

# PASSWORD



THE EL PASO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Volume 42, No. 2 • El Paso, Texas • Summer, 1997

**James M. Day**  
Editor

**Richard Field**      **Marilyn Gross**  
Associate Editors

**Richard Baquera**  
Book Review Editor

### Editorial Board

J. Morgan Broaddus, Leon Metz, Mary Ann Plaut, Carol Price, Claudia Rivers

### Honorary Board Members

Mrs. John J. Middagh, Martha Patterson Peterson, Mrs. Eugene O. Porter

Graphic Artist    Denise K. Mankin  
Historical Society Logo    José Cisneros

ARTICLES APPEARING IN THIS JOURNAL ARE  
ABSTRACTED AND INDEXED IN  
**HISTORICAL ABSTRACTS** and **AMERICA: HISTORY AND LIFE**

Correspondence regarding articles for **PASSWORD** may be directed to the editor at  
9004 Polaris Street., El Paso, Texas 79904-1141

### GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

**PASSWORD** requests writers to send a query letter and self-addressed stamped envelope before submitting material. Manuscripts should be double-spaced on 8½ x 11 inch paper, one side only, standard margins. Ideal maximum length is 20 pages including documentation. Shorter articles are welcome. For style and format consult recent issues of the *Quarterly*. Please attach a brief biographical sketch. Photographs and illustrations should be accompanied by identifying captions. There is no stipend for articles published. All articles or book reviews published become the property of the *Quarterly* and are copyrighted.

The per-copy price of **PASSWORD** is \$6.25 plus \$1.50 for postage and handling.

Correspondence regarding **back numbers, defective copies, and changes of address** should be addressed to:

Membership Secretary, El Paso County Historical Society, P.O. Box 28, El Paso, Texas 79940.  
Society Membership of \$25.00 per year includes a subscription to **PASSWORD**.

**PASSWORD** (ISSN 0031-2738) is published quarterly by  
**THE EL PASO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**, 603 W. Yandell, El Paso, Texas 79902.

Periodicals Postage Paid at El Paso, Texas.

**POSTMASTER: Send address changes to**

**PASSWORD**  
The El Paso County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 28  
El Paso, Texas 79940



# PASSWORD

VOLUME 42, NO. 2  
SUMMER, 1997  
EL PASO, TEXAS



## CONTENTS

- 55 **The Santa Isabel Episode,  
January 10, 1916:  
Ethnic Repercussions in  
El Paso and Ciudad Juárez** ..... RAUL R. REYES
- 78 **The Río Grande:  
Nile of America** ..... PAXTON P. PRICE
- Frank W. Gorman Memorial  
Essay Contest Winners**
- 87 **Papa and Me** ..... JOSHUA DAWSON
- 89 **Gum Wrappers and  
Victory Gardens** ..... JOSEY PICKETT
- 91 **My Great Grandmother** ..... JOSE MARTINEZ
- 93 **The Houck & Dieter/  
Empire Bottling Works:  
El Paso's Most Popular  
Non-Franchise Soft  
Drink Bottlers, Part I** ..... WILLIAM W. LOCKHART
- 102 **Book Reviews**



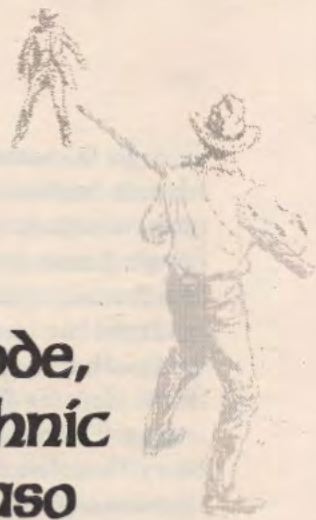
*Burges House, Home of the Society – The East Portico.  
Photo courtesy El Paso County Historical Society*

© The El Paso County Historical Society, El Paso, Texas 1997

The El Paso County Historical Society  
disclaims responsibility for the statements and opinions of the contributors.

Entered as Periodicals Mail at El Paso, Texas





## The Santa Isabel Episode, January 10, 1916: Ethnic Repercussions in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez

By Raúl R. Reyes

In the course of the Mexican Revolution, events in 1916 at an isolated cattle crossing near Santa Isabel, Chihuahua, México enkindled binational and border race relations between Anglo Americans and Mexicans living on both sides of the *frontera* in El Paso—Ciudad Juárez. The wholesale slaughter of fifteen American mining men by Villistas would set in motion a succession of fateful events that would ripple across the Rio Grande, banefully affecting the racial attitudes and perceptions of the El Paso/Juárez region. The racial sentiments of Anglo El Pasoans toward Mexican residents of the border became especially strained as xenophobic neuroses toward their brown-skinned neighbor gripped the mainstream community. The depredations committed by Villistas against the men of the American owned American Smelting and Refining Company subsidiary, Cusiuhirachic Mining Company, stirred and agitated the racial fears of an ethnically paranoid Anglo-American populace. Ricardo Romo consequently characterizes this period as the era of the “Brown Scare” in the United States, a time when “anti-Mexican sentiment” was strong.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, the mayhem and butchery committed against the Cusi American mining engineers would, in light of the racial tenor of the times, unavoidably poison the racial presentiments of the border peoples. The feeling resulted in open expressions of violence on the streets of El Paso.

In December, 1915 the racial climate of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez centered around a superficial cordiality that cloaked the true sentiments of sister city residents. The strong-arming of Anglo-American streetcar passengers by Mexican government troops on December 21, 1915 coupled with the shooting of an American railroad car inspector by sniper fire from across the river served notice that the racial climate would be tense. According to the *El Paso Morning Times*, a dozen Mexican soldiers boarded the streetcar and, at gunpoint, forced the occupants to give up their billfolds.<sup>2</sup>

These border hostilities led to the suspension of streetcar service as General John J. Pershing issued orders making Juárez off-limits to all Americans until a semblance of order returned. Mexican soldiers added to the chaos by frequently rioting in an effort to collect their back wages.<sup>3</sup> The intentional shooting of an Anglo-American from across the Rio Grande that same afternoon escalated the racial feeling in El Paso. The victim, George A. Diepert, an employee of the El Paso & Southwestern Railway Company, died shortly after six soldiers of the Mexican garrison shot him from the Juárez side of the river.<sup>4</sup> In response, Pershing massed American troops along the riverfront with "orders to vigorously return any deliberate firing from the Mexican side."<sup>5</sup> The two episodes went a long way in perpetuating racial misgivings of Anglo-Americans toward their Mexican neighbors.

In this anxious atmosphere, binational officials extended diplomatic overtures within the sister cities in an attempt to preserve an air of cooperation and friendship. A clear example of this cooperation occurred when El Paso Mayor Tom Lea met with General Alvaro Obregón upon the latter's visit to El Paso on December 23, 1915. In the course of their meeting, Lea mentioned to Obregón that "El Paso is desirous of maintaining the friendliest relations with Juárez." Obregón replied that he too felt "desirous that a lasting harmony will exist between the two cities and countries."<sup>6</sup>

Manuel Prieto, the mayor of Ciudad Juárez, also echoed the general theme of bilateral fellowship and dialogue. With the swearing in of Prieto as mayor, Lea, in a gesture of goodwill, invited and met with the new Juárez chief executive. One item discussed at this conference on December 28, 1915, explored the possibility of establishing a toll-free international bridge. Lea thought that the toll border residents paid at the bridge was "a travesty of hospitality" to sister-city citizens wishing to visit across the border.



At the meeting, the conferees promised to conduct a vigorous campaign against vice in their efforts to clear the criminal element from both cities. The conference ended with the idea that "if the desires of both mayors are carried out, relations between Juárez and El Paso, will ever be on the friendliest of footing."<sup>77</sup> Beyond the publicity and exchange of pleasantries, evidence suggests that hidden deep-rooted racist perceptions were held by officials on both sides of the border. A communique from T. D. Edwards, the United States Consul at Ciudad Juárez, to Secretary of State Robert Lansing, assessed the mood in Ciudad Juárez and the situation of United States citizens and other foreigners residing there. Edwards, in explaining the plight of foreigners living in Juárez stated that the mood in Juárez is one of "distress and fear," and that "there are few Americans or foreigners in or near Juárez excepting a few Chinese and Japs."<sup>78</sup>

An indication of Mexican views of Anglo Americans and their motives manifested itself with the arrival of Mexican government troops in El Paso and in the remarks made by General Gabriel Gavira, their commander. On December 30, 1915, Gavira's ragtag troops, after traveling through Arizona and New México, arrived by train from Naco, Sonora, where they had recently defeated a band of Villa sympathizers. His army consisted of a pathetic looking bunch of *soldados* suffering from the side-effects of malaria. Given their motley appearance, Gavira felt that the narrow-minded Anglo-American soldiers who saw them arrive "must of [sic] not formed a good impression of my poor [Mexican] people." Although they had permission from the United States government to pass through the country, it was obvious that Gavira's infirm, injured, and maimed soldiers could not make the twelve mile march to Pelea, New México, after immigration officials denied them passage into México via the El Paso/Juárez international bridge. Resentfully, Gavira transported his troops by paying "whatever amount was demanded by some Americans." He thus formed an uncomplimentary opinion of the "savage and covetous sort among some [Anglo-Americans] who will do anything for money."<sup>79</sup>

Despite the apparent existence of uncomplimentary racial perceptions shared by sister city residents and the isolated acts of hostility against Anglo Americans, some officials from both countries continued to rally against the growing attitudes of ethnic antipathy and cultural conflict along the border. The banquet held in honor of Mexican General Alvaro Obregón on December 31,



1915 serves as an example. With dignitaries from both sides of the border attending the dinner, the event was intended to foster fellowship and friendship toward the Carranza government.<sup>10</sup> For instance, Mr. Burt Orndorff, on behalf of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce, spoke of being "willing and anxious to do all in its power to foster the growth of friendly relations and [thus was] ready to exchange courtesies with officials and citizens across the river." Speaking for Mayor Tom Lea and the El Paso Chamber of Commerce, Felix Martínez, a prominent El Pasoan of Mexican descent, welcomed Obregón in Spanish. Martínez, quite taken by the atmosphere of hospitality, stated that "when men of different races [get] together in the spirit of this [kind] of gathering, it is like a draught of some wonderful nectar to me."

Mexican government luminaries also commented favorably on working toward better binational relations. Andres G. García, Mexican consul, expressed satisfaction at honoring Obregón, "because by honoring [him] you are honoring the whole Mexican people..." After being introduced by Lea, Obregón thanked El Paso's civic and military leaders for the courtesies extended on his behalf and felt impressed enough to "predict for the people of both countries a period of intimacy and friendship such as they have never known before." In the course of the banquet, Obregón also addressed Cusiuhirachic Mining Company officials by "inviting all of [them] to come to México." Obregón remarked, "I want you to come down into our territory and open up your mines...I give you my word that you will be given full protection."<sup>11</sup>

Thus, sister city *politicos* gave the appearance of being pillars of racial tolerance who viewed the community and its people across the river as equal to their own. Nevertheless, bureaucrats from both sides of the border held perceptions about each other that remained hidden from the public eye. For example, the accord between border city mayors to combat crime and vice within their respective communities illustrates duplicitous attitudes adhered to by the local politicians. Mayor Lea, for his part, closed down El Paso's red light district by formally repealing the city ordinance that led to its creation.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Mayor Prieto, but more significantly, General Gavira, began to close gambling houses and brothels because Ciudad Juárez had come to be perceived "as the most wicked city on the American continent," a notion readily accepted as fact by many El Pasoans and a large portion of white America.<sup>13</sup> The war to clear out the saloons and casinos received favorable response



from El Paso's Anglo Americans. However, when the crackdown impacted local Anglo-Americans directly, the idea did not exactly get rave reviews. The arrest of two Anglo-American Juárez tavern operators during the city's "anti-vice campaign," coupled with the rhetoric of Mexican government reformers, were reported in the *El Paso Herald* and probably added to the continuing racial misperceptions held by white El Paso.<sup>14</sup> The paper quoted Gavira as saying, that "the enforcement of the laws in [Juárez] will not be hindered by any claims to nationality or race."<sup>15</sup>

Aside from their bluster, the guileful character of border bureaucrats with their own hidden agenda and the double-standards they espoused served only to confirm the attitudinal images these officers held about their contemporaries across the river. A classic case of this occurred in a conference involving Lea, Prieto, and Gavira. According to Gavira, after an exchange of preliminary pleasantries, Lea "cut to the chase" by remarking that "he would be most appreciative if [your local government] would permit the reopening of Keenos [a gambling casino]."<sup>16</sup> Gavira answered Lea's request with a resounding "Never! Lose all hope and [he] also added: Why don't you permit it here, in El Paso, the operation of a [gambling parlor] under Mr. Alderete your great friend?" Alderete was a former Juárez casino proprietor. In Gavira's own words, "Since that [episode], the rogue interventionist Tom Lea, Mayor of El Paso, became my sworn enemy."<sup>17</sup> One can conclude that politico power brokers on both sides of the border did little to bridge the ever widening racial schism.

