

P.W. Litchfield HERITAGE CENTER



History, Arts, and Culture of the Southwest Valley

SPRING 2025

Archivists in Ink and Image

*News photographers record local
history one frame at a time*

By Jim Painter

The 1980s were a golden age for newspaper photography—film cameras reigned supreme, deadlines were tight, and the thrill of capturing a front-page shot made every day an adventure. For those of us working in small metropolitan markets, the job was a mix of adrenaline,

improvisation, and old-school grit. Unlike the big-city photojournalists covering state and national news, we covered everything from high school football games to city council meetings, often on the same day, with a few car accidents and ribbon-cuttings in between.

During the '80s, I worked as a staff photographer



U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater chats with Sun City Daily News-Sun publisher Burt Freireich in Freireich's office in March 1980. Goldwater, who ran for president in 1964, served as an Arizona senator from 1953 to 1965 and again from 1969 to 1987. News-Sun publishers Burt and Ursula Freireich were longtime Litchfield Park residents.

for two West Valley community newspapers: the Daily News-Sun in the Northwest Valley (1977-1985) and the

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Upcoming Events

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Repurposed barracks

Houses and the Stories They Tell

By Mary Dickson

The cities on the west side of the Valley of the Sun each have their own history, challenges, and hopes for the future. I have had the pleasure of working for El Mirage, Avondale, and Litchfield Park during my 25 years in building safety. I've seen beautiful homes grow from a dirt lot and homes that, for one reason or another, have struggled to stay vibrant and useful to their occupants. These houses help reveal the stories of their cities.

El Mirage

El Mirage is a community of contrasts. Suburban homes and ranchettes stand apart from the simple dwellings in the older section. The town started as a migrant encampment with residents struggling to find or create housing. Necessity and ingenuity led them to utilize

objects with other intended uses.

One home I inspected surprised everyone when the owners simply wanted to remove a wall to open the floor plan. Instead of wood stud walls, they found a railroad box car! With the original owners no longer able to tell the story, it is assumed they snagged an abandoned car from the nearby rail line. Additions to the rail car over the years

had completely engulfed it. The homeowner ultimately decided to remove drywall from the rest of the walls to leave the rail car exposed.

In some locations, we found sheds built from ammunition boxes from Luke Air Force Base. The ammo boxes were stacked and bolted together, making a strong storage area. Another unique structure was an old outhouse, no longer in use, made from stacks



An outhouse made from old car batteries

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Liberty – A Step Back in Time

By Lisa Hegarty

Liberty is a small community in the Buckeye Valley with a long history. Now a county island within the boundaries of Buckeye, the area was first settled by farmers in 1885 and is located about 22 miles southwest of Phoenix. The area developed into a community by 1900 and is centered at the intersection of South Jackrabbit Trail and Maricopa County Highway 85, and bounded by the Gila River, Cotton Lane, McDowell Road, and Rainbow Road.

Several of Liberty's historic structures are visible from Highway 85, offering a glimpse into the past. These include the Liberty School, Liberty Methodist Church, and the Liberty Store and Pool Hall. Located just south and west of Jackrabbit and Highway 85 is the Liberty Historic Cemetery, where many Buckeye Valley pioneers are buried.



Historic Liberty Elementary School classroom

Several years ago, the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center accepted a collection from long-time Liberty resident and

historian Wilbur Kaufman. We are now the stewards of this community's history. Kaufman grew up in Liberty on his father's farm and his mother was one of the first teachers at Liberty School. He is the author of *Liberty, Arizona: Remembering Our Past*.

Last October, docents from the Heritage Center visited Liberty to tour its historic 1910 schoolhouse and the Liberty Historic Cemetery. School officials are in the process of applying to get the school on the National Historic Register. The Heritage Center believes that the school is the oldest continually used school building in the state of Arizona.

