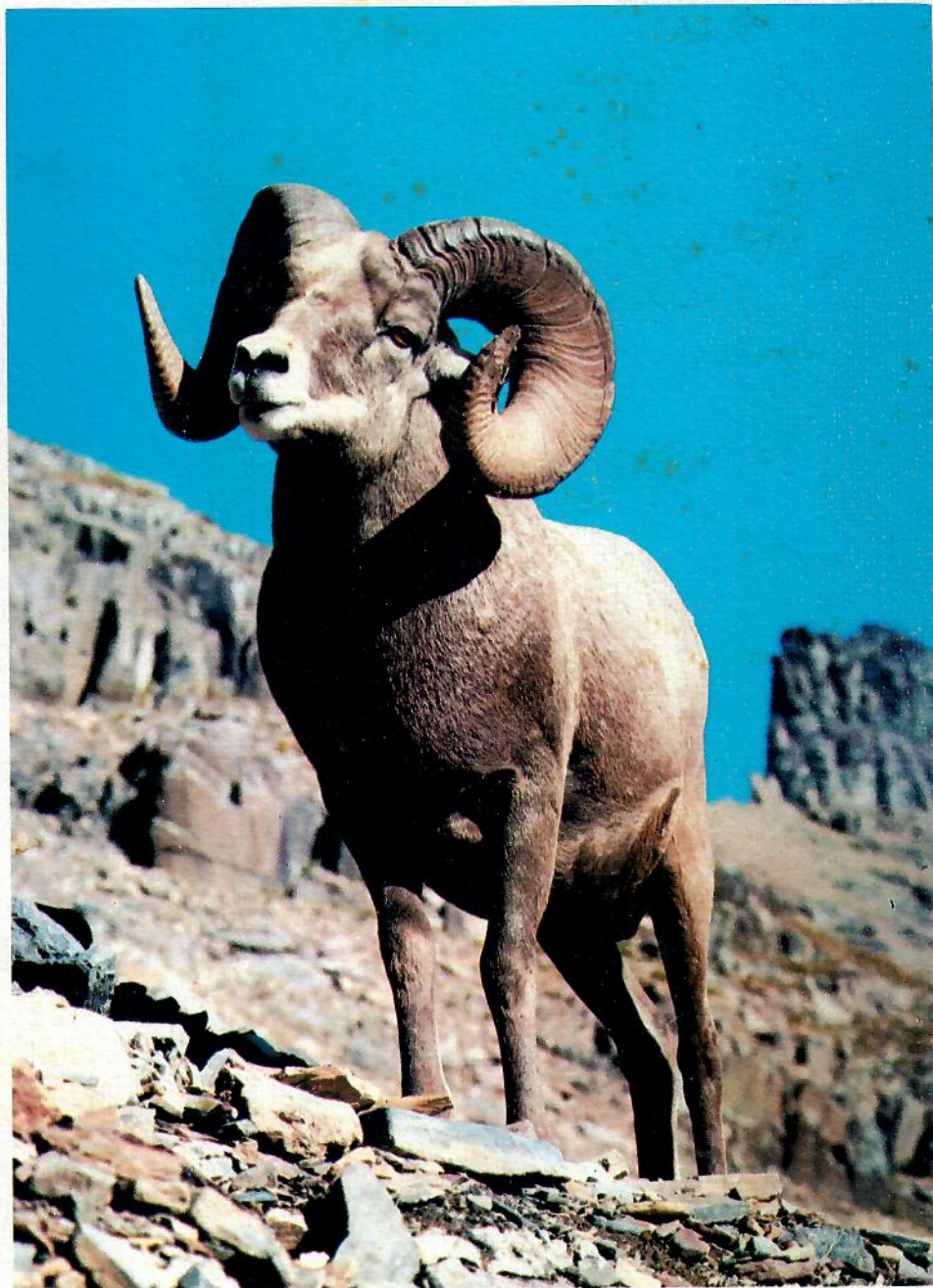


# HI DESERT DREAMING

A HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITIES OF  
MORONGO VALLEY • YUCCA VALLEY • JOSHUA TREE  
29 PALMS • WHITEWATER • LANDERS





Mr. & Mrs. L.W. Buchanan

1947 - Barbara Buchanan

## U-WASH-IT LAUNDRY



Do your own washing and ironing here or have it done rough dry, or finished — Open 7 to 7 Mon. thru Fri. — to noon Sat. — Owner Marie Hoilenback, Yucca Valley. Located at Santa Fe and Kickapoo Trail.

## Memories

### YUCCA VALLEY'S "GRUBSTAKE DAYS" APRIL 6-7-8; BIG PROGRAM PLANNED March 30, 1951

"Grubstake Days" Yucca Valley's big celebration of the year, will get underway next Friday and will continue through Sunday. The big community fete is being sponsored by the Yucca Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with the area meeting of Western Mining Council, Inc., at that time.

Entertainment has been planned to keep the 300 to 400 council members amused during their stay in the desert.

The following program has been arranged:

April 6 — 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., conducted tours through Joshua Tree National Monument with rangers from the local National Park Service in charge. A picnic lunch will be held during the first tour. 5 to 7 p.m. — Ham dinner at Community Club, sponsored by the Community Club and Woman's Club. 8 p.m. — Movies at Community Club, when a color film on "History of Gold Mining in California" and films on Alaska will be shown.

April 7 — 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. — At the Grubstake Field the Future Miners of the West will have a gold-panning exhibition, wheelbarrow races and other games for young miners and visitors. 11 a.m. — Big Western Parade with the sheriff's posses from San Bernardino, Los Angeles County No. 5 and Morongo Basin; other riding groups and individuals along with the miners, some floats and buggies. 2 p.m. — At the field, Western Horse Show with horsemen from all over Southern California competing. 4 p.m. — Welcome and inspection of new 29 Palms stage and caravan. 5 to 7 p.m. — Turkey dinner at American Legion Hall. 9 p.m. — Western dance at the Community Club.

April 8 — Business sessions of the Western Mining Council, Inc., to be held all day at Community Club.

Young Tommie 1½ yrs. waving to everyone.

Lorena Humphreville



Tom Humphreville and  
Doctor John Bendall in Mexico.

Lorena Humphreville



### EVANOFF BUILDING

Orpha Austin Booth was in business here from Oct. 1, 1959 to October 1961.

Joan's Collection



# Landers - A Fast Growing Community

**T**he community of Landers began as a hideaway for eight flying enthusiasts who created an airstrip which could only be reached by plane. One by one they built homes along the airstrip. George Belfield was first.

Lee Defever, from Cudahy, California, and an airminded man who was sold on the project of his eight friends, filed on a tract to the east of them and built the second home. According to Mary Defever, Lee's wife, it was at this home that seven of the group met to decide on a name for their community. Newlin Landers was the one member of the group who was not present. The others decided to name the community Landers after Newlin Landers with whom the idea of a flier's hideaway in the desert had originated.

Defevers later added a wide porch around their home, and it became known as Defever Hall, because it was lent rent-free as a community meeting place. The Landers Association, Inc. and the Homestead Valley Women's Club were organized in Defever Hall, and they held their first meetings there. The first Sunday School and the first church service were held there also. The Defevers often rented a motel when they came to Landers, because their home was in use at the time of their visit. Defever Hall burned to the ground August 5, 1963. Glenna Kirkendall, the daughter of the late George Belfield, lived with her family in a home on the site of this old landmark.



Newlin Landers and Steve Beede

Vernetta Landers

**N**ewlin Landers built the third home. Newlin had invented, tested, developed, patented and manufactured a series of high pressure valves. At this time, he was co-owner of the Selwyn-Landers Valve Factory in Los Angeles. Later, he purchased and developed Havasu Landing near Needles, California, and the Navajo Tract in Apple Valley.

**N**ewlin put a light plant in his home. Most early settlers had to provide their own electricity with private generators. In 1951, they banded together to form an electric co-op, and in 1957 the Government gave the area electricity through the REA program. The co-op was later purchased by the Southern California Edison Company. In 1960 three-phase electricity was brought into Landers for more efficient pumping of wells, and luminaire street lights began to make the area appear like a town.



Vernetta Landers

*The Honorable Dr. Vernetta Landers,  
HE, DDG, LPIBA, LFABI, LFWLA, LFIAP*

*Explanation:*

*Honorable — Lifetime Deputy Governor American Biographical Institute Research Association*

*HE — Her Excellency — Grand Ambassador of Achievement, American Biographical Institute.*

*DDG — Deputy Director General International Biographical Center, Cambridge, England*

*LPIBA — Life Patron International Biographies Assn.*

*LFABI — Life Fellow American Biographical Institute*

*LFWLA — Life Fellow World Literary Academy — England*

*LFIAP — Life Fellow International Academy of Poets — England.*

**J**ack Bale, a service station and tire-recapping shop owner in Bell Gardens built the fourth home on the northwest side of the airstrip. He added a cafe, and this was the beginning of the Sky Room Cafe. Jack also put in a gas station. Newlin Landers later purchased the station and added a pump and tank for aviation gas. President Nixon's Phase IV phased out the gas station, but Newlin still used the station as a base of operations for his septic tank and water system installation business.

Joe Nugent built the fifth home. The owner of six planes, he promoted air charters to remote places. He plotted a plane haven at Landers and hung up a wind sock. Friends from all over flew in for weekends.



*Photo Courtesy of Vernette Landers*

*Vernette Landers, Linda Clark and Newlin Landers*

**J**ack Hulet, who worked in a tire business while studying to become an accountant, built a home north of the Bale property.

Dr. Morris, a dentist from Lakewood, built a home across from the gas station, and A.T. Stock, a plastics manufacturer from Bell Gardens, built just north of Dr. Morris. Mr. Stock was interested in finding out what effect desert weather would have upon plastics. Joe Nugent's brother-in-law, George Roth, built across from Joe. This completed the homes on the airstrip. By 1986, all these homes had changed hands except those owned by Newlin Landers, Joe Nugent and George Roth. Newlin Landers is the only one who is still a permanent resident.

After the first trails were blazed in 1950, George Belfield wanted to start a mutual water company to bring water to that part of the Hi-Desert. Collections were taken by Hazel Bale, treasurer for the new company, and a 165-foot well was drilled on George's claim.

**N**ewlin Landers had his own well drilled in 1953 which he operated with a gas engine from an old Chevrolet. Water was good in Landers, but those residents who were not in a water district and who did not have a well had to pay to have domestic water trucked to their homes or haul it themselves. People came with all types of containers and conveyances to get water from Newlin Landers' well. Newlin also started a water delivery service which he operated from his gas station and shop.

With water available, more people became interested in the area. The building of cabins became a booming business. Roads and trails began to appear everywhere. Real estate salesmen began to acquire land for subdivision. Among them was Joe Fleming who started a real estate subdivision called Flamingo (Fleming must go.) Estates on Old Woman Springs Road.

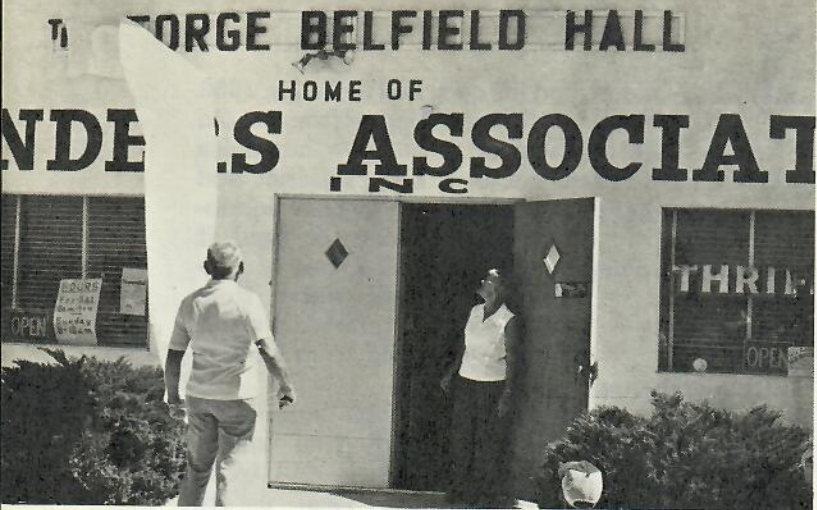
**F**irst means of written communication in Landers was a weekly newsletter called the "Homesteader," which was published by the Hawleys from 1958 to 1960. Next came the "Homestead Valley News" published semi-monthly by the Kellys in 1960, followed by the Landers Association, Inc. Newsletter which is mailed out to members of the Association.

In December of 1959, Dicey Anderson began to write her column "Landers Homestead Valley" for the Hi-Desert Star. Other scribes who donated much valuable time to local news reporting were Vola Gribble, Opal Hammon, Adele Glomb, Willa Gonzales, Adele Bond, Helen Grabowski, and at present Fran Traylor and Jeanne Taylor.

*The late George Belfield whose motto was "Fastest Water Service in the Hi-Desert. 1500 gallons \$8.32".*

*Photo by Vernette Landers*





Get ready to open.

Vernette Landers



Photo by Vernette Landers

1981 — Supreme Party Giver and M.C. Linda Clark

## A Look at Landers

Ellie Hedberg, Road Commissioner, Doris Stasse, recipient of first Community Citizen Award presented at Grange meeting Oct. 2, 1985.

Vernette Landers



Photo by Newlin Landers

1963 — Vernette Landers at Landers Well No. 2



Landers - Leena Clark

Vernette Landers



1983 — Grubstake Parade: Rosiena Graves, Honorary mayor of Landers.

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Vernette Landers





Vernetta Landers

Vernetta Landers with "Impy" her bobcat.



Photo by Vernetta Landers

1965 — The duck pond at Landers Lake made from a wash by Newlin Landers in 1957. The pond wash was washed out by a flash flood in Aug. 1969.



Dacey Anderson at the Landers sign on the Old Woman Springs Road.



Photo from Joan's Collection

Adele Glomb served as editor and publisher of the Landers-Homestead Valley Newsletter and helped establish the Landers Volunteer Fire Department. She resided in Landers for 25 years.

