



The Shoshone Museum Reader

Summer 2009

Shoshone Museum
Association
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(760) 852-4524
Editor: Jennifer O. Viereck

This article is the second in a series “IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK” about the historic buildings in Shoshone.

The Historic Brown House

by Judy Palmer and Susan Sorrells

In April of 1910, Ralph Jacobus “Dad” and Celesta Fairbanks moved their family from the failing boom town of Greenwater to Metbury Spring (also known as the Lee ranch), located near the Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad (TNT RR) about 30 miles south of Death Valley Junction. Over the next 99 years, that early settlement grew into the present town of Shoshone. The Fairbanks family had a very diversified operation, but was primarily involved in the mercantile business. In 1912 “Dad” located the Redwing mine (originally lead, later zinc and lead), and in 1913 he leased the Shoshone siding from the TNT RR where he established a station stop with facilities for train passengers and crew.



Susan Sorrells Collection

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A Shoshone Treasure Moves On: Stella Louise Rook



Stella Louise Rook, 96, a resident of Shoshone for 73 years and a treasured community

member by several generations, passed away on April 8, 2009. Stella was born on January 14, 1913, and moved to the Mojave Desert at the age of four in a horse-drawn wagon. In 1933, she married Carl Rook. Their first home was a boxcar on the Tonopah and Tidewater (TNT) Railroad, which they shared with her sister Nona and her husband Harry Rosenburg. When the TNT shut down, Carl built a home in 1940 from railroad ties in the Shoshone area, where they raised their family.

Wonderful memories were shared by many at Stella’s service on April 18th—her years of service to the children of the area through cooking lunches for the school system, as a den mother, PTA and school board member, and especially through her passion for baseball and her scorekeeping for the ‘Shoshone Indians’ team. Summer months were filled with trips to Beatty, Baker and even Darwin, packed into un-airconditioned cars, to play baseball in

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In 1910, their oldest daughter, Stella, had married a miner, Charles Brown. Over the next 9 years, Charles and Stella lived in various mining camps, but in 1920, they finally returned to Shoshone with their children and joined the Fairbanks business ventures. In 1923, Charles was elected Inyo county supervisor and, in 1939, he was selected as a California State Senator from Inyo and Mono counties--a position he held for 20 years.

It was with regret that we learned this week that Supervisor and Mrs. Chas. G. Brown suffered the loss of their home by fire at Shoshone last week while the Supervisor and his wife were in Independence. The house and contents, including many articles of personal value were completely destroyed, with no insurance carried. The origin of the fire is not known.

Inyo Independent
Sep 18, 1926

Since the land was leased from the railroad, many of the original buildings were moved from other locations or were frame structures built only to meet the immediate needs. In 1926, while Charles and Stella were away on county business in Independence, they received word that their original house had burned down. Although Inyo county tax records (dated 1954) estimated the construction date of the present structure as 1922, it is likely that it was actually constructed shortly after the 1926 fire.



A 1929 Frasher photograph shows the home.

Legend has it that this residence was constructed from a Sears kit. From 1908 to 1940, over 100,000 Sears mail-order homes were purchased. These ready-to-assemble homes were popular because of their low cost and, in the days before the ready availability of electricity and power tools, ease of assembly due to the pre-cut lumber. Other companies also supplied kit homes, so it is possible that it was not Sears, but some other ready-to-assemble home.

Over the years, the building has been remodeled and updated. Judging from photographs, it is likely that the original house consisted of one or two porches and a living room. The porch area behind the living room was probably converted to bedrooms soon after construction. It is said there was no kitchen because everyone ate at the nearby boarding house; the present kitchen was probably added about 1940. The bathroom and bedroom/office on the east side were also added to the original building sometime before 1954.

The Browns lived in this house until their deaths (Charles in 1963 and Stella in 1970). It has subsequently served as a residence for Susan Sorrells and a guesthouse, and is currently the home of the Amargosa Conservancy nonprofit organization.

REFERENCES and SOURCES

Inyo Independent, Sep 18, 1926.

Inyo County Tax Assessor (Jan Ontano and Jeff Brice), Inyo County Library (Nancy Masters), and Inyo County Clerk/Recorder (Mary Roper).

Records of the Tonopah & Tidewater RR, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA

Inyo County Mining Records, volume 13, page 373-4, Jan 1 1912.

Memories of Ethel Rook Messer, Stella Rook, Susan Sorrells, and George Ross (long time Shoshone residents and historians).

Stella Fairbanks Brown diary (courtesy Gilliam family, Alta Loma, CA).

Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, Houses by Mail, A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company, Preservation Press, 1986.

