

PASSWORD



THE EL PASO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Password

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El Paso in the Fifties

By Carol Price Miller and Holly Thurston Cox

The year 2004 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the El Paso County Historical Society, thus it is that Password prints this article with thanks to the authors who submitted it at just the right time.



For most people, it was fun in the 1950s. The city was growing, jobs were plentiful and neighborhoods were safe. Nobody locked their door—that was rude, locking your neighbors out. You could take off and ride your bike for miles, carefree and safe. It was a different culture—long, lazy summers—evenings when everybody in the family sat down to dinner, and most of the time Mom was at home. TV dinners were introduced, but were not very popular or tasty. Mail was delivered twice a day. Reading was a major pastime and the library was very popular. El Paso's new public library was built downtown in 1954 and included a badly needed exhibition hall. Thanks to librarian and art lover Maud Sullivan, artists could show their work in a real gallery. By the end of the decade El Paso's first art museum was established.

Television stations began broadcasting in the 1950s—you watched the test pattern until the black and white programming started at noon. Then you watched Dinah Shore, Ed Sullivan, Jimmy Durante, Bob Hope, George Burns and Gracie Allen, the news with Walter Cronkite or Edward R. Murrow, and the Victory at Sea series about World War II. The 50s television industry also welcomed Loretta Young, Jack Parr, and the Mickey Mouse Club with Annette Funicello!

The decade of the 1950s was a period of El Paso's great growth and expansion, when population increased by thousands each year, military included. The skyline changed radically because of the 50s building boom—lots of new structures in housing

and industry. Phelps Dodge and American Smelting and Refining Company, ASARCO, produced 29% of the nation's refined copper. There was significant growth in some of the older, established industries: cotton as well as copper. ASARCO had the world's largest smokestack and El Paso Natural Gas was by 1950 the

Some of the theaters you were supposed to avoid as a kid, but you could go to the Teen Canteen and the Mesa Bowl, or hang around at the Oasis Drive-In to socialize. Fun could be had downtown for as little as fifty cents, including the bus ride—the fare was raised to seven cents in 1950.

largest natural gas transporter in the country. El Paso could boast 200 new factories as well as a \$45 million tourist industry. Apparel industries in El Paso grew to dominate the world market in items such as pants and boots. Homes spread into the surrounding desert.

Going downtown to the movies was a popular pastime. The Plaza Theater, Ellanay, State, Crawford, Wigwam, Texas Grand, Palace, and the Colon, all had "picture shows" as movies were called then. Some of the theaters you were supposed to avoid as a teen-ager, but you could go to the Teen Canteen and the Mesa Bowl, or hang around at the Oasis Drive-In to socialize. Fun could be had downtown for as little as fifty cents, including the bus ride—the

fare was raised to seven cents in 1950. No suburban malls existed, so if you went shopping you went downtown. Finally the Chelmont Shopping Center opened at Chelsea and Montana. In the late 1950s, Bassett Center opened as the first suburban shopping mall.

In the valley a continuing pastime for the kids was fishing in the ditches and looking for "crawdads" and frogs in swampy areas. What was later to become Sunland Park Race Track was just a creosote and mesquite patch or bosque swamp. North Loop in the Lower Valley was a country road and all housing ended at Rosedale. Near the river were lots of mosquitos: ditch-burnings were tried to get rid of them. When later the big trucks started going down the streets spraying clouds of fog, "we'd run after them, getting that stuff all over us," remembers Richard Dittmar ruefully. DDT was in use then damaging the citizenry and wildlife as well as the bugs.

The city was incorporating many outlying areas and became a metropolis. Ascarate was annexed in 1952 and Ysleta in 1954. Alameda Street ran beside cotton farms rather than blocks of

stores. The Mesita Addition and Loretto Addition were the outskirts of the city in 1950. By 1959, El Paso had expanded to include Coronado, Cielo Vista, and Mission Hills, and the Cordova port of entry was being constructed. Texas Street was still the heart of El Paso, as it had been since the 1920s. The kids living in Smelertown, mostly non-Anglo children of blue-collar workers, were slowly being poisoned by the unhealthy atmosphere, but that would not be realized for another decade.

