The 1904 Oklahoma Prairie Fire

When we hear of wildfires, we think of California. The Golden State leads the nation in both the number of wildfires and in the destruction that they cause. Other heavily forested states like Alaska, Colorado and Oregon also come to mind. It is somewhat of a surprise then to find that Texas is number two, after California, in wildfire danger and that the state of Oklahoma also makes the top ten list. Both states are susceptible to prairie fires which are becoming larger and more frequent.

What prompted interest in this topic was an article in the November 5, 2018, edition of New Yorker Magazine. “The Day the Great Plains Burned,” by Ian Frazier, reported on a gigantic prairie fire that spread over three states, Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas, on March 6, 2017, and burned almost 2 million acres in a single day. In his report, Frazier describes howling winds (50-60 mph gusts), downed power lines, burning tumbleweeds hurtling through the air, and thousands of cattle either being killed or horribly burned. He vividly describes how “the wind swept up the dry grass until the air itself was on fire.”

We are fortunate to be able to provide a historical perspective to this topic of prairie fires. Vernette Landers, who was born in Lawton, Oklahoma, in 1912, devoted two chapters in an unpublished history of her pioneer family in Oklahoma to different accounts of the prairie fire of 1904. One chapter is from the viewpoint of her mother, LaVerne Hamilton Stevens, whose hometown of Lawton was threatened by the fire but which was saved by the actions of its citizens. The other chapter tells of how the fire burned down the homestead of her father, Fred Trosper, and how he and his family survived.

Both fires, the one in 1904 and the one in 2017, were huge mega-fires, each burned more than three thousand square miles. Also, the conditions were similar, especially the high winds which spread the fires rapidly.

Here is a March 3, 1904 New York Times account of the Oklahoma Prairie Fire of 1904:

**Lawton Saved After Desperate Night Battle – Five Lives Lost**

Lawton, Oklahoma, March 3 – For hours tonight 5,000 persons fought a great prairie fire which threatened this city. The advance line of the fire was fully two miles in length and came in a semi-circular form. A thousand men turned their efforts to checking the grass borders of the reservation at the city limits.

Water from every source, carried in every conceivable way, was distributed along the line and carried all around the city limits. This served the purpose of checking the advance lines of the fire, but was of little avail in hindering the continual rolling of the firebrands into the streets of the city.

In more than a hundred places flames arose from dwellings, barns and outbuildings, but whenever a blaze grew,
men were present to quench it with water. As a result of the cool judgement of the fighters, the city’s loss was only $10,000.

Families lay out on the prairie throughout the freezing night after the storm had passed with only thin clothes on their backs. Hundreds of persons are destitute, and are suffering intensely from the cold.

Reports received here indicate that five persons have been burned to death and 3,000 square miles of territory in Kiowa and Comanche Counties swept by fires. Hundreds of people are homeless, and it is impossible to estimate accurately the financial loss owing to the wide extent of country affected.

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Following is Vernette Landers’ description of the night of the fire in Lawton as experienced by her grandparents, Walter and Nan Stevens, and mother, LaVerne (“Girlie”). Walter was a prominent judge, attorney and businessman in Lawton. Their daughter, “Girlie,” was 12 years old at the time of the fire.

**Lawton is Saved by a Backfire, 1904**

After supper, which was around six o’clock, Walter used to walk down to the Post Office at 303 C Street to get his mail. Joe White had established it. Lon Chaney, the man of a thousand faces, had his Dance and Acting Studio upstairs.

Walter could never resist stopping at Jack Messinger’s Candy Shop on D Street on the way to his office to drop off his mail. Two big windows full of candies led him in to look at the contents in the glass cases. His favorite candy was a marshmallow dipped in a brown sugar syrup. Walter liked to talk to the little, dark-haired owner, because he was always smiling and had pleasant conversation to offer.

At the office, Walter would open his important mail and then return home. Nan and Girlie would be waiting to join him in a game of Whist, which they usually played for about an hour before going to bed.

On the night of March 4, 1904, at about eight o’clock, their game was interrupted by a strong wind that made so much noise it caused them to go out on the porch to see what was happening. They saw tumbleweeds aflame rolling down the streets and into the yards. Washtubs, blown by the wind, were bouncing along the streets. It had been a bright moonlight night, but the moon was obscured by smoke.

