



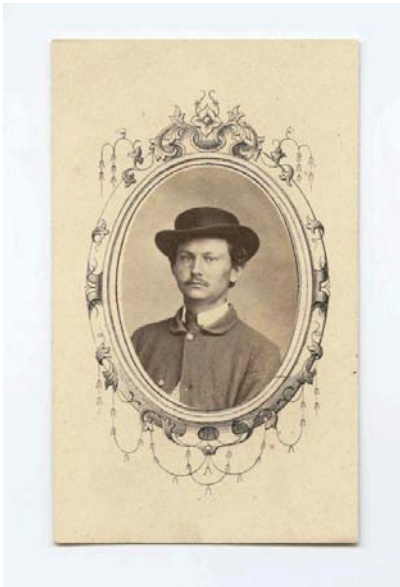
MANTON HISTORY TALK  
***NO ONE WILL GO HUNGRY***  
***The Manton Store under***  
***Les and Lena Childs, 1916-1946***

**MATTHEW MEYER**  
**MARCH 8TH**  
**2PM**  
**SWEETSHOOTS CAFE**



*Sponsored by Manton Education Council*

George Leslie (“Les”) Childs was the fifth child of Indiana natives Samuel McKinney and Mary Jane Childs, and the first one born in California. The parents had settled in Kansas before the Civil War, during which Samuel served in the 12th Regiment of the Kansas Infantry, and started their family there following the war. Around 1880 Samuel Childs (photo below) and family came to California. They settled first near Red Bluff, where Les was born, in 1882, and within a few years established themselves along Digger Creek in what would become Manton. Samuel was a noted fruit grower in the area, but the Childs family was probably best known in the community for the hotel it operated out of its ranch residence. The Childs Hotel stood on the Shasta County side of Digger Creek, west of the road. The two-story hotel, with large weeping willows around it, offered shady accommodations to weary travelers and boasted a livery stable for their animals. It was a Manton institution from its founding in the 1880s to 1918, when it burned to the ground.



Les Childs and the emerging village of Manton grew up together. As a boy, he worked in the family fruit orchards and helped run the hotel. Les attended the local schools on the Shasta side, the closest ones being Rockland and then, after 1888, Benton. Before he reached his teen years, his older siblings were already starting families of their own. Myrtle Minerva, who was 15 years older than Les, married James K. Morgan, a member of the stock-raising family whose name is still associated with the Mineral-area landmarks Morgan Springs and Morgan Summit. Ivy Adelia, the second-born, married Lincoln

Forward of the prominent milling family. Les’s two older brothers, Frederick Oscar and Franklin Preston, nine and five years older, respectively, both eventually became local stockmen. Frederick married Mabel Turner, and after her early death established ranching operations near Round Mountain. Franklin married Olive Rowena Nanney, “the fair and fascinating violinist of the Sierras,” of the locally famed musical family who were also stock raisers and business partners with the Morgans in the Paynes Creek-Mineral corridor, and the couple settled on one of the Nanney family ranches in Lanes Valley. The youngest member of the Childs clan was Mary Eleanor, born in 1884. Presumably because of the two-year

difference in their age and the decamping of the older siblings to their married homes, she and Les were particularly close. Social columns from the late 1890s and the early 1900s show the pair often attended parties and school programs together, without their brothers and sisters. Other recreational activities of the day in which they took part included outings to Coffee Cave, picnics at Bluff Springs, and a seemingly constant parade of dinners, dances, and masquerade balls.

As Les entered his twenties, he began to take jobs outside the home that landed his name in the newspapers. In 1904, for example, he served as a “floor manager” for the Christmas masquerade ball at I.N. Gould’s North Manton Hall, the first of many such gigs Les would take over the next decade. Floor managers combined the roles of gofer, decorator, and bouncer, and they were in charge of keeping things moving smoothly at dances. Whether or not compensation was part of the deal, there was clearly a level of prestige in getting your name in the paper as a floor manager. Les was floor “director” for the 1906 Candidates’ Ball at the North Manton Hall, where he would have had the chance to hobnob with aspirants to local and, perhaps, regional public office, and to dream of being in their shoes one day.



