



MORONGO BASIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter Quarterly

Winter 2011

Holiday



from the Mine

Reprinted from "Christmas on the Desert" by Ruth Duarte & Carolyn Evans © 1970, self-published.

Any seasoned hardrock miner will refuse to be caught in the high country after the first deep snow drifts along the ridges and piles up deceptively in the canyons. Come the last of November, it's time to go. Back in the early 1930's I was a guest at the old Onyx Quarry near Onyx Peak in upper Pipes Canyon when Kate Harvey, the cook, put on one of her famous farewell dinners. The year of work was ending and crew and owners always shared this fellowship around the long table in the cook house. It was a sort of Thanksgiving and Christmas all lumped into one avalanche of delicious food served with hearty good wishes to everyone who happened to be there ... and when Kate got it cooked, sometime between noon and two o'clock.

The first time she stepped out the door and banged on the triangle hanging in the tree meant "everybody come to the cook house and wash up."



CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 >

PO Box 2046, Yucca Valley 92286 • 760-364-2000 • www.MBHS.net • MBHS.history@gmail.com



Photo by Mike Lipsitz

Tales of two Homesteaders

Following are the reflections of two settlers who came to Morongo Basin as the children of homesteaders. In a summary of her Oral History Interview, Onie Overbay Jones tells of a post WWI rush to homestead that brought her folks to the Basin in 1931, and where she called home for most of the next 78 years.

Next, writer David Dowling describes his earliest memories of family weekends at their 1961 homestead. Dowling's account is excerpted from a series of his personal accounts set in and around his family's retreat in the wilderness area just north of Pioneertown known as Gamma Gulch.

The tales of these homesteaders begin on pages 4 and 5.

Inside

Board Reorganizes Page 2

Programs Page 3

Member News Pages 6 & 7

plus much more!

From the President



Since our annual meeting the last week of September our Board has lost two dedicated and valuable members. President, Barbara Harris, and 1st Vice President, Bob Benson, resigned a month apart, each in order to attend to personal matters. Both of these dynamic and talented leaders made enormous contributions to the Morongo Basin Historical Society and both will be sorely missed.

Following the rules of succession, it is my duty and honor to assume the office of MBHS President, a role I had not expected, but that I accept with joy and optimism. I was introduced to MBHS by Dale Noel almost a decade ago and have since held a number of board and chair positions. That experience, plus the privilege of working under effective leaders like Bob Connors, Lloyd Noel and Barbara Harris, leaves me prepared to continue the mission.

My confidence would not be possible were it not for the talents and loyalty of the other MBHS Board Members including 2nd VP Ruth Long and Treasurer Jeannie Lindberg. The capable Roxanne Miller takes over as Secretary and the office of 1st VP is open as is Chair of Programming. Nominations for both seats are sought; won't you please consider serving?

With shock and great sadness we learned last week of the untimely passing of James Brock who was Curator of the MBHS Archeology Programs as well as a popular and generous contributor to the Historical Society. We dedicate this issue of Newsletter *Quarterly* to Jim.

Laurie Geeson, MBHS President

Recent Roundup

Our **Annual Meeting** held Sept. 25 turned out to be a "coming out" party for the Museum & Research Center. The board and volunteers spent the summer working to transform the house into a museum. The displays and exhibits will be changing every few months.

Our booth at **Gubler's Orchid Festival** was busy all day. Everybody is so interested in Giant Rock history and Barbara Harris, our expert, was staffing the booth so questions were answered accurately. We signed up several new members.

Archeapoolooza was also a huge success. We signed up a couple new members and handed out a lot of information about MBHS.

The **Yard Sale** surpassed all fundraising goals. Bad weather was predicted so we moved the display tables and bargains inside. That turned out to be an excellent idea. Perspective buyers not only picked up treasures for great prices they also toured the historical exhibits and displays and were properly impressed. "I never knew this was here" was heard over and over again and we signed up more new members. We made more than \$1,200.00 !!! Saturday was crazy!

