Ridge Route Communities MUSEUM & Historical Society

Summer 2026

The Ridge Route Rambler

We're nuts about history.

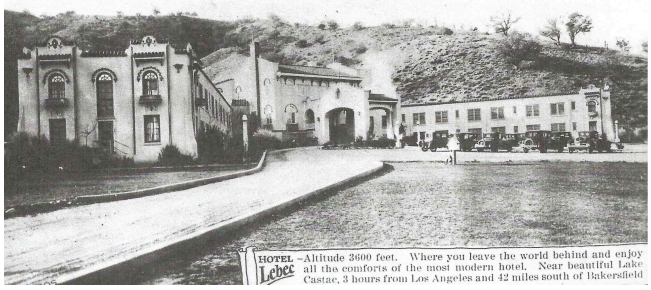
HISTORY SCHOLARSHIP

For the first time, the Museum is pleased to award its $500 History Scholarship. Its recipient is **Isaac Sotelo**, (shown here with Museum Historian Bonnie Kane). Isaac was a senior at Frazier Mountain High School with a 3.86 average. He plans to go to Taft College in the fall for his basic subjects towards a career in dentistry.



And here is his essay that won:

HOTEL LEBEC: A Historic Mountain Landmark



THE BEGINNING

Before the I-5 freeway, there was a winding road that was completed in 1915 along the crest of the Tehachapi Mountains. It became the first route between Southern and Northern California. This road leads to the famous "Hotel Lebec". Not often do people talk about it, mention it or even know that there used to be a hotel. Everyone just sees grass and mountains. But, this hotel used to be very famous back in the early 1900s and also very beautiful.

FOUNDING AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Hotel Lebec was founded by Thomas O'Brien. Thomas O'Brien was born in 1869 and died in 1942. O'Brien's life got off to a rocky start, with him being only 15 when his father drowned while fishing near the Ohio River. O'Brien arrived in Bakersfield, California around 1899, just as the Kern River Oil Field was discovered. Eventually in his 30s, O'Brien and his younger brother invested in that oil field. With the money O'Brien was making, he financed the "Louvre" saloon and the "Empire" vaudeville theater in Bakersfield. In 1913, he purchased 11,500 acres of land in nearby Lebec. At first, O'Brien built a large dining room with 25 small cabins on it, and called it "Hotel Lebec".

Hotel Lebec wasn't much to look at. But he tried his best to attract tourists by providing every service, and advertising Sunday chicken dinners. In 1915, the Ridge Route road between Los Angeles and Bakersfield had finally been oiled and in 1919 had been paved in concrete. The public could now reach the hotel much more easily. With this, O'Brien thought of many ideas and even thought of turning Hotel Lebec into a "Class A" hotel. He opened up a general store, lunchroom, and garage.

THE DURANT HOTEL ERA

Thanks to financing provided by the Durant family, Durant Hotel was born in the spring of 1920, with Thomas O'Brien as partner. Hotel Durant cost about $200,000 to build and was shaped in the form of a "Y". The hotel would be "fireproof" and have 100 rooms. They also wanted to include a billiard room, a banquet hall, private dining halls, and a dance floor. Each room would have a bath heated by steam, lit by electricity, and have telephone service. After two years, O'Brien and Durant did not remain in control of the hotel for long.

CURRY'S LEBEC LOUNGE

In October 1922, the hotel was sold to Foster Curry, former manager of Camp Curry in Yosemite Valley. Curry first bought the hotel from Durant, then purchased the garage and general store later on from O'Brien. The hotel was renamed "Curry's

Lebec Lodge". The L.A. Times published an article about the hotel being a really good example of a division point on the Valley Highway for travel between Los Angeles and San Francisco. About a month after Curry took over the hotel, a fire broke out on November 4, 1923, causing $60,000 worth of damage. So much for being fireproof.