We thank the Liberty Elementary School District for opening the historic school room for a tour, allowing us to ring their historic school bell, and affording us an opportunity to step back in time.

Houses and the Stories They Tell cont.

of car batteries, and I know of at least one tiny well-kept house that still has dirt floors!

Perhaps the most unusual homes in El Mirage are relocated army barracks. Constructed at Luke Airfield by Del Webb Construction, they were made entirely of redwood. Some were used at the Japanese internment camps and others as base housing. After World War II, the unused buildings were sold and relocated. At one time there were three left – two in El Mirage and one in old town Surprise. The one remaining barracks home can be found on Ventura Street.

Avondale

In the Las Ligas area in Avondale, there is a house built on piers in case of flooding from the Agua Fria River. The owner was concerned about some foundation settling and asked for an inspection. Lying on my back under the house, I saw a flamenco dancer looking back at me! She was part

of a billboard that had been used to construct the floor. The colors were still vibrant, and the wood was in remarkably good condition.

Litchfield Park

Litchfield Park has a few interesting finds. At last count, 15 houses have full or partial basements, and two have elevators. The most unusual find was discovered by a new buyer making renovations. After removing the wood floor in the living room, a series of chambers lined with concrete and river rocks were discovered about five feet below the floor level. Theoretically, air blown through the chambers would cool down enough to refrigerate the home. Needless to say, the new owner opted to fill it in.

As a product of their time, houses can be like time capsules. Big or small, expensive or modest, old or new, they never cease to amaze with the stories they can tell.

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Lisa Hegarty

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MUSEUM HOURS

Wed., Thurs., & Friday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
1st Saturday of each month:
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Summer hours (beginning May 27th)

Wednesdays 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
1st Saturday of each month:
10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

MUSEUM LOCATION

13912 W. Camelback Rd
Litchfield Park AZ 85340
623-535-4414



W.T. and Nikki Gladden

SW Valley Farmer W.T. Gladden Inducted into Arizona Farm and Ranch Hall of Fame

Widely respected by the Arizona farming and ranching community, Southwest Valley farmer W.T. Gladden was honored by the Arizona Farm and Ranch Hall of Fame on March 22 at their Annual Honorees Dinner. Regarded as a champion of Arizona agriculture, W.T., who goes by "T," has been farming for over 70 years.

A Southwest Valley resident since 1955, T Gladden's parents, James E. "Ned" and Castelle Gladden, farmed 160 acres along Highway 80 west of Cashion following nearly 20 years of running a 40-acre dairy in Chandler. After an early start farming with his father, T eventually acquired land and expanded west to Cotton Lane, later moving into Palo Verde, the Harquahala Valley, and Paloma Ranch in Gila Bend. His farming operations grew to 9,000 acres where he farmed alfalfa, wheat, and cotton and founded Saddle Mountain Dairy with his family.

With nearly 40 years spent serving on irrigation boards such as the Buckeye Water Conservation and Drainage District, T has played an important role in shaping water policy for agriculture. Along with his wife, Nikki, and their family, T has been recognized for a legacy of resilience, stewardship, innovation, and service. His life-long devotion to the industry of agriculture and his unflagging integrity was recognized through the testimonies given by his peers at the dinner.

The P. W. Litchfield Heritage Center warmly congratulates T Gladden on this honor.

Trails, Tribes & Petroglyphs: The Layers of White Tank History

By Karen Krause

The White Tank Mountains have always been a defining backdrop of the Southwest Valley. They're also a landmark steeped in history.

Before Phoenix was even a fledgling settlement on the Salt River, the White Tank Mountains had already made their mark on Arizona Territory maps. In the spring of 1863, mountain man and trailblazer Joseph R. Walker led a group of prospectors into central Arizona to search for gold. From New Mexico, they followed the Gila Road into the new Arizona Territory and stopped for provisions at Maricopa Wells, a supply post on the Southern Emigrant Trail.

