

Museum Remembers When There Was A “Legend City”

A new changing exhibit which opened November 6 at Tempe History Museum, 809 East Southern Avenue, should bring back many a fun memory for Tempeans and other residents of the Valley who were around when its subject was in existence. Replacing the popular “The Tempe Sound” exhibit which has featured memorabilia recalling the music of the ‘90s in Tempe, the groups who played it, and the places it was played, the new year-long exhibit will be a walk through nostalgia for those who found the old Legend City a fun place to be back in the 1963-83 period when it was in existence.

The brainchild of Phoenix ad agency owner Louis Crandall, who in April 1961 bought the 87 acres of land in the Papago Park area between Tempe and Phoenix it would be built on, Legend City opened to the public for the first time on June 29 1963. With buildings, characters and attractions in the 1890s Old West theme, it offered opportunities over the years for visitors to ride a locomotive-pulled train, pan for gold with an “oldtimer,” explore a dark and spooky abandoned mine from a mine car, boat down a river, watch shootouts between rustlers and the “good guys,” enjoy concerts by local music-makers, see melodramas presented in a music hall and get an overall view of the park from a “sky ride” overhead among other attractions.

From the beginning, though, the amusement park was plagued with major debt, the Valley’s hot summers and, that first year, a cold, rainy winter. Attendance for its opening year was about half of the one-million visitors that had been predicted. Reportedly Crandall and his Board of Directors had invested \$2.25 million in the project. Another \$1-million was raised through a \$2-per share public stock offering. But in November 1964, the park quietly closed its gates. In December it was in Bankruptcy Court and a judge placed it in receivership. Crandall in the meantime had moved to Provo, Utah whose city fathers had asked him to build a ski resort amusement park. That never panned out, but Crandall remained in Provo starting a new business there.

Legend City opened again in May 1965 under a new business plan which included adding more non-Western themed carnival type rides. Before it finally shut down for good in September 1983, it had gone through four different ownerships.

But for the many Tempeans, other Arizonans and visitors who enjoyed its attractions over the 20 years it was in existence, Legend City still remains a fun place to have been - even in Arizona’s summer heat (if you went at night!). Those memories can be revived at the Tempe History Museum’s Legend City exhibit. Among the attractions: portions of actual amusement rides, a re-creation of the Dutchman’s Shack, a gondola from the Skyride, costumes from Wallace and Ladmo shows, concert tickets and, according to the museum, you “can stare into the eyes of Kurley Q, the ventriloquist dummy of Vonda Kay Van Dyke who was Miss America 1965” (and started her rise to that post as Miss Tempe in the Miss Arizona competition!).

Legend City founder Louis Crandall was to be a special guest for the exhibit’s opening ceremony on November 6. There were to be some other familiar names among those there for the occasion, too - among them Arizona’s Official State Balladeer Dolan Ellis, and that “mean kid” from the old Wallace and Ladmo television show, Gerald (otherwise known as Pat McMahon) who was to lead a special program.

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Past Celebration Due A Revival

There’s a new annual celebration a’brewing in Tempe, due to make its debut in mid-March. And its planners hope it will stir up some of the same community interest, enthusiasm and participation that the yesteryear’s celebration from which it gets its name attracted.

Forty-five years ago, a large number of dedicated, determined and hard-working Tempeans were nearing, with much excitement, and no doubt some trepidation as well, the home stretch of the longest, most multi-faceted, most community-involved and probably the most fun and festive celebration the city has ever seen - Tempe’s Centennial Celebration. The grandiose salute to Tempe’s 100th birthday and its beginnings as Hayden’s Ferry offered a slew of varied activities from April 1970 to April 1971 focusing on the city’s past, present and possible future. That historical event in the life of the city, resulting in some major achievements for Tempe - among them the beginnings of what is today’s Tempe History Museum and the restoration of the city’s historic Hackett House, is the impetus for a planned new celebration of Tempe’s heritage.

Spearheaded by Tempe Historical Society and involving several community groups, the first of what is anticipated to be an annual Hayden’s Ferry Days will debut on March 18-19, 2016. Hayden’s Ferry Days was the name given the month of major events which wound up the year-long Centennial Celebration of the city’s 100th birthday in April 1971.

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Lunch Talk Speakers Sharing Memories...

This Old House’ Is Topic for Marcie Gorman

Marcie Elias-Rodriguez Gorman, who grew up in what has become one of Tempe’s National Historic Places, will be “Remembering This Old House” as second speaker in this season’s Tempe Historical Society Lunch Talks on Wednesday, November 11. She’ll be marking Veteran’s Day, too - saluting the more than 30 men and women in her family who served or are serving now in the US military. The 11:30 a.m. program will be in the Community Room at Tempe History Museum, 809 East Southern Avenue. The second Wednesday monthly Lunch Talks, to continue through April, are free to the public and include light refreshments, though those attending may bring sack lunches.

Mrs. Gorman spent 22 years, from ages 3 to 25, living in the Elias-Rodriguez house at 927 East Eighth Street in Tempe’s also-historic Sotello addition at a time when cottonwood trees and an open canal lined the south side of the street known also as Creamery Road. Except for one small section, the canal has long since been covered and only one cottonwood tree remains.

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This Old House. . . (Continued from Page 1)

The house was built in the early 1880s by Marcie's grandfather Vicente Elias for his wife Inez and family. Elias had come to Tempe from his native Tucson where his family was regarded as nobility. Marcie's parents, Vicente's daughter Irene (Elias) and her husband Reynaldo Rodriguez, moved into the home when Marcie was a toddler to care for Inez after her husband died. Irene was born and died in the house.



