

# Through ice and 'rain,' history stays alive in archives project

BY KARLA JENSEN  
SPECIAL TO THE HERALD/REVIEW

Feb. 1 marked a moment in time that will not be forgotten. Cochise County Arizona marked its 125th anniversary and the new County Historical Archives Center, recording more than a century of rich history, officially opened its doors to the public.

The new center, dedicated at a ribbon cutting ceremony on the county's official anniversary, included appearances by Miss Arizona Audrey Sibley and Gladys Ann Wells, director of the Arizona Department of Libraries, Archives and Public Records.

The doors to the new center and "mini" museum showcased a treasure trove of documents, photographs, artifacts and personal mementos reflecting some of the most famous and infamous families in our state and nation's history.

"We've come a long way since the days when our documented past was stored in places like the old county jail, and basement of the Sheriff's office," explained Cochise County Treasurer and long-time local historian Marsha Bonham.

Bonham, along with other active stewards of local history including County Recorder Christine Rhodes and Chief Deputy Treasurer Mariann Fletcher have put a lot of sweat and elbow grease into not just preserving the county's past.

Many of these records



Pictured at the recent grand opening for the Cochise County Historical Archives Center are, from left to right, Marion Fletcher, deputy county treasurer; Paul Newman, Cochise County supervisor; Gladys Ann Wells, director of the Arizona Department of Libraries, Archives and Public Records; Audrey Sibley, Miss Arizona 2006; Marsha Bonham, Cochise County treasurer; and Pam Munsey, assistant to county treasurer.

were nearly destroyed more than 25 years ago.

According to Bonham, since there was no formal facility to store the hundreds of books of documents, they were spread out into every nook and cranny in the county.

They moved from the old Cochise County jail, to basement of the old high school

to what used to be the high school gym.

The basement storage proved almost catastrophic for the documents when a water line burst raining over more than 200 books—books that contained records and tax documents dating back to the Territorial Days of Arizona.

Some were destroyed and

others were saved from destruction from mold by storing them in probably the oddest place yet — a local merchant's meat lockers.

"According to the state, the only way we could save these books was to freeze them," explained Bonham.

"Our employees used every inch of their freezer space at home, they were

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throwing out perfectly good hamburger to save history.

So a local meat shop owner graciously offered his facilities, also sacrificing perfectly good meat."

Once the books were sufficiently frozen to prevent mold from forming, they each had to be thawed and dried. The best way to accomplish this, while saving the paper and the ink, was to insert newspaper between every single page.

Several people over the course of a weekend laboriously made sure that history was preserved.

Finally the books were moved to the Bisbee old high school gymnasium, but after nearly 20 years, the floor was threatening to cave under the weight of the books leading the treasurer to form the Archives Project providing the funds and the work necessary to create the new center.

Some of the archival material that may surprise, even amuse visitors include donated photos from local celebrities from the movie industry and retouched photos of several decades of

the mines as well as mining communities which no longer exist.

There are photos and mementos of sports teams before the turn of the century, photos of the original Hereford Bridge and even a little-known story about the summer when John F. Kennedy was a cowboy coming to build a ranch in the J-6 area in 1936.

Beyond the museum, like metal fortresses, are floor to ceiling shelves containing pen and ink, and typeset records proving the existence of some of the most important ranchers, military installations, notorious lawmen, Apache and Mexican rebellions,

The shelves also include some of the most utilized stagecoach and railroad lines in the country around the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The County Archives Center is free and open to the public Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The center is located at the county Melody Lane complex off Highway 92 in Bisbee.

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