

# SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW



J. CISNEROS '89

*Pasajero del Camino Real*

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# Doña Ana County Historical Society

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## Editor's Note

I would like to thank the Doña Ana County Historical Society for thinking of me to edit this year's journal. It was an honor. The Society holds a special place in my heart because many of my favorite people seem to collect there -- Jon Hunner, Jim Eckles, Buddy Ritter just to name a few.

My strongest connection comes by way of my late mother-in-law Dr. Donna Eichstaedt and father-in-law Dr. Carl Eichstaedt. Their active involvement and love of history brought me, and my children, to many Historical Society banquets if not to listen to speakers then to promote publishing projects. That permeated my own professional endeavors as a writer for the Las Cruces Sun-News and then as publisher of my own periodicals – *Southern New Mexico Magazine* and *Southwest Senior*. Through them, the message was clear – history counts.

As one reads thorough the articles, reviews and memorials in this year's journal, they will notice a diversity of styles. Some are well researched with footnotes and citations, while others are personal accounts. One of my favorites is the review of the El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center. In it, Kimberly Miller gives just enough about its style and history that she leaves readers with a desire to go – a desire to see for themselves. And that is what writing and history should do.

Here we also have reviews of writers' works on subjects ranging from Mesilla to the Trinity Site to the mystery of the Anasazi and, of all things, the great bunion running race across the county in the late 1920s.

But behind this wonderful historical tapestry are the voices telling the stories from people who make Doña Ana County and the Mesilla Valley their home and share a love of history. These voices, like many others, comprise the fabric of the Doña Ana County Historical Society. And there is one thing I learned from beloved Dr. Donna Eichstaedt. While history is important, the one telling it is important too.

Enjoy.

Keith Whelpley

*Special thanks to Bud Russo, writer and editor, for his help.*

# The Electoral Surprise of Mid-Century New Mexico: Edwin L. Mechem, Dennis Chavez, and the Gubernatorial Campaign of 1950

By Judith L. Messal

In 1950, a pivotal political development took place in New Mexico. It began when a young Las Cruces lawyer Edwin L. Mechem entered the gubernatorial race against veteran politician John E. Miles. The new candidate had only one electoral victory on his record – a run for the state legislature. The powerful Miles, on the other hand, had won many elections in his 34 years of service, including the governorship twice. He had never lost a race. Furthermore, his Democratic Party had dominated statewide offices and most local ones for two decades.

Mechem, was a member of the Republican Party, which was greatly in the minority. He seemed to have little chance. The last time his party won the governorship was 1928. And aside from a senate win in 1934, a Republican had not been elected to a statewide office for more than two decades. With Franklin Roosevelt heading the Democratic ticket during much of that time, the GOP could hardly compete, yet they did not want to leave races uncontested. Veteran party leaders sifted through names of potential candidates, finding possibilities, twisting arms and organizing campaigns against sure winners. Gamely, various Republicans took their turn. And in 1950, it was Ed Mechem's turn.

In an astonishing electoral outcome, Edwin L. Mechem won his race, becoming New Mexico's youngest governor to that point. He would be elected three more times during the decade. No other Republican won statewide office in 1950, and no other Republican would be elected to join Mechem in the executive branch until 1960. Political observers at midcentury tried to explain the Mechem phenomenon. Credible voices suggested voters had grown tired of practices in recent gubernatorial administrations. Mechem had spoken extensively about those practices during his first campaign, offering his alternative vision of good governance. The voters responded to him. Over time, however, Mechem's rise

to office became associated in the popular media with another issue, one that was only marginal to the more extensive themes of his campaign. It was the case of Ovida (Cricket) Coogler.

The Coogler case concerned the violent death in 1949 of an 18-year-old Las Cruces woman who was linked to powerful politicians. As Paula Moore indicated in her 2008 book *Cricket in the Web*,<sup>1</sup> early investigations into the death may have done more to conceal than reveal those who left Ovida Coogler's body in a sandy grave outside of Las Cruces, New Mexico. The case has continued to be of interest for more than half a century and is mentioned in recent news stories in connection with the 1950 gubernatorial campaign.

Since Governor Ed Mechem reopened the Coogler case, his name has become associated with it. Journalist Milan Simonich in 2010 called the case "a centerpiece" of Mechem's first campaign.<sup>2</sup> Other writers have made similar statements. However, the journalists, scholars and politicians who observed the 1950 election do not support the claim that Mechem used the sensational crime as a cornerstone of his candidacy. Instead, they documented the themes he used repeatedly across the long campaign, and the Coogler case was not among them. It entered his discourse only late in the race. To elevate its prominence, in retrospect, obscures the issues that Mechem presented more extensively to voters. The conversation he opened with them that year concerned practices in the statehouse. The dialog was vibrant, and the plan for a more transparent government was richly detailed. Looking at the race from firsthand accounts provides a sense of why Mechem connected so powerfully with the public in 1950. The emerging story reveals the unsettled condition of the two political parties, Edwin Mechem's own motivations in the race and the actions of a powerful Democratic senator, Dionisio (Dennis) Chavez.

At mid-century, New Mexico was virtually a one-party

state. Democrats controlled all branches of state government and the congressional delegation. "In the thirties and forties, nomination by the Democratic Party pretty much equaled election in New Mexico," Moore stated.<sup>3</sup> Measures of party strength were striking. Voter registration was about seven Democrats to three Republicans in the 1950s;<sup>4</sup> perhaps up to four-fifths of newspapers were Democratic.<sup>5</sup> However, internal power struggles in the party were becoming serious. One faction leader, U. S. Senator Dennis Chavez, had concerns about state government, and he did not want ex-governor John E. Miles' faction to return to the capitol.

Despite the rifts and worries, the Democrats had reason to expect to win the governorship and other state offices in the general election. Their real contest was in the primary in June. And it was contentious. Forty-one candidates sought nominations to run for nine executive branch offices in November.<sup>6</sup> Four candidates ran for the gubernatorial nomination, the most viable being Miles and David Chavez, Jr. Chavez, a former federal judge and the brother of the powerful senator, lost.

The story of how Miles got on the June 6 ballot and walked away with the Democratic nomination conceals another story. It is one in which David Chavez's brother Dennis, unhappy about the primary and critical of his own party's governance in Santa Fe, may have helped Miles' opponent win the general election. John Miles, a homesteader from Tennessee, was a skilled politician. He was a "... very likeable, almost fatherly type of leader who had a way of making everybody feel good, comfortable," said Fabian Chavez, Jr., a rising young Democrat in 1950.<sup>7</sup> Chavez recalled Miles' popularity. He came from the state's eastside, Chavez said, but also was loved by Hispanic voters in the north. In his later political quests, however, Miles began to cause concern. In 1948, he had run for a seat in Congress, which entailed ousting fellow Democrat Georgia Lusk, whom Senator Dennis Chavez supported. Before Miles' first term ended, he had tired of Washington and had come home to run for governor. By taking Lusk's seat in 1948 and then planning his exit in 1950, Miles disrupted New Mexico's seniority in the House. And by defeating David Chavez in the 1950 primary, he had challenged the Chavez faction twice in two years. Despite the discord, it seemed Miles could win any post he wanted.<sup>8</sup> "They didn't think he could lose' . . .," Fabian Chavez recalled.<sup>9</sup> But the extent to which some powerful Democrats were disgruntled with John

E. Miles had not yet been fully expressed.

Before the primary, Senator Chavez said he would not support Miles for governor.<sup>10</sup> Later, in the general election campaign, he did not campaign as vigorously for his party's nominee as he might have. Some believed he was signaling unhappiness over his brother's defeat. R. David Myers thought government corruption made him reticent.<sup>11</sup> The senator himself gave evidence supporting the corruption theory. Even before 1950, he had criticized the Democratic administration in Santa Fe for padding the state payroll with people he called "barnacles" and "leeches."<sup>12</sup> On the eve of the 1950 election, Chavez again would use the "barnacles and leeches" term. In an extraordinary statement, he named five Bernalillo County Democratic leaders who were on the state payroll and commented that he doubted they deserved more than a small percent of what they were paid.<sup>13</sup>

Whatever the reasons might have been for Dennis Chavez's actions that fall, they were about to amount to oblique support for the Republican candidate. Mechem, looking back nearly half a century after the event, saw a strategy behind Chavez's willingness to help him. A Mechem victory in 1950 would effectively remove Miles as a gubernatorial candidate in the 1952 race. "They figured that I was good for one term," Mechem remarked in a 1997 interview with Emlen Hall and Maureen Sanders, "and then they could elect a Governor of their own choice without any problem whatever."<sup>14</sup> At the time, however, Mechem said he and his party did not know the extent of the rift between the Chavez and Miles camps and had no idea that Chavez's strategy would benefit Mechem in the way that it did. Fabian Chavez, on the other hand, knew about the growing division in his party and commented on it.

"The primary battle was so bloody that it created a major split in the state Democratic Party . . . . Miles was the last man standing . . . . It set up a general election race against this young, attractive lawyer from Las Cruces, Ed Mechem," said Fabian Chavez, Jr. "New Mexico hadn't elected a Republican governor in twenty years, but Mechem came across looking tall, strong, and refreshingly untainted on the campaign trail. . . . And he was going up against a battered Democratic Party."<sup>15</sup>

Whereas Mechem looked untainted, some in state

government had compromised themselves, in the opinion of Fabian Chavez. To exemplify the politics of the time, Chavez mentioned state liquor regulator, Tom Montoya. Brother of the incumbent lieutenant governor, Montoya was accused of misusing his power in office and benefiting personally from it. GOP candidate Ed Mechem also would criticize Tom Montoya during the campaign and would become, as Chavez biographer David Roybal stated, “. . . an opponent who, although soft-spoken, appeared to offer reform of old style politics.”<sup>16</sup> One issue which neither Fabian Chavez nor his biographer gave any prominence in Mechem’s campaign, not even a mention, was the case of Ovida Coogler.

During the 1950 gubernatorial campaign, no judicial action involving Coogler’s unsolved death took place, but two related trials were in progress. In one, a state official was acquitted of engaging in illegal activities with Ovida Coogler in the weeks before she vanished.<sup>17</sup> The other involved state and local law enforcement officers who were accused of violating the civil rights of Wesley Byrd, an African American, while trying to coerce him to confess to killing Coogler. A federal grand jury charged the officers that July. Edwin Mechem, a gubernatorial candidate at the time, praised the decision in a brief statement.<sup>18</sup> In the fall, the case went to federal district court.<sup>19</sup>

The account of how Mechem came to be a candidate in the summer of 1950 goes back to March of that year. Like the Democratic Party, Mechem’s party had its problems. In the case of the GOP, there was no candidate for governor. When party leaders gathered to sort through possibilities for the upcoming election, Mechem’s name came up. His was not the only one. Another being considered was that of Holm O. Bursum, Jr., son of a former U.S. senator. Watching the process, journalist Will Harrison wrote that the leaders had been “. . . quietly gathering . . . for what promises to be a movement to draft Holm O. Bursum of Socorro or Ed Mechem of Las Cruces as a candidate for governor. The men, youngsters in politics, have been softened up to the idea of making the race and are now at the courteous stage of each urging the other to run.”<sup>20</sup> In that courteous stage, the two men tossed a coin, Bursum’s son Holm III recalled.<sup>21</sup> Ed Mechem lost the toss, he said, thereby winning the candidacy.

The leaders called upon Mechem. They were, he said, people who “. . . had been operating the party structure

over a period of time. The ones who would put up the money. The ones who had done the work. The ones who had run for office before . . . .”<sup>22</sup> In late March, Mechem came to Albuquerque to meet with them. He was 37 at the time, the father of four young children and an attorney re-establishing his practice in Las Cruces after three years of wartime service with the F.B.I.

Thomas A. Donnelly, in his 1952 study of the campaign, documented the following story of the young man’s encounter with his party’s leaders at the Alvarado Hotel that spring day.<sup>23</sup> A prominent member of the group, who did not wish to be identified, recalled the day as cold and windy, the air filled with dust. The harsh weather, he said, reflected the party’s gloom. “We were telling Ed Mechem he had to make the sacrifice as it was his turn. He was holding back uncertain about what he should do,” the informant recalled. Earlier, Mechem had expressed worry about having sufficient resources to campaign and about getting the support of the others who had been considered for the nomination. He was assured of having both, but as the meeting progressed, his decision was not forthcoming. Finally someone ordered a round of drinks to be sent to the room. The group simply sat and talked for a time. They were bereft; their party had fallen on the hardest of times. By the end of the discussion, the leader reported, Ed Mechem had accepted the party’s call.

Mechem did what his father and other older Republicans had done before him. He agreed to enter a futile race for state office to help keep a two-party system alive in New Mexico. The objective was not to win the governor’s office in 1950 but to lay the groundwork for 1952, the presidential race, Mechem said.<sup>24</sup> If the national party was to run an appealing candidate, the New Mexicans may have reasoned, that candidate could sweep other Republicans into office in their state. For the future race, the leaders had raised \$65,000. They planned to invest some of it in 1950 to organize the party at the county level for 1952.<sup>25</sup> The plan also called for energetic candidates whose real job would be an internal one, to travel the state to “. . . establish the fact clearly to the Republican organizations in the counties that the Republicans were here to stay,” Mechem said. The leaders “. . . wanted somebody to get out and really campaign without any thought of being elected,” he recalled. “The general consensus was that there just wasn’t anybody that could beat [John E.] Miles . . . .”<sup>26</sup> Mechem embraced the party

organization work. He had no plans to be governor; his career goals did not include elective office.

Although a reluctant candidate, Mechem was a good choice. He had grown up in a political family. His uncle Merritt Mechem had been the state's fifth governor. His father Edwin C. had been a state district judge and mayor of Las Cruces. His mother Eunice worked avidly for her party. Mechem himself had run for district attorney twice in Dona Ana County to help fill the GOP ticket and had lost. Although he had won a seat in the state legislature, he did not seek a second term. He was active with at least six groups such as the Red Cross, county bar association, Lions Club and Mesilla Valley Chamber of Commerce. As a candidate, Edwin Mechem offered another quality -- his very presence. He was imposing. A large-framed, trim man with dark blond hair, he was often the tallest person in the room. His style was low key and laconic, and his wry humor could generate laughter. He had a great memory for people, and he loved his state. Courteous, reserved, modest, honest and sincere are words his colleagues and constituents applied to him. Ed Mechem was candidate material in spite of himself.

Soon, the leaders called on Paul Larrazolo, 39, to run for lieutenant governor. The son of former Governor Octaviano A. Larrazolo, he, too, was a good choice. During the war, Paul Larrazolo had served in the Pacific. A graduate of Georgetown University Law School, he practiced in Albuquerque before going to Belen as assistant district attorney. He was a leader in the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Young Republican League. With dark hair and fine features, Larrazolo was slim and aristocratic looking. "He was a gentleman," Holm O. Bursum III said.<sup>27</sup>

In June, the two young men began to visit the counties. Good government was their theme, and they knew in detail what could be improved. GOP leaders had been researching practices of the state liquor control division, revenue bureau, and state police ". . . [I]t was just bad," Mechem said.<sup>28</sup> Among the appointed officials in the statehouse, some seemed to operate on their own without gubernatorial direction.<sup>29</sup> A few appeared to have power that rivaled the governor's.