Walter said to Nan, “Get the kid to help you. Start pumping water at once and put it in the washtubs while I get some men together.” Girlie and Nan went into the kitchen where there was a hand pump at the sink. This pump brought water from the cistern into the house. Girlie pumped while Nan held a kettle under the spout.

C.P. had taught Walter how to fight prairie fires in Kansas. Walter phoned the fire department, and yelled into the mouthpiece, “This is Stevens. We need a backfire out on the Boundary, or we’ll lose the town! Is it okay to start one? I had experience with this in Kansas.”

The Fire Chief came to the phone and said, “All our equipment and men have been deployed. If you can get enough volunteers together to control a backfire, for God’s sake make one. I’ll call for volunteer fire wagons.”

Walter hung up the receiver and ran out into the street and to his neighbors’ doors screaming, “Prairie fire! Let’s start a backfire. We need a backfire. Come help start a backfire.”

The neighbors he contacted called to other neighbors, and they all began to gather in Stevens’ front yard. There they organized into groups. Some of the men went off with coal oil cans and matches to start a backfire.

Women went into the kitchen to help pump water. One woman pumped water into kettles. Another would pick up a kettle and pour water into a bucket. The buckets were carried to the back porch where the water was dumped into tubs into which Walter had thrown gunny sacks that he brought up from the barn.

Two men would pick up a tub filled with water and gunny sacks and carry it out the back yard to the alley where
they went east to Fourth Street and a half block north to Boundary where the backfires had been started. Men at the front on Boundary took the wet gunny sacks from the tubs and beat the flames of the backfires in order that the fire would not come upon the town.

The word spread to other sections. Men and women from all over town came to help stop the fire at Boundary. Water was carried from cisterns and wells at other locations. Wagons were finally brought to help haul water. Women at the front lines used their handkerchiefs to wipe the dirt and cinders out of the eyes of the men so they could see.

On one of the trips into the kitchen to try to speed up the water delivery, Walter called Nan aside and said to her, “Nan, we may have to evacuate the town. Go pack up some of the things you most want to save. Make the bundle light, because we won't be able to take too much.”

Nan went upstairs to carry out his order. While she was upstairs, she looked out the window and saw billows of fire, like waves of an ocean, moving across the fields. She said aloud, “Oh, God, is this the relief from suffering I have been praying for?”

Nan pulled a sheet out of the linen closet and laid it on the bed. She piled things into the sheet, tied the ends into one knot and carried the bundle down to the bottom of the stairs. Next morning when all was safe, Walter untied the knot and opened the bundle. It contained some old house dresses and the lid off of the sugar bowl.

The backfire stopped the prairie fire short of Boundary, and the town was saved. Walter won the acclaim of his neighbors. Some of them collected money and bought an Indian blanket which they gave to him with a note expressing appreciation. We still have the blanket. The center has a pink background with white crescent moons and stars separated on each side with green, white, pink, and black stripes from two ends with a pink background containing green crescent moons and stars. A heavy, long, green fringe is crocheted in an intricate pattern all around the blanket.

Meanwhile, three miles away, another family was battling the prairie fire. These were Vernette’s paternal grandparents, Robert and Katherine Trosper and their sons Pete, the eldest and Fred, Vernette’s father. The family had moved to Oklahoma from Kansas following Robert’s graduation from law school. Robert Elijah Trosper, a lawyer whose nickname was “Lige,” was away in Lawton when the fire reached his homestead outside the town. Pete and Fred went to school in Lawton. In the evening before the fire, Pete had snuck away from home to go to a dance in a little mining town called Mountain View, close to the Wichita Mountains. So, when the prairie fire struck their house, only Katherine and Fred were at home. Here is Vernette Landers account of the fire at the Trosper farm.

A Prairie Fire Destroys the Homestead, 1904

After Fred heard the clatter of Pete’s horse’s hoofs going over the hill, he closed both the big windows to shut the cold out. He banged shut his math book and threw it on the desk. He put out the wall light and lay on the bed, because he kept thinking of his big brother, who he believed had escaped with the greatest of success. Fred could only think it would create trouble.

“How stinky!” he said aloud. As he wrinkled his nose he thought he smelled smoke. When he realized it was really fire, he ran downstairs screaming loudly, “Fire! Fire! Smell the smoke!”