The issues of racial dispositions and perceptions of people in México and the United States as evidenced along the border would not only endure but would blossom into full-blown acts of brutality against Americans as the massacre of Santa Isabel testifies. The first signs of anti-American sentiment emerged in the months just prior to the return of American mining interests in northern México. "Anti-gringo" passions in the north of México arose from the abiding racial resentment shared by Pancho Villa and his adherents. Villa's animosity toward Anglo-Americans grew out of the United States extension of diplomatic recognition of the *de facto* Carranza regime and in the American acquiescence in the transport of Constitutionalists (Carranza troops moved to Pelea, N.M. via El Paso) over American soil.<sup>18</sup> Hence Villa discerned that the "U. S. had double-crossed him," and he vowed to "kill every *gringo* that fell into [his] hands."<sup>19</sup> Such were the feel-



ings when the Cusi-huirachic mining party boarded their train in El Paso on January 9, 1916 to travel to the mountains of western Chihuahua.

According to Juan Vásquez, the train carrying the Cusi mining men came to an abrupt stop at Chavara de Baeza, five miles west of Santa Isabel. The train consisted of two passenger cars, one carrying fifteen Americans and two Canadians and the other carrying twenty Mexican nationals including Vásquez. Vásquez tells of a "Villa colonel named Lopez" as the ringleader, who with his men "robbed [Mexicans on board] of everything they possessed." In the narrative by Vásquez, Villa's men, prior to exiting their compartment "told [them]: Now we are going to kill the gringos" and then proceeded to shoot the Americans in their car. As Vásquez's story indicates, "gringos," or those who appeared to be Anglo-American, served as the discriminating factor for the Villistas' bloodletting. The remaining Anglo Americans, some badly wounded were forced to walk off the train. There they suffered further humiliation by being forced at gunpoint to strip naked. As Vasquez tells it, once outside, a single pair of Villistas killed off one American at a time, while the rest of them encouraged the executioners with cheers and shouts of "Viva Villa."<sup>20</sup> As their Anglo-American colleagues fell, the Mexican co-workers on the train "cried out when they saw what was happening to the Americans outside; they were told to keep quiet or they would be shot."<sup>21</sup>

Thus, it would appear that these Villistas sought more than the wholesale slaughter of Americans. The Villistas obviously sought to convey a disturbing and undisguised message which became clearer in the violation of "one American [whose] head had been shot off and [whose] brains [had] run out [on] the ground."<sup>22</sup> The Villa partisans also verbalized the message in parting words of bravado. As the bedlam subsided, a Mexican from the train was stripped naked and shot, though not fatally. The Villistas told Vásquez and his traveling companions that they could "tell those brave Carrancistas to come out and get the gringos bodies if they dared."<sup>23</sup> Haldeen Braddy theorizes that Villa's motives behind such intrigues testify to his willingness to introduce race as an issue. Braddy asserts that Villa "may have hoped to lure the United States south to embroil it with the Carranza regime and thus play off the *gringos* against the *pelones*, Constitutionalist federal police in double vengeance."<sup>24</sup>



Of all the first-hand accounts that came out of Santa Isabel, the narrative of José María Sánchez, a Mexican national employed by the mining company, serves as the most inflammatory concerning racial perspectives. Sánchez explained that after the Villistas looted the coach carrying the Mexicans, he heard Colonel Pablo López remark, "if you want to see some fun, watch us kill these gringos." Sánchez remembers that five Americans made a run toward for the Santa Isabel river and that "some of the [Villistas] drops [sic] to their knees for better aim while others were shouting racial epithets of Death to the gringos!"<sup>25</sup> After the remaining wounded Americans were forced off the train, Sánchez stated that López chose two of his followers to execute the mining men: "This nearly precipitated a fight among the [Villistas] over who should have the privilege of shooting the Americans."<sup>26</sup>

Sánchez's account clearly indicates that race was the discriminating factor in the atrocities. United States foreign relations records also affirm the race issue definitely functioned as a factor in the tragic affair. According to Zach Cobb, the United States customs chief in El Paso, evidence gathered at the scene and collected from "other Americans and other passengers" clearly indicates that López was the Villista commander at Santa Isabel.<sup>27</sup> After his capture by Chihuahuan officials, López admitted his actions and explained his motives. Chihuahua Governor Ignacio Enríquez, reported that López confessed to the atrocities at Santa Isabel and that he "brags of his crimes and says he is sorry that he could not have killed more Americans."<sup>28</sup>

Though first-hand accounts and government records shared in shaping racial attitudes and assumptions, biased newspaper reporting provided further prejudicial fodder. An *El Paso Morning Times* article of January 13, 1916 testified to the fallacies presented as facts by the mainstream press. Contrary to the first-hand narrative reported also in the *Times* the previous day, an article pointed out that Villistas ordered "all gringos to step out" so that they could execute them, while the fifty passengers including "all Mexicans were not molested."<sup>29</sup> Eyewitness reports, however, show that, although they were robbed of their belongings and threatened, only "one Mexican passenger was told [by Villistas] to take off his clothes...and told to march as he was going to be executed."<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the January 13 edition fails to recognize or make the distinction, at least in ethnicity, of the murder of Manuel Bonifacio Romero, an American of Mexican ancestry, who



was the accountant of the Cusi Mining Company. He died at the hands of Villistas as he ran toward the Santa Isabel River.<sup>31</sup> Romero's murder argues against the *Times* article that Mexicans, regardless of nationality, suffered no retribution by the Villistas. The portrait the *Times* paints of Mexican passengers sitting idle while Anglo-Americans endured their fate depicts *Mexicanos* as being indifferent or at worst craven cowards in their reluctance to get involved. In spite of the contrary eyewitness reports of Vásquez, the same edition of the *Times* pointed out that "no attempt was made by any [Mexican] passengers to interfere" as the Americans went down.<sup>32</sup> The newspapers in El Paso made every effort to embellish and aggrandize the racial aspects of the incident. The *Times*, for example, reported that "as each American fell, [Villistas] set upon them like wolves and then took the clothing from their bodies [and] stripped them naked."<sup>33</sup> The *Times* editorials do not agree with the less racially provocative eyewitness narrative of Vásquez, who said that the Americans endured the debasing and forced ordeal of disrobing at the point of a gun. The *Times* also had no problem with condemning the passive actions of Mexican passengers and consequently indicting an entire people, especially those of the El Paso/Juárez region.

The spiraling momentum of racial suspicions and intolerant dispositions continued unabated as the revelations of the butchered bodies, coupled with bureaucratic red tape in recovering the remains of Americans at Santa Isabel, pushed the local border people to an emotional boiling point. William L. Fink, a Cusi mining engineer, stated that "excitement ran high in Chihuahua" when news of the slaughter reached the mine. Fink and seventeen other Americans from Chihuahua City carried out the grisly task of recovering the remains.<sup>34</sup>

Mexican government policy not only hampered American recovery efforts, it did little to improve racial harmony. In accordance with Mexican law, the train that transported the American mining men to Chavara de Baeza, where the massacre took place, could not be moved before the arrival of a Mexican coroner. This delayed the recovery of the bodies by fifteen hours.<sup>35</sup> Fink mentions that the Carranza *federales* stopped the American convoy carrying the recovery team. The Cusi miners engaged the *federales* in "a big argument." Only after harsh sentiments were expressed by both factions was the American party allowed to proceed into the restricted area. They were shadowed by a mili-



tary escort.<sup>36</sup> When the group finally arrived at the scene, night had fallen, making the search for bodies all the more difficult. A witness tells of finding "thirteen of the bodies piled up on each other at the right of the railroad track" and that the Americans "were stacked like cordwood, robbed and denuded."<sup>37</sup> The rescuer recounts that "all the bodies were mutilated horribly by shot after shot having been poured into [the Americans] faces after they had been killed by volleys."<sup>38</sup> It is no wonder that these horrible accounts affected the attitude of the Anglo Americans on the border.

The newspapers in El Paso went to great lengths in reporting the Santa Isabel murders in order to intensify racial feelings in El Paso. One, an *El Paso Morning Times* article, reported on the physical and the emotional condition of three dogs who belonged to the unfortunate Americans. The article tells of the animals being "stabbed with bayonets, kicked and shot at by the Mexican murderers of eighteen Americans."<sup>39</sup> The article expresses regrets that the "[dogs] can't relate the horror they witnessed," however, "the belief of the rescue party is that the dogs resented the mistreatment of Americans by Mexicans."<sup>40</sup>

Despite the shocking narratives and biased reporting, and despite the bureaucratic bungling in the recovery of the dead Americans, some diplomats made a strong effort to diffuse the negative racial undercurrents. In a communique dated January 12, 1916, Eliseo Arredondo, Mexican ambassador to the United States, informed Secretary Lansing that "my Government and myself deeply deplore the dastardly actions [in Santa Isabel] of the Villa forces and that efficient actions will be taken to bring the murderers to justice."<sup>41</sup> Locally, the mood of officials could be described as one of support and assistance during this crisis. In a telegram to Lansing, Customs Chief Cobb explained that he had "just returned from Juárez where a courteous and positive conference" took place, during which Mexican officials "were deeply impressed by the gravity of the situation and show an eagerness to [cooperate]."<sup>42</sup> This spirit of cooperation evinced itself in a conference between Mexican General Gavira and Cobb, after

*Despite the shocking narratives and biased reporting, and despite the bureaucratic bungling in the recovery of the dead Americans, some diplomats made a strong effort to diffuse the negative racial undercurrents.*



which the latter mentions that "Juárez authorities show a desire to please" in regards to securing the safety of the train carrying the dead Americans from Chihuahua to El Paso.<sup>43</sup> Yet, in spite of the diplomatic overtures, other Mexican officials did little to lessen racial friction in the return of the American remains to the United States. For instance, Mexican authorities, shamelessly charged friends and relatives a fee of \$1,280,000 for transporting the remains to El Paso.<sup>44</sup>

In light of these recurring public relations fiascoes, it became increasingly apparent to officials of both nations that the Santa Isabel situation dangerously teetered on an explosion. In a telegram from Lansing to President Carranza, dated January 13, 1916, the Secretary expressed grave concern about a growing resentment, stressing that "the massacre of Americans near Santa Isabel has caused intense excitement." He also expressed his fear "that continuance of this attitude of the public mind may create a grave crisis with far-reaching consequences."<sup>45</sup> His words proved to be prophetic, especially in El Paso.

The "death special" with its crated cargo arrived in the sister cities amidst dubious displays of protocol and suppressed racial sentiments of mutual distrust, quiet indignation, and frazzled nerves. The cadavers in their cheap wooden coffins came into the darkened Juárez depot in the cold morning hours of January 13, 1916. When the train arrived, a "guard from the Juárez garrison stood at attention...and dipped the Mexican flag as the train rolled in."<sup>46</sup> American passengers who accompanied the ghastly cargo agreed that General Jacinto Treviño, Carranza commander of the state of Chihuahua, "cooperated with them to the fullest extent" in the recovery and transport of the remains.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, American distrust grew as it became known that bureaucrats in México wanted to detain the train. Reportedly, a "Mexican judge demanded that the death train be held up...for the opening of all coffins [and] the superficial examination of the bodies" before allowing it across the Rio Grande.<sup>48</sup> American authorities, however, appealed to General Gavira, who intervened by granting a waiver of this Mexican law and thus allowed for the train's expeditious passage.<sup>49</sup> Border officials from both nations met the funeral train in Juárez and accompanied it to the international bridge. The train and its bureaucratic entourage arrived at the Santa Fe railway station at two-thirty in the morning. Upward of three-hundred mourners gathered; however, "there was not a



[border] Mexican to be seen" among the Anglo-American crowd. The *Times* tartly suggested that *Mexicanos*, regardless of nationality, remained objects of derision and were held in utter contempt and consequently were made to feel unwelcome.<sup>50</sup>

As racial tensions increased, border officials made a concerted and last ditch attempt at diffusing the volatile situation. For instance, the *El Paso Herald* reported that Mexican garrison commander Gavira secured permission from the United States government to transport from Juárez to El Paso seven to eight boxcars containing arms and ammunition, for he feared the "possibility of a demonstration among his soldiers upon any [racial] outbreak in El Paso."<sup>51</sup> In Gavira's biography, he mentions that in light of the racial temper "[The] prepared for whatever eventuality, for inasmuch as [local] Villistas were more to be feared and more reactionary than [Anglo-American rioters]" if hostilities broke out in El Paso.<sup>52</sup> General Pershing also began to prepare his troops for civil disturbances. Pershing called his men to general quarters in case "any riot call or outbreak...of an anti-Mexican nature."<sup>53</sup> In the face of such growing racial resentment, El Paso city leaders organized a sweep of formerly politically prominent Mexican nationals. Cobb informed Lansing of the arrest on vagrancy charges of fifty Mexican ex-politicos connected to Villa as a precautionary measure as "[racial] feeling is running very high." The customs chief also mentioned that "sober-minded men are quietly advising against any mistaken [acts] of public expression."<sup>54</sup>

