A FAMILY'S QUEST FOR A PIECE OF PARADISE

THE BENBOW HOTEL AS A SYMBOL OF THE FIRST MODERN ERA

by

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ABSTRACT

The 1920s was truly the first modern decade with the advent of new technology and wealth. Humboldt County had its own version of the prosperity of the 1920s and challenges of the ‘30s in the building and running of the Benbow Hotel. It became a regional symbol of the decade.

The decade of the 1920s is often characterized as a period of American prosperity and optimism. It was the “Roaring Twenties,” the decade of bathtub gin, the Model T, the first transatlantic flight, mass media, electricity, and the $5 work day. It was a period of great advancement as the nation became urban and commercial. America became the wealthiest country in the world without a rival. Industry created wealth for many individuals through the sales of goods from coast to coast. The automobile was one of those goods that changed America forever, enabling people to do things they had never done before, like travel.

With all of these changes occurring in America, the Benbow family, a group of nine brothers and sisters, decided to try and capitalize on the nation’s new wealth and technology. They started by purchasing a 1288-acre sheep ranch in Humboldt County and then building a Resort Hotel. Not just any hotel for the middle class traveler, but a luxury Hotel for the rich and famous. One gets the feeling that the Benbow Hotel was a playground for the wealthy during the 1920s. The hotel also felt the hard hit of the depression and almost lost the dream and hard work that made a vision a reality. The Benbow experiment will tell a great story about the modern era.
This project will provide local educators with classroom ready resources to help tell the story of the 1920s and ‘30s locally as well as nationally. This project will develop an appreciation and understanding of what people across America, as well as locally, experienced during the first true modern era. I will be using articles from local and national papers, diary entries from Helen and Eva Benbow, letters and personal accounts of life within the Benbow family during the ‘20s and ‘30s. I will also refer to a variety of books to account for the history and culture of this era.
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INTRODUCTION

Life in Northern California at the turn of the century was not easy. Without a strong family and a pioneering spirit, people didn’t last very long. Life in this rural area of Humboldt County called for initiative, self sufficiency, good health, and faith in God, and family. This was still a hunting and farming society for most residents. Working the fields, hunting, fishing, tending to the livestock and holding down jobs away from the homestead were the responsibility of the men. Many worked in the area as tree fallers, or in the numerous mills that developed during this time.¹

The women ran the homesteads, worked the vegetable gardens, raised the children, and tended to the livestock, such as chickens, goats, and sheep. They were also required to ride wagons for miles to pick up needed supplies that had been ordered from wholesale houses by mail. These supplies would arrive by train or by ship to Fort Bragg and Shelter Cove, California.

The local economy began to boom with the splitting of redwood into shakes, fence posts, grape stakes, housing lumber, and railroad ties. The tan bark industry, whereby the bark of the tan oak was peeled and processed to produce tannic acid, provided summer jobs for many of the homesteaders. Tannic acid was used in the curing of leather. Men could earn enough money during a three to four month summer period logging to provide a year’s supply of staples for their families such as sugar, flour, coffee, and other commodities which they could not produce themselves.
At this time, commuting to the cities was impossible, especially during the winter months. The workmen stayed on the job sites until those jobs were finished. They generally stayed in bunkhouses and earned wages of around $2.50 a day plus room and board. Backwoods industries were made possible by the forests proximity to the ocean. Small harbors sprang up all along the northern coast to ship out the lumber products and to receive shipments of supplies required by the local communities.²

In the late 1890s, logging in Humboldt County turned redwood trees into 200,000 board feet of lumber each year. The advent of the Steam Donkey and the bulldozer created roads through the wilderness and methods by which more lumber could be moved more efficiently.³ This booming industry would continue until the 1930s and would cause an influx of people to move into Humboldt County. One group of people that would move from Berkeley would be the Benbow family; nine brothers and sisters with lofty goals and plans that would see their dream a reality in the southern part of Humboldt County.

From the onset of their endeavor it appeared to look like a very prosperous project, but the reality would end up only sustaining life for the family. The modern tendencies of the Benbow project would be the appearance of the rise of wealth, more leisure time for the wealthy, and laissez faire political policies. These issues would give business a boost, but if businesses limited themselves, they would fail. The Benbows would limit their chance to create a prosperous enterprise. They countered tendencies of the decade by moving from an urban setting and settling in the rural countryside, decided
to not advertise, and because of religious and political beliefs did not include alcohol in their plans. These issues would prove to be fatal for a business trying to survive.
A FAMILY’S QUEST FOR A PIECE OF PARADISE

No one is really certain why the Benbow family decided that it was time for a change from what they knew in Berkeley. They were doing something that ran against the norm of the 1920s. They were actually leaving the city for the country. The 1920s marked the first time in history that the population was higher in the city than that of the countryside. The Benbows didn’t really know what they wanted to do when they got the right land, but they knew it was going to be a family project. They all agreed that a change in routine seemed desirable and that the project needed to accomplish three things: 1) It had to be a family project; 2) it needed to financially support all members of the family; 3) and everyone would have a voice in all decisions needing to be made. They were not sure at first what the project would be or all that it would entail. All nine brothers and sisters would save their money and then lump it together when the time was right. The older Benbow siblings would be more established and were able to afford more than the younger ones. This caused some problems down the road.4

The eldest member of the family was Joseph. Born in 1893, he attended school in Eureka, California. In 1915, Joe became a principal and taught at Franklin School in Eureka. He started classes in blacksmithing and woodworking to help teach kids a trade. He tried a variety of other jobs before becoming a lawyer. After dabbling in the law field, he then became successful in starting an insurance business. He would later become the President of the Benbow Hotel and Benbow Power Plant.5
The younger siblings were just as ambitious. Evangeline had a very promising career as a commercial artist and illustrator. Burt became a watchmaker and engraver. He also was an inventor with several patents to his credit. Clara taught school and Helen became a draftsman and student of architecture. Jessie had already married and seemed ready for a family project. Then the three youngest Benbow family members, not yet old enough to vote; were Loleta, Walter, and Robert.

The Benbow family decided that a dude ranch would be the perfect project. Not having any land and not much money didn’t make a difference to the family. They decided that the project would happen. There were many questions as to who would visit and how would they make enough money for the family to survive? It is said that it was one of the Benbow women who stated “the rich snobs from the city would come to a dude ranch.” They agreed that they could prosper if they all worked together.

The family began to search for the right piece of property shortly after the end of World War I. Their search for land took them too many parts of California and lasted nearly two years. They had some specific guidelines for the land they wished to acquire. It had to be a day’s travel from the city of San Francisco. They presumed that the people interested in visiting a dude ranch would be the wealthy city folks who could make a trip to the countryside for an outdoor adventure. If potential guests were more than a day’s travel away, they may not get as many visitors. At this time the road trip from San Francisco was about 12 to 14 hours. The land also had to have a source of year-round water. Water was a necessity of life for many reasons; drinking, fishing, swimming, and eventually for power.
After searching for eighteen months, the Benbow siblings found the location for their dream project. The parcel was the Linser Ranch in Southern Humboldt. They chose this site for its location on the Redwood Highway, for its power and lake possibilities, and for the scenic grandeur of its valley embraced by virgin Redwoods and mountains with the Eel River passing through the property. They bought the 1,288 acres for $45,000. They purchased the land on credit. This eventually led to some internal family strife when one of the Benbow boys married Mr. Linser’s daughter. The Benbows actually spent their entire savings on the down payment for the land. Thinking that raising sheep would cover the cost of living for their family, they enlisted the help of Ernest Linser who stayed on and helped them get started. They soon discovered what millions of other Americans across the United States would find out about farming: monetary profits were rare.

The family met and decided that something else had to be done. The original plan featured a dude ranch. They thought that it would provide a service to a particular group, the rich. People from the city that were looking for an escape would love to be in the country to enjoy all the things that attracted the Benbow family. When they agreed on the dude ranch, they faced the challenge of getting money to fund building suitable quarters for the guests as well as stables for the much needed horses. They decided that they would sell lots on their land to help fund the project. At that point a few of the older Benbow men went to San Francisco to sell lots for the new Benbow subdivision. Slowly, they sold enough parcels to raise money to start their project; however one encounter would soon change everything.
While in San Francisco, some of the family members met Margaret Stewart, owner of the Hotel Stewart. They immediately hit it off and she became very interested in the property. She actually bought a lot in the subdivision. But while on the trip, Stewart convinced the group that a hotel would be perfect for the location. She showed them her hotel and convinced them that if the visitors had similar luxuries at Benbow around them, such as hot water and climate control of their room, people from the city would jump at the chance to get away to the redwoods. Especially the wealthier population that could afford the finer things that the twenties could offer.9

The group returned from their trip and called a meeting of the family. The resolve to build a luxury resort that would be able to support the family became unanimous. The family imagined financial profits from the enterprise. In an era of endless possibilities, why couldn’t success happen for their venture?

All the members would contribute to the cause. Helen would be the supervisor of the building crews. Burt would be the problem solver and saved countless hours by creating or inventing to make the job easier. Robert tended to the ranching and the stables. Loleta was the bookkeeper and postmaster. Evangeline was the artist. She did everything from sketches of building plans to decorating the hotel with her paintings. Walter was the jack of all trades. He would be the driver for all supplies and would be the one to call if there were any problems with anything. Clara was the one that most of the Benbow family gives credit to for making the project work. She was the peace keeper who made sure that the family stuck together and never lost focus of the goal. She was what one family member said was “the glue of the family.”10
Once the funding for the project was secured, the building of the Hotel would begin. It is very important to understand that it was not the only project going on at that time. They were also building vacation homes for the investors in the project. The Hotel itself was designed by architect Albert Farr, who was most noted for The Wolf House; the home he designed for author Jack London in Glen Ellen. Farr was commissioned by the Benbow family to create the cornerstone for the resort community they intended to build on their 1,288-acre valley.

To build a hotel in the 1920s in rural America was quite an undertaking. The area of Southern Humboldt didn’t have a lot of skilled labor to draw from, not many supporting industries nearby, and the roads at the beginning of the 1920s were poor, becoming non-existent during the stormy winter months. It didn’t help that the family didn’t think local workers could do the job. They usually hired men from San Francisco to do most of the building and rock work. There wasn’t even a local builder’s supply. In the closest town of Garberville a general store met the needs of nearby ranchers, but not building contractors. The Benbow project required intense focus from the family members to achieve a very difficult goal.

The era in the United States appeared to have a character all its own and “fun, frivolous, carefree” became synonyms for the era. But what made it so unique and significant in the history of the twentieth century? World War I, “the war to end all wars” had ended and American soldiers returning home were glad to be free from the horrors they had seen. They wanted to have a good time and to forget the trials and tribulations of warfare. So they did. Some might say they did so in excess. Americans
began to look at the old order and the old morality of the pre-war period and found the old rules no longer applied to them.\textsuperscript{13}

People worked more and began to buy many products on credit. Possessing luxuries soon became a status symbol not only to the rich, but also to the hard working middle class. Prosperity had been assisted with the onslaught of two new stimulants to purchasing: credit purchasing and the stock market. Both issues would come back to hurt Americans eager to raise their standards of living. Fredrick Lewis Allen, a contemporary observer of the era, writes that it basically became an old fashioned belief to limit one’s purchases to the amount of cash on hand. Both would prove very costly when the stock market crash eventually came.\textsuperscript{14}

The standard of living for many Americans was raised to an all time high. The growth in the economy went hand in hand with the technological advances of the twenties. These advances made life easier and less constrained. They bought them even if they could not afford them. The use of credit made most products attainable and in turn made Americans enjoy the benefits from them. Middle class families bought new appliances such as electric refrigerators, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners. The modern assembly line, which Henry Ford first introduced with the idea of time management, was vital not only to the automobile industry, but to many other industries. This mass production created more jobs and resulted in an increase in wages that fueled the need for more goods.\textsuperscript{15}

The 1920s marked the climax of “the second industrial revolution,” powered by electricity and producing a growing array of consumer goods.\textsuperscript{16} In 1907, one out of ten
American homes had electricity. By 1929, more than two-thirds of Americans had electricity. Electricity managed to further distinguish everyday life in electrical urban America from that in the largely non-electrified countryside. Some believed that rural America had been left behind technologically, but to others that seemed fine.

The Benbows brought electricity to Southern Humboldt. They initially bought some diesel generators to power the hotel in 1925. At this time not much of rural America had the opportunity to have generated power. The Benbows had a truck with a tank on it that they hauled to Eureka every few days to get more diesel. This became very expensive and they soon realized that they needed to build a dam. It would not only be cost effective, but it would provide a lake that guests could enjoy with swimming, boating and fishing. During this time one could go into Garberville at night and not see much, only hear a few diesel engines powering independent homes. Garberville sat two miles from the Benbow hotel. Later Garberville would ask to get electricity from the Benbow Power Company and the Benbow family would then make a profit from the project. They would later sell their power company and the rights to the dam to Pacific Gas and Electric (P.G.&E.) in 1947.

During the building of the dam, it was not unusual to see guests gathering on the bank watching the construction of the dam. The Benbows used this as an opportunity to serve a hot picnic lunch under the trees in addition to the other activities that they had to offer. They built the dam in one season due to the threat of high waters that could have destroyed their work come winter. Completed in the fall of 1931, people made bets as to
if the dam “would go”, and “when it would go.” It lasted fifty years before P.G. & E. made some additions to it.

Originally called the "Hotel Benbow", it opened to the public in July, 1926. The Benbow family would also construct the Benbow Dam, Power Company, the Golf Course and RV Park. The Hotel became a popular destination for motoring tourists traveling up the newly-completed Redwood Highway. By 1920, there was a passable road from Sausalito to Eureka. The combination of seclusion and elegant hospitality also served as quite an attraction for the Hollywood elite. Spencer Tracy, Clark Gable, Alan Ladd, Charles Laughton, Nelson Eddy, Jeanette MacDonald, Joan Fontaine, and Basil Rathbone were all patrons of the Hotel. Dignitaries such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, and Lord Halifax also enjoyed the Benbow hospitality. Guests relaxed among all the amenities of fine dining and luxurious rooms, along with the best of the great outdoors: riding stables, golf course, hiking trails, swimming, boating, and fishing on the Eel River.

The Benbow family supported the Republican Party and believed that the Republican ascendancy of the 1920s addressed the ills of society. They were pro business and liked the idea of laissez faire in the economy. They absolutely adored Herbert Hoover and the fact that he was a frequent guest at their hotel. Hoover’s home away from Washington D.C. was in Palo Alto, California and he also owned a ranch near the Rogue River in Oregon, so Hotel Benbow became a natural overnight stay between the two homes. He vacationed at Hotel Benbow every summer while Secretary of Commerce, however, his stays were limited to just overnight trips once he became
president. The Benbow family would gather around the fire to listen to Hoover speak. Phyllis Benbow, daughter of Joe Benbow, said this about President Hoover, “I remember how important the president must have been. After all, mother, who hated cigar smoke, thought it perfectly all right on those specific evenings because it was Mr. Hoover.” The entire Benbow family enjoyed his visits.

The Benbow family opinion of Democrats, according to interviews, is summed up by the following statement: “Until their dying days, the words, “FDR” and “SOB” always followed one another in their vocabulary”. Carol Bickler, daughter of Walter Benbow remembered this story. “I was ten and my uncle Joe asked me if I wanted to see the great American destroyer. Being very curious I said ‘yes’, and he then showed me a Roosevelt dime.” This portrays some of the feeling about Democrats. The Benbow family went as far as censoring the *Saturday Evening Post* for the children and teenagers. Anything too liberal was cut out and removed. Eleanor Roosevelt stayed at the hotel and changed some family attitudes about the democratic party. “My father had tea with Mrs. Roosevelt on the terrace one afternoon. I never found out what was discussed, but whenever her name came up in conversation, he always would say something nice about the first lady.” This was the one time when the Benbrows would not slander the democratic party.

The Benbrows did little advertising for the Hotel. They believed that if they gave great service, wonderful food, and atmosphere, then word of mouth would be enough. This would prove very costly when the hotel could not support itself. Walter Benbow said that in the beginning, the summertime at the Hotel was full with all kinds of people.
“A full house from the beginning” is how Walter put it. They made enough in the summer to pay for most of the year, with little extra for actual profit.

Guests would enjoy the finer luxuries inside of Hotel Benbow. Silver everywhere, antique furniture, all providing the best of the time. That sentiment is still evident when one walks through the Benbow Hotel today. At times the hotel was opened only from April to September, most people were only seasonal employees, except the chef who was paid year round to ensure his happiness and employment. The Hotel was seasonal because of the Great Depression. They could not afford to keep the place open during the winter months. The family acted as though they were well off, but they were never able to make it out of the debt that they constantly found themselves in during the 1920s and 1930s.