As they toured, Mechem and Larrazolo revealed new findings. The Associated Press and some local journalists covered their talks. The following are representative of their early major themes:

- Carlsbad, June 14: Praise recent reapportion-

ment despite state machine opposition.<sup>30</sup>

- Clovis, June 16. Remove the statehouse clique with its disconnection from the people.<sup>31</sup>
- Raton, June 19: Remove the two-cent gas tax hike; a one-cent hike would suffice.<sup>32</sup>
- Las Vegas, June 20: Reform the state liquor board; end power abuse by the regulator.<sup>33</sup>
- Los Alamos, June 21: End requirements to give kickbacks to contract with the state.<sup>34</sup>
- Santa Fe, June 22: End detrimental effects of the statehouse machine on governance.<sup>35</sup>
- Belen, June 24: End the use of welfare files to contact recipients to ask for votes.<sup>36</sup>
- Las Cruces, June 28: Reverse the order that state police ignore illegal gambling.<sup>37</sup>
- Deming, June 30: Remove political workers from the payroll who do no state work.<sup>38</sup>

At the end of the first tour, Mechem reported that he and Larrazolo had talked with more than 13,000 people. New Mexicans had treated them well, he said, and he saw a widespread desire for better government practices than existed.<sup>39</sup> The tours resumed, with themes both old and new:

- July 9: End the practice of high bids being accepted for state highway purchases; institute efficient, effective purchasing procedures.<sup>40</sup>
- August 11: Recognize the excessive money spent by the state on reassessment without adequately involving county assessors or considering local conditions.<sup>41</sup>
- August 20: End liquor inspectors' collection of party "donations" from liquor dealers.<sup>42</sup>
- Albuquerque, August 31: Remove deadheads from the state payroll.<sup>43</sup>
- Gallup, September 20: Replace a one-party statehouse with a bipartisan government.<sup>44</sup>
- Farmington, September 22: Remove from the payroll those who do not report to work; use a law, ignored by recent governors, to establish a job classification system.<sup>45</sup>
- Aztec, September 22: Use competitive bids in state highway purchases.<sup>46</sup>
- Los Alamos, September 25: Build a nonpartisan judiciary selected on basis of merit.<sup>47</sup>
- Cleveland, September 29: Amend the constitution to set up a board of education.<sup>48</sup>

That summer, Republican National Committee

(RNC) director Albert Hermann came to New Mexico to make a surprising announcement. The GOP might win the governorship, he said. Also, the RNC had selected the state for special training in local political organizing.<sup>49</sup> U.S. Vice President Alben Barkley, in New Mexico for a Democratic event, saw humor in the plan. Republicans were importing people “. . . from New York to teach them how to organize friends and keep them,” he remarked.<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile, John E. Miles, 65, was running a less extensive campaign than his opponents. He had had surgery in April, and party leaders worried that his recovery time would delay his start in the race.<sup>51</sup> In October, Miles was going to Roswell for only the third event of his campaign. His two previous ones had been in Albuquerque.<sup>52</sup> His modest travel contrasted with the lively Mechem/Larrazolo tours. Miles was a good campaigner, Mechem said. “He never passed up anybody.” But his health and the dynamics between him and Dennis Chavez probably hurt him, Mechem said in retrospect.<sup>53</sup> The GOP invited Miles to debate, but he declined. Possibly he saw no need. He had come up with a descriptor for Mechem and Larrazolo. “Kindergarten politicians,” he called them—not suitable to run the government.<sup>54</sup>

Systematically, community-by-community, Miles’ young opponents were presenting what they saw to be a closed world of cronyism with few benefits for citizens. Early on, they had begun using the term “Dinero-crats,” saying they were not running against Democrats but against a state machine.<sup>55</sup> If officials had not been taking high bids for contracts and padding the state payroll with party workers, Mechem and Larrazolo said, there would be more money for social and health programs.

The young men were evolving as campaigners. Republican leaders, dispirited in March, must have been pleased. State Chair John Knorr noticed that Mechem was catching the public’s attention, being heard, winning regard from the citizens. Mechem had “a future in New Mexico,” he said.<sup>56</sup> In the last weeks, Mechem and Larrazolo traveled far. Examples of their destinations and topics follow:

- Vaughn, October 2: End the practice of putting political workers on the state payroll.<sup>57</sup>
- Melrose, October 3: End four machine officials providing one-third of state insurance.<sup>58</sup>
- Hobbs and Jal, October 6: Consider Miles’ oil transactions during his time in office. Attend to state’s high rate of infant mortality.<sup>59</sup>

- Dexter, October 9: Establish an effective safety program to reduce highway deaths.<sup>60</sup>
- Albuquerque, October 16: End illegal gambling and unfair liquor regulation.<sup>61</sup>
- Hurley, October 19: End voter fraud (e.g., improper voting and ballot counting). Have more rural/public health resources. Inspect water systems, restaurants, and dairies.<sup>62</sup>
- Albuquerque, October 27: Reinvestigate Ovida Coogler’s death.<sup>63</sup>
- Las Cruces, November 5: Remove from land office payroll those who do no state work.<sup>64</sup>

Only late in October did the Coogler case become a focal point of Mechem’s message. The *Las Cruces Sun-News* accompanied his announcement with a story about the flaws in the 1949 investigation into the death.<sup>65</sup> The Mechem campaign also ran an ad on November 5, pledging to reopen the investigation.<sup>66</sup> It was a new theme for Mechem’s ads; the earlier ones had emphasized points of improved governance.

Soon after Mechem’s announcement about the criminal investigation, the popular Las Cruces Mayor Sam Klein went to Albuquerque to address the topic of corruption in Dona Ana County. He took issue with Mechem’s position on the Coogler case. Speaking on KOB Radio, he criticized Mechem for “. . . bringing our community into the limelight of unfavorable publicity.”<sup>67</sup> Mechem’s insistence on further investigation, Klein said, had “blackened the reputation of his friends, neighbors and his community.” He stated that area businesses had been hurt by the publicity and that New Mexico A&M enrollment had declined significantly. He estimated the cost to the community to be at least in the thousands.

W. B. Darden responded to the mayor’s statements.<sup>68</sup> Darden, a Democrat for Mechem and an attorney for the 1949 grand jury that had looked into Coogler’s death, cited Chamber of Commerce data about the recent robust tourist industry in Las Cruces. He also pointed out that the community wanted the killing solved. He said that many local people “. . . were mystified over Klein’s trip to Albuquerque Friday to attack Ed Mechem and at the same time attempt to ‘play down’ the Coogler murder.”<sup>69</sup>

The focus on the unsolved case had occurred. By then, however, voters across the state had become concerned about more than the fate of one young Las Cruces woman, as disturbing as it was.

On November 4, Mechem came home. Las Cruces

organized a “Send Ed Mechem to Santa Fe” rally, and “Democrats for Mechem” were invited to join in.<sup>70</sup> In his last speech, Mechem addressed concerns that were circulating about how one voted in New Mexico. “Ballots were secret, he assured the audience. By law, no one had the right to see how a person had voted. People registered in one party had the right to vote in the general election for candidates from either party. People receiving relief checks should not worry about being removed from state rolls based on how they voted. “As a[n] . . . American citizen, everyone has the right to vote as he pleases,” Mechem said.<sup>72</sup>

Mechem, who had not desired elective office, had been recruited to run with no illusions that he could win. However, in his final statement that evening, he indicated that he had begun to see something extraordinary evolving in his long campaign, something that could change everything. He called the election “. . . a turning point in the history of New Mexico. “The people have far more intelligence and courage than the machine politicians give them credit for,” he said.”<sup>73</sup>

Despite the possibility that Mechem had glimpsed, the election odds still favored his opponent. Seventy-two hours after his rally, Mechem gathered with supporters. They would spend the evening together to see just how much he had been able to narrow John E. Miles’ margin of victory. As polls closed, the votes poured in. Democrats had turned out all over New Mexico. Their candidates for state office were winning by 20,000 to 35,000 votes, except in two races. Edwin L. Mechem was ahead of John E. Miles by an edge that was holding, and Paul Larrazolo and Tibo Chavez were very close in the lieutenant governor’s race. Edwin and Dorothy Mechem sat holding hands, waiting for news of the outcome.<sup>74</sup> John Curtis of the Associated Press called to tell Mechem he was winning. Mechem was sure the news was wrong. In disbelief, he bantered with the journalist about his state of mind. “No,” Curtis insisted. “I’m serious. This is happening. . . .” “John, it can’t be,” the candidate replied.<sup>75</sup>

Mechem was stunned. He and Larrazolo had not discussed the possibility of their being elected, nor had he and his wife considered the impact of a win on their children and their schooling. “That subject had never come up. . . . We hadn’t even thought about it,” he recalled.<sup>76</sup> Absorbing the reality of his election, Edwin Mechem waited for his opponent to concede before claiming

victory, but it did not happen that night. John Miles waited. If Mechem had been astonished by the results, the Democrats were incredulous. In the morning, John E. Miles declared his run “a failure” and acknowledged that Edwin Mechem had won decisively. Then Miles made the following statement: “I would have conceded early last evening . . . [b]ut my friends throughout the state urged me not to concede and in respect to them I consented to wait.”<sup>77</sup> He said that the victories of others on his ticket assured him that New Mexico remained Democratic.

In the lieutenant governor’s race, to Mechem’s disappointment, Paul Larrazolo fell behind Tibo Chavez by 1,071 votes. Not a single Republican was elected to the executive branch besides Mechem.

Observers tried to explain the unexpected. An Associated Press story attributed Mechem’s win to an “. . . anti-Miles vote [that] developed into a spectacular political upset.”<sup>78</sup> Bud Rouse, of the *Las Cruces Sun-News*, spoke of the evolving independence of voters in New Mexico. They “. . . can’t be herded anymore,” he said.<sup>79</sup> The Coogler case was not mentioned in either report. Senator Dennis Chavez was the one who spoke of Ovida Coogler as an element in Miles’ defeat. On November 9, that year, *The Albuquerque Tribune* published his comment. It was poignant. “The case should be solved,” Chavez stated. “The girl had a right to live.”<sup>80</sup> He also listed slot machines, state officials’ ties to big oil and gas corporations, poor conditions in the state hospital and liquor enforcement problems as factors. Officials in government were too self-interested, he said, and not concerned enough with the public good. Many in Senator Chavez’s faction had supported Miles, but others had voted for Mechem, according to Fabian Chavez, Jr.<sup>81</sup>

On January 1, 1951, Edwin L. Mechem was sworn in as governor for a two-year term. The rest of the nine-member elective executive branch was Democratic. Mechem controlled only departments directly associated with the governor’s office. Immediately he began to put reforms in place that he had discussed with voters. Among them were purchasing procedures designed to eliminate conflict of interest and kickbacks, the start of a personnel system to end patronage abuses, fair liquor regulation, more state police training and merit-based criteria for judicial appointments. He also reopened the investigation into Ovida Coogler’s death.

As Dennis Chavez’s post-election statement showed,

Coogler's death was not just a Mechem concern or a Republican issue. Both parties wanted justice. The Democratic-majority state house of representatives passed a bill to fund a new investigation. Attorney General Joe L. Martinez, a Democrat elected separately from Mechem and not under his direction, assigned an attorney to the case. A state homicide investigator who had worked on the case under the previous governor returned to Las Cruces to investigate. In the end, no resolution occurred. In her book, Moore discussed flaws in the first investigation which may have doomed later ones.<sup>82</sup> Simonich criticized the government's case, alluding to other involved officials but naming only Mechem in his commentary.<sup>83</sup> A study of the reinvestigation is warranted for more clarity about evidence the state had and why officials made the decisions they did regarding the case.

At the end of Governor Mechem's first term, news editors across the state remarked on his clean administration. Political scientists writing in the 1950s and '60s considered Mechem a capable administrator who ran an honest government. The voters returned him to office in 1952. Mechem reluctantly ran a third time in 1956. That year, in a replay of the 1950 campaign, he declined to be on the ballot; GOP leaders twisted his arm, and Dennis Chavez again may have had a hand in his victory. Mechem lost his re-election bid in 1958. In 1960, he won his fourth and final term. Edwin L. Mechem's work to modernize critical functions of the executive branch is a story in itself. It began with his race in 1950, the one based on his vision of improved governance, the one he had not imagined he would win.

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About the Author: Judith L. Messal worked at New Mexico State University for many years. As a college associate professor, she taught advanced English composition courses for international undergraduate students and research writing and seminar skills courses for international graduate students. She has a bachelor's degree in history and two master's degrees, one in government and one in communication studies. She moved to New Mexico as a child in 1957 and has followed New Mexico's gubernatorial elections since 1958.



The Mechem family in their home on University Ave. before moving to Santa Fe. Courtesy Walter and Janet Mechem.



Mechem being sworn in as New Mexico's governor in 1951. From the Walter and Janet Mechem family scrapbook.

# 120th Combat Engineers New Mexico National Guard 45th Infantry Division

By Manny Chavez



*Editors Note: World War II required a collective sacrifice from every community in America. Men women and children answered the call one way or another. The following is a story of how one young man and his community did the same.*

I joined the National Guard at age 17 while a junior in high school because several of my buddies had joined. At the time, I worked for El Paso Times and had also gotten to know Tom Phillips, who was supply officer for Regiment Headquarters based in Las Cruces, NM. Phillips was one of my customers and sometimes hired me on Saturdays for a dollar a day to help clean the second floor of the armory after a function.

The Regiment Headquarters (HQ) and the Headquarters and Service Company (H&S) were based on Griggs Street. Regiment Commander was Colonel Uil Lane, CEO of the Myers Farm Equipment Company. The H&S company commander was Capt. Jerry Hines, Aggies football coach. The chaplain was Capt. Henry Buchanan, pastor of St. Genevieve's Catholic Church. 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Salomon Alvarez was a Las Cruces postal clerk. Col. Hugh M. Milton, dean of engineering at New Mexico State College was an Army Reserve officer who attended the weekly meetings to fulfill his training requirements. As supply officer, Phillips took care of the armory building.

The armory was a rectangular two-story brick building with wide concrete stairs leading to the second floor. The second level had polished hardwood floors suitable

for dancing. The hall was often rented by Las Cruces organizations for plays, concerts and recitals. The National Guard held weekly drills on Tuesdays and on weekends occasionally conducted special training. Other facilities included an arms firing range located east of the A & M College.

The lower floor of the armory was where Phillips lived and was reserved for offices, an Army band room and other supply rooms. It was there I sometimes helped sort and store equipment. Among the interesting things I saw, were old photo supplies and a newsman's Speedgraf camera, which I learned to use. There also were gas masks and a manual on chemical warfare, which I read. And by the time I made corporal, I was the regimental chemical warfare instructor.

Regiment uniforms during the 1930s were similar to those worn during WWI. Officers wore olive green blouses with Sam Brown belts, riding britches and boots and a saber. Enlisted men wore wool blouses, britches and wool rap leggings and were issued high-top shoes. It took a little practice to learn how to properly wrap the leggings.

Our weekly drill meetings were held at the Griggs Street armory building. Training consisted of marching and weapon cleaning. Marching drills inside the building on the hardwood floors could be heard outside and throughout the neighborhood. Though weapon stripping and cleaning was interesting, cleaning weapons that had

been shipped with greasy cosmoline was an unpleasant chore. Small gun-cleaning patches were inadequate for wiping off the goo. Our annual two-week training camp took place in Las Vegas, NM. But we occasionally had joint maneuvers with Ft. Bliss troops at Bishop's Cap, the hilly country east of Anthony, NM, between the Organ and Franklin Mountains.

Three months after joining the Guard, I took a correspondence course on chemical warfare from the Army Edgewood Arsenal Chemical Warfare School. Two months later, the Guard promoted me to corporal, and I became the chemical warfare instructor.

Col. Milton told me that he also had taken that course and offered to help me prepare lesson plans and guide me in conducting training classes for the troops. After I received a steel cylinder containing small vials of poisoned gas used for training, he and I went to an arroyo near the college to conduct tests with which to train troops. Poisoned gasses at that time were identified by distinct odors. Some smelled like garlic or rotten eggs, while some induced vomiting. It was designed that way in order to force the enemy to remove their masks, thereby exposing them to the poison.



Training soldiers how to arm a smoke bomb used for camouflage of troop movements.

I graduated from Las Cruces Union High School in May 1937 and was promoted to sergeant. The next month, our National Guard unit boarded a troop train headed to Camp Luna in Las Vegas, NM. This camp was the base used by the 120<sup>th</sup> Engineer First Battalion that joined us in the two-week training program. While there, I conducted training in the use of gas masks and detection of poisoned gas. I walked the soldiers through a tent of low dose gas. As they entered the tent, they

would open the side of the mask with a finger to get a whiff of the odor and quickly exit.

