

Shoshone Museum Reader

Produced for our Members by the Shoshone Museum Assn.

Winter 2019

Shoshone Museum Association

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Maury Sorrells in Southern California (mid 1920s)

Maury Sorrells.

The Silent Hero of the Fifth District

by Charles Sorrells

Maurice Leo Sorrells was born in Ashland, OK, to Fred Sorrells and Bertha Sisemore Sorrells on March 28, 1909. His mother and father divorced before he was born; he did not see his father until he graduated from high school. Maury's mother married Fred Merriman, and they had two more children. The family moved to Mesa, AZ, and then to Sanger, CA, where he attended Sanger High School. He lettered in football, baseball, and wrestling, and was elected student body president.

In 1928 Maury entered the University of Redlands in CA, where he met and eventually married Jacobus "Dad" and Celesta Fairbanks's granddaughter Bernice Brown. He played football in college and was known as a good tackler and a hard man to block. He also excelled in drama, playing the leading role in "The Merchant of Venice" and "When Knighthood was in Flower." In 1932 he entered the University of Oklahoma law school. After Bernice graduated in 1934, they married in Las Vegas, NV, and lived in Oklahoma until he completed law school. They then moved to Redding, CA, where he became vice-president of a title insurance company.

Maury had polio as a teenager, which left one leg shorter than the other, so he did not pass the physical for military service in WWII. When Charlie Brown was elected to the State Senate, Bernice and Maury moved to Shoshone to help run the town. Together they built the new store, the motel, and the post-office.

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FROM THE CURATOR

Mary King

The Shoshone Museum offers a little something for everyone, including exhibits on geology, on paleontology, on the T&T Railroad, on the mines and miners who worked and lived in our towns, and last but not least, on the merchants who helped found these towns.

We also have many wonderful items donated over the years to help illustrate the complex stories of our area. Robert Hart recently donated the HO scale model T&T Railroad that is now on display in the Railroad Control Panel.

Marion and Betty Harner donated a copy of Loafing Along Death Valley Trails, by William Caruthers, which contains four full pages of signatures of Shoshone area residents and an inscription by Charles and Stella Brown.

Vance Gilliam donated a very rare and self-published book, Castle in Clay, by Harvey Rutledge, who lived with his son Lincoln in the Castle at Shoshone during the 1950s. Vance and Lincoln rode bicycles together as children.

In an effort to establish our museum as a research center for this area, we are currently cataloging historical items and scanning them into our Past Perfect database with the help of volunteers, including Death Valley Academy's work/study student Steve Belmares. Thank you, Steve, we so appreciate your work.

If anyone wants to volunteer at the museum, we would be more than grateful!

ERRATA

Regrettably there were a couple of errors in the last issue of the newsletter. The Death Valley Chamber of Commerce Art Show at Furnace Creek will be held on March 9 and 10, 2019 (not March 15-17 as stated in the last issue). George Ross (page two) actually recorded two published oral histories. The first was done in 2004 for the Pahrump Valley Museum by Harry Ford and Don Hendricks. It was in this one that George recorded many Paiute words and phrases. The second history was done in 2013 by George D. McCracken for the Nye Town History Project as mentioned in the article in the last issue of the newsletter.

MUSEUM HOURS

Open daily from 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

(continued from page 1)

Maury generally got along well with the Fairbanks family, but there were a few conflicts. One such instance involved a grease pit next to the museum (which was originally the store). The customers would drive their cars over the pit and Charles or Maury would get down in the pit underneath the car to lube it, change brakes, etc. One time when Charles was away, Maury took out the pit and installed a hydraulic hoist. Upon returning home, Charles thought the hoist was too expensive and unnecessary. After about a week of complaints, one day early in the morning, Maury found Charles with his Chrysler Imperial on the hoist just running it up and down.

Maury was elected Inyo County supervisor in 1944 and served five terms until 1964. He was chairman of the board when the new courthouse was built and was also president of the Inland Empire Supervisors Association. He was the first vice-president and one of the organizers of the Death Valley 49ers and once substituted as Inyo County coroner until someone could be found to fill the job.

Maury was always soft spoken. He didn't say much, but when he spoke you needed to listen, because he usually only said something once. There used to be a big red barn containing petroleum products where the Feldkamp Shoshone Park is located today. One of my friends and I had started a big bonfire in the middle of the barn to roast marshmallows. Dad ran into the barn, stomped out the fire, and then took me to the store (now the museum), where I was confined to the office for the rest of the day under the protective custody of my mother.

