



Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert

230 W. Ridgecrest Blvd. • P. O. Box 2001, Ridgecrest, CA 93556 • 760-375-8456

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December 2016

To see our schedule of events, visit us at hsumd.org or on Facebook at [hsumd](https://www.facebook.com/hsumd)



Come to Our Holiday Party!

Our December meeting is always a party, and so it will be this year! We'll get together on the third Tuesday, as usual — Dec. 20. Doors will open at 6 p.m., with dinner at 6:30. Our program and entertainment will start at around 7:15.

Casey's will cater a chicken-breast dinner with side dishes, ice tea and lemonade. This isn't the time to scrimp on calories, so please do bring a yummy dessert to share.

Tickets for the dinner, available our Gift Shop, are \$15 each. Please purchase them by the 16th so we can give Casey's an accurate head count.

Enjoying their victory are the festively clad winners of our costume contest, from left Roger and Kym Mcentee, Tony Damiano, and Rich LaSalle (a visiting relative of Tex). Clapping in the background are Tom Rindt and Sayer de Woadhyll, members of The Whatevers.



Our own Kathy Armstrong (left) and other Sweet Adelines offer us a joyous Christmas carol.

Photos by Liz Babcock



Entrants in last year's Christmas costume contest show off their finery, flanked by Christmas trees with crowd favorites The Whatevers onstage. What a fun event that was . . . and so will be this year's party!

Photo by Liz

President's Message —

So Long, Dear Friends, and Thank You

We wish you all a very merry Christmas and a wonderful holiday season with family and friends.

We also wish to share some happiness and appreciation for certain volunteers and their superlative contributions to the Historical Society, as well as some sadness at their leaving us! We are speaking of our dear friends and members, the Stagers.

Tom and Patty Stager have been two of our stellar volunteers who, although busy with other volunteerism for the city and their church and their family, have still found time to help us at the Historic USO Building.

They both have donated many, many hours to organizing, documenting, and tagging our history library upstairs. They have both volunteered in our Gift Shop, as many of you may have noticed on Thursdays (and other times as needed).

Tom has been John Abbott's right-hand man (and sometimes his left-hand man) in maintaining our building by installing locks, sanding and painting, sweeping and mopping, and doing sundry other tasks that make our building a good and safe place you want to visit.

And Tom joined our Board of Directors and became our treasurer last year.

Tom has always been one whose talents and good judgment could be relied on. Patty is just as talented, AND she keeps an eye on Tom!

Tom and Patty will be leaving this month and moving south. Let us all wish them well.

I, personally, will miss having them and their ever-friendly faces in our midst. The Society will miss all of their many contributions of time and talent.

But I speak for all of us when I say, "God speed, my friends!"

— *Tex Hoppus*

GREAT FRIENDS, GREAT VOLUNTEERS —

Shown at last year's Historic USO 70th Anniversary Gala are (from left) Norma and John Abbott and Patty and Tom Stager. What a power-packed bunch of Historical Society volunteers!

Photo by Liz



Tex models presidential holiday wear, complete with Grinch slippers.

Photo by Liz



Report on Collections

Thank you, Stagers and Other Volunteers

J realize December is often a time to recap the year's completed projects, but that is difficult to do with archives and preservation. I look around and wonder if there will ever be an end in sight and forget to look at all that has been accomplished.

We have moved on from proper protection of our history files to reorganization to what we hope is a more intuitive and nonduplicative method. Of course that is almost a bigger task than preservation and indexing as it takes thought and logic.

Thank goodness for my upstairs crew who toss ideas around and come up with sensible plans. We are working on more complete files on our early settlers and reminding each other that folks arriving in 1950 to 1970 are by today's standards early settlers.

The photo collection is still an area in great need of organizing. Our goal is to group by subject and to identify location and people in as many cases as possible. We need lots of help with the identification, that's for sure.

Of course right after I mention what a big task that is I want to remind you all that we want any and all photos you might think will contribute to the Historical Society's history of people, places, and activities in our Upper Mojave Desert area. Your original photos or negatives can be scanned and returned you — no need to part with them and leave a hole in your own collection.

I want to mention that the family of Billie and Ron Hise donated a four-drawer file cabinet full of Billie's and Ron's collected items.

