

# SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW



*Pasajero del Camino Real*  
By  
*J. CISTERNOS '89*

**Doña Ana County Historical Society**

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# Doña Ana County Historical Society

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# *Southern New Mexico Historical Review*

Volume XXVIII

Las Cruces, New Mexico

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## Paso del Norte in 1817

From the Report of Father Juan Rafael Rascón



*By Dennis Daily*

First-hand accounts of our border region prior to the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848, and the coming of the *norteamericanos*, are important for providing a perspective on life in the area during the two centuries of Spanish and Mexican rule. Several journals and memoirs by U.S. citizens who traveled through the region during the early 19th century are widely known and are often cited for their descriptions of Paso del Norte, the Mesilla Valley, and environs. Among these, accounts by Zebulon Pike, Josiah Gregg and Susan Shelby

Magoffin give us important first-hand descriptions of life on Mexico's northern frontier before the Mexican Cession of 1848.<sup>1</sup>

However, they all are victims, to greater or lesser extent, of the biases inherent in their authors being outsiders to the cultural, political and religious traditions of those they are describing, and their words must be read and interpreted with this in mind. Less known are accounts by Spanish and Mexican citizens themselves during the 17th through the 19th centuries. While there is a lack of



*The mission of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe as depicted by Augustus Guy de Vaudricourt, principal artist with the U.S. Boundary Commission, ca. 1851. The lithograph appeared in William H. Emory's 1857 Report on the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey, Vol. 1, following page 92.*

published material offering this insider's point of view, archives in Mexico and New Mexico contain a wealth of first-hand narratives waiting to be explored.<sup>2</sup> Translated here is a brief description of the Paso del Norte area during the early 19th century by its priest, Father Juan Rafael Rascón.

Paso del Norte, generally what we think of today as Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, during the Spanish viceregal, or colonial, period formed a part of the northern province of New Mexico. It was not until after Mexican independence in 1821, and the establishment of the state of Chihuahua, that jurisdiction for Paso del Norte was transferred from New Mexico to that new state.<sup>3</sup> The town played an important role in New Mexico's history, most notably for serving as the refuge to New Mexicans fleeing the Pueblo Revolt in 1680 and serving as the seat of New Mexican government until the re-conquest more than a decade later. It was also a crucial link on the Camino Real between the provinces of Nuevo Mexico and Nueva Vizcaya, between Santa Fe and the cities of Chihuahua and Durango.<sup>4</sup>

On October 28, 1817, the priest of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Paso del Norte, Father Juan Rafael Rascón, signed a report he had prepared for the new bishop of Durango, Don Juan Francisco de Castañiza, describing the ecclesiastical district (*curato*) under his care.<sup>5</sup> The report was in response to a supe-



*Interior view of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe mission in Ciudad Juárez, formerly Paso del Norte, taken around 1890. Father Juan Rafael Rascón served at the mission from 1814 until 1829. (NMSU Library Archives and Special Collections, RG2019-039)*



*Altar detail from the previous photo.*

rior order from Bishop Castañiza of September 9, 1817, that went out to all the ecclesiastical districts within the vast diocese of Durango.

Born and raised in Mexico City, Castañiza had been ordained Bishop of Durango in August 1816 and had only recently arrived in the northern city.<sup>6</sup> Unfamiliar with the character of his new diocese, he asked the priests of all the ecclesiastical districts to supply information about: the geographical extent of their *curatos*, including longitude, latitude, and circumference; the neighboring districts in all directions; distances between the head church and outlying communities; the numbers of parishioners in the communities; the administrative structure of the ecclesiastical district; whether there was a river that in time of flooding caused difficulties in administering the sacraments; as well as anything else of importance.<sup>7</sup>

The diocese of Durango covered a huge swath of northern New Spain, from the border with Zacatecas in the south to New Mexico in the north, Sonora in the west to Coahuila in the east. Bishop Castañiza had a list made of about 60 districts from which he wished to receive reports. In the end, he received information from the priests of 40 *curatos*, including Paso del Norte, Presidio del Norte, Janos, and Santa Fe in the far northern

reaches of the diocese. The information provided to the bishop by the individual priests varied in its detail and extent, with some hardly complying with Castañiza's instructions and others supplying wonderful detail. Rascón's report from Paso del Norte falls into the latter category. All together the reports make up an extremely valuable snapshot of church and society in the north immediately prior to Mexico gaining its independence from Spain in 1821.

Juan Rafael Rascón was born in 1783 in Santa Rosa de Cosihuiriachic, in the present-day Mexican state of Chihuahua. He studied philosophy at the Colegio de San Juan de Letrán in Mexico City between 1802 and 1804. He was ordained in Durango in 1806 and appointed priest of the church at Paso del Norte in 1814.<sup>8</sup>

Only two years prior, the church had been "secularized" by Durango Bishop José Miguel de Irigoyen, that is converted from a mission under the care of the Franciscan brothers to a parish under the authority and administration of the Diocese of Durango.<sup>9</sup> Rascón served at Paso del Norte for 15 years, until 1829 when he was named vicar general and ecclesiastical governor of the territory of New Mexico and transferred to Santa Fe.<sup>10</sup> He transferred to Chihuahua in 1833, then spent the latter part of his life in the city of Durango. He rose to high levels in the hierarchy of the church, serving on the cathedral chapter as an advisor to the bishop, and as chanter in Durango's Baroque cathedral. Rascón died of cholera at San Miguel del Mezquital, Zacatecas in 1851.<sup>11</sup>

Rascón's report, along with the 39 others, are housed in the massive archive of the Archbishopric of Durango, Mexico (Archivos Históricos del Arzobispado de Durango, or AHAD). The New Mexico State University Library Archives microfilmed the Durango archive between 1992 and 2005. The project produced 721 reels of microfilm, more than one million pages, documenting every aspect of the governance of the diocese from its creation in 1620 up to the 20th century.

Information contained in the archive on the social, political, and religious life in New Mexico

and the border region is extensive and remains to be fully examined and brought to light. There are more than 70 documents pertaining to Father Rascón in the archive, including extensive correspondence between the priest and officials in the Durango diocese. A 1,300-page guide to the microfilm can be viewed on the website of the NMSU Library.<sup>12</sup>

**The Report of Juan Rafael Rascón to  
Bishop Juan Francisco de Castañiza**

To the Most Excellent Dr. Don Juan Francisco  
Marqués de Castañiza  
October 28, 1817

Most Excellent Sir,

In fulfillment of Your Excellency's official letter dated September 9, last month, which instructed me to prepare a brief report regarding the points that were asked of me in the aforementioned letter, with the goal of determining the area of the diocese, insofar as it is known, I pass along to your excellency accounts that I have at hand, and with information supplied by old and trustworthy persons of this place.

The circumference of this curate of the town of Our Lady of Guadalupe of the Pass of the Northern River (el Paso del Rio del Norte) forms a trapezoidal figure of five leagues, more or less, containing on the surface of this plane the houses, vineyards, orchards and lands that the inhabitants cultivate.<sup>13</sup> The land is watered by the abundant Río del Norte, to the south of whose banks is situated this aforementioned town, and its latitude is judged to be 32 or 33 degrees.<sup>14</sup> Regularly in the month of May, great flows of the river occur when the snows melt on the mountain slopes and give rise during this time to strong, annual floods that wash away the pickets and dam, which at the cost of innumerable hardships and public works are repaired each year on a sandy foundation with woven branches filled with loose stones and bound together with ropes. It's a shame that so much work is required in the most precious season,

abandoning or suspending cultivation of the vineyards and crops for the repetitious, common work of dam, bridge, etc.

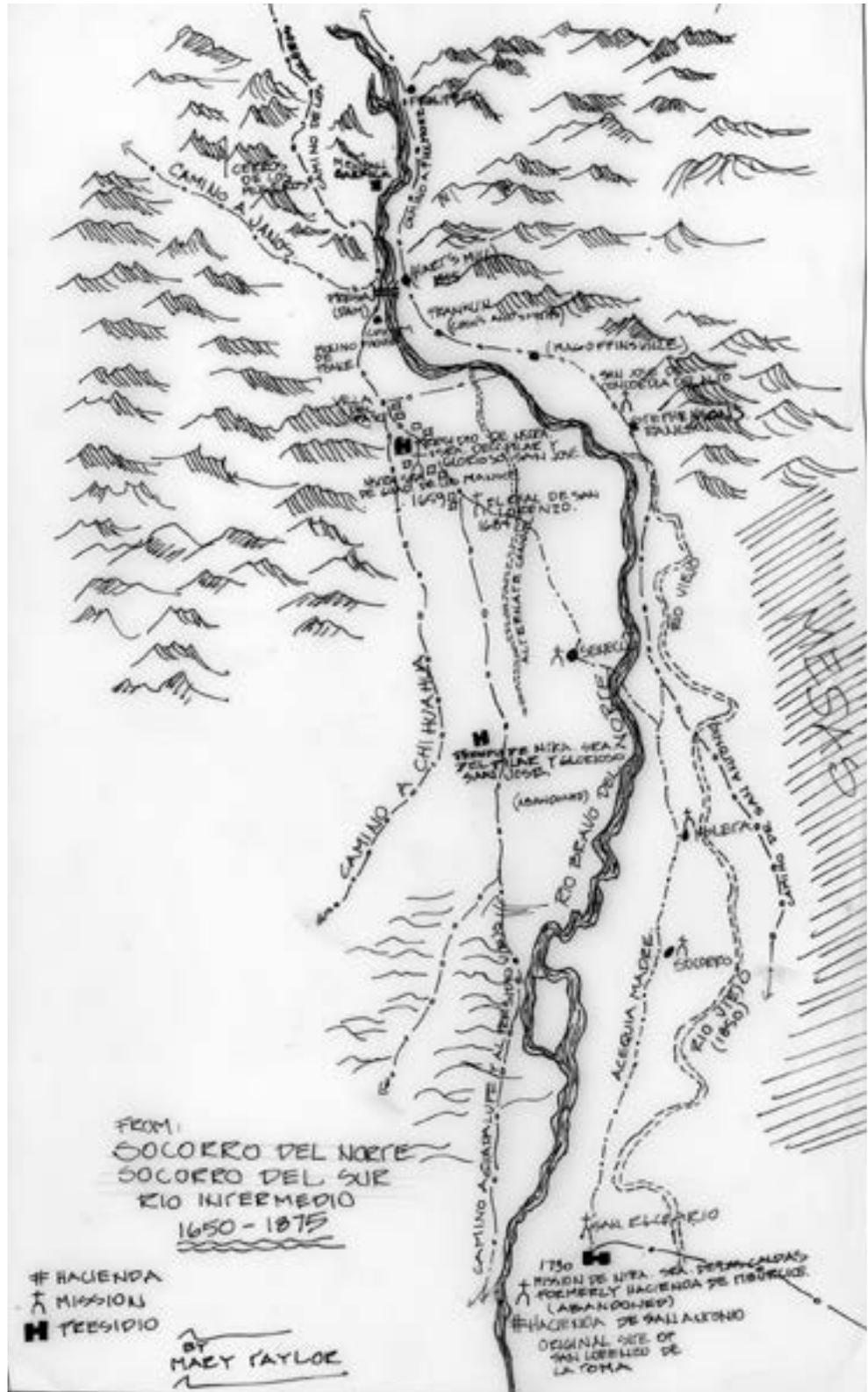
The longitude of the settlement, or diameter from east to west, is two consecutive leagues, in the west from the house where the lieutenant governor of this jurisdiction lives, to the house called "of Gallegos" in the eastern portion and where the bridge, also called of Gallegos, is the point that divides this curate from the mission, or town, of San Lorenzo, currently administered by Friar Ysidoro Barcenilla. Thus, in the stated direction, the house of Gallegos and those of the widow Dominga, Chepe Garcia, Cleto Yáñez, and Don Pablo Elías are adjacent on the east to the inhabitants of said mission of San Lorenzo, whose settlement is very near. In the opposite direction there are no neighboring settlements. In the southeast, this settlement ends with the houses of Don Bernadino Borrego, Maldonado, and the Villeros. On the hill named Aranda is the dividing line of these lands and those of the mission of the Pueblo of Senecu, a visita [charge] of the town of San Lorenzo, and the Indians of the pueblo annexed to this curacy are the owners of the fields that lie in that direction.

The latitudinal diameter measures one and one half leagues, which is inhabited from north to south, from the banks of the river, or the Playa district, to the home of Benancia García, or the hills to the south, and within the aforesaid limits there are no neighboring settlements until you reach the Presidio of Carrizal, a distance of more than 30 leagues.

To the northeast, this town ends at the homes named Largo, the widow Guadalupe, and the house of Romano Portillo, and in this same direction, at a distance of about two leagues, are the campsites known as Salineta [salt beds], where the livestock of the inhabitants and the horse herd of soldiers and civilians are pastured. There are many groves all along the banks of the river and excellent flat, open spaces and river bends for settlements and fields, principally in the place called Bracito, where currently Don Juan Antonio García de Noriega lives.<sup>15</sup> For going on two years he has

plowed fields contiguous to those that this community worked three years ago for the use of the Apache Indians, with the goal of persuading them to take an interest in working and staying put, which has been in vain as they cannot accustom themselves to work. From this town [El Paso] to Bracito is 18 leagues and in the surrounding hills, as well as in the Organ Mountains, so famous for serving as the refuge of the Apache Indians in time of war, they say there are abundant veins of copper, iron, a little silver, and a lot of lead. From this point and the last inhabitants, citizens of this curacy, there is no other inhabited place until las Joyas, belonging to the missions of Santa Fe and many leagues distant.<sup>16</sup>

The mining town of Santa Rita del Cobre is further to the west, measuring about 70 to 80 leagues from this Pueblo and they say it is inhabited by about 400 souls.<sup>17</sup> The climate is cold. In civil matters, it is subject to the military commander of the Janos Presidio, and ecclesiastically, according to the latest regulation of the very venerable dean and cathedral chapter of the vacant see of Durango, those inhabitants are adminis-



*Hand-drawn map of the Paso del Norte area, from Frontera to San Elizario, by Mesilla historian Mary Taylor. (NMSU Library Archives and Special Collections, Mary Taylor papers, Ms0162, box 26, folder 14)*

tered spiritual nourishment either by the priest of this place or by the military chaplain of the said presidio, depending on where they voluntarily decide to go. It should be noted that said regulation does not revoke the former declaration of His Excellency Sr. Olivares, the former most dignified bishop of this diocese, of which Your Excellency is now in charge, that the said mining town of Cobre be joined to this curacy of El Paso.<sup>18</sup> The current priest, during the nearly four years since he has taken possession of this curacy, has never gone to the mining town of Cobre, as much because of the long distance and as because of the risk of encountering enemies, and likewise because at no time has he been called there, even to hear annual confessions, but he has performed some baptisms and marriages of those that have requested it. To go to this mining town, and similarly to Bracito, one has to cross the Rio del Norte by a bridge, and only when the strong floods wash it away, the crossing of the river becomes difficult.

The number of souls in this curacy, that live within the circumference stated in part one, exceeds 4,300, including military personnel and Indians, commonly referred to as being from the Pueblo annexed to the community.<sup>19</sup> They are all administered by a priest with ownership of his curacy, ecclesiastical judge, rural dean, and military chaplain, who at this time is Bachiller Don Juan Rafael Rascón, who has with him as assistant curate the priest Don José Miguel del Prado. The civil government is under the control of a political and military lieutenant governor, presently the veteran lieutenant Don José Ordaz, whose jurisdiction extends to the four neighboring towns that are situated in a line one after the other, called the Real de San Lorenzo and its charge the Pueblo of Senecu, the Pueblo of Ysleta, and Socorro where the Reverend Father Fray Jose Gonzales resides, who also administers Ysleta. And all these towns, including this one [El Paso] are the ones that make up the entire jurisdiction of El Paso. Adjacent to Socorro is the presidio of San Elcario [today San Elizario]. This pueblo and said presidio are at the edge of the inhabited places that are situated along the banks

of the river and beyond these places there are no more, except at great distance, and for this reason during the times when the Apache enemies rise up, one cannot travel except in convoy. During the present time these said Apaches are at peace and they freely and continually wander through all the towns, visiting all the homes in search of food, but always with their weapons at hand.

The climate of this town of El Paso (and almost the same can be said for nearly all the neighboring towns) is extreme in heat and cold, according to the season. It hardly rains and if it weren't for the benefits of irrigating from the river, some years, like the present one, there would be no produce. For this reason, there is no pasture that is not irrigated by the river. The ground is commonly sandy and full of dunes and in some parts clay. Within the circumference referred to, there are some lakes, ponds or pools. The homes of the inhabitants are in great confusion with interposition of the orchards, groves, and the fields of maize, wheat, beans, cotton, and so forth, to such extent that in times of plague the spiritual administration is very difficult because of the lack of order and communication between homes and for the shortage of bridges that require one to go out of the way in order to cross the irrigation canals.

Also, it is worth noting that when the snows melt, or when it rains, the roads are filled with many large puddles and mud so that during those times a great number of the faithful are not able to attend mass because they do not live near the church, or they have to walk a lot. The land is shown to be very fertile and fruitful, and capable of producing a variety of crops, provided that the art, the industry and protection are applied. And all this has been very necessary and in so many years of habitation, there is only one rich person.

The parish church of this place was founded in the year 1662 by the minister Fray García de San Francisco. It is located in the highest part of the settlement, and on the edge of it to the west side of the church is the home of the priest and behind it the house where the lieutenant governor lives. And it is the place that is safest, or free from risk

of some extraordinary flood of the river, like that which two years ago caused great damage to the church, orchards and houses of the neighboring towns. Since the church is constructed of sandy adobe, the exterior is in a sorry state of appearance; it doesn't have a tower and the bells are suspended under some small pillars with a wooden roof. The interior structure is more or less decent, ornamented with carved wood, and three missals are old and in bad shape, with no church building funds with which to address these urgent needs. Two years ago, with license and superior order, the outdoor cemetery was constructed and a little chapel alongside, all of adobe, and this mainly at the expense of the church building fund, but also with some labor supplied by the citizens at the priest's request, and since then all the bodies are interred in this cemetery to avoid the sickness and contagion experienced by burying the people within such an ancient and tiny church.

Such works, as well as the building fund, were only established recently in this curacy, and in proportion to the poverty of these people, and with allotments of plots of the parish, no longer allowing burials inside. So that the building fund is no longer burdened, if it is pleasing to Your Excellency, it's appropriate to assign plots in the said outdoor cemetery according to them and by collecting a fee for the rights of the holy building fund. In this way, I informed the provisor [bishop's deputy] and capitular vicar when the construction of the aforesaid cemetery was concluded, providing him the instruction for the plan of plots according to the circumstances of the work, and in full conformity with the provisional fee created during the time of my predecessor, Curate Prado. To this the said deputy responded that he would carry out the said assigning of plots whenever there was someone with the right [authority] to do it, and I understand that in this he was speaking of your excellency, to whom I present these necessities of this parish in this same report, which I don't think is out of line with the charge that I ought to carry out in complying with your request.

May God protect the important life of Your

Excellency, El Paso de Rio del Norte, October 28, 1817.

Most Excellent Sir  
Juan Rafael Rascón

**Dennis Daily** is department head of Archives and Special Collections at the New Mexico State University Library. He has worked with archival collections, both in academic and public libraries, for more than 20 years. His passion is connecting researchers with the primary-source, historical materials that provide direct contact with the past. Special interests include the history and cultural heritage of the U.S./Mexico border region, photographic history and practice, folk and popular traditions, oral history, and the use of archival resources in humanities scholarship.

## Endnotes

1. These well-known works have been published in many editions over the years. Zebulon Montgomery Pike and Donald Jackson. *The Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike: with Letters and Related Documents* 1st ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967); Josiah Gregg. *Commerce of the Prairies : or, The Journal of a Santa Fé Trader, During Eight Expeditions Across the Great Western Prairies, and a Residence of Nearly Nine Years in Northern Mexico* (New York: H. G. Langley, 1844); Susan Shelby Magoffin and Stella Madeline. Drumm. *Down the Santa Fé Trail and into*

*Mexico; the Diary of Susan Shelby Magoffin, 1846-1847* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926).

2. Archives critical to the study of the Mesilla Valley and Paso del Norte areas during the Spanish and Mexican periods include the Municipal Archive of Cd. Juárez; Archive of the Cathedral of Cd. Juárez; Spanish Archives of New Mexico; Mexican Archives of New Mexico; Archive of the Ayuntamiento of Chihuahua; Historical Archive of the Archbishopric of Durango; among others. Most of these archives have been microfilmed over the years and are available in many libraries in the United States.

3. *Various correspondence to Mayor of El Paso del Norte municipality relating to civil militia, military hospital, decree to separate from la provincia de Nuevo México and the formation of the new province of Chihuahua. (Interspersed with some records related to the foundation of Doña Ana, 1843), 1823-1824.* Municipal Archives of Cd. Juárez, MF 513, part II, roll 15, paging sequence 3, frames 217-284.

4. Rick Hendricks. "Paso del Norte: New Mexico's Southern Gateway on the Camino Real," in *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, Volume Two*, ed. June-el Piper (Santa Fe: Bureau of Land Management, 1999), 209-220.

5. Juan Rafael Rascon. *Informe sobre la demarcación de El Paso del Norte*, 1817. Historical Archive of the Archbishopric of Durango (AHAD), AHAD-233, frames 431-435.

6. Catholic Hierarchy. "Bishop Juan Francisco Castañiza Larrea y Gonzalez de Agüero," in *The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church: Current and historical information about its bishops and dioceses*, accessed November 8, 2020, <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bcaslga.html>; Vicente de P. Andrade. "El Ilmo. Sr. Dr. D. Juan Francisco de Castañiza Larrea y González de Agüero, Marqués de Castañiza" (p. 260-269) in *Noticias Biográficas sobre los Ilustrísimos Prelados de Sonora, de Sinaloa y de Durango* (Mexico City: Museo Nacional, 1899), accessed November 8, 2020, [http://cdigital.dgb.uanl.mx/la/1080027725/1080027725\\_35.pdf](http://cdigital.dgb.uanl.mx/la/1080027725/1080027725_35.pdf).

7. *Recordatorio de los informes solicitados para*

*la demarcación del obispado*, 1817. Historical Archive of the Archbishopric of Durango, AHAD-233, frames 355-367.

8. *Expedientes de órdenes de Juan Rafael de Rascon*, 1804. AHAD-346, frames 357-373; *Expedientes de órdenes de Juan Rafael de Rascon*, 1806. AHAD-346, frames 609-621; *Subcolector de mesas y medias anatas sobre el título de cura del Paso a Juan Rafael Rascón, Durango*, 1814. AHAD-228, frames 409-483; Expediente de títulos de propiedad de dos casas de José Álvarez Tostado, luego de Juan Rafael Rascón y después de la iglesia de Durango, 1833 a 1853. AHAD-273, frames 577-621.

9. W.H. Timmons. *El Paso: a Borderlands History*, (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1990), 67-68.

10. *Títulos de licencias y nombramientos de vicario general, visitador y gobernador eclesiástico del territorio de Nuevo México a Juan Rafael Rascón*, 1829. AHAD-484, frames 522-531.

11. Chihuahua Grande Magazine. *Estado y Sus Minicipios: 037 Juárez*, accessed November 8, 2020, <https://chihuahuagrande.com/037-Juárez/>.

12. Rick Hendricks, Maria Teresa Dorador de Reyes, and Maria Eugenia Reyes Dorador. *Guide to the Microfilm Collection of the Archivos Históricos del Arzobispado de Durango* (Las Cruces: New Mexico State University Library, 2005), accessed November 8, 2020, <https://lib.nmsu.edu/archives/documents/ahad.pdf>.

13. The measurements supplied by Rascon must be considered estimates. The measurement of a league varied from place to place and can only be imprecisely translated into modern miles – generally between two and four miles. Rascon estimated the distance from Paso del Norte to Santa Rita at 70 to 80 leagues. On a modern map, the distance is about 160 miles, or a conversion of about two miles per league.

14. Rascon's estimate is very close to the actual latitude of about 31.7 degrees north.

15. The Bracito, or little arm, was a bend in the Rio Grande just south of modern-day Las Cruces. The river has changed course many times in the intervening years, but the place called Brazito remains a known locality. It is perhaps best known

as the site of the Battle of Brazito, where American forces under Col. Alexander Doniphan defeated Mexican troops on Christmas Day, 1846, during the Mexican-American War. It is fertile and valued farming land.

16. Las Joyas, currently La Joya, was a settlement on the east bank of the Rio Grande, just north of the town of Socorro, New Mexico. When the Spanish first arrived in this area in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, they found it inhabited by large populations of the Piro people, whom they befriended. There were several Spanish settlements in this Rio Abajo region along the Camino Real. Many Piro

came south to Paso del Norte with the Spanish following the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, settling the towns of Senecu and Socorro mentioned in this report.

17. The rich copper mines of Santa Rita del Cobre began to be exploited by the Spanish in 1804. Their importance is evidenced by the size of population estimated by Rascon in 1817.

18. Francisco Gabriel de Olivares y Benito was Bishop of Durango from 1795 to 1812.

19. Other population estimates for the Paso del Norte region during this time, according to W.H. Timmons, are between 7,500 and 8,000 persons.

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## Gotham West

### The Transformation of the New Mexico State University Library, 1972-1977

*By Dylan McDonald*

During the spring of 1975, the New Mexico State University (NMSU) Library participated in arguably the largest retail sale of published works in United States history. Library leadership, awash in funds after New Mexico voters passed a \$10 million bond in 1972, negotiated the purchase of more than 200,000 items from the world-renowned Gotham Book Mart, a pillar of New York City's literary scene. The transaction was initially projected to increase the library's holdings by over 50%, although it would take years before all the volumes became easily accessible to the campus community. Most importantly, the volumes transformed the library by plugging a major gap within its arts and humanities titles. The sale promised to move the university beyond its agricultural roots to become a major Southwest research institution.

This paper will discuss the history and growth of the NMSU Library, the voter-approved 1972 bond and library spending priorities, the details of the subsequent Gotham Book Mart purchase, and finally, the impact of these massive but short-term budgetary expenditures. The history of this period of transformation provides evidence of the attempts by NMSU administrators to respond to repeated calls to address deficiencies in library holdings and live up to its keystone position in the rapidly expanding land-grant university.

#### **Founding a University Building a Library**

The 1880s proved pivotal for the growth of Las Cruces, a burgeoning city in southern New Mexico's Mesilla Valley. Situated between the Rio Grande, a keystone to the region's irrigated agricultural interests, and the Organ Mountains, with its mining district producing primarily silver, lead,

and zinc ore, civic and business leaders leveraged these national resources to push for further development and economic stability. Securing an Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway line and depot in 1881 helped the city obtain another advantage over its more-well-known civic rival, Mesilla, a town four miles to the southwest. Prosperity seemed within reach, but more would be needed. As Las Cruceans began to build key civic institutions, several voices advocated for the founding of an agriculture and mining college.<sup>1</sup> The *Rio Grande Republican* editorialized, "that we could secure the location of an agricultural college here is of little doubt, but it's being secured, unless we exert ourselves as a people, we do strongly doubt . . . we must send our legislative delegation to the next legislature prepared to offer a good location for the farm and building and as liberal a donation as is possible for us to offer."<sup>2</sup> Into this civic zeal entered the distinguished and capable Hiram Hadley, a recent transplant.

A pioneer in educational development, the Ohio-born Hiram Hadley earned a degree from Haverford College, taught at and founded schools in Indiana and Virginia, and wrote textbooks for those entering the teaching field.<sup>3</sup> In 1887, he moved to the southwest, as his eldest son, Walter, had gone to New Mexico seven years prior in search of better health.<sup>4</sup> At the age of 54, Hadley tried his hand in Mesilla Valley real estate but quickly reentered the educational endeavor, finding numerous ready allies in the city. Las Cruces College, a shareholder corporation, opened to students on September 17, 1888 with Hadley as its president. Five months later, the citizens of Las Cruces celebrated when Territorial Governor Edmund G. Ross signed the Rodey Act, which des-

ignated the city as the site of the state agricultural college and agricultural experiment station contingent upon acquisition of 100 acres for the school. With land secured and a board of trustees in place, the two fledgling schools merged, with Hadley once again at the head when the first classes of the New Mexico Agricultural College, soon changed to the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (NMCAMA), were held on January 21, 1890.

