



# Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert

P. O. Box 2001, Ridgecrest, CA 93556

Vol. 24 No. 6

June 2009

## June Meeting Topic: A Man and His Dog

The Society's June meeting will feature John and Barbara Marnell presenting a topic of research that they uncovered at the Goffs Cultural Center. The meeting will take place on Tuesday, June 16, at 7:30 p.m. at the Historic USO Building, 230 W. Ridgecrest Blvd.

This month's topic is about a man and his dog, Lou Wescott Beck and Rufus, and their dedication and commitment to make the deserts of Southern California a safer place in the 1910–1917 era. This story tells of their effort to erect signposts to remote water sources in a time before government and others took up the cause.

Lou Beck, as a result of a life-threatening experience on the California desert, made and kept a promise to his Maker that he would devote the remainder of his life to doing what he could to rescue others from a similar fate.

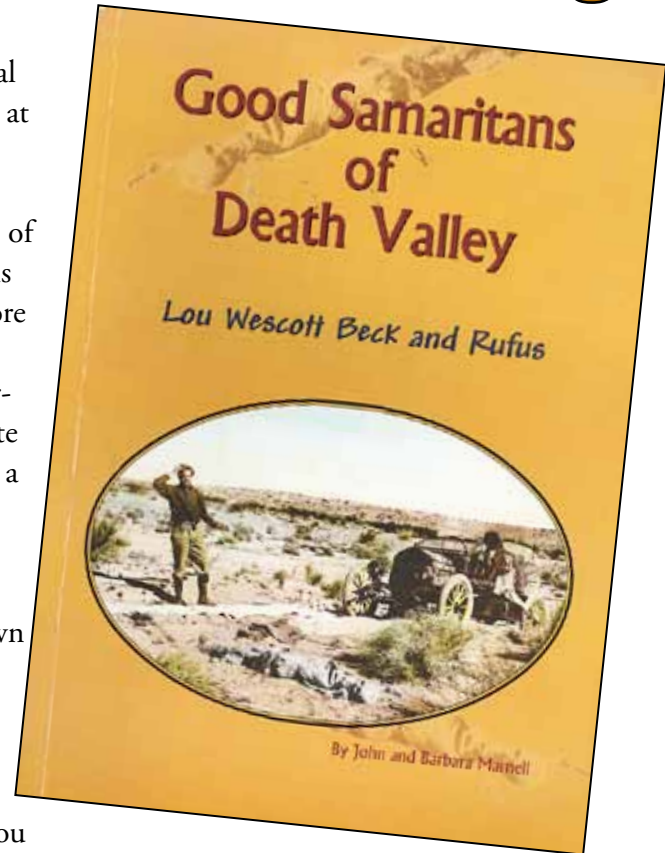
The desert, Death Valley in particular, has been studied, prodded, researched, and written about time and again. It is rare that an almost unknown and yet important story comes to the light of day.

John and Barbara Marnell, while at the Goffs Cultural Center, became aware of the Lou Beck material, stored for years in an archives box. They picked up the research that had begun nearly 60 years earlier, the result being the Marnells' first book, *Good Samaritans of Death Valley*.

The Marnells live in Hesperia, have two adult children, and enjoy exploring remote corners of the California desert as well as Baja California.

The Goffs Cultural Center (more formally, the Mojave Desert Heritage and Cultural Center) contains an extensive collection of material relating to the Mojave Desert. The facility is located at the old townsite of Goffs in

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Come learn about *Good Samaritans of Death Valley*, a great true-life yarn about a man and his dog.

### No Field Trips This Summer

No field trips are planned for June, July, or August. Field trips will resume in September.

In the meantime, have a great summer!

— Jim Kenney



Rufus dressed to do a good deed.

Photo from *Good Samaritans of Death Valley*

## President's Message



Our upcoming June 16 meeting and talk will be the last meeting until our Sept. 15 meeting. We will be taking the summer off since so many people will be travelling or have other obligations. Have a good summer!

