



# NEWSLETTER

## March 2018

Doña Ana County Historical Society

### Monthly Speakers Set Through May

March's speaker will be Dr. Deb Dennis, vice president of the Amador Hotel Foundation and president of Human Systems Research. By the way, we just inducted her into the historical society's Hall of Fame.



Dennis will talk about the historic Amador Hotel, what has happened and what is planned in the future. One thing she will address is the upcoming work to tear out the old bank structure that was tacked onto the hotel decades ago. Don't be alarmed, no one is attacking the hotel itself.

Dennis is dedicated to preserving this core building of historic Las Cruces. At one point, in 2006, she met with county officials to look into Human System Research acquiring the hotel in order to save it. The county insisted on \$700,000.

In 2007, she was invited to join a new group, the Amador Museum Foundation, that was bent on saving the hotel. Since then she has been a key player in the work done to date on restoring the Amador. She has served as both secretary and vice president of the foundation and is credited with being a steadying presence, using her numerous skills to help move the project forward.

Dennis believes preserving a cultural resource such as the Amador can bring a community together. She says, "The ghosts of the

past would have it no other way!"

This lecture will be March 15 at 7 p.m. in the Good Samaritan Auditorium at 3011 Buena Vida Circle.

April's speaker will be Pat Garrett. That's right, the former Dona Ana County sheriff will be on hand to answer your questions and talk about his life here in Las Cruces.

Since Garrett has been in the ground a long time, he will be appearing through the person of Scott Green. We understand that if you ask him if he really shot Billy the Kid at Fort Sumner in 1881, you shouldn't expect a pleasant response.

May's speaker will be Dr. Yolanda Leyva, associate professor of history and acting director of the Institute of Oral History at UTEP. Her lecture will be on the significance and impact of the temporary U.S./ Mexico Bracero Work Exchange Program on our region.

If you have a suggestion for a future speaker, please let a board member know. We have a couple of openings in the fall schedule and would like to get them filled. Right now, September will be taken with Dr. Jon Hunner talking about his exploration of our National Parks during the Park Service's centennial. Jon took a sabbatical from his teaching job with the NMSU History Dept. and travelled all around the country visiting National Parks and writing about them.

That leaves October and November open.

**REMINDER**  
**MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE DUE**

# Charlotte Priestley, Former DACHS President, Passes

Charlotte Priestly-Martin died on January 21, 2018 here in Las Cruces. In addition to her many interests and passions was her love of our local history. She was one of our first members and served as the historical society's 3rd president. **The following is from Madeleine Vessel's history of the DACHS.**

Charlotte was born in Albuquerque in 1934. Her father was employed by the Veteran's Administration, and as a result, her family moved often.

In 1945, Charlotte moved with her family to El Paso. She graduated from Austin High School in 1951 and later entered Texas Western College (UTEP). She continued to pursue studies at NMSU.

When Priestley married in 1955, she moved to Las Cruces - home for the rest of her life. She raised four children.

Priestley joined the DACHS on October 22, 1963. She remembered in 1994, "there was an ad in the paper, a little notice in the *Las Cruces Sun-News* that said a historical society was forming and that the meeting would be at the First National Bank. I had some interest in history. It had always fascinated me, so I decided I'd go."

Priestley describes DACHS's early years as the "Shining Years." "The most important thing I think that we did was give our children and ourselves history. We gave them roots. We took them places. They learned to appreciate old things. They learned to look at the mountains and the desert around here with a new eye. When you delve into history, go wandering through Fort Selden, Cooke's Peak, or St. Nicholas Canyon, all of a sudden you realize you're not the only soul on this earth. And life didn't begin with you. You appreciate, a little bit, the hardships that the people who came here before us went through—their courage, their grit. That was the most important thing we did."

Charlotte was elected president in 1966 and served until 1969. The DACHS was still very young and was finding its place in the community.

Charlotte appointed members to the following committees: the Preservation and Restoration Committee, the Fort Selden Committee, the Fort Fillmore Committee, the Heliograph Committee, and the Anniversary Awards Committee.

J. Paul Taylor chaired the Preservation and Res-

toration Committee which was intended to insure a public DACHS voice for the preservation of historic sites. At that time the State Department of Development was also interested in preserving historic sites, and at their prompting, DACHS began identifying historic buildings for inclusion in the New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties.