I received my driver's license when I was fourteen. That summer Dad started teaching me how to make deliveries of oil, diesel, gasoline, and petroleum products in the fuel truck to the different mines. Maury had a great teaching method. The first trip he drove and I observed. The second I drove and he made comments. The third he stayed home. I remember the first trip I took by myself. I said, "Dad, do you think I am ready for this?" He said, "You're ready, kid." It was a scary but successful trip.

Another incident happened when I was about 12 or 13. I was building a pasture for my horses using railroad ties for fence posts. Buddy Feldkamp was my helper. While digging the post holes, we hit a bad patch of caliche clay that we couldn't dig through. I went to Carl Rook, Inyo County 5th District road foreman, and he gave me three sticks of dynamite, cut in half, so that we could do six holes. He blasted the first hole with us, and we blasted the next two. Maury heard the blasts and came driving down in his pickup. He said, "What the hell are you kids doing?" I replied, "Carl showed us how to use the dynamite." Maury said, "If Carl showed you how to use the dynamite, you know how to do it right," and left. It was true that Carl showed us how, but I think he expected us to wait until he came back to blast the other holes.

There were very few things in Shoshone that Maury could not do. He was an excellent butcher. He was an auto mechanic. He kept the water lines and sewer lines running. Shoshone didn't have a deputy until the early 1950s, so Maury was the Crow Bar bouncer. He literally kept the lights on in Shoshone. We had two big Caterpillar generators behind our house. When he finished reading his *Time* magazine, the whole town went to bed, because he turned off the generator! We lost Dad in the summer of 1965 when he had an accident in his private plane here in Shoshone. Shoshone is a very special place in the world. Maury Sorrells silently helped many people make Shoshone this special place.

About the author: Charles Jackson Sorrells, son of Maury and Bernice Sorrells, graduated from Shoshone Grammar School and Death Valley High School. He graduated from the University of Redlands and received an MBA from the University of Southern California business school. He managed the family business in Shoshone before moving to Las Vegas, NV, to practice as a CPA with his wife Alice Keefer. They now live in Kelowna, BC, Canada.



Maury and Bernice with the author in Shoshone (1942)

Echoes from the Archives

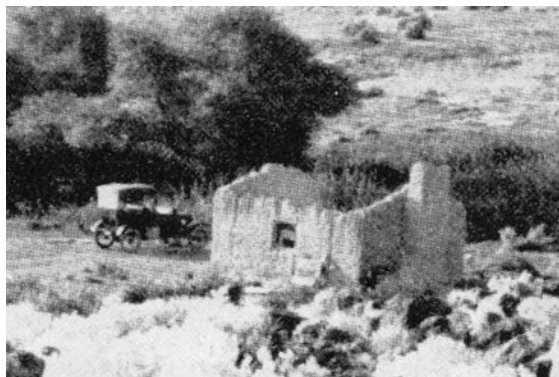
by Susan Sorrells



Old West Days was a great success this year. There were a record number of participants, with a full house Friday at the Keynote Speakers Night at the Shoshone Museum. Mike Reynolds, the superintendent of Death Valley National Park, gave an interesting insight into the historical bonds between Shoshone, Tecopa, and Death Valley. In addition, Ethel Messer and I provided personal insights into the life of George Ross, the area's native son whom the community lost this last spring. Both Ethel and I are fortunate to have called George a friend throughout our lives.

One of the most important events at the Keynote Speaker's Night was the presentation of the community service awards that the museum gives each year to outstanding members of the community. John Muccio and Carla Perkins received these awards from Robin Flinchum, our local author and historian who herself is a tireless volunteer for the museum and for the community. John and Carla are two of the museum's stellar staff, in addition to our two other employees, Ethel Messer and Mary Burke King. John and Carla are very familiar with the Amargosa and Death Valley areas and are a great resource for our visitors who want to explore these special places and their artisan offerings.

Recently Toni Kizzia, an indispensable member of the Tecopa/Shoshone community who lives in Tecopa, joined our staff. Toni contributes many important services to our area and, with Robin Flinchum, keeps our Tecopa/Shoshone Writers Group on track. Ethel, Mary, Carla, John, and Toni are a dynamic team, and together they are raising to an even higher level of excellence the services the museum offers the community, its members, and future generations studying its history.