Kate came out of her room in a long dressing gown, her eyes half shut with sleep. Her long, brown hair was falling down her back. Fred could tell by her expression that she was afraid. Together they ran through the hall and out on the veranda. The sky was red, and each tree appeared to be a torch. The smoke was already thick enough to make them cough as the wind whipped the fire over the prairie.

Kate said, “We may be able to save our clothes if you gather them up and put them down in the cave.”

In answer, Fred ran upstairs and hurried back down to the cave with all their best clothes. On the way, he yelled, “Mom, run for the ploughed ground while I try to save the livestock.”
The animals were already wild. By the time Fred reached the barn, the flames had jumped the fence. He cut all the ropes that bound the horses to their stalls, and tried to herd them to broken ground. They were all crazy with fright and unmanageable.

Fred was able to snatch up one halter. He slipped it over the head of the horse they used for driving to town. The boys also used this horse when they wanted to take a girl out in the buggy. The horse had one fault. He would stop at every house where the boys had taken out a girl. The girl in the buggy would know all the girls the boys had dated.

“Come on Blue Stem,” Fred coaxed. He stroked Blue Stem gently and led him firmly away. His own pony whinnied and made him wish he could get him at the same time, but he knew he couldn’t. He hurried to Kate in the ploughed field. The air was filled with awful sounds. He begged his mother, “Hold Blue Stem while I go back for Comanche.

As Fred turned toward the barn, there was a loud crash. The barn walls collapsed, and the roof fell toward the floor. The flames shot out on all sides. In the light, he could see all the livestock burning. His heart fell. The odor of the livestock’s burnt flesh was sickening, and his stomach was churning. Fred ran back through the thickening smoke to his mother.

The wind blew lighted straw from a burning haystack onto the roof of their home, and the house began to burn. They watched it become a pyre of all their past labor and love. There were blasts from shotguns that had been left inside the house. Then Fred heard Penny cry as the little dog died.

As Kate watched the house burn, she recalled how not too long ago she had stood out in the rain holding an umbrella over a cook stove that had been temporarily set outside and had prayed that rain would not put out the fire so she could serve dinner to her family. Now she prayed for rain to put out the fire.

As they thought of their sacrifices and their loss, Fred and Kate clung close to each other, and he explained what Pete had done. The wind blew the fire elsewhere, and the heat subsided. Fred said, “Let’s go into town.” Kate nodded in assent.

As they passed by the charred mass where their house had been, they stopped. Both were sobbing. Fred helped Kate climb upon Blue Stem, and he led the horse away. As they moved along slowly, they shivered from the cold wind. The shock of their great loss filled them with the deepest despair. The wind blew cinders into their eyes and noses and mouths. They wheezed, and kept trying to turn their heads away from the wind, but it seemed to continually change direction. They had to face into the wind.

Lige was attending a Masonic Lodge banquet in town when he heard about the fire. This immediately started him on his way home. He saw women manning pumps at wells and cisterns. He passed men carrying tubs of water. Winds of high velocity were tossing washtubs in his way. As he drove through all this commotion, he became more and more concerned about what was happening on the homestead. He laid a whip alongside of his horse to make it go faster. This was something he rarely did.

Fred and Kate could hear another horse approaching. Then Fred heard the sound of wheels and his father’s dog bark. He ran toward the buggy wailing, “Dad, we are cleaned out!”

“Where is your brother?” his father shouted.

Fred answered, “He will have to do his own explaining.” Fred and Kate had made this agreement.

Kate, on Blue Stem, had followed Fred. She pleaded, “Let’s not go back tonight.” They decided to squeeze into the office for the night. Lige had purchased a two-story brick building in town. He maintained his law office upstairs and rented the lower floor to a store and later to a restaurant. The office was small, because Lige would rather break horses than take a case to court. He would go to Denver, Colorado, buy a carload of wild horses, and ship them to Lawton. The boys and hired riders would drive them out to pasture on the homestead.
On weekends, the boys would break them for riding, and Lige would sell them at a profit.

His other interest was lending money to the business people and to the Indians. If the Indians couldn’t make their payments, he took things in trade, such as blankets, jewelry, beaded bags and moccasins which he either kept or sold. He also sold insurance – he was a good salesman. In addition, he had several farms he leased out to share croppers. He was always going from one farm to the other to see how things were progressing. It seemed to give him much pleasure.

None of them rested in the quiet, little room in the cold building, because all were thinking of the great loss the fire brought them.