Steve Schultz, a Landers Eagle Scout, addressing Landers Association. 1981

Vernetta Landers



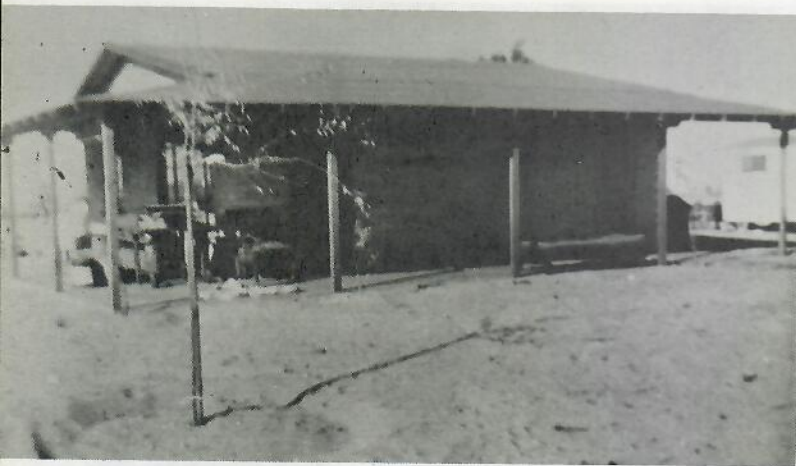
Bill and Georgia Elliott were the first realtors in Landers. They became brokers and realtors in 1967 and received their D.B.A. the same year. They have their Real Estate office in their split-level home. They built their cabin in 1960 and added on to it in 1963. They also have Branch Office No. 1 of their Hi Desert Properties operated by Neva Wesson.

Photo by Georgia Elliott



**G**eorge Belfield wanted to organize a non-profit, protective Association for community improvement that would outlive him. He studied constitutions and by-laws of other organizations brought to him by Vernetta Landers, and under his guidance, the Landers Homestead Valley Association, Inc., was formed. It was granted a State Charter on February 13, 1959. Under the capable leadership of its first President, John Handley, Town Hall meetings were conducted at Defever Hall, and later moved to the Sky Room Cafe.

In 1962, George Belfield made the Association an offer of land on the corner of Reche Road and Becker Avenue which it accepted, and in 1962 completed its own building with much donated labor. This building was later named Belfield Hall. The Landers Association meets the second Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. in Belfield Hall. A potluck is held at 6:30 p.m. preceding the meeting.



Vernetta Landers

1949-1950 — George and Merrol Belfield's home, the first house in Landers.

**A** Thrift Shop is operated in the front of Belfield Hall as a service to the community and to help defray the expense of maintaining the building and grounds. Barbara McDowell, a former President of the Landers Association, is in charge.

Town meetings became more organized, and groups with varied interests began to form associations and build their own buildings. The Yucca Mesa Improvement Association was formed in 1961, and meets in its own clubhouse on Balsa Avenue. The Flamingo Heights Property Owners Association, Inc. was organized in 1968. It obtained a voting precinct and postal service city delivery. It holds meetings the second Saturday of alternate months beginning in January at their clubhouse which was opened July 3, 1980 at 55977 Perris Street.

**T**he Johnson Valley Improvement Association was organized in 1969. It was formerly known as the Grandview Improvement Association. It meets the first Saturday of each month in its clubhouse on the corner of Quailbush and Larrea. San Bernardino County Fire Station No. 43 was dedicated on property beside the Johnson Valley Association building in August of 1980. Breakfasts are held every Saturday morning at the Association building from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. to raise money to support the Fire Station.

In 1959, Newlin Landers married Vernetta Trospen Lum who had filed on a five-acre tract on Old Woman Springs Road in the forties, and they came out to live permanently in Landers. At that time, the Reches, the Belfields, the Van Tassels and the Taylors were the only other permanent residents in the Landers area.

Newlin and Vernetta Landers maintained a First Aid Station and a Citizens Band Base Station for emergency service at the Landers Gas Station and Airstrip. Newlin served with the Yucca Valley Sheriff Rangers for 13 years. This included Search-and-Rescue, First Aid, CB Service, tracking, and searching for lost persons with the Landers' airplane, a Stinson flying station wagon.

There were no telephones, and the Landers relayed emergency messages from Johnson Valley to Yucca Valley by CB radio. A telephone exchange was not installed in Landers until 1963 on Reche Road, and telephone service was begun in July of that year.

Oil companies would not deliver supplies to the small Landers Gas Station, so Newlin and Vernetta trucked gas from Santa Fe Springs in their own tanker. They went through Lucerne Valley and over Cajon pass through floods, ice, snow, and heat. They would get up any hour of the night to pump gas for some stranger who needed it.

1968 — Max Epley, Fire Chief, and Ed Glomb, President of the Landers Association, in front of the first equipment for the Landers Volunteer Fire Department.

Vernetta Landers





In 1972, James Garner used the Landers Gas Station for location for his television series "Nichols."

Newlin and Vernetta took the water truck from the Landers Water Delivery to all the local fires before there was a fire department. Newlin pumped water, and Vernetta held the hose. No charge. Later they used their truck as an auxiliary tanker to help the established fire department. They also installed fire hydrants on Reche Road and on Landers Lane for the use of the fire trucks.

Vernetta Landers succeeded in getting a rural Post Office for Landers which was opened in 1962 in the former Klingbeil cabin on the corner of Reche Road and Landers Lane which Vernetta purchased from Frances and Richard Kelly. Vernetta was Clerk-in-Charge, and Mary Chessey was the first postal clerk. They were supervised by Hilda Hardesty, the Postmaster at Yucca Valley, who helped them get started. There were numerous assistant clerks, but Virginia Deshon served the longest, 20 years.



Joan's Collection

The Landers Post Office was dedicated Feb. 1, 1962. Vernetta Landers, clerk, and Mary Cheesey, her assistant, are shown putting up the first mail. Then there were 170 rented boxes with 160 of them rented to permanent residents of Landers. Some of the folks living along Victorville Road still get their mail on the Star Route out of Yucca Valley.

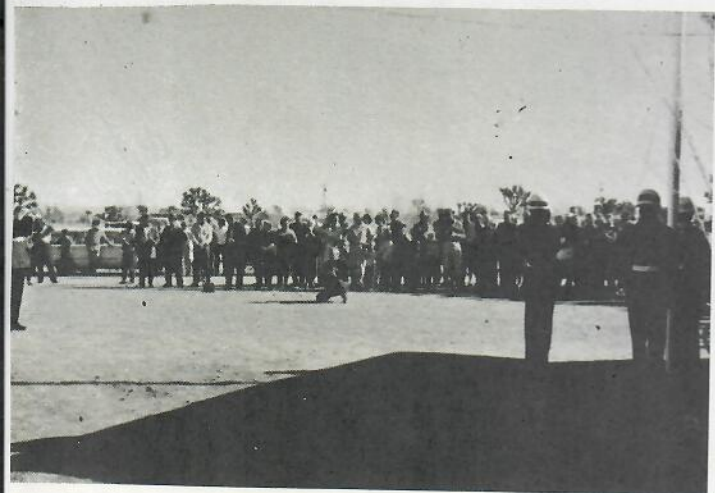


Photo by Vernetta Landers

Feb. 3, 1962 — The opening of the Landers Post Office.

Vernetta served as volunteer clerk-in-charge for 22 years. In 1985, Vernetta donated the property to Postal Service, and the Landers Post Office became an official, classified branch of Yucca Valley with its own zip code 92285 and a 40-hour week classified postal clerk, Billy DeShazer.

Newlin Landers was the first mail messenger. He took the mail from Landers to the Yucca Valley Post Office and brought the Landers mail back. A rural delivery from Yucca Valley to private mail boxes was established in 1962. Oswald Harrod drove the rural route truck and picked up and delivered the mail at the Landers Post Office. Edward Wright took over the mail delivery when Harrod retired in 1970. It has passed through several hands since that time. ■



Vernetta Landers

1985 photo of U.S. Post Office





Vernette Landers

Donated Labor, for Landers Community Church. Pastor: Charlie Haynie: first in back row. 1963



Vernette Landers

1970 — Landers Community Church



Vernette Landers

1968 — Fun Festival Queen contestants. From left to right: Robin Smollen, Carol Smollen, Linda Boyd, Sandy Smollen, princess, Debi Hill, Queen, and Lillian Page, princess.



Vernette Landers

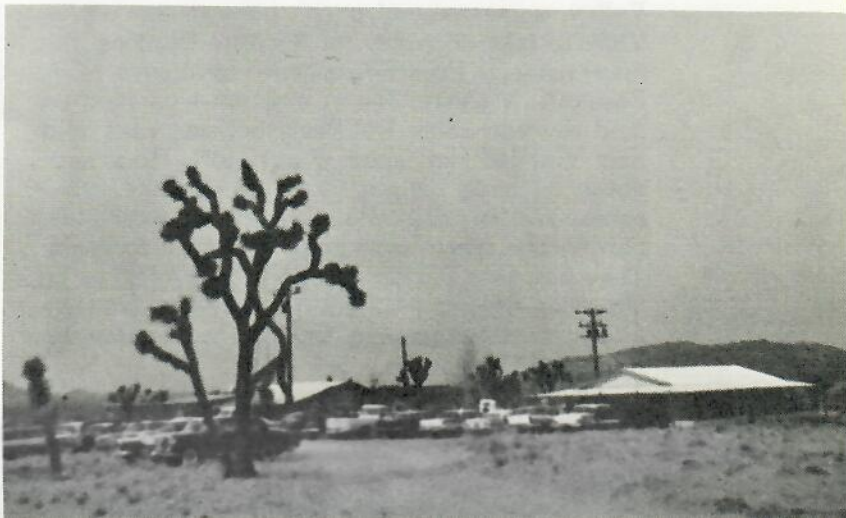
Hazel Galloupe, owner of the first beauty shop in Landers.



Vernette Landers

July 1981 — Max Epley addressing Landers Association.

De Fever Hall at Landers

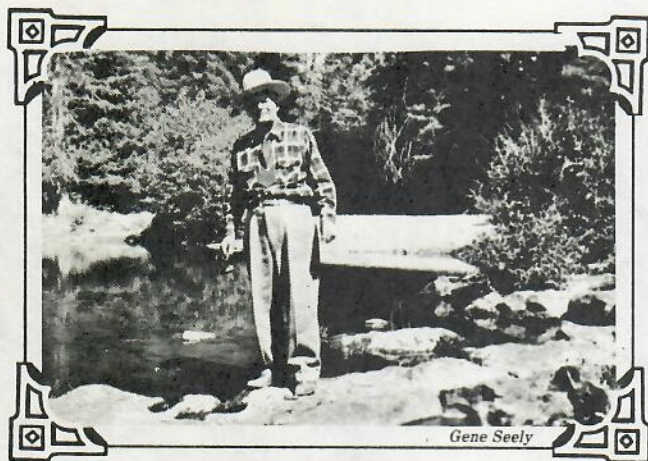


# Violette Valley/Sunfair

by Lucile Weight

**R**anching, cattle herding and branding, well drilling, mining, turkey raising, operating a business and maintaining stables — these are some of the occupations of “the Constable from Violette Valley” after he came to the desert.

Gus (Gustavas William) Seely was the first elected constable of Twentynine Palms Judicial District. After World War I, he had done paving contract work around Los Angeles — Culver City, Hawthorne, Inglewood, wherever the jobs were. His first trip to the desert was in 1922, and in April 1923 he moved his family to “Violette Valley,” now known as Sunfair.



William Seely

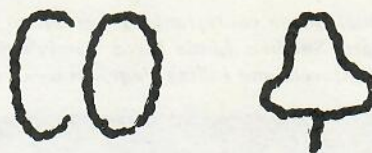
**O**nly two other people lived there then, as recalled by son William A. (Bill) Seely, now a retired Marine living in Twentynine Palms. Fred Schuman and Walter Lassiter, had been friends in Venice, had come out about 1922. Shuman had learned to fly in 1912, was an instructor and aircraft mechanic. His little cabins with lathhouse and service station, west of Sunfair Road, remained the area’s lone landmark for many years. Lassiter’s place, near Sunfair junction, had “a junkyard that kept increasing with the years.”

While the area was long known as Coyote Valley, some remember the present Sunfair as Violette lake or valley, or Violette Corners, the floral name, in French form, one report says, is for Frank A. Violette, one of a group who filed on land there in 1888. Bill Seely believes that “old man Violette” left there about 1921. He is supposed to have bought “that whole lake,” 640 acres. Violette drilled a well on the west side, plowed the whole lake and planted it to grain. Then for some reason unknown to the Seelys he left. The furrows were still noticeable when they moved to the area, but finally were leveled by flood and erosion.

**T**he name Violette also was associated with Twentynine Palms in the 1920s, this one known as Albert Violette, described as a land promoter who lived in the Old Adobe at the Oasis part of 1925 and 1926. Children, a son Alfred and a daughter, attended school when it was held in one of the original Gold Park Hotel cottages, which were moved from east of Utah Trail to make up the later 29 Palms Inn.

Coyote Well was put down by Barker and Shay for their cattle, about 1915. Located in Section 28, T1N R7E, it was about a quarter-mile north of the highway, and is west of Sunfair Road. The windmill was supplemented by a gasoline engine housed in a small sheet-iron shed, but the wind did the pumping about 70 percent of the time. Water, at 170 feet, was of good quality, although its iron content was more than four times that at Twentynine Palms Oasis. That at Warren Well (Yucca Valley Airport), used by cattlemen from last century, had almost as much iron as Coyote.

Gus Seely homesteaded 160 acres near the center of Coyote or Violette Valley, adding another 160 five years later. But a family couldn’t eat from new barren land, so half the year Gus continued his contracting, returning to the desert in winter, and living off his savings while developing the land.



C.O. Barker Brand

Wm. Shay Brand

**A**t first, he and others used water from Coyote Well, homesteaders accepting the responsibility of keeping the concrete reservoir clean. It was “swim day” when the family would scrub the reservoir. Water from this was fed into a 36-foot long trough for cattle.

