

# Shiloh Scrapbook

SHILOH MUSEUM OF OZARK HISTORY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 34, No. 1 May 2015

## The Wonder of *Wonder Valley*



Actors and extras at the Hitchin Post Café, Springdale, September 27, 1951. With actor John Fontaine (seated at front table, middle) and locals Betty Walker (seated at back table, left), Teena Carpenter (seated at back table, right), and Wayne High (standing at back table). *Teena Carpenter Collection (S-2004-57-1)*

### Marie Demeroukas

*Photo Archivist/Research Librarian*

Movie fever was in the air during the summer of 1951. Viva Ruth Liles of Russellville, president of Wonder State Motion Pictures, Inc., tantalized local press with word of an independently produced color movie to be filmed in Northwest Arkansas. Businessmen and area leaders would have a chance to invest in both the movie and the film-production company.

Liles hoped to sell \$100,000 of common stock at \$10 per share to

fund her company. But first, \$30,000 had to be raised before filming could begin. While there was enthusiasm about the project and the prospect of the company permanently locating here, there was caution, too.

Initially titled *Seven Wonders*, the film told the story of the widow Wonder, her seven children, and their “fight to modernize their valley farm” through electricity. The overly complicated screenplay featured young love, rivalry,

stolen money, and tragedy. In the end, the progressive measures taken by Wonder Valley’s residents allowed them to “build good homes, own automobiles, and generally step up their standard of living.”

Lance Devro and former child actress Gloria Jean played “Ben Wonder” and his sweetheart “Mary.” Other actors included John Fontaine, Walter Kingsford, Thurston Hall, Louise Lorimer, Lisa Abbot, Gordon Hanson,

**see WONDER, page 6**

## DIRECTOR'S COLUMN



**Allyn Lord**

experiences and provide support for each other. The organization soon saw the many needs of the burgeoning Latino community and found ways to fulfill those needs. Thus HWOA's activities include voter registration drives, help with the naturalization process, providing scholarships, and organizing events such as annual Cinco de Mayo celebrations and HWOA Conferences.

In 1997, Margarita began her studies at Northwest Arkansas Community College. By taking one or two courses per semester while working full-time at a factory, in 2003 she earned an associate's degree in social work. Besides working to support her

family, she became a U.S. citizen in 2000. As HWOA's executive director, she serves on the board for the Arkansas Department for Career Education, a committee for the Washington County Juvenile Court, and the Community Advisory Board for UAMS Translational Research Institute. She received the 2014 Dragon Slayer Award from the Citizens First Congress and Arkansas Public Policy Panel and was honored as a Defender of the Interest of the Latino Community by the Mexican Consulate in Little Rock.

Margarita has committed her life to increasing educational attainment, citizenship, and participation in the Arkansas Latino community. Her personal history echoes that of many of our own first-generation ancestors, facing and overcoming numerous challenges in order to find community and make it a better place to live. Margarita's dedication, hard work, concern for others, and deep caring has made her a person of history for all of Northwest Arkansas. Her story—her history—is a big part of what the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History is all about. Kudos to you, Margarita!

For folks who don't think about history as frequently as we do at the museum, what's sometimes difficult to grasp is that history is happening every day, that today's news is being written into history the moment it occurs. I was thinking about that when I learned that the Washington County Women's History Month coalition was giving one of its 2015 "Women in History" awards to my friend Margarita Solórzano, executive director of the Hispanic Women's Organization of Arkansas (HWOA). Margarita not only has her own amazing history, but she is, day in and day out, also making history in Northwest Arkansas.

Margarita came to the United States in 1990 from Mexico, speaking no English, not knowing how to drive. While in California, Margarita worked in factories, studied ESL at night school, and was a parent-educator in her daughters' school. In 1996 she moved to Arkansas to find a better life for her family. But here they didn't find much of a community. So Margarita and fifteen other women formed a support group—which became HWOA—to share their

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### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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### VOLUNTEERS (DECEMBER 2014–APRIL 2015)

Geri Alvis, Emma Artman, Marty Benson, Ethna Billings, Abby Boosey, Cassie Boosey, Steve Brizzi, Frank Burke, Carolyn Butler, Haley Calhoun, Noah Calhoun, Karen Cordell, Grace Costello, Kyla Cross, Dawn Didier, Tom Duggan, Steve Erwin, Cheryl Fears, Sara Fixmer, C. J. Freeman, Virginia Freeman, Regina Gabel, Abby Hutchins, Molly Hutchins, Bill Jones, Mary John Jones, Ann Kabanuck, Jim Langford, Cheryl Larson,

