

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Ancient well site has many incarnations

Tracy Conrad

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The Desert Sun newspaper in 1949 celebrated taking the time to observe the wonders of the natural desert, as people had done for centuries before. "The folks came down to see the flowers and were armed with every make of camera, some with paint brushes and easels trying to catch the beautiful colors ... the county road ... takes you through thousands of acres of verbena, so does Washington Avenue ... the most photographed spot in the valley is the flower-blanketed side of Point Happy at the La Quinta turn off."

That gorgeous spot was known in ancient times, but in the early 20th century, it was the site of the homestead of homesteader Norman "Happy" Lundbeck. On the east side of the rocky hillside, Lundbeck farmed, ran a stable and small store located along the primitive road that ran through the valley. Upon Lundbeck's death, his wife sold the garden spot to Chauncey and Marie Rankin Clarke who created Point Happy Date Gardens.

According to the La Quinta Historical Society, the ranch featured many gardens and some more manmade improvements including two swimming pools, an archery range, and bridge paths. It was a working ranch, orchard and farm. The Deglet Noor date grove provided the sweet treat. The Clarks also cultivated a variety of citrus including limes and tangerines. The ranch house itself was ahead of its time with solar heating and a solid copper roof. Later, air-conditioning was added, even in the homes of the families of workers, each of whom had a radio. The Clarks entertained frequently; their houseguests included prominent politicians along with Hollywood celebrities such as Rudolph Valentino, John Barrymore and Clark Gable.

Valentino visited often and had a special affinity for Jadaan, the gray Arabian stallion owned by the Clarks. Chauncey was a devoted Arabian Horse enthusiast. He bought six Arabian mares and five Arabian Stallions, including Jadaan, to Point Happy Date Gardens in 1925. Falling seriously ill a short time later, Chauncey sold his Arabians to the W.K. Kellogg Ranch in Po-



Aerial view of Point Happy, La Quinta and Indian Wells, circa 1960.

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mona, where they became prized breeding stock. He died in 1926.

Marie Rankin Clarke carried on until her death in 1928. She bequeathed the ranch, valued at a spectacular \$5 million, to Claremont College. The college sold the gardens to William Dupont Jr. in the 1950s, and the property was further subdivided upon Dupont's death in 1965.

But for eons before this modern history, the protruding rocks were a known landmark to indigenous people traversing the desert. Somewhere points west of that spit of mountain was an Indian village called Kavinish. According to scholar Bruce Love, the earliest written record of Kavinish comes from an 1856 official U.S. land survey, written by John La Croze, Deputy U.S. Surveyor. The survey noted an "Indian rancharia" and the "Palma Seca" artesian well, the Indian well, for which the area would become named in the 20th century.

Love writes: "La Croze offered little description of the village, stating simply that it consisted of 'a few Indian huts.'" One other account places the number of houses at Kavinish at 17 and together are the only surviving physical descriptions that can be definitively attributed to the village, while it was still occupied in the late 19th century.

Love notes that the only other possi-

ble description was written in 1862 and referred to a place called "Indian Villages" between Agua Caliente and Martinez along the Cocomaricopa-Bradshaw Trail. In the summer of that year, a traveler named Mahlon D. Fairchild reported that his "party camped for one night at Indian Villages, where 'there was an epidemic of measles and it was pitiable to see the results.'"

The Bradshaw Trail was in its heyday in the 1860s and 1870s and the Indian well was a regular stop on the desert, providing precious water needed for survival of the journey. During that period, a stagecoach station was established at or near Kavinish, slightly west of the mountain protruding in the middle of the vast expanse of flat desert.

According to the La Quinta Historical Society, "The Cahuilla were one of the few Native American tribes to dig wells. This well was dug into the wash with steps leading down to water level less than 300 yards from Point Happy. That well is the namesake of modern Indian Wells. Nearby Cahuilla villages as well as travelers made good use of the well until it was destroyed by floods in 1916. The Cahuilla people were the only permanent dwellers in the Coachella Valley for hundreds of years. It wasn't until the early 19th century that Europeans began traversing the valley. Spanish and later

Mexican explorers, soldiers and missionaries came here desiring only to cross the inhospitable desert as quickly as possible."

According to Cahuilla tradition, Kavinish existed since the earliest days of creation, and according to Love, "As the 19th century village sadly disappeared from depopulation and introduced diseases, the ... area remained abandoned and vacant until the early decades of the 20th century at which time the first non-Indian settlement appeared. Old Indian Wells Village grew into a viable town by the 1940s and reached its apex during the 1950s, after which it went into decline, all but disappearing by the 1970s. The newest incarnation of this centuries-old site is now the Indian Wells Country Club East Course, the latest but surely not the last example of human land use in this arid desert setting."

Kavinish, one of the oldest known places to human beings on the desert, is one of the most important archaeological sites in Riverside County. Love will be speaking for the first time ever on the excavations done at the site 20 years ago.

His talk promises interesting stories about the charred ruins of a circular house site, the remains of a male "master point maker" and a female metate-maker. The excavation revealed rock cairns lined with brush and made to trap Bighorn sheep. Famous local archaeologist Harry Quinn found a new type of arrow point at the site and named it for the ancient village. Love reports on a potentially controversial re-interment, the re-burying of Indian remains, because archaeologists believe the practice destroys artifacts and Indians believe it protects their ancestors.

Ann Japenga, the prolific writer on all things desert, says Love's talk for the Indian Wells Historic Preservation Association at the Indian Wells Resort Hotel on Dec. 5, from 2-4 p.m. will be "a time machine transporting us all back before country clubs and tennis tournaments." Reservations for this free event may be had by calling or emailing Adele Ruxton at 760-346-8420 or arxtn@aol.com.

Tracy Conrad is president of the Palm Springs Historical Society. The Thanks for the Memories column appears Sundays in *The Desert Sun*. Write to her at pshstracy@gmail.com.