Then Gus witched their own well, finding water at 220 feet. He put in another well when the Crawfords moved out (Roger was a commercial pilot), and wanted a well and airfield. The Seelys grubbed out creosote and grass by hand, then pulled a homemade drag over what became K Field. One of Bill Seely’s boyhood memories was the thrilling flight out of Los Angeles with Roger Crawford, when a landing couldn’t be made on the new field, and they set down instead on Violette Dry Lake.

**G**us later did more well drilling. Bill helped his dad for a few months in 1936. One of the wells was on the property later purchased by Mental-physics. Then, they charged \$2 a foot to drill, and furnished the casing. A whole well might cost \$400. "Now it's more like \$25 a foot," Bill estimates.

The Seelys might have had more neighbors in 1923 if witching had been done for them. But Wallace Stacey and Elgie McCargar that year relinquished their claims and went to Warren (Yucca) Valley when they had not found water at 200 feet.

**C**oyote, or Violette lake is called by hydrologists a sub-basin of Copper Mountain Valley Basin, the other sub-basin, Giant Rock, to the north-northwest. Its east side is bounded by Copper Mountain fault, its southern boundary is formed by the major east-west Pinto Mountain fault, considered a barrier to groundwater movement from the south. General elevation of the valley is 2100-2200 feet.

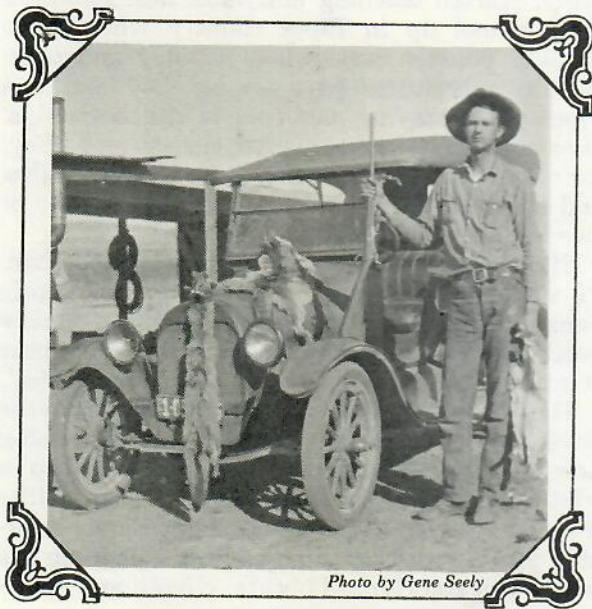


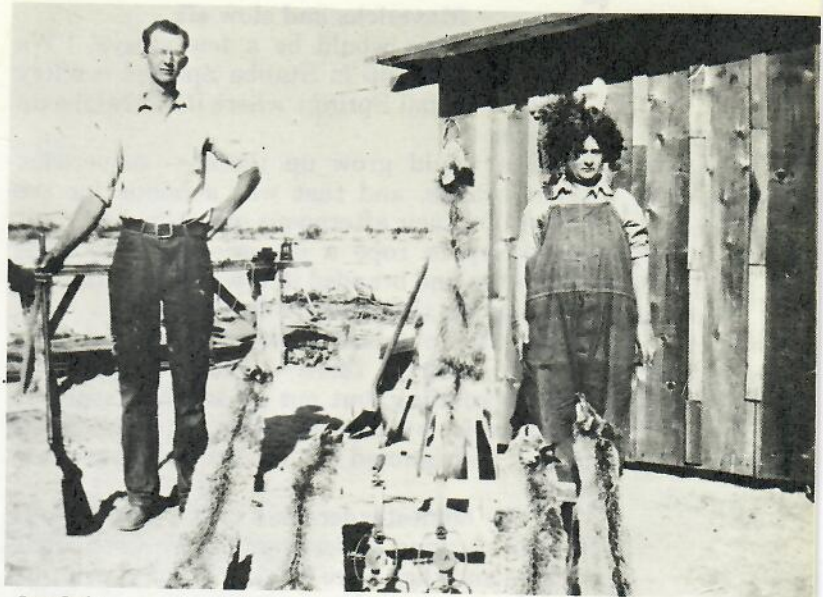
Photo by Gene Seely

1925 — Orrin Seely, age 19, of Joshua Tree

### A cowboy's life

**G**us Seely was no cowboy. A native of upstate New York, he has always been mechanically inclined. Steam rollers were more familiar to him than a roundup. His steam engineer's license proved more practical, when he was hoistman at the Virginia Dale mine, it was a calf branding time.

But when he went to work for C.O. Barker, in 1927, his know-how was valuable in maintaining the wells for the Barker cattle. They had about 6,000 Herefords that ranged through much of the Morongo High Desert and what is now the



Gene Seely

1929 — Orin J. Seely and Yolo U. Seely

Joshua Tree National Monument. One monthly task was to put out 50-pound blocks of salt, seasoned with sulfur to curtail the cattle's intake.

At that time, Bill Seely recalls, the main winter headquarters was at Coyote. From there the cattle could range northward for three or four days to Surprise Springs where there was a flowing well. At periods they would range clear to Dale.

**A**t that time, Bill Seely recalls, the main winter headquarters was at Coyote. From there the cattle could range northward for three or four days to Surprise Springs where there was a flowing well. At periods they would range clear to Dale.

About May, before the drive up to the summer pasture in the Monument country, Barker cowboys, in several trucks, came out from Banning or the Whitewater Ranch. Roundup and branding took two weeks. At times this was done at Twentynine Palms, where 29 Palms Inn now stands.

When the Seelys made summer camp they headquartered at Lost Horse. It was a family affair and young Bill, only about 12, hauled their essential furniture up with a team of four burros. Going up from Coyote via Quail Springs "was a country haul," as Bill put it. The road was a rough trail subject to flash floods every year.

Water for the cattle was at Barker Dam Lake and Quail Springs as well as Lost Horse. Depending on rainfall, it might be found at Live Oak and Ivanpah tanks as well.

When time came for the drive to Whitewater, maybe late October, they would go without salt. Then when they wanted the cattle to gather, they put it out at strategic points. "Cows go crazy for salt, after being away from it."

**E**ven so, there would be a few strays. "We always lost some up in Stubbe Springs country and over by Quail Springs where it's straight up and down.

"Calves would grow up there — mavericks, without brands, and that was a bonus for the cowboys. On their afternoons off, they'd tear out there trying to rope a maverick." When they brought it in and branded it, it was theirs, the cattlemen paying the cowboys for it.

Cattle were obtained in other ways, too. Yes, Bill Seely confirms, there was some of what you could call rustling, but not on any real scale. It was sporadic, by homesteaders, and the cattle company just ignored it. "I never saw anyone arrested."

"For the homesteaders had to live out here. If you were starving to death and there were cattle out there and they were feeding off of your property, I don't see any big deal about it," was Bill's assessment of the "slow elk" that sometimes appeared on the table.

This picture changed later, Bill referring to rustling by use of trucks, in the late 1950s, when cattle were loaded and hauled away from the south of Big Bear.

**A**mong the cowboys was Harve Martin, Indian from the Banning country. It was Harve who taught young Bill Seely how to "break" a burro. The method seemed hard and cruel but the burro remained Bill's friend. It was the only one he knew that would lope, instead of trot.

In the 1920s, burros left by prospectors from days before jalopies ranged all over. Cowboys, when not wrangling cattle, would get a herd of them started west. Seely said they would set up relay stations, keep the burros on the run, tiring them so that the cowboys could manage them by the time they got to Pipes Canyon. Then they drove them up to Big Bear to the fox farms where they were paid \$5 apiece. Bill went along on one of the burro drives but found it was "too hairy" for him to repeat. A lot of burro meat was eaten in those days, he said.

That summer of 1927, Bill first felt the excitement of cowboy life. He couldn't afford a horse, but defended his burro: "Did the same thing, only slower." It was a long slow trek to Whitewater, down through Warren and Morongo valleys, across Devil's Garden, several camps. A mile an hour was good time, as they had to stay with the slowest, little calves.

Bill was assistant cook. They would butcher a cow and cook up a big pot of beans. "Beans and biscuits and beef was exactly what they had. It's a wonder it didn't kill them," Bill says, as he thinks back. With no refrigeration, food was hauled from camp to camp.

**I**n 1929, a new group of cattlemen came in, buying or leasing from Barker. Jim Teaver, young part-Indian, 6 feet 6 inches, brought in longhorns from Texas, the first the Seelys had seen. It was not a good pasture year, and the longhorns were scrawny when they arrived. The filaree did not fill them out, and ordinarily gramma grass, which made the country "green as a gourd," was the mainstay — when there was rain. By now, more cars were along the road, a cow crosswise in it could cause a death — either the motorist's or the critter's. Soon, at least part of the desert became off limits.

**A** boy along on his burro, coming down out of Pipes Canyon at night, could hear noises that tingled the spine. But when a boy lived in such big country, with no school within many miles, his only transportation a burro, getting an education could be "interesting."

When the Seely family came to Violette Lake, Bill was only seven. His mother, Vera Margaret Seely, started teaching him, later heard about a little school up in Pipes country where Mrs. Camilla Hudson was school trustee and occasionally substituted for a teacher. Bill became a Pipes pupil, staying part time in the mountains. He would leave for home after classes on Friday, for weekends. The trail was more than 20 miles, and he would arrive in Violette Valley at one or two in the morning.

Bill still remembers the chilling thrills he had. "I was scared to death. There were mountain lions in that country . . . Just me and the donkey getting down out of that Pipes country — I'd hear something and didn't know but what it was lions."

The boy was accustomed to wild animals in the daytime. He had learned from a Colorado catalog how to prepare skins for sale. While he'd trap in winter and earn money, he found that colder weather is needed to produce commercially desirable fur. Besides he came to prefer padding his traps, to catch lynx, bobcats, coyote and swift-foxes for pets.

**H**is schooling continued when he attended the new school in Twentynine Palms. This one-room school, now part of the warehouse to the rear of the Morongo Unified School District administrative offices on Utah Trail, was built by homesteaders late in 1927 and had been open nearly a year when Bill was able to manage transportation. He had a \$15 Model T, vintage of 1921 or '22. Coming in to school he would stop to pick up the Showalter daughter (where the private patrol place is near the Edison substation). He was learning fast about cars and he was entering eighth grade. The teacher, Miss Elvira Chesney, had a 1925 coupe, and Bill did maintenance on it.

**B**ill made himself useful in the school "kitchen" as well. While children brought their own lunches, these were supplemented in winter with hot soup. This had been instigated by Mrs. Frank (Helen) Bagley, one of the school trustees. Bill was the soup cook — the kitchen being the coat closet. Inside was a kerosene stove. The Chore was a breeze for Bill after his cattle camp experience. Now all he had to do was open cans into a big kettle. With classes going on at his back, he would have the soup bubbling in 10 or 15 minutes.

Miss Chesney, just out of college, had 26 children in that room, all grades. She had the little ones in front. At the back were Bill and red-haired eighth graders.

"But I was a stinker," Bill confesses. "I loved snakes and would bring them to school. I'd get an old bullsnake, three or four feet long, put it in a paper sack and leave it on teacher's desk. She was sedate and precise — and when that old snake poked his head out, you'd just come all apart."



Photo by Gene Seely

Sam Phelps and wife Inoa at their homestead.



Gene Seely

1928-1930 — Seely Homestead

**M**iss Chesney knew she had to put a stop to some of his antics. Bill was twice her size. A public whipping would have to be administered with his consent, which Bill, realizing her problem, reluctantly gave. Getting out her board, kids of all ages gathered about while Miss Chesney gave him "what for."

His next learning experience was at Banning where he entered high school. He and his step-sister, Selmae, were staying with an elderly woman, paying \$15 a month each. The problem here was food — or the lack of it. "She could take a quarter pound of meat and make it go three ways. I was 6'2", and I was starving to death, literally starving. I'd have to go downtown and scrounge something to eat."

#### Law comes to town

**L**aw was an informal affair here. Long before, a judicial district had been centered at Dale, 15 miles to the east. Population in that mining area fluctuated, Twentynine Palms had not taken on the character of a community until the influx of veterans in the 1920s. A court case in 1928 which involved nearly everyone, witnesses or otherwise, helped precipitate action which led to creation of the Twentynine Palms Judicial District.

Prior to the trial (still talked about in half-legendary terms), Sheriff Walter A. Shay on March 16, 1928, swore in Walter E. Ketcham as deputy sheriff, with one of his first duties to serve court summonses to many residents — some of them hard to find. A few months later, after the trial was over, a replacement was named for "Ketch," at his request.

A petition for legal status was presented at a mass meeting in 1929, and the new judicial district was implemented February 24, 1930. Interim appointments were given Samuel T. Bailey, as justice of the peace, Guy F. Mattox, constable.

At the first election, later that year Louis Jacobs became justice, and Gus Seely, constable. Seely also was deputy sheriff for this area. Big Gus Seely, 6 feet 4½ inches, weighing 250 pounds, was an imposing lawman. Perhaps that's why there was little trouble in the two years he served. Son Bill recalls such incidents as boisterous behavior at dances held in the school.

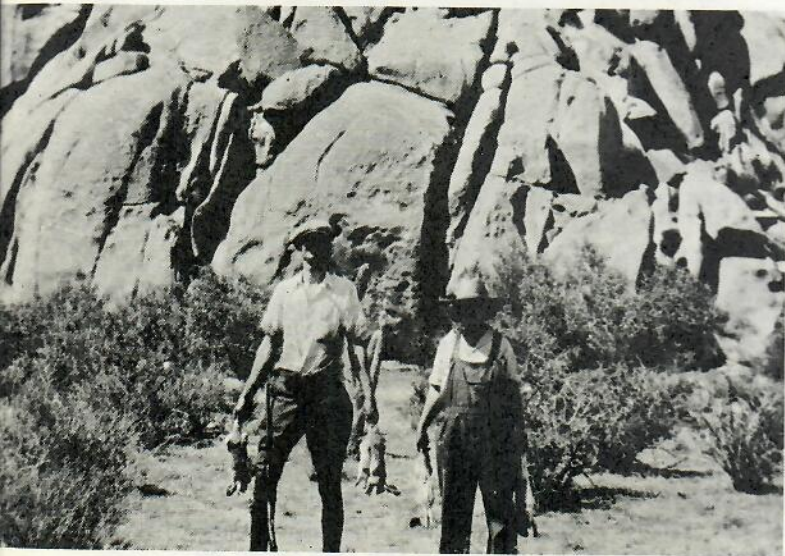
"These two fellows had brought their own white lightning and were making a lot of noise. Dad cooled them off by hand-cuffing them, with a single pair of cuffs, to the bumper on his old Studebaker. It was winter and those guys almost froze. They were soon ready to settle down."

