



Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert

P. O. Box 2001, Ridgecrest, CA 93556

Vol. 24 No. 4

May 2009

Annual Dinner Features Dr. Kristin Berry

The Historical Society of the Upper Mojave Desert will hold its annual dinner meeting on Tuesday, May 19, at 6 p.m. at the Historic USO Building, 230 W. Ridgecrest Blvd.

Our featured speaker will be Dr. Kristin H. Berry, who will document local and landscape-level changes from the 1890s to the present using rephotography. Her presentation is entitled “Then and Now: A Photographic Account of Change in Indian Wells Valley and Vicinity.”

We hope you will attend to hear this fascinating speaker, participate in our annual meeting and enjoy a good dinner with friends. Tickets, which cost \$25 and are available at the Maturango Museum and Red Rock Books, must be purchased by May 15.

The speaker — Dr. Kristin Berry — is familiar to long-term residents of the Indian Wells Valley, since she grew up here, graduated from Burroughs High School, then returned to live here until 1979. Her father, Dr. Ivar Highberg, was head of China Lake’s Test Department, and her mother, Mary Highberg, was one of the valley’s most popular music teachers.

Her interest in the desert developed very early; her homes were adjacent to or



Dr. Kristin H. Berry

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Visitors to Cerro Gordo enjoy exploring the old mining town, with a beautiful view of Owens Valley in the background.

Photo by Liz Babcock

May 30 Field Trip to Cerro Gordo

We will leave the Historic USO Building at 8 a.m. on Saturday, May 30, and venture up to Owens Valley on our annual trip to Cerro Gordo.

We’ll talk history and share tales with Mike Patterson, the owner, and talk about efforts to further restore this 1860s-era ghost town.

This trip is suitable for all vehicles in good shape with good tires; the last 8 miles are up a well-graded Inyo County dirt road up to a little higher than 8,500 feet.

Bring layering clothing as the weather can be almost anything, walking shoes, lots of water, lunch, snacks and of course a camera.

If you have any questions, call Jim Kenney at 760-371-2458.

— Jim Kenney

Meet Our Board Candidates

Our Nominating Committee chaired by Dale Lane, with members John Di Pol and Joan Woodman, presents a strong slate of candidates for the HSUMD Board of Directors. Here's some information about each candidate. We'll vote on eight positions at our Annual Dinner. As always, you can nominate someone from the floor, but you need to have the person's permission to throw his/her hat in the ring before you do so.

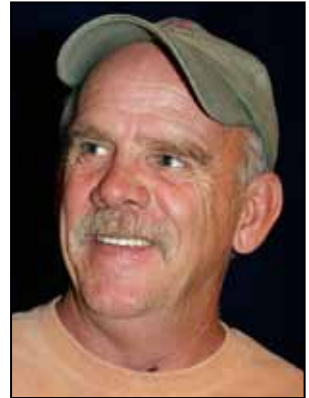
Liz Babcock

Liz Babcock (incumbent) serves as our newsletter editor. She is also the history curator for the Maturango Museum and author of *Magnificent Mavericks*, Vol. 3 of the history of China Lake. Liz also works as the copy editor for the *News Review* and as a writer on the staff of the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce. Liz arrived here in 1960 and had a career in the Technical Information Department at China Lake. She is the newsletter editor for the Ridge Writers and frequently does publicity for CLOTA. You probably have seen her with her camera glued to her eye — she takes photos everywhere!



Roger McEntee

Roger McEntee graduated from PS 127 in Gilcrest Colo., in 1970 and then spent the next eight years in the Navy, with three of those years in Vietnam in Patrol Squadron 40, based out of Moffett Field. Roger came to our valley in 1975. At China Lake he worked in the Range Department, retiring from there in 2007. "For three years I have been involved with the restoration of the USO, a project that has been a passion for me," he said. He has two children, 11 grandkids, and a new wife, Kym, who has also spent many hours on USO Building renovation.



Joan Chartier



Joan Chartier (incumbent) is not just interested in our local history — she has lived it! In 1945 her parents, Bill and Marie Parks, brought Joan and her two sisters to China Lake. The Parks both worked as civil servants on the base until they retired. After Joan went to school, she returned to go to work for the Navy for 41 years as a program manager in the Combat Environment Simulation Division. She retired in 2003. "I have been on the Board for two years and secretary the whole time," said Joan. "I've been on Kathy Armstrong's Fund-raising Committee for three years. I love this valley."

Jim Kenney



Jim Kenney (incumbent) has been a resident of our valley since 1971. "I enjoy getting the speakers and doing the local tours as my way of giving back to the community," said Jim. A former teacher at Cerro Coso, he attends BLM Advisory Committee meetings and is a member of the Gear Grinders. Jim is interested in visiting and exploring historic sites and mines. This will be his third term on our board. "Now that we have the Historic USO Building up and running, I would like us to see the society start to move back to recording local history, including oral histories," he said.

