



# NEWSLETTER

October 2011

Doña Ana County Historical Society

## President's Comments

By: George Hackler

Our November Membership Meeting is coming up soon. Remember that it is at our November meeting that we are presented with and ask to vote on the names to fill vacancies coming up on the Board of Directors. I appointed the entire current Board of Directors as the nominating Committee. I did this because we are facing a very difficult transition this year.

My term expires in January. I won't be available for the presidency next year and because the position of Vice President was never filled there is no one to automatically move into the presidency. The current Board is:

- George Hackler, President
- Past President, George Helfrich
- Vice president, Vacant
- Secretary, Linda Galloway
- Treasurer, Xandy Church

Members at large:

- Martha Andrews
- Jim Eckles
- Marcie Palmer
- Mary Lou Pendergrass
- Doyle Piland
- Buddy Ritter

All of these terms expire January 2012

The Board will be approaching the membership asking you to volunteer for one or more of these positions. PLEASE give the request careful consideration, the future of this organization may well depend on your response.

Good news, the Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce will assume ownership of the Armi-jo/ Gallagher property and thanks to donations, grant money and other assets has the funds to repair and protect the house. The Chamber then will use the house for their offices and plan to build a new structure (not connected) to the west of the house which will be used as the Visitors Center and Meeting Rooms.

**Go To Board Action**

Whatever happened to that 100 tons of gold and other treasure hidden in Victorio Peak on White Sands Missile Range? Was there really more gold in Victorio Peak than in Fort Knox? Did vice-president Johnson fly a helicopter to the site and sneak off with the booty? Jim Eckles will relate some of the peak's history and answer these and other questions about the legendary lucre of Victorio Peak. There will even be pictures.



**20 October speaker, Jim Eckles with his share of the Victorio Peak gold.**

Eckles worked in the Public Affairs Office at White Sands from 1977 to 2007. He just missed the gold search in early 1977 when Dan Rather was there for "60 Minutes," but was there for the multi-year effort in the 1990s. He has been inside the peak, kicked rocks up and down its exterior, and listened to multitudes of stories and anecdotes about it. He says it was a nice break from the typical bureaucratic work he faced piloting his desk in Public Affairs.

## Board Actions:

The Board acted to support the Centennial Celebration in cooperation with the Farm and Range Museum by sponsoring one or more events scheduled at Farm and Ranch and has committed \$1000 to help pay for planned programs.

The Board has decided to move and simplify the Annual Awards Banquet coming up in January. The Board is considering doing away with the Silent Auction and moving to a smaller room and considering an afternoon luncheon format to accommodate those folks who don't like to drive at night. A search is under way for a smaller location and lower pricing for meal and room. We will keep you posted as we work out the details.

.....

## Calendar

Thursday, October 20, 2011

**Jim Eckles;**

speaking on the Doc Noss Treasure Hunt on White Sands Missile Range.

Thursday, November 17, 2011

**Irene Oliver Lewis;**

speaking on the History of the Las Cruces Public Schools System. You may remember that several years ago she presented a program on “Dichos de Mi Madre”

All meetings of the Society are normally at 7:00pm on the third Thursday of the months of Feb. - May and Sept - Nov. in the Good Samaritan Auditorium at 3011 Buena Vida Circle.

.....

### Fort Cummings Field Trip

*Editor's Note: In the September 2011 issue of the Newsletter, we started the story about Fort Cummings and our Society sponsored field trip there on June the 11th. In this issue that story will be completed below:*

About 8000 folks would come south from Santa Fe and follow the road blazed by the Mormon Battalion to get here. Benjamin Ignatius Hayes accompanied one such group and kept a detailed record of their journey. They arrived here on November 21st, 1849. During that night John Chaffin died. He had become ill right after the party departed Socorro. The caravan waited while his grave was being prepared. The morning was bitter cold from a piercing wind and light rain blowing in from the southwest. The grave was dug near the road, cedar logs were cut from the hills nearby. His body was wrapped in a blanket and laid on his over coat. Cedar logs were placed on top and filled with cedar sprigs. The grave was covered with a layer of earth and rocks to prevent wolves from opening the grave. John Chaffin's dreams of riches ended a short way over in that direction (west) where his grave still marks the end of his trail. He left a wife and 4 children baby.

