



The Hourglass



Editor Bob Tyler

Fall 2019

Interview with John Gurley by Bob Tyler, Part Two

Read Part One in the Summer 2019 newsletter at www.hspd.org

The house on the sand dune in Indian Wells had a lot of history connected with it. My dad had some minor surgery at Casita Hospital in Indio, and during his stay he got to know the administrator of the hospital, Harlow Mitchell. Harlow was the half owner of the house on the sand dune, and it had just been turned over to them from the government. My dad had heard that it was for sale and knew where it was located, but at that time you couldn't see the house from the road because it was surrounded with tamarisk trees. So, my dad ended up buying the house and property, and we moved in November of 1947, right after the military left. There were various stories about who might have lived there, some people thought the house belonged to Lucille Ball, but that was all nonsense. It was General Mark Clark's headquarters during the desert training and was used as officers' quarters, and it was a very secure place. I was told that General Patton had stayed there too. There was a concrete building and power line made of stainless steel leading out to the road and so the transformers were at the house. There were also some pads there where the military had their communication towers.



The house was built by a Los Angeles attorney named Lucian Grey and was built in stages, one year they built one part of it and the next year they built another. The architect was Gordon Kaufman who had also designed the Desert Inn and El Mirador hotels in Palm Springs. Grey's daughter Constance Billikey and her husband acquired the property in the 1930's and started farming the 100 acres that surrounded it. There was an Olympic sized swimming pool which they used as a reservoir, and the crops and citrus trees were all watered from it. The house was also used as a location for filming; there were several episodes of "The FBI" filmed there as well as a movie "Silver Chalice." The Billikeys had built a smaller Spanish style house behind the main house where the ranch foreman Frank Lawrence lived.

Some of the local people who I remember at that time were Marion Harmon and his brother who both owned acreage planted in grapes, Bert Cavanaugh had a date garden, the Connors had dates across the street; their property adjoined what is now Miles Avenue. To the west was the T. W. Braun Date Ranch and farther west was the Simpson Ranch, which

later became the Manzo Ranch. There was also Smead's Ranch and Faber's Date Garden. In the early fifty's I was allowed to drive the ranch Jeep to the market. While shopping at the market I became aware of a couple of cute young girls who were always around Suggs' Market. I damn near wore that Jeep out going to and from that market! I could just imagine how fun it would be to take those girls on a Jeep ride in the desert, but I also remember a man named Doyle warning me about monkey business with his daughters, so I stayed away for some time.



Looking west from Doc Gurley's house on the sand dune. They are just breaking ground for the Desi Arnaz hotel.

Down Highway 111 to the east was Indian Wells proper, some of the things I remember about it was that on the north side of the road there was "The Snake Pit," which was a big round container full of rattlesnakes, and they charged fifty cents to view all the snakes. Farther down the road on the south was a small "Motor Court" with little cabins, that's what they called motels in those days. Farther down there was Suggs' Market, as well as "The Hogan," which was a log cabin on a sand dune and the only place to eat and was a local hangout for Indian Wells locals. They served great hamburgers called "Hogan Burgers." Farther down there was Dan's Market which had about six cabins that they rented. A fellow named Charlie Carr rented one and had a sign out front that read "Oklahoma Charlie." Carl Bray's home and art studio was also there, there must have been some sort of water war because his water tank said "Bray's Water." I never did know what that was all about. Shortly after Miles Avenue was connected to Highway 111, construction started on what was known as "Yeakel Village," The developers were Bob Yeakel, who owned a Los Angeles Oldsmobile dealership, and Dick Lane who was an announcer on KTLA television.

When my father passed away, my mother sold the house to the Delgado family that owned the Las Casuelas restaurants, but the people in Indian Wells wouldn't have any part of it, they didn't want a restaurant there, they just wanted that house to go away. Later the City of Indian Wells condemned the property.

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President's Letter

We've been pretty lucky this summer. Except for a few weeks, this season has been pretty mild. Soon hopefully we will be leaving our air-conditioned environments, shading our eyes with our hands and scanning the horizon for the opportunities of Fall.

Speaking of opportunities, the Opening Day celebration is coming up on October 5th, from 11-1, all welcome. We've been working during the summer on new signage at the Firehouse. We've also been busy cataloguing and boxing up the architectural drawings in our collection. October also means Mini-Muster season, starting on the 1st at the five elementary schools in Palm Desert. On October 18th Paul Clark kicks off our Friday Night Lecture Series with "Capturing the Desert Wind: Wind Energy's Transformation of the Coachella Valley". On October 19th at the Firehouse we will be dedicating our exhibit room / apparatus bay to Jim West & Karen Prinzmetal at 2 PM— we hope you can join us on that day.



