

# Shoshone Museum Reader

*Produced for our Members by the Shoshone Museum Assn.*

Fall 2017



Marta Becket at the Crowbar Cafe (2004)

## MARTA BECKET

Robin Flinchum

It's been fifty years since Marta Becket wandered down the colonnade of the sprawling adobe at Death Valley Junction for the first time. She found a home that day--for her performances, for her art, and for her creative soul.

Death Valley would change Marta Becket very little. She became proficient in the kind of hard work required to live a life on the desert. She grew accustomed to the people and wildlife, and they grew accustomed to her. But her vision remained the same.

While the vast landscapes and stark light of the desert have historically influenced other artists in their work, for Marta it was in many ways the opposite. Death Valley, in its quiet stillness, the sparseness of the population, its feeling of having been abandoned—and therefore ungoverned by the vision of others—gave Marta the freedom to create as she had always wanted to do. She drew her inspiration from the depths of her own rich inner world. She danced, choreographed, wrote, and painted at will, generally undisturbed except by ghosts and the occasional bill collector.

In the late 1960s, when Marta first arrived on its border, Death Valley was probably best known as the source of Twenty Mule Team Borax and the Old West stories depicted every week in the Death Valley Days radio and television shows.

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Shoshone Museum Association  
P.O. Box 38  
Shoshone, CA 92384  
760 852-4524

## OLD WEST DAYS

Mammoth Room - Shoshone Museum  
Moderator: George Ross

**Friday 3 November**

Reception 5:30 - 7:30

6:00 pm Welcome & Presentations

Matt Kingsley,

Inyo County 5th District Supervisor

**Robin Flinchum**

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**

**MARTA BECKET and her**

**Death Valley Legacy**

**Saturday 4 November**

1:00 pm

**SUSAN MANDEVILLE**

## Carl Dennett Receives California State EMSA “Meritorious Service



Carl Dennett (second from right)

In a ceremony at the Marines' Memorial Club in San Francisco on December 15, 2016, Carl Dennett received the California State Emergency Medical Service Agency's Meritorious Service Award for his outstanding work as administrative chief of the Southern Inyo Fire Protection District. We have a lot more exciting news about our outstanding Fire and Rescue Department that will be featured in the next issue.

## MUSEUM HOURS

Open daily 9 am to 3 pm

The mission of the Shoshone Museum Association is to tell the unique story of the Amargosa region and to preserve its cultural and natural history



### SHOSHONE MUSEUM WELCOMES NEW ASSOCIATE John Muccio

John was born in New York and raised in Palisades Park, New Jersey. At the age of 20, he graduated first in his class at the New York Culinary & Hotel Management Institute. When his parents retired to Las Vegas in 1984, he decided to follow them. He spent twenty years on and off The Strip cooking for locals and tourists at Romeo's, Ferraro's, the Stratosphere, and in partnership with Mama Jo's Italian Bistro.

In 2006 John was looking for a more peaceful life. He found it in Tecopa, with its hot springs, where he enjoyed hiking and soaking. He opened a restaurant at Tecopa Hot Springs Resort called The Bistro and moved there with his teenage son, Ryan.

After 10 years of cooking at The Bistro, it was time to take a break from cooking. Because John enjoys talking to people, especially about the Death Valley, Shoshone, and Tecopa areas, the Shoshone Museum seemed to be the perfect fit for him.

## MARTA BECKET (continued from page 1)

It had also gained a certain amount of notoriety as the counter-culture refuge of the murderous Charlie Manson 'family' and for its mysterious Devils Hole—where Manson claimed he found the secret entrance to an underground universe and in whose depths two young men disappeared in full scuba gear in 1965.

But Marta Becket paid no attention to these things. She went on dancing old-fashioned Vaudevillian pantomimes and painting classic figures from the ancient past. Eventually the media discovered her and her extraordinary Amargosa Opera House. Magazine articles, television features, and an Academy Award-nominated documentary brought Marta, during the course of her 49 years on the desert, into the national limelight and changed, slowly and almost imperceptibly, the popular culture vision of Death Valley. It became, with Marta Becket in toe shoes standing on its surface, a softer, more magical place.

Other artists, writers, dancers, and performers were drawn to the Junction to see Marta Becket, to find the proof that it could be done, that an artist could walk away from civilization, live for her art alone, and not only survive but thrive.

And there they found her, up until her early eighties, dancing en pointe in front of a backdrop of her own creation, surrounded by her art. And they went away again, inspired to creations of their own, inspired to step off the beam of the known and risk living for their art alone, not just in the desert but in cities and towns around the world.

In January 2017 we lost Marta Becket, the flesh-and-blood artist who loved the wild horses, who danced with the same passion before a full or an empty house, who could wield a pitchfork as well as a paintbrush. She died quietly at home, surrounded by the fruits of her nearly fifty years of artistic labor.

But her legacy lives on. In 2017 we saw it in the performances of Jenna McClintock's Teatro El Grande in Tecopa. This Fall we can see it in a special screening of the documentary *Amargosa* at the Amargosa Opera House on Saturday, October 21 (reservations recommended).