The Northern California Power Company was the biggest thing going around Manton during the buildout of its massive hydroelectric complex in the first decade of the 20th century. Whatever misgivings he may have had about its impact on the community, Les hauled

wagon-loads of laid-off NCPC workers to Red Bluff and Redding and transported lumber for the company. All the while Les (still in his 20s) was taking a more central role in running the Childs Hotel, according to the local papers, which called him the hotel’s “genial proprietor” in 1907 and “host of the Manton hotel” in 1911. For the better part of a decade, Les also served as Manton’s constable, a job that led to several memorable episodes.

In the winter of 1908, someone broke into Ed Head's house and stole several small items, including a couple of checks from a checkbook. Employees of the Bank of Tehama County received two checks in the mail supposedly made out by Ed Head, but grew suspicious of the signatures on them. The two checks were payable to young Archie DeLaMontanya of a well known local family and one Verne Cook. Investigators quickly focused on the five endorsement signatures on the back of the checks, belonging to Archie, Verne Cook, S.R. and W.P. Hall, and Lee Williams. Under orders from Sheriff Boyd, Constable Childs arrested Archie and Lee, and eventually the Halls were brought in as well (Verne Cook was never detained, for reasons that are unclear.) Lee Williams, a teenager, was said to be the stepson of the famous 'Diamond Jack' Davis of Nevada, and his mother reportedly wore "thousands of dollars worth of diamonds while doing her housework." He had been staying with his grandparents, the Croziers, near Manton. The suspects in the forgery were all released on bail, but suspicion soon came to center on Lee Williams after a San Francisco handwriting expert told Sheriff Boyd and D.A. Fish that the writing on the checks was his. Lee's bail bondsmen revoked their bond, and Constable Childs rearrested him. By mid-February, 1908, D.A. Fish dropped the charges against the others, and Lee Williams was found solely responsible for the forgery and sentenced to four years of reform school.



Downtown Manton, approx 1920

Les Childs was still Manton constable some five years later, in October 1913, when another newsworthy case came up. This one also involved Ed Head. Ed and his wife had gone to bed one night and had just turned down the lights when an enormous blast of dynamite destroyed their house. Miraculously, they were neither killed nor maimed. Mantonites were on edge: just two weeks earlier, someone had blown up the South Powerhouse pipeline. Charles Hunceker, who was known to have a beef with Ed Head, was suspected of involvement in the house explosion. Constable Childs detained Hunceker at the Childs Hotel for interrogation. Hunceker gladly admitted his extreme dislike for Ed Head and talked at length of the disputes over water rights they'd had, but denied blowing up his house. Ultimately the D.A. declined to pursue the case, and no one was ever charged for the attempted murder of Ed and his wife.

Not long after Ed Head's house was blown up there came a third noteworthy case involving Constable Childs. It had nothing to do with Ed Head, but did feature dynamite as a central element. (With the Northern California Power Company just finishing its hydroelectric system construction, there was a lot of dynamite around in those days.) In early March 1914, class was in session at the Lee School, located near the Waterwheel Park and the Kampmann place, on the Shasta County side. A boy on recess climbed up on a rock to check the clock through the schoolhouse window, but slipped on the rock and fell to the ground. From his prone position he happened to glance under the school building, and there he saw something strange. On investigation, about two dozen sticks of dynamite with fuses attached were found just beneath the floor where children trip-trapped back and forth, unaware of the danger. The local press went mad with speculation at this third dynamite incident within six months. What was going on in Manton? One exciting theory was that the explosive charges might have been intended to blow up the "socialists" who held meetings at the school twice a month. But ultimately the authoritative word was that the power company had stashed the dynamite there for "storage" and then forgotten about it! Oops. Constable Childs was enlisted to transport the deadly sticks to Redding "for future reference," and that was the end of it.

Les's work as Manton constable yielded the occasional dramatic episode, but it was probably not a full time job and certainly wasn't his only occupation in the

years before he bought the store. Besides the hotel and family orchards, he grew alfalfa in 1912 for the fledgling Manton dairy. Then he nearly became a soldier. With the Mexican Revolution in progress and potential threats at California's southern border, Les was one of several young men from Manton to join Company D of the California State Militia. In the spring of 1914, as Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and other rebels joined forces, Les and his Manton comrades answered a call to report to Redding, expecting to be sent to the border. Not knowing when (or even if) they would return, they said fond farewells to friends and family, only to reach Redding and discover there had been a mixup in the messages and they weren't going to the border after all.