Shortly after my high school graduation, I resigned from the guard. In August of 1937, I left Las Cruces to attend Woodbury Business College in Los Angeles. Upon graduation from Woodbury, I returned, less than two years later. Shortly after, I was hired to the supply division of U.S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service, which oversaw three Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps in Doña Ana County. I was in charge of the stock record department. At this time, I also rejoined the H&S Company, 120<sup>th</sup> Engineers as a Sergeant.

World War II was rapidly escalating. With Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, England and France declared war on Hitler's Germany. By early summer 1940, Hitler had marched into the Balkans. France would later surrender.

Silently, the United States continued to prepare for war by modernizing its military forces. Our National Guard unit benefited because we received new uniforms and equipment in preparation for what was sure to come. Short britches were replaced with long pants. We no longer wore leg wrappings. We also received new weapons, vehicles, bulldozers and trench diggers.

Then a special piece of equipment caught my eye. It was a portable water purification unit. With it came several manuals for operation, which I took home and studied with enthusiasm. Within three weeks I was ready to test my skills. With two helpers, we took the equipment to a nearby muddy irrigation ditch and produced clear, purified, potable water. I took a bottle of the purified water to a medical lab for testing, and the results declared the water suitable for consumption with no odor or taste of chlorine. A week later, I demonstrated the purification process to several of the staff officers who were pleased with the results. I was promptly made regimental water supervisor. My principal duties would be to provide potable water for the regiment, which included two battalions -- one based in Las Vegas, NM and the other in Oklahoma.

During early spring 1940, Col. Milton, then President of New Mexico A&M College (Aggies), invited me to his campus home to see his "war room." He had established a professional combat war room on the second floor of his home with the walls covered by European and Soviet border maps. In the center of the room, he had placed

a large table with maps and a battle display to show and move the battle lines of the opposing military forces as the war progressed.

As part of the U.S. preparations, the Third Army began extensive maneuvers in Louisiana during July and August of 1940 under the watchful eye of Lt. Gen. Stanley Embick, who commanded the Third Army. Furthermore, Brig. Gen. George Patton had been assigned as an umpire for the maneuvers designed to test fast moving armored units in combat.

The 45th Infantry Division (Thunderbird) -- part of the Third Army -- also included my National Guard unit -- the 120th Combat Engineers Regiment. During the maneuvers, which were staged near Alexandria and Pitkin, Louisiana I established an active "water point" along a creek bank to supply purified water. Using two portable purification units and three 3,000-gallon canvas storage bags, I provided clean water for the entire 45th Division. The source water in the creek had been a dark brown color, caused by decaying vegetation. But after treatment, it was crystal clear and pure.



Preparing a water purification unit.

Since we all were Hispanic and from Las Cruces, we chatted away mostly in Spanish while filling the water cans. This prompted Gen. Patton to ask, "What the hell kind of an Army do you have here? I thought I was stopping at a U.S. Army water point." He then laughed.

One late afternoon, Gen. Patton, accompanied by four tanks, stopped at our water point and asked permission to refill the "Jerry" water cans carried on the tanks. He spoke to us for about 30 minutes and appeared interested in our little, six-man, operation.

He knew Las Cruces and El Paso well from his visits to Fort Bliss in El Paso.

## War Clouds

After returning from maneuvers in late August 1940, I told our company commander that I planned to resign in order to attend Georgetown University. Unknown to me was that our nation was at the very edge of its entrance into WWII, which explained my commander's response: "You cannot resign, and I can say nothing more for a few days."

I was left wondering what he meant. A few days later, I got my answer. President Roosevelt called the 45th Infantry Division and several other National Guard units into federal active duty September 16, 1940. We no longer were under state control but rather federal control and had become a bona fide Army unit, preparing for war.

This order affected half the town, including the owner of the largest farm equipment and hardware store, the pastor of St. Genevieve's Catholic Church, the college football coach and Lauro Apodaca, a high school teacher. They were all community leaders and called into service. In the beginning Col. Milton, the college president, received a dispensation because of his civilian position but later was called, although not assigned to our unit.

Our unit left Las Cruces together, marching in full military gear. We were led by our Army band to the troop train headed for Fort Sill, Lawton, Oklahoma. Half the town came out to cheer us on our way. Many men of our division never returned home alive. On the day we departed, I didn't realize that I would never return to Las Cruces either, but for another reason. That day was the beginning of my military career that lasted 29 years.

The 45th Division was ordered to Fort Sill to begin integration into the Army with new equipment and



Las Cruces, NM train station with troops preparing to board troop train for Ft. Sill, Lawton, Oklahoma.

intense combat training. There were no barracks or quarters available. A space near the airfield was cleared. We burned away grass and weeds. Tents were erected to house the entire division. Since all units were ordered to meet active duty requirements known as “strengths and grades,” several promotions took place immediately. By good fortune, my position of Division Water Service Supervisor called for a rank of technical sergeant, to which I was promoted and given a pay rise to \$86 per month



Tent mates around a Sibley stove warm our bones through those icy Oklahoma days at Ft. Sill. Six men to a tent is not cozy living. Note clothes hangers. Stove pipe went to top with a spark arrestor to catch cinders. Some clowns removed them causing tent to catch fire.

The troops of the 45th Division endured the rugged bivouac conditions for several months. First there was dust and the burned grass soot from the open field. Then



Sprucing up was a team effort

came the bitter cold of Oklahoma’s winter months. Brrrr! Icicles formed on the tent flaps and the military-issue blankets on a canvas cot. The only heat came from a small cone-shaped, wood-burning, stove named Sibley. Some clowns tried burning coal in the stoves, but the cinders

fell on the canvas tent and caused them to catch fire. For several months our cooks had to use field stoves outside. Our mess hall was a hospital tent. The Army finally built a frame mess hall where we could warm our bones during meals. This mess hall also served as a temporary chapel for mass on Sundays. Before that, an altar was set up on the tailgate of a truck in an open field.



Tailgate Mass in the open field by Chaplin, Fr. Henry Buchanan

I will never forget the day we had to qualify for marksmanship on the firing range. It was cold. Our fingers were so stiff we could barely pull the trigger on our old Springfield .30-06 rifles.

Although we endured the hardships of living and training during the winter of 1940, the Christmas dinner at our tent mess hall was something special. Packages containing fresh fruit, candies and nuts were distributed to all. The cooks provided turkey, ham and delicious pies. Some of the married personnel brought their families who lived in rented apartments in nearby Lawton, making it almost a family affair.

See the list of all the personnel assigned to H & S Company, 120<sup>th</sup> Engineers at the time of the Christmas dinner on pages 15 and 16.



Mess hall crowded but cozy, especially for the Xmas party.

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# Headquarters and Service Company

## 120th Engineers (Combat)

Fort Sill, Oklahoma

December 25, 1940

### ROSTER

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#### COMPANY COMMANDER

Captain GERALD H. HINES

#### FIRST LIEUTENANTS

EUGENE F. ISLAS

PATRICK L. McCLERNON

#### MASTER SERGEANTS

Alvarez, Solomon G  
Lawrence, Ray J.

McBride, Paul C.

Phillips, Thomas J.  
Sherwood, Rex E.

#### FIRST SERGEANT

Harris, Wesley D.

#### TECHNICAL SERGEANTS

Apodaca, Lauro D.  
Billups, Benjamin E.  
Chavez, Manuel J.

Flanagan, Jim M.  
Holcomb, H. H.

Medinger, Henry P.  
Meeks, Raymond R.  
Phillips, John H.

#### STAFF SERGEANT

Butler, Ernest R.  
Ferguson, George A.

Ledesma, F. T.  
McCartor, Rollin R.  
Ray, James R.

Rose, Howard C.  
Webb, James M.

#### SERGEANTS

Armijo, Arthur  
Biel, Manuel M.  
Dailey, Robert A.

Davenport, P. F.  
Hardgrave, Jack M.  
Howell, Raymond E.

Martinez, Pascual B.  
Rives, Harold L.  
Smith, Louis L.

#### CORPORALS

Carillo, Joe N.  
Chavez, Carlos K.  
Chavez, Summie T.  
Dreyfus, Adolfo  
Flores, Eddie P.

Frietze, Fred R.  
Garcia, Sam S.  
Hoop, Ludwig  
Loya, Max

Montoya, Robert A.  
Ogas, Alex C.  
Rico, Manuel L.  
Spelts, Martin E.  
Tuttle, Raymond E.

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PRIVATE FIRST CLASS

Alderete, Albino M.  
Alderete, Leo H.  
Amos, Ben W.  
Apodaca, Frank C.  
Archuleta, Ramon  
Avila, Enrique M.  
Bowers, James M.  
Carrion, Angel L.  
Chandler, Clide T.  
Dugger, Joe C.  
Horwitz, Sam H.

Lopez, Carlos L.  
Lopez, Charles H.  
Lucero, Hob S.  
Maese, Cipriano R.  
Maese, Valentine R.  
Marquez, Abelardo G.  
Mendoza, Mike M.  
Montoya, Natividad  
Padilla, Augustine  
Pena, Albert L.  
Raley, Jesse C.  
Reid, James L.

Reiter, Nathan I.  
Rodriguez, Sam S.  
Rodriguez, Tito L.  
Romero, J. R. Jr.  
Sheldon, John H.  
Taylor, Hewitt  
Tellez, Felipe V.  
Townsend, Calvin  
Turney, Joseph C.  
Vigil, Paul  
Wheeler, Jimmie S.

PRIVATES

Alvarez, Arthur O.  
Alvarez, Fernando R.  
Alvarez, Pablo S.  
Amesquita, Jesus J.  
Apodaca, Efron  
Apodaca, Luis V.  
Apodaca, R. A.  
Baca, Jose C.  
Baca, Paul A.  
Bal, Hobert  
Banegas, Don V.  
Banegas, Pete V.  
Barela, Carlos L.  
Barela, Claudio A.  
Barela, Felipe D.  
Barela, Reyes U.  
Barrio, Willie G.  
Bashom, Robert G.  
Belardo, Charles F.  
Borrego, A. P.  
Borunda, Henry C.  
Brown, Garry N.

Caro, Jesus M.  
Carrillo, E. M.  
Carrillo, Ricardo M.  
Chacon, Amador M.  
Cooper, James W.  
Costales, Erineo A.  
Cothorn, Harold T.  
Diaz, Manuel G.  
Diaz, Sam L.  
Estrada, M. C.  
Fernandez, G. R.  
Fernandez, Reyes O.  
Flores, Mike G.  
Gallegos, Manuel V.  
Gallegos, S. G.  
Gil, Henry F.  
Guerra, John A.  
Hernandez, C. D.  
Lara, Augustine L.  
Lopez, Nicholas R.  
Lopez, Willie H.  
Lucero, Fred A.

Lujan, Santiago P.  
Medina, Ernest T.  
Melon, B. R.  
Montes, Ricardo B.  
Noel, Doyle C.  
Ornelas, Albino R.  
Owens, C. W.  
Provencio, M. F.  
Ramos, Raymond C.  
Romero, Dick  
Sandoval, A. J.  
Salas, Fred A.  
Sarabia, Carlos P.  
Sarabria, Eduardo U.  
Tellez, Jose U.  
Torres, Mariano B.  
Trammell, C. R., Jr.  
Turey, Lupe A.  
Turey, Pedro A.  
Valenzuela, B. R.  
Wasson, Benton T.  
Zapian, Manuel

Finally in early spring of 1941, the 45th was ordered to move to a new military base -- Camp Barkley in Abilene, Texas. The Texas National Guard's 36<sup>th</sup> Division was also based there. What a great change! Cone-shaped tents, known as parameter tents, were erected over wood floors with four-foot plywood sides, which provided more headroom. Also, each tent had a natural gas stove for heat. But by the time we arrived, it was already spring, and the hot summer was on its way. The communal bathrooms and showers were a luxury. We also had a building that was a real mess hall. But it still served the same "SOS," which was slang for the Army's version of corned beef on toast and rubbery pancakes.

During May 1941, I was sent to the Engineer School at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, to take a formal course in water purification. On my return in August, I rejoined my company, which was on maneuvers in Louisiana involving two armies with 19 divisions and 40,000 troops. Participating officers included, Omar Bradley, Mark Clark, Dwight Eisenhower, Walter Krueger, Lesley McNair and George Patton. I did not have to operate a water purification station during these maneuvers but was assigned many other duties.

All seemed to be going well until Mother Nature stepped in. A massive hurricane swept the nearby Texas coast and our maneuver area was drenched with wind and rain for three days. Our outside kitchen was swept away and the fire pit flooded. That meant soldiers were in for cold pork, beans and spam. Tents don't do well in stormy weather as seen by the accompanying photos.



Recovering from wind

In early November 1941, a team of Army Air Corps officers from Randolph Field, Texas, came to Camp Barkley to recruit candidates for pilot training. My cousin, Sammie Chavez, encouraged me to join him and stand in the long line of about 200 soldiers who were applying.



Water and mud not good for marching

I really didn't think I stood a chance. But I learned that with two years of college -- which I had -- and passing the physical, I could meet the prerequisites. Sammie and I both qualified for flight training. But that didn't get us in. We had to wait for the final approval. Unfortunately, many that had been in line to apply never made the grade.

Then it happened. On Sunday afternoon, December 7, 1941 several of my buddies and I were at the Abilene Theater watching the World War I movie *Sergeant York*. Suddenly, the lights flickered and then stayed lit. The theater manager came on stage for an announcement. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor

Camp commanders ordered all soldiers to return to their units immediately. At first, we thought it was part of the show - a publicity stunt. But the theater manager again urgently said the Army commanders had ordered that all troops return to the camp immediately. When we finally heard the sirens blaring and church bells ringing, we knew it was true. World War II had started! Good Lord, what now?

On January 1, the 45<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions were ordered to Fort Devens, Massachusetts in preparation for embarkation to Africa. On January 3, while supervising the loading of the water supply equipment on railroad cars, I was told to report to Col. Uil Lane at Regimental Headquarters.

"Sergeant, we just received two sets of orders that apply to you," Col. Lane said. "One is assigning you to the Engineer Officers Candidate School at Fort Belvoir, and the other is assigning you as an aviation cadet at Lackland Air Training Command. Which of the two do you accept?"

This was a complete shock! After thinking about it for a couple of hours and with counsel from friends, I chose the Army Air Corps training.

God's influence guided me toward a fascinating mil-

itary career in the United States Air Corps and then the newly formed United States Air Force.

During the first week of January 1942, I departed for flying school at Lackland AFB, TX. The 45<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup> Divisions at Camp Barkley departed for Fort Devens, MA and then to North Africa under the Command of General Mark Clark, 5<sup>th</sup> Army. They fought in the battle of Anzio and Salerno in Italy and then France and Germany.

Col. Milton was called to active duty approximately six months after we departed for Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. He served on the staff of General Eisenhower in several important battles in Europe and was promoted to major general. Eisenhower named him assistant secretary of the Army in 1953 and deputy secretary of the Army in 1958. I visited him at his office at the Pentagon during July 1953. He treated me as if I were part of his family by introducing me to all his staff.

Capt. Hines, our H&S Company Commander was promoted and moved to Regimental Headquarters, 120<sup>th</sup> Engineers when we moved to Camp Barkley, Texas. After

the war, Hines returned to New Mexico A&M College to become athletic director. Capt. McClernan became our commander. First Sgt. Alvarez returned to Las Cruces after the war and became postmaster. Tech. Sgt. Flanagan returned to Las Cruces to become a deputy sheriff and later was elected sheriff of Doña Ana County. Sgt Sammie Chavez, my cousin, returned to Las Cruces to become a homebuilder and served as a colonel in the newly organized National Guard.

I remained in the US Army Air Corp and the US Air Force until my retirement in 1966 at age 47, with 29 years of military service. After the war, I specialized as an intelligence officer and served as a US air attaché in ten countries of Latin America. During 1960-64 I was attached to the CIA Office in Miami during the Bay of Pigs invasion and the missile crisis. I then served as a counterinsurgency staff officer during my last two years of military service with US Southern Command in Panama Canal.



