

The Holiday Herald

Cascade Mountains, Shasta County, California

16-17 December 2024

*When the snow
lay round about*

Manzanita Lake

Lassen Volcanic National Park
Elevation 5,900 feet / 1,800 meters

See page 7 for notes on photos.

When the snow lay round about ...

SOURCES: Click on [underlined text](#).

This is the second time in the 15 years of creating these holiday newsletters that I've used a line from the 1853 poem "Good King Wenceslas," by [John Mason Neale, an Anglican priest from London](#), as the headline. The first time was in 2013 when California's December snowfall was so sparse that I drove to Klamath Falls and Crater Lake National Park in Oregon to simultaneously indulge my loves of snow, mountains, travel, photography and Christmas, the holiday I celebrate among the many that fill this season. You can read that newsletter [here](#).

Neale's poem fits its purpose as a Christmas carol only in an approximate sense, the same way these newsletters fit the peaceful, charitable sentiments of the broader holiday season though cloaked in red and green of one holiday. It fits where it fits and rubs a blister where it doesn't. I touched on that concept in one of last year's holiday newsletters: [Home for the Holidays 2](#).

The Wenceslas whose legend Neale wrote about was not a king, and his poem was set to a 13th Century tune written to celebrate the arrival of spring. The tune is *tempest adest floridum*, Latin for "there is flowery weather." The poem celebrates the [Feast of Stephen](#) on December 26 (Boxing Day in British Commonwealth nations), which has been elevated to an legal holiday in many European countries as a way to extend Christmas one more day.

[Here is the poem:](#)

*Good King Wenceslas look'd out,
On the Feast of Stephen;
When the snow lay round about,
Deep, and crisp, and even:
Brightly shone the moon that night,
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gath'ring winter fuel.*

*"Hither page and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?"
"Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain;
Right against the forest fence,
By Saint Agnes' fountain."*

*"Bring me flesh, and bring me wine,
Bring me pine-logs hither:
Thou and I will see him dine,
When we bear them thither."
Page and monarch forth they went,
Forth they went together;
Through the rude wind's wild lament,
And the bitter weather.*

*"Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger,
Fails my heart, I know now how,
I can go no longer."
"Mark my footsteps good, my page;
Tread thou in them boldly;
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly."*

*In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod,
Which the Saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure,
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor,
Shall yourselves find blessing.*



Cloud confusion

Cayton Valley elevation 3,045 ft / 928 m

Soldier Mountain elevation 5,531 ft / 1,696 m



Downtown Hat Creek

Population 266 (2020 census)

Elevation 3,422 ft / 1,043 m



Loomis house

Lassen Volcanic National Park
Elevation 5,900 ft / 1,800 m



Fire and ice

Lassen Peak elevation 10,457 ft / 3,187 m
Hat Creek Ranger District, Lassen National Forest

Notes on photos

SOURCES: Click on [underlined text](#).

MANZANITA LAKE (front and back covers) — “Manzanita” refers to 107 species of evergreen shrubs along North America’s Pacific Coast. The vast majority of the half-million annual visitors to Lassen Volcanic National Park come from May to November and enter at its northwest or southwest corners where state highway 89 crosses the park boundary on a circuitous 30-mile / 48-kilometer route that almost circumnavigates the volcano for which the park is named. Most of the highway is closed in winter, blocked by 30 to 40 feet / 10 to 12 meters of annual snowfall. Manzanita Lake is less than a mile inside the northwest corner. I did not have skis or snowshoes for the short hike along the shore where I shot the [cover photo location for my 2023 Fourth of July newsletter](#), in which you can see Lassen Peak itself.

CLOUD CONFUSION — As the morning fog burns off, cloud layers at multiple altitudes battle for control of the airspace over this small agricultural valley midway between the two largest volcanoes in California’s Cascade Range, Lassen Peak and Mount Shasta. On the far side of the valley, the peak and forest fire lookout tower atop Soldier Mountain are still socked in.

DOWNTOWN HAT CREEK — The small settlement and creek itself were named for a group of surveyors in 1851 who were mapping the Emigrant Trail. [One of them lost his hat in the stream](#). The [Hat Creek Radio Observatory](#), which was partly inspiration for the [1997 movie “Contact,” starring Jodie Foster and Matthew McConaughey](#), is what I wanted to photograph. However, I couldn’t travel on the days it was open to the public. Foster played Dr. Ellie Arroway, an astronomer searching for intelligent life in the universe. Arroway’s character was based on Dr. Jill Tarter of Palo Alto, once a student of astronomer Carl Sagan and now chair emeritus of Mountain View’s [SETI \(search for extra-terrestrial intelligence\) Institute](#). The observatory has 42 radio telescopes, each with a 20-foot / 6.1-meter dish, called the Allen Telescope Array for Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen. He donated \$30 million to build it. The observatory receives, analyzes and pinpoints the sources of radio waves from outer space. Watch a 12-minute YouTube video of the dishes in action [here](#).

LOOMIS HOUSE — Homesteader B.F. (Benjamin Franklin) Loomis and his wife Estella [built this house in 1927](#) on land they owned near Manzanita Lake, which later was incorporated into Lassen Volcanic National Park. Loomis photographed the 1914-15 eruptions of Lassen Peak and advocated for the park’s creation. The museum across the entry road is named for him and has a seismograph that monitors the volcano.

FIRE AND ICE — Looking south, Lassen Peak is the snow-covered mountain on the horizon. Its 1915 eruption was the most recent of any U.S. mainland volcano until Mount St. Helens in Washington State, also a Cascade Range volcano, exploded in 2004. When Congress was considering whether to include Lassen’s taller neighbor to the north, Mount Shasta, in a national park. Lassen’s eruption interrupted Congress’ deliberations and made it the more popular candidate. In the foreground is a portion of Lassen National Forest scorched by the [2021 Dixie Fire](#), which was ignited when a tree nearly 60 miles away fell on a Pacific Gas and Electric power line. The fire burned from July 13 until October 25 through five counties and cost \$637.4 million to fight. Its size of 3,070 square miles / 7,950 square kilometers made it the largest wildfire from a single source in California history.

See earlier holiday newsletters from this region.

[2010 *Happy Holidays to You*](#)

[2013 *Home for the holidays*](#)

[2021 *The weather outside is frightful*](#)



Manzanita Lake

Lassen Volcanic National Park
Elevation 5,900 ft / 1,800 m