In the midst of all the real-life drama, Les found an opportunity to show his theatrical streak that same spring of 1914, taking the role of Sheriff in the Manton Amateur Theatrical Club's production of the popular play "Diamonds and Hearts," while little sister Mary played the spinster sister of Abraham Barnes, described in the script as "a Yankee farmer still unmarried at forty." Mary was hardly a spinster in fact, but she and Les, at ages 30 and 32 respectively in 1914, were both getting slightly long in the tooth to be still single in those days. Les's purchase of J.L. Barham's store was about to inaugurate a new phase in both of their lives.

In the summer of 1914, J.L. Barham was 60 years old and had been running the Manton store for a dozen years. He wanted to retire and move to the East Bay to be close to his son Courtney, so he placed ads in the San Francisco Examiner offering the store for sale. A month before Barham placed the ads, Lassen Peak had blown its top in the first of what became a 3-year series of eruptions. This may or may not have figured in Barham's desire to sell and leave town. More likely, Barham recognized that the power company's decade-long buildout of its hydroelectric system had pretty well finished with the 1911 addition of Coleman Powerhouse, and the fat local payroll that had been so good to his business was going away and unlikely to return. It took him more than a year to find a buyer for the store, and when he did, it was no Bay Area carpetbagger who stepped up, but our own local hero, Les "Skinner" Childs.

By the way, the origin of Les Childs's affectionate nickname "Skinner" was told to Alice Wilson by Henry Graham for "Manton Yesteryears." Graham says that Walter Cleland bought a pair of overalls at Les's store, only to discover that they lacked shoulder straps. Cleland returned to the store and put the defective garment on the counter, protesting, as we may presume, with mock anger: "You're just an old skinner and this is Skinner's Corner." A "skinner" was slang for a cheat or a conman, but it was also a term for the driver of a team of animals, especially mules and horses. Les had certainly been a skinner in that sense, and the double meaning might have given the nickname the edge of humor that made it stick.

It's unclear when Lena Buszdieker and her younger brother Henry came to Manton. Both of them are listed in the 1910 census residing at the family home in Whitmore, but in "Manton Yesteryears" Leonard Wright says that Lena "worked for Barham as a cook" before she and Les were married in 1916. Her signature appears on a 1914 petition of Manton residents asking the county to invest in road paving equipment, the better to connect Manton with Red Bluff and the valley, but history does not record whether she there to swoon over Les's turn as the sheriff in "Diamonds and Hearts." Lena Buszdieker came from a pioneer family that settled in Whitmore, Shasta County, in the 1880s. Where Les was the first Childs baby born in California, Lena was the last born to the Buszdieker clan before they came west. Her parents were born in Missouri to German immigrant families and had their first children there before relocating to Nebraska in the mid-1870s, where Lena came along in 1884. By 1888, when Lena's younger brother Henry was born, the family was in Whitmore, farming commercial quantities of hops along with a number of other German-descended families who made up the Eudora colony. According to anecdote, the settlers were lured to the area with promises of land already cleared, but ended up having to spend their first few years opening fields in the Whitmore woods for their animals and crops, in addition to building homes to live in and ditches for irrigation, some of which may still be in use today.

Lena's father died in 1907, at age 59, and her mother passed in 1910 at about the same age. My best guess is that it was around this time that Lena moved to Manton and started cooking for J.L. Barham. By the time Barham sold the store to Les Childs in late September of 1915, Les and Lena had probably already met, and it is tempting to imagine her as his date at his parents' golden wedding

anniversary less than two weeks later. They would not actually tie the knot for almost a year, and in the meantime, Les was no doubt keeping busy with his new store. In March of 1916 Les made a trip to San Francisco, where he purchased goods to be shipped to Red Bluff, presumably by rail, and then trucked to Manton. To that end, in May 1916 Les bought a new GMC truck, hauling 2600 pounds of merchandise on the first of what would become daily trips over the rough roads to Red Bluff.