During Charlotte's administration, the Fort Selden Papers included the recorded deeds to the State of New Mexico.

The Fort Fillmore Committee inquired with the National Park Service about the possibility of recommending Fort Fillmore for preservation. They learned that a survey made of the forts did not recommend Fort Fillmore for preservation. Lacking national support, the only hope for preservation seemed to be in local interest and financial support.

During Priestley's term of office, some members had an interest in the former military use of the heliograph, a signaling device to reflect the sun with a moveable mirror, capable of transmitting messages by Morse code. It was believed that a heliograph had once been used near Fort Selden on the Robledo Mountains. As a consequence, Charlotte appointed John Hawley, Calvin L. Traylor, and John Gumert to a Heliograph Committee. The Committee was unable to obtain military records concerning a heliograph station existed on the Robledo Mountains.

The Society gave awards for the 100th anniversary of the Aztec Masonic Lodge and the 75th anniversary of the Wednesday Literary Club.

Also during Charlotte's administration, the Society became involved in certain festive events in the area. They participated in both the 1967 and 1968 Vaquero Days parade. Alice Ward, who chaired the committee to coordinate this activity in 1968, reported that the theme would be "a unit of a wagon train of 1883 that got lost." A wagon and mules were obtained together with appropriate supplies to enable DACHS to join the parade.

DACHS also participated in the First Annual Southern New Mexico State Fair. On short notice, a special committee chaired by J. Paul Taylor organized an exhibit featuring, "a parlor of the territorial period in the Mesilla Valley" The exhibit won second prize in the adult education category.

# Federal Recreational Lands Passes Still A Bargain

Hopefully you got your Senior Pass to more than 2,000 federal recreation and historic sites before the price went up late last year. For decades the cost to citizens aged 62 or over was only \$10.....and it is a lifetime card. The price is now \$80.

The pass gets the owner and usually up to three others in your vehicle into National Parks, National Monuments and many other federal facilities for FREE. The six agencies who honor the pass are: National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The pass won't get you a free campsite and there are other niceties you'll still have to pay for. But, even at \$80 for the lifetime pass, it is still one of the greatest bargains/benefits provided by our govern-

ment. With the price of admission to most parks continuing to rise, it is easy to see how the one-time \$80 investment can pay for itself in one vacation.

Here in New Mexico, many of the smaller parks are still free but it costs \$20 to get into Chaco Canyon, \$12 per person to enter Carlsbad Caverns, \$10 per family to visit the Gila Cliff Dwellings and \$5 per person to visit the white gypsum sand dunes in our own backyard. Go out-of-state to some of the big parks and the fees are significantly higher. Want to visit the Grand Canyon? That'll be \$30 per vehicle. To visit Yellowstone it is also \$30 and if you want to tack on neighboring Grand Teton, they'll sell you a combo entrance pass of \$50.

The passes are available at all the sites listed here as examples as well as the Bureau of Land Management Office in Las Cruces.



*This great photo of Main Street in Las Cruces was taken in the 1905-1910 time frame. It is a postcard that would have been sold at, and used as advertising for, Las Cruces Drug Co. and can be found in the Rio Grande Collection at NMSU. It is looking north to the Dona Ana Mountains in the distance and the towers to St. Genevieve's on the right. Note all the horse-drawn buggies and wagons in the street but no automobiles. Also, there are telephone lines running down both sides of the street. The telephone was introduced decades earlier with the first wires linking Las Cruces and Mesilla in 1879. It is not clear but there may be some poles for power as well as this is around the time that electricity was introduced. Image number 00010052*



*Jim and Fannie Cox, circa 1958, pose outside their famous fortress-like house at San Augustine Ranch on the east side of the Organ Mountains. W.W. Cox purchased the ranch in 1893. After he died in 1923, the ranch was shared by all the children. In 1926, sons James, A.B. and Hal, along with brother-in-law John Stablein (Laura Ann's husband) banded together to form Cox Brothers, Inc. and bought out the other heirs. Ten years later the partnership dissolved with Jim taking over the old house and the main part of the ranch. Jim and Fannie raised three sons here - William, Jay and Rob. When White Sands Proving Ground was established, Jim stood up to the Army when it tried to take what was left of the ranch and the house. Jim passed it on to his youngest son Rob who has passed it on to his son Mark.*

[www.donaanacountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donaanacountyhistoricalsociety.org)

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