Communicating in Spanish with the Maricopa Indians, the prospectors were informed of a source of water in the mountain range – a natural basin surrounded by white granite rock and large enough to hold rainwater for most of the year. The Maricopas called the place “tinajas blancas,” which was interpreted as “White Tank” by members of the Walker party. It was this source of water that gave the mountain range its name. The path that the Walker party took became known as the White Tank Wagon Road.

The White Tank watering place was at the northeast end of the range as shown on maps for travelers along the White Tank Wagon Road. This supply road stretched from Maricopa Wells to Wickenburg, continuing north to the new territorial capital in Prescott. Remnants of the road are few and the watering hole itself is now gone. The White Tank was destroyed sometime between 1898 and 1902, when heavy rain caused the collapse of the cliff above the tank, filling it in. The exact location of the tank is now a mystery.

Well before the time of mountain men and prospectors, the

White Tank Mountains were a significant location of human activity. In 1965, when the White Tank Mountains Regional Park was established, an archeological study listed 11 prehistoric sites in the park attributed to the Hohokam, which dated from 500 to 1100 A.D. Though best known for their river-based agricultural irrigation systems throughout the Sonoran Desert, small Hohokam satellite settlements were found in the White Tank Mountains along with petroglyphs featuring animal forms and complex abstract designs.



Petroglyphs in the White Tank Mountains

From the 1700s to the 1900s, the Yavapai came through the area to hunt, gather mesquite beans and cactus fruit, and to stop for water on their travels across central Arizona. Although the Yavapai usually burned their brush dwellings before they moved on and left little trace of their presence, petroglyphs associated with their culture have been identified in the White Tanks.

The largest number of petroglyphs in the White Tank Mountains are attributed to the Western Archaic people. Predating both the Yavapai and Hohokam, these desert nomads roamed the area perhaps as early as 2000 B.C. Their rock art style is abstract and includes lines, squiggles, sets of circles, concentric circles and gridiron patterns.

Even after the mountains' namesake water source disappeared roughly 125 years ago, the White Tanks continued to be a valued location. At one time hundreds of small mining claims were established, and other water sources in the mountains allowed for ranching operations, including grazing cattle, sheep, and goats. Abundant wildlife has lured hunters over the years, and visitors now flock to this regional park. Among its attractions are the popular waterfall that forms with seasonal rains, prominent petroglyphs, photography, picnicking, hiking, camping, bicycling and horseback riding, all in a wondrous and ancient Sonoran Desert setting.

From Cartoons to Cultural Icons: The Wallace & Ladmo Legacy

By Lisa Hegarty

If you lived in the Phoenix area between the 1950s and 1980s, you know the *Wallace and Ladmo Show* was a beloved children's television program. Airing on KPHO-TV (Channel 5) in Phoenix from April 1, 1954, to December 29, 1989, this show holds the distinction of being one of the longest-running, daily, locally produced children's TV shows in American broadcasting history, with over 35 years on air.

Initially premiering as *It's Wallace?* in January 1954, the show began as a showcase for cartoons and was hosted by Bill Thompson portraying the character Wallace Snead. Ladimir Kwiatkowski, originally a cameraman, soon joined as Ladmo, Wallace's sidekick. Pat McMahon joined the cast in 1960 and introduced a variety of characters that parodied popular culture. By the end of its run on December 29, 1989, the show had won nine regional Emmy awards.

A mix of slapstick, live music, and satirical sketches ensured the program was entertaining for children and older viewers, making it a popular staple of Phoenix's television landscape for decades.

The show's popularity continues to this day, with fan clubs, websites, and exhibits dedicated to celebrating its legacy, and many people who grew up watching the show still have fond memories of it.

We hope you'll join us for our May Heritage Lecture as guest speaker Steve Hoza traces the story of this



unique
Arizona
cultural
phenomenon.

A Phoenix native and friend of show creator, Wallace Thompson, Hoza was entrusted with the legal rights to the show and runs the official website for the iconic Arizona children's TV program.