Just in case this isn't clear — not the file cabinet, but the items in it are



One of the many tasks Patty and Tom Stager completed for HSUMD was a reorganization of our entire library. Here — in the midst of the task in February 2013 — they pose with Collections Manager Carol Porter. *Photo by Liz*

the treasures. Thank you, Hise family.

This talk about pictures brings up the latest news — not thrilling to HSUMD. As Tex mentioned in his column, the Stagers are relocating. Patty has been working on organizing photos while Tom is our librarian.

Thanks to Patty and Tom, we have a nicely organized library of reference book, local authors' writings, books of interest of our nearby areas and periodicals as well as a complete database. These two will be greatly missed.

I might add that Patty also is a Gift Shop volunteer and Tom is John Abbott's right-hand man in the building fix-it department. Thank you, Stagers, for all the amazing things you have done for us.

As the year 2016 draws to a close, I also want to mention the others on the upstairs crew and pass on a big thank you.

We have Don Snyder, Doug Whitnell, Kitty Ferguson, Leann Moel, Greg Boske, Claudia Sound and Mary Kus, plus Liz Babcock. Quite the crew — but I certainly can find a task for you too if you'd like to join us.

I'll end with a quick reminder — we are planning our regular work day on Thursday, Dec 15, following the Veterans Breakfast. The work will take place in the Veterans Memorial Building, 10a.m.–1 p.m. to put together displays and organize donated items. All are welcome to help.

— Carol Porter

CLASSIC MOVIE NIGHT CELEBRATES ALL THINGS OZ



Lyle Gregory

On Wednesday, Dec. 28, at 7 p.m., HSUMD will present a very special evening in its Classic Movie Night series. I'm excited about this final presentation in the "There's No Place like Home" series. The very name of this series comes from the much-beloved film starring Judy Garland, Ray Bolger, Jack Haley, Bert Lahr, Billie Burke, and Margaret Hamilton ... oh, and Toto, too! I guess there's no way that you would not be able to figure out the title... unless you didn't have a brain!

Revisiting that wonderful emerald-green kingdom, via the "Yellow Brick Road," holds special significance for so many in our community. You see, for the last 10 years, there has been magical spectacle at Church and Downs that lights up the desert's night sky in all its Oz-ian wonder from Halloween through Christmas. The West OZ House was the gift of my dear friend, Lyle Gregory, to the citizens of this town. There was nothing like it, and probably will never be again.

A whole block of beautifully green-lit cottages, anchored by the West OZ House itself, presented a giant quirky, wonderful hodgepodge of levels and additions and funky yard art that made it unique ... even when not lit up. But during those magical months, the house was a major attraction to people traveling to and in Ridgecrest.

Christmas Eve was especially spectacular, with the movie itself projected on a large screen, the soundtrack booming forth in the night and the beloved "Oz" characters roaming the grounds, waving to passersby. Counting some 400 cars per night during the holiday season and a thousand cars on Christmas Eve was not a rarity. Thousands of children grew up in Ridgecrest with that lasting magical memory that they now share with their children.

The man who gave so much joy to Ridgecrest, Lyle Gregory, the Wizard of West OZ himself, has deep roots with the Historic USO Building. As a young man, he taught dance for several years in the Historic USO building, then known as the Old County Building. Thousands of local teens and adults learned jazz dance or disco from Lyle. At a time when the Ridgecrest-area population was about 20,000, Lyle Gregory had an impressive 1,200 dance students here in just one year. These classes were arranged by our own Carol Porter, who was then director of Ridgecrest's dance program.

Lyle then worked for the next 25 years at ABC and CBS in Los Angeles as the producer of the British Michael Jackson's long-running talk radio news show. There he met and worked with luminaries of film, television, and politics, often bringing celebrities for weekends to The West Oz House.

But, alas, all things must end. These days, Lyle is busier than ever as the writer and producer of a major musical, projected to open on Broadway in 2019. He is spending more time in Los Angeles and New York, thus now selling the West Oz House and surrounding properties to devote all his time to his musical. So The West Oz House has permanently closed. But, not quite! The magic continues!

This month's showing of the famous film had actually been planned for several months, so it seemed natural to tie in a celebration of the West Oz House with the showing of the classic. The Joe Fox auditorium will be decorated with some of the



West OZ House, Christmas Eve 2010.

Photos by Liz

See p. 7

Farewell to Some Historical Society Favorites

Francie at an event at the Historic USO.

