

California - Bert L. Vaughn/W.T. Ratcliff - Desert View Tower

BIOGRAPHY

(source for the following information: Odens, Peter R. 1977)

- 1879 Bert L. Vaughn was born in West Virginia. He moved west after serving in the Army during the Spanish American War. Vaughn was an early pioneer who developed Jacumba valley and owned most of it. He became a real estate man and founded several towns including Needles, California.
- 1913 Vaughn moved to san Diego and became the city's mayor.
- 1922-28 Bert L. Vaughn built the Stone Tower to commemorate the early road and railroad builders opening up this area as well as pioneers travelling the Mormon Trail across the desert to San Diego. [The mail route was established in 1857 by James E. Birch and was derisively called "the Jackass Mail" . Later the route became a toll road operated by the San Diego and Fort Yuma Turnpike Company until 1878]. Vaughn laid the first course of rocks, sealing them in place with cement. By late 1923 the base of the Tower was well established. Not until 1928 was the height of 60 feet and the four feet thick base completed. At this time the Tower was almost straight sided. The lookout Tower is a three story circular structure, about 60 feet high and has walls four feet thick, and was built of native materials on solid rock.
- 1930's W. T. (letter from Elder to Chamberlain re plaque says M. P.; letter from Elder to plaque makers says W, T,) Ratcliffe, (Ratliff in Sunset article; 5 years) an itinerant engineer, recovering from tuberculosis, spent c. 2-5 years carving fantasy stone animal figures including snakes, lizards, fish and buffalo out of the boulders on the site.
- 1944 Bert Vaughn sold his land in Jacumba to W.A. Hansen of Fullerton, the first of a succession of owners, and gave the Tower to his son Dick.
- 1947 Dennis A. Newman, a veteran flyer of World War II, came to Jacumba for rehabilitation after five years of operational flying in Europe and the Middle East. He acquired the property from Dick Vaughn, Bert's son, with the idea of opening it to the public. The Boulder Park Project took three years. of building and reconstruction.
- 1950 On May 26 Desert View Tower was opened to the public. The tower was converted into a museum containing Newman's collection from World War II, old guns, swords, lamps, war trophies, wagon models, Indian and pioneer relics, southwest artifacts. The top level of the museum is an observation tower, with binoculars providing a view of the surrounding country.
- 1976 The road to the Tower was washed out in a hurricane
- 1976 Vaughn died at age 97.
- 1976/77 In exhibition "In Celebration of Ourselves" San Francisco Museum of Modern Art curated & photographed by Seymour Rosen
- 1977 Newman was in contact with Russell Cahill, Director of the State Department of Parks and Recreation concerning the Towers being made part of the Anza Borrego Park, as the rear line of the property is the boundary with the Park. Apparently the department was not interested in having 93 acres of land, improvements and property transferred to them (see letter 12/26/77 from D. Newman to S.R.could contact the Department for copies of the correspondence?)

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- 1978 On SPACES suggestion The Tower was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under the thematic nomination "Twentieth Century Folk Art Environments in California".
- 1980 The Tower was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- 1981 In May the Tower became California Registered Historical Landmark No. 939. Twentieth Century Folk Art Environments in California Thematic.
- 1984 On May 5th a plaque was placed by the State Department of Parks and Recreation ("in Cooperation with Imperial Valley Pioneers and Squibob Chapter, E. Clampus Vitus").

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ODENS, Peter, R.

1977 Desert Tower Country: The Desert's Edge . *

GIBBS, Jocelyn

1986 "Visions of Home: Preserving America's Folk Art Environments" The Whole Earth Review, Fall, no. 52 *

ROSEN, Seymour

1979 In Celebration of Ourselves. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; A California Living Book. *

SELWAY, Robert, Albert Hurtado and Emily Hart

1977 "Twentieth Century Folk Art Environments in California", National Register nomination form.*

1974 "If You Drive East of San Diego". Sunset Magazine pp. 22, 24, October *

Desert View Publications *

1. fold out 'postcard put out by the Towers with photographs and some information.
2. Fold out Scenic Map of the Imperial Valley Desert Area

(* -references in SPACES archives)

CONTACTS

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**California Room (for San Diego microfilm files)
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Hap Horne (cf. booklet by Eugene Chamberlin. Horne has been associated with the Towers since ca. 1957. He opened a rock shop near the Towers and works there a few days a week)

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