Weekly Open House: Remember MBHS is open Tuesdays, 10:30 am to 2:00 pm.

Roxanne Miller, MBHS Secretary

Landers Quake

TIME: 04:57:34 AM
DATE: SUNDAY 06/28/1992
MAX. DURATION: 247 SECONDS
LOCATION: LANDERS, CA
EPICENTER: 33°N58' & 116°W19'
MAGNITUDE: 7.3
AFTERSHOCKS: 20,000
TYPE EVENT: RGT LATERAL STRIKE SLIP

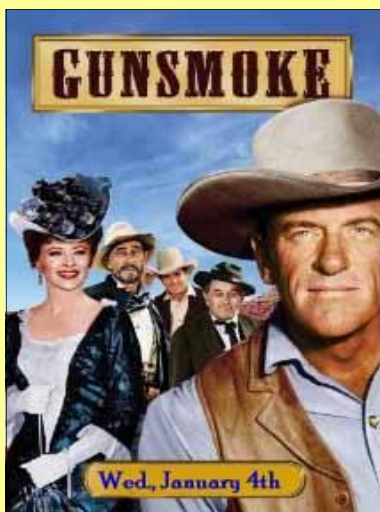
This June marks the 20th year since the devastating Landers Earthquake. It was the most powerful to strike the contiguous U.S. in 60 years and the Historical Society has planned a number of fascinating events to mark the occasion, but we need community input.

If you have an eye witness account you'd like to relate, photographs of the event, artifacts or any other relevant materials, we'd like to document and possibly borrow them for use in some of the programs marking the date. Contact MBHS at 760-364-2000 or via email to: MBHS.History@gmail.com

1st Wednesday Programs

GUNSMOKE NIGHT

Local author Ben Costello joins author/film historian Julie Ann Ream for **GUNSMOKE NIGHT - a tribute to the legendary TV Western Jan. 4 at the Hi-Desert Nature Museum.**



Local author Ben Costello joins author/film historian Julie Ann Ream for **GUNSMOKE NIGHT - a tribute to the legendary TV Western Jan. 4 at the Hi-Desert Nature Museum.**

Julie was born into Hollywood - her grandfather was Taylor "Cactus Mack" McPeters; she's also related to Rex Allen and Glenn Strange, who aka Sam the bartender on GUNSMOKE.

Ben wrote the award-winning

book GUNSMOKE: AN AMERICAN INSTITUTION and he and Julie contributed to the book PERFECTLY AMANDA - the story of Amanda Blake aka GUNSMOKE's Miss Kitty. Ben and Julie have plenty of stories to share and special guests who worked GUNSMOKE on both sides of the camera will be on hand to add their perspectives.

Wednesday, January 4, 2012



5:30 - 7:30 pm
\$5 Donation at Door
Hi-Desert Nature Museum next to the Yucca Valley Library

2nd Wednesday Programs

In March programs move to the 2nd Wednesday each month.



Wednesday, March 14 Dennis Casebier of Goffs California

This popular speaker, who has done two previous presentations, returns to talk about "Building the Goffs Cultural Center in the Middle of Nowhere."

5:30 - 7:30 pm \$5 donation at the Door
Hi-Desert Nature Museum, Yucca Valley

FIELD TRIPS

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

- ✓ Idyllwild Nature Center
- ✓ Whitewater Preserve
- ✓ Old Woman Springs Ranch



Dates to be announced.

STAY UP-TO-DATE

For the latest on events, or to check out historic photo slide-shows, interesting stories and links or to download old newsletters, you'll want to check out the MBHS website.

www.mbhs.net

E-Mail: MBHS.history@gmail.com



Morongo Basin Historical Society Group Page

morongo@groups.facebook.com · Open Group



Share: Post Link Photo Video Event Doc

An Oral History Project Summary

ONIE JONES and The OVERBAY HOMESTEAD

After World War I many veterans and their families homesteaded 160 acres of desert sands, rocks, and Joshua trees in the Morongo Basin. One such family was Jeff and Julie Overbay and their daughter, Onie. Onie spent an afternoon at our office reminiscing about the people, the places, and the predicaments that she experienced from 1931 through the next four decades in Joshua Tree and Twentynine Palms. A summary of that interview follows. A videotape of the complete interview is available to view at the MBHS office.

