



Summer 2006

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SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Message from the President

“IT’S FUN TO SEARCH, AND A JOY TO FIND”

I admit those aren’t my words, but the motto of the Questers organization. The thought seems especially appropriate for this issue, so I trust Questers won’t mind my borrowing it this one time.

Inside, you’ll find a story about a gift from Questers that will enable us to expand our oral history program ... a report on one couple’s search for the history of a unique carving they obtained when King’s Inn closed . . . and a memory-stretching “In Search of Yesterday” quiz.

I’ll bet you have found the search to be as much fun as the finding in many aspects of your life. I know I have. One way we experience it is in our migration from Wisconsin to Arizona in the fall, and back again in the spring.

Instead of taking the direct route, and attempting to cover the 2000 miles in the shortest time possible, we love to explore the country in between.

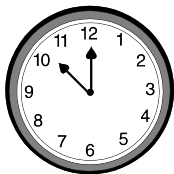
As a result, we take different routes, searching for new sights, local histories, and

special collections of art or eccentric exhibits. And what a joy they are to find!

Anyone with a collection experiences the fun of searching through flea markets, garage sales, and second-hand shops, looking for a missing item. I’ll bet most of us watch the TV program “Antiques Roadshow” — revel in the discoveries — and secretly hope that we’ll have the joy of finding an overlooked treasure in the next rummage sale that we visit.

Here’s wishing you the best of luck in whatever you may be searching for in the months ahead! And, keep the Sun Cities Area Historical Society in mind if you have artifacts from the 1960s that you no longer want. Give us the opportunity to see if they might help with our search to restore 10801 Oakmont Drive closer to its original appearance.

Edson Allen
President, Board of Trustees



SUMMER HOURS — June, July, August

10 a.m. to Noon, Friday and Saturday (or by appointment)

10801 Oakmont Drive — Sun City, AZ 85351 — Phone: 623/ 974-2568

Email: scahs@frys.com

Web site: www.scazhistory.org

The Sun Cities Area Historical Society is certified by the Arizona Historical Society

The Search for a Carving's Identity

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Remember the King's Inn? The beautiful woodcarving pictured below once hung in the inn and was acquired by Bill and Bonita Skidmore shortly after the King's Inn closed. That started them on a search that has reached to England in an attempt to learn where the carving came from, who carved it, and how it got to the King's Inn.

The Skidmores were told that Del Webb purchased the carving in 1958 in London for \$28,000. Those who knew Webb, however, are unaware of his ever traveling abroad. One former Webb employee believes the carving originally hung in the Florida King's Inn and was shipped here after being saved from a fire that consumed that hotel.

Here is what is known about the carving. A crest of arms appears on a breastplate in the center of the carving. Around the crest are the words, "For God and Empire." At the bottom of the carving is the Latin phrase, "*Per Aspera Ad Astra*," which translates to "*Through all difficulty toward glory*." There is no artist's signature on the front, but inscribed on the back are the date, "24-XII-29," and three names: Irene Fraser; AJ (or perhaps AS or AG) Oakley; and Malcolm Fraser. The carving measures four feet in width, four feet in height, and is six inches deep at the thickest point. It weighs 60 pounds.

The names gave the Skidmores a clue, and a friend in England searched through a registry of English heraldry. He found a Sir Malcolm Fraser, whose wife's name was Irene. The Fraser coat of arms is very similar to the breastplate in the carving and appears above the same Latin inscription found on the carving.

The registry also listed Sir Fraser's two children. Bill called the daughter, and she remembered the carving, but not the carver. A

search of English sculptors turned up an A.J. Oakley (Alfred James) who lived from 1878 to 1959. The Tate Gallery in London has a sculpture by this artist, measuring 19"x 2"x 6" deep, entitled "Mamua," circa



1926. Could he be the carver of the treasure owned by Bill and Bonita Skidmore? Only further investigation will tell.

The thrill of the search goes on!



Before we give you the answers to the quiz in our Spring Newsletter, here's a new search for little known facts about our past. Be the first to call in the correct answer to the Historical Society at 623-974-2568, and you'll receive a set of 26 "*Memories of the Sun Cities.*" Call at any time of the day, as the answering machine will record your answer and tell us when you called. As before, the answers will be on display at the Society.

- 1) *What were the original names of the first three Sun City recreation centers — the ones we now call Oakmont, Fairview, and Mountain View?*
- 2) *What three things have been planned for the vacant land located between the former Sundome and the former Crestview/Vacation Headquarters building?*

Now for the answers to the last quiz. The first to call in with the correct answers were _____ and _____.



The first question asked about Sun City's movie theater. It was named the **Alco**, and opened in 1974 in the LaRonde Center in the building that now houses the Amish Furniture Store. Its final showing, on May 31, 1990, was the police thriller "Q&A," starring Timothy Hutton and Nick Nolte. Fewer than 40 people were in attendance in the 437-seat theater. Tickets cost \$2.50!

