



NEWSLETTER

May 2019

Doña Ana County Historical Society

Dr. Dwight Pitcaithley Will Talk About New Mexico, Slavery, And The Confederate Cause On May 16

Dr. Dwight Pitcaithley will present “**New Mexico, Slavery, and the Confederate Cause**” on May 16 at the regular monthly DACHS meeting. The talk will explore the centrality of the New Mexico Territory in the political debates that rocked the country between 1846 and 1861.



Based on Dr. Pitcaithley’s latest book, *The U.S. Constitution and Secession: A Documentary Anthology of Slavery and White Supremacy*, this presentation connects the expansion of slavery in the western territories with the intractable political posturing of Republicans and Democrats on the eve of the war. Central to the talk will be an analysis of the 67 constitutional amendments proposed over Secession Winter aimed at solving the sectional crisis.

The presentation will be at Good Samaritan Village in the Stucky Auditorium downstairs in the main activities building, 3011 Buena Vida Cir., at 7 p.m. The program is free and open to the public.

Dwight T. Pitcaithley retired from the National Park Service in June 2005 after serving as Chief Historian for ten years. During his 34 career with the NPS, he served in Santa Fe, Boston, and Washington, DC where he focused on issues relating to historic preservation and the interpretation of historic sites.

He holds a Ph.D. in history from Texas Tech University and has served as president of the National Council on Public History and the George Wright Society.

His other publications include *The Antiquities Act: A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation, and Nature Conservation*, co-editor (2006); and chapters in *Becoming Historians* (2009), *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (2006), *Preserving Western History* (2005), and *Public History and the Environment* (2004).



The U.S. Constitution and Secession

A DOCUMENTARY ANTHOLOGY
OF SLAVERY AND
WHITE SUPREMACY

Edited by DWIGHT T. PITCAITHLEY
FOREWORD BY SANFORD LEVINSON

Dennis Daily Offers Another Visit To NMSU Achive

In case you missed a prior tour, our president Dennis Daily is offering another special field trip to the NMSU Archive in Branson Library, at noon on June 8. **Pre-registration is required.**

This will be a behind-the-scenes tour of the archive led by Department Head Dennis Daily. To pre-register, visit this web page: <https://nmsu.libcal.com/event/5374274>

Just fill in your name, email address and how

Thank You Letter Contains More Info On *Review* Article

Dear Society:

Thank you for your support of the projects and articles that preserve southern New Mexico's history. I thank you especially for giving me the opportunity to submit articles to the Southern New Mexico Historical Review and for awarding me the Gemoets Prize this year. I appreciated the award beyond what I can say. As I mentioned at the luncheon in January, you have helped me find my passion: researching parts of New Mexico's 20th century political history.

A gentleman in California read "The Great El Paso-Phoenix Road Race of 1919" about the young World War I veteran John Hutchings, who was shot during the race. I wanted to tell you about the California gentleman's response. His name is James McIntosh Mechem, and he was born in Las Cruces before World War II. In 1940, his father Davenport Mechem moved his family to California where he began to train military pilots. The son Mac Mechem grew up to be an artist and lives in Fresno.

I thought Mr. Mechem would be interested in the road race article because his grandfather Edwin C. Mechem was the first judge to hear the shooting case. Mac Mechem told me that he was astounded as he read the article because it gave him a context for an heirloom that had been passed down to him - an ashtray that had belonged to his Grandfather Mechem. It was made from a World War I artillery shell, and it had been given to his grandfather by a man who -- according to family lore -- was a driver for General John J. Pershing. Mac Mechem realized that John Hutchings, Pershing's chauffeur in Mexico and Europe, could have been that person. What a poignant addition to the story, I thought, to know about an artifact that symbolized John Hutch-

ings' survival of a war but not of a road race through southern New Mexico.

We will gather at the main entrance to the library at noon. Branson is located at 1305 Frenger St. on campus - wehre Frenger and Williams meet. Since it is a Saturday, you can find free parking in any of the lots just south of Branson on Williams Ave.

ings' survival of a war but not of a road race through southern New Mexico.

Once again, thank you for work you do to publish the *Review*. I enjoy it from cover to cover. I appreciate how you make the region's history more accessible to us and how it enriches our lives in unexpected ways.

Sincerely,

Judy Messal

BY THE WAY, Judy will be the presenter for our monthly meeting on November 21. She will be talking about Dorothy Heller Mechem, New Mexico's First lady through four terms.

Judy says that Dorothy Mechem was "Striking and stylish, astute and witty, she had a life of adventure, romance, and tragic loss." She died at sixty. Born in 1911, she grew up on a ranch near Pueblo, Colorado. She attended Colorado Women's College in Denver where she met Jean Sexton. Visiting Jean's hometown of Las Cruces, Dorothy Heller met Edwin Mechem--quite an enduring and romantic match. His political career brought her challenges which she met with grace and hard work. No first lady spent as many years raising young children in the public eye of the state capital as Dorothy Mechem did--8 years. She lived in three governor's mansions--first, the beautiful one in downtown Santa Fe that was literally falling apart and had feral cats in the basement. She was one of the busiest first ladies of those times with regard to official entertaining--all accomplished with virtually no staff, a delightful sense of humor, four kids to raise, and retreats along the rivers and streams of northern NM where she became passionate about fishing.

