



Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert

P. O. Box 2001, Ridgecrest, CA 93556

Vol. 24 No. 2

February 2009

Feb. Meeting To Feature Tales of the Magnificent Mavericks

Our February program speaker will be longtime HSUMD member Liz Babcock talking about her new book, *Magnificent Mavericks*, Vol. 3 of the history of the Navy at China Lake.

The meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 18, at the Historic USO Building. The public is welcome.

Liz plans to discuss the problems and pleasures associated with creation of the book, which was more than 22 years in the making. She will also share some of the many colorful stories she learned as she conducted oral-history interviews in connection with research for the book.

Magnificent Mavericks tells the story of the creative military and civilian team at the Naval Ordnance Test Station, China Lake and Pasadena, from 1948 to 1958.

The book encompasses an era China Lake retirees look back on as “the fun years.” Described are the vibrant life of the community, the colorful characters, the ranges and facilities, as well as fascinating stories (including the politics) of such successful weapons as Sidewinder, Polaris, ASROC and Mighty Mouse.

Liz spent the last 10 years of her 24-year career at China Lake doing research and preliminary writing on the book.

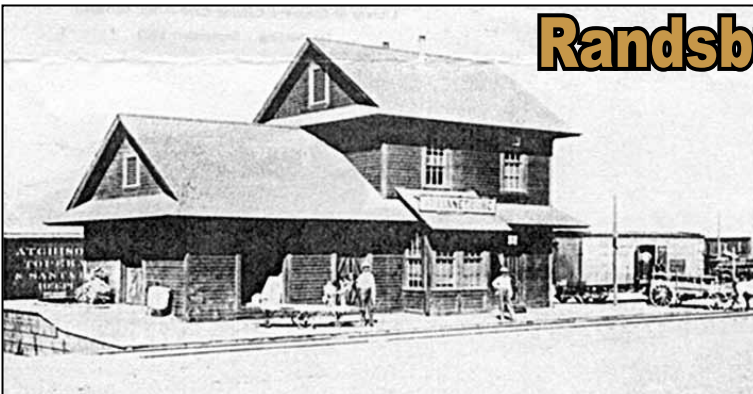
Since her retirement in January 1996, she has been busier than ever, with her current schedule involving part-time jobs as copy editor for the *News Review*, staff



Liz Babcock shows off the hard-cover version of her book.

Photo by Laura Austin

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Randsburg Railroad Tour Offered

Two-story Randsburg Railway depot in Johannesburg, 1900s. The 28.5-mile railroad ran between Kramer and Johannesburg in 1897–1933, when the Johannesburg depot was officially retired. The depot was later taken apart, with each of the two stories becoming a house in Johannesburg. Photo from www.randsburg-railway.com/pictures.htm

(Bill Peterson Collection)

For February we'll tour the Randsburg Railroad and its roadbed.

The Randsburg Railroad ran from Kramer Junction to Johannesburg, never actually reaching the city it was named for.

This trip is suitable for high-clearance 2- and 4-wheel-drive vehicles with good tires.

Bring all the normal winter supplies — several layers of clothing, cameras, lunch, water, and sturdy shoes.

We'll leave the USO Bldg at 8 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 28, and should be done by late afternoon.

For answers to any questions, call Jim Kenney at 760-371-2458

— Jim Kenney

HSUMD President Bruce Wertenberger receives a "Water Wise Is Beautiful" Partner Award given the Historical Society by the IWV Water District. The award, in recognition of the IWVWD Xeriscape workshop HSUMD hosted on Nov. 8, also recognized our water-friendly landscaping at the Historic USO Building. The friendly burro crafted by community-minded artist Skip Gorman will be located in front of our building.

*Photo by
Andrew Sound*



Feb. Speaker

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writer for the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce and history curator for the Maturango Museum. She is also HSUMD's newsletter editor.

Copies of the book will be on sale at the conclusion of the meeting, and Liz will be pleased to autograph them. The softcover version of the book is available at the Maturango Museum and at the giftshop of the China Lake Museum Foundation, publisher of that version. Also on sale at the CLMF giftshop is a hardcover version, published by the Naval History and Heritage Command and the Naval Air Systems Command.

