



HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE UPPER MOJAVE DESERT

230 W RIDGECREST BL ✦ P.O. BOX 2001, RIDGECREST, CA 93556 ✦ 760-375-8456
VOL. 36, No. 8 AUGUST 2021

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

THE HISTORY OF “THE CORNER”

Today, if you are at the southwest corner of the “central” intersection in Ridgecrest—Ridgecrest and China Lake Boulevards—you are ready to enter the Bank of America’s Ridgecrest Branch. Near you is the intersection of a four-lane (six-lane if you count turn lanes) fully paved north-south boulevard and a four-lane paved east-west boulevard, controlled by an array of electrically controlled traffic lights. The Bank of America building was built and opened in 1972 as a contemporarily modern building that was replacing the former site of buildings—such as Loewen’s TV and music store—on “one of the Indian Wells Valley’s most historic corners.”

Go back in time a little over 80 years. That corner was an empty, dusty intersection of two then-named dirt roads—Trona and Randsburg roads—in a village informally called either “the Dairy” or “Crumville” after a nearby farm and dairy owned by Bill Crum.

In 1939, Ridgecrest pioneer Joe Fox sold 450 feet of dirt-road frontage for \$450 to his long-time friends, Bill and Sudie Bentham, whom he knew from his Hollywood days and who had travelled with the Fox family when they migrated to the

area in 1934. They built a store to provide local farmers and Trona’s American Potash Company workers with groceries and gasoline. The location took on the name **Bentham’s Corner**.

After a while, the Bentham’s daughter Donna, age 10, began loaning books off a shelf in the store, becoming the town’s first (albeit unofficial) librarian. The Kern County Library system appears to have taken her seriously, because it reportedly offered books for her to loan out.

As “Crumville” grew to around 15 homes and about 96 people, residents inconveniently received their mail at either Trona or Inyokern. The Benthams, whose store was also the “community center,” applied for a contracted U.S. Post Office. Since the townspeople didn’t really like the name Crumville, the Benthams originally applied for the post office name “Sierra View.” However, the Postal Service rejected this name, claiming there were too many “Sierras” in California and suggested that they apply under another name.

The following year a contest was held at Bentham’s store for a new name for Crumville. Many names were offered, but “Ridgecrest” and “Gilmore” became the two popular choices. “Ridgecrest” was suggested by a visiting friend of the Benthams, Ada Thompson, who fondly remembered a place called Ridgecrest in Missouri. “Gilmore” was the brand of gasoline the Benthams sold. Some felt if the name “Gilmore” was selected, Earl Gilmore, owner of the Gilmore Oil Company of Los Angeles and legendary for his promotions and marketing, would see the publicity value and become the town’s benefactor, possibly building a swimming pool, library, or other civic amenities for.

The final tally of the townsfolk had “Ridgecrest” winning the contest by one vote—51



“Bentham’s Corner,” where the Benthams themselves may be glimpsed in this 1941 photo. Lion Head Motor Oil (a Gilmore brand) is on the signage.

“THE CORNER” (GO TO: PAGE 2)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

With the help of vaccinations and other public health mitigation measures, the state and county have largely lifted our “closure” mandates. Especially for those guests that have been vaccinated, we are fully open!

Being closed by the county was similar to having a switch thrown: It happened very quickly. Being allowed to reopen is a slower process, and we are working through that process while being aware that an uncontrolled flare-up of new infection cases among the unvaccinated public may cause us to be closed again.

So here's our status: Our Historic USO Building and its Store are open, Thursday through Saturday, from 11:00 am till 3:00 pm. Masks are not required of vaccinated guests. When we are able to find and train additional volunteers, we will reopen our Store on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Our every-other Friday night Open Mic event will restart on Friday, September 10. Tom Rindt and his team are getting ready to resume this wildly popular night of musical entertainment for all. And we need to secure the funds needed to restock food and drink. The county has raised the cost of our “event permit” so we need to account for that.

Our every-other Wednesday night Classic Movie Night will restart on Wednesday, September 15. Nick Rogers, movie aficionado, is working toward reassembling a team to provide you the evening of family entertainment that so many have missed.

Our third-Thursday-of-every-month Veterans Breakfast will restart on Thursday, September 16. Our former cook continues to support veterans and our efforts, but he can no longer get food and prepare it for us. So we're looking at asking local food businesses to donate breakfasts each month for us to serve our veterans.