In the month after Les started making his runs, local kids quickly grew used to the sight of “Skinner” Childs motoring up the Red Bluff road with a truck full of new stock from town. In those early days of automobiles, it must have been about the coolest thing imaginable. Young Matthew DeLaMontanya of Manton and Roy Miles, a 14-year-old visiting from Oregon that summer with his mother

and 8-year-old brother, had gotten into the habit of meeting the truck each night half a mile or so from the store to ride the rest of the way into town, perhaps getting some rock candy from “Skinner” in the bargain. On the 23rd of June, Roy Miles’s younger brother had ridden into town along with Les. Although they began the return trip in the afternoon, they didn’t reach Manton till 10 or 11 that night. As the truck neared the village under a dark, moonless sky, Roy Miles and Matthew DeLaMontanya approached the highway to meet it and greet the younger Miles boy. Les didn’t see them. As the truck chugged up the final grade, Roy Miles attempted to climb onto the back of it, but his foot became “entangled in the gear chains,” dashing him against the road and killing him instantly. Over the noise of the engine and the jerking of the rough road, Les didn’t know anything had happened until the younger Miles boy yelled that he thought his brother had been hurt. Stopping the truck, Les gathered the already-lifeless body and drove the rest of the way to the store, where he called the county authorities. An overnight

coroner's inquest absolved Les of blame in the accident, and Roy was buried in the Manton cemetery the next day.

Barely two months after Roy Miles's death, in late August 1916, Les and Lena Childs were married at the Tremont Hotel in Red Bluff. The wedding seems to have been a relatively simple affair, though they later took a honeymoon trip to the Bay Area and held a celebration on their return to Manton in early September. I wonder what role the tragedy may have played in the decision of this very sociable couple not to be wedded in grander fashion at any of the several homes of their relatives in the area. It must have put something of a damper on the otherwise heady days at the start of Les's tenure as local shopkeeper.

Taking to his role, Les joined the newly formed Tehama County Betterment Committee, a group of businessmen trying to boost economic development, in March 1917. Such local concerns took a backseat to national efforts as the United States entered World War I the next month, in April 1917. Les and Lena, like many civic-minded Americans, turned their considerable energies as volunteers toward the war effort. The Childs store was designated a draft registration point, and Les joined a committee to sell Liberty Bonds to fund the war, together with postmaster Alice Dines and fellow Mantonites W.J. DeLashmutt and E.L. Fulbright. Lena's brother Henry enlisted in July 1917 at Red Bluff, and was assigned as a driver to the 11th Aero Squadron, which ran bomber aircraft on the Western Front, mostly in France. Lena, meanwhile, was Manton captain of the Red Cross, in which Les's sister Mary was also active. The group planned a series of parties to honor local draftees, the first of which was held at Mary's house in June 1918. Among the young men at that party was Ludwig "Louie" Meyer. In retrospect it's easy to imagine a romance brewing: in September, Louie, now in the Army but home on furlough from his station in San Diego, was guest of honor at a party given by his sister Clara. Mary Childs was there. Six months later, when the war had ended, Mary and Louie were wedded at the home of her brother, Frank Childs, in Paynes Creek. The Meyer and Childs families would remain close friends for nearly three decades, often taking trips and celebrating birthdays together.

When the Armistice was declared at the "11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month" of 1918, Americans were jubilant that the "war to end all wars" was done.

Red Cresser, a truck driver for Les, got so excited that he hot-dogged Les's truck all around Red Bluff. The police were probably as glad as anyone that the war was over, but Judge Lennon still fined Red five dollars, which he "promptly paid and went his way rejoicing."

So the war had ended, apparently without any deaths among Mantonites who enlisted. But there were still wartime casualties for the Childs family. Les's mother, Mary Jane Childs, died in April 1918 while the war still raged. With her gone and Les busy running the store, his 74-year-old father Samuel decided to turn over hotel operations to Bert Graham. Just two months later, in August 1918, a burn pile got out of control as powder caps, raked up with the vegetation, exploded in the fire. Both the Childs hotel and the large barn full of hay were completely destroyed.