Steve Hoza is an artifact conservator at the Salt River Indian Community with a career in museums of over 40 years. He has also authored two books on World War II in Arizona and

is a recognized authority on Arizona POW camps.

Details:

The History of the Wallace and Ladmo Show

**Thursday, May 15, 2025,
10 – 11 a.m.**

**Goodyear City Hall, 1900 N. Civic
Square, Goodyear, AZ 85395**

Free Event

P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center Upcoming Programs and Events



Discovery Days Pioneer Life

April 5 & 9

Hands-on activities will teach about the lives of pioneers and farm workers in the Southwest Valley. Learn how cotton was planted and picked, try doing laundry the old-fashioned way, and make adobe bricks.

Plan Your City

May 3 & 7

Learn how local cities developed and about the New Town Movement in Litchfield Park. Kids will design and create their own city in a hands-on activity.



Fun and Games

July 5 & 9

Learn what kids did for fun in the past! We'll show how to play classic games like marbles, jacks, and pick up sticks.



Enrichment Classes

Photography Workshop for Teens and Adults

May 17

Time: 1 – 2:30 p.m.

Learn tips and tricks for taking fabulous photos with your smart phone from local photojournalist and former head of photography at 12 News in Phoenix, Chuck Emmert.

Water in the Desert

June 7 & 11

Desert dwellers have long been savvy about water use.

Hands-on activities will allow kids to explore where this resource comes from and how it has been harnessed over time.



Heritage Lecture Series

The History of the Wallace & Ladmo Show

Thursday, May 15, 2025

10 – 11 a.m.

Goodyear City Council Chambers
1900 N Civic Sq., Goodyear
FREE

Historian Steve Hoza will present on the history of this iconic Arizona children's TV program and distribute show memorabilia, including Ladmo bags!

Heritage Lecture Series THE HISTORY OF THE WALLACE AND LADMO SHOW



THURSDAY,
MAY 15, 2024

The History and Mystery of the Gila River

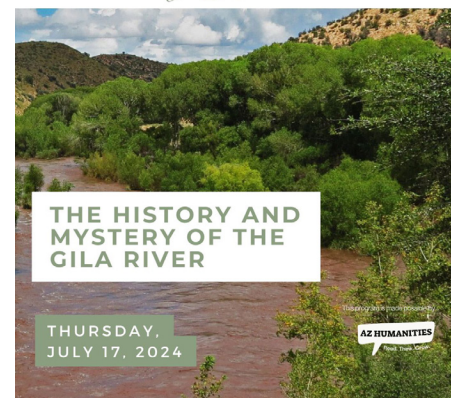
Thursday, July 17

10 – 11 a.m.

Goodyear City Council Chambers
1900 N Civic Sq., Goodyear
FREE

Presenter Christine Reid will explore the geology that formed the Gila River

Heritage Lecture Series



THURSDAY,
JULY 17, 2024

AZ HUMANITIES

and its prehistoric peoples, along with personal memoirs, field journals and anecdotes of the missionaries, explorers, and adventurers who followed it and the pioneers who settled alongside it.

*This program is made possible by Arizona Humanities

Heritage Lecture – Topic TBA

Thursday, September 18

10 – 11 a.m.

Goodyear City Council Chambers
1900 N Civic Sq., Goodyear
FREE

Thank you to our Sponsors!

