

# Editor's Word

By Douglas C. Towne

In our carefully planned worlds, serendipity is a term that's fallen out of vogue. It wasn't so in the mid-1960s when the Serendipity Cocktail Lounge in Phoenix at 3218 East Van Buren Street had its grand opening and when the Serendipity Singers, a folk group formed at the University of Colorado, was riding high on the music charts with *Don't Let the Rain Come Down* (*Crooked Little Man*).

Through no design of my own, I'm pleased to offer another thematic issue of the *SCA Journal* focused on roadside adaptations of traditional structures such as wigwams, Spanish torreóns (watchtowers), and George Washington's Mount Vernon estate. Submissions on these topics appeared in my mailbox—dare I say serendipitously—from columnist Diane DeBlois, and two writers gracing the pages of the *Journal* for the first time, Troy Lavata and Justin Gunther.

Catching the spirit of the issue, I'd like to briefly focus on a building type—the log cabin—which many associate with another much-revered American president, Abraham Lincoln. About the only “log cabin” to be found in Phoenix is a motel clinging to a tenuous existence at 2515 East Van Buren, a street formerly designated U.S. Highway 60, 70, 80 and 89.

As with many enterprises that interest commercial archeologists, visiting the Log Cabin

Motel (originally the Log Cabin Auto Court when it opened in 1939) is a bittersweet experience. Located across the street from the State Hospital for the mentally-ill, potential lodgers are greeted—or perhaps repelled—with prominent “No Trespassing” and “Adult Movies” signs. Despite these telltale signs of blight, tattered vestiges of its former glory



This page: A 1950s postcard and current view of the Log Cabin Motel.

**Opposite:** A 45 record of the Serendipity Singers' Top Ten hit, *Don't Let the Rain Come Down* (*Crooked Little Man*); Log Cabin Motel advertisements from Phoenix telephone directories show changing priorities:

- 1953 notes a “Putting Green” and Shuffleboard Court.”
- 1959 calls it the “Water Wheel Motel” with a “Complete Gift & Sportswear Shop.”
- 1977 notes “Water Beds,” “Mirrored Rooms,” and “Adult Movies.” — All courtesy author.

can be glimpsed in the motel units that mimic log cabins and in the broken remains of its neon sign which sports a rather unusual, “Sportswear” advertisement.

Perhaps the best route to visualize the Log Cabin's former grandeur is through a person who grew up in the 1950s next door at the Sun Villa Motel and was named after the Log Cabin's owner. “The units were painted redwood and looked like real log cabins; a big attraction was its working water wheel out front,” says Marianne Gilbert. “I used to hang out in the Log Cabin Motel's gift shop where they sold post cards, cactus candy and other Arizona souvenirs. By the back door was a cage which held a black mynah bird who would talk to the shoppers,” she adds wistfully.

These are halcyon memories indeed for a business whose address now regularly makes the newspaper's Police Beat. Yet, the Log Cabin Motel remains an undeniable allure for those interested in the roadside.

Although a pleasurable stay these days at the Log Cabin Motel may be a long shot, I'm confident you'll enjoy this thematic issue and maybe even discover some wigwams,

... continued next page



Spanish torreóns and Mount Vernons in your own travels. And although the martinis have long since stopped being shaken at the Serendipity Cocktail Lounge and the Serendipity Singers failed to chart once Dylan went electric, this issue is proof that serendipitous happenings still occur. Keep a sharp eye out for a few of your own.... ●



**This page:** The Log Cabin Motel today, including its broken neon signs for "Gifts & Sportswear" and the motel name itself.



**Chuck's Corner** Featuring photos from the collection of artist and photographer Chuck Biddle.

Penn Aire Motel,  
Route 30,  
Breezewood,  
Pennsylvania.

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