



The Hourglass

Memories of Highway 111

Nonagenarian Louise Neeley remembers Palm Desert

Palm Desert has many memories for me. I am going back to the mid 1930s to 1950s. Driving East from Rancho Mirage to Indio, Highway 111 was lined with date ranches, with date palms. The dates harvested in Palm Desert were top quality.

From Rancho Mirage to Indio, as one drove East, the sight of majestic palms was beautiful. Visitors could stop at Ripples Date Shoppe or Sun Gold and enjoy a date shake and sample the variety of dates. Ah, the good old days!

Today Shields Date Shop, just past Jefferson Street, is the only one between Palm Desert and Indio.

Coachella Valley is known as The Date Capital of the World. Visitors to the Historical Society of Palm Desert often ask questions about those palm trees they see as part of the landscaping in the many country clubs. Questions visitors ask may number from one to forty. To begin, let's start with:

1. How many acres of dates of all varieties are grown in the Coachella Valley? About 6,500 acres.
2. How many date trees per acre? 50 trees.
3. If I plant a date seed, will I get the same type of date? The answer is no. But there is a story to that question.
4. How tall do some of the date palms get? From 76 to 86 feet.
5. How old are those tall palms you see at some of the clubs? Easily about 80 years old.

In between questions, there is a story. The history of the Date Palm here in the valley is most interesting. I can think of 33 to 40 questions regarding the date planting, harvesting, care of a date palm, how tall does a palm grow, and so on. But for now, I am going to leave you with this information. Each palm tree, to be productive, requires eleven months of work.

More on the date trees later...



Museum Hours
 10 AM to 3 PM
 Monday, Wednesday,
 Friday, Saturday

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

A note from your president's desktop
 It's raining, or as I've been corrected, drizzling out there, so I'm confined to my little office for a while. And rather chilly, too, at least for those of us with 'thin blood.' Winter finally is here, but where was Autumn? It was above 80 degrees just a day or two ago.

This newsletter not only brings in a new year, it starts a new series of what I like to call 'A date with Louise.' We are quite fortunate here at the old firehouse, especially those who drop by at least once or twice a week. That's because we're often seeing and chatting with folks with unique experiences here in

our Coachella Valley. Louise Neeley is one such local treasure, and she's agreed to share some of her stories centered 'round this valley's unique date industry. Enjoy her conversations with you.

I hope you had good times with family and friends during Thanksgiving and Christmas '12. Sometimes it's all we can do just to make it through in one piece, so to speak. But here we are, looking at a new year's calendar, to be filled with as yet unknown memories. Please drop by often, and join in as many activities as possible. Folks young, old and in between—it's always good to see and chat with you!

—Don Graybill
 December 2012

OBITUARIES

William Asher

Millie Bird

Al Casino

Al Hastings

Jeanne Hanousek Martin

John Mazicola

The Mission and Purpose of the Historical Society of Palm Desert (HSPD)

To preserve, record and provide access to its historical collections.

To relate an on-going history of the City through exhibits, publications, media, programs and events.

To support, with volunteer efforts, activities sponsored through the Society and co-sponsorship with other private and public agencies.

HSPD is organized as a non-profit corporation that supports its mission and purposes in a responsible manner. The Society cares for the materials and pieces in its possession as unique and irreplaceable objects of local history and strives to protect and preserve its collections for posterity.

Executive Board

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 Harry Quinn
 Hal Rover

Newsletter

Duchess Emerson, editor
 Ty Davison, layout

Newsbits

Annual Yard Sale

The annual firehouse yard sale was held November 10 & 11, with a special 3 hours on Veteran's Day, everything 50% off.

The yard sale is our biggest fund raiser and the success of the sale is due to all the support of our members and friends who donate to us during the year.

We also say "Thank You" to our board members and friends who worked tirelessly the week before, setting up tables, merchandise, and marking.

Even though we work hard we have a lot of fun and a lot of laughs. Come join us next year. Any time you would be able to give would be greatly appreciated.

—Adele Sandman

A Showing of the Unique and Original Artwork of Ron Backer

Following the Thanksgiving week-end at the near-by historic Shadow Mountain Resort and Tennis Club, local historical artist Ron Backer displayed a collection of his oil paintings in the main lounge, over-looking the pool area. The painting to the left, Birth of a Town, is a montage of images from the Historical Society of Palm Desert's recent book of the town's early days. (Look to the pool area!)

The exhibit and sale of both book and pictures began Thursday, Nov 28, and ran through the following Sunday. A reception provided opportunities to meet Ron and his wife, Elie, and also our own book authors, Hal Rover and Brett Romer.

Almost 30 pictures were offered for sale, half of them in and around our valley. Over 100 folks attended each day. Thanks to all who made this event possible.

Andy the Donkey Man

Andy the Donkey Man was an early Palm Desert fixture. A lot of kids remember riding his donkeys, including myself. A number of adults got to know him when they took their kids over to ride his donkeys. Does anyone remember who the mystery people were who supplied hay and grain for the

donkeys? Do you remember riding the donkeys? What do you remember about Andy and his donkeys? If you have any remembrances of Andy and his Donkeys, would you take the time to jot them down and send them to the Historical Society of Palm Desert at the address shown on your Newsletter? Short notes to lengthy writings are all welcome. If you have any old photos of Andy or his donkeys they would be appreciated as well.

—Harry M. Quinn

Hopalong Cassidy (William Boyd)

Another early Palm Desert fixture was Hopalong Cassidy (William Boyd). People come into the museum and talk about meeting him around town and he apparently passed out tokens to many of the kids he met.

At one time it was fashion to carry a Hopalong Cassidy Lunch pail with thermos. Do you have any remembrances of meeting him? Did you ever receive one of his tokens? Did you carry one of his lunch pails? Did you have one of his cap pistol and holster sets? If you have any remembrances of Hopalong Cassidy (William Boyd), would you take the time to jot them down and send them to the Historical Society of Palm Desert at the address shown on your Newsletter. Short notes to lengthy writings are all welcome.

— Harry M. Quinn

New Members

Fran Anderson
 Genny & Mike Davis
 Burton Falk
 John Fraim
 Radka Hodza
 Constance McGuigan
 Steven Rich
 Bob Tyler
 Jeanne & Jim Steller
 Kim Sweet
 Brandon Sweet
 Mary Warrick
 Betty Yee

Business Members

We are fortunate to have the support of several local businesses. We encourage you to visit these businesses and when you do, please let them know that you appreciate their support of our Historical Society.

Backstreet Bistro

Casuelas Café

*College of the Desert Alumni
Street Fair*

Desert Map and Aerial Photo

Hidden Harvest

Jeff Frisco for Hair

Jillian's

Robert D. Reed, D.D.S.

Shadow Mountain Resort & Club

The Inn at Deep Canyon

Wayne Connor & Associates