Technical Sergeant 1940



Lt. Colonel 1966

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## Epilogue

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# The Legacy of Lorenzo Torrez

By Paul Ward

Only a couple of years before the Great Depression gripped the United States, and a little more than a decade before World War II, Lorenzo Torrez entered the world. Torrez, also known as “Lencho,” began his life on May 18, 1927 in a little farming community on the Gila River in Grant County, New Mexico. At the tender age of 16, after dropping out of high school, he entered a rough line of work with the New Mexico copper and zinc mines.



Lorenzo Torrez

His decision to work for the mining camps greatly affected his life, with his eventual participation in the Empire Zinc strike of 1950 and later the film about the strike -- *Salt of the Earth*. Then, southern New Mexico strikers demanded improved safety conditions at the Empire Zinc mine as well as equal pay for

Hispanic miners. Though the strike was settled in 1952, it remains significant for the non-violent posture taken by the strikers in the face of violence by strikebreakers. Furthermore, it illustrated the strength and bravery of the wives and mothers who took to the picket lines after a county district court issued an injunction against the male miners.

The following year, film crews came to Grant County to shoot a fictionalized version of the mining strike. That film -- *Salt of the Earth* -- became the only film in the United States to be banned because its creators and participants had been deemed communist sympathizers.

But the strike along with Torrez’s family’s past as it related to his with his own experiences, made him angry and bitter toward the United States government and the capitalist system. While the strike, the film and excitement surrounding these events were only a moment in history

for most, for Torrez it would launch a life spent organizing labor and eventually propelling the Communist Party in the United States.

After the strike, he was unemployed and frequently harassed by the FBI due to his involvement with the Communist Party; the fight seemed to be never ending. According to *Lorenzo Torrez: A Portrait*, a biographical account of Lencho:

After a period of mine/mill shutdowns Lorenzo was not recalled to work. He began traveling throughout the Southwest from one mining town to another, he was unable to find work. It was then he realized he had been “blacklisted” by the mining industry.<sup>1</sup>

Following his realization of being blacklisted, fellow Communist Party member Pat Bell recommended Torrez for a job as Chair of the Chicano Commission. Shortly after, he secured a career as a Communist Party organizer, extending his footprint into California.

In the fall of 1970, he moved his family west, and he became a Party organizer within the Los Angeles’ Latino community. The FBI attempted to disrupt the commission’s work, but Torrez never gave up. One of his first jobs in the commission was to create a paper on the Party’s relationship with the Latino community. His trade union background helped him work through many problems. People could see that if they were going to organize, mount effective fightbacks and have strength there must be unity.<sup>2</sup> According to *A Portrait*, “A resolution adopted by the CPUSA (Communist Part of the United States of America) in 1972 and developed by the Commission under Torrez’s leadership became the guide for developing Chicano leadership” in the Party.<sup>3</sup> It was also during this time that he helped to build the foundation of the Instituto El Pueblo in Los Angeles.

*A Portrait* claimed that “The Instituto was responsible for recruiting several hundred people into the YCL and the Party.”<sup>4</sup> It was a place that taught communism and socialism, and it was run entirely by communists. While in Los Angeles, Torrez met young and hardworking

Marxist/Leninists who eventually acquired leadership positions within the Party as well. Following a couple years of hard work at the Instituto, he was elected to the central committee, which became the National Board of the Communist Party. His new position meant that more work had to be done back in the Southwest.

The last chapter of his life began with yet another move. He settled in Tucson, Arizona. According to *A Portrait*, "... a militant rank and file movement was taking shape within the mining industry in the southwest and particularly within the United Steel Workers of America."<sup>25</sup> Torrez swiftly responded to the opportunity. It became a chance for him to lead a movement that would propel the working class forward. Without hesitation, the party assigned him.

In 1974, Torrez became the chair of the Arizona Communist Party. He served for more than 30 years. And according to author Tim Wheeler, "He also led the party's Chicano Equality Commission and was a member of the CPUSA National Committee."<sup>26</sup> Perhaps he knew that Tucson was where he was meant to be for the remainder of his life. Arizona became a foothold for him.

Wheeler wrote about Torrez's impact in the state. "He built the Arizona CP into an influential organization in all the progressive movements of Arizona. He also wrote and raised money for *People's World* and its predecessors."<sup>27</sup>

After establishing himself in Tucson, he ran for political office on the local, state and national levels. *A Portrait* discussed his work. "(He) built grassroots campaigns, creating multi-racial and multi-cultural coalitions focusing on the needs of the working class and emphasizing the need to put people before profits."<sup>28</sup> His campaigns showed the Latino community that grassroots campaigns were effective in building unity that transcends race and culture. Although Torrez never won an election, his campaigns were seen as victories. They empowered people within communities. People saw that, through unity, they can hope, organize and ultimately fight back.

When asked about his runs for office, he said: "My campaigns for political office have helped lay the groundwork for future candidates showing that progressive Chicanos can run effective campaigns here."<sup>29</sup> He took pride in knowing that his Party Club played a role in helping Ed Pastor -- Arizona's first Mexican American in the U.S. Congress -- to get elected. Torrez's hard work and dedication made a major impact. His influence is easily seen in *A Portrait*:

The revival of militancy and unity of rank and file trade unionists here in Tucson is directly related to the involvement of the Party. The peace movement locally has grown and developed building broad coalitions in the struggles against the Gulf War, Central American Solidarity and more recently in the building of a strong Cuba support network. It was Lorenzo's early pushing and writing for our paper, and providing leadership that shaped the fightback and defined the anti-NAFTA struggle both locally and nationally.<sup>10</sup>

Hard work, determination and his leadership had a profound influence locally, nationally and even internationally. Programs inspired by the Party educated people, and led to Torrez's inspiration to build a place where people can receive this type of education.

Perhaps a final contribution, he established the Salt of the Earth Labor College. According to the college's statement of purpose, it was created to help Arizona's working people because they suffered from "... low wages, lack of benefits, dangerous working conditions, high unemployment, and a state of government in league with employers eager to adopt any and all anti-labor legislation."<sup>11</sup> The college believes that the situation must change in order for working people to have a better life. The college's goal has been to provide an education to help change the conditions for the working people. The school feels that ... "Working men and women must organize themselves into unions if they expect to take on the powerful corporations that run the state's economy and government."<sup>12</sup>

As the main examples behind its force, the college uses the Salt of the Earth strike along with the 1983 Phelps-Dodge strike to demonstrate the necessity of building a working-class consciousness. It sees unity and involvement amongst men, women and all races as being vital to its cause. The school stands behind its belief that ... "Unions are only as strong as their membership. Every member must be educated. By educating rank and file workers we will be strengthening and empowering the entire labor movement. By educating unorganized workers, we will be laying the groundwork for growth in Arizona's trade unions."<sup>13</sup> Studying past labor struggles and movements is how the school begins its educational work.

Learning labor history is how it ascertains that it will help workers to better-shape the future. Students are taught about a history of strong labor leaders like, “Roberto Barcon from the Miami-Globe area, Joaquin Flores from Winkleman, Henry Marques, Thomas Aguilar and David Velasquez from Clifton-Morenci; and Juan Chacon legendary star of the film *Salt of the Earth*.”<sup>14</sup> Learning about the struggles workers faced in the past can help pave the way for handling the struggles that may present themselves in the future. According to a writing titled *The Role of the College*, the college will explore the history of working class heroes and discuss questions like: “What gave these leaders their ideas and energy? How did they view the world in which they worked? What motivated them to struggle?”<sup>15</sup>

The school also focuses on the roles played by women. Women, such as Torrez’s wife Anita, have been significant in the struggles of the working class. The college recognizes other women also seen as working class heroes. It uses Mother Jones, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Dolores Huerta as examples of past female leadership on union and worker movements. According to the school, “As women have become more numerous and more powerful as workers in the mines, mills, factories and other places of work, they have taken on more active and visible roles.”<sup>16</sup> Perhaps it was Torrez’s experiences, alongside Anita, that paved the way for this aspect of the program.

The college explores the political, social and historical factors that it feels have kept the working people divided and weak. It sees United States’ bosses as being more successful in this division of workers than in other countries. They have divided workers along racial, gender and ideological lines. Other classes offered allow students to study racism’s effect on labor and explores the struggle in other regions and countries. Ultimately, the college relies on its ability to be a forum for discussion. Torrez made the school a place where people can discuss important issues to analyze the national, political and economic policies that have created the hostile conditions for the working-class people.

The Salt of the Earth Labor College remains open today and has become a landmark and symbol of Torrez’s

contributions. He spent a lifetime working to progress the Communist Party and to move the working-class forward. The school has continued spreading his ideas and beliefs. His own words reflect his life’s work and decision to be a life-long activist within the Party. He said: “Joining the Communist Party was the most important decision I’ve ever made and that decision is reconfirmed every day. What is key is that our Party has world and national cohesion. It is this network that studies and analyzes attacks on the working class enabling us to work and fight back as a unit.”<sup>17</sup>

The Salt of the Earth strike radicalized Torrez, and aggravated him to devote the remainder of his life promoting civil rights. His legacy persists with The Salt of the Earth Labor College. He summed up his belief best in his own words when he wrote:

Certainly, weapons of mass destruction, nuclear and bio-chemical, are not in our self interest [sic]. A better life, education for our children, national healthcare, these are, in our self interest [sic]. They are also issues that will unite us. They are the broad basis of self-determination for the right to choose, and among those rights in the “right” to choose our own leaders—those who we think will respond to our own self and community interests. Such is life, it is a life of struggle, of activity in order to hold our interest together. Unity in struggle is our hope.<sup>18</sup>

Torrez succeeded in giving the working class the knowledge and empowerment. He has raised the consciousness of the working class throughout the Southwest. The strike helped set the stage for his future contributions. His strategic use of the film *Salt of the Earth* brought awareness to issues that bounded workers. Cold War politics did not affect his decision to obtain Communist Party membership. He dedicated his life to spreading his vision and never faltered. He plunged himself into the Communist Party USA, and brought the ethnic struggle of the Latino community with him. His career exposed the unstable and complex relationship between race, class and gender in the fight for workers’ rights in American history.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 A Portrait, box 1, folder 17, Torrez Papers, 3.
- 2 Ibid., 3.
- 3 Ibid., 3.
- 4 Ibid., 3.
- 5 Ibid., 3.
- 6 Tim Wheeler, "Lorenzo Torrez, Copper Miner, Communist Leader, Dies at 84," People's World, <http://peoplesworld.org/lorenzo-torrez-copper-miner-communist-leader-dies-at-84>.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid., 4.
- 9 Ibid., 4.
- 10 Ibid., 4.
- 11 Salt of the Earth Labor College, box 7, folder 13, Torrez Papers, 1.
- 12 Ibid., 1.
- 13 Ibid., 1.
- 14 Ibid., 1.
- 15 Ibid., 1.
- 16 Ibid., 2.
- 17 Ernesto Portillo Jr., "Communist Still Believes in, Labors for His Special Cause," The Arizona Daily Star, 2002.
- 18 Salt of the Earth Reviewed by Lorenzo Torrez, box 7, folder 13, Torrez Papers, 12.

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About the Author: Paul Ward is a New Mexico State University graduate, originally from El Paso, Texas. In August of this year, he received his M.A. in history; adding to his B.A. in elementary education. During his time at New Mexico State he became a member of the national honor society Phi Alpha Theta and dedicated much of his time to traveling throughout the Southwest conducting research for his thesis. His thesis is based around the film Salt of the Earth, and focused on the life of New Mexican Lorenzo Torrez. As an educator at heart, Paul also teaches 5th grade in El Paso. He plans on continuing his education by pursuing a doctoral degree; his long-term goal is to be a history professor. When Paul is not working he enjoys spending time with his family, playing a variety of instruments, creating music, and operating his own recording studio.

# Horrific Air Crash Kills Eminent NMSU Alumnus Dr. Joseph W. Rigney

By Walter Hines

**I**t was a hot late summer day in San Diego, September 25, 1978, and Pacific Southwest Airlines (PSA) flight 182 from Sacramento and Los Angeles was inbound five miles northeast of Lindbergh Field. The Boeing 727 with 135 passengers and crew had just turned westward on its final approach. Among the passengers was New Mexico State University (NMSU) alumnus Dr. Joseph W. ("Joe") Rigney ('39). Suddenly, there was a loud bang and a violent tremor. The right wing of the 727 had been hit by an ascending Cessna 172. The pilots of the little plane had been practicing take-offs and landings at Lindbergh Field. In addition to veering into the wrong airspace, they flew too low to be readily tracked on radar. The PSA pilots struggled in vain for control, but the 727, engulfed in flames, nosed down and accelerated earthward. It crashed at 300 mph into the densely populated North Park area of San Diego. Joe Rigney and all on board were killed, along with seven on the ground and two in the Cessna. At the time, it was the worst airline disaster in US history. To this day it remains the worst ever in California.

In 1978, Dr. Rigney was in the midst of a brilliant career as director of the Behavioral Technology Laboratories at the University of Southern California (USC). His pioneering work in psychology of aviation operation and performance, layout of aircraft and ship control systems and performance-based computer training had been widely recognized by the U.S. Department of the Navy. Rigney had recently received a letter of commendation from President Carter and awards from NATO and the Royal Naval College in England. During the 1960s and 1970s, he crisscrossed the country by air for workshops, meetings, and presentations. Many were in Washington, D. C., at various Navy facilities, with occasional flights to Europe.

It was a heady career for the only son of New Mexico A&M (renamed NMSU in 1960) alumnus Professor J.W. Rigney, Sr. and his wife Elsie Raye Hines Rigney (1). Joe Sr. was a colleague of distinguished NM A&M

agriculturist, Professor Fabian Garcia. Working together as researchers and professors, they co-authored several classic monographs on the cultivation and harvesting of New Mexico field crops for the A&M Agricultural Experiment Station. Joe Sr. had started a farm at Brazito south of Mesilla Park in the mid 1920s. Sleeping on the front porch of the spartan farmhouse, Joe Jr. grew up there with three sisters – Elsie (Carr), Lois (McMillan), and Ruth (Meadows), all NM A&M graduates. A strapping young man of six feet four inches, shy and reserved, Joe was an excellent student, graduating with honors and a BS in Chemistry from NM A&M in 1939. He was also an ROTC student who saw service with US Army intelligence in Puerto Rico and Cuba during WWII.

In Puerto Rico, Rigney's duties were classified. But it is known that he helped to oversee radio and telephone monitoring of Axis agent operations, which were focused on tracking U.S. shipping, fleet and aircraft activity. In San Juan at the Naval telephone exchange, he met his future wife Dorothy, the daughter of prominent businessman John Richard Nuber, who was heavily involved in buying, selling and trading rice in Louisiana and the Caribbean.

In 1944, while in the Caribbean, Rigney contracted tuberculosis and spent months in a New Orleans sanatorium supported by the US military. Dorothy and newly born daughter Josette were forced to live away from Rigney for a time. Other relatives visited him at the sanatorium and worried about his slow recovery. They were appalled with the conditions and the poor health of many of the patients. They were adamant that something be done immediately and made arrangements for Joe to be transported to dry, sunny southern New Mexico.

There he came under the care of his dad's brother, who was a doctor. With rest over the following months in the desert air, Rigney began to recover. He pondered his future, read about new careers for returning veterans, became interested in applied psychology and decided to pursue more education. He enrolled at University of New Mexico (UNM) and received an Masters of Science

in psychology in 1949. Learning about the excellent program in cognitive psychology at USC in Los Angeles, he applied and was accepted. There, he earned a Ph.D. in 1953. Besides Josette and wife Dorothy, his family now included sons John and George (2). When Rigney was offered a professorship at USC, he bought a permanent home in Downey, just south of Los Angeles.

Over the next several decades, Rigney became increasingly involved in a program at USC supported by the Navy and focused on training personnel in the quickly evolving field of computer-based control and guidance systems for ships and aircraft. His intelligence and leadership were readily apparent. In addition to teaching, Rigney became director of the Behavioral Technology Laboratory, funded largely by Navy grants.