Earl Shorris who attended Morehead School, then on Arizona Street, worked in 1955 as a reporter at the *El Paso Herald Post*. He shares this memory:

El Paso was then, as it is now, a city divided between the Anglos who had money and power and the Mexicans who did most of the work and did not have power. I remember that was the time when Ruben Salazar, a journalist and reporter who worked with me, had himself put in jail to do an exposé of the jail system and brought about some reforms. He became one of the first spokesmen for the Latino community, went on out to California, made a name for himself there, and was eventually killed by the police.

Arturo Islas was another from the Mexican community who served in an important office, as a captain, and later inspector, on El Paso's police force. The El Paso Public Schools in 1955 had been among the first in the nation to desegregate. In 1957 Raymond Telles was elected mayor, the first Mexican-American to hold that office, according to W. H. Timmons, but real inclusion was to remain a struggle.

There was no division when it came to the automobile craze. Everybody loved cars, all the different designs and names. "I had a '55 Chevy," says Dick Merrill, "and later a '57 Chevy 4-door hardtop. All the cars were unique in design—individual, and easy to tell apart even from a long distance. These days you can't tell the difference between lots of them." People did a lot of traveling by car in the 1950s and El Pasoans were no exception. Cheap gas, an abundance of cars, and lots of fueling stations stocked with travel maps, encouraged highway excursions. Many have memories of long hot car trips, windows open, wind blowing in. It was a long drive wherever El Pasoans went: Albuquerque, Ruidoso, Phoenix, Tucson, Santa Fe, Dallas—nothing was close. "I remem-

ber us kids sitting on the floor of our 1950 Ford, letting our beloved dog sleep on the back seat. We were all cramped up by the time we got to a rest stop, where we could stretch out and eat the picnic lunch we brought along," recalled Charles Smith.

"See the USA in your Chevrolet . . ." sang Dinah Shore on her television show every week. From El Paso it took a long time, no matter where you were going. Or, in town, you could drive over to see *The Sound of Music*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *South Pacific*, or some other wide-screen movie in technicolor at the Pershing Theater in Five Points. Or you could go eat Mexican food at Ashley's restaurant on Montana, sit around the big pond in the patio and feed enchiladas to the goldfish. You could drive downtown to shop, or go over Scenic Drive to see friends on the other side of the mountain, or go watch Hal Eurich in the melodrama at La Hacienda. In the Lower Valley were the Bordertown and Bronco Drive-Ins and the Lakeside Oasis; the Ysleta kids also went to the Hill Top Oasis or the Red Rooster closer to town.



From "Scenic Drive: A Road with a View" by Clinton P. Hartmann, Password XXXII, no. 3. Drawing by Jose Cisneros.

The interstate freeway was being built and El Paso was again divided in half as it used to be when the railroad was above ground. David Jurado, attending Holy Family School in Sunset Heights, remembers watching the neighborhood in front of his school being razed for construction of the highway. "Some of those



High school letters and the star on the mountain in the 50s.

homes were big, nice, two story buildings, and the owners were not thrilled about having to leave them." Jurado later attended Cathedral High School and said "The C on the mountain is not Coronado's, it stands for Cathedral." Mt. Franklin also boasted an "A" for Austin, a "B" for Bowie, an "E" for El Paso High and a "J" for Jefferson. The letters were made of mountain-side rocks painted in whitewash and cans of kerosene and sawdust which burned on nights of the games. A horseshoe represented the new Burges High School. After that no more schools were allowed to use the mountain for their letters, but it was fun in the 50s to see your school's letter shining brightly on the mountain.

