



Images of America:  
Indio's Date Festival  
By Sarah Seekatz

Image of America  
ISBN: 9781467134255  
\$21.99 | 128pp. B & W | paperback  
**Available: January 18, 2016**

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## Images of America Indio's Date Festival

Telling a story in pictures is Indio's Date Festival, the newest addition to Arcadia Publishing's popular Images of America series. The book by local author Sarah Seekatz is set to release on January 18, 2016. The book boasts 200 vintage images.

Since the turn of the 20th century, Southern California's Coachella Valley has embraced a unique crop: the date. As success with the fruit grew, so too did regional celebrations of it. Beginning in 1921, the City of Indio hosted a Festival of Dates, an event that became the annual National Date Festival in 1947. The area linked itself to the date's birthplace, the Greater Middle East, in multiple ways, but the festival drew national attention to Indio's use of these Arabian fantasies. Attendees celebrated the fair's camel races, Arabian Nights musical pageant, Middle Eastern architecture, Queen Scheherazade pageant, and the costumes worn by boosters and visitors alike. While the United States' political and pop-cultural relationship to the region changed over time, the Eastern Coachella Valley continued to embrace fantasies of the Middle East at its fair.

#### AUTHOR SIGNINGS

#### National Date Festival in Indio, CA Taj Mahal Building

Friday, February 12th from 10 am-5 pm  
Saturday, February 13th from 11 am-5 pm  
Sunday, February 14th from 11 am-5 pm  
Monday, February 15th from 11 am-5 pm

**Mission Inn in Riverside California**  
Saturday, March 26th at 10 am



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

An Indio native, Sarah McCormick Seekatz (31), has long been interested in the history of the Coachella Valley, a place her family first came to during World War II. “My great-grandparents grew some dates on their ranchito in Indio.” Seekatz continued, “I recall too that my grandparents had several date palms at their home in Indio. Dates were all around me growing up, but it didn’t occur to me how special they were until I was away from home in college.” Research for the book uncovered family stories too. “While I was researching on the microfilms, I came across a story in the Spanish

portion of the *Indio News* from 1950. It had a photo of the Mexican Americans participating in that year’s fair pageant. Lo and behold it listed my grandmother, Patricia (Salcido) Ligman.”

After interning for the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History’s Latino collection, Seekatz returned to the desert. As the director of the Mexican American Pioneer Project for the Coachella Valley History Museum she not only collected oral histories but also guided exhibits and special events with the local Mexican American community. “The wonderful people I met at the museum working to preserve Mexican American history shared their fond memories of the fair with me and reached out later as I worked on the book to share stories and photos. I am so grateful for their help and for the kindness of so many desert residents who shared their images with me,” Seekatz says. She continues to volunteer for the museum both as social media coordinator and archival consultant. In 2011, Seekatz won third prize in the Library of Congress National Collegiate Book Collecting Contest for her collection of books about the Coachella Valley. Her articles on the date industry and the Desert Training Center reached wide audiences on KCET.org’s Artbound website.

A 2002 graduate of La Quinta High School, Seekatz obtained her B.A. from the University of California, Irvine in 2006. She holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of California, Riverside. Her academic work explores the date industry of the Coachella Valley and the “Arabian” fantasies developed in the region, based on the crop’s Middle Eastern origins and the desert setting. Her research has been supported by fellowships from the Autry, The Huntington Library, and the UC California Studies Consortium and she has been featured on CNN, NPR, Al Jazeera America, KCET.org, *National Geographic’s* The Salt Food Blog, the Autry Blogs, and KQED’s The California Report. Most notably Seekatz worked with NPR’s Kitchen Sisters to bring the date’s rich history to their James Beard Award-winning radio program: *Hidden Kitchens*.

Seekatz currently serves as a professor of history at San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton, California, though she visits family and friends in the desert often. When not working in the classroom or archives, Seekatz enjoys exploring historic recipes, especially about dates. Seekatz is also a historical advisor for the radio program “California Foodways.”

Please visit her website at <http://www.datefestivalbook.com/>

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