Teenager Bill probably caused as much commotion, in another way, when he'd get into that Studebaker, now equipped with siren and red lights. "I'd go ripping up the road, turn on the siren — and the Showalters would report me. I was in bad trouble. But there weren't any cars on the road — and I got a kick out of it. What a change from the burro."

Seely moved into Twentynine Palms (where the Seelys lived from 1931-33). Gus had a soda fountain, with a pool hall in the rear, on Sullivan Road next to Clovis and Mary Benito's garage and grocery at Adobe. Across the road, Seely had a stable of horses, first brought to this area for riding and charged "50 cents an hour."

Young Bill rode horses, swimming in the American Legion's new pool (once saving Irene Mead from drowning) and among jobs served as a welder's helper when the first waterworks were being put in for the subdivision at Four Corners.

He had a touch of mining, too, for Gus Seely, after resigning as constable, was working the hoist at the Virginia Dale. Bill went down the shaft a couple of times but chiefly helped his Dad on the surface. Here in the rocks he found a new kind of pet — the chuckawalla lizards. Once when he was there, he recalled recently, Bill and Ada Hatch came out. He picked up his "favorite" chuckawalla to show them "and that little thing caught me and almost bit my thumb off!"



Yolo and Orrin rabbit hunting.



Gene Seely

1928 - Orrin Seely changing tire on old Model A on the Morongo Grade.

### Gobblers got him

It was turkey growing that drove Bill from the desert. At least, that's how he thinks of it. In 1935, his folks, back at the homestead, had about 5,000 turkeys. They would haul hay from Indio, and bring in onions. We'd chop them up, put alfalfa hay through the power chopper, then put this into vats to ferment. That was spring feed for the little turks."

The climate is fine for turkeys, but raising them was a gamble. The crucial time would come at Thanksgiving and Christmas — the pivotal questions being when to market them — keep them a few weeks longer for a four or five pound gain, or play safer by selling, if the price was good, at an earlier date. Cleaning up one year would induce the grower to double his turks next year — and all could be lost.

The Seelys did this, but lost 2,000 out of the 10,000 by disease in the first several weeks. At the same time, turkeys came on the San Bernardino market from Utah, at a price below what the feed has cost the local growers. They had to sell out at cost — a year's work gone for nothing.

This market problem was somewhat alleviated when in the late 1940s a leading feed company lent money to buy turks and guaranteed to sell them ("they didn't say for how much"). Whatever the agreement, growers found they were paying so much for the company's feed that many went broke "and you can see those old pens all over."

Even without such problems, raising was not for Bill, "for they are the stupidest thing alive. A buzzard can fly over on a moonlit night — a little shadow — and they'll just crash into the side of a pen and smother those on the bottom."

**I**t was a lot of fun," he says a little wryly. "And there was a lot of eating — you have turkey stew, fried turkey — you name it," Although he felt compelled to get away from the desert to the damp and cool, which he found in Humboldt County, he returned before long to help a while in the well drilling business.

**T**he senior Seelys left the desert about 1938. Gus all through World War II served in the Merchant Marine. He died in 1953. His widow Vera, 81, lives in Long Beach and now drives freeways.

By 1929 Bill had joined the Marine Corps and was at Pearl Harbor with the 3rd Division, later being discharged as a warrant officer. He returned to the desert in 1954, going to work as a civil

service employee in the Base maintenance division.

This son of the Constable from Violette Valley, who lived the life of a real westerner from age seven, found that there was no place like home — on the desert.

**P**hotos and transcription of the William A. Seely interview, tape-recorded by Librarian Cheryl Erickson and Harold O. Weight, in the Local History Collection, Twentynine Palms Branch County Library. Article based on tape, public documents, unpublished journal, personal contacts, and published accounts. ■

## Dean Fairbanks of Joshua Tree D.C.

**D**ean Fairbanks, who is survived by his wife, Elinor, of Joshua Tree and two brothers, Guy and Stan Fairbanks of Redlands, was born in Minnesota on Oct. 29, 1911. His family moved to Redlands, when he was a youth.

**T**he Fairbanks were married in 1933, and seven years later, Dean Fairbanks graduated from the Ratledge Chiropractic College of Los Angeles. Dean also served as a U.S. Navy Corpsman for four years during World War II. Dean Fairbanks had practiced here since moving to Joshua Tree. Since there were no veterinarians in the basin, in addition to his human patients, he also tended sick and wounded animals.

**D**ean set up and conducted an early day junior physical fitness program with Fred Marble. The program served Basin youth before park and recreation districts were established here. Dean Fairbanks had raised racing greyhounds since 1946 and raced them all over the western United States as well as Mexico. Kirk Martin did a beautiful painting of the greyhounds in detail.

In addition, he was a dedicated supporter of the Hi Desert Community Concert program. ■



*Elinor Fairbanks*

*Dean Fairbanks, with picture of his greyhounds. Kirk Martin painted the picture.*





# JOSHUA TREE

**A**n early homesteader in the Joshua Tree area was Willard S. Wood, who filed on a site about three miles north of Coyote Holes in the fall of 1911. He put down a well 276 feet deep which, he says, proved drier, if possible, at the bottom than at the top.

But it wasn't until the five-acre claims were made available that Joshua Tree's growth accelerated. In January, 1941, Joshua Tree had a population of 49 and a total of 22 occupied buildings. Wartime restrictions on building supplies kept many homesteaders from building weekend cabins or homes. However, in April, 1946, there were 112 completed and occupied homes and 46 under construction. The population had increased to 426.

Chet Bunker came to Joshua Tree in 1942, and Colonel E.B. Moore began coming out from Los Angeles after the war. Both went into real estate in Joshua Tree.

But with the availability of materials for building and gas for traveling after the war, Joshua Tree and all the High Desert literally sprouted with cabins and homes and commercial buildings.

**J**oshua Tree's present population is approximately 12,000. Progress has provided fine schools, and active Parks Recreation District including a Senior's Nutrition Center. Joshua Tree has become the seat of Hi-Desert Government and is the location of the Morongo Basin fine, modern hospital.

In addition to being the gateway to the Joshua Tree National Monument, Joshua Tree is known nationally for its annual Turtle Races, that glorious annual event where, "the slow a foot," reign supreme, if for only the day. Another well-known facility in Joshua Tree is the Cultural Center. It's the home of the Hi-Desert Players Guild and the Chaparral Artists. Both are outstanding organizations, bringing a great deal of joy to the community.

The Campus of Copper Mountain College is in Joshua Tree. This is a facility for which any community, of any size, could be justly proud. Although the funds for building this Campus were raised throughout the Hi-Desert, Joshua Tree can take pride in being the home of the College Campus that LOVE built. ■

JOSHUA TREE SCHOOL  
1945 - 1947



*Gertrude Hagum*  
First Row: Eleanor Bayes, Sandra Berry, Donald Berry, Troy Clark, Bruce Snyder, Leak Arnold, Tommy Decker. Next Row: Norma Low Ojalla, Lyndell Hoover, Amarelle Graham, Virginia Bauer, Terry Decker, Paul Smith, Brooks Simmons, David Young, Jimmy Walker, Jerre Ann Giles, John Matyjasick, David Matyjasick, Robert Norman, Larry Colton, Garry Hoover, Donald Walker, Shirley Hoover, Claudia Randall, Mary Bryant, Joan Papendick. Back Row: Frank Lehenbauer, Billy Brown, Ray Lehenbauer, Peter Young. Teacher - Dessa Keatley, Trent Crane, Mildred Bayes, James Lafferty, Annalee Beard, James Snyder, Bobby Sanders. Not in picture: Evelyn Van Gorden, Patty Smith, Phyllis Bryant.

# Joshua Tree Senior Center

**T**he first lunch — roast beef and all the goodies that go along to make up a balanced meal — was totally prepared by the Site Manager Lida Secrest, Cecelia Marsh and Bob Johnson and then served by volunteer hostesses. That was on March 25, 1974 and the Community United Methodist Church was the place. About 40 senior citizens enjoyed that first meal and some of those same folks are still enjoying the food and fellowship.

The volunteers, the backbone to hold it all together, took various jobs and one of the most important was "getting out the word". Harold McGee, Project Outreach, was extremely efficient in this area and his goal was to contact

every household in Joshua Tree within the first few months to be sure everyone knew the Nutrition Site was open and available to all senior citizens. And at the front desk, from "day one", was Blanche Elliott welcoming the participants and keeping the financial records, making sure everyone knew they were welcome even if unable to pay for their lunch.

Some of the early Hostesses were Pearl Holland, Nellie Nelsen, Ina Belle Walker, Jeanette Gresko, Zelma Cain, Melvadene Howell, Jeanne Kaupp, Mary Johnson, Margaret Eschmann, Lucille McGee, Genie Swartout, Mildred Keers, Grace Holzgraf, Lillian Jones, Wanda Root, Sue Winters, Eldora McLaughlin, Edna Heins, Helen Townsend, Dorothy Sherman, Yula Miffleton, Mazie Kiestler, Nellie Galloway, Ruth Berry, Nell Sims, Ruby Tschinkel, Lucille Bouren, Ada Hume, Cecilia Dionne and a couple of waiters, Jim Hume and "Bish" Butler.

**T**he first drivers of the van that was delivered to the site in December 1975 were: Frank Smith, Marge Tyerman, Virgil Monroe, Ed Burkhardt, Neva Naaktgeboren, Dot Randolph, John Roller, Ray Rash and Jerry Keefer. These drivers took anyone needing a ride to the site for the lunches and, on specific days, Frank Smith took shoppers to Yucca Valley for errands. A paid driver, Carl Walters, took participants to Palm Springs or Loma Linda for medical appointments or shopping. There were also trips to the Orange Show and Oak Glen at apple harvest time.

**T**hat first year several special events were held that proved to be so much fun they became annual affairs. Of course, there are also the Monthly Birthday Parties honoring all the participants born in that month. Rev. and Mrs. Kenneth Bidwell were song leaders for these parties.

**S**pecial interest groups formed including a crafts class, organized games, nature walks and a Spanish class led by Art DelaO. And out of the Spanish class came the Cinco de Mayo Celebration and Las Posadas, the Christmas program presented in English and Spanish.

A Crazy Hat Contest at Halloween, a Luau and a Hobby Show kept the calendar full — year after year.



MARCH 8, 1979 DEDICATION OF  
JOSHUA TREE COMMUNITY CENTER

Lida Secrest, Site Manager with cooks Cecelia Marsh (l) and Jeannette Donsbach (r).

The "facts" that were presented at the third birthday party were that the first year an average of 1,000 meals were served per month. In the third year, over 15,000 meals were served each month. Lida Secrest, the Site Manager, presented flowers and extended a special thanks to Cecelia Marsh, Head Chef and Jeanette Donsbach, Assistant Cook. Lida also moved to honor many of those who had assisted her and volunteered so tirelessly to make the program really work. Those so honored included: John Jones, member of the official board of the host church; Minnie Barney, Site Council President; Peg Sission, R.N.; Art DeLaO, Spanish class instructor; Rev. and Mrs. Kenneth Bidwell, monthly music programs; and Blanche Elliott, greeter and treasurer. The hostesses honored were Ina Belle Walker, Dorothy Sherman, Mary Johnson, Lillian Jones, Helen Townsend, Wanda Rott, Genie Swartout, Pearl Holland, Grace Holzgraf, Edna Heins, Eldera McLaughlin, Verda Kruz and Sue Winters.

The van drivers receiving recognition were Frank Smith, Neva Naaktgeboren, John Roller, Virgil Monroe, Dot Randolph and Ed Bernhardt.

Peg Sisson was specially honored for volunteering her services every Wednesday to take blood pressure readings, check pulse rates and keep appropriate records.

Ground breaking, October 7, 1977, for the Community Center was a "red letter" day. Visiting dignitaries included Supervisor James Mayfield; Howard Goddard, the President of the Board of Supervisors, San Bernardino County; Glenn Gaines, Mojave Water Authority; Wm. Schaefermyer, MAC; Vicente Rodriquez, Director of the Nutrition for Seniors Program for San Bernar-

dino County and Larry Tyerman, Parks and Recreation Director.

On January 22, 1979, the first meal at the new site was served to 128 participants. Much celebration and honoring of special people at the Dedication Ceremony on March 8 had made it all "official" and the regular routine began in earnest with the Hobby Show held on March 24.

The Sixth Birthday of the Site was noted with Lida Secrest awarding "Olympic" ribbons to her helpers and the many faithful volunteers — some who were still helping out on a regular basis.

After 125,472 meals prepared in seven years and three months, Cecelia Marsh retired as Head Cook on May 29, 1981. Lucille Beavers took the reins at that point.

Shortly thereafter, Lida Secrest resigned as Site Manager to become Area Coordinator, Senior Information and Referral.

Larry Tyerman, a constant friend, was honored at the site as 150 seniors and Joshua Tree Park and Recreation officials turned out to say a hearty "Thank You" and also wish him a "Happy Birthday" on August 6, 1982. Larry continues to add his support in any and every way possible.

The mid-80's brought some changes for economic reasons and, although the preparation is now all done at the Yucca Valley Site, the volunteers, such as Past President Barney Barnett stay busy.