Once, El Paso High's "E" was sabotaged by its rival, Austin, whose students moved the kerosene cans from the bottom row of the "E" to fill in the right side, forming the block letter "A." El Paso High retaliated by rolling Austin's whitewashed rocks down the mountain obliterating its letter. The El Paso High School

basketball team had won the state championship in 1947, and a few years later the "B" for Bowie became the focus for celebration when that school won the state championships in baseball and football. "We were a strong group of supporters and we still are,"

Once, El Paso High's "E" was sabotaged by its rival, Austin, whose students moved the kerosene cans from the bottom row of the "E" to fill in the right side, forming the block letter "A." El Paso High retaliated by rolling Austin's whitewashed rocks down the mountain obliterating its letter.

says Queta Pena. "Once a Bowie Bear always a Bowie Bear. We still get together sometimes and do things, like at the Chamizal concert last weekend."

In schools, teachers reigned superior—you stayed in your seat and you did your work or you got paddled. One young man remembers finding a *Playboy* in the halls of the old Zack White school at the Crossroads. He made the other boys pay him twenty-five cents for a peek. It was fun, until the coach found him and paddled him. All the kids from the Upper Valley had to ride the bus when it was time for high school—El Paso High was the closest. Ysleta High School housed the Lower Valley kids. Eastside kids rode the bus to Burges way out in the middle of the desert in Cielo Vista, or went to Ysleta, further east of town. The College of Mines played basketball in the County Coliseum until the Miners' own stadium at Holiday Hall was built. A riding stable existed where the Special Events Center is now located. On horseback you could visit the Smelertown cemetery close to the present location of Executive Center Boulevard.

The Texuns baseball team played at old Dudley Field, and you'd try to catch and bring home the foul balls. The New York Yankees stopped once to play an exhibition game. We're talking Yogi Berra, Casey Stengel, Joe DiMaggio, etc., and all signed baseballs for the kids! There was a frenzy of baseball card collecting.

Those old enough to go to dinner in Juárez could walk or drive over the flat bridge from downtown El Paso where children waited below with baskets for you to throw pennies to them. In addition to dining, you also went to see great shows. Night clubs such as La Fiesta, La Cucaracha, and El Continental had Vegas-type night club acts as well as dinner, and Hollywood stars often came to visit—sometimes they came for quickie divorces.

Viewing movies at the Plaza Theater was an experience because of the unique atmosphere. The stars twinkling in the ceiling and the decorative window-boxes and balconies high up on the walls made you feel as if you were sitting in a courtyard. Next door, at the old Mills restaurant, one could enjoy the same ambiance in the garden room.

Changes in music reflected social changes—the 50s took us from the crooners Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Frankie Laine, Patty Paige and Perry Como, to Buddy Holley, the Big Bopper, Bobby Fuller Four, and ELVIS PRESLEY. American Bandstand prevailed. Conformity went out the window as teenagers asserted

themselves and rebelled against their parents. In movies, James Dean thrilled the audience with his brashness in "Giant," "East of Eden," and "Rebel Without a Cause." El Paso's own "Dick Clark," Rudy Tellez, spun the platters on his KTSM show.

Art in El Paso was coming into its own during the 1950s. Our artists were becoming nationally as well as regionally known: a movie was produced based on Tom Lea's *The Brave Bulls*. The world premier at the Plaza Theater on April 13, 1951 created much excitement. Lea's other books of this decade were *The Wonderful Country* in 1952 and *The King Ranch* in 1957. José Cisneros, Tom Lea's friend, created the cover and division pages of the Texas Western College annual in 1951, using the theme "Our Spanish Heritage." This book, dedicated to Carl Hertzog, founder of Texas Western Press and nationally known typographer and book designer, is now a collector's item. Cisneros worked frequently with Hertzog as well as an almost endless stream of other book designers and authors. "My real job was painting busses—I did my own artwork at night. The hardest part was being color blind," he said.