In spite of these precautions, border racial resentment: isolated, seething, and silent, began to show signs of outward violent manifestations. Public demonstration of racial anger showed itself with the discovery of an organized plot to lynch some members of the El Paso Mexican community in retribution for Santa Isabel. The *El Paso Morning Times* reported that "Mexican leaders" who shared in the blame of Santa Isabel, became targets of an Anglo-American lynch mob. The plan was foiled by the El Paso Police Department which uncovered the plot.<sup>55</sup> The Anglo-American "citizens plot" unraveled when friends of one intended Mexican victim "tipped him off" that the lynch mob lay in wait for him at the El Paso Del Norte Hotel.<sup>56</sup> Given the intensity of racial unrest, and the threat of violence against Mexicans and Mexican Americans, anti-Mexican sentiments could hardly be veiled. The presence of Mexicans in public places along the border dropped precipitously. Thus, in view of the mood, the management of a local



hotel "sent home [it's] orchestra of Mexican musicians" whose "presence might be an irritant to some [Anglo American patrons] who might be provoked."<sup>57</sup>

From the strong-arming of Anglo Americans on board a streetcar, to the ultimate outrage of Santa Isabel, and the succeeding arrival of the mutilated handiwork of Mexican Villistas, the racially tense climate, long fermenting but contained, finally burst into full-scale violence in El Paso. Hostilities erupted during the evening of January 13, 1916, following the funerals of two victims of Santa Isabel. Spasmodic street fights broke out around seven o'clock in the downtown area with "Mexicans that had been attacked" being hauled off to the police station along with [Anglo-American] civilians who entered into the disturbances.<sup>58</sup> Bedlam ensued on the El Paso border when two United States soldiers assaulted area Mexicans on a downtown sidewalk. This attack led to a series of saloon fights between soldiers and Mexi-

*The race riot reports in the newspapers tellingly illustrate the Anglo-American mob mentality and ethnic intolerance that tore the twin communities...*

cans.<sup>59</sup> At this juncture, the isolated disorders in downtown El Paso degenerated into a full-blown race riot. An Anglo-American mob of twenty-five men took to the streets. "No Mexican whom they encountered escaped their blows" as they marched toward south El Paso with a cry of "Let's get down and clean [the local Mexican community] out," as Anglo-American bystanders cheered and egged them on.<sup>60</sup> Captain Lee Hall, a police spokesman, issued a statement mentioning that all of a sudden all border "Mexicans were denounced and attacked." The press reported that forty Mexicans had been "pounded up" by the Anglo-American rioters a number which swelled to

fifteen-hundred by night's end.<sup>61</sup> Enlivened by news that the Mexican community of El Paso was taking a beating, Mexican troops in Juárez threatened to storm en masse over the international bridge in a violent response to the Anglo-American rioters. The local press reported that the Mexican garrison wanted to cross the Río Grande when accounts of "rioting and attacks against Mexicans" and rumors of Mexicans being killed by the Anglo-American mob circulated among the troops.<sup>62</sup>

As the mob increased in size and moved toward south El Paso, the police department could exercise little control because the



entire police force consisted of sixty-five officers. In response to this situation, Pershing, with the acquiescence of Lea, dispatched four companies of troops to disperse the demonstrators.<sup>63</sup> Ironically, the Anglo-American soldiers deployed to quell the uprising also "are said to have been conspicuously active in the disturbance." Some soldiers openly admitted that they wanted to come to blows, "in looking for Mexicans...in cleaning up El Paso Street."<sup>64</sup> With the general denouncement of area Mexicans, local authorities encouraged all out-of-town Mexicans to stay out of El Paso. The *New York Times* reported that police reserves went to local hotels "searching out Mexicans and advising their departure."<sup>65</sup>

The race riot reports in the newspapers tellingly illustrate the Anglo-American mob mentality and ethnic intolerance that tore the twin communities; first-hand accounts, however, give intimate insight as to the perceptions of people in explaining the biracial crisis. Tom Lea, Jr.'s childhood recollections, as the son of the former mayor Tom Lea, recalled that the basic mood of the mob could be described as a fevered and intense feeling that "was just against México," taken out on Mexicans living on this side of the border.<sup>66</sup> Lea further remembered that the armed rioters made their way to "Segundo Barrio," the enclave of local Mexicans and Mexican Americans, in order to kick them out.<sup>67</sup>

Hortencia Villegas, a south side resident recalled that Anglo-American racial antipathy manifested itself upon all Mexicans, regardless of gender, age, or nationality. She recollected that on South El Paso Street she witnessed an assault in which Anglo-Americans began beating "all [Mexicans]—the elderly, and the young."<sup>68</sup> Villegas vividly remembered seeing "three to four [Mexicans] both elderly and young women beaten there" sprawled about the sidewalk.<sup>69</sup> She failed to find a valid reason why local Mexicans of the border suffered such harsh treatment by Anglo-Americans, but she determined that retaliation for Santa Isabel provided the only possible underlying motive. Villegas questions "what fault was it of [Mexicans in El Paso] that [Villistas] did what they did" in Santa Isabel? She concluded that Anglo-American rioters "wanted vengeance, they wanted revenge."<sup>70</sup> In contrast to Villegas' perspective, Pershing, in a written memorandum to his superiors, wrote "It did not appear to be the purpose of the [Anglo-American] mob to kill [Mexicans], but the spirit was more that of revelry" in explaining the full-scale race riot in El Paso.<sup>71</sup>



Eyewitness narratives also help explain the far-reaching ramifications of the race war and its end, and how perilously close to an international armed confrontation the bicultural communities had come. Tom Lea, Jr. explains that the mob moved toward Overland Street and South El Paso. As Lea told it, Captain Joe Stowe of the police department and Fire Chief John W. Wray, "faced down the mob" as the gun-brandishing rioters surged forward. The fire chief who had a "firehose [sic] trained on the crowd,...let them have it and it stopped the riot."<sup>72</sup> In all likelihood, Wray prevented the Anglo-American rioters from entering the Mexican section of town and thus averted greater tragedies. As Villegas recalled, local Mexicans in *Segundo Barrio* or the second ward district, "stood ready to meet the Anglo-American threat head-on, armed with clubs and sticks."<sup>73</sup> Pershing gave credit to Mexican government authorities for maintaining order and vigilance when he wrote that "General Gavira has taken strong measures to prevent any move on the part of the Mexicans on his side of the river."<sup>74</sup> Pershing placed El Paso under martial law: a "dead-line was established along Overland Street north of which no Mexican could pass and south of which no [Anglo] American could until things quieted down."<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the most valid comment on the race riots was expressed by Mayor Lea. He believed that "if the [Anglo-American] mob had not been controlled, [rioters] would have killed and burned and massacred the Mexicans in Chihuahuita."<sup>76</sup>

In the daybreak following the racial fracas, an atmosphere of enmity made evident by the militarization of the border city, continued to fester. In the fall-out of the race riots, El Paso remained a city divided by ethnic division in spirit and in body. The local press reported that military policemen stood guard on every corner of Overland Street to "prevent [Anglo-Americans] from entering the southern part of the city, and in keeping Mexicans out of the business and residential districts." Juárez remained a restricted area for El Paso Anglo-Americans as well.<sup>77</sup>

Public sentiment, as expressed in the opinion section of the local press, reveals that hardened racial tensions did not relax quickly. The author of one letter wrote, "There is no doubt that [Anglo-American] honor has been insulted by the Mexicans and [Anglo-Americans] have taken the insults like quaking cowards that Mexicans say we are." Next, the author exhorts "Men of [Anglo] America! Can we stand this any longer?"<sup>78</sup> The same



author mentioned that throughout the [Mexican] Revolution the [American] flag has been dragged through the dust and walked on" and that vile Mexicans have spit upon it."<sup>79</sup> The tone of this letter indicated that racial indignation persisted. Still another wrote that others "who feel as I do, would be pleased to go across the little creek and show the Mexican people that we are not all of the watchful waiting class."<sup>80</sup> The writer went on to mention that all Mexicans, regardless of nationality, revel in committing heinous acts of cold-blooded murder. He conjectured that these "[Mexicans] who kill for amusement" also come across the border and find work locally because El Paso pays "Mexican wages."<sup>81</sup> Letters like these testify to the kind of ethnic perceptions that pervaded El Paso.

Contrary to general public opinion, the *El Paso Herald* in its editorial, took a conciliatory tone toward México and border area Mexicans, but soft-pedaled their condemnation of the actions of Anglo-Americans in their race riot role. The *Herald* praised Gavira for his sagacity in sending to El Paso the boxcar of munitions as a precautionary measure in the midst of an "interracial crisis, "thus proving his "friendly feeling and complete American goodwill."<sup>82</sup> The same editorial, in apologetic fashion, criticized Anglo-Americans involved in the race war. The *Herald* lamented that the race riots "will not restore the dead or punish the guilty" but rather will serve to "intensify the international and interracial" feeling against Anglo-Americans still in México.<sup>83</sup> The editorial advised citizens to "be careful in thinking bad things of all Mexicans because of [Santa Isabel]...the situation does not yet call for the accusing of a whole people, or chastising of a whole nation."<sup>84</sup>

In spite of these efforts to placate the racial hostilities, bi-racial acts of violence and discriminatory policies precluded the relaxation of tensions. The issue of race appeared to be the motive behind the assault of an Anglo El Pasoan just two days after the riots. The local paper reported that C. J. Anstand was attacked by two area Mexicans near south El Paso. One of the Mexicans brandished a knife, but a provost guard came upon the scene and subdued the "armed Mexican." The arrest of both perpetrators followed.<sup>85</sup> Though the attack could easily have been dismissed as random, further evidence suggests the presence of more sinister elements. The *El Paso Morning Times* reported that several disturbances in the community of Fort Hancock near El Paso broke out between Anglo-Americans and area Mexicans which



the paper attributed to a wave of anti-Anglo Americanism.<sup>86</sup> The paper also related that Mexicans fired shots from the Juárez side of the river into a residential area in the eastern part of El Paso, which possibly served as an indicator of the existence of tensions.<sup>87</sup> Two days after this incident, the Santa Fe bridge border station came under fire, with the shots coming from the Mexican side. When a squad of El Paso police officers arrived to assess the situation, Mexican government officials denied the involvement of any of its *soldados* and the sniper fire.<sup>88</sup>

In this tense climate, some Americans used United States immigration policies and gunplay at the border to promote the continuance of ethnic friction. With reports of a typhus epidemic in Juárez, United States customs officers issued orders to stop Mexican refugees, especially those carrying old clothes and rags, from crossing the border. Officers opened fire on some Mexicans lugging "several large bundles of rags" but no injuries occurred.<sup>89</sup> A shooting with more serious implications occurred at the international bridge on January 21, 1916, when two Anglo-American soldiers opened fire on armed Mexican soldiers who ventured onto United States soil. The *Times* related that American soldiers shot at a pair of Mexican *soldados*, who attempted to recover their mounts which had strayed across the river. The "Mexicans did not return fire" but "soldier guards on both sides of the river were doubled" as tensions increased.<sup>90</sup> Race relations did not fare any better at the border checkpoint when Mexicans and Mexican Americans attempted legal entry into the United States. In their efforts to safeguard against the spread of highly contagious diseases, border officers mandated that "no [Mexicans] from the southern districts of México will be permitted to enter [El Paso] unless [they] have been fumigated" or deloused.<sup>91</sup> Apparently, this policy, and the arbitrary abuses that it invited, angered and upset Juárez officials, especially Gavira. He declared that United States customs "authorities had been discourteous many times to [the Mexican community]," and continued, "if [Mexicans] are to be denied entrance to El Paso, I shall see that the same ban is placed on [Anglo] Americans who wish to come to Juárez."<sup>92</sup> In gauging the general conditions of the border communities in the wake of the riots, Pershing gave a grim but accurate appraisal of the racial atmosphere. In a communique, Pershing commented that although excitement over the Santa Isabel victims had subsided, "an undercurrent of bitter resentment that might easily lead to...violence



against individual [area] Mexicans" continued to exist.<sup>93</sup> Pershing also concluded that "the lawless bandit class of Mexicans along the border without doubt dislike [Anglo] Americans intensely."<sup>94</sup>