From the outset, a robust and adequately funded library for the land-grant institution stood at the stated heart of the Las Cruces effort to build a successful college.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, Hadley declared, “Not the least important of the good things the Agricultural College is to bring the people of New Mexico, is the library connected . . . The aim has been to give, in this beginning, merely a taste of the sweets of the literary world.”<sup>6</sup> Hadley himself

seeded the library with donations of books from his personal collection and even allowed one cash-strapped student to gift a new set of *Encyclopedia Britannica* in lieu of tuition (a \$112.00 value in 1890, today worth over \$3,200.00).<sup>7</sup> The state college budgeted less than \$1,000.00 in its first year to continue building its library, although an error in dispersing federal funds saw Hadley having to rush the purchase of books from an Ohio supplier before the fiscal year closed.<sup>8</sup> Despite stated desires, one can argue that the rocky start of the institution’s library is one yet to be fully overcome.

Initially the library focused heavily on science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and reference works – encyclopedias, almanacs, dictionaries, technical manuals, textbooks, and periodicals.<sup>9</sup> At the close of 1890, the “small but good” library contained over 500 titles, and the college promised that more would “be added every year.”<sup>10</sup> Hadley



*Library reading room in Hadley Hall, c.1910 (UA A77-42-054, Hobson-Huntsinger University Archives, NMSU Library).*

himself envisioned it soon numbering over 20,000 volumes, thus allowing students to hold “communion with the greatest and the best minds of all past ages.”<sup>11</sup> A local journalist, given a guided tour of the college by the president himself in early 1892, declared with boosterish zeal afterward that the library was “first-class” and “one of the most attractive and interesting features” of the school.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, initial student recruitment advertisements specifically noted the college’s “good library.”<sup>13</sup>

As the college built out its infrastructure during its formative decades, the library collection grew at a commensurate pace, necessitating several relocations in the search for space. In 1891, the library was housed in the English room of Old Main (McFie Hall) and in three years grew to include 2,000 books, 1,000 pamphlets, 1,500 textbooks, and 60 newspapers and periodicals.<sup>14</sup> By 1900, the library had moved to the administration offices on the first floor of Old Main, followed by its transfer to the newly completed Administration Building and Library, also known as Old Hadley Hall, in late 1908 or early 1909.<sup>15</sup>

The second floor space was designed specifically for the library – a first for the growing collection of 11,000 volumes – with a reference room, reading room, stack room, workroom, and office.<sup>16</sup> However, after Old Main burned to the ground on September 12, 1910, college regents began to search for a fireproof home for the library, as they wanted to avoid a costly replacement of a fire-ravaged collection made even more difficult by the numerous out-of-print titles. By early 1918, the library was removed to safer environs, finding a new home in occupying the entire third floor at the top of the engineering building, Goddard Hall.<sup>17</sup> However, the disjointed space with its lack of shelving and no office for staff motivated the college librarian in 1926 to report, “we are in sore need of a new library building.”<sup>18</sup> The stay ultimately proved transitory, as the college sought funding for a new standalone structure to house its library.<sup>19</sup>

On February 2, 1928, R.E. McKee General Contractor of El Paso, Texas began construction on Young Hall, a new library edifice located on the



*Library reading room in Young Hall, c.1940 (UA0339005, Hobson-Huntsinger University Archives, NMSU Library).*

college's horseshoe. By then the collection bulged at 27,000 volumes and proudly described by students as "the largest and most complete library connected with any educational institution in the Southwest."<sup>20</sup> To hold the books, pamphlets, and serials, the hall's design featured the main stacks on the first floor with the second floor housing a reading room that extended the length of the building. Also on the second floor was the circulation desk and librarian's office. By October 1928, the library collection had taken up its new "fire-proof" residence.<sup>21</sup> In June 1934, two 10-foot-long and 4-and-a-half-foot-tall government commissioned murals were installed next to the circulation desk.<sup>22</sup> The artwork, painted by muralist and El Paso native Tom Lea, depicted the history of the military and religious conquest of New Mexico by the Spanish, and the acquisition of the Mesilla

Valley by the United States. Over the next twenty-five years, the library flourished in its dedicated space.<sup>23</sup>

With the post-World War II higher education enrollment boom fueled by the GI Bill, the college's Board of Regents placed construction of a new library as the top facility need in the summer of 1950.<sup>24</sup> The structure would be modular in nature, built-out as need dictated and budgets allowed, with an initial projected capacity of 250,000 volumes.<sup>25</sup> As construction ended on the building's initial iteration, supply interruptions and contractual issues with the builder delayed the move of the library collection from Young Hall into what would later be named Branson Hall.<sup>26</sup> In May 1953, work crews began erecting new shelving and transferring nearly 200,000 items some 270 feet to the southeast, the distance between the build-



*Cover of the NMSU Bulletin showing Branson Library, April 1961 (Hobson-Huntsinger University Archives, NMSU Library).*

ings. By July 23, and after 1185.5 person-hours, the move was completed.<sup>27</sup> By 1957, the building's upper two floors were finished, and though the building was conceived to accommodate future growth, in 1965-1966 the library underwent further expansion as a west-end addition doubled the library's floor space and reoriented the building to face Frenger Mall to the south.<sup>28</sup>

### **The State Educational Institution Library Bond Act of 1972**

In the previous section, the need for space on the New Mexico State University (NMSU) campus, a 1960 renaming of the school, drove the narrative. However, the focus will now turn to another pressing need of libraries, that of collection development. It is part of the natural maturing process of an institution to refine their collecting practices and gauge if the library is meeting the informational needs of its users in an economical manner. Examples of this maturation at NMSU can be seen in the transition from the Dewey Decimal system to Library of Congress subject headings in the 1920s and from the analog card catalog to the digital resources of a computerized network in the 1970s. The purchasing of general collection material to the solicitation of rare and unique manuscripts additionally illustrates this maturation. The archival mission of the library rapidly accelerated with the formal creation of the University Archives on November 29, 1965 and the founding of the Rio Grande Historical Collections on January 29, 1972.<sup>29</sup> A former librarian noted that few understood the "demands that were made on that little library" by the rapid growth in the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, the library budget went from \$41,000 to \$560,000, and holdings exploded from 67,500 to 345,500.<sup>30</sup> Yet even these impressive achievements and numbers would not be enough to satisfy faculty and student demands.<sup>31</sup>

At the onset of the 1970s, university students throughout New Mexico began to voice their dissatisfaction with library resources on their campuses. Continued enrollment growth accom-

panied by newly created academic departments to accommodate student educational demands strained libraries. Intra-campus budgetary tug-of-wars often saw libraries on the losing end, while rising inflation and publisher's costs ate into their purchasing power. NMSU Library Director, Dr. James P. Dyke stated bluntly, "Libraries in the state have been ignored for 50 years."<sup>32</sup> Students felt the impact of inadequate and outdated library holdings, limited service hours, fierce competition for books and periodicals, and difficulty finding spaces to study. Each contributed to a diminished educational experience.

At NMSU, graduate students organized under the Graduate Student Assembly and proactively requested increased library hours in the spring of 1970. In October, the Assembly's Library Committee reported a small victory. Dyke responded that the request of 13 additional open hours a week would cost \$12,000 per year, funds the library did not have, however, the university had chipped in enough funds to cover an additional five hours.<sup>33</sup> Yet, as the Assembly's library committee dug deeper into library deficiencies, they soon shifted their focus to funding shortfalls. In their report to members, "Present Library Situation," they ominously stated, "In short, our library is deficient (even below minimal standards) and is becoming further deficient as each year passes."<sup>34</sup>

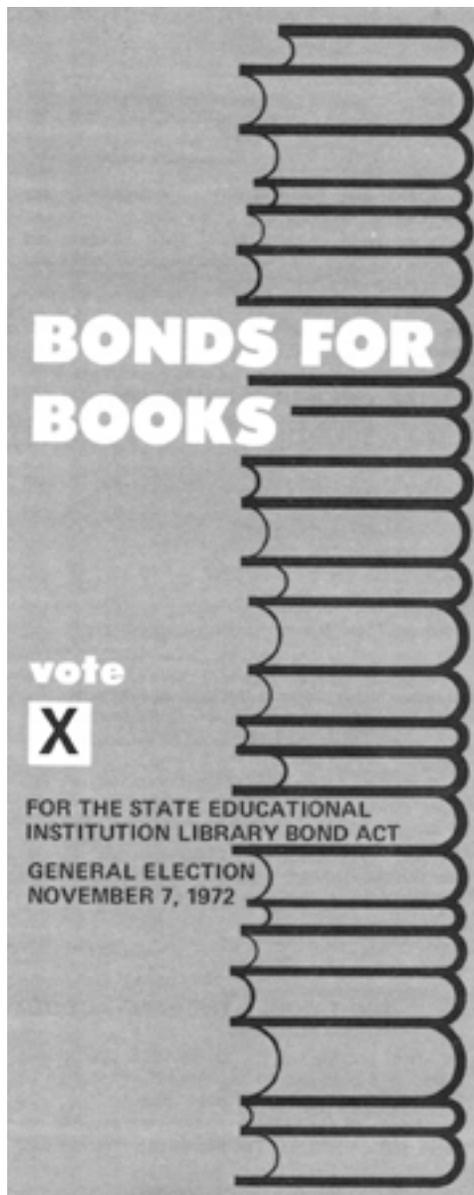
The statewide student outcry became so loud that in 1971 a bipartisan Legislative University Study Committee, after visiting campus libraries across the state and gathering testimonies, concluded that growth had outstripped funds. Additional resources were quickly needed to rectify deficiencies in collection development. On March 2, 1972, Governor Bruce King signed House Bill 59, which placed on the November ballot a voter-approved sale of \$10 million in bonds over five years to finance the purchasing of books for libraries at the state's higher education institutions.

The campaign by bond supporters soon kicked into high gear. Members of "Action for Education," a statewide committee chaired by artist Peter Hurd, urged support of the bond in speeches

before service, civic, and educational organizations that fall.<sup>35</sup> The New Mexico Library Association asked its members to make passing the bond a priority and declared effective public information a necessity. With the slogan “Bonds for Books,” the organization printed 350,000 brochures and hundreds of thousands bookmarks for distribution.<sup>36</sup> University student body officers from around the state coordinated inter-campus efforts to support the bond and register fellow students to vote.<sup>37</sup> The bond received endorsements from numerous educational, labor, civic, and business organizations, and even secured the support of both major political parties.

Still, NMSU’s Dyke worried that few voters really knew what the bond issue was about, a fear confirmed in poll reporting by *New Mexican* political columnist Fred Buckles who noted large blocks of undecideds outside of those who lived in locales with institutions of higher education.<sup>38</sup>

Appealing to readers of the *Las Cruces Sun-News* in the run-up to the election, Dyke discussed the general and technical terms how the bond money would solve numerous issues in an October 15 interview.<sup>39</sup> He first reviewed the student’s complaints before spelling out four issues that library and university administrators currently faced. First, the “scientific knowledge explosion” had made it difficult to ensure up-to-date publications on a limited budget. Second, New Mexico had not kept up with recognized library standards



*Bonds For Books brochure, 1972 (UA A73-43, Hobson-Huntsinger University Archives, NMSU Library).*

regarding resource allocation. Indeed, per an adapted Clapp-Jordan formula addressing total volume count at academic institutions, NMSU fell 387,319 books short – a staggering number when considering in 1972 the library only held 328,556 volumes, a shortfall of 51.6%.<sup>40</sup> Third, neighboring states, including Arizona and Texas, were far outpacing New Mexico in their rates of library purchases, putting the state at an educational disadvantage. Fourth, a university accrediting body had warned in March that lack of library resources throughout the state endangered accreditation, and specifically recommended that NMSU “exert additional efforts to improve library collections in humanities and social sciences.”<sup>41</sup>

Dyke reminded readers that if the bond passed, library administrators like himself would be heavily monitored in their spending. Before distribution of any funds, each academic library had to supply the State Board of Educational Finance (BEF) with detailed needs analysis and spending formulas, showing money going directly

to library bread and butter items like books and periodicals.<sup>42</sup> He closed by affirming the bond would benefit all New Mexicans who could either in person or via interlibrary loan access the new materials.

The voters of New Mexico passed the State Educational Institution Library Bond Act, a constitutional amendment, on November 7, 1972, with 121,337 for and 89,094 against the measure.<sup>43</sup>

## Plans of the Council of New Mexico Academic Libraries (CONMAL)

The BEF, the state authority responsible for managing the State Educational Institution Library Bond funds, requested from the benefiting academic libraries a “plan for the most appropriate use of monies.”<sup>44</sup> The bond act stipulated which libraries were eligible for funds, the type of materials okayed for purchase, and considerations regarding capital outlays for equipment and services. Further, the bond required a yearly plan submitted by the libraries to BEF for approval. Thus began a direct, multi-year relationship between BEF and the state’s academic library directors, who cooperatively organized as the Council of New Mexico Academic Libraries (CONMAL), a hands-on committee eventually chaired by NMSU’s Dyke.

The ad hoc committee of academic library directors met multiple times during the lead up to the 1972 election to draft their plan. They knew the plan had to address directly the current library materials crisis, or in other words, the plan had to solve the problem. Critical to both approval and annual evaluations by BEF was establishing quantitative formulas that addressed library needs in conjunction with college enrollment figures. The criteria and benchmarks for distribution of funds had to be collectively agreed upon. Meeting in Portales on September 7, the directors agreed on definitions of library and academic jargon to be used in ongoing reporting and then finalized the “Criteria for Evaluating Current Academic Library Collections.”<sup>45</sup> This inventory instrument – one full of data showing current holdings in 31 fields along with minimum collection requirements as determined by enrollment, faculty numbers, and degrees awarded – would ultimately determine how the bond funds would be allocated to each college.

The NMSU report, completed on September 27 by Dyke, showed that while the library held 328,556 books and periodicals, along with 338,108 maps, government documents, and microforms, the numbers were woefully inadequate in support-

ing the nearly 120 undergraduate and graduate fields of study offered to students. Per minimum national standards, NMSU fell far short, a reality faced by all of the state’s universities and colleges. The report went on to state that evaluations of the library by degree programs overwhelmingly chose to rate the holdings as “weak” or “of some adequacy.” He closed the report outlining 12 steps that would direct NMSU spending, including purchasing “en-bloc collections that may come on the market.”<sup>46</sup>

Upon passage of the bond, CONMAL formally organized on November 10 in Albuquerque, establishing a governing structure and a mission to “provide a forum for the discussion of the common problems on New Mexico libraries” and



*Dr. James P. Dyke (left), Library Director, and Gen. Hugh M. Milton II, former university president, in the Milton Room, Branson Library, 1971 (UA0204-0398, Hobson-Huntsinger University Archives, NMSU Library).*

“carry out projects of common usefulness.”<sup>47</sup> BEF released its plan for distributing bond funds one month after the election, largely per the CONMAL established criteria, with NMSU receiving over \$2.1 million for its main Las Cruces campus, and its two-year branch campuses in Alamogordo, Carlsbad, Grants, and San Juan each awarded between \$50,000 and \$80,000. Funds, available on July 1 of each year, would be issued in \$2 million segments over the five-year bond period, starting in 1973.<sup>48</sup> While NMSU would receive nearly a fifth of the bond windfall, averaging \$433,000 each year, Dyke received a memo from his superior stating he was “not sure that we are getting a fair share” when compared to the funds received by rival University of New Mexico and asking for comment.<sup>49</sup> There is no record of how that conversation went.

With the bond distribution amounts for each of the 18 university units set, along with \$500,000 specifically for cooperative capital outlay, CONMAL set an agenda of building statewide library projects along with lobbying for further funding from the legislature. Bond funds allowed for the expansion of fledgling but sophisticated-for-the-time telecommunication efforts to create a shared cataloging system via computer networks. Three New Mexico libraries, NMSU, UNM, and Eastern New Mexico University, used bond funds to pay for membership in the growing Ohio College Library Center Network (OCLC).<sup>50</sup> Newly acquired OCLC terminals networked through long-distance phone lines allowed these libraries to share cataloging records, thus increasing bibliographic quality and control while also saving labor through the sharing of cataloged resources. Additionally, CONMAL created a microfiche Union Author Catalog of the library materials purchased through bond funds, creating a near complete record of all the titles added to the state’s academic libraries. Distributed to all 18 libraries, the microfiche would make it easier for libraries not part of OCLC to engage in “interlibrary lending, provide cataloging copy to units without extensive bibliographic apparatus, and information for selection

and acquisition decisions.”<sup>51</sup> The bond’s capital outlay funds went to the acquisition of machines – OCLC terminals, Bell & Howell microfiche readers/printers, Western Union Teletypewriter (TWX) terminals – and use of technologies – telecommunication networks, magnetic computer tape, microphotography, machine-readable cataloging (MARC) – that brought the academic libraries into the increasingly computerized world.<sup>52</sup> The bond hastened this transition and enabled further state financing to continue these proven cooperative efforts when bond monies ended.

Informed by the original CONMAL criteria, the continuously updated acquisition lists from the other academic institutions, and the college’s own degree-granting programs, each library proceeded to purchase books, periodicals, microfilm, maps, and other published material to strengthen its holdings.

The doubling of book budgets, however, caused challenges with the management and utilization of bond funds. The staff and supplies needed to get the new materials into users’ hands did not exist, a problem foreseen by CONMAL.<sup>53</sup> Bond funds could not be used for salaries and the hoped-for supplementary funding from the legislature was never fully encumbered, thus leaving library directors with three unsatisfactory options. Directors could 1) purchase new materials at a rate existing staff could handle, leaving carried forward funds to suffer a loss of purchasing power due to inflation, 2) redirect their existing staff to new bond-enabled technical tasks, hindering the work in other library departments, or 3) store the purchased material until the backlog could be absorbed into the normal workflow, delaying the needed library resources.<sup>54</sup> NMSU used a combination of these approaches when tackling this conundrum.<sup>55</sup>

### **“From the Hudson to the Rio Grande”**

Dr. Dyke described the 1973-1974 fiscal year at NMSU thusly, “At no point in the year could library operations be considered as ‘normal.’”<sup>56</sup> The impact of the initial surge in acquisition funds

from the bond and the commencement of the long-awaited Branson Library remodel and addition took its toll on library operations. Begun in September 1973, the \$2.3 million library expansion included a remodel of the original 1952 portion of the building, along with an update to the lobby and the creation of mezzanine reading areas on the second, third, and fourth floors.<sup>57</sup> The construction schedule required shifting existing holdings, a situation that strained staff and confused users.<sup>58</sup> Add to this state of flux a massive infusion of new materials.

The decision on what new materials to purchase for the library came from multiple sources. The initial plan submitted to the BEF had been framed by CONMAL criteria, however the finer points of what to acquire by NMSU was determined by academic departmental statements assisted by an ad hoc faculty committee.<sup>59</sup> To maximize efficiency, the library created a detailed subject profile and provided this to its book wholesaler who, so authorized, sent at least one copy of every newly published English-language title from the U.S. and Great Britain that matched the profile.<sup>60</sup> Another source of input was the students themselves, who could tap into \$20,000 set aside each year for them to suggest purchases of titles they needed for their studies.<sup>61</sup> One final source worth noting came from used and rare book dealers from across the country. Word of the New Mexico bond windfall soon had dealers reaching out to libraries directly or mailing catalogs of their offered stock. Bibliotannian Bookstore, Abbey Bookshop, and Bartfield Books, among others, offered deep discounts for large purchases from their wares.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, between 1973 and 1975, NMSU purchased directly from Bartfield Books of New York City.<sup>63</sup> Into this purchasing frenzy stepped another New York book dealer, Andreas Brown, owner of world-famous Gotham Book Mart.

Brown faced a daunting problem. Insurance costs for his West 47<sup>th</sup> Street location in midtown Manhattan, an old brownstone with inadequate fire protection, ran nearly \$1,000 a month. Hop-

ing to cut costs, Brown decided to move his operation and transition from renter to owner. Financing that purchase and move would require that he sell a significant portion of his largest asset, the books. His bookstore specialized in American and British literature, poetry, the performing arts, and obscure periodicals. Since its founding in 1920 by Frances Steloff, the store had become one of the city's literary centers and a spot where writers eagerly socialized. With its sophisticated window displays, penchant for selling banned works while ignoring government censorship attempts, and bold motto, "Wise Men Fish Here," emblazoned near the entryway, the store had built a loyal following. When Brown purchased the store in 1967, the arrangement included allowing Steloff to continue working in the store as well as to live in the apartment above until her passing. The sale of the nearly 50 years of published treasures and pending move gave Brown pause, "I know it's strange to say, but we were reluctant to sell what we had."<sup>64</sup>

Another New York City bookman, Christopher P. Stephens, a broker with extensive experience selling major collections to university libraries, was contacted in September 1974 by a New Mexico librarian asking if he knew of a "really good bookstore crammed with great books" that might be for sale. Stephens thought of Gotham Book Mart and reached out to Brown, who was still uncertain about any offer. Librarians at the University of New Mexico sent a representative to New York to review the store's materials but ultimately determined it was too duplicative of Zimmerman Library holdings and, as such, backed out of a potential joint library purchase.<sup>65</sup> Among the CONMAL members, NMSU had the next largest budget, and a glaring need to increase its arts and humanities holdings. In February 1975, Dyke flew to New York City to get a firsthand look at Gotham Book Mart. He spent a day in the multistory building recording his thoughts into a cassette recorder while photographing its shelving, closets, and nooks, all overflowing with books.<sup>66</sup> Upon returning to Las Cruces and comparing current holdings, Dyke and his staff determined that Go-

tham's inventory, with its voluminous collection of out-of-print, rare, and difficult to find items, would more than adequately address the library's arts and humanities deficiency. This, coupled with CONMAL's stated goal of efficiency through large block purchases, prompted Dyke to quickly pursue the sale.

Negotiating the terms proved a delicate task. Stephens and Brown began the emotionally charged task sequestered in the bookstore's upstairs conference room. Over multiple sessions, a deal was struck. NMSU would pay \$485,000 for between 200,000 and 250,000 items, estimated to be about 65% of Gotham's stock, with Brown retaining the literary manuscripts and correspondence, along with material published by Steloff, then stored in the basement. NMSU determined it would take up to six copies of any title, factoring in editions and printing states, accepting only those in the best condition. Brown also requested swift removal of the purchased books as he still had a store to run. Stephens received a large enough commission to allow him to purchase a home.<sup>67</sup>

The large monetary sum of the Gotham purchase required per state law that the library seek bids and approval from the NMSU Board of Regents. In late February the published call for bids went out and Dyke began preparing his report for the March 6 Board of Regents meeting in Grants.<sup>68</sup> During the meeting, NMSU Academic Vice President Donald C. Roush reported the potential purchase a "once in a lifetime opportunity," one that directly solved the library's shortcomings, the

very reason for the passage of the bond.<sup>69</sup> Further, the sale proved fiscally prudent, as the average cost of each item from Gotham would be \$2.42 rather than the standard \$14.00. Any duplicate titles would be distributed to the branch colleges or sold to UNM. Roush acknowledged that a purchase of this size would be difficult to process and store, but assured the regents that students would not have to wait more than 48 hours after requesting a title from the Gotham acquisition. The motion to approve the nearly half million-dollar sale was made and carried.<sup>70</sup>

Days after receiving approval, the library submitted the purchase order and dispatched David Ince, the Assistant Director for Technical Services, to New York City to supervise the herculean task of packing and shipping the collection.<sup>71</sup> Over a 72-hour period, Christopher and Louisa Scioscia Stephens oversaw three shifts of temporary works as the packing and labeling went on around the



*Andrea Connors (left), Acquisitions Librarian, and David Ince, Assistant Director for Technical Services, examine the contents of the recently arrived Gotham Book Mart purchase, April 11, 1975 (Archives and Special Collections, NMSU Library).*

clock. Each evening Ince would seal the now filled semi-trailer. Over 2,300 cartons were trucked out of the city on three sealed semi-trailers, eventually arriving in Las Cruces piggybacked by rail in mid-April. Unfortunately, a wooden protective crate housing the most rare and valuable ephemera, estimated to be 10% of the value of the overall purchase, never made it to New Mexico, the cause of the loss never identified or legally investigated.<sup>72</sup> Still, a significant portion of Gotham had moved west.

Unable to bask in the glow of his literary coup for long, Dyke began devising plans to secure storage space for the soon-to-arrive books and strategized processing and cataloging workflows in light of a distinct lack of personnel to handle the volume.<sup>73</sup> He also became inundated with sales offers from eager book dealers around the country as media coverage of the sale, deemed by the *New York Times* as “one of the largest retail sales in bookstore history,” began to spread.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, he noted, the funds were either spent or already committed. One other task seemed to beg for his attention, that of reaching out to Gotham Book Mart’s founder, a person who “bridged the 20th-century gap between modern creative literature on the one hand and the bibliophile tradition and the antiquarian book trade on the other.”<sup>75</sup>

Frances Steloff, approaching 90 yet only seven years removed from her ownership of Gotham Book Mart, felt morose upon seeing her life’s work packed up. “I felt as if I were about to attend a funeral. After all I remember when and how the books came in.”<sup>76</sup> On March 24, Dyke penned a three-page letter to Steloff, reassuring her that the books would receive a “high degree of care and affection.” Further, he stated, “In our judgment, we could have searched far and wide and could not have located a collection which would have filled in and complemented our current position to anywhere near the degree that will be accomplished by the collection which you have built over the years.” He concluded with a promise that each book, transported from “the Hudson to the Rio Grande,” would contain a special bookplate

honoring her courageous lifetime commitment to supporting literature.<sup>77</sup> Steloff replied, “Your beautiful letter arrived and changed (my feelings). It was comforting to learn that they would still be together and have their own identification.”<sup>78</sup>

### Creating Gotham West

Prior to the Gotham purchase, the largest single discrete addition to the NMSU Library general collections had been a 1969 gift of 5,000



*NMSU student employee Hanie White adds cards to the catalog from the Gotham Book Mart purchase, February 22, 1976 (Archives and Special Collections, NMSU Library).*

hardbound engineering and mathematical periodicals from a retiring engineering professor.<sup>79</sup> Now library administrators believed they faced nearly doubling the library's entire holdings in one purchase. In 1975, Dyke estimated that if his current staff focused only on the purchased material from Gotham it would take 3 ½ years to get all the books and periodicals cataloged and shelved.<sup>80</sup> Staffing levels never allowed such an arrangement, and it would not be until the late 1980s before the purchased materials were fully ingested or disposed of per library and state surplus property requirements.

Dyke and his staff vigorously attacked the book cartons upon their arrival with a team of employees and temporary, 90-day help. The ongoing library renovation provided an unobstructed open space to work in, if only temporarily, and using an assembly-line process, the team roughly sorted the publications one box at a time. After filling out a catalog card by hand for each item, capturing only basic data (author, title, publisher, date, and edition), the books were sorted for three separate workflows. The books were either re-boxed for a later, more descriptive processing when time allowed. If found duplicative of current holdings, the books were then marked for transfer to the NMSU branch libraries or potential sale to UNM. Finally, if they met criteria for placement into the library's special collections holdings, they were stored separately. Each card noted the disposition of the item as well as its newly given accession number and storage box location. After 90 days, over 80,000 titles had been sorted, placed into the card catalog for access by patrons, and the storage boxes palletized and moved to off-site storage.<sup>81</sup> As the sorting and refining continued incrementally over the coming years, the projected total number of Gotham titles added to the library's holdings saw a downward trend as staff began to get a clearer picture of the purchase. After culling the massive amount of repetitive copies and esoteric items outside the purview of an academic library, much of the remaining unprocessed material required Branson faculty to review the material

in light of library collecting areas, a more time intensive activity than previously practiced with Gotham, further slowing the effort.<sup>82</sup> Impressive as the initial processing effort was, it focused on the low hanging fruit.

As the staff worked through the cartons, it became clear the purchase would more than adequately address deficiencies in the library's arts and humanities titles. To show the breadth of the acquisition, administrators developed a list of over 200 prominent authors whose works could now be counted among Branson's holdings – including Willa Cather, Ray Bradbury, T.S. Eliot, Jack London, Sylvia Plath, Susan Sontag, John Updike, and Edith Wharton.