In the early 50s Manuel Acosta returned to Texas Western College to study with famed sculptor Urbici Soler, who introduced him to Peter Hurd, with whom he began working. Acosta's friendship with Hurd and his wife Henriette Wyeth would influence the rest of his life. In his handwritten last will and testament, Acosta designated the Hurds as executors of his estate.

El Paso's art community of the 50s was enriched by the arrival of two very talented people, William Kolliker and Winifred



The W. W. Turney House

Korf. Kolliker, who had been an art director for William Randolph Hearst, threw himself into community activities, where he very generously shared his time and talent. Korf became a curator and later a teacher at the El Paso Museum of Art. Her art history classes influenced a whole generation of El Paso artists and collectors.

Anticipating the Kress Collection of European old masters, the El Paso Museum of Art renovated the W. W. Turney home designed by the architect Henry Trost and planned a cultural mecca for El Paso's triple heritage of Indian, Hispanic, and Anglo-American art. Because of the new art museum, El Paso then had the opportunity to host outstanding exhibits. In 1959 plans were made for the Sun Carnival Art Exhibition to move to the El Paso Museum of Art. It soon would become a national show—another major arts event to highlight El Paso and its multi-talented people.

This, then, was El Paso in the fifties.

Carol Price Miller and Holly Thurston Cox are working on a book about pioneering art and artists in El Paso in the years before 1960. This will be a sequel to Early El Paso Artists published by Texas Western Press in 1984.

CAROL PRICE MILLER, who earned her Ph.D. in rhetoric and professional writing at New Mexico State University in 1997, has been teaching writing classes at the University of Texas at El Paso for fifteen years. She has also taught at El Paso Community College and International Business College. A native of El Paso, she has masters degrees in American history and in English, and has written books and articles about El Paso history. In addition to the above mentioned *Early El Paso Artists*, she has also written "The Novels of Eugene Cunningham" in *Southwest Heritage*, 1980, and "Eugene Thurston: Portrait of an Artist Getting Started" in *Password*, Winter 1992. She has also been editor of *Artbeat*, a publication of the El Paso Arts Alliance, and wrote the *Procedures Manual for the El Paso Festival*. She has won the Book of the Year award and the Article of the Year award from El Paso County Historical Society.

HOLLY THURSTON COX, a fourth generation artist, received her formal art training at the University of Texas at El Paso, and also studied with Winifred Korf, Doug Kingman, Charles Reid, Ben Konis and Bill Kolliker. A dedicated artist, she has taught art courses in the El Paso public schools, the YWCA, the El Paso Museum of Art, and also in her own home studio. Ms. Cox has participated in numerous shows, including those with her father, Eugene Thurston. Her work has been exhibited throughout Texas, New Mexico, and California. She is active in many art organizations, many of which she has served as president and on boards and committees. She has won numerous prizes and awards for her paintings of realism and abstraction, both locally and regionally. She is included in *Who's Who in American Art*.

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The Origins of the Historical Society of El Paso

By Monica Hunter

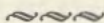


In all probability, the first historical society in El Paso County was located at Hueco Tanks, where the first historian accounted for several pictographs and petroglyphs on the caves and the cisterns from which Hueco Tanks gets its name.¹ From those beginnings, a full

fledged and functioning historical society, as such, has been developing, but it has been through several stages prior to arriving at the final organization that we now have.

The first mention of an historical society, in the past as well as in the present, has meant the preservation of things historical, that is, the historical places, and the objects around which history has been made, as well as recollections and stories regarding the early times. As an example, on Tuesday, May 10, 1904, pursuant to a call published in the daily paper, between fifty and sixty persons met in the City Council chamber to form an association of pioneers. From the notes of that organizational meeting the following appears:

It was suggested that the society might collect old relics such as a wooden-wheeled cart, a Mexican wooden plow, an old ox yoke, a wine press, and so forth. Dr. Alexander, S. H. Newman and others suggested the preservation of old photographs, descriptions of old adobe houses, and so forth, and it was suggested that the President should be chosen from among the oldest residents of El Paso.²



This article includes material from the newspaper columns of Cleofas Calleros published in 1953 and 1954.

