

JOHN EHN

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"WASTE NOT, WANT NOT"

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 worked as a bounty hunter and trouble shooter for the Field and Game Department of the state of Michigan. While in their employ he trapped in many of the states between the Canadian and Mexican borders. For a five year period, the family lived with one of John's brothers in Florida. John became partners with Snake Johnson and together they trapped alligators and snakes. In 1937 John began writing and publishing How To Snare: The Best Kept Secrets of Trapper John, a series of ten correspondence courses. John mailed these out with scents and trapping supplies until his death.

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. He later named the property "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 Knott's berry Farm in 1951, John hired the sculptor to construct a giant concrete portrait of himself as a trapper. After three days, John learned all the techniques he needed and began creating the sculptures which were to become "Boot Hill Cemetery". Each of the sculptures consists of a strong wire armature covered with cement. Occasionally other materials were incorporated; the core of the "Texas Bed Bug" is a giant turtle shell which came from Mexico.

Constructing the cemetery and the "Old West Mooseum" (both in the front yard of the motel) was John's main occupation for the next 15 years. The cemetery was intended as a memorial to John's family. Statue heads were taken from life masks he made of family members. Bodies were modeled after characters from John's favorite folksongs and stories, including Mormon Biblical history and tales of the Old West. The dancing girls are John's daughter's Louise and Lorraine. His grand-daughter, Judith, and son Clifford, form the tableau "Clementine". Tombstone epitaphs tell stories of the alleged demise of each particular character. A friend of John's occasionally helped him with the signage, but otherwise, John constructed the cemetery single-handed.

John's motto was Waste Not, Want Not. A lifetime collection went into the museum display. Animal skins, tools and other memorabilia decorate the motel walls. 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 members.

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