Over 400 workers alone related to Edward Gorey were cataloged. The Chicago-born Gorey served in the Army during World War II, graduated from Harvard in 1950, and then began his



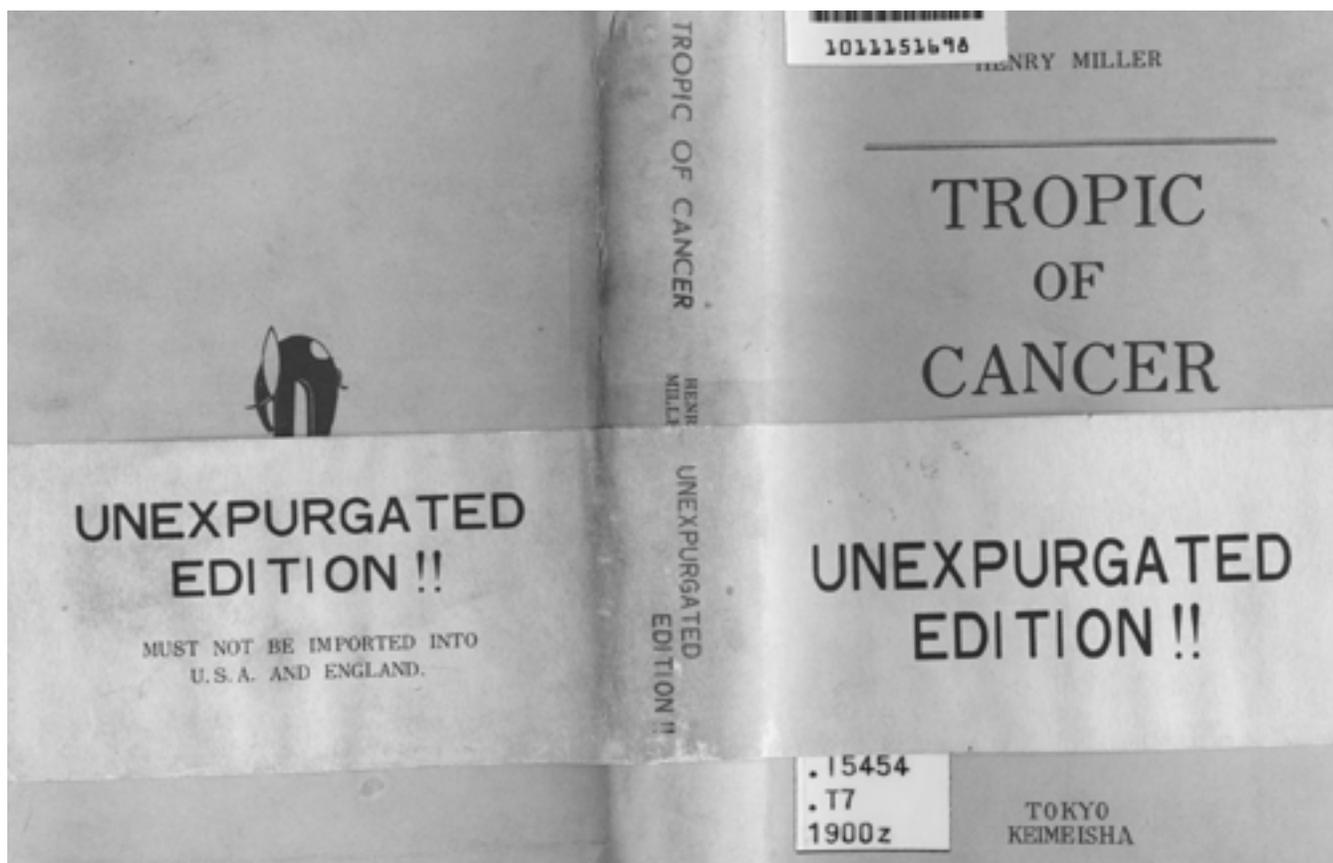
*Bookplate for Gotham Book Mart purchases added to general collection titles (NMSU Library).*

professional career with the publisher Doubleday illustrating book and magazine covers. While recognized as a major commercial illustrator, creating over 300 drawings for other authors and publications, Gorey also authored and illustrated more than 100 books of his own. Gorey's design aesthetic – described as unsettling, humorous, absurd, and macabre – developed a cult-like following with the help of heavy promotion and publishing efforts by Gotham Book Mart.

Also among the materials obtained from the sale were works that challenged the concept of free speech, evoking the ire of governmental customs and postal services, school boards, library trustees, and religious leaders from around the world for the author's inclusion of controversial "adult themes" and explicit content. These "banned books" included such literary figures as Truman Capote, Allen Ginsberg, D.H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, and perhaps most famously, Henry Miller.

Miller's *The Tropic of Cancer*, deemed obscene when published in 1934, would become one of the most censored books in history, setting off a nearly thirty-year effort to see the work sold legally in the United States. In 1939, according to Steloff, the author offered to sell to Gotham Book Mart first and second editions of his work to help fund his move from Paris to Greece:

Both *The Tropic of Cancer* and *Black Spring* were banned in this country, and I still didn't see what good it was to have the books in Paris, but there they were. After serious deliberation, I called the New York office of our French jobber, and it was arranged that the Paris office would hold the books until we could find a way of getting them here. But there must have been a misunderstanding in the Paris office because not long afterward I got a hysterical phone call from the jobber



*The dust jacket of the 1953 edition of *The Tropic of Cancer* indicates to purchasers the work is uncensored and not for import into the U.S.A. or England (Special Collections, NMSU Library).*

here that one of the cases in a large shipment from France that contained the twenty copies of *The Tropic of Cancer* had been opened by our customs! I told the jobber that I would take full responsibility and cover all the expense, but I was just about as hysterical as he was. I had been in close touch with Anaïs Nin, and she suggested that I write to Huntington Cairns in the State Department in Washington. After some days of deliberation, he suggested that we could have the books returned to Paris – or we could have them forwarded to Mexico. I wrote to Michael Frankel, who was living in Mexico City then. He agreed to accept the books, and eventually they got to him. Then friends going to Mexico picked them up, one at a time, and brought them to New York.<sup>83</sup>

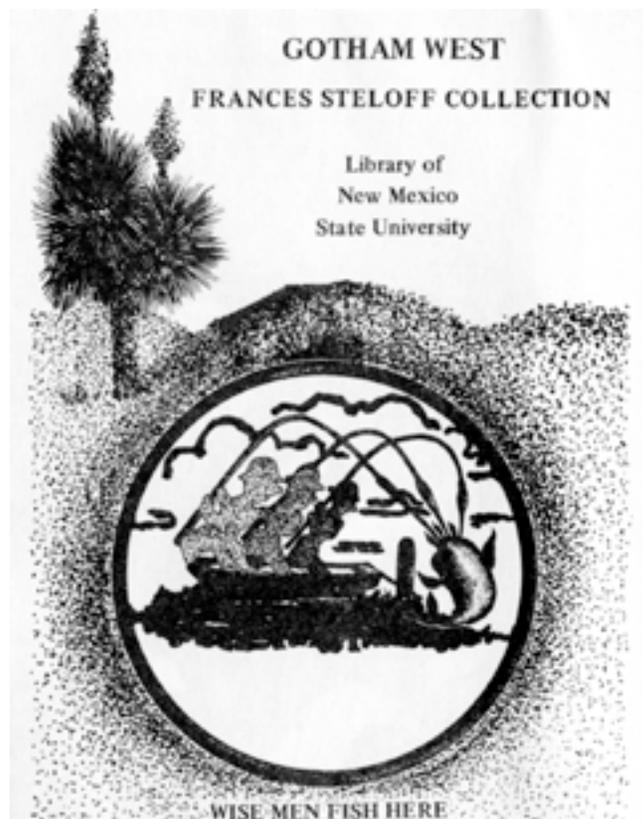
Multiple copies of *The Tropic of Cancer*, including several with dust jackets stating they “must not be imported into U.S.A. and England,” made their way to the library’s special collections after processing.<sup>84</sup>

Dr. Dyke hoped to honor Gotham and Steloff in perpetuity, initially suggesting that an area or room in the library might bear their names.<sup>85</sup> Perhaps overruled by his superiors, as naming rights generally went to financial donors or those directly connected to the institution, Dyke nevertheless made good on his earlier promise to Steloff by having his staff adhere

commemorative bookplates into each book as it went through the cataloging process. The library created two distinct bookplates for placement on the book’s interior board or end sheet, one memorializing the Gotham Book Mart and added to general collection titles, and the other paying tribute to founder, Frances Steloff, and added to the special collection titles. The latter books – generally modern first editions, limited editions, signed copies, or rare titles – bore the further distinction of being shelved in the library’s rare book room as part of the newly created “Gotham West – Frances Steloff Collection,” as signified by the bookplate.<sup>86</sup>

As the one-year anniversary of the purchase approached, two bond-funded initiatives began to work hand-in-hand. Nearly 90,000 titles from Gotham had been roughly cataloged and could be requested by library patrons with only a 48-hour delay for off-site retrieval. Upon return of

the checked-out item, the publication got the full attention of the cataloging team using the newly installed OCLC terminals. With data from the cooperative catalog, the title received a much fuller descriptive catalog record and a newly printed card replaced the old one in the catalog. Rather than returning to storage, the work found its place on a Branson Library shelf, arranged in proper Library of Congress call number order.<sup>87</sup> Thus, patron demand helped drive NMSU cataloging efforts, which in turn made the library’s holdings more discoverable for inter-library loans by patrons around the state via the updated OCLC record.



***Bookplate for Gotham Book Mart purchases added to the special collection titles; note how both bookplates incorporate the bookstore’s motto and logo (Special Collections, NMSU Library).***

As the period for bond financing closed in the summer of 1978, the *Las Cruces Sun-News* concluded that the NMSU Library had proven innovative with taxpayer monies.<sup>88</sup> Dyke admitted to reporter Tom Schilling regarding the Gotham sale, “We still don’t know what all we have,” noting that the 175,000 items purchased, the revised number then offered, was still years away from being fully cataloged due to staffing limitations. While the astonishing numbers of the acquisition – in dollars and volume counts – and the names of literary giants – e.e. cummings, William Burroughs, James Baldwin, Gertrude Stein – proved the focus of the article, the concluding paragraphs also pointed to the computerized OCLC system as proof of the bond delivering on its original promise. Still, the multiple library processing and cataloging plans from the Gotham-era document the ongoing effort to get the material out of storage and onto the shelves; however, the lack of bodies to do the actual work, even if enabled by OCLC, remained problematic, one clearly foreseen by bond-proponents in 1972. The literature, experimental fiction, poetry, theater, cinema, dance, fine art and photography, metaphysical thought, and scholarly non-fiction published as modern first editions, limited editions, limited-print run magazines and periodicals, chapbooks, screenplays, broadsides, drawings, vinyl records, and scholarly libraries purchased from Gotham deserved more than what the university and the state budget could give.

On March 18, 1988, the NMSU Board of Regents approved a motion to dispose of “100,000 pieces valued at \$35,000 of the University Library’s remainder of Gotham Book Mart Inventory acquired in 1975” in one bid lot.<sup>89</sup> Identified as duplicative of material held in the NMSU system and occupying needed space in its still unprocessed state, the last of Gotham went to Peter Howard, of Berkeley, California’s Serendipity Books. Bart Harloe, then Head of Collection Management at the library, reached out to Andreas Brown, still operating out of his West 47<sup>th</sup> Street location in Manhattan fourteen years later, to see if he might be interested in purchasing back the material for

\$100,000.<sup>90</sup> He declined. The serendipity of the resale brought the material full circle as Howard, a Haverford College alumni like Hiram Hadley, earned a reputation as “one of the major anti-quarian book dealers of our time,” an attribution regularly given to Frances Steloff.<sup>91</sup>

## Conclusion

The NMSU Library’s transformation wrought by the State Educational Institution Library Bond Act of 1972 did not take place without several missteps. The lack of foresight by the New Mexico legislature and the pro-bond library supporters to create a financial means, whether through voter initiative or legislative means, to address the hiring of staff needed to handle such large materials purchases resulted in a major pinch-point in the library’s technical operations. The Gotham Book Mart sale, envisioned as the solution to rectifying the library’s arts and humanities deficiencies, became an arduous decade-long processing project. While 100,000 Gotham items eventually found a home on the library’s shelves, the true transaction price of each publication proved far higher as the overall number of added titles failed to reach expectations. When factoring in the cost of securing additional storage, the amount paid per item was at least double the much-earlier estimations. Taking on a project the size of Gotham given the limited time to adequately review the bookstore’s holdings became further problematic when the needed staff to get the books into user’s hands efficiently never materialized. While the purchase certainly proved an attention-grabbing transaction, the sale should have transpired differently. As the bond monies could be carried over each fiscal year and Andreas Brown’s imminent move never materialized, perhaps a better-suited arrangement for both NMSU and Gotham Book Mart, one less time-sensitive, could have been negotiated.<sup>92</sup>

The impact of the bond on NMSU’s library was primarily felt in the statewide cooperative efforts required to manage the rush of funds and in the development of physical collections. Through the allied planning of CONMAL and backed by BEF

approval, the administration of Branson Library initiated membership in OCLC and helped coordinate the dissemination of New Mexico's academic library holdings to encourage access beyond the geographically scattered campuses through interlibrary loan. By placing standing orders with book distributors and procuring the Gotham Book Mart offering, NMSU made efforts to close gaps in the holdings, particularly in the arts and humanities, a glaring weakness at a university wishing to expand its degree offerings beyond its "agriculture and mechanic arts" roots. In these regards, the bond money did inaugurate a new era in library development at NMSU.

**Dylan McDonald** is the Special Collections Librarian at the New Mexico State University Library. He came to New Mexico in 2019 from Sacramento, California, where he had been deputy city historian and manuscripts archivist at the Center for Sacramento History since 2004. Dylan holds an MA in history from Boise State University and previously taught as an adjunct in the graduate public history program at California State University, Sacramento. He serves on the executive board of the Society of Southwest Archivists and is a Certified Archivist.

## Endnotes

1. Simon F. Kropp, *That All May Learn: New Mexico State University 1888-1964* (Las Cruces, NM: New Mexico State University, 1972), 1-3; Gordon Owen, *Las Cruces, New Mexico 1849-1999: Multicultural Crossroads* (Las Cruces, NM: Red Sky Publishing Co., Inc., 1999), 83-84.
2. "More About the Agricultural College," *Rio Grande Republican*, November 13, 1886, 3.
3. Simon F. Kropp, "Hiram Hadley and the Founding of New Mexico State University," *Ari-*

- zona and the West* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 22.
4. Anna R. Bowman, *Hiram Hadley: March 17, 1833-Dec. 3, 1922* (Boston: Private, 1924): 32.
5. Land-grant colleges came into existence with the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862, which granted states control of former federal lands to raise funds with in order to establish or endow institutions of higher education. The original focus of these schools would be on teaching agriculture, science, and engineering, as was the case with what is today New Mexico State University.
6. Hiram Hadley, "The College Library," *Rio Grande Republican*, November 29, 1890, 2.
7. Hiram Hadley, "Some Reminiscences of the Beginning of Our Library," *The Round-Up*, March 20, 1917, 1.
8. Owen, 89-90; Bowman, 38.
9. The first accessioned material by the library were the tome *Webster's Dictionary* and the eight-volume set *Johnston's Encyclopedia*; see Cheryl Nancy Laslow Bandy, "The First Fifty Years of the New Mexico State University Library 1889-1939" (master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1970), 7.
10. *The Agricultural College and Experiment Station of New Mexico: Catalogue for 1890 and Announcements for 1890-1891* (Chicago: Hornstein Bros, Printers, 1890), 17.
11. Hiram Hadley, "The College Library," *Rio Grande Republican*, November 29, 1890, 2.
12. *Rio Grande Republican*, January 15, 1892, 3.
13. *Rio Grande Republican*, May 1, 1891, 1; September 11, 1891, 1.
14. Mary Alice Will and Lise Courtney Howe, "A History of the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts" (undergraduate thesis, New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 1929), 21.
15. *Tenth Annual Register New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts Mesilla Park: Catalogue of Students for 1899-1900 and Announcements for 1900-1901* (unknown, c.1900), 61; and Bandy, 22. The following story imparts the challenges of running a library in a space not designed for the activity: "The physical plan of the Library did not allow for an opening so that one could go

directly from behind the counter into the reading room. It was necessary to go outside into the hall through one door and then enter the reading room through another. Miss Baker (the librarian at the time) had requested that President Luther Foster have a 'hole' made for her to get out, but he refused, saying the counter was of such beautiful wood it should not be cut. However, the President entered the Library one day in time to see Miss Baker vault over the counter into the main part of the room. He expostulated with Miss Baker, saying her behavior was undignified, but she told him she was too busy to go through the hall. Each succeeding time the President entered the Library, he found the persistent Miss Baker flying over the counter. Subsequently, the hole was cut;" see Bandy, 17-18.

16. *Nineteenth Annual Catalog New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts Agricultural College: Catalog of Students for 1908-1909 Announcements for 1909-1910* (Santa Fe, NM: New Mexican Printing Company, 1909), 21.

17. *Twenty-eighth Annual Catalog New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts State College, New Mexico Catalog for 1917-1918 Announcement (sic) for 1918-1919* (Albuquerque, NM: Albright & Anderson Printers and Binders, 1918), 44. Will and Howe also place the date at 1918 (22), however Grumet places the date at 1920; see Patricia Grumet, *The Buildings of New Mexico State University: NMSU's Building History, Volume 1* (Las Cruces, NM: New Mexico State University, 2004), 118.

18. Bandy, 69.

19. Students in the Civil Engineering program drew up plans for a new agricultural building, which they designed to include space in the basement and first floor for the library. It might have been wishful thinking, as the move would free up the congested space in the engineering building, a cramped structure where they received the majority of their schooling. This plan never happened, as it would require another costly move and a temporary sojourn for the library before a new facility to house the collection could be built; see

"Junior Civil Engineers are Making Design for New Agricultural Building," *Rio Grande Republic*, April 13, 1922, 6.

20. Mary Alice Will and Lise Courtney Howe,

22. This claim was often made in written descriptions of the library, however rarely were exact measurements or side-by-side comparisons provided as evidence; see E.C. Hollinger, "Our Library Now One of Best in Whole Southwest," *The Round-Up*, March 20, 1917, 1; "N.M.C. of A. and M.A. Library is the Largest and Most Complete Library Connected with Any Educational Institute in the Entire Southwest," *The Round-Up*, March 12, 1918, 1.; and "Old Main was never like this," *New Mexico Aggie* 3, no. 8 (July 1953): 6.

21. "Students and Faculty Enjoy New Library," *Las Cruces Citizen*, October 13, 1928, 5.

22. "Library Receives Mural Paintings," *The Round-Up*, September 12, 1934, 1.

23. Bandy, 46-47.

24. Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Regents of the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, July 15, 1950, 639, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

25. *64<sup>th</sup> General Catalog Issue College Record 1953-1954 1954-1955* (State College, NM: New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 1953), 4.

26. "New Buildings Not Completed," *The Round-Up*, January 21, 1953, 1; "New Administration Building Occupied," *The Round-Up*, February, 25, 1953, 1.

27. "The College Library Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1953," 12-17, Folder 6, Box 8 UA120 Library Faculty-Chester Linscheid, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

28. Chester H. Linscheid, "From Traditional to Contemporary," *New Mexico Aggie* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1966): 10; and Grumet, Vol. 2, 79.

29. The University Archives would later take on the name Hobson-Huntsinger University Archives on May 24, 1968 in recognition of university donors.

30. Chester H. Linscheid to Lila Foss, January 23, 1987, UA120 (87-003), Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
31. University President Roger B. Corbett noted after reading the library's annual report for 1967 regarding the completed building expansion, "Your report brings me up short in that I had felt that we had taken care of the Library situation for approximately 10 years. It proves again how great our growing pains are and how fast we are moving;" see Roger B. Corbett to Chester H. Linscheid, November 1, 1967, scrapbook, Box 9 UA120 Library Faculty-Chester Linscheid, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
32. Dean Whitten, "Library Bond Issue, Filling the Gap," *New Mexico Aggie* 21, no. 4 (August 1972): 3. Dyke came to NMSU in July 1969 having earned a doctorate at University of Illinois in 1957 and after serving stints at Eastern New Mexico University and Texas A&M University.
33. "Students Want Increased Library Hours," *Graduate Student Newsletter* 1, no. 3 (March 1970): 2-3, and "Library Hours," *Graduate Student Newsletter* (October 1970): 5, Folder 11.3, Box 2 A73-43 Library Faculty-Mildred Barrett, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
34. "Present Library Situation," *Graduate Student Newsletter* 1, no. 4 (May 1970): 3, Folder 11.3, Box 2 A73-43 Library Faculty-Mildred Barrett, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
35. "Martin named chairman," *The New Mexican*, September 22, 1972, A12.
36. "Bond Approval Would Give State Libraries \$10 Million," *Page One* 8, no. 1 (September 1, 1972): 1; "New Mexico Librarians Do More Than Talk About Cooperation," *New Mexico Libraries Newsletter* 1, no. 2 (September 1972): 1.
37. Jackie Farmer, "Inter-campus organization to be attempted," *The Round Up*, October 11, 1972, 1.
38. "Voters to consider library issue," *The Round Up*, October 20, 1972, 5; Fred Buckles, "Democrats take lead over GOP in Las Vegas poll," *The New Mexican*, October 20, 1972, A11.
39. Marvin Tessner, "Bond Needed To Boost College Library Status," *Las Cruces Sun-News*, October 15, 1972, 14.
40. Verner W. Clapp and Robert T. Jordan, "Quantitative Criteria for Adequacy of Academic Library Collections," *College & Research Libraries* 26, no. 5 (September 1965): 371-380. Dr. Dyke and his predecessor, Chester H. Linscheid, had been sharing these types of Clapp-Jordan figures for years with NMSU leadership in hopes of addressing this shortfall; see "New Mexico State University The University Library Annual Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1966," 12-13, Folder 6, Box 8 UA120 Library Faculty-Chester Linscheid, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
41. "Doctorate Degrees Accredited," *Las Cruces Sun-News*, March 24, 1972, 8.
42. Founded in 1951, the New Mexico Board of Educational Finance (BEF) has no direct authority over educational institutions rather it serves as a budgetary agency that makes spending recommendations subject to review of other state agencies; see Edward M. Goldberg, "The New Mexico Board of Educational Finance: A Study of the Coordination of State-Supported Higher Education" (master's thesis, University of New Mexico, 1956).
43. The text of the election measure asked voters to if they were for or against the following statement: "State Educational Institution Library Bond Act: The State Educational Institution Library Bond Act provides for the successive issuance and sale of State Educational Institution Library Bonds for each of the following years and in the amount specified for each year, 1973 - two millions dollars (\$2,000,000), 1974 - two million dollars (\$2,000,000), 1975 - two million dollars (\$2,000,000), 1976 - two million dollars (\$2,000,000), and 1977 - two million dollars (\$2,000,000) to provide funds for capital expenditures of libraries at state educational institutions, and provides for a tax levy for payments of interest and principal of the bonds."
44. "Services/Projects/Meetings/Buildings," *New*

*Mexico Libraries Newsletter* 1, no 2. (September 1972): 7-8.

45. "September 7, 1972 Portales Meeting Of Academic Library Directors Minutes," Folder CONMAL Minutes, Box 2, UA86-6, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

46. "Criteria for Evaluating Current Academic Library Collections," Folder Bond Fund-5 Year Plan, Box 2, UA86-6, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library. Also of note is the "NMSU Institutional Library Plan for the Five Year Period, 1973-74/1978-79" which lays out nine similar priorities in building its collections of library materials.

47. "November 10, 1972 The Council of New Mexico Academic Libraries Albuquerque Meeting Minutes," Folder CONMAL Minutes, Box 2, UA86-6, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

48. Bill Feather, "Book fund formulas Ok'd," *The New Mexican*, December 11, 1972, B3.

49. La Juan Cook to Dr. James Dyke, November 9, 1972, Folder Bond Issue Working Papers, Box 2, UA86-6, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

50. "Southwestern Libraries to Participate in OCLC," *New Mexico Libraries Newsletter* 2, no. 3 (May 1974): 2. For an initial report of the OCLC system at ENMU, see Shirley Lowman, "Automation Comes to New Mexico Libraries," *New Mexico Libraries Newsletter* 3, no. 1 (January 1975): 5.

51. James Dyke, "CONMAL Union Author Catalog," *New Mexico Library Association Newsletter* 4, no. 3 (July 1976): 7.

52. See multiple proposals to the BEF for capital outlay, Folder Bond-Capital Outlay, Box 2, UA86-6, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

53. "March 16, 1973 Executive Committee of the Council of New Mexico Academic Libraries Alamogordo Meeting Minutes," Folder CONMAL Minutes, Box 2, UA86-6, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

54. Joe Sabatini, "College Library Bond Issue Books – An Unavailable Resource?" *New Mexico Libraries Newsletter* 2, no. 1 (January 1974): 1.

55. James Dyke to Department Heads, October 15, 1973, Folder Bond Issue-Faculty Advisory Committee, Box 2, UA86-6, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

56. *New Mexico State University Annual Report to the President of the University 1973-1974* (Las Cruces, NM: New Mexico State University, 1974), 370.

57. "Library Expansion Is Now Underway," *Las Cruces Sun-News*, February 24, 1974, E6.

58. James Dyke to Dr. Floyd Abbott, December 23, 1974, Correspondence Binder July 1974-June 1975, Box 1, UA86-56, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library. The shifting of collections was also further complicated during construction as the library transitioned from four separate divisional sections into one single collection serviced by one Reference Department.

59. *New Mexico State University Annual Report to the President of the University 1972-1973* (Las Cruces, NM: New Mexico State University, 1973), 338.

60. *New Mexico State University Annual Report to the President of the University 1973-1974* (Las Cruces, NM: New Mexico State University, 1974), 371.

61. "Library money to be used," *The Round Up*, May 4, 1973, 5; "Students can order books from library," *The Round Up*, November 28, 1973, 8; "Library Service Expanded," *The Round Up*, February 13, 1974, 1.

62. "December 7, 1973 The Council of New Mexico Academic Libraries Roswell Meeting Minutes," Folder CONMAL Minutes, Box 2, UA86-6, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

63. James Dyke to Jack Bartfield, January 17, 1975, Correspondence Binder July 1974-June 1975, Box 1, UA86-56, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.

64. Thomas Lask, "Gotham Book Mart Thins Its Shelves," *New York Times*, April 24, 1975, 38.

65. Mike Murphey, "Famed New York Book Mart Stock Relocated at NMSU," *Las Cruces Sun-News*, June 29, 1975, 21; Peter Goodman, "NMSU To Buy Historic Book Stock," *El Paso Times*, March 4, 1975.
66. "Major Book Purchase From Gotham," *AB Bookman's Weekly*, March 24, 1975, 1354; Louisa Scioscia Stephens, "NM University System – Gotham Book Mart," Riverrun Bookshop Blog, June 1, 2009, <https://riverrunbookshop.blogspot.com/2009/06/nm-university-system-gotham-book-mart.html>, accessed November 26, 2020.
67. Louisa Scioscia Stephens, June 1, 2009.
68. "Call For Bids," *Las Cruces Sun-News*, February 21, 1975, 16.
69. "Intervisitation Faces Board Again," *Las Cruces Sun-News*, March 7, 1975, 1.
70. Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Regents of the New Mexico State University, March 6, 1975, 1483; "NMSU to purchase 200,000 books," *The Round Up*, March 10, 1975, 1.
71. James Dyke to D.C. Roush, March 7, 1975, Correspondence Binder July 1974-June 1975, Box 1, UA86-56, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
72. James Dyke to M. Scilken, October 22, 1975, Correspondence Binder July 1975-June 1976, Box 1, UA86-56, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library; Louisa Scioscia Stephens, "NM University System – Gotham Book Mart," Louisa Scioscia Stephens, "Whatever Happened to all those Book Gems? - Gotham Book Mart, Riverrun Bookshop Blog, June 3, 2009, <https://riverrunbookshop.blogspot.com/2009/06/whatever-happened-to-all-those-book.html>, accessed November 26, 2020.
73. James Dyke to Ted Arellano, March 17, 1975, Correspondence Binder July 1974-June 1975, Box 1, UA86-56, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
74. Thomas Lask, 38; James Dyke to Gertrude Botkin, April 30, 1975, Correspondence Binder July 1974-June 1975, Box 1, UA86-56, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
75. Jacob L. Chernofsky, "Frances Steloff: Centennial of a Bookseller," *AB Bookman's Weekly*, January 4, 1988, 9.
76. Thomas Lask, 38.
77. James Dyke to Frances Steloff, March 24, 1975, Correspondence Binder July 1974-June 1975, Box 1, UA86-56, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
78. Mike Murphey, 21.
79. "5,000-Volume Collection Goes To NMSU Library," *Las Cruces Sun-News*, July 10, 1969, 1.
80. James Dyke to M. Scilken, October 22, 1975.
81. Ibid.
82. "1974-1975 Acquisitions and Inventory Report for NMSU," September 8, 1975, Folder Bond Issue-Annual Monitoring, Box 2, UA86-6, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
83. Frances Steloff, "Henry Miller," *Journal of Modern Literature* 4, no. 4 (April 1975): 809.
84. Henry Miller, *The Tropic of Cancer* (Tokyo: Keimeisha, 1953).
85. James Dyke to Andreas Brown, March 6, 1975, Correspondence Binder July 1974-June 1975, Box 1, UA86-56, James Dyke, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
86. The Gotham purchase had a role to play in the development of the library's Special Collections. In their annual report to the governor in 1895, college regents stated the acquisition of "matter relating to the early history of the Territory such as files of old newspapers, old maps, and other documents of value" a priority. Over time, a New Mexico Collection of rare books was created, followed by other significant special collection efforts: the Sarabia Memorial Library on Latin America (1940), University Archives (1965), the General Hugh Milton II Room (1971), and the Rio Grande Historical Collections (1972). By the fall 1977, growth of the material found in the rare book room, spurred by the influx of Gotham material, saw Christine Buder appointed as the first full-time Special Collections Librarian at NMSU.

