

P.W. Sitchfield HERITAGE CENTER



History, Arts, and Culture of the Southwest Valley

FALL 2025

LIGHTER THAN AIR

*Balloons, Blimps, and Dirigibles: Upcoming Exhibit
Explores Fascinating Chapter of Transportation History*



By Chuck Emmert

For thousands of years, human transportation evolved primarily on land and water. Moving through the air presented a unique challenge until the dawn of the 20th century, when inventors worldwide embarked on a journey to conquer the skies.



Sponsored by Flite Goodyear

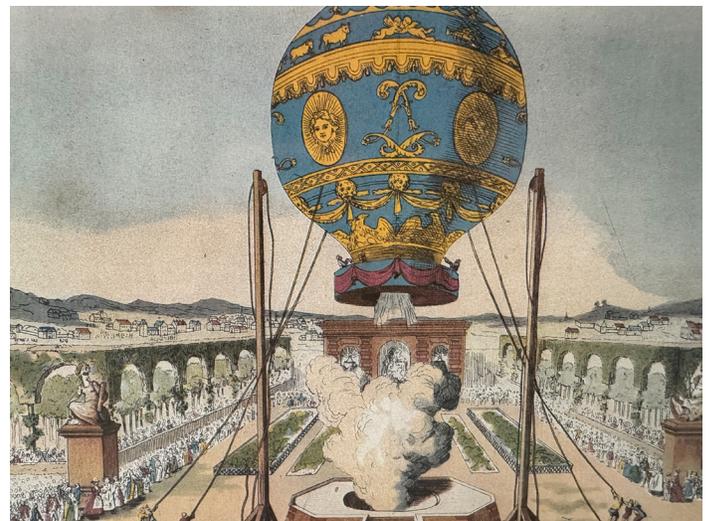
This exhibit delves into the development of lighter-than-air balloon technology, tracing its evolution from the early hot-air balloons in late 18th-century France. These pioneering flights, including those famously witnessed by King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, paved the way for modern blimps that entertain and educate us today.

Curators John Donahue, Chuck Emmert, and Tim Mansell have meticulously selected

photographs and artifacts that showcase the history of hot-air ballooning and its significant role during wartime, particularly in both World Wars. The exhibit also highlights Goodyear-built blimps used for submarine spotting, the advent of balloon racing as a sport, and even early attempts to explore the outer reaches of space.

A significant portion of the display is dedicated to the majestic dirigibles of the early 20th century, luxurious airships that traversed continents and oceans at unprecedented speeds. Among them, the zeppelins—named after Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin—captivate

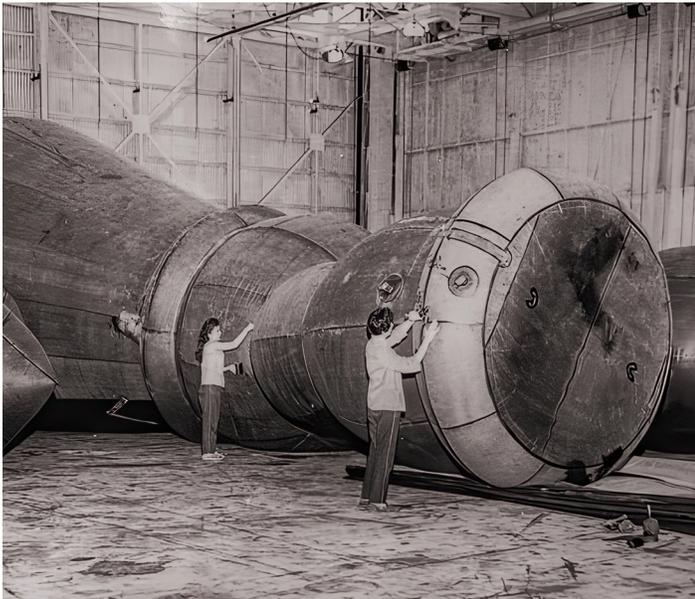
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Early balloon illustration.

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"Balloon Girls" work on the body portion of the Popeye balloon.

Lighter than Air cont.

with their sheer size and historical significance, including the infamous Hindenburg tragedy, a mystery that remains unsolved to this day.