Our second question asked about the largest model home offered in Sun City West. It was the 4,580-sq. ft. English manor style **Tudor**, with a base price of \$395,000. It included a 900-sq. ft. "Great Room," a library, maid's quarters, butler's pantry, and an exercise room off the master bath.

Among the fine interior touches were a spiral staircase leading to a study loft, Roman columns lining the entry to the living area, arched doorways throughout, and a tiled garage floor. Outside security shutters could be programmed to close when the sun struck them. The deluxe features drove the price to more than \$500,000.

John Meeker, president of DEVCO, hoped that offering larger luxury homes would attract the affluent that were moving into Scottsdale. The Tudor, and a slightly smaller Spanish-style **Monterrey**, drew 25,000 lookers in the first three weeks — but no buyers. The two new luxury models were announced just as interest rates skyrocketed, and they are the only two of their kind in Sun City West.



The Search for Floyd Johnson's Museum

We wish we had met Floyd Johnson when he lived in Sun City! Like many who move here, Floyd had an intriguing background. But he had something more, a strong drive to start a museum.

Floyd loved the west. After returning from World War I, he worked as a game warden in Colorado and New Mexico. One time, he was assigned as an undercover agent in Louisiana, and brought a band of poachers to justice. His passion, however, was preserving the old west, and wherever he went, he collected items of historical value. Eventually, he moved to Sun City.

He wanted a permanent home for his collection, and he began to look for an old homestead to convert to a museum. Harvey Finks, a local attorney, recalls traveling throughout the state with Floyd, looking for the right location. He established a non-profit, tax-exempt entity known as the Johnson Historical Museum of the Southwest. Unfortunately, Floyd died in 1978 before finding the right location. Having no family, he directed that his estate be used to create the museum he had so hoped for.

Mr. Finks served as corporate secretary and continued the search on behalf of Floyd's estate. Events unfolding in the southeast corner of the estate would soon lead to the opportunity that Floyd Johnson had been searching for.

Let's step back to 1884, when a Texan by the name of John Slaughter bought a Spanish land grant near Douglas consisting of some 80,000 acres, most of which lay in Mexico. It was known as the San Bernardino Ranch. Slaughter died in 1922, and his widow continued to live on the ranch until she sold it in 1936. At that time, the Mexican government would not allow the land in Mexico to be sold to an American. As a result, the ranch was split into two pieces.

About 20,000 acres lay north of the border and was purchased by an American. In 1978, the Nature Conservancy acquired 2380 acres. This included a 130-acre section that had been designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL), and that included the ranch buildings. Four years later, the United States Fish & Wildlife Service took over the land from the Conservancy, but did not want to administer the NHL.

Mr. Finks learned of the opportunity and immediately took steps to acquire the historical section, as the ranch buildings would be an ideal place to house Floyd Johnson's collection. Johnson's estate, however, covered less than one-third of the funds needed for purchase and restoration. Mr. Finks was determined to realize Floyd's dream and raised the additional capital. After three years of planning and reconstruction, the Slaughter Ranch Museum opened to the public, administered by the Floyd Johnson Foundation. At last Floyd had his museum!



If you wish to visit the museum, take 15th Street east from Douglas. It becomes Geronimo trail, a well-maintained dirt road. It crosses high desert country for 15 miles, and then drops down into the lush San Bernardino Valley. Flowing springs and ponds dictated the location of the ranch house more than 100 years ago, and the springs continue to flow. The museum is open Wednesday-Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. There is a \$5.00 charge for adults.

A New Look for Our Old House

This “new look” really means giving visitors a better idea of how things might have looked in 1960 and the early years of both Sun City and Sun City West. A donation of Danish modern furniture from Julie McGlynn of Sun City has started the process of returning the living room to a 1960s look. We envision splitting the room diagonally, with everything to the right of the door as you enter being circa 1960 . . . furniture, accessories, draperies, and carpeting. A life-sized likeness of Del Webb will greet you alongside a large photo of opening day.

Wall displays will be greatly simplified, with a shelf beneath holding “flip books” of photos. Eventually, on the wall to your left will be a flat-screen TV on which we will be able to play some of the early films about life in the new community.

Attending to the kitchen tasks will be a life-sized cutout of a 1960s housewife. Other than this, the kitchen and bathroom look like they did when this was a model home.

The front bedroom will become a display room for exhibits that change periodically. Perhaps one on baseball in the spring, or the story of the evolution of medical care. Other possibilities include a look at early transportation options, and the evolution of the church community. Each new exhibit will give you another reason to return to 10801 Oakmont.

The present meeting room will feature the birth and growth of Sun City West. The former sales office that was appended to the house will continue to feature the town of Marinette and the story of the years leading up to 1960. We have more ideas, but we need to take this step-by-step as funds permit. All donations toward this worthwhile project will be greatly appreciated.