87. "New Books Pack NMSU Library," *Las Cruces Sun-News*, February 22, 1976, 10.
88. Tom Schilling, "Library Expands, Innovates," *Las Cruces Sun-News*, June 25, 1978, D1.
89. Minutes of the Board of Regents of New Mexico State University, March 18, 1988, 2764, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library.
90. Bart Harloe to Andreas Brown, February 25, 1988, copy in author's possession.
91. Frances Dinkelspiel, "Era ends: Liquidation sale at Berkeley's Serendipity Books," *Berkeleyside*, November 7, 2013, <https://www.berkeleyside.com/2013/11/07/an-end-of-an-era-serendipity-books-liquidation-sale>, accessed November 26, 2020.
92. In 2004, Brown moved his bookstore to 16 East 46<sup>th</sup> Street; see Mel Gussow, "Where Wise Men Fish? It's Moved Down a Block," *New York Times*, August 4, 2004, E3.

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## Sister Onfa

### Uranian Missionary to Mesilla

*By John Benedict Buescher*

I offer here, as an invitation to future research, a preliminary sketch of an early herald of the religious New Age, who was drawn with her followers to Southern New Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a preliminary sketch because I have found very little information about her early life, and because it contains points that, without more solid evidence, are speculative, and are quite open to revision, depending on what turns up.

Santa Onfa De Santos, whose birth name is uncertain, was born in Louisiana in October 1856.<sup>1</sup> She died on December 23, 1914, in her isolated home outside Mesilla. Her laconic obituary notice in the *El Paso Herald* was suggestive, but vague about her past:

Onfa de Santos, better known as “Sister Onfa,” of the Uranian mission, died at her home, situated several miles west of Mesilla on the road to Deming. She lived alone with no neighbors less than about two miles, but friends were with her at the time of her death.

She was a highly educated woman and a writer of note. Her contributions for various periodicals were generally of a religious nature. She had a book partly written at the time of her death. It was entitled “Where the Arrow Fell.” She was for some time a correspondent of the *New York Herald*. At the Columbian exposition in Chicago she was art reporter for the *Chicago Record*. She had traveled extensively. She was a nurse during a portion of her life, and came here from California a number of years ago. She lived a quiet life, only becoming acquainted with a few people here.<sup>2</sup>

Another brief notice in the *Rio Grande Republic* in Las Cruces added:

The world at large and this community especially, have had a great loss in the death of Santa Onfa de Santos (Sister Onfa), who passed quietly away Tuesday, December 23, at her home, the Urania Mission. Her illness was of short duration, loving friends being with her at the last.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from these notices, what evidence do I have of her early life? The first time she seems to appear is in the 1898 New York City directory, where she is listed as “Onfa Desantos,” living at 108 W. 83<sup>rd</sup> Street. The listing suggests she was the head of her household. There is no occupation listed, but, as stated in her obituary, she may have been contributing articles to the *New York Herald*.

Two years later, the 1900 Federal Census found her, as “Santa De Onfa,” at St. Elizabeth’s Hospital in Boston on June 16, where she was a patient. St. Elizabeth’s was a Catholic hospital that treated a full range of maladies. It was managed and staffed by an order of religious sisters who wore a full-length habit of white, including a white underveil and a black veil. The census entry says she was widowed, and that she had been born in Louisiana. (The 1910 census verified her date and place of birth and added the information that she had had two children, both of whom were still living.) The 1900 census record does not say what she was being treated for; but, for reasons that will become clearer, I think it is possible that she was being treated for consumption, and that the doctors at St. Elizabeth’s advised her to move West for the climate.

Less than three months after the census was taken in Boston, an ad in the personals columns of the *San Francisco Examiner* announced, “The famous Mme. Santos de Onfa just arrived from Boston; palmistry; horoscopes written; 10 to 5 daily. 1129 Ellis street.”<sup>4</sup> I believe the word “famous” in the ad reflected more of a promotional wish than a reality, because I can find nothing about her as a psychic consultant or teacher before this.

The 1901 San Francisco city directory listed her (“Santa Onfa”) at the same address, but now described her simply as an astrologer. By 1905, she had moved south. The Los Angeles city directory for that year (prepared in late 1904) listed her as “Sister Onfa DeSantos,” living at 2129 Hoover Street, but by May she seems to have moved further south to State Street in San Marcos, north of San Diego, and was advertising as far away as Santa Barbara for students or clients. She was no longer a mere palmist or astrologer, but had become a seer, an adept, a mystic, a kind of guru, the head of a mystical “Order of Uranian Mystics.” (“Urania” being an old word referring generally to astrology or “astral science”)<sup>5</sup>

A display ad showed a photo of her dressed in a very high-collared white robe and a long white veil, though the woman in the photo looks to my eye to have been on the earth less than the fifty years that Onfa had been. Perhaps it was an old photo. “S. Onfa,” it said:

Offers practical methods of soul development demonstrating the continuity of life beyond the change called death. Conscious transition from the physical body on to higher spheres. The power of concentration, producing results on material, mental or spiritual planes. All phases of unfoldment. I come to use your latent forces. Hours from 10 a. m. to 5 p. m.<sup>6</sup>

Having followed her track so far to Southern California, we find another guru figure assembling a cult following there around the same time, offering to teach esoteric “practical spiritual development” and publishing a journal, *The Light of India*.



SISTER ONFA

*Onfa de Santos from Light Of India, June 1907.*

He was Baba Bharati, who has been summarized this way:

Surendranath Mukerji (“Baba Premanand Bharati,” 1868-1914) was a Bengali English-language newspaperman (and an editor of the *Lahore Tribune*) of prominent family who was converted to Gaudiya Vaishnavism in 1884 and, turned holy man and missionary after a vision, tried to spread the movement in America, Japan, and India. He was an early example of the first wave of gurus and swamis to descend on the United States after the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893, and his success (he claimed 5,000 disciples, mostly women, in Los Angeles) was a factor in the passing of the Alien Exclusionary Act of 1917 and the resentment of American mages ... who urged people to support their local gurus and “Buy American.” He arrived in the United States in October 1902 (after traveling through Paris and London, where he offered three lessons in “spiritual development” for a

guinea) and for several years made the circuit of East Coast reform-minded, feminist, New Thought enclaves like Green Acre (“long-haired men and short-haired women”) and then, inevitably, decamped for Los Angeles in August 1905, where he established a “Krishna Home.” His message was a combination of “Krishna Consciousness” and American New Thought, tempered with pointed comments on “The White Peril.” The journal was a very polished production for its type, in turns literary and devotional, and overlain with a very strong, and even virulent, strain of anti-western, anti-Christian thought. Bharati thoroughly resented his perceived slights at the hands of his former colonial masters in India, especially the “Tommies,” and was determined to point out western errors and failings and to emphasize the primacy and superiority of Hinduism, at last awakened by the impositions of Christian missionaries. His novel *Jim: An Anglo-Indian Romance Founded on Real Facts*, a “reply to” Kipling’s *Kim*, was first published serially in the journal and showed a westerner humiliated and put in his place on being exposed to the wonders and secrets of the Indians—a “divine people.”<sup>7</sup>

I do not know how Baba Bharati and Sister Onfa encountered each other, but they certainly did, as evidenced by the new way in which Sister Onfa presented herself as a teacher of “spiritual development” when she reached Southern California. The next trace of Sister Onfa I find is a display ad in the June 1907 issue of Bharati’s Los Angeles-published *Light of India* in which she offered to send to readers a free booklet described as “A message of the Higher Occult Life as Taught by Jesus of Nazareth.” Readers were directed, however, to write to her, care of the Order of the Golden Rule, Mount Aden on the Heights, Aden P. O., New Mexico.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the fifty-year-old psychic teacher had now moved to the rather unlikely and bleak location of Aden, in Doña Ana County. It was, as Jim Eckles has pointed out, a desolate



**Baba Bharati from *Light of India*, Nov. 1906.**

stop near the lava fields west of Las Cruces on the Southern Pacific Railroad, with little more than a post office and perhaps a building or two, thrown up with an ultimately fruitless hope by the railroad that a community of some kind might grow up there.<sup>9</sup> In truth, some cattle roamed about the area and a little pumice was mined in the area’s lava beds, but it never amounted to much. Its population in 1912 was 15, which may have been its maximum.

Why Sister Onfa and surely less than a handful of followers got on the train in Southern California and got off at Aden is a mystery to me, and perhaps it was to her as well. But the Southern Pacific Company busily circulated promotional material to encourage settlement along its line in New Mexico, and perhaps Sister Onfa was looking for the very healthiest climate she could find. A booklet issued by the Bureau of Immigration of New Mexico in 1908 touted Doña Ana County as the most perfect place anywhere for those suffering from consumption. “Annually many healthseekers from all parts of the United States,” it said, “seek

health while resting in the delightful sunshine and on every hand are found the happy, prosperous homes of one time health seekers, PEOPLE WHO HAVE COME IN TIME.”<sup>10</sup>

More to the point, however, is that it appears that Sister Onfa had visited Aden as early as 1902, based on her later claim under the Homestead Act for the entirety of a rise referred to as Aden Peak, which sits just west of the Southern Pacific Railroad line there.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, she was definitely residing in and giving lectures at that time in California, so I conclude that she (and perhaps others) were intermittently traveling to Aden, essentially to conduct meditation retreats at the top of the rise. Without any other evidence, I can only imagine a scenario in which Sister Onfa first discovered Aden Peak, while traveling from someplace to somewhere on the Southern Pacific. Perhaps the train was delayed for a while when it stopped for water at Aden. Perhaps, then, she got off the train and took a hike up to the top of the rise north of the track to look at the view from there. In this imaginary scenario (let us make it at twilight when the stars were coming out in the clear sky, an appealing point to an astrologer), she

had some kind of exalted experience there and was deeply affected, deciding it was her “power spot” for connecting with higher beings. Then she got back on the train, it continued to its destination (San Francisco? Los Angeles?) and had someone research the place and file a claim on it, having decided it was her Mountain of Destiny. (I am just winging it here.)

By the beginning of 1908, they had set up at least a temporary “secluded refuge,” which they called “Mount Aden on the Heights.” As Jim Eckles puts it, “At less than 300 feet tall it isn’t much of a mountain but in those flats it does stand out.” The little group of “Uranians” described it to the outside world as “the haven for health seekers ... those who seek a temporary retirement from the strife and turmoil of life.”<sup>12</sup> Probably the key word here, for visitors, is “temporary.” It is also very likely that Sister Onfa and her followers had now come to see her entire migrations through California since 1900 as guided by a higher intelligence, whose aim they themselves might not yet fully comprehend, but requiring a silent ingathering of souls from among her California clients and students, who had formed a secret society, the As-



*Mount Aden to the southwest of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks. Photo by Jim Eckles*



***Looking south from the top of Mt. Aden with DACHS President Dennis Daily taking photos. Some may jump to the conclusion that the rocks were piled up in a circle by Uranians. However, most high points in the mountainous West have rock piles on them - some are cairns and some seem to be attempts to create a wind shelter. Photo by Jim Eckles***



***An old road at the base of Mt. Aden, on the south side, leads to some crude, low rock walls that may have been the start of Sister Onfa's retreat, maybe an attempt to meet the Homestead Act requirements to show progress in improving the acreage. It does not appear to have ever been fully developed. Photo by Jim Eckles***

sociation of Uranian Mystics (A. U. M.), who, without any outward expression until then, had been called to that spot and that moment in Aden to announce themselves to the world. I think it is impossible not to assume that the acronym "A. U. M." quite deliberately referred to the ancient Indian, most sacred seed syllable *Aum* (or *Om*), out of which, according to Indian myth, the universe was born from a single sound.

I do not know the names or numbers of people who followed Sister Onfa to Mount Aden from Southern California, but one of them was George Albert Brocke (1865-1941). By December 1907, he would be appointed postmaster at Aden, and would try his hand at some small retail merchandising

there, perhaps selling refreshments or Uranian booklets to the SPRR passengers who were on the local trains that stopped there, or perhaps he sold supplies to those who came there to seek spiritual refreshment on Mount Aden, though Brocke appears to have taken up his actual residence somewhere near Deming (presumably commuting by rail to Aden).

It seems to have been Brocke who established a connection by mail between Sister Onfa and another occultist, Celestia Root Lang (1842-1924) of Chicago.<sup>13</sup> In 1892, Mrs. Lang had published "*Son of Man,*" or *the Sequel to Evolution*, a book that attempted to reconcile her understanding of Christianity with the theory of Evolution by envisioning the human race as evolving and ascending to a state of "Cosmic Consciousness."<sup>14</sup> The publisher, known for its catalog of Progressive

books, had advertised it as “in perfect touch with advanced Christian Evolutionary thought, but takes a step beyond the present position of Religion Leaders.” On the strength of having published it, she had been invited to give an address during one of the many special “congresses” (this one on Religion and Evolution) that attached themselves to the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the same fair that also hosted the World’s Parliament of Religions, at which Westerners were first given the opportunity to hear such delegates of Eastern faiths as Swami Vivekenanda.<sup>15</sup> If Sister Onfa’s obituary was correct, Celestia Lang could have intersected with her then, because Sister Onfa, under some name, covered the Exposition for the *Chicago Record* as its art reporter, but I do not know if they did in fact meet then.

Lang was also an avid devotee (as was Sister Onfa) of the works of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), the founder of the Theosophical Society in 1875. When Lang’s rather airy effusions, both in poetry and prose, written from within her “higher vibrations,” were rejected by some of the more established Spiritualist and New Thought journals, she decided to begin her own monthly journal, *The Divine Life*. Its first issue was published from Chicago, where she lived, in November 1906.<sup>16</sup>

Sister Onfa’s “co-associate” (as she referred to Brocke) was apparently a subscriber to *The Divine Life* and sent to Lang Sister Onfa’s booklet and information about “Mount Aden on the Heights.” This began a period during which Sister Onfa and Sister Celestia not only corresponded, but also collaborated. Sister Onfa

wrote Lang in July 1908, from “Mount-Aden-on-the Heights, N. M.”:

Our work at this Heart Center has been established for a little over seven years. It is an isolated place upon the Desert, chosen, for occult reasons, for carrying on the work for a certain purpose and a certain length of time. We have done no public work whatever, and our message is only sent to those whom we know to be true students of the Higher or Divine Life. I am the Scribe of the Council and the visible representative. We are a sub-Lodge of the Great Lodge, or Brotherhood of Love and Wisdom. Our connections are both with the Lodge on this our Earth plane and its counterpart on higher planes. We have been sent to do a certain work; to establish certain forgotten truth. We have a message concerning the Master, Jesus, from those who sent the Wise Men of the East to welcome Him and have kept the record of His Life and Mission.<sup>17</sup>

What sort of neophyte would be expected to come and drink from the wisdom of the Great Lodge overseeing humankind, invisible to most, but manifested in its incipient “outer form” now in Southern New Mexico? Sister Onfa explained in the next issue of *The Divine Life*:

He must clearly understand the indissoluble links connecting the Microcosmical with the Macrocosmical Worlds, the Higher Ego with the One Universal Ego. Such knowledge is absolutely

TRUTH ALONE IS REAL.



Cover detail from *The Divine Life*, Dec. 1908.

requisite, whether the student aims at purely metaphysical knowledge of the Higher Life or to practical Adeptship. Therefore the Teachers of the Inner Court, or Practical Section, of the A. U. M. begin their instructions to all students by an effort to define and to show this connection in all directions with the worlds—Absolute, Archetypal, Spiritual, Mental, Psychic, Astral and Elemental. . . . The Neophyte must acquire a perfect understanding of the Correspondence between Color, Sound and Number and their relation to the Macrocosmical and Microcosmical Systems. These vibrations are the basic principles of all manifestations—”The Seven-Tongued Flame.”<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps such a neophyte, wandering about in contemplation on the bare lava fields around Aden, might find that all this made some sense. At any rate, Sister Onfa did. More significantly, by this time, Sister Onfa and her Uranians had already taken steps to acquire a more permanent second site in Doña Ana County somewhere in or near Mesilla or Las Cruces. They seem to have envisioned the place as a residential religious training center, as “Lodge I” of A. U. M., leaving “Mount Aden on the Heights” as perhaps little more than a pilgrimage place.

The move away from Aden would have been important for another reason as well. In May, “Mrs. Santa Onfa de Santos, of Aden, N. M.” had “filed notice of her intention to make final proof in support of her claim” under the provisions of the Homestead Act for 160 acres centered around Aden Peak; in other words, the entire mountain.<sup>19</sup> Claims under the Homestead Act required evidence of continuous habitation and of improvements on the land. That would have been difficult. However, named as witnesses “to prove her continuous residence upon, and cultivation of, the land,” were George Brocke and three other men, all listed as living in Deming. They were Anthony J. Clark (a land developer and official of the newly incorporated Colorado, Columbus and Mexican

Railroad Company), Wright W. Lawhen (Chief Freight Clerk in Deming for the Southern Pacific), and Frank Phillips (an engineering foreman for the railroad and local lodge recorder of the Ancient Order of United Workmen). These last three were all naturally eager to see the development of communities, even unpromising ones, along the railroad lines. They might also have been able to give testimony that she and her followers had shipped supplies over to Aden from time to time. Unsurprisingly, it appears the claim was denied (it seems to have been recorded as formally “cancelled” in 1910). The Uranians’ move to the Mesilla Valley was therefore not difficult to justify. Besides the property on which the abandoned mission stood, Sister Onfa also seems to have then bought a small lodging for herself near Mesilla.<sup>20</sup>

By October, Celestia Lang, demonstrating her strong solidarity with Sister Onfa, had organized her own “Divine Life Center” in Chicago as Lodge II of the A. U. M. and told her readers that she was ready to receive applications from her readers for membership. Sister Onfa seems to have offered to send Sister Celestia, whom she named “Daughter of URANIA,” a list of names of those who might be interested in uniting themselves with Lodge II. Lang would also thereafter redesign the cover of *The Divine Life*, picturing on it the A. U. M. symbol of an ouroboros enclosing a pentangle enclosing an All-Seeing Eye. It closely resembled a logo often used in Theosophical Society publications, which was encircled by the popular Theosophist motto, “There is no religion higher than Truth.” In the A. U. M. rendition, the motto is “Truth Alone is Real.”

In a letter (dated mysteriously URANIA, 18618747—A. D. 1908) that Lang reproduced in *The Divine Life*, Sister Onfa mentioned incidentally that the new “Heart Center” had its own press and that she had had to learn to set type. She also declared that the “Holy Ones of earth as well as Those watching from the higher spheres” had approved the establishment of the new Chicago branch, now that the “seven years of silence” of the Uranians, “without making any public propa-

ganda, or effort to reach the people on this lower plane,” had been completed. The great invisible lodge whose earthly scribe she was described their work as a continuation of the Theosophy begun by “that great Loyal Soul,” Helena Petrovna Blavatsky:

It is our portion to restore to Christianity its lost Mysteries, and to show that it is identical with that of every great world religion; we know, and will prove that the Blessed Master of Nazareth was indeed a Prince Adept, a true Son of God, that His Crucifixion was a triumph and not a sacrifice as the Church believes. The Lodge will restore, to those able and willing to accept it, the most pure and ancient Religion, the worship which prevailed during the reign of the Sons of God, on this planet.<sup>21</sup>

She described the founding of her new little colony, the “Heart Center,” and suggested that the disciples she had found to renovate the place were working without pay:

From such a Heart Center all helpfulness of whatsoever nature must ever be Love’s free offering, and all received must come in like manner. Every effort, on the part of those appointed to such a place, must be directed to preparing the place to this end. The purchase of the needed land, (we own ours), the building of shelters, the planting of fruits, and all such products as are suited to the maintenance of such a Center. URANIA MISSION is the place they have secured for this purpose. The property is an old abandoned Indian mission. The climate is ideal, the soil is rich and there is an abundance of water with also water rights from the Government’s great reservoir of Elephant Butte on the Rio Grande. There is a large old adobe house with a small chapel connected; both are nearly in ruins, but the massive walls will stand a hundred years and the repairing is only a simple matter. We will begin cultivating as soon as possible. In

this beautiful valley to which we go, there are no Americans save those of our own Order. The rest of the settlers are Mexicans, a kindly, helpful people. This place here will be closed for future use. I think with this explanation you will fully understand the relationship of the whole body to its Heart Center.<sup>22</sup>

The following month, Sister Onfa’s letter to *The Divine Life* announced that “we held our first service in the little ruined Chapel” on the 7<sup>th</sup> of the month at 7 p.m., a time and date, perhaps, full of mystical potency on the astral plane: “You must have felt the wave of Divine Life flowing out,” she wrote. “You will know that the Holy Ones were present, the vibration reaching many waiting souls; and ever since letters have been pouring in bearing the date of that memorable night; many ties were renewed never before taken up in this incarnation; other Mystics brought into connection with us on the outer plane, those who are a part of this particular plan of the Great Lodge.”<sup>23</sup>

In this issue, the “Uranian Mystics,” which Sister Onfa had originally described as a “Sisterhood,” now comprised both a sisterhood and a brotherhood, which formed the “Central Heart of the Order of the Golden Rule.” Sister Onfa also recognized that more lodges might be formed, although, she wrote, “It does not seem that it would be possible for the other sub-Lodges to establish and maintain their Centers without monetary offerings at stated intervals.” To me, this seems to suggest that her enterprise in New Mexico was being funded by a wealthy patron (I will speculate on who that might have been toward the end of this article). She also took the opportunity to state the purpose of the Association of Uranian Mystics (Motto: “To Will, to Dare, to Do”), which purpose seems to have been evolving. She now glossed “Uranian,” not as connecting the group with an astrologically occult influence operating on it under the planet Uranus, but as meaning “Universal” in the sense that it was open to people of all races, nationalities and creeds. Also, “The Uranians,” she wrote, “are called Mystics because they delve into

the mysterious realm of man's spiritual nature and into the supersensuous spheres."<sup>24</sup>

By the following month, *The Divine Life* was referring to the Uranians as the "Uranides" and the address of Sister Onfa's Lodge as the Heart Center, Lodge 1., Urania Mission, Via Las Cruces, N. M. Mrs. Lang made a pitch for membership in that issue, and printed a letter in which Sister Onfa wrote that at the Heart Center they were drawing their morning lessons from Lang's book, *Behold the Christ!* And there were fan letters, such as one that exclaimed, "Yourself and Sister Onfa have touched cords [sic] in my soul that never vibrated to any other call or work ..." and the first of a series of enthusiastic letters of support for the journal's teaching of evolutionary "Cosmic Consciousness." It had been written by Mathias Evangelus Taylor, a 90-year-old Unitarian and Universalist preacher who had retired to California and had spent a few years in the 1890s living in the Spiritualist community of Summerland, where he had become extraordinarily fond of Sister Onfa when she was in Santa Barbara around 1905 offering lessons.

The following month's issue (January 1909) registered a new A. U. M. branch, Golden Trinity, Lodge III, in Hollywood, California, whose "Chief Councillor" was Rosella Dennis, the recently divorced wife of a local architect. In that issue, a letter from Sister Onfa appeared, evidently trying to encourage her "co-associate" Celestia amid her work burdens, assuring her that those conducting their great work were "knit together in bonds of unity and love that is immortal."<sup>25</sup> Reading between the lines, that was possibly meant to shore up any doubt that Lang may have had when she joined her followers (and journal) to A. U. M. and accepted the additional task of using her press to print both *Divine Life* and Uranian leaflets and pamphlets. Sister Onfa wrote that she, too, was hard at work in their great cause:

The burden of material work falls so heavily upon me that I have little time for the real work, simply because there are so many

things that must be done here in order not to make other things already done useless. I could not get American workers at any price [Why not?—JB], and have had to depend upon entirely incompetent Mexicans [Where were her followers?—JB]; much of the carpenter work I must do myself, such as laying the floors, etc., for Mexicans do not have floors, and do not know how to put them down. I tried to save myself this hard work by letting a Mexican try laying one floor; it makes us dizzy to walk over it, it is like the waves of the sea. I have no ceilings overhead yet, only the old thatched roof with the blackened beams, black with smoke and age, and over this, through which pour muddy rivelets [sic], or torrents when it rains. I must go upon this half acre more or less of roof, with mud and trowel, must repair this myself and try to make it water-proof.

The yard must be graded, because the drift of the sand has banked up, in some places, three feet above the foundation of the house; thus the floors are sunk beneath the level of the courtyard. I am obliged to do everything myself, or watch it done, throughout the day; for the moment a Mexican workman is left alone, he sits down and smokes; well, these are only trivial things, but they take my time that belongs to the blessed work; and I grow at times impatient to be about the real things of life; yes, it is only the body that is frail, and even my frail body is an instrument of tremendous endurance; and so great is the welling up of the power from within that at times it seems that the frail body will be wrecked in the effort to respond ...<sup>26</sup>

So much for the "kindly, friendly" Mexicans of her previous starry-eyed letter. Now the laborers were incompetent sluggards and dull smoke breathers who forced her highly elevated mind away from its vibratory meditations on the All-in-All in order to do some actual work.

Sister Onfa's letter in the February issue re-

ported that “The house is roofed, floors are laid, the yard graded, and the garden plowed ready to plant; trees and grape vines will be set out next month, for this is the season when such things are done here. . . . I am sorry I could not have a picture of the old Mission, ‘Before and After,’ for no one will ever be able to imagine the ‘Before’ when in later years they see the aftermath [sic!] to all my trials and tribulations.”<sup>27</sup> In the next couple of issues are letters from a few enthusiasts from within a group of about twenty earnest seekers in Calcutta, who had begun writing both Sister Lang and Sister Onfa for counsel. They subsequently formed Lodge IV., A. U. M., and Mrs. Lang commented that it would “restore to the Christianized Hindus their Ancient Wisdom Religion; which is in truth, the Heart Doctrine, taught by Gautama, Krishna, and Jesus; it is all one teaching, as you will see when you come into the Christ-consciousness.”<sup>28</sup>

In the same issue, Sister Onfa concurred, writing that “we are to restore to many Christianized Hindus their ancient Wisdom Religion, of which the materialized Christianity of missionaries robbed them by giving them the exoteric or the ‘letter’ in place of the esoteric or Heart Doctrine.”<sup>29</sup> Here, it seems clear that the “Heart Doctrine” (as well as the name of the Heart Center in New Mexico) refers not to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but to the Mahayana Buddhist *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* (*Prajñā-pāramitā-hṛdaya Sūtra*)—“Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form”—as interpreted and filtered via Theosophists to mean something like the supreme Ineffable above all things. It was a convenient tool to use to disparage the “mere” particularities that distinguish one religion from another, and so to justify distinguishing (as both Lang and Onfa did here) the smart initiates who can lump the Buddha, Krishna, and Jesus together as merely moving hand in hand toward the One True Reality, from the less than smart mob who are so occluded that they actually take the claims of their own religion seriously, who were, as Sister Onfa put it, “swathed in the moth eaten garments of decaying creeds.”

This is a form of modern Gnosticism, an old

hydra-headed heresy, as Christians have always called it, which reduces the material world to an illusory prison, which only those with special higher knowledge can escape from by flying away into a world of pure spirit. Historically, forms of Gnosticism have clothed themselves in Christian terms, but have read those terms in eccentric ways, to suggest there is an exoteric doctrine, only fit to hold the dull prisoners of this world, as it were, and an esoteric one, a secret doctrine, which only initiates and adepts can know insofar as they can transcend the earthly plane and travel in mind and spirit above time and space. It also neatly dissolves the distance between the Creator and the creature: “Thou art That” (*Tat tvam asi*, from the Hindu’s *Chāndogya Upanishad*, as Theosophists loved to repeat). For a Gnostic, the fully enlightened adept is God. As Celestia Lang’s poetic narrator in her 1906 epic poem *Behold the Christ!* (which Sister Onfa’s students studied at their morning lessons) put the whole matter at the very beginning of her work:

I thank thee my Father, Soul Supreme!  
That thou hast to *me* the knowledge given,  
That mine *inner* eyes have opened; to see  
The soul within *me* to be the Master;  
The Higher Self, the Christ, and Lord of Lords.  
That within this soul they all are seated.  
Thou art the One inmost eternal Lord.<sup>30</sup>

This sort of re-reading of the supposed hidden meanings in Christian language is evident in many of the titles of Sister Onfa’s booklets and leaflets. “If a Man Die, Shall He Live Again?” is an endorsement of reincarnation; “As Ye Sow, so Shall Ye Reap” is about the law of karma; “The Resurrection of the Christos” argues that Jesus’ resurrection was his Buddha-like moment of supreme enlightenment while he was yet living, and so on. “Atonement” is rendered as “At-One-Ment,” suggesting that reconciliation with God was not through Jesus’ sacrifice alone, but by his mystical enlightenment, and that others might equally achieve “at-one-ment” with God by their own enlightenment.

