



NEWSLETTER

March 2015

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Susan Krueger

Our thanks to Alex Mares for his presentation of traditional Pueblo winter stories on February 19th. There were several moments when members of the audience became one with the story and we thank Alex for providing us with unusual and special examples of balance and beauty.

On Thursday, March 19, at 7 p.m., Nathan Stone, Manager of the Fort Selden Historic Site, will share with us what is happening today with the DACHS's reason to be: saving Fort Selden, as set forth in 1963 at the Society's first meeting. There is now a Management Plan for the Site, along with a series of educational and fun activities throughout the year. Bring your questions and enthusiasm.

On Thursday, April 16, at 7p.m., Jim Eckles, a member of the White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation Board of Directors, will introduce his new book: Trinity: The History of the Atomic Bomb National Historic Landmark. He will use the book as a resource to talk about this year's commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the world's first atomic bomb detonation on July 16, 1945, at Trinity Site.

On Thursday, May 21, at 7 p.m., Bill Godby will entertain us with his talk titled "The Legacy of White Sands Missile Range and How I learned to Love the Cold War." Bill attended the Society's Annual Awards Banquet on January 31st, to accept the Architectural award for the White Sands Missile Range 500K Static Test Stand.

All programs are free and open to the public. They are held in the Good Samaritan Auditorium at 3011 Buena Vida Circle, starting at 7 p.m. If you would like more information, please contact Susan Krueger or Jim Eckles at

19dachs63@gmail.com.

The DACHS Board of Directors meets monthly at the Branigan Cultural Center, on the second Tuesday of the month at 3 p.m. Our next meeting is March 10th and I would like to invite you to join us.

Mesilla Comes Alive: A History of Mesilla and its Valley by C. W. (Buddy) Ritter.

The long awaited publication of Buddy Ritter's book took place in December and if you would like a signed copy, you may pick one up at the Double Eagle Bar. Copies are also available at COAS, the Mesilla Book Store and Amazon.com. The Collectors' Edition, hard back, in color is \$39.95; soft back version in color is \$29.95 and the black and white version is \$14.99. ■

MARCH MEMBERSHIP MEETING

JOIN US ON MARCH 19, 7 p.m. AT THE
GOOD SAMARITAN AUDITORIUM

Our presenter will be Nathan Stone, the Manager of the Fort Selden Historic Site.

Preservation of Fort Selden was the primary purpose for the formation of the DACHS and we are honored to have Nathan Stone present to the Society and bring us up to date on how we can support and help his work at the Site.

To glance back to 1963, the group of history and preservation enthusiasts, who met together in September of that year to lay the foundation of the Doña Ana County Historical Society, had as their immediate goal to save Fort Selden. Fort Selden was a military post, located just north of Las Cruces, established in 1865, and closed in 1890, at which time it became a part of the public domain. By 1963, subjected to the effects of weather and vandalism, the post had deteriorated significantly. It was then that the DACHS took on the complicated task, full of twists and turns, of saving Fort Selden. Their effort culminated in the formal dedication of Fort Selden as a state monument on February

21, 1976, during the Doña Ana County Bicentennial Celebrations.

Madeleine Vessel, in her book Doña Ana County Historical Society 1963 -1994, beginning on page 7, has recorded the story of Fort Selden and what follows is her report of the Fort's beginning.

Named after Colonel Henry R. Selden, veteran of the Civil War battles of Valverde and Glorietta, Fort Selden was established on May 8, 1865. It joined similar fixed frontier posts operating in the Southwest to curb Apache depredations, facilitate settlement and safeguard travel.

The Fort Selden site, located near present day Radium Springs about thirteen miles north of Las Cruces, was well suited for a fixed post. It stood on level ground and was conveniently situated near the Rio Grande with plenty of water and trees. Though vegetation in the surrounding desert county was sparse, there was sufficient grass nearby for livestock. The Robledo Mountains, which were just across the Rio Grande from the fort, provided an ideal look-out site.