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### STAFF

Allyn Lord, director; Judy Costello, education manager; Marie Demeroukas, photo archivist/research librarian; Kris Johnson, photographer; Aaron Loehndorf, collections/education assistant; Curtis Morris, exhibits manager; Kathy Plume, receptionist/gift shop manager; Marty Powers, maintenance; Carolyn Reno, assistant director/collections manager; Carly Squyres, education assistant; Susan Young, outreach coordinator

### SHILOH MUSEUM OF OZARK HISTORY

118 W. Johnson Avenue • Springdale, AR 72764 • 479-750-8165  
[shilohmuseum.org](http://shilohmuseum.org) • [shiloh@springdalear.gov](mailto:shiloh@springdalear.gov)

Open Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. • Free Admission

## Bentonville, Back Then



Jim Morriss recently donated several photos that belonged to his grandmother, Hattie Connelly Carithers (1890–1985), who taught school in Bentonville from the 1920s until her retirement in 1955.

The photo above shows the **1926 Bentonville High School orchestra**. Standing from left: Howard Allen, Sherman Robbins, Alice Dana, Ida Fay Selby, orchestra conductor Lou Smith, Caroline Omohundro, Marjorie Young. Seated from left: Bill Pickens, Alvin Gibson, Edwin Pickens, Glynn Gailey, Percy Gailey, Jack Allen.

Pictured at the right is **Jessie Stewart Gilstrap** (1892-1980). This 1930s photo was taken when she, like Hattie Carithers, was a Bentonville teacher. Jessie's husband, Jake, owned several lumber yards in Northwest Arkansas and Kansas. After Jake's death in 1946, Jessie took over the business and became well-known as one of the few women in that line of work. She was a regular contributor to *Retail Lumberman* magazine, writing a column entitled, "Lumber Lou Sez."



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# Summer Fun for Kids!



Registration is underway for our summer history camps for kids. Two sessions are offered:

*Cooking and Clothing, Ozark Style!* is **June 8–12, 9:00–11:30 a.m.**, for ages 7–10 years. Cost for the camp is \$30 for museum members and \$40 for non-members, and includes snacks and crafts. [Registration form](#)

*Time Travelers, 1960-2009* is **July 13–17, 10:00 am–3:00 p.m.**, for ages 11–14 years. Cost for the camp is \$45 for museum members and \$55 for non-members, and includes lunch, crafts, and a ticket to the July 21 NWA Naturals baseball game. [Registration form](#)

Space is limited for both camps; preregistration and payment is required. The registration deadline is May 31. A limited number of scholarships are available. The application must be received by May 31. [Scholarship application](#)

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We'll host a fishing derby **Tuesday, June 16, 1:00–4:00 p.m.** at Murphy Park Pond in Springdale. Kids of all ages are invited to bring a fishing pole and bait and try their luck at catching some of the 200 channel catfish that will be stocked in Murphy Park Pond by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission.

The derby is free, but registration is required in order to be eligible for prizes. Registration begins at 12:30 p.m. at the park pavilion. Participants 16 and over must have a valid Arkansas fishing license.

Murphy Park Pond is located next to the Springdale Public Library at 405 S. Pleasant Street.

*For information about our camps or the fishing derby, email education manager [Judy Costello](#); phone 479-750-8165.*

## WISH LIST

### For education programs

- Walmart gift card (any amount) to purchase perishable items
- 3 skeins 100% wool yarn, white
- wool for spinning into yarn
- canning jars: 20 16-oz. size; 10 8-oz. size
- two deer roasts for making jerky

### For exhibit workshop

- clamps, any size (\$5-\$30 each)

### For museum grounds

- hummingbird feeders (\$10 each)
- food-grade barrels for use as rain barrels
- wooden barrel for barn display

### Thank you for these “for-use” items (November 2014–April 2015)

*Carolyn Bayley, Kathryn Birkhead, Curia Lake Sorghum, Dianne and David Kellogg, Cheryl Larson, Mira Leister, Carolyn Reno, Dolores Stamps:* cornbread, ham, and sorghum for pioneer exhibit reception

*Julie Beggs:* wool and skeins of yarn

*Trisha Beland:* metal dollhouse

*Frank Burke:* wooden barrel

*Grace Costello and Elaina Tillery:* reproduction pioneer-era dress and bonnet

*Judy Costello:* eggs

*Tom Costello:* financial support for education staff to attend professional conference