By the way, if you have already purchased your softcover copy, please take a look in the index and see if you can look up Hack Wilson. If not, you are missing the last page, which we discovered — too late — that the printer had omitted!

Liz will have some spare back pages with her, so you can pick one up if you don't have that last page.

One of the Best Bargains in Town: Your HSUMD Due\$

Have you paid your 2009 dues yet? Your support is very much needed for the continued activities of HSUMD and our Historic USO Building — and our dues are modest, considering what you get in return — great programs and activities, plus the satisfaction of knowing that you're helping keep the history of our town alive.

Your 2009 dues are now due — please send your check (\$20 family membership or \$30 business membership) to Treasurer, HSUMD, P.O. Box 2001, Ridgecrest, CA 93556. Remember — we are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and your dues are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

We Need Building Rentals!

Speaking of ways you can help our HSUMD, the rental calendar for the USO Building is still not as full as it needs to be.

Our building is a great place for all sorts of activities — weddings, graduations, anniversaries, parties, church services, club events and more. Tell your friends and business associates!

Our main auditorium has a maximum capacity of 211 auditorium seating or 98 for dining. There's also a smaller meeting room ideal for club meetings or strategy sessions where you want to get away from other distractions.

To learn more about rates, insurance, etc., give Andrew Sound a call at 371-1795. You'll be glad you did!

February Features Fun Activities at Our USO Bldg.

COMMUNITY DANCE!

Saturday, Feb. 28 6-9 p.m. Historic USO Building
230 W. Ridgecrest Blvd.

All Ages Welcome

Music Provided by Music Xpress Mobile DJ Services

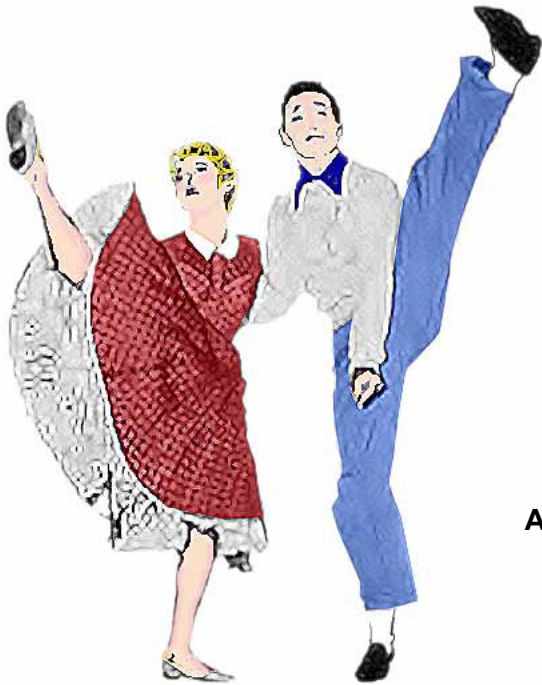
Big Band, Swing, Oldies, R&B, Country — you name it, we play it!

Come and enjoy! Fun for the whole family!

Admission: Adults \$5
Couples \$8
17 & younger \$2
Military \$3

Another Fundraising Event for the Restoration of the Historic USO Building!

Tickets Available at the Door
Dance Info: 382-3390



Wine Tasting!

A Fundraiser for the Historic USO Building!

Come to the Joe Fox Auditorium in the USO Building on Friday, Feb. 27, 6:30-8:30 p.m., for a lot of fun and some delightful wines!

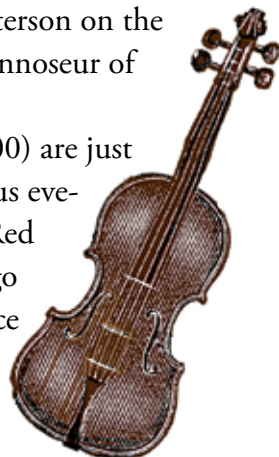
Six “tasting tables” will be hosted by supporters and businesses. Personally selected wines and hors d’oeuvres will be featured.