We recently had a good annual meeting with 68 people in attendance. Shortly after that meeting, the board had its formation meeting. After discussion, we voted to continue with the same officers we had this past year.

At the annual meeting, as I was briefly noting various activities which had occurred during 2008, I forgot to mention the honor we received in the fall when we were presented one of just 10 awards made this year by the State of California's Office of Historic Preservation. We were honored for our successful efforts to preserve our Historic USO Building.

Speaking of our building, it is being rented out for various activities, but more rentals are needed to help defray the cost of operating it. Please keep it in mind if you are in an organization which could make use of our facilities.

Andrew Sound, our treasurer, is the point of contact for rentals and pricing information.

— Bruce Wertenberger

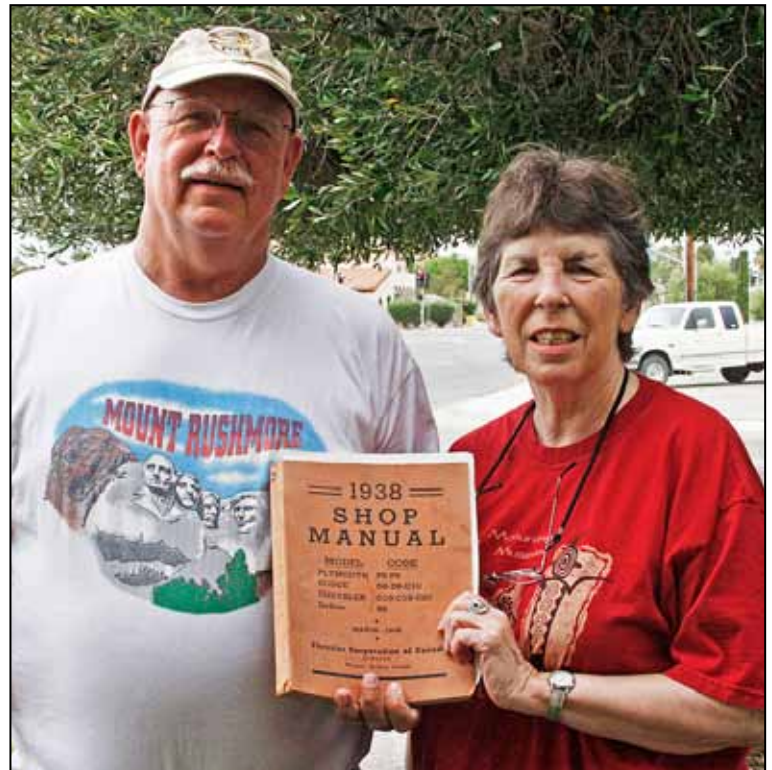
## Man and His Dog ——— From p. 1

Eastern California. You may remember last year's annual dinner, at which founder Dennis Casebier told us about his adventures getting the Cultural Center off the ground.

HSUMD meets on the third Tuesday of the month, but we're taking a break from meeting during July and August. Watch for more programs on our desert's fascinating history starting in September.

All are welcome to attend all of our meetings. For more information on this or future meetings, call Society President Bruce Wertenberger at 375-2369.

— Andrew Sound



### What are Rich Prosser and Liz Babcock doing with the shop manual for a 1938 Dodge?

The answer to that question appears to be a win all the way around for Rich, Liz — and HSUMD. Back in 1994 Liz inherited an old Dodge sedan (complete with shop manual) from her second husband, Don Kumferman. Liz got tired of watching the car gather dust in her garage, and a couple of years ago HSUMD agreed to accept it as a donation. Recently our board decided selling the vehicle made more sense than hanging onto it, since we currently have nowhere to store it. After Chris Cane/Prosser carried that news home, Rich, who is a car aficionado, showed up with a generous offer. He got the car — HSUMD got the money — and Liz got some much-needed space in her garage plus a nice tax write-off. *Photo by Jackie Scherry*

## HSUMD Garage Sale Planned for Sept.

Got any gently used treasures, large or small, that we could sell to make some money for our USO Building Fund?