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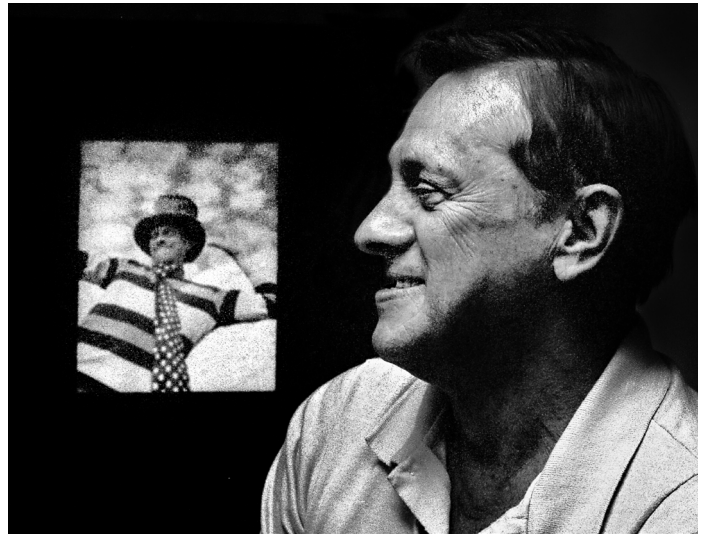
West Valley View in the Southwest Valley. I worked primarily as a photographer for the View from the time Elliott Freireich launched the paper in April 1986 until he named me managing editor in 1991.

As much as I enjoyed being a newspaper editor, I always thought the best job in the world was news photographer. Despite the “routine” assignments mentioned above, my camera bag and press badge allowed me to meet people I never could have met otherwise. I had lunch with U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater in a Sun City restaurant. I chatted with comedian Bob Newhart in his dressing room before his stand-up show at the Sundome in Sun City West. I had a smoke break (yes, I was a nasty smoker back in those days) with legendary TV journalist David Brinkley outside the back door of the Sundial Auditorium in Sun City. All the while, I was taking pictures, of course.

Also, I was able to go places I otherwise couldn’t have gone: the sidelines of Fiesta Bowl games, the front seat of a Stearman biplane; a U.S. Air Force KC-135 as it refueled F-16s high above the Grand Canyon.

The Tools of the Trade

Before the age of digital cameras and smartphone photography, we relied on sturdy, all-manual 35mm film



A news photographer must be adept at shooting a wide variety of photographic types from breaking news, to sports, to portraiture. This is a portrait of Ladimir Kwiatkowski, aka Ladmo, from *The Wallace & Ladmo Show*, taken in his dressing room after filming one of the program’s final episodes in December 1989 (related story, Page 6).

cameras like the Nikon F1 or Canon F1. These workhorses were built for tough conditions, with mechanical shutters that could withstand being knocked around on the sidelines of an NFL game or dropped on the pavement while chasing a breaking news story.

We carried multiple rolls of black and white film in our camera bags alongside extra camera bodies, lenses, and flashes. There was no instant preview, no second chance. You had to know your settings by heart: shutter speed, aperture, and ISO were adjusted on the fly. Every shot counted, because once you hit the darkroom, the real work began.

The Darkroom Dance

Developing film was an art in itself. Back at the newsroom, we’d rush to the darkroom, clip our film into stainless steel reels, and dip them into light-tight stainless-steel tanks. The acrid smell of fixer and developer was as much a part of the job as the scent of printer’s ink wafting from the press room. Timing was everything—too short, and the negatives would be too light; too long, and the highlights would disappear.

One of the most peculiar challenges of the job was maintaining the proper water temperature.



Faculty and staff at Littleton Elementary School in Avondale lead children to safety in the school cafeteria, which was untouched when a microburst from a thunderstorm tore the roof off classrooms Sept. 20, 1994. One teacher was seriously injured. This is an example of spot news photography.