Post-World War II, balloons and blimps found new roles in more lighthearted pursuits. In 1957, the Goodyear Aircraft plant near Litchfield Park was the birthplace of one of these playful icons: a massive cartoon balloon of Popeye, created for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. A video presentation shows how four local women—known as the "Balloon Girls"—crafted this larger-than-life inflatable with skill and creativity. Another rare historic film showcases Goodyear blimps soaring over Litchfield Park and captures the spirit of a community that helped bring whimsical balloons and wonderful airships to life.

While the golden age of airships has passed, the exhibit also explores modern advancements in airship technology, showcasing how these innovations continue to enhance efficiency and utility in contemporary applications.

Join us in experiencing the wonder and nostalgia of an era when the sky was not the limit and explore this captivating exhibit, where history meets innovation and dreams of flight continue to inspire.

Exhibit Opening
Sunday, October 19, 2025
4 – 6 p.m.
PW Litchfield Heritage Center



Wool on the Desert Wind: The Story of Sheep Ranching in the West Valley

By Jim Painter

On a cool winter morning in the West Valley, it's easy to imagine the distant bleating of sheep drifting on the breeze. For much of the last century, those sounds were not imagination at all. They were the pulse of a thriving industry that once defined rural western Maricopa County.

Sheep first arrived in the Southwest in the late 1600s, brought by Spanish missionaries like Father Eusebio Kino. Alongside Christianity, they introduced wool and meat production to Native American communities. By the mid-1800s, long after Arizona passed into U.S. control, commercial sheep ranching had begun to take root.

In 1870, the Arizona Territory counted just over 800 sheep. A decade later, the number had soared to 76,000, and by 1890 nearly 700,000 grazed across the territory's grasslands. The wide-open spaces of the Salt River Valley, with its mild winters and ample

Continued on Page 9



A century-old cotton gin near Yuma Road and Cotton Lane.

Paving Paradise:

Goodyear's vanishing landmarks

By Mary Dickson

There is a 1970s Joni Mitchell tune with the lyrics:

*Don't it always seem to go
that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone?
They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.*

Those words quite literally reflect what happened to the original Goodyear Farms Boy Scout Lodge (built in 1943) and the Town Hall and Fire Station (1948). While a simple building, the Scout Lodge in particular served many roles in the community. Goodyear historian Sally Kiko tells us that her mother, Eleanor Stanton, held her kindergarten class there in 1947. "When my mother rented it for the kindergarten, the only heat was the lodge-sized fireplace. Not the best with five-year-olds." She purchased two gas heaters and had a local carpenter build child-size tables, benches, and a storage cupboard. She also bought a used piano to play, as music was an important part of the curriculum.

The building always needed to be left ready for other

people to use at night and on weekends. "Prior to the completion of Town Hall, City Clerk Ben Veneklassen had his office in the front north corner. It wasn't unusual to have residents come in to pay water bills," Mrs. Kiko recalls.

While these buildings were later found to be either structurally unsound or too small for future use, they were only the first of several Goodyear historic buildings that are disappearing.

The Avondale Moose Lodge (so named because Goodyear wasn't even a thought when it was established in 1935) is one example. While the Moose organization is building a new facility due to be completed this December, the quirky-looking building south of Yuma Road on Cotton Lane was recently demolished to make way for the Loop 303 expansion. Next on the list is the century-old cotton gin across the street. Perhaps the iconic water tower can be salvaged and used in the landscape?

And let's not forget Roman's Oasis! The Oasis has been

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MUSEUM HOURS

Wed., Thurs., & Friday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Saturdays 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

Paving Paradise cont.

in business for longer than anyone can recall. The historic dive bar (a term endeared by the owners) is going to be relocated to the buildings at the rear of the property within the next year. It will be impossible to recreate the atmosphere, but the owners are determined to keep it going. All for the widening of Yuma Road.

A recent survey of Goodyear residents found historic preservation to be a top concern. How much more history will be sacrificed for “progress”?

Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone...



Goodyear Fire Station and Town Hall, built in 1948.

Mobile, Arizona: A Brief History

By Chrys Walton

Mobile, Arizona, is a small historic community situated along State Highway 238 and the Southern Pacific Railroad. It rests between the Estrella Mountain Range and the Maricopa Mountains, and its neighboring cities are Maricopa and Gila Bend. Despite its remote location, it falls within the boundaries of the city of Goodyear.