Kathy Armstrong and her Fund-Raising Committee are planning a garage sale sometime in September, so our summer hiatus would be a great time for you to set aside treasures you no longer want or need. If you have items you'd like to dispose of now, give Kathy or a member of her committee a call to make arrangements.

# New From the HSUMD Gift Shop!



We now have four wonderful volunteers to staff our gift shop Mondays–Fridays, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

At left is a drawing from the company making our new high-quality polo shirts. As you can see, there’s a nice design based on our logo that will be stitched on the shirt.

We will have sizes 4X, 3X, 2X and x-lg and large, as well as golf caps (also shown in the drawing). The shirts are \$25 each and the caps run from \$12.50 to \$15.00. The shirts are a sand color with bright stitching. Want to reserve a shirt or a cap? Call the USO Building at 375-8456 during gift shop open hours, and we will reserve one on your credit card.

We also are carrying local handmade jewelry from Su Tipton, From My Hand, all just beautiful.

The gift shop will also be open at all HSUMD events.

— Chris Canel/Prosser



## DON'T MISS BBX APPEARANCE!

At left, in a historic appearance, Big Band X-Press plays in a sold-out April 2007 event on our USO Building stage as we were in the midst of renovations. Enjoy the Big Band again this Saturday, June 13, from 8 to 11 p.m. in the beautifully renovated Joe Fox Auditorium! The public is invited, and tickets are \$10 each at the door. The band invites you to “Swing Into Summer” by dancing to the sounds of Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington, Les Brown, Count Basie, Tommy Dorsey and Harry Connick, Jr. Free snacks at each table and a no-host bar!

Photo by Liz Babcock



# The Manzanar of Old

By John Di Pol

followed quickly by ranchers. Conflict ensued for 5 years; however, settlers, protected by an Army detachment, continued to come in.

One of those early ranchers was cattleman John Shepherd who homesteaded 160 acres 3 miles north of George's Creek midway between the settlements of Lone Pine and Independence. He did very well and expanded his ranch to 1,700 acres by 1900.

In 1905 respected irrigator George Chaffey, together with investor partners, purchased 1,300 acres of the Shepherd ranch to establish an agriculture orchard colony modeled after successful projects Chaffey had completed east of Los Angeles and down in Imperial County.

The colony would be known as the "Manzanar Irrigated Farms" since apples would be the principal product and "mananzar" is the Spanish word for apple. In 1910 the Chaffey interests formed the Owens Valley Improvement Company to subdivide and sell the Manzanar land into 10-, 20-, and 40-acre plots.

OVI also built a large community hall (which also served as a packing plant in harvest time), a two-room elementary school, and a general store. An irrigation system was installed to deliver water from Shepherd and Bairs Creek to each parcel.

In 1912 OVI planted 22,000 trees, mostly apple with a few pear. Why the 2-year delay from 1910? You guessed it — disputes with Los Angeles over water rights.

The city had started construction of its aqueduct and had acquired most land and water rights downstream of city diversion point on the Owens River 9 miles north of Independence. OVI prevailed, and the trees went into the ground.

For the next 10 years, the trees grew and started to produce. The community also grew, with the Community Hall and general store being the social center. The inhabitants became very close-knit and social with neighbors and friends.