What would you do if your Model T car got stuck in a wash at night? Or you built your rock house on the wrong parcel? Or the only doctor in the area had chronic lung problems and couldn't provide medical care? Onie's answers to these and other tales offer a glimpse of the ingenuity and perseverance of the Homesteaders who helped forge together a community while raising families, making a living, and surviving on as little as \$27 a month.

Onie remembers the cattle roundups in this area. Her family fetched water from Warren's Well and the Tanks. And they collected wood in the canyons, which they sold as a side business. She tells of barbecues at the McKinney Ranch attended by over 400 people during the Depression and joining the game craze in 1935 when Monopoly© became a new national phenomenon.

Onie started school in Yucca Valley and tells of the first schoolhouse burning down and of its reconstruction. It was used for community dances and even for a child's funeral. She recalls the postman taking the children to school each day and picking them up on his way home at the end of the day. Her family went to Morongo Valley to swim in the teacher's own pool. She went to high school in Twentynine Palms with 32 students in the entire school and a senior class that contained five students: four boys and a girl!

Her parents helped start the American Legion Post in Yucca Valley and also the local Boy Scouts. She tells of dancing with Worth Bagley, her friendship with June LeMert Paxton, and tales of several homesteaders: Jim

Hankins, Frank and Anna Bull, Bill and Betty Campbell, Margie Taylor, Frank Bagley, and Frank Rogers among others. Though many close friendships developed, the early days of our community were not without lawsuits and angry words backed up with a penknife or 38 revolver, which she explains to the delight of all.

Onie married Harlow Jones, pioneer photographer of Twentynine Palms. Harlow made and sold postcards. He had a one-hour photo finishing business 50 or more years ago, was projectionist for the local movie house, and brought cable TV to the Eagle Mountain area. They raised three children: Ann, Steven and Susan Jones. After Harlow's death Onie continued to run the cable TV service at Eagle Mountain with her son until the bankruptcy of Kaiser in 1987. She then bought a laundromat and moved to Hemet, CA. Not liking that, she did home care for another 12 years, retiring at age 78.

This two-hour interview of Onie Jones seems to be only a glimpse of the tales that she could tell of our homesteaders and how they overcame the harsh environment and fledgling economy to build the Morongo Basin communities we know today.



An abandoned Homestead in Landers.

Gamma Gulch and The Road Less Traveled

By David Dowling

Back in the middle of the 20th Century, undeveloped property around Pioneertown was being offered by the government for "homesteading" purposes. This program allowed people to purchase five-acre parcels in remote areas at cheap prices. The catch to this plan was that one had to actually build a livable structure with a certain square footage and within a certain time frame or run the risk of losing the property back to the federal government.

Continued next page >

In the early 1960's my family, the Dowling's (Pat, Betty and myself), discovered the area north of Yucca Valley. Recreation and relaxation were foremost in my parent's minds. Little did I know that almost 50 years later I would reflect on it as the story of fulfilled growth, friendships and acceptance.

The homesteaded structure that would ultimately pull my family to the desert and create the home that I would grow to love, was created by an unusual effort. Emory Martin worked as a Utility Plant Supervisor at Patton State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, near the community of Highland, Ca.. Emory was married to Loretta who was a grocery checker at Sages Markets in San Bernardino,

where my father was employed for many years. A friendship grew between this couple and my parents, eventually leading Emory to invite my parents out to see the "cabin" he had built "out in the desert." As events unfolded, in 1961 Emory was close to losing this property back to the federal government due to his inability to construct a habitable building adhering to the homesteading requirements. Forced by a quickly approaching deadline, Emory enlisted the assistance of several of the inmates at the State Hospital where he was a supervisor. The frame for the cabin was built at the Hospital and trucked out to the Gamma Gulch site and set on the foundation that other inmate workers had formed and poured.