Throughout the twenties a host of issues had to dealt with in the community of Benbow, including boosterism in politics, and the controversial religious beliefs of the era. Warren Harding’s campaign slogan of “Returning to Normalcy” after WWI made his landslide election victory no surprise to many at the time. However, there really would be nothing normal about business in the 1920s. Changes and innovations occurred in the economy while technology and culture gave more Americans leisure time to pursue whatever they wanted to do. A Republican pro business atmosphere and the pursuit of profits led to a period of apparent economic prosperity between 1922 and 1928. The business boom saw a rise in manufacturing output of over sixty percent during the period from 1919 to 1929. Times seemed to roar for many and the real wages and standard of
living rose for many in urban areas.\textsuperscript{25} This would be a false sense of security because many of the items that were raising the standard of living were purchased on credit.

It is impossible to deny the incredible feats that the U.S. economy seemed to perform in the 1920s and how it improved the quality of life for many Americans. The most obvious reason was the debilitation of Europe after World War I, which left America the only truly healthy industrial power in the world. This role would be used to benefit the American business cycle. By selling our products in Europe and helping in the rebuilding of Europe, it would increase American wealth. The economy also benefited from lax governmental policies such as protective tariffs and the easing of antitrust pressures that led to a more laissez-faire economic system. Most important, however, were the emergence of new industries and the expansion of existing ones within the United States. For example, the automobile industry grew at an enormous rate during the 1920s. In 1919 there had been 6,771,000 passenger cars in service in the United States, by 1929 that number rose to 23,121,000.\textsuperscript{26} It also spurred the growth of secondary industries like glass, rubber, and steel. Gas was needed to fuel the cars, and a highway system had to be developed as people now had more freedom of movement to go wherever they chose to go.\textsuperscript{27} With this freedom of movement people could now do what they wanted, when they wanted. No longer were they captive to train schedules as now they were truly free to go by automobile whenever they chose. The problem of being bound to a small town was solved with the production of the automobile. This revolutionary mode of transportation made everyday life easier and gave people more time to do what they wanted.\textsuperscript{28}
The road system early on was all dirt and later gravel by the middle of the 1920s. The Benbow area would not have been able to create businesses without that road. Walter Benbow spoke of a Redwood Highway and how once graveled, it made travel that much better but very dusty. He also said that he would have liked to find the guy that came up with the idea to oil the road. “The dust didn’t fly in the summer time, but the flying oil sure made a mess of everything.” The trip would take about twelve hours from San Francisco and about four hours from Eureka. This Redwood Highway and its proximity to the Hotel Benbow would be a huge factor in the success of the hotel, or at least to its longevity of appeal.\textsuperscript{29}

The construction of the Redwood Highway would be very difficult as many people doubted an adequate road could be built through the terrain drained by the Eel River. Many things would happen to ensure its completion; the first would be Chinese laborers to help early on in forging roads through wilderness, the second, California passed the Convict Act of 1915 allowing the use of certain trusted convicts on road building jobs, especially during WWI when many men had gone to war. By 1920 there was a passable road between Sausalito and Eureka.\textsuperscript{30}

The Benbows also talked about a motor stage that came from Willits to Garberville in the early 1920s. The cost of a one way trip from Willits to Garberville amounted to approximately seven dollars. The trip actually took about four hours to travel that distance but the stage would stop at all the resorts along the way. The opening of the Redwood Highway was the beginning of the tourist industry for the Southern Humboldt area.\textsuperscript{31}
The Hotel Benbow could not have been created without the availability of the automobile and the different aspects of its creation. In much of the family’s diary, family members relied on the use of the automobile in a variety of ways. In searching for the location of the Hotel, the family realized that it must be a short day trip from the city. The only way to travel was by car. There was not a train that would bring people to their destination. While the creating the hotel, the Benbows had to rely on the use of the automobile to get all of the construction supplies for building the Hotel itself. They did not own a mill of their own, and they certainly could not afford to buy a mill at the onset of the Hotel’s creation.

Walter Benbow did all the commuting to San Francisco, Santa Rosa, and Eureka. During the construction of the Hotel, he hauled every piece of lumber for the hotel and building projects from Carlotta, California. “American Tank of Carlotta went out of business. They had one hundred thousand board feet of fir stacked and dried. My brother Joe bought the lumber for $7.00 per thousand feet. Quite a deal even then. I ended up hauling all of that lumber on an old REO speed wagon. I still don’t know why we thought that truck would haul lumber.” The REO speed wagon was a flat bed truck designed and built by Reed and Fanning in Eureka following WWI. It was a small truck with not much power, but it did the job.

The trip to Carlotta would take about five hours and was only made possible with the use of the automobile. Later as vehicles became better constructed, the family hauled steel from Oakland to allow them to build the dam on the Eel River to create electricity for the entire Garberville area.
Without the automobile none of this would be possible and the Hotel Benbow would not have been an option for a business opportunity. The automobile craze of the 1920s did have some drawbacks which negatively affected the Benbow family. There would be problems with the car, problems that in hindsight seem pretty amusing.

Walter Benbow told this story to many members of the family. The Benbows hired a chef to come and cook for the guests of the Hotel during the summer months. The season had just begun when the chef returned to his workplace with a brand new car. It was a new Chevrolet and it was a top of the line model. So the chef wanted Walt to look at his car because it was making a horrible noise. Walt told the chef to go ahead and start the car. When he did, it made a horrific noise, metal grinding and sounding just awful. Walt then asked if he could try it and the chef agreed. Walt got in and started the car right up without the previous noises. It ran smoothly and sounded perfect. Walt asked the chef why he didn’t use the clutch to start the car, and he responded with, “Oh, I wondered what that peddle was for!” Many new car owners didn’t really understand all the equipment, let alone application for a driver’s license.

Allen refers to the many changes in the economy. The biggest change was the automobile. Allen does a very good job discussing not just the boom in the automobile industry but the boom in all the supporting industries as well. In appearance, it looked as if the industry had done very well, but the numbers decrease later in the decade. Many people also bought on credit and this gave a false sense of financial security. One usually does not think of what the automobile means to the economy. From the sister plants that make the parts for the car itself, one must look at the gas stations, repair shops,
restaurants and other businesses that arose due to the automobile. The days of the railroad towns were disappearing. The rise of the roadside town in America emerged, for example, the development of Route 66.

Throughout his book, David Kyvig, author of *Daily Life*, gives a great sense of the era. He actually talks about the idea of a vacation for many families in America. This was mostly for the rich and middle class, but an entire industry would spring from these outings. Some called it Auto-tourism. He called it “driving for pleasure”.³⁴ It became a very popular pastime for people of all classes. The rise of the tourist trap and destinations really sparked another part of the economy and again led to other businesses that would prosper from the manufacturing of the automobile.

“Automobiles were made with such precision that the motorist need hardly know a spark plug by sight; thousands of automobile owners never even lifted the hood to see what the engine even looked like”³⁵ According to Allen the car was doing just fine. In 1919 there had been around 6.7 million passenger cars in service in the United States, and by 1929 there were no less than 23 million cars driving the roads of America.³⁶ There is little doubt that Allen was right that automobiles had transformed the nation’s economy.

In Kyvig’s book, *Daily Life*, the author describes the automobile as the catalyst for the production of other products. His discussion of Henry Ford is also well done. Henry Ford stated in 1908: “I will build a motor car for the great multitude. It will be large enough for the entire family but small enough for the individual to run and care for. It will be constructed of the best materials by the best men to be hired, after the simplest designs that modern engineering can devise. But it will be so low in price that no man
making a good salary will be unable to own one and enjoy with his family the blessings of hours of pleasure in God’s great open spaces”  

Ford’s vision for the automobile would hold true. It not only transformed the auto industry but all industries incorporating mass production techniques. It inspired people to take risks during the 1920s to make more profits to enjoy this new American way of travel. Kyvig also talks about the downfall of Ford’s Model T and introduces some interesting issues. One issue is about consumers buying on credit. He shows how banks and car companies began to offer credit to buyers, with the exception of Henry Ford. Henry Ford made an affordable car for anyone to own. Ford’s theory was to make a low priced car that would be durable enough to last a very long time. This ended up hurting his company in the end. “The availability of credit from other manufacturers and dealers made it much easier for a car buyer to get behind the wheel of a more expensive car with conveniences, like the electric starter, that the Model T lacked.” Car prices have skyrocketed since the 1920s, but Americans do not look at the overall cost of the car. They look at their monthly payments. If they can afford the payment, they will buy the car, even if it will take up to seven years to pay for it. So credit eventually caught up to people beginning in the 1920s.

Automobiles and radios emerged as the top-selling consumer products of the 1920s. By 1925 there was one automobile for every six persons in the country (as compared to one for every one hundred in Great Britain), and by 1930 this had increased to one for every 4.6 people. By the end of the decade, an estimated 40 percent of American families owned radios. Both of these products served to connect remote
communities, automobiles brought mobility to both urban and rural consumers and radios provided them with access to information and opportunities.\(^{39}\)

The Gross National Product rose from $74 billion at the beginning of the decade to more than $104 billion in 1929. Wages were up at first. Workers felt they had more money to spend, and they spent it on automobiles, home appliances, radios, phonographs, and popular entertainment, especially movies. Millions of ordinary Americans invested in the stock market for the first time as stock prices soared upward.

One person interviewed for the classic study, *Middletown*, by Robert and Helen Lynd (1929) said: "I'd rather go without food than give up the car." Another interviewee said that the biggest change in America could be explained in just four letters: A-U-T-O.

Mass production of automobiles and the urbanization of America also led to a new culture and a whole new way of organizing cities, towns, and markets as cars made it possible for millions to live in suburbs, some with their own shopping centers.

Since the national highway system did not exist in the 1920s, roads remained better suited to horses and buggies than to automobiles. Motorists faced frequent mechanical breakdowns, flat tires, and being stuck in mud holes. When traveling long distances, they often found it difficult to find lodging or rest rooms and campsite stops and small tourist cabins, as we know them today, were just beginning to flourish.

Automobile congestion in cities contributed to a mass exodus to a new place to live, the suburb. The growth of suburbs eventually caused the decline of inner-city business districts as suburban shopping centers began to replace older concentrated business districts.\(^{40}\)
Once the onset of the depression took place, the automobile industry and all the other industries would be hurt and this in turn, hurt the Benbow Hotel. Not many people could afford to travel, let alone the gas needed to fuel their auto. The automobile played a huge role in the potential success and failure of the Benbow Hotel.

Where did this sudden boost in big business come from? Big business was feared by the average man, so it needed to change its image to fit into this pro business world that developed after the war. Many historians argue that business became socially responsible due to the progressive movement.\textsuperscript{41} In Warren Susman’s book \textit{Culture as History}, it exemplifies how Bruce Barton really changed how people looked at business, through advertising.\textsuperscript{42} In the years before the 1920s, the progressives feared business and felt that it held too much power.\textsuperscript{43} Leaders of industry somehow came to the conclusion that they needed a serious change in how they did business. It apparently worked. Business started to become somewhat socially responsible for how they were doing business.

A Chemical National Bank of New York executive, Charles Carson, summed it up best by saying, “Real success in business is not attained at the expense of others. Business can only succeed in the long run by accruing and holding the good will of the people. The best upper class men in business are really genuine in their belief, in its service and are consistent in its practice.”\textsuperscript{44} Suddenly in the 1920s clergymen, journalists, and politicians all proclaimed service to be the chief aim and justification to American business. “Service as a basis for profit making is coming to be recognized as a true motive for creative industry” quoted the Benbow family’s favorite industrialist, Henry
The family believed that Ford was a “genius, way ahead of his time”, simply put by Walter Benbow. The Benbows recognized that Fords vision and technological advancement were to be applauded and followed as an example.

The Benbow family in the 1920s did not perceive corporations as a negative influence. Businessmen garnered respect in all parts of the country, including Humboldt County. Thus the family organized the Benbow Development Company in the fall of 1922. They bought into the idea of service and the idea of business as a noble cause. This idea would be tested during the depression, but many of the Benbow family members never swerved from that earlier belief. They would eventually sell stock in the corporation to fund the building of the resort known as ‘Hotel Benbow’. They planned to sell about 150 home sites to fund their projects throughout the 1920s. They ended up building all the homes for the out-of-town investors. In addition to building the hotel, they built many of the homes that are still in the valley today. In the houses that they built, the Benbows made sure that they did not build kitchens in them. It was believed that the owners of each of the houses would come to the hotel for all of their meals.

With the big boom in land development and real estate investment throughout the country, the Benbows traveled all over the state in search of investors who would join their cause. Joe and Burt Benbow spent months walking the streets of San Francisco armed with photographs, drawings, and dreams, seeking out those who would join in the project. This led to the idea of the hotel being built with a golf course to attract more people of wealth and leisure to the area.
The increased leisure of the 1920s led to an increase in the popularity of golf during the decade. The game was restricted to the wealthy because of equipment costs, the time required to play a round, and the expense of maintaining a large and carefully groomed grass course. Big business started to get as much done on the golf course as they did at the office. So it really became an outdoor place to do business. By the end of the decade an estimated three million players could be found on some four thousand courses nationwide.  

The Benbow Golf Course was definitely an afterthought that investors wanted before they bought lots in the subdivision. Businessmen from Eureka traveled down and said they would buy lots, as would many of their friends, if there were a golf course in the valley. The Benbows really did not know much about the game except that it could help them sell lots. It seemed to offer a good attraction for the wealthy from San Francisco as well. Later on after the Hotel was built, airplanes from San Francisco would land on the golf course bringing in the wealthy patrons to spend the summer at the hotel. The planes would circle the valley and that would let the Benbows know that they needed to remove the sprinkler heads on the golf course so the plane could land.  

J.H. Tregue, Secretary Treasurer of the National Association of Banks once wrote in 1922, “With geographical separation of seller and buyer that followed this large scale manufacture and large scale distribution commerce done on the principal of caveat emptor proved precarious. Selling and buying needed a confidence and warmth which the principle of caveat emptor did not supply: Goods could not move freely if the buyer had continually ‘to beware’. The compulsion lay on the seller to make his goods of such
quality as to remove the suspicion of the buyer and to insure his confidence in the

51 This quote typifies the Benbow family’s attitude that they came from and had plenty of money. 52 This attitude had no factual basis as they did not come from a wealthy background. Their father was a traveling salesman who rarely stayed at home, and they were raised by their mother. This picture of how the family struggled to fund and provide for nine children was never conveyed to potential investors. The Benbows believed that no one would invest in a venture that a poor, struggling family tried to create. Instead, they needed to come across as confident and certain that their project would be a success. They really were blue collar workers reaching for a very lofty goal of becoming successful entrepreneurs. The Benbows believed that they must seem like a part of the wealthy class to attract that cliental. It is strange to imagine, but the Benbow family discouraged each other from getting help from nearby Garberville, because they thought that all good workers came from San Francisco. The Benbows also didn’t talk to the help when guests were around. Another sign of the family’s elitist attitude. The Hotel Benbow project would eventually be built, but never completely finished due to lack of funds. 53

One of the best books on the era of the 1920s is Fredrick Lewis Allen’s, Only Yesterday. It establishes a very concise history of the 1920s from a very personal perspective. It reads as though it is a newspaper or magazine report, full of vibrant detail. It paints a vivid picture of the decade and really draws one into the story of boosterism in the 1920s. Published in 1932, the book does an excellent job of retelling the story of the roaring twenties. Fredrick Lewis Allen served as the editor of Harpers Weekly for many
years and really is a journalist and not an historian. Allen chronicled what the average American did during the 1920s.

Throughout the decade of the twenties some people amassed great fortunes. With the onslaught of mass production and consumerism, individuals were able to create wealth as opposed to the old fashioned method of inheritance. The economy was fueled by new technology, more efficient management, and innovative advertising. Production would almost double, but the benefits would not be distributed evenly. According to Allen there were many companies and individuals that were blessed with profits in the 1920s. “During the three years between 1924 and 1927 alone there was a leap from 75 to 283 in the number of Americans who paid taxes on incomes of more than a million dollars a year.” While the numbers of wealthy increased in this decade, the majority of people still lived at substandard levels. Between 1923 and 1929, real wages increased 21 percent, but corporate dividends went up nearly two thirds. The richest 5 percent increased their wealth from a quarter to a third, and the wealthiest 1 percent controlled 19 percent of all income. According to Jeffrey Nash, one study suggested that a family in the 1920s needed between $2,000 and $2,400 a year to maintain the “American standard of living.” In 1924, 16 million families earned under $2,000. Wages did go up for many, but hours went down; therefore workers did not make as much as they possibly could. The majority of Americans could not afford the Benbow dream, and in reality neither could the Benbows.

During the 1920s, churches appeared to directly compete with the new values and pastimes of Americans. “Common Sunday activity appeared to be taking the family out
for a Sunday drive in the family automobile, for the purpose of visiting friends, sightseeing, or travel to a picnic site. Stores remained closed, but otherwise Sunday was becoming a day for leisure rather than piety.” This would depend on location of the population. It is known that the more rural the more religious.

Religion has been an issue that make people raise their eyebrows. One either liked to talk about it or changed the subject. The temper of the 1920s did not fairly portray religious beliefs as the national debate on the Scopes Trial created great skepticism concerning religious beliefs. Sunday, in general, provided time for the family to go on Sunday drives, picnics, and other activities. Prosperity, after World War I and the attempt to gain material possessions became the new material creed for Americans, not to mention the popularity of Sunday golfing and cruising in the automobile. The biggest challenge to religion seemed to be the rise in scientific methods of thought. Churches worked to try and entice more membership by becoming recreational, not spiritual. Churches built swimming pools and offered different leagues to try and keep people around.