Marcie attended Tempe's 10th Street Grammar School, graduated in 1952 from the old three-story Tempe High School on property which many years later was home to the now-gone Tempe Shopping Center. She worked for five years for Valley National Bank's home office in Phoenix before a stint in Los Angeles, returning to Tempe when L.A. smog caused her problems.

Now owned by Tempe, which has had plans to restore it for use as a museum focusing on local Mexican American history, the Elias-Rodriguez single-story, four-room adobe house is in danger of disintegrating and in recent years has rarely been open to the public, mostly for an occasional exhibition by the Quilters.

ASU V.P. To Talk About Growing Up With 'Legends'

Tempe Historical Society's 11:30 A.M., January 13th "Lunch Talk" speaker Dr. Christine Wilkinson, the first ever female Senior Vice-President and Secretary at Tempe's Arizona State University, had legendary footsteps to follow while achieving those roles and others. A graduate of Tempe elementary and high schools, as well as ASU where she earned bachelor's and doctorate degrees, she also serves as ASU Alumni Association's president, publisher of *ASU Magazine* and as a tenured faculty member in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at ASU, the nation's fourth largest university.

She has even, on two occasions, served as the university's athletic director which probably wouldn't have surprised any longtime Tempeans. She is a daughter of Arizona State's legendary longtime football, basketball and baseball coach, the late Bill Kajikawa, who began his 40 some years of coaching at ASU when it was still Arizona State Teachers College. She's also the wife of Don Wilkinson, a retired coach, educator and administrator in Tempe Union High School District schools and, for the last 28 years of his 42 with the district, TUHSD's athletic director.

Like her mother, the late Marge Kajikawa - a Tempe bank official who became legendary for her community service and chairing of local efforts for Valley and state non-profits' fund-raising campaigns, Dr. Wilkinson has been an active community servant since her Girl Scout days. And like both her father and her mother, the ASU administrator has garnered multiple awards for her many contributions to education, community, state and nation while serving on boards and organizations as diverse as Tempe Leadership Advisory Board, Mesa Community College's Commission on Excellence in Education, Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association Board, Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center Board, and National Board of Governors of the American Red Cross.

Celebration. . . (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Tempe's Centennial Celebration began in April of 1970 - after months of planning and preparations instigated by the new Tempe Historical Society. The Society had been created by proclamation of then-Mayor Rudy Campbell in the late 1960s. In its initial years, it was involved in gathering oral and written histories of Tempe's early-day families, collecting artifacts for a hoped-for future history museum and starting the ball rolling in planning for the city's Centennial Year.

Numerous individuals and groups representing just about every facet of Tempe life from schools, churches, service clubs and other organizations to families, businesses and city government had a hand in the "doing" when it came to getting the city's Centennial Year celebration in the works.

For a year folks enjoyed everything from musical performances, square dancing and other special events in Tempe Shopping Center's lot and other sites to a Town Hall to consider the city's future, a luncheon with members of pioneer families, a "through the years" fashion show and luncheon, a Centennial Fourth of July Fireworks Show and more. The grand finale "Hayden's Ferry Days" came in April 1971, highlighted by a parade, a several days Hayden's Ferry history pageant enacted by Tempeans, a trio of wind-up dances for those of differing musical taste. Tempeans went to work - and to play - appropriately dressed for the Hayden's Ferry era throughout the month.

Turn-outs for the Centennial activities were, for the most part, phenomenal and everybody seemed to have a good time. Tempe Historical Society hopes that will happen with the new Hayden's Ferry Days as it grows into an annual event for reminding Tempeans, whether oldtimers or newcomers, that Tempe has a history and heritage that's worth celebrating - every year.

Here's A Chance To Honor Someone Special

Tempe Historical Society, Tempe Veterans History Project and Friends of the Library will once again this Christmas holiday season offer local citizens a unique way to honor or remember someone, or several someones, special in their lives or to Tempe. At the same time, they will be helping see to it that the lives of many Tempe veterans and other Tempeans are never forgotten.

For the 14th year, Tempe History Museum will be site for the annual Larry Campbell Tree of Lights reception on Sunday, December 6, from 3 to 5 p.m. in the lobby at Tempe History Museum. The event was begun in 2001 by Tempe Historical Society's then-president Larry Campbell as a means of raising funds for an oral histories project for the museum. In more recent years the Veterans History Project, which collects oral histories of Tempe's war veterans - also housed at the museum, and Friends of the Tempe Library have joined the society as reception co-hosts.

Main attraction for the reception will be a pair of Christmas trees - each decorated with Christmas lights and ornaments, one honoring Tempe veterans, the other honoring non-veterans. For a donation of \$5, Tempeans can have a Christmas light and tag with the name of a person they want to honor or remember placed on one of the trees; for \$10, an ornament inscribed with an honoree's name will go on a tree and then sent to the honoree or a family member when the trees come down at the holidays' end. The donations will help fund the Veterans oral history project and Historical Society projects. Donor forms are available at the museum. Donors, persons they have signed up to be honored and family members of those being remembered will be invited to attend the reception. There will be refreshments, entertainment by Meredith Johnson's Corona del Sol High School string quartet and Darin Shryock's Marcos de Niza Chamber Singers as part of the afternoon's fare.