

The view from Cactus Schaak

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RANCHO MIRAGE – What can one man do about poor management in America? He can do plenty.

It was one woman, Shirley Wall, aided by her neighbors, who started a movement that reached its climax at College of the Desert on Feb. 3, 1965, when the free men and women of Rancho Mirage collected enough money to purchase the Rancho Mirage Community Association from Ronald Button at a price of \$1,097.40.

Probably deed restrictions were the chief cause of the grief, for many of the lots on Highway 111 are zoned residential (R1) and they have long ceased to be desirable for residences and are now highly desirable for commercial property.

The resulting spot zoning brought service stations and billboards, to both of which the residents objected.

Thus closed an era that started 40 years ago when Highway 111 was a dirt farm road.

Frank Reyes, of Rancho Mirage Water Company, probably knows more about the community than anyone else, for when it was first subdivided April 24, 1934, Frank laid the pipeline for water.

He used surplus pipe from World War I, probably purchased from Belgium or Germany. There were no fittings, but Frank improvised, in between his other jobs of building roads and selling lots.

Frank is still the angel of the water company, known to every resident of Rancho Mirage.

Even as early as 1934, the Hollywood stars sought privacy and escape from the hectic life of Palm Springs in the inaccessible village of Rancho Mirage.

Most notable of the early arrivals were Alma and Frank Morgan, whose parties are still remembered. Their adobe house still stands.

Workers from Mexico earned \$2.25 for a nine hour day. Adobe (bricks) were made, using sand from the wash, price - \$60 per thousand.

According to Don Cameron, who pioneered the lot sale, the bathroom fixtures cost more than the four walls of the home.

Don says that Ralph Bellamy and the *Charleses* – Butterworth and Farrell - were among the gay Hollywood group who built cottages in Rancho Mirage. A small house that cost \$2,600 in the middle 1930s sold for \$29,000 in the post-war days when living accommodations were scarce, Don related in a lecture before the Rancho Mirage Woman's Club.

During the war, the small cluster of homes housed wives of Army officers, many of whom were with General Patton's army that was training near Desert Center.

The women petitioned Uncle Sam for mail boxes, since it was necessary to go to Indio for mail. The 13 mailboxes by the side of the road remained until the first post office was established.

Major Ronald Button was one of the Army men who saw Rancho Mirage and liked it, along with Major Phil Boyd, who bought Redwood Ranch previously.

Rancho Hankeroo, Hank Gogerty's property, now Desert Air Hotel and Airfield, the Sand Trap and Amy Croft's home, were among the first in the community.

From 1948 to 1951, the Rancho Mirage Community Association operated, controlling zoning and being in charge of the swimming pool. But home owners refused to pay their yearly dues of \$10, and the association was dropped, and later Mr. Button picked it up for back taxes.

Zoning is the chief concern of the property owners. Those with lots on Highway 111 want business zoning, and those owning lots one block north and south of the highway seek multiple family zoning.

Basil Collier, representative of Desser & Garfield, owners of much of the subdivision, promised full co-operation with zone changes and payment of \$200 for various expenses connected with the enterprise.

Sid Greenleaf, Postmaster and President of the Chamber of Commerce, who is himself a pioneer of Rancho Mirage, said the Chamber of Commerce only wished to aid in securing the instrumentality for control of property and would immediately withdraw.

Citizens will meet, elect officers and once again attempt to control their own area.

Just as it is inspiring to see the people take care of a situation that had become unpleasant; it is now a question as to how long this interest will continue.

There were about 100 residents present at the meeting, representing both the longtime residents and the newcomers.

Messrs. Greenleaf, Walt Smith, Joe Buccino, Les Yoxsimer and Laddie Svoboda have lived in Rancho Mirage for some time and are regarded as being co-operative and workers for civic betterment.

Gerald Harmon, of the Palm Springs Planning Commission, who lives in Rancho Mirage, offered to help.

Rancho Mirage faces an interesting challenge. This writer, recognizing the need for a concerted community effort, last year organized the Rancho Mirage Woman's Club, which the young women of the community are working with, very actively.

The Chamber of Commerce was revived three years ago, largely through the efforts of the late Gerald Nisley.

What will happen now? Will the residents actually be able to attract business to the community, which at present has some outstanding institutions? Or will it revert to the old formula of inertia and indifference?

Passage of the upcoming school bond measure is practically a guarantee of a new public school within two years, according to a local school board member.

The community has a glowing opportunity. It will be interesting to see what transpires.