In the early 1920s, the popula-

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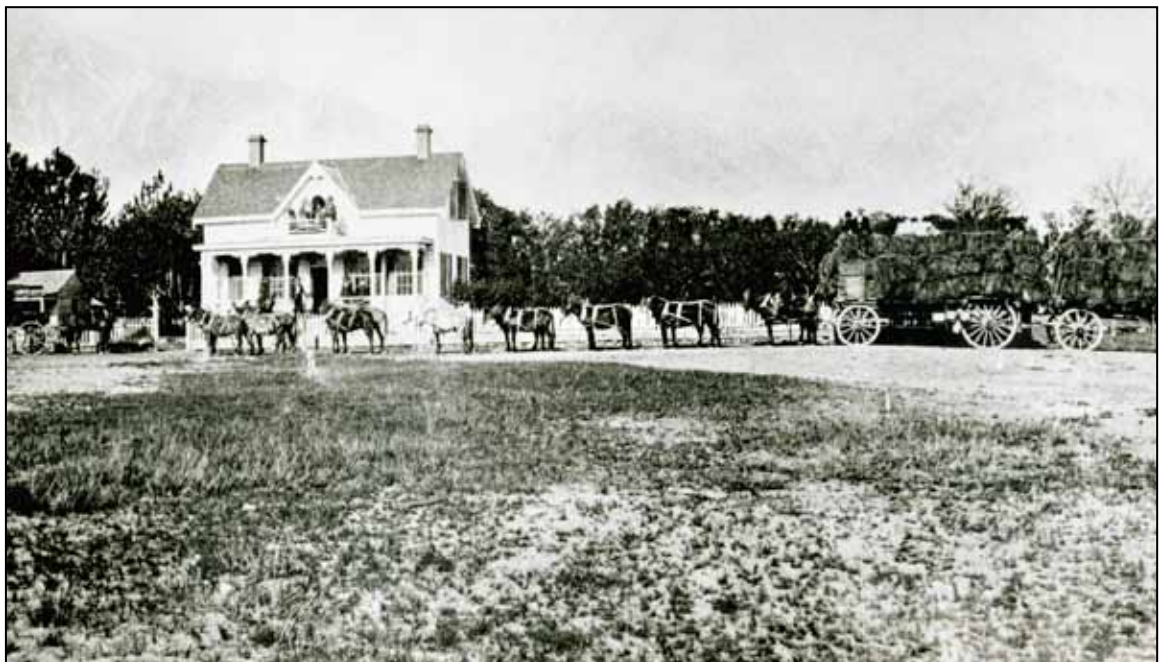
**M**anzanar! Quickly — what does that name first bring to mind? Of course, the World War II Manzanar War Relocation Center, which has had a degree of prominence in recent years — and a interesting history.

But Manzanar is the name of a place in the Owens Valley, Inyo County, also with an interesting history that predates that of the Relocation Center. That history is the subject of this month's article.

The Owens Valley trends north-south, is 5 to 10 miles wide and 60-70 miles long, and is located at the base of the Eastern Sierra Nevada. The valley floor is flat and even, at an elevation of 4,000 feet above sea level. It is in the rain shadow of the Sierra which has a crest 13,000-14,000 feet above sea level.

The valley's climate is semiarid; however, the water table historically was very high with many springs. The Owens River, a sizable stream fed by many tributaries which carry the snow melt from the Sierras, meanders down the length of the valley.

The valley's first inhabitants were the Paiutes from 600 years before the present era. The first Euro-Americans who came to stay were miners, who began arriving in 1860,



Mule team and haywagon in front of John Shepherd's house, six miles south of Independence, 1874.

Helen Gunn Edwards collection,

Maturango Museum

# Our Business Members — *please patronize them!*

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*The Swap Sheet*

## Short Plays Festival

Mark your calendar now! You won't want to miss the Short Plays Festival to be put on by Ridgecrest Community Theatre Troupe on July 10 and 11, at 7 p.m. in the Fox Auditorium of our historic USO Building.

Tickets, to be available at Red Rock Books well in advance of the festival, are only \$5 per person, and all proceeds will go to the Historical Society and the Theatre Arts Club at Cerro Coso Community College. Unsold pre-sale tickets will also be available at the door.

The festival will feature three dramas and three comedies. "Misadventure in Storytime" will be directed by the author, Rick Tobias, who wrote and directed another play last year at Cerro Coso's Summer Short Plays Festival. Others are "The Game" and "Forbidden Fruit" directed by Anne Schreckengost, "Down Came the Rain" directed by Robin Moen, "No Exit" directed by Pearl Woolam and "Drugs Are Bad" directed by Becki Cornett.