News From Our Gift Shop

We have three more volunteers for our Gift Shop — and can always use more! (We are currently open during events in the building, but would like to be able to extend our hours.)

Recently, with the board's approval, I ordered new polo shirts — high-quality cotton in a sand color with bright stitching identifying the Historical Society — a great way to show your dedication to our local history! Please let me know if you'd like to reserve a shirt. (See my contact info on the back page of this newsletter.)

— Chris Cane/Prosser

Meet More of Our Board Candidates

Bill Nevins



Bill Nevins has been a resident of the Indian Wells Valley since 1966. He retired from China Lake in 1999 and has continued working as an engineering consultant. Bill previously served on the HSUMD board for five years and was our president for three of those years. Bill was the driving force behind getting our USO Building restoration effort under way

and he continued to served as the program's manager until last year. He has also provided volunteer support for the Sand Canyon Environmental Education Program and the California Archaeological Site Stewardship Program.

Lou Renner

Louis Renner (incumbent) and his wife Joan came to the Indian Wells Valley in 1958. A Korean War veteran and an aerospace engineer, Lou worked in the CLPP area at China Lake and retired from NAWCWD in 1989. He has been involved in many community activities, including coaching and managing Little League and soccer teams, Knights of Columbus (officer), Friends of the Fair, Burroughs Band Boosters, and NARFE (an officer for six years). On our board, he serves as membership chair and has worked hard to get brass plates naming the window sponsors at the USO Building. Lou has always been concerned with recording the history of the valley and trying to make sure the desert area is respected.



Pete Smith



Pete Smith first saw our valley in January 1969, when he came here to visit his uncle, Bob Cartwright. Pete took a job here with Texas Instruments just the following month, and after college in Bakersfield, he returned to work for Loral, Lockheed Martin, then EER. He met his wife Kathy on a blind date at the Hideaway, and they were married here in 1986. A back injury resulted in disabled retirement in around 2000.

Pete has been very active in the community, including on the board (including as vice president and treasurer) of the Friends of the Fair and on the Recreational Park Committee for the Ridgecrest Elks. He also worked on the successful effort to establish Red Rock Canyon as a state park. "When they started restoring the USO Building, it got me excited," he said. "I got involved, sponsored windows, went to events. I like to see the history stay around!"

Bruce Wertenberger

Bruce Wertenberger (incumbent) has served on the HSUMD board since 1986 both as president (numerous terms) and as secretary. He was the editor of the HSUMD newsletter for many years, and he and a helper still do the label-sticking and mailing tasks for the newsletter. Bruce also helped create exhibits for the Society. He was active in the Maturango Museum and other community organizations until recently. A native of North Dakota, Bruce came to China Lake as a junior professional in 1953 and retired in 1988.



GOT YOUR BRICK YET?

We'll soon be installing more inscribed bricks in front of the USO Building — but there's still a lot of room for more! You can honor a friend or relative and help the USO Building restoration effort by buying a 4- x 8-inch brick for \$100 or an 8- x 8-inch brick for \$250. The 4x8 brick has space for three lines, with 21 characters per line, and the 8x8 brick has space for six lines, 21 characters per line. Our treasurer, Andrew Sound, can give you more details — see contact information on the back page.

Help Us Collect Gifts for Heroes

Chris Cane/Prosser is spearheading an effort to collect items needed to help make our valiant troops a bit more comfortable as they risk their lives on our behalf. To learn more about how and what to donate, see last month's newsletter or call Chris at 793-0741 between 10-2 anytime.

Annual Dinner Featured Speaker

From p. 1

only a few blocks from the open desert. She observed changes from livestock grazing and the impact to wildflowers while learning the species of plants in college and then made similar observations about effects of vehicle use on the desert.

Dr. Berry received bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in biology and related subjects at Stanford University, University of California at Los Angeles, and UC Berkeley.

She conducted her doctoral research on the chuckwalla lizard here, using an Argus Range location within the China Lake reservation to plot out a controlled area where she could study the territorial habits of individual lizards.

She has worked for the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management and Geological Survey since 1974 and may be best known for her research on the desert tortoise. It was her leadership that led to establishment of the Desert Tortoise Natural Area.

During the late 1990s, Dr. Berry and colleagues Matt Brooks (now a principal investigator for the U.S. Geological Survey at Yosemite) and Historian Wes Chambers were interested in the distribution and prevalence of perennial bunch grasses in the desert, prior to the arrival of livestock grazing (among other subjects).

She and collaborators collected old photographs of the Mojave Desert from U.S. Geological Survey files in Denver. These photos were taken by geologists who explored the West to discover important mineral resources and to map springs and rivers.