One reason that the Pioneers Association recognized the need for preserving historical data and objects, was the fact that most of the people in El Paso in 1904 had come to the city relatively recently. The minutes of the Pioneers Association show that most of the people came to El Paso around 1881, thus they had seen this community develop so rapidly that they wanted to preserve for just such a society as we now have some of the old relics and the history as they had seen it develop. The Pioneers Association is still in existence but its main purpose was not as is ours, an historical society. And so, over the years, there have been many people who have felt the need for an historical society and have deplored the lack of interest in historical things in El Paso.

It was with this impetus that in the early part of September 1953 Cleofas Calleros started talking to Mrs. Helen Farrington, Leslie Reed, and many others about stirring the interest of people in an historical society. At this same time it was most provident that the Women's Department of the Chamber of Commerce had adopted as their program or theme for that year, "Show El Paso to El Pasoans." It was, then, on October 13, 1953, that Mr. Calleros was invited by Mrs. T. W. Lanier to participate in a pioneer's program in the Victory Room of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce on the occasion of the annual meeting of the Women's Department of the Chamber of Commerce. At that time, Mr. Calleros presented to this group of women the problems and the necessity for a society to care for things historical in El Paso.

On October 25, 1953, Cleofas Calleros wrote in his column "El Paso—Then and Now" which appeared in the *El Paso Times*:

What we need in El Paso is a historical society in order that we may interest ourselves to perpetuate the many "firsts" and other historical events which rightfully belong to us and the first in the United States of America.

Calleros pursued this endeavor when on November 22, 1953, he wrote:

At the regular monthly meeting of the Woman's Department of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce, held last Thursday, it was unanimously decided that the Department serve as a sponsoring unit for the proposed El Paso Historical Society.

In presenting the plan to the women I had in mind two things: first, that the organization had many pio-

neer families who have contributed immensely to the development of El Paso; secondly, that as a unit, it was the most active in civic affairs in the "do something class" in El Paso.

First mention of the formation of the historical society was made at the October meeting. Many women either by letter, card or phone signified their willingness to help organize the society, and to accept responsibilities in seeing that the plan was carried to a successful conclusion.

The following committee was appointed to serve as a steering-liaison group: Mrs. W. W. Schuessler, chairman; Mrs. Helen Seymour Farrington, Mrs. T. W. Lanier, Mrs. Frank H. Hunter, Mrs. Andy Fuentes, Mrs. William J. Hooten and Mrs. Maury Kemp.

This committee will meet early in December to lay plans for the initial formal gathering to be held right after the first of the year, at which time the original organization of the Historical Society will be undertaken.

El Pasoans are particularly invited to attend the original gathering. It will be the first time in El Paso that such an undertaking of its kind will be attempted. Let me emphasize the fact that membership in a historical society is open to every citizen in all walks of life.

Officially, then, this society was established on January 19, 1954, at 9:30 A.M., at a meeting called in the home of Mrs. Willard Schuessler, at which were present Mrs. T. W. Lanier, Mr. J. Page Kemp, Mrs. Andy Fuentes, Cleofas Calleros, and Mrs. Frank Hunter. Much remained to be done, however, before the society was to become a reality. The project of the year for the Civic Improvement Committee of the Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce was the formation of the historical society. Invitations were sent out by Mrs. C. H. Gabriel on March 12, 1954, to a very large mailing list of El Pasoans encouraging them to become charter members of the historical society. The response was more than gratifying—it was amazing.

