

Grand Canyon Historical Society, Inc.

To develop and promote appreciation, understanding and education of the earlier history of the inhabitants and important events of the Grand Canyon and surrounding area.

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Gale Burak (1917-2011)

Gale Gardner Burak first saw the Grand Canyon in May of 1942 when she was 24 years old. Throughout her life she returned again and again to the Grand Canyon.

"Everyone thought I was crazy," Gale said of her earliest days in the Canyon. "After all, I was one of the few nuts, male or female, who hiked in the '40s. Everyone rode a mule in those days. Hiking! Imagine!"

Gale's first husband, Reuel "Mac" McLaughlin, contracted tuberculosis and had to be in a sanitarium for year. "The doctor advised us to go out West," Gale said. She contacted a friend who lived on a ranch near Springerville, Arizona, and arranged for she and her husband to live with them for a few months in return for helping with chores.

"It was wonderful," Gale said. "There was such beauty to this barren country that it was immediately home." When they left the ranch, they decided to visit the Grand Canyon before deciding to settle down. "I was overwhelmed," Gale said. "I telephoned my mother and said, 'Send me my clothes and my bicycle. I've found Utopia.'"

Gale and Mac found jobs at the Fred Harvey Motor Lodge -- Gale as a waitress and Mac as a maintenance man. A few months after getting jobs at the Canyon, they agreed to divorce. "He took the car and I kept my bicycle and the canyon," Gale said. "I got the better deal for sure."

Gale arranged her work schedule so she would have a few days off at a time. "Sometimes I'd pop down to Phantom Ranch after work for an exploring trip up Phantom Creek, up to Utah Flats, over to Clear Creek, or to the North Rim for a few days," she explained. Gale especially enjoyed moonlight hikes. "I can still feel the thrill of those night hikes," she said. At other times she hiked from the South Rim to the North Rim and back.

Gale's time at the Grand Canyon was too short. She was transferred to Fred Harvey's Escalante Hotel thirty miles south of the Canyon at Ash Fork. At the end of the tourist season, Gale quit to hike down to Supai, a village in the western end of the Grand Canyon that was home to 300 Havasupai Indians. While in Supai, Gale took a job as cook in a mining camp below the village. She spent her one day a week off exploring the Canyon.

After three months at Supai, Gale and the mine owner, a Mr. Sanderson, had a disagreement. Gale agreed to stay one more week to give him time to recruit a new cook. During this week, Effie, a Supai woman who had become friends with Gale, invited her to take a sweat bath with the women. This was a high honor and one that Gale could not refuse. A Havasupai sweat lodge is a small igloo-shaped hut covered with animal hides and with a fire pit in the center. Rocks are placed on hot coals. Pouring water over the rocks creates intense steam.

"There were four of us using this particular lodge," Gale explained. "You had to crouch in a fetal position because it was so low and rounded that there was no chance to sit up straight. When you figure the condition of the old hides as affected by the heat plus the accumulation of both smoke and strong perspiration odor, the effect of it all was pretty strong."

After leaving Supai Gale traveled around the west, often getting odd jobs to support her travels. During the summers of 1944 and 1945 she worked in Yosemite National Park for the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, the park concessioner. When the summer of 1945 season ended she decided to take one last

backpacking trip. "I headed out of Yosemite Valley to Merced Lake, where the cook was closing up for the season," Gale said. "He gave me a big piece of warm apple pie, and I went on up the trail with it in my hand covered with a napkin." Just before the junction of the Half Dome turn-off, she came across a fellow bent over drinking from a brook. "He looked up and grinned, and oh, what a grin!" The grin was on the face of Ted Burak, the man Gale would marry.



AT HOME IN THE WHITE MOUNTAINS, FALL 1995.
(Photo by Betty Leavengood.)

Both Ted and Gale loved the mountains and hiking. After their marriage they settled in Sonora, California, where Ted opened a service station. Their three children, Lance, Susan, and Pam, were born there. In 1955, when Gale developed an acute allergy to poison oak and Ted's service station fell victim to an interstate, they decided to move to New England to be nearer both families. They settled in Lincoln, New Hampshire, in the White Mountains, where Ted ran a service station and Gale managed a grocer, gift shop, cabin rentals, and campground.

