

# DEVELOPMENT OF DESERT HOT SPRINGS DEPENDED ON BIG DREAM

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The original postcard pictured uncommonly large pools with a few slightly sad looking short palm trees on the edge of the cement deck. On the reverse, above where you might drop a line, the post card read: "Five Hot Water Pools with Five Different Temperatures Two Safe Kiddie Pools Giant 25' x 90' Warm Swimming Pool. All fed with Nature's own HOT MINERAL WATER from our own HOT MINERAL WATER WELLS - Five HOT MINERAL WATER Pools with Five different temperatures from 100 to 110 degrees Motels, Cocktail Lounge, Dining-Room and Coffee Shop."

Five! It was repeated for emphasis. To have any pool in the desert at that time was unlikely enough, but five was impossibly unusual and clearly the work of devoted desert developers (or madmen). This wasn't the first or even the most ambitious of projects in what is now known as Desert Hot Springs.

"The man responsible for conceiving, designing and developing the Highlands area is Cliff Babin, a wiry, energetic real estate man who has been able to project his enthusiasm to thousands of newcomers who are swarming into the Highlands. Cliff was once a resident of Palm Springs and foresaw the mushrooming trend that was to materialize on the American Desert during the late 1940's. He opened an office in Desert Hot Springs in 1947 and since then has handled over six million dollars in desert properties-and this is just the beginning!"

Babin had come to the desert in search of help for his arthritis, and like many before him, fell in love with the area and dreamed big. Desert Hot Springs wasn't incorporated until September 17, 1963. Half a century before, Cabot Yerxa arrived as one of the very first homesteaders. After much meandering around the escarpment of San Gorgonio, he finally made claim to some 160 acres, building a one-room cabin at first, and then buying a black burro which he named "Merry Xmas." With his trusty companion, Yerxa constructed Eagle's Nest Cabin, on Miracle Hill, ensconced in rock. He walked the seven miles to the railroad station at Garnet to procure supplies, and patiently walked the seven miles back to his hidden cabin after a drink of water at the station.

The Desert Hot Springs Historical Society notes that all went well for a number of years until the Eagle's Nest was discovered by vandals and sacked. By 1941 there was talk of a town, so Yerxa



This Desert Highlands Hot Springs rendering was created for Babin Realty by artist Val Samuelson.



A postcard shows Cabot Yerxa's Eagle's Nest Cabin on Miracle Hill in what is now Desert Hot Springs.

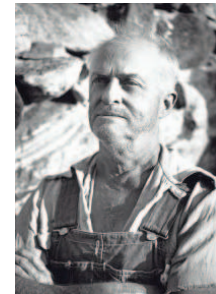
salvaged what was left of the cabin and began construction of a Hopi Indian-style Pueblo, toiling for some twenty years.

When Babin arrived, construction on the Pueblo was well underway, but the town still had no paved roads. Babin was suffering from arthritis of the spine and could barely walk. As exercise in the hot mineral baths improved his health, he partnered with a local real estate broker, Al Simone. Together they began to extol the virtues of the area, selling land and dreams.

The Palm Springs Villager noted, "There's pure, sweet mineral water in those hills and it has caused a new community to spring up overnight. Desert habitants. Well-steeped in real estate

booms, have acknowledge that the pattern of growth in the Highlands threatens to outstrip anything witnessed here in the past."

Situated at a 1,500-foot elevation, the subdivision commanded a sweeping view of San Jacinto to the south and west. The Villager continued, "What makes the Highlands unusual is the natural, hot mineral water that inundates the underlying tables. The water emerges from the wells at a 170° temperature and, once cooled, is exceptionally pleasing to the palate in its natural state. It goes without saying that every swimming pool comes supplied with its own built-in therapeutic water supply in the form of a well and a pump in the backyard!"



**Cabot Yerxa arrived as one of the very first homesteaders of the area.**

PHOTOS BY PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

"Perched on one of the higher promontories, a swimming pool has been constructed for the use of Highlands and neighboring desert residents. The club boasts five therapeutic pools maintained at five different temperatures. The water in the various pools comes from the club's own 170° natural, hot mineral water wells. In addition, club members are offered such conveniences as beautiful sun patios, massage rooms, lounge rooms and other ultra-modern facilities."

The subdivision was mapped around a ten-acre circle that contained the Desert Highlands Swimming Club, a restaurant and cocktail lounge and a planned multi-million-dollar shopping center. Around the perimeter of the circle were businesses designated for no less than sixteen motels. The architecture was modern and simple, a far cry from that of the Pueblo nearby.

Babin ingeniously, and sincerely, promoted the idea of wellness, for which the city would eventually become famous, with an early brochure stating, "The Highlands will become one of the truly great health and pleasure resorts of the world. Even now, noted medical authorities have singled out the Desert Hot Springs area for its remarkable healing qualities."

Babin himself served on the Desert Hospital District for thirteen years, devoting himself to making sure that proper hospital facilities were provided for Coachella Valley residents. He developed Desert Crest, a mobile "own-your-own-home" community a few miles southeast of Desert Hot Springs. He served on the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club, finally selling his real estate empire in 1967, in one of the largest deals of the time, after the city was firmly established.

Babin's original pools were said to accommodate 1,100 people, a thousand more than had lived in the town when he arrived, and infinitely more than Cabot Yerxa could have ever dreamed of being in town.