Our entertainment will include Nathan Wiley and friends with some amazing fiddle music, “Lounge Wizard” Dan Peterson on the piano and our surprise connoiseur of special wines.

Tickets (limited to 100) are just \$20 each for this fabulous evening and are available at Red Rock Books, the Maturango

Museum, the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce and Fundraising Committee members.

Any remaining tickets will be sold at the door for \$25 each.



Hypnotists!

Local hypnotists **Bob and Stephanie Riedel**

will perform their popular stage hypnotist show in the Joe Fox Auditorium of our Historic USO Building on Friday, March 6 at 7 p.m.

This hour and a half of amazing fun is open to the public at the low cost of only \$5 per ticket!

Bob and Stephanie have performed locally, including at the Desert Empire Fair last fall.

We are pleased to have the Riedels volunteer to do this fundraiser for the continued USO Building restoration. We expect our offices to be moved into the facility on around April 1.

For more information about either the wine tasting or the hypnotists’ show, call Fundraising Chair Kathy Armstrong, 375-2643.

FOSSIL FALLS AND THE PINNACLES

By John Di Pol

Fossil Falls and the Pinnacles are two rare geological features located here in the Upper Mojave Desert. Each is just half an hour driving distance from our city of Ridgecrest. Each was created by Mother Nature during the Pleistocene period and by the same agent: water, lots of it.

A bit of background: The geologic time period which started 1.8 million years ago and ended 10,000 years ago is called the Pleistocene (also the Great Ice Age).

Following the Pleistocene is the Holocene, which continues to this day. There were several great glaciation periods (four or five) in the Pleistocene, followed by long intervals of warming climate and melting, with some pluvial periods.

The Sierra Nevada were heavily packed with snow and massive glaciers which, when melted, drained east of their crest into the Owens River in great quantities. The flow of water of the glacial Owens was so immense in these periods that it overflowed Owens Lake, its normal catch basin, and continued south through Indian Wells, Searles, and Panamint Valleys, ending in Death Valley and creating what geologists call the Chain of Lakes. These flooded basins were extremely large (and some very deep) in their day and are an interesting geological phenomenon even though they are dry playas at the present time.

But back to the Fossil Falls. They are located in southern Inyo County at the northern end of the Little Lake basin, a very short distance from the lake itself, which is bounded by the Sierras and Highway 395 on

the west and a massive lava flow front on the east side to form the Little Lake gap.

To reach the viewpoint for the falls, go northbound up Highway 395 from our Indian Wells Valley, through the Little Lake gap to shortly reach a signed intersection with Cinder Road, which turns to the east at the base of a very prominent red cinder cone.

In a short distance will be a signed turnoff to the south to reach a parking area. A 10-15-minute walk along a foot trail over uneven lava will bring you to the brink (top) of the falls.

The falls are in two tiers, with a total fall of over 100 feet. The top tier of 70–80 feet is basalt lava, eroded into a cascade of grotesque boulders, tunnels, potholes spillways, gaps, etc. — truly a jumble created by a tumultuous flow of water.

The bottom of the cascade reaches a lip in the lava flow over which the water flowed in a sheet to plunge into the basin pool 30 feet below.

The falls you can see today were created in the most recent glaciation of the Pleistocene, in the phase called by geologists the “Tioga,” and that the flow of glacial water stopped about 10,000 years ago.

The Trona Pinnacles National National Landmark, located in the southern part of the Searles Valley in San Bernardino County, are individual tufa towers formed underwater during the glacial periods. The three groups of pinnacles — North, Middle and South — were formed during different glaciations: the North and Middle during the Tioga (20,000 years ago) and the Tahoe (75,000 years). The South pinnacles, at a higher elevation, were formed pre-Tahoe.

All the pinnacles were formed



Water has worn the lava of Fossil Falls into odd shapes with a beauty all their own.



Trona Pinnacles: Tufa sentinel at dusk.