In 1973, when the children were grown and on their own, Ted and Gale sold all of their holdings except their home and service station. Although Ted still had to manage the station, Gale was free to spend summers at her beloved Grand Canyon. She became a member of the Volunteer in the Park (VIP) program. For the next several years, Gale spent her summers at the Grand Canyon as a ranger in charge of inner canyon campgrounds. On one of her hikes out of the canyon, Gale noticed an elaborate spider web and pulled back a bush to get a better look. There she discovered an earthenware jug that today is in the museum collection of the Grand Canyon National Park. A Park Service archeologist estimated that the jug was at least 1000 years old.

In 1983 Gale left her work in the Grand Canyon to spend more time with her husband. Ted sold his business in New Hampshire and he and Gale bought a house in Moab, Utah, to be close to the canyon country they both loved. Gale worked as an Interpretive Ranger at Arches National Park while Ted golfed. A year after moving to Moab, Ted was diagnosed with cancer. They returned to New Hampshire to be near their family. Ted died in 1987. Gale returned to Moab for one year before returning to New Hampshire.

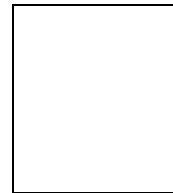
Grand Canyon Historical Society

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(Gale Burak, cont'd)

Gale returned to the Grand Canyon in the winters of 1991-92 as a VIP interpretive ranger at Phantom Ranch. After giving her talk in the evening, Gale would invariably be asked, "Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?" She knew what was coming. "How old are you? How did you get down here? Did you get flown in?" Gale responded to the question by saying, "I'm 74, I hiked in, and I'm hiking out."

In early March of 1992, after completing her winter assignment, Gale hiked up the Bright Angel Trail for the last time. The weather looked forbidding. "I shouldn't have tried it," Gale said, "but I thought the next day might be worse. It was raining at Phantom, and by the time I got to Indian Garden it had turned to slush. I wondered if I would ever do this again." Although Gale visited the Grand Canyon several more times, she never did hike to Phantom Ranch again.

Gale died in New Hampshire on March 15, 2011.

This article was authored by Betty Leavengood, and was taken from interviews Betty conducted with Gale Burak for her book, *Grand Canyon Women*, published by the Grand Canyon Association in 2004.

Reminder: Accepting Nominations for Pioneer Award

Nominations are still being accepted for the 2011 Grand Canyon Historical Society Pioneer Award. To make a nomination, submit the individual's name and their accomplishments and/or contributions that have advanced our knowledge of the Grand Canyon by **April 15, 2011** to:

Amy Horn
2885 W Noria St
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
riconamy@msn.com

Grand Canyon River Heritage Museum Website

is now up and running at:

<http://www.gcrivermuseum.org/>

2011 Outings

July 16 Annual Picnic at Shoshone Point. Details to come.

January 26-29, 2012 GRAND CANYON HISTORY SYMPOSIUM III

GCA Community Lecture Series

The Grand Canyon Association has several upcoming lectures of interest. A complete listing with details is at:

http://www.grandcanyon.org/events_lectureseries.asp

Ellen Brennen *Grand Archeology: Excavation and Discovery along the Colorado River.* Thurs, April 7th, 7pm NAU Cline Library, Flagstaff.

Wed, May 11, 6:30pm Foothills Branch, Glendale Public Library.

Seth Muller *Walking the Canyon Highway: The Story of the Corridor Trails of Grand Canyon.* Sunday, April 10, 2pm, Prescott Public Library.

Tues, April 19, 7:30pm, Shrine of the Ages, Grand Canyon NP.

Brad Dimock ***Murl Emery: Historical, Hysterical Pioneer of the Lower Colorado River.*** Wed, April 13, 6:30pm Foothills Branch, Glendale Public Library.

Richard Quartaroli *The Grand Canyon Rose: The Canyon's First Botanist, Rose Collom.* Thurs, April 21, 7pm NAU Cline Library, Flagstaff.

Jan Busco, *Recovering Grand Canyon's Brightest Botanical Jewel.* Thurs, May 5, 7pm NAU Cline Library, Flagstaff.

Stephen Hirst, *Supai Village in Harm's Way.* Sunday, May 8, 2pm, Prescott Public Library.

Thurs, May 19, 7pm NAU Cline Library, Flagstaff.

Outings/Programs: If you have a suggestion for a future outing/program or a question about an upcoming event, contact the **Outings Coordinator** at TontoWalk@gmail.com.

The Bulletin welcomes comments, stories, or reflections and remembrances.

Please send them to: kgreig@yahoo.com

Ol' Pioneer submissions should be sent to Mary Williams: mary@marywilliamsdesign.com