

# NEWSLETTER

September 2017

Doña Ana County Historical Society

## We Start The Fall With A Talk On Tombaugh

By Dennis Daily, DACHS Vice President

Alden Clyde Tombaugh will present a fascinating glimpse into the life and work of his father, the illustrious astronomer Clyde Tombaugh. **(Sept. 21, 7 p.m. at Good Sam)**

Born in Flagstaff, Arizona, in 1945, Al moved with his family to Las Cruces just before his second birthday. He graduated high school here, then attended the University of New Mexico and New Mexico State University. He received his graduate degree from the University of Colorado School of Banking, then returned to Las Cruces for a long career in banking and finance. After more than 35 years, he retired from the banking industry in 2000 and founded Planet Development Company, a construction contracting business

Currently Al is vice president of Tombaugh Educational Diagnostics, Inc., specializing in the diagnosis and compensations for dyslexia.

Al's father, Clyde Tombaugh, made himself a household name shortly after his 24th birthday, in 1930, when he discovered the ninth planet of the solar system. Working at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff at the time, Tombaugh became the first American

to discover a planet. Although Pluto has been reclassified as a dwarf planet, the thrilling story of Tombaugh's discovery has not lost its fascination and still is told to children in classrooms across the country.

Moving to Las Cruces in 1946, Tombaugh's expertise in optics landed him a job as Chief of the Optical Measurements Section at White Sands Proving Grounds, where he was responsible for the tracking telescopes used to photograph rockets and missiles during test flights. Over the next several decades, Tombaugh initiated and led numerous research projects in planetary and astronomical science. Along the way, he taught astronomy at NMSU, helped establish a doctorate program at the school, co-founded the Las Cruces Astronomical Society and the Las Cruces Unitarian Fellowship, designed and built his own telescopes, and corresponded with thousands of colleagues and fans.

Al Tombaugh's illustrated talk will provide a personal glimpse into the remarkable life of a 20th-century legend.

See the calendar on page 2 for a list of our other fall programs, including two special events in November.

## Invitation From The Dona Ana Archaeological Society

Members of the Dona Ana County Historical Society are invited to attend a lecture sponsored by the Dona Ana Archaeological Society at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, September 12 in the Good Samaritan Auditorium. Society member Margaret Berrier will give a presentation entitled *Tantalizing Tassili Tadrart: Rock Art along the Edge of the Plateau of the Rivers in Algeria.*

The rock art images in Tassili Tadrart shelters document climate change as the area evolved from a savana to a desert over 8,000 years. Images changed in time from large wild animals, to domesticated cattle, to horses and finally to camels. Human images also changed with the environment.

Like our meetings, this meeting is FREE. For more information, call: 524-9497

# Calendar Of Upcoming Events For Members

**October 19 --- Monthly Members meeting at Good Samaritan, 7 p.m.** New Mexico State University Professor Peter Kopp will speak about Fabian Garcia, the world renowned horticulturist. Garcia is often cited for the very large economic boon he created for New Mexico through his agricultural work on chile, sweet potatoes, pecans, onions and improved varieties of cotton.

**November 9 --- Special presentation about the library of ancient manuscripts at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai at Good Samaritan, 7 p.m.** The library contains the second largest collection of old texts in the world, second only to the Vatican. The monastery itself dates back to around 600 A.D.

The presentation will be given by Father Justin who is the collection's librarian. He is the only American monk in the monastery and just happens to be from El Paso. We are lucky to get him because he will be visiting home for a few days.

We owe Lutisha Piland a great deal of thanks for this special engagement. Years ago, when she worked for the Library of Congress at the American Embassy in Cairo, Lutisha helped the monastery set up its first computer system. Although she never met Father Justin, they traded communications frequently.

When Buddy and Margaret Ritter vacationed in the Middle East recently, Lutisha arranged for them to visit St. Catherine's and meet Father Justin. Since then, Buddy has been in contact with the librarian and when he learned that Father Justin was returning to the States, Buddy invited him to Las Cruces.

Father Justin accepted and graciously agreed to talk to our group.

St. Catherine's Monastery is the world's oldest continually operating monastery, and its library holds an exceptional collection of manuscripts from the first millennium CE. Among these are more than 160 known palimpsests, the erased layers of which preserve unstudied texts from as early as the 4th century.