*Judi Pitchford and Mayor Susan Marie Weber
at the Summer Potluck*

That is just October! We haven't even mentioned November yet. In the coming weeks we will be sharing plans for sprucing up our great old Fire Engine. A special thanks to all those who came out for our Summer Potluck on July 12th. Here are some pictures from that evening.



*Board member Don Graybill at the
Summer Potluck*

Hope to see you soon,

Rob Pitchford

Dedication at the Firehouse

During the Fall Preview (October 17-20) for Modernism Week, The Historical Society will be dedicating the Jim West-Karen Prinzmetal Room at 2 PM on Saturday, October 19. These stellar local archivists and preservationists have contributed much to the current displays at the Museum, which feature the work of Walter S. White (the Wave House), William Krisel (Sandpiper), John Elgin Woolf (Marrakesh), John Outcault, and more. No architect aficionado will want to miss these exhibits and other treasures that the room offers. The dedication is open to all; refreshments and meet-and-greet at 1:30.

Do You Have A Flat File

That you're not using? The Historical Society would appreciate the donation of a flat file filing cabinet for our many vintage posters, maps and building plans. Call 760-346-6588 and leave a message. And remember, if you wish to make a special donation to the Historical Society, you can go to the website at www.hspd.org, and click on Donate Now. There is a memo area where you can describe the purpose of your donation. Thank you in advance!

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Memories of Old Indian Wells by Kathryn Coleman

My mother, Maxine Taylor (Coleman), came to the Coachella Valley in the late 1940's and stayed with her family at Sandy Korner, Faber's Date Ranch, Old Indian Wells, and Cook Street. As I was growing up Mom often took us kids to see some of the places she had lived, and particularly old Indian Wells. As a child I like to pick my parent's brains for their memories, personal stories as well as photographs. A few years ago, I finally detailed it all in a little book entitled, "Old Indian Wells, A town for Dreams."

My Mom was about 16 years old when she lived with her family at old Indian Wells, and although some people said it was just a wide spot in the road, to my mother, Indian Wells was a great adventure. In the evening she liked to take walks on the giant sand dunes and dream about her future, what her life might be and what she would do. She often found pieces of bone, pottery and arrowheads left from the local Indians who had once lived in the cove. When I was growing up my Mom took us to the old town site where we would walk and hike and find pieces of purple glass scattered across the desert. We would often hike along the well-worn mountain trails behind the town site, and it was a peacefulness that I have not experienced since then. Those trails were said to have been made by the Spanish explorers, so when we were

hiking, we felt a kinship with those ancient people.



Maxine Taylor at Sugg's Market

My Mom told us that when she lived at old Indian Wells, everyone treated each other like family. John and Maude Suggs owned and operated Suggs' Market, and Grandma Suggs sewed dresses for the neighborhood children. My mother and her sisters were some of those children. Mom said that John Gurley Jr. who lived in the beautiful house on the hill, was always asking people if he could take their photo. One day he took my mother's picture inside of Suggs' Market.

Sylvia Montoya (Valenzuela), who was a close family friend, told me that her parents, Arthur and Lucy, had owned and operated a restaurant and bar called "The Playhouse", which was located just east of the Shell gas station. The Montoyas served up a fine Mexican cuisine, and there was also a bar and little dance floor with a juke box and a shuffleboard court. Sylvia and her family lived in the back of the restaurant. Sylvia said her friend Nancy Mathers would come over and together they would dance up a storm, Sylvia said Nancy liked to spin and swing her around quickly.

In 1994 my grandmother Taylor passed away from Alzheimer's disease. When I was going through her house, I found some very old negatives enclosed in a McIntosh's Drugstore envelope. When Grandma lived at Indian Wells she had taken some photos and so I was overjoyed to find some treasured memories left by her. When I had the photos developed, the little town and its history came alive to me.

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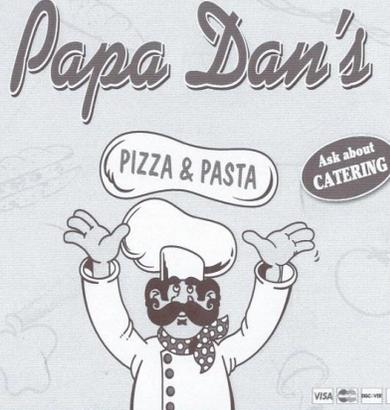
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