

PASSWORD



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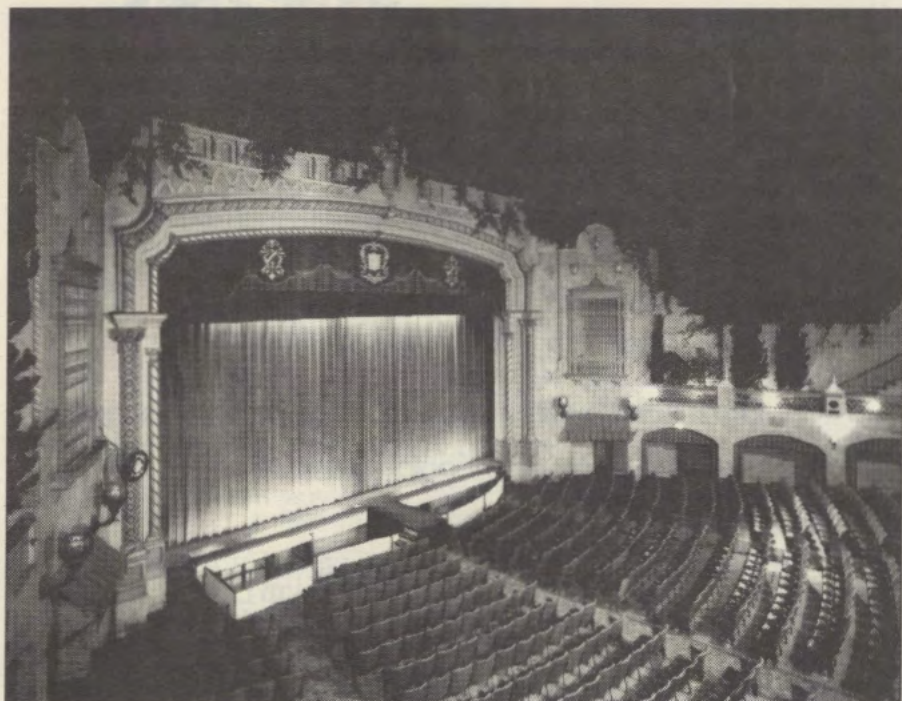
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*El Paso's Paramount-Publix Plaza Theatre.
Photo courtesy El Paso Public Library Archives*

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El Paso's Paramount-Publix Plaza Theatre

A Brief Historical Overview

By John Martin West



Editor's Note: *The use of British spellings is one of the distinguishing features of the writing of the author of this article. This article is printed as Mr. West wrote it.*

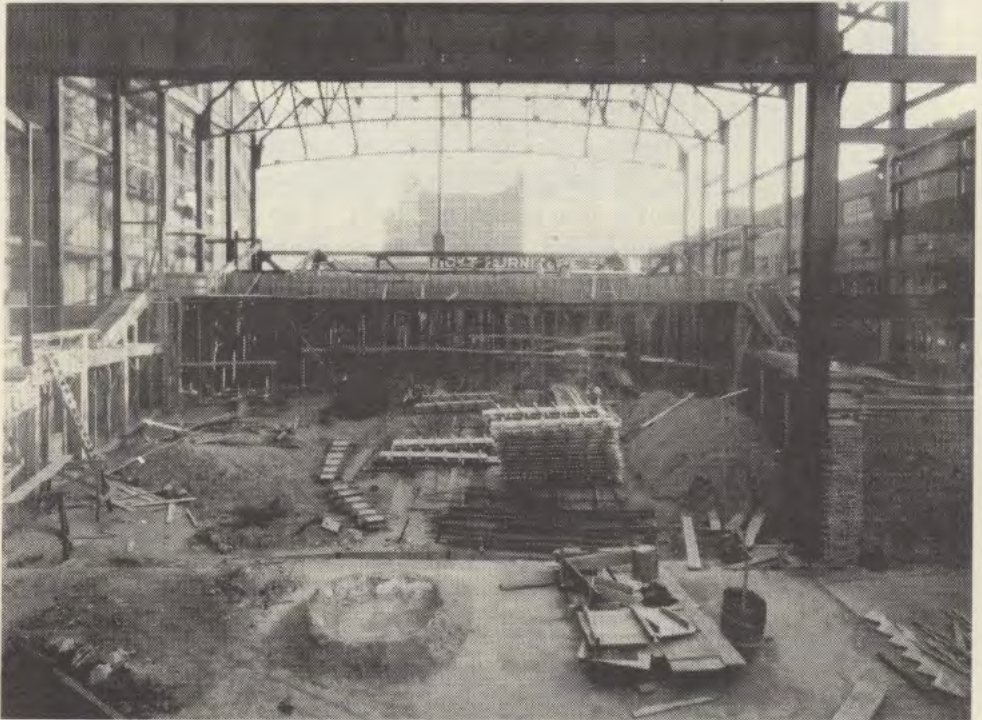
In 1929, plans to build a three-thousand seat vaudeville theatre in the border town of El Paso, Texas were announced. The town already had a relatively rich theatrical history, due largely to the fact that it was one of the key points for roadshows travelling cross-country by rail or automobile. For centuries before the development of the interstate highway system, El Paso was situated along the only transcontinental route to be open year-round. As the theatre was being built, facilities for sound film presentation were added. Plans were eventually scaled back to 2,410 seats in order to give theatre-goers a sense of intimacy with the stage. Despite the downsizing, the Paramount-Publix Plaza was, for decades, the largest theatre between Dallas and Los Angeles.

When the Plaza opened, it was the first public theatre with air conditioning, the first building with refrigerated drinking fountains, and the first with an internal telephone system which was used to alert the box office as to what seats remained available. It was also the first to utilise a single-unit, remote controlled stage-lighting console. Except for certain components of the seat check system, all of these "firsts," remain intact and usable to this very day.

The Plaza is an atmospheric theatre: the ceiling of the main auditorium was modelled on the evening sky of summer, complete with flickering pinhole lights for stars and special projectors

which simulated lazily sailing clouds. Ostensibly to save the costs of an elaborate gilt or painted ceiling, the effect is both uniquely charming and very convincing. Although the architecture of the Paramount-Publix Plaza loosely mirrors the Spanish baroque, architectural effects are arranged and adapted in ways particularly suitable to a combination vaudeville-film presentation house. The end result of all this is a uniquely American form of architecture: flamboyant, yet not excessively ornate; everything perfectly suited to the operating considerations of a modern theatre.

The Plaza is neither the largest nor the most ornate atmospheric theatre still in existence. The Paramount in Anderson, Indiana, while smaller, is considerably more elaborate in design. The Majestic in San Antonio is both larger and more ornate. El Paso's Plaza, however, is the only remaining example of an atmospheric theatre to remain intact, neither demolished nor unsympathetically "restored" for uses not in keeping with the original design of the building. The Plaza is a building usable for both film and live theatre. Even in the upper balcony, one feels close to the stage,



Construction of the Plaza theatre, 1929. The Hotel Paso del Norte can be seen through the "doorway." El Paso Public Library Archives

a feeling one most decidedly does not have in the San Antonio Majestic or El Paso's Abraham Chavez Theater.

In addition, El Paso's Plaza Theatre does not suffer from the past history of segregation as do some theatres of this vintage. At the San Antonio Majestic, for example, the upper balcony can be reached only through a back entrance that is in an alley with a plain stairwell that is roughly five stories high. In effect, the Majestic sacrifices seating space and demonstrably superb acoustics because of the psychological association with segregation. The Plaza has a separate entrance which once served the ends of racial segregation. It is on the side of the building, but it opens directly into the main foyer from a street entrance. The entrance itself can not be viewed as degrading as that at the Majestic. Indeed, upon completion of the Arts Festival Plaza and restoration of the theatre, this entrance will be every bit as inviting and useful as the original main entrance. The upper and lower balconies of the Plaza Theatre are connected by stairs, separated only by a walkway which serves well in the management of crowds.

One enters the theatre through a long entrance hall with high frescoed ceilings. There is an arcade to the left, the upper gallery of which contains no less than five well-apportioned offices. From the lower level one passes into the long Patio Room, two stories high with an atmospheric ceiling, complete with stars, which affords the patron a foretaste of the open space within the auditorium. On the walls are murals of a Spanish-style town and bullfighter. In the early years of the theatre, this room featured a special lighting system which recreated a sunset every fifteen minutes. Until 1973, there was a bronze fountain on which was a nymph standing on the back of a turtle.

Just past the entrance hall is a domed rotunda with gold-leafed columns and ceiling. A patron in the Paramount-Publix days would have handed his ticket here to the liveried doorman, who would open the silent, hydraulic-hinged doors which kept the inner foyer and auditorium isolated from the sounds of the outer lobby. The theatre was exceptionally well staffed—there were no less than forty-three employees on duty on opening night, including coat check girls, strategically placed ushers, doormen, restroom and lounge attendants, and even a nurse.

It is worth noting that the concessions stand which now occupies the rotunda is not original; in fact the Plaza did not have concessions in the theatre at all. Food, drink, and tobacco were

never allowed into the auditorium in its early years. Mixed-use vaudeville-film theatres were typically designed with adjoining buildings near the main entrance for the purpose of housing soda fountains and/or restaurants. Customers were expected to finish food and drink in the outer lobby.

From the rotunda, one enters the splendid foyer, more notable for exquisite proportioning and clean visual rhythm than for elaborate detail. A split grand staircase leads to mezzanine and balcony levels. This portion of the theatre is of particularly fine design. The ceilings are low; the corridors are wide. This creates a feeling of open space, and allows ample room for large crowds to move comfortably and safely. Every architectural detail serves a useful purpose, yet is treated as a work of art.

The effect is unique: a theatre which works flawlessly on the day-to-day level of operations, yet which, by its very purpose, serves to transport the customer into a more purely aesthetic realm of experience. This approach to building theatrical spaces all but vanished with the coming of the Great Depression.

After World War II, government-imposed changes to the existing network of film distribution made it impossible for the-



Cover of the special eight-page "Plaza Theater Section" in the *El Paso Times*, celebrating opening night, September 12, 1930. This shows the original façade of the building.

atres like the Plaza to turn a profit. Combined with a nationwide building frenzy which turned farmlands into suburbs and drove all traces of civilization to the outermost limits of existing cities, theatres such as the Plaza fell into disrepair, as did the neighbourhoods surrounding them. People moved *en masse* from the nuclear hub of the city to outlying developments.

The nation became heavily dependent

upon automobiles, and there was insufficient parking in downtown areas to support business at a profitable level. Mixed-use commercial-residential areas became strictly commercial as zoning ordinances mandated the over-specialised use of already developed land. Downtown areas around the country spiraled deep into economic depression—a depression non-existent on what had previously been the fringes, where such unreal places as shopping malls came to dominate commercial life. Design on a human scale gave way to the needs for ample parking and reasonable drive time. Unable to compete with powerful national retailers, local businesses dried up, leaving retail markets saturated with corporate homogeneity. In the world of the theatre, that translated into two things: first, the multiplex, designed as nothing more than a way to draw crowds to the “snack bars,” and secondly, government-subsidised live theatre and the nearly total absence of private, for-profit theatrical ventures.