Racial hysteria, when it involved murderous acts and the issues of race, intensified the ethnic tensions of the sister city residents. The murder of Bert Akers, an Anglo-American rancher, by Mexican American cattle thieves stirred rancor throughout El Paso. The *El Paso Morning Times*, whose editors only too willingly pandered to the racial sensitivities of white El Paso, related that two Mexican Americans murdered Akers as he attempted to reclaim his stolen cattle in San Lorenzo, an outlying community of Ciudad Juárez.<sup>95</sup> Cobb expressed concerns over the murder and how the race question would be played up in the press. The customs chief commented that "under such trying [racial] conditions inflammatory articles" by the *El Paso Morning Times* and the *El Paso Herald* "served to keep alive and intensify race feeling."<sup>96</sup> Cobb also mentioned that the provocative articles had a disquieting impact on the local Anglo-American citizenry. The articles, he remarked, have "served to inflame feeling,...where there is talk, and, I fear, the probability of lynching suspected Mexicans" involved in the Akers affair.<sup>97</sup> In any event, there existed lingering suspicion that Bernardo Durán, a local Ysleta resident of many years, was the triggerman behind the murder of Akers. Douglas Downs, an eyewitness who accompanied Akers into México, declared publicly that "[he] was convinced that [Bernardo Durán] was not the man who pursued,... and shot at [him] and killed Akers."<sup>98</sup> Allegedly, the brothers Bernardo and Federico Durán, confessed to the crime and thus an execution by firing squad would take place at six o'clock on the morning on January 23, 1916 at the Juárez cemetery.<sup>99</sup>

In the morose atmosphere at the Juárez *cementerio*, the condemned would evidently become the latest casualties of the intense racial climate that strangled the border community. As the men valiantly faced the firing squad, the Durán brothers, in utter defiance, hurled racial epithets at the Anglo-American spectators who had come to witness the morbid spectacle. The brothers could be heard to yell out, "Watch and see how Mexicans die, you [gringo] American...!"<sup>100</sup> As the *hermanos* Durán awaited their fate, Bernardo remarked, in anger, to a *Times* correspondent, "We are dying for you [Anglo] Americans"; however, Bernardo admitted, "he shot the American because [Akers] was



trying to force entrance into my home." In Durán's eyes he killed "defending his rights as any man would have done."<sup>101</sup> Cobb, who attended, lamented that the morose event should bring such a number of Anglo-American onlookers. He complained that the attendance of "curiosity seeking [Anglo] Americans" at the twin execution of the Mexican Americans "was unfortunate, and the portrayal of the scene before the wrought up people more unfortunate."<sup>102</sup> For Cobb, the macabre mood of the crowd that gathered at the cemetery went beyond that of morbid curiosity. In his opinion, "the race feeling was apparent, and the feeling which we experienced was creepy."<sup>103</sup> Just before his execution, Bernardo Durán proclaimed the innocence of his brother and condemned the racist mind-set of Anglo Americans. In Bernardo's final remarks he insisted "My brother is entirely innocent," but bemoaned that "Mexican government officials] are going to kill him too." Durán ended by saying that his brother Federico was "being sacrificed to your [Anglo] American public opinion," which fittingly characterizes the color-conscious nature of the times.<sup>104</sup>

In the totality of the Mexican Revolution, the Santa Isabel episode and the sequence of related events will be etched in history as a low point in binational and border race relations. From the events in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, to the depredations of Santa Isabel and the subsequent denouncement of the entire Mexican populace, the issue of racial bigotry exposed its baneful and repulsive presence. In the era of the Revolution, Santa Isabel stands as a tragic testament to the racist atmosphere that polluted the perceptions of people on both sides of the border. It was in this climate of contaminated ethnic conceptions that Santa Isabel and the related events originated. It is easy to see that the Santa Isabel episode became the event that played a vital part in the exposure of the ethnic intolerance of the era and that raised unleashed racial irritabilities in the restless border cities of the Rio Grande.

---

**RAUL R. REYES** attended the University of Texas at El Paso where he recently completed his studies. He graduated in May of 1997 with top honors while acquiring his Master of Arts degree in history. In 1995 he earned his Bachelor of Arts in history graduating *cum laude* at UTEP. Additionally he received his Associate of Arts in 1993 at El Paso Community College finishing with a cumulative GPA of 4.0. He has live in El Paso most of his life while sharing many happy and sad moments with the former Margarita Silva, his wife of seventeen years, and their daughter Brooke. He dedicated this humble endeavor to his twelve-year-old son Clifford Diego Reyes, who unexpectedly passed away on July 4, 1995.



## NOTES

1. Ricardo Romo, *History of a Barrio: East Los Angeles*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 90.
2. *El Paso Morning Times*, 22 December 1915.
3. *Ibid*
4. *Ibid.*, 1.
5. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1915, p. 821.
6. *El Paso Morning Times*, 24 December 1915.
7. *El Paso Morning Times*, 29 December 1915.
8. *Papers Relating to the Department of State in Mexico, 1910-29, Correspondence on Border Conditions*, December 28, 1915, File 812.00/17024, Microcopy 274, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
9. Gabriel Gavira, *General de brigade Gabriel Gavira su actuacion politico militar revolucionaria*, (Mexico City, Mexico: By the author, 1933), 162.
10. *El Paso Morning Times*, 30 December 1915.
11. *El Paso Morning Times*, 12 January 1916.
12. *El Paso Herald*, 6 January 1916.
13. *El Paso Morning Times*, 28 January 1916.
14. *El Paso Herald*, 7 January 1916.
15. *Ibid*.
16. Gabriel Gavira, *General de brigade Gabriel Gavira su actuacion politico militar revolucionaria*, (Mexico City, Mexico.: By the author, 1933), 167.
17. *Ibid*.
18. Thelma Cox Knoles and Jessie Peterson, *Pancho Villa Intimate Recollections by People Who Knew Him* (New York: Hastings House, 1977), 55.
19. *Ibid*.
20. *El Paso Morning Times*, 12 January 1916; *El Paso Morning Times*, 13 January 1916.
21. *El Paso Morning Times*, 13 January 1916.
22. *Ibid*.
23. *Ibid*.
24. Haldeen Braddy, *Pancho Villa at Columbus the Raid of 1916*, (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1965), 36.
25. "The Mexican Murders," *The Literary Digest* 22 (January 1916): 157.
26. *Ibid*.
27. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1915, p. 652.
28. *El Paso Herald*, 4 March 1916.
29. *El Paso Morning Times*, 12 January 1916.
30. *El Paso Morning Times*, 13 January 1916.
31. *El Paso Morning Times*, 13 January 1916; *El Paso Morning Times*, 14, 1916.
32. *El Paso Morning Times*, 14 January 1916.
33. *Ibid*.
34. Thelma Cox Knoles and Jessie Peterson, *Pancho Villa Intimate Recollections of People Who Knew Him* (New York: Hastings House, 1977), 56.
35. Ernest Otto Schuster, *Pancho Villa's Shadow: the True Story of Mexico's Robin Hood* (New York: Exposition Press, 1947), 200-201.

36. Thelma Cox Knoles and Jessie Peterson, Pancho Villa Intimate Recollections of People Who Knew Him (New York: Hastings House, 1977), 56.
37. El Paso Herald, 13 January 1916.
38. Ibid.
39. El Paso Morning Times, 17 January 1916.
40. Ibid.
41. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, p. 654.
42. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, p. 652.
43. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, p. 655.
44. Alberto Salinas Carranza, La expedicion punitiva (Mexico City: Edicion Botas, 1936) 83; Haldeen Braddy, The Paradox of Pancho Villa, (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1978), 46.
45. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915, p. 656.
46. El Paso Morning Times, 13 January 1916.
47. Ibid.
48. El Paso Herald, 13 January 1916.
49. Ibid.
50. El Paso Morning Times, 13 January 1916.
51. El Paso Herald, 13 January 1916.
52. Gabriel Gavira, General de brigade Gabriel Gavira su actuacion politico militar revolucionario (Mexico City, Mexico: By the author, 1933), 166.
53. El Paso Herald, 13 January 1916.
54. Papers Relating to the Department of State in Mexico, 1910-29, Correspondence on Border Conditions, January 13, 1916, File 812.00/17090, Microcopy 274, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
55. El Paso Morning Times, 13 January 1916.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. El Paso Herald, 14 January 1916.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. El Paso Morning Times, 14 January 1916.
62. El Paso Herald, 14 January 1916.
63. El Paso Morning Times, 14 January 1916.
64. El Paso Morning Times, 14 January 1916; New York Times, 14 January 1916.
65. New York Times, 14 January 1916.
66. Tom Lea Jr, interview by Adair Margo, UTEP Institute of Oral History, (May, 1993-July, 1994), transcript 800, p. 45
67. Ibid.
68. Hortencia Villegas, interview by Oscar J. Martinez, UTEP Institute of Oral History, (February, 1976), transcript 235, p. 14.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Papers Relating to the Department of State in Mexico, 1910-29, Report of Border Conditions, week ending January 15, 1916, File 812.00/17401, Microcopy 274, National Archives, Washington, D.C.



72. Tom Lea Jr, interview by Adair Margo, UTEP Institute of Oral History, (May, 1993-July, 1994), transcript 800, p. 42.
73. Hortencia Villegas, interview by Oscar J. Martinez, UTEP Institute of Oral History, (February, 1976), transcript 235, p. 15.
74. Papers Relating to the Department of State in Mexico, 1910-29, Report on Border Conditions week ending January 15, 1916, File 812.00/17401, Microcopy 274, National Archives, Washington D.C.
75. Thelma Cox Knoles and Jessie Peterson, Pancho Villa Intimate Recollections of People Who Knew Him (New York: Hastings House, 1977), 57.
76. Mardee de Wetter, Revolutionary El Paso, 1910-1917, (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at El Paso, 1946), 142.
77. El Paso Herald, 15 January 1916.
78. El Paso Herald, 14 January 1916.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. El Paso Morning Times, 15, January 1916.
86. El Paso Morning Times, 17 January 1916.
87. Ibid.
88. El Paso Morning Times, 19 January 1916.
89. El Paso Morning Times, 22 January 1916.
90. Ibid.
91. El Paso Morning Times, 3 March 1916
92. El Paso Morning Times, 9 March 1916.
93. Papers Relating to the Department of State in Mexico, 1910-29, Report on Border Conditions, week ending February 1, 1916, File 812.00/17193, Microcopy 274, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
94. Ibid.
95. El Paso Morning Times, 22 January 1916.
96. Papers Relating to the Department of State in Mexico, 1910-29, Correspondence on Border Conditions, January 29, 1916, File 812.00/17193, Microcopy 274, National Archives, Washington D.C.
97. Ibid.
98. El Paso Morning Times, 23 January 1916.
99. Ibid.
100. El Paso Morning Times, 24 January 1916.
101. Ibid.
102. Papers Relating to the Department of State in Mexico, 1910-29, Correspondence on Border Conditions, January 24, 1916, File 812.00/17193, Microcopy 274, National Archives, Washington, D. C.
103. Ibid.
104. El Paso Morning Times, 24 January 1916.

## **Business/Professional Members**

THE EL PASO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**ADOLPH'S EATS & DRINKS**  
1201 Airway Blvd.

**AMERICAN FINANCE &  
INVESTMENT COMPANY, INC.**  
1201 E. Yandell

**AMIGO PRINTING**  
5738 Trowbridge

**DUANE A. BAKER, ATTORNEY**  
303 Texas, Suite #1400

**BANK OF THE WEST**  
500 North Mesa

**BOOKS AT THE PASS  
OF THE NORTH**  
*(Out-of-Print Scarce and Rare  
Books on Texas & the Southwest)*  
P.O. Box 4904, 79914

**BROWN, ALCANTAR & BROWN**  
9630 Plaza Circle

**SONNY BROWN & ASSOCIATES**  
200 Bartlett

**C & L PLUMBING**  
4300 Rosa

**CHARLOTTE'S INC.**  
5411 North Mesa

**CONTINENTAL  
NATIONAL BANK**  
601 North Mesa

**CREATIVE STAFFING  
SOLUTIONS**  
1533 N. Lee Trevino, Suite B-2

**CURREY, ADKINS,  
COOK & CO.**  
6633 North Mesa, Suite 605

**DAVE'S LOAN COMPANY**  
216 South El Paso

**DIAMOND, RASH, GORDON  
& JACKSON, P.C.**  
300 E. Main, 7th Floor

**DISCOVER EL PASO  
ASSOCIATION, INC.**  
3503 Volcanic

**EL PASO HEART CLINIC**  
1300 Murchison, Suite 200

**EL PASO NATURAL  
GAS COMPANY**  
100 North Stanton

**EL PASO RADIOLOGY**  
444 Executive Center Blvd.

**EL PASO SADDLEBLANKET**  
601 N. Oregon

**FAUGHT & ASSOCIATES, INC.**  
433 Executive Center Boulevard

**FUTRELL (KASTER-MAXON &  
FUTRELL) FUNERAL HOME**  
8817 Dyer Street

**GADDY CONSTRUCTION CO.**  
5875 Cromo Drive, Suite 100

**GAIL DARLING  
TEMPORARIES**  
4150 Rio Bravo, No. 100

**DR. C.A. GUNTER, P.A.**  
2311 N. Mesa, Suite B

**HANDGARDS, INC.**  
901 Hawkins Blvd.

**INTERNATIONAL DATA, LLC**  
6633 N. Mesa, Suite 601

**JAXON'S RESTAURANTS**  
6927 North Mesa, Suite C



SYLVIA J. KELLEY  
FINANCIAL SERVICES  
5959 Gateway West, Suite 250

LAWYERS TITLE  
OF EL PASO  
301 E. Yandell

LIFT TRUCK SERVICES  
10016 Odessa

DENISE K. MANKIN  
Freelance Graphic Artist  
5459 Soledad Lane

MARTIN FUNERAL  
HOME, INC.  
Box 3895, El Paso, TX 79903

MITHOFF ADVERTISING, INC.  
4105 Rio Bravo

MOORE NORDELL KROEGER  
ARCHITECTS, INC.  
1301 North Oregon, Suite 100

MORENO & FRY,  
ATTORNEYS-AT-LAW  
701 Magoffin Ave.