As the future of Mobile hangs in the balance, it is important to reflect on its past, and the contributions African American settlers made to its culture and legacy.

Edison Lung was the first homesteader of the Mobile area. He applied for a large homestead patent in 1922 and gained rights to the land in June 1925. By this time, he had constructed a house, barn,



Abandoned building in Mobile.

Mobile cont.

storeroom, commercial store, and gas station. His wife, Elsie R. Lung, operated the Mobile Post Office while he provided service to motorists and railroad workers who passed through the area.

Black homesteaders began to populate Mobile between 1933 and 1938. At the time of Edison Lung’s death, the area surrounding his land had evolved into a community of between 100 and 150 inhabitants.

Though it is widely believed that Mobile earned its name from migrants hailing from Mobile, Alabama, archaeological evidence suggests that the name “Mobile” dates back to 1916—when the area was populated only by local railroad workers—and that a majority of the early settlement migrated from Phoenix, Texas, or Oklahoma.

Mobile’s decline began in the 1950s, after State Highway 80—now Interstate 8—replaced the Southern Pacific railroad as a major route across southwest Arizona. This relocation

directed business away from the Mobile-Maricopa area and toward the more profitable Vekol Valley. By the early 1960s, many Black families had vacated Mobile in favor of Phoenix, Los Angeles, and Washington State.

The civil rights movement inspired a slight revival of Mobile’s Black population, with educator William Warren facilitating the migration of 55 Black families from Phoenix to establish a new development called Tangier Acres. Throughout the late 1960s, Warren secured education, employment, and a steady water supply for these residents. The



Galilee Baptist Church Cemetery, Mobile

Farmers Home Administration, a government agency that provided loans and grants to farmers and rural communities, allotted 50 sows and two boars to each family in Tangier Acres.

The community maintained a profitable hog-raising operation until sanitary concerns and widespread cholera led to a mass euthanasia of contaminated livestock. This event inflicted irreversible damage upon the community, and by the 1970s, Warren himself had returned to Phoenix.

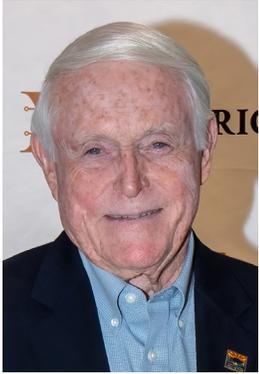
Present-day Mobile is a small, predominantly White community on the outskirts of Goodyear’s southern city limits. It encompasses an elementary school, a waste management facility, and a private airport. As recorded in an oral history interview, Mobile residents and brothers Pierre and Daniel Deck described the enduring community as maintaining a sense of closeness and interdependence, with Daniel Deck detailing its lack of infrastructure and abundance of wildlife, particularly snakes.

Since its annexation by Goodyear in 2007, Mobile has been subjected to various plans of development, including Amaranth—a master-planned community led by Montage Holdings, which was ultimately abandoned due to the Great Recession in 2008—a solar and battery storage facility, and the Sonoran Valley Parkway, which would streamline the route from Mobile to greater Goodyear.

While Mobile residents have voiced concerns about these developments, as they could risk environmental damage and emission of hazardous waste, they largely support the prospect of change, as it would ensure easier access to critical resources such as education and emergency services.

Ron Rayner to be named an Arizona Historymaker

F. Ronald (Ron) Rayner of Litchfield Park and Goodyear is receiving the honor of being named an Arizona Historymaker by the Historical League Inc., part of the Arizona Historical Society. The award recognizes living leaders in the state who have impacted Arizona.



Ron Rayner

Ron Rayner's Arizona roots are deep, with his family arriving from California to farm here in 1913. Yet he's always looked to the future with his nationally recognized farming innovations. He pioneered arid land double crop and no-till crop management practices that use less water, require fewer pesticides, reduce fuel use, reduce dust, and increase soil health.

When his father died in 1968, Ron and his brothers Earle and Robert took over the family farm and built A Tumbling T Ranches into a diversified operation including cotton, wheat, alfalfa and sorghum.

Rayner's community involvement includes founding chairman of Electrical District No. 8, former board member of the Central Arizona Project and several other local and state water organizations, past chairman of the National Cotton Council, president of Farmer's Gin, and member of the Agua Fria Union High School District Governing Board for 27 years.