Photos by Liz



Francie Lewis was irreplaceable at City Hall — and at Movie Nite

My heart broke a few weeks back at the sad news of the passing of one of Ridgecrest’s nicest ladies and an avid Classic Movie Night fan.

Frances (Francie) Lewis was always the first to arrive every flex Wednesday evening with a comfortable cushion in her hands and a little tidbit about the movie I was screening that evening.

She always sat alone on the far right side of the auditorium enjoying her “Crumville” hot dog and giving me big smiles as I gave my pre-movie talks.

She loved movies so much that she named her cats “Bogie” and “Bacall,” and she proudly reminded everyone who visited the City Planning Office about my movies.

So I dedicated the second film in our series “There’s No Place like Home” to Francie.

See p. 6

We also learned recently that John Orozco died on Nov. 19 — just a few short months after the death of his daughter, Salina. Carol Porter and I came to know and love John after interviewing him and his sister Mary Zeiss as an HSUMD history-gathering project.

Mary, the third oldest of the Orozco children, told us that when Johnny was born, their mother gave Mary the task of raising him. He was still her baby all those years later when we interviewed them! We enjoyed their interactions.

Our sympathies to Mary, his wife Pauline, and all his family. We are saddened that this irreplaceable part of our history is gone. — Liz B.

John Orozco grew up in Garden City



At left are five of the 13 Orozco children who grew up in historic Garden City. From left in this 1944 photo from Mary Orozco Zeiss’ scrapbook, Johnnie, Alice, Mary, Carmen, and Sophie pose beside the Trona Railroad tracks that ran by their home.

Above John Orozco visits with Carol Porter in the Historic USO lobby, 2015. Photo by Liz



Time To Find Holiday Gifts in Our Shop

See's Christmas Candy

Come early for the best selection!

❄️ Extended Hours Dec. 21-23 11:00-5:00 ❄️

❄️ Dec. 24 11:00-3:00 ❄️



400+ book titles about local history, children's books, desert-themed hats, vintage Ridgecrest shirts, and more!

This 80-quart "Old Glory" ice chest would be a perfect gift for the person who loves to entertain.

Francie Lewis — From p. 4

This film starred Lucille Ball and Henry Fonda in true story of a late-in-life second marriage and the blending of two families that resulted in an astonishing total of 18 kids. Francie would have just loved this family classic!

In the words of one of Francie's film idols ... "Here's looking at you, kid."

— Nick Rogers

The year 2017 is almost here — and some of you have already sent in your membership dues — along with special donations to help us with the many great projects we have going on. Thank you — and may the trend continue!

Member Categories

HSUMD has three membership categories — all very important to us. Our regular memberships are \$35 per individual or family. Our business memberships are \$45 each.

We also have a special category: life member, which is something the board bestows only on members who have supported HSUMD in sustained and special ways. Our life members' names are displayed on our website.

New Members

Greg and Cindy Côté

Business Members — please patronize them!

Allen County Public Library,
Genealogy Department
Anna Marie Bergens, Realtor
Best Western China Lake Inn
Blues After Hours
Bob & Ardyce's Bicycle Shop
Cal-Sun Pools
Clarion Inn
Comfort Inn
Cordell Construction
DeathValley.com
Desert Empire Fair

Desert Garage Door
Earth Landscaping
Econo-Lodge
Edward Jones Investments
Brook H. Andreoli
The Flower Shoppe
Griffin Excavation & Paving
Heritage Inn
Phyllis M. Hix, Attorney
Jack & Dana Lyons, Realtors
Maturango Museum
Motion Tire & Wheel
Nevins Tech. Consultants

The News Review (Farris)
Pleistocene Foundation
Professional Tax & Business Services
Red Rock Books
Ridgecrest Automotive
Ridgecrest Moving & Storage
Roaming Dog Kitchen
S&M Coins & Collectibles
Gary P. Staab & Assoc., Inc.
The Swap Sheet
Truffles@1105
Warren's Automotive

CLASSIC MOVIE NIGHT

From p. 4

collections from The West OZ House. His actor friends (including me) dressed in Emerald City costumes as characters from the film will greet guests. Lyle will be there to talk with the audience and share West OZ House stories. It promises to be a very moving evening.