NORWEST BANK OF EL PASO  
Box 1072, El Paso, TX 79958

PEPSI-COLA BOTTLING CO.  
10841 Pellicano

PHELPS DODGE  
REFINING CORP.  
Box 20001, El Paso, TX 79998

SAHARA SPORTSWEAR, INC.  
341 Artcraft

SANDERS, WINGO, GALVIN &  
MORTON ADVERTISING, INC.  
4050 Rio Bravo, Suite 230

SCOTT, HULSE, MARSHALL,  
FEUILLE, FINGER AND  
THURMOND  
11th Fl., Texas Commerce Bank

W. SILVER RECYCLING  
76 Williams

STUDDARD & MELBY  
415 N. Mesa, Third Floor

SUN TRAVEL, INC.  
3100 North Mesa, Suite B

SUNWEST BANK  
416 North Stanton

DR. RICHARD  
THOMPSON, P.A.  
1501 Arizona, Suite 8B

TONY LAMA  
1137 Tony Lama St.

TRES MARIPOSAS  
5857 N. Mesa

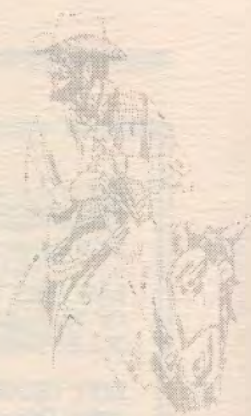
TRI-STATE MEDIA  
COMPANY, INC.  
801 North Oregon

VALLEY FEED  
7911 North Loop

DR. RICHARD WESTBROOK  
2150 Trawood, Suite A150

YSLETA INDEPENDENT  
SCHOOL DISTRICT  
9600 Sims





# The Río Grande: Nile of America

By Paxton P. Price

**D**uring the decades following the Civil War, settlers from beyond the Missouri River poured into the new western states looking for new farm lands and other opportunities for livelihood. The new mountainous western states and territories offered scant farm acreage, and that which was available was suitable only when irrigated. The continuing water streams that fed irrigation ditches in the West very often poured through rocky canyons, by-passing irrigable land.

This perplexing situation continued to exist, a constant concern for Congress. The Department of the Interior also had to wrestle with the issue of arid land for which there were no new answers in Washington. Various solutions were advanced but abandoned. Pressure for a solution was not yet strong enough in the early years of the open West since the population was sparsely distributed.

The Mesilla Valley in New Mexico's Doña Ana County was one place where population had increased enough in the 1880's to stimulate a trial solution to this problem. And the Río Grande conveniently coursed through the center of it.

Because of his health, John Bryan Bowman<sup>1</sup> age sixty-three, was a retiree living at Captain Jack Martin's well on the Jornada Del Muerto. The Jornada, of course, is an infamous ninety mile stretch of waterless desert, thirty miles wide, above the Mesilla Valley. At that time, in 1887, it was traversed only by an old dirt road to Santa Fe and the paralleling Santa Fe Railroad track.

Bowman was familiar with the West and its problem of arid land. He was then living in the midst of such a piece of it.



He conceived the astonishing idea of irrigating the entire length of the Jornada. There certainly was no better place for such a wild scheme.

"General" J. B. Bowman, with the support and collaboration of Simon B. Newcomb, a Las Cruces lawyer, began to promote a proposal to divert water from the Rio Grande into a gigantic irrigation canal.

It could be constructed across the length of the Jornada and beyond, to a point below El Paso, where it would rejoin the river. The canal, beginning just below Socorro, would have a total length of two hundred miles and would supply irrigation water for the arid Jornada land. By using reservoirs and ditches as part of the entire system, the central canal had to be only eighty feet wide and ten feet deep. Where that much water was to be found was not specified. Bowman used effusive terms in describing the project, claiming "it will make the

Jornada rich and prosperous." Obviously the project, estimated to cost fifteen million dollars, required a guarantor with more resources than were available in the county, or for that matter, in the territory. In order to advance the idea in higher government circles, Bowman and Newcomb realized that they needed the backing of an interested group of businessmen in the area to give it more than singular legitimacy. Hence, in January 1888, they called a meeting of leaders in El Paso, including the mayor, in order to explain their ideas. They also intended to gather financial backing to take the proposal to Washington, where federal authority and aid would be requested. They generated a great deal of enthusiasm for their proposal by predicting that the scheme would transform the Rio Grande into the "Nile of America." Even so, no El Paso financial pledges were received at that time. It was not explained how adding a channel which would pass over a desert would create another Nile, since the amount of water for both courses would not be increased!

Bowman's next appeal was made in Las Cruces, where endorsement of his scheme was more forthcoming and fervent. Business and political leaders in the county seat backed their enthu-

*In order to advance the idea in higher government circles, Bowman and Newcomb realized that they needed the backing of an interested group of businessmen in the area to give it more than singular legitimacy.*



siasm with hundred dollar subscriptions to a newly formed committee. This committee was to arrange for a survey focusing on the proposal and to pay the expenses of a delegation to Washington. Local real estate firms immediately took front page ads in the local papers to promote the idea and, incidentally, to promote land sales in the Mesilla Valley. Several thousand dollars were subscribed by residents of Las Cruces. The committee authorized "General" Bowman to be their lobbyist in Washington and to this end they apportioned some of their subscription money. He left for the national capital in February, 1888.

Bowman lost no time in placing the scheme before Congress and a month later reported to his supporters in Las Cruces that congressmen were in favor of the canal. Bills proposing the "Jornada and El Paso Reservoir and Canal Company" had been introduced by New Mexico delegate Antonio Joseph and by Senator Henry M. Teller from Colorado. The measure authorized creation of a corporation with the purpose of "promoting agriculture, horticulture, stock raising and transportation, for milling and for domestic use." It authorized a stock issue of ten million dollars. Another twenty-five thousand dollars was authorized for surveys. The bill, with amendments, was recommended for passage by the House Committee on Agriculture but it was flawed by a minority dissenting report. The committee's favorable report pointed-out that the lands contained in the Jornada del Muerto were "utterly worthless in their present condition, and can have no value until provision is made for their irrigation....(They are uninhabitable...and will never be settled...."<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Bowman was lobbying in Washington and, at one point while in New York, he wrote to his friends in the Valley asking local citizens to support his Jornada Canal scheme when the time came for a visit from the Senate Agriculture Committee. While Bowman was in Washington, a new Mesilla Valley development created a threat to the success of the Jornada scheme, or so he thought. Irrigation was already in use in the Rio Grande's Mesilla Valley, having been developed early when farms and vineyards were established. Those early *acequias* were community ditches created and supported by farmers who were served by their waters. But more tillable land was being cultivated and more ditches within the reach of the Rio Grande were immediately needed. This led to the formation of a new organization, the Fort Selden Canal Company, which was amply financed by subscrip-



tions from prospective users and interested investors. The new company proceeded with the required ditching during 1889. The project plan was to situate the ditch-head on the Rio Grande above Fort Selden. That design necessitated the passage of a ditch through the Fort Selden Reservation, which required a license from the War Department. This was duly granted.

Alerted to this new competitive move, "General" Bowman, who was in Washington, tried to get the War Department to cancel that newly granted license. He contended that his Jornada Canal proposition was pending in Congress and the Fort Selden Canal would diminish its effect. A temporary injunction was issued and all work on the Fort Selden Canal was stopped. This move by Bowman indicated that he viewed his canal scheme to be a significant re-routing of the Rio Grande.

This turn of events immediately stimulated considerable local public opinion for and against both canal propositions. Old *acequia* operators feared the new Fort Selden Canal would be a possible threat to their required water supply from the river. The Fort Selden Canal supporters trumpeted the need for more water and ditches in the Valley and, in addition, were less than confident about the ultimate realization of the Jornada Canal project. The *Rio Grande Republican* editorialized that because the Jornada Canal proposition would take too long to be realized, the *Republican* would lend its supporting voice to the urgent operation needs of the Fort Selden Canal Company. That paper, in its January 25, 1890 issue, went on to criticize Bowman for squelching the Fort Selden Canal operation by calling him "a professional lobbyist" and a "scheming speculator." Local financial supporters of Bowman's idea were called "suckers."

This turmoil over competing canal projects brought the United States Army into the picture. The Army was ordered to conduct an investigation into the Fort Selden canal situation. Special Agent D. A. Bowman, from the Department of the Interior, was sent to Fort Selden to hold a hearing on the relative merits of that proposal and the possible effect on Fort Selden. After hearing

*This turn of events immediately stimulated considerable local public opinion for and against both canal propositions....*

*This turmoil over competing canal projects brought the United States Army into the picture.*



the testimony, he stated that work on the new canal, as started, should proceed; that additional water was clearly needed; and that *acequia* supporters had unsubstantiated fears.

Although the license to cross the Fort Selden Reservation was restored and construction was resumed, it was stopped again less than a month later on orders from the United States Land Office. In the meantime, Fort Selden was abandoned by the Army in 1890 and the site was transferred to the Department of

*Although the license to cross the Fort Selden Reservation was restored and construction was resumed, it was stopped again less than a month later on orders from the United States Land Office.*

the Interior. Under that change of ownership, the license of the Fort Selden Canal Company was again restored, but capital for the company diminished, and work on the canal stopped by the end of March.

By this time, Las Cruces had learned that New Mexico's delegate to Congress, the Honorable Anthony Joseph, had elected to support "General" Bowman's *Jornada Del Muerto* Canal scheme. The editor of the *Rio Grande Republican* published an appeal to Joseph,<sup>3</sup> who, he thought, was of the same mind as Bowman, to desist in his opposition to the Fort Selden Irrigation Ditch and Canal Company with the

claim that its project would benefit the landowners in the Mesilla Valley. Since it was locally conceived and financed, it is difficult to understand why the paper felt compelled to criticize Joseph for his Washington attitude toward the Fort Selden Ditch because it was not a Congressional concern. No mention was made of Joseph's attitude toward Bowman's proposal.

The arguments about canal schemes provoked other ditch arguments at the local level. The *acequia* operators of the Las Cruces and Mesilla ditch systems began to think of enjoining the Colorado (Rodey) *acequia* operators, to the west of Rincon, to stop taking so much water out of the Rio Grande because it so diminished the amount available for their systems farther south. This brouhaha among the ditchers expanded further. The Doña Ana *acequia* operators, who were first in the Valley, began to think of enjoining the Las Cruces and Mesilla systems to cease operations because their ditch heads were located above the Doña Ana ditch head.<sup>4</sup>



If the several federal executive departments, and Congressional and local actions were not enough to settle the matters of irrigation, ditches, and canals in the Mesilla Valley, there was soon added another authoritarian voice. This one added a new note. Major John Wesley Powell, Director of the United States Geological Survey, reported on the Fort Selden Canal Company plan. The central element of his thinking about solving the needs for irrigation waters was to place a dam on the Rio Grande which would hold the river waters in reservoirs.<sup>6</sup> He concluded that the Fort Selden Canal project would be a great benefit to the Valley although its function would be limited to the farming season. Even so, he favored it, saying that the old *acequia* system wasted water that clearly was needed by others. Nevertheless, Powell made a strong plea on behalf of the needs of small landowners who, he said, should not be excluded by the large property ditch operators. All the new demands for additional ditches and water up and down the Rio Grande led Powell to predict that there would be less water for El Paso and Mexico in the future unless reservoirs were built on the river north of the Mesilla Valley. That proved to be true.

As the canal arguments waxed hot, "General" Bowman came in for more attention in the valley even though little was happening to his bills in Washington. A letter was published in the *Rio Grande Republican* for March 8, 1890 defaming the "General." The letter was written by a man in Washington by the name of Burr who said that he secured his information from a member of the United States Ute Commission of 1880-1881 on which Bowman had also served. Burr relayed the reported claim that Bowman was a drunk, a gambler, a bad influence on the Ute Indians, and had been dropped as a commission member.

That letter created a flurry of letters which were all printed in the Las Cruces paper. F. W. Smith of Las Cruces, Secretary of the Jornada and El Paso Canal and Reservoir Company, wrote a letter trying to clarify Bowman's authority in Washington. He remarked also on the veracity of Martin Lohman when he reported on the content of resolutions adopted by the local Jornada Canal Committee. "General" Bowman responded to the letter from Burr and that from F. W. Smith with one of his own. He claimed they both contained falsehoods: that he had been appointed General Manager for the Canal Company by its "contributing" members and not by an executive committee, as claimed by Smith.