How all this was orchestrated, I've no idea, but the result was a single room cabin roughly 400 square feet, coexisting on a site with mice, quail, jackrabbits, coyotes, mesquite and Joshua trees. The single room structure, dominated inside by a deco-style, gray brick fireplace used as the only source of heat, had a linoleum floor, open beam ceiling with no insulation, picture windows, trundle beds and a small kitchenette area.

Water cost a penny a gallon for those folks without wells ... ordered in advance of your arrival and trucked in to fill a 1,000 gallon, above ground, Osborn Tank. Any water over what the tank would hold was used to refresh the few plants that might be growing around the cabin. We didn't expect any heat other than what the fireplace could generate and that depended on how much pre-cut firewood was available. Electricity would be available within a year and with it came an electric pump for the water, if the new electric pump didn't freeze in the cold winter temperatures. An operator assisted, party line telephone service became available shortly after the electricity arrived.

Accessible by a dirt driveway winding around several small storage sheds, you would find the cabin's wonderful, double hole outhouse, with its wallpaper of cute baby pictures to keep customers company. During the construction period, 2 1/2 acres of the original 5 acres had been sold to a lovable and eccentric woman named Peggy Smith,

who was by then living in her newly built cabin on a permanent basis, 100 yards to the east. Five or six other cabins, several with water wells, had popped up in the general area by this time, most of them were weekend or vacation homes. Elevation in the area is about 4,200 feet and despite high temperatures in the summer, gentle afternoon breezes kept things cool and very livable. The views of the Sawtooth and San Jacinto Mountains to the south and knowing that Big Bear was just over the hill, fueled my father's need for adventure. My mother loved the image presented by



the Sawtooth Mountains of the Indian woman lying on her back in full head dress, viewable directly south out of the cabin's picture window.

Dad purchased the property from Emory in 1962 and our family began regular weekend trips to the cabin, eventually expanding the structure, adding more water storage, electricity, telephone and propane. While easily located if you knew where to look, our property seemed to defy the outside world's attempt to pinpoint it. There have been at least three legal addresses proclaimed over the years: 52261 Gamma Gulch Road, per the Edison Company; 2219 Cottontail Lane, per the Planning Department; and East Line Road - Section 36, Township 2 North and Range 4 East, per the Federal government.

The best location I ever saw or heard for this cabin was the local description of "the last place painted yellow, on the left, about two miles up Gamma Gulch Road from Pipes Canyon." Colorful, homemade signs placed at key intersections by property owners also directed confused or lost visitors. Many remain to this day and are credited with leading countless weary travelers to their destinations long after their GPS systems were no longer in range of reliable satellite communication. Seems a small price to pay for the tranquility one finds in the hi-desert wilderness north of Yucca Valley.



David Dowling currently lives in San Bernardino, California with his wife, Cathy. Look for more of his essays in upcoming issues of the *MBHS Newsletter Quarterly*.

Holiday from the Mine



A white enameled wash pan sat on a bench outside the door and you dipped the icy water from the bucket nearby, tossed the dirty water over the bank and wiped on the roller towel hung beside the door while the next man took his turn at the wash basin. But when Kate stepped out a second time, waved her dish towel in the breeze and yelled, "Come and get it!" you'd best take a seat on one of the long benches at the table. Kate had a shrill squeaky voice that could cut a man down to size if he was late for one of her exotic meals. John Olson, mine foreman, said grace, his Swedish accent blessed the food and also the hands that prepared it. Kate was a darned good cook, by Yee.

I was sitting beside big George Natvick, driver of the onyx truck and semi which hauled the huge blocks of translucent marble over fifty miles of treacherous desert road to the train station at Garnet just north of Palm Springs. George was saying, "Let me tell you, girl, it takes a man to stop the onyx truck when it's loaded and rolling down this hellish canyon road but I killed 'er dead when I saw them two up on your cabin roof sawing the ridge pole in half. I walked in to the clearing and caught 'em with a pickup loaded with your furniture. It was me who run 'em off and saved your table that time." George took the platter being passed and speared himself a couple of slabs of roast meat with his fork.

