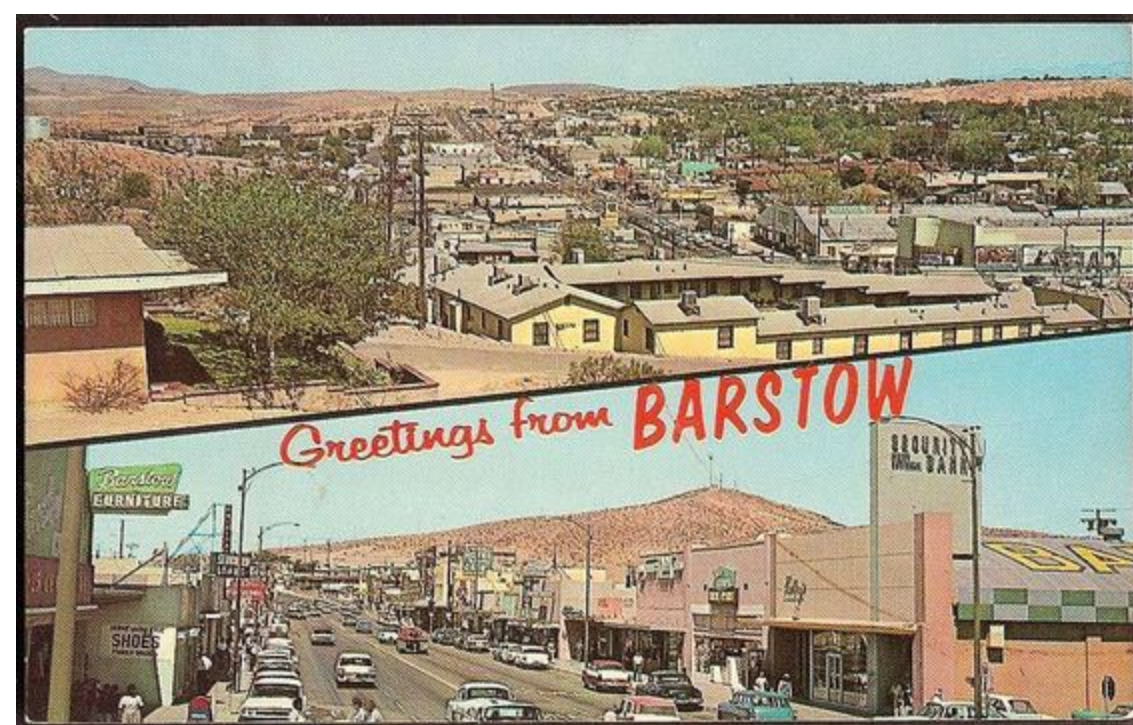


San Bernardino County history: Barstow

December 12, 2024

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Postcard from the 1950s.

Imagine living in a city that has changed its name four times throughout history and celebrates Halloween twice a year. In the city of Barstow, this is a reality.

Located in the Mojave Desert at a junction of pioneer trails lies the city of Barstow, a major transportation corridor and historic landmark on Route 66.

Throughout history, Barstow has gone through several name changes. In the 1850s, Barstow was known as Grapevine, named for the local wild grapes that grew in the small oasis of willows and cottonwoods. Later, it was known as Camp Sugarloaf when the U.S. Army set up camp to protect the increase flow of miners and travelers.

By the 1880s, this region was known as Waterman Junction after Robert W. Waterman filed two of the biggest silver mine claims in Barstow, which turned out to be some of the largest in California history.

In 1884, the new Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad named their depot after their president, William Barstow Strong. In 1886, the town changed its name once more, this time officially, when it was requested that their post office be named Barstow.

With the silver rush ending, neighboring Calico became a ghost town, but Barstow continued to grow due to the railroad depot and the Harvey House chain of restaurants. In 1911, after the depot experienced a fire, the railroad rebuilt the depot in a blending of the Spanish Renaissance and Classical Revival architecture styles designed by Francis W. Wilson. The historic structure called the Casa del Desierto is considered the finest remaining depot-hotel in California.

In 1931, the city began a tradition that led to celebrating Halloween twice a year. The local Kiwanis club hosted an annual parade followed by a dance to entertain and help raise funds for children locally.

The event came to be known as the Barstow Mardi Gras Halloween Parade held on Oct. 31 with trick-or-treating scheduled on Oct. 30. Each parade is organized around a theme with floats from neighboring cities and a grand marshal. In 1964, the theme was Politics on Parade, and the grand marshal was former President Ronald Reagan.

To this day, Barstow continues to hold the annual parade, but it now occurs the weekend before Halloween. To learn more about Barstow's history, please visit the

city's [website](#).

The information in this historical feature was originally part of a video series produced by the Assessor-Recorder-County Clerk's office and County Archives, managed by Assessor-Recorder-County Clerk Chris Wilhite.