Everyday, men and women were reminded that science could accomplish anything. The idea of evolution went against literal teachings from the Bible. Two major camps came out of this controversy. On the one side, there were the fundamentalists who believed the Bible to be true, and would not accept anything else. On the other side, the modernists believed it was time to throw out the older portions of biblical teachings of the Bible and use science to mediate between Christianity and scientifc thought.
For the Benbow family, Christian Science, first originated by an American women, Mary Baker Eddy in 1875, became significant. This religion increased greatly during the 1920s because its core belief implied individuals could accomplish great things when they had the right mind set. The influence of this religion is very important to understanding the Benbow family. Christian Science is based on two books: the Bible and *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. Christian Scientology did not believe in doctors. They believed in individual healing through mind over matter, not through the use of medicine. It valued the strong individual. Mary Baker Eddy sums up this belief in 1899:

> “Jesus’ sacrifice stands pre-eminently amidst physical suffering and human woe. The glory of human life is in overcoming sickness, sin, and death. Jesus suffered for all mortals to bring in this glory; and his purpose was to show them that the way out of the flesh, out of the delusion of all human error, must be through the baptism of suffering, leading up to health, harmony, and heaven.”

This belief system appeared to be the perfect religion for the decade of the 1920s. Jesus and the bible condemned the rich, but not one line in *Science and Health* can be found to condemn the rich. In the bible passage (Luke 18:22) it illustrates what is said of the rich; “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven”. Some called Christian Science, a rich man’s religion because it did not mention giving to the poor at all. Being poor was a diseased state of mind, and the entire religion was based on being an enemy of disease. Christian Scientists basically received divine assurance that there was no need for charity. They would not support funding for hospitals because no one is sick; illness was all in a person’s mind. The more successful they are, the healthier. These concepts fit right
into the Benbow frame of mind. This is amazing because the family itself was not rich. They never became rich with the Hotel, though they acted as though they were.

Their religious views would help explain how the Benbow family operated. Every morning the family would meet to discuss the chores for the day. This was only for the immediate family. This entailed the Benbow brothers and sisters, but not husbands and wives. The meeting would usually end up with the men arguing about some issue and the women usually settling the disagreements among the men. These women were very directed in their goals. Within this familial structure, the Benbows believed that anything could be accomplished if they kept their minds their goals. Clara Benbow eventually became a Christian Science reader in order to disseminate the concepts of Christian Science faith.

Not all family members followed the religion. Interviewing certain family members indicates internal strife between a few of the family members. One member, Walter Benbow, married Vera Benbow who didn’t accept the Christian Science belief. When one of their children would become sick, they sneaked into Garberville to see the doctor. This was a condemned action among the Benbow clan, and they hid all evidence of the visit. This would cause some serious tension within the family. Vera didn’t feel that Christian Science provided the necessary attention that modern medicine could. Yet the family’s religious beliefs would give them, or at least the immediate brothers and sisters, solidarity during these years. It would give them the confidence to dive into all types of complex projects, allowed no negativity and no discussion of failure in their thinking. However, their religious beliefs also included temperance which hurt the
family business by preventing the sell alcohol at the hotel. The Benbow attitude of religious and class superiority prevented them easy access to many locals who might have been helpful with assistance to achieve their goals.\footnote{The concept of a national federal prohibition, stemming from the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century temperance movement became law during WWI.}

Americans, confronted by a new wave of financial and industrial consolidation, became alarmed as concentration brought monopoly and meant the decline of the individual economic opportunity that had been central to the American democratic faith. Middle-class Americans had long since come to believe that equal opportunity enabled the average man to get ahead, acquire wealth, prestige, and power, and that the struggle for individual success brought material progress, prosperity, and happiness to the nation as a whole. They had also come to believe that their highly competitive economic order was the foundation of their moral strength; as long as opportunity remained open to all on a relatively equal basis, the test of success was a man’s own effort, character and ability. The Benbow family exemplified this attitude and it would be a driving force behind their project. Since good character led to success and bad character to failure, men were encouraged to develop and practice such virtues as industry, thrift, honesty and sobriety.\footnote{Many lower class Americans feared large monopolies that restricted their opportunity to climb up the economic ladder. Middle class Americans worried about lower-class unrest and discontent. Their real fear concerned the lower classes rising up}
and pushing the middle class out of its way. So the middle class needed to do something to protect their position.

During the decade before the 1920s, a growing critique of the American liquor industry caused many progressive reformers to promote prohibition. With the advent of World War I, reformers sought to stop the flow of alcohol to young servicemen. A quote from the retail Liquor Dealers Association of Ohio highlighted the problem:

“We must create the appetite for the liquor in the growing boys. Men who drink…will die, and if there is no new appetite created, our counters will be empty as well as our coffers. The open field for the creation of appetite is among the boys. Nickels expanded in treats to boys now will return in dollars to your tills after the appetite has been formed.”

With the publication of “Ten Nights in a Bar and What I Saw” by T.J. Arthur, the public saw the seamier side to alcohol consumption. Progressive reformers took this book and ran with it. They argued that abuse of alcohol created abuse within the family structure. Domestic and public brawls only strengthened their argument for outlawing alcohol.

Therefore, prohibition became a struggle against “loose” morality. It was not just the struggle between the rural, older folks, and reactionaries against urbanites, but a struggle for the young and the liberal as well. Many argued against prohibition in the name of personal freedom and the right to make their own choices.

Despite strong prohibition sentiment, the alcohol industry gained enormous power in the liquor-free decade in the 1920s. Illegal alcohol sales would rival even the automobile industry as far as profits were concerned during the roaring twenties.
With prohibition intact during the 1920s, the Benbow Family became strong supporters of prohibition. They believed that alcohol made people weak and really never had alcohol available to guests visiting the Hotel. This does not mean that the visitors of the Hotel had no access to alcohol. Within the Hotel the family made certain that alcohol was not provided, but guests could bring their own. One guest who was on a hunting trip from San Francisco found out that his driver had forgotten to pick up the “hooch”. He ordered his driver to go back and get the alcohol. The driver drove 150 miles back to Santa Rosa to the local dealer and met the hunting group before they left on their trip. Once en route, they drank so much, that their guide, Robert Benbow, left them because he was afraid that they were going to shoot someone. When he went back the next day, they had all survived, but did not feel like hunting.70

The Benbows didn’t change their stance on alcohol even after 1933 and the end of prohibition. They continued to believe that they had a moral obligation to keep such evil at bay. People constantly tried to convince them that the sale of alcohol would boost their profits. They did not budge. The bar at the Benbow Hotel was not constructed until 1960 after the sale of the Benbow Hotel was complete and out of the Benbow family’s care. Many of the Benbow family cannot recall a time where alcohol was involved at family gatherings or even in the houses of the members.

The single most devastating event of the family enterprise came with the rest of the country’s devastation and that was the Great Depression. The stock market crash in 1929 ended the decade of prosperity, or at least perceived prosperity. Farmers, blacks,
and other ordinary Americans did not prosper. This decade of the 1920s would be one of intolerance and hate.  

Unfortunately in the small community of Benbow would not be immune from racism. Within the building codes of the Benbow subdivision, it specifically listed who could live in the subdivision, listing blacks as undesirables. This fit right into the restrictive covenants in history, where whites perceived themselves superior to other races.

The Benbow family loved everything about Henry Ford and what he did for America. Henry Ford published anti-Semitic papers and brochures that were passed out whenever a Ford automobile was sold. Jews were barred from fashionable resorts; one of those resorts was the Hotel Benbow. Members of the family said Jews were not allowed because they spoke too loud. In reality they were racist. This would lead the Jews to build their own resorts, one example would be the Catskills in New York.

The 1920s were, for eight years and three quarters of 1929, a very happy decade. The last quarter was the Stock Market Crash that did start the Great Depression that lasted straight through the 1930s, not ending until mid-1940. A war started before 1920, and a war broke out in 1929. Although it was called the Great Depression, people killed others, killed themselves, became homeless, and became penniless. Actually, the eight years of happiness might have felt like a small vacation to a person who lived during the time.

The Great Depression would change the lives of an entire generation. It came at a time of unprecedented prosperity and most thought that the business cycle was immune
to a downturn. Not everyone went hungry, stood in breadlines, or lost jobs, but almost everyone suffered, and most tended to blame themselves. President Hoover, who was once an admired guest at Hotel Benbow, rejected calls for the federal government to get overly involved in the economy. This would lead to the unemployment rate skyrocketing to 25% in 1932.

By October of 1929, Hotel Benbow was running smoothly and systematically. They were making profits and times were good. Then the crash on October 29th changed all the good fortune for the Benbow family. By noon of the next day, the hotel was practically empty. Everyone rushed back to either talk to their brokers or at least be closer to the action. The shock slowly passed and they saw and felt the effects of the downturn. It would greatly reduce the travel of the upper class that they were trying to attract. This led them to operating seasonally. It would not be until 1932 that the impact would be fully felt.

During the formation and financing of the Benbow Project, the sale of bonds had been added to the sale of stock. In the latter years of the depression, some investors decided to proceed to foreclose on the property. It was Burt Benbow that would secretly form the Benbow Bondholders Association and quietly buy back control and gain the majority of the bonds. The shell shocked opposition learned of this association and knew that they were outwitted. Without the action of Burt Benbow, the family labor for so many years would have gone for naught.  

To accomplish the take over, the family had to sell and/or borrow on every life insurance policy, piece of jewelry, or any other personal possession that they owned. The
dream of making a fortune suddenly changed overnight to simply making a living. The Benbows only had a seasonal hotel to run.

When World War II began, it hit the Benbows very hard. Because of gasoline rationing and most centers of population too far away from the hotel, they would not have many travelers. The other problem that they would face would be how to serve their outstanding meals while using food rationing. There was a shortage of help with so many people in the armed services or wartime industries and they could not buy replacement linens or other items that were no longer being made available due to war production. They would make the decision to close the hotel for a couple of years, until they could get more guests.

In the spring of 1945, when the United Nations Charter was being formed in San Francisco, a number of the members of the British delegation, including Lord Halifax, wished to see the Redwoods and telephoned the Benbows for a reservation. They opened up the Hotel and accepted without hesitation. They immediately contacted the chef in San Francisco and he arrived by greyhound (gasoline was still rationed and impossible to obtain) with all the necessary supplies, including the food. 75

The Benbows would continue to run the Hotel until the middle of the 1950s. They tried to sell twice, but the buyers were unable to have success in the venture. The family ended up taking back ownership both times. At that point, they changed the name from Hotel Benbow to the Benbow Hotel.

The final chapter to the Benbow era was when Clara Benbow died. She was the glue that held the family together. Once she was gone, the family had different visions for
the Benbow Hotel. Not able to come to a mutual agreement, the family was left with no choice but to concede to the final sale of the Hotel. One can only imagine the feelings and emotions that each of the original founders experienced as they walked down the steps of the Hotel for the last time. Present day owners still honor the family and their dream by keeping the name---the Benbow Hotel.

In conclusion, writing about this topic has really given me great insight into the Benbow family’s desire to build a hotel. It’s interesting that so much of what the Benbow family did really resembled the different eras that they functioned in.

During the 1920s they were strong supporters of the Republican agenda of big business. They took on a huge project with the idea that they too could share in the wealth of the decade. This dream would never be realized and the family would not have much to show for their hard work and effort. They were the beneficiaries of the new technology like the automobile and the onset of new business practices that would allow for more leisure time to spend in their resort.

Even small out-of-the-way places were affected with what develops nationally. The Benbows reached for a dream, somewhat achieved their mission, and left a legacy to follow. The masquerade of wealth that they accepted makes one ponder the reasons for their actions. Yet many people lived that charade during the so called “roaring 20’s”.

The Benbow Hotel is definitely a symbol of an age, an age that fought through some turbulent times and great times. It is truly a symbol of the first modern era in which technology and industry brought America together. Rural to urban areas were much more connected thanks to the changes in society. The Hotel Benbow serves as a perfect
example of a family trying to survive and prosper in a rollercoaster era. Major issues like prohibition, religion, technology, and big business all were national issues that filtered down to become a regional issues within the building of the Hotel. The failures of the Benbow family to adapt with the times would eventually cause the Inn to be unsuccessful and they would have to sell their dream. The Benbows would limit their chance to create a prosperous enterprise. Had they decided to advertise and promote their business, as well as accept alcohol in their plans, they may have done a better job continuing their dreams.
A Family’s Quest for a piece of Paradise:
The Benbow Inn as a Symbol of the First Modern Era

Introduction

What exactly is it that inspires nine brothers and sisters to decide that they want something more out of life? They were teachers, a lawyer, an artist, farmers, insurance salesmen, a watchmaker, an architect, and some students who would set out to do something that none had any experience doing; building and running a hotel. It would not be just any ordinary hotel, but rather a luxury hotel built to attract the wealthy and famous throughout the state of California.

The Benbow family began in 1922 by purchasing the 1288 acre Linser sheep ranch. They did not think of building a hotel immediately. It wasn’t until they realized that ranching was not enough to sustain the entire family, that the idea of a hotel arose. A resort hotel was the plan, with such amenities as a golf course, riding trails, boating, swimming, and fishing in what was to become Benbow Lake after the Eel River was damned.

Their dream was not unusual in the 1920s. Throughout America, many individuals were making more money than anytime in history. With the onset of new technology, many had the means to gain great fortunes. The stock market was another phenomenon, where people could invest and make lots of money. Risk taking became an
excepted venture and a pot of gold often resulted from the effort. The Benbow plan was to take advantage of this wealth of the 1920s by creating a getaway among the redwoods for those with money and hopefully finding their pot of gold at the end to the rainbow.

This lesson plan will explain the history of the Benbow Inn as a regional example of what was happening in other parts of the nation. I will tie together the changes and events of the 1920s and 30s to the building and running of the Benbow Inn. I will try and show how the 1920s was the first modern decade of life as we know it.

I am going to emphasize in the lesson’s theme: that the roaring twenties didn’t roar for everyone. Students need to know that not everyone really prospered during the 1920s. High School history books tend to focus on all the prosperity and the Gatsby-like feelings of the era. In fact, few really prospered; the rich got richer and the poor remained poor. While some middle class people amassed fortunes, most did not, and some even lost their fortunes. It is really important to teach not just the glitz of the decade, but the experience of the average American. This will be demonstrated through the experiences of the Benbow family. When one looks at the Benbow Hotel, it looks like they had lots of money. However, students will learn that they made ends meet and survived without making a fortune. Plus I think that it is important for students to realize that many things were happening in the decade that would lead from boom to bust.

This six to seven day lesson plan has four main objectives:

- To explore the changes that the roaring 1920s brought to American society.
- To explain why people today, like that of the Benbow Family, take risks in order to make money.
• To show how national issues affected local economies. (from boom to bust, depression)

• To examine the life and times of the 1920s and 30s at Hotel Benbow and throughout America.

Prior Content Knowledge

Students should have a general understanding of the major national issues that were plaguing America up to the end of World War II. Knowledge of the Progressive Movement would be important. This background will set the stage for an in depth look into a single area that will deal with these issues. Students should also be familiar with using primary documents and answering document-based questions. Students will get a good feel for what the 1920s were about and some of its real problems.

Discussion of Content Hook

This hook will give students a feeling for the social climate of the 1920s. This decade was a period of loosening morals and zany social fads. In this activity, students will recreate the language of the era. It will start with a brainstorming activity that will involve everyone in the class. The first part is to hand out the brainstorming sheet (Appendix B) for students to complete quietly on their own. Direct students to use as many slang words they can on the list that is provided. They will come up with some interesting words some which you may have no clue; but this will be a good learning opportunity for the teacher as well. After 5-7 minutes to write on their own, open up a
brainstorming session and write all the words under each of the headings on the board.
Brainstorm should take about 10-15 minutes. Then handout the second part, language of
the 1920s, and have them try and guess what each word means (Appendix B). Once
done, hold another session of what they think they mean and what they really mean.

Once done with the brainstorm, divide students into groups of no more than four
to five per group. You will then hand out about eight words (Appendix B) to each group
that they then make up a skit by creating a conversation using their eight words. The
groups will also prepare a translation into today’s language for the conversation they will
act out. Give the groups about 20 minutes. When each group presents, they start with the
words that were given to them. Once they are done, the class tries to guess what they
were saying. Once they have guessed what they have said, they then perform modern
translation of the same skit.

Questions to ask after all groups are done:

1. What slang from the 1920s was new to them? What slang did they recognize?
   Why do some of the slang words and expressions from the 1920s endure to this
day?

2. Slang words and expressions for what types of things or activities were coined in
   the 1920s? How do these words reflect the social tensions of the time?

3. What can we learn about history by analyzing the slang expressions of the time?
   What do you think future generations will say about the slang expressions of
today?
Lesson Content

Day one: The hook will take up the first day of the lesson. Be sure to make a connection between the hook and this next area of study- the 1920s. Explain the homework assignment. Have students work on what I call a study tool (Appendix C). It is a list of people and things of the 1920s. This list is most likely in most of the history books that most schools have adopted. I call this assignment an OLEO- Overnight Learning Enhancement Opportunity, and students will come back the next day ready to have a discussion of the 1920s.

