

Tidbits from Harry Quinn's Scrapbook

Jan Holmlund, Coachella Valley Historian and Archivist and HSPD member who started the Mini Muster Program, brought me a box of materials from the museum's past several years ago. In the box were a number of descriptions from past exhibits. I'm not sure if all these were written by Jan, but I believe they were. Enjoy a virtual trip through some of the exhibits that used to be on display at the Firehouse Museum.

Harry Quinn



WATER, THE STAFF OF LIFE

Water meant life, death, prosperity, feuds, food, and survival in the desert. A great effort was exerted to develop water wells in this area to serve travelers. In 1860, the California State Legislature appropriated \$5,000 to fund the digging of three wells in the Colorado Desert, because the mail route that ran from San Bernardino through the desert to Yuma, Arizona required regular water stops. The contractor dug only one successful well (at present-day Indian Wells); his other two wells proved to be dry holes. He filled his dry wells with water before the well inspections came by, to assure payment for his services. For many reasons, including the availability of water, the Butterfield Stage and Desert Mail route were soon abandoned. It was not until the Colorado River Gold Rush of 1862 that the county had a well-traveled highway, the Bradshaw Trail.

COVE COMMUNITIES WESTERN BOUNDARY

Cathedral City, the most westerly of the Cove Communities, was named by George and Luella Allen, who first developed the area. The town developed with the working person in mind and became known for small lodges which catered to monthly and seasonal boarders.

Local resident Josephine Morse True adored her adopted town and wrote about it in 1935: "Our small settlement of cabins and modest homes at Cathedral City feels even more of this peaceful influence, and our

views are fully as superb as at Palm Springs though there are no big hotels and just few shops. Land and rents are markedly less expensive, and here a pleasant group of people reside. Painters, writers, convalescents, retired and tired businessmen, ranchers...down-and-outers."



A TREE TO REMEMBER

The tallest tree in the Palm Desert area was planted in 1947 in front of the old Palm Village Inn in an area which subsequently became Palm Desert. It stands today, towering at 70 feet (*sic*), at the northwest corner of Hwy 111 and Portola.

Ed. note: Our own Susan Marie Weber (HSPD Board Treasurer and Palm Desert City Councilmember) has proposed that the city preserve this tree and dedicate a park where it stands, using the few square feet of ground beneath it. It would be "The tallest tree in the smallest park" in the U.S.



TENNIS THE LOCAL SPORT

Nearly 30 country clubs (*sic*) now cater to the Coachella Valley. The Shadow Mountain Club, which was developed after World War II by Clifford Henderson, built its membership with a homogenous group of families by promoting tennis as a new local sport. The Shadow Mountain Club became the focus of a new community, Palm Desert; the club and town grew together. The four Henderson brothers worked together to develop Palm Desert. Clifford Henderson set aside easements between lots for riding trails. He advertised Palm Desert as having an hour more sun each day than Palm Springs, and his brother Randall Henderson brought the Desert Magazine here.

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE

If at times there was too little water, there were other times when flash floods wreaked terrible devastation in the valley. In the 1916 flood, the Whitewater Channel, a yawning chasm, was formed. Suddenly here was a channel which was up to 50 feet deep, 600 feet wide and discharging water at a maximum rate of 1 acre, 2 feet deep, in just over a minute. The Channel stretched from Cathedral City to Point Happy (Hwy. 111 and Washington Street). For many years, floods in the Cove area cut off traffic to people who lived on either side of the Channel. Local residents often stocked a week's food or sent someone by jeep cross country to 1000 Palms for supplies. Another great flood occurred in 1927 in Indian Wells; some of its waves leapt to 10 feet.

Ed. note: Not in the caption is the flood of 1938 that left Palm Springs cut off from the rest of the Valley.

A PLACE TO PLAY AND HIKE

The pleasures of water often centered on natural pools created after rains. Some of the pools, like the one at Magnesia Falls in Rancho Mirage, were graced with palm oases. Here, locals and visitors would picnic, swim and camp.

In 1923 James Smeaton Chase wrote in Our Araby, "*Magnesia Spring Canyon opens...about twelve miles from Palm Springs...It is quite easy of access, the approach being sandy instead of boulder, but automobiles may find some difficulty after leaving the main road (at a point opposite Frey's old house). At the narrows, about two miles from the mouth, there are fine cliffs; also a little water, not the best quality, yet drinkable; and a rock-bound pool large enough for a miniature swim. In the upper canyon there are a large number of palms. This canyon makes a pleasant objective for a picnic, or for a one- or two-day camping trip.*"

A MESQUITE FOREST

There was once a mesquite forest just east of Point Happy (Highway 111 and Washington Street) which was transected in the early 1900s by a sandy road that wound from Indio to Palm Desert. Travelers often had to hack their way through the dense thickets. Neither the forest nor the road exists today. Other roads were built through the sand in that area, but most were poorly built. The road from Banning to the Valley wasn't paved until the 1930s.