Palimpsests are recycled manuscripts. When the need for a new text outweighed the value or usefulness of an older manuscript, ancient and medi-

eval scribes would sometimes disassemble the older codex, scrape and wash its parchment folios to erase the ink, and re-use the old folios in a new codex, with new text written over the old. The erased layer of writing is normally faintly visible under the new writing, but not legible.

Innovations in spectral imaging have made it possible to recover a large percentage of these erased texts, making legible again texts which were erased centuries ago.

**November 16 --- Monthly Members meeting at Good Samaritan, 7 p.m.** Chris Adams, Gila Forest Archaeologist, will talk about the White Mountain Apache Scouts attacking Victorio's Band on the Palomas River, May 24 - 25, 1880. The presentation will highlight the archaeological work that has taken place on this important fight that pitted Apaches against Apaches. Today the battle site is protected by the Gila National Forest and Turner Enterprises Inc.

Although this is the night for our regularly scheduled meeting, this presentation if being sponsored by Human System Research which has their own series of lectures. The 16th turned out to be the only day they could get Chris scheduled. Deb Dennis called to see if HSR could have the auditorium on this date. Since the subject seemed to be right up the historical society's alley, the board said yes.

Basically, this is a joint presentation and we hope to see you there.

## Other HSR Presentations

\*Saturday, September 16, 7 - 9 p.m. *Land of Plenty: The Zooarchaeological Record of the Cañada Alamosa*, by Dr. Michael Wylde.

\*Thursday, October 12, 7 - 9 p.m. *Five Millennia of Prehistoric Settlement, Belief, and Ritual Expression in the Jornada Mogollon Region*, by Dr. Myles Miller.

\*Saturday, January 20, 2018, 7 - 9 p.m. *Droughts, Floods, and Freezes: The Role of Climate in the Human History of the American Southwest* by Dr. Carla Van West

Lectures are in the Good Samaritan auditorium.

# Getting Aid To Flood Victims Is Nothing New

By Dennis Daily, DACHS Vice President

Southern New Mexico and the Mesilla Valley may not be in the path of hurricanes, the likes of which have devastated our coastal areas with regularity since people began recording such events. However, our region has not been immune to catastrophic flooding, which has taken lives, destroyed property, and caused general havoc for the people of New Mexico throughout its recorded history.

Our summer monsoons and spring snow melt frequently trigger flash floods that can swell rivers and turn dry arroyos into dangerous raging torrents. These events particularly were a problem in the Mesilla Valley before the construction of the Elephant Butte Dam helped tame the Rio Grande watershed.

The early 1860s brought two seasons of massive flooding to the Rio Grande, with lasting consequences. Some of the worst flooding on record in the West occurred during the Great Flood of 1862. Considered the worst recorded flood in the history of the states of Oregon, California and Nevada, significant flooding was also experienced in New Mexico that year. The Rio Grande, which at that time flowed