Three months after he wrote the first Bowman-condemning letter, Burr in Washington, wrote to "General" Bowman confessing that he was wrong and had been misled, and that his letter containing allegations against Bowman was false and malicious in purpose. He apologized to Bowman and wanted to make amends by disclosing his letter of apology to the public. Another letter sent to Bowman from Otto Mears of Denver was published. Mears had been associated with Bowman on the Ute Commission and he refuted all of Burr's original derogatory report of Bowman's character and performance and gave contradicting and complimentary information about Bowman. Finally, Burr admitted that lawyer S. H. H. Llewellyn of Las Cruces, stock agent for the Santa Fe Railroad, had persuaded him to write the first false letter with the intent of discrediting Bowman.

Thus did "General" Bowman clear the attempted smear on his personage, but the *Rio Grande Republican*, opposed to him and his scheme, endeavored to find holes in the published denials of Bowman's bad character.

In the meantime, Congress had passed a new law that represented Powell's Geological Survey ideas and plans for creating irrigation facilities in the Southwest. A clause in the 1888 Act would have reserved from sale by the United States government those irrigable lands not yet occupied, as well as sites where dams and reservoirs could be located. They would be reserved until Powell's Geological Survey office had time to survey all of them in order to fit them all into the master plan. When this reservation became known, it created a storm of opposition in New Mexico based on the belief that the required survey would take too much time to complete, and that during that time new settlements and the creation of new irrigation canals which were urgently needed would be prevented. Territorial political leaders published in the various Territorial newspapers a long resolution containing bitter and indignant complaints against the Act showing that there were several reasons why Powell's plan would not benefit the West. The arguments against the law burned so hot that the editor of the *United States Land Register* in Las Cruces was inspired to write an open letter to his Congressional delegate claiming that dire circumstances would ensue from execution of the act. He finally called for repeal of the offensive and crippling clauses.



Evidently, Congress heard enough of these complaints to believe the critics and, after the Land Office declared that 183 cases of land settlement would be affected in Doña Ana County alone,<sup>7</sup> it repealed the offensive section of the law.

The canal interests and ditch arguments subsided and "General" Bowman stayed in the East keeping an eye on the progress through Congress made by his Jornada Canal bill. He shuttled between New York and Washington, occasionally writing letters to New Mexico supporters and friends including Governor L. Bradford Prince. His bill eventually died because of local opposition and for failure of passage in the 50th Congress. It went no further than introduction in the 51st Congress. "General" John Bryan Bowman died on September 22, 1891 and was buried in his home state of Kentucky. He had dedicated himself to education in his native state and to the new public issue of reclamation of arid land in New Mexico.

---

**PAXTON PRICE**, author of the recently published *Pioneers of the Mesilla Valley*, is a retired executive and Army officer. He spent his boyhood in Doña Ana County, attending public schools there. He attended New Mexico Military Institute and graduated from George Peabody College in Tennessee. Price, who now resides in Las Vegas, New Mexico, completed his graduate work at Columbia University.

#### NOTES

1. John Bryan Bowman, born in Kentucky on October 16, 1824, had come to the West for his health in 1879. Bowman was a graduate of Bacon College in Kentucky and afterward studied law. He was married but childless. In Kentucky his fame was built on being the instigator in the founding of the University of Kentucky. He served that university as a regent and administrator for fourteen years. He was not a "General."
2. 50th Congress, 2nd Session, House of Representatives, Report Number 3934, p. 1-2.
3. *Rio Grande Republican*, January 18, 1890
4. *Rio Grande Republican*, February 15, 1890.
5. *Rio Grande Republican*, March 1, 1890.
6. *Rio Grande Republican*, July 26, 1890
7. *Rio Grande Republican*, August 23, 1890.

## Editor's Note

The Frank W. Gorman Memorial Historical Essay Contest is sponsored annually by the Society. It began in 1961, with the prizes donated by Frank W. Gorman. He funded the contest until his death in 1974. The Gormans have continued their support for the contest, which is open to seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. Cash awards are given for the top three essays.

This year's winners were announced at the Society's quarterly meeting on May 18, 1997. Joshua Dawson, a seventh grade student from Parkland Middle School, won first prize; Josey Pickett, an eighth grader from St. Raphael's School, took second place; and José Martinez, an eighth grade student from Guillen Middle School, earned third prize.

The articles are printed to illustrate the quality of the students' abilities and to show, historically, the difference of interests and lifestyles between young persons and their ancestors.





• Historical Essay Contest •  
First Place



## Papa and Me

By Joshua Dawson

I love Sega Saturn. Papa loves trains.

I love monster trucks. Papa loves trolleys. I mean real trolleys – streetcars – not those “wannabes” which are really just buses in disguise.

We both love salsa.

When I stop to think about it, we are different in a hundred ways and the same in a hundred ways.

What probably makes us different was the world around us when we were growing up.

He had downtown, I have the mall.

He had dime comic books, I have collector comics at \$4.95.

He had a pinball machine at the drugstore, I have virtual reality.

I think of Papa as my own personal time machine to let me see what it was like to grow up in the forties and the fifties. Even if I am a “nineties kind of guy,” I would like to know what it was like to buy a nickel coke in a real glass bottle and get a chocolate malted for a quarter.

Papa grew up in Las Cruces where his dad had a Chevron gas station. He was pumping gas and washing windshields by fourteen. He told me his parents would let him, at the tender age of only eleven or twelve, ride the Parrish Stage Lines bus to El Paso by himself where he would spend the day walking around downtown. Papa says there used to be a lot more to do downtown than there is now. To me, to go downtown now and spend the day would seem like major boredom.

But Papa had lots to do downtown. He would watch the passenger trains come and go at the Union Depot. What cool names they had: The Sunset Limited, The Golden State, The Argonaut, The Imperial, The Westerner, and The Texas Eagle. It was hard to see the trains because, unless he wasn't looking, you had to have a ticket to get by the gateman, and the outside fence was too tall to see over. In those days there were many trains every day, now there is one and only three times a week.

He would go to the railroad offices in the old office buildings and collect timetables. He enjoyed going down to San Antonio Street to watch the big green and yellow streetcars turn the corner at San Antonio Street, clanging and squealing on their way to Mexico.

He loved to wander around the big five and ten cent stores like S.H. Kress and Newberry's where he could get a grilled cheese sandwich and a cherry coke at the lunch counter. Talking about five and ten, what could you buy there for five or ten cents? After lunch he would go to the Plaza Theater for movies. He says it made the mall movies look like cracker boxes. It had two balconies, a great big huge auditorium with trees on the side and twinkling stars in the ceiling.

As you can see, there was a lot to do back then, but now, there is hardly anything to do. With me it is the same thing every day; I get up and go to school, I hang out with my friends. Then, after school, me and my best friend 'Anthony' walk to his house just to get glued to his T.V. playing video games until my grandfather picks me up. Every Friday when I'm at Anthony's house, we go to Major Players to rent video games and then get pizza. This is usually the weekly routine.

Papa is now a therapist and helps people get better and learn how to talk again, but he still loves trains the same as he did when he was my age. He still collects timetables and train pictures. He puts up with my video games and my loud music. I put up with his detours on trips looking for a lost railroad or a depot. I wish I could have been with him back then. We probably would have been best buddies.



• Historical Essay Contest •  
Second Place



## Gum Wrappers and Victory Gardens

By Josey Pickett

**M**y grandparents on my mother's side are Nan and Bill Blair. They live near me in El Paso, and I call them Granny and Grandad. They were both born in Guthrie, Oklahoma and they were both born at home instead of in a hospital. In fact, Granny was born in a house that her dad and brother built.

When they were young, Granny and Grandad liked to do a lot of the same things that we do now, like roller skating and climbing trees. They were both in band when they were in high school and junior high. Grandad remembers a tree house that he and his brother had that was next to the apple trees. They would go up to the tree house with their comic books and eat apples right off the tree. Granny had a playhouse that her brother built for her that she and her friend played in. Gran's brother was seventeen years older than she, and he got married when she was four. She had the chickenpox during the wedding and gave them to all the other kids in the family!

The most important event that influenced their lives was World War II, which was going on while they were in grade school and they remember the Hiroshima bomb being dropped when they were in junior high. Because of the War, lots of things were rationed. Granny says that every family got coupon books that showed how much of certain things each family could have, such as meat, butter, sugar, and tires. She and her friends would save the tinfoil wrappers from gum and candy bars and turn it in to collection centers, just like we do with aluminum today.

Like lots of American families, their families had Victory Gardens during World War II. Grandad hates green beans because of his mom's Victory Garden; she grew lots of green beans and he had to pick, clean and snap the beans so that she could

can them. His family lived in a poorer section of town and he had lots of jobs when he was very young. His family boarded horses for other people; he worked at the Guthrie newspaper inking the presses; sometimes he would do farm work for his grandfather or other people and when he was fourteen, he worked at a gas station. Once the man who owned the gas station decided to go out of town and he left Grandad in charge of the station! The gas cost twenty-five cents per gallon.

When my grandparents were growing up, ice and milk were still delivered to people's houses each day in wagons. Granny's family got their first refrigerator when she was in junior high; before that they had an icebox that kept food cold with a big block of ice. The trash man who collected in Grandad's neighborhood drove a wagon instead of a truck, too. Across the alley from Gran's house was a blacksmith's shop, where people would bring their horses and mules to be shoed.

School was different in Guthrie, too. There were separate schools for black students and white students, but both Granny and Grandad say they don't remember racial tensions or prejudices.

When I compare my life to theirs, I think that my grandparents were more independent at a young age. People had to work together more, and were more involved with other people than with the T.V. or with the computer as they are now. Guthrie was also not as developed as a city. We don't have to take responsibilities like they did until we are much older and almost adults. I feel that sometimes now people care more about themselves than others or everyone together. I don't think we learn to do things with other people as well as we used to and there are too many buildings here. It's not very rural.

I chose these grandparents because I feel a little closer to them and I've heard a lot about their lives. I have also been to visit where they grew up and met my Grandad's mother and father before they died.

Today, my grandad is retired. He worked as a radio and television announcer for many years. My granny works as a computer wire operator for a stock broker and likes to paint, read and garden. They moved to El Paso in 1968, so they have lived here for quite a while and know lots of interesting facts and places to go in El Paso. Gran says, "It's a spectacular place to live!" Grandad says he is surprised about the whole place and that he thinks El Paso is the best kept secret in Texas!



• Historical Essay Contest •  
Third Place



## Mr Great Grandmother

By José Martinez

**M**y great grandmother is one of the people I admire the most. Her name was Norbertha Guerrero de Lopez. It is very sad that I did not know her name until she passed away.

She was born in June 6, 1908 in Jalisco, Mexico where she was a teacher. At that time, teachers only taught the students how to read and write. Each teacher was given a house. When my grandmother got hers, she took all her family except her father because he passed away. When she was eighteen, she met my great-grandpa.

My great-grandpa lived in California and was a citizen of the United States. He worked in California and had a well paying job. Every summer, he went to Jalisco so they knew each other for quite a while. The summer she was eighteen, he asked her to marry him. Her answer was yes. When they got married he asked her to go with him to California, but she did not want to because she did not want to leave her mother alone.

In 1927 the generals from Mexico passed by the little pueblos and took all the women they wanted. They did not care if they were married or not. When she heard that the generals were coming, she called my grandpa to come pick her up. He went as fast as he could for her and escorted her to California. They stayed there for some time and had their first born son. He was named Felipe. She did not feel comfortable in California so she decided to get my grandpa to take her back to Jalisco. In Jalisco they had six more children and the first was my grandma Ramona. After that they decided to go to Juarez, Chihuahua. When they got there they made a whole neighborhood. It was the first neighborhood in the border. Later they made the first store which was named *Los Gemelos* because they had just had some twins.

They also had thee more kids there.

At that time, my great grandpa was left without work. My grandma wanted to work but he said that he was not going to let her work. He said that that was not manly. It was not right for women to work at that time. It meant that he could not support her. Texas and Arizona needed workers to pick their crops. Once in a while, authorities would let anyone who wanted to work in the United States cross the bridge. He worked in the United States for some time.

My great grandma was very respected. Everybody respected her because she never gave up and she always said what was on her mind. I think she was a very strong lady because she lost four children. She also thought that it was not good to always depend on her husband. She taught my mom how to pray and she took her to school.

She lived in California since she was seventy-two years old, I did not see her much since I lived far away. When I went to visit them, she was the first one to wake up all the time. She woke up very early to make breakfast. She was really good at cooking. She liked to make chicken soup and she killed the chicken herself.

She always used to tell stories about her life to her grandchildren. She was very nice and gentle with everybody.

I think that her life was much different than mine. She was very smart and knew everything about housework. She was very brave which I'm not. Now-a-days you don't have that may children. I have a better education than her, but she knows a lot more about life. She told me that Juarez and El Paso were not as populated. The soldiers used to pass by here.