It cannot be stressed too greatly that the theatre business was different by its very nature before the Great Depression. Whereas contemporary multiplex movie houses compete with each other purely on the basis of per capita profits, theatre owners and managers before the 1930s sought to bring in customers by constantly upgrading/remodeling, adding staff, and generally making their theatres more luxurious places to be. Several El Paso theatres, including the Ellanay and the Crawford, were completely rebuilt several times through the years.

The Paramount-Public Plaza Theatre was in a unique position regarding these practices. The theatre opened well into the beginning of the depression. Paramount sold the Plaza to Interstate Theatres within three years of opening. Thus practically from the beginning, the Plaza was saved from remodeling and upgrades by the fact that it was built on a model which, given the overall economic situation of the day, would never prove profitable. It is the same principle which preserved Radio City Music Hall in New York. Like Radio City, the Plaza remains the largest and most perfectly preserved movie palace in the town where it stands.

Interstate Theatres continued to operate the Plaza Theatre as its district headquarters until 1973. This is the period best remembered by most El Pasoans as the “Golden Years” of the Plaza. Among many other regular features, the Plaza hosted a weekly “Mickey Mouse Club” for children. The theatre served its

purpose not so much as a physical space in which films and live performances were presented, but rather as a central public meeting space and social center.

In the late 1950s, manager John Paxton allowed a group of local volunteers to refurbish the theatre's Wurlitzer Balaban III, the three-manual, fifteen-rank theatre organ originally utilised to accompany silent films. With the rapid demise of silent films, however, the organ had been largely unused for a number of years. Once restored, the organ was played for regular radio broadcasts. Dave Schutt, one of the principal organists from this period, recalls that the radio station, located in the White House Department Store building next door, ran heavy cables out of their windows, over a roof and into the theatre simply to wire the microphones. They removed the cables when the broadcast concluded.

Between 1972 and 1973, the theatre's artwork and organ were auctioned off, and the fountain in the Patio Room and some of the other fixtures of the theatre disappeared. Later in the same year, the Plaza was closed in favour of a new two-screen cinema at Morningside Mall. Because of antitrust legislation, the Interstate Theatre Company was required to close a theatre for every new one it purchased or built, and at the time, the Plaza was not financially viable. The movie-going population had moved to the outer limits of the city, largely along Interstate 10, and were generally neither willing nor able to drive into the former heart of the city in order to see a film—especially when they had a variety to choose from at one of the closer multiplexes which came complete with sufficient parking for a crowd of practically any size.

The theatre was purchased by downtown landowner and businessman Mike Dipp, who contracted with the El Paso Entertainment Corporation to manage the theatre. The first efforts to "save the Plaza" as an historically and architecturally important structure date from this time. Manager Lane Robertson tried various approaches to keep the theatre open. He used the lobby as a museum, displaying firearms and other items of regional historic importance in an attempt to draw local customers. He opened an El Paso Visitors' Center in the outer lobby for out-of-towners, and a "Plaza Sandwich Shoppe" in the Patio Room to draw downtown business people. Despite the best efforts of many, the theatre continued to spiral deeper into debt. At one point,

members of the theatre's already minimal staff sued for six weeks of unpaid wages. Near the end there was a complicated scandal involving missing ticket receipts. In 1976, after many months of non-payment of rent, Dipp initiated eviction proceedings. The eviction was halted the day before it was to go into effect by the El Paso Entertainment Corporation's declaration of bankruptcy. The company owed well over \$120,000.00.

Dipp then entered into a contract with the Movie One Corporation, a line of second-run, discount-admission movie houses which was then in its infancy. They immediately announced their scheme to "convert" the Plaza into a four screen multiplex after one year, splitting the balcony and the orchestra levels down the center for two screens each. The reason for waiting a year was that they intended to show the remake of *King Kong* with Jessica Lange on the theatre's large screen. There was some public outcry about the "conversion," and Movie One placated the public by reminding them that the outer lobby would "probably remain intact." It was only lack of profit that kept them from

pursuing this plan; *King Kong* was one of only two films they showed which "broke even." When their contract expired, they abandoned the theatre. After this, the Plaza was sold to a Dutch Antilles firm known as Golden Chain Investments. They used the theatre to exhibit both first and second-run Spanish-language films, and leased the theatre for private use on numerous occasions. It was under such an agreement that the infamously wretched film *Manos: The Hands of Fate*, now a cult classic, premiered at the Plaza. The company could not show a profit, and it was decided to demolish the theatre in order to build a parking lot, which it was expected would be more profitable.

In November of 1986 the El Paso Community Foundation, led by Janice Windle, began negotiations with Golden Chain Investments to purchase the theatre. The price was eventually set at one

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Original remote controlled stage lighting console, which remains intact to this day. El Paso Public Library Archives

million dollars. The foundation was given six short weeks in which to raise the funds. The campaign was heavily publicised, and the public responded exceedingly well. The sentiment that the Plaza had to be saved was felt intensely throughout the community, due in no small part to the exceptionally close deadline for raising the money. Public tours were given on several occasions, and money was contributed not only by countless schoolchildren, but also by

total strangers who had never even seen the building. Actress and movie palace activist Rita Moreno put on a last-minute benefit the night before the deadline and played to a sold-out house. Immediately following her performance, Janice Windle came onstage to announce that the benefit had raised the last of the money needed.

After the excitement of the "Save the Plaza" campaign, the theatre needed one thing—a plan. What it got was several plans. While most were well-intended, practically all were poorly conceived and, in many aspects, ill-advised. There were a number of widely divergent options at the disposal of the foundation, perhaps too many for intelligent decisions to be made with finality.

Several plans which were, at various times, adopted as "official," glossed over irreplaceable historical integrity for the sake of technological advances, most of which were, at best, arguably helpful but largely unnecessary. Not a few of these schemes were utterly unrealistic in their goals and prohibitively expensive. Many involved the use of local firms as opposed to using out-of-town companies which had the necessary experience and resources to restore a theatre such as the Paramount-Publix Plaza correctly. The Community Foundation tried desperately to keep the explosive enthusiasm of the 1987 campaign alive. Various individual plans were advanced at different times as being the only acceptable plan to ensure the future of the theatre, in spite of the fact that many of the provisions of these plans would have rendered

the theatre historically worthless in some ways, and theatrically useless in others.

In the case of a theatre such as the Plaza, verifiably the last of its kind, preservation must take precedence over restoration. Technology can be accommodated for as deemed necessary by future generations. Historical integrity, once compromised, can never be re-created; whether it be in as minor a detail as the pigments of paint on a column, or as vital a factor to the operation of the theatre itself as the carbon-arc projector lamps and reel-to-reel projection systems. A balance between technology and historical integrity is needed. Without allowing for legitimate technological advances, the theatre may be of little use to some of those who should benefit the most from its restoration. On the other hand, with historical or architectural integrity compromised, the spirit of the theatre would be lost—to say nothing of the peculiar mixed-use functionality which is at the heart of its design. Witness, by way of example, the San Antonio Majestic, where seating arrangements have been completely redrawn and bright floodlights and speakers installed, destroying the outdoor and evening atmosphere, and removing all possibility of film presentation. This is a delicate game of balance which will have to be played very, very carefully.

In 1990, the deed to the Plaza was passed to the City of El Paso as a gift from the El Paso Community Foundation, which lacked the public support to restore the theatre properly. Over time, the project became mired in bureaucracy and special interests, and eventually became lost among the plans for downtown redevelopment.

There was some antagonism displayed by members of the city government which caused the cessation of the project. Since then the project has limped along with little, if any, sense of direction. Various ideas concerning restoration surface from time

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to time, but there is no serious consideration of a long-term plan to preserve the theatre, re-open it, and make it a success.

One of the more interesting recent developments is a planned four-hour television documentary of the Interstate Theatre Circuit to be produced and directed by Jeff Mills. The Plaza is the last of the Interstate Theatres remaining to be restored, and Mills plans that the documentary tell the story of the theatre chain punctuated, as it were, by the ongoing story of the Plaza's restoration.

The Plaza is also the last of the great Paramount-Publix atmospheric theatres to remain in restorable condition, and as such it is of national historic importance. It was in theatres such as El Paso's Plaza that generations of Americans formed their sense of personal and collective identity through vaudeville and film. It was partly around theatres like the Plaza that viable, sustainable urban communities developed. It is now possible to rebuild El Paso's urban community, in part, by preserving and re-opening the Plaza.

The history of the theatre is a cycle of day and night. The sun rose on the Paramount-Publix Plaza in 1930: it set in 1973. In 1987, midnight was passed. It is the responsibility of those who are here now to see the theatre safely through to the new dawn — not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of generations yet to come.

JOHN MARTIN WEST, a 1993 graduate of El Paso High School, is particularly interested in the lessons of history as they relate to the current nationwide dilemma of rebuilding viable, diverse, and safe communities in established yet largely abandoned city centers. He is also keenly aware of El Paso's past—and, he believes,—its future as an important part of transcontinental rail service, and has authored an unpublished history of the El Paso and Southwestern Railroad's Locomotive #1.

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The Camino Real at the Pass: The Economy and Political Structure of the Paso Del Norte Area in the Eighteenth Century

By Rick Hendricks

ECONOMY

INTRODUCTION

When Governor Domingo Jironza Petris de Cruzate conducted a census of the residents of the Paso del Norte area in September, 1684, he recorded a situation so dismal that it moved Jesuit scholar Ernest J. Burrus to remark later:

In some forty years of handling documents on Spanish America in Mexico City, Seville, Madrid, Simancas and other European and American archives, I have never come across such extremely tragic conditions.¹

In that summer of drought and despair, the leading citizens of the riverine communities that stretched down the Rio Grande south and east from El Paso del Norte boasted of only modestly decent clothing, small quantities of grain for sustenance, a few animals, and some few weapons of war. The poorest citizens were dressed in rags and living in abject poverty. Many of these same citizens were to witness and participate in a remarkable change in the level of wealth of the Paso del Norte area in a short period of time. Within the space of forty-five years, area community leaders—many of them new arrivals, but more than a few long-time residents—had accumulated personal estates, including land, live-

stock, and goods valued in the thousands of pesos. By the late 1720s even most humble folk owned a small piece of property, some tools, and a few animals.