It is clear that both Sister Onfa and Celestia Lang regarded themselves as Esoteric Christians, but orthodox Christians would certainly have regarded them as something like wolves in sheep's clothing. In her pamphlets, Sister Onfa developed a counter-Christianity, one in which Jesus went into the desert (as had John the Baptist before him) to do yoga. The Apostles never did comprehend his real secret teaching and did not understand that Jesus, on the Cross, "entered a conscious trance state, that is, He separated His Spiritual Self from His physical body; or entered the state of 'Sama-dhi' just as all Initiates can do" and that "Jesus was NOT DEAD."<sup>31</sup>

I cannot find much about what the spiritual practice (as opposed to the belief) of the Uranian students was. Indeed, letters to both Sister Onfa and to Celestia Lang complained about the lack of specifics in their "practical" courses of spiritual development. Students surely some time spent doing yoga, although I am reasonably certain that it was more or less a sort of motionless mental concentration meant to invoke or awaken spiritual powers and not (as "yoga" has come to imply these days) a gymnastic routine of physical postures. For beginners, some meditations based on a system of distinguishing colors and numbers (which suggests some connection to the Kabbalah) was prescribed, and some regular lectures were given to them on selected inspirational texts, such as Celestia Lang's *Behold the Christ!* Apart from that, I imagine that much of the students' practice consisted of "selflessly" moving large rocks about, re-grading the property, planting trees, and cleaning latrines. I have also been unable to turn up any evidence of what their neighbors thought of them.

Lang's publication in the October 1909 issue of *The Divine Life* of a list of fifteen "Uranian booklets and Leaflets" (Sister Onfa's) and a paltry three "Divine Life Leaflets" (Celestia Lang's) seems to reflect at least one reason for a certain cooling of the relationship between Onfa and Lang. Sister Lang, it appears, began to feel like Sister Onfa was imposing on her by pressing her to print and publish the Uranian booklets, a burden and expense on

top of the work involved in publishing *The Divine Life*. It is fair to wonder if Celestia was questioning whether there was anything in the relationship with Sister Onfa for her. Perhaps the relationship had brought her no surge in subscribers to *The Divine Life* or new members in her own Divine Life organization made up of Theosophists who had become disgruntled, as was she, with the fractious and fraudulent behavior of the main leaders of the Theosophical Society in India, Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater. What then was the advantage for Lang?

The cooling is noticeable in the issues of *The Divine Life* beginning about mid-1909, although Lang still paid lip service to the fellowship that existed between her Divine Life Centers and the lodges of the A. U. M. The June 1909 issue of *The Divine Life* no longer listed the Hollywood A. U. M. Lodge III; it had apparently already fizzled out. It seems this one had been established by Sister Onfa's inspiration. In its place, as Lodge III, was an entirely new one, the Rock of Ages Lodge, in Rockford, Illinois, about which I know nothing, but its proximity to Chicago suggests that it was inspired by Mrs. Lang. Lodge IV, in Calcutta, appears to have eventually been subsumed by Mrs. Lang, as well, and to have renamed itself The Eastern Brotherhood Centre. I cannot trace this track to its conclusion because I have not found the issues of *The Divine Life* for 1910, but I read it as a sign of such a cooling, shifting relationship (or even a complete severing of it) that Sister Onfa was advertising in the *Denver Post* in March 1910 for a "woman printer," presumably because Celestia Lang was no longer willing to serve A. U. M. in that way.<sup>32</sup> Although Lang would continue publishing *The Divine Life* for several more years and would become so outraged by the then-current leaders of the Theosophical Society that she would create her own organization, the Independent Theosophical Society, in Chicago and would install herself as its President for Life, she would do all that without Santa Onfa de Santos.<sup>33</sup>

Sister Onfa's Uranian Mission continued after her association with Lang dissolved. I cannot

find any advertisements for it in Occult or New Thought journals after that (or, for that matter, in secular journals or newspapers), so I think it is reasonable to suppose that whatever students she had were gained through the Uranians' direct mailing of her pamphlets and booklets, and by word of mouth among seekers after enlightenment. A letter printed in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research* in 1913 seems to reflect this:

Have you ever heard of Sister Onfa? I enclose a circular which explains itself. From these western Mystics you can obtain valuable data very frequently. ... She is a mystic of a very high order with wonderful control and power over her astral self, can probably project it at will, that is, leave the body voluntarily for a longer or shorter time under proper conditions. These occasional souls that live on the border-land of the higher life, who have risen so superior to the sense life which holds us to earth, can best interpret psychical facts ... whether embodied or disembodied entities are responsible for psychical or spiritistic phenomena.<sup>34</sup>

Upon her death on December 23, 1914, Sister Onfa left a will, which was offered for probate in Doña Ana County on January 30, 1915. I have not seen the will, but the names in the required public notice were: L. E. Blochman, Bonnie Davis, Sappho Davis, Mrs. Lela Cuete-Diaz, and Stephen Ross Peters.<sup>35</sup>

I do not know the exact nature of the connection Blochman had with her, but he was Lazarus ("Lazar") Emanuel Blochman (1856-1946), the author of the letter above to the *Journal of the American Society of Psychological Research*, an amateur meteorologist and "weather prophet." He was a California native who lived for decades at Santa Maria, California as a government weather observer while developing his property as a test orchard. In 1906, while Sister Onfa was lecturing in Southern California, oil was discovered on

his land and he quickly became one of the state's wealthiest residents. He consulted Spiritualist mediums and was a devoted student of the Jewish Kabbalah.<sup>36</sup> He was also a long-time member of the American Section of the Theosophical Society and would eventually write enthusiastic articles for *The Jewish Theosophist*, published in Seattle. In a prayer he would pen for that publication, he included the petition, "To Thee, God, we look for help, for the inspiration for the uplift of our souls, and to be freed from this murky earth's atmosphere."<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps (to let my imagination work here), Sister Onfa left him an astral weather logbook from her "observatory" on Mount Aden. I can even imagine that a strong connection with Bloch-



**Lazar E. Blochman.** Courtesy of the Santa Maria Valley Historical Society.

man could explain why she and her followers had got on the train in Southern California and headed out to New Mexico, getting out at a place that was essentially uninhabited, but where the atmosphere was perfectly clear, to try to stick it out there. Which is to say, Mount Aden, pre-selected back in California or not, might have been an excellent place for Sister Onfa to set up a sort of “astral weather station” (on an analogy with Blochman’s meteorological one in Santa Maria), far from possible interference from what I can only think of as vibrational mind-interference from other people, with a possible aim to experiment with communicating mentally or spiritually on the astral plane. Such an idea might also explain why the house Sister Onfa bought for herself in Mesilla was so isolated from her neighbors. At this point, however, I can only speculate.

Descending from the imaginative possibilities, however, it is likely that Blochman had been a generous benefactor of the Uranian Mission, if not its original projector; and a close connection with him would likely explain the Uranians’ Kabbalah-like meditation lessons focused on colors and numbers.

The diligent research of my tireless colleague Marc Demarest suggests that Lela Cuete-Diaz may have been Sister Onfa’s biological sister or niece; Bonnie and Sappho Davis were definitely Lela’s daughters. The other person named, Stephen Ross Peters, may have been a Texas cattleman and rancher by the same name. In any event, I have no information on why he was mentioned in Sister Onfa’s will.

The Uranian Mission continued in existence at least into 1916, with residents, but that is the last notice I see of it.<sup>38</sup> As for Sister Onfa’s whilom co-associate George Brocke, the Federal Census of 1930 shows that, at least by then, he was back in Los Angeles, where he was working as a printer, probably using the experience he had gained when he was a Uranian.

Sister Onfa’s brief obituary tells us that at the time she died, she left an unfinished manuscript for a book entitled “Where the Arrow Fell.” As far

as I know, that manuscript has not surfaced. Its title might refer to the account of Robin Hood’s death, where, from his death bed, “Robin shooteth his last shaft” out the window and was buried “where the arrow fell.” That is one possibility, but another is that it might refer to the Tibetan lama in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, who was ever in search of another place “where the arrow fell.” From that place, he had learned, where the Bodhisattva’s golden shaft had lodged, a river had sprung up. And whosoever immersed himself in its waters would be freed from the endless rounds of rebirth and suffering. If that was what Sister Onfa’s title referred to, perhaps she would have been satisfied to leave the book itself unfinished, as a sign that she was flinging her spirit into the afterlife with no sure knowledge, but with only trust, in where it would land.

**Editor’s Note** - as we prepared to go to press, John received the will and probate documents for Sister Onfa from the Doña Ana County Clerk’s Office. John prepared this small addition based on it.

**Late Update (December):** Thanks to Marc Demarest and to the Doña Ana County Clerk’s office, I now have a copy of Sister Onfa’s will. She left half of the Uranian Mission property to Leo Blochman, which probably means that he had originally provided the cash to buy the place.

The will also clarifies that the women mentioned in the will were her kin: Leila Cuete-Diaz was her daughter, and the other two were Leila’s daughters. Stephen Ross Peters, also mentioned in the will, was in fact her estranged son, who lived in Lagarto, Texas, just west of Corpus Christi (she left him \$1).

Leila and Stephen’s father (and so Sister Onfa’s husband) was Joshua E. Peters. He had married “Sister Onfa” in Lagarto in 1877, when she was named Ida I. Williams. I conclude that that was likely her birth name. Joshua Peters was shot and killed by a Texas Ranger during an escalating street brawl in 1878 in Banquete, Texas while Peters, his pregnant wife Ida and their son Stephen were passing through the town. The Ranger was subsequently tried for his murder.

## Acknowledgements

I thank my fellow researchers Marc Demarest and John Patrick Deveney, who did much of the digging into Sister Onfa in old journals, periodicals, and genealogical and newspaper databases, Brandon Hodge, and Boaz Huss, who contributed information about Lazar Blochman. Thanks also to Jim Eckles, David Thomas, Dennis Daily, and Sally Kading of the Doña Ana Historical Society for their help, and especially to Jim for magically conjuring the location of Mount Aden from the Bureau of Land Management databases. I also thank Teddie Moreno of the Archives and Special Collections of the New Mexico State University Library for dedicating a few days to turning up information on Sister Onfa.

**John Buescher** is an historian who writes about 19th- and early 20th-Century American Spiritualism. His latest book, *Radio Psychics: Mind Reading and Fortune Telling in American Broadcasting, 1920-1940*, will be published in Spring 2021 by McFarland & Company. He lives in Georgetown, Texas.

## Endnotes

1. The month and year are as listed in the 1910 Federal Census; the 1900 Federal Census also lists her as having been born in 1856. Both censuses list her place of birth as Louisiana. The two censuses disagree, however, about the places of birth of her parents. In 1900, her father was said to have been born in Spain; her mother in Louisiana. In 1910, her father was said to have been born in Florida; her mother in Mississippi.
2. "Writer Dies Near Mesilla," *El Paso Herald*, 29 December 1914. I have searched in vain for a Desantos byline in both the *Chicago Record*

and the *New York Herald* during the 1890s.

3. "Death of Sister Onfa," *Rio Grande Republic* (Las Cruces), 29 December 1914.
4. *San Francisco Examiner*, 5 September 1900.
5. See, for example, C. Cooke, *A Plea for Urania; being a popular sketch of celestial philosophy* (London: Piper, Stephenson, & Spence, 1854).
6. Ad for "S. Onfa," *Santa Barbara Morning Press*, 7 May 1905.
7. John Patrick Deveney at [http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/light\\_of\\_india/](http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/light_of_india/)
8. Why the group (at first, anyway) was going under the alternate title of "The Order of the Golden Rule" is a mystery to me. Imaginative possibilities for a connection range from the somewhat innocuous Social Gospel church clubs popular at the time to the extravagantly strange "Order of the Golden Rule" organized by the ultra-eccentric Masonic occultist "Prince Immanuel of Jerusalem," described at [http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/prince\\_immanuel\\_journal/index.html](http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/prince_immanuel_journal/index.html)
9. *New Mexico State Business Directory* (1913), 39; "Special Licenses," *El Paso Herald*, 28 June 1910. On Aden, Eckles has pointed me to the commentary on Poole Brothers' *The Correct Map of Railway and Steamship Lines Operated by the Southern Pacific Company* (1892) in Peter Eidenbach, *Atlas of Historic New Mexico Maps, 1550-1941* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012).
10. *Dona Ana County in New Mexico; Containing the Fertile Mesilla Valley, Cradle of Irrigation in America* (Las Cruces: Bureau of Immigration of New Mexico, 1908), 31. Capitalization in the original.
11. The original claim (Homestead Entry No. 3687) was filed June 17, 1902. Thanks to Jim Eckles for figuring out the area this claim covered, and for finding the record of its cancellation. The first printed mention I see of "Mount Aden on the Heights" is in "Bureau of Group Organization," *To-Morrow* (Chicago) 4.2 (February 1908): 43-44.

12. "Arcane Societies in the United States. II," *Rosicrucian Brotherhood* 2.4 (October 1908): 153.
13. Celestia Root was then the second wife of Major Merrill Lang, a career Army officer, sometimes assigned as a paymaster at various posts, and sometimes as a health inspector. I have no indication that he shared Celestia's mystical enthusiasms.
14. "*Son of Man*," or *the Sequel to Evolution* (Boston: Arena Publishing Company, 1892).
15. Lang's lecture is noted in Rossiter Johnson, ed., *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition* Volume 4 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 480.
16. Issues of *The Divine Life* during this period are available online at [http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/divine\\_life/](http://iapsop.com/archive/materials/divine_life/)
17. "A Valued Recognition from the Association of Uranian Mystics," *The Divine Life* 2.8 (August 1908): 142-43.
18. "The Law of Spiritual Unfoldment," *The Divine Life* 2.9 (September 1908): 151-52.
19. "Notice for Publication," *Deming Headlight*, 22 May 1908.
20. "Daily Record," *El Paso Herald*, 7 November 1908: "Roman Bermudes to Santa Onfa de Santos, tract of land in Mesilla grant, precinct 4; consideration \$200." It is possible that the old mission property and her private residence were the same property.
21. "A Call from the Council of Uranian Mystics," *The Divine Life* 2.10 (October 1908): 165.
22. *The Divine Life* (October 1908): 168-69.
23. "Heart Center, Lodge 1., A. U. M." *The Divine Life* 2.11 (November 1908): 180-81.
24. "Association of Uranian Mystics," *The Divine Life* 2.11 (November 1908): 185-86.
25. "From the Heart Center," *The Divine Life* 3.1 (January 1909): 16-18.
26. *The Divine Life* 2.10 (January 1909): 13-14.
27. "From the Heart Center," *The Divine Life* 3.2 (February 1909): 37.
28. "A Prayer from India," *The Divine Life* 3.4 (March 1909): 71.
29. "From the Heart Center," *The Divine Life* 3.4 (March 1909): 72.
30. *Behold the Christ! An Epic of the New Theism* (Chicago: n. p., 1906) [dedicated to All Souls' Unitarian Church in Washington, D. C.]. In reviewing Lang's earlier 1892 work, "*Son of Man*"; or, *The Sequel to Evolution* (Boston: Arena Publishing Company), the Portland, Maine *Daily Press* (10 February 1893) commented, "Aforetime, in hell, so Milton tells us, Satan and his court 'reasoned high' of these things, 'and found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost.'"
31. Sister Onfa's letter from the Urania Mission, *The Divine Life*, 3.5 (May 1909): 88. "Meditative equipoise" or "fixed concentration" are ways to translate *samadhi*.
32. *Denver Post*, 6 March 1910: "Wanted— To correspond with woman printer, one who thoroughly understands the business; Urania Mission, New Mexico."
33. She would also somewhat fortify her credentials with occultists by authoring *The Reverse Side of the Seal of the United States; and Its Symbolism* (Chicago: Divine Life Magazine, 1916).
34. Letter from L. E. B----, Santa Maria, California, *Journal of the American Society of Psychological Research* 7.8 (August 1913): 458.
35. "Notice of Probating Will," *Las Cruces Sun-News*, 9 March 1915; and "Testamento y Voluntad de Santa Onfa De Santos, finada," *Estrella* (Las Cruces), 13 March 1915.
36. David F. Hoexter and Mary R. Hoexter, "Lazar E. Blochman of San Francisco, Santa Maria and Berkeley," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 13.1 (1980): 53-62. For his consulting of Spiritualist mediums, see page 61. On his connecting religious Occultism (in his case, the Kabbalah) with Evolution, see L. E. Blochman, "Heaven, an Evolutionary Conception," *The Jewish Theosophist* 1.2 (December 1926): 13-16; Blochman introduced Bozena Brydlova's essay, "The Ancient Kabbalah," *The Jewish Theosophist* 1.2 (December 1926): 27, in which he wrote that the essay "most resembles the Theosophi-

cal presentation of today.”

37. L. E. Blochman, “A Prayer,” *The Jewish Theosophist* 1.5 (December 1927): inside front cover.

38. *Rio Grande Republican* (Las Cruces), 21 March 1916, noted that “Mr. M. B. Bowman,

who lives at the ‘Sister Onfa Mission,’ has been under the weather.” This was possibly Monroe Bentley Bowman (1859-1939), a farmer who had patented a claim “west of Red Mountains” in 1914, and who was at one point living in Deming.

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## A Working Definition Of “Historical Significance”

*By Susan Krueger*

You may have read or heard the phrase “historically significant” used by members of the Doña Ana County Historical Society (DACHS) and wondered how something becomes historically significant. For definitions, I have borrowed liberally from the National Register of Historic Places. If you create a mental image of the definitions ready to call up as needed, the lists below will be less daunting. Examples to illustrate the determining elements of historical significance are taken from past DACHS awards given out at the Society’s Annual Awards events.

To begin, “historical significance” is a quality that attaches to districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects if and when they possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

Examples of *historic districts* include the Mesilla Town Plaza and the Mesquite Historic District, each of which contains a significant concentration of buildings united by their history.

A *site* is defined as the location of a significant event or historic activity, such as a battlefield or ruins of a building.

A *building* is constructed primarily to house any form of human activity and can include a house, school, or fort.

*Structures* are used for purposes other than human shelter such as bridges or gazebos.

And finally, an *object* is primarily artistic in nature or relatively small in scale and simple in construction and includes a sculpture or a monument.

Additional elements of historical significance include age, 50 years or older, and the quality of integrity in location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Further, the historical significance of a place is determined by one or more of the following:

☞ The place is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to history, including Fort Selden, Radium Springs, one of two historic landmarks deemed worth saving by the organizing committee of the DACHS in 1963; or

☞ The place is associated with the life of a significant person in the past, such as the Mark Thompson House at 409 West Las Cruces, Ave., built in 1909, notable for its architectural style and its association with Mark Thompson, who, as the Dona Ana County District Attorney, was involved in the trial of Sheriff Pat Garrett’s murder; or

☞ It incorporates the characteristics of a significant method of construction, exemplified by the preservation of the exterior of the De La O Saloon in the Village of Dona Ana, as the cement stucco was stripped off the walls and replaced with lime-based plaster, allowing the adobe walls to breathe; or

☞ The place has yielded or has the potential to yield information important in prehistory or history. Examples are the Old Picacho Cemetery in Old Picacho Village and the Prehistoric Trackways National Monument in the Robledo Mountains.

A good place to browse for more about historical significance is the Dona Ana County Historical Society website at: [donaanacountyhistsoc.org](http://donaanacountyhistsoc.org). It lists awards given over the years in several categories, including historically significant buildings and properties worthy of preservation

**Susan Krueger** Susan grew up in Detroit, did her under graduate work at the University of Michigan and received a PhD in English and American Literature from Brandeis University. Susan has taught history; visited multiple historical sites in her travels; and, when she moved to

Mesilla, she became involved in repairing and preserving local historically significant buildings. Then, one hot Saturday afternoon while walking shelter dogs with Donna Eichstaedt, she was introduced to the DACHS. She joined, met, and continues to meet all kind of historians.

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## The Juggling Fool

Santa Fe To Albuquerque: Toss, Catch, Step; Toss, Catch, Step.....

*By Jon Hunner*

*Before I served on the board of the Doña Ana County Historical Society, way before I was a historian teaching at NMSU, I was the Juggling Fool. Here is the story of my juggling march against arthritis.*

Toss, catch with the right hand. Catch, toss with the left. Toss, catch right; catch, toss left; and right and left and right and left. The balls arched in front of me at eye level, but I was watching the road as I juggled and walked along North Highway 14. Toss, step, catch, step. Catch, step, toss.

It was Day Three of the Juggling Fool's March Against Arthritis from Santa Fe to Albuquerque. My wrists were swollen from all the juggling, but the sun was bright. I was heading south out of Madrid, New Mexico.

Toss, step, catch. Catch, step, toss. Repeat for seventy miles. For one week. To celebrate the U.S. Bicentennial. To raise money for the New Mexico Arthritis Foundation. To act the fool.

As the Juggling Fool, I embraced Shakespeare's jester clown, the fool in King Lear who spoke truth to power. Earlier that

winter, I read a story about Will Kempe, one of Shakespeare's clowns, who in the 1600s danced from London to Norwich, about 100 miles. I started planning to juggle from Santa Fe to Albuquerque as my contribution to the celebration of the U.S. Bicentennial.

A support crew helped me along the way. John, a former race car driver offered his customized VW camper with Plexiglas domes over the driver's and passenger's seats. Charlie, a sportswriter and house mate. Peter, an English astrologer and his wife Cissie, a photographer. Paul, the contact person with the Arthritis Foundation. But most

of the time, I walked and juggled alone through the high country of northern New Mexico.

On the second Saturday in May 1976, a rally at the Santa Fe Plaza launched the March. Paul mc'ed the event, a band played circus tunes, and fellow street performer Prof. Belloni (aka Dan Bush) did magic tricks on stage. I had on my clown face and costume and juggled for the gathered crowd. Since it was early May at 7,500 feet above sea level, it snowed a bit



*Jon Hunner in his juggler/clown makeup and costume ready to leave the Santa Fe Plaza in May 1976. Photo by Cissie Ludlow*

but cleared up as I headed south through the City Different. I halted for the night at the city limits where Charlie picked me up and drove us back to our house.

The next day, after Charlie dropped me off where he had picked me up, I juggled south along North 14 past the State Pen. Cars were coming and going on visitors' day at the Pen, and I saw a driver crying as she pulled out of the parking lot and left her loved one.

Dick McCord, the editor of *The Santa Fe Reporter*, drove out to interview me. A photo of me in an oversized newsboy's cap and baggy pants splashed on the front page of the *Reporter* that week. In the story, he wondered if I would complete the Walk. Other newspapers picked up the story. From the *Tallahassee Democrat* ran the story from *UPI*: "During the next seven days, clown-juggler Jon Hunner will walk an 80 mile route, throwing things in the air and catching them all the way from Santa Fe to Albuquerque, N.M.... Following a send-off by other clowns and jugglers and a kazoo band at the Santa Fe Plaza, Hunner planned to juggle his way ... to Albuquerque's Old Town Plaza by May 15." (*Thanks to SNMHR's editor Jim Eckles for finding this clip.*)

After Dick left, I juggled into the Galisteo Basin with its piñon and cedar trees, past Cerrillos, and up the curvy road to the artist and hippie enclave of Madrid. At the Mine Shaft Tavern, I had trouble hoisting the beer mug. The juggling balls constantly slamming into my upturned palms had sprained my wrists. Nursing my beer and my wrists, I worried that I could not continue the March. We decided for Charlie to dash back to Santa Fe to grab some lighter balls and ace bandages. That night, I slept in a tent that John had pitched at home plate in the old ballpark in town.

The next morning, as I started up the steep incline out of Madrid, I saw two guys with long hair building a stonewall for a house. One said hi and asked: "What are

you doing?"

"Juggling to Albuquerque."

"I heard about you on the radio this morning. Do you want a taste?"

"I don't know. I have to hike up that hill."

"Exactly. You need a little something extra don't you?"

"You might be right about that."

I climbed up to their house, watched as the guy with the long blond hair rolled a joint and laid it on top of the wall in the sun. As I watched it dry, we talked about their house. They bragged about using all local materials and doing it all themselves. I watched the joint dry. They asked about the Juggling Walk and if I was going for a world record. I explained that judges approved by Guinness had to witness the whole walk.

"So no, not a world record for long distance juggling, but unofficially, yes, one for dropping the most juggling balls in a week." That got them laughing, and so we fired up the fat joint.

Toss, step, catch up the steep road out of Ma-



*Jon Hunner, left, interacts with Professor Belloni (you might want to say the professor's name out loud) in the Santa Fe Plaza before heading to Albuquerque. "Belloni" was the stage name for Dan Bush, a magician who often entertained in Santa Fe with the clowns and jugglers.*

*Photo by Cissie Ludlow.*

drid. Past the coal shafts and mine tailings, past where David Bowie landed from outer space in the film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Past the boundary of Santa Fe and its suburbs, walking out of one world and into another, into the solitude of the San Pedro Mountains.

It took all morning to march up the road out of Madrid and then all afternoon to get to Golden, the next village on North 14. As I juggled along, afternoon clouds built up around me. I looked at the roiling white, gray, and black clouds, and a vision appeared. I saw Our Lady of Vaudeville blessing me from above. The San Pedros provided the stage, the clouds billowed as curtains and draped her in a flowing dress with her head crowned by circling juggling balls. The patron saint of jugglers, performers, and fools adopted me and blessed me on this lonely stretch.

Toss, step, catch. Sometimes drop. Then I had to chase the bouncing ball sometimes down the road, sometimes off into the weeds. As I walked down the windy road, my shadow chased me and then as I rounded a bend in the road, it stretched out ahead of me. I chased my shadow self, my foolish self, like chasing a rainbow. My shadow's dream? To bring laughter into the world.

Late in the afternoon, I staggered into the Golden Inn having juggled some fifteen miles. John, Charlie, and I grabbed a table at the Inn and ordered beers and burgers. The jukebox played CW and rock and roll tunes. Since it was a Monday night, we had the place to ourselves. After dinner, I stumbled out of the bar and went over to John's VW at the edge of the parking lot. Next to it, he had pitched my tent. I crawled into it and fell asleep listening to the jukebox blaring "Your Cheatin' Heart."

Next morning, south of Golden, a dirt road cut west off of Highway 14. I said goodbye to the blacktop and started down the road. In planning the juggling walk, I had decided to avoid marching next to the heavy traffic of cars and trucks on Interstate 25 between Santa Fe and Albuquerque. Instead I found this dirt road which skirted the northern tip of the Sandia Mountains. For the

next ten miles, it was just me and the balls dancing against the turquoise sky.

I juggled through a desert landscape of fragrant sage bushes, piñon trees, and chamisa shrubs with scant yellow flowers. I followed the dirt track and around noon, I spied a large cottonwood tree across an arroyo. As I rested and ate a sandwich under its welcome shade, Charlie drove by. I stood up and shouted at him but with the Stones turned up to full volume, he didn't hear or see me across the arroyo.

"See ya soon" I yelled as he bounced around a bend in the dirt road, leaving a cloud of dust. Charlie and I had sprinted across the country a month earlier to cover several sporting events in Florida for *The Santa Fe Reporter*. He had persuaded Dick the editor that *The Reporter* needed to cover Chris Hinson, a local boxer who had qualified for the national Golden Glove championships. Richard agreed to let Charlie go but insisted that he submit his stories on time and denied any extra money for travel. While we were in Florida, we also hit some spring training baseball games. Charlie had a press pass that got us into the press box for a Reds game with me as *The Reporter's* "photographer." In the story he filed about the games, Charlie predicted that the Reds and the Yankees would meet in the World Series. They did, and the Reds won the championship.

I followed Charlie's dust cloud as the road squeezed through a cut in a hogback and opened up upon a vista that included the San Pedros on my right, the 12,000 foot high Jemez Mountains ahead in the distance, the Cabezon volcanic plug rising on the horizon to my left, and the Sandia Mountains looming behind me. No cars, no houses, no people, just an expansive landscape of mountains and blue sky.

After a while, the road forked. Ahead on the right lay the ghost town of Hillside, the campsite for the night, but my path around the Sandias veered off to the left. I knew I should go a little further on the left fork before calling it a day, but Peter and Cissie pulled up in their red Mercedes convertible and asked: "Hey - you wanna ride?" I

jumped in, and we headed towards the lost dreams of Hillside.