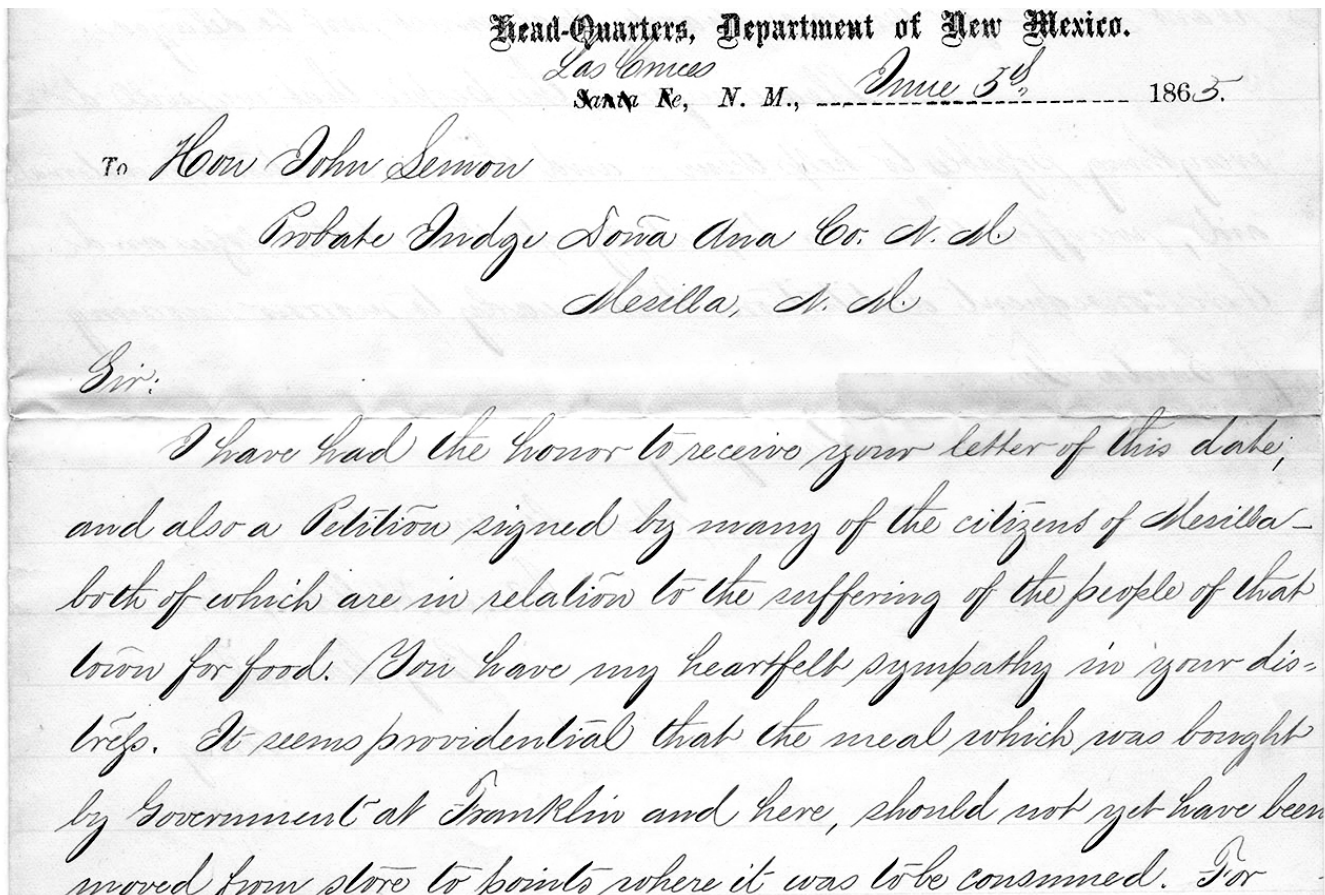
on the east side of Mesilla, separating that town from Las Cruces, reportedly cut a new channel to the west, effectively placing it on an island with river channels on either side.

A summer flood in 1865, considered the worst known flood of the Rio Grande, permanently changed the course of the river to the west side of Mesilla. Crops were destroyed and people were left homeless and starving throughout the Mesilla Valley. The pitiful condition of the people of Mesilla prompted relief action from federal and territorial authorities.

A letter dated June 5, 1865, sent from Gen. James H. Carleton, military commander of the Department of New Mexico, to Mesilla resident John Lemon, offers a glimpse of the magnitude of the flooding and its aftermath, as well as the government's response.

The letter, the first part reproduced below, is part of the John Lemon family papers, Ms 0233, housed in the Rio Grande Historical Collections, NMSU Library Archives.

The back page has a transcription of the letter.



Head-Quarters, Department of New Mexico  
Santa Fe Las Cruces, N.M. June 5th 1865

To Hon John Lemon  
Probate Judge Doña Ana Co. N.M.  
Mesilla, N.M.

Sir:

I have had the honor to receive your letter of this date, and also a petition signed by many of the citizens of Mesilla – both of which are in relation to the suffering of the people of that town for food. You have my heartfelt sympathy in your distress. It seems providential that the meal which was bought by Government at Franklin and here, should not yet have been moved from store to points where it was to be consumed. For now that the flood and other causes have injured or destroyed the crops of your citizens, it is still here, - and enables us to help the suffering at this vital moment. Colonel Davis, U.S. Army is here and is charged with the task of helping the poor and destitute in this their trying emergency to the utmost of our ability. To him I have transferred your letter and the petition, and given him authority to act in the matter. Please confer with him about what will be the best course to get food to those absolutely in want now – for this is a charity that must not be delayed.

Please inform the people that we will do everything possible to help them – and that in addition to material aid, we offer them our deepest sympathies at the losses and their consequent destitution. I leave early tomorrow morning for Santa Fé.

Respectfully  
Your obt servant  
James H. Carleton  
Brig. General  
Consig.

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