Dancer Hilda Vazquez carries on Marta's legacy with scheduled performances at the Opera House beginning on Friday, October 20. And the Amargosa Opera House nonprofit foundation continues to work to preserve Marta's artwork and to curate a museum dedicated to her life. On Friday, November 2, to kick off Old West Days and the museum's day of history talks on Saturday, the Shoshone Museum will host a presentation on the subject of Marta's legacy. Please come and share your own stories of how Marta Becket inspired you.



Robin Flinchum is a freelance writer from Tecopa and the author of *Red Light Women of Death Valley*. She is one of many who gained profound inspiration from Marta Becket's artistic courage and dedication.

(Photograph courtesy of Victoria Goring)

## Echoes from the Archives

by Susan Sorrells



The Shoshone Museum has been incorporated as a non-profit since 1989. At the time of its incorporation, the original founders dreamed that it would become a repository for information on the cultural and natural history of the Amargosa and Death Valley areas and that it would also become a learning center for the area. Over the last twenty-five years, many of these dreams have come to fruition. The Shoshone Museum is now the repository for more than six thousand specimens related to natural and cultural history, and, at the same time, it regularly hosts history and nature talks and walks for the enjoyment and education of our extended community. But these dreams could not have been fulfilled without the tireless dedication of many of our board members and volunteers. This year we lost two great supporters who, over the years, have helped our museum association reach greater heights. These two giants were Benny Troxel and Jim Ito, and the area, as well as the museum, is much richer because of their contributions.

### Benny Troxel



Benny was a renowned geologist who broke new ground in the interpretation of Death Valley and Amargosa geology with his colleague Lauren Wright. He received a BS and MS in geology from

the University of California. Soon after graduating, Benny interviewed with Lauren Wright to work with him at the California Division of Mines and Geology, and together the two became legends in the field of geological history. They worked together 50 years in this area and created an extremely important series of maps--that took twenty years to complete--that explained in detail the regional geological system.

But in addition to being a great scientist, Benny was also a great human being and a stellar community member. His generosity and wit were well known. He was a member of the Shoshone Museum Board of Directors, where he gave of his time and talents. His memory and his contributions live on in the many lives that he touched.

### Jim Ito

Jim Ito began visiting Tecopa and Shoshone many years ago. He loved the expansive vistas of the area, the brightly colored mountain ranges, and the



people. He grew up in the Los Angeles area where his parents were well-known horticulturists and floral designers. His family home was in Los Feliz near the Griffith Observatory in Hollywood, CA, and its grounds still are a showcase for landscaping and gardening. He graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara, where he studied foreign languages, art history, and comparative religions. His hobbies were gardening, landscaping, floral design, art, and music.

Jim's extensive talents are manifested throughout the Tecopa and Shoshone areas, where many of the businesses and homes are decorated with exquisite cacti and succulent gardens that enhance the beauty of the towns and the charm of the boutique establishments.

Jim was on the Shoshone Museum's Board of Directors for many years and brought wisdom and beauty to our organization.

### Upcoming Events

- Sep 21-32 Teatro El Grande (8 pm) Under Big White Tent – & Sep 29-Oct 1 Tecopa Hot Springs Resort
- Oct 7 Moody Scott Concert - End of Summer & Retirement Party - Tecopa Hot Springs Resort
- Oct 21 Amargosa Opera House Documentary screening – Death Valley Junction
- Oct 28 Firehouse Fling - Tecopa Community Center
- Nov 4-5 \*Old West Days - Shoshone (see pages 1 & 3 for details)
- Nov 3-12 Neon Artist Jeffrey Johnson - Tecopa Hot Springs Resort
- Nov 10-12 Las Vegas Jam Society Takeover - Tecopa Hot Springs Resort
- Feb 10-11 Sierra Club Desert Section Meeting - Shoshone
- Ongoing** Death Valley National Park events: <www.nps.gov/deva> Road Scholar Program, Death Valley National Park <www.dvnpa.org/programs-events/road-scholar> Get Outdoors Nevada volunteer opportunities <www.getoutdoorsnevada.org> Ash Meadows Natl Wildlife Refuge events information <adrienne\_mcgill@fws.gov> Pablo Tecopa & Dusty Butter Band & guest artists – Saturdays at sunset - Tecopa Hot Springs Resort Tecopa Hot Springs Campground (music, hikes, and more) <http://www.tecopahotspringscampground.com/>

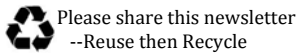
Please contact the Shoshone Museum for more information  
 discover@shoshonemuseum.com 760 852-4524  
 (\* Shoshone Museum events)

### Shoshone Museum Association Membership Form

(Annual Dues)

Individual	\$25	Name: _____
Family	\$35	Mailing address: _____
Business	\$50	_____
Nonprofit	\$35	_____
Mtn Lion	\$100	Email: _____
Mammoth	\$500	Donation: \$ _____
Senior	\$15	Amount enclosed: \$ _____
Student	\$15	New <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/>

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