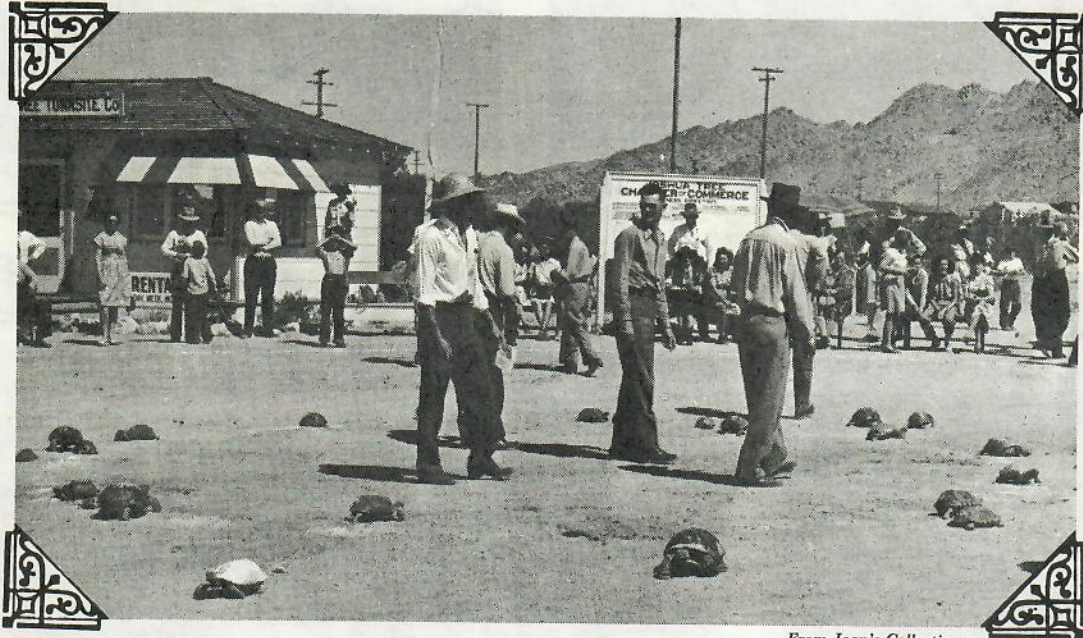
The aroma of a home-cooked meal doesn't greet you as it once did as you open the door of the site but the same warm feeling of friends, fellowship and food — an unbeatable combination — is still there. And that's mighty important, isn't it? The volunteers at the Joshua Tree Site must think so for they just "keep-on-keeping-on". Filling a need. An admirable group. ■



1978 Luau — Total Enjoyment

# Turtle Races

MAY 12, 1946 — FIRST TURTLE RACE



From Joan's Collection

## HISTORY OF THE TURTLE RACES

**E**ighteen years ago a visitor to the high desert inquired of Chester R. Bunker of Joshua Tree, "What in the world do you folks do for amusement around here?" Mr. Bunker replied in jest, "Oh, we race turtles!" "Well," said the visitor, "When do you hold the turtle races?" "First weekend in May," declared Bunker — and thereby an idea was born.

In 1946 (on the second Sunday in May) Joshua Tree staged its first Turtle Race. Because the second Sunday was Mother's Day the races were changed to the first Sunday.

## PRIVATE LIFE OF MR. AND MRS. TURTLE

**W**e desert denizens, commonly referred to as turtles, are in truth, tortoises, *Gopherus Agassizis*. We mate in the spring and sometimes in the summer. The number of eggs in a clutch varies from two to nine but is often about five. Weather and other factors are important, causing variations in behavior, therefore generalizations are in order, favoring June as the peak month for egg laying. The peak for hatching is September or October. We like to spend the winter, usually in groups, in underground burrows.

Photo by Lois C. Dillion



May 2, 1948 — Picking, and waiting for the winner.

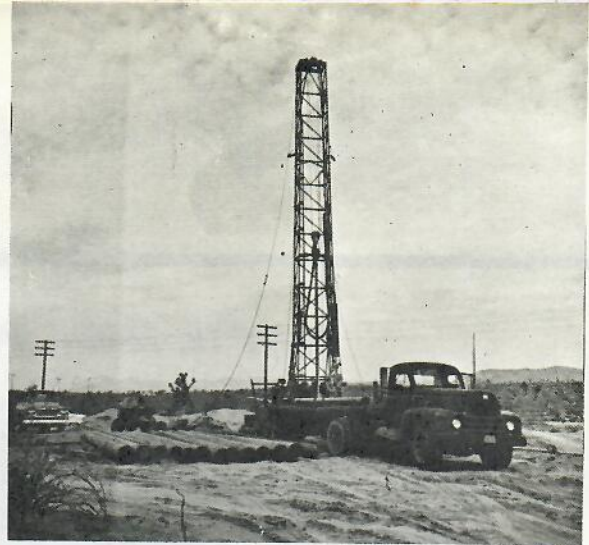


Fun at the Turtle Racing Grounds



Joshua Tree 29 Palms Hwy. in the 40's.

Joan's Collection



Early years drilling for water in Joshua Tree.

Lois Dillion

# Joshua Tree



Lois Dillion

Left to right: Unknown, Mary Eva Von Deusen, the Secretary for the Joshua Tree Water Co. in 1940 and Frank Batters who came to Joshua Tree in 1922 and helped drill the first water well.



Photo by Gene Seely

Sam Phelps Homestead

Joan's Collection

Man in white slacks  
Dr. Kermit D. Lacy  
1957

Catherine Richardson



1964 — Fire Chief Bob Garry



Woody's Emporium one of the early businesses.



Lois Dillion





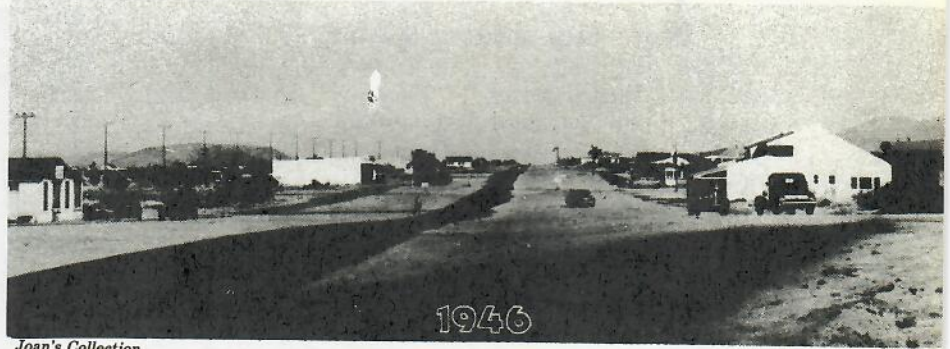
1955 Card and Gift shop of Vic and Carl O'Brien



Joan's Collection

As of January 1, 1944, Joshua Tree boasted a population of 49 and a total of 22 occupied dwellings.

## The Early Years



Joan's Collection

April 10, 1946 saw 112 completed and occupied homes, 46 in progress of construction and the population had risen to 426. This rate of growth promises to be greatly accelerated with the release of adequate building supplies.



SPORT'S HALL

Joan's Collection

First home of the Hi Desert Playhouse Guild.

1979 Volunteer Workers Honored. Art and Opal De La O, Martin Gittleman, Administrator from Angel View Crippled Children Hospital. Both people are wonderful workers for many fund raising events.

Joan's Collection



Catherine Richardson

Drilling a well in Joshua Tree 1957.

Left to right: Gladys Taylor, Chester Bunker, Editor of the Southwest Land Journal and High Desert Sun with an unidentified man.

Photo from Joan's Collection



# Howard Pierce - Ceramist

Can't help noticing the beautiful ceramic pieces you have in your home; they look like Howard Pierce pieces"! "They are", is the proud reply. The conversation, while contrived, is typical of exchanges made in all parts of the country. They are, of course, referring to the work of the multi-faceted, many-talented Howard Pierce. Howard is a quiet man who would rather create works of art than anything else one might conceive. It's his forte, his joy, his life. His is the creative act from start to finish. The pieces bearing his name were fashioned from his talent and are uniquely, Howard Pierce. His work is clean of line, and expressive in their rhythmic execution. The finish glazes are as pure Howard Pierce as the original sculpture he creates before making molds.



Neal Vocke

Howard Pierce at work assembling a mold.

Perhaps some biographical background on Howard is in order at this point, if for no other reason than to show to what extent Howard has gone to enhance his innate talent. "Born in Chicago, he began his artistic training at the Art Institute of Chicago and the University of Illinois". In 1934 he moved to Claremont, California where he continued his education at Pomona College.



Neal Vocke

Ellen Pierce approaching the studio in their beautifully landscaped yard.

Around 1935 Howard went to work for William Manker, Ceramist. He had a studio in Padua Hills north of Claremont. Howard spent three years working directly for Mr. Manker. This was an important period for Howard, for it allowed him to develop his love and talent for ceramics. In June of 1941 Howard married his equally talented wife, Ellen. After settling down to life as a couple, their first venture together was in metal craft, but with World War II waiting in the wings, raw materials were cut off. Though their first venture together wasn't successful, they have been working together ever since.



Neal Vocke

The Pierce created environment note the detail on the facade of the studio, upper right.

**W**ith the start of World War II, Howard went to work for Douglas Aircraft as a Production Illustrator where he worked for approximately three years. His production of ceramics started some time after his stint with Douglas Aircraft. His designs were widely accepted and have been sold out, each year since he started. Howard says he is now in partial retirement but there are people working full time who couldn't keep up with Howard's "part time" creativity. For instance let us read a quote from a brochure.

"Among the rocks surrounding his home and studio are the largest of Howard Pierce's creations. These include an eight foot high roadrunner and a lifesize bighorn sheep. The town of Joshua Tree has a unique ten foot long turtle, which was restored by Howard Pierce. A ten foot statue of a family group is now located in front of the Medical Center in Joshua Tree. The Copper Mountain College has a pair of large roadrunners located in a garden at the entrance to the college. Two great-horned owls perched in a tree welcomes visitors to the Hi-Desert Nature Museum in Yucca Valley. A twelve foot statue of an eagle is on the parade grounds of the Marine Corps Base in Twenty-Nine Palms."

*Owls at the Hi Desert Museum by Howard Pierce*

*Joan's Collection*



*Joan's Collection*

*Entrance Monolith to Copper Mountain College, created by Howard Pierce standing by his creation.*

In addition he has just finished a large entrance logo for the Copper Mountain Campus of the College of the Desert.

In short, Howard and Ellen Pierce give freely of themselves to causes they deem worthwhile. They are dedicated to their Community and through Howard's creative talent they have already done a great deal in adding to the culture and beauty of the Morongo Basin.

Should you ever find yourself at the Howard Pierce Studio in the hills high above Joshua Tree you will doubtless agree that much of his inspiration comes from the setting in which the Pierce Home and Studio was placed. The location and the structure all reflect Howards' talent. His love of wildlife is reflected in his work. His love of life is reflected in the man himself.

The Japanese have a custom in which they make their outstanding artists and craftsmen a national treasure. In the opinion of many, Howard Pierce is at least Morongo Basin's own treasure. ■

*Howard Pierce in front of his studio.*



*Neal Voeke*



# Joshua Tree Playhouse/Cultural Center

*Those who helped in writing the history of the Hi-Desert Playhouse Guild: Connie Doerty, Art Rohman, Fred & Mary Shepherd, Charlie McMahon, Ed Scoggins - donated his personal scrapbook to the Playhouse.*

In 1963 there was "nothing to do" in the high desert. Life centered around activities of community associations: PTA and the two sororities which held an annual GAY NINETIES REVIEW organized by Gwen Keyes.

Ed Scoggins, an elementary school teacher and PTA program chairman, invited talented friends from Los Angeles area to entertain. The first big show was AN EVENING WITH THE DOHERTYS. The following year a local teacher, Nellie Hyde, was severely burned from a campfire explosion. Friends rallied to help and the Dohertys gave another program as a fund-raiser.

In 1965 the Dohertys, with a local cast, were sponsored by the elementary school PTA to perform A MAN CALLED PETER. Seven shows were presented at the Yucca Bowl, Desert Hot Springs theatre, and Redlands Bowl. At this time Martha Knowles, an actress from Long Beach Community Playhouse, suggested that a theatre group should be started locally. Great enthusiasm was shown. Mr. and Mrs. Terrell (Bertha) Clark and Ed Scoggins called a June meeting to form an organization for the purpose of promoting a Hi-Desert theatre. The minutes state that "this playhouse is planned to adequately meet the future growth of this fast expanding desert empire and its facilities shall be open to meet the needs of all the various cultural groups of the Hi-Desert area".

To be known as the Hi-Desert Community Playhouse Guild, its function will be to assist and cooperate with the varied Hi-Desert groups in all their cultural activities and to encourage and stimulate participation on the part of the young people in the field of cultural arts. At this meeting the first donating was a \$10,000 home in Sunfair by Howard Miller who played in "A Man Called Peter". By the end of this first meeting further subscriptions and memberships totaled \$454.50.

It was announced in July that San Diego lawyer Keith Atherton would handle the details of incorporating the organization without any charge to the Guild. Non-profit corporate status was received in March 1967. At this time plans were underway for the first production of the Playhouse Guild, THE COLONEL'S NIECE, written by Bertha Clark.

The August meeting brought additional members plus the first Life Membership for Vernetta Landers from the nearby town of Landers.



*Photo by Vern Ecklund*

*Hi-Desert Cultural Center.*

The Good Book says "Ask and you shall receive". In response to the plea for a gift of land an anonymous couple from Landers offered a Paradise Valley lot to be used to the Guild's advantage. This show of good faith, goodwill and generosity continues to this day.

Kay Brown was the first president, and shows were put on at the Joshua Tree Elementary School. Ed Scoggins was president of the almost defunct Sportsmans Club. The two groups joined forces, improved the deteriorating structure of the club, therefore saving a historical building and providing cultural entertainment for the Morongo Basin residents. The Cabaret Theatre was born and the Guild became well-known in southern California for their high caliber performances.

The Artists of the Hi-Desert Playhouse Guild were very active at this time. They had a mini-mart in the Sportsmans Club which was the primary fund-raiser for the Guild.

