



The Hourglass



Winter 2021

From the Archives

Marian Marsh Henderson - Beauty in the Desert

*From the Winter 2006 Hourglass, compiled from the Society archives by **Ginny Folkers***

Marian Marsh Henderson (née Violet Krauth) was born in Trinidad, West Indies on October 17, 1913. When she was four years old the family of six migrated to the United States and settled in Boston, where her father set up his chocolate manufacturing business. With her mother and three siblings, Violet traveled across the country during WWI and settled in Long Beach where she attended Hollywood High School. She first visited the desert in the late 1920's, vacationing at the El Mirador Hotel in Palm Springs. With her brother Tony she would hike the canyons and mountains, ride horses and water ski at the Salton Sea.

Violet's big sister became an actress, taking the name Jeanne Morgan. This lovely girl was chosen the most beautiful in the United States by a top Hollywood producer. Little sister tagged along with Jeanne, and at the age of sixteen she took a bit part in Howard Hughes' epic *Hells Angels*. It was at this point the young actress took the name of Marian Morgan. After that she and Hughes sometimes dated when they were in the desert. They would drive across the roadless sand in Hughes' white Cord convertible to an elegant restaurant with back-room gambling on Date Palm Drive. Her brothers would have to tow them back to Palm Springs because the Cord had a habit of breaking down.



John Barrymore noticed her lovely voice quality and diction. It was in the 1930's that Marian became well known beginning with the role of young Trilby, who was mesmerized by the hypnotist Svengali, played by Barrymore. When her beautiful face started appearing in movie magazines, she became known as Marian Marsh, her permanent stage name. Her second movie, *The Mad Genius*, featured the same leading man. While still in her teens, she was one of the first to join the Screen Actors Guild, and she was also the first American actress to make films in England. Marian continued making movies with some of Hollywood's leading stars throughout the 1930's, more than 40 productions.

In 1938 she married stockbroker Albert Scott and had a daughter, Cathy, and a son, Albert, Jr. Marian stepped down from most of her work in movies and theater in 1952 to raise her children. This 5'2" bundle of energy founded a community beautification group in Chatsworth. She was also involved

in Rancho San Antonio, a school for boys in trouble – hiring 35 of the boys and encouraging other ranchers to do the same. Marian also established housekeeping and grooming classes for the Home for Girls. After 19 years, Marian and Albert Scott divorced, and in 1959 she made two television appearances.

In 1960 Marian married Cliff Henderson, the Founder of Palm Desert, and became Marian Marsh Henderson. At this time the Shadow Mountain Club was the rising star in the social whirl of Palm Desert. Marian stepped right into the role of No. 1 hostess, but that didn't slow her down in community activities and environmental concerns.

When pilot Jaqueline Cochran complained about all the trash she saw while flying over the desert, Marian thought of her past experience in Chatsworth. So in 1962, *Desert Beautiful* became a reality, encompassing more than 15 Coachella Valley communities. She believed there was no need for "visual pollution", and with a group of loyal volunteers she began removing litter from the valley floor. They concentrated on clean-up, repair and painting, and planting trees and flowers. Local youngsters participated, too, and were educated in conservation with art and essay contests. Commercial people worked hard to earn the beautification awards presented annually. Besides removing abandoned vehicles, Marian was instrumental in stopping the burning of trash, installing recycling depots, and arranging for two free residential pick-ups each year. Mrs. Henderson worked tirelessly on the *Desert Beautiful* project for 35 years until her health went into decline.

Marian served on the boards of Desert Hospital and Eisenhower Hospital for 11 years. From 1972 to 1978 she was also on the United Way board. The recipient of many awards, in 1973 Marian was one of three ladies honored by the Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce. In 1993 she flew to Los Angeles at the request of a group dedicated to showing and preserving old films, and she was given the 1994 Inspiration Award.

Her most enduring dream was that there would be lighted palms along the highway from the ocean to the Salton Sea. Other expressed wishes were to return to the times of good behavior, well-dressed people and not having to lock doors. Before pursuing her film career, Marian had a strong desire to become a nurse, and surely would have had success in that pursuit as well.