In April of 1954, Calleros wrote in the *El Paso Times*:

One of the major projects of the Historical Society will be the publication of the Paso del Norte Historical Quarterly. So far the following have accepted assignments on the editorial staff of the publication: William J. Hooten,

Edward M. Pooley, Dr. C. L. Sonnichsen, Dr. Rex W. Strickland, Col. M. H. Tomlinson, Carl Hertzog, Tom Lea Jr., John Mid-
daugh, Clinton P. Hart-
mann, George Hochrein,
and Mrs. Phillis A. Mainz.
Other staff members will
be announced as their ac-
ceptances are received.

A great deal of publicity was given to the organization of the Society, and the first general meeting of the Historical Society convened on April 26, 1954,³ in the Victory Room of the Chamber of Commerce.



Mrs. Willard Schuessler

Mrs. Willard Schuessler was chosen by the founding committee to preside as temporary chairman of the group which consisted of 240 charter members. It was voted that this Society would meet in April, July, October, and January and that at the next meeting in July the officers and board of directors would be elected. A committee was appointed to write a constitution and by-laws for the historical society to present to the July meeting. On that committee were Allen Sayles, chairman, Mrs. R. E. Sherman, Mrs. T. W. Lanier, Mr. Clinton Hartmann, and Mr. Frank Hunter. The constitution and by-laws were presented and adopted at the second general meeting on July 26, 1954,⁴ and Mrs. J. Harold Kitchen presented the slate of officers and a list of twenty-one directors which was accepted by acclamation.

Mr. Paul Heisig was elected president; Mrs. Willard Schuessler, first vice-president; Mrs. T. W. Lanier, second vice-president; Mr. Cleofas Calleros, third vice-president; Mrs. Charles Gabriel, recording secretary; Mrs. J. R. Payne, corresponding secretary; Mr. Chris Fox, treasurer; Mrs. Helen Farrington, curator; and Mrs. Frank Hunter, historian.

In addition, the following were elected directors: Steve Aguirre, Mrs. John Ballantyne, Mr. Joe Goodell, Mr. W. J. Hooten, Mrs. C. M. Newman, Mr. Tom Patterson, and Col. M. H. Tomlinson

to serve for three years; Mrs. George Brunner, Dr. Paul Gallagher, Miss Margarita Gomez, Mr. Carl Hertzog, Mayor Fred Hervey, Mrs. J. W. Lorentzen, and Mrs. C. L. Sonnichsen to serve for two years, and Mr. Leonard Goodman, Sr., General Ralph Meyer, Mrs. Hugh Myer, Mrs. Jack Ponder, Mr. Juan Stockmeyer, Mr. Karl Wyler, Jr., and Mrs. Louis Zork to serve for one year.

Thus, at 8 P.M. on July 26, 1954, in the Victory Room of the Chamber of Commerce, the El Paso Historical Society was a full fledged reality, with a constitution, by-laws, officers and directors, and was in business from then on.

In August of 1954, Cleofas Calleros, still indicating his great interest in the historical society, reported that the Society had "490 paid memberships including thirty life members and two honorary life members." He went on to present an outline for its further organization:

As there are diversified interests in the membership, it is planned that working committees will be organized to cover the particular interests of the entire membership. Among some of the proposed fields are study clubs of Southwestern history, Texas history, cowboy and ranger history, folklore and early cultural history.

Other activity committees to be named will be: preservation of historical sites, markers and monuments, coordinating museum activities, preservation of family albums and histories, documents and manuscripts, hobbies and collections of Texania.

Group activities, such as lectures, speaker's bureaus, visits to historical sites, motorcades, cavalcades and historical drama presentations will be featured.

One of the major projects of the Society will be the publication of a quarterly or a semi-annual historical review . . . the Paso del Norte Historical Quarterly. This publication will enable the membership to receive feature articles on El Paso's rich history which heretofore has remained unpublished for the past 418 years.

So far the following have accepted assignments on the editorial staff of the publication: William J. Hooten, Edward M. Pooley, Dr. C. L. Sonnichsen, Dr. Rex W. Strickland, Col. M. H. Tomlinson, Carl Hertzog, Tom Lea Jr., John Middaugh, Clinton P. Hartmann, George

Hochrein, Mrs. Phillis A. Mainz. Other staff members will be announced as their acceptances are received.