Day 2:

Welcome students and proceed to give students a lecture/discussion of the 1920s (Appendix G). The information will be the same that the students worked on from the previous night. It will help to add pictures to your power point presentation. One can find all types of pictures on Google images to add to the presentation. Have students take notes on the presentation. The overall goal of today is to provide students with a solid feel for what was happening in the 1920s. The focus is on the growth of business, the stock market, the automobile, prohibition, and politics. I usually ask a lot of questions from the pictures…..What do you see? Why do you think it looks like this? Doing so keeps them involved in the lesson. Ask students to give examples of how the 20s roared for some and didn’t roar for others. This might take more than one day, but you can adjust it to fit your schedule.
At the end of the period, explain homework to students (Appendix D). Today, they learned that many Americans saw an opportunity to make their fortunes in the 1920s. They were willing to take risks in order to better their position in society. Now is their opportunity to make their fortunes by creating a business that they think will be successful. They will share their ideas tomorrow. This is going to set up the case study of the Benbow Inn.

Day 3:

Students will be ready to share their business ideas to the rest of the class. Hopefully, they will dream big. Anything is possible, and this is the point I want to emphasize. During the 1920s, most people thought anything was possible. This would explain why people started investing in the stock market, investing in land, and creating new ways for people to spend their increased income. This should take about 20 to 25 minutes for students to share their ideas.

The next part of class will set the stage for the case study in which a family thought they could make some money. Explain to students that they are going to examine a case study of the 1920s and the Benbow Inn. Prepare maps (Appendix L) on an overhead to show the location of the Benbow Inn. Show a California map, a Northern California map, a Humboldt County map, and a Southern Humboldt map. The Inn is located about 1 hour, or 60 miles, south of Eureka and about 4 hours or 220 miles, north of San Francisco.

Once you have the Southern Humboldt map up ask students the following questions:

- What do you notice about the location of the Benbow Inn?
• Name all the important geographical factors that may have been considered when the Benbows selected that location?

• Have any of you ever been to the Inn? How would you describe your experience?

Then Divide students into five groups. It works just to go down the rows and have them count to five. Once they have been divided, hand out the different sections of the reading (Appendix E) and questions (Appendix F) for them to answer at home. Tell them to write on their own paper and to be prepared to discuss their answers with the rest of the class. Explain to the class the need to focus on how the Inn is a symbol of the 1920s. Give them the rest of the period to get a start on the reading.

Day 4:

Put students in groups and have them go over what they learned from the reading. All part I people in one group, and so on. Once they have had time to make sure they all answered the questions fully, they will all present their answers to the rest of the class. Have as many people answer questions as possible. Afterwards, ask these questions.

• How was the building of the Hotel a symbol of an era?

• Did the Benbows become rich by building and running the Inn? Why?

Write all the student responses on the board. Here are some ideas that they should have received from the reading:

• Became corporation-sold stock and land for investment.

• They were big time Republicans and loved Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover.

• Golf was important to the wealthy class that they were catering to.
• Prohibition was strictly followed and the Benbows were supporters.
• The automobile made it all possible for them.
• The Benbow women were modern women in their jobs and roles they performed.
• They were a part of the intolerance of the rich by excluding Blacks and Jews
• Religion affected them like it did everyone else throughout the 1920s.
• They were affected by the crash of ’29 and the Great Depression that followed
• The Benbow business was affected by the war years.
• “Did the Benbow family become wealthy and did the 20s roar for them?”

For OLEO hand out reading on the Benbow Inn, *When the Stars Stayed at Benbow*, and the document-based questions that go along with them (Appendix J). Instruct students to answer the questions and to be prepared to discuss them in tomorrow’s class.

Day 5:

Have a brief discussion of the reading from the night before. Ask the question, Do you think the Benbow Inn was successful? Why? What stood out for them? What things could have been done to increase prosperity? To give students a visual idea for the 1920s, show one or more of these videos. The first one is in the Century Series *America’s Time* with Peter Jennings, the one on the 1920s, *Boom To Bust* is outstanding. I have a movie guide that I have students fill out as they watch (Appendix I). The film is about 53 minutes and is really good. The entire series is a must have if you teach American history. The next film, which is outstanding to show, is called *Brother Can You Spare a Dime?* It is about 20 minutes and shows great newsreels from the time. The
final one is a PBS film narrated by Bill Moyers. The film is called 1920s, and is number 96 in the series. It does a really good job showing both sides of the growth of America and is about 55 minutes long. All three movies can be found at Amazon.com.

Other videos, or feature films that go really well with the 1920s depending on what kind of time you have: The Untouchables, starring Kevin Costner, about Prohibition, Al Capone and Chicago during this period. It is rated R, so I usually have a parent permission slip, or I cut the video to show what I want them to see. The Great Gatsby is another classic that does a great job showing the wealth of the 1920s. It is a great film and should be seen by everyone studying this decade.

Tonight students should study for their final quiz on the 1920s. The quiz will be on all notes, readings, and videos.

Evaluation

Students will take the final quiz on the unit. The tasks for each lesson are intended to build content knowledge in order to ensure success when the students test in the traditional way. The final aspect of evaluation will be an objective exam. This brief exam will ensure that all students are responsible for the content. A clear understanding of the content is important, as this lesson will serve as the foundation for future lessons. The traditional method will be a variety of types of questions. True/False, matching, fill in, and essay. See quiz and answer key in back of lesson (Appendix H and Appendix K). The non-traditional quiz on the 1920s would be to create a brochure advertising the 1920s. Have students spend some time creating this brochure to convince people to live
or not to live in the 1920s. Other ideas for the non-traditional methods would be to pair students up and have them create a rap song of the time. When students create this rap, they then will put it to music and perform it on video or in front of class. Kids love to perform rap music. This concludes the lesson on the 1920s.

Standards Alignment
California Content Standards
11.5 Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s.

1. Discuss the policies of Presidents Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover.

2. Analyze the international and domestic events, interests, and philosophies that prompted attacks on civil liberties, including the Palmer Raids, Marcus Garvey's "Back-to-Africa" movement, the Ku Klux Klan, and immigration quotas and the responses of organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Anti-Defamation League to those attacks.

3. Examine the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the Volstead Act (Prohibition).

4. Analyze the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the changing role of women in society.
5. Describe the Harlem Renaissance and new trends in literature, music, and art, with special attention to the work of writers (e.g., Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes).

6. Trace the growth and effects of radio and movies and their role in the worldwide diffusion of popular culture.

7. Discuss the rise of mass production techniques, the growth of cities, the impact of new technologies (e.g., the automobile, electricity), and the resulting prosperity and effect on the American landscape.

National History Standards:

Era 7: The Emergence of Modern America

Standard 3: How the United States changed from the end of World War I to the eve of the Great Depression.

Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)

Standard 1: The causes of the Great Depression and how it affected American society.

Rationale:

This lesson will satisfy California State Standard 11.5 through a focused study of the experience of the Benbow family. Though 11.5 specifically asks teachers to examine the conditions for life throughout the 1920s, this lesson will provide students with a specific parallel story that will provide a foundation for understanding the larger national story that will follow in subsequent units of study. Moreover, the motivation to
understand the details of a local compelling piece of history will strengthen a student's understanding of the entire standard.

This lesson asks students to understand the impact of the Technology and the rise of industry. By doing so, students accomplish many of the goals set in part 7 of 11.5. Consequently, for students to truly understand the 1920s, students must first understand the conditions for this time and place. Additionally, this lesson provides details as the racial and cultural divide that existed in the area of Southern Humboldt and other communities throughout the United States. The events that occurred in Benbow serve as an excellent case study for this era in American History.

Students will demonstrate understanding of Era 7 standard 3 through their examination of the Benbow development during this 1920s decade. Students must grasp the idea that modernization was a part of all of America. Growth of business seemed like all was well, but reality will sink in when the depression approaches.
Appendix A

Modern Language
Use slang from today to describe the words, think of as many words that you can.

Transportation-

Communication-

National culture-

Money-

Alcohol-

Intoxicated-

Female-

Male-

The police-

Get arrested-

Friend-
New Words for a Modern Society

Directions: Attempt to define each of the following words. Be prepared to discuss possible meanings.

Operator
Soap Opera
Talkies
News Reel

Struggle Buggy
Flat tire
Tin Lizzie
Hay burner

Pinch
Speak-easy
Ossified
Hooch

Dumb Dora
Flapper
Sheba
Flour lover

Sheik
Out in Left Field
Bank’s Closed
Fire extinguisher
Answer Key for Words of the 1920s- Modern world

It would be great to show pictures from Google on each section.

Communication:
- Operator- Phone worker
- Soap Opera- Radio
- Talkies- Movies
- News Reel- News of the world.

Transportation:
- Struggle Buggy- Car and dating for men and women.
- Flat tire- Boring person
- Tin Lizzie- Cars/ Model T
- Hay Burner- A car that burns a lot of gas.

Government:
- Pinch- Arrested
- Speak-easy- Hidden saloon supplied by bootleggers/Prohibition
- Ossified- Drunk/Smashed
- Hooch- Alcohol

Women:
- Dumb Dora- Not-so-smart women (Blond)
- Flapper- Unconventional Women/ Shoulders showing/Gunny sack dress
- Sheba- Hot women
- Flour Lover- Woman who wears too much make up.

Culture:
- Sheik: Suave and manly man.
- Out in left field: Lost/ A fool. Babe Ruth would hit to right field.
- Banks Closed: No Kissing or Loving.
- Fire Extinguisher: Chaperone

For more 1920s words go to: http://home.earthlink.net/~dlarkins/slang-pg.htm
Appendix B

Key Words for the 1920s
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Wet</th>
<th>Dogs</th>
<th>Heebie-jeebies</th>
<th>Lounge lizard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrong: arguing a mistaken belief</td>
<td>Human feet</td>
<td>The jitters</td>
<td>A ladies man</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bannana Oil</th>
<th>Drugstore Cowboy</th>
<th>Hep</th>
<th>Main drag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonsense</td>
<td>A fashionably dressed person who tries to pick up girls</td>
<td>Wise</td>
<td>The most important street in town</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bee’s Knees</th>
<th>Dumb Dora</th>
<th>High Hat</th>
<th>Neck</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A superb person or thing</td>
<td>A girl who is perceived to be unintelligent</td>
<td>To snub</td>
<td>To caress intimately</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belly Laugh</th>
<th>Fall Guy</th>
<th>Hooch</th>
<th>Ossified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A loud, uninhibited laugh</td>
<td>A scapegoat who takes the blame for the wrongdoings of someone else</td>
<td>Bootleg liquor</td>
<td>Drunk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blind Date</th>
<th>Flapper</th>
<th>Hoofer</th>
<th>Pet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A date with an unknown person, usually arranged by a mutual friend</td>
<td>A typical young girl of the 1920s, bobbed hair, short skirts, and rolled stockings</td>
<td>A chorus girl</td>
<td>To caress intimately</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Big Cheese</th>
<th>Flat Tire</th>
<th>Horsefeathers</th>
<th>Pinch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An important person</td>
<td>A dull, boring person</td>
<td>Nonsense</td>
<td>To arrest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bull Session</th>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Hotsy-totsy</th>
<th>Pushover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An informal group discussion</td>
<td>To cause a person’s arrest by giving false testimony</td>
<td>Pleasing</td>
<td>A person or thing easily overcome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bump Off</th>
<th>Gam</th>
<th>Jake</th>
<th>Ritzy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To murder</td>
<td>A girl’s leg</td>
<td>Okay</td>
<td>Elegant (Ritz hotel of Paris)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cake-eater</th>
<th>Gatecrasher</th>
<th>Jalopy</th>
<th>Scram</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A ladies man</td>
<td>A person who attends a party without an invitation</td>
<td>An old car</td>
<td>To leave hurriedly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cat’s Meow</th>
<th>Giggle Water</th>
<th>Keen</th>
<th>Sex Appeal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anything wonderful</td>
<td>An alcoholic drink</td>
<td>Attractive, appealing</td>
<td>Physical attractiveness to members of the opposite sex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cheaters</th>
<th>Gold Digger</th>
<th>Kiddo</th>
<th>Sheba</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eyeglasses</td>
<td>A women who uses charm to extract money from a man</td>
<td>A familiar form of address</td>
<td>A young women with sex appeal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copacetic</th>
<th>Goofy</th>
<th>Kisser</th>
<th>Sheik</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Silly</td>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>A young man with sex appeal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Darb</th>
<th>Hard Boiled</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Smeller</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An excellent person or thing</td>
<td>Tough, without sentiment</td>
<td>Insincere flattery</td>
<td>The nose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak-easy</td>
<td>Stuck On</td>
<td>Upchuck</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A saloon or bar selling bootleg whiskey</td>
<td>Having a crush on</td>
<td>To vomit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiffy</td>
<td>Swanky</td>
<td>Whoopee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an elegantly fashionable appearance</td>
<td>Ritzy</td>
<td>Boisterous fun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spifflicated</td>
<td>Swell</td>
<td>Lousy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunk</td>
<td>Marvelous</td>
<td>Bad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggle Buggy</td>
<td>Torpedo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A car (from its use as a place in which boys tried to seduce girls)</td>
<td>A hired gunman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

Definitions
Use your text book to define or explain each of these words:

1. Palmer Raids
2. Red Scare
3. Flappers
4. Sacco & Vanzetti
5. White collar workers
6. Soviet Ark
7. Roles in the Workforce
8. Ku Klux Klan
9. Scopes Trial
10. Great Migration
11. Garvey Movement
12. Prohibition
13. 19th Amendment
14. Speakeasies
15. Bootlegging
16. Al Capone
17. St. Valentine's Day Massacre
18. 21st Amendment
19. Suffrage
20. Tea Pot Dome
21. Dawes Plan
22. Disarmament
23. Corporations
24. Oligopoly
25. Welfare Capitalism
26. American Plan
27. Henry Ford
28. Route 66
29. Assembly line
30. Scientific Management
Appendix D

Business Profile
MY BUSINESS PROFILE

You are going to become an entrepreneur, or someone who goes into business on their own. People did this all the time in the 1920s and they continue to do it today. You will fill this sheet out fully, honestly, and yes, you have to do this assignment. We will go over it at the beginning of class tomorrow.

What business are you going to start?

What makes you think that this business will work?

What group of people are you trying to get to buy your product or service?

What are some steps that you may have to take to get this business off the ground?

Where and what location would you choose to place your business?

Will there be competition for your venture?

How much money do you think you will make?

How will you spend the money that you make from this business?
Appendix E

Benbow Case Study
Life in Northern California at the turn of the century was not easy. Without a strong family and a pioneering spirit, people didn’t last very long. Life in this rural area of Humboldt County called for initiative, self sufficiency, good health, and faith in God, and family. This was still a hunting and farming society for most residents. Working the fields, hunting, fishing, tending to the livestock and holding down jobs away from the homestead were the responsibility of the men. Many worked in the area as tree fallers, or in the numerous mills that developed during this time.

The local economy began to boom with the splitting of redwood into shakes, fence posts, grape stakes, housing lumber, and railroad ties. The tan bark industry, whereby the bark of the tan oak was peeled and processed to produce tannic acid, provided summer jobs for many of the homesteaders. Tannic acid was used in the curing of leather. Men could earn enough money during a three to four month summer period logging to provide a year’s supply of staples for their families such as sugar, flour, coffee, and other commodities which they could not produce themselves.

At this time, commuting to the cities was impossible, especially during the winter months. The workmen stayed on the job sites until those jobs were finished. They generally stayed in bunkhouses and earned wages of around $2.50 a day plus room and board. Backwoods industries were made possible by the forests proximity to the ocean. Small harbors sprang up all along the northern coast to ship out the lumber products and to receive shipments of supplies required by the local communities.

In the late 1890s, logging in Humboldt County turned redwood trees into 200,000 board feet of lumber each year. The advent of the Steam Donkey and the bulldozer created roads through the wilderness and methods by which more lumber could be moved more efficiently. This booming industry would continue until the 1930s and would cause an influx of people to move into Humboldt County. One group of people that would move from Berkeley would be the Benbow family; nine brothers and sisters with lofty goals and plans that would see their dream a reality in the southern part of Humboldt County.

From the onset of their endeavor it appeared to look like a very prosperous project, but the reality would end up only sustaining life for the family. The modern tendencies of the Benbow project would be the appearance of the rise of wealth, more leisure time for the wealthy, and laissez faire political policies. Theses issues would give business a boost, but if businesses limited themselves, they would fail. The Benbows would limit their chance to create a prosperous enterprise. They countered tendencies of the decade by moving from an urban setting and settling in the rural countryside, decided to not advertise, and because of religious and political beliefs did not include alcohol in their plans. These issues would prove to be fatal for a business trying to survive.

