



# NEWSLETTER

March 2016

## NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Dr. Jon Hunner

As the new President of the DACHS, I would like to welcome you to another edition of our newsletter. I would also like to say a couple of thanks -- first to Susan Krueger for her leadership over the last two years as President and to Kimberly Miller for becoming the Vice President for the next two years. We've had a good beginning of the year in celebrating the history of southern New Mexico. Our annual banquet at the Double Eagle gave us the opportunity to hear from Board member Buddy Ritter about the history of the Mesilla Valley, to award those who have preserved our heritage and have presented our past, and to see old friends and meet new ones. Then several weeks ago, Jim Eckles arranged a tour of the Hembrillo battlefield on White Sands Missile Range for our members. And finally, David Thomas entertained us with a history of movies and movie theaters in Las Cruces at our monthly meeting. It's been a good month for history. We look forward to continuing to bring you interesting programs as well as working to preserve the rich history of our region.

History-- it's not just a past time. ■

## Presentation at March 17 Membership Meeting

Just in time for the next Trinity Site open house on April 2, author and historian Jim Eckles will talk about the site of the first atomic bomb explosion in his presentation about the convergence of World War II technologies at White Sands Missile Range. The talk is part of the monthly free public lectures sponsored by the Doña Ana County Historical Society. Eckles will appear on March 17 at 7 p.m. in the auditorium at the Good Samaritan.



Jim Eckles balancing the merging technologies

Toward the end of the war, nuclear and rocket testing both appeared in our backyard at White Sands and eventually gave rise to two National Historic Landmarks there. Launch

**See Presentation on page 2**

## Presentation from page 1

Complex 33 is where German V-2 rockets were tested. The work is usually referred to as the beginning of the Space Age.

Trinity Site is where the Atomic Age began on July 16, 1945, just a week after the missile range was established.

Very quickly the two weapons were married together. However, one system developed in the 1950s, the Redstone, wasn't just a weapon. It was also used for Space research as modified Redstone rockets put the first American satellite, Explorer I, into orbit and propelled both Alan Shepard and Gus Grissom on suborbital flights during Project Mercury.

Jim Eckles grew up in Nebraska and attended the University of Nebraska. He majored in psychology and English lit. A masters in literature followed at the University of Washington but he was saved from a life in academia when, in 1977, he was offered a job in the White Sands Public Affairs Office. He worked there until 2007 when he retired. In 2013 he was inducted into the missile range's Hall of Fame. ■

## \*\*Correction\*\*

On page 20 of the *2016 Southern New Mexico Historical Review* there is an error in the second paragraph. The second sentence should read, "He served under General MacArthur in the Pacific and rose to the rank of brigadier general. He played a major role in the liberation of the Japanese internment camps on Luzon. Later, for the Korean War, he was called back to active duty as executive for reserve and ROTC affairs and promoted to major general with a date of rank of 16 March 1944."

We apologize for the error. ■

## Pasajero Del Camino Real Award

This award is given to author(s) of a significant historical publication about events, persons, places or issues in Doña Ana County or the nearby area. The Society should strongly consider works by its members and those persons living and writing in Doña Ana County.

**2016 Pasajero Del Camino Real Award Recipient C.W. "Buddy" Ritter** with Craig Holden for *Mesilla Comes Alive; A History of Mesilla and its Valley*

Realizing early on how time consuming writing a book can be, Buddy turned to Craig Holden, a novelist and professor at New Mexico State University, for assistance. At their first meeting, it was clear the



On the left, President Dr. Jon Hunner presents the Pasajero Del Camino Real Award to C. W. "Buddy" Ritter

two shared a vision of a book about Mesilla and the Mesilla Valley.

Describing the book to the reader, Buddy explains that he wanted to challenge assumptions, some of which have stood the test of time - until now; reveal new information, for example, the true origin of the City's name "Las Cruces"; and uncover new resources, including a document written in Spanish by Albert Fountain. Getting the information to the public was important to Buddy.

The book begins with the first European contacts in the Mesilla Valley, about 1535, and closes with statehood in January 1912. It is well annotated with footnotes and images of primary source documents. Add the photographs, illustrations, maps and political cartoons, and the story indeed comes alive.