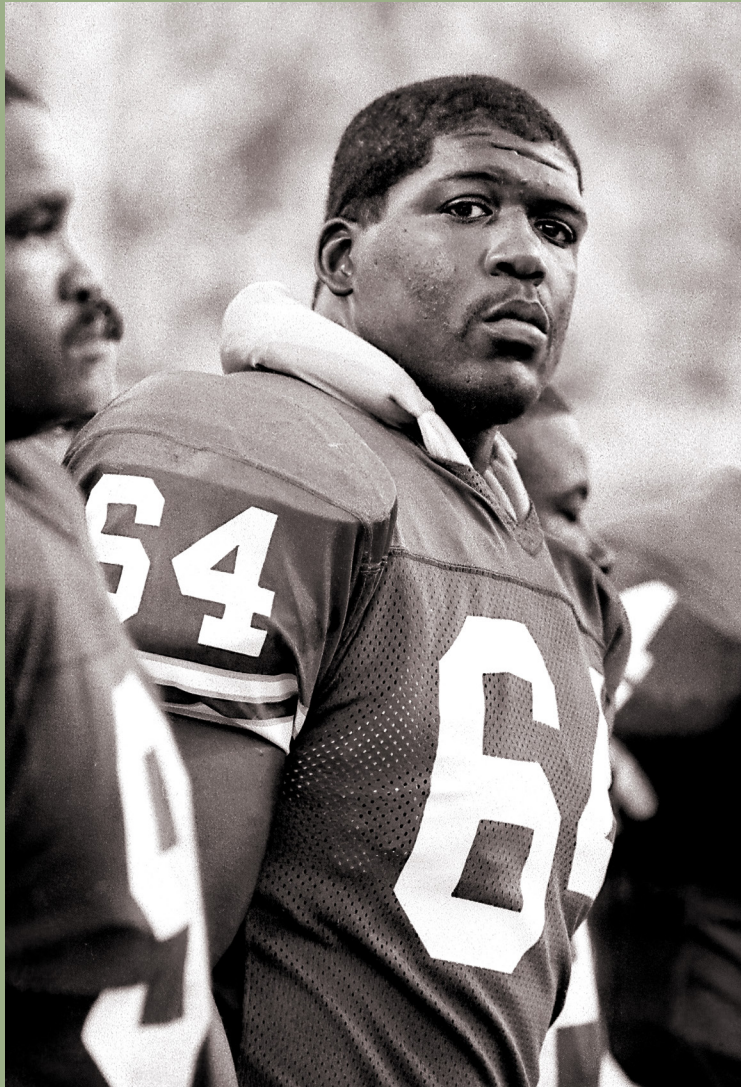
During the Sonoran Desert summer, water from the faucet came out far too warm for the recommended developer temperature. We used water we kept in the lunchroom refrigerator to cool the developer, stop bath, and fixer to the right temperature for developing film. If the developer was just a few degrees above 72, the pictures would be grainy and contrasty. Of course, the photos would be printed as coarse halftones on cheap newsprint, so contrast was desirable and grain wasn't much of an issue.

Printing the perfect image required dodging and burning under an enlarger, using our hands or bits of cardboard to control the exposure. A good darkroom technician could make an average shot look great and a great shot look legendary.

The Thrill of the Chase

One of the best parts of the job was the unpredictability. Some days were slow—shooting staged grip-and-grin shots at a charity event—but others were pure chaos. Car crashes, fires, floods, and political scandals kept us running. A police scanner in the newsroom was our lifeline, and when a call came in, we'd grab our gear and race to the scene.

In a small metro market, you got to know the community



Press credentials gave me access to places such as the sidelines of an NFL game. This is local sports hero Randall McDaniel at a game early in his rookie year when the Minnesota Vikings played the Arizona Cardinals on McDaniel's old home turf at Sun Devil Stadium. McDaniel graduated from Agua Fria Union High School in Avondale, played at ASU, and was drafted in the first round by the Vikings in April 1988. He is now in the NFL Hall of Fame.

well. The mayors, the police chiefs, the local business owners—all familiar faces. It meant earning trust, which could lead to better access for exclusive shots. It also meant covering tragedies up close, sometimes knowing the people involved. That part never got easier.

A Job Like No Other

By the late '80s, technology was changing. Color images became more common in community newspapers. But nothing could replace the instincts, patience, and skill needed to be a good newspaper photographer.