## The Manzanar of Old

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tion was more than 200 (including 50 children). But all was not roses. In the good years, tons of high-quality fruit were produced, but in the bad years severe frost and wind damage to trees (3 out of every 5 years) and high shipping costs created big losses.

Also OVI parcel-lot sales were slow. Half of the land was subdivided, and only half of that was sold. OVI was ripe for a buyout.

Concurrently, Los Angeles' need for more water was growing in the early 1920s. The city went after the water that farmers in the upper end of the valley above the city's diversion point were using. That was good farming country and the farmers had built a fine system of gates and canals to divert their own water from the Owens River.

The city did not haggle over prices.

It paid good money for land and water rights and maybe used a heavy hand to convince reluctant sellers.

Back to Manzanar. The downslide continued, and in 1924 the Chaffey OVI Company sold its land holdings and water rights to Los Angeles. The other propertyowners began to follow suit.

By 1926 Los Angeles owned all of the land and water rights of the Manzanar Irrigated Farms Colony endeavor.

Los Angeles then instituted a program to permit the former parcel owners to stay as renters and continue to operate the orchards with a lease arrangement under the supervision of a city manager. Some opted to continue, but this program also gradually declined until 1934 when the city shut off the water supply — the death

knell.

The last family moved out in 1935. The city cleared off all the buildings and houses. Some were moved into the nearby towns, others were razed, and the rest were burned. A few orchards were left standing but they too slowly withered away over the years.

Postscript: Seven years later in 1942, as U. S. government construction crews and bulldozers moved onto these Manzanar lands to build the Relocation Center, one of the first actions was to use Chaffey's irrigation system as part of the center's water supply network.

*Ref: VOICES FROM THIS LONG BROWN LAND*, Jane Wehrey, Palgrave McMillan, 2006.

*MANZANAR*, Jane Wehrey, Arcadia Publishing, 2008.

## DIRECTORS

Bruce Wertenberger, President  
375-2369, brucew@ridgenet.net.  
Doug Lueck, Vice President  
375-8202, racvb@filmdesert.com  
Joan Chartier, Secretary  
499-9119, joan1@mchsi.com  
Andrew Sound, Treasurer & Publicist  
371-1795, afsound@verizon.net



Liz Babcock, Newsletter Editor  
375-7900, lizbab@iwvisp.com  
Chris Cane/Prosser, Giftshop  
793-0741, christinecane@msn.com  
Chuck Cordell, Building  
cordell.construction@yahoo.com  
Jim Kenney, Field Trips/Programs/  
Oral History/SEEP  
371-2458, rubiblue@verizon.net  
Mike Leming, Accessions/Events  
371-7270,  
inspirationalcountry@hotmail.com  
Roger McEntee, Building Manager  
poppamac@verizon.net

Louis Renner, Membership  
375-4379, linkrenn@verizon.net  
Pete Smith, Exhibits  
joe.bear4@verizon.net

## COMMITTEE LEADERS

Kathy Armstrong, Fundraising  
375-2643  
Carol Porter, Accessions  
porter@ridgenet.net  
Janet Westbrook, Webmistress  
jwest@ridgenet.net

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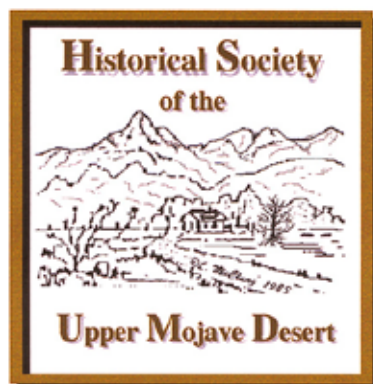
## Important Reminders

- ★ 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  
P. O. Box 2001  
Ridgecrest, CA 93556

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## JUNE 2009 MEETING

Tuesday, June 16, 2009, 7:30 p.m., Historic USO Building