To my left, Carl Nyberg, retired seaman and an investor in the quarry reached across the table for a biscuit. "Don't you worry none about dat cabin. It are not going any place til spring. Ve put dat roof back ship shape ven da time is right, yah."

Across the table another partner, Pete Lager, was waving a jelly glass half full of wine above his head. "Von't nobody listen to me? I want a chance to say the only toast I know." His black eyes sparkled and his wide smile showed several gold teeth as he

repeated, "Here's to the world ve all live in, vere de cates are eating the rats and the rats are eating the cats, nobody ever wins." In Pete's philosophy, there were human cats and rats to cope with.

From the far end of the table, pretty Charolet Schley winked at me while buxom Kate filled her coffee cup. She and her miner husband, George, would be spending the winter in the city where their son, Bob, was going to school. I also had a job waiting for me in town where I expect to work and save for the time when the snow melted in the spring, and I, like so many of us, could return to the Pipes country with a grubstake.



Pipes Canyon, 1938. The Swedes, Carl Nyberg, Pete Lager and John Olson, with Kate Harvey, the mine cook, at their house in Pipes Canyon, several miles below the onyx mine. Photo by Ruth Duarte

Outside the clouds hovered low, "spitting snow." Most of the crew had tossed their bed rolls in their own cars and were anxious to clear the mouth of the canyon before dark. Kate saw each one off with a generous portion of mince pie wrapped in wax paper. After they were gone, John and Pete helped Kate pile dishes and food in boxes and pack them in the station wagon. Dishes could be washed when Kate had more time down at the lower camp. Carl Nyberg put out the fires and locked up. The Onyx mine was officially closed for the winter, about time too. Up here at the 8,000 foot level on the mountain, the bears had already dened up and the big cats would be following the deer and small game down to the lower ledges and dry washes of the mesas. The three onyx mine partners and their cook were planning to mine gold down in the lower part of the desert where the sun was still warm. Why not look for "color" in the riffles of a dry washer while soaking up the warmth of the low desert sunshine?

Everything at camp would be snowed in and frozen until the next spring, so in the last light of the afternoon, we headed down the canyon ... to happy holidays.



WELCOME NEW[†] & RETURNING MEMBERS

Ken Arnett
with a Lifetime Membership
as a Birthday Gift
from Marion Arnett.

**Sherri Andrews, Marie Baca,
Sigrid Hudson & Greg Bishop,
Kristina Brook,
John Coogen, Eve Ewing,
Mary & Arthur Gerpheide,
Sandor Henry, Therese Hone,
Kathy Lahti,
Audrey Lechtenberger,
Michael Marks, Carole Miller,
James & Nan O'Keefe,
Dean Pieper, Don Risser,
and Deborah Turner.**

Rejoining :
**Pioneertown Motel,
Buck & Carol Vaughn
and Richard, Theresa,
Richie & Jimmy Deaver.**

**Apologies to new member
Carol Camrin,
whose name was incorrect
in our Fall 2011 newsletter.**

**Thank you all who invested in
historical preservation and
renewed membership.**

*Because of space limitations,
we no longer print renewals*

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

longtime members

**Mel Bailey
Jim Brock
Ernie Brown
Ann Horsefield
& Onie Jones.**

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Note the expiration date on your label. Renewing your membership prior to being invoiced saves a lot of time and expense so please ... **renew before you're due!**

And if you elected to receive the paperless Newsletter, you'll receive a paperless invoice as well!

Everyone makes mistakes. If your expiration date is incorrect, your address needs updating, or your email has changed, **please let me know.**

New Members We continue a tradition of welcoming new members each newsletter and are thrilled to count so many this issue. Welcome, we hope you'll take advantage of all the benefits MBHS has to offer.