*Daisy Airgun Museum:* 400 lbs. of BBs

*Crow Johnson Evans:* knitted sock

*Julian King:* skein of yarn

*Lewis and Clark Outfitters:* climbing party (prize for fishing derby winner)

*Ozark Chinquapin Foundation and Hobbs State Park:* chinquapin seeds

*Jane Scroggs:* file cabinet

*Martha Spark:* clothespins

*Cherie Squyres:* dress pattern

*Dolores Stamps:* 1950s neckties; stamp collection; vintage schoolbook

# DONATIONS TO THE COLLECTIONS

November 2014–April 2015

*Glenn Brown:* Rachel Riggs' 1943 stock certificate for Springdale Airport, Inc.

*Betty Christian:* Grant Cline's gold Odd Fellow rings, Eureka Springs, early–mid 1900s

*Marie Demeroukas:* Tontitown Winery bottle, 2014

*Claudia Driver:* Joyce's Drugstore bottle, Springdale, 1950s

*James Duncan:* Ione Mills Duncan's portable radio, Winslow, 1930s–1940s

*Mary Lou Dunn:* Fayetteville High School Class of 1927 reunion records; University High School records and photos, 1940s–1990s; scrapbooks of local and state political ads, 1950s

*Wanda Dupree:* Essie Treat Ward's scrapbook, Searcy County, circa 1918

*Susan and Orville Hall Jr.:* Baby crib; cameras; metal toy car; Susan Dulan Hall's wedding dress; Ruth Roberts' handpainted china; make-up compacts; children's books; all from the Hall and Dulan families, Fayetteville, 1930s–1980s

*Jane Jakoubek:* "Vitamized Growing Mash" feed sack from Jeff Brown's Springdale Hatchery, mid-1900s

*Norma Johnson:* Eunice Sherry Huntley's feathered hat, Springdale, circa 1960

*Mary John Jones:* Photographs of Sub Deb rush party, Fayetteville, circa 1948

*Gene Mapes:* Letters, papers, and photographs of Bobbie Kennard, Sulphur Springs (Benton County) 1900s

*Laurie Marshall:* 1938 Springdale High Bulldog annual; 1940 letter regarding UA Kappa Sigma fraternity; *Fraternity at Arkansas*, 1941–42; *Small Homes in the New Tradition*, featuring Oglesby home in Springdale, 1959

*Sharon McGuire:* Larry Sims' white sport coat, Springdale, 1950s; Wilson and Company poultry plant grand opening invitation, Springdale, 1959; First Baptist Church of Springdale membership booklet and brochure, 1961; 1930s book from Harmon School (Washington County)

*Jim Morriss:* Drawings of Bentonville buildings, late 1900s; Bentonville Public Schools stationery, circa 1950; photos of Bentonville High School students, 1920s–1940s; photos from filming of *Jesse James*, 1938

*Pat Pond:* Muzzleloader; shotgun; pistol; Army sabers; all from the George Roberts and J.R. Pond families, Washington County, late 1800s–early 1900s

*Carol Scott:* Rocking chair and "dry sink" cabinet from the Green and Grace Hall family, Madison and Washington counties, circa 1900

*Marcella Sharum estate:* Buggy robe; ceramic jar; butter stamp; baby shoes; quilts; photos; family papers; all from the Head and Sharum families of Head's Ford and Springdale, late 1800s–late 1900s

*Margaret Shaver:* Quilt made by Nancy Ray for the marriage of her son James to Grace Parker, Clifty (Madison County), 1898

*Shiloh Museum Board of Trustees:* Invitation to Ozark Grape Festival, Springdale, 1926; Springdale Canning Company "Little Mill Brand" spinach label, circa 1950

*Springdale Public Library:* School book used in 1930s–1940s; Walker Elementary School yearbooks, 2008, 2009; all from Springdale

*Charlotte Steele:* Numerous items from the Phillip Steele estate, including J. C. Steele's cash register, 1905; and Schwinn "Typhoon" bicycle, circa 1960s

*Georgia Thompson:* Arch and Chris Thompson family photographs, circa 1900–1949; September 1949 issue of *Country Gentleman*, featuring the Thompson family of Harmon (Washington County)

*Joseph Webb:* Drawings and photographs of Monte Ne (Benton County), 1950s; booklets and *The Liberty Bell* newspaper by Willima "Coin" Harvey, 1916–1930s

Photographs loaned for copying: *Carole Byerly*, *Wayne Farwell*, *Joyce Griffith*, *Wendell Ridenour*, *Tom and Cindy Rimkus*, *Nila Sizemore*

To learn more about artifacts and photos in our collection, visit our website's [Artifact of the Month](#) and [Photo of the Month](#).

