

# Marta Becket Timeline

## The Woman Behind the Amargosa Opera House

Use this quick-reference timeline as a companion to your visit to Death Valley Junction. Marta Becket transformed an abandoned company-town social hall into one of the most unusual art destinations in the California desert - a theater, a painted audience, and a lifelong act of devotion to creative work.

A desert stage. A painted audience. A life built around art.

<b>1924</b>	Marta Becket is born in New York City on August 9. She grows into a performer and visual artist whose life will later become inseparable from Death Valley Junction.
<b>1940s-1950s</b>	Becket works as a dancer and performer, including appearances connected with Radio City Music Hall and Broadway productions. She also develops as an illustrator and painter.
<b>1962</b>	Marta marries Thomas Williams, who becomes her manager as she tours with her one-woman dance and mime performances.
<b>March 1967</b>	While traveling near Death Valley, Marta and her husband stop at Death Valley Junction after a flat tire. She looks into the deteriorating Corkill Hall and imagines it as a theater.
<b>August 1967</b>	Marta and Thomas return from New York with their belongings and begin repairing the old social hall, which she renames the Amargosa Opera House.
<b>February 10, 1968</b>	Marta gives her first performance in the new theater to a small audience. Later that year, flooding damages the hall and helps inspire her painted audience.
<b>1968-1974</b>	Becket paints the walls and ceiling with a 16th-century-style audience, musicians, nobility, performers, cats, and theatrical details that turn the room into a world of its own.
<b>1970</b>	National media attention helps introduce Marta and the Amargosa Opera House to a wider public after reporters encounter the story of a dancer performing in the desert.
<b>1981</b>	The Death Valley Junction Historic District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, reinforcing the importance of preserving the town and its buildings.
<b>1983</b>	Thomas J. Willett, later known onstage as Wilget, becomes an important partner in the theater operation and performances.
<b>2000</b>	The documentary Amargosa brings Marta's story to another generation of viewers and helps cement the Opera House as a cult-favorite desert landmark.
<b>2008-2010</b>	Health challenges lead Marta to pause and adapt her performing, including later seated performances that allow her to continue appearing for audiences.
<b>February 12, 2012</b>	Marta gives her final performance at the Amargosa Opera House, closing more than four decades of personal performance history in Death Valley Junction.
<b>January 30, 2017</b>	Marta Becket dies at age 92 in Death Valley Junction, leaving behind the murals, the nonprofit, and a continuing preservation mission.

## Today

The Amargosa Opera House continues as a desert arts destination. Visitors can tour the theater and see the murals that grew out of Marta's singular vision.

## Why Marta Becket's Story Still Matters

Marta Becket's life at the Amargosa Opera House is more than a colorful desert legend. It is a story about recognizing a place of possibility, committing to it, and then creating art whether the audience is full, sparse, or imaginary. Her murals are not simply decoration; they are a statement that the work itself mattered.

## Sources Consulted

- Amargosa Opera House official Marta page: birth/death dates and legacy summary.
- Amargosa Opera House official Opera House history page: 1967 arrival, \$45 rental, first performance, mural details, current tours.
- Amargosa Hotel official history page: Pacific Coast Borax Company civic center and hotel background.
- Contemporary news and obituary coverage confirming Marta Becket's death in 2017 and final performance in 2012.

The Places Where We Go