This new prosperity in El Paso del Norte divides into two distinct periods. From at least as early as the late 1720s, and perhaps well before, until around 1750, or for about one generation, El Paso del Norte was demonstrably more important economically than the colonial capital, Santa Fe. Arguably, the greater Paso del Norte area was more important in an economic sense than all the rest of New Mexico until the middle of the eighteenth century. After midcentury, El Paso del Norte and the surrounding area declined markedly in economic importance relative to the upriver part of the colony. The principal source of wealth in El Paso del Norte, while it lasted, was agricultural activity, broadly defined, and trade in farm and ranch products. In good years the region's farms produced sufficient maize and wheat to meet local demand with enough left over to export. And over time, the Paso del Norte area gained renown for its wines, brandy, vinegar, and raisins. From early in the eighteenth century, ranching operations supplied sheep, cattle, and horses throughout the colony. Several Chihuahuan trading houses also maintained representatives who managed branch stores in El Paso del Norte, and these were usually individuals of some means. Added to this was a considerable infusion of money brought to the area by the prosperous people who settled in El Paso del Norte for a variety of reasons. Finally, as is the case with most frontier areas, El Paso del Norte attracted its share of would-be entrepreneurs, some of whom probably did get rich quick. Occasionally all these elements could be found in a single individual, one of whom will be met below. El Paso del Norte's rapid climb from the depths of destitution of the 1680s to the heights of relative prosperity in the early 1700s was possible only because of its strategic location astride the Camino Real.

VITICULTURE

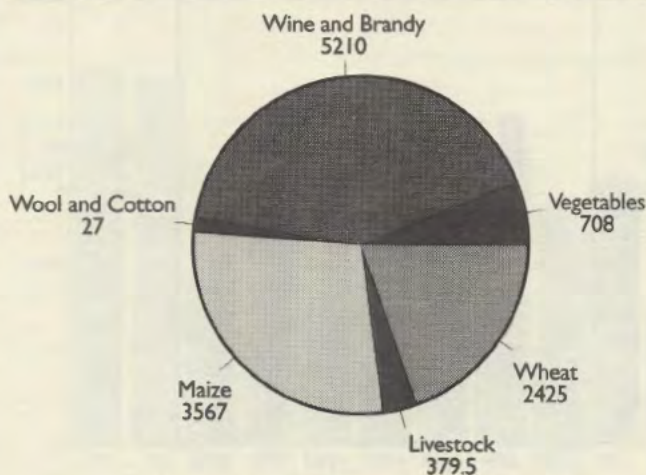
In any given year maize or wine and brandy topped in value all the agricultural products of El Paso del Norte, while wheat usually placed third. The importance of viticulture to the Paso del Norte area economy, as expressed in the number of individuals involved in growing grapes, was remarkable. Each year as many area farmers—often several hundred—grew grapes to make wine and brandy as grew life-sustaining maize. The vineyards, which

Franciscan missionaries at the Guadalupe mission began as a source for sacramental wine, soon spread throughout the Paso del Norte area. By 1755 an inventory of producers and vine stock counted some 250,000 vines, which suggests that about 125 acres were planted in vine stock.²

In that year the largest vineyard belonged to Manuela García de Noriega, who had approximately six acres under production. Doña Manuela was the widow of Domingo Antonio García. A Chihuahua merchant and militia captain, García had purchased his extensive properties from the estate of José Valentín de Aganza, the son-in-law of Antonio de Valverde Cosío. Only twenty other growers dedicated as much as an acre to grapes. On average, the 288 owners of vine stock in 1755 cultivated just under half an acre each.³

In some years more brandy was produced and in others more wine, though brandy tended to dominate by about two to one over time, as it did elsewhere in the Spanish empire. Output varied widely according to the size of the annual grape harvest. Given the various sizes of barrels for storing and shipping wine, it is difficult to make accurate assessments of production. Available data nevertheless show that in lean years more than two hundred barrels, or 4,000 gallons, of brandy and wine were exported from El Paso del Norte to Chihuahua in the eighteenth century, and

Tithes in Agricultural Products, El Paso, 1771-1774 (in Pesos)

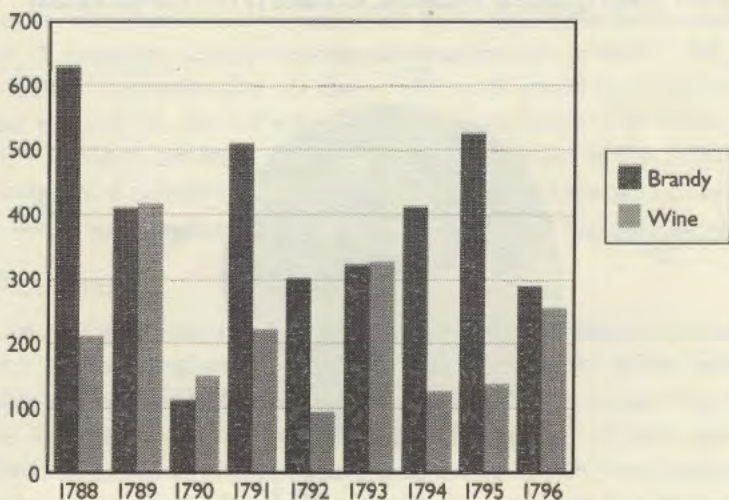


Detailed Summary of Tithes, El Paso, 1771-1774, AHAD-126.

in bountiful years more than eight hundred barrels, or 16,000 gallons, were sent south down the Camino Real. As for local consumption and shipments north, we have no comparably accurate figures. Yet if we assume a per capita annual consumption of twenty gallons, a low average for wine-drinking countries such as France and Italy, then the greater Paso del Norte area could easily have accounted for 70,000 gallons out of an excellent year's harvest of some 84,000 gallons.⁴

Incomplete records for many years in the eighteenth century make it difficult to construct a meaningful time series for production and prices of brandy and wine produced in the Paso del Norte area. The common use of *pipas*, or casks, of varying sizes and three barrel sizes, the *quintaleño*, *parreño*, and the *jalapeño*, further complicates production-price analysis and price comparison of the two commodities. Anecdotal evidence indicates that production and prices varied greatly in the 1700s and that, in general, a given amount of brandy was worth from more than half again to almost twice as much as an equal amount of wine. Records surveyed from the 1750s through the 1790s show El Paso del Norte wine selling in Chihuahua for as little as eleven pesos per barrel to as much as thirty pesos per barrel, brandy for as little as twenty and as much as forty-five pesos per barrel.⁵

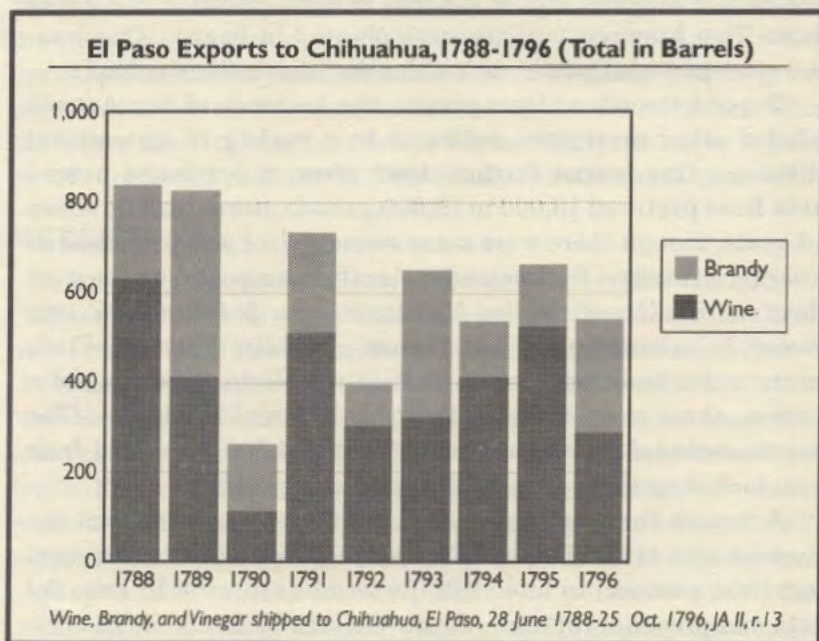
El Paso Exports to Chihuahua, 1788-1796 (By product, in Barrels)



Wine, Brandy, and Vinegar shipped to Chihuahua, El Paso, 28 June 1788-25 Oct. 1796, JA II, r. 13

So important were brandy and wine to the local economy and so seemingly systematic their use as media of exchange, that in many respects they took on the role of common currency for those who produced them. Financial records of some area merchants make a clear distinction between items that were exchanged through barter—the more common method—and those sold for credit secured by wine or brandy. Since little specie circulated in the Paso del Norte area in the eighteenth century, it comes as no real surprise that commerce literally floated on this credit based on annual brandy and wine production. Merchants issued personal loans and credit at local stores that were to be paid off with the proceeds from sales of wine and brandy. Traders in Chihuahua who had ties to El Paso del Norte merchants duly recorded the number of barrels of wine or brandy received and credited them to their colleagues in El Paso del Norte, noting the name of the shipper to ensure cancellation of debts paid. Property sales too were frequently paid for with an agreed-upon pesos' worth of wine from a future year's production.⁶

Freight wagons leaving El Paso del Norte for the south over the Camino Real chose from two routes. Lighter wagons usually struck out due south for the *Ojo de Samalayuca*. Those more heavily laden took the branch of the Camino Real that followed the



Rio Grande south and east, passing by the valley communities of San Lorenzo, Senecú, Ysleta, and Socorro. At the ranch of *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad de Los Tiburcios*, present-day San Elizario, Texas, the Camino Real turned sharply to the southwest, eventually rejoining the main route at the *Ojo de Samalayuca*.⁷

HACIENDAS

By the time travelers arrived at the turnoff of the river route of the Camino Real at *Los Tiburcios*, they were in the agricultural heartland of the Paso del Norte region. There, on the west bank of the river, Antonio Tiburcio de Ortega had purchased several thousand acres for his ranch in 1724. On the opposite side of the river, Antonio de Valverde Cosío had located the headquarters of his hacienda of *San Antonio de Padua*, which measured in the tens of thousands of acres, having begun his operation by 1711. By that date, Valverde Cosío was already filling orders from the governor of New Mexico in Santa Fe for cattle.⁸

The hacienda was dedicated primarily to wheat production. In 1726 Valverde Cosío stated that each year, 2,000 *fanegas* [3,200 bushels] of wheat were harvested and 1,500 of maize. A grist mill built of stone operated on the property. In addition, 10,000 to 12,000 vines produced grapes for wine and brandy. The hacienda boasted five hundred fenced *fanegas* of maize fields and 1,000 of wheat. Two hundred *fanegas* were planted in beans. One hundred oxen provided power for cultivating the various crops.⁹

Beyond the wheat farm proper, the hacienda of *San Antonio* included other properties dedicated to a variety of agricultural activities. One league further down river, a compound named Santa Rosa pastured 18,000 to 19,000 *ganado menor*, mostly sheep and goats, though there were some swine. Wool was processed at an *obraje* located on the hacienda. Another compound on the west side of the Rio Grande, called *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, was devoted to raising cattle and horses. Finally, Valverde Cosío maintained a home upriver in El Paso del Norte, consisting of a 27-room, three-story house with stairways and balconies. The grounds included an orchard with 3,000 to 4,000 vines and fruit trees, including two varieties of apples and peaches.