Les had taken charge of the store as conflict loomed. Now, perhaps things might settle down, bringing to Manton a "return to normalcy" like Warren G. Harding promised Americans in the 1920 presidential election. Lasting town institutions took shape as PG&E bought out the Northern California Power Company in 1919, and the four remaining Manton school districts consolidated into the Manton Joint School District in 1920. For the store, perhaps, it was also a time of "normalcy": in comparison with the hectic early days of the store under J.L. Barham, when hundreds of temporary power company workers peppered the Manton hills and each camp had its own store branch, not too much was happening that merited inking on newsprint. Les, Lena, and Henry Buszdieker were the store's central personnel. The 1920 census found all three living in the same household, possibly in the rear of the store. (Henry would remain a bachelor until 1926, when he married Leona Boren). Les gave his profession as "merchant," while Lena and Henry were "clerk," and "truck driver," respectively. As the town's primary mercantile establishment, if not its only one after the war, the Childs general store carried a little bit of everything, from flour to clothes, batteries, building materials, gas and oil. (When Wes Sitton cleaned house after he took over the store in the early 1950s, "collar buttons," "hat pins" and "high button shoes" were among the outmoded items he figured dated back to Les Childs's days.) Les would give kids a handful of hardtack candy, and also cut men's and boys' hair, according to testimonials in "Manton Yesteryears." One thing the store could not have been

selling (legally, at least) after the war was liquor, as Prohibition came into effect in 1920.

Les Childs kept a rather low profile in the early 1920s, probably hard at work running the store. Even so, he found time to indulge his sporting streak. He co-promoted a boxing match in 1922 at Viola's 4th of July celebration. In the main event, Kid Buckley knocked out Cyclone Walker in the first round. Les seems to have like baseball especially well: As early as 1914, he was manager of a Manton baseball team that played against Diamond Match. Now, in 1923, he managed the new Manton squad in the six-team Lassen View league, which also had teams in Red Bluff, Gerber, Los Molinos, Cottonwood, and Hamilton City. The second half of the 1920s began what looks to my perspective like the most active period of Les Childs's life. There were important transitions: the birth of Les and Lena's only child, their daughter Leslie, in 1924; the death of Les's father, Samuel Childs, in 1925. Les, at 43, was now patriarch of his own branch of the Childs clan, and the following year, he put his hat in the ring of county politics for the first time with a run for supervisor of Tehama County's 3rd District.



The campaign centered on a promise to improve roads. Les had personal experience with the difficulties farmers in outlying districts faced getting their crops to markets and transportation hubs in the valley, as well as the challenges of supplying a general store separated from commercial depots by many miles of bone-jarring roads that were muddy in winter and dusty in summer. The focus on roads was timely, too, as California's state government took important steps in the late '20s toward establishing the network of state highways we know today. Les won a straight majority in the August primary against Lou Smock and Henry

Kauffman to capture the 3rd District supervisor seat outright, without need for a runoff in the general election.

True to his campaign promises, Les and his crew were soon seen all over the district grading roads. The Bend and Jelly areas benefited from this work, as did the road from Dales to Manton. His crew also graded the runway at the Bidwell Airport (later renamed the Red Bluff Municipal Airport) in 1928. As important as this work was, it wasn't nearly as sweet as the time Les and Supervisor Walcott were out assessing roads with Surveyor Luning. Inspecting a bridge, the men found a mewling kitten, so Walcott grabbed a nearby milk cow while Les worked the udders to get some milk for the little kitty. Very cute—and it came out in the paper! Les's advocacy for road building and improvement went beyond local roads to regional routes, like the Red Bluff-Eureka highway (today's highway 36W). He saw roads as a boon to commerce, but worked to promote tourism too as automobile leisure trips grew in popularity. Les's brother Franklin, along with other stockmen, had opposed the establishment of Lassen Park in the teens, but by the late twenties Les was working to boost its attendance. He oversaw upgrades to the connecting spur between Mineral and the park loop road, and also supported wayfinding signs in Grants Pass directing travelers to Red Bluff, "gateway to Lassen Volcanic National Park." Les ran unopposed on his roads record in 1930 and waltzed to a second term as 3rd district supervisor.

Les's activity as supervisor was not limited to his signature roads issue. His committee appointments reflect broader interests: in hospitals and public health, libraries and education, and volunteer organizations like 4-H, which he actively supported and defended against attempts to cut UC Extension funds during the Depression. His passions combined in his work for Camp Forward, which brought malnourished youth to the woods with the explicit goal of increasing their weight to boost their general health and, especially, to ward off the risk of tuberculosis. (The papers even published lists of the camp's top weight-gainers.) Les worked with Manton community members to improve the Manton-Viola (or Rock Creek) road that provided access to Camp Forward; he used his own trucks to transport children there year after year, and donated books and peaches to the camp. He also provided transportation to kids attending 4-H camps at Mineral, Viola, and Manzanita Lake. Among Les's other activities were helping establish the Corning