No one is really certain why the Benbow family decided that it was time for a change from what they knew in Berkeley. They were doing something that ran against the norm of the 1920s. They were actually leaving the city for the country. The 1920s
marked the first time in history that the population was higher in the city than that of the countryside. The Benbows didn’t really know what they wanted to do when they got the right land, but they knew it was going to be a family project. They all agreed that a change in routine seemed desirable and that the project needed to accomplish three things: 1) It had to be a family project; 2) it needed to financially support all members of the family; 3) and everyone would have a voice in all decisions needing to be made. All nine brothers and sisters would save their money and then lump it together when the time was right. The older Benbow siblings would be more established and were able to afford more than the younger ones. This caused some problems down the road.82

The eldest member of the family was Joseph. Born in 1893, he attended school in Eureka, California. In 1915, Joe became a principal and taught at Franklin School in Eureka. He started classes in blacksmithing and woodworking to help teach kids a trade. He tried a variety of other jobs before becoming a lawyer. After dabbling in the law field, he then became successful in starting an insurance business. He would later become the President of the Benbow Hotel and Benbow Power Plant.83

The younger siblings were just as ambitious. Evangeline had a very promising career as a commercial artist and illustrator. Burt became a watchmaker and engraver. He also was an inventor with several patents to his credit. Clara taught school and Helen became a draftsman and student of architecture. Jessie had already married and seemed ready for a family project. Then the three youngest Benbow family members, not yet old enough to vote; were Loleta, Walter, and Robert.

The Benbow family decided that a dude ranch would be the perfect project. Not having any land and not much money didn’t make a difference to the family. There were many questions as to who would visit and how would they make enough money for the family to survive? It is said that it was one of the Benbow women who stated “the rich snobs from the city would come to a dude ranch.”84 They agreed that they could prosper if they all worked together.

The family began to search for the right piece of property shortly after the end of World War I. Their search for land took them too many parts of California and lasted nearly two years. They had some specific guidelines for the land they wished to acquire. It had to be a day’s travel from the city of San Francisco. They presumed that the people interested in visiting a dude ranch would be the wealthy city folks who could make a trip to the countryside for an outdoor adventure. If potential guests were more than a day’s travel away, they may not get as many visitors. At this time the road trip from San Francisco was about 12 to 14 hours. The land also had to have a source of year-round water. Water was a necessity of life for many reasons; drinking, fishing, swimming, and eventually for power.
After searching for eighteen months, the Benbow siblings found the location for their dream project. The parcel was the Linser Ranch in Southern Humboldt. They chose this site for its location on the Redwood Highway, for its power and lake possibilities, and for the scenic grandeur of its valley embraced by virgin Redwoods and mountains with the Eel River passing through the property. They bought the 1,288 acres for $45,000. They purchased the land on credit. This eventually led to some internal family strife when one of the Benbow boys married Mr. Linser’s daughter. The Benbows actually spent their entire savings on the down payment for the land. Thinking that raising sheep would cover the cost of living for their family, they enlisted the help of Ernest Linser who stayed on and helped them get started. They soon discovered what millions of other Americans across the United States would find out about farming: monetary profits were rare.85

The family met and decided that something else had to be done. The original plan featured a dude ranch. They thought that it would provide a service to a particular group - the rich. People from the city that were looking for an escape would love to be in the country to enjoy all the things that attracted the Benbow family. When they agreed on the dude ranch, they faced the challenge of getting money to fund building suitable quarters for the guests as well as stables for the much needed horses. They decided that they would sell lots on their land to help fund the project. At that point a few of the older Benbow men went to San Francisco to sell lots for the new Benbow subdivision. Slowly, they sold enough parcels to raise money to start their project; however one encounter would soon change everything.

While in San Francisco, some of the family members met Margaret Stewart, owner of the Hotel Stewart. They immediately hit it off and she became very interested in the property. She actually bought a lot in the subdivision. But while on the trip, Stewart convinced the group that a hotel would be perfect for the location. She showed them her hotel and convinced them that if the visitors had similar luxuries at Benbow around them, such as hot water and climate control of their room, people from the city would jump at the chance to get away to the redwoods. Especially the wealthier population that could afford the finer things that the twenties could offer.86

The group returned from their trip and called a meeting of the family. The resolve to build a luxury resort that would be able to support the family became unanimous. The family imagined financial profits from the enterprise. In an era of endless possibilities, why couldn’t success happen for their venture?

All the members would contribute to the cause. Helen would be the supervisor of the building crews. Burt would be the problem solver and saved countless hours by creating or inventing to make the job easier. Robert tended to the ranching and the stables. Loleta was the bookkeeper and postmaster. Evangeline was the artist. She did everything from sketches of building plans to decorating the hotel with her paintings. Walter was the jack of all trades. He would be the driver for all supplies and would be the one to call if there were any problems with anything. Clara was the one that most of
the Benbow family gives credit to for making the project work. She was the peace
keeper who made sure that the family stuck together and never lost focus of the goal. She
was what one family member said was “the glue of the family.”

Once the funding for the project was secured, the building of the Hotel would
begin. It is very important to understand that it was not the only project going on at that
time. They were also building vacation homes for the investors in the project. The Hotel
itself was designed by architect Albert Farr, who was most noted for The Wolf House;
the home he designed for author Jack London in Glen Ellen. Farr was commissioned by
the Benbow family to create the cornerstone for the resort community they intended to
build on their 1,288-acre valley.

To build a hotel in the 1920s in rural America was quite an undertaking. The area
of Southern Humboldt didn’t have a lot of skilled labor to draw from, not many
supporting industries nearby, and the roads at the beginning of the 1920s were poor,
becoming non-existent during the stormy winter months. It didn’t help that the family
didn’t think local workers could do the job. They usually hired men from San
Francisco to do most of the building and rock work. There wasn’t even a local builder’s
supply. In the closest town of Garberville a general store met the needs of nearby
ranchers, but not building contractors. The Benbow project required intense focus from
the family members to achieve a very difficult goal.

The Benbows brought electricity to Southern Humboldt. They initially bought
some diesel generators to power the hotel in 1925. At this time not much of rural
America had the opportunity to have generated power. The Benbows had a truck with a
tank on it that they hauled to Eureka every few days to get more diesel. This became
very expensive and they soon realized that they needed to build a dam. It would not only
be cost effective, but it would provide a lake that guests could enjoy with swimming,
boating and fishing. During this time one could go into Garberville at night and not see
much, only hear a few diesel engines powering independent homes. Garberville sat two
miles from the Benbow hotel. Later Garberville would ask to get electricity from the
Benbow Power Company and the Benbow family would then make a profit from the
project. They would later sell their power company and the rights to the dam to Pacific
Gas and Electric (P.G.&E.) in 1947.

During the building of the dam, it was not unusual to see guests gathering on the
bank watching the construction of the dam. The Benbows used this as an opportunity to
serve a hot picnic lunch under the trees in addition to the other activities that they had to
offer. They built the dam in one season due to the threat of high waters that could have
destroyed their work come winter. Completed in the fall of 1931, people made bets as to
if the dam “would go”, and “when it would go.” It lasted fifty years before P.G. & E.
made some additions to it.
Originally called the "Hotel Benbow", it opened to the public in July, 1926. The Benbow family would also construct the Benbow Dam, Power Company, the Golf Course and RV Park. By 1920, there was a passable road from Sausalito to Eureka. The combination of seclusion and elegant hospitality also served as quite an attraction for the Hollywood elite. Spencer Tracy, Clark Gable, Alan Ladd, Charles Laughton, Nelson Eddy, Jeanette MacDonald, Joan Fontaine, and Basil Rathbone were all patrons of the Hotel. Dignitaries such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, and Lord Halifax also enjoyed the Benbow hospitality. Guests relaxed among all the amenities of fine dining and luxurious rooms, along with the best of the great outdoors: riding stables, golf course, hiking trails, swimming, boating, and fishing on the Eel River.

The Benbow family supported the Republican Party and believed that the Republican ascendancy of the 1920s addressed the ills of society. They were pro-business and liked the idea of laissez faire in the economy. They absolutely adored Herbert Hoover and the fact that he was a frequent guest at their hotel. Hoover’s home away from Washington D.C. was in Palo Alto, California and he also owned a ranch near the Rogue River in Oregon, so Hotel Benbow became a natural overnight stay between the two homes. He vacationed at Hotel Benbow every summer while Secretary of Commerce, however, his stays were limited to just overnight trips once he became president. The Benbow family would gather around the fire to listen to Hoover speak. Phyllis Benbow, daughter of Joe Benbow, said this about President Hoover, “I remember how important the president must have been. After all, mother, who hated cigar smoke, thought it perfectly all right on those specific evenings because it was Mr. Hoover.”

The entire Benbow family enjoyed his visits.

The Benbow family opinion of Democrats, according to interviews, is summed up by the following statement: “Until their dying days, the words, “FDR” and “SOB” always followed one another in their vocabulary”. Carol Bickler, daughter of Walter Benbow remembered this story. “I was ten and my uncle Joe asked me if I wanted to see the great American destroyer. Being very curious I said ‘yes’, and he then showed me a Roosevelt dime.” This portrays some of the feeling about Democrats. The Benbow family went as far as censoring the Saturday Evening Post for the children and teenagers. Anything too liberal was cut out and removed. Eleanor Roosevelt stayed at the hotel and changed some family attitudes about the democratic party. “My father had tea with Mrs. Roosevelt on the terrace one afternoon. I never found out what was discussed, but whenever her name came up in conversation, he always would say something nice about the first lady.”

This was the one time when the Benbows would not slander the democratic party.

The Benbows did little advertising for the Hotel. They believed that if they gave great service, wonderful food, and atmosphere, then word of mouth would be enough. This would prove very costly when the hotel could not support itself. Walter Benbow said that in the beginning, the summertime at the Hotel was full with all kinds of people.
“A full house from the beginning” is how Walter put it. They made enough in the summer to pay for most of the year, with little extra for actual profit.

Guests would enjoy the finer luxuries inside of Hotel Benbow. Silver everywhere, antique furniture, all providing the best of the time. That sentiment is still evident when one walks through the Benbow Hotel today. At times the hotel was opened only from April to September, most people were only seasonal employees, except the chef who was paid year round to ensure his happiness and employment. The Hotel was seasonal because of the Great Depression. They could not afford to keep the place open during the winter months. The family acted as though they were well off, but they were never able to make it out of the debt that they constantly found themselves in during the 1920s and 1930s.

The road system early on was all dirt and later gravel by the middle of the 1920s. The Benbow area would not have been able to create businesses without that road. Walter Benbow spoke of a Redwood Highway and how once graveled, it made travel that much better but very dusty. He also said that he would have liked to find the guy that came up with the idea to oil the road. “The dust didn’t fly in the summer time, but the flying oil sure made a mess of everything.” The trip would take about twelve hours from San Francisco and about four hours from Eureka. This Redwood Highway and its proximity to the Hotel Benbow would be a huge factor in the success of the hotel, or at least to its longevity of appeal.

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The construction of the Redwood Highway would be very difficult as many people doubted an adequate road could be built through the terrain drained by the Eel River. Many things would happen to ensure its completion; the first would be Chinese laborers to help early on in forging roads through wilderness, the second, California passed the Convict Act of 1915 allowing the use of certain trusted convicts on road building jobs, especially during WWI when many men had gone to war. By 1920 there was a passable road between Sausalito and Eureka.

Walter Benbow did all the commuting to San Francisco, Santa Rosa, and Eureka. During the construction of the Hotel, he hauled every piece of lumber for the hotel and building projects from Carlotta, California. “American Tank of Carlotta went out of business. They had one hundred thousand board feet of fir stacked and dried. My brother Joe bought the lumber for $7.00 per thousand feet. Quite a deal even then. I ended up hauling all of that lumber on an old REO speed wagon. I still don’t know why we thought that truck would haul lumber.” The REO speed wagon was a flat bed truck designed and built by Reed and Fanning in Eureka following WWI. It was a small truck with not much power, but it did the job.

The trip to Carlotta would take about five hours and was only made possible with the use of the automobile. Later as vehicles became better constructed, the family hauled steel from Oakland to allow them to build the dam on the Eel River to create electricity for the entire Garberville area.
Walter Benbow told this story to many members of the family. The Benbows hired a chef to come and cook for the guests of the Hotel during the summer months. The season had just begun when the chef returned to his workplace with a brand new car. It was a new Chevrolet and it was a top of the line model. So the chef wanted Walt to look at his car because it was making a horrible noise. Walt told the chef to go ahead and start the car. When he did, it made a horrific noise, metal grinding and sounding just awful. Walt then asked if he could try it and the chef agreed. Walt got in and started the car right up without the previous noises. It ran smoothly and sounded perfect. Walt asked the chef why he didn’t use the clutch to start the car, and he responded with, “Oh, I wondered what that peddle was for!” Many new car owners didn’t really understand all the equipment, let alone application for a driver’s license.

The Benbow family in the 1920s did not perceive corporations as a negative influence. Businessmen garnered respect in all parts of the country, including Humboldt County. Thus the family organized the Benbow Development Company in the fall of 1922. They bought into the idea of service and the idea of business as a noble cause. This idea would be tested during the depression, but many of the Benbow family members never swerved from that earlier belief. They would eventually sell stock in the corporation to fund the building of the resort known as ‘Hotel Benbow’. They planned to sell about 150 home sites to fund their projects throughout the 1920s. They ended up building all the homes for the out-of-town investors. In addition to building the hotel, they built many of the homes that are still in the valley today. In the houses that they built, the Benbows made sure that they did not build kitchens in them. It was believed that the owners of each of the houses would come to the hotel for all of their meals.

With the big boom in land development and real estate investment throughout the country, the Benbows traveled all over the state in search of investors who would join their cause. Joe and Burt Benbow spent months walking the streets of San Francisco armed with photographs, drawings, and dreams, seeking out those who would join in the project. This led to the idea of the hotel being built with a golf course to attract more people of wealth and leisure to the area.

The increased leisure of the 1920s led to an increase in the popularity of golf during the decade. The game was restricted to the wealthy because of equipment costs, the time required to play a round, and the expense of maintaining a large and carefully groomed grass course. Big business started to get as much done on the golf course as they did at the office. So it really became an outdoor place to do business. By the end of the decade an estimated three million players could be found on some four thousand courses nationwide.

The Benbow Golf Course was definitely an afterthought that investors wanted before they bought lots in the subdivision. Businessmen from Eureka traveled down and said they would buy lots, as would many of their friends, if there were a golf course in the valley. The Benbows really did not know much about the game except that it could help them sell lots. It seemed to offer a good attraction for the wealthy from San
Francisco as well. Later on after the Hotel was built, airplanes from San Francisco would land on the golf course bringing in the wealthy patrons to spend the summer at the hotel. The planes would circle the valley and that would let the Benbows know that they needed to remove the sprinkler heads on the golf course so the plane could land.\textsuperscript{104} Everyday, men and women were reminded that science could accomplish anything. The idea of evolution went against literal teachings from the Bible. Two major camps came out of this controversy. On the one side, there were the fundamentalists who believed the Bible to be true, and would not accept anything else. On the other side, the modernists believed it was time to throw out the older portions of biblical teachings of the Bible and use science to mediate between Christianity and scientific thought.\textsuperscript{105}

For the Benbow family, Christian Science, first originated by an American women, Mary Baker Eddy in 1875, became significant. This religion increased greatly during the 1920s because its core belief implied individuals could accomplish great things when they had the right mind set.\textsuperscript{106} The influence of this religion is very important to understanding the Benbow family. Christian Science is based on two books: the \textit{Bible} and \textit{Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures} by Mary Baker Eddy.\textsuperscript{107} Christian Scientology did not believe in doctors. They believed in individual healing through mind over matter, not through the use of medicine. It valued the strong individual.

This belief system appeared to be the perfect religion for the decade of the 1920s. Jesus and the bible condemned the rich, but not one line in \textit{Science and Health} can be found to condemn the rich. In the bible passage (Luke 18:22) it illustrates what is said of the rich; “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven”. Some called Christian Science, a rich man’s religion because it did not mention giving to the poor at all. Being poor was a diseased state of mind, and the entire religion was based on being an enemy of disease. Christian Scientists basically received divine assurance that there was no need for charity. They would not support funding for hospitals because no one is sick; illness was all in a person’s mind. The more successful they are, the healthier.\textsuperscript{108} These concepts fit right into the Benbow frame of mind. This is amazing because the family itself was not rich. They never became rich with the Hotel, though they acted as though they were.

Their religious views would help explain how the Benbow family operated. Every morning the family would meet to discuss the chores for the day. This was only for the immediate family. This entailed the Benbow brothers and sisters, but not husbands and wives. The meeting would usually end up with the men arguing about some issue and the women usually settling the disagreements among the men. These women were very directed in their goals. Within this familial structure, the Benbows believed that anything could be accomplished if they kept their minds their goals. Clara Benbow eventually became a Christian Science reader in order to disseminate the concepts of Christian Science faith.
Yet the family’s religious beliefs would give them, or at least the immediate brothers and sisters, solidarity during these years. It would give them the confidence to dive into all types of complex projects, allowed no negativity and no discussion of failure in their thinking. However, their religious beliefs also included temperance which hurt the family business by preventing the sell alcohol at the hotel. The Benbow attitude of religious and class superiority prevented them easy access to many locals who might have been helpful with assistance to achieve their goals. The concept of a national federal prohibition, stemming from the 19th Century temperance movement became law during WWI.