In 1857 the army contracted with James B. Leach to build a wagon road from Yuma to Mesilla to facilitate the occupation and development of the newly acquired territory. The straight away was 18 feet wide and 25 feet wide in the turns to make room for a stage with mules to negotiate the turn. To allow heavy wagons to pass, slopes were reduced in accordance with engineering standards based on number of mules and load. Again it was the water source that would bring Leache's road through the place where you are standing. By this time the spring was called Cooke's Spring and the canyon beyond, Cooke's Canyon.

The Overland Mail Company followed in 1857, improving

the road, building stage stations, and developing water sources. The typical station was about 60 by 80 ft, with walls 10 ft and 3 feet thick of rock or adobe. Living quarters would be enclosed within the walls. Each station was manned by 2 or 3 people, and held 12 to 16 mules, harness, spare wagon parts and feed. Each station could be identified from afar by the flying American flag.

There were 4 stagecoaches stopping at each station every week - two going west and two going east. Each stagecoach needed 4 fresh mules. Several supply wagons would also pass and perhaps stop each week. Many travelers, soldiers, Indians, gold seekers and settlers passed through. There were some going, some returning. Herds of cattle, sheep, mules and horses would also pass through heading for the rich California market. A steer worth \$10 in Texas would bring \$100 in California.

The Civil War broke out April 12th 1861. After Baylor and the Texas Confederates took Mesilla and Fort Fillmore, he dispatched patrols to the west, passing here in July. One of the soldiers kept a diary wherein he drew a sketch of the entrance of Cooke's Canyon depicting an overturned, burned stage with bodies lying about and vultures circling overhead. News of the Confederate invasion of the New Mexico Territory quickly reached California where an army of 1400 volunteers was enlisted and marched this way to engage the Texans. The column marched all the way from California reaching here in July of 1862. The California Volunteers rested here then part headed north to Fort Craig in hopes of cutting off the retreating confederates, the remainder went on to Doña Ana and Mesilla, but they were too late. By this time the Texans had suffered a major defeat at Pigeon's ranch above Santa Fe and retreated back to Texas. Some of the California Volunteers would return here to build and man the newly established fort.

A board of officers met here on September 30th , 1863, to pick a location for the new fort. They picked the hill just north of the Stage Station. Sometime later the site was moved to the location below the hill where you can see the remains today. The fort was named for Major Joseph Cummings, killed at Canyon Bonito in a skirmish with Navajo Indians.

There was no fire wood in the vicinity of the fort, what little there was was used up years ago. A semi permanent wood camp was set up in Oak Grove about 4.5 miles north in OK Canyon. In mid January, 1866, a wood cutting party of one corporal and six privates was working at the camp. On the 16th Corporal Webber returned to the fort with a wagon load of wood planning to pick up supplies. On the morning of the 17th the crew was just sitting down to breakfast when they caught sight of 40 or 50 Apaches working to surround the camp. Privates Matthew and Goldsberry grabbed their arms and hid in a sheltered bunch of trees on high ground. Privates Rowan, Hunter, Devine and Daly were caught in the open and killed by the onslaught. The dead were buried in a single grave under the head stone (on a small hill near the Stage Station). When the fort was abandoned, the bodies were exhumed and moved to Fort Leavenworth, leaving the headstone.

Shortly after the Oak Grove incident the firm of Kerns and Mitchell would establish a new stage station here and resume a regular mail and passenger service.

Ten years after the Fort was established it was abandoned. On December 1st, 1873, 1st Lt. Horace P. Sherman packed up, and with the remaining 15 men marched away. Miners, ranchers and local people began dismantling the fort for the construction materials.

In 1877 two men, Edward Orr and Lon Irington discovered rich lead ore with 32oz of silver per ton about 10 miles north of the Fort. The deposit was located at the head of Hadley draw. Over time a large mining community would grow up in the area. In 1881 when the railroad came through, a narrow gage spur was built up to a concentration plant below the mines and triggered an economic boom. World wars 1 and 2 would revive activity for short periods. While doing a WSA patrol for the BLM I met Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Preston of Idaho Falls, Idaho here. Mrs. Preston had a photo album of pictures taken of Cook town site. She told me that when she was 13 her family operated a mine at the site. Her Father would lower her down the hole in a bucket and her job, with the aid of a candle and pick, was to fill the bucket with ore.