I had scouted Hillside earlier that spring as I mapped the route for the Juggling March Against Arthritis. A sign on the road leading to it from Interstate 25 warned that this was the private property of the Diamond Back Ranch. I stopped at the only house along the dirt road which was the ranch's HQ to get permission to camp at Hillside, but no one answered my honking from the car or knocking at their door. So I sent a letter to let them know what I was doing. Hopefully, they wouldn't shoot a trespassing clown.

Hillside was a coal mining town in the first part of the 20th century that had a large two story adobe community center. Nestled up against a low ridge of cliffs, the building's roof had collapsed along with several of its walls. Scattered around the center, ten or so adobe houses crumbled in the wind. The entrance to the mine had been filled in. A brickworks lay to the south and fragments of red bricks with "Tonque" stamped on their faces were scattered around the grounds. Ruins of Tonque Pueblo lay close-by. Hillside dried up during World War II as its coal vein ran out, and its residents scattered.

Peter parked behind Charlie's car, and we walked across the wide arroyo to Hillside. Charlie had dug a shallow pit, circled it with rocks, and gathered some piñon for a fire. He also set out some chairs for us to lounge on. We drank some beer and wandered among the ruins.

Before the light faded, I led us north of Hillside past some cliffs with Indian petroglyphs. I stopped and waited while the others looked around until Cissie gasped.

"Is that is a petrified log?"

"Yup."

All around us lay a petrified forest with logs scattered in the arroyos, sticking up out of the sand, tumbling down the slopes of a hill. This was a land beyond time.

Back at the campsite, we grilled hot dogs and warmed up a can of beans for dinner. Peter broke out a bottle of gin and started pointing

out the constellations overhead. We didn't have any vermouth so we invented desert martinis. We splashed some gin in a glass, whispered "vermouth" over it, and drank. They were as dry as Hillside.

Wrapped in the sweet incense of the piñon smoke as the fire died down, we counted satellites that sputniked overhead. Then, one of the lights that moved like a satellite made an abrupt 90-degree turn above us. Sparks threw off from its pivot.

"That's not one of ours," Peter stated.

"You mean American?" Cissie asked.

"No, not one of the humans. Our satellites moving at speed can't turn on a dime," he replied.

We followed the light on its new course as it quickly accelerated. We lost it in the myriad of stars as it disappeared over the horizon.

"Huh," Charlie said.

"Yeah," Cissie agreed.

"Don't know if I can sleep after that."

"Sounds like we need another desert martini," Peter said and splashed gin into our glasses. We all murmured "Vermouth" over our martinis.

"Here's to the aliens."

"To E.T.," Cissie raised her glass.

"To E.T.," we agreed and laughed.

I crawled into a sleeping bag, falling asleep under the diadem of stars spinning around Our Lady of Vaudeville's head.

Next morning, Peter shook me awake. I rolled out of the sleeping bag as a rosy fingered dawn swept the skies. Cissie cooked scrambled eggs with green chile over the fire, and made me a peanut butter sandwich for lunch. Then I headed out to skirt the looming Sandia Mountains. I juggled back to the fork in the road not taken the day before. After a while, the track faded away, and I started bushwhacking over the piñon tree covered hills. I had not scouted this part of the route.

No path, no compass, nobody with me, just me tossing, catching, and stepping up and down the foothills.

"Bless me Our Lady. Show me the way," I prayed.

I dropped a ball which rolled under a sage

brush. I gingerly looked before I reached in, worried that a rattlesnake might covet the orb. After several hours of wandering in the wilderness, I crested a hill and in looking over a dry valley, saw a house on the next ridge. I felt like Stanley finding Livingstone. Juggling down the slope, I walked west along a dirt road that traced the valley floor. As I walked, more houses appeared dotting the hillsides.

I juggled through the adobe houses in the village of Placitas, and then on the road going down to Bernalillo. A photographer for the *Albuquerque Tribune* pulled up and snapped a picture. By then, I was fried. As I limped and juggled on the highway's shoulder, cars sped by. What a difference an hour made. I went from wondering if I would ever reach civilization to dodging careening cement trucks. Right after the photographer left, brother Chuck picked me up and took me to his house in the northeast heights of Albuquerque. I collapsed onto a guest bed and fell immediately asleep.

Chuck dropped me off the next morning where I had stopped the night before. I juggled down Bernalillo's main street and then south onto the Sandia Pueblo. Toss, catch, step. Catch, step, toss. Drop, chase, pick up.

That afternoon, I hit the wall of marathon juggling. I collapsed under a cedar tree on the side of the road, spent. I still needed to juggle around ten miles to reach Albuquerque's Old Town Plaza. Maybe this was the end of the Juggling Fool's March against Arthritis.

While staring vacantly at the Sandia Mountains, the Eastbound Southwest Chief Amtrak streaked by. I jumped up and juggled for its passengers. Enlivened by that image from a by-gone era of locomotives and transcontinental railroads, I stepped back onto North Fourth Street and continued south. With my knees and wrists protesting every step, toss, and catch, I grinded south.

I got within a couple of miles of the Old Town Plaza in Albuquerque when Chuck picked me up to spend another night at his house. We started to celebrate the end of the Juggling March and then heard a DJ on KUNM, the university's ra-

dio station, mention me. I called him up, and we did an interview. Being foolish about publicity, when he asked where I was, I said at my brother's house. "No," he quickly cut in. "Where are you in the Juggling March?" I replied just north of Old Town and invited everyone to come down to the Plaza the next day for the finale. Then I went to bed as the party roared on. After seventy miles of stepping and tossing, catching and stepping, I was crispy and done.

The next morning, I put on my clown make-up and clothes, and Chuck dropped me off at the previous day's end point. Diamond, a friend from Santa Fe, walked with me. He had a tear drop tattooed under his right eye and provided me with a counter culture honor guard for the last mile of the March. He beamed as we walked down the sidewalk, two fools joyfully marching to a different drummer.

As I approached the Plaza, Shriner clowns zoomed by on their go-karts and accompanied me for the last bit of the March. Then a high school marching band joined as we circled around the plaza, them playing Souza marches and me juggling. On the bandstand, the Arthritis Foundation presented me with a Nambe Ware plaque. Friends, family



***Hunner at the end of his march for the Arthritis Foundation in Old Town, Albuquerque. Note the ace bandage on his right wrist. Albuquerque Journal***

members, strangers cheered this zany stunt.

And then everyone drifted away. After another night at Chuck's, I headed back to Santa Fe. I had about thirty dollars in my bank account so I grabbed a job bussing at The Captain's Table restaurant. But my notoriety spread. I was a made man in the looney world of alternative New Mexico in 1976. I regularly juggled on the Plaza and started getting gigs to perform as a New Age clown at birthday parties. The Mime Circus invited me to travel around northern New Mexico with them and I teamed up with Prof. Belloni some more. That winter I got some minor parts in plays. Yeah, I was on the road to stardom.

Why did I do this? One of the main reasons was that I wanted to celebrate our country's bicentennial. I also wanted to support the Arthritis Foundation. We raised about \$3,000. But ultimately, I was a fool, in the best sense of the phrase.

I embraced being outside the mainstream, doing things that others found humorous or even ridiculous.

Laughter is the best medicine, and I wanted to spread humor. And besides, I can still claim the unofficial world record of dropping juggling balls 2,138 times in one week.

**Jon Hunner** has been an historian, an actor, a commodities trader, and president of an art services business. Since 2012, he has traveled over 60,000 miles visiting places where history happened. His book from that journey, *Driven by History: A Road Trip through America's Past* is almost finished. Since he retired from NMSU in 2018, he has continued to travel and now lives in northern France with his wife Cécile.

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## Nestor Armijo

### Merchant, Rancher and Philanthropist of Las Cruces, New Mexico

*By Jennifer Olguin*

#### Abstract

The Armijo family is one of the pioneering families of the Mesilla Valley and their everlasting legacy can still be felt within the community today. It all began in 1854 when Nestor Armijo arrived in Las Cruces and assisted in developing the community by establishing a mercantile store. Armijo supported movements that helped build and develop the city and the advancement of its citizens. Nestor's success in the mercantile and the ranching business put Las Cruces on the map during the developmental years.

#### Nestor Armijo Continues Family Legacy in the Mesilla Valley

In the heart of Las Cruces, New Mexico stands a two-story dwelling that was the home to Nestor Armijo and his family. The home has undergone renovations over the years and most importantly is registered in the National Register of Historic Places. To obtain a greater insight of the family who resided in the home, one needs an understanding of Nestor Armijo and his success as a merchant and rancher during the 1850s to the early 1900s both in the United States and in Mexico. This article provides a glimpse of Nestor Armijo and the Armijo family.

#### Armijo Family Ties to New Mexico

Long before Nestor was born, his family was involved in sheep ranching. For generations the family worked sheep on their land grants, which provided them with social and economic wealth. The Armijos were one of the most successful sheep holders in the region. Nestor's parents were Colonel Juan Cristobal Armijo and Juana Maria Chaves de Armijo. The colonel was a native from Spain

who served in the Spanish army and was also involved in sheep ranching. The 1860 census reveals that Nestor's father's estimated worth was \$82,000 where an average person's assets amounted to \$100.<sup>1</sup> The large sum of assets belonging to Juan Cristobal demonstrates the success and status of the family.

This pioneer family is a prime example of how New Mexico native families were involved in the ranching and mercantile business. The Armijo family is also unique because they had an advantage of having bi-national and bi-cultural status. The Armijos were able to use this to their advan-



*Portrait of Nestor Armijo, undated. NMSU Archives and Special Collections – Rio Grande Historical Collections, Ms0322*

tage when conducting business in both the U.S. and Mexico.

### Nestor Armijo

Nestor was born in 1831 in Los Padillas, a small town located south of Old Albuquerque. Nestor had seven siblings, but only two survived to adulthood, Nicolas and Justo. At the early age of twelve, Nestor was one of the first New Mexicans to attend an American school, the Christian Brothers School in St. Louis, Missouri. The Jesuit school was known to serve the affluent families from the frontier country.<sup>2</sup> After he completed his schooling, young Nestor returned to Albuquerque where he received training on the family business in the areas of livestock, trade, money, risks, profits and overland transportation.

In 1851, Nestor married Josefa Yrisarri. Josefa who was a native of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque. She was the only daughter of Mariano Yrisarri and Juanita Otero de Yrisarri. The Yrisarri and Otero families were renowned families in the region, which made Josefa an heiress of two-family fortunes.

Nestor and Josefa had two biological children, son Carlos “Charles” and daughter Juanita Carolina who died at infancy. The couple adopted a son named Federico “Fred.” Fred went on to marry Mary Stephenson. After two years of marriage, Fred died at the age of twenty due to heart failure.

Carlos, the biological son, was born at the family hacienda at Los Padillas on February 3, 1855. Following the family viewpoint towards education, Carlos was educated at Germantown, Pennsylvania and in Heidelberg, Germany. After completing his formal schooling, Carlos returned home, followed his father’s profession and assisted in the family sheep and cattle business in New Mexico and Mexico. Carlos assisted his father by overseeing the Tres Ritos (Three Rivers) ranch as well as the Mexican ranch and farms located in Janos, Chihuahua. In 1877, Carlos married Beatriz Otero, the daughter of the well-known Otero

family of New Mexico. Carlos and Beatriz had three children, Nestor, Gertrude and Josephine.

### Nestor’s Overland Transportation

In 1853, Nestor received his training in the family business and soon made his first sheep drive across the rugged plains. The drive consisted of 55,000 head of sheep, which were taken to California to the prosperous markets of San Francisco.<sup>3</sup> For the massive undertaking of the sheep drive, military aid was provided to Nestor in pre-railroad days to accompany him for the long trip. He was provided with a commanding officer and ammunition to assist in the five-month sheep



**Prior to embassies, republics like the United States had legations which issued documents like this that might be considered visas or passports for identifying the bearer, 1874. NMSU Archives and Special Collections – Rio Grande Historical Collections, Ms0322**

drive to the west coast. During the drive, harsh conditions and problems developed along the way. Encounters with Native Americans upon arriving in Arizona, shortages of water, and lack of medical supplies were some of the misfortunes they experienced. Nonetheless, the trip was carried out successfully and Nestor arrived safely back to New Mexico.

### Opening of Las Cruces Store

Shortly after Nestor made his overland trip to California, he journeyed to Westport in present day Kansas, where he made his first purchase of various goods for general merchandising. It was evident that distance was not a barrier for Nestor to acquire goods to be sold at his store. It was quite customary for general merchants to make trips across the country to acquire goods to supply their businesses.

In 1854, family fortune and connections made it possible for Nestor to own and operate a successful general mercantile store in his hometown at the age of twenty-three.<sup>4</sup> The deciding factor that steered Nestor to open a store in Las Cruces was the growth that the city was experiencing at

the time. His general store was situated in the vicinity of North Main Street in downtown Las Cruces near the proximity of the distinguished Loretto Academy. Analyzing the store order book held within the Armijo family papers provides insight into some of the store's more affluent customers which included the Sisters of Loretto, Ascarate family, Isidore Armijo, Frank Islas, and other local residents of the Mesilla Valley. In examining the ledgers, it is evident that the mercantile store was pivotal for the residents of Las Cruces in providing essential items such as meat and common household goods. The store proved to be at a "stop-over point for resting and replenishing of supplies" for individuals making the trek to Chihuahua.<sup>5</sup> The prime location was a contributing factor which lead to the successful operation.

The Las Cruces store was one of several similar businesses operated by Nestor and his brother Nicolas. Other stores were located in Albuquerque, El Paso and Chihuahua and due to the success of the stores, the Armijo brothers were one of the most important "comerciantes" (merchants) in their family.<sup>6</sup> To expand and supplement his business enterprises, Nestor made trips to Chihuahua



*Armijo family home, undated. NMSU Archives and Special Collections – Rio Grande Historical Collections, Ms0322*

to sell American goods wholesale; meanwhile he was still involved in the sheep business in New Mexico. The trips to Chihuahua were made while Nestor was residing in Las Cruces, which continued to occur almost until his time of his death.<sup>7</sup>

Nestor sold his Las Cruces store in 1868 and decided to pursue and concentrate on his family dealings situated in Chihuahua.<sup>8</sup> Nestor joined his brother Nicolas who oversaw a supply store and a freight line in Chihuahua. Along with being in the mercantile business, Nestor was involved in ranching, real estate, and investments.

### **Ranching Profession**

The ranching profession was not foreign business to Nestor. Raising sheep was part of the Armijo family enterprise. Nestor was introduced to the ranching profession at a young age. Sheep raising in particular ran deep in the Armijo bloodlines family and it was stated “Nestor’s father pursued the first and foremost business of sheep raising, a business Nestor himself knew well.”<sup>9</sup>

Nestor obtained additional income from ranching. He had ranches near Tularosa, New Mexico and Janos, Mexico. The Tres Ritos (Three Rivers) ranch was situated twenty miles north of Tularosa. This large 2,360-acre ranch was managed by Nestor’s son Carlos. Nestor’s sheep and cattle business rewarded him with financial success but there were problems.

While Carlos managed and oversaw the daily ranch business, financial obstacles were encountered leading to mismanagement of the ranches. Nestor often had to loan money to Carlos to keep the business afloat. Carlos divided his time as manager of the Tres Ritos and the Janos, Mexico ranches. It is noted that the Tres Ritos ranch was “well developed and profitable with its sheep ranges, and its grains and fruit farms. Most of the produce of the Tres Ritos made it way to Lincoln, the Mescalero Agency and White Oaks Mining Camps.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Real Estate and Investments**

In 1877, Nestor returned to Las Cruces and

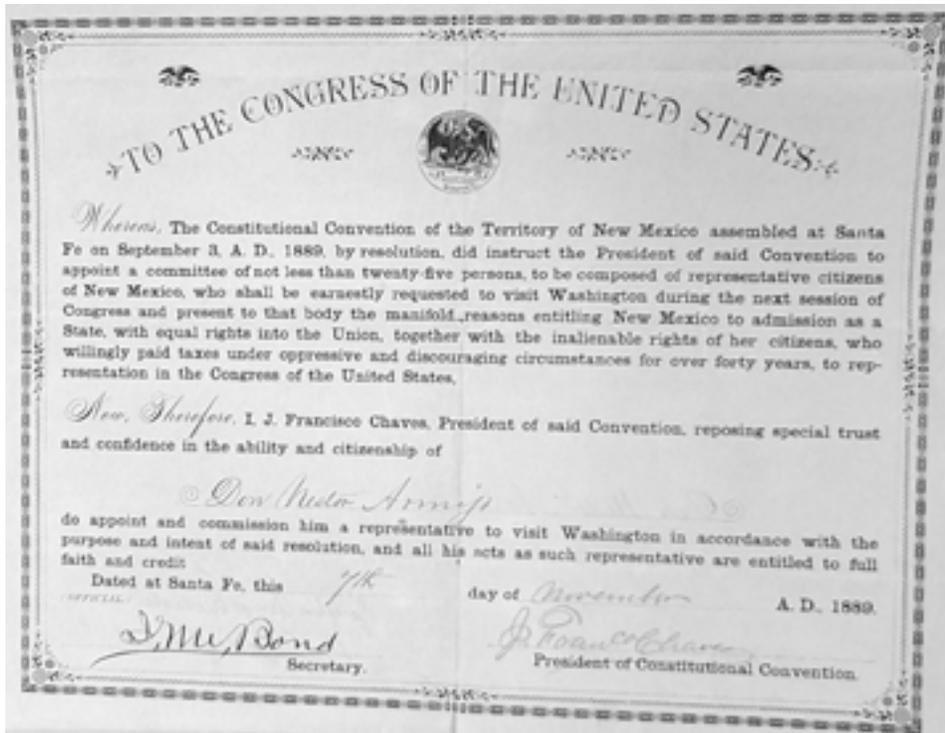
purchased the well-known Armijo residence situated in the Las Cruces downtown area on Lohman Avenue and the south end of Church Street. Bradford and Maricita Dailey originally built the home in 1870. Nestor Armijo purchased the house in 1877 for the sum of \$4,050 and soon after, he expanded the modest one-story house by adding a second floor and veranda. The home was noted to be the first two-story in the city and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The home had the following: six bedrooms on the ground floor and a large center hall running the full fifty-six-foot depth of the building. The second floor contained two parlors, another hall, and a large storage room over the rear two-thirds of the structure.

Nestor had several real estate investments in Las Cruces, Albuquerque and in Mexico which added to his income. Nestor also invested in lots in Albuquerque in 1880. Albuquerque at the time was undergoing a land boom due to the arrival of the railroad. Along with investing in real estate, Nestor had stocks in Chihuahua, Mexico and El Paso. Nestor wisely invested his earnings, which resulted in a large fortune. Along with real estate investments, Nestor had banking interests in Las Cruces and El Paso as well as government securities in Chihuahua. The government securities eventually became worthless due to the Mexican Revolution.

### **Minor Political Events**

Due to Nestor’s involvement and support within the community, it would have been easy for him to enter into the political arena. It was noted that he participated behind the scenes but never ran for political office himself. It was mentioned that, “although interested in the great game of New Mexico politics, and a liberal donor to the Democratic Party, he declined all overtures to public office.”<sup>11</sup> J. Francisco Chavez, acting president of the Constitutional Convention, appointed Nestor on November 1889 to be one of the twenty-five representatives of the Territory. Representatives had the responsibility to visit Washington and present to



***Constitutional Convention invitation to Nestor Armijo, dated 1889. NMSU Archives and Special Collections – Rio Grande Historical Collections, Ms0322***

Congress the reasons for admitting New Mexico as a state. It is not evident if Nestor made the trip or participated.

### **Declining Years within the Armijo Family**

During early 1900s, the Armijo family experienced deaths within the immediate family circle. In the winter of 1902, Beatriz and Carlos passed away. Tragically, they passed away seventeen days apart. After their deaths, their daughter Josephine was placed under the care of Nestor and Josefa. To make matters more tragic, Nestor's wife and companion of many years was in ill health. She passed away in 1905 in Rochester, Minnesota.

Financial issues seemed overwhelming for the last years of Nestor Armijo. The Mexican Revolution robbed him of much wealth. Armies and guerilla bands butchered his cattle and sheep and confiscated his horses. Bank stock in Mexico City and Chihuahua became worthless. Failure of El Paso Mortgage and Investment Company further compounded his losses. Realty depreciated and

rentals dropped. Nestor decided it was in his best interest to sell the ranches. The upkeep and management of the ranches proved to be too much for Nestor. Eventually the Three Rivers ranch was sold to A.B. Fall and later became property of Thomas Fortune Ryan.

Nestor, the family patriarch, passed away in 1911. Nestor's sudden death made local headlines in regional newspapers. The passing of Nestor was a surprise and shock to many Mesilla valley residents. In one local article, it states that Nestor attended a moving picture show on Saturday evening with his granddaughter Josephine and while returning to his

residence, he seemed to be in good health. It was further explained that Nestor's cause of death was said to have been the bursting of a blood vessel in the head, causing a congestion of the arteries, which affected his heart.<sup>12</sup>

At the time of Nestor's death, he was considered one of the oldest residents in southern New Mexico. Reporting on the funeral, one newspaper said, "the attendance was exceedingly large, every man feeling that a friend was being buried."<sup>13</sup> He was buried in the Catholic cemetery of Las Cruces near his mother, wife, and son Carlos in the Armijo plot that he had established years earlier.

Nestor Armijo was a well-liked and respected citizen. He served the community as a merchant, rancher and philanthropist. He left his footprint and paved the way for the development of the City of Crosses by establishing a mercantile store and serving as a strong and prominent Hispanic figure within the city.

**Jennifer Olguin** obtained her undergraduate degrees from New Mexico State University and a Masters in Library Science from the University of North Texas. Currently, she is the Archivist at New Mexico State University Library Archives and Special Collections Department – Rio Grande Historical Collections. Contact information: Email: [jechavez@nmsu.edu](mailto:jechavez@nmsu.edu) Telephone number: (575)646-7281

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## A Health-Seeker's Paradise

### Tuberculosis in Alamogordo and Southern New Mexico

*By Clara Roberts*

Tuberculosis is a disease most people in the 21st century rarely think about. Perhaps some will recall stories from great-grandparents or maybe even great-aunts and uncles who were children during a time the disease still greatly impacted the United States. For most part, the idea that New Mexico was once thought of as a health-seeker's paradise for lung diseases is an unlikely one.

Once known by many names—including consumption, phthisis, and the white plague—tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, a tubercle bacillus. It was long thought a high, dry climate, along with fresh air and healthy foods, could cure the disease, which is why much of the American West was considered an ideal place for treating the disease. Antibiotics developed in the 1930s and 1940s eventually brought tuberculosis under control, though it continues to plague millions of people worldwide to this day.<sup>1</sup> The significant role that New Mexico played in providing relief to tuberculosis sufferers is often forgotten and fails to remain in public memory. This paper seeks to explore the background of tuberculosis treatment in New Mexico in general and focus more narrowly on the impact and significance of some sanatoriums located in the Dona Ana and Otero counties.

In North America, tuberculosis was the leading cause of death in the 18th and 19th centuries. These deaths were often slow and, at the end, agonizingly painful as the body wasted away in a futile attempt to fight the disease. Despite the discovery of the bacterial cause by German doctor Robert Koch in 1882, tuberculosis continued to ravage global populations until the development of a vaccine in 1921. However, this was not widely used until after World War II and the death toll

continued to be vast. Even today with modern medicine the death toll is significant, and most often connected with victims co-infected with HIV.<sup>2</sup> Before the discovery of antibiotics (which would be more than twenty years after the vaccine was developed), physicians had few tools to use in fighting against the powerful disease. An interest developed around the 1830s in the apparent benefits of a high altitude and dry climate for the treatment of tuberculosis patients, often called “lungers,” and initiated a westward migration.

New Mexico was especially favored because of its relatively stable climate and thousands of health-seekers traveled there during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Physicians in the eastern United States also hoped that sending patients west might provide relief for population-dense urban centers where rich and poor alike increasingly filled the cities.<sup>3</sup> The treatment of this disease was done in what are known as sanatoriums (sometimes spelled sanitariums), which, according to Miriam-Webster, are long-term treatment facilities set up to care for any chronic disease that emphasizes diet, exercise, and fresh air as well as medical intervention. However, the name now has a connotation that links sanatoriums almost exclusively to the treatment of tuberculosis.<sup>4</sup>

Even before the invention and spread of railroads made travelling to the Southwest more accessible, the Santa Fe trail was a gateway for many suffers of tuberculosis seeking the so-called cure of high and dry climates. Though the rigorous journey took at least three months, even those in the final stages of the disease could travel the Santa Fe Trail in wagons to reach their long-awaited “cure” in New Mexico. The Rio Grande, a much more lively and full-flowing river than what we see

today, was also a valued route for health-seekers in the mid-19th century. As early as 1840, some locations in the Southwest such as San Antonio became famously known as part of the health frontier. Renowned contemporary figures like adventurer George Frederick Ruxton and Frederick Law Olmstead, alongside his brother, Dr. John H. Olmstead who suffered from tuberculosis, promoted the healing effects of Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico throughout the 1850s.

While travel to the beneficial desert climes was temporarily interrupted with the outbreak of the Civil War, the ever-increasing “promotional rhetoric” produced throughout the 1850s shows that the territory’s reputation had already reached far and wide and likely maintained interest while access to the West was restricted. Douglas Brewerton, artist and journalist, and W.W. H. Davis, Civil War veteran and journalist, especially praised the purifying New Mexican climate and nature’s cleansing effects.<sup>5</sup>

After the North’s victory and the reunification of the United States at the close of the Civil War in 1865, the growth of railroads significantly changed the way the Southwest interacted with the rest of the country. The completion of the Pacific Railroad in 1869 and the Santa Fe Railroad in the early 1870s, opened the Southwest to numerous travelers, settlers, and health-seekers; California and Colorado were especially desirable locations. For the New Mexico territory and neighboring Arizona, the main migration of health-seekers did not come until the late 1880s. This was due to the “wild west” reputation of the largely unregulated territory that was thought to be overrun by “Indian bands...crusty old prospectors, and...lawless renegades and desperadoes.”<sup>6</sup>

Once the trains did arrive, however, New Mexico had much to offer health-seekers. Santa Fe and Albuquerque soon became associated with a tuberculosis center: “endless rows of little shacks that consist chiefly of a screened porch with a bed on it.”<sup>7</sup> Once the railroads granted more access to New Mexico, Las Vegas quickly became the most notable and desirable of locations for health-

seekers, known as the “unrivaled king of...health and pleasure resorts” in the territory because of its high elevation. However, southern New Mexico soon gained recognition for its efforts to attract lungers, especially the town of Eddy (now Carlsbad) in the Pecos Valley. By 1888, health-seekers traveling to New Mexico arrived in droves and every train that stopped in the territory contained at least a few men or women hoping to be cured by the pleasant climate.<sup>8</sup>

Promotion of New Mexico as a health-seeker’s paradise was encouraged by many. Physicians, businesses, railroad companies, and tuberculosis organizations alike all advised consumptives to seek warmer, drier climates to ease the symptoms of their disease. Businessmen promoted rural southwestern locations in hopes of attracting future consumers who might boost the local economy once the climate had “cured” their illness. The New Mexico Board of Immigration promoted its corner of the Southwest as a health-seeker’s paradise by advertising all the “health attractions and facilities” available to lungers.