Although consumed by his work at USC, Rigney was a pensive man with a flair for poetry, prose and philosophy. And he possessed a great sense of humor. Interviewed by columnist Jack Smith of the Los Angeles Times in 1977, Rigney recounted his youth which included the tough farm work and his dread of the many Sunday visits with his dad to other Rigney relatives in the Mesilla Valley. Joe Sr. was a staunch Southern Baptist and took pride in engaging his brothers and cousins in long-winded, competitive preaching sessions. On one Sunday, a 4-year old Rigney, irritable at having to listen to the flowery oratory and prevented from playing outside, retreated underneath the table where the men were holding court. As the preaching droned on and on, he became so frustrated that he lightly bit an uncle on the ankle. He was made to apologize and later got a thorough spanking from Joe Sr. upon his return to the farm in Brazito.

During his cross-country travels for USC and the Navy, Rigney returned periodically to the farm where the weather, big skies and views of the Organ Mountains were a tonic for an overworked man. In a letter to sister Ruth in 1966, he wrote about a visit during which he got a rental car stuck in the sand off a Rio Grande levee while on a nostalgic sightseeing outing. Seems he was trying to photograph two mating goats with Picacho Peak in the background. In the same letter, he joked about a very rough aircraft landing in Tucson during one of his many cross-country plane trips. He remarked, ironically and prophetically, that it was frightening but better than being dismembered in a midair collision.

In a letter to Joe Sr. in 1977, a 59-year-old Joe Jr.

reminisced about his childhood on the farm.

*"It does not seem so long ago that I was in the fields early in the morning and heard the meadowlarks ...saw the blackbirds circling the corrals...watched them in the cattails with their shiny black coats and the red chevrons on their wings. It seems too that it was only yesterday when I walked the hills toward the mountains (Organs) where the ocotillo stalks blazed red at their tips ...and I knew the hidden places where rare cactus bloomed briefly. That was a solitary world I shared with the shy creatures that lived under the mesquite, the long-eared jackrabbit, the cottontail and the coyote. I remember well the magnificent coyote that leaped up from his bed under a mesquite, almost at my feet, and raced away, only to stop and turn to look back a hundred yards distant...and then ran on until he was too small to see, over a mile away in an arroyo. I have not entered that world since, but it lives on."*

*"I have been crossing the country a lot in an airplane that passes over the Rio Grande between Taos and Albuquerque. The last time, we crossed the Jemez Mountains I could see the purplish-red rocks near Jemez Pueblo, the peaks of the Jemez and the town of Los Alamos...and the canyons where the Anasazi built their stone and mud houses, then the Rio Grande and Sangre de Cristos beyond. I thought briefly of the different kinds of men who lived in that rugged panorama during the past 20,000 years. I cannot say that the (present-day) men of Los Alamos are any farther advanced than the men of Frijoles Canyon who lived at the bottom of the cliffs. "*

In October 1977, Rigney returned to NMSU to accept the Distinguished Alumnus Award for the College of Arts and Sciences. He received a congratulatory note from Governor Apodaca and replied with a letter of thanks. He wrote:

*"Since receiving the award, I have mused a great deal about the time I spent at the college, and about New Mexico. Although I have lived in California many years, my deepest roots remain in New Mexico. My memory retains countless impressions – of the desert air after a storm, of towering thunderheads over the mountains, of the mesas sweeping away to the horizon, of majestic skies. I also have thought about how great was the concept of land grant colleges. So many of us were given the opportunity for an education that we would not (otherwise) have had. NMSU is a very special social resource. I hope it will continue to flourish in the coming years."*

Although the PSA 182 disaster less than a year after his award brought a tragic ending to his life, Dr. Joe Rigney would be happy and proud to know that NMSU has continued to flourish and that the majestic skies, panoramas, farms, and desert creatures of his home state live on.

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ENDNOTES

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- 1 Joseph W. Rigney Sr. and Elsie Raye Hines were married in 1913 in Las Cruces. The sun dial just west of present-day Hadley Hall on the NMSU campus is dedicated in her honor.
  - 2 Joe Jrs.' wife Dorothy passed away in San Diego in 1996. Sons John and George and daughter Josette are well as of this writing and living in southern California.
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About the Author: Walter Hines holds a BS and MS in Civil Engineering from NMSU. He has written and edited a number of articles and authored two books on NMSU history, *Aggies of the Pacific War* and *Hugh Meglone Milton: A Life Beyond Duty*, the latter with University Archivist Martha Andrews. Dr. Rigney was Hines' first cousin and he knows Rigney's sons John and George and daughter Josette.



Joe Rigney with mother Elsie Raye Rigney, c. 1962



Joe Jr. with sister Elsie, c. 1921



Rigney sisters, (l to r) Ruth, Elsie, Lois, c. 1948



Joe Rigney, Sr., c. 1965

# A New View of the Baylor/Kelly Killing

By Dr. Walter Earl Pittman

One of the most compelling incidents in the early history of southern New Mexico is the killing of Robert P. Kelly, owner and editor of *The Mesilla Times* by Col. John Baylor, C.S.A. The attack occurred on the streets of Mesilla on the afternoon of December 12, 1861. Baylor was the Confederate commander of six small companies (265 men) of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Texas Mounted Volunteers (2<sup>nd</sup> TMV) sent west by the Texas Confederate government to safeguard the badly needed Union supplies seized at Fort Bliss when soldiers, often referred to as Federals, abandoned that post in 1861. Already well known as an Indian agent and Indian fighter (and hater) the big, balding, Texas colonel, son of an Army doctor, had an aggressive spirit. Recognizing that his small Confederate force, armed primarily with shotguns and pistols brought from home, was badly overmatched by the nearly 700 well-equipped and trained U.S. Regulars -- or Union soldiers -- at Fort Fillmore, he simply went on the offensive. Already some local Confederates had successfully raided the Fort Fillmore horse herd twice, severely limiting the mobility of the Fort Fillmore command. Led by Bethel Coopwood's San Elizario Scouts some 100 of these local rebels would join Baylor and be organized into four small companies.

On the night of July 24, 1861, Baylor stealthily moved his battalion up the Rio Grande for a surprise night attack on Fort Fillmore. He expected to be aided by turncoats in Fort Fillmore but instead was betrayed by another double turncoat. Undaunted, Baylor simply continued up the west bank of the Rio Grande and seized Mesilla unopposed. Stunned, Union Maj. Isaac Lynde marched 380 men, including cavalry and artillery, out of Fort Fillmore on July 25 to Mesilla. Deploying his forces in an open field, Lynde sent in an unheeded demand for the Confederates' surrender then fired a few rounds from his artillery pieces. Baylor's men fired back with their short-range weapons from rooftops and adobe walls, killing three and wounding six. Lynde's Federals hastened back across the Rio Grande to their fort. The next night, Lynde hurriedly abandoned the post.<sup>1</sup>

The Union garrison retreated northeast toward Fort

Stanton, which led them away from the Rio Grande and across the desert toward the Organ Mountains. This decision, fatal as it turned out, was made because the Union officers believed incorrectly the Confederates had already interdicted the direct route north to Fort Craig along the Rio Grande with strong forces. The escape path of the Fort Fillmore garrison led them across desert uplands on a day that grew steadily hotter, during New Mexico's dry season. The column brought little water, and no effort had been made to check the condition of springs along the route. The twenty-mile march to San Augustin should have been within the capability of the Federal troops, but many, perhaps most, of the regulars had filled their canteens with commissary whiskey at Fort Fillmore rather than destroy it as ordered. The men grew more and more thirsty as the day grew hotter, and they turned to their canteens for relief with disastrous results. The road, which was rough and relatively steep in places, was soon lined with hundreds of Union soldiers who had collapsed, unable to go further.

When daylight came and Bethel Coopwood's locally recruited San Elizario scouts reported to Baylor that the fort had been abandoned, he set off in pursuit. Leaving nearly half his force to secure Fort Fillmore, the colonel headed northeast with 162 men -- selected because they had the best horses -- to head the Federals off at San Augustin Pass. Baylor's men soon began to overtake the Yankee column. Hundreds of soldiers lined the roads, unable to proceed and begging for water. Some were unconscious. Twenty-four were captured while asleep at a spring in the mountains, where they had gone seeking water. At first, Baylor's men disarmed the Union soldiers and pressed on, but there were so many that they soon gave even that up. Led by Coopwood's company in the van, the Rebel horsemen captured the wagon train, the artillery and 108 civilians and soldiers' dependents, before they reached the pass. Union cavalry, assigned as a rearguard and deployed to fight, turned tail when the Confederates charged. Lynde and a cavalry escort, in advance of the beleaguered column, reached the San Augustin Springs to find it nearly dry. He turned back

to rejoin the main body only to meet Coopwood's men, with Baylor close behind. After a futile attempt to form a line of battle, Lynde simply surrendered an estimated 500 (by Union count) to 700 (by Baylor's count) Army Regulars to fewer than 200 "long-eared, ragged Texans." It was the U.S. Army's most embarrassing moment.

After the disaster at San Augustin, Union forces in New Mexico remained strangely passive. Regardless, Union Col. Edward Canby's – who administered the forces grew to nearly 5,000 by December 1861, over a magnitude larger than the Rebels. Very conscious of their inferiority, the Confederates expected Canby to move aggressively against them before expected reinforcements could arrive. Baylor made plans for such a contingency, which did not include standing and fighting it out, but rather was based on a "skedaddle" below El Paso or across the border into Mexico. The fears became real when Baylor's secret agents reported in late November that Canby was ready to move south with a force six times (2,000 men) the Rebel strength. Hurriedly, the military and civilian residents of Mesilla scattered south to Franklin (El Paso) or Mexico, carrying what they could of their possessions and supplies and burying or destroying the remainder, including badly needed forage and food. The press and font of the newspaper, *The Mesilla Times*, was buried out in the desert.

But nothing happened. The Union soldiers remained in their tents and barracks and the embarrassed southerners eventually trickled back to Mesilla. Baylor was deeply embarrassed by the "Mesilla Panic." One of the many who blamed Baylor for the comedy was the editor of *The Mesilla Times*, Robert Kelly, who had published several of Baylor's alarming reports along with some of his own, feeding the local hysteria that led to the evacuation.

*The Mesilla Times* had come to Mesilla through the efforts of two businessmen, Kelly, a professional surveyor from Kentucky, and D.W. Hughes, a newspaperman from Missouri. The men were also involved in mining, milling and real estate. Apparently there was difficulty in securing a press and it was June 9, 1860 before the first edition of the newspaper appeared under the title, *The Mesilla Miner*. But lacking paper supplies it wasn't until October 18, 1860 that the paper began to appear regularly under the name, *The Mesilla Times*.

Eventually Kelly and Hughes had found their press and two new partners in San Antonio. Bredett C. Murray

had been born in Allegan, Michigan in 1837. He began his journalistic career as a printer's devil, or apprentice, at 13. Always restless, Murray worked his way up the scale of newspaper careers, even as a Pony Express rider in Michigan. By 1857, he was working as a journalist in New Orleans. His wanderlust brought him to San Antonio, then a rough frontier town. By 1859 he was working for Lewis S. Owings, in both his mercantile and printing business. The men became close friends as well as business associates. Owings was a doctor as well as a businessman who followed the siren call of gold discoveries to New Mexico in 1860. He took with him his wife and her younger sister, Amanda, Murray and a printing press to Mesilla. Murray and Amanda eventually would marry in Texas in 1866.

The exact nature of the partnership between Murray, Owings, Hughes and Kelly is unclear. Murray became the editor and part owner. Frank Higgins was the printer. Under Murray, the paper prospered, having a circulation of 750 and reaching towns along the Rio Grande below El Paso to Tubac and Tucson in modern Arizona. It became a regular Saturday paper in February 1861. On April 27 of that year, Frank Higgins became the editor of the *Times* for unknown reasons. Murray continued to work, as he had, for the paper. His change of status came as news of the outbreak of the Civil War was reaching Mesilla. Earlier, Murray had served as secretary to Owings in 1860, when local interests had created a shadow state government and Owings had been elected "Governor." The region was comprised of the southern half of Arizona and New Mexico, then known as Arizona. Several attempts already had been made to create a state constitution with the hope that Congress would recognize the territory as a state, thereby freeing it of Santa Fe control. Those attempts failed, as did this one. It is probable that Murray was involved with Lewis Owings in an effort to achieve recognition by the new Confederate Congress. Eventually (1862) Arizona did become a Confederate territory.<sup>2</sup>

Kelly suddenly assumed the editorship of the *Times* in the early fall of 1861. Immediately, he began a series of attacks on Col. Baylor, which grew increasingly vitriolic with each edition. Kelly's motives have always been unclear. The traditional view was summarized by regional historian and writer Martin Hardwick Hall in 1963. "No doubt Kelly assumed his new duties strictly from patriotic motivation." Kelly was an extreme southern secessionist

who bitterly criticized Baylor's military actions in print although Kelly had no military training or experience. This culminated in the edition of December 12 in which Kelly viciously ridiculed Baylor for the fiasco of the earlier "Mesilla Panic" evacuation. That proved to be the final straw for the angry and fuming John Baylor.

On that same afternoon Baylor confronted Kelly as he walked by the colonel's headquarters. He then attacked and killed the editor. Baylor claimed it was self-defense. Many, maybe most, believed it was murder. Four soldiers who were eyewitnesses testified before the (Confederate) grand jury but left the question of Baylor's responsibility unclear. They were members of Company "A" of the colonel's command who were at the headquarters when the incident occurred. Their sworn testimony tells the story with some minor inconsistencies:

J.W. Crooms.—"I saw Mr. K. coming up the street, and Col. Baylor came in at the door just above him. When Mr. Kelley was within about ten feet of the door Col. Baylor stepped to the door and spoke to Mr. K. I understood him to say, "Hold on, my lad, I want to speak to you." Mr. Kelley continued to advance up the street; Col. Baylor stepped inside the door, picked up a musket and struck Mr. Kelley on the head; Mr. Kelley then struck at Col. Baylor with a knife; Mr. K. was in a falling attitude at the time; I saw the knife; Col. Baylor then threw down the gun and jumped upon Mr. Kelley, saying at the time, "You can't come that;" Col. B. caught the hand in which Mr. Kelley held the knife, and told him "to let go the knife."—Mr. Kelley seemed to be struggling to use the knife; Col. Baylor drew a pistol with his left hand, and then ordered Mr. Kelley to give up the knife; Mr. Kelley refused to do so. Col. Baylor then pointed his pistol at Mr. Kelley's head and fired."

H. S. Maynatt.—"I was sitting outside the door; Col. Baylor walked in and spoke to a young man who was sick; I saw him turn and pick up a musket and raised it as if to strike; I followed the direction of the musket, and saw Mr. Kelley as

the musket descended upon his head; as he received the lick I saw him make a strike with a knife at Col. Baylor. Mr. Kelley was in a falling position. Col. Baylor caught hold of him as he was falling, and fell on top of Mr. Kelley with one knee on his body; Col. Baylor then caught the hand that held the knife; Mr. Kelley was endeavoring to cut Col. Baylor while he was trying to secure the knife. Col. Baylor then told him to lay down the knife; nothing was said in reply. Col. Baylor then drew a pistol with his left hand, at which time someone said, "Don't shoot him." Col. B. then told Mr. Kelley a second time to put down the knife; Mr. K. did not make any reply, and did not put down the knife; about that time the pistol was fired by Col. Baylor."

Rbt. McClare.—"I was setting in the door when Col. Baylor came in; when I next saw him he reappeared at the door, with a musket in his hand; Mr. Kelley was nearly opposite the door, walking along; Col. Baylor called to him saying, "Hold on, my lad," or something to that effect. Mr. Kelley then stopped, faced Col. Baylor, who then struck him on the head with the musket, which stunned him. Mr. Kelley then threw out his hands as if to catch in falling. Col. Baylor dropped the musket, caught Mr. Kelley and threw him to the ground. He held him to the ground. Mr. Kelley appeared to be struggling to use something in his hand. Col. Baylor, remarked, "You can't come that on me, I am too much for a man of your sort," or something to that effect. He then remarked, "You try to stab people do you?" and also told Mr. Kelley to put down the knife. Col. Baylor then reached and drew a six-shooter with his left hand, cocked it on his thigh and then pointed the pistol at Mr. Kelley's head and fired."