Although the best documented, Valverde Cosío's was not the only hacienda in the Paso del Norte area. All, however, enjoyed short-lived success. In late 1749 the *alcalde mayor* of El Paso del Norte and presidial captain, Alonso Victores Rubín de Celis, com-

mented on local haciendas. He stated that there had only been three flourishing haciendas in the district, all of which had fallen on hard times. A flood had washed away his hacienda, located upriver from El Paso del Norte. The hacienda that had formerly belonged to Governor Valverde Cosío could no longer be planted. The hacienda of *Carrizal* was in equally poor condition. Five years later Manuel Antonio San Juan, then captain of the presidio, offered his assessment of the state of haciendas in the Paso del Norte area. As recently as 1752, there were still two in operation, *Carrizal* and *Ojo Caliente*, both of which had been abandoned by 1754. Of the hacienda of *San Antonio*, nothing remained; the Suma Indians and their allies had destroyed it through their ceaseless raiding. As for Captain Rubín de Celis' property, San Juan did not consider it a hacienda; rather he termed it a *labor*, or farm. Nevertheless, it must have been a large operation, since he deemed it worthy of mention that heavy snows in the interior of the province had led to flooding that caused the Rio Grande to jump its banks, inundating low-lying areas and carrying off the crops sown in Rubín de Celis' fields.¹⁰

The existence of the Camino Real as a road to market, particularly in Chihuahua, had made the effort and expense of setting up large-scale haciendas in the Paso del Norte area seem worthwhile. The experiment failed not because of transportation problems; rather the irresistible problems of flooding and Indian uprisings destroyed the haciendas and in so doing dealt a grave blow to the overall financial well-being of the area. In fact, after the loss of all of its area haciendas, El Paso del Norte never regained the dominant position in New Mexico's economy it once held.

MERCHANTS

In the eighteenth century, especially after the founding of Chihuahua, the way station at El Paso del Norte on the 1,500-mile-long Camino Real from Mexico City to Santa Fe took on a new character. Because of its location at the southernmost point in New Mexico, El Paso del Norte rapidly emerged as an important trade center. Though it is true that the yearly trade caravan from Santa Fe to Chihuahua offered the best opportunity to obtain goods not produced locally in New Mexico, a number of well-supplied merchants operated stores in El Paso del Norte. In such trading establishments it was possible to purchase such utilitarian items as tools, cooking vessels, and durable cloth. Also

available to those who had the means or credit to buy them were such things as chocolate, silk ribbon from France, almonds from Sonora, and blue serge from England.¹¹

While a number of Chihuahua trading houses maintained representatives in El Paso del Norte during the eighteenth century, no merchant was more prominent in the historical record or active in as many arenas as Pedro Angel Colmenero. Colmenero, a native of *Querétaro*, had arrived in El Paso del Norte by early 1754. From his base of operations—his store in El Paso del Norte—Colmenero maintained business relations in Chihuahua, northern New Mexico, and Sonora. In El Paso del Norte's cash-poor economy, two of Colmenero's most frequent transactions were extending credit for goods purchased at his store and making personal loans, and both types of credit were frequently secured by proceeds from future wine and brandy production. Colmenero's pursuit of lawsuits to recover bad debts was nearly as common as his lending activities. One of his many other financial activities was a partnership with another Chihuahua merchant, Gaspar Macías, to collect the tithes in El Paso del Norte for a time in the 1750s.¹²

The documentary record indicates that in several instances Colmenero used the leverage he gained over individuals who owed him money to purchase real estate from them. Without doubt, Colmenero was the most active real-estate speculator in colonial Paso del Norte. From 1761 through 1764, he bought—frequently with his wife, Rita de Almanza—twenty-two parcels of land, many in the center of El Paso del Norte; sold six, and exchanged another four which belonged to the Tigua Indians that could not be sold but could be traded.¹³

It was difficult to complete the inventory of the Pedro Angel Colmenero estate when he died in 1768. His account books confused his executors, and it seemed that his personal property and the items for sale in his store were commingled. Examination of chest after chest of articles of clothing and cloth revealed that clothing for his personal use was packed away with multiple pieces of brand-new items. Thus it seems plausible that virtually everything the merchant owned was for sale—at a price. It also seems clear that Colmenero was heavily investing his profits in land. At the time of his death he was owed more than 8,000 pesos by numerous people from the Paso del Norte region and elsewhere, but he had scarcely 25 pesos in cash.¹⁴

POLITICAL STRUCTURE

INTRODUCTION

It would be wrong to suggest that the presence of El Paso del Norte on the Camino Real affected all aspects of its political structure or even most of them. Nevertheless, in order to understand the important changes that came about precisely because of the relation of the Paso del Norte area to the Camino Real, some background is required. Although *Nueva Vizcaya* had pressed its claim to El Paso del Norte on many occasions in the seventeenth century, by the time Diego de Vargas arrived there in 1691 to prepare for the reconquest of New Mexico, the matter had been put to rest. Vargas, the reconqueror, enjoyed civil authority over El Paso del Norte and the area communities, which he exercised through the man he appointed *justicia mayor* of El Paso del Norte, and military command through his appointment of the captain of the presidio. This situation changed in 1700, however, when Antonio de Valverde Cosío succeeded in obtaining viceregal approval of a lifetime royal appointment as captain of the presidio of El Paso del Norte, thus stripping the patronage of this jurisdiction from the governor of New Mexico. Valverde Cosío also campaigned for the position of *alcalde mayor*, which he eventually obtained.¹⁵

1700 TO 1771

From the time he secured title to the captaincy of the Paso del Norte presidio until his death in 1728, Antonio Valverde Cosío dominated civil-military affairs at the pass. During his terms as governor of New Mexico from 1716-1722, he kept up on El Paso del Norte matters through a fellow countryman, his nephew and son-in-law, Juan Domingo de Bustamante, who served as lieutenant general there.¹⁶

The lower levels of political administration in El Paso del Norte were more directly concerned with farming and Indian affairs. A position of vital importance to agriculture, the lifeblood of the region, was the *alcalde de aguas*. For many years Rafael Téllez Girón held this crucial post.¹⁷ The *alcalde de aguas* was responsible for organizing annual cleaning and repair of the *acequias*. For a time in the early years of the eighteenth century, the Indians of El Paso del Norte had the services of a protector. It is unclear how long this office persisted in the area.¹⁸ For as

long as they existed as separate entities, each of the Indian groups in the area, the Mansos, Sumas, Tiguas, and Piros, also had their own political structure as the Spaniards recognized such things. The documentary record suggests that in the Paso del Norte area the only Indian officials who came to the attention of the Spaniards were the governor and the *cacique*. It is equally clear from the historical record that the Indian leaders came to rely on the *justicias* who were assigned to the largely Indian settlements in the area.¹⁹

Soon after Valverde Cosío's death, another man, Alonso Victores Rubín de Celis came to dominate the political structure of El Paso del Norte. Capt. Rubín de Celis, who had received a lifetime appointment as captain of the presidio of El Paso del Norte, also held the title of *alcalde mayor* for more than twenty years.²⁰ At one point in this period, during the year 1744, an individual in El Paso del Norte held the title of lieutenant governor of New Mexico. This was probably a temporary appointment, however, because no one else seems to have held this title until after the military reforms ordered later in the century. During this time there was usually a *teniente de alcalde mayor* who had initial responsibility for the other communities in El Paso del Norte's lower valley.²¹

Another long-serving captain eventually followed Rubín de Celis. After Manuel Antonio San Juan obtained his appointment as captain of the presidio of El Paso del Norte, however, he never used the title *alcalde mayor*.²² He was always referred to and referred to himself as *capitán* and *justicia mayor*. During San Juan's administration, there was a *teniente de justicia* of the presidio and an *alcalde mayor* over San Lorenzo, Senecú, Ysleta, and Socorro. Each community had a *teniente de justicia* as well. Upon San Juan's death in 1764, the governor of New Mexico named an interim captain to whom he also granted the title *alcalde mayor*. This was the situation in El Paso del Norte when the presidential *Reglamento of 1772* forced further fundamental changes on the political system of the Paso del Norte area.

THE REGLAMENTO OF 1772 AND RELOCATION OF THE PRESIDIO OF SAN ELIZARIO

The implementation of the *Reglamento of 1772* brought about two immediate alterations in the situation of governance in El Paso del Norte, and the protection of the Camino Real clearly inspired the changes. First, the office of lieutenant governor of New Mexico was revived. The occupant of the post was to be a

military officer based in El Paso del Norte. He was to oversee protection of the local communities and provide escort as far north along the Camino Real as the *paraje* of Robledo. Second, and more dramatic, the presidio of El Paso del Norte, which had protected the area since the 1680s, was to be relocated to *Carrizal* to the south for the express purpose of better protecting the Camino Real.²³ Thenceforth, the Paso del Norte area was to rely on six militia companies: four from El Paso del Norte, one from Senecú and Ysleta, and one from Socorro and *Los Tiburcios*. However, only four companies were organized, and then only after great difficulty.²⁴

While the removal of the presidio of El Paso del Norte may well have been judged a success with respect to improved protection for the Camino Real south of the pass, another aim of the *Reglamento of 1772* failed. The hope had been that a concerted military effort would solve the problem of marauding Apaches. As the 1770s wore on, it became apparent that this was not going to happen. If anything, the pace of Apache attacks quickened, and the Paso del Norte area, particularly the downriver towns, was especially hard hit; the once-thriving ranching community of *Los Tiburcios* was abandoned.²⁵

Viceroy Bernardo de Galvez enunciated a new Indian policy in his 1786 *Instrucción*. Indians were offered the choice between all-out warfare and peace on the Spaniards' terms. The heart of the program was the concept of *Indios de paz*, or Indians at peace. The new regulations demanded that the effort to convert the Indians, especially the Apaches, should be set aside for a time. They were instead to be encouraged to settle near presidios, where they would be given food, liquor, tobacco, and old or poor quality firearms. It was hoped that the Apaches would in this way become dependent on the Spaniards for their very survival.²⁶

Military authorities saw an opportunity in the recently abandoned site of *Los Tiburcios*, which had everything needed to settle Apaches in a peace camp. The land was cleared and fertile, and the presence of nearby communities seemed to make the location ideal for staging trade fairs. Moreover, by relocating the presidio of *San Elceario* upriver to the *Los Tiburcios* site, the protection of the Paso del Norte area, especially the all-important river route of the Camino Real and the branch road to the *Ojo de Samalayuca*, could be assured. In early 1789, this move was carried out.²⁷

As a result of this realignment, though, a rather curious political structure was imposed on the Paso del Norte area, one that

remained in place throughout the rest of the eighteenth century and, indeed, to the end of the colonial era. The presidio of *San Elceario*, although relocated to territory considered a part of New Mexico, fell within the military organization of *Nueva Vizcaya*. In all matters military, the lieutenant governor in El Paso del Norte looked to the commander of the presidio downriver in *San Elceario* for direction. The documentary record could not be clearer on this point, as the lieutenant governor and his militia companies were at the beck and call of the presidial commander. In times of crisis military expediency also meant that the civil-military lines were crossed, with the presidial commander dictating policy to the civil authority, the lieutenant governor. Not infrequently, the commander berated the lieutenant governor for failing to act promptly as ordered.²⁸

This loss of local control notwithstanding, the move proved beneficial to the Paso del Norte area. The presidio provided for defense and returned a civilian population to *Los Tiburcios*, long an important part of the lower valley. And as is developed over time, one of the principal roles of the presidio of *San Elceario* became that of providing escorts to travelers on the Camino Real, north to Santa Fe and Taos, and south as far as Chihuahua, thus fulfilling one of the original and essential aims of the late eighteenth-century military reforms.