"There were no roads when we were first preparing to move out to Indian Wells in 1917. They were building the road from Indio to Palm Desert, and that road was completed, or almost completed, when the rain, heavy rains, came in 1916 and washed out most of it. The road was not paved from Palm Desert to Palm Springs until in the early 30s, and after that we got lots more traffic." – Robert Cook

A PLACE FOR POOLS

By the 1950s swimming pools had become a symbol of the desert's leisurely lifestyle. The pools were part of the attractions of area hotels and clubs, and the Shadow Mountain Club's figure-eight pool was cited in many national advertisements. By the mid-1950s, the area earned a reputation for having more swimming pools per capita than any other place in the world.

One of the legendary pools in this area was built by the Jay Clark family on their ranch on Highway 74 next to what is now the Silver Spur Mobile Home Park. The pool was fed by a spring in Cat Canyon, the water piped down the edge of the canyon. This was the only water ever found on the west side of Highway 74. The pool was the scene of a tragedy when Mr. Clark drowned in it in the early 1960s.



Shadow Mountain Club and figure-8 pool with lake in foreground. The lake was a reservoir for the club.

FLOWERS IN THE DESERT

Ranchers like Raymond Pederson had a tough time in the desert. In 1925, after buying 240 acres of the original Marshall homestead in La Quinta to raise flowers, Mr. Pederson was obliged to build homes in Indio just to put food on the family table.

“During the Depression, everybody was flat broke and it didn’t make any difference what kind of work they did. If you could somehow get a job with some money attached to it, then you took it. After we were married, we picked dates for \$2.50 a day...and half of the time there wasn’t enough to pay the power bill to irrigate what little we had growing on the ranch, but we managed and we had a good time, but there was sure no money around.” – Mrs. Raymond (Olive) Pederson, 1980.

The Pederson’s were the first to grow gladiolas in the Coachella Valley, and the first to exhibit their flowers at the Indio Date Festival. Pederson’s became active in the early 1940s, when the Japanese farmers on the coast were interned.

GOLF MAKES GOOD IN THE VALLEY

Until the Thunderbird Country Club was completed in 1952 around an 18-hole course, “desert golf” was a conundrum.

“It was an awful battle...because people didn’t believe we could build a golf course down here. We got about 40 people at \$5,000 apiece (to build the club) but it was by hard work. After we got Bing Crosby and Bob Hope to come on board, then other people wanted to join in too. It became sort of easy after that.” – Frank Bogert

The Rancho Mirage property was developed primarily from a dude ranch that local resident, Frank Bogert, had helped establish, as well as land from what had been Palm Springs Mayor Philip Boyd’s vegetable ranch.