The Benbows didn’t change their stance on alcohol even after 1933 and the end of prohibition. They continued to believe that they had a moral obligation to keep such evil at bay. People constantly tried to convince them that the sale of alcohol would boost their profits. They did not budge. The bar at the Benbow Hotel was not constructed until 1960 after the sale of the Benbow Hotel was complete and out of the Benbow family’s care. Many of the Benbow family cannot recall a time where alcohol was involved at family gatherings or even in the houses of the members.

The single most devastating event of the family enterprise came with the rest of the country’s devastation and that was the Great Depression. The stock market crash in 1929 ended the decade of prosperity, or at least perceived prosperity. Farmers, blacks, and other ordinary Americans did not prosper. This decade of the 1920s would be one of intolerance and hate.

By October of 1929, Hotel Benbow was running smoothly and systematically. They were making profits and times were good. Then the crash on October 29th changed all the good fortune for the Benbow family. By noon of the next day, the hotel was practically empty. Everyone rushed back to either talk to their brokers or at least be closer to the action. The shock slowly passed and they saw and felt the effects of the downturn. It would greatly reduce the travel of the upper class that they were trying to attract. This led them to operating seasonally. It would not be until 1932 that the impact would be fully felt.

When World War II began, it hit the Benbows very hard. Because of gasoline rationing and most centers of population too far away from the hotel, they would not have many travelers. The other problem that they would face would be how to serve their outstanding meals while using food rationing. There was a shortage of help with so many people in the armed services or wartime industries and they could not buy replacement linens or other items that were no longer being made available due to war production. They would make the decision to close the hotel for a couple of years, until they could get more guests.

In the spring of 1945, when the United Nations Charter was being formed in San Francisco, a number of the members of the British delegation, including Lord Halifax, wished to see the Redwoods and telephoned the Benbows for a reservation. They opened up the Hotel and accepted without hesitation. They immediately contacted the chef in San
Francisco and he arrived by greyhound (gasoline was still rationed and impossible to obtain) with all the necessary supplies, including the food. The Benbows would continue to run the Hotel until the middle of the 1950s. They tried to sell twice, but the buyers were unable to have success in the venture. The family ended up taking back ownership both times. At that point, they changed the name from Hotel Benbow to the Benbow Hotel.

The final chapter to the Benbow era was when Clara Benbow died. She was the glue that held the family together. Once she was gone, the family had different visions for the Benbow Hotel. Not able to come to a mutual agreement, the family was left with no choice but to concede to the final sale of the Hotel. One can only imagine the feelings and emotions that each of the original founders experienced as they walked down the steps of the Hotel for the last time. Present day owners still honor the family and their dream by keeping the name—the Benbow Hotel.

During the 1920s they were strong supporters of the Republican agenda of big business. They took on a huge project with the idea that they too could share in the wealth of the decade. This dream would never be realized and the family would not have much to show for their hard work and effort. They were the beneficiaries of the new technology like the automobile and the onset of new business practices that would allow for more leisure time to spend in their resort.

Even small out-of-the-way places were affected with what develops nationally. The Benbows reached for a dream, somewhat achieved their mission, and left a legacy to follow. The masquerade of wealth that they accepted makes one ponder the reasons for their actions. Yet many people lived that charade during the so-called “roaring 20’s”.

The Benbow Hotel is definitely a symbol of an age, an age that fought through some turbulent times and great times. It is truly a symbol of the first modern era in which technology and industry brought America together. Rural to urban areas were much more connected thanks to the changes in society. The Hotel Benbow serves as a perfect example of a family trying to survive and prosper in a rollercoaster era. Major issues like prohibition, religion, technology, and big business all were national issues that filtered down to become a regional issues within the building of the Hotel. The failures of the Benbow family to adapt with the times would eventually cause the Inn to be unsuccessful and they would have to sell their dream. The Benbows would limit their chance to create a prosperous enterprise. Had they decided to advertise and promote their business, as well as accept alcohol in their plans, they may have done a better job continuing their dreams.
Appendix F

Benbow Questions
Benbow Inn Case Study

Please answer questions on your own piece of paper. Be ready to discuss your answers with your classmates.

Part I

1. What were the responsibilities of the early men in Humboldt County? What about the women?
2. What were some of the early economic activities of the region? What caused an influx of people to Humboldt County? Why?
3. Why did the Benbows leave the city? Why was this unusual to the time? What were some of their occupations?
4. What did they hope to create? For who? Where did they finally settle and how did they buy it?
5. What part of this reading mostly stands out to you? What idea does this reading give you about the 1920s?

Part II

1. How did they originally plan to finance the project? What encounter would change everything? Why?
2. How did the Benbows follow the pattern of big business in the 1920s? What did they do to make money to fund the project?
3. What did they build to attract even more wealth to their project? Why was it so popular? What made it a rich mans game?
4. What was their stance on prohibition? Why? What is your reaction to the story about the hunter?
5. Why was the automobile so important to the creation of the hotel? Explain all the reasons that you read about.

Part III

1. What did Walter Benbow haul? Where did they find all the material? How much did they pay for it?
2. What was the early road system like? Be specific.
3. What problem did the chef have with his new car? What do you think of the story? Why?
4. What religion influenced the Benbows in their quest at paradise? What are its principals? Why did it fit perfect with the 1920s?
5. What did the religion provide for the Benbow family? Did everyone buy into the belief? Would you?
Part IV
1. Who was the architect? Why is he famous? What were the different roles of the family during the construction and running of the hotel?
2. What other things did the family build to go along with the Hotel? How did these things help out the running of the Inn?
3. Who were some of the famous people that visited the Hotel? Do you recognize any of them? Which ones? Why didn’t they advertise for the Hotel?
4. How were the Benbows responsible for bringing electricity to Southern Humboldt? Why?
5. What was the most devastating event during the existence of the Hotel?
6. How were the Benbows a reflection of the intolerance of the decade?

Part V
1. How did the Great Depression affect America? How did President Hoover respond?
2. How did the depression affect the family at the Hotel Benbow? What situation occurred that would have been disaster to them? How were they saved?
3. How was the Hotel affected by World War II?
4. What finally ended the Benbows from owning and operating the Hotel? Why? How many times was it sold before it was gone for good?
5. What, in your opinion, would be the most difficult part of building and operating a hotel during this period in history? Why?
Appendix G

Notes
However, far more people complained about the arrest of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. They were arrested in May 1920 and charged with a wages robbery in which 2 guards were killed. Both were known to be communists and when they were found they both had loaded guns on them. The judge at their trial - Judge Thayer - was known to hate the "Reds" and 61 people claimed that they saw both men at the robbery/murders. But 107 people claimed that they had seen both men elsewhere when the crime was committed. Regardless of this both men were found guilty. They spent seven years in prison while their lawyers appealed but in vain. Despite many public protests and petitions, both men were executed by electric chair on August 24th, 1927.

The Jazz age also brought new dances such as The Charleston, One Step and Black Bottom. The Black Bottom angered many people. This was also the era of great sports champions such as Babe Ruth the baseball player and Bobby Jones "the greatest amateur golfer of all time." One more thing is that Hollywood made the 1920s.

Some of the scandals surrounding President Harding were that he signed bills to eliminate wartime controls and slashed taxes, established a Federal budget system, restored the high protective tariff, and imposed tight limitations upon immigration.

The “Teapot Dome” was the popular name for a scandal during the administration of U.S. President Harding. The scandal, which involved the secret leasing of naval oil reserve lands to private companies, was first revealed to the general public in 1924 after sensational findings by a committee of the U.S. Senate. The legacy of Teapot Dome is an ambiguous one, although the scandal in its final outcome was a victory for honest government.

In 1918 Prohibition was introduced to America. This law banned the sale, transportation and manufacture of alcohol. It was clear that millions neither wanted this law nor would respect it. There was obviously a huge market for what in the 1920s was an illegal commodity. It was the gangsters who dominated various cities who provided this commodity. Each major city had its gangster element but the most famous was Chicago with Al Capone.

Al Capone moved to Chicago in 1920 where he worked for Johnny Torrio the city's leading figure in the underworld. Capone was given the task of intimidating Torrio's rivals within the city so that they would give up and hand over to Torrio their territory. Capone also had to convince operators to buy illegal alcohol from Torrio. Capone was very good at what he did. In 1925, Torrio was nearly killed by a rival gang and he decided to get out of the criminal world while he was still alive. Torrio handed over to Capone his 'business'. Within two years, Capone was earning $60 million a year from alcohol sales alone. Other rackets earned him an extra $45 million a year. He drove everywhere in an armor plated limousine and wherever he went, so did his armed
bodyguards. Violence was a daily occurrence in Chicago. In 1931, the law finally caught up with Capone and he was charged with tax evasion. He got 11 years in jail. In prison, his health went and when he was released, he retired to his Florida mansion no longer the feared man he was from 1925 to 1931.

The 1920s saw a stock market boom in the United States that came as the result of general optimism by businessmen and economists who believed that the newly created Federal Reserve would stabilize the economy and the pace of technological progress. The "roaring twenties" was an era when the country prospered tremendously even though there was an oversupply of goods that were not considered necessities by many. Since the majority of the population did not have enough money to purchase these goods, the solution to this problem lay in one that would allow those who wanted these goods, to purchase them on credit. The concept of buying now and paying later was quickly adopted and by 1929, 60% of all cars and 80% of all radios were bought on installment credit. By 1929, 80% of Americans had no savings at all. Between 1925 and 1929 the total amount of outstanding installment credit increased from $1.38 billion to over $3 billion. This rapid expansion of credit resulted in a stock market bubble in the U.S. that hadn't been experienced for decades.

Stock prices reached levels that were so grossly overvalued that it made no sense to buy except for the reason that investors hoped to sell later at a higher price. RCA Corporation's stock price leapt from $85 to $420 during 1928, even though it had never paid a single dividend. Many investors became conditioned to think that stock prices would continue going up because they had always gone up before. The Federal Reserve became concerned that a "bubble" in stock prices was indeed being created and started raising interest rates in 1928 and 1929.

The strength of America’s economy came to an end in October 1929 when the Stock Market crashed. The very rich lost money on Wall Street but they could just about afford it. But the vast bulk could not afford any loss of money. This had a very important economic impact as these people could no longer afford to spend money and therefore did not buy consumer products. Therefore as there was no buying, shops went bust and factories had no reason to employ people who were making products that were not being sold. Therefore unemployment became a major issue. The depression took a while to get going but by the winter of 1932 it was at its worse. The impact it left was that 12 million people out of work, 12,000 people being made unemployed everyday, 20,000 companies had gone bankrupt, one farmer in twenty evicted, and 23,000 people committed suicide in one year. It was one of the hardest times for America’s economy.

The Roaring 20s

A Return to Normalcy? -- I Don't Think So

After years of reform during the Progressive Era (1900 - 1920) and the upheaval of World War I (1914 - 1918), most Americans yearned for a quieter time. Warren Harding ran his successful presidential campaign as a "return to normalcy." In other words, let's get back to normal. If only it were so easy. While most Americans may have wanted a simpler and quieter life, the 1920s produced some of the greatest changes in our history. It's not called the Roaring 20s for nothing. This decade is marked by rapid industrial growth, the nation's first Red Scare, the formation of a mass culture, the Harlem Renaissance, the Great Migration, prohibition, jazz music, flappers, heroes (Charles Lindbergh, Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey) and controversial figures (Al Capone, Marcus Garvey, John Scopes, Sacco-Vanzetti).

"The Chief Business of America is Business"

All three of the presidents elected during the 1920s were conservative Republicans. Warren G. Harding was elected on his promise to "return to normalcy." Harding died in office after only two years on the job. His administration is usually ranked as the worst of all U.S. presidents. Several of Harding's appointees engaged in illegal activities for their own private gain. The worst scandal of his administration (Teapot Dome) did not become public until after his death in 1923. Teapot Dome was the name given to an oil reserve in Wyoming. Harding's Secretary of the Interior received over $300,000 as a kickback for leasing public oil reserves to private companies.

Harding was succeeded in office by his vice-president, Calvin Coolidge. Coolidge succeeded in deflecting criticism about the scandals of the Harding administration. Thus, "Silent Cal" -- a man of few words -- won election in 1924. Coolidge is most associated for his strong support of big business. Quotes such as, "The chief business of America is business," indicate his pro-business views.

Herbert Hoover was elected in November of 1928 and took office in March of 1929. The stock market crashed in October of 1929, and the nation fell into the Great Depression which lasted throughout the 1930s. Hoover's administration will be discussed in paper on the Great Depression.

Mass Culture, Lucky Lindy & The Jazz Age

Great changes in technology led to great changes in social life. For the first time, the U.S. was truly developing a mass or national culture, rather than regional cultures. Three inventions -- the automobile, the radio and motion pictures -- ushered the way. By 1920, cars were commonplace. People traveled great distances. People from the various regions became more aware of each other through face-to-face contact, national broadcasts and movies. NBC, ABC and CBS all developed huge radio networks. People from all over the nation heard the news from New York, Washington and other big cities. From the radio and movies people heard the new jazz music of Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington,
George Gershwin and others. They saw heroes of the silver screen such as Rudolph Valentino, Charlie Chaplin and yes, Tom Mix.

No hero of the 1920s was more acclaimed to Charles Lindbergh who flew solo across the Atlantic in 1927. Americans loved technology and daring individual achievement. Lindbergh exemplified both. Other heroes such as baseball's Babe Ruth and boxing's Jack Dempsey achieved lasting national fame. Prior to the mass media of the 1920s, actors, musicians, athletes and even presidents did not have the widespread recognition that has become commonplace. For better or worse, we are very familiar with strangers through the mass media. We instantly recognize the physical features, the voices and stories of hundreds of people who we have never personally met. This media revolution began in earnest during the 1920s.

Culture Wars: Prohibition, Flappers and the Scopes Monkey Trial

The 1920s, like the present era, was an era of rapid social change. Like today, some people embraced the changes and others resisted them. Prohibition was enacted in 1919 and remained in effect until 1933. Although it was illegal to manufacture or distribute alcoholic beverages, consumption remained high. Sale of alcohol became an illegal business run mostly by organized gangsters. Clubs, called "speakeasies," sold alcohol illegally. Competition between the organized gangs became fierce and often deadly. Some historians and social commentators liken the illegal drug trafficking of today to Prohibition era gangs. While Prohibition was enacted after several decades of campaigning by temperance groups, a large percentage of the population did not comply. Even President Harding served alcohol in the White House.

Jazz, the new music of the time, not only had enthusiastic fans, but bitter critics. Some critics claimed that syncopated music was against God's teachings. Just as some music of today is condemned, and rock music was attacked during the 1950s and 60s, so also was jazz during the 1920s.

New styles of dress and behavior emerged -- and so did their critics. Perhaps the most striking images were the young "flapper" women who sported short, closely fitted dresses, short hair and informal manners and speech. This trend toward more casual and informal dress and behavior has continued practically unabated since the 1920s. But not without a fight. Then, as now, cultural changes had their critics. Many believed that the casual manners and dress led toward immorality.

One of the great culture wars of all time occurred in the famous Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925. John Scopes, a high school science teacher, taught about Darwin's theory of evolution. This violated a Tennessee state law. He was arrested and charged. The trial featured two of the nation's most famous people. William Jennings Bryan, a former congressman from the Midwest who thrice ran for president as the Democratic nominee and who served as Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of State, helped prosecute the case against Scopes. Bryan was a fundamentalist Christian who welcomed the opportunity to
defend the Tennessee law. Mr. Scopes was represented by Clarence Darrow who the most renowned attorney of his day. He had already served prominently in two "trials of the century" prior to this case. Mr. Scopes lost the case but only had to pay a small fine. However, Bryan and the fundamentalists lost in the court of public opinion. The trial featured a remarkable drama when Mr. Darrow put Mr. Bryan on the witness stand. Darrow got Bryan to admit that even he interpreted parts of the Bible. By the way, Tennessee authorities have never charged anyone else for violating the anti-evolution law.

Connections to Today

So we see that the 1920s was a time -- like our own -- of great change and tension. Is change always healthy? Is something better just because it's newer? Conversely, should we keep on following tradition just because that's the way it's always been done? These questions apply to then as well as now. Technological changes cause social changes. Successfully coping with rapid change presents a great challenge to us now, as it did for our parents and recent ancestors.

Notes: The Roaring Twenties (1919 - 1929)

Postwar Economy was Shaky: During 1919 and 1920, inflation struck hard. Prices doubled in two years. Labor unrest was common also. Unions had put their interests on the back burner during the war effort. Now they wanted their needs addressed. For example, steel workers worked 7 days, 60 hours weekly in dangerous conditions.

The Presidential Election of 1920 -- A "Return to Normalcy": The Democrats nominated two Progressives, James M. Cox for President and Franklin D. Roosevelt for Vice-President. The nation was weary from twenty years of Progressivism and the emotional, financial and physical hardships of World War I. They elected Warren G. Harding, President and Calvin Coolidge, Vice-President. Harding campaigned on a platform of returning to normalcy. He was a conservative. Let's stop tinkering with the economy and social policy and let things take care of themselves. During Harding administration, government drastically reduced spending and taxes.