A significant development in 1968 brought together three separate groups of players. The Twentynine Palms Players, Yucca Valley Players and the Hi-Desert Playhouse Guild cooperated in the presentation of a ONE ACT PLAY FESTIVAL.

The first annual Artists Studio Tour was organized in November 1968 by Mildred Sherard.

The Cabaret Theatre put on 11 productions in four years. The final production was OLIVER in 1973. The Joshua Tree Fire Department declared the Sportsmans Club as unsafe for public gathering and the Guild was again without a stage.

That decision touched off a chain of events that eventually culminated in the construction of the Cultural Center. With fewer than 100 members and a treasury of \$12,000, most of it from the artists, each member was given \$1.00 to "make grow". Someone bought string to make macrame items to sell, someone else made lemon pies and breads, and many other ideas were implemented. This determined group put on numerous fund-raising activities beginning with OPERATION PAPERBAG. Hamburger rallies, auctions, white elephant sales, smorgasbords, swim meets, spaghetti dinners, pancake breakfasts — anything to raise money was tried.



Photo by Connie Doerty

Guild President Fred Shepherd being presented a check from a local sorority. Shown left to right are: Shepherd, Bob Palmer, Vern Ecklund, Dick Davis and Ed Bagley.

The Guild's 1974 Board of Directors allocated \$2,500 to be used to search for a building site and to prepare preliminary plans and a table model of the envisioned Cultural Center. Fred Shepherd, Building Chairman and two term president, was the positive thinker and backbone behind the whole project. Throughout the years his CAN DO attitude urged everyone to keep striving for fulfillment of the impossible dream. A stroke of luck occurred when Mel Benson, a Joshua Tree realtor, put the committee in touch with Nancy Carmichael who owned 1½ acres of unimproved land on the 29 Palms Highway where the Cultural Center now stands. Miss Carmichael donated this property in memory of her father, William James Carmichael, who died in 1975 at the age of 100 years. With the building site in hand, the Guild decided that the construction of the Cultural Center was to be a product of the people, by the people and for the people.

No public funds were received. This meant a vigorous, varied and continuing fund-raising effort would have to be made. It took 18 months for

plans to be drawn, permits obtained, environmental impact studies to be approved, and the engineering to be completed. In March 1977 things began to happen. Grading was done, rough plumbing installed and by June the cement slab poured. A summer recess was called but the volunteer building crews were hard at work by September. Lumber was ordered, more "slave labor" rounded up and building contractors who could contribute time, talent and building materials were searched out. On October 1, 1977, a crew of 22 did the framing and suddenly a building began to take shape and excite the curiosity of passersby. Those who stopped by were handed a hammer and told what they might do to assist. By January 1978 the roof was completed.

It is not possible to list all the people who took part in the many and varied fund-raising affairs. However, major credit is due to Charley McMahon for an outstanding job in arranging, organizing and publicizing most of the fund-raisers. His camera was always recording events as they occurred.

It is estimated that \$110,000 was spent for curbs and gutters, sprinkling systems and other specialized items which had to be contracted out or purchased. All other work was done by volunteers, mostly an "over 60 club" of retirees, many of whom learned the building trade "on the job". The daily work crew for a long time consisted of five or six men with others coming in when needed. At least 200 helped at one time or another.

Pouring concrete for seats in new cultural center. L.-R. - Charlie McManon, Vern Krause, Bob Allred, Dickm Davis.



Play House

**W**hile the building continued, a series of plays were performed in local schools, community halls and other buildings from Yucca Valley to the Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base. The Chaparral Artists of the Guild held annual Art Studio Tours netting from \$900 in 1975 to \$3,000 in 1979. Pete and Dee Fererro's almost monthly breakfasts and spaghetti dinners raised thousands of dollars annually for four years. One garden party at the home of Irene and Bob Bertrand in 1978 raised \$10,915.28 for the fund. Signed prints of one of Irene Scoggin Bertrand's paintings, "Proud Heritage", has brought in over \$5,000. An antique auction raised \$5,000.

Guild members and other supporters came forth to purchase \$22,000 worth of \$100 denomination unsecured notes bearing 5½ percent interest. Construction never stopped because of lack of funds and all the notes were redeemed.



Photo by Connie Doerty

Under the direction of Patsy Newing, volunteers prepare 1982-83 brochures for mailing.

**O**ccasionally even the weather worked to the benefit of the workers. In March 1977 the expense of soaking the land prior to grading was saved by a heavy rain the night before.

Theatre seats came from an old theatre in Huntington Park. Volunteers left here at 5 a.m. and it took the whole day to unscrew them from the floor. The following day that theatre was to be torn down.

Food for the workers came in as popcorn, cakes, cookies. One volunteer, Leo Lewis from Twentynine Palms, would put rising cinnamon rolls and an electric oven on back of his motorcycle and bake them at break time. On the first day of framing, Pete Ferrero served beef dip sandwiches to the crew of about 22 men.

**T**he front porch railing, stained glass door and six white painted redwood pillars were donated by Ivan and Ada Sladek. They were rescued by the Sladeks about 25 years ago from a Victorian mansion the city of Inglewood had built as a summer home for General John C. Fremont, 1st governor of California. This never-used home was to be destroyed the next day.

The 5,000 square foot Cultural Center is barn red with 14 foot high ceilings, a 14 by 50 foot lobby art gallery, a box office, 170 seats in the auditorium and a "green room" with dressing rooms. The dressing rooms, kitchen and lobby furniture were donated by Allstate Savings and Loan which was redecorating its building. The Allstate manager, Phyllis Grubaugh, served two terms as Playhouse Guild president.



Play House

The Chaparral Artists are an integral part of the Cultural Center. Through their member & shows the Chaparral Artists Group raised large sums of money.

**R**ay Ingwersen, Guild Treasurer, remembers many funny and near tragic incidences. "There was a long delay in obtaining plasterboard as insulation. It was finally delivered at 9 p.m. during a blizzard. A crew had been waiting since 3 p.m. The delivery man's truck broke a water pipe and flooded the whole back yard. 130 pounds of water pressure shot up under the truck so we had to just cover and leave the 22,000 square feet of plasterboard until we could get it inside. Each sheet weighed 225 pounds — a total of 90,000 pounds. A 100 foot of donated factory rollers was used to move the load which was staked 5 feet high on the stage."

The Artists of the Hi-Desert Playhouse Guild regrouped in 1976 and adopted Howard Barrett's name suggestion of Chaparral Artists. Barrett gave 1st president, Charley McMahon, six of his paintings to be used for fund-raisers.

Sounds of Music was initiated by Mary Ingwersen in October 1979. She recruited Jean Hall, a local piano teacher and conductor, to bring this new dimension to the Hi-Desert Playhouse. Hall organized the Community Chorus, later called the Chorale, and the Keyboard Club. The Singalongs were formed by Wilma Cormier in March 1980 and offers a free musical program to the community.

The March 1980 official opening of the Cultural Center was celebrated with the musical OKLAHOMA! The parking lot paving had not been completed so theatregoers had to park at the bank in Joshua Tree and shuttle buses drove the goodhumored, understanding group to and from the theatre. In October 1980 the 1st Annual Juried Art Show was held in the auditorium. Also in October Dorie Pope started the Drama Workshop.



Photo by Charley McMahon  
 Dec. 6, 7, 1986 — Town of Bethlehem  
 Centurians Eric Murray, Jason Hughes  
 Beggar Jody Lukatich  
 Children (Temple Students) Daniel Mohler,  
 and Gabriel Lester



Photo by Charley McMahon  
 Cliff Selzer, President of the Yucca Valley Players turns over a check for \$571.01 to Phyllis Grubaugh, President of the Hi-Desert Play House Guild, Inc. to be used towards its building fund for the Culture Center. Fred Shepherd, who is the chairman and building supervisor of this project is holding the plans.

An important event occurred at the general membership meeting on March 4, 1982 — THE MORTGAGE WAS BURNED! On that same evening \$3,200 was raised for the Organ Fund.

The inspirational TOWN OF BETHLEHEM Christmas pageant was organized in 1958 by two Joshua Tree businessmen, Vic Groves and Carl O'Bryan, who felt the need to unite the churches

and citizens of Joshua Tree. They convinced ministers and priests to gather and discuss the feasibility of producing an ecumenical program. With the Bible as reference to determine phrases and passages acceptable to all denominations, a script came to pass. In a laundramat managed by Groves, drapery material, bedspreads and other available materials were dyed, cut, sewn and pressed by the two men. The costumes were used for several years until enough money from donations was accumulated to afford more luxurious costumes. With the help of enthusiastic community members, false fronts transformed the business of Joshua Tree into a small town of Bethlehem. The public parked their cars along the highway and for seven nights before Christmas the pageant was repeated for the ever enlarging crowds.

Irene Scoggins Bertrand. Play House



**F**or four years the program continued this way. Traffic control was managed by Marines from the Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base. Busloads of visitors from churches in Banning and carloads of people from Indio and Palm Springs flocked to listen and watch this well-known story retold. The crowds were largest on Christmas eve.

The overwhelming response by the public made it necessary to relocate. The hillside site on Sunburst Road was selected so all sets could be viewed at one time by the observers. Donations were collected by "beggars" and local Boy Scouts directed traffic in the parking area.

The program became so well-known that people all over southern California came to watch. Voice of America interviewed director Dorie Pope and the Automobile Club called annually to provide directions for motorists who wished to attend.

Because of vandalism the area was dismantled and the pageant site was changed to the Cultural Center. In 1982 John Vester directed the first stage presentation of **LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM** with the accompanying program of **AM AHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS**.

Cleo Schappi, Jim and Joellen Cain, spearheaded the Writer's Workshop in 1983. Also that year was the beginning of the Summer Youth Theatre under the able direction of Ed Will.

Project Bingo was started in August 1985 under the leadership of Rocky and Dottie Roy at the American Legion Hall in Yucca Valley.

In June 1986 choreographer Bob Regger started tap and ballet lessons for those interested as well as for cast members of the musicals.

*Board of Directors 1986-87  
Hi Desert Playhouse Guild, Inc.*

*From left to right are Charley McMahon, Rocky Roy, Frank Geising, Wilma Cormier, Alice Allen, Ardeth Lowe, Bertha Treling, Bob Allred, unidentified, Ada Sladek, and Mel Benson.*

*Photo by Vern Ecklund*



*Charley McMahon*

*1976 — First group of Chaparral Artists with Charley McManon the first president.*

**W**ith the ever expanding activities, the Cultural Center has not been able to accommodate the numerous needs. Phase II, the Guild Hall, was put into action. Property in back of the Cultural Center was acquired in 1981 which now gave the Guild about 2½ acres of land. In January 1984 the now older "slave crew" was again called to man the hammer. As before, this 5,000 square foot building was built on a pay-as-you-go basis. With battles against mud slides, floods, blizzards, hot summers and deadlines, the Guild Hall was completed in March 1986 in time for rehearsals of **THE KING AND I**. An area the actual size of the stage allows for realistic set lay out. Set builder Bob Palmer has a workshop where set props can be built for the next play while the current one is in progress. Wardrobe mistress Cheri Palmer now has a large room for the overflowing wardrobe department, storage area is available for the play and musical library, office space, kitchen area and a specialized "floating" dance floor for rehearsals, all of which make this Cultural Center a unique and envious community theatre. Recently the Red Cross accepted the hall as an emergency shelter.

**T**he Christmas pageant took on a new look in 1986 with the location of the Guild Hall being transferred into the **LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM** through efforts of Jean Hall and staff along with 17 area churches. A Bedouin tent for caretakers of the animals — ducks, horse and goats — was in front of the entrance and a brick-maker in authentic Bedouin costume demonstrated the making and framing of clay bricks. Inside,

the money changer changed dollars for silver and gold coins of the realm. The street went past the synagogue with the high priest dressed in costume with jewels depicting the 12 tribes of Israel. There was a demonstration of the use of the Greek style handloom which was popular in Biblical days. The street wound past the well to the potter and sculpturers' booths, to a demonstration of cloth dying and a display of making olive oil. Young, handsome, authoritative, costumed Centurians purposefully searched the streets looking for baby Jesus who had been ordered to be killed.

Ragged, tattered, hungry beggars roamed about pleading for alms. Beautiful, scantily clad dancing girls performed in the courtyard of the Inn. The innkeeper directed searchers to the manger where the baby lay. A bazaar offered items from Israel and Columbia as well as pieces locally made. Lentil soup, pita bread sandwiches

and whole grain cookies could also be purchased.

Enroute to the auditorium was the children's storyteller tent. In the auditorium musical entertainment was presented by the Memorial Handbell Choir made up of men and women from the United Methodist Church in 29 Palms, the Essence Gospel Quartet of the Skyview Chapel in Joshua Tree, the Hi-Desert Playhouse Guild Chorale and a Singalong.

All weekend activities were videotaped by the newly formed Hi-desert Playhouse Guild Video Department.

Donations from the week-end went to the Helping Hands, an organization which aids the needy.

Our debts are small and our horizons wide. Like the phoenix rising from its ashes, the Hi-Desert Playhouse Guild brought into being from what might have been a fatal loss, a Cultural Center for all people who live in the several communities of the high desert area to enjoy. ■



Photo by Vern Ecklund

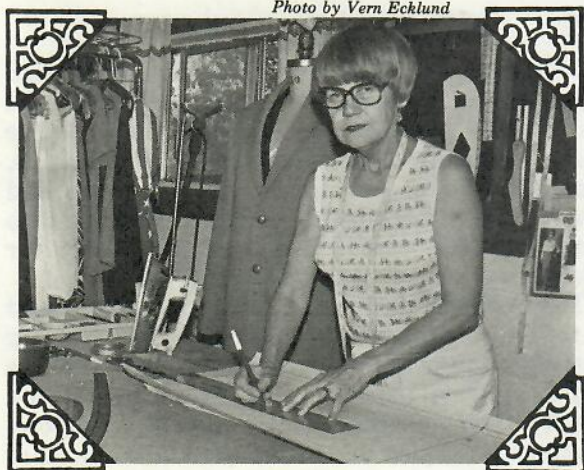
At left is Edith Porter, with Alice Allen on the right with cabinets donated by Pyrammid Enterprises Y.V. for Chaparral Artists Mini Mart in Art Gallery of Hi- Desert Cultural Center.