Loafing Along Death Valley Trails. 1951

SHOSHONE'S OLDEST BUILDING

Located just above the spring, the oldest building in Shoshone probably dates from the late 1800s. In his book Loafing Along Death Valley Trails, William Caruthers states that the home was built by Cub Lee. Recently uncovered documents indicate that Cub Lee was in northern Nevada and Idaho from the mid-1870s until 1902, so it is unlikely that he built the house.

In 1917, Tracey Irwin Storer, a noted University of California (UC) zoologist, visited Shoshone. He kept notes of his observations and of his conversations with residents. On May 11 he stated that locals told him that the spring was formerly known as Nels Medbury Spring. In 1936, two more UC zoologists, Annie Alexander and Louise Kellogg, also inquired about the spring, but by then, no one remembered the Medbury name. The name Medbury was also confirmed in scientific publications and in a letter to Senator Charles Brown from Della White Fisk, a pioneer resident of Pahrump, NV. In notes from an 1891 expedition to the spring by Vernon Bailey (field naturalist for the US Department of Agriculture), Bailey states he camped near an old adobe built by Nelse Medbury.

James Nelson Medbury (1830-1905) was born in East Providence, RI (known at that time as Seekonk, MA). He was said to be a lineal descendant of Roger Williams, one of the founders of the state of Rhode Island. He left home at age 15 after the death of his mother and remarriage of his father. At age 21 he came West with his brother where, except for brief visits to Rhode Island, he lived the rest of his life. He worked as a prospector/miner in Tuolumne, Kern, and Inyo counties. In the early 1880s, he was listed as a teamster in Mono and Inyo counties and appears in the register of voters in Bodie and Lone Pine. In 1883 he located 6 mining claims in the Wildrose Mining District in Death Valley and water rights to Cottonwood Creek near Owens Lake. The following year he sold the mining claims to J. M. Keeler for \$1600. In 1888, he moved near Salem, OR, and purchased a farm where he lived with his sister, Phoebe R. Medbury, until his death in 1905.

An early photograph of the house (left) indicates that it was a small one-room adobe structure. Later residents added sleeping quarters on one side and a kitchen on the other. After the tragic fire of 1929 that killed Tom and Nellie Weed, their daughter, Julia Ross, moved into the house with her two children, George and Stella. She lived there until her death in 1975. The house has been uninhabited since then.

Although we do not yet have documentary evidence that Medbury actually built the house, the fact that the spring bore his name would indicate that he had made his home there sometime before 1891. We would appreciate any additional historical information about the building and/or James Nelson Medbury.

Many thanks to Johnnie Zollinger, R. N. (retired) whose family history information helped fill some of the gaps in the James Nelson Medbury story.

Upcoming Events


- Tecopa Station/Bistro Stage: (at sunset, weather permitting)
 - Fri nights: open mic music
 - Sat nights: music by Pablo Tecopa & Dusty Butter Band
- thru Jan 17 Martin Powell's Birds, Tecopa Hot Springs Resort
- Jan 19 Skandar Reid, Trails & Tales of Inyo, (reception 2-5pm)
 - Mar 31 Ancient & modern art forms -Tecopa Hot Springs Resort
- Feb 16-17 Sierra Club Desert Section Meeting, Shoshone
- Mar 1 - 3 Dark Sky Festival, Death Valley Natl Park
- Mar 9-10 Death Valley Chamber of Commerce Art Show, Furnace Creek Ranch
- Ongoing** Death Valley Natl Park events: <www.nps.gov/deva>
 - Get Outdoors Nevada volunteer opportunities <www.getoutdoorsnevada.org>
 - Road Scholar Program, Death Valley Natl Park <www.dvnpa.org/programs-events/road-scholar>
 - Ash Meadows Natl Wildlife Refuge events information <<https://www.facebook.com/pg/AshMeadowsNWR/events/>>
 - Tecopa Hot Springs Campground (music, hikes, and more) <<http://www.tecopahotspringscampground.com/>>
 - Amargosa Conservancy volunteer opportunities <tanya@amagosaconservancy.org>

**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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 Mail to: P.O. Box 38, Shoshone, CA 92384 or
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