Both photos by Liz Babcock

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Our Business Members — *please patronize them!*

Allen County Public Library,
Genealogy Department
AltaOne Federal Credit Union
Anna Marie Bergens, Realtor
Baxendale's Antiques
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DeathValley.com
The Flower Shoppe
TJ Frisbee Bicycles, Inc.
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The News Review (Farris)

The Pleistocene Foundation
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Ridgecrest Automotive, LLC
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Sierra Odyssey, LLC
Sierra Wave Tank Sales
Southern Sierra Medical Clinic
Spectrum Graphics
Gary P. Staab & Assoc., Inc.
The Swap Sheet

FOSSIL FALLS, PINNACLES

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by basically the same process. The tufa material is a form of calcium carbonate. The southern part of the pluvial lake had many underwater springs that were rich in calcium carbonate which, with favorable variables such as water depth, temperature, chemistry, etc., would precipitate out and form the tough tufa.

Algae were also a factor in the more shallow water. Thus grew the towers that are seen today.

Most of the towers are 30 to 40 feet in height, some shorter, some higher, with the tallest 140 feet high (in the Middle group).

Their bulk is also imposing close up. The tapered mound at the base of each tower is the result of weathering and erosion. The towers are often found in clusters within each group.

In toto, the Trona Pinnacles offer one of the most unusual landscapes in all North America. They have been the site for many films, commercial videos, and still photos when the plot or script calls for a "different" background.

The best time to experience their grandeur is to stand in their midst on a windless and silent day and even stop your own breathing for a moment or two. Come and try it.

The pinnacles can be reached by taking Highway 178 east from central Ridgecrest, across Salt Wells, down Poison Canyon into Searles Valley. Prior to turning north toward Trona you'll see a well-signed intersection with a dirt road heading south. The pinnacles, 7 miles distant, can be seen from this point. This road will end at the North group of towers.

Remember, the Trona Pinnacles have been declared an Area of Critical Environmental Concern and merit our protection.

Ref: *GEOLOGY UNDERFOOT In Death Valley and Owens Valley*, by Robert P. Sharp and Allen F. Glazner, 1997

Mary Sue's

by Howard Auld

In the early days of China Lake,
There was a dress shop outside the main gate.
Mary Sue's the store for ladies' apparel galore.
Made her store the place to shop and explore.

For the latest female fashions, up-to-date styles,
The shop so full, you were challenged to walk the
aisles.
A peaceful haven from the stress of the work day.
A friendly place to release your cares and wisp
them away.

A place for work for Mary Sue's friend Gertrude
and others of friendly disposal and attitude.
Male shoppers would patronize the shop too
In search of the right gift appropriate to the need
For that special person to be pleased on occasion
with ease.

So the little shop outside the gate served
the community
At a time and place never to be replaced or
replicated
At that historic time when the Station workforce
was dedicated
To our country's safe, secure future for our
progeny related.

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You could be seeing this
newsletter in color!

Check out our web-site, www.maturango.org/Hist.html, for an archive of our newsletters. Thanks to our gracious webmistress, all the recent issues are included in the archive as color PDFs.

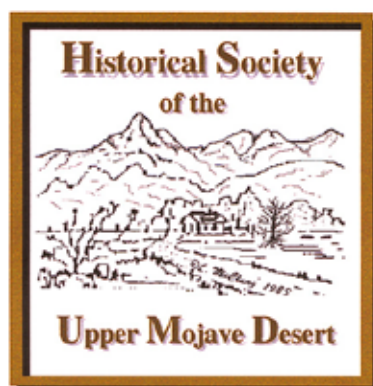
Important Reminders

- ★ Annual dues are \$20 per family for the calendar year.
- ★ Business Member dues are \$30 for the calendar year.
- ★ Please remember the Historical Society in your wills, trusts and other gift giving. We are a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

Historical Society of the
Upper Mojave Desert
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Ridgecrest, CA 93556

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FEBRUARY 2009 MEETING

Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2009, 7:30 p.m., Historic USO Building