Designed for a cavalry troop and an infantry company, the post was built almost entirely of adobe. Most buildings were flat-roofed, one storied structures. Without a walled perimeter, the post sprawled over six acres, providing troop quarters with kitchen and mess, officer quarters, a hospital, a commissary, a court room, a guard room, a granary, a carpenter's shop, a blacksmith's shop, a butcher's shop, a saddler's shop, and a cemetery. In addition there was accommodation for livestock and storage.

Soldiers quartered at Fort Selden, including black infantry referred to as "buffalo soldiers" by the Indians, patrolled the area bounded on the west by the Florida Mountains and on the east by the Sacramento and Guadalupe mountains as far north as Cañada Alamosa and as far south as the Mexican border. Eventually their duties included escorting the mail; defending the local citizenry and their livestock from rustlers, outlaws, and raiding Indians; and protecting travelers crossing the Jornada del Muerto. When they were not officially occupied, soldiers combated the enemies of loneliness and boredom with visits to nearby Doña Ana and Leasburg where they could find "women, dancing, gambling, and alcohol."

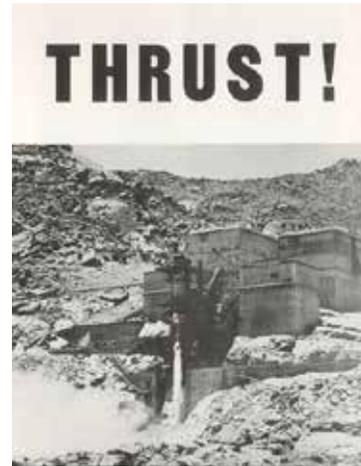
In 1877, during Victorio's War, which raged between 1878 and 1880, an entire company of the Ninth Cavalry was transferred to Fort Stanton, leaving only a regular garrison of one First Lieutenant and three enlisted men. At that time the post was in a semi-caretaker status. Then by special order from the Headquarters Department of New Mexico on May

27, 1879, Fort Selden was abandoned. Soldiers returned to the post in 1880 to provide protection for Rio Grande, Mexico and Pacific Railroad crews laying track south from San Marcial across the Jornada del Muerto.

Not long after Victorio's War, installation of a series of heliograph signal stations was completed. Signals transmitted between the Robledo Mountains, Cooke's Peak, Fort Stanton, Mount Franklin, and Fort Bliss kept troops advised of the location of roving Apache bands and ultimately signaled their demise. Between 1889 and 1891, after the military's successful campaign to subjugate the Indians, the military closed twenty-eight frontier posts, including Fort Selden. After Fort Selden was ordered closed in 1890, its soldiers were reassigned, and its military dead were moved and re-interred at Santa Fe. The post then reverted to the public domain. After passing through various owners, it was acquired by Harry H. Bailey in 1926.

We will continue Madeleine Vessel's account of Fort Selden in subsequent newsletters. ■

2015 Award For Building Worthy of Preservation and Building with Historical Significance: 500K Static Test Stand White Sands Missile Range