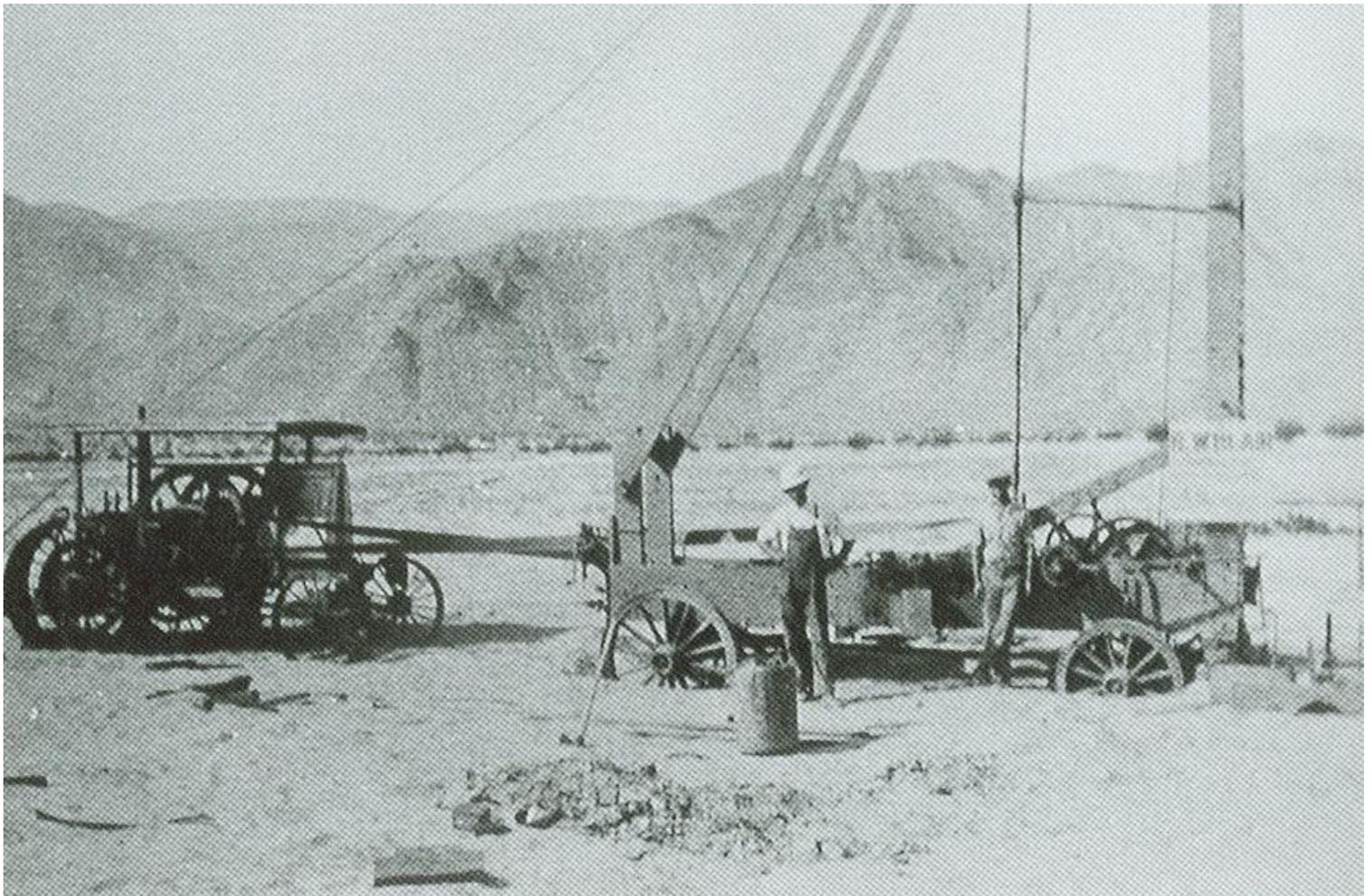
“This was called the Red Roof Ranch. I had a Japanese foreman and he was a fine grower. We grew tomatoes to begin with, and then later we grew strawberries. That went on with a great feeling of satisfaction until the war came, and Frank Kowase and his wife were moved to a relocation center in Poston, Arizona. So here I had the one man who was in charge of the ranch taken away...and so I stopped growing about 1945 and waited until the right time came to sell the property. Our ranch was the first vegetable ranch for quite some distance.” – Philip Boyd

The Thunderbird became the first country club to have homes situated around the greens of a golf course. Its success was followed by the El Dorado Club, Indian Wells and Tamarisk country clubs in the late 1950s.

THE DESERT COULD BE A STRUGGLE

The struggle to make ends meet engaged most of the energies of Cove ranchers from the turn of the century through the 1930s. Many people held two jobs. R. W. Blair helped work his father's ranch in Indian Wells while running a blacksmith shop by the two-rut county road which ran past their front door. Neighbor Ernest Chapin, Sr. later recalled, "Every few days there'd be one to three covered wagons going by on their way to Los Angeles or Bakersfield from the East. They'd all stop at Blair's."

Neither the blacksmith shop nor the ranch fared well, however. The father, William P. Blair, saw the ranch house destroyed in the 1916 flood. By then Robert W. Blair had closed the blacksmith shop. He went on to drill water wells in the area, becoming modestly successful.



Drilling for water in the desert – Robert W. Blair drilled many wells in the area including six prior to 1919.



THE COOK RANCH

Caleb Cook's family came to the Coachella Valley for health reasons in 1913. An electrical manufacturer in Los Angeles, Mr. Cook worked as an electrician here in the desert while building his family's ranch and date palm nursery in the Indian Wells area. Cook became a pioneer date grower in his new desert home, establishing the first sizeable Deglet Noor date garden west of Indio. Deglet Noor (date of light) is now one of the area's prime date crops. Later, Mr. Cook imported some Saisy date palms from Egypt. Cook's ranch was quite a showplace in its time, his commitment to the date industry was very strong. Mr. Cook became the president and general manager of the Deglet Noor Date Growers Association in Indio from 1922 to 1927.