The Huntington Library was another source of old photographs and journals of expeditions to sites on the



Same Scene, Different Century — Shown are a 1901 photo (top) and one taken by Dominic Oldershaw in exactly the same spot in 2000.

Naval Air Weapons Station. Lou Prachia of HSUMD and Bob Wheeler also provided valuable materials.

Both Wheeler and Tom Campbell accompanied Dr. Berry and landscape rephotographer Dominic Oldershaw in searches for the photo sites, some of which are now in remote places.

Dr. Berry will draw from her collection of more than 600 rephotographs of the Mojave Desert to discuss change — and the lack of it — in the Mojave Desert and to show the value of old photos in assessing longevity of plants, recovery of vegetation and

invasion of alien plants after major disturbances.

The meeting will start off with a short business meeting, including the board election and a report on the past year's activities, followed by a buffet dinner catered by Farris' Restaurant.

HSUMD meets on the third Tuesday of the month, except for July and August. Each meeting features a presentation on some aspect of local history. All are welcome to attend. For more information, call President Bruce Wertenberger at 375-4764.

— Andrew Sound

Our Business Members — *please patronize them!*

Allen County Public Library,
Genealogy Department
AltaOne Federal Credit Union
Anna Marie Bergens, Realtor
Baxendale's Antiques
BevLen Haus – Bed & Breakfast
DeathValley.com
The Flower Shoppe
TJ Frisbee Bicycles, Inc.
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JRP Historical Consulting
Dick Lewis Domestic Water Systems
Jack & Dana Lyons, Realtors
Netzer-Russell Consulting, LLC
Nevins Tech. Consultants
The News Review (Farris)

The Pleistocene Foundation
Kenneth G. Pritchard, Attorney
Ridgecrest Automotive, LLC
Ridgecrest Moving & Storage
Sierra Odyssey, LLC

Sierra Wave Tank Sales
Southern Sierra Medical Clinic
Spectrum Graphics
Gary P. Staab & Assoc., Inc.
The Swap Sheet

Come Look at Our Beautiful Upstairs!

If you haven't already done so, why not use the opportunity of the Annual Meeting to tour the newly refurbished upper floor in the USO Building?

The restoration work has been accomplished over the last few months under the able supervision (and with the elbow grease of) Building Manager Roger McEntee and largely funded by a bequest from the late Helen McCall.

The second floor of the USO Building was added to the plans for a standard V-1-type Federal Recreation Building in order to provide the USO staff with living quarters, since little vacant housing was available in Ridgecrest in 1945.

During the building's later life as the County Building, the upstairs apartment was used by some of the judges. Just another aspect of what makes Ridgecrest's own Historic USO Building unique! — *Andrew Sound*

★ Fund-Raising Activities ★

When you're at the **Spring Festival** on **May 14-17**, be sure to stop by the **HSUMD booth** where Kathy Armstrong and her dedicated team of fund-raisers will be conducting a silent auction the entire four days. You'll be able to bid on handcrafted items, oil paintings by popular local artists, donations from local businesses — inexpensive treasures, with all the proceeds going to our Renovation Fund!

Another planned fund-raising activity will be a **big yard sale in September**. "These sales are always successful because of the many donations from our members and the public," Kathy said. She asks that we start gathering items now.



Attendees at our April 25 fund-raising event enjoy **Swing 'n Easy**, the fabulous band led by Elena Vitale that brought the sounds of the Big Band era to the USO Club for a very fun evening. You can swing and sway to this joyous music too — **Swing 'n Easy will return on Saturday, June 6**. Mark your calendar and be sure to show up — you'll be glad you did! The doors open at 5:30 p.m. and the concert lasts from 6 to 9 p.m. Admission is only \$10, with seniors admitted for \$7 each. The USO Renovation Fund will be the beneficiary. For more information about the concert, call 382-3390.

Photo by Liz

A Note From Bruce

Bob Riedel put on another good hypnotist program this past Saturday. It's amazing the things his subjects will do under hypnosis, and also interesting to see how people don't respond when he suggests they do something out of their comfort zone.

Hope to see you at our Annual Meeting May 19!
— *Bruce Wertenberger*

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**You could be seeing this
newsletter in color!**

Check out our website, 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.

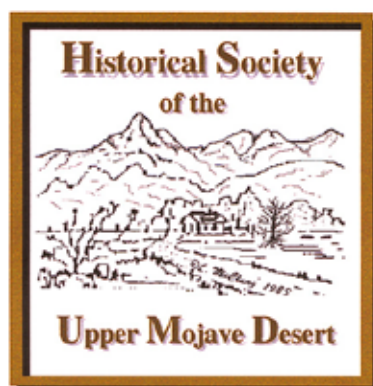
Important Reminders

- ★ 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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MAY 2009 ANNUAL DINNER

Tuesday, May 19, 2009, 7:30 p.m., Historic USO Building