For New Mexico especially, some railroad companies played a vital role in the promotion of the territory as a health-seekers paradise. In northern New Mexico, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad in 1882 built and developed the fabulous Montezuma Hotel in Las Vegas and partnered with the New Mexico Bureau of Immigration to augment their meager budget. Further south, the El Paso and Northeastern Railroad cut through the desert landscape and aided in the establishment of Alamogordo in 1898 and its subsequent growth.<sup>9</sup>

Health resorts, which included other wellness facilities, often accompanied many sanatoriums. These facilities, often small-scale and run privately or established by a religious or fraternal organization, were popular in the Southwest (Arizona, California, Colorado and New Mexico) and became invaluable treatment tools where lungers could both labor and rest in the desirable, salubrious climate. The numerous natural hot springs located throughout the state were beneficial to

these health resorts and many sanatoriums were created alongside them. Despite being developed for the benefit of lungers, however, many of these resorts were quickly overrun by “the parvenu and hotel-dwelling rich.” While this was not beneficial for those seeking treatment for tuberculosis, the arrival of high society tourists surely aided New Mexico by boosting the economy and, in the eyes of some, its reputation. It was not the outcome intended by those promoting New Mexico as a health-seeker's paradise, but their arrival would have been beneficial to the territory's development nonetheless.<sup>10</sup>

There were other motives in the promotion of New Mexico to health-seekers other than a desire to cure consumption. Nancy Owen Lewis, author of *Chasing the Cure*, believes that New Mexico's struggle to achieve statehood (which did not occur until 1912) was inherently connected to its lack of a “sufficient” Anglo population. Though never explicitly stated, the literature Lewis used to research the topic indicate that the New Mexico Bureau of Immigration was largely concerned with attracting Anglo men and women to come to New Mexico in search of a tuberculosis cure who might stay and bolster the minority white population. This would not only prop up the economy but also, hopefully, augment the number of Anglo citizens the territory needed to successfully be admitted to the Union.<sup>11</sup>

The view that New Mexico was not civilized or white enough to become a state is displayed by one physician, H. G. Wetherill. Dr. Wetherill claimed to have toured the Southwest and its amenities to ascertain whether its reputation was warranted. He praised southern Colorado and northern New Mexico highly for its “altitude, dryness, abundance of sunshine, the peculiarly stimulating and invigorating qualities of the atmosphere” as well as people of good education and society, pleasant lodgings, excellent food, and interesting entertainments. Traveling further south, however, the good doctor's review turned rather severe. The altitude is lower, the rainfall too little and the sun much too hot, and the high alkaline water

is “very distasteful and disturbing to those not accustomed to it.” And if these natural deterrents were not enough, the hotels available were “bad beyond endurance,” the food “wretched, and the people one meets, with a few notable exceptions, are not attractive companions.” Wetherill advised his fellow physicians to cease directing patients to southern New Mexico, a place “as unhygienic as the filthy habits of the native Mexican and Indian population can make it,” and which “is no place for a delicate Eastern invalid with a cultivated taste for many things that have become necessities of life, and that are here unattainable.”<sup>12</sup> Many politicians likely shared Wetherill's sentiments about the inhabitants of the “wild” New Mexico territory and his published review sadly lends further credence to Lewis' theory.

For those suffering from tuberculosis the prospect of bad society, unfavorable food, or unpleasant hotel service were not priorities. If the possibility of a cure meant they had to sacrifice a few “unattainable necessities” then it was a worthwhile price for the chance at a longer life. In fact, Wetherill's unfair and blatantly racist review of the Southwest was thoroughly countered by another health professional, James H. Wroth, a former president of the New Mexico Medical Society who spent significant time in the territory. Wroth noted that “The leading physicians and specialists of the great Middle States, with Chicago as a center, have realized and known for the last fifteen years the capabilities of this Territory. They have made climatology a study and they are aware that within the banks of the Rio Grande Valley, from El Paso on the south to Embudo on the north, there extends a strip of country with a minimum rainfall and with a moderate degree of heat; from past experiences, they are learning how to utilize it.”<sup>13</sup> New Mexico's new reputation as the place with the cure continued and by 1904 it had an abundance of beds devoted to tuberculosis patients, second only to New York.<sup>14</sup>

The number of prominent figures who came to New Mexico, many of whom stayed once they were “cured,” clearly attests to the appeal that the

Southwest continued to provide health-seekers. For instance, the infamous Albert Bacon Fall came to the territory in 1881 as one of those health-seekers. After serving as a United States Senator for the state of New Mexico, he eventually became secretary of the interior under the Harding administration and was embroiled in the Teapot Dome scandal.<sup>15</sup> Fall was not alone. Clyde Tingley, who later became mayor of Albuquerque and governor of New Mexico, arrived in 1910 from Ohio with his tubercular fiancée. Edith Hicks, from Pennsylvania, arrived in 1924 and became the manager of the Albuquerque Civic Council. They accompany numerous other political and civic leaders, as well as judges, medical professionals, developers and realtors, business owners, journalists, educators, and artists.<sup>16</sup>

Tuberculosis impacted the nation in multiple ways. Not only did it challenge medical professionals and shape public health policy, but it influenced social and cultural changes as well. New laws prohibiting spitting in public and the shortening of women's skirts (both initiated as a way to stop the spread of germs) were two social changes that resulted from the widespread disease. Even homes were transformed as the architecture of many places in the "health frontier" of the Southwest adapted to include sleeping porches.<sup>17</sup> Many physicians prescribed fresh air as a treatment for those suffering with tuberculosis and sleeping outside in the desert air transferred beyond health-

seekers into the wider cultural context. This was especially true in New Mexico.

There were ten locations in southern New Mexico that housed sanatoriums from west to east. Las Cruces and Alamogordo both had notable tuberculosis facilities.<sup>18</sup> Dr. Nathan Boyd's sanatorium still stands at the foot of the Organ Mountains, a hidden piece of history that once was part of General Eugene Van Patten's Mountain Camp resort. This resort, established in the late nineteenth century, boasted of sixteen guest rooms as well as a large dining room and even a concert hall. As was the case with many sanatoriums, Dr. Boyd purchased the resort in 1917 and moved from San Francisco with his tubercular wife. He in turn sold it to a Las Cruces physician, Dr. T.C. Sexton and it stayed open until approximately 1925.<sup>19</sup>

Alamogordo at one time claimed the title of "The Breathing Spot of the Southwest," a fitting name for a city that contained multiple sanatoriums through the early 1900s.<sup>20</sup> The Fraternal City Sanatorium was established there by the American Co-operative Sanatorium Association in 1907. In 1908, W.A. Reed founded the Alamo Cottage Sanatorium. Lastly, the Mountain Air Sanatorium was established by the National Children's Tuberculosis Society in 1913 for the treatment of children, though it also treated adults and often lacked an adequate number of patients.<sup>21</sup>

Health-seekers only needed to look to the nearest newspaper to find information about local



*Alamogordo's Fraternal City Sanatorium. The postcard image, next page, shows the second large building on the campus which is to the east of this one. Library of Congress.*

sanatoriums. In an advertisement for the Alamo Cottage Sanatorium, the facility was advertised “for the treatment of Pulmonary and Laryngeal Tuberculosis. Primary and Suitable Cases. Individual Cottages. First-class Cuisine. Trained Nurses. H. H. Cate, M.D.”<sup>22</sup> Newly arrived health-seekers might have seen the newspaper advertisement as they departed their train at the Alamogordo station. Though there are no instructions on how to contact the director or even where it was located, the advertisement shows the community's engagement in promoting tuberculosis treatment facilities.

The Fraternal City Sanatorium is one facility that embodies both the importance of New Mexico in treating tuberculosis and the difficulties many of them faced. Five New Mexico cities competed to become the home of a sanatorium paid for by the National Fraternal Sanitarium Association, which was formed from various members of national fraternal organizations, in 1905. Deming had previously been approved as a location for the sponsored sanatorium, but when plans fell through the Association decided to look elsewhere. Las Vegas, New Mexico, was declared the winner at a banquet in May of the same year;



*Postcard promoting the Fraternal City Sanatorium and Alamogordo. The caption on the back reads: The largest Sanatorium for climatic and scientific treatment of tuberculosis in America. This is not a private institution for profit but a humanitarian Sanatorium where patients will receive the best of care and attention at about the actual cost of their keeping, making it the cheapest modern home in this country for those suffering with tuberculosis. Every patient is provided with separate rooms, under supervision of the medical director and trained nurses without extra cost. The Sanatorium is equipped with telephones, electric lights, and pure mountain water from the city pipes. Alamogordo, the home of the Sanatorium is a city of beautiful residences, with miles of shade trees on each side of all streets and a park in which are lakes stocked with fish and fowls of almost every variety. This is the largest and most beautiful park in the Southwest. New Mexico State University Archive.*

however, the lavish and expansive resort—advertised to become the biggest in the world—ultimately failed to become a reality due to financial difficulties from both the Association and the Santa Fe Railroad Company, a significant financial backer. These problems were exasperated by Las Vegas residents, who were less than enthusiastic about the project.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to the Las Vegas community, Alamogordo citizens were determined to have a facility and endeavored to house the sanatorium. By the autumn of 1906 construction of a fraternal sanatorium began in Alamogordo, spearheaded by three businessmen who had previously been involved with the National Fraternal Sanitarium Association. Alamogordo's involvement in this project is significant for several reasons. The citizens of Alamogordo actively initiated and organized the project and in addition the city provide many amenities not readily available elsewhere. The city had “electric lights, nicely laid-out streets, ‘a splendid water system,’ and Queen Anne-style buildings similar to those of other midwestern railroad towns” and all of these features would be attractive to health-seekers who desired a sense of familiarity when they came to find a cure. Alamogordo's south-central location and altitude were also amenable, hosting an ideal elevation of 4,336 feet (significant because its proximity to 5,000 feet, which many physicians incorrectly believed was an altitude too high for tuberculosis bacteria to survive).

A year later, on August 25, 1907 the Fraternal City Sanatorium opened. This 150-bed facility was located at the foot of the Sacramento mountains, just south of the entrance to Alamo Canyon, and admittance was open to all, not only members of fraternal organizations. After years of complications and hardship, the Fraternal City Sanitarium looked toward a promising future.<sup>24</sup>

That future was not guaranteed, no matter how promising, and despite the good intentions and dedication by many the sanatorium was wracked with difficulties. Leadership of the facility, which was renamed the Alamogordo Sanatorium in

1909, was unstable, changing hands several times, and although it consistently drew attention and acquired new patients, its success was short lived. According to *The Alamogordo News*, in March of 1911 the building was temporarily purchased by three investors, “Messers. Gilbert, Coe and Carmack,” so that they could protect their investment in the venture, but a five-person committee was considering an offer made by the Woodmen of the World. One investor, Dr. Gilbert, turned down a nomination for mayor of Alamogordo the previous year due to the sanatorium and his “very large professional practice” occupying his time. In 1912, only five years after it opened, the Alamogordo Sanatorium was ravaged by fire and never repaired.<sup>25</sup>

Arthur Pickney Jackson was a leading member of Alamogordo who came to the area for the benefit of his health. Though it is not confirmed if he suffered from tuberculosis it is certainly a possibility. Jackson was a prominent businessman and president of the Jackson-Gailbraith-Foxworth Lumber Company which operated lumber yards in Alamogordo, Tukumcari, Santa Rosa, and multiple locations in Texas. At the time of his death in 1906, aged 40, he had greatly contributed to the local economy and improved the quickly-growing railroad town. A news article issued after his death noted that he provided \$1,000 to grade and pave 9th Street, a stretch of road more than a mile long between his home and the lumberyard; he was landlord, business owner, and contributed to the “college addition” of Alamogordo. This subdivision of Alamogordo earned its name from New Mexico Baptist College, which was located in the area

Considering all of his other contributions, Jackson undoubtedly was one of the Alamogordo citizens who subscribed to the building of this college and the subsequent “college addition.”<sup>26</sup> Before his death he pledged another \$1,000 to 9th Street “in order to give Alamogordo at least one first-class street.”<sup>27</sup> The article notes that, by all accounts, Jackson was truly beloved by the community and did much to support the continued growth of Alamogordo. His 20th century Queen

Anne-style home still stands on 9th Street today; in 2004 it was added to the National Register of Historic Places under the name of Jackson House.<sup>28</sup>

The story of tuberculosis in New Mexico, and specifically in Alamogordo, is significant in two ways. Firstly, tuberculosis had a massive impact on the state of New Mexico. Patients that recovered and chose to adopt the state as their new home often filled a “vacuum of economic and professional leadership in New Mexico” in a time where there was not much other incentive to travel to the remote and sometimes dangerous Southwest. Though their reasons for arriving were far from pleasant, many health-seekers who came to New Mexico searching for a cure remained once the disease went into remission and not only contributed to the economy but also became leading figures in the state.<sup>29</sup> One example of a health-seeker who came to Alamogordo is A. P. Jackson, who boosted the local economy with his business and gave generously to his community.

Secondly, the Alamogordo community's involvement in the story of tuberculosis in New Mexico is a part of its history that has largely been forgotten. It is a part that should be remembered and honored, so that the hard-working members of the community can emulate the compassion and dedication of those who came before them. Though Alamogordo's sanatoriums may not have been as famous or as big as the resorts in Las Vegas or Santa Fe, for many families their small contribution was surely felt in a big way. The community's active participation in the establishment of the Fraternal City Sanatorium demonstrates that treating tuberculosis was viewed as a priority and their efforts should no longer go unrecognized.<sup>30</sup>

In a time when we face uncertainty and fear due to the ravages of a novel virus changing the world, the story of tuberculosis might provide some small source of comfort. Millions of people in the 19th and 20th centuries suffered from this terrible disease all their lives, and millions worldwide still do. Yet despite that, people were brought together in support of their communities and

did their part to protect their neighbors, family, and friends by following the advice of healthcare professionals and providing for each other. For many folks suffering from tuberculosis, the outcome looked bleak and a cure seemed impossible. But without the disease increasing the population of New Mexico and other southern states and contributing to local and regional civic and political life, the state would be vastly different than it is today and its impact should not be ignored.

The story of “lungers” can also give hope to a world that is living in a time that often can feel hopeless. Eventually, a respite will come, and until then, we all must do what we can to band together and support our communities and others searching for aid, just as the Alamogordo citizens in 1905 committed to the building of the Fraternal City Sanatorium to help those lungers searching for a cure.

**Clara Roberts** is a graduate student at New Mexico State University, where she studies History, with a concentration on Public History, Museum Studies, and music of the American Revolution. History has always been a most fascinating subject, and the thrill of discovering the stories of people from the past is one like no other, and trying to make those voices heard even hundreds of years later in an engaging and exciting way is something she's very passionate about. She grew up in Alamogordo, NM and has always had an interest in the local history there, and would like to explore more deeply into its roots one day. She splits her time between Las Cruces and Alamogordo, where her parents and several siblings still reside.

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## Birth Of White Sands Proving Ground

### From Sand And Mesquite To Rocket Launches And Roadblocks

*By Jim Eckles*

White Sands Missile Range has now existed for 75 years. Originally called White Sands Proving Ground and billed as a temporary facility, much of the detail about its establishment has gone missing. The birthdate of July 9, 1945 is well known but what was going on during the months before and after that day are hazy at best.

For the local communities, the story begins in April 1945 when the public first found out about the new facility. In early April, the Army Corps of Engineers in Albuquerque filed a condemnation suit in federal court against a number of ranchers and mine claimants for use of their land east and northeast of the Organ Mountains. The 556,000-acre tract identified in the taking is what now forms the southwest corner of the missile range. It was tacked onto the Alamogordo Bombing Range to make a more uniform rectangle running north and south. The bombing range lands were acquired through leases in early 1942.

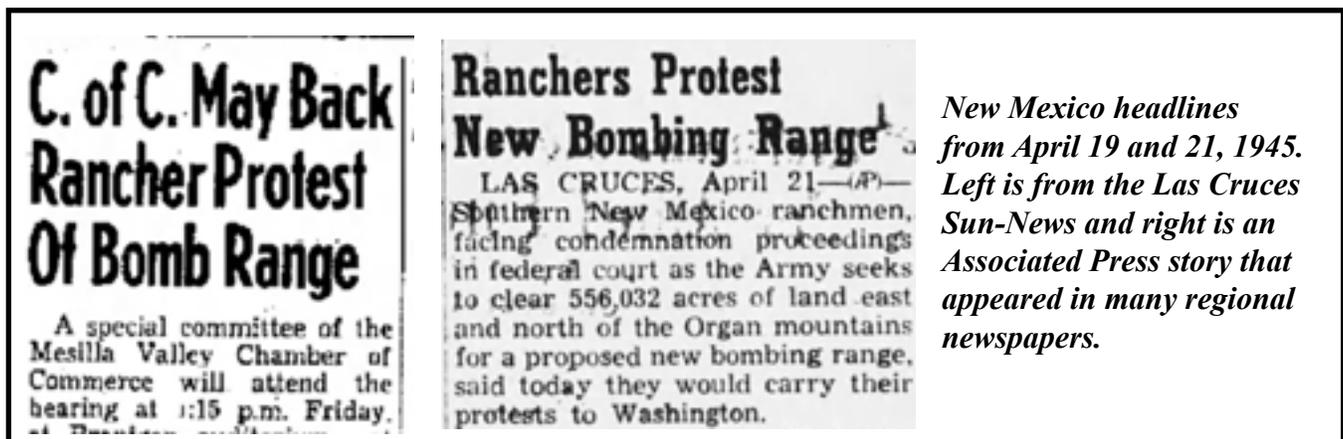
Early on, the media referred to the effort as the ORDCIT Ordnance Project. Neither the news media nor the ranchers had any idea exactly what the land was needed for. Because the land adjoined the Alamogordo Bombing Range, most people assumed it was some sort of bombing range. At half

a million acres, the land was “condemned for use,” and was repeatedly described by locals as “vast” in size.

Most citizens of Las Cruces became aware of the action in an April 19, 1945 article in the *Las Cruces Sun-News*. The article stated the Mesilla Valley Chamber of Commerce was going to send a special three-man committee to a “hearing” on Friday, April 20 at which ranchers were going to protest the condemnation proceedings. The meeting was scheduled for 1:15 p.m. at the Branigan auditorium and was being conducted by Army Corps of Engineers personnel from Albuquerque and Washington, D.C.

It didn't go well as the Corps of Engineers exhibited the kind of behavior they became infamous for when they evicted ranchers in 1942 to create the Alamogordo Bombing Range. The civilian perception was, “it didn't matter how much human or financial suffering they created, the Corps had a schedule to keep and no ranchers were going to spoil it.”

The day before the meeting, Capt. Floyd Snyder of the Corps of Engineers announced that the Mesilla Valley chamber of commerce and the *Las Cruces Sun-News* were barred from attending. He



said something to the effect that it was none of their business.

That was like poking a hornet's nest with a stick. For a few weeks after, the chamber and the newspaper got their flamethrowers out and went on the offensive.

An April 20 *Associated Press* story filed after the rancher/miner meeting reported that the ranchers, who were asking for a 90-day extension for evacuating their land, failed to persuade the Army at the meeting. In fact, Capt. Snyder was quoted as saying he "could neither suspend condemnation proceedings against 556,032 acres of land east and north of the Organ Mountains nor delay the order to vacate by May 3." (This date is a bit uncertain. Later in the process, everyone, including the government, used a May 10 deadline. Whether the 3<sup>rd</sup> was an error or a week was tacked on when ranchers appealed to Washington is not known)

The newspaper article stated that 16 ranchers were affected by the action with the Cox ranch at 100,000 acres the largest. The ranchers claimed there were actually 25 affected. Ranch families

and their supporters vowed to take their fight to Washington and get a delay.

The rancher complaints were similar to those in 1942. With the short time to evacuate, they had to round up all their livestock and try to sell them or find other grazing for them. With that many animals suddenly on the local markets, prices were bound to plunge. Also, they had to find places for themselves, either on another ranch or in a town. Plus there were all the other details involved in moving out. It wasn't something you'd want to attempt in a few weeks.

On April 22, the *Sun-News* summarized the rancher's issues but also gave some details about the planned new facility, calling it a "rocket range." It said that the area south of highway 70 would

be used to launch rockets and the area north of the highway would be the receiving side. Firing rockets over the highway would necessitate safety roadblocks of the road.

Blocking highway 70 quickly became the top issue for the *Sun-News* and Mesilla Valley Chamber of Commerce. They expressed concern for their rancher neighbors but blocking the highway was their main focus. They saw frequent roadblocks as a great deterrent to business traffic and tourism.

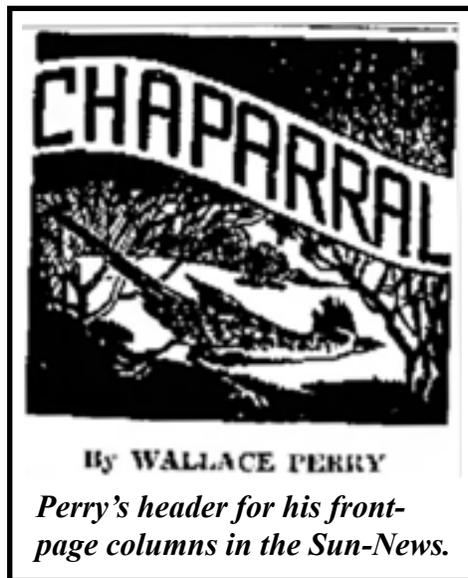
Also on April 22, Wallace Perry, editor of the *Sun-News*, published one of his columns about

the situation. Called "Chaparral" the columns started on the front page and sometimes jumped inside. They offered Perry's point of view and, since he was the publisher, they became the paper's opinion as well.

Perry scoffed at the Army's argument that the hearing was none of their business. He said the condemnation would have a direct impact on Las Cruces business and that was everyone's concern. He questioned that here was the only place to

put the new rocket range; he questioned that such a new range would actually help end the war; he thought the whole thing might be a Texas congressman's plan to make Ft. Bliss the largest installation in the country; he also thought the closing of the highway might be a devious plan devised by the El Paso Chamber of Commerce to acquire all the vehicle traffic that would have to detour down to Texas to get around the new base.

The ranchers, the newspaper and chamber of commerce concerns were heard in Washington. New Mexico senator Carl Hatch and congressman Clinton Anderson both went to the Army to see what was going on as they had earlier heard one thing from the Army and now something else from their constituents. After meeting with Army



officials, both men wrote letters home saying how cooperative the war department was and things were going to be fine. Anderson did say the condemnation process was “very poorly handled” but seemed to think the Army at the top levels would make sure those down the line did a better job. He added he was told roadblocks would be no more than two to three hours each and would only be set once every seven to ten days. What he heard and what actually happened in October did not match up.

On April 25 the *Sun-News* reported ranchers were given a 30-day extension. It wasn't the 90 days they requested but it was something. It also said that New Mexico Highway Commission engineers Fred Healy and W.R. Eccles were sent to Las Cruces to investigate this idea of closing highway 70. Healy, the state's chief engineer, was quoted as saying, “The highway commission certainly would not countenance a closing of any through highway on even a temporary basis.” On April 27 the highway commission voted to protest the planned highway 70 closures.

Senator Hatch wrote he was assured the Army had no intention of permanently closing 70 while *Sun-News* editor Perry talked about the possible “death of 70.” Perry kept hammering that one nail and called on all towns along highway 70 to weigh in on the closures. On May 4, Roswell chimed in and the newspaper suggested the city support Las Cruces.

In the end, the Army was able to satisfy local objections. By June there was little activity in the newspapers about the new facility. On June 10 an article appeared in the *Sun-News* saying today was the deadline for ranchers to be out for the new “robot bombing range.” The article said there were no known holdouts.

Also, it said Highway 70 would only be closed during “practice firings” for short periods of time; that there would be prior warning; and there would be guards on the road to make it happen.

This article pointed out again the uncertainty in the community about what they were getting as a neighbor to the east of the mountains. It was

variously called a bombing range, a rocket range, and a robot bombing range. For the launches across the highway, the paper called them “practice firings” like artillery rounds and not tests. Nobody mentioned the V-2 rockets or the state-of-the-art technology that was on its way. They were all comparing it to what they knew, the typical World War II artillery rounds and aircraft-delivered bombs.

News about the construction of the facility's infrastructure started showing up in the local newspapers on July 1 with the *Las Cruces Sun-News* reporting that contracts for construction had been awarded to local companies. The *Sun-News* quoted Lt. Col. R.E. Cole from the Albuquerque Corps of Engineers office on June 30. According to the paper, Hayner and Burn of Las Cruces were awarded a contract worth \$238,510 for installing a water system for the new camp. Work was to begin immediately. The article doesn't mention it but that included a sanitary sewer system. It is difficult to have water going into kitchens, bathrooms and other facilities and not do something with it coming out.

According to “White Sands History,” a document generated in 1959 by the missile range to cover the history of White Sands during the first 10 years, six shallow wells were to be drilled. At the beginning of July, the only well water available came from one of James Cox's wells used to water his livestock east of his ranch headquarters. It was conveniently located near the main gate but couldn't touch the amount of water needed for a modern military base.

Drilling wells and installing the casings, pumps and the pipelines to carry it from place to place and to a storage tank located on some high ground took weeks to accomplish. Initially, for the water needed for grading and smoothing the desert landscape, building roads, etc., non-potable water was pumped from abandoned mines near Organ and hauled to the site in tanker trucks.

That original *Sun-News* article also said a contract for \$219,069 was awarded to R.E. McKee of El Paso for the construction of housing and an

electrical distribution system. How many housing units? That contract detail was not revealed but the newspaper said rumors were pushing for 70 barracks buildings with each housing 50 men. With that kind of a projected population, the place was going to be HUGE right out of the gate. The local business community began to buzz.

The electrical system was self-contained. Power came from a diesel-powered generator located at the very northeast corner of the main post. Eventually, lines from Elephant Butte Dam and then El Paso Electric provided solid, uninterrupted power for the post. When the post got hard power, the diesel system was moved and used for backup for some years afterward.

The *Sun-News* reported the new test range was going to cost \$1.5 million, a number that raised eyebrows. That number went crazy in the days following. By July 19, the estimated value jumped to \$4 million, then to \$12 million and finally, to \$20 million. Suddenly, the Las Cruces business community lost interest in the few negative impacts and started seeing dollar signs.

When it became clear that German V-2s were headed to New Mexico, many of the newspapers still used the term “robot bomb” to describe the anticipated testing. And it was not a one-time, local term. *Associated Press* stories about the new base that popped up all across the country used the term for months.

In a 1964 interview, Lt. Col. Harold Turner, the first commander of White Sands, stated one of the first things the engineers asked him was where he wanted the headquarters building. The original site plans were drawn up in Washington, D.C. in April and May 1945 and sent to the Corps of Engineers District Office in Albuquerque. They were not so specific as where to exactly place the buildings on the landscape. Turner said he looked around a little and marked a cross in the sand with his shoe. Once the engineers had that reference point, everything could be laid out.

Also on July 1, the *Sun-News* rehashed the protest story about the Mesilla Valley Chamber of Commerce, ranchers and mining claimholders

from April and May. It also went over closing of U.S. Highway 70 during testing. At this point there was still worry about the highway being closed permanently. The Army responded quickly saying it would only be closed for testing periods. They obviously didn't need anymore congressmen or senators appearing at the Pentagon gate with their hair on fire.

We do know that the engineers were on site on June 25. This was probably survey work to get a lay of the land and mark where to put streets, buildings and utilities. Turner said the engineers were ready to start placing buildings on the 29<sup>th</sup> which means there was probably some dirt work done leading up to it. The vegetation had to be removed, the land leveled and streets/utilities lines marked.

The July 8 issue of the *Sun-News* reported McKee had just started work erecting buildings on July 6. It further reported that McKee had established a Las Cruces office in the old Conoco station at Main and Amador. Work was being done to remodel the interior and H.L. Price was going to be McKee's superintendent of construction.

Price told the paper that Las Cruces “will be the truck shipping center for moving construction materials through the mountains to the camp site.” He also said he had hired 25 men in the previous two days.

Moving most everything through Las Cruces made sense at the time since there was no road from El Paso up the eastside of the mountains to the post. The “History of White Sands” reported that the main post was made up of old Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) buildings from some of the Depression era camps in New Mexico and a hanger from Sandia Air Base in Albuquerque.

There were also several dozen hutments erected for the enlisted men who were to be assigned there. They were each 16 feet by 16 feet, made with plywood floors and walls but with a canvas roof. One pioneer told me that after the first big spring windstorm the troops were out searching for their roofs someplace between the main post and Alamogordo.

Accessing the new site was difficult at first. The only road to the camp was the ranch road used by James Cox to get to his headquarters west of the White Sands main post. Construction of a good, all-weather access road directly from Highway 70 didn't begin until July 7. This was crucial because there was no way for large trucks hauling sections of CCC buildings to get to the construction site using the Cox ranch road.

On July 10, the *Sun-News* reported on the frustration coming from the Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce. Apparently vacant housing in the city was tight, almost non-existent, and the chamber realized they really didn't have room for a large influx of military personnel and their families. The chamber wrote to the War Department and the Department of Army asking for guidance on how many people might the city expect to see. They got nothing back. Tom Graham, the chamber president, then

wrote to New Mexico Senator Carl Hatch who responded that the Army was keeping information about the new base a secret.

Graham then appealed to General Edwin March of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Command in Dallas for information. The *Sun-News* said nothing definite was provided.

The paper concluded that housing was so scarce there was nothing for even the few families that were just starting to arrive – there was nothing for LTC Harold Turner, the commander. Early on Turner stayed at the Amador Hotel. There is a report that later on, when his wife and daughter arrived, he found housing at the college.

On July 10 work began on the rocket launch facility about six miles east of the main post. Construction there centered on a blockhouse to protect men and equipment during rocket and missile launches. The walls to the concrete



*An aerial photo of the White Sands Proving Ground main post taken during the first week of August 1945. Most of the buildings were Civilian Conservation Corps structures from other parts of New Mexico that were taken apart and reassembled here. The only structure in this photo still standing is the old hanger, the large quonset hut, that was first used as the V-2 rocket assembly building. White Sands Missile Range Museum Archive.*

structure were 10-feet thick and the pyramid shaped roof was 24-feet thick. It was designed to withstand a direct impact from a V-2 rocket falling out of the sky at over a thousand miles an hour. The site is now known as Launch Complex 33 and is a National Historic Landmark.