Veterans Memorial Hall, stocking steelhead and trout in the Battle Creek watershed (often with his brother-in-law Henry Buszdieker), and assisting firefighting efforts, both as a participant and with food donations. As the Depression deepened, he was active on the Elks charity committee, on the supervisors' homeless support initiative, and as a distributor of Red Cross flour donations in the 3rd district. For her part, Lena was active in the Stitch Club, the Home Demonstration Committee (which taught skills for domestic frugality), the Manton school, the Red Bluff Women's Improvement club, and she attended Eastern Star meetings in Millville with her sister Marie and Ruby Blodgett. Marie Buszdieker was a county librarian for years and frequently visited Henry and Lena in Manton. She may have had a hand in moving the Manton branch library from the post office under Irene Dines into the Buszdieker house under Leona's care in 1928.

It's an impressive resume of community service that Les and Lena built, even in those days when civic volunteerism was more common in those days than it is now. It seems they liked and helped people, and people liked them back. Even those who ran afoul of Les the supervisor couldn't help but like Les the "genial shopkeeper." For example, a Red Bluff man who'd apparently encountered resistance from Les Childs in the supervisors chambers over some policy matter or other wrote of his pleasant surprise at the kind treatment Les showed his kin up here on the hill. Without specifying the issue, he wrote that "This here G.L. Childs aint any too whole hearted when he's in our town sittin in the supervisors room in the court house... But meet Mr. Skinner upon his own hill at Manton and nothing he's got is too good for you. I've heard that before and one late week end we had it brought closer." Family members on their way to Brokeoff from Redding stopped by the Childs store to use the phone, he explained. "And Skinner turned himself inside out to be nice to them...which shows you shouldn't judge a fellow for hospitality by the way he turns you down at a supervisor's meeting"! Mantonites knew Les to be a generous person. As Tip Wilson recalled for his wife Alice's "Manton Yesteryears": "When hard times came, Less said, 'No one will go hungry as long as I have the store.' Less was true to his word. The people would have charge accounts and pay once or twice a year," Tip said.

Saving lost kittens, feeding the hungry, putting patriotism in action to support the war effort—it almost sounds too good to be true. Midway through Les's second term as supervisor, however, there arose a situation that might have scandalized the Childs name, had it been connected with him in the papers. In the summer of 1932, as Prohibition was drawing to a close, federal agents were scouring Tehama for violators of the law. They busted a few places that had a case or two of beer, maybe a little wine. But their biggest raid, by far, stemmed from a tip they got of an unusual sight: drunk hogs frolicking in a draw near the Long Ranch, just south of Battle Creek. Prohibition agents went to the property with Sheriff Hull, and there they found a new metal building, painted brown to look like an old barn. Inside was a large, sophisticated bootleg distillery. The building was wired for electricity with an unauthorized tap into the PG&E system, and buried water lines drew from a nearby irrigation ditch to feed the building's maze of pipes, valves, boiler, and five 3000-gallon tanks. The liquor agents estimated that the operation cost about \$50,000 to outfit (that's over a million dollars now), and could turn out 1000 gallons of high-proof alcohol per day. About a year before the bust, a pair of San Francisco men had bought the property from local farmers Louie and W.H. Wilson, and word was that the liquor was trucked to the City in delivery vehicles with "MILK" written in large letters on the side. The men had told the Wilsons they intended to raise greyhounds on the property, and in fact agents were greeted by dozens of the sleek racing dogs when they arrived. They also found two men, Kenneth Atyeo and Hugh Jackson, near the distillery building, which was in the midst of a batch when it was busted. The pair would say nothing about their employers. They were arrested, and ultimately indicted on liquor production charges, but only Atyeo was convicted, despite his claim that he was on the property only to exercise the "pups." As far as I can tell, no locals were ever implicated in the operation, let alone charged.