Subscribe to our website's [RSS Feed](#) to keep up with the new offerings each month.

**Please note: We have a new fax number, 479-756-7732.**

(Even in this modern world of technological marvels, we occasionally need to send and receive faxes.)

## Wonder

From page 1

Taylor Holmes, and Gary Kent Liles and Mirna Liles (Viva Ruth's children).

In early September about forty Hollywood actors and crew members descended upon the small Benton County community of Cave Springs, taking advantage of a recreational area developed there by E.L. Keith. They were housed in barracks-type accommodations and ate their meals at the resort's restaurant. After several delays, shooting finally began.

Area residents had a chance to be stars for a day, serving as extras in a fish-fry scene held on the shores of Lake Keith and in a segment filmed at the Hitchin Post Café in downtown Springdale. Arkansas Governor Sid McMath had a small role, playing himself. Early "rushes" (unedited selections from the filming) were shown to the delight of all at the Victory Theatre in Rogers and the Apollo Theatre in Springdale.

Actors, crew, and community came together. Dignitaries and businessmen from Northwest Arkansas officially welcomed the production company with a banquet at the Harris Hotel in Rogers, followed by a public reception at the high school auditorium. Actors John Fontaine toured the Veterans Hospital in Fayetteville and Walter Kingsford attended a fundraiser for a municipal swimming pool in Springdale. The Hollywood gang took part in a pie supper for the benefit of the Cave Springs fire department.

Liles thought Arkansas would be a more economical place to film than Hollywood. *Wonder Valley* was the first movie filmed entirely in Arkansas and the first of three movies Liles planned to produce. Another was "the



**Shooting a dinner scene, Cave Springs, September 1951.** Howard Clark, photographer. Caroline Price Clark Collection (S-2002-72-2478)

true story of how motion pictures got started in Arkansas" (presumably a feature about Liles' film company).

Not much is known about Viva Ruth Lawrence Liles. She was born around 1916 in the Buttermilk Community of Appleton, Arkansas (near Russellville). In 1936 her husband, Harry C. Liles, sued for divorce, but it's unclear if the divorce was ever finalized because in 1940 the Liles were living in Oklahoma City with one-year-old daughter Mirna Ruth. By her own account, Viva Ruth Liles made money in the oil business in Oklahoma before going into the motion picture industry in the early 1940s.

During the early days of filming *Wonder Valley*, a reporter for the *Northwest Arkansas Times* noted that

Liles believed that "Arkansas [had] not tendered the reception she expected [for herself] and her program." She was "disappointed because residents [had] not extended themselves in their welcome." Perhaps Liles was hoping for local investors.

Although several thousand dollars was said to have been raised at Springdale, the *Times* reported that folks in Fayetteville were skeptical. Shooting dates and locations were constantly changed and there were rumors that the film company's board might be changed.

In October 1951, filming stopped as actors and technicians walked off the set, claiming they hadn't been paid in two weeks. Liles denied the charge as she headed to Oklahoma City to raise



funds. A few days later the Wonder State Motion Picture Company declared bankruptcy. A local investor may also have brought suit against the company.

During a 1952 bankruptcy hearing in Little Rock, it was noted that while it would “take considerable money to complete the picture,” Liles would “advance the necessary funds.” Luckily, principal filming was completed by the time the production faltered.

It appears that Liles kept her word. A movie poster exists, along with the sheet music to “Beautiful Arkansas.” Written by Pat and Marge Patrick of Springdale and published by Liles in 1952, it was the film’s theme song. When asked about the film after Liles’ death in 2003, her sister said *Wonder Valley* had a national run, according to a Hollywood trade magazine. At the least it played in California. Liles

was said to possess the only known copy of the movie, but it was badly deteriorated and no longer exists.

While the film is long gone, its impact on Northwest Arkansas still lingers. In the 1960s there’s mention of Wonder Valley as a picnic spot near Cave Springs. The town was also home to the Wonder Valley Boys, who played western music at the Pea Ridge Fair. Some folks still remember when the film company came to town. Glenn Jones of Lowell was a young boy visiting his grandparents in Cave Springs. It was “all the locals talked about day and night.” He watched some of the filming but was “bored stiff,” wishing he was out playing in the fields and creeks. After his grandmother bought a Lake Keith postcard from an enterprising salesman, stars Gloria Jean and John Fontaine saw Glenn with it and

autographed it for him. But this brush with Hollywood was lost on him: “I wasn’t impressed since [I] had never heard of them.”