When the first ray of light appeared, they set out to view all the damage that had been done. Lige rode Blue Stem, and Kate drove a one-seated buggy hitched to Bonnie, a bay mare that was Kate’s favorite riding horse. Kate had changed to clothes she kept at the office to wear to special occasions in town. Fred sat on top of the back rack of the buggy.

When they reached the scene of the tragedy, they felt bound close together with greatest empathy. A singed kitten, leaving a trail of bloody footprints, came walking toward them in obvious pain. It was the only living thing to bid them welcome to the black devastation that had once been their house.

Fred hunted for his pony and his beloved dog. He found their charred skeletons in the mire. He collected all the remains he could find, and sobbing laid them tenderly into a grave that he had dug deep and with care. He filled the hole and raked the top gently. Then he went down to the rock cave to get his good clothes. He slipped his hands under the pile to lift them up. His arms sifted only ashes except for one watch which was all melted. Fred turned around to leave, and silhouetted in the doorway was a familiar figure but an unwelcome sight. There stood his brother Pete dressed in his very best clothes. His pony was behind him, and his dog was at his side.

Fred shook his head and said, “You are one lucky devil!”

But with tears in his eyes, Pete answered, “You don’t know what it is like to come over a hill, neither seeking nor expecting to find any change, and discover everything you hold dear could vanish in just one single night. And not know if the prairie fire had consumed your family.”

Some neighbors came by to offer condolence. They said, “We saw several head of cattle over on Wolf Creek. Some of them looked as if they were yours.” Fred and Pete rode on Pete’s horse to Wolf Creek, which ran by the homestead. They rounded up the cattle that belonged to them and herded them back to where the barn had been. The cows’ bags were encrusted. They had to be milked with care.

Lige went back to town and returned with lumber, nails, some tools and chains, and salve for the cows. Lige and the boys built a shed that would serve as shelter for them. They made stakes for the cows.

Lige moved Kate and Pete into a small frame house he owned on E Street while he had a larger home built on D Street and Seventh. He had acquired the lot at the lot sale when the town was first opened. Lige had a stone mason come from Lawrence, Kansas, to build a rock cave and foundation for the new house. About six feet of this finely chiseled stone was exposed to view between the ground and the house. The house was a two-story, frame building with five steps that led to the front porch.

It was decided that Fred would stay out of school that semester. He would live on the homestead, clean up the mess, break prairie, and take care of the cows. Lige moved out a little wooden shack on steel wheels that thrashers occupied when they thrashed grain. This small shack was Fred’s living quarters at the farm while the house and barn were being rebuilt.

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**Newlin and Vernette Landers Founder’s Day**

On March 10, 2019, the Morongo Basin Historical Society held its first annual Newlin and Vernette Landers Founder’s Day honoring the Landers who were instrumental in founding the community. The Historical Society’s Museum and Research Center is located on the property that was the Landers’ former residence. This made the Founder’s Day event and Open House doubly important.
The next two articles were prepared for Founder’s Day so we are including them in this newsletter. The first is the story of Vernette’s bobcat raising and breeding experiments. The second is a short biography of Newlin Landers for whom the community of Landers was named.

Raising Bobcats In Landers

In 1966 a friend gave Vernette Landers a male bobcat named Impy and a year later someone gave her a female bobcat named Libra. At first, she and husband Newlin kept Impy in the main house but although he was loving and tame, he tore up so many books, upholstery and other items that they moved him next to Libra in the bobcat house, just off the porch at the back of the house. The famous Linn twins, Carroll and Traverse, constructed the bobcat house using rocks from their mines. Impy and Libra went on to have nine litters, but only one of their offspring, Sissy, a female, born in 1974, survived.

In addition to raising the bobcats, Vernette and Newlin kept chickens, mallard ducks, rabbits, 20 to 30 domestic and cross-bred cats, a kit fox and tortoises. Vernette also befriended a raven, she called Squawkie, who would ride part of the way to town on the hood of her car before flying back to the house. Later she had another raven named Talkie which was also the title of a children’s book about ravens that she published.

Vernette purchased a Siamese cat, called Mama Cat and her second litter from a friend in 1976. The four baby cats were named Pretend, Personality, No Count and Ms Quote. Since their father was a “bob-tailed” cat and Mama Cat was a Siamese, Vernette referred to the baby cats as “Si-bobs”. Vernette kept busy corresponding with many different people about cats and frequently gave cats away to friends and acquaintances locally and from outside of California.