We’re excited about the possibilities of telling an old story in a new and fresher manner. We’ll keep you posted on progress, and at some point will announce a “grand opening” for members to preview the first round of changes. Meanwhile, stop by and watch “the good old days” unfold.

1960 Webb Sales Manager Visits

Had you come out to Sun City on the opening weekend in January 1960, you’d have found Owen Childress busy marshalling his small sales force. They were completely overwhelmed by the crowds, never dreaming that 100,000 people would show up over the four-day weekend! Owen and his wife, Marie, stopped by the SCAHS house on Oakmont recently, and he admitted it was his first time back since the days of the five original model homes.



Looking out the window, Owen recalled running over to Safeway for receipt books, as the Webb sales forms were soon used up. He instructed his men to get names and addresses, along with \$500 deposits, and they would follow-up later with the proper sales forms. The paved portion of Oakmont ended at the fifth model, and Owen recalled one man running in, wanting Owen to accompany him to a specific site further along the dirt path. “Here,” he said, “I want whatever lot has this tall tree.” Owen

promptly wrote out a receipt specifying the tree and the approximate distance from the end of the paved road. Sales of 237 houses that opening weekend laid to rest any doubt about the success of a well-planned, active adult community!

The Sun Cities Area Historical Society needs YOU!



If you enjoy . . .

- **Meeting people** Be a host or hostess, introducing visitors to our home.
- **Reading newspapers** Clip pertinent articles for SCAHS files.
- **Organizing** Assist in keeping files in order and up-to-date.
- **Planning events** Develop programs of interest to members.
- **Writing** Assist with publicity and our newsletter.
- **Being creative** Develop displays in our historical home.
- **Interviewing people** Contact and record interviews of past community leaders and past residents.
- **Or, you name it** Suggest an area where you can best contribute.

Call 623-974-2568 to discuss your interests and availability.

Oral History Program Receives a Boost

The Lysiloma Questers Chapter has been a long-time supporter of the Historical Society. This year, they raised funds to enable the Society to purchase a recorder and transcriber to use in expanding its collection of oral histories. Chapter President Nancy Wyatt (left) and Vice President Shirl Hilton presented a check for \$350 to Ed Allen. Incidentally, the picture was taken using the digital camera that the Questers' last gift made possible.



Capturing a person's recollections on audiotape adds an important dimension to the history of our area. Adding urgency is the fact that many of the early residents who played important roles in the unfolding of the Sun Cities are passing from the scene. If you have an interest in interviewing key, long-time residents, we'd be happy to train you in capturing oral histories.

You'll find the people, and their stories, a rich and rewarding experience!

This is the fifth in our series on cotton, tracing its history from seed to final product.

HOW COTTON IS GINNED AND MARKETED



After harvesting, the cotton is transported to the gin. Powerful pipes suck the cotton through cleaning machines that remove “trash” such as burrs, dirt, stems, and leaf material from the cotton. Then it goes to the gin, where circular saws with small, sharp teeth pull the fiber from the seed.

The invention of the gin in the United States paved the way for the important place cotton holds in the world today. Eli Whitney, a native of Massachusetts, got his idea for the cotton gin while watching workers on a plantation in Georgia separate the fiber from the seed by hand. In 10 days, he built a machine that did the work 50 times faster. He called it a “gin” — short for engine, and secured a patent on it in 1793.

From the gin, fiber and seeds go different ways. The ginned fiber, now called lint, is pressed together and made into great bales. To determine the value, samples are taken from each bale and classed according to fiber length, strength, width, color, and cleanliness. Growers usually sell their cotton to a local buyer or merchant who, in turn, sells it to a textile mill. Linters, the downy fuzz removed from the seed, are baled and sold to the paper, batting, and plastics industries, while the seed is processed into cottonseed oil, meal, and hulls.

*Our next issue will present an article on how cotton is spun and woven.
The final article in this series will feature PIMA cotton.
We hope you are enjoying this special feature.*

It's Our House . . . and you're invited!

We recently celebrated our 17th anniversary at 10801 Oakmont Drive, where in May 1979 the Sun Cities Area Historical Society was able to purchase the first model home ever built by Del Webb. We have filled the house with early Sun City and Sun City West history and memorabilia. We know you'll enjoy your visit, and our volunteers will be happy to bring those early days of the Sun Cities to life for you.

Come often . . . bring as many friends as you like . . . browse through the home on your own, or request a tour led by one of our knowledgeable volunteers. See how the Sun Cities have grown over the years.

Our summer hours are Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m. to Noon, or by appointment.

Special Thanks to . . .



We extend our sincere appreciation to **Ken Meade Realty** for their generous support of the Society in underwriting the cost of this newsletter.

WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS



INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIPS

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SCAHS is a 501-c-3 non-profit organization. Membership dues are tax deductible.

SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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MEMBERSHIP