On July 13, the order activating White Sands Proving Ground as a Class IV activity was published but was pre-dated to July 9. It so happens that the 13<sup>th</sup> was a Friday and maybe someone was superstitious so they moved the date back to Monday. In the end the White Sands birthdate is simply a paperwork date from Washington with no correlation with what was happening on the ground in New Mexico. Three years later, on Sept. 8, 1948, another order was published making White Sands a Class II installation.

By July 19, the *Sun-News* was getting frustrated with the rumors rocketing around about the new facility. The paper ran a clarification story that started with a long "editor's note." The note said the following information came from the *Associated Press* in Albuquerque after the *Sun-News* asked to get the "actual facts." The wire service interviewed Lt. Col. Cole who provided some more information.

The paper pointed out that dollar estimates had zoomed from \$1.5 million to \$20 million in just a couple of weeks. Cole restated the original \$1.5 million estimate but then said, "Nobody knows what the total construction will be."

Cole said the initial construction of the camp was to be completed by Sept. 1 and that the facilities could handle a maximum of 500 men. He said the water system was large because it was based on fire protection and not domestic supply for a certain number of people. The water system was being built with a 100,000-gallon storage capacity and with wells that could pump 100 gallons per minute. The fire protection requirement needed to be able to deliver 1,000 gallons per minute per hour. Rocket engines breathe fire and often explode

so fire fighting was a top priority.

Cole also said the initial plan was for 25 miles of highway and paved streets – not the 140 miles in some rumors. He also said personnel would be using some of the "trails" out on the new base to get about the place.

By the beginning of August, Lt. Col. Turner was available to the *Sun-News* to provide answers to questions. The paper no longer depended on the Albuquerque Corps of Engineers for their information. The paper reported that site construction was going well and Turner said they would occupy the camp sometime in September. Hayner and Burn were making progress on the water system as "supply of water was already assured, water being reached in several drillings." McKee also got a nod for building construction.

According to the paper, Turner revealed on Aug. 4 that the initial force at White Sands would be 12 officers and 280 enlisted men, not the thousands from early rumors. The article also talked about launching "robot bombs" over Highway 70. Finally, Turner speculated that Las Cruces "will derive considerable benefit from the project." Turner was probably very aware of the previous public relations problems the Army had created and seemed to try to put out the flames with positive economic information. It is doubtful if he had any idea how right he would prove to be.

In the Aug. 19 timeframe, an *Associated Press* story went national about WSPG. A search shows the article in papers, large and small, all across America. The story has Turner announcing that they are going to study "German V-2 rocket bombs." He was quick to reassure everyone that there would not be any "explosive" tests. He said, "We already know what the explosion will do."

Turner added that 240 rail freight cars loaded with V-2 parts had been moved from Las Cruces to WSPG. He said there was enough material on hand to build "100 complete bombs."

This announcement that the huge stash of V-2 material had already been moved to White Sands is important in dating some old photos. In the WSMR Museum Archives are two aerial photos of the new main post – one looking west and one looking north. The buildings, hutments and hanger are all in place. The main erection of buildings seems to be complete but there is more to do. There are just a few cars parked around the living quarters yet. More importantly, there is no V-2 material stacked around the hanger (the initial V-2 assembly building). That means the two photos were taken before the V-2 tail sections, fuselages, propellant tanks and motors were moved from Las Cruces, as most of this material ended up being stored outdoors.

In turn, that means the photos were taken in early August, probably when McKee had completed the initial construction process. It clearly demonstrates that McKee did a remarkable job getting all those buildings up in just six to seven weeks.

On Aug. 20, the *Sun-News* ran Perry's regular "Chaparral" op-ed piece. The Japanese had

just surrendered on Aug. 14 and everyone was celebrating the end of the war. In this column Perry brought up the uncertainty about the future of WSPG now that the war was over. Will construction continue? Will V-2 testing really happen now?

He also pointed out that Las Cruces residents living near the rail depot knew for 10 to 14 days before what was being shipped into town and out to White Sands. It was impossible for the Army to hide those telltale rocket fins and fuselages being unloaded.

**SIDE BAR** – *In the same column, Perry announced that Las Cruces Charles S. McCollum had suggested that Trinity Site, where the first atomic bomb was detonated on July 16, 1945, be made a national monument. McCollum's suggestion was very detailed with what to preserve, what to highlight, the use of murals, etc. He also pointed out that the Alamogordo Chamber of Commerce was making the same suggestion. This is only two weeks after the military announced that the explosion people saw back in July was the atomic bomb test at Trinity Site.*

Perry's questions about the future of White



*The second aerial photo of the White Sands main post from early August 1945. The gap in the Organ Mountains is Baylor Pass. White Sands Missile Range Museum Archive.*

Sands were answered a few days later when the War Department, per the *Associated Press*, said work would continue on the unfinished White Sands Proving Ground and “that the installation would be maintained on a permanent basis for testing rocket bombs.”

An Aug. 26 *Associated Press* article featured an interview with Lt. Col. Turner. He said the V-2s were “mean looking” and filled with intricate machinery. Also, he went out of his way to emphasize that they would be firing V-2s without explosive warheads. He said that was important because one rocket loaded with TNT “would wipe out Las Cruces if it hit in the middle of town.” That may not have been the most diplomatic thing for Turner to say to people living close by who could easily be the target of an errant rocket.

Turner said he had first-hand knowledge of the V-2’s destructive power. He was staying in a London hotel during the war when one struck nearby in Hyde Park. He said, “The area simply ceased to exist.” Again, maybe something he shouldn’t have shared with locals who were going to regularly see V-2 launches.

Also, Turner said work was progressing and there were a few officers and troops on hand to

assist him in setting up the new test range.

Some of the best early information I found about the purpose of WSPG came from the *Public Opinion*, a newspaper in Chambersburg, Penn. On Sept. 17, the paper reported on a document received at nearby Letterkenny Ordnance Depot. The War Department issued the article that said long-range, guided rocket research was to continue at White Sands Proving Ground. The military planned to glean as much information from the German V-2s as possible but had no plans to try and improve the German weapons and incorporate them into the U.S. arsenal.

Instead, the Army planned “to uncover applicable data that can be incorporated in American rocket design.” At White Sands scientists would learn to assemble the “delicate” and “complicated” rockets. They would also look at launch techniques, control procedures and flight behavior.

By the end of September, the initial post was pretty much complete and ready for business. Offices were furnished with desks and chairs, barracks got cots and lockers and mess halls were set up for the officers and the enlisted men. To mark the occasion White Sands



*Some of the V-2 rocket tails and rocket motors stored outside the old hanger used for rocket assembly, date unknown. The material was all trucked over San Augustin Pass from the railyard in Las Cruces. Flanagan’s escort provides some scale. James M. Flanagan papers. Ms 0259. New Mexico State University Library, Archives and Special Collections Department.*



***First official flag raising at the new White Sands Proving Ground on Sept. 29, 1945. The public was invited to attend on what turned out to be a chilly, blustery morning. The ceremony started at high noon with the Ft. Bliss band playing music beforehand. White Sands Missile Range Museum Archive.***

invited the public to attend a flag-raising ceremony at noon on Saturday, Sept. 29. The invitation ran in the *Sun-News* on Sept. 24 and Lt. Col. Turner said “with the official raising of the flag, the camp takes on the regular rules and regulations of Army establishments.”

There are a couple of photos of this event that have been mislabeled as July 9. Many people have jumped to the conclusion that since White Sands was established on July 9, the first flag raising was that day. There are many problems with that conclusion. The main issue is that the buildings in the photos weren’t erected yet in July. Another problem is that the flagpole wasn’t even in place yet when the aerial photos were taken of the completed camp in early August. The photos are of the Sept. 29<sup>th</sup> event. There was no formal flag raising ceremony on July 9.

Not only was the public invited to the flag raising, they were invited to come out early and look around. Also, members of the Ft. Bliss band played a variety of music before the ceremony.

Also during this last week of September, the *Associated Press* ran a story announcing the proving ground’s first test that would require a roadblock on Highway 70. It was going to be conducted on Oct. 9 and the highway would be blocked from 6 to 10 a.m.

On Sept. 30, the *Sun-News* reported extensively on the first flag-raising ceremony the day before. Turner spoke to the crowd and announced a different schedule for Highway 70 roadblocks. He said they would be on four weekdays from 6 to 10 a.m. with nothing on Wednesdays – much more frequent than what Congressman Anderson was told. The article also mentioned that there were about 50 scientists and technicians working on “rocket bombs” at the facility.

Turner did his part in trying to improve relations with the local communities. First, he stressed the importance of White Sands saying, “the best insurance against future aggression is complete technical superiority in the munitions of war.” He said White Sands Proving Ground will guarantee that.

Secondly, he said he knew the proving ground might cause some inconvenience but, in the long run, will “benefit us all.” He added that he was available if people experienced serious problems and would do what he could to solve them.

On Oct. 9, everyone involved in the missile test business and the public got an early sample of the vagaries in the testing business. The *Sun-News* announced that day that the scheduled test from that morning was postponed because of bad weather and Highway 70 wouldn't be blocked. They would try the test on Thursday, Oct. 11 followed by another one on Friday.

This business of firing experimental rockets and missiles started with a few hiccups because of the very nature of the testing business. All kinds of factors have to come together to actually run an open-air test involving rocket-propelled vehicles that you want to collect information about. The very next week, White Sands announced it was changing the times for the possible road closures to 7 to 11 a.m. because of weather considerations. Then they announced they wanted to do a night launch.

Basically, the proving ground and public quickly learned that the testing business often didn't fit into regular office hours. It was

too complex and unpredictable. Instead of management holding a solid cube, they found themselves with a blob of gelatin that required constant attention to keep it in hand and not oozing out onto the floor. Eventually, the Army jettisoned the idea of hard and fast roadblock times that could be



*A WAC Corporal rocket, almost erect with the black nose, is being loaded into its launch tower at the Army Launch Area by engineers from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), date unknown. Laying on the trailer, with the large fins, is the Tiny Tim booster used to accelerate the rocket to a high enough speed, it will be stable as it leaves the 100-foot tower. James M. Flanagan papers. Ms 0259. New Mexico State University Library, Archives and Special Collections Department.*

announced weeks in advance and went to a more sustainable model of projecting a week out and then announcing exact times the day before.

The rocket launch that took place on Oct. 11, the first one to require a Highway 70 roadblock, was a WAC Corporal built by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in California and not a German V-2. The liquid-fueled, two-stage rocket was designed to carry a 25-lb. payload to 100,000 feet, straight up. It was a meteorological rocket.

The WAC Corporal was 16-feet long and 12-inches in diameter. It was woefully underpowered with a motor that could generate about 1,500 pounds of thrust. On the other hand, the fully fueled rocket only weighed 660 pounds. A WAC Corporal is on display inside the missile range museum.

To get the rocket off the ground and to a fast enough speed that it was stable in flight, JPL used a gunpowder booster called the Tiny Tim. The Tiny Tim was modified so that it provided 50,000 pounds of thrust for just six-tenths of a second.

To keep everything together during those first moments of rapid acceleration, the booster and rocket were stacked and locked into a 100-

foot tall tower just north of the Army blockhouse. As the WAC Corporal was shot out of the tower it was going about 300 miles per hour and the three fins dragging at the bottom provided stable flight.

Test firings of the Tiny Tim booster and various combinations of dummy and partially fueled

WAC Corporals began on Sept. 26 at the Army launch area six miles east of the main post. The first fully fueled WAC Corporal flight was initially scheduled for Oct. 9 and because it had enough energy potential to reach the highway, the first roadblock on Highway 70 was required. It was calculated that the earlier launches with a partially fueled rocket couldn't reach the highway if things went sideways and, therefore, didn't require safety blocks.

On Oct. 11 the WAC Corporal stack was successfully launched with the weather package reaching an altitude of 235,000 feet – 44 miles. It was a record for an American rocket. The next day the JPL launch team did it again.

This series of launches marks the beginning of rocket and missile testing at White Sands Missile Range. From a place with an uncertain future in 1945, the following



***The Jet Propulsion Laboratory's chief aeronautical engineer, Frank Malina, poses with Round #5, the WAC Corporal rocket successfully fired on Oct. 11, 1945. Rounds before this one were only partially fueled. It was the first launch at White Sands that required a roadblock on Highway 70. Round #6, also successful, was launched the next day. Courtesy JPL.***

decades were nothing but growth for the facility. And fame. Photographs, movies and articles in newspapers and magazines featuring tests at White Sands appeared worldwide. The range became synonymous with cutting-edge technology. Even advertisers like Oldsmobile used imagery from V-2 tests at Launch Complex 33 to sell their “Rocket 88” car.

It is difficult to pin down the installation’s exact impact on the local communities that Turner promised. The money is obviously there but every time you place a marker and look at one year of salaries and contracts throughout the Cold War, something changes the next year. It seemed to just get bigger and bigger.

During the height of the Cold War the workforce was large, way beyond what Turner could have imagined. In 1961, for instance, the White Sands workforce totaled over 11,000 people. The breakdown was: 4,100 military, 5,100 civilians and 2,200 contractors. A huge percentage of those people chose to live in communities like Las Cruces, raise their families and spend, spend, spend.

But the local impacts aren’t just from the active workforce. In 75 years, thousands of employees have elected to retire and settle in the surrounding communities. After their time at the range, they continue to contribute to the local area economy.

On top of that, there have been hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts awarded to local businesses. The economic arteries reaching out from White Sands, once thought to be a temporary facility and maybe a nuisance, have provided tremendous succor locally during the past 75 years.

And then there are the intangible benefits. Innumerable White Sands employees have served on the Las Cruces city council. A couple have served as mayor. Family members have taught in the school system, started businesses, held jobs in medicine, at NMSU and in every field imaginable.

To many people, White Sands Missile Range may seem a distant, off-limits place for testing rocket bombs, but its impact on communities like Las Cruces has been spectacular.

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*White Sands History: Range Beginnings And Early Missile Testing* by Eunice H. Brown, James A. Robertson, John W. Kroehnke, Charles R. Poissall and 1st. Lt. E.L. Cross. Public Affairs Office, White Sands, N.M. An excerpt from a 1959 White Sands Missile Range historical report covering the range’s first 10 years..

**Jim Eckles** retired from a 30-year career at White Sands Missile Range in 2007. He has written extensively about the history of the range and published *Pocketful of Rockets: The History and Stories Behind White Sands Missile Range* and *Trinity: The History Of An Atomic Bomb National Historical Landmark*. He was inducted into the missile range Hall of Fame in 2013. He is currently the DACHS secretary and newsletter editor.

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## Book Review

***Acid West: Essays*** by Joshua Wheeler. New York City: MCD x FSG Originals, 2018. ISBN 978-0-3745-3580-0, 395 pages, \$17.00, trade paperback.

In *Acid West: Essays*, writer Joshua Wheeler recasts many familiar, if misunderstood, episodes in recent Southern New Mexico history to grant readers a view of what he labels “the underbelly of the West.” While not a straight work of history, Wheeler employs the investigative techniques of the historian and journalist, William Vollmann-style, as he contextualizes past events. Informed by his Alamogordo upbringing and family’s Tularosa Basin homesteading roots, Wheeler provides an entertaining perspective – a New Mexican voice, largely indifferent to promotional and self-serving impulses, and willing to examine

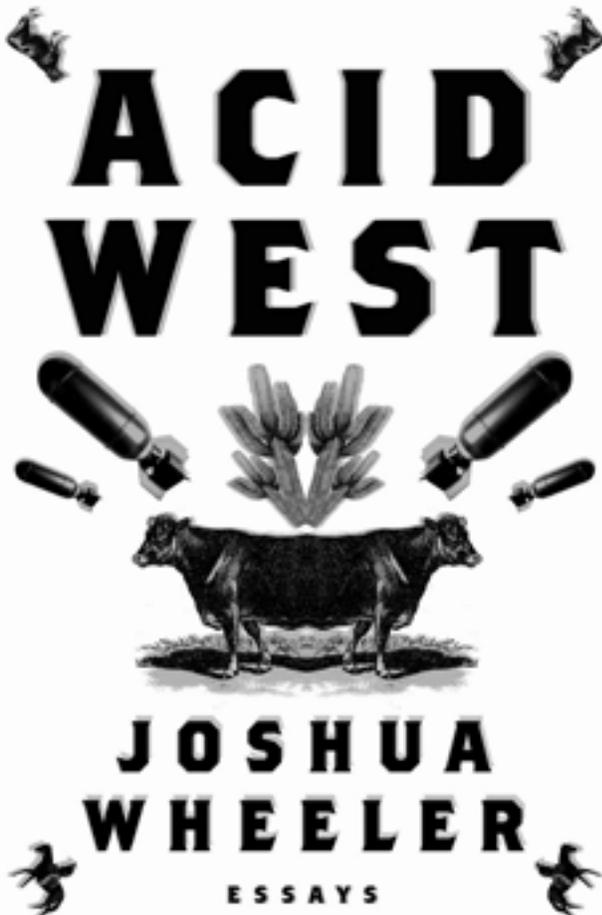
the context of his (our) own origin story. This insightful read is highly recommended for its ability to deliver a fuller, more robust regional sense of place, as well as for the humor found throughout the book.

Readers will doubtlessly be familiar with many of the historic Southern New Mexico names, places, and events that Wheeler describes in the book’s thirteen essays. These historic elements serve as the core of each chapter – Trinity Test Site, Spaceport America, the Roswell UFO incident, homesteading in the desert, capital punishment, cartel border violence – and the springboard to defining life below the 34th Parallel.

Wheeler juxtaposes the historic elements with his thoughts – drone warfare and baseball’s instant replay; the search for extraterrestrial life and the divine – to invite readers to see corollaries they may have previously passed over or never connected. This effort proves successful in the first six essays, the strength of the book, but unfortunately loses some of its momentum as the chapters pile up, particularly in “Keep Alamogordo Beautiful” and “A Million Tiny Daggers.” Those essays fall victim to what the author notes as his penchant to use too many words when he cannot find the right ones to begin with (320) and potentially even navel-gazing (236). Agreed.

Still, Wheeler proves capable more often than not of finding the right words. Three themes that reoccur throughout his essays typify this. First, the role of archival records and their essential place in reconstructing memories can be found in several chapters, specifically in “Raggedy, Raggedy Wabbitman” with its trunk of ephemera (174) and “Living Room” and its scrapbooks (195 and 204). While he admits he can never be sure why people keep these mementos, he nevertheless acknowledges their value in making sense of the past (207 and 390).

Second, raised as a parishioner of the Church of Christ on Cuba Avenue in Alamogordo, but



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having since lapsed (“I am too steeped in a culture that distrusts sincerity,” 393), Wheeler nevertheless employs Christian morality to inform his essays even if he believes “we create fictions upon which to rationalize” (203). While the essay “Things Most Surely Believed” explicitly grapples with the role Christianity played in New Mexico death row inmate Terry Clark’s decision to not appeal his own execution, Wheeler effectively uses Judeo-Christian stories like the Fall of Adam and Eve (144-145), the resurrection of Jesus (254), and Moses on Mount Sinai (338-340) as metaphors in his own story telling.

Finally, Wheeler cannot escape Southern New Mexico and its history. Indeed, it is in his blood (288) and a place he cannot quit coming home to (3). Because of this intimate connection to the landscape, coupled with Wheeler following Twain’s dictum of “waste no opportunity to tell all you know” (184), *Acid West* succeeds essay-by-essay in articulating the region’s charm all the while challenging its staid origin stories.

Wheeler structures and informs his essays with additional devices that readers of history will enjoy. Most chapters include footnotes, with one regarding the death of actor John Wayne and its possible connection to downwind radiation carrying on for six pages (44-50). What historian does not love good contextual footnotes? The

endnotes are a mixture of annotated bibliography and commentary, making them more than a spot check but rather a must read. The map and definition of “acid western” found in the front matter are critical tools in helping to determine Wheeler’s cosmology.

One minor critique is the cover image itself. While it is arresting with its neon green and odd assemblage of mirrored images, it includes a saguaro cactus – something Wheeler takes pains to inform readers is decidedly not Southern New Mexico (5-6). Thus, its inclusion is either an oversight or a play on the “hallucination” of American Western icons that the state often suffers from. If the latter, it fails to fully communicate this, as the other images while iconic are not ahistorical.

Joshua Wheeler’s debut work, *Acid West*, is highly recommended for anyone interested in Southern New Mexico’s history and identity. The title should be carried in public and academic libraries alike. These essays are hopefully just the start of Wheeler’s writings on his native state, as he doubtlessly has more stories to share.

Dylan McDonald  
Political Papers Archivist/Special Collections  
Librarian  
New Mexico State University Library

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## Book Review

*Countdown 1945: The Extraordinary Story of the Atomic Bomb and 116 Days that Changed the World* by Chris Wallace and Mitch Weiss. New York. Kindle Edition, Simon and Shuster, 2020.

*La Cronica de Nuevo México* is the official newsletter of the Historical Society of New Mexico. In the Autumn issue is a listing of books put together by Richard Melzer. He calls it “New Books For Your New Mexico Bookshelf,” with all the books published in 2019 or 2020. This book is on the list and being someone who has written about the atomic bomb here in New Mexico for decades, I thought I ought to read and review it.

First of all, you may recognize the author given first billing. Yes, that is Chris Wallace of TV Fox News and son of legendary CBS newsman Mike Wallace. As in many books authored by “personalities,” I imagine most of the work was done by his co-author Mitch Weiss. In this case that is great since Weiss is a Pulitzer Prize winner and author of many books all on his own. The two have made a pretty good team.

They have taken a 116-day period out of the World War II timeline, from Harry Truman taking office after FDR’s death to the end of the war, and focused on the atomic bomb during that time. This may sound familiar as A.J. Baime published *The Accidental President: Harry S. Truman and the Four Months That Changed the World* in 2017 which covers the same period and, of course, most of the same events.

In a nutshell, the book is an easy and interesting read with a very broad view of events. However, the authors were smart and shined a spotlight on numerous individuals, some well known and some not, and provided details that give the reader characters you can relate to.

If you are looking for much information about Los Alamos or the Trinity Site atomic bomb test, there isn’t much in this book. Harry Truman dominates it with his decision to make about using the atomic bombs against Japan and his experi-

ence at the Potsdam Conference in Germany in July 1945. A close second is Paul Tibbets and the crews that dropped the bombs on Japan.

Mixed in is a nice array of real people with what they were doing during this period. For instance, Ruth Sisson was a young woman who worked at the Oak Ridge Laboratory. It provides the authors a doorway to what was happening as far as extracting U235 for the Hiroshima bomb and what life was like in America during the war. Her fiancée Lawrence Huddleston ends up in the European Theater as a medic and they explain the uncertainty people back home had to live with during the war because their loved ones were in peril.

One of the reasons the authors probably picked Ruth was that when they were doing their



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research she was still alive and they were able to interview her.

They did a similar thing with a young Japanese woman, Hideko Tamura, who survived the atomic bomb blast at Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945. She was there and the authors use her to describe the death and destruction. Tamura eventually came to America and became a psychotherapist and social worker in the radiation oncology department at the University of Chicago Hospital.

I only noticed a few problems with minor details. For instance, they describe Gen. Groves lying on the floor of a bunker at basecamp for the Trinity Site test. There were no bunkers at basecamp. He was lying on the ground with everyone else behind a small berm of earth – the dam to Dave McDonald’s dirt tank. They also swallow the story about the storms during the night leading up to the test. In fact, they embellish them by calling it heavy rain with muddy roads. Most eyewitness-

es, however, describe it as drizzle or a light shower.

And I learned a few things about the war I did not know going in. One of those characters they focus on leads divers (frogmen) in the Pacific to prepare islands for invasion. They clear mines and cut channels through coral so the landing vessels can safely get to the beaches.

Also, I had no idea that the Potsdam Conference lasted just over two weeks. I always assumed it was a couple of days and that was it. Turns out it was a crazy frustrating experience for Truman that went on day after day with little accomplished.

In the end this is a book for folks who want to know a little about 1945 without wading through mountains of detail. It is not a reference work but a book for popular consumption. That is not necessarily a bad thing.

Jim Eckles  
Las Cruces, NM

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## Memorials

**Roger E. Rothenmaier**, May 1, 2020, at age 86. He and his wife Celine were long time, active members of the DACHS, with Roger serving a one-year term as president in 2007-2008.

**Patrick H. Beckett**, November 20, 2020, at age 79. Pat had a special energy born of the mix of his Irish and Hispanic backgrounds. He was an archaeologist, inspiring students and lay people alike to follow in his path. In 1984, Pat founded Coas Bookstore, a bookstore-library with easy chairs and a world of books carefully arranged in stacks where it was a pleasure to spend an afternoon. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1991.

**Dr. Gordon R. Owen**, September 29, 2020, at age 96. Along with many academic publications, Gordon authored *The Two Alberts*, 1996, a history of Albert Fountain and Albert Fall, and *Las Cruces: Multicultural Crossroads*, 1999, a 150-year history of the City of Las Cruces. He donated copies of the latter book to the DACHS, which the Society has sold and given away to thank speakers. Gordon held a life membership in the DACHS and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2000.

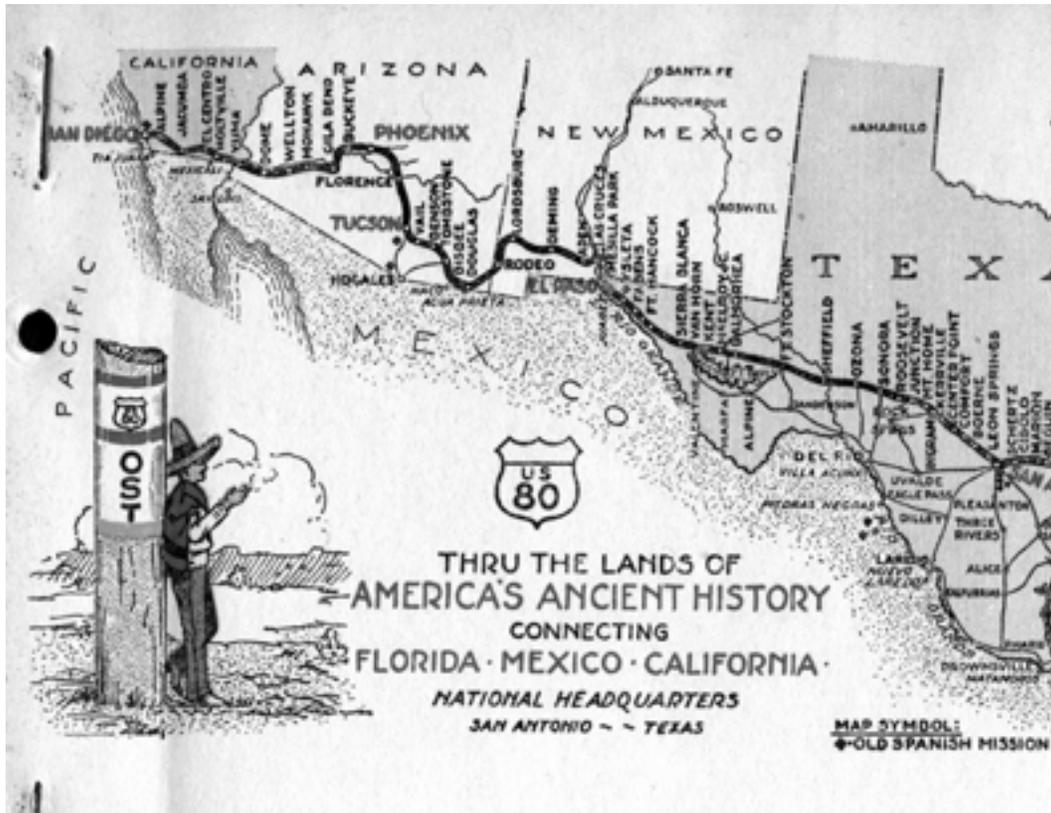
**Mary Alice Aylor**, December 3, 2020, at age 99. Mary Alice and her husband John came to Las Cruces in August 1950. Here Mary Alice assisted her husband in his dental practice, graduated from NMSU, became a life member of the DACHS and joined the Friends of Fort Selden. She travelled widely both in the United States and abroad, always with an eye out for history.

**Leon Metz**, November 15, 2020, at age 90. Leon, out of El Paso, was a well-known author, historian, lecturer, story-teller, UTEP archivist, radio and television personality. He wrote 17 books about El Paso history, gunfighters, Ft. Bliss, and the Mexican border. A frequent visitor and speaker in Las Cruces, he was inducted into the DACHS Hall of Fame in 1988.

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*This map is located in a Scrapbook of Old Spanish Trail materials donated to the San Antonio Public Library by Herral Ayres in 1931. Courtesy of the OST100 website.*