The Fort was reopened in the summer of 1880 following Victorio's break out. The old facilities were mostly in ruins. A few buildings were repaired but one observer commented that the area looked like a field of mushrooms because of all the tents. In the fall there was a surprise visitor. On October 25th, President Rutherford B. Hayes and his wife stayed overnight. There was a gap in the Southern Pacific tracks between sections in southern New Mexico that had to be traversed by stagecoach. The Santa Fe and the Southern Pacific joined in Deming on March 8th, 1881.

In the spring of 1882, two men arrived in Silver City in the

dark of night . They did not register into any hotel but choose to stay in a private boarding house. They made arrangements next morning to catch the stage from Silver City to Fort Cummings When asked ,they gave their names as John Smith and Bill Snooks. They would have passed the Stage Station to hitch a ride down the railroad to catch a train north. An article appeared in the Silver City paper after they departed identifying them as "the Earp Boys" Wyatt Earp and Doc Holiday. Wyatt was taking Doc to Denver to the TB sanatorium. They had to avoid Deming because they were well aware of Sheriff Dan Tucker's reputation as a tough lawman and that he most likely held murder warrants for their arrest from Pima County Arizona.

By the year of 1884, Geronimo was pinned down in the Sierra Madres of Mexico, and Indian depredations around the Fort had decreased. The Garrison was cut from 226 to 58 in 1884. The Fort was ordered abandoned for the last time by August 14th. The garrison flag was moved to Fort Selden. Abandonment was completed by the end of May 1885. About the time that things were winding down at Ft Cummings James Judson Haytt was moving from Mason County, Texas to the Cloudcroft area.

On October 6th, 1891 the final chapter on Fort Cummings was closed when the USA government turned the military reservation over to the Department of the Interior.

The Haytts moved here in 1897 and soon had ranches surrounding Cookes Range. Leedrue Haytt lives a short way to the north where you see the tops of the trees. The remains of the Fort are on private deeded land belonging to the Haytts.

**References:** Pasaron por Aqui, by Doñald Couchman;  
Pistols, Petticoats & Poker, by Jan Devereaux ■

-----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 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 Treasurer, Xandy Church, at 526-9774 (May-Sept. 575-536-9728) or the President, George Hackler, at 521-4458.

### Annual Membership/Sponsorship Rates

Individual \$20  Family \$25  Student \$8  Contributor \$40  Benefactor \$150  Life \$300   
*Southern New Mexico Historical Review Sponsorship \$50*

**This is a change of information** Yes  No  A check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed. Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Check # \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_ Newsletter via E-mail Yes  No

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

**We Welcome These  
New Members**

**William Divan**



**Rick Hendricks, the State Historian for the state of New Mexico on the left and Society President George Hackler before Rick Gave his talk at our Society meeting on the 22nd of September**

At the Society meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, Rick Hendricks, the State of New Mexico Historian gave a very interesting and informative talk about his research into the lives and contributions of Fabian Garcia and Roy Nakayama and the research and development of the most famous chile in the world. Fabian Garcia was born in Mexico and immigrated to the US with his parents as a child. He excelled in many areas of agriculture, but his research on improving the chile which was prevalent in the Mesilla Valley, along with the continued research by Roy Nakayama ended with the result being what many consider the "World's Best Chile."

**We wish to thank our  
Corporate Sponsors**

***Bank of the Rio Grande  
Double Eagle Restaurant  
Insta-Copy***



**Next month's Newsletter will begin the Trip Report for our field trip to the Saint Joseph's Mission church in Mescalero, New Mexico.**

Photo by Chuck Murrell

**2011 Board Members**  
President: George Hackler  
Past President: George Helfrich  
Vice President: Vacant  
Secretary: Linda Galloway  
Treasurer: Xandy Church  
Historian: Vacant  
At-Large Board Members:  
Marcie Palmer  
C.W. "Buddy" Ritter  
Martha Shipman Andrews  
Mary Lou Pendergrass  
Jim Eckles  
Doyle Piland  
Publicity: Jim Eckles  
Website: Mary Lou Pendergrass  
Newsletter Editor: Doyle Piland  
SNMHR Editor: Martha Shipman  
Andrews  
BCC Liaison: Garland Courts  
Education Chair: Frankie Miller  
www.donaanacountyhistoristsoc.org