O'Brien remained a co-owner since he had only sold Curry the garage and store, but eventually there was a lawsuit between them. O'Brien wanted to sell the hotel due to indebtedness. Curry filed a lawsuit against O'Brien to prevent O'Brien from selling the hotel because payments were up to date. O'Brien argued that the payments from Curry were "in arrears". There is no date when this case ended, but as a result O'Brien won and Curry had to sell his portion of the Hotel to Jack Wooley, a former wealthy Oakland saloon man. The hotel went back to its original name "Hotel Lebec".

PROHIBITION INCIDENT

By 1925, the hotel was increasingly back in popularity. Movie companies would use the hotel when they needed to shoot mountain scenes in the area. Many actors and crew would stay at the hotel. Unfortunately, several occurrences happened at the hotel that many people don't know about today.

Because of the 18th Amendment alcohol prohibition in the 1920s, Jack Wooley stashed 40 cases of alcohol, valued at $5,000, in the hotel. In August, 1925, four armed men claiming to be federal agents came into the hotel and stole the stash while Wooley and O'Brien were away in San Francisco. The only person there at the time was the manager of the hotel, James Bryant. Wooley sold his entire share in the hotel to O'Brien that week.

THE LINDEN KILLING

Another incident that occurred at the hotel was the Linden killing. On September 24, 1929 a Department of Justice agent, Moody, went to the home of Frank R. Linden, a laundryman for the Hotel Lebec, to question Linden's 23-year-old niece and foster daughter. This investigation involved a prostitution and gangster criminal case. Linden threatened Moody, so Moody called in sheriffs for backup. When deputies knocked on the door demanding admittance to the home, Linden met them with a .45-caliber pistol. Officers took action and killed Linden with a shotgun. Charges were dropped. Officer Al Welch was cleared of the shooting; it was ruled self-defense.

MORE OWNERSHIP CHANGES

In the 1930s, Hotel Lebec continued ownership changes. A.F. Kennedy became the new manager and proprietor for the hotel. In 1936, Kennedy sold the hotel to a new group of Los Angeles and Pasadena residents. The new owners were M.C. Kress and Charles F. & George O. & Grace G. Relf. The purchase price was $79,000, including 2,000 acres of land. Grace sold her interest; the rest of the members stayed until 1948, when they sold their interest to Burk Enterprises for $190,000.

GAMBLING OPERATION

For about four months in the spring and summer of 1953 there was a gambling operation at the hotel. Harry Burk was an owner at the time. At midnight on October 2, 1953, Hotel Lebec was raided by a team of five state agents. According to the L.A. Times: "The dozen or so customers stood foolishly idle in a large room appointed with a roulette table, two craps tables, a blackjack table and four card tables." The operation was run by Burk, Howard Mooney and Max Travis of Long Beach. Burk sold the hotel in 1955 to Al Perlman for $300,000.

END OF AN ERA

After the gambling debacle, the hotel struggled a lot and went into a death spiral of disuse and decline. No more movies were being filmed in the area; no more actors stayed there and the hotel lost its popularity. The hotel closed down for good in November of 1968 due to concerns about its substandard water system and dilapidated condition. And finally the hotel was destroyed and burned to the ground by the Tejon Ranch Company two weeks after taking possession of it in 1971. There are many pictures of it, but the only things left of the hotel are four lamp posts and some artifacts at the Ridge Route Museum in Frazier Park, California. It was truly the end of an era.

SIGNIFICANT DONORS

Viola Gusler made a good sized donation, while Pat Gaspar & Dene Barrett made a $200 donation towards our ReHome the Bell project.

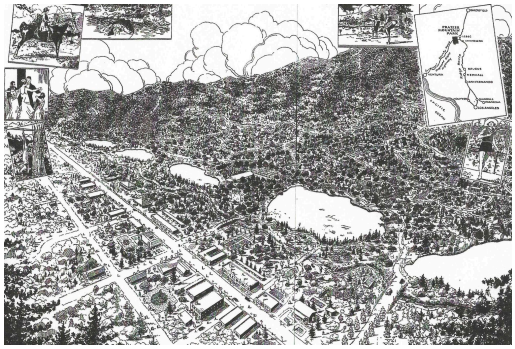
OBITUARIES



Our community lost a vital member recently in Jim Lowery, who wrote books and offered classes in "earth skills" such as tracking, native plant uses and preparation, wilderness skills and indigenous wisdom. He will be missed by many.