In 1977, Vernette wrote a letter to Marlin Perkins, famous as the television host of “Zoo Parade” and then “Wild Kingdom” from 1963-1985, explaining her experiments in raising and crossbreeding domestic and wild (bob) cats. She explained that she became interested in crossbreeding the species in an effort to prove that “gene therapy” could be effective in combating and curing disease. She was unable to get funding for her efforts from a university because she said it required a residency at the school in order to qualify.

Beginning in the 1980’s California required that owners of most wild animals apply for an annual permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife in order to care for and raise them. The owners or keepers had to pass an annual inspection as part of the permitting process.

Vernette acquired bobcats Jamie and Tommy from Gordon Meredith’s collection of animals known as “Orphans of the Wild,” located in Victor Valley, California. Jamie was famous as the bobcat who was filmed jumping over a Mercury Lynx in a 1981 television automobile commercial (see You Tube). Meredith was a well-known animal trainer who was the proprietor of a zoo on Palisades Ranch in Victor Valley. His animals appeared in movies as well as in television shows and commercials.

After 1992, it became illegal to raise bobcats and other wild animals for private purposes in California. Only if you owned a bobcat prior to 1992 could you get a permit to raise it. By this time, Vernette Landers had lost her last bobcat and was no longer raising them.
Newlin Landers – A Short Biography

Newlin Jewel Landers, for whom the town of Landers was named, was born in North Salem, Indiana, in 1906. He started working as an office boy at the age of 13 and soon had his own business on the side, beginning a life-long career as entrepreneur and self-made businessman. Later, in the early 1940’s, he became the co-owner of Selwyn-Landers Valve Company in Los Angeles.

In 1947 Newlin began flying to the Landers area and was soon so captivated by the desert that he and seven friends filed on adjoining five-acre homestead sites adjacent to the Landers Airstrip. In 1950, several residents met to decide on a name for the area and Landers’ name was selected, according to one version of the story, because he was the only one absent from the meeting.

Newlin’s interest in the desert continued to grow. He purchased Havasu Land- ing in Needles and Navajo Tract in Apple Valley. But it was Landers that held his greatest interest. In 1953, he started the Landers Water Delivery Company and later owned a gas station and worked as a contractor installing water tanks and systems.

One day early in 1959 he delivered water to a widow’s residence at the corner of Old Woman Springs Road and Lum Lane. The two struck up a conversation and Newlin asked her for a date which she readily accepted. Several months later Newlin and the widow, Vernette Trosper Lum, were married in Las Vegas, Nevada.

From then on, Newlin and Vernette teamed up and were instrumental in the development of Landers, contributing their time and energy as well as land, services, and money to community projects and civic organizations such as an elementary school, the local women’s club, the volunteer fire department and a post office. Newlin’s focus on delivering water, digging wells, and installing water systems was critical to the area’s growth.

When Newlin died in April, 1990, one newspaper account referred to him as a “modern day pioneer” a description which captures the spirit of the man whose contributions were so important to the community he helped to found.

2-YEAR-OLD GIRL SAVED FROM 40-POUND WILDCAT GREATER MORONGO BASIN THE SUN

Animal shot in yard of Yucca Valley building August 13, 1955

GREATER MORONGO BASIN—Clay Tunstall and John Arch of Yucca Valley experienced a harrowing few minutes with a 40-pound wildcat late Tuesday evening in the yard of George’s Skyroom, off the Victorville Rd (now known as Old Woman Springs Road). It all started when they stopped for a soft drink and saw the wildcat standing within 50 feet of the 2-year-old baby daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Belfield, owners of the Skyroom. The cat was so huge that Tunstall asked Arch to go in the house and ask Mrs. Belfield if they had a huge pet cat. Mrs. Belfield replied by screaming, “My baby, my baby.”

Tunstall called for a gun and finally his 7-year-old daughter found a gun and five bullets. Tunstall says he made three direct hits that caused the wildcat to tumble head over heels, but he did not kill the animal.

Project Bobcat

In January 2013, not far from the boundary to Joshua Tree National Park, a trapper found what he thought was the ideal spot, near some boulders, to place a bobcat trap. But in fact, his choice was far from perfect and he would find out he had been in the wrong place at the wrong time. A short time later, Tom O’Key, Joshua Tree resident and environmental activist, found the bobcat trap on his private property and called the San Bernardino Sheriff’s Department and informed the dispatcher. The sheriff quickly returned his call and told O’Key that unless his property was posted to prohibit trapping, the trap was legal and he was required to return the trap to its owner. The trapper was legally allowed to trap on his property without asking for his permission.