Caleb Cook and one of the many rattlesnakes typically found in the palm groves.

President's Letter

Summer is here again and we're halfway through the year. What a year, huh? In the downtime, things have been happening around the Firehouse. Maybe you saw the article in the Desert Sun on June 28th about Luke and our Archivist, Rochelle. It is still online and it's a good read if you have some time. We have been sharpening our Zoom meeting skills. We should be right about perfect at it by the time we won't need it anymore. The Firehouse has been re-roofed and we're very glad for that. VP Mark has been working on the Cliff Henderson home movie digitization project. I've seen some clips – this will be a great addition to our archive.

What I can't seem to wait for is some kind of normalcy. A day when we are open for visitors – to be able to hold our regular events and lectures. I am hoping this happens this fall. I'm sure it won't be quite the same as we're used to with social distancing and all the rest that goes with a pandemic. But I'll settle for close.

Hope to see you all soon. Stay safe!

Rob Pitchford, HSPD Board President

The Archivist's Corner

As you know, we are closed for the summer but there is still plenty of work to be done in the archives. HSPD has done a great job of saving things, so now we can focus on making assets more accessible. We've welcomed a few volunteers who are helping us out (with masks, distancing and hand-sanitizing). We're very grateful for the assistance. We've been going through past donations to find the most critical items needing repair or protection and have been prioritizing which photos and negatives to digitize. See the Desert Sun article of June 28th by Tracy Conrad, who wrote about this project.

We've also had several researchers book time in the archives. Since these tend to be in-depth inquiries, we've created an Ongoing Research Request list. This means that if we come across any of those subjects while going through donations, scanning images or reviewing research files, we can immediately notify the researchers.

In addition, we've been testing out a potential "Traveling Historian" project. We've put together a portable scanner, laptop and archival supplies so that we can go out and gather history directly from members of our community. If you're interested in helping with this project either as a historian or as an information donor, please let us know. Call the Firehouse Museum at 760-346-6588 and leave a message.

Rochelle McCune, HSPD Archivist

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A Volunteer's Report

While the global pandemic has brought the foreseeable future to a halt, it has given us a chance to work on the archive, digitize collections, and generally make a mess at the Firehouse with many need-to-be-organized photos, negatives, brochures, letters, blueprints —just about “everything under the sun”.

On one side of the Firehouse HSPD Archivist Rochelle McCune and I have already scanned over a thousand negatives of Palm Desert and beyond, repaired dozens of architectural renderings and blueprints (which are also being sent off for digitization), sorted and categorized thousands more photos for scanning, and even begun the process of filtering the dozen or so boxes of Clifford Henderson's archive that had been in storage at the Portola Community Center. On the other side of the building Merilee (and occasionally her black Labrador Rae) has been preparing historic collections of Sun Spots, Palm Desert Post, and oral histories in text and audio format for digitization for “California Revealed”. Just when Merilee thinks she's done tediously describing the contents of each item, Rochelle and I pull a handful more out of a box.

This is certainly a lot of work, but the discoveries — which happen about every 10 minutes — make the process completely worthwhile. If you're looking for something to do at home or away from people, there is lots of scanning, data entry and research that needs to happen in order to build the archive that the HSPD deserves. We need people to log original Palm Desert Corporation sales contracts, scan 35mm Kodachrome slides, sort newspaper clippings and even Cliff's personal letters. Email hspd.firehouse@gmail.com if you're interested in volunteering* with us this summer.

**6 feet away and with a mask!*

Luke Leuschner, Researcher

Grants Committee Report

This summer has seen a lot of activity so far, preparing submittals for the FY20-21 California Revealed grant year. This grant was described in the last newsletter: it is a grant sponsored by the State Library to digitize written and audio-taped materials gleaned from historical societies in California, and then display them on the Library's website; our materials will have a link to the HSPD website. For this cycle we are submitting the “Sun Spots”, the Shadow Mountain Club newsletter from 1947-1967 (the last year in our possession), and Wheeler's Desert Letter, a defunct publication that chronicled the business climate in the Coachella Valley from the 1950's until just a few years ago.

We don't have a complete set of either the Sun Spots or Wheeler's Desert Letter, so if you have any of these publications please let us know. You can call the Firehouse at 760-346-6588 and leave a message, and I'll get back to you and let you know which editions we need. Yes, we are asking for donations of these periodicals! You will have your originals back in about a year (it's not a quick process).