The American Plan: This refers to the policy of business leaders to break unions during the post World War I period. Business leaders claimed that it was un-American for a worker to have to join a union in order to get a job in a particular plant. So that was their rationalization for refusing to deal with unions. Owners fired workers who went on strike.

Scandals During Harding's Administration: Harding had brought from Ohio a group of close friends and advisors known as the "Ohio Gang." Unfortunately, Mr. Harding did not see that many of his friends were not only incompetent but corrupt. For example, Charles Forbes, head of the Veterans' bureau, had swindled $200 million from the Veterans' Administration. This was at a time when many thousands of veterans were
suffering from war wounds in V.A. hospitals. Other Ohio Gang members were selling favors, receiving kick-backs, etc. The most infamous scandal of all became public in 1924 several months after Pres. Harding had died from a heart attack. This scandal, known as the Teapot Dome Scandal, centered around the Secretary of the Interior who leased government oil reserves (including one in Teapot Dome, Wyoming) and received hundreds of thousands of dollars in kickbacks. Other members of the administration were also linked to the scandal. In a present day book, Rating the Presidents, a few hundred history professor rate Mr. Harding as the worst President in U.S. history.

Coolidge Succeeds Harding: Vice-President Calvin Coolidge, a dour but popular New Engander became President in 1923 upon Harding's death. He was overwhelmingly elected in his own right in 1924. The Democrats had turned away from Progressivism and nominated John Davis a West Virginia corporation lawyer. Progressives nominated Fighting Bob LaFollette of Wisconsin.

Coolidge's Presidency: Coolidge was a man of few words and thus earned the nickname, "Silent Cal." He worked four hours daily, took naps and slept ten hours at night. He was a "hands-off" President. When he died in 1933, witty writer Dorothy Parker quipped, "How could they tell?" Coolidge believed that America would be great if government stayed out of the economy. "The business of America is business" and "What's good for General Motors is good for America" are two quotes that exemplify his political philosophy. Much of the economy boomed during the 20s. The auto industry was especially prosperous. Although not all segments of society (most notably farmers and laborers) did not prosper, the 20s was believed to prosperous by many people. Cities, manufacturing and white collar jobs all grew considerably. Advertising and credit grew considerably during the 20s. Consumerism exploded. People often went into debt to purchased sewing machines, pianos, vacuum cleaners and other household items. In 1928, Coolidge announced, "I do not choose to run."

Mass Culture: Prior to the 1920s, America was distinguished by much more variety in its cultural milieu. That is, each region and sub-region had distinguishing language, food, music, businesses, etc. The 1920s saw a dramatic move toward unifying American culture. Through the movies, literature, radio, the automobile, the railroad, sports, etc. we see influences that have created a national culture. The 1920s was a rapid acceleration toward this mass culture. Movie stars such as Charlie Chaplin, Rudolph Valentino, and yes, Tom Mix, athletes, such as Babe Ruth and Jack Dempsey, authors, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald became national heroes and celebrities. Through the radio, the popular music industry first boomed. The Jazz Age flourished with greats such as Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and George Gershwin promoting it. Dancing to pop music became a big craze in the nation’s cities and towns.

The Farm Crisis: During the 1920s demand for American agricultural products lessened greatly. Europeans who formerly imported lots of American food products started growing their own again. Less grain was needed for horses since automobiles
replaced them. Even people ate less since urban life burned fewer calories than farm life. As a result, farms were producing more agricultural products that the market could bear. Prices plummeted. Many farmers who had mortgages from WWI when demand was high could not afford to keep up with payments during these bad times. As a result many farmers had equipment and real estate repossessed by banks and other lending institutions.

Conflict in Values between Rural and Urban: With the great movement of Americans from farms to cities came a revolution in social values. Women for example found more independence in urban life. Many could support themselves so they were reluctant to accept male domination at home or in other spheres. The city offered a certain degree of anonymity. If someone chose not to go to church for example, he/she would be much less likely to hear from neighbors or to be gossiped about as they likely would be in a farming community or small town. At the same time that many people took to the relative independence of urban life, Billy Sunday and other preachers reacted against what they perceived as a decline in public morality. With economic changes go changes in social values.

The Scopes Monkey Trial: One such conflict between country and city values was the Scopes Monkey Trial. Thomas Scopes a Tennessee high school biology teacher was arrested for teaching Darwin's theory of evolution. The teaching of evolution or any theory which differed from the story of Genesis in the Bible was considered illegal according to a Tennessee law. Scopes was defended by Clarence Darrow a famous Chicago attorney. The prosecution team included William Jennings Bryan who had unsuccessfully run for President three times and who had served as Secretary of State under Wilson. Scopes was convicted by the trial court, but the Tennessee Supreme Court overturned that decision on a technicality although it upheld the constitutionality of the law (which was still on the books in the late fifties and I believe is still on the books).

Prohibition: The 18th Amendment was passed in 1919. It outlawed the manufacture, sale or transportation of alcoholic beverages in the U.S. Congress passed the Volstead Act which provided for enforcement of prohibition. "Speakeasies," bootlegging, false medical prescriptions and homemade 'stills sprang up across much of the nation. Organized crime got involved in the alcohol business. Prohibition was repealed by the 21st Amendment in 1933.
1920s and 30s Questions

All answers are in the notes.

Students should be able to answer these questions from your notes.

1. Create a chart of the U.S. Presidents of the 1920s and 30s. Include names, party affiliations, years in office, and a list of the most important events which occurred during their administrations.

2. Warren Harding ran with the slogan "Return to Normalcy." How does that describe his politics? (3 - 5 sentences)

3. Briefly describe the politics of Calvin Coolidge.

4. Why was Henry Ford important?

5. What was the Scopes Trial all about?

6. Briefly describe the economy during the 1920s.

7. A. What is speculation and how does it relate to the 1920s?
   b. What is buying on margin how does it relate to the 1920s?

8. What caused the Great Depression?
   • When were the Depression years?
   • What year did the U.S. stock market crash?

9. List the major effects of the Great Depression.

10. How did President Hoover respond to the Depression?

11. What recommendations did John Maynard Keynes make?

12. Briefly describe the New Deal (including the 3 "R's").
Appendix H

Quiz
Quiz for the 1920s

Vocabulary

A. Great Migration  F. Prohibition  K. Volstead Act
B. Garvey movement  G. Temperance  L. Speakeasies
C. Dawes plan  H. 18th Amendment  M. Flappers
D. American Plan  I. 19th Amendment  N. Talkies
E. Route 66  J. 21st Amendment  O. Mass Media

1. _____ Young, unconventional women in the 1920s.
2. _____ First talking picture films.
3. _____ Financial plan that aided Germany.
4. _____ Back to Africa Movement.
5. _____ Made alcohol legal again.
6. _____ Gave women the right to vote.
7. _____ Law declaring any alcohol .5% intoxicating and illegal.
8. _____ Made manufacturing, transporting, and selling alcohol illegal.
9. _____ First Federal Highway.
10. _____ Movement to outlaw alcohol in the late 1800s.
11. _____ Newspapers, radio billboards, and national magazines.
12. _____ Secret illegal night clubs.
13. _____ African Americans in the south moved north for more money.
14. _____ Period of American History that made alcohol illegal.
15. _____ Way for companies to demoralize Labor Unions.

True or False?

1. _____ The Palmer raids were seen as a good thing by progressives.
2. _____ When businesses are legally separate form stockholders it is considered a corporation.
3. _____ Prohibition was easy to enforce.
4. _____ The Scopes trial was about two immigrants that were anarchists. They were sentenced to death.
5. _____ Henry Ford was seen as a traitor by his fellow automobile manufactures.
6. _____ When there is only one major producer of an industry, which is considered an Oligopoly.
7. _____ Welfare Capitalism helped out the worker, but hurt unions.
8. _____ Most Americans trusted unions in the 1920s.
9. _____ Working on an assembly line required a lot of skilled labor.
10. _____ Scientific management was a time study to make a job more productive.
Fill in the Blank
1. Most Americans were fearful of what type of system that might overtake the U.S.? ______________________________________
2. Palmer sent some Russian immigrant home on what ship? ________________
3. This was the scandal that rocked the Harding Administration? _______________
4. This was the Benbow family’s favorite President? _________________________
5. These were new workers that were professional and dressed up everyday for their jobs? ______________________________________
6. Credit began in the 1920s, what did most people call it? ____________________
7. This was the most famous bootlegger that became incredibly rich, and eventually goes to jail for tax evasion? _____________________________
8. What caused the Red Scare in the United States? _________________________
9. What was the nickname of Calvin Coolidge? _____________________________
10. This was the conflict with religion during this time period? _____________________________

Essay
1. How was the Benbow Hotel a symbol of the Era? Give specific detail.
2. In what ways did America change in the 1920s? Give 5 examples and use detail
3. In your opinion, why didn’t everyone feel the roar of the economy during the 1920s?
Appendix I

The Century: The Roaring Twenties: Film Guide
Film Guide

1. The 18th Amendment made the sale and consumption of _________________ illegal.

2. Where was liquor sole while Prohibition was underway?

3. In the 1920s, more Americans lived in _________________ than in rural areas for the first time in our nation’s history.

4. Which street in New York City best represented the city’s expanding opportunities?

5. Where was the “capital” or center of Jazz during the 1920s?

6. Name two important jazz artists of the 1920s.
   a.
   b.

7. Which city was probably the most racially mixed in the United States?

8. What new technologies changed life in the United States?
   a.
   b.
   c.

9. What form of payment became widespread during the 1920s?

10. What amendment to the Constitution gave women the right to vote in 1920?
11. What were the “more daring” women of the 1920s called?
12. What was John T. Scopes accused of doing in Tennessee?

13. What was the verdict in the Scopes trial?

14. How large did KKK membership become in the 1920s (how many people)?

15. How many people were lynched by the Klan during that decade?

16. Where did 50,000 Klansmen march in 1927?

17. Who was the most famous baseball player during the 1920s?

18. Who flew solo across the Atlantic?

19. Which continent did Admiral Bird reach in an airplane?

20. Who was inaugurated as U.S. President in 1929?

21. In October 1929 what happened to the stock market?
Appendix J

When the Stars Stayed at Benbow
A nostalgic look at one of the most elegant hotels in California, through the eyes of one who remembers it best. The writer is daughter of Joseph Benbow, eldest of nine brothers and sisters who built the inn.

By Phyllis Benbow

Today, it looks traditional and elegant. But that's the way it looked even while its cement was hardening in 1926. Nostalgia is now "in." Lovely old buildings are being re-seen through appreciative eyes. Many can remember, or would like to experience, the days and times of a more gracious and leisurely time in our country's history. Benbow as a hotel and resort center was built close to the end of this era. It was the 1920's and still not uncommon for the wealthy to travel with their chauffeurs, horse trailers, and maids.

It was to be a hotel operated in the style of this grand manner, and though new to the scene of "luxury vacation center," it took its place quickly among the famous hostleries in California.

The hotel was my home and the environment of the building of Benbow was my life. Construction began when I was six and I grew up with famous and important people being guests. But my list of important people would certainly have to begin with the Benbow family — a family of nine brothers and sisters to whom the hotel became the abiding dream.

The background was sentimental; perhaps even whimsical. By 1920, a once close-knit family was divided by several miles. Part of the family had remained in Humboldt County where they had grown up, while the others had moved to the Bay Area.

My father, Joseph Benbow, was principal of Eureka Elementary School. (He had married one of its schoolteachers, Mabel Curry Benbow.) Aunt Eva was working as a freelance artist in San Francisco and Berkeley for such publications as the Saturday Evening Post, the
old Esquire, McCullough, Harper, and many others, while Aunt Helen had recently finished architectural school. Uncle But as was his third year of operating a jewelry store in Eureka, and Aunt Letia was a bookkeeper at an accounting firm, also in Eureka. Aunt Clara taught school near Loleta, while Uncle Walter and Rob were still in high school and living with their father in Berkeley. (Their mother had died during the Swine Flu Epidemic of 1918.) And finally, Aunt Jay and her husband owned a dairy near Loleta.

The nine-member family, along with husbands, wives and children which had entered the picture by the early-1920s, decided to find a little piece of land, preferably by a river or stream, where they could rent a camp together during summer vacations. They eventually found a lovely spot in a grove of gracious Redwood trees near the Garberville area along the Eel River.

Nobody now remembers when, or who, first suggested that they team up as a family and build a hotel. Perhaps it was first said in jest, but the commitment was eventually made. None of the nine knew the first thing about running a hotel, but somehow they "would learn."

During the summer of 1924, they purchased 1,288 acres from Earnest Limner, a sheep rancher. They pooled their total financial resources — about $30,000 — and began work on their recently purchased property which, some 40 later, would be part of Benbow Lake State Park.

It was to be not only a hotel, but also a golf course, riding stable, canoe area along the river, a power and water company, and a dairy.

The hotel was designed by Albert Fall, a then well-known architect from San Francisco. As for its construction, the hotel’s basic foundation is supposed to last one thousand years, and its built-in sprinkler system far exceeds any current fire code safety standards even today in 1981.

Yes, the Benbows were hard workers. They had to be in order to survive. But they were also smart enough to hire professionals. The chef, the head waiter, the greenskeeper, the gardener — these were perfectionists and their loyalty to the family was expressed by their personal devotion to the hotel.

Even at the age of eight or nine, I was fully aware of what being a guest at Benbow Inn meant during vacation: Seven-course dinners of the finest cuisine. Silver that glistened in the soft light. Fresh flowers everywhere. It was obvious to me as a child why those who could afford every luxury would choose to stay at Benbow.

But let me admit to a kind of private childhood concern. The guests had the luxury, the beauty, the service. But I lived the most real part, the "behind-the-scenes" of the details that make a hotel run. Guests would ask to meet the chef. I didn’t have to meet him. He was my friend. The guests enjoyed the Benbow family, and many enduring friendships remained throughout the decades. But the guests would eventually pack their suitcases and leave.

But this was my home and the Benbows were my family, and I somehow thought every child was lucky enough to see an actor on the silver screen and then be able to meet him in person the following summer. There were political stars as well, and the hotel was honored several times with the presence of one of the greatest of his era.

While he was Secretary of Commerce during the Harding Administration, Herbert Hoover’s home away from Washington, D.C. was in Palo Alto, California. He also owned a ranch near the Rogue River in Oregon, so Benbow Inn was a natural overnight stay between the two homes. He had vacationed nearly every summer at the hotel, but his visits were limited to overnight stays once he became president.

Until father’s final days, the words, “F.D.R.” and “S.O.B.” always followed one-another in his vocabulary. Yet, after having tea with her, father never again passed up an opportunity to say something nice about Eleanor Roosevelt.

The hotel business was deeply cut by the Crash of ’29, as was the travel and vacation industry as a whole. Since the summer of 1930 was a financial disaster for the hotel, how very nice it was to receive President Hoover that winter. The hotel was closed, but his dinner was cooked and served to him in the lobby in front of the fireplace.

I still remember that chilly, wet December evening.

How cruel and heartless it seemed to me at the time when father insisted that I turn off Jack Benny’s come downstairs to the lobby, and listen to Mr. Hoover talk. Being 12, I have little recollection of what was discussed, yet I remember how important the president must have been. After all, mother, who hated cigar smoke, thought it perfectly all right, that specific evening. “Because it was being done by Mr. Hoover.”

After Roosevelt became president, Mr. Hoover’s visits became more frequent and leisurely. It happened that he and my father shared the same birthday — August 10th — and through the years, father would wear a carnation on that date in honor of one of our greatest presidents.

Once, several years later during the mid-1960s as I walked by the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, I thought wistfully of this soft-spoken and gentle man I had met as a child. Also somewhat wistfully, I stopped in to say hello. He received me graciously. I told him that the Benbows no longer owned the hotel but were still active in the valley. The visit was all too brief, but the smiling statesman, then in his 80’s, told me something only a very proud daughter could fully love and appreciate: “By the way, Phyllis — did you know that your father and I share the same birth date?”

President Hoover wasn’t the only political superstar who honored the hotel with his presence. The family was sitting at the dining room table one afternoon when mother approached with a determined look. She was including all those present, but addressed father in particular.

“I have just taken a reservation for Mrs. Roosevelt and her secretary. She will be staying as our guest, and remember, Joseph, no politics!”

Eleanor Roosevelt proved to be one of the most genuinely charming persons ever to stay at Benbow.

One experience shared in private by a young girl showed a particularly warm and unexpected side of the First Lady. I was down by the circular stone garden steps calling and waiting for my toads when Mrs. Roosevelt’s secretary happened by and was curious about what I was doing. I explained that the toads were my pets. No, they were not coming for food but that they just enjoyed the “sociability.” Sure enough, they came out from under the leaves where they were hidden during the heat of the day.

The secretary suggested that Mrs. Roosevelt might enjoy seeing them.

When we entered her room with a handful of toads, Mrs. Roosevelt looked up over her glasses. Standing up from a desk top buried in papers, she walked over to me and asked whether or not they would enjoy a swim? It was a test of total sophistication for a great lady, even though seeing five giant toads swimming in her bathtub was not an expected or usual sight. Pushing her elegant chiffon sleeves above her elbows, she got down on hands and knees to play with my pets.

