September 15, Johan Henry (John) Ehn was born in Violet, Mackinaw County, Upper Michigan. Violet was a logging camp.

Johan Ehn Sr. (John's father) was born in Stockholm Sweden. He had 5 sisters. At age 24 he apprenticed as a Hydraulic machine Engineer. He was trained to set up systems for lumber mill machinery run by the power of falling water (before electricity was invented). He came to the U.S. when he was 18 to set up a lumber mill in Upper Michigan. Here he met Marie Ella Berg. They married and homesteaded a farm near Gould City.

Marie Ella Berg Ehn, John's mother was born in Helsinki Finland. She was an orphan who worked as a servant and saved her money from childhood to buy passage on an emigrant ship to the U.S. She was 4' 10" tall and spoke Finnish, Swedish, and English.

John Ehn and Mary Berg had six sons and one daughter: Wilhelm, Fredrich, Oscar, John, Joel, Victor and Anna.

The Ehn family farmed and owned a commercial fishery at Scotts Point Michigan and ran a lumbering operation. John Junior dropped out of school in the 7th grade because of his father's ailing health.

1920 John worked as a trapper from Mexico to the Canadian border for 20 years, with his headquarters on the family property in Michigan.

1921 April 2. John married Mary Leota Esther Gonyon. Born July 27 1904, in Gould City Michigan Mary had a fifth grade education. Her mother Maryanne Polly Gonyon came from Ohio. She was one of 9 or 10 children. Her father, Isaac Gonyon, was a French Canadian widower. He farmed during the summer and worked as logger and lumberjack in the winter. Mary was the eldest of six children, Joseph, Stephen, Edith, Ellen and Amy.

John and Mary had 4 children: Clifford Bell 1924; Louise Joy 1926; Lorraine Ann 1930; and Rosemarie 1937.

1929-34 The Ehn's moved to Florida where John's brother Joel lived. John became partners with Snake Johnson. Together they trapped and shot alligators and snakes in the Everglades for their hides. Mary helped skin and stretch them.

*1933 John had his closest shave with death in Iron county Michigan (source: John's tape).*

1934 Returned to Michigan. The state of Michigan started a force of salaried trappers to catch predatory animals feeding on livestock. John was hired as a bounty hunter by a representative of the Field and Game Department/Fish and Wildlife Service. John worked for the government in Michigan and Arizona for 20 years before moving to California.

1934 The Federal Bureau of Biological Survey hired John as their trouble shooter trapper. He worked in several states for the Department.

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- 1937 While in Michigan John began to teach other trappers. He wrote and published ten courses on trapping including How to Snare: The Best Kept Secrets Of Trapper John. He continued mailing the correspondence courses, scents and trapping supplies, from the Depression to his death. In 1985 the Ehn family was still receiving requests for them.
- 1940 John contracted a spinal inflammation .
- 1941 March. The Ehn family moved to Roscoe (Sun Valley), Southern California. John began building a house. He realised the need for housing in the area due to the burgeoning aircraft industry, and started to build rental units. Mary and John both worked in aircraft factories for about 15 years to raise money for construction. John worked for Lockheed. The children helped with the construction.
- John began to dress in Western clothes to help his trapping and rental businesses.
- 1951 John began building the Boot Hill Cemetery outside his motel. He hired Claude Bell from Knotts Berry Farm to build a monumental sculpture of himself. After watching for three days and consulting with Claude, he started his own creations. John's collection of Western artifacts were placed in the Old West Museum.
- 1972 Sunday February 8, 5.00p.m., Old Trapper was on **It Takes All Kinds**, Chanel 2. He was interviewed and videotaped at Old Trapper's Lodge and at his residence.
- 1976/77 Ehn is represented in the Exhibition *In Celebration of Ourselves*, curated by Seymour Rosen, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.
- 1981 John finished working on Old Trapper's Lodge and Boot Hill Cemetery. May. Old Trapper's Lodge was named as a California State Historical Landmark #939. December 26 John died of a heart attack after breaking a hip.
- 1982 April 2. Mary Ehn died after a series of heart attacks. June 3. Lorraine Phillips (John and Mary's daughter) prepared A Brief History of John and Mary Ehn after her parents demise. The whole family collaborated in the preparation of keepsake packets each containing a primitive Indian necklace made by John, two pieces of Mary's costume jewelry , a picture taken on Mary and John's 60th wedding anniversary, a business card, (possibly a knick-knack from their home) and a copy of the family history.
- 1983 John Ehn's work is included in the exhibitions Many Mansions: Four Folk Art Environments, which was curated by Seymour Rosen and held at the Beyond Baroque Foundation in Venice, California.
- 1984 Old Trapper's Lodge was repainted by Jerome Ward ( see the recommendations from Don Howlett July 17, 1983 in SPACES archive) February 3. The State Historical Resources Commission recommended allocation of a plaque for Old Trapper's Lodge. This was unveiled on March 25, 1985.

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- 1985 Ehn was one of seven California environments chosen for the exhibition *Divine Disorder* at the Triton Museum in Santa Clara. Curated and photographed by Seymour Rosen. This was the first time sculpture and assemblage was taken from the site and displayed in public outside of Los Angeles.
- 1986 John Ehn's work is included in the exhibition *Cat and a Ball on a Waterfall*, curated by Harvey Jones and held at the Oakland Museum, California; a catalog is produced. The environmental art section was co-curated by Seymour Rosen of SPACES.
- 1987 Old Trapper's Lodge is highlighted on the PBS TV show Videolage
- 1988 Site moved to Pierce college.
- 1989 Work begins on log cabin exhibition area at Pierce College. Ehn included in ancillary exhibition, *40 years of California Assemblage* at UCLA

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**JOHN EHN: OLD TRAPPER'S LODGE - CA**

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1986 A Cat and a Ball on a Waterfall, Catalog for the Oakland Museum, CA

**EXHIBITIONS**

1976/77 In Celebration of Ourselves San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. CA  
Dec 3 - Jan 23

1983 Many Mansions: Four Folk Art Environments at Beyond Baroque, Venice, CA  
April 23 - June 4

1984 Dreambuilders of California Chevron Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
Apr 9-May 25

1985 A Joyful Vision at the Craft & Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA

Divine Disorder at the Triton Museum in Santa Clara, CA  
Oct. 26 - Dec. 1

1986 A Cat and a Ball on a Waterfall, at the Oakland Museum, CA  
Mar 22 - Aug 3

1989 40 years of California Assemblage, at UCLA (show will travel)  
(part of ancillary slide show) Apr 4 - May 21