And, of course, the movie will glitter and shine on our big screen with surround sound thrilling families all over again. A special four-minute short, "The Wizard of West Oz," will screen first. Lyle Gregory knew some of the original cast of the main film, including the late Ray Bolger (the Scarecrow) and Jerry Maren the center Lollipop Guild Kid, who is the last surviving Munchkin, who at 93 is still living in Los Angeles.

Doors will open at the Historic USO Building, 230 W. Ridgecrest Blvd. at 6 p.m. (earlier than usual) Wednesday, Dec. 28. The Snack Bar will be open to sell its tasty treats, and I suspect that the Gift Shop will be open, as well. The film rolls out at 7 p.m. Admission is still free, but donations help keep our "Emerald City" in top shape!

Remember..."There's No Place like Home...at your Historic USO Building!"

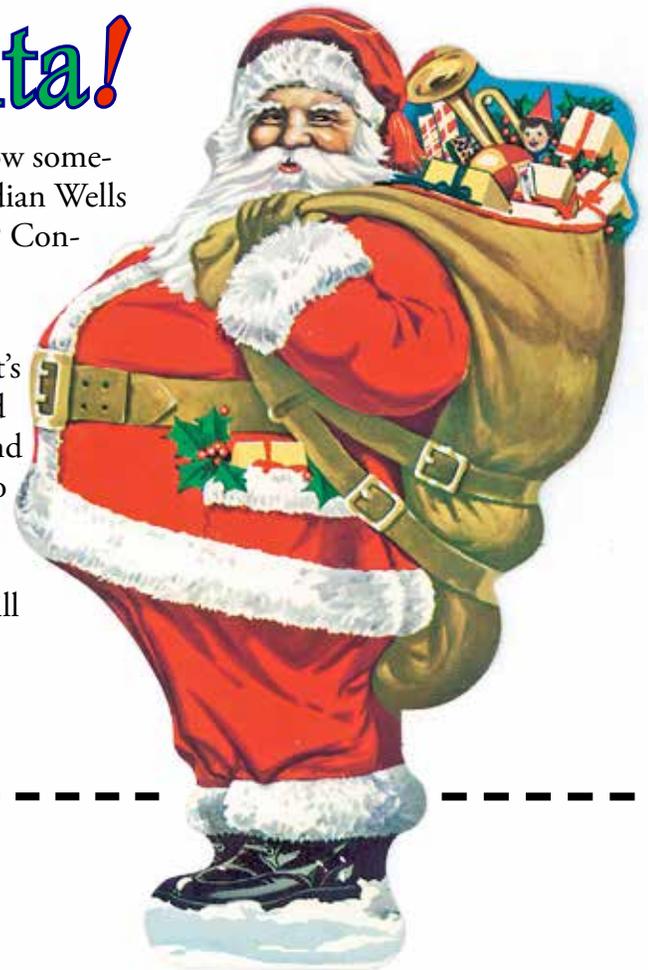
— Nick Rogers

Be an HSUMD Santa!

What can you get someone who already has everything? Know someone out of town who'd like a monthly reminder of life in the Indian Wells Valley? Got a friend or family member who's nuts about history? Consider giving a gift of the Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert. A gift membership costs a mere \$35.

Or you could order a commemorative brick in your recipient's name, giving him or her a permanent presence in Ridgecrest and helping HSUMD at the same time. Please contact Andrew Sound (information given on the last page) to learn more about how to get a brick giving your favorite recipient a presence forever on the walkway in the front of the Historic USO Building. Our sidewalk already has a gratifying number of bricks, but there's still plenty of room for more.

And please don't forget to renew your own membership!



Please enter a gift membership for:

Name _____

Address _____

City, State Zip _____

Sign gift card as follows: _____

I enclose \$35 for each membership and \$45 for each commercial membership. (Send to address as given on back page.)

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Here's an easy way to see this newsletter in color!

Just send an e-mail to our membership coordinator, Lloyd Smith at *lloyd.smith@hughes.net*, and ask him to put you on the list to get a PDF copy e-mailed to you each month.

We don't plan to stop sending paper copies, but online is the way to go if you prefer living color.

Important Reminders

- ★ Annual dues are \$35 (family) and \$45 (business).
- ★ Please remember the Historical Society in your wills, trusts and other gift giving. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

HOLIDAY PARTY 2016
Tuesday, Dec 20, 6 p.m.(dinner), 7:15 p.m. (program), Historic USO Building



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