CONCLUSION

It is perhaps impossible to view the urban sprawl of modern El Paso del Norte-Juárez and conjure up an eighteenth-century image of this area as a land of agricultural plenty, where shimmering, water-filled *acequias* crisscrossed waving fields of maize and wheat and every house seemed to have a well-tended vineyard alongside. While wagon loads of maize and wheat rolled down the Camino Real to Chihuahua, for the visitor to the area in those days, who had doubtless arrived over that same Camino Real, it was the grapes, always the grapes, that captured the imagination. Despite the efforts of the hardworking local people who developed viticulture to the point of dominating the local economy, their success would have been impossible were it not for the existence of the Camino Real. Over the Camino Real word spread of the excellent El Paso del Norte grape and its by-products, thus helping to create a market through advertising. What was more important was that the Camino Real made it

possible to deliver the product to fill the created need, to transport brandy, wine, vinegar, and raisins north and south. It is doubtful that the industry would have ever grown beyond the local market without the existence of the Camino Real.

In a very direct way, the Camino Real twice altered the political structure of the Paso del Norte region. As a result of the *Reglamento of 1772*, the El Paso del Norte presidio, one of the oldest institutions in the area, was relocated to *Carrizal*, and El Paso del Norte became the seat of the lieutenant governor of New Mexico. The initial outcome of this move was that the burden of self-defense fell on the citizenry. As events showed, however, they were not up to the task of facing down as implacable a foe as the Apache. This led to the relocation of another presidio from *San Elceario* to the abandoned site of *Los Tiburcios*. In this instance as well, the protection of travelers along the Camino Real was an element of paramount importance in considering this move.

As these examples show, the Camino Real was more than a mere road connecting Mexico City and Santa Fe with points along the way. The Camino Real was a vital artery for commerce, which helped El Paso del Norte's agrarian economy boom. It also made El Paso del Norte an important trading center. Finally, the Camino Real was also a human highway that brought people into and out of the Paso del Norte area. For that reason alone, military decision-makers restructured the Paso del Norte area on more than one occasion in an ultimately successful effort to protect the Camino Real and those who traveled it.

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A Pass to the Future: The Keystone Site

By Carol Price Miller
and David L. Carmichael



One of the most important prehistoric finds in North America, the Keystone Archaeological Site in west El Paso, contains an ancient village dating to about 4,500 years ago. Because this ancient village is one of the oldest ever found in North America, both the National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian Institution have indicated an interest in helping to support the proposed research there. According to George Stewart of the National Geographic Society, the Keystone site is a "non-renewable resource of great value and significance," and the importance of this site to history, he urged, "cannot be estimated at this time; but initial research convincingly shows that it holds enormous potential as being the largest Archaic period village site in the Southwest, and the earliest known village site west of the Mississippi River." The Archaic period extended between the years 6000 B.C to 3000 B.C.

The importance of the site was not discovered until the 1970s, but the neighbors always knew that something was special there. "When we were kids," says Chita Olivas, who grew up in Pacific Heights, the neighborhood nearest the ancient village, "we used to go walking over there after a rain and see what we could find. Several of us found rocks with pictographs painted on them." Then one day in the late 1970s there was such a flood of water coming down from the mountain after a downpour that one of the prehistoric houses was partially uncovered, leading to a discovery of the importance of this area. Rex Gerald, anthropologist, and local archaeologists recognized the need to study the area carefully.

Above: Artifact found at Keystone Site

This discovery has been documented by photographs which appear in the O'Laughlin, Gerald, Cully and Clary publication.

As the United States Army Corps of Engineers was already constructing a dam at the site to slow the occasional floods of rainwater that rushed down the mountain, they had to build that dam in a very strange shape. Test excavations in the area revealed the presence of between twenty-three and forty prehistoric pit houses that would be buried by the dam structure. In order to preserve the archaeology, and avoid excavating the site prior to building the dam, the Corps of Engineers redesigned the south side of the dam to form a dog-leg around the back of the ancient village area. At the same time the site was determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. By 1983, the city-owned portion of the Keystone site was designated a State Archaeological Landmark, and soon after, a State Historical Landmark.

What led to this designation? From February 15 to May 4, 1979, fieldwork during the excavation of a trench that was to carry off water under the dam allowed examination of cultural remains in the area that would be impacted by the construction. Surface collection and mapping, soil coring and backhole trenching uncovered four house floors and yielded carbon dates from the Middle Archaic Period, approximately 3,600 to 4,800 years old. Artifacts



Drawing of a typical Keystone site pit house, constructed of wood and straw and then covered with clay. This is by far the largest site containing Archaic-period houses anywhere in the western

U.S. or northern Mexico. It is also the oldest known Archaic village site in the U.S., and possibly the entire western hemisphere. The group of pit houses that were excavated in the early 1980s seemed to be grouped around a common area, or plaza. From The Keystone Dam Site.



found are now housed in the El Paso Centennial Museum on the campus of the University of Texas at El Paso. An estimated twenty-one to thirty-five other pit houses were found by soil auguring and core samples. No further effort was made to excavate the site, out of a commitment to the conservation ethic: sites protected on public lands and not threatened with immediate disturbance are left as part of our heritage, to be studied and appreciated in the future. It was only recently that the threat to the site was discovered. It was not being protected, and it had been transferred out of public holding and sold to the Southern Pacific Railroad.

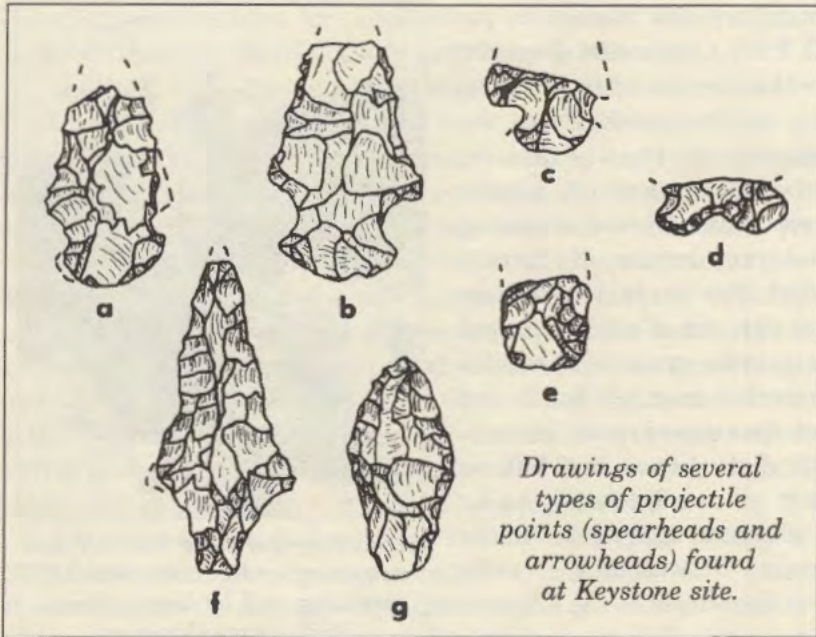


Student researchers who are soil auguring at Keystone Site 33, screening soil by levels during wide interval coring.

By 1988 the railroad company had decided to put a switching yard on the site, and the El Paso City Council had already given its permission when the area residents rallied their forces and fought the plan, raising \$85,000 to hire lawyers and experts. Because part of the site was a wetland, the Environmental Protection Agency met with lawyers from the Corps of Engineers, the City of El Paso, and the original owners, the Boykin Estate. The railroad's plan was not looked on favorably, and the area was declared a federally protected wetland.

The archaeological site itself had been overlooked by some in city government, the Historical Landmark designation archived by the Texas Historical Commission, and it was forgotten by most El Pasoans. "A few years ago," writes Charles Edgren, "you would have been hard put to find ten or twenty people in El Paso who knew the real significance of the Keystone Archaeological Site.... Few people actually knew that this was the spot where El Paso history begins, at least when you're talking people."

"Millennia before the birth of Christ," Edgren continued in his November 8, 1998 article, "a nameless people decided, for whatever reason, to settle in what is now the Keystone site.... And what



they built and left behind perhaps 5,000 years ago is one of the richest archaeological treasure troves in the country." The Archaic pithouses in this "treasure trove" originally consisted of a shallow, basin-shaped floor excavated out of the soil, covered by a framework of timber and branches, such as mesquite, cottonwood, and willow, and then plastered with a thin layer of clay. Looking similar to large igloos made of sticks and mud, they were about three meters in diameter, with simple doorways facing east. They are clustered in groups of two to five houses. Because they are more substantial than some other types of desert shelters, it is believed they were occupied during the winter and spring, and possibly more. The Centennial Museum's archaeological report (O'Laughlin, Gerald, Cully, and Clary) states that "The small, fire-cracked hearth and botanical and faunal evidence indicate a spring, summer, and fall occupation. There is reason to suspect, therefore, that the houses must have been utilized throughout the year."

The Keystone site is unique in its ability to inform us about the major behavioral changes that occurred during the Archaic period. This is when people changed from being mobile hunter-gatherers and began the shift towards a reliance on cultivated plants. This change, the beginnings of domestication, is believed

by scientists to be the single most important behavioral change since the development of modern humans as a species. The Keystone site, established before Rome was built, closer to the time of the pyramids of Egypt, predates the introduction of crops—corn, beans and squash—into the Southwest, but it contains evidence of an organized village, a social development traditionally thought to be dependent on a farming way of life. The site thus contains evidence that could require a major revision of the way we think about the development of complex societies.