Echoes from the Archives



Beginning Friday, April 17th, and ending April 19th, the Shoshone Museum hosted a weekend filled with celebration, interpretation and conversation around the geology of southern Amargosa and Death Valley as a way of honoring Dr. John Cooper, a giant in the field of Sedimentary Geology who taught at Cal State University at Fullerton for many years. Dr. John Cooper, affectionately known as Coop by students and colleagues, passed away in September 2007 while on his morning hike near his home in Chino, California. Dr. Cooper was a leader and a trailblazer on the international scene but always remained connected to his community. He made Shoshone his base for over thirty years while he conducted research on the evolution of eastern California from a marine environment to becoming part of a continental land mass. From 2003 to 2005 Dr. Cooper was the president of the Shoshone Museum and brought with him a knowledge of professional standards and a passion for the land that was priceless. As president he also expressed the vision of building a new museum that could display the natural wealth and beauty of the Amargosa. His good work will always be a permanent part of the Amargosa landscape and was celebrated throughout the weekend.

It is fitting that a two-day journey through the landscape that fascinated Dr. Cooper was led by another giant in Death Valley geology, Dr. Lauren Wright. This two day field trip took place on April 18th and 19th. Dr. Wright's fellow researcher and friend for over fifty years, Bennie Troxel, another Death Valley icon that was a Senior Mining Geologist for the US Geological Survey for many years, accompanied him. The field trip on Saturday concentrated on the oldest rocks in the Death Valley region in the vicinity of the War Eagle Mine at the southern end of the Nopah range and the field trip on Sunday studied Tertiary and Quaternary features displayed in the Black Mountains which frame Death Valley.

This festive weekend was kicked off at the Shoshone Museum by a fascinating presentation entitled "A Photographic Journey of Amargosa and Death Valley Geology". Another well known Death Valley geologist and photographer, Dr. Marli Bryant Miller, a professor at the University of Oregon, gave this presentation. On Saturday evening, after an inspiring day in the field, there was a dinner celebration at the Crowbar Café patio featuring entertainment by Desert Song. Over one hundred people attended the evening event. Not only did everyone who participated in the three-day celebration have a wonderful time; in addition, over \$3,000 was raised for the museum. Thanks to everyone who contributed to making this event such a success.

—Susan Sorrells, Board President

(cont. from pg 1) 120 degree heat. In 2008, Stella was named Citizen of the Year by the Death Valley Chamber of Commerce for her lifetime of community service.

The Shoshone Museum looks forward to working with the family to document Stella and Carl's contributions to our local history. We also thank those who have made recent donations to the Shoshone Museum in Stella's memory: Norman and Joan Boardman, Philip and Ruth Meyer-son, and Brian and Bonnie Brown.

ShoshoneMuseum.org Website Coming This Fall!

The Shoshone Museum is very honored to receive a \$5,000 grant from the Desert Legacy Conservation Program of the Community Foundation (serving Riverside and San Bernardino counties). The purpose of the grant is to "create a scalable and interactive website for the museum which will provide a one stop shop to accommodate inquiries for information about the Amargosa desert area, interpretive exhibits, collections, and programs."

Educational materials about the mammoths and other Museum exhibits will be developed simultaneously as handouts in the museum or as downloadable PDF files on the website. Different components of the website will be developed over the next nine months, in consultation with the board of directors, volunteer curatorial staff, and other consultants. In the future, we plan to add an on-line shopping component.

We hope the addition of a well-designed website will help make our wonderful little museum more visible and available to the general public from near and far, as well as to tour groups, school and university groups, scholars and more in the future.

We really hope that any of you with ideas about what you would most like to see on a Shoshone Museum website will communicate their thoughts to me by mail or email. If you have a favorite website, either because of its content, functionality or design, please let us know.

Jennifer Olaranna Viereck
Contact at shoshonemus@veawb.coop

SMA Membership Form

Membership Dues

Individual	\$ 15
Family	\$ 25
Business/ Nonprofit	\$ 50
Cougar	\$ 100
Mammoth	\$ 500
Donation:	\$ _____

Make checks payable to:
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Name: _____

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Returning Member: ___ New Member: ___

Sharon K. Schafer Natural History Exhibit reception and official opening will be rescheduled in the fall. It was unfortunately cancelled due to a grass fire at China Ranch that day. (There was no major damage.)

Shoshone Old West Days 2009

October 30-November 1 in Shoshone CA
Details will be available in the Fall newsletter.

Death Valley 49ers 60th Annual Encampment

Pre-Encampment November 1-3
Encampment Events November 4-8
Details can be found at www.deathvalley49ers.org

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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.

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