



The Daily Courier

Trusted local news leader for Prescott, Arizona communities since 1882

Blast from the past: Reenactors perform comic Victorian-era skits

By [Karen Despain](#)
The Daily Courier

Thursday, December 31, 2009



Les Stukenberg/The Daily Courier

A "merry widow" watches her dead husband and his buddies play cards in the Heavenly Saloon in a skit that the Boots and Bustles reenactment club will present at the Gathering of the Gunfighters competition in Yuma.



Prescott's Boots and Bustles reenactors live in a time warp, polishing boots, puffing up bustles, and practicing their lines in hopes of coming away "ace-high" from the Gathering of the Gunfighters competition Jan. 9 and 10 in Yuma.

And the new reenactment group's actors are making doubly sure that every detail of their characters' attire and the skits they perform reflect exactly, down to shirt buttons, the Victorian years -1860s to 1900 - that they portray.

Boots and Bustles will present two skits - "The Baby on the Bar" and "The Merry Widows" - during the two-day fest at the historic Yuma Territorial Prison.

In a recent dress rehearsal of "Baby on the Bar," Boots and Bustles dramatis personae were all decked out in garb for the occasion, so much so that it was reminiscent of a Victorian parlor of bygone days. Ladies wore long, swishy, billowy gowns, and the gents sported typical male fashion of the era.

Judging at competitions, such as the one in Yuma, is strict. Women better not have cell phones in their reticules, and men must empty their pockets of wallets, keys, and whatever else is non-Victorian. And the club's acting chair, Sue McDonald, cautioned all of them to use the vernacular of yesteryear. "You guys" is not acceptable, and neither is 20th-century slang or other modern-day expressions and political innuendo.

"Victorians embellished everything," McDonald said of that period's dress. Women of the day worked to achieve a "fussy look," with laces, fringes, tassels, ribbons, bows, buttons, pleats and chenille balls. Gentlemen always wore their shirts buttoned up to the top and vests were straight across the bottom rather than pointed. The boots Victorians wore were knee-high with rounded or square toes. Fabrics were natural - linen, wool, cotton, silk.

All of this was long before the day of snaps, zippers, cowboy boots, plastic and polyester, so a judge better not find any of this in Boots and Bustles trappings or it's points off.

Aside from focusing on details that judges will scrutinize,

Karen Despain/The Daily Courier

Sue Angle and Bill Hill play Laura and Judge Charles Hicks in the Boots and Bustles reenactment club's historical sketch "Baby on the Bar."

Boots and Bustles is a three-month old social club intent on having fun while members act out vignettes of the Old West. Rehearsals are lively with a lot of coaching from the sidelines. "You are going to have to make a lot of noise," McDonald told the cast of card players who were going to argue the fate of the Baby on the Bar.

Scripts in hand, the rehearsal began and the characters took their places. "Remember to come from the diaphragm," McDonald said, giving them a hint so that their voices would project to the audience.

The scene is a [Whiskey Row](#) saloon in 1888 where men are playing cards just as an "infamous" event is about to take place - a woman sneaks in and leaves her baby on the bar.

"Ma'am, ma'am," the bartender (Ray Ritchie) shouts after her. "Dang it," he says. "Did any of you guys (a verboten word, comes the reminder) see that woman? Oh, man. Now what are we going to do?" he moans. Offers among the group to take the baby escalate into an argument and guns come out, prompting Judge Charles Hicks (Bill Hill) to admonish, "What's wrong with you? Put your guns down. We need to decide this fair and square."

Fair and square it was in the gamble for the baby. The judge, who is childless, tosses down the winning hand in a game of five-card stud, scoops up the baby and dashes home, where his wife, Laura (Sue Angle), is less than joyous about the new family member. The story does have a happy ending, though. Laura pitches a fit at first, but melts and embraces baby "Chance Cobweb Hall" as if she were her own.

The gang's second skit, "Merry Widows," is an uproarious interpretation of a make-believe scenario that gets funnier each time the widows rehearse it. The Merry Widows (Sue McDonald, Marsha Jensen and Cheryl Ritchie) are grieving their mates' demises and become merrier and merrier the more tonic they sip. All the while, their deceased mates are cutting up in a "Heavenly Saloon" in the background. The men get in a fight and start shooting, but, of course, they are impervious to the bullets. As the tonic takes hold, the widows' despair turns into hysterical frivolity and the widows decide, "May they rest in peace."

Boots and Bustles is available to participate in costume at events at no charge. For more information about the reenactment group, call Dale or Sue McDonald at 777-1095.

Related Links

Content © 2010 Daily Courier/dCourier.com
Software © 1998-2010 **1up! Software**, All Rights Reserved