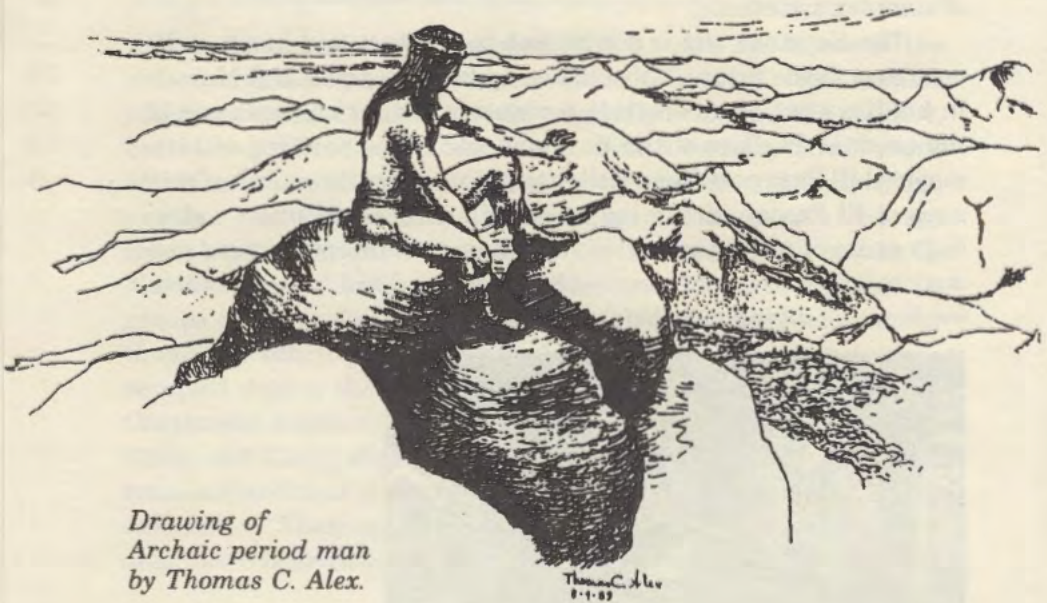
Painting by artist Hal Marcus of the Keystone site and wetland. Reprinted with artist's permission. © Hal Marcus, 1998.

The Keystone site is a vital link to the past and in a way IS our "pass to the future." Visualized by El Paso Artist Hal Marcus in his Keystone commemoration painting of that name, is one of the original dwellers of the Keystone site. This painting in turn inspired El Paso poet Gene Keller to put words in the mouth of this ancient El Pasoan, dreaming as he walked in the shallow water, in "a grass of nutty grains," saying, "some winters we prayed one duck would arrive in a snare set by the water," and "in our dreams we flew . . . diving over bright fields of maize."



Pictographs from Keystone mural painted by artist Bill Rakocy, 1998.

Four acres that contain the highest concentration of pit houses have been donated to the Archaeological Conservancy, but the City of El Paso has not yet donated to the Conservancy the ten acres that it controls. In addition, it is imperative to save the wetland as well. These Environmental Protection Agency-designated "waters of the United States" form the basis of the wildlife park which will surround the archaeological site and preserve the culture that was part of the lives of these ancient Native Americans. As Charles Edgren says, "This site makes us unique. It is a window into history, a history of which too little is known or appreciated." Some of the past of Keystone Site is known: the future of Keystone Site remains in doubt.



*Drawing of
Archaic period man
by Thomas C. Alex.*

CAROL PRICE MILLER, MA, History, 1972, University of Texas at El Paso; MA, English 1984, University of Texas at El Paso; Ph. D. Rhetoric and Professional Communication, New Mexico State University, 1997. Dr. Miller teaches business communication, technical writing, research writing, and composition in the English Department, University of Texas at El Paso. She is vice president of Keystone Archeological Protection and Preservation Association (KAPPA).

DAVID LANCE CARMICHAEL, Ph.D., Anthropology, University of Illinois. Associate professor, Sociology and Anthropology Department, University of Texas at El Paso. He participated in the early archaeological site study in and around the Keystone site in the 1980s. He directed the excavation of two other sites related to Keystone and assisted at the Keystone Site. He is now directing the efforts to preserve and study the village of pit houses near Keystone Dam.

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"...And All Through the House..."

by Lea Vail

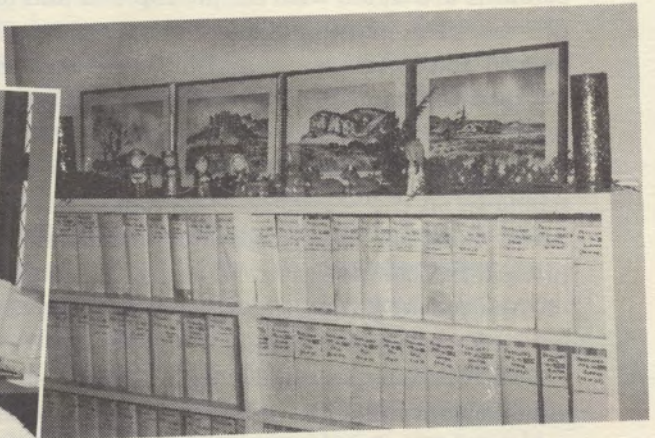
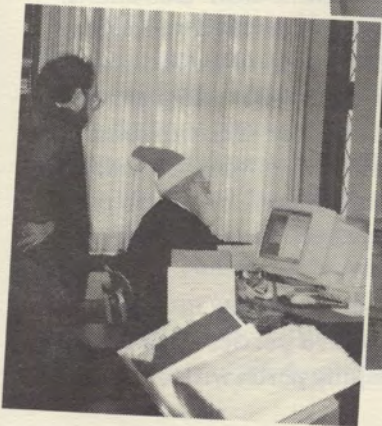
THE INVITATION READ

"Christmas on the Border"

and that meant that it was time once again for luminarias, posadas, biscochitos, and the Burges Open House. An article in "El Tiempo" in the *El Paso Times* of December 18, 1998, reminded its readers of the tradition of Richard Burges' invitation through the years to "Come and have a cup of Christmas cheer."

And come they did—over eight hundred residents and visitors—to enjoy the refreshments and festive decorations all through the house. Many first-time visitors, former guests, and members of the Society wanted to know more about the history of Burges House and the collections, documents, and photographs in the archives.





The Burges House

By Lea Vail



Ed. Note: Previously listed as an El Paso Historic Landmark and on The National Register of Historic Places, the Burges House was designated as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1993. The text of the application for inclusion as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark follows. It is printed here just as it was submitted to the State Historical Commission in 1993.¹

The Burges House which is in the Sunset Heights Historic District of El Paso was built in 1912 by Contractor J. E. Morgan for Richard Fenner Burges. Alterations and additions were made in 1927 under the direction of Architect Otto H. Thorman. Facing west, the two-story house carries the Adams Architectural style from the Georgian Revival manner popular in El Paso from 1881-1940.

A six-foot grey Franklin stone retaining wall and an additional six feet of sloping yard support the house with classical Revival characteristics. Concrete steps, flanked by retaining walls, lead to the entry under a four column, two-story portico. The four round columns are fluted with simple capitals and base resting on square plinths. The main entrance consists of two French doors with an arched fan-light above, and strongly rusticated wall treatment. The second story above the entry is cantilevered on three sides and butts up against the center columns. A row of four multi-lighted double hung windows on each side of the first floor and a pair of windows on the second floor complete the façade. The building is brick, finished in a rough almond-colored stucco and a shallow pitched red composition roof and wide overhangs. The under part of the overhangs and the woodwork of the doors and windows are painted dark green.

Alterations and additions by Architect Thorman in 1927 included: removal of dormers from the roof, added portico with fluted columns of the Doric order and upstairs sleeping porch with entrance

vestibule below, added new screened porch on back. Plans were drawn at this time for a 26' x 21' library room which was added on the back of the house and an open porch on the south side of the house.

Entering the house through the front door one sees a wide hall from which rises a staircase. To the right is a large room with open fireplace. There is an archives room in the former library at the back of the house. On the left of the hall as one enters is a spacious dining room. Originally on the second floor were six bedrooms and sleeping porch. These rooms were remodeled into an apartment.²

The Burges House stands beside the site of the famous Mesa Garden which was built in 1880. This historic site was originally a beer garden and later became an ice cream parlor. A battery of guns was set up in the garden during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. A live oak tree brought here from California and planted in 1915 still shades the large front lawn. There is a restored "Caretaker's Cottage" and detached garage on the property flanking the gardens.

J. F. Morgan, the builder of Burges House, was a well-known El Paso contractor. His credits include El Paso High School in 1915. The construction company, J. F. Morgan and Sons was active for over a half century.

Architect Otto H. Thorman who directed the 1927 additions and alterations was born April 12, 1887 at Washington, Missouri. A son of Frederick and Fannie (Laugenberg) Thorman of German stock, he studied at the University of St. Louis and became a student in the St. Louis Art Institute. He opened an office in El Paso in November 1911 following two years practice in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Mr. Thorman practiced architecture in El Paso until his death in 1966, and his designs were generally in the Pueblo and Spanish styles such as the house at 625 in the same block of West Yandell as Burges House. His work was mainly residential, although he did many commercial designs which included the Women's Club and office building of R. E. McKee, General Contractor.

Richard Fenner Burges was born to William H. and Bettie Rust Burges on January 7, 1873 in Seguin, Texas. Shortly after, on January 25 his mother died of fever. Before she died she asked her sister Nannie to take care of her sons William Jr., Alfred Rust, and Richard. The three brothers came from pioneer stock. Richard's grandfather was a Virginian and his wife from North Carolina. Richard's father William H. Burges, Sr. settled in Texas; he studied under John P. White and in 1859 he was admitted to the bar. In

1861 he went to Virginia with Company D, 4th Texas Infantry of the Confederate Army under the command of General Hood. He was among the men who surrendered at Appomattox to the Union forces. Upon his return home he met and later married Bettie Rust. He was a brilliant lawyer and an eloquent speaker and served in the state senate. Aunt and grandmother raised the boys and when the aunt married Dr. William Yandell, the young boys made their home with them until their father remarried. Richard attended his Aunt Laura's private school in Seguin for eight years, then was tutored by a German professor. In 1890 he attended Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. He returned to Seguin and read the law in the office of I. D. Quinn of New Braunfels, Texas.

In 1894, on reaching his majority, young Richard was admitted to the bar in El Paso before Judge C. N. Buckler, and in 1896 became associated with his brother William in his law firm, a partnership which was later dissolved. He practiced alone until 1912. On June 24, 1919, he became a charter member of the El Paso Bar Association. From 1912 until 1924 Richard F. Burges was in partnership with his brother Alfred Rust until the latter's death. In 1938 Richard and his brother William became associated in partnership. At the time of his death, on January 13, 1945, he was a senior member in the law firm of Burges, Burges, Scott, Rasberry and Hulse.

In 1898 Richard married Ethel Petrie Shelton who had come to El Paso with her family in 1886 from Brandon, Mississippi. He soon became well-known and respected by the citizens of El Paso. On December 7, 1898, *El Paso Daily Graphic* described him as "One of El Paso's youngest as well as ablest attorneys, enjoying a lucrative practice, winning the confidence and esteem of all with whom he comes in contact, and whose character has always been above reproach." Richard and Ethel Burges had a daughter Jane Rust. Mrs. Burges died while the Burges house was under construction.

Early in his career Richard Burges became nationally known as an expert on irrigation law. One of his greatest accomplishments was his instrumentality in obtaining the land and money for the construction of Elephant Butte Dam. As city attorney from 1905 to 1907, he led the successful fight to eliminate organized gambling in El Paso. It was he who wrote the El Paso City Charter. He served in the Texas Legislature from 1913 to 1917. Afterward he interested himself in the El Paso Water Improvement District serving as president of the International Irrigation Congress in 1915. By

Presidential appointment he represented the river rectification project concerned with the straightening of the Rio Grande bed until the project was completed. He authored the Texas Litigation Code and the Texas Forestry Act. He served from 1921-1923 as president of the Texas Forestry Association.