Another member of the family also remembered her visit. Father had tea with her on the terrace one afternoon. I never found out what they discussed, but it must have been impressive. Until father’s final days in 1965, the words, “F.D.R.” and “S.O.B.” always followed one-another in his vocabulary. Yet he never passed up an opportunity to say something nice about the former First Lady whenever her name came up in conversation.
Outside of horseback riding, golfing, canoeing and swimming, there was little to do at the hotel. And that was the way the guests liked it. People from every walk of professional life signed their names in the Benbow ledger, and they vacationed there to receive the service but not the recreation.

This was true of many stars who visited Benbow, including Janet Gaynor, the first actress ever to win an Academy Award for Best Actress (1929). She was very popular and beautiful. Miss Gaynor and Margot Lindsey arrived as a party of two with their chauffeur in 1930. I was acting to meet them, but understood completely the unwritten rule that guests, whether world-famous or not, were to enjoy complete privacy.

Mother was not only a gracious hostess but also the kind of hostess who arranged special things to do for special guests. I was beside myself when she had invited the two stars for a breakfast cook-out in the Redwoods. A little stream ran through our breakfast picnic spot, and a big plank served as a bridge. It was long enough and strong enough to safely reach from bank to bank. Ah, but what a marvelous bounce it had!

Under the footlights or in front of the camera, perhaps theater people take on a special, perhaps even snobbish sophistication. Make-up and hair must be perfect under the hot lights, and only the "best side" is ever to be seen by their admiring public. Miss Gaynor continued with her successful movie career but never again was she as beautiful or radiant on the screen as she was that morning while holding my hand, bouncing and giggling until breathless, hair a mess and wearing only an old pair of blue jeans, sweatshirt, and tennis shoes.

Jack Benny's visit to Benbow was memorable, but mainly through the eyes of Uncle Burt's three little boys — Stan, Christopher and John — who were the sole audience to what must have been a delightful show.

During the height of the tourist season when absolutely no rooms were available, either at the hotel or in nearby Garberville, the family would accommodate guests in their homes. Mr. Benny and announcer Don Wilson arrived without reservations, and, instead of making a scene, accepted a room at Uncle Burt's ranch house. They arrived late and either were early risers or had been awakened by my three cousins who were riding their tricycles out on the wooden porch.

From the delightful reports of the boys, "two nice men" were riding the tricycles. Jack Benny, a man of normal size, would have had some difficulty, but Don Wilson, noted for his corpulence, must have had something of a sight to see. The highlight of the race, according to the boys, was when the "Big One," lost his balance and fell down the front steps.

The two radio stars breakfasted in the dining room, accepted the suggestion of taking box lunches for a picnic in the Redwoods, then left without any adults having heard of the adventure shared with appreciative eyes by only three little boys.

When John Barrymore first visited Benbow, he had made only a couple of pictures. His reputation was as a famous actor and his film career ended in the 1920s. He was always one of the two with their chauffeur in 1930. I was acting to meet him, but understood completely the unwritten rule that guests, whether world-famous or not, were to enjoy complete privacy.

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Under the footlights or in front of the camera, perhaps the theater people take on a special, perhaps even snobbish sophistication. Make-up and hair must be perfect under the hot lights, and only the "best side" is ever to be seen by their admiring public. Miss Gaynor continued with her successful movie career but never again was she as beautiful or radiant on the screen as she was that morning while holding my hand, bouncing and giggling until breathless, hair a mess and wearing only an old pair of blue jeans, sweatshirt, and tennis shoes.

Even for a tourist, Sam Armstrong checked in with an unusually large number of cameras around his neck.

He was an artist gathering background photos and sketches for a new Disney cartoon. The end result: "Bambi."

he was Hamlet. I must have gotten up enough courage to approach him on the golf course, for I ended up being his caddy. (My mother later asked whether or not the golf bag wasn't a bit heavy for a 15-year-old to lug around for three holes. What bag! I must have carried one but don't remember doing so.)

When he married Dolores Costello, they spent their honeymoon at the hotel. I was waiting for their arrival eagerly, of course, and was invited up to their room where I was allowed to help her unpack. He supervised while the bellboy unpacked his ample liquor collection and I was thrilled just to touch her elegant clothes. She was so pretty and smelled delicious.

I was in my teenaged heaven when I heard that they had bought property near the hotel. That would mean that they would live in Benbow Valley — well, at least part of the time. That never happened. How neatly, as a young woman some years later, I read the book, "Good Night, Sweet Prince," a biography of his life.

Yes, John Barrymore was indeed many men.

There was a strict rule at Benbow — no pets.

Accommodations could be provided in the cabins at the stable, but they were welcomed in the guest rooms or tent. Mother made one exception and this was kept secret from the rest of the family for years — even after the family told the hotel in the early 1950s.

Basil Rathbone, so suave and so handsome, and, as his mother explained, "was so Sherlock Holmes," pleased with mother so eloquently the cause of his doberman that she allowed him, his wife and the dog to have the guest room at the very end of the row of guest rooms. After the first visit, he would be sure that his letter of reservation would always be addressed to mother, with a note stating, "Is our secret still on?"

On the reservation card, Mother would write, "Rathbone. Room 17. Do not move!"

Alan Ladd was a star with the "macho" image, and he naturally found himself at the stables. But he didn't rent a horse because the truth of the matter was, he knew little about riding. Yes, he had been in several westerns, but those were doubles on the horse.

An interesting chemistry happened between Mr. Ladd and Uncle Rob. The actor was straightforward enough with the stable manager to explain his situation, and Uncle Rob recognized an honest and genuine human being when he met one. No, he didn't spend the following three weeks at the hotel but rather at Uncle Rob's ranch. And he spent days rather than hours in the saddle.

About two years passed. Then, one afternoon, Uncle Rob received a very unique and special present — the saddle which Mr. Ladd had used while making "Shane."

By the mid-1950's, it was common knowledge in the movie industry that Alan Ladd was one of the few stars who did his own riding, declining the use of doubles. But at least one Benbow remembered when that wasn't always so.

His name was Sam Armstrong and even for a tourist, the family thought he checked in with an unusually large number of cameras around his neck. He also had several sketchpads and would leave early in the morning right after breakfast, not to return until late at night. Sam needed a guide and, as a girl of 17, I was as knowledgeable of the back hills as anyone. I showed him not only the deep Redwoods, but also open grassy hills, thickets, streams, natural springs and open meadows.

He was a Disney artist gathering background photos and sketches for a new...
cartoon about a fawn. The end result: "Bambi."

More than four decades later, much of the movie's background settings are still easily recognizable to those familiar with the Garberville area.

Spencer Tracy was a guest at Benbow in the summer of 1940.

Certainly not because he expected starting theatrical excellence, he bought a ticket and attended a performance at the Redwood Playbox in Garberville. Those of us on stage nearly froze in our theatrical tracks when we looked beyond the footlights to see him sitting in the front row. He came backstage after the show. He showed us how our new salt water dimmers worked (a recent invention at the time) and he complimented each of the eight members of the cast on "a wonderful job."

What a switch from ordinary procedure it was for such an actor and actresses to ask for an autograph from a member of that audience. Would he sign the cast program?

Yes indeed. On a very special page.

Publisher William Randolph Hearst was a guest on several occasions. He and his party enjoyed horseback riding and the hotel received beautiful press coverage during the 1930’s through the San Francisco Examiner and other Hearst-owned newspapers throughout the country.

Several members of the family received open invitations to visit the Hearst Castle at San Simeon. When father, mother, and I were there, Mr. Hearst was not present but we were overnight guests and enjoyed all the legendary hospitality.

When Uncle Burt stayed there, he was fortunate enough to have the preside over the dinner table. And yes, the gold plates and ketchup bottles were a fact.

Those with famous faces would come to the hotel timidly at first, often making reservations under an assumed name. Yes, privacy was important, but there was such an atmosphere of ease and privacy that they would eventually eat in the dining room rather than have meals sent to their rooms.

An exception was Edgar Rice Burroughs. His face was not well known but certainly as the creator of Tarzan, he had world-wide fame and fortune. And he loved it. Tarzan was real to him, and if the Burroughs' guests were, one could almost believe that Tarzan had been there too. None of the blush of success had worn off or had become tiresome.

He accepted an invitation to visit Kimmu, a Camp Fire Girl's hideaway that was on Benbow property about three miles away. He seemed to relish the signing of autographs for each of the 60 or more campers and counselors.


I had married and moved away when Charles Laughton stayed at the hotel, but I heard about the accident several months later from an unfortunate witness.

Uncle Walter used to say time and again that "the only really important person at the hotel is the chef." This was true on many occasions through the years, and it was true on this specific evening when Charles being Charles did not ask permission to speak to the chef but simply handed over the kitchen. Having personally gone in and out of those swinging doors several thousand times during my childhood, I knew exactly what happened even before it was said.

There was a crash.

The waitress was pushing just as Mr. Laughton was shoving on the other side of the door. A trayful of dishes and plates shattered everywhere, and a large bowl of hot soup spilled on the actor's large chest and stomach.

It was reported to me that the great Laughton, with those magnificent theatrical lungs of his, gave out a Tarzan-like yell which even surpassed that of Mr. Burroughs.

Thanks to Mr. Laughton, the kitchen's swinging doors now have an IN and OUT deeply carved on both sides for the benefit of all guests.

Yes, it was a marvelous and unforgettable childhood. But taking nothing away from the countless celebrities I was fortunate enough to know and meet, my fondest memories are those of a very special father and mother — not to mention eight loving aunts and uncles, plus their immediate families.

Just how special a father was he?

One October day he walked into the classroom and yanked me out of school about 10 minutes before the noon lunch hour was to begin. Yes, I was smart enough to miss my lunch today because he wants me to see something. No, it can't wait until after school because Dr. Strauss will be checking out in less than an hour.

The guest's bed was piled with blueprints. Father also wanted me to see the drawings and sketches. These drawings and sketches eventually became the Golden Gate Bridge.

About three years later, my teacher told the class that a controversy was brewing at City Hall in San Francisco over whether or not a single-suspension bridge nearly one mile in length could ever be constructed.

What controversy!

The bridge was going to be built. I had seen the blueprints — the same way I had once seen blueprints of a hotel my family wanted to build."
Questions that go along with the Reading, *When the Stars Stayed at Benbow*.

1. What did it mean to be a guest at the Hotel? How was it the perfect vacation?
2. What was President Hoover's visit like? Why did he spend time at the Inn?
3. What did the Benbows think of Franklin Roosevelt? Why do you think they felt this way?
4. What was Eleanor Roosevelt like? What made her visit stand out to the author of the article?
5. Which of the famous guests of the Inn stands out to you? Why?
6. What does the Golden Gate bridge have to do with the Benbow Inn? What do they have in common?
Appendix K

Answer Keys
American Century Video Sheet-

1. Alcohol
2. Speakeasies
3. Urban centers
4. Wall street
5. Harlem clubs
7. Lower East side
8. Electricity (science and technology), Automobile, Radio
9. Credit or Buying on Time
10. 19th Amendment- 81 years women won right to vote
11. Flappers-knew how far they could take it, Vamps didn’t care how far they went
12. Teaching evolution- Darwin’s theory
13. Found guilty and fined $10
14. 4 million
15. 200 lynched by the Klan
16. Washington D.C.
17. Babe Ruth, Lou Gerg
18. Charles Lindberg
19. Antarctica
20. Herbert Hoover
21. Crashed- Many Americans were in the stock market. No regulations. Panic selling – 9:30-3:00 30 billion dollars vanished.

Quiz 1920

Vocabulary True/False
1. M 1. F
2. N 2. T
3. C 3. F
4. B 4. F
5. J 5. T
6. I 6. F
7. D 7. T
8. K 8. 8
11. O
12. L
13. A
14. F
15. D
Fill in the Blank

1. Communists
2. Soviet Ark
3. Teapot Dome Scandal
4. Herbert Hoover
5. White collar workers
6. Buying on time
7. Al Capone
8. 1917 Bolshevik Revolution
9. Silent Cal
10. Scopes Monkey Trial

Essay Response

1. Any of these answers would be a part of the answer.
   - Became corporation- sold stock and land for investment
   - They were big time Republicans and loved Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover
   - Golf was important to the wealthy class that they were catering too.
   - Prohibition was strictly followed and they were supporters.
   - The automobile made it all possible for them.
   - The Benbow women were definitely modern in the jobs and roles that portrayed.
   - They were a part of the intolerance of the rich by excluding blacks and Jews
   - Religion affected them like it did everyone else throughout the 1920s.
   - They were affected by the crash and the Great Depression
   - Not the 1920s, but historically they were also affected by the war years with rationing that really hurt business.

2. Answers will vary according to students.
3. Answers will vary according to students.
Appendix L

Maps
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Benbow, Clara. Diary Accounts of the Building of Benbow, 1924-1928.


2 Walter Benbow. Interviewed in 1992 by Carol Bickler (Ukiah, California).
4 Clara Benbow. Diary accounts. p. 14
6 Clara Benbow. Diary account. It does not go into much detail, but does let the reader know what they were thinking.
7 Walter Benbow would marry Vera Lindser, and the older Benbows would not pay her father the money that they owed due to politics. The family rumor was that he voted for Roosevelt.
8 Clara Benbow. Diary accounts. p. 25
10 Bickler, Countless interviews with the entire Benbow family.
11 Clara Benbow, Diary accounts. p.10
12 Nash, Benbow. p.5
16 Ibid. p.28
18 Nash, Benbow. p. 8
20 Cook, Early days. p. 7
21 Nash. Benbow. p.5
22 Phyllis Benbow, When the Stars Stayed at Benbow. Humboldt County Magazine (Summer 1981) p.24
23 Ibid. p.25
24 Walter Benbow, Interview with Carol Bickler (Ukiah,1992)
26 Allen, p. 136
27 Kyvig, Daily Life. p.70
29 Walter Benbow. Interview (Ukiah, 1992)
30 Cook , Humboldt History. p.61
31 John Benbow. Interview about the beginning of the project (January 2005). His father was the oldest Benbow.
32 Walter Benbow, Interview (Ukiah, 1992)
33 Ibid.
34 Kyvig, Daily Life. p.52
35 Allen, Yesterday. p. 133
36 Kyvig, Daily. p.136

ENDNOTES

104
Dodes, *Everyday*. p.96

Kyvig, *Daily Life*. p.31

Ibid, p.133


Ibid. p.126


Ibid. p.126


Ibid. p. 116

Walter Benbow, Interview by Bickler (Ukiah 1992)

Benbow Development company investors were as followed: Margaret Stewart, C.H. Wright, H.B. Daly, C.H. Sooy, Carl Wright, R. Richardson, E. Dickson, E.F. Card, L.H. Service, P Pierson, and W.J. Quin. Most were doctors, Lawyers, and businessmen.

Eva Benbow. Diary accounts. p. 26

Kyvig, *Daily Life*. p. 161

Walter Benbow. My grandfather loved to tell stories about the building and running of the Hotel.

Plesur, *Problems*. p. 117

Bickler, Interview with several family members indicated that their attitude of wealth, led them to believe that they really believed that they were better than the “workers” at the hotel.

Carol Bickler. Interview by Mike Benbow (Menlo Park, 2005)


Allen, *Yesterday*. p.139


Ibid. p.694

Kyvig, *Daily Life*. p. 163

Ibid, p.155

Allen, *Yesterday*. P. 163

Hume, *Religions*. P.93

Ibid. P. 83

Plesur, *Problems*. P. 123

Hume, Religions p. 87

Bickler, Interview by Mike Benbow (Menlo Park, 2005).

Bickler, Interview by Mike Benbow (Menlo Park, 2005).

Dodes, *Everyday*. p.221


Kyvig, *Daily Life*. p. 21

Walter Benbow. Interview by Bickler (Ukiah, 1992).

Jeffrey Nash p.702

Bickler, Interview by Mike Benbow (Menlo Park, 2005). I am using many interviews to make this statement.


Nash, *Triumphs*. p.16

Ibid. p. 18

Bickler, Interview by Mike Benbow (Menlo Park, 2005).

For the first 20 years it was known as Hotel Benbow. It was then renamed the Benbow Hotel in 1946. After the Hotel was sold in 1960 it became known as the Benbow Inn. These terms will be used interchangeably throughout the lesson.
California map can be found at cpis.org. Humboldt map can be found at bindle.com. Garberville map can be found at kmud.org. Benbow map was a part of the deed in 1960, I have a copy from family.


Walter Benbow. Interviewed in 1992 by Carol Bickler (Ukiah, California).


Clara Benbow. Diary accounts. p. 14


Clara Benbow. Diary account. It does not go into much detail, but does let the reader know what they were thinking.

Walter Benbow would marry Vera Lindser, and the older Benbows would not pay her father the money that they owed due to politics. The family rumor was that he voted for Roosevelt.

Clara Benbow. Diary accounts. p. 25

Carol Bickler. Daughter of Walter Benbow, Interview by Mike Benbow (Menlo Park, 2005).

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