THE POND
THEN, AND THEN, AND NOW

Frazier Park's pond, next to the community building, was originally meant to be one of five ponds, as conceived by the Glendale company that founded Frazier Park, Frazier Mountain Park & Fisheries Co., Inc. in the 1920s. "The" pond is actually Pond #3.



Pond #3 was opened to fishing for the first time in June of 1937, stocking it with trout, bass, crappie and catfish.

In the mid 50s Kern County took over responsibility for the park. Four of the ponds remained, but all of them had been so overgrown with tule and willows that the county performed a controlled burn, dredging and bulldozing to handle years of overgrowth. Two of the ponds were practically dry. Within two years the remaining two were restored and restocked, and Pond #3 became the center of community life.

The water levels have varied in the past, not just in the last 10 years. There was a drought in 1957 and again in 1987 when the water receded but never went completely dry.

In 1994, just a month before Fiesta Days, they had stocked the pond with fish for the fishing derby when the water level began to drop rapidly. Yes, there was a drought. But apparently the spring that had fed the pond chose to give out right then. The utility district and community volunteers located a new spring source above the pond, dug a catch basin and installed an underground line to carry thousands of gallons of water a day to the pond. Fiesta Days had a successful fishing derby.





And then in 2016, it went completely dry (shown with the Ketterl brothers). And the conspiracy theories and finger pointing abounded. But really folks, it's called a drought.

And here we are ten years later, with the water restored, but vegetation choking most of it. And just this month I hear there are baby ducks again!!!



2026 Pond #3 (photo by MaryAnn Ryan)

INTERNS

We have had the pleasure of welcoming two

interns in the last year, Katie Masuhara of Pine Mountain Club, a college student at College of the Canyons and Alexa Ward of Pinion Pines, a freshman high school student.

Katie just completed part I of her research on Mil Potrero (which we published last issue) here at the museum. She has been excellent at any research assigned, and has recently undertaken the nightmare of identifying and reorganizing our maps.

Alexa has taken on the project of finding a local event that happened in each of the 52 weeks in the year, so that eventually we can run a "This Week in the Ridge Route Communities……" short article in the paper.

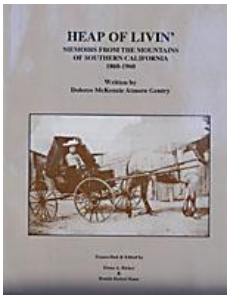
We hope to see more young people showing up; we have a list of potential projects they could take on in a wide variety of skill sets (artistic, i.t, archival, organizational, research, etc.). With all of us in our 60s, 70s and 80s, these young people will be our legacy.

OUR EVENTS

In **June** we had an interesting panel of speakers for our **Programs on the Patio**. Geologist Tim Elam, who last spoke here 10 years ago, was a welcome return & spoke on Roadside Geology & the San Andreas Fault. Matt Schnittker of the Fort Tejon Historical Association presented a working 19th century telegraph that the audience was invited to operate as well as a printing press. Abby Gwinn from California Dept. of Fish & Wildlife spoke on living with our local wildlife**.** Paul RedHorse sang & interpreted Native American songs.

As of press time we are making final plans for our Freedom Festival on **July 4** to Celebrate our country's 250th birthday. We plan to have food vendors, music, art & face painting for the kids, adult games (like tug-o-war) and kids games, a quilt show, a 1776 costume contest, a parade of decorated bicycles, tricycle, wagons & strollers, and a BIG opportunity drawing.

NOTICE: On Saturday **July 25 (not the 18th as previously indicated)** at 7:00 p.m. we will once again present our Living History Theatre dramatic reading of **Heap of Livin'**. It tells some colorful stories from our mountains in the 1860s-1920s. **Admission** will be $8.