Play House

Cabaret Cast, 1983

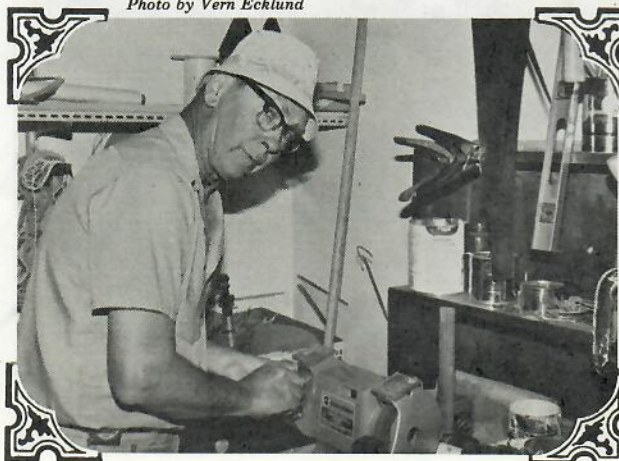
Photo by Vern Ecklund



Wardrobe Mistress Cherie Palmer with costumes.

Bob Palmer, Set Builder and General Fixer!

Photo by Vern Ecklund



# Keys Ranch -- The Desert Queen

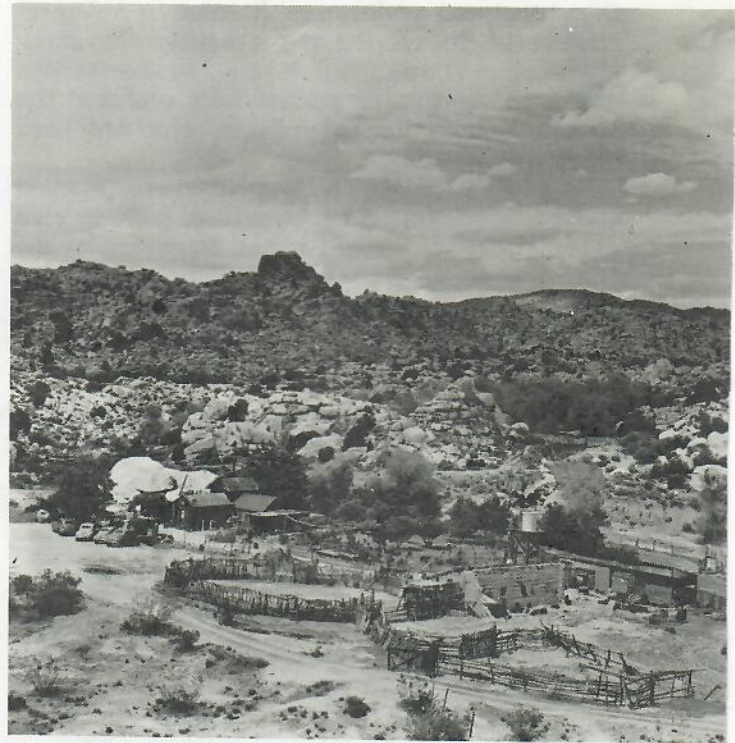
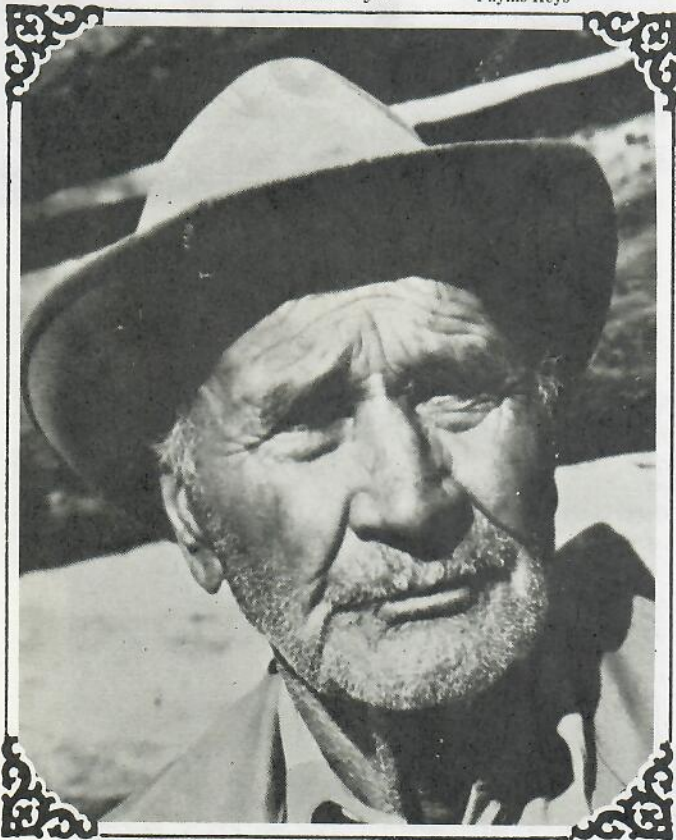
By Pat Rimmington

**T**he Desert Queen Ranch, located in the Joshua Tree National Monument, was the homestead of William Franklin Keys and his family. They were the first two people to homestead in that area. Bill Keys died in 1969 and since that time nobody has been living at the ranch, so with the effects of wind, weather, packrats, vandals and lack of funds for the Park Service to maintain it, the place has fallen into disrepair. However, it still serves as an example of the difficulties of homesteading in the days when there were nothing more than ruts in the sand to serve as road, no electricity or telephones.

Bill Keys was the last person to live at the ranch but he was by no means the first to have used that area. Rain water drains from a large area of the Wonderland of Rocks down the wash which runs through the ranch. Indians used that area for many hundreds of years as a camp when they were hunting. They were nomadic ranging from the Colorado River, to Indio, Palm Springs, Desert Hot Springs (where they too took the mineral waters for health reasons), Twentynine Palms and in the hottest weather they went to the higher reaches of Big Bear.

Bill Keys

Phyllis Keys



Pat Rimmington

*The Desert Queen Ranch from the rocks above the ranch.*

**T**hese Indians were mainly Serrano but there were Piutes and Chemehuevis too. They used but did not abuse the desert. They hunted the animals from the Big Horn Sheep to the smallest lizard. The plants provided them with food — flour from the ground mesquite beans; jam from the fruit of the cactus; seeds from the various grasses; nuts from the pinyon pines, oak and jobos.

**T**he plants of the desert provided them with other necessities. Gum to mend pottery and to fix arrowheads to shafts; hair dye from the mesquite resin; remedies for headaches, toothaches, stomach upsets, sore gums, chapped skin and smelly feet. Fibers from the yucca were used to make baskets, carrying nets, fishing nets for when they went to the rivers or lakes.

The Chemehuevi were the last tribe to be found in the Morongo Basin until around 1912. Having a spoken language, it is obvious that when the last Chemehuevi speaker dies, so dies everything about their people, the language, folklore, medicines, religion and so on. We know a little of the Chemehuevis of this area thanks to a man



*Keys Ranch with Mr. and Mrs. Keys and relatives.*

Phyllis Keys

named Bill McHaney who came with his brother, Jim, and some others to range their cattle on the grass which was more abundant around 1879 than it is today. It was said that the "McHaney Gang" were in the cattle rustling business and the spot where they hid the stolen cattle gave Hidden Valley its name. They had their headquarters in the very place that later would become the home of the Keys family. There were other cattle outfits in the area at the time and the "McHaney Gang" followed the trail of one of the other cowboys who had been doing a little gold prospecting while out riding the range. Art James had found some rich ore but the McHaney's "persuaded" Mr. James to sign over the claim to them. Under duress Art James did sign and was shot for his trouble. He is buried in the Ryan Campground area. This was the start of the Desert Queen Mine.

**J**im and Bill McHaney ran the Desert Queen for a couple of years and it was indeed very rich gold. However, the elder brother, Jim, was the one who always took the gold into town where he

*Left to right: Mr. Johnson, Mr. Peabody and Bill Keys in a garden during the 1920's.*

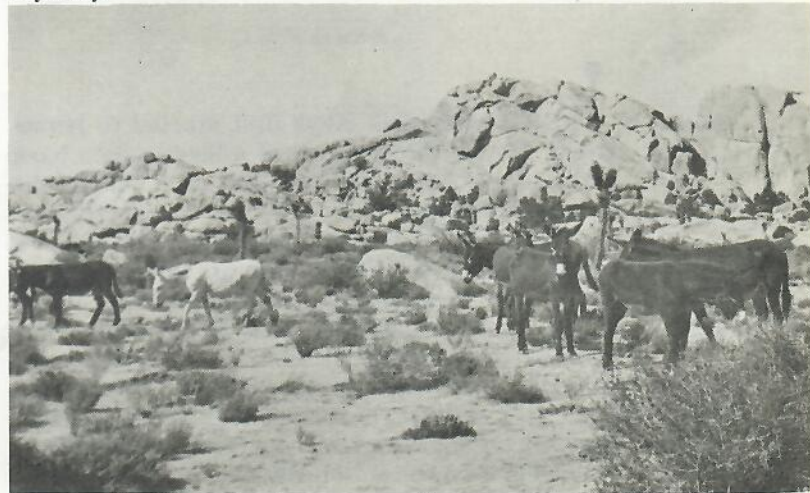
Phyllis Keys



spent the profits on buying the best horses and carriages, and going so far as to buy diamonds for his hatband which gave him the nickname "Diamond Jim". This went on until they mortgaged the mine to the bank and when they did not pay on time the bank took over the Desert Queen. Jim McHaney left the area and reported ended up behind bars for forgery. Bill McHaney remained in the area until his death in 1937. He became a very respected member of the community. His most important asset was his incredible memory. At the turn of the century Bill was living at the Oasis of Mara, site of the present Joshua Tree National Monument Headquarters. There were also some 40 Indians living there at the time. As Bill respected them and they him, in turn the Indians revealed to him many water holes, sources of gold and more importantly to us now, much of their religion, folklore and medicine. Bill McHaney in turn passed this information on to early homesteaders of Twentynine Palms, namely William and Elizabeth Campbell. The Campbells were very good amateur archeologists, and under license did an archeological survey of the Twentynine Palms region. They uncovered many beautiful artifacts, arrowheads, spears, pottery, baskets, spirit sticks and so on. Most of the Campbell collection is now housed in the Southwest Museum, some in the National Monument Headquarters.

*Cattle at the Keys Ranch*

Phyllis Keys





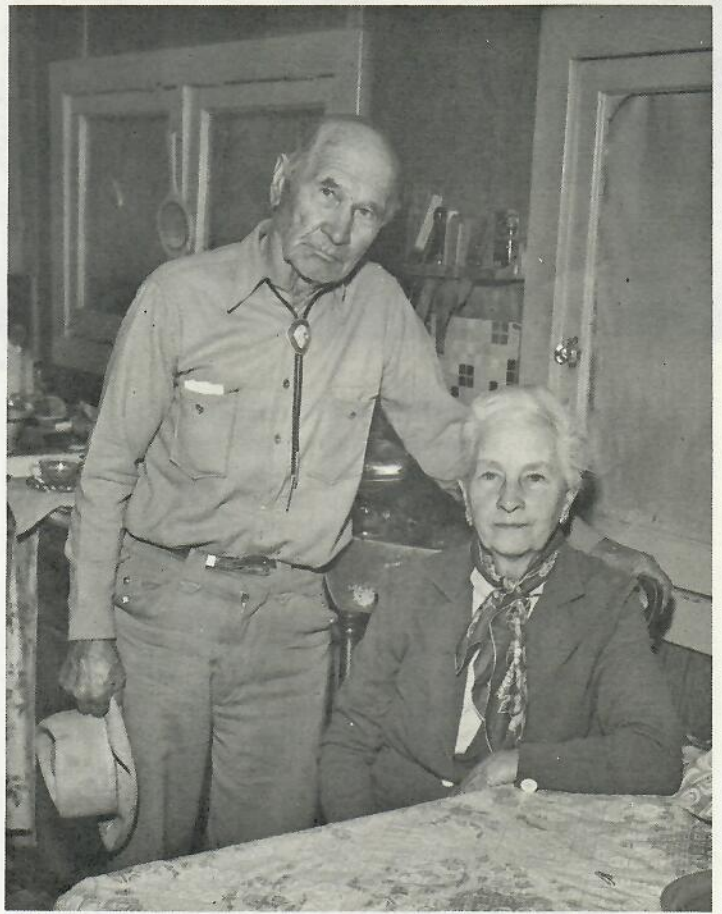
**A**fter the McHaneys left the Desert Queen mine the bank sold it to a Mr. William Morgan who employed a man, who had recently come to the area as superintendent/watchman. This man also ran the mill and kept the mining equipment in working order. When, through ill health, Mr. Morgan got out of the mining business, he had not paid his employee, so in lieu of back wages the employee received the Desert Queen Mine and the mill site. This man was William Franklin Keys. Once Keys had the property he then filed a homestead claim of 160 acres on what would then become The Desert Queen Ranch.



Phyllis Keys

*Frances Keys*

**I**n 1916 when Bill Keys first started to homestead, the ranch consisted of a large adobe barn and Joshua log corrals as well as a few adobe shacks which had been built by the McHaneys around 1893. Bill erected a one room cabin with a beautiful rock fireplace and chimney. It was to this small house that he brought his bride, Frances May Lawton in 1918. Bill was the very essence of the Western man, miner, prospector, cowboy, jack of all trades. Frances was a city born girl, refined, beautiful, well dressed. Here they set up home and raised a family with no outside help. Seven children were born to them. Two



Phyllis Keys

*Bill and Frances Keys*

boys died soon after birth, another son, Elwood, received a blow to the head from the windlass of the well. He received medical attention from a doctor in Twentynine Palms but several months later Elwood started to get blinding headaches. He was taken to Redlands Hospital where it was found that he was suffering from a blood clot on the brain. He was eleven years old when he died.