In June, 1917 Richard Burges organized an El Paso infantry company which became part of the First Texas Infantry of the National Guard, later a unit in the famed Thirty-sixth Division in World War I. He received a battlefield promotion to the rank of major when the ranking officer of the division's First Battalion was killed, leaving the command to Major Burges. He returned to El Paso with the Croix de Guerre and a citation from Marshal Pétain for gallantry in action.

In August 1923 Mr. Burges asked the Carlsbad Caverns discoverer, Jim White, a New Mexican cowhand, to show him the caves. White consented and Richard Burges was lowered into the abyss in a guano bucket hung on a strong rope. He was the first person to publish an account of the caverns. His efforts brought them to the attention of the National Geographic Magazine and the Department of the Interior. It was due in no small measure to his activities that the caverns became a national park.

Richard Fenner Burges served as a member of the Board of the El Paso Public Library from its beginning, and contributed largely to its resources. The Northeast branch library is named in his honor. A scholar and expert on Texas history, he never got around to writing a history book. His library of over 7000 volumes of classics, history books, general reference, and scrapbooks made it one of the largest private owned collections in the state.

Four generations of the Burges family have lived at Burges House. When Ethel Burges died, their daughter Jane was only twelve years old. Miss Burges was given the responsibility of running the house at an early age. When the family moved into the new house, Mrs. Burges' sister, Marie Shelton Howe and her husband and children lived with them. In 1923 Jane Rust Burges married Preston Rose Perrenot. The wedding and reception were at the house, beginning a tradition that produced around twenty-five weddings or receptions through the years. The Perrenots moved to the house about four years after their wedding. The couple had three children: Burges, Mary Austin and Anne. Many members of the Burges family have called Burges House [their] home as it stayed in the family until Jane Perrenot's death in 1986 when she

bequeathed the property to the El Paso County Historical Society.³

Through the years the house was the scene of numerous parties and informal gatherings. Such famous personalities as Irvin S. Cobb, the humorist; Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor; General John Pershing, and political leaders were entertained there. There is a picture of Burges House in "El Paso's Forgotten Past," a November 1977 Historic Preservation publication, and *El Paso - A Centennial Portrait* published in 1973. The house is on the El Paso Chapter, American Institute of Architects list of architecturally significant buildings, November, 1978, and was featured on El Paso County Historical Society's 1989 tour of homes in the Historic District of Sunset Heights.

1. This application was written by Lea Vail.
2. Since the extensive exterior restoration work was done in 1993, the upper floor has been restored to its original floor plan.
3. Jane Burges Perennot had made provision in 1981 that upon her death her home would become the property of the El Paso County Historical Society.

LEA VAIL is the chair of the Burges House Commission. She is a noted storyteller and speaker and is a member of the National Storytelling Association.

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Book Reviews

BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS OF THE MAQUILADORA by Norma Iglesias Prieto. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997. Paper, \$9.95. Originally published in 1985 as *La flor más bella de la maquiladora*.

One of the most interesting projects undertaken by the Institute of Oral History at the University of Texas at El Paso was one on labor history along the border. Included in this venture were interviews with migrants who came to the border area to work in the maquiladoras. Mostly women, those interviewed spoke of their hardships before acquiring jobs in the Ciudad Juarez plants, and the difficulties they continued to endure as they juggled family, work, and the search for a "better life" for themselves and their children. This reviewer was privileged to be involved with that project. Although Prieto conducted her research in the Tijuana area, it could well have been done in Ciudad Juarez twenty years ago. The life histories of the women she chose to publish have backgrounds and experiences which are similar to each other and to their counterparts who work in maquilas along the border from California to Texas. Most have come from rural areas and have little education past the *primaria* or elementary school. Several are married with children, although some are single parents. For many, this job is the first they have had outside the home. They are perceived by the managers and plant owners as necessary, if little appreciated, bodies which must be driven to perform their specified tasks, or, in management's eyes, the work would never be completed.

Being perceived as such, the women are paid wages which would be laughed at in the United States, but which are seen as "good" in Mexico. Companies can keep wages low because the maquilas provide their workers not only with meals but with some health services. In addition to those two fundamental essentials there is the threat of competition from hundreds of other women wishing to find employment in the plants. The workers must tolerate standing for long hours in extreme heat or cold; and, depending on the products with which they work, they may inhale toxic fumes. Most of the time they must meet unreasonable quotas, and favoritism is commonplace, as are sexual advances from male managers. And, as we are reminded in the foreword by Professor Henry A. Selby, the economic conditions in Mexico have become worse, not better, since the book was written in the 1980s. This should make us all more appreciative of the advantages we are fortunate enough to enjoy because we benefit in part from the labor of women who toil under such circumstances.

This sociological study includes theory and interpretation which may bog down some of her audience, but for the most part it is an easy read. It is the candid and moving life stories themselves which trace the women's struggles, aspirations, and victories that will remain with the readers.

Ms. Sarah John
History Department
El Paso Community College

THE BATTLE OF GLORIETA: UNION VICTORY IN THE WEST by Don E. Alberts. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1998. Hardcover, \$29.95.

THE BATTLE OF GLORIETA PASS: A GETTYSBURG IN THE WEST, MARCH 26-28, 1862 by Thomas S. Edrington and John Taylor. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998. Hardcover, \$29.95.

In 1862 a small army of Texans invaded New Mexico in order to win it for the Confederacy. Now the contest between the two states continues in the form of competing books about the Battle of Glorieta. Although the two works cover much the same material, they reach somewhat dissimilar conclusions. In addition, the authors offer different styles of history to the reader with different strengths and weaknesses.

By late 1861, Confederate military officials felt secure enough in Texas to advance plans for an invasion of New Mexico. If successful, the Confederate advance would have conquered New Mexico and perhaps threatened the rest of the Union West, including Colorado Territory and California. The New Mexico invasion was to mark the farthest westward incursion of the Confederacy.

In February and March of 1862, however, that invasion was turned back by New Mexico and Colorado volunteers in a series of drama-filled battles. The first, at Valverde on February 21, occurred when Confederate forces decided to bypass the Union-controlled Fort Craig and threaten its supply lines to Albuquerque. This forced the Union forces to come out for a battle that the Confederates were able to win. A month later, advance parties from both sides clashed at Apache Canyon where a legend, which both books dispute, records that a company of the Colorado Volunteers made a spectacular charge, leaping their horses over an eighteen-foot wide chasm. Two days later, on March 28th, the main bodies of the two forces clashed at Pigeon's Ranch, near the village of Glorieta. By mid-afternoon, Confederate forces had managed to outflank the Union soldiers under Colonel John Slough. As the Union troops pulled back to a new defensive line, there was enough confusion in the fighting that a Texas soldier, Alfred B. Peticolas, ran into Union troops. Expecting to be taken prisoner, Peticolas found that the

Federals had mistaken him for one of their own, probably because he had acquired a Union overcoat at the Battle of Valverde. Accepting their friendly advice to stay out of the Confederate fire, Peticolas bluffed his way back into the Confederate lines. One reason for the failure of the Union line to hold that day at Pigeon's Ranch was the prolonged absence of Colorado troops under John Chivington, a pre-war Methodist minister who would make a name for himself by massacring a peaceful band of Cheyenne at Sand Creek, Colorado in 1864. On that March day near Glorieta, Chivington and his Pike's Peakers were following a circuitous mountain route to the rear of the Texas camp. Descending from their perch above the Texans, Chivington's men wreaked havoc on the Texas supply train. The next day, however, the Union forces retreated. Although they had done considerable damage to the Union forces in New Mexico, lack of supplies and the inability to live off the land in New Mexico, forced the Confederate withdrawal from the territory.

Both volumes are extensively researched and contain a profusion of notes. Both are well illustrated with fine maps and photographs of the principals, although the illustrations in Edrington and Taylor are larger and more lavish. Alberts' work is the more scholarly and formal in tone. Both come with useful appendices, although the one in Edrington and Taylor contains more information.

On two other issues the volumes merit comparison. First, Alberts sees the campaign in New Mexico as an unqualified Union success. Although the Confederates held the battlefield, Alberts sees the Battle of Pigeon's ranch as a draw in which both sides suffered roughly equal losses and the Confederates failed to clear the road toward their ultimate goal, the federal post at Fort Union. In addition, the Confederates were forced to abandon the invasion in New Mexico altogether. Edrington and Taylor argue that each battle was a Confederate victory, although the Confederates ultimately could not hold nor further their gains.

On the second issue, Alberts embraces the notion of Glorieta as "The Gettysburg of the West," both battles having marked the peaks of Confederate efforts in the west and in the east. Edrington and Taylor are more conflicted on the use of the term. Conceding that the comparison has some "superficial applicability," (p.114) they are troubled by the vast difference in scope between the two battles and the unlikelihood, as they see it, that the Confederacy had any chance of success in New Mexico once it failed to capture Fort Craig.

Despite these differences, both books are worthy contributions to the literature on the campaign in New Mexico. Scholarly readers will doubtless prefer Alberts' measured and careful discussion; the general reader might find Edrington and Taylor more congenial for the liveliness of their prose. Both books will reward the interested reader.

Nicole Etcheson
University of Texas at El Paso

CONTESTED GROUND: COMPARATIVE FRONTIERS ON THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN EDGES OF THE SPANISH EMPIRE by Donna I. Guy and Thomas E. Sheridan, Editors. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998. \$50.00 Cloth; \$24.95, Paper.

Well-known editors Donna I. Guy, Latin American historian, and Thomas E. Sheridan, Curator of Ethnology at the Arizona State Museum, in this book bring together research studies of thirteen distinguished scholars—nine historians, three anthropologists, and one sociologist. The twelve essays contained in the book originated in two conferences held in Tucson, Arizona, in the Spring of 1992 and 1993. The authors focus upon similarities and differences of such frontiers as the Rio de la Plata, Brazil, and northern New Spain during the Spanish colonial and national periods from about 1500 to 1880.

The purpose of the book is to publish scholarly research studies that explain perceived similarities and differences of frontiers in Latin America which are defined by the editors as "zones of historical interaction," which were, "in a most basic sense, contested ground." (p.10) The thesis seems to be that "power and violence" demonstrate that in these selected frontiers on the edges of South and North America imperial power or national power "was too weak to maintain stable patterns of coerced labor."(p.11) This resulted in violence, instability, and concessions between indigenous communities on the one hand and colonists on the other over contested ground. Although the authors of the essays succeed admirably in accomplishing both the purpose and thesis of the book, it is strange that one of the frontiers on the edges of the Spanish and national frontiers, Chile, is virtually ignored except in one essay by Kristine L. Jones.