Honors include the Lifetime Achievement Award from the University of Arizona College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and the Environmental Stewardship Award from the Arizona Farm Bureau.

The celebration will be held at the Arizona Heritage Center in Tempe. For more information about tickets visit the Historical League's website at: <https://historicalleague.org/2025-arizona-historymakerstm-turquoise-treasures-celebration>.



Heritage Center Prepares for 5th Annual Las Posadas Event

The P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center is proud to again partner with Ballet Folklórico Esperanza for Las Posadas of Litchfield Park: A Journey Together to the Mission. This evening community procession and fiesta will be on Saturday, December 6.

Las Posadas is based on a Mexican Christmas folk tradition. All are welcome to participate as *peregrinos*, or pilgrims, accompanying Mary and Joseph as they make their way to various locations. The procession ends with a fiesta including entertainment, displays, vendors, food trucks, and crafts on the grounds of the original St. Thomas Aquinas Mission Church at Neolin Avenue and Wigwam Boulevard.

The event honors the Southwest Valley's history and culture while paying tribute to the origins of the historic St. Thomas Aquinas Mission Church, located in the heart of Litchfield Park. Designed by a prominent Pasadena

architect, Reginald Johnson, this Mission Revival church has special significance in the Southwest Valley's history as a place of worship for the Mexican Catholic workers who were central to the area's development.

We hope you'll join this special community cultural celebration!

Date: Saturday, December 6, 2025

Time: 4:30 – 8 p.m.

Location: Original St. Thomas Aquinas Mission Church on Neolin Ave. & Wigwam Blvd.

4:30 – 5:30 Music, food, crafts, and shopping

5:30 – 6 Procession: join or watch costumed participants singing and portraying the roles of innkeepers, Mary, and Joseph.

6 – 8 Fiesta continues with performances, food and craft vendors, and children's activities.

Rancho La Loma Homestead Achieves Historic Milestone

The Rancho La Loma Homestead located on the hilltop property at Litchfield and Camelback roads has taken a significant step toward being listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Historic Sites Review Committee (HSRC) with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) recently voted unanimously to forward the property's nomination to the Keeper of the Register of National Historic Places for review. These initial steps have further validated Rancho La Loma Homestead's standing as a valuable cultural asset.

The property was nominated as a historic district on the basis of its association with Paul Weeks Litchfield. An inventor and industrialist, he helmed Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. as president and CEO from 1926 to 1940 and was influential in shaping Arizona's agricultural and aviation industries. The property contains multiple contributing resources including Paul Litchfield's office, residences, and a bandstand. The nomination also cites the underlying character of the hilltop landscape as a contributing factor of qualification.

This prestigious recommendation honors the remarkable legacy of the Rancho La Loma Homestead. The PW Litchfield Heritage Center's Historic Preservation Committee (HP Committee), with the support of the City of Litchfield Park, has been pivotal in achieving this recognition. If the Rancho La Loma Homestead achieves designation on the National Register of Historic Places, it will be the first site in Litchfield Park and the second in the Southwest Valley. Monument Hill near Phoenix Raceway achieved designation in 2002.



Historic aerial view of Rancho La Loma.

As an advocate for historic preservation, the PW Litchfield Heritage Center hopes to help bolster regional heritage tourism, which is founded on recognizing the cultural and economic value of historic sites throughout the Southwest Valley. Recent feedback from a City of Goodyear survey published in its *In Focus Magazine* echoes this enthusiasm, revealing that residents are eager to see historic preservation efforts grow.

As our preservation efforts gain momentum, the Heritage Center remains committed to ensuring the stories and places that shaped the region's past remain vibrant threads in the fabric of the Southwest Valley's future.

Archiving Committee Tours State-of-the-Art Cultural Repository



From left, Liv Keesling, Cydney Jackson, Patty George, Jerry George, Chrys Walton, Judy Cook, Steve Hoza, Lisa Hegarty, and Gilbert Soto.

Members of the PW Litchfield Heritage Center Archiving Committee recently toured the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community Cultural Repository. Head archivist, Steve Hoza, graciously shared his extensive knowledge of preservation and showed the repository's processes and materials for proper storage of artifacts and archive conservation. It was a fascinating look at best practices for preservation.