Volunteers I've served as Membership Chair and Co-Chair since January 2008. I could really use a hand 🙋. Contact me if you could volunteer a few hours weekly.

Gift Memberships When you give a Gift Membership you unlock endless possibilities for discovery and learning for the lucky recipient, plus you support the Histori-

cal Society's efforts at preservation and education. Simply complete an Order Form like the one below. We'll write a warm *Welcome Letter* on your behalf and send it to your recipient and on the day of your choosing. Contact me if you have questions.

Go Green; Go Paperless If you're still receiving your Newsletter Quarterly via the U.S. Postal Service, try having it delivered to your email inbox instead! Paperless subscribers save paper, postage, printing & production costs. Try it and if you don't like it, you can go back to the printed edition any time. Contact me.

Wanted Volunteers to sign up businesses for the PRIVILEGED MEMBERSHIP program. It doesn't cost the business and the program brings our members to their store. This program cannot move forward without volunteer help.

Sincerely, *Carole Kester*

Membership Chair, Email Coordinator

760-365-4096 pioneertowndolls@earthlink.net



MORONGO BASIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving Our Past For Our Future

P.O. Box 2046 • Yucca Valley, CA 92286

760-364-2000

Email: MBHS.history@gmail.com

www.mbhs.net

MISSION STATEMENT

The specific purpose of this (non-profit) corporation is to collect, conserve and exhibit artifacts; to collect, display, interpret and publish memorabilia relating to the history of the Morongo Basin; to locate, identify and preserve historic sites; to promote the research and study of local history, and to share the rich heritage of the Morongo Basin with all the communities within and surrounding it.

MEMBER INTERESTS:

I would be interested in volunteering for:

- Docent tours of MBHS Museum & Research Center.
- Help maintain the grounds or house at MBHS Museum & Research Center.
- I would be interested in serving as an officer (specify) _____
- I would be interested in serving on a committee: (circle)

Programs	Membership	Auditing	Budgeting	Fundraising	Hostess/Server	Other
----------	------------	----------	-----------	-------------	----------------	-------
- Telephone committee or liaison representative for my community
- Research land records; member inquiries; requests from public.
- I can file/transcribe/do registrar or archive work.
- I could do video/oral interviews with people within the communities.
- I could help with events and programs / marketing / sales / advertising / newsletter.

FOR MBHS USE ONLY

Date received: _____ Cash: \$ _____ Check: # _____

Date received by Treasurer: _____ Date Newsletter sent: _____

NOTES:
(Revised 3/09)

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

MEMBERSHIP (Please check one) New Renewal

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES (Please check one)

- Individual.....\$20.00 per year
- Family (1 address).....\$35.00 per year
- Organization.....\$40.00 per year
- Businesses.....\$45.00 per year
- Life (1 Ind/Bus/Org).....\$300.00 per person

**Please make checks payable to:
MORONGO BASIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Name: _____
LAST FIRST MI.

Additional Name (Family Membership only): _____

Mailing Address: _____
P.O. BOX or STREET

CITY STATE ZIP

Telephone: (_____) _____

E-mail: _____ Check here for paperless Newsletter

MORONGO BASIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

GIFT SHOP

Open every day 10 to 5



Afghans are IN!



MBHS GIFT SHOP

*inside Tamma's
Magic Mercantile*

55727 Twentynine Palms Hwy. • Old Towne Yucca Valley • 760.369.1970

Just in time for winter. Stop by the MBHS gift shop and see our selection of new afghans. They are representations of our great West and they will keep you very warm! Check our many other selections that are ideal for you or as gifts. The gift shop selection of items changes frequently. It is always a "fun visit" to stop by the gift shop.

Check the expiration date on your mailing label. It may be time to renew your membership.

If you are not now receiving event updates & reminders via email and would like to, write Carole Kester at pioneertowndolls@earthlink.net




Morongo Basin Historical Society
 P.O. Box 2046, Yucca Valley, CA 92286
 www.MBHS.net

Preserving
 our past
 for
 the
 future