W. D. McGill.—"I was lying in the room, and heard some words on the

outside of the door as if a difficulty was going on. I saw a man lying on the ground and Col. Baylor on top of him. The man that was under was holding a knife in his left hand and Col. Baylor had hold of the left arm; the man was struggling to use the knife. Col. Baylor then remarked, "You try to cut people with knives, do you?" or something to that effect; he also said, "I am too much for your sort," and told him to let go the knife or to drop it, which the man did not do. The Colonel had drawn his pistol during the time; he now cocked it on his thigh, and shot the man in the cheek. The Colonel then arose and said, "Give him a chance for his life." This occurred in the Town of Mesilla, Ter'y of Arizona, on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> day of December 1861.<sup>3</sup>

The grand jury, likely under Baylor's influence, failed to indictment him.

While the degree of Baylor's guilt in Kelley's death is hazy, the question as to why Kelly persistently provoked Baylor is even more so. Hall, best-known student of this piece of history, attributes it somewhat hesitantly to the men's differences over wartime strategy in Arizona. But this has never seemed wholly satisfactory, lacking the personal rancor Kelley's attacks revealed.

An occasional editor of *The Mesilla Times*, Bredett C. Murray, offers another point of view. His story of the Mesilla shooting is contained in a handwritten, unpublished account, donated by his grandson, Bredett Thomas, and preserved at the Arizona Historical Society:

The writer was a high private in the Confederate service, member of Col. Madison's regiment, General Lane's brigade, General Butler's division. His company was mustered in San Antonio in the fall of 1872 [1862]. H.H. Hall was captain of the company and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in the last year of the war. In 1873, he was living in Paris [Texas] and was shot – murdered-[sic] in cold blood in that town by a desperate character who made his escape and was never apprehended. Most

members of the company, including the writer were from the southern portion of New Mexico, then known as Arizona, the division running east and west instead of North and South as at present. Arizona had "seceded" from New Mexico prior to the Civil War and L.S. Owings first mayor of Tucson was its first governor chosen by delegates who met in Tucson in 1872 [1860] to organize a provisional government. A delegate was chosen to represent the Territory at Washington, but on the breaking out of the war, this new territory joined her destinies of the South and the delegate, Ned McGowan, a rather notorious character during the frontier in San Francisco, proceeded to Richmond and the Territory was duly taken in as part of the Confederacy, the only "Territory," by the way within the jurisdiction of the Confederate government.<sup>4</sup> In the spring of 1872 [1862] General John R. Baylor who had a body of troops at El Paso, moved up the Rio Grande passed Fort Fillmore and took possession of La Mesilla where he and his men met with an [ ? ] frantic reception from the American population. That night the Federal troops stationed at Fort Fillmore set fire to the fort and attempted to escape through the Organ Mountains twenty miles distant. Owing to the season's heat and lack of water, they never reached the mountain pass but one after another fell by the way from sheer exhaustion. They were overtaken by the Confederate troops who were better equipped and the whole Army surrendered. General Baylor made his hind [sic] quarters in La Mesilla. The writer was publishing a weekly paper, the Times in Mesilla, Mr. R.A. Kelly one of the owners of a [flouring] mill and a merchant, also one of the stockholders in the Times, had trouble with Gen. Baylor over the awarding [sic] contracts for [flour for] the Army. Claiming he

was not treated fairly, the contract going to John Buell, a merchant in the town, although he, Kelly, was the lowest bidder. Kelly assumed editorial control of the paper [and at] once opened his batteries on the general. Kelly was a fair pistol and told this writer his object of his vicious attacks was to force Gen. Baylor to send him a challenge. The writer told Kelly he didn't believe he would do that but was more likely to be shot down unawares, as Gen. Baylor had nothing to fear as he had his troops behind him. The result confirmed this [appreciation] the day as Mr. Kelly passed Gen. Baylor's headquarters, the latter slipped out of the door of the adobe house, knocked Kelly down, saying "Take that you [hound] and Kelly drew a small shank stiletto and as he did so Baylor drew his pistol and deliberately fired at the prostrate man. The ball entered his cheek crushing the roof of his mouth. Kelly lived several days, but the hemorrhages could not be stopped by the physician and he gradually bled to death. Sometime after this Gen. [Baylor] issued an order to congregate the Indians at a certain point – pretending to make a treaty – with them, and give them poisoned whiskey. This order was never carried out but Kelly's friends found it out and reported the matter to President Jefferson Davis. Granville Owings [a prominent founder and Governor of Arizona], a particular friend of Mr. Kelley was especially bitter against Gen. Baylor.

When the Confederate forces under Gen. Sibley evacuated New Mexico after a brilliant campaign up the Rio Grande taking Santa Fe, he [Sibley] accompanied them to San Antonio, learning Gen. Baylor was in the city and had boasted he would fight him on sight, sent word to Baylor he would be on the main

plaza between certain hours of the next day ready to meet him. The General [Baylor] left for Austin by the next stage. President Davis was a man who detested dishonorable warfare in any form and who became convinced of this report of Gen. Baylor's attempt to poison the Indians deprived him of his command in the Army. He was subsequently given the command by the [State] in the home guards which he held until the close of the war.<sup>5</sup>

Kelly then, according to Murray, deliberately attacked Baylor, hoping he would challenge him to a duel. Under the customs of "code duello" the challenged party had the choice of weapons. Kelly, an expert pistol shot, planned his revenge that way. Murray warned him that Baylor was raised on the frontier and would be unlikely to observe the customary etiquette of the duel. He was right.

There is yet another possible factor in Kelly's motivation. He had recently married a remarkably beautiful woman who was "formed like a Venus." She had a shady past, and it was rumored that she had not been legally married to a former "husband" she lived with. In 1861, Kelley was seeking a divorce from her for unknown reasons. This was a rare and extreme event in that time in history. Kelley believed her to have been unfaithful to him, according to Frank Higgins, the *Times* printer who later courted the widow himself. While there is no known connection between Baylor and her, the coincidence in time is remarkable. The widow was soon remarried to an unsuspecting Yankee officer.

The total truth of the cause and course of the Baylor/Kelly fight will probably never be known. Why Kelly, an expert pistolero, had no gun that December 12 is unknown as is the degree to which Baylor shaped the evidence of the soldier witnesses and influenced the grand jury. Mrs. Kelly's role, if any, is tantalizing but obscure. Would the course of the Civil War have been different if Baylor's reputation had not been so besmirched that he never rose to high command despite his obvious aptitude? The incident remains as proof that personal passions are usually the most important things, even in the midst of war.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Jerry Thompson, *Colonel John Robert Baylor: Texas Indian Fighter and Confederate Soldier* (Hillsboro, TX: Hill Junior College Press, 1971), 1-25. "Satanic-looking John R. Baylor fought Yankees, Indians and One Unfortunate Newspaper Editor," *America's Civil War*, 3(January 1991), 10. Martin Hardwick Hall, "The Skirmish at Mesilla," *Arizona and the West*, (Winter 1958), 346.
- 2 Hall, "*The Mesilla Times*", 340, 342-48.
- 3 "Evidence Taken by Grand Jury, Territory vs. J. R. Baylor," n.d., Dona Ana Criminal Court Records, Territorial Archives of New Mexico, State Record Center and Archives, Santa Fe.
- 4 Murray was wrong. The Indian Territory (Oklahoma) was also recognized as a Confederate Territory.
- 5 Untitled, hand-written manuscript, n.d., Bredett C. Murray Papers, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.

# DOÑA ANA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## In Memoriam



**Calvin “Cal” Lee Charles Traylor**, 90, of Las Cruces died on June 11, 2015. Cal had a long association with the Doña Ana County Historical Society, dating back to its very beginning. He served as its fourth president from 1969 to 1971. His dedication to the cause was demonstrated when he volunteered for a second term as president from 1991 to 1993.

Cal was born Oct. 5, 1924, in Melrose, N.M., to Elmer and Myrtle Traylor and was raised in Elida, N.M. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II.

In 1957, Cal married the love of his life, Frances Pill, and in 1963 they relocated to Las Cruces. Cal and Frances

were the owners of an employment and business college with offices in Las Cruces and Alamogordo, as well as a gift and craft wholesale company.

In addition to his service with the Historical Society, Cal was a member of the Rotary Club and Archeology Society of Southern New Mexico.

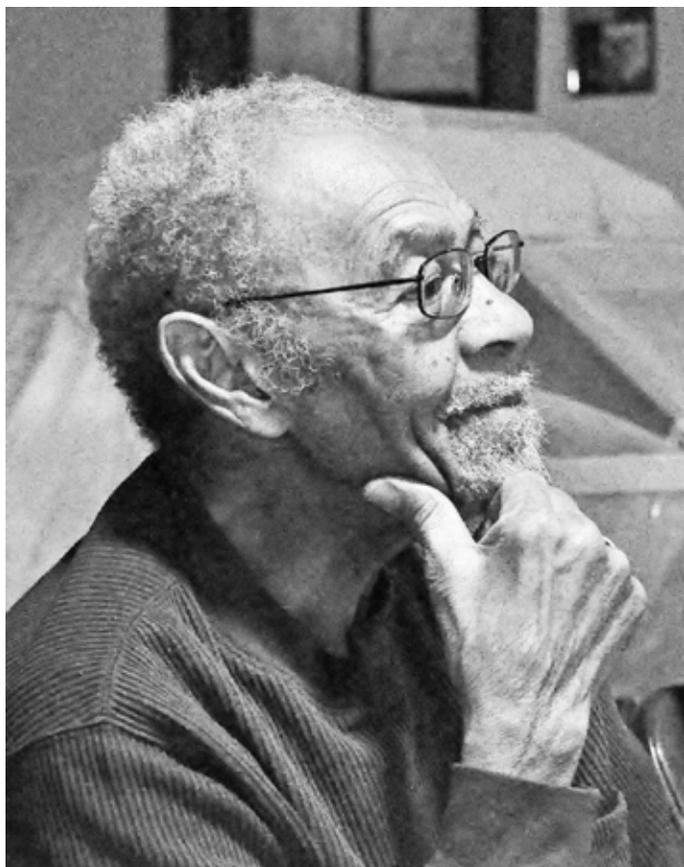
When people hear the name Cal Traylor today, many immediately think “Pat Garrett.” Cal’s patient and long-term research into the life of this famous Wild West lawman, made him easily recognized as one of the nation’s experts on Garrett.

Cal worked with Jarvis Garrett, one of Garrett’s sons, in identifying and commemorating the spot where the legendary sheriff was killed in the Alameda Arroyo, east of Las Cruces. Through Cal’s generous efforts and tours to the site, many visitors experienced the story told by a true expert and could walk away knowing more about the kind of man Garrett was.

In 2012, Cal acquired the horse-drawn hearse that was used to transport Garrett’s body to the cemetery after he was killed in 1908. Cal knew about the hearse for years, but the owner wouldn’t let it go. Cal’s patience paid off. He was able to get the vehicle and then donate it to the Doña Ana County Sheriff’s Department Historical Museum of Lawmen.

His interest in the history of the Mesilla Valley was broad and detailed. In fact, many viewed Cal as a walking reference volume that would freely open up if asked the right question.

Cal was working on a Pat Garrett book when he died.



**Clarence Henry Fielder**

(1928-2015)

Photo courtesy of Darla Matthews

**Farther Along**

(Lyrics by Rev. W. A. Fletcher, 1911)

Farther along we'll know all about it  
Farther along we'll understand why  
Cheer up my brothers, live in the sunshine  
We'll understand this, all by and by

Clarence H. Fielder was a man of faith who believed in the philosophy of the gospel song “Farther Along.” Respected historian, historic preservation advocate, much loved teacher, and New Mexico State University History Professor Emeritus, Mr. Fielder passed away on April 3, 2015. Rick Hendricks, New Mexico State Historian, said, “As a fellow historian, I valued his unrivaled knowledge of the history of the Black experience in New Mexico and his eagerness to share what he knew with all who were willing to listen.”

Fielder was born in Las Cruces, the son of Henry and Gertrude Hibler Fielder. His maternal grandparents, Daniel and Ollie Berry Hibler, were early black pioneers who settled in Las Cruces and were the found-

ers of Phillips Chapel Colored Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church in 1911. The church, located in the Mesquite Townsite Historic District, is the oldest extant African-American church in New Mexico. Fielder attended Phillips Chapel and was a lifelong trustee.

Fielder served during the Korean War. He was awarded the Purple Heart and Silver Star as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army 1st Cavalry Division, F. Company, after refusing to leave his fellow soldiers, despite receiving serious wounds. Returning from the war, Clarence earned a Bachelor’s degree from New Mexico A & M College (now New Mexico State University). He also earned an M.A. in Education from NMSU.

Fielder devoted his life to education, teaching in the Las Cruces public schools for thirty-two years and as a professor of black history at NMSU from 1970 to 2010. He was instrumental in the formation of the Black Studies program. He created the curriculum for African-American history, which he taught until he retired. He had generations of students, who respected and admired him. He received many awards for his contributions to education. These awards include Racial Harmony Award from the Las Cruces School Board; Office of African-American Affairs Recognition for Outstanding Educational Services; Outstanding Historian Award for lifelong work in perpetuating teaching and keeping the historic contribution of African-Americans visible, vital, and valuable, from the New Mexico African-American Museum and Cultural Center; and the NMSU College of Education Aggie Cornerstone Award. The Clarence H. Fielder digital archive has been created at the Rio Grande Archive, NMSU.

Beginning in 2002, with then NMSU Anthropology graduate student, Terry Moody, Fielder embarked on a journey to recognize the Phillips Chapel, now the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, by successfully nominating the church to the State Register of Cultural Properties and the National Register of Historic Properties. The chapel is significant for its association as a social center for the African-American community and as a school for black children (1925 – 1934) during a period when the Las Cruces public schools were segregated. Ms. Moody, M.A., and Fielder, M.A. were co-curators of the exhibit “The African-American Community of Las Cruces” funded by the New Mexico Endowment for the Humanities in 2003. Later, this exhibit became part of “New Mexico’s African American Legacy:

Visible, Vital, and Valuable” which has toured the state. Fielder was invited to lecture on African- American history in many places including the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe.

It became critical by 2009 that Philips Chapel needed major restoration. Fielder had faith, that by working with others, resources could be found to preserve this historic landmark. He worked closely with NMSU and Doña Ana Community College faculty (Dr. Beth O’Leary, Ronald Taylor, and Pat Taylor) who created an Adobe Preservation Class. Fielder inspired those who met him, believing in the lyrics of the song, “Farther Along.” Students and community volunteers from 2009 to 2014 worked to complete the restoration of Phillips Chapel. The entire project was funded by individual monetary donations, materials, and volunteer

labor. Many fund-raising events were held at the chapel. “Mudder’s Day” was celebrated with the Muddy Hands Blues Band, lead by one of the restoration volunteers, John Hyndman. Dr. Bobbie Green, director of NMSU Gospel Choir, performed a series of Christmas concerts at the Chapel.

As a member of the State Cultural Properties Review Committee, Clarence Fielder served as a historian from 2006 to 2013. He dedicated his final years to preservation efforts. In May 2015, he was awarded a posthumous Lifetime Achievement Award from the Historic Preservation Division, New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs. Through his dedication and efforts, he opened up students’ minds to history, helped preserve the heritage of New Mexico, and in particular, kept the Philips Chapel open to all.