O’Key’s next move proved to be crucial and was a catalyst for what became known as Project Bobcat. He called a reporter at the local newspaper, the Hi-Desert Star, explained what had happened, and asked him if he would return the trap to the trapper in exchange for the trapper’s side of the story. The paper agreed to return the trap and when the trapper was contacted, he defended his right to trap bobcats. He claimed he mistakenly thought he had put his trap on public land. He said he could get anywhere from $80 to $1,700 per pelt on the international market, primarily China and Russia.
No matter what the trapper said, it wasn’t enough to stop what happened next. His actions had set off an intense grassroots movement – Project Bobcat - that began in Joshua Tree on January 24, 2013, the day Tom O’Key found the trap on his land. The crusade culminated in Sacramento later that year with California Governor Jerry Brown signing the Bobcat Protection Act of 2013, sponsored by Democratic assemblyman Richard Bloom from Santa Monica, a long-time wildlife advocate.

The new law went into effect on January 1, 2014 and had three main provisions. First, it prohibited trapping along the boundaries of Joshua Tree National Park by establishing a buffer zone which would give bobcats room to crisscross the park border without being trapped, just outside the boundary. Second, the law required the California Department of Fish and Game to establish similar no-trapping areas along the boundaries of California’s other national parks, monuments, wildlife refuges and other designated areas throughout the state. Finally, the law banned bobcat trapping on private land without the written consent of the land owner.

As pleased as the backers of the Bobcat Protection Act were, they did not stop there. They continued their efforts to influence the public, legislators, the media and the bureaucracy until in August, 2015, the California Fish and Game Commission voted to end bobcat trapping throughout California - in other words, no more trapping of bobcats, a total ban. Now, less than four years later, the Wildlife Protection Act of 2019, introduced in January, proposes to ban all fur trapping in California for all wildlife, not just for bobcats.

The Morongo Inn

In the last newsletter we referenced the Morongo Valley Inn in an article about the Redden family. Jesse Jarman, in an interview, mentioned that her father would bring her books that he would get at the inn when he walked there to get pipe tobacco. We thought we should provide a little background on the inn since it was one of the earliest businesses in the Morongo Basin.

In articles it is referred to by several names, including the Morongo Valley Inn, the Lodge and the Morongo Inn, although the sign on front read “Morongo Valley Inn.” In any case, it was one of the first buildings in Morongo Valley and according to one account it was the original stage stop from Prescott, Arizona, to Los Angeles.

There may have been a lodge first, built before 1920 by a man known as “Daddy” Kiler. It had a rock reservoir and a few rental cabins. Surrounding the property was an orchard. It attracted health seekers from the city as well as travelers on their way to gold mines further east in Yucca Valley and beyond.

DeFaus and Helen Geils acquired the Lodge in 1923 and according to a compilation of Morongo Valley History, they were the ones who built the Morongo Inn using rocks from different parts of the desert. However, an owner from the 1990s said that different parts of the inn were built at different times. One wing was built around 1880, another around 1900 and the upstairs started in 1920 and completed in 1927. So, the Geils may have very well completed and added on to what had already been built.

The Geils promoted the property as a staging area for film producers looking for locations for silent western films. The couple would make trips to Burbank and Glendale to pick up the film moguls and bring them to the desert. Zane Grey’s “Desert Gold” was one of the first movies to be filmed in the area, at the site of the old Warren ranch nearby.

Following the Geils, there has been a succession of owners and a colorful history. It has been reported that Chicago gangster Al Capone stayed at the Morongo Inn while waiting for his resort Two Bunch Palms to be built. He apparently had a private card room on the second floor of the inn, overlooking the valley, where only a few close friends would be admitted. Later, sculptor and painter Carlo Wahlbeck lived on the property with his wife Irma for five years.
Grant’s Market Site Report by Steve Hanson

Steve Hanson is a volunteer researcher for the Morongo Basin Historical Society. He writes site reports for future reference and he tries to choose historical sites where there is little written history. He recently prepared a site report on Grant’s Market, a general store built in 1947.