Professionally, Buddy is a hotelier, restaurateur and a banker with a well-rounded education, including majoring in banking and finance at Tulane University. He has extensive experience serving on boards, including two terms on the National Board of Directors of the American Hotel Association. He was named Citizen of the Year of Las Cruces in 1984 and 2010. He has supported state and local historic preservation initiatives, serving on the Board of the New Mexico Historic Preservation Alliance and acting as the founding Chairman of the Amador Museum Foundation.

However, perhaps most valuable to his study of New Mexico history and culture in preparation to write his book were the six years he served as President of the Board of Regents of the Museums of New Mexico, which included access to the State Archives. Here the wealth of material provided the excitement and impetus for Buddy to begin *Mesilla Comes Alive*.

Buddy was born and raised in the Mesilla Valley. He owns the 165-year old historic Double Eagle Restaurant on the Plaza in Mesilla and he has served on the DACHS Board of Directors for the past ten years. ■

## Noteworthy Renovation Award

This award recognizes a renovation (interior and exterior) of a historic home or building in Doña Ana County. It was awarded most recently in 2012 to the De La O Saloon in Dona Ana.

### 2016 Noteworthy Renovation Award Phillips Chapel

Phillips Chapel CME (Christian Methodist Episcopal) Church, 638 N. Tornillo St., was built in 1911. It served as a church and a community center for the African American population in Las Cruces. In 1924, when the Las Cruces Public School District became segregated, Phillips Chapel also served as a school for 35 or so black students sent there from Central Elementary.

Distinguished by its age and historical significance, the Chapel was recognized by the DACHS in 2001 as a building worthy of preservation. In 2003, the Chapel was listed on the State Register of Cultural Properties and the National Register of Historic Places.

Over time the structure's adobe walls had begun to deteriorate. Water damage had been repaired with concrete, causing the adobes to retain moisture and the walls to crumble from inside out. The south wall in particular was unstable and it was clear the adobe bricks would have to be removed and replaced. By 2005, the entire building appeared ready to collapse.

In 2009, a preservation group began fund-raising to preserve the Chapel and recruiting faculty from NMSU and Doña Ana Community College (DACC) for assistance. In January 2010, DACC, along with a several adobe experts, turned the site into a hands-on classroom for students eager to learn adobe restoration techniques for credit. Immediately, community volunteers joined

in, led by Clarence Fielder, a NMSU History Professor and Steward of Phillips Chapel which his grandparents founded.

When DACC stopped offering the class in the fall of 2011, Beth O'Leary, an anthropology professor at NMSU and a member of the Phillips Chapel Restoration Committee, stepped up to help recruit and train volunteers and oversee the restoration tasks. It was not easy: there were ongoing structural problems, volunteers came and went, it was cold outside and inside during January and February. Then it finally came to pass, as the year 2012 ended, the restoration project was completed.

Today, the Chapel includes a small museum celebrating its history and services are held weekly. To honor this accomplishment, the DACHS recognizes Phillips Chapel with the Society's Noteworthy Renovation Award. ■



Members of the Fielder family

-----Cut along dotted line-----

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   
*Southern New Mexico Historical Review* Sponsorship \$50

Is this a change of information? Yes  No  A check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed. Date \_\_\_\_\_  
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How would you like to receive your copy of the *Southern New Mexico Historical Review* (SNMHR)?  
Printed Version  Society Website Version  PDF on CD Version



David Thomas chatting with Vice-President Kimberly Miller after his presentation on the new book “*Screen with a Voice*,” the history of Motion Pictures in Las Cruces.

## SCHEDULE OF 2016 SPRING PROGRAMS

As promised in the January newsletter here is the list of spring programs matched up to the Membership Meeting dates.

March 17: Jim Eckles will talk about how the atomic age and the space age started right here in our backyard.

April 21: Rick Hendricks, New Mexico State Historian, will present a topic of his choosing, relevant to the history of southern NM.

May 19: Sarah Stanley will present on the Chope family and heritage preservation through food.

### Thanks to our 2016 Corporate Sponsors

We encourage our Members to patronize their businesses

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