## Book Reviews

***Mesilla Comes Alive: A History of Mesilla and its Valley*** by C. W. “Buddy” Ritter with Craig Holden: Published by the Ritter Publications, Las Cruces, New Mexico, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-9908783-0-8. 226 pages, ill., 56 photographs, maps, documents, lithographs, sketches, cartoons, List of historic places by the United States Department of the Interior National Register, Contents, Sources, Acknowledgements, Index. \$12.89 paperback, soft back in color \$29.95, and hard back in Color \$39.95

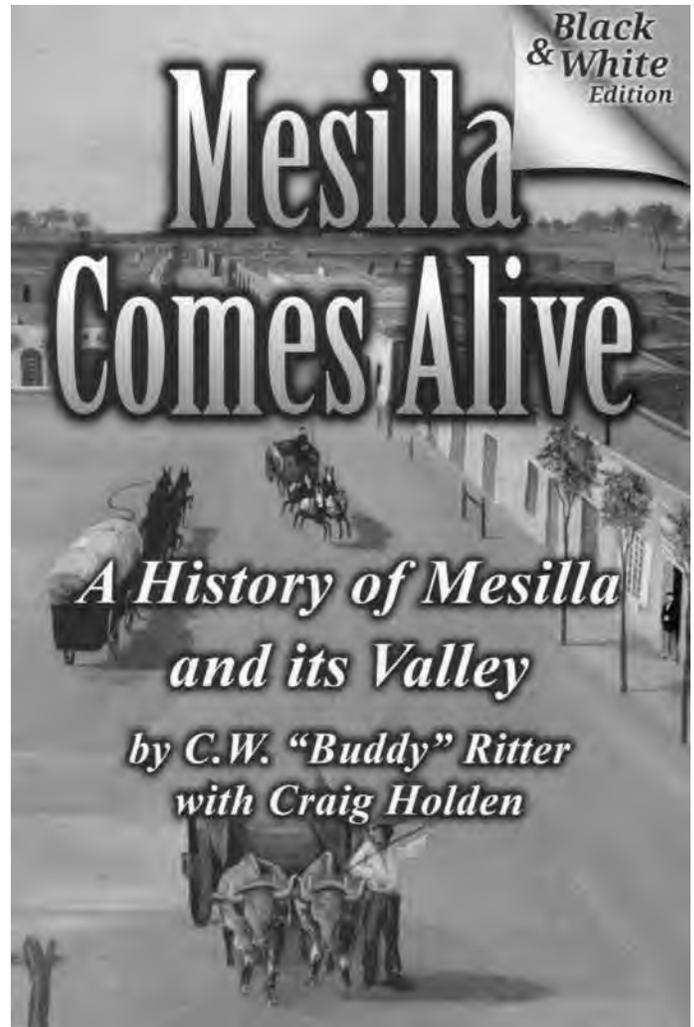
Between the years of 1824 and 1912 -- New Mexico statehood -- the land known today as the Mesilla Valley changed its ownership, politics and shape constantly. At times it was recognized as part of Mexico, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. In his new book, *Mesilla Comes Alive: A History of Mesilla and its Valley*, C. W. Ritter and contributor Craig Holden lay out the changes over those years.

What Ritter and Holden provide is a thorough examination of relevant treaties of the day as well as newly published historic documentation. Their archival research uncovered Col. Albert Fountain’s manuscript on Mesilla in the New Mexico History Archives at the University of New Mexico. It was a “promotion piece on Mesilla” prepared for the New Mexico Department of Immigration in 1885. Also discovered were a number of wonderful photographs and maps in the Archives of the Museum of New Mexico, many unpublished until now.

Ritter takes readers through the intriguing changes that eventually shifted power from Mesilla – once the center of all political activity in the region -- to Las Cruces. Along the way, he covers culture, changing boundaries, floods, slavery, the railroad and the Civil War years in the Mesilla Valley.

What makes this work an important addition to any library is its references and their presentation at the end of each chapter, which makes it useful for a casual reader and researcher alike. Furthermore, the author takes great effort to provide numerous maps showing boundary changes and what was happening with the disputed land at different times.

Ritter, a fifth-generation New Mexican, attended New Mexico State University, Tulane University, where he majored in business and finance, and eventually entered Michigan State University’s graduate program. Later he became the first certified hotel administrator in New Mexico.



Ritter’s grandfather, Winfield Ritter, came west for his respiratory health. He met Margaret, the daughter of Judge Barnes. They were married in Silver City. Ritter’s father, John Barnes Ritter, was their first child.

The author’s great-great grandfather, Dr. Edwin Burt, was the first private practice surgeon in the Mesilla Valley. Ironically, when the author, a Mesilla restaurateur, purchased the 167-year-old building in 1985 that now is his Double Eagle de Mesilla, he was not aware that it used to be his great-great grandfather’s office.

Burt sent his daughter to NYU in 1878. There, she fell in love with Richmond Barnes, a Washington D.C. law student. They were married after graduation, and moved back to Mesilla where he practiced law.

Barnes went on to serve as District Attorney and helped prosecute Oliver Lee in the famous trial for the murder of Albert Jennings Fountain and his young son. He later became a member of the Territorial Legislature, member of the Constitutional Convention, and then a

New Mexico Supreme Court Judge.

Included in *Mesilla Comes Alive* is a letter from Judge Barnes to his two daughters, Margaret and Bess in 1908. The advice he gives them about their area of study is amazing for the time, considering they were women.

The author's New Mexico connection is strengthened further by his wife, Margaret Bonnell Ritter, a fourth generation native whose family helped pioneer Otero County. She was born in Alamogordo, and their two sons still live in southern New Mexico. Their daughter lives in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Ritter holds numerous awards. Some that stand out are: Citizen of the Year of Las Cruces in both the years 1984 and 2010; New Mexico Tourism Hall of Fame in 2003; and he has served the past six governors on boards and commissions. A reflection of his interest in history, art and culture is found in all the commissions and boards

upon which he serves or has served. Furthermore, he spent eight years and two terms as President of the Board of Regents of the Museum of New Mexico.

All told, it would be hard to find someone with a more rich New Mexico family background to tell the story of the Mesilla Valley.

Considering all the state and local historical events that have contributed to the history of our area, Ritter's book is a meaningful addition to the documentation and understanding of that history.

By Lutisha Piland, MLIS  
Librarian, Retired  
Library of Congress  
American Embassy, Cairo, Egypt

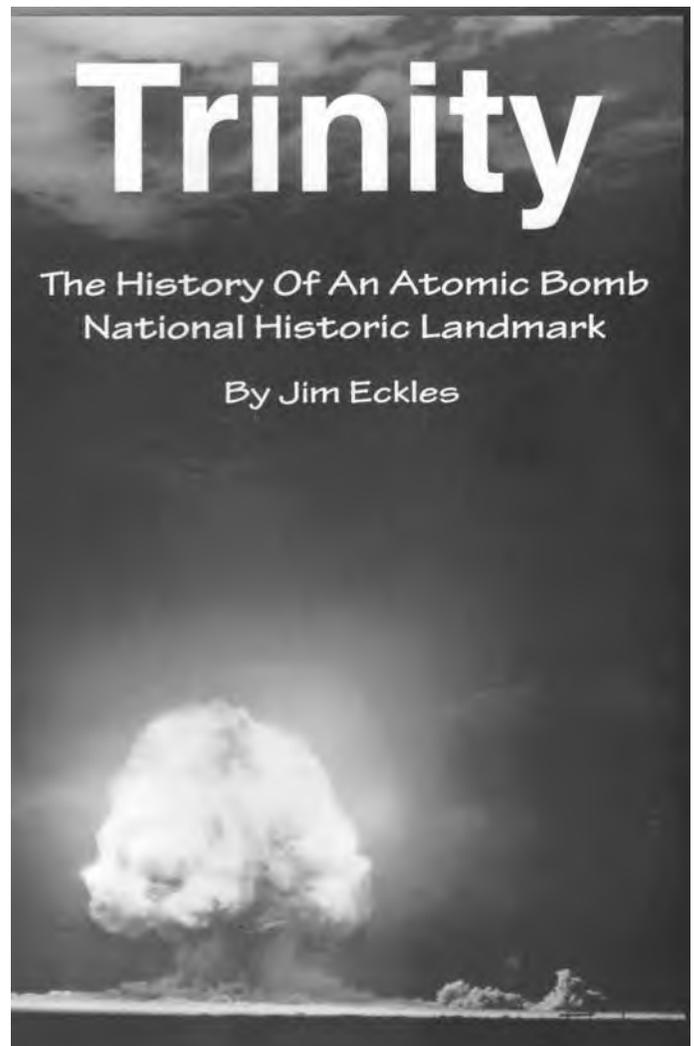
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***Trinity, The History Of An Atomic Bomb National Historic Landmark*** by Jim Eckles: Published by Fiddlebike Partnership, Las Cruces, New Mexico, 2015. ISBN-13:978-1507798553. 160 pages. Ill., 79 photographs, contents, mileage chart, 2 drawings, Appendix A Albert Einstein's Letter, Appendix B Schmidt Letters, Appendix C Marvin Davis Sr. Letters, Appendix D Carl Rudder Letters, Appendix E George Cremeens Documents, and Sources. \$10.00

Jim Eckles, author of *Trinity, The History of an Atomic Bomb National Historic Landmark*, probably has been to Trinity Site more times than anyone else. It is the place in New Mexico on July 16, 1945 where the world's first atomic bomb was tested and is part of White Sands Missile Range in southern New Mexico.

Eckles' 30-year career as public affairs specialist at the range included coordinating two visits per year to the historic Trinity Site for a public open house. The author also conducted the majority of personal tours for high-ranking military officials, VIP's, and others, such as TV news anchor Walter Cronkite.

This is not a book like many others about the atomic bomb that focuses on Robert Oppenheimer or building the bomb at Los Alamos. Instead, it is about the Trinity Site National Historic Landmark and the people who conducted that fateful test in 1945. Also, there is much detail about what has happened at the site since the end



of WWII.

The test, as well as the project, was one of the best-kept secrets of the war. The development of the bomb took place at three very diverse locations working on different facets. Only a handful of top officials knew what was going on at these labs and how they were tied together. The bomb test site also had the highest security restrictions.

Eckles details some of the considerations that went into choosing the location for the test, including proximity to Los Alamos, land ownership of the site, communities located downwind and its desolation.

He writes with an appreciation for the people who ran the site, considering them heroes who didn't get deserved recognition. He mentions many who came to visit years after their work there. As public affairs specialist he had opportunities to interview these past workers during their visits, capturing stories and details of what their daily lives were like.

He also had the opportunity to meet other people who had worked on the project or were doing more current research at the site. For instance, for more than a decade scientist Robb Hermes had been investigating the formation of trinitite – the greenish glass created by the heat of the blast that once covered the blast crater. For a long time test, it was believed trinitite was the result of extreme heat melting the sand on the ground. But new research revealed in Eckles' book explains the greenish glass was formed when sand was blasted up into the nuclear fireball, melted and then fell back to earth as liquid, molten glass. Another point Eckles makes is how the detonation was a scientific test with a great deal of instrumentation used to collect data. It took months to set up the test bed for the explosion.

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***The Lost World of the Old Ones: Discoveries in the Ancient Southwest*** by David Roberts. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2015. ISBN 978-0-393-24162-4. 337 pages, index, bibliography, 44 photos, \$27.95 hardcover, \$14.16 eBook.

This book struck a cord with me. I love roaming the Four Corners area, a hotbed of ancient cultural remnants in the place where New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Colorado meet.

Nothing beats finding pictographs, petroglyphs, cliff dwellings and granaries -- grain or feed repositories -- to

For me, the most touching story concerned the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the test.

In Buddhism, 60 years is a complete cycle, basically the life of a human being. After the devastating explosions, Japanese monks lit a fire from the Hiroshima ruins and kept it burning for 60 years. They then traveled worldwide with the embers and a message of peace. They brought the embers to the Trinity Site on August 9, 2005, -- the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bomb being dropped on Nagasaki -- and extinguished the flame to close the circle.

Eckles takes some pains to educate readers about radiation and fallout. Then he tries to dispel some of the rumors and misinformation. He quotes some of the more outlandish myths he has come across. One is that the white sand at nearby White Sands National Monument was bleached colorless by the bomb test.

At the end of the book, he runs through a list of the various arguments, pro and con, concerning the use of the atomic bombs against Japan. In the appendices, he reproduces some of the letters and other documents sent to his office while he was there over three decades. Some of these have never been available to the public before.

I would suggest anyone interested in history, read this book.

By Lutisha Piland, MLIS  
Librarian, Retired  
Library of Congress  
American Embassy, Cairo, Egypt

The interest in visiting the Trinity has not diminished. On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary there were over 5,000 visitors.

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explore and photograph. It is a rush to stumble upon a 900-year-old pristine granary to find a corncob or two that has been sitting there all that time.

Discovery is quickly followed by questions. What were these people like? How did they grow corn? Why did they build on extreme cliff faces? How many fell to their deaths? Where did they go? How long did it take them to peck out a petroglyph?

So where do you go to find the answers? If you aren't a scientist/archaeologist, the jargon in professional papers can be daunting. Plus, those articles are usually so specific it is like a blind person trying to discover

the shape of an elephant by feeling its tail. On the other extreme are handouts and interpretative signs at monuments and national parks that provide a vague silhouette of the elephant – no real detail.

David Roberts in *Lost World of the Old Ones: Discoveries in the Ancient Southwest* shines a light on some of the questions about the ancient ones and does it in a very readable fashion. Also, he is fairly up-to-date. For instance, concerning the issue of what happened to the Anasazi (or ancestral puebloans as they are now called), Roberts cites Las Cruces archaeologist Karl Laumbach and his work at Cañada Alamosa, which is located much farther south and well beyond the pueblos the Anasazi are known to have established at Mesa Verde.

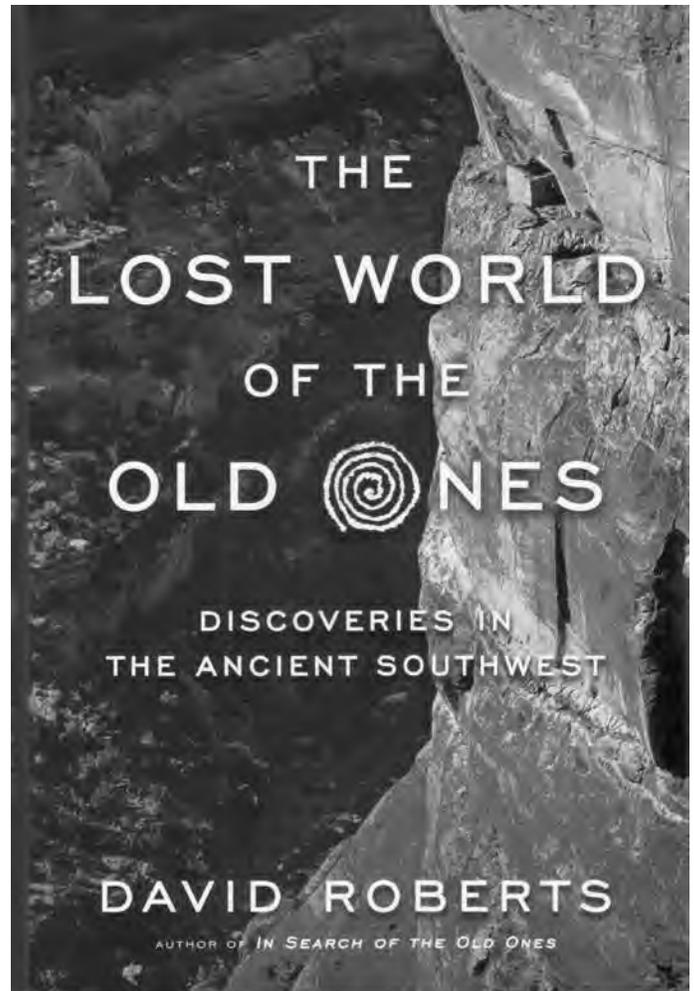
Apparently archaeologists are now engaged in a “migration battle” concerning when and what happened to the ancestral puebloans. Roberts points out that Laumbach has found pottery and building techniques like those used by the Anasazi and it dates to a period well before the supposed great exodus from Mesa Verde et al. Cañada Alamosa is northwest of Truth or Consequences, N.M.