We hope—and plan!—to again become part of your regular entertainment delight.—*Tex Hoppus*



Tex Hoppus

“THE CORNER” (CONTINUING)

town had neither a “ridge” nor a “crest” of note. But the community now had a name with which to move forward.

Later Bill Bentham built a very large chicken coop and raised hundreds of chickens. Life in Ridgecrest was serenely quiet and comfortable.

Then came 1944, along with the Navy and the people—thousands of them. Bentham's little corner store and one-pump station was no match for this turn of events.

Bentham's Corner had several very different looks over the years. By 1948, the business had been bought by the Cochranes, who were homesteaders from Indian Wells Canyon. While the Cochranes may have owned the site, it was still called Bentham's Corner. By 1952, W. A. Hankammer, owner of the Randsburg Drug Company, had bought and remodeled the corner and ran a Rexall Drugstore there. Marie Stephenson had rented part of the building and opened “Marie's Shop,” advertised as the “house of values for the ladies.” Harry's Coffee Cup had opened next door, too. And the chicken coop had become—wait for it—the Chicken Coop, a “beautifully remodeled, redecorated refreshment center with snooker, pool, and billiard tables and a busy but efficiently operated snack counter.” The one-pump gasoline station had been converted to a new Texaco Station with “full stocks of accessories for the modern automobile and storage capacity to keep four pumps busy from morning to night.” Next door, and in the same building, was Bill Brown's Barber Shop, giving “prompt and expert service to the well-groomed.”

But it was still called “Bentham's Corner.”

By 1970, the “corner” had Loewen's TV and music shop, a men's clothing shop operated by Herb King, a pharmacy operated in part by Ted Bachman, and a carpet store operated by George Kirkpatrick.

Now, as you stand on that corner, you know the long and illustrious history that preceded the Bank of America building that stands today.

Tex Hoppus

Sources: *Daily Independent* article, February 14, 1952; *Daily Independent* article, May 22, 1972; HSUMD Newsletter Article by Alan Alpers, January 2013; Excerpt from *High Desert Double Exposure*, publication of Maturango Museum, by Mark Pahuta, Liz Babcock, and Donald Moore, 2020; Interview with Roger Loewen, March 2021.

“THE CORNER” (FROM: PAGE 1)

votes to 50 for “Gilmore.” On August 11, 1941, the U.S. Postal Service established a post office with the contest-winning name Ridgecrest. The

THE BIG CHILL: COOLING OFF AT THE MOVIES

Well, dear readers, here we are. Smack dab in the middle of the summer of 2021, with the temps hitting triple digits on almost a daily basis, and citizens longing for the shorter, cooler days of autumn. For 90 years now, a few hours spent in a lovely, air-conditioned movie theater, has been a popular way to beat excessive summer heat.

Modern air conditioning, as we know it, was born in 1902, when mechanical engineer **Willis Carrier** developed and installed the first system in a publishing company in Brooklyn, New York. Carrier's invention would prove to be revolutionary. American life before air conditioning was radically different—summer heat transformed large cities into virtual ghost towns during the summer, as citizens took to the roads in search of cooler climes, escaping oppressive temperatures and humidity. The sizzling temperatures of cities such as Phoenix and Las Vegas inhibited their growth. The stifling heat and humidity of southern cities like Houston, Atlanta and New Orleans “dampened” the enthusiasm of industrialists to locate there.

Modern air conditioning changed all this. The extraordinary influence of Carrier's invention on American society is illustrated by its introduction into movie theaters in 1925. Until then, the film industry and theater operators had a problem. Hot, sticky temperatures, combined with the natural body heat of an audience crammed into a confined space, created an absolutely miserable environment for movie-goers. As a result, theater owners saw the size of their audiences, and consequently the size of their profits, slump during the summer months. In fact, many theaters of that era would simply close during the summer months, reopening in the fall.

Willis Carrier's invention offered movie goers a cool solution, and an escape from hot homes. In

fact, theaters often advertised their air conditioning systems as prominently as their film offerings. Well into the 1960's movie palaces, big and small, would proudly trumpet their AC systems on their marquees, with banners claiming “30 Tons of Cool Air-Conditioned Comfort!” and “It's Cool Inside!” Local newspaper listings featured icicle-like borders and embellishments on theater advertisements, reinforcing in the minds of potential movie-goers the cool comfort theaters offered, in sweltering times of heat.