Each of the essays is preceded by a brief synopsis. The essays themselves concentrate not only on comparing and contrasting southern South American frontiers with those of North America (New Spain), but also in explaining apparent similarities and differences between them. Chapter notes reveal the principal sources consulted by the authors, but many primary and secondary published works are missing. For example, in the studies pertaining to the Rio de la Plata region and Buenos Aires there is no mention of the works by James R. Scobie. In the essay on "Indigenous Rebellions on the Northern Mexican Mission Frontier: From First-Generation to Later Colonial Responses," author Susan Deeds, in analyzing the Acaxee rebellion of 1601-1603 in Nueva Vizcaya and the Yaqui revolt of 1740 in Sinaloa-Sonora, makes no reference to appropriate studies of Maria Elena Galaviz de Capdavielle, Guillermo Porrás Muñoz, and other published works on the frontiers of Nueva Vizcaya and northern New Spain with few exceptions.

The text is supplemented by five grouped maps: one of the Greater Southwest in 1800, and four of southern South America; river systems of west central Brazil, Paraguay, and the Buenos Aires region. There

are no illustrations provided. While the comprehensive bibliography is useful, it is unfortunately not classified, thereby including unpublished sources with published books and articles under one heading. Chapter notes for all essays except one—an index of names and subjects, and notes about the contributors and editors—all enhance the text and overall value of the book.

Throughout the essays there is a proclivity toward repetition and speculation, both from one study to another and within each essay. Some statements are also misleading and open to question. For example, Deeds confuses *encomiendas* with *repartimientos* when she states that "encomienda Indians were to provide labor for a few weeks per year...."(p.35) Richard W. Slatta in his essay, "Spanish Colonial Military Strategy and Ideology" states erroneously that in the Borderlands, Spain fielded well-armed light troops, *companias volantes* during the Chichimeca Wars of the sixteenth-century, (p.89) although he does examine the "flying company" policies and practices of Hugo O'Connor, Teodoro de Croix, and other frontier officers in New Spain during the late eighteenth-century. Occasionally throughout the essays in general, the comments of one author contradict those of another.

These observations and criticisms do not detract notably from the overall value of the book. Instead, there is much to be learned and digested from the material in each essay. The selected frontiers are generally well compared and contrasted with regard to evident similarities and differences. "Contested Ground" between indigenous peoples and Spanish/national residents is a central theme of each chapter. Other topics, such as Indian-white relations; the use of Indian auxiliaries; indigenous resistance (both violent and non-violent); military policies; ecclesiastical practices toward Native Americans (e.g. the Jesuits); economic development; social structures; ethnicity; and gender are all apparent or addressed in one or more essays.

Contested Ground is basically an intellectual, sociological, and ethnohistorical study. It provides not only worthwhile material for scholars, but thoughtful observations concerning similarities and differences for the selected frontiers, and indigenous forms of resistance to Spaniards, Mexicans, Brazilians, and Argentines, including accommodation and selective borrowing from one culture to another.

Dr. Oakah L. Jones
Albuquerque, New Mexico

FROM CAN SEE TO CAN'T: TEXAS COTTON FARMERS ON THE SOUTHERN PRAIRIES by Thad Sitton and Dan K. Utley. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997. \$16.95, Paper, \$25.00, Cloth.

THE WHITE SCOURGE: MEXICANS, BLACKS, AND POOR WHITES IN TEXAS COTTON CULTURE by Neil Foley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. \$29.95, Cloth.

At the start of the 1920's over two-thirds of the population in Texas lived in rural areas. By 1950 the ratio had fallen to one half and since 1970 the figure has stabilized at about twenty percent. Two recent books examine that earlier period when rural life and agriculture were the social and economic forces that so characterized Texas. Thad Sitton and Dan K. Utley's *From Can See to Can't: Texas Cotton Farmers on the Southern Prairies* "describes the daily life of German-, Czech-, Anglo- and African-American farm families," (p.5) something they contend has not often been done by historians of the rural South. Much more bold and ambitious is Neil Foley's *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, a study that seeks to disentangle the complex social and economic matrix wherein racial power and privilege were shared, not always equally, by those who were able to construct identities as Anglo Saxons, Nordics, Caucasians, or simply whites." (p.7) The book has earned Foley considerable praise, including the Organization of American Historians' award for the best first book published in 1997 on American history. Four themes form the basis of rural Texas as presented by the authors.

The first is cotton. Long associated with the economy of the Southeast, both books demonstrate that cotton was not just an integral sector of state agriculture, its roots are deeply ingrained in Texas history. Don Antonio Martinez, the Spanish governor of Texas during the 1820's, believed that certain portions of the state, in particular the central Texas soil enriched by river bottoms, were worth the risk of settlement by Americans because of the potential cotton crop they could grow. He was prescient. The settlers developed the land into a profitable cotton growing region, but they also imported slaves, a move that both fostered the independence movement from Mexico and led the state of Texas to side with the Confederacy during the Civil War. But it was in the early twentieth century when the impact of cotton was most felt. During the 1920's Texas produced one-third of all the nation's cotton. Over one-half of that state's cropland was devoted to cotton, and it was estimated that nearly one-third of all working Texans were involved in some way with the cotton industry.

A second theme developed by the authors is economic uncertainty and efficiency. The inherent fragility of the cotton plant, the unpredictability of the weather, and indeterminate labor conditions were among the most significant variables that tinged the cotton market

with a gambler's risk. For instance, in the four year span of 1917-1920, the per pound price started at twenty-eight cents, rose to thirty-five cents, and then plummeted to thirteen cents. By 1923 it had risen to thirty cents. Pendular swings in rural lifestyles resulted. Sitton and Utley note that when cotton hit thirty-five cents per pound in 1919 "many farmers responded by buying their first Model T Fords." (p.56) They describe the harvest period as those "wonderful months of cash-in-hand, payment of debts, fairs, circuses, and Christmas buying." (p.35) But more often than not life was a grind, if not a brutal existence. Prior to the mid-1930's electrification of the rural areas was nearly non-existent, agriculture was just beginning to be mechanized, and communication was antiquated. To survive it was necessary to be efficient. Nothing was thrown away if could again be used, clothes were mended and handed down, and all parts of a slaughtered animal were used.

Economic efficiency was also critical in the formation of the area's class system, referred to in both texts as the "agricultural ladder" that people climbed in order to progress economically and socially. To be a landowner was to be at the apex; they owned the land, controlled the sale of the crop, and they were held in the highest regard by others in the community. Luring settlers into the area required that large tracts of land be granted to them. Owners could then sell it, parcel it out to families, or lease it to those at the lower rungs of the ladder. The latter option, a way to generate income on tracts of land that otherwise would not be used, created the other classes. Land tenants were renters who owned the capital needed to make the land productive: plows, tools, animals, and so forth. Because they were legal renters of the land they were owners of the crop, and thus entitled to sell it. They were allowed to keep three-quarters of the cotton and two-thirds of the other crops grown. Sharecroppers on the other hand occupied the lowest of the levels. Foley describes them as "essentially wage hands hired to work on farms they did not own."(p.10) Lacking resources other than their own labor, they used the tools and other resources of the landowner. Barely able to eke out a living, nearly all sharecroppers found that they had to rely upon the owner for credit to cover expenses of various sorts incurred during the growing season. Because they legally did not own the harvest, sharecroppers were required to turn it over to the landowner, who upon sale returned one-half of the profit minus expenses to the worker. It was well understood that the veracity of landowners about the amount of the sale was usually questionable. There were other problems as well, but so long as there was hope that one could advance, the class system was not questioned. Foley characterizes it this way.

The notion of a ladder was a fundamental tenet of American agriculture from the Civil War to the New Deal. It held that the young male farmhand could climb, rung by rung, through the stages of hired hand, sharecropper, and tenant farmer to farm owner. It guaranteed opportunities for all farmers, in theory at

least, to move across social and economic boundaries toward farm ownership, which was both the symbol of and passport to full citizenship in the democracy of rural America. (p.10)

Race and ethnicity form the final area analyzed by both books, but the approaches are different. Most significantly, Sitton and Utley devote considerable descriptive study to European immigrants, some to African-Americans, and little if any to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. They borrow the concept "kinship community" to form the argument that the above groups, and in particular the Germans and Czechs, were distinct groups. They infer that the Europeans were more communal than any other.

Soon after coming to Texas, the Czechs formed benevolent societies, insurance societies, and cooperative gins and stores, and the Germans organized those things and more. Beginning in the 1830's, and demonstrating what students of German culture have termed as Vereinswesen, "an intense desire to band together," Texas Germans along the Brazos and Colorado swiftly united in farming, shooting, singing, dancing, literary, athletic, and mutual aid societies. (p.22) Unwilling to sever their ties, these settlers, as immigrants are often prone to do, established networks that both encouraged others to emigrate and facilitated overcoming the legal and social barriers that newcomers often faced. Apprenticeships for the new arrivals were organized, and following a short period of learning and saving money they became land owners. Class lines existed, but they were not as distinct as what existed around them. African-Americans established "freedom colonies" that provided them with business and economic services as well as social opportunities that were otherwise nonexistent. (p.28)

Foley, on the other hand, expands the scope of race beyond the often seen dichotomy of black/white to provide a penetrating analysis of how people of Mexican descent were a crucial group in the socio-economics of the cotton culture. Moreover, he extends the study to whites because "not all whites...were equally white." (p.5) His conclusion that nearly everyone was harmed by the ensuing divisiveness and negative stereotyping is a departure from similar studies. By the 1920's the ladder of upward mobility had been all but removed from sharecroppers and tenants, a condition that enraged the whites in those classes. In response they demanded better working and housing conditions. Landowners reacted by hiring what they thought were the less diligent but more acquiescent and lower cost Mexican and Mexican-American laborers to do the work. They surely earned less, but they proved themselves to be very productive, pleasing points to the landowners. But they were not as docile as expected. Not only would they also make demands, they were also more likely to organize among themselves or simply walk away from the job.

Foley argues that race and class were so inextricably interwoven that their synergy affected the way people viewed one another. Landowners believed that white tenants and sharecroppers especially were unable to progress up the agricultural ladder due to bad genetics. White tenant and sharecroppers unable to ascend felt trapped and vented their bitterness toward blacks and Mexicans. Even Mexican-Americans, eager for acceptance through assimilation, viewed Mexican nationals, especially mestizas and blacks, with contempt. Foley analyzes it accordingly:

Whiteness and Mexicanness, like slow moving tectonic plates, shifted over time, slipping over and under one another and creating a new ethnoracial terrain on which Mexican-Americans could forge identities as white citizens in order to benefit from what historian George Lipsitz has called "the possessive investment in whiteness." (p.211)

The White Scourge and *From Can See to Can't* work well together; they are written from different perspectives and for different purposes. And it is because of their distinctiveness from one another that their confluence both provides the reader good understanding of the life at that time and challenges them to view that world differently.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: To Mardee Belding deWetter:

Please accept my apologies and those of the Editorial Staff of the *Password* for the inadvertent typographical error which printed your name incorrectly in the Winter 1998 issue of our publication. Steps have already been taken to try to prevent such an occurrence in the future. My personal thanks for the gracious manner with which you accepted this unfortunate error.

- Marilyn Gross, Editor

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