Granville (Grant) Redden was the second oldest son of John and Edna Redden, early homesteaders who came to Yucca Valley in 1923. We wrote about the Redden family in the January, February, March Newsletter 2019. They moved to Redlands, California from Kansas in 1920, mostly due to the influence of Hezekiah Quick, Edna’s father. Quick, a Civil War veteran, settled in Yucca Valley in 1914. He wrote letters to his family praising the country and these convinced the Reddens to make the move to California.

When the family came to Yucca Valley in 1923, they brought only their two youngest children, Jessie and Robert. Grant Redden stayed behind with his other siblings in Redlands, which had established schools. He would come out to visit the homestead during holidays and summer vacations. After graduation he moved full time to Yucca Valley but did not build the store until 1947.

Today the Grant Redden building is at 55231 Highway 62, Yucca Valley, Ca. It sits on the south side of the highway just west of Kickapoo Trail.

This is the Grants Market as it was in 1948. The car shown is a 1948 Packard so fits in with the time period perfectly.

First homestead cabin of the Redden family, 1923, located on Kickapoo Trail, YV.

On June 14th I received an email from Emily Chavous, asking if I knew more about the building on this site and its history. She shared with me a 1950 check (Actually a short term loan) found by the new owners under the bathroom floor during renovations.

It's April now which means it is tax filing time. The following article from the Desert Journal September 18, 1953 is a report about the penalties imposed on the jack rabbit homesteaders if they failed to file and pay taxes on their claims.

5-Acre Tract Cabins May Be Sold For Tax Liens

Failure to File Common Occurrence

Failure of many 5-acre government lessees to file property tax notices may result in seizure of the property for delinquent taxes according to Deputy Tax Assessor Vic Curran of the County’s Assessor’s office. Mr. Curran issued a warning this week to five-acre tract owners that they must file tax notices, and pay taxes on these five-acre claims, or they will be sold for taxes when they become delinquent.

"There seems to be a common belief that since these 5-acre leases are federal property that they are not subject to county taxes,” stated Curran, “but this is false assumption.”

The assessors have a difficult time locating improved property and the owners to serve notice that taxes must be paid. However, the law does not require that the owner be notified in person. The attachment of a “re-notice” tag on the property is in most cases the only notice that will be received.
According to the Land Office all 5-acre leases receive a tax notification with their filing receipt, but apparently many persons either ignore the slip or overlook it. This slip is important, according to Curran, since it is the first notification that the lease will receive concerning taxes. In many cases it is the only one since the builder must file for a permit; and failure to do so deprives the Assessor’s office of their only means of knowing it the property is improved, except by exploration.

Recently, the deputy assessor and his assistant Gerry Davis have been running themselves frantic in and around the hills and sagebrush locating improved property. Where the property has not been registered they are forced to “red tag” it for taxes if the taxes are due.

Mr. Curran stated that there are going to be a lot of “hoppin mad” 5-acre leasers when they discover that their property has been sold for taxes, but that the County has no other recourse for collecting the taxes since the owners have failed to register. He stated further that many do not take out a building permit (this is also mentioned on the filing slip), and that they can also be penalized for this. The filing permit is one method used by the county to locate property.

Curran suggested that leasors who read this notice should pass the word around to check for red tags and help straighten up the situation or lose their property.— Desert Journal September 18, 1953

Charlie Reche’s handmade dry washer donated by his grandson Morgan Reche

This is the hand-made dry washer of Charles Reche, who was the first person to homestead in the Landers area near the site of what is now the Integratron. Reche, who was an alfalfa farmer, teamster, gold miner, deputy sheriff and businessman, in 1887 filed on a homestead northeast of Morongo Valley which was identified on some maps as Reche’s Well. Reche was married to Francis Eleanor Warren, eldest daughter of Mark “Chuck” Warren and his wife Sylvia Paine Warren.

In 1909, while working as a foreman at the Desert Queen Mine, Reche heard about the manhunt for Willie Boy and volunteered to join the posse. The posse eventually trapped Willie Boy in the vicinity of Ruby Mountain and during an exchange of gunfire, Charles Reche was wounded in his leg and had to be taken out to Banning for medical treatment. For the rest of his life, Reche walked with a limp.