**T**he family had to be as self-sufficient as possible. There were no immediate neighbors, nor stores. The nearest store in the early days was at Banning. A quick trip to Banning consisted of hitching up the team to the wagon and after driving all day they arrived in Morongo. The second evening brought them to Banning, the third day was spent in Banning buying, selling and trading. Then it was back to the ranch, up hill all the way. Barring anything going wrong with the team, the wagon or the weather a quick trip was six days. You could not afford to forget anything and that was another reason that the Keys kept and collected and stored at the ranch anything that might come in handy.

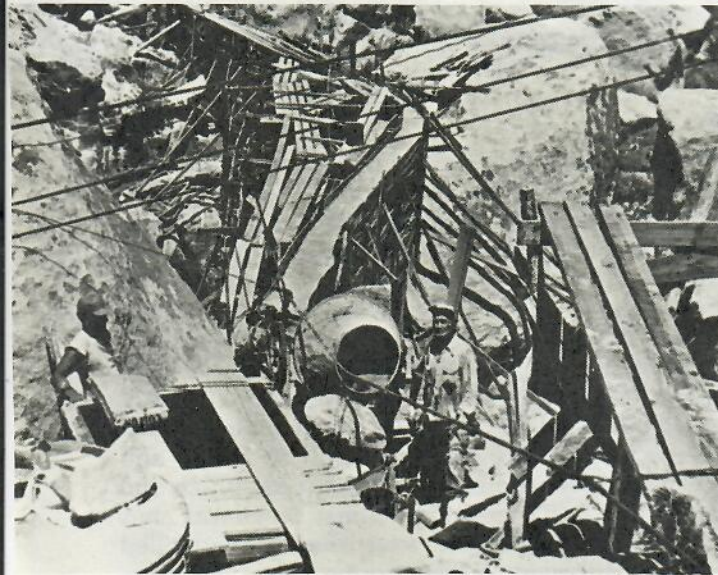
**B**ill Keys dug many wells by hand. Water was needed for domestic use as well as for the animals and in the mining process. The soil around the ranch is very hard so none of the wells had any shoring on them. Bill constructed several dams to conserve the rainwater. To the east of the house is Keys Lake. One of the original earthen dams that was built burst after a heavy summer rain in 1933. Bill rebuilt the dam in concrete using some of the materials like old bedsprings and iron bars as reinforcement for the dam which as of today does not leak. As the children were rather young to help him with this sort of heavy labor at the time, Bill would use the help of men who were seeking work (this being the middle of the Depression) to aid him with these chores. They probably got no pay as the Keys were not rich but the laborers would be given food and board.



Phyllis Keys

Visitor at Lake

**K**keys built a workshop on the property and anything that needed mending that could be moved was brought there for repair. Here he did carpentry, blacksmithing for his burros, mules and horses. He repaired mining equipment, mended tools for other miners, did assay work for himself and others. Even when one of the cattle was butchered, the hide was tanned and the leather saved for shoe repair, saddle and harness making and repairing and for belts for the equipment.



Phyllis Keys

*Mr. Keys held a permanent permit from the State Water Resources Department to keep these dams and make improvements. The ranch dam was built and is 19' high. There are three dams on Keys Desert Queen Ranch property — the Barker (or Bighorn), the Cow Camps and the original homestead dam.*

**O**nce the lake was filled, the Keys stocked the lake with blue gill, bass and catfish. The lake provided them with a place to swim in the summer and skate in the winter. With cows and goats the family was provided not only with the meat but also all the dairy products. They raised rabbits, chickens for meat and eggs, bees for honey. Pipes lead from the dam to irrigate a wonderful garden and orchard. Corn, tomatoes, beans, squash, turnips, beets, carrots, cucumbers, melons, peanuts, kale, lettuce, dill, lettuce and asparagus grew in the garden and the orchard had pears, apples, peaches, apricots, crabapples, prunes as well as many varieties of grapes. When these were harvested the family then had to work until the work of bottling, pickling and drying was completed. There were also fields of oats, barley, wheat and alfalfa.

*Keys Lake Bed, (l-r) Diane McRoberts, Pat Key, Don McRoberts, Marian Headington, and Bill Keys.*

Phyllis Keys



**B**ill Keys loved stonework, and the examples of his masonry work can be seen at the ranch as well as around the Joshua Tree National Park. He quarried the stone himself and he brought it to where ever he was working. After the dam burst in 1933 he built a retaining wall all along the wash to protect the garden area and was working on another wall that would protect the house. He marked this wall as a "Landmark". In the 20s when he was working on the road to what is now called Keys View, Bill and his friends came across the body of an old miner called Johnnie Lang.

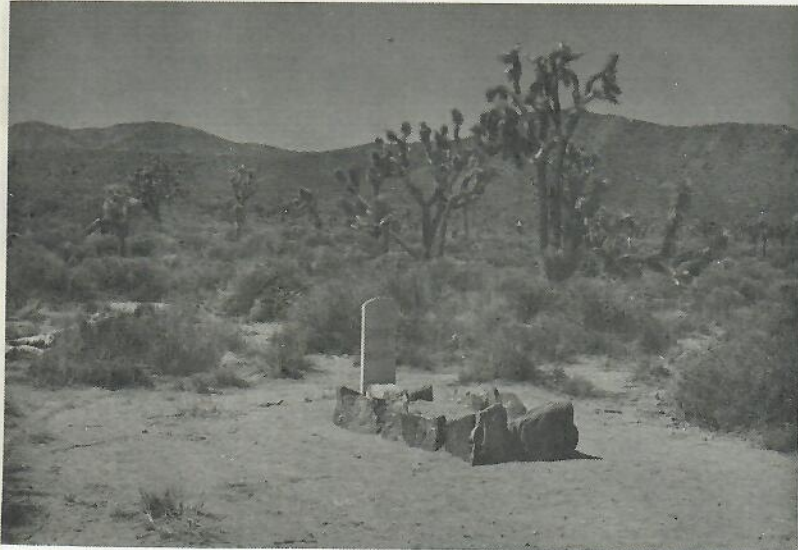


Phyllis Keys

The Keys Barn

Lang had discovered the Lost Horse Mine. Bill and his friends buried Lang where they found him and Bill erected a headstone with the appropriate name and dates but added "Buried by Wm. F. Keys". He did also mention the other men who were present at the burial. When the Keys family raised the level of Barker Dam they marked it and renamed it "Big Horn Dam" built by Wm. F. Keys, Willis Keys and Phyllis Keys. In 1943 Bill was ambushed by a homestead neighbor called Worth Bagley (No relation at all to Frank and Helen Bagley who ran the store, post office and land office in Twentynine Palms). Keys was shot at by Worth Bagley; Keys returned fire and killed Bagley. Bill went to Twentynine Palms and gave himself up to the constable. He went to trial and was sent to San Quentin prison. During that time he learned calligraphy, wrote poetry and read extensively.

Mac Truck at Keys Ranch



Pat Rimmington

Johnnie Langs Grave

Johnny Lang's Grave in Joshua Tree National Monument. It lies just to the right of the road to Keys View. The poem (Epitaph) to Johnny Lang is an example of Bill Keys poetry.

John Lang

Bury me in this valley along;  
 About my grave place some stone,  
 For here is where I took my last sigh,  
 No more to hear the coyotes cry,  
 It is sad to die in such disgrace,  
 On earth and world I had no place,  
 So here I lie me down to rest,  
 Without care, or friend, or inquest,  
 Take pity on me, who finds me here,  
 And cover me over, for god I fear,  
 So you found me here, after forty days,  
 Of death, despair, and black disgrace,  
 Forty days, coyotes passed me by,  
 And buzzards, only looted from high,  
 My troubles are over, I hunger no more,  
 Forgive me all for the worthless name I bore,  
 I was worthless on earth, and had no pride;  
 My neglect for all I could not hide,  
 Forgive me all, I'm gone from here,  
 Never more, will I reappear,  
 Oh, bury me now, and lay me low,  
 For I've had a hard row of stumps to hoe.

**M**eanwhile, Frances Keys remained alone at the ranch. Their son, Willis, was in the service. Two of the girls were married and away from home and the youngest daughter, Phyllis, attended high school in Twentynine Palms. Phyllis stayed with friends in town during the week and would return home only at weekends. Mrs. Keys' brothers would come out to help when they could. This being wartime, gas was rationed and so they could only visit when they had sufficient gas coupons for the trip. Frances wrote to and enlisted the help of Earle Stanley Gardner who was writing a series called "The Court of Last Appeals". With the aid of his lawyers he had Bill Keys' case re-opened and they found that many facts had not been brought out at the trial. This led to Bill being released and in time receiving a full pardon. However, on his return, the first thing that Keys did was to erect a marker which stated that "On this spot on May 11th, 1943, Worth Bagley bit the dust at the hand of Wm. F. Keys". This marker still stands.



Phyllis Keys  
Freed from prison, Bill Keys (left) is welcomed home by daughter Phyllis, Argosy's investigator Raymond Schindler, and Mrs. Keys.



Phyllis Keys

Phyllis and Mother

**W**hen the children had all left home Bill and Frances thought that it would be an idea to have a "dude ranch". They would build cabins which they would rent out to visitors, self-contained with bed and stove. Although the idea was never realized beds and stoves were collected and stored and can be seen on the ranch today.

**A**lso on the ranch are a couple of school houses. Although the parents had tried to teach the children to read and write, with all the other chores that had to be done this was difficult. So in 1932 the Keys hired the first teacher, Mr. Oran Booth. Oran Booth taught the children in a tent house in the mornings. The children had chores to do in the afternoon and Oran Booth, an engineer, would help Bill mend machinery or go prospecting on his own. Mr. Booth later homesteaded in Twentynine Palms and continues to prospect and work his own mine.

L. to R. Don McRoberts, Pat Keys, Phyllis Keys, Marvin Headington.

Phyllis Keys





*Keys Ranch Before new kitchen was put on. — Note the late model automobile*



*Bill Keys at kitchen door.*

## **Desert Queen**



*Bill & Frances Keys & cat Richard*

*Sign for Keys Desert Dude Ranch.*



*Stamp Mill - At Bill Keys' Desert Queen Ranch.*

*Phyllis Keys*

*Bill & Frances Keys -  
The day the pardon came*



*Neal Vocke*

*Bottle collection in the workshop.*





*Bill Keys, harvesting the rye.*



*Phyllis Keys*

# Ranch DO



*Frances Keys*

*Except for the few pictures credited to other persons, the photographs in this story were furnished by Phyllis Keys Meidell. We offer our sincere thanks for her cooperation and sense of history.*

*William Keys making a headstone for Mrs. Key's grave.*

*Bill Keys: Story time for school children.*

Photo Credits - Phyllis Keys

*Keys Grandchildren — back row: Frances and Bill Keys. Front row: Susan McLeod, Mark Garry, James McLeod.*



In 1933 the Keys had more homestead neighbors with children of school age. The neighbors were willing to send their children to the Desert Queen Ranch where, if there was a minimum of 6 children, the County would furnish a teacher. The County furnished the educational material and half of the teacher's salary. The Keys furnished the other half of the salary, a house which they built especially for the teacher as well as the food. It must have been quite a lonely life for the teacher too. Most of them stayed only one year and then moved on. The last teacher there was a Mrs. Dudley, who with her husband had been missionaries in Burma. What a change of climate for them!

Frances May Lawton Keys died in 1963 and is buried in the family cemetery which is still the private property of the Keys family. It is located a short distance south of the ranch house. She was laid to rest next to the three young sons that had died. Bill Keys had carved and decorated each of the headstones using chrysacholla, a blue stone rather like turquoise. When Bill died in 1969, just short of his 90th birthday, he too was laid to rest in the cemetery beside his beloved Frances. Although he had not really wanted a headstone, two of the young Park rangers that he had befriended found a stone that Bill had made and placed it at the head of his grave. Later Willis



Phyllis Keys

Desert Queen Ranch School, Mr. and Mrs. Howard E. Dudley, teachers from 1938-1940.

Keys and his wife, Gwen, carved and decorated the marker the same way that Bill had.

The Keys family were never rich in money but rich in all the virtues that enabled them to survive in the harsh desert environment. Very few of us today could endure the hardships or have the self discipline that is needed for such a life. ■

## Keys Ranch & Water

### WATER SLIPS AWAY FROM KEYS RANCH

Feb. 27, 1964

Those who take water for granted may not fully appreciate the situation at the Keys Ranch, but those who have had to do without it a time or two — or have lived on the desert away from modern plumbing will understand. There are three dams on Keys Desert Queen Ranch property, the Barker (or Bighorn), the Cow Camp and the original homestead dam. At present there is water in all three — but the gate valve is stuck in the open position on the dam at the ranch site and the water is coming out unchecked.

Several months ago, Willis Key, Mr. Key's son, attempted to wrest the valve open or shut but it wouldn't budge. A week or so later, Willis, with friends Myrtle and Colbert Rees, of Joshua Tree, tried to locate the outlet pipe on the inside of the dam by submerging in a frogman outfit. The depth (25' to 30') of water was too much for Willis' sinus and when Colbert made a dive, the air compressor gave out. Their idea in locating the outlet pipe was to wedge a three-inch piece of redwood into it to stop the flow.

Bill Wessel, a friend of Bill Keys, from Barstow, made a dive with his skin diver outfit a few weeks ago. He located the outlet pipe and was submerged for 25 minutes but he too was unsuccessful with the wedge. There is no way to see while under water — but he found that the pipe will need a larger wedge.

Mr. Keys has had the new wedge made and is waiting patiently for someone to come and try their luck.

The dams are entirely dependent on rain water. Mr. Keys holds a permanent permit from the State Water Resources Department to keep these dams and make improvements. He stated that the ranch dam was built in 1914 and is 19' high. He built the dam originally with the assistance of two friends, Ray Bolster and Fritz Slikter. When full, the water is used for irrigation and will last approximately two years. Mr. Keys is planning to raise it another seven feet. He estimates that when finished — and full it will last for five years.

Mr. Keys has met with discouragement before and so says — rather wistfully, this reporter thought "... in the meantime I can do other work, besides gardening." ■