We need to complete these submissions by August 31st. The FY20-21 awards will be announced in the Fall. The three FY19-20 HSPD awarded items, old issues of the Hourglass and 55 audio and written oral histories, are being digitized now. The oral history interviews of early desert pioneers cassette-taped from 1979-1981 may appear on the State Library's website soon for your listening pleasure. We will be sure to let our members know when these materials become available online.

Merilee Colton, Chair, Grants Committee

HSPD MISSION STATEMENT

TO COLLECT, PRESERVE AND RECORD THE HISTORY OF OUR CITY AND COMMUNITIES, AND TO PROVIDE ACCESS TO THE SOCIETY'S ARCHIVES AND ARTIFACTS THROUGH EXHIBITS, PUBLICATIONS, PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Building Maintenance Report

The Firehouse Museum finally has a new roof! The city contracted Al Miller and Sons to replace the old roof, work began June 8th and was completed within two weeks. Under the supervision of Jeremy Frey, the city's new Facilities Manager, the existing roof was stripped down to the plywood deck and some of the plywood was replaced as needed for structural integrity. The new roofing that was installed is traditionally called the "Built-Up" style. It included 1" rigid foam insulation, followed by three layers of hot-mop with asphalt applied between each layer. Lastly, white rock completed the application, which is what you see as the finished product. All this material was inspected by the Palm Desert Building & Safety Department and complies with 2019 California Energy Code and CRRC (Cool Roof Rating Compliance), to ensure the energy efficiency of the building.



That's one big item to check off our list! Next is painting the building exterior and installing a gate to the rear parking lot. Stay tuned....

Mark Zimmer, Chair, Building Maintenance and Fire Truck Committee

Membership Update

The Board has voted to change the membership year from annually on the anniversary of joining, to annually at the HSPD's fiscal year, which is July 1 – June 30. This change will help our all-volunteer Board keep up with the administrative duties of membership. Between August and next May members whose year is up will be offered the option of a pro-rated dues amount to continue their membership. Then in June of next year everyone will receive a membership dues reminder at the same time, for the following fiscal year. If you have any questions, please email to hspd.firehouse@gmail.com.

Advertising in The Hourglass

Advertising space is available in The Hourglass to current HSPD Business Members at the following rates: ¼ page \$25, ½ page \$50, full page \$75. Rates subject to change. The Editor reserves the right to accept or reject an ad based on its suitability for publication in The Hourglass. Revenue from the ads will be used to offset the cost of newsletter publication and to further the mission of the HSPD.

Free Notary Public Services

for members of the Historical Society. Contact the Society at 760.346.6588 or stop by to make an appointment. This service is provided by *Susan Marie Weber*.

Bates House News

The recently rehabbed Bates House (also called the Wave House for its distinctive roofline) was the topic of a June 25 webinar from London, which I joined. The U.K.'s 20th Century Society, dedicated to promoting architecture from the 20th Century, interviewed one of the architects who worked on the rehab, John Going of Stayner Architects, which firm purchased the Bates House at auction during Modernism Week, 2018. The webinar included before and after photos, background on Walter S. White, the architect of the house, and Miles C. Bates, the artist who commissioned the house. Following the photos, Mr. Going gave a live video tour of the house for people in London and from all over.

Information about the rehab work included: 95% of the original roof materials were saved; metal window frames were refabricated to White's original specifications; up to five inches of roof insulation was added on top of the roof in an inconspicuous manner; and original underground air conditioning ducts continue to be used. Stayner Architects will start renting the house for events and overnight stays in early July. Check it out at 73697 Santa Rosa Way in Palm Desert.

Darrell Cozen, HSPD Member and Docent



Front facade of the Miles C. Bates House | Photo by Tim Hirschmann

(Ed. Note: The story about the Wave House has been featured in most major newspapers in the U.S., as well as Palm Springs Life, Architectural Digest, Atomic Ranch and other magazines. Numerous Blogs on mid-century modern architecture have also featured stories and photos about the house, which was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2018 due to the efforts and sponsorship of the Historical Society of Palm Desert. Many thanks to all the donors and volunteers who made this designation possible, and special thanks to Kim Housken for letting us know about the webinar.)

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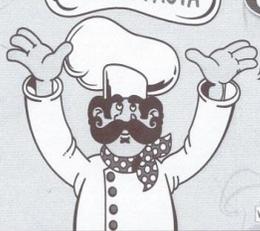
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