Three years ago she passed away. It is very memorable to all of our family. Three days after she died, my great grandfather told my aunt Ana that he had seen a lady with a pink dress calling for him. She had died in a pink dress. He did not know she had passed away. I will always love her.







# The Houck & Dieter/ Empire Bottling Works - Part I

*El Paso's Most Successful  
Non-Franchise Soft Drink Bottlers*

By William W. Lockhart

**W**hen the firm of Houck & Dieter, El Paso's first soda waterbottler, merged with Purity Bottling & Manufacturing Company to form Empire Bottling Works in 1912, few could have predicted that by the middle of the 1920s the company would be the largest and most successful of the non-franchise El Paso bottlers. Empire vended its products across the United States and even to Puerto Rico and Mexico City, and successfully competed with the biggest and best in the business, second only to Coca-Cola in product sales in El Paso. The merger of the original two companies produced a dynasty that lasted from just prior to the arrival of the railroads in 1881 to the modern mechanization of 1969 and wrote an important chapter in the history of one of El Paso's most popular businesses - the soft drink industry.

## *Houck & Dieter (1881-1912)*

Glass of any sort was scarce in El Paso prior to the coming of the railroads. During the Spanish Colonial Period (1556-1821), goods were transported by *carreta* (ox cart) from Mexico City along *El Camino Real* (The Royal Road) to Santa Fé, New Mexico, utilizing *El Paso del Norte* as a way station. The long trip provided only necessary items, allowing very few glass articles to penetrate into the area. When the Santa Fe Trail opened in 1821 the caravans often continued to The Pass of the North and into Mexico, but glass items remained at a premium. It was not until

the Southern Pacific Railway, coming from the west, arrived in El Paso on May 19, 1881, that bottles, windows, and other glassware became commonplace in the small dusty town. On December 16, the Southern Pacific met the Galveston, Harrisonburg, and San Antonio at Sierra Blanca, Texas, linking the town to both coasts.<sup>1</sup>

John Philip Dieter was a man who saw opportunity and took action. Although Dieter was primarily interested in alcoholic beverages, he was farsighted enough to realize that the coming of the railroads meant an opportunity to fill the needs of a multitude of different thirsts. On April 1, 1881, less than two months before the arrival of the railroad, Dieter, and a partner, A. L. Houck of Wichita, Kansas, opened the firm of Houck & Dieter in El Paso. According to the *El Paso Times*, the new establishment was "a branch of A. L. Houck & Co., Santa Fe, New Mexico, the largest and most extensive wholesale beer and soda house in the territory."<sup>2</sup> Dieter managed the El Paso establishment that the *Times* crowed was "the largest establishment west of Chicago, employing a large number of men."<sup>3</sup>

Although the *Times* may have exaggerated, Houck & Dieter could rightfully claim a thriving business. The firm bottled Soda Water, Sarsaparilla, Royal Ginger Ale, Seltzer Water, Champagne Cider, and other carbonated beverages. Royal Ginger Ale enjoyed a particularly good reputation in early El Paso. In addition, the firm distributed Appolinaris Water, Nassau Seltzer, Manitou Mineral water products, and Stafford Mineral Springs Water. The El Paso branch bottled five hundred dozen sodas a day, while their second plant, across the Rio Grande in *Paso del Norte*, Mexico, had a capacity for two hundred fifty bottles per day. In addition, the firm sold Anheuser Busch St. Louis Beer and was the city's leading supplier of ice.<sup>4</sup> In the beginning, its only competitor was Coffin & Company, which sold "Complete Outfit[s] for Manufacturing Mineral Water, Seltzer, Ginger Ale, Lemon, Sarsaparilla" and other carbonated beverages. Coffin & Co. promised that "All orders in the City and along the line of the Railroad will receive prompt attention."<sup>5</sup>

The parent company, A. L. Houck & Co., was not much older than Houck & Dieter. The company had a strong beginning in Santa Fe in June 1880, "leasing the large building and yards of J. L. Johnson on San Miguel Street." According to Houck, who came to Santa Fe in person to oversee the early development of





*Houck & Dieter Co., 1909-1912, 125-127 San Francisco.  
Photo courtesy Rick Chavez Collection*

the business, "A special brew of beer is made for us at the Anheuser Busch brewery in St. Louis," for which the firm charged a higher price than for ordinary cask beer. A yield of 6,000 bottles of beer could be processed by the Houck machinery, one hundred dozen bottles (1,200) of which were distributed in Santa Fe. The rest sold throughout New Mexico where Houck was the sole authorized dealer. Apparently, the company was unconcerned about personalizing its bottles:

*Walking into the yard, there was to be seen nothing but bottles, bottles, everywhere. Bottles in kegs, bottles in boxes and barrels, and bottles in high heaps. Of them all, Houck informed the reporter, there were over a million on hand then. "I let people know that I pay the highest market price for bottles, and they come to me every day in immense quantities, from all over the Territory."<sup>6</sup>*

The A. L. Houck Company also manufactured lighter drinks, including soda, ginger ale, sarsaparilla, seltzer, and champagne. Demand for these softer beverages was obviously lighter, as the firm only produced two hundred dozen (2,400) of them daily. At what Houck called "low" prices, the firm sold "beer at \$2.50 per

dozen, soda at 60 cts, sarsaparilla 60 cts, ginger ale 50 cts, seltzer \$2.50." Just where A. L. Houck & Co. began operating is unknown, but the firm was planning to construct a new building in March 1881 and continued to advertise Anheuser Busch Lager Beer and Crystal Ice throughout that year.<sup>7</sup> Although the firm continued to produce soft drinks, it primarily associated itself with alcoholic beverages, listing itself as "Houck, A. L. & Co., Beer Bottlers and Ice Dealers" in 1882.<sup>8</sup> The firm was beset with bad luck a year

*Most of the company's energy at the time was devoted to cutting and hauling between 8,000 and 10,000 tons of ice, much of which was shipped to Albuquerque.*

later when a fire destroyed part of the plant on or about February 5. Most of the company's energy at the time was devoted to cutting and hauling between 8,000 and 10,000 tons of ice, much of which was shipped to Albuquerque. Although the ice haulers feared that the fire damage would result in the loss of their winter's wages, Houck paid them off on February 8. By the eleventh, Peter Winne, an insurance agent from Denver, had made good on Houck's losses.<sup>9</sup>

Houck & Dieter eventually branched out to Douglas, Arizona. Their plant was located on the south side of Twelfth Street between F and G under the management of Charles J. Lachance. The firm sold wines, liquors, cigars, Pabst beer, and at least some form of soda water. Although there is no record of when the business was established in Douglas, it was at least in place by 1904. By 1907, however, Houck & Dieter had closed, possibly as a result of heavy competition from the newly formed Copper City Brewery that operated from 1904 to 1916. The brewery produced Copper City and Tanhauser beers and attempted to survive Prohibition by selling Barette (two percent beer) along with soft drinks such as soda water and ginger ale. A series of "beer wars" in the city starting in 1904 badly deflated prices and may have driven Houck & Dieter out of business in Douglas.<sup>10</sup>

The El Paso firm was originally located on Fourth Street between Santa Fe and Chihuahua Streets. The firm was originally a partnership, with Dieter as the resident manager in El Paso. With a capital of \$90,000, the firm incorporated in 1900 with J. Philip Dieter as president and Fred G. Lemley as secretary and treasurer and opened an office at 220 South El Paso Drive. The



office moved to 125-127 San Francisco in 1909 and remained there until the company was dissolved. Abe M. Heineman assumed the presidency in 1907 with Hugo Eichwald as vice-president and Fred G. Lemley still in the position of secretary and treasurer. The power structure remained the same until the merge with Purity to form Empire Bottling Works in 1912. Even though Houck & Dieter terminated their production of carbonated beverages with the advent of Empire, the firm continued in the liquor trade until 1918.<sup>11</sup>

Eichwald came to El Paso in 1906 and worked as a salesman for Kohlburg Brothers. He maintained his vice presidency at Houck & Dieter throughout its corporate life, although his living arrangements implied a lack of permanence. Throughout his tenure in El Paso, he boarded at hotels, notably the Hotel Regis and Hotel McCoy. Lemley had been an employee of the firm since the 1890s and continued in the positions of secretary and treasurer until Houck & Dieter merged with Purity Bottling & Manufacturing Company in 1912. Heineman arrived in El Paso a year after Eichwald and was just in time to be elected president of Houck & Dieter. He may, in fact, have been imported to fill the position. Like Eichwald, he lived in hotels (such as the Hotel McCoy, Hotel Lincoln, and Hotel Linden) and never achieved permanence, despite enduring until the ending of the firm and continuing as president of Empire Bottling Works. In 1917, still nominally the head of Empire, he moved to Los Angeles, California and never returned to El Paso.<sup>12</sup>

At some point Houck & Dieter published an undated booklet called *200 Spicy Toasts* at a price of ten cents. The booklet listed various toasts for all occasions, contained a series of exotic drink recipes, and advertised Hed-Eez. Captions like "Hed-Eez cures Hed-Akes," "Hed-Eez is made of Celery," "Hed-Eez moves the Bowels," or "Hed-Eez is a Nerve Tonic" form headers on all pages of the booklet. Although the product never appeared in any of Houck & Dieter's city directory ads, it may have been a patent medicine distributed by the company or may have been a joke. The booklet did suggest, however, that Hed-Eez was available at "the Soda Fountain."<sup>13</sup>

Dieter was involved in a second firm that was less well known, at least in El Paso. Along with partner, George D. Sauer, he founded the firm of Dieter & Sauer in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Although the firm was first listed in the El Paso City Directory

*Samples of  
various Houck  
& Dieter bottles.*



at the northwest corner of Calle del Comercia and Avenida Lerdo in 1898, it was probably in existence earlier. In apparent competition with Houck

& Dieter, the company advertised Apollinaris Company Mineral Water in 1898. Dieter & Sauer advertised itself as "transporters and jobbers, groceries, liquors, wines, cigars." In 1906, the company moved across the Rio Grande to locate at 210 San Francisco with George D. Sauer as manager. The firm was no longer advertised in the city directories after 1907. Sauer went on to form George G. Sauer & Company, "commission merchants, export and import" at 715 Myrtle. In 1915, in addition to running his company, he became president of Runkle & Peacock, Inc. as well as vice president of the El Paso Brewers Association. By 1920 he was no longer involved with Runkle & Peacock and was listed as residing in Red Bank, New Jersey. He returned to El Paso in 1923, rooming at the Toltec Club, but soon went back permanently to New York City, although his company continued to flourish in El Paso until 1934.<sup>14</sup>

J. Philip Dieter was an interesting figure in early El Paso. Born in Gross-Bieberhau, Germany on February 2, 1851, Dieter came to the United States as a young man and married his first wife, Anna E. McNeal, on November 12, 1873. The couple lived in Wichita, Kansas, and produced three children, all of whom were victims of a cholera epidemic. He met and befriended Amos L. Houck in Wichita. Dieter came to El Paso on one of the first trains that arrived in the city in 1881.<sup>15</sup> The *El Paso Times* described him as "a courteous gentleman thoroughly posted in all the details of this extensive manufactory, and is always ready to impart information to the many people who visit the works."<sup>16</sup> A later edition showed that Dieter may not always have been so



courteous when his wife, Annie, divorced him on October 22, 1887.<sup>17</sup> He soon married Minna Bruhn, sister of his lifelong friend, Henning Bruhn, who was a fellow German and was manager of the Lone Star Brewing Company of San Antonio. After the couple enjoyed a three-month honeymoon in Europe, they returned to El Paso.<sup>18</sup> Prior to his remarriage, Dieter had lived at the Grand Central Hotel, but the couple moved to 302 S. Stanton while waiting for the construction of their eleven room house at 404 Magoffin Avenue which was not completed until 1898. By the turn of the century, Dieter was president of the El Paso Cigar Manufacturing Company, president of Consumers Ice Company, and president of the International Light and Power Company along with his connections to Houck & Dieter and Dieter & Sauer. In 1905 Dieter bought the El Paso Brewery out of receivership for \$60,000 against bids by William Griesser, the original builder and promoter of the establishment. At the time the brewery contained in its vats 2,793 barrels of beer worth \$30,000. J. Philip Dieter died September 23, 1907 and was buried in Concordia Cemetery in El Paso.<sup>19</sup> He was best remembered by El Pasoans as the owner of a mansion that he built for his wife, Annie, in 1880. The house was constructed of dark red brick with a beautiful walnut staircase leading to the upper story. The main entrance had "doors paned with sand blasted glass and etched in fancy design."<sup>20</sup> The house was so ponderous that it became the second site of the Hotel Dieu Hospital in March 1892 and was later used as a boarding house before it was razed in 1936.<sup>21</sup>

His partner in the firm, Amos L. Houck, was equally noteworthy. Born in Massillon, Ohio of Pennsylvanian parents around 1847, Houck had married his wife, Jennie by 1876. Jennie, too, was from Ohio, and the couple had two children, Rex and a daughter enumerated only as "Baby" in the 1880 census.<sup>22</sup> Houck was in Wichita at least as early as 1872 when he partnered with J. A. Wallace to form the firm of Wallace & Houck, "dealers in farm machinery, wagons, buggies, etc."<sup>23</sup> The farm machinery was displayed at 308 and 310 Douglas, while the "spacious carriage and wagon repository" was located across the street. The firm of Wallace & Houck was so successful that they opened branches in Kingman, New Mexico Territory (now Arizona) and Saratoga, Kansas.