The bust happened on July 26th, 1932, a Tuesday. One week later, Les Childs suffered a heart attack in Red Bluff and missed that week's supervisors meeting "due to illness." Just a coincidence? So it would seem, were it not for a couple of 2007 Jean Barton columns in the Daily News, in which she recounts stories Bobe Graham told her shortly before his death. There, Graham held forth about various cowboy escapades in the old days and some local bootlegging operations during Prohibition. He told Barton that "there were a lot of stills in the country... The

moonshiners had a still in a barn along a creek on the Long ranch that made good whiskey until it was busted.” Graham mentioned the drunk hogs and milk trucks, then added this: “Les Childs said he had invested \$10,000 in the project and lost it all.”

Whatever locals in Red Bluff and Manton knew or gossiped about the incident, it was never connected with Les Childs in the papers, and certainly not in the courts. Nor did it seem to affect his position as supervisor. In fact, when the board met in January 1933 to assign committee roles, Les was made chairman for a second time. The Daily News, in noting “Skinner” Childs’s chairmanship, clarified that he was “a square shooter and popular,” and “didn’t get his nickname skinning anything but mules.” And although Sheriff Hull had assisted federal agents in the still bust, he and Les remained close enough personally that when Hull died suddenly that August, Les was a pallbearer at his funeral. Les even launched an ill-fated campaign to replace Hull as Sheriff in 1934, losing badly to J.N. Froome, who would go on to hold the office until 1950. The campaign did produce one noteworthy moment, when a baseball game among candidates for county office featured 52-year-old Les at first base and 23-year-old political newbie Clair Engle at shortstop, just beginning the rapid ascent that would take him from the Tehama D.A.’s office to the senate chambers in Washington.

With his loss to Froome in the race for sheriff, Les was out of county-level politics for the next eight years. Henry Buszdieker had taken on a bigger role at the store while Les was supervisor, and presumably now Les had more time to devote to the business. A series of health problems plagued him after his 1932 heart attack, leading to several hospitalizations in St. Elizabeth’s over the following decade, but Les showed few signs of slowing down. In 1939, six years after Prohibition’s repeal, Les applied to sell beer at the store again. He focused his husbandry efforts on hog-raising, regularly shipping pork to the Bay Area in the later 1930s. And he continued to support 4-H camps in the mountains and the TB Association’s Camp Forward, serving the group’s board in the late 1930s and early Forties. Les was also closely involved in establishing a Townsend Club in Manton in 1936 to promote the Townsend Plan, a Depression-era proposal by a California doctor to pay Americans over 60 a generous monthly stipend. It didn’t become law, but the Townsend Plan put pressure on FDR’s administration that helped bring about the

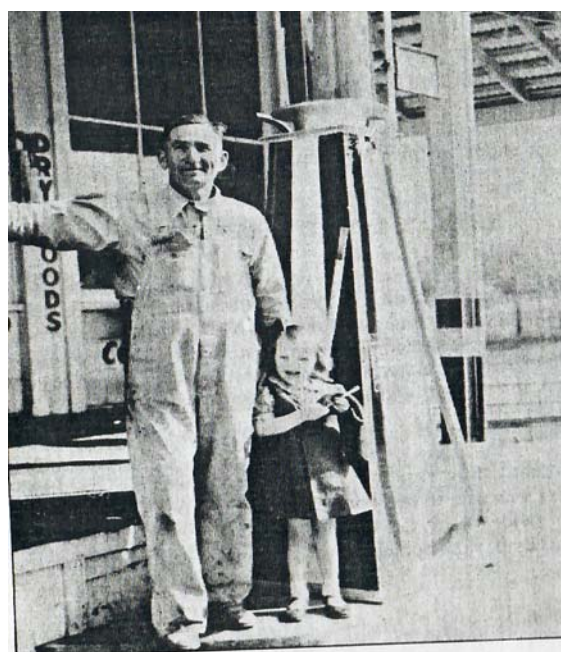
Social Security system. After war rekindled in Europe in 1939, Les continued to support Red Cross relief efforts, and served a stint on the Manton Joint Cemetery board from 1937 to 1943. And when floods washed out the south fork Battle Creek bridge connecting Manton to Red Bluff in 1937, Les rolled up his sleeves and joined CCC workers to set up a pulley system to bring goods across the raging creek in a large basket.