Cliff and Marian traveled each year to see the Olympics. They also attended functions all over the world sponsored by the many aviation organizations of which Cliff was a member. Being a first-hand witness to her husband's efforts concerning the growth and development of the initial stages of Palm Desert, Marian doggedly stood her ground in seeing that he was given the credit he deserved. With his vision and her backing, Palm Desert became the city in which we are all proud to live and work.



Marian Henderson and Ed Mullins at the Historical Society

Marian died in her home on Pinyon Street in Palm Desert on November 9, 2006, following several years of deteriorating health. She is survived by daughter Cathy of Arkansas, son Albert of Colorado, eight grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. On November 16, 2006 a funeral mass took place at Sacred Heart, the church Marian attended during her 46 years in the desert.

Note: this article was written shortly after Marian Henderson's death. Marian Henderson was a supporter of the Historical Society of Palm Desert.

President's Letter

Believe it or not, there's light at the end of the tunnel! If the good Lord's willing and the creek don't rise, our plan is to re-open the Firehouse Museum in early October of this year – October 8th to be specific. Of course, this could all change as the vaccines roll out and herds become immune. But we need something to look forward to. Behind the scenes we have been working, cleaning, organizing and re-organizing. The updated Exhibit design and implementation is exciting, and we are chomping at the bit to open it up to the public. Although it's not ready to unveil as of yet, the early October date has us charged-up and anticipating an exit to this lockdown funk we've all been in.

**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**

Since we last spoke, HSPD started a YouTube Channel. We started posting to the channel in lieu of holding our Friday Night Lectures, as we've been unable to meet due to the virus. The Historical Society has been filming many of our past lectures and have accumulated quite a few, along with some old films and clips from the past addressing Palm Desert and the Coachella Valley environs. I'm not sure if you have

spent much time on YouTube. What annoys me is when you are watching certain channels, someone will come on and ask you to "Like and Subscribe." Or they will ask you to "Hit the Notification Bell" if you would like to be alerted to new videos. What I would like you to do is check out our channel – Historical Society of Palm Desert. If you enjoy what you see please **like and subscribe** and **hit the notification bell** if you would like to be alerted to any new videos from our channel. Luckily, included on most of the videos is a familiar face, there to remind you of all these things. He will probably also remind you that if you haven't joined the HSPD and would like to, go to www.HSPD.org and click on the "Join" button.

Stay Safe,

Rob Pitchford

The White Roof Tops of Early Palm Desert

When the Palm Desert building boom of the 1950s occurred, the need for roofing material expanded rapidly. Most of the housing was single story with flat roofs, and being in a hot climate, light-colored roofs were in vogue. Mr. Arthur Nightingale of Pinyon Pines saw the great need and recognized that there was a large amount of white marble and dolomitic marble in an outcrop in the Pinyon Flats area. He and some of his partners began to develop dolomite mines north of Highway 74, slightly east of Ribbonwood (now called Springcrest). These mines were abandoned shortly after they opened when a larger and better deposit of dolomitic marble was found over behind the old Nightingale's store near where Pigeon Creek enters Deep Canyon. The remains of all three of these old mines can be seen by taking a trip up Highway 74 from Palm Desert to Springcrest.

The white rock from the Pinyon Flats mines became a common material for roofing the Palm Desert homes. The white rock reflected heat and helped keep the home cool. This type of roofing rock was a low value, large volume commodity and could not stand long distance transport. So, when the building boom went bust, the need for granulated white rock was no longer there, and the mines shut down.

I can remember one cold, windy, and snowy afternoon we went down to the Nightingale store and café (later the Sugarloaf Café) to get something to eat. They made very good hamburgers back then. While we were eating, a group of cold and wet miners came up from the old dolomite mine to thaw out and get something to eat. I remember all but one miner ordering hot coffee to help them thaw out. The one miner ordered a bottle of cold beer and then sat with his feet up on

the old wood stove to thaw and dry out. He was the butt of a lot of jokes from the other miners but didn't care, and later ordered a second bottle of cold beer.

Our next-door neighbors for many years in Lomita, Henry and Janis Dupske, sold out and moved to Palm Desert during this 1950s building boom. We stopped to visit with them on several occasions when we were heading up to our cabin at Pinyon Pines. He was a rockhound, so they had to haul a lot of rocks and rock cutting equipment down to their new place. I ended up with some of the rocks he did not want to take with him. I was recently shocked to find that their house is still there just east of the present day Greek Orthodox Church.