By 1878, he was listed in the City Directory as a partner in Houck Brothers Hardware along with his father, Samuel.<sup>24</sup>

The Houcks shared a home at that time but moved into separate quarters the following year, although they remained in business together until at least 1880 when Amos listed himself as a "Hardware merchant." In 1887 he extended his operations to join W. A. Thomas in the firm of Houck & Thomas Real Estate. The following year, the company added loans to their listing and, as Houck, Thomas & Co., had become proprietors of Sarcoux Lime Works.<sup>25</sup> Houck apparently left the hardware business at some point to concentrate on real estate. In the 1891 City Directory, the hardware business is listed as Samuel Houck, Hardware, Stoves, and Tinware. Like his El Paso partner, J. Philip Dieter, Houck built a mansion. Located on North Topeka Avenue, the structure soared five stories into the air with an elaborate, wrap-around porch in front and a minaret-like tower guarding the approach. Houck may have suffered setbacks and/or ill health, however. He was listed as a boarder at the Carey Hotel in 1894 and thereafter vanished from the Wichita city directory.<sup>11</sup> The boom in Wichita was over but where Houck resided during the next nine years is unknown. However, he resurfaced in El Paso in 1903 and worked as a salesman for Houck & Dieter until 1906. At that point the impressive Mr. Houck again vanished, possibly this time in death.<sup>27</sup>

---

**WILLIAM W. "BILL" LOCKHART** is an archaeologist who lives in Alamogordo, New Mexico. He graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Texas at El Paso for both his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees. He has taught at the University of Texas at El Paso, Park College, New Mexico State University, and El Paso Community College. He has researched extensively and has published in *Password*, and in other publications. His article "Casa Ronquillo in San Elizario" earned the prize as the best article in Volume 41 of *Password*.

#### NOTES

1. W.H. Timmons. *El Paso: A Borderlands History*. El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1990.
2. *El Paso Times*, January 1, 1882, p.2, c.3.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.* One of the earliest copies of *The El Paso Times*, June 10, 1881, advertises Houck & Dieter on page 3 as "Manufacturers of soda, and all kinds of Mineral waters, Ginger Ale and Champagne...Special Attention Called to our sparkling cider in Keg or Bottle."
5. *El Paso Times*, June 10, 1881, p.4 c.6.
6. *Santa Fe Weekly New Mexican*, July 5, 1880, p.1, c.3.



7. *Santa Fe Weekly New Mexican*, July 5, 1880, p.1, c. 3; January 9, March 9, March 17, 1881.
8. Charles W. Green, *A Complete Business Directory of New Mexico and Gazetteer of the Territory for 1882*. Santa Fe; New Mexico Printing and Publishing Co., 1882, 130.
9. *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican*, January 8--February 11, 1883.
10. Douglas, *Arizona City Directories, 1904-1907*; *Sunsitter*, January 1, 1990, p.1, c.3.
11. *El Paso City Directories 1885-1918* [1902, 82, "Corporations"]. Although Heineman continued to serve as president of Empire Bottling Works, Hugo Eichwald became president of Houck & Dieter in 1916 and held that position until the corporate dissolution two years later. Despite the break with Empire, Houck & Dieter continued to distribute mineral waters until the firm closed.
12. *El Paso City Directories 1888-1917*.
13. Rick Chavez Collection, El Paso.
14. *El Paso City Directories, 1898, 1899, 1908, 1930*; *El Paso Times* December 25, 1889, p.8, c.4.
15. Genealogical material prepared by Sigrid O Harnsberger and other descendants of Dieter.
16. *El Paso Times* January 1, 1881, p. 2, c.3.
17. Jane A. Beard, *Births, Deaths, and Marriages from El Paso Newspapers for Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Indian Territory*, Vol. II, 1886-1890. Southern Historical Press, 1995, 291; *El Paso Times* October 23, 1887, p. 3.
18. Genealogical material prepared by Sigrid O. Harnsberger and other descendants of Dieter.
19. *El Paso City Directories 1888-1908*; *El Paso Times* March 15, 1906, p.8, C.5; Tombstone of J. P. Dieter, Concordia Cemetery.
20. *El Paso Herald Post*, August, 27, 1935, p.6, c.3.
21. *El Paso Herald Post*, November 14, 1936, p. 3, c. 2; *El Paso Times* December 23, 1936.
22. Twelfth Census of the United States, 1880.
23. Anonymous. *Wichita: An Illustrated Review of its Progress and Importance*. Wichita: Enterprise Publishing Company, 1886, 51.
24. O. H. Bentley. *The History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas, Past and Present*. 2 vols., Chicago: C. F. Cooper & Company, 1910. Bentley states that Samuel, the partner in the store, was Houck's father and his brother's name was Adrian. Directories, however, consistently list the proprietors of Houck Brothers Hardware as Samuel and Amos.
25. *Wichita Journal of Commerce*. Wichita Board of Trade, 1887, 107; *Wichita, Kansas City Directories 1877-1878, 1881-1888*; Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, p. 5.
26. *Wichita Journal of Commerce*. Wichita Board of Trade, 1887, 34; *Wichita, Kansas City Directories 1889-1895*; *Wichita Daily Eagle* October 9, 1887, p.1.
27. *El Paso City Directories. 1903-1906*.





## Book Reviews

**TEXAS AND NORTHEASTERN MEXICO, 1630-1690.** By Juan Bautista Chapa. Edited with an Introduction by William C. Foster. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997. \$24.95.

Almost three centuries ago, a retired Spanish bureaucrat (although he was Italian), Juan Bautista Chapa completed a *Historia del Nuevo Reino de León*, a work that some have called the first official history of Texas. Fearful of Inquisition interrogations, however, he remained an anonymous author until a new Spanish edition of his work in 1961 identified him as its writer. Having arrived in Nuevo León around 1650, Chapa served as secretary for several governors, eventually becoming *secretario perpetuo*. His history is the major component of this work which also includes a translation of Governor Alonso de León's revised 1690 Expedition Diary.

As Foster explains it, in compiling sources for his *Spanish Expeditions into Texas, 1689-1768* (University of Texas Press, 1995), he realized that several significant Spanish and French journals and diaries, "which seemed to me critical to an appreciation of Texas history, had not been translated into English." This volume is an extension of that effort.

Readers of the narratives of Cabeza de Vaca, De Soto, Coronado, Oñate, or others do not need this reviewer to remind them of the detailed, first-person, often harrowing yet touching nature of these original Spanish narratives. Chapa's *Historia* is no exception. Here is the mundane, day-to-day imperial bureaucracy at work. But here also is the story of the individual Spanish frontier men and women. Clashes with native tribes and threats from the French dominate the narrative. Sometimes the Indians win, other times, the Spanish win. Chapa boasts about how the Spanish are able to outwit the Indians—yet sometimes are themselves ambushed. No wonder, then, that Chapa concludes that the depopulation of the Native Americans is God's punishment for their sins—something he believes will continue, "so that in the course of time all the Indians of New Spain and Peru will be exterminated."



One also reads about Captain Nicolas Ochoa of Monterrey. Ochoa had climbed a local peak to inspect a mine that was just opening up. He knelt down on a ledge to pray; somehow the ledge slipped and the captain fell to his death. "While he was falling," Chapa continues, "his companions heard him invoke the name of the Virgin." Or, there is the story of the Frenchman discovered living in special favor among some Indians along the Gulf coast. Tales such as these add a human touch and are complemented with detailed drawings that bring these people to life.

This book is a significant addition to the original Spanish/French narratives available in English. Aply translated by Ned F. Brierley, I recommend it to anyone interested in Southwest history. If this is an example of what William Foster and his colleagues hope to translate, one hopes that they will continue their work.

RICHARD BAQUERA  
El Paso Community College

**SAM DREBEN: THE FIGHTING JEW** by Art Leibson. Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1996. \$26.95.

In many respects Sam Dreben was no different from countless other Russian Jewish emigrants to the United States. Never really having had a country to call his own, he became extremely patriotic toward his adopted one. And, like many other Jewish immigrants in America, he was led away from the teachings and practices of Judaism while establishing a new life for himself. Though not observant of his religion, Dreben was fiercely proud of being a Jew. He was the first in El Paso to contribute to Jewish War Relief during the First World War, and he was a close friend of Rabbi Martin Zielonka of Temple Mount Sinai, where he sometimes attended services. Sam, too, like millions of immigrants, supported himself by working at various "conventional" jobs: in his uncle's tailor shop in Philadelphia; killing rats in San Francisco after the earthquake; selling insurance and real estate in El Paso. However, Dreben was unlike most other Jewish immigrants in that he seemed cut-out only for soldiering and took himself wherever he could find a battle to fight.

Art Leibson, for forty years a correspondent and columnist for the *El Paso Times*, has written this fascinating account of a man whose only real home after leaving Russia was, though only briefly, El Paso. Leibson has been writing and lecturing on Dreben for many years, and several of his articles on Dreben have appeared in *Password*. His lively interest in Dreben, coupled with his extensive research of the subject, is apparent as he unfolds the storybook-life of this short, stocky "Fighting Jew" who repeated-

ly risked his life fighting battles.

Liebson's description of some of those battles reminds one of scenes from motion pictures: Dreben in the Philippines in 1899 charging alone into a cannon emplacement, somehow coming out alive and turning the tide of battle; Dreben fighting in the streets of Peking during the Boxer Rebellion dispatching a sword-wielding giant of a man with a single shot from his pistol; Dreben and fellow soldier Tracy Richardson loading a train with dynamite and sending it crashing into another one carrying Maderists near Parral; Dreben waiting to be executed by a firing squad in Mexico, only to be saved at the last possible moment.

Liebson explains that Dreben first came to the Border in 1904 when he signed up for a second hitch in the United States Army and was assigned to Fort Bliss. There he learned how to handle a machine gun, his only real trade for the next dozen years. After his discharge in 1907, he became a mercenary and gun-runner, in Nicaragua and Honduras for a short time, but later in Mexico for a longer time. El Paso then became a sort of headquarters (often at the Sheldon hotel) for Dreben's activities, especially those connected with the Mexican Revolution. So numerous were these activities and so characteristic of "the Fighting Jew" that Liebson devotes several chapters to detailing them.

In 1916 Dreben finally settled long enough in El Paso to marry Helen Spence, a woman half his age. It was to be a brief and unhappy marriage, which probably influenced Sam to enlist in the United States Army as a buck private at the age of forty. He was sent to France, where he distinguished himself in battle, earning the Distinguished Service Cross, the *Croix de Guerre*, and the *Medaille Militaire*.

One can hardly imagine a more exciting or un-Jewish life than Sam Dreben's. Art Liebson is to be congratulated for successfully chronicling the exploits of one of the Border's most colorful figures. These exploits beg to be shown on a motion picture or television screen. Until that happens, readers can use Liebson's book as a guide to their imagination.

HARVEY N. PLAUT

Chair, Social Studies Department  
Bowie High School, El Paso





**OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS 1997  
THE EL PASO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

President	Frank Gorman
First Vice President	Alan Rash
Second Vice President	Michael Bernstein
Third Vice President	Eddie Lou Miller
Recording Secretary	Constance White
Corresponding Secretary	Ruth Park
Treasurer	Hugh Frederick
Historian	Marta Estrada
Membership	Al and Grace Adkins
Curator, Jane Burges Perrenot	
Research Center	Barbara Rees

**MEMBERS EX-OFFICIO**

Editor, PASSWORD	James M. Day
Editor, EL CONQUISTADOR	Frank McKnight
Chair, Burges House Commission	Lea Vail
Director, El Paso Museum of History	René Harris
Immediate Past President	Joe Battle

**DIRECTORS**

**1995 - 1997**

Eugene Anderson  
 Dr. Haywood Antone  
 Marta Duron Hernandez  
 Rosita Horwitz  
 Dr. Charles Martin  
 Nadine Prestwood  
 Thomas Starkweather

**1996 - 1998**

Margaret V. Bloss  
 Jeanette Brady  
 Carolyn Breck  
 Ida Coldwell  
 Dr. W. J. Pindar

**1997 - 1999**

Lillian Collingwood  
 Dr. Joseph Leach  
 Margaret Marsh  
 Rudy Miles  
 Kathleen Gilliland  
 Richard Field

**ALL PAST PRESIDENTS ARE HONORARY BOARD MEMBERS**