Our lovely **Historic USO Building** has six mighty swamp coolers that do the very best they can to keep patrons cool and comfortable. But, in these sweltering triple digit temps, they just can't muster up the cool! Therefore, we have decided to wait until cooler weather in the fall to restart our signature activities: **Open Mic Night**, the **Veterans' Breakfast**, and **Classic Movie Night**. Speaking of movies, one of Movie Night's loyal sponsors, **Ridgecrest Cinemas** offers the latest in current movie hits in beautiful cool comfort and offers an awesome Snack Bar. Please support Kelly Walden and her incredible staff, and take in a movie at the Cinema real soon. —**Nick Rogers**

www.ridgecrestcinemas.com ~ 760-446-6996.



Photo: [Pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We need volunteers to help staff the **HSUMD** Book Store in the Historic USO and to host visitors to the Historic USO Building and exhibits.

Open hours are currently 11:00 AM-3:00 PM, Thursdays-Saturdays.

If you are interested, please drop a line to hsumdnewsletter@gmail.com, or stop by the building during open hours.



BUSINESS AND NON-PROFIT MEMBERS

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 Mohahve Historical Society
 Mojave River Valley Museum

Motion Tire & Wheel
 Museum of Western Film History 🍷
 Needles Regional Museum
 Phyllis M. Hix, Attorney
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 Rand Desert Museum
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 Shoshone Museum Association
 Starbucks
 Tehachapi Historical League
 The Desert Tortoise Preserve
 The Flower Shoppe
The News Review
 TJ Frisbee Bicycles 🍷
 Vaughn Realty
 Warren's Automotive 🍷
 Wrightwood Historical Society
 🍷 Classic Movie Night Sponsor 🍷

HSUMD'S 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 an honor the **HSUMD** Board bestows only on members who have supported the **HSUMD** in sustained and special ways. Our Life Members' names are on our website: hsumd.org!

MEETINGS RESUME IN SEPTEMBER

Regular monthly meetings will resume September 21 with Mark Pahuta and Liz Babcock discussing their just-published book, *High Desert Double Exposure*.

Join us as they share pictures from the book and discuss aspects of creation of the book.

Tuesday, September 21, 7:00 PM at the Historic USO Building

CLASSIC MOVIE NIGHT RETURNS ON WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

“TICKET to TRAVEL” premieres on flex Wednesday, September 15. Join the stars: Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton, Maggie Smith, Audrey Hepburn, Gregory Peck, Paul Newman, Orson Welles, Louis Jordan, Rod Taylor, Eddie Albert, Diane Baker, Elke Sommer, and Suzanne Pleshette on four hilarious, romantic, action-packed journeys to exotic locales.

Our **Super Star Snack Bar** will be open featuring: our famous ¼ pound all-beef “Crumville” hot dog,” four-cheese pizza, cold soft drinks, tasty ice cream cups, a wide variety of candies and fresh, hot popcorn.

And, speaking of popcorn, all guests will be served a FREE bag on this evening of our Grand Re-opening of **Classic Movie Night**. Fliers featuring film titles and information will soon be available in the lobby of the Historic USO

Building. Doors open at 6:30, and the show starts at 7:00. Admission of course is, as always, donation, only.—*Nick Rogers*

“SEE YOU AT THE MOVIES!”



**FREE BAG OF POPCORN ON OUR
GRAND RE-OPENING OF
CLASSIC MOVIE NIGHT**

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE UPPER MOJAVE DESERT	Membership Application or Renewal Form	230 W Ridgecrest Bl Ridgecrest, CA 93555 (760) 375-8456		
Renewal <input type="checkbox"/>	New Membership <input type="checkbox"/>	Family (\$35) <input type="checkbox"/>	Business (\$45) <input type="checkbox"/>	
Last Name: _____		First Name: _____		
<u>Mailing Address:</u>				
Street/P.O. Box: _____				
City: _____		State: _____ Zip: _____		
Contact Phone: _____		Email Address: _____		
Newsletter Preference:		Email & Print <input type="checkbox"/>	Email ONLY <input type="checkbox"/>	Print ONLY <input type="checkbox"/>

Mail complete form and payment to:
 Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert (Membership)
 P.O. Box 2001, Ridgecrest, CA 93556

Make checks payable to:
HSUMD

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**REGULAR MEETINGS
RESUME: TUESDAY
SEPTEMBER 21, 2021**

**HSUMD NEEDS
PEOPLE!
INVITE SOMEONE TO JOIN/HELP!**

HSUMD.org

For More Information, click

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