Roberts provides a nice look from above upon the Southwest and what currently is happening in regional research. He is a great storyteller and unfettered by trying to write academically correct jargon that no one but a handful of people speak. He has read much of the current literature, and better yet, has interviewed many of the researchers. At one point in the book, he referees a tete-a-tete conversation between two leading archaeologists as they go toe to toe with their theories.

Tying this all together are his stories about going out into the desert or canyons to search for evidence of Mogollon, Fremont and Anasazi peoples. He began his life of exploration as a mountain climber in Alaska but grew tired of the cold and dark. But the skills he learned there have been useful in the Southwest, as he has been able to reach rocky ledges most of us only view from a distance.

The book opens with him on a magazine assignment for *National Geographic* in Range Creek, Utah. Not only does he follow the archaeological team around as they survey the canyon, he gets Renee Barlow, a member of the Utah Museum of Natural History, into the high alcoves that no one else dares to approach.

Together they explore a granary close to a thousand feet above the canyon floor. The archaeologist provides



information about the Indians who built the structure. Meanwhile, Roberts talks about how difficult it was to get to the ledge. He and his climbing buddy speculate about how the Fremont people may have safely managed it more than 600 years ago.

One story he tells is about the Telluride blanket, which he thinks is the most beautiful artifact he has ever seen from the Four Corners area. He relates how it was discovered in a sealed olla in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, disappeared for decades and then was rediscovered. The blanket is 57 by 59 inches, has red, black and tan stripes and probably was woven about 800 years ago. It is made of cotton and is in such good condition the corner fringes are still intact. It is on display in the Telluride Historical Museum. To wrap the story up, Roberts recounts his own adventure in finding the alcove in which the blanket was found.

This book is not dogmatic. Roberts goes out of his way to present lots of points of view and how they are supported by various research projects. He often offers his own opinion, but it is not the focus of the book.

He also is skillful at untangling the complexity of the issues he writes about and readily admits being despised by some government officials who feel he gives away too much information. They feel he allows the looters loose.

But who are the looters? He points out that most historic sites have been stripped bare by “official” researchers and those artifacts now rest in drawers in basements and will never be seen by the public – maybe not even by other scientists. To top it off, many of these researchers have never written a single word about their work at these sites.

He talks about grappling with that question of just how much information to reveal. On the one hand,

allowing people to find these places allows them to share that feeling of awe at what these ancient people accomplished and wonder at what it was like living there centuries ago. On the other hand, knowledge allows the few looters and just plain fools into areas where the rest of us don’t want them.

He offers no final solutions because there are no simple satisfactory ones but he does hope, that through education, more people will strive to protect this ancient cultural heritage.

By Jim Eckles

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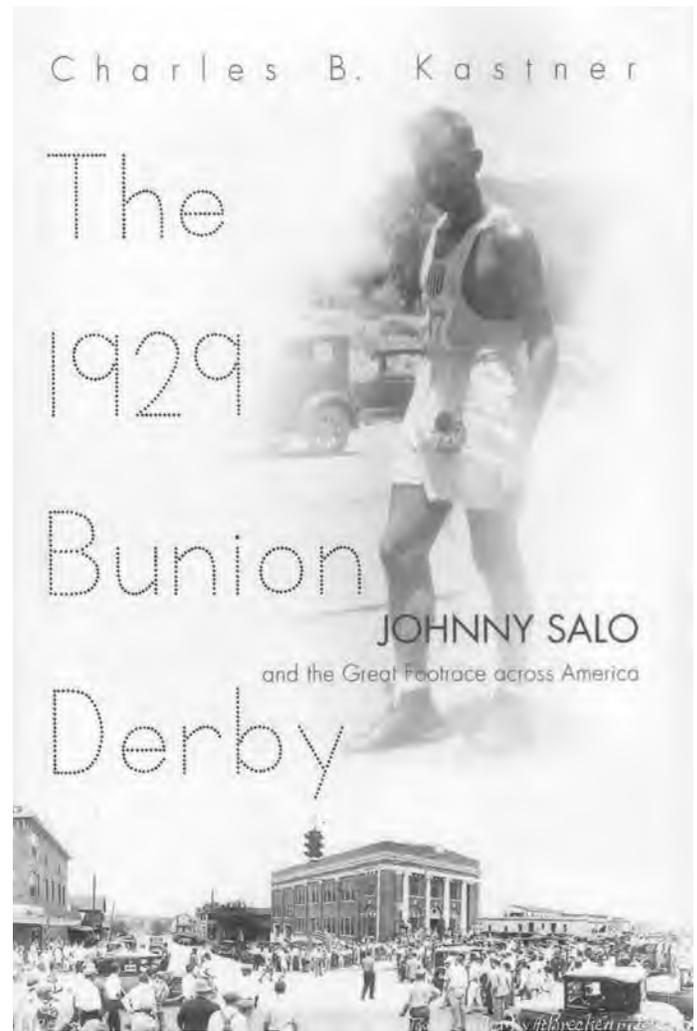
***The 1929 Bunion Derby*** by Charles B. Kastner. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, NY, 2014. ISBN 978-0-8156-1036-6. 306 pages, index, appendices, bibliography, 25 photos, 11 maps. \$24.95 hardcover, \$19.91 eBook.

On May 29, 1929, 20 hardened men ran from El Paso to Las Cruces, N.M., a distance of 44 miles. It was their 59<sup>th</sup> straight day of running. The next day they continued west, running 63 miles to Deming.

It was part of an incredible event now long forgotten. Officially billed as the “Second Annual International-Trans-Continental Foot Race – New York to Los Angeles” it was dubbed the 1929 “Bunion Derby” by the press and fans.

The year before, a group of men raced on foot from Los Angeles to New York for prize money, and this was the 1929 answer – to reverse the route with \$25,000 for the winner. The organizer was Charley Pyle, a fast-talking promoter, who pretty much failed miserably. He was quite a contrast to the tough men he ended up duping.

*The 1929 Bunion Derby* by Charles Kastner is the story of this race and the amazing men who finished it. The race started in New York City with 77 runners who all paid an entry fee to participate. Each day the men would run to a set destination and their times totaled. They’d spend the night trying to recover, and then everyone would start together the next morning. Every day their time would be added to the previous stage finishes. The total would dictate a runner’s standing. In the end, two men were within minutes of each other when they



arrived in Los Angeles. The rest were hours behind with no chance to win first or second place money.

The total distance covered was 3,553 miles, and

they did it in 78 days. That averages to just over 45 miles a day – a little more than a marathon and a half every day for two and a half months.

Some might denigrate their running saying it wasn't very fast. But when put into perspective of the distance run day after day after day on terrible roads during the high temperatures of the Southwest around June 1, it is pretty remarkable. When Johnny Salo, the eventual winner, pulled into Las Cruces on one late May day, he had covered that 44 miles at an astounding per-mile speed of eight minutes and 10 seconds. The day before, he had run from Fabens to downtown El Paso, 30 miles, at a rate of seven minutes and 56 seconds per mile. His distance covered to date when he spent the night in Las Cruces was 2,588 miles, which he covered in 59 days.

Kastner spends a great deal of ink giving readers this kind of detail as he follows the racers day by day in their struggles. Some of it gets a bit repetitive and may turn off some readers. But there is much more to the story, and Kastner gives us the scoop. For instance, the promoter certainly promoted the race but didn't do very well in organizing it. Competitors were pretty much on their own, day and night. They had to supply their own support and find their own rooms each night. Pyle's people got them started each morning, made sure no one cheated and recorded their times at the end of each run. So, in addition to an entry fee, each guy had to have

a traveling pit crew to provide food, water and first aid on the course.

Eddie Gardner was one of the lead runners for half the race. He was black and had to sleep in hotel furnace rooms and buy food from sympathetic locals.

Pyle planned to make money from a traveling follies act he took to each finish-line town. That was his idea for finding the prize money. It was a disaster. In the end, there was only enough money to give the top two places a token payment. Instead of \$25,000, Salo received \$4,000 and Pete Gavuzzi, who finished second and was owed \$10,000, received a paltry \$750.

Pyle gave the men IOUs for the rest of the money, but the stock market crash thundered down on the country just a few months later. There was no chance for the men to get paid.

I enjoyed the book, but I think that might be because I once was a runner. Not a real distance runner but one who ran cross country in high school and some 10K races around southern New Mexico – enough to hurt a little. I think many readers will find the great pile of running information a bit much.

Having said that, if you want to read about how tough people used to be and what a human being can accomplish, get a copy.

By Jim Eckles

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Kuhn, Berndt, *Chronicles of War: Apache and Yavapai Resistance In The Southwestern United States And Northern Mexico, 1821-1937*, Tucson, The Arizona Historical Society, 2014 The book is a large 7 ½ by 10 ½ inches and 436 pages, price \$60.00, E-book 24.95

Berndt Kuhn has made an important contribution to southwestern history by adding to our knowledge of the Apache Wars. Berndt labored for many years by checking articles, books, primary source documents, interviews and by visiting many sites related to his entries. He knows his subject. The size and price may discourage some, but those who understand good research will appreciate it. The book is not only a boon

to Indian Wars, and especially Apache Wars aficionados, but to those interested in genealogy. I feel very strongly that this volume should be available in all colleges and universities with a history department, in the U.S., as well as middle schools and high schools west of the Mississippi. The book does not read like a story of the Apache Wars, but one perusing through it will garner a pretty good idea of the subject. An electronic version is available but the book will more readily pique the interest of those looking through a library's history or research section. Maps and Tables enhance this great work.

By Daniel D. Aranda  
Las Cruces, N.M. - 88005

## Holocaust Museum Review

### El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center

715 N. Oregon  
El Paso, TX 79902  
(915) 351-0048

Parking Lot is at the corner of El Paso St. and W. Yandell Dr.

Monday: Closed

Tuesday - Friday: 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday: 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.

Free Admission (Donations accepted)

**Reviewed by Kimberly L. Miller**

The El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center is a testament to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. It immerses visitors into the Germany of 1933 to 1945 by incorporating informative panels and short videos, artifacts from Jewish families and Nazi soldiers, life-size recreations and oral histories.

The Holocaust Museum is an educational center as well as a place of remembrance. Its mission is to educate the public, particularly young people, about the Nazi Holocaust. Through education, the museum seeks to combat hatred, bigotry and indifference so such horrors will not be repeated. The museum also serves as a memorial to the survivors and to the 11 million Jews and Gentiles who perished during the Holocaust.

The museum's logo is a beautiful rendition of remembrance. The word *holocaust* is derived from Greek words that translate to: "consumed by fire." At first glance, the red lines of the logo, set on a black background, appear to be flames. Upon closer examination, you see a man embracing his wife, who is holding a baby. The flames above them spell *Zachor*, the Hebrew word for "remember."<sup>1</sup>

Visitors enter the exhibits through a wide hallway where numerous panels provide an overview of anti-Semitism from 1913 to 1918. There is also a large collage of period family photographs donated by local residents. Subjects range from young toddlers to the very old, from a child on horseback to a wedding couple to family groups.

This is the beginning of what this museum does so well: presenting the visitor with the reality of what happened through identification with the victims. At first, the museum successfully shows visitors the human aspect of anti-Semitism, enabling them to empathize with

those who suffered. Then it presents the grim reality of the Holocaust.

The museum is organized into a series of galleries accessed by following a curving hallway that guides visitors through the exhibits. Galleries are arranged in chronological order to help them fully grasp the museum's message. Galleries start with "The Roots of Anti-Semitism" and proceed to the "Rise of Hitler's Nazi Party," "Anti-Semitic Campaigns," "Kristallnacht" (Night of Broken Glass), "Deportation to Ghettos and Massacres," "The Final Solution: Concentration Camps and Killing Centers," and "Heroes: Resistance and Rescuers – the Hall of the Righteous." This progression provides a deeper understanding of the incremental steps that led to such a horrific outcome.

The Nazi Holocaust was the result of Adolph Hitler's goal to create the "perfect Aryan race." With Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Jewish people were progressively discriminated against and targeted by the government, military and common citizen. The first of many concentration camps was built in 1936, where prisoners were worked to death or mass murdered.

As the Allies conquered Germany, they liberated those in the concentration camps. Some of these liberators were from the El Paso area, and their stories are included in the museum. A surprising number of Holocaust survivors eventually settled in El Paso. One of these refugees was Henry Kellen (originally Kacelenbogen), a native of Lodz, Poland. In 1984, after contacting Mike Jacobs, the grassroots founder of the Dallas Holocaust Museum and Study Center, Kellen began collecting artifacts and memorabilia, which became the core collection for a Holocaust museum in El Paso.<sup>2</sup> Started as a one-wall display in the El Paso

Jewish Federation building, it continued to grow and, in 1994, moved into its own facilities. That building was destroyed by fire in October 2001, along with eighty percent of the exhibits and artifacts. On January 27, 2008, the current museum location opened.

The subject of this museum is one of violence, torture and heartbreak. The organizers do not minimize the agony in what they are presenting but neither do they sensationalize it. Facts are presented, largely from the Jewish perspective, and visitors are left to consider and learn from what they have seen and heard. In the gallery, "Rise of Hitler's Nazi Party," information about Germany's and the world's condition from 1918 to 1933 is presented, explaining in part why Hitler was able to rise to power and impose his will and goals on the German people. This is the only time the Nazi perspective is addressed, but that makes sense. The museum's goal is to honor the victims and survivors, not to delve into the German population's mindset.

The timelines and informational panels in each gallery are drawn from secondary sources, though no citations are given. Each gallery also has a short (less than five minutes) video, which uses contemporary photographs as a background to the narration. Other primary sources, used effectively, are artifacts from pre-Holocaust Jewish homes and military uniforms. There are recreations of sources, which were not available, such as the various identifying badges concentration camp prisoners were required to wear. Photographs on display, as well as the panels, focus largely on the men. The only artifacts specific to women or children are a small pile of children's shoes and a small open box of shorn hair. This may be because men recorded their experiences more, or perhaps, to the women and children, it was too horrifying to look further at what happened.

The exhibits of the Holocaust Museum do not present new research. Their strength is in conveying the human side of the story and challenging visitors to examine themselves in light of what they see. Asking visitors "to consider what you have seen and heard here today" is done explicitly at the end of the last gallery and before the Memorial Room, but it is unobtrusively done throughout the exhibits. Each gallery video does not play constantly. There is a pause of a few minutes before it replays, giving the viewer some quiet time to think about what they just learned. The quiet transition

between galleries also gives visitors time to absorb and contemplate.

The Holocaust Museum presents a great deal of information. A few changes to the exhibits would make this information more accessible to the visitor. Some of the display cases use mirrors as their back. This allows the visitor to see the opposite side of the artifacts, but it contributes to a cluttered appearance. Also, it would be worthwhile to re-type the descriptive cards in a larger font and to clearly identify the item being referenced. If the text on the large panels was divided into smaller panels, it would encourage more visitors to read them.

Appropriate lighting would be helpful and benefit several areas. For example, a grouped podium display of German helmets under vitrines was rather dark. In another area, enlarged contemporary photographs mounted below the replicated storefront from the "Night of Broken Glass" seemed to be missed by almost all the visitors.

One of the most powerful moments is entering a replica railcar used to transport prisoners to the camps. The organizers have again focused on the human element just prior to this portion of the exhibit, but most visitors merely glanced at it or missed it completely. On the wall at right angles to the railcar there is a large sepia photograph of contemporary children. In front of this is a small statue of a forlorn little girl sitting and holding her doll. Rather than the overall muted lighting, a small spotlight on the girl would highlight this message.

The El Paso Holocaust Museum is the only free-standing Holocaust museum between Dallas and Los Angeles and one of only a few throughout the country.<sup>3</sup> It plays an important role in educating people about the Holocaust and challenging them to ensure it does not happen again. I highly recommend that you take the time to visit this unique and powerful museum.

(Endnotes)

1 Mimi Reisel Gladstein and Sylvia Denner Cohen, *El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center: El Paso – the Wild West Welcomes Holocaust Survivors and Epilogue* (USA, Signature Book Printing, 2012), p. 82.

2 Ibid., p. 15.

3 Ibid., p. xi.