Today, with digital cameras and AI editing, it's easy to forget how much effort went into capturing the perfect frame. But for those of us who lived it, the rush of the 1980s newsroom remains unforgettable—a time when every frame mattered, and the world was

seen through a viewfinder, one roll of film at a time.

The black-and-white photography exhibit *Crossroads of Change* transports visitors back to 1985-1995, a pivotal era in the West Valley's history, capturing a decade of transformation through the lens of local photojournalist Jim Painter. The exhibit will be on display at the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center Museum, 13912 W. Camelback Road, Litchfield Park, through October 2025.

New Book Club to Start at Heritage Center

Join us for Regional Reads and Tea in our Cozy Museum

Starting May 7, we invite you to join us at the Heritage Center for books and conversation in a relaxed and cozy setting. Each month, we'll gather to explore and discuss a book with a regional focus. These thoughtfully curated selections of non-fiction and fiction will provide the opportunity to delve into the rich tapestry of our local culture and history.

As an added treat, every month we will feature a new artisanal tea to sample as we explore engaging books together.

Whether you are an avid reader or just looking for a pleasant way to spend an evening, our book club welcomes everyone. Meetings will be on the first Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. We look forward to evenings of great books, fine teas, and engaging discussion!

Visit our website at PWLHC.org, follow us on social media, or join our email list to keep up to date on monthly book picks!

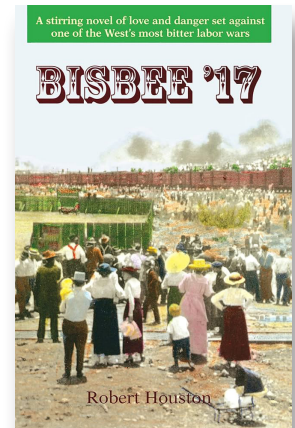
Please let us know if you'll be joining us as space is limited. RSVP at office@PWLHC.org.



May 7th

Bisbee '17
by Robert Houston
Fiction

"Based on a true story, this novel vividly re-creates a West of miners and copper magnates, bindlestiffs and scissorbills, army officers, private detectives, and determined revolutionaries." – University of Arizona Press

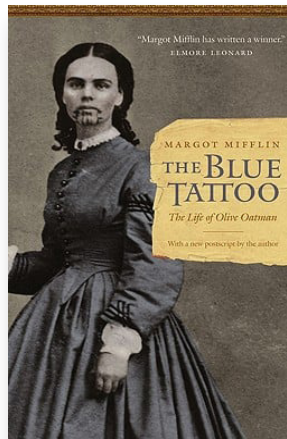


June 4th

The Blue Tattoo: Life of Olive Oatman
by Margot Mifflin
Non-Fiction

The Blue Tattoo examines the life of Olive Oatman. Orphaned and kidnapped in 1851 when her family was killed by Yavapai Indians near present day Gila Bend, Oatman was returned to white society after living among the Mohave Indians for several years.

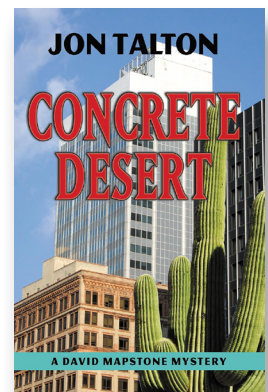
Drawing on historical records, this book examines her remarkable life and its fascinating cultural backdrop.



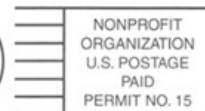
July 9th

Concrete Desert
by Jon Talton
Mystery

David Mapstone takes a temporary job with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office after losing his job as a history professor. He's soon drawn into a case that bears striking similarities to a 40-year-old unsolved murder.



"The Phoenix setting is particularly strong, with wonderful and succinct descriptions of a city in flux ... more intelligent and rewarding than most contemporary mysteries." — *Washington Post*



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