Harry M. Quinn

Archivist's Report

What does an archivist do during shutdown? One project we're doing is working with the museum's exhibit team to come up with new ways to tell the story of Palm Desert. After some thought, we decided to create a "Palm Desert Family" gallery exhibit to celebrate the people that have made Palm Desert a great place to live. We're looking through the depths of our archives to find interesting images and stories about the people who lived or are now living here - Early Settlers, City Founders, Civic & Social Luminaries.

Some of the stories we're finding are new to me (as a newer resident, I'm still learning the lore of Palm Desert) while some are lost or forgotten memories. So far, I've learned about Catherine Venn Petersen, one of the early Jack Rabbit Homesteaders. I've learned just a little bit about Harold Bromley, a WWII pilot who taught Amelia Earhart how to fly and "retired" to Palm Desert to run a date farm & be a real estate broker for the area that would become Palm Desert.



While I'm enjoying the research, I'd love to hear from our members. Do you have a Palm Desert resident you'd love to celebrate and spotlight in our gallery? Do you have any portrait or action photos of people and life in Palm Desert that could be used in our exhibit? Do you have any memories or stories about these residents? Call 760-346-6588 and leave a message or email us at hspd.firehouse@gmail.com. We'd love to hear from you and share your memories with us.

Rochelle McCune

Bylaws Committee Update

The ballots are in, and both proposed changes to the Bylaws passed. The proposal to reduce the number on the Board from 19 to 15 passed unanimously. The proposal to eliminate the requirement that the Immediate Past President be a member of the Board passed, 77 "yes", 10 "no" and one abstention. Any member can request a copy of the Bylaws by calling 760-346-6588. Provide your email or snail mail address and a copy will be sent to you. Thank you for your participation in this Bylaws vote.

Bylaws Committee

Membership Update

In July 2020 the Board 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 renewals. Between August 2020 and this March, members whose year is up will be offered the option of a pro-rated dues amount to continue their membership through June 30. Then in June 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 or call 760-345-6588.

In Memoriam

Ron Backer, long-time HSPD member, Palm Desert resident, husband of Elie and a prodigious painter, passed away on Christmas Day, 2020. Ron was a colonel in the Army and worked at NASA. He picked up painting as a hobby and painted every day for more than 40 years. Ron painted the famous "Birth of a Town" which illustrates the founding of Palm Desert. He donated the original painting to the HSPD, where it hangs in the Firehouse Museum. Giclée copies can be purchased from the HSPD for a donation. To view the painting go to the website at www.hspd.org and click on News/Events.

Grants Committee Update

The Historical Society of Palm Desert is partnering with the California State Library to digitize portions of our collection and place them online for easy access for researchers and the public. In the 2019/2020 grant year we were awarded grants to digitize old issues of "The Hourglass", the newsletter of the HSPD, prior to 2011 (2011 and forward are on the HSPD website), and about half of the audio tapes and accompanying tape transcripts from the HSPD's Oral History Project, which took place from 1979-1981. This project engaged professional interviewers who interviewed many of the still-living pioneers like Nina Shumway, who came to the Valley as a child in 1909, as well as the early developers and businesspeople like Hank Gogerty, Cliff Henderson and others.

You can listen to the early pioneers and the post-WWII movers and shakers of Palm Desert and surrounding Valley cities online at the State Library website, "California Revealed", at <https://californiarevealed.org/collections/historical-society-palm-desert>. Enjoy these tapes and be sure to bookmark the page, there are 53 tapes. Due to Covid 19-related delays, the tape transcripts and the newsletters will be put online later this year. They will be available at the same link.

For the 2020/2021 grant year we were awarded grants to digitize the remainder of the audio tapes in the 1979-1981 series (60) and all of the "SunSpots" in our collection. This is the newsletter of the Shadow Mountain Club, from its inception in 1947 through May 1967, 66 issues in all. These newsletters document the many parties and special events at the Club and are replete with photos of the famous and notable. The "SunSpots" and more audio tapes will be online in 2022.

Grants Committee

Volunteer Opportunities – Members Only

If you have a few hours a week to spare, we can use your help! We are in the middle of a huge photo and slides scanning project and have other work that needs to be done as well. You can work from home or come into the Firehouse – we can set you up in a room by yourself. Please call 760-346-6588 for more information. Thank you!

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