As the world suffered through the Depression and careened toward another global conflict, time was taking a toll on the Childs siblings. Les lost his eldest sister, Myrtle Morgan, in 1935. Ivy Childs Forward died in June 1941, almost exactly six months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. As spring 1942 rolled around, Les's brother Frederick also died. That summer, Les decided to run for a third supervisor term, betting that his long experience in local business and politics would "be of benefit to the county during the present troubled times." His campaign hit a roadblock in July, however. Les's nephew Coyle Childs, his brother Frank's son, became involved in a dispute with the draft board over his claim of conscientious objector status. Coyle was known to local law enforcement from a pair of arrests in his youth: a hit-and-run incident in his father's Packard sedan in 1927, when Coyle was 16, and a reckless driving charge from 1935, when he ran into the back of a snow plow on highway 36 after a party in Paynes Creek. It's an understatement to say that the local press treated Coyle's draft claims with skepticism. The Daily News printed, in an ironic tone, a letter he wrote to the draft board quoting the New Testament books of Matthew, Timothy, and II Corinthians as justification for his refusal to serve earthly armies. It didn't help matters that Coyle's church was the Jehovah's Witnesses. Members of traditionally pacifist groups like the Quakers were sometimes granted religious waivers, but the Jehovah's Witnesses were widely seen as a cult, and had recently provoked public anger with highly publicized court cases over their refusal to salute the flag and say the Pledge of Allegiance. Newspaper coverage of Coyle's case strongly suggested that he was trying to use religion to avoid his patriotic duty. Attempting to dissociate himself from the controversy, Les placed an ad in the Daily News in August, just a few weeks before the primary election. He was not now, never had been, and never intended to become a Jehovah's Witness; he had "every respect for my country and the symbol of its greatness, the American Flag." His family, he clarified, "consists of Mrs. Childs and our daughter," and the Lutheran, Christian, and Baptist were the only churches they attended. "Above all," he concluded, "I

shall do everything I can to support the war effort.” In a tight three-way contest, Les out-pollled incumbent Tom Beaumont by 84 votes, setting up a November runoff. It was the closest race Les had faced, but he eked out a 100-vote general election victory over Beaumont; less than two weeks later, Coyle was sentenced to two years in prison for draft evasion.

Time was running short for Les in his third and final stint as supervisor as health issues mounted. As pledged, he did much to support the war effort, including heading up a war bond drive and serving on the board of Tehama Red Cross. He got to see his and Lena’s daughter Leslie marry local Navy man Bud Welbourn in November 1943, while Bud was on leave and Leslie home from secretarial school in Oakland. And he witnessed the 25th wedding anniversary party for sister Mary and Louie Meyer in the spring of 1944. But Les’s persistent heart troubles seem to have forced him to slow down. Within a day or two of the war’s end on V-J Day, September 2nd, 1945, Les sold the store and its stock (but not the building) to Glenn Wingfield and his wife, recent arrivals in town. (Wingfield would die suddenly two years later, but that’s another story.) But Les seemed unwilling to give up his supervisor’s seat. He announced his run for reelection in 1946 but was unable to campaign properly, as he lamented in an ad in the *Corning* paper in May. That same month, Les sent a letter of regret when he missed a meeting of the River Park Boosters, a citizens’ group working with county supes on the Woodson Bridge park to level the ground and add picnic facilities. Despite his health challenges, when the August primary rolled around, Les narrowly defeated

Dairyville’s J. Walter Bunting to win a 4th term as supervisor.



*Leslie Childs with her Uncle Henry Buszdieker.*

He would not live to be seated a fourth time: Les Childs was just 64 when he died of cardiac failure at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital on September 15, 1946. Lena moved to Red Bluff after Les’s passing, then went to live with Leslie and Bud Welbourn in Dutch Flat, Placer County, where she died in 1977. Leslie died in 2010, and is buried next to her parents in the Manton Cemetery. In addition to Les’s parents, our

cemetery is the final resting place for his sisters Myrtle Morgan and Ivy Forward, his younger sister Mary and Louie Meyer, his brother Frederick and wife Mabel, and the infant child of Leona and Henry Buszdieker, stillborn in 1933.

Les and Lena Childs saw the Manton store through 30 tumultuous years of America's history, encompassing World War I, the Prohibition era, the Great Depression, and World War II. Their example of unstinting service to the community during trying times is impressive enough to make them seem saintlike, while the tragedies and difficulties they lived through—including the accidental death of Roy Miles, the bootleg still bust, and Coyle Childs's draft evasion prosecution—add a patina of real life to their story. May we keep them in our memory.



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