The SRPMIC Cultural Repository is a modern facility focused on safeguarding the community's cultural artifacts and records, with climate-controlled storage, archival rooms, and conservation labs. It directly serves the preservation needs of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, supporting heritage conservation, community education, and compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

Thank you to our Sponsors!

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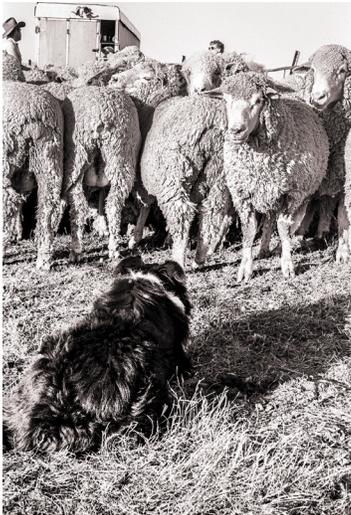
Erica Zuniga
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Sheep ranching cont.

forage, made Maricopa County a perfect seasonal haven.

While much of Arizona’s sheep industry centered in the cooler, grassy plateaus of the north, Maricopa County was a vital part of the seasonal cycle. Ranchers practiced “transhumance”—moving their flocks between summer ranges in the high country and winter pastures in the Valley.



The Basque immigrant Michel O’Haco built one of the most successful operations in the state, the O’Haco Sheep Company, which by the 1940s had become Arizona’s largest. Winter grazing around Phoenix, Goodyear, and Litchfield Park sustained tens of thousands of sheep before they made their long trek north

each spring.

The seasonal migration became legendary. Ranches like the Espil Sheep Company drove their flocks 130 miles from the Valley to the summer ranges near Flagstaff, following a route that came to be known as the Woolgrowers’ Trail. When Interstate 17 sliced through Arizona in the 1970s, engineers built special underpasses so the tradition could continue without halting traffic.

At its peak, Arizona’s sheep industry was home to more

than 1.5 million head and over 150 ranching families—Basque, American, Mexican, Canadian—each with their own methods, stories, and grit.

Today, large-scale sheep herding is rare in Maricopa County, but its legacy persists. The industry’s seasonal rhythm—driving flocks to the valley in winter and to the high country in summer—helped shape the county’s early economy and left a cultural footprint that still endures in memory, place names, and tradition.

As a newspaper photographer in the mid-1980s, I had the opportunity to photograph the operation of a West Valley sheep ranch. Several of the photos are currently on display in the exhibit Crossroads of Change, which bids farewell on Sunday, September 28.

**Exhibit Farewell
Crossroads of Change
Sunday, Sept. 28, 2025
1 – 3 p.m.
PW Litchfield Heritage Center**





**Exhibit Farewell
Crossroads of Change
Sunday, Sept. 28, 2025
1 – 3 p.m.**

Join us as we say farewell to our current exhibit, **Crossroads of Change**, which features the artistic black-and-white-photography of local photojournalist Jim Painter. This exhibit explores a transformational era in the West Valley’s history brought about by pivotal events. Copies of Mr. Painter’s book will be available for purchase. Light refreshments served.



**Exhibit Opening
Lighter Than Air:
Balloons, Blimps, and
Dirigibles
Sunday, Oct. 19, 2025
4 – 6 p.m.**

Join us for a special reception as we celebrate the opening of **Lighter Than**

Air: Balloons, Blimps, and Dirigibles. The exhibition traces the history of balloons from the 1700s through their use in battle, balloon races, and, 20th century airships — blimps and dirigibles — which were used for defense and transportation purposes. This history is closely linked to Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. of Akron, Ohio, and Goodyear Aircraft-Arizona, which played a major role in the promotion and development of blimps and dirigibles in the United States. Light refreshments served.



**Discovery Day
Hands-on History**
Check out family-friendly Discovery Days at the Heritage Center. Each month we explore a new theme through hands-on learning. **FREE**

**History & STEM: Farming Ingenuity
Saturday, Sept. 6, 2025
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
& Wednesday, Sept. 10
10 a.m. 4 p.m.**

Learn about the inventiveness of farmers through hands-on demonstrations and kid-friendly STEM activities.

**Exploring Dia de los Muertos
Saturday, Oct. 4, 2025**

**10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
& Wednesday, Oct. 8,
10 a.m. 4 p.m.**
Explore Mexican heritage and Dia de los Muertos traditions through kid-friendly activities and contribute to our community ofrenda display.