In 1914, Reche became the first to mine for gold on Goat Mountain. According to legend, found a piece of quartz that had broken from a site higher on the mountain. After taking it home and panning it out, he determined that it was gold, so he returned and found the origin atop the mountain. He soon moved his family closer to Goat Mountain and built a rock house and an arrastra. He worked the mine for the next 18 years, extracting approximately $6,000 in gold.

Volunteers Make Us Smile

Shout out to the 6 Marines who did the heavy lifting filling Burrtec’s largest roll-off dumpster with yard waste.

Thanks to all the volunteers who pulled and hula hoed the gardens: the Landers crew - Cary and Leslie, Jillian and Derek and Jo Marie. The Joshua Tree gang Jon, Brittany, Charlie and Michael. Johnnie Painter the Past Perfect guru, chef Kim and chief bottle washer Kate. Special thanks to Mike Lipsitz, for writing about us in the Landers column in the Hi-Desert Star.

Singer Sewing Machine Company

In 1851 Isaac Merritt Singer with New York lawyer Edward Clark founded the Singer sewing machine company. In 1860 the company was the largest manufacturer of sewing machines in the world.

Singer was claiming cumulative sales of two million machines and displaying the two millionth at the Philadelphia International Exhibition of 1876, the first official World’s Fair in the United States.

It was held from May 10 to November 10, 1876 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia.
If you have any vintage or historic photos of Old Woman Springs Ranch, the Pineapple Express railroad on the ranch, Rattlesnake Canyon, Ames Well, the Rock Corral, Heart Bar Ranch, Heart Bar Campground, Heart Bar State Park, cattle, cattle drives, cowboys, Dale Gentry, Albert Swarthout and Charlie Martin families or any related images, diaries, documents, please get in touch with us. We appreciate your help in preserving history. Contact Claudia cj61464@gmail.com and 760-366-7896.

### Tour of Old Woman Springs Ranch - Spring 2020 date to be decided

### Donations Spring 2019

- **Majorie Seary** - complete 6-volume set of Joan Wilson’s History of Morongo Basin. The **Cactus Sew-ables Quilt Club** donated $300 to support history.
- **Shane Williams**, **President of the High Desert Gold Diggers** donated items from Goat Mountain, a vintage pan, a vial of gold flakes, 3-pound, single jack hammer (QUIKWERK) and ore from Goat Mountain. **Michael Quarles** donated a 1915 Singer treadle sewing machine. **Barbara Jean Dills** donated a vintage ball & ring bunion shoe stretcher (medical tool patent 10/30/1917).  **Paul and Bertha Hadden** - color photo of a unique handmade 1928 Model A Ford tractor.

### Necessity Is the Mother of Invention

During the Depression people needed tractors but could not afford to buy them outright because money was tight. **On loan** - from Paul and Bertha Hadden. This 1928 Model A Ford was converted and used as a tractor in 1937. The hood is made from half of a 55-gallon drum. John Deere engine and gas tank. **On loan** - Wink and Ginger Thornton owners of 1922 Fairbanks Morse 1 1/2 HP gas engine and Racine Power Hacksaw vintage 1930’s.

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

- **Chino** - Dan Stratton, Joshua Tree - Norman & Patti Jensen, **Landers** - David Ruiz, **Yucca Valley** - Chris Wall, Kim Close

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### PLEASE SUPPORT OUR BUSINESS SPONSORS

- 29 Palms Band of Mission Indians
- 29 Palms Historical Society
- 29 Palms Inn
- Big O Tires - Thomas Huls
- Desert Christ Park - a Museum of Sculptures
- Dr. Robert Lombardo, DDS.
- Glenn Isaacs & Sallie Brown Isaacs
- Guity Race Club—Eric Pealstrom
- HI-DESERT AIR - Lance and Kari Cody
- Hi-Desert Nature Museum
- Hi-Desert Propane
- Hi-Desert Water Dist.
- Homestead Valley Community Council
- Integratron - Patty, Nancy & Joanne Karl
- Johnson Valley Improvement Association
- Karl Loescher
- Phillip Brown Home REALTOR - Phillip Brown
- ProVideo - Bob Stephenson
- Rainbow Stew - Stacey Clayton, Valerie Meyer, & Michelle Nemechek
- Swella Chiropractic, Inc. - Gene Swella
- Tortoise Rock Casino
- Tri-Valley Realty - Linda Paino
- Ultimate Motors - Adam Spitz
- VisitPioneertown.com - Kenneth Gentry
- Yucca Valley Insurance - The Millers