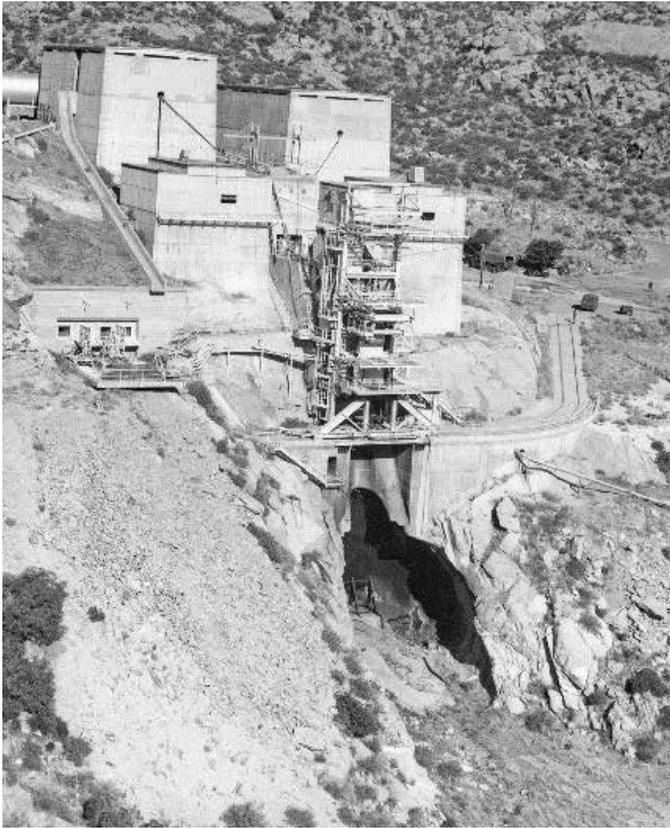


1956 Poster featuring the
500K Static Test Stand

Located about four miles south of the White Sands main post, the 500K Static Test Stand juts out from the side of Granite Peak like some medieval European castle but is most often mistaken as an old mining structure. Built between 1948 and 1950, it was capable of testing rocket propulsion systems with up to 500,000 pounds of thrust while holding them firmly in place against the peak.

At one time it was the largest facility of its kind in the world. The Army and White Sands saw it as the future of propulsion testing.

The original rocket motor mount was built to fire rockets at a 60-degree angle. Later it was rebuilt to



Four observation windows in the east wall faced angular mirrors which allowed safe, indirect viewing of the motor under test.

German V-2 motors were tested there in 1950 and 1951, Redstone motors from 1953 to 1955, Nike motors during 1956 and Corporal missile propulsion systems in 1957 and 1958. The facility was mothballed in 1961.

The 500K Static Test Stand is one of the top five important structures still standing at WSMR. It is both worthy of preservation and has unique historical significance. ■

fire on a vertical plane with a reduced capability from 500K to only 125K. The motor mount was designed to be adjustable and accommodate various sized missiles and power plants. Scattered around the motor mount, instrumentation captured information on a rocket motor's performance. The control room, housing personnel and recording devices, was built directly into the granite cliff.



Bill Godby, talking about the 500K Static Test Stand after accepting the award on behalf of White Sands Missile Range.

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Doña Ana County Historical Society, P. O. Box 16045, Las Cruces, NM 88004-6045

DACHS Membership Form

Please renew/enroll my/our membership in the Doña Ana County Historical Society. Memberships are active for the calendar year of enrollment and fees are deductible within legal limits for Federal and State income tax purposes. If you are unsure of your status or have questions regarding membership, please contact the President, Susan Krueger, at 575 525-0654.

Annual Membership/Sponsorship Rates

Individual \$20 Family \$25 Student \$8 Contributor \$40 Benefactor \$150 Life \$300
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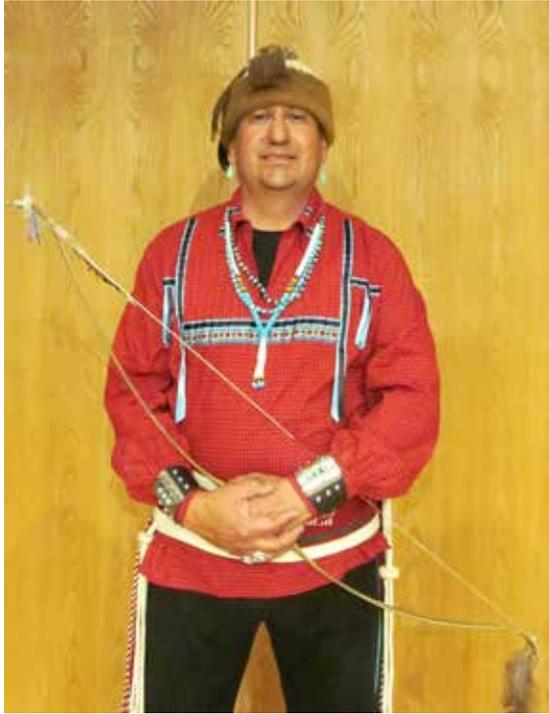
Is this a change of information? Yes No A check for \$ _____ is enclosed. Date _____
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Alex Mares with his Pueblo regalia worn during the telling of traditional Pueblo winter stories at our February meeting.

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**Doña Ana County Historical Society
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of Beasley, Mitchell & Co.
for tax preparation.**

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