Who knows? Perhaps a copy of *Wonder Valley* will turn up someday in a dusty attic. Until then, we can only imagine the film’s earnest and homespun sweetness as expressed in “Beautiful Arkansas”:

*Down in the heart of the Ozarks,  
There’s a most wonderful place  
Kissed by the streams from the  
mountains,  
A spot that’s all beauty and grace.*

*Arkansas, land of abundance,  
Made by the angels above.  
Here live the kindest of people,  
And this is the place that I love.*

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## Shiloh Meeting Hall: In the News and On the Agenda

The historic Shiloh Meeting Hall—formerly called the Shiloh Church and Odd Fellows Lodge—is one of the oldest and most significant buildings in Northwest Arkansas, and you may have seen it in the news recently. Built in 1871, it has been home to, and a meeting place for, three churches (two of which still exist today), the local Masonic lodge (also still in existence), the Women’s Civic Club, and the New Era Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

The building was donated to the museum in 2005 with the understanding that it be renovated for use. The building’s exterior and roof were completed by 2009 with almost \$200,000



in funding. The museum’s board of trustees is about to undertake a campaign to raise an additional \$1 million to complete the interior renovations, landscaping, and parking, to transition the historic building into a place to gather, a place to learn, and a place dedicated to the history and future of Springdale and Northwest Arkansas. You’ll be hearing much more about the building in the months to come. Stay tuned!

## CALENDAR

**May 19–March 26, 2016.** *Silver Screen Memories*, an exhibit featuring photos and memorabilia of area movie theaters and filmmaking.

**May 20, noon.** A program on the history of Springdale's First United Methodist Church by longtime church members Earlene Henry and Fay Marie Johnson.

**May 23, 2 p.m.** Dedication of a Civil War Sesquicentennial marker at the corner of Johnson Avenue and Mill Street, just east of the museum campus. The marker remembers the hardships faced by people living in and around the Civil War-era settlement of Holcomb's Spring, which is present-day Springdale. Speakers at the dedication include Mayor Doug Sprouse, Arkansas Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission member Dr. Jamie Brandon, Shiloh Museum director Allyn Lord, Holcomb family representative Margaret Holcomb, and Kyla Cross, who will perform a selection of Civil War-era ballads. In case of rain, the dedication will be held in Shiloh Square on Emma Avenue.

**June 17, noon.** "The Back-to-the-Land Movement: Ozark History and Memories," a program by local historian and author Denele Campbell.

**July 15, noon.** "A History of Fly-Fishing in Arkansas," a program by fishing guide Scott Branyan.

**August 19, noon.** "Kodaking with Mulkeepmo," a program about early 1900s Johnson-area people and places as seen by Marion Mason, photographer and correspondent for the *Springdale News*, by museum photo archivist/research librarian Marie Demeroukas.

**September 12, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.** 38th Ozark Quilt Fair, with new and antique quilts for show and sale.

**September 16, noon.** "With My Nose to the Grindstone: The Rebirth of War Eagle Mill," a program by former mill owner Zoe Caywood.

**October 21, noon.** "The Ordinary Life of Extraordinary Minnie," a program based on the diaries and letters of Searcy County resident Minnie Atteberry, by Brooks Blevins, professor of Ozarks studies at Missouri State University.

**November 18, noon.** "The Music Archeology of the Prehistoric Ozarks," a program by Jim Rees, retired teacher and volunteer with the Arkansas Archeological Survey and the UA Museum Collections.

**December 15–May 21, 2016.** *Putting People to Work*, a photo exhibit featuring public buildings and state parks in Northwest Arkansas that were built by New Deal workers during the Great Depression.

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### MISSION STATEMENT

*The Shiloh Museum of Ozark History serves the public by providing resources for finding meaning, enjoyment, and inspiration in the exploration of the Arkansas Ozarks. Adopted by the Shiloh Museum Board of Trustees on July 13, 2006*

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### Join the Shiloh Museum Association

- Satisfaction of knowing you are supporting an important cultural institution and helping preserve our Arkansas Ozark heritage, *and*
- 10% discount on Shiloh Store purchases
- Discount on photo reproduction fees
- Reduced fees for children's and adult workshops
- Invitations to exhibit openings and special events

#### *Consider a gift to the Shiloh Museum Endowment Fund*

- ☐ Check here if you would like more information about the endowment fund.

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