Mark your calendars.

Historical Clues Can Pop Up Just About Anywhere

By Jim Eckles, Editor

I've been digging into the history of the first atomic bomb test at Trinity Site since 1977. I arrived at White Sands Missile Range in the middle of September that year and a few weeks later I worked my first Trinity Open House. Didn't know a thing so I just played like I was a sponge, soaking it all up.

One of the little known stories about Trinity Site is the Pope siding, 30 miles west of the test site on the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. This is where much of the material for the bomb test was shipped to. The 100 tons of TNT that was used in the May 7, 1945 simulation blast was unloaded here. The building materials for base camp were shipped to Pope as well.

But it was Jumbo that has captured most people's imagination. The 214-steel container that was built in Ohio was shipped by rail to Pope. It was unloaded there, placed on a huge trailer with 64 wheels, and then pulled and pushed by bulldozer to Trinity Site. The bomb was supposed to be placed inside Jumbo and then detonated. If the bomb was a bust, Jumbo was designed to contain the conventional explosion and keep the plutonium from being spewed all over the countryside. The idea was to be able to recover it and use it again.

Long before it arrived at Trinity, the decision had been made not to use Jumbo. Confidence in the bomb's mechanism was high and using Jumbo would have interfered with many of the planned measurements. So, Jumbo stood on end about 800 yards from Ground Zero during the test.

People often ask me about the location of the Pope siding and some wonder about its name. I have heard more than once the theory that the siding was named after the Pope in Vatican City because of the world famous Italian scientist Enrico Fermi who was working on the project. Their thought process is that Fermi, being Italian, had to be a Roman Catholic and that the siding was dubbed "Pope" in his honor.

In response I used to say I disagreed and that it was probably always Pope. I had nothing to back it up but now I do.

Recently I bought a used copy of *The Rhodes Reader*, a collection of stories by Eugene Man-

love Rhodes. It has probably been out of print for decades. I got it because it has an essay called "In Defense of Pat Garrett" which Rhodes penned after the book *The Saga of Billy the Kid* by Walter Burns was published in 1926.

In perusing the book, I came across a story called "No Mean City." In the piece, Rhodes provides a fictional story focused around Engle - the place just east of Truth or Consequences that was a prominent railroad stop for the big ranches on the Jornada del Muerto. Engle's main claim to fame now is that it is where you turn south to go to the New Mexico Space Port. The Armandariz Ranch has an office there as well.

In the introduction to his story, Rhodes says that the railroad sidings through the Jornada were named after a bunch of young railroad employees who built them. He lists them: "Morley, Pope, Crocker, Engle, Cutter, Upham and Grama."

The book's editor quotes a letter dated Oct. 3, 1947 in which J.W. Higgins, a valuation engineer with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, says they did a little digging and were able to confirm that Crocker, Engle, Cutter and Upham were indeed all engineers in charge of construction when the line was laid. No mention is made of the other names.

Whether or not Rhodes was correct in his assertion that the places, including Pope, were named after railroad employees is actually irrelevant to meet my need. He clearly named the sidings and Pope was included. The key here is that the Rhodes story appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* in May 1919. There is no way that the siding's name had anything to do with the Manhattan Project's work at Trinity Site.

Dues Will Go Up This Fall

After Dennis Daily queried the membership at a recent public meeting and the board heard no negative feedback, the DACHS board of directors voted to raise dues by \$5 this fall. The increase will be for individual and family memberships.

The increase will help pay for liability insurance for DACHS. As far as we know, the group has never carried insurance - we will now.

Membership Notes

✦ The next meeting of the Dona Ana County Genealogical Society will be on May 8 from 1:30 to 3 p.m. in the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library Roadrunner Room on the second floor.

The topic will be “Overlooked Census Schedules.” Trica Willey Hazelton will show how many of the Census Schedules are overlooked by researchers. It turns out these schedules can add “flesh” to the bones of ancestors and provide information about the communities in which they lived. She will include: voter registers, tax records, US Census Agricultural Schedules, US Mortality Schedules 1850-1880, state censuses, and Native American censuses.

Trica has been an active member of DACGS since 1981. She is a retired high school teacher.

✦ We are looking for original articles concerning local New Mexico history for the next annual *Southern New Mexico Historical Review* (Volume XXVI, January 2019). Biography, local and family histories, oral history, student papers and articles focusing on the history of the Southwest and Northern Mexico will be considered. Small monetary awards are available for some pieces.

The editors prefer submissions electronically as Word or simple text documents. Other formats can be negotiated. We prefer photos to be fairly high resolution as JPEGs or TIFFs. It is nice to see images at 300 dpi.

To submit an article or to ask questions, contact Jim Eckles by email at 19dachs63@gmail.com or by phone at 575-521-8771.

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