**Exploring Las Posadas
Saturday, Nov. 15, 2025
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
& Wednesday, Nov. 19
10 a.m. 4 p.m.**
Learn about the Mexican tradition of Las Posadas. Make your own mini piñata!

**Aviation
Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
& Wednesday, Jan. 7
10 a.m. 4 p.m.**
Explore local aviation history with hands-on activities.

**Arizona Day
Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Wednesday, Feb. 11
10 a.m. – 4 p.m.**
Discover fascinating Arizona facts and celebrate the state’s birthday with hands-on activities.



**Enrichment Class
Saturday, Nov. 1, 2025
1:30 - 3 p.m.
Create Your Own
Succulent Planter**

Learn about the characteristics, care and propagation of succulents while creating your own succulent bowl. Materials included. \$40 for non-members | \$35 for members



**Heritage Lecture Series
The Storied History of
Wickenburg
Thursday, Sept. 18, 2025
10 – 11 a.m.
Goodyear City Hall
Chambers
1900 N. Civic Sq.,
Goodyear
FREE**

Join master docent Joe Stevens from the Desert Caballeros Western Museum in Wickenburg as he relates the history of this consequential mining town.



**Holiday Open House
Sunday, Dec. 14, 2025
1 – 3 p.m.**

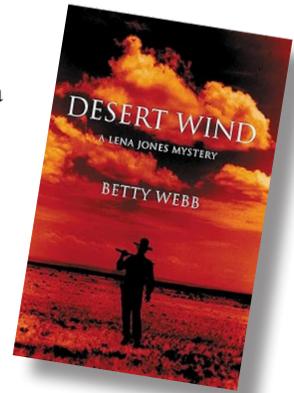
Stop in to enjoy refreshments, take in the latest exhibits, browse the museum shop for unique gifts, and bring the kids for crafts and activities!

Regional Reads Book Club

October 1

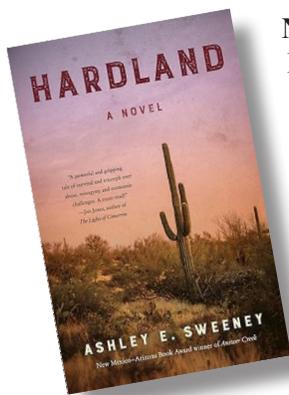
Desert Wind by Betty Webb MYSTERY

When P.I. Lena Jones investigates murders in a northern Arizona town, she finds a community in turmoil over the opening of a new uranium mine ten miles from the Grand Canyon. She also uncovers a 60-year-old injustice caused by atmospheric testing of nuclear bombs in Nevada affecting the residents who are downwinders from the test site.



November 5

Hardland by Ashley E. Sweeney FICTION



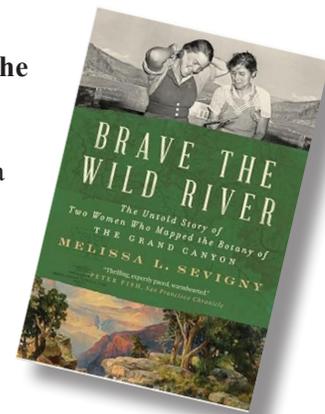
Set in 1899 Arizona, *Hardland* tells the story of Ruby Fortune, a former Wild West performer juggling single motherhood with running a business in a harsh frontier town. The novel features Southwest imagery and history, while examining domestic abuse, motherhood, interracial relationships, and the challenges women faced in the late 19th-century American West.

2023 Independent Press Awards Winner in Western Fiction

December 3

Brave The Wild River –The Untold Story of Two Women Who Mapped the Botany of the Grand Canyon by Melissa L Sevigny NONFICTION

Brave the Wild River recounts how University of Michigan botanists Elzada Clover and Lois Jotter became the first women to survive a journey down the Colorado River while creating an important botanical map in 1938. Drawing from their diaries and her own research, science journalist Melissa Sevigny details their 43-day expedition through dangerous rapids, rugged landscapes, and gender discrimination. The book offers both a gripping adventure and a tribute to the Grand Canyon's natural beauty.



Winner of the National Outdoor Book Award for History/Biography

Visit our website at [PWLHC.org](https://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](mailto:office@pwlhc.org).



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