Based on the book of the same name by Dolores McKenzie Atmore Gentry, it is a true story of three generations of her family that starts on a wagon train from Texas to a homestead on Tejon Ranch in southern California. At age fifteen she unknowingly marries the leader of an outlaw gang of cowboys and is left to prove up his desert claim.



Our annual **Great American Yard Sale** is coming up Labor Day weekend in September, so please use the month of August to bring us your unwanted treasures to sell. Please no clothing or fabric.

OTHER LOCAL EVENTS

On the **first Saturday of October and November** this year the Fort Tejon State Historic Park will host **Frontier Army Days at Fort Tejon**. It's a living history event where you can talk to "soldiers" and "citizens" who lived and worked at Fort Tejon over 150 years ago. Call the Fort Park at 661-248-6692 for info on other scheduled events.

Like us, the **Fort Tejon Historical Association** (**not** the same as the park) is hurting for new members to help them put on future events. You can contact them at info@forttejonca.org.

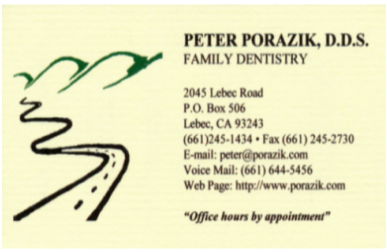
PLEASE SUPPORT THE BUSINESS MEMBERS THAT SUPPORT US!!!!!













8N04 RIDGE ROUTE DIGITAL GALLERY BY SYDNEY CROASMUN

https://8n04.com

Snedden Ranch
P.O. Box 129
Maricopa, CA 93252
(661) 747-5646





FRAZIER MOUNTAIN INTERNET SERVICE
CONNECTING FRAZIER MOUNTAIN TO THE WORLD

Donations

☐ $ _____ (Any value is appreciated) for _____

Membership

Personal	Business
☐ $15 Senior (62+)	☐ $50 Silver
☐ $25 General	☐ $100 Gold
☐$500 Lifetime	☐ $250 Platinum

Sponsorships

☐ $50 Speaker	☐ $1000 Gold Level Bell Fund
☐ $75 Tea or Basket Class	☐ $2,000 Chumash Exhibit
☐ $100 Patio Eve. Program	☐ $3,000 Cuddy Cabin
☐ $500 December Lights	☐ $5,000 Grounds
☐ $500 Silver Level Bell Fund	☐ $10K Exhibit Hall Fund

Mail In Form

Name / Company: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Phone: _____

E-Mail: _____

Newsletter Format: ☐ Email ☐ US Mail

Ridge Route Communities Museum & Historical Society
PO Box 684, Frazier Park, CA 93225
ridgeroutemuseum.org

BOARD MEMBERS

Executive Officers:

President: Bethel Billesbach
Secretary: Chandra Mead
Treasurer: Tammie Goddard
Vice President: Vincent Dobradenka II

Directors at Large:

David Carlson
Sydney Croasmun*
Barbara Bouman Jay
Kevin Woten

* Ridge Route Preservation Organization board member.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!



We always need volunteers to help docent during the hours that we are open (Fri. Sat. Sun. 12-4). So if you have some free time, and are interested in history, please contact us. Training will be provided. Other skills, such as I.T., handyman, are also needed.

VISIT OR CONTACT US

Location:	3515 Park Drive Frazier Park, CA
Hours:	Fri., Sat., Sun.: 12-4 pm
Phone:	661-245-7747
Text:	661-245-7747
Website:	ridgeroutemuseum.org
Email:	info@ridgeroutemuseum.org

Historian/Curator: Bonnie Ketterl Kane

NEWSLETTER

Editor: Chandra Sargent Mead

Printing: **MANY THANKS TO**

TEJON RANCH COMPANY

RIDGE ROUTE COMMUNITIES MUSEUM & HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 684
FRAZIER PARK, CA 93225