The El Paso Public Library was the site chosen for the third general meeting on November 11, 1954. The organization had grown to 577 regular members and forty-three life members. Mrs. Tom Charles of Alamogordo spoke of the early settlers in the Tularosa basin.⁵

The El Paso Public Library proved to be a popular place, as the regular meeting on February 17, 1955 was held there as well. It was announced by Mrs. T. W. Lanier, membership chairman, that there were 700 charter members to date, making this the largest historical society in Texas. Mr. Heisig announced the appointment of Mrs. Ralph Hellums as corresponding secretary and publicity chairman; Mrs. C. A. Goetting and Mr. Cleofas Calleros as chairmen of the committees on historical markers and preservation of relics; and Dr. Eugene Porter as chairman of the editorial committee. The speaker of the evening was Mr. Lou Batchley who played some interesting recorded interviews with "old timers" in New Mexico. Mr. Batchley had formed the Pioneers Foundation, Inc. in New Mexico for the purpose of recording these interviews and keeping a library of them.⁶

The El Paso Public Library proved to be a popular place, as the regular meeting on February 17, 1955 was held there as well. It was announced by Mrs. T. W. Lanier, membership chairman, that there were 700 charter members to date, making this the largest historical society in Texas.

At the general meeting of May 13, 1955, in the El Paso Public Library, a scroll listing the charter life members of the Society was presented by Mrs. Kate Ball. A drawing in the right hand corner of the scroll was done by Mr. José Cisneros. Dr. Porter presented plans for *The Password*, the quarterly to be published by the Historical Society. The speaker of the evening was Mr. Wallace Perry who gave a review of the Symposium on Arid Lands which he had recently attended in Albuquerque.⁷

Under the supervision of Mr. Calleros, bronze markers had been placed at the seven original missions of the El Paso Valley, including the Juárez Mission.⁸

On September 14, 1955 the mule car which ran between El Paso and Juárez was placed in San Jacinto Plaza. A cast of the mule Mandy was given by the Odd Fellows Lodge No. 284. The Popular Dry Goods Company furnished a mannequin as the conductor of the car. Mr. J. B. Binkley and Mrs. Floyd Payne assisted in obtaining the car. The Sheriff's Posse and the mayors of Juárez and El Paso took part in the dedication which was attended by many El Pasoans including the families descended from Mr. Zach White and Judge Joseph Magoffin.

At the general meeting in September 1955, it was announced that membership had grown to 716, including ninety-six life members. A letter was read from the president of the New Mexico Pioneers Association who thanked the El Paso Society for the [funds] it had given them for research and said that the recordings of old timers were on file in Silver City but were the property of the El Paso Historical Society. Officers for 1956 were elected as follows: Paul A. Heisig, president; Louise Schuessler, first vice-president; Mrs. T. W. Lanier, second vice-president; Cleofas Calleros, third vice-president; Mrs. Frank Hunter, recording secretary; Mrs. Ralph Hellums, corresponding secretary; Chris Fox, treasurer.

The Historical Society is looking forward to the dedication of the Southern Pacific steam engine #1 which will take place during the seventy-fifth anniversary of the coming of the railroads to El Paso.

Dr. Eugene Porter, speaker of the evening, read a paper written by Col. Albion Smith on the Salt War at San Elizario. He also gave the report of the editorial committee and it was voted by the Society that the first quarterly would be published in February 1956.⁹

Thanks to the historical visionaries of early El Paso and their persistent striving toward the goal to "protect and preserve," the dream of having a bona fide historical society became a reality.

Material from the newspaper columns written by Cleofas Calleros were taken from the newspaper files compiled by Richard Field.

The biographical material on Mrs. Hunter was provided by Dr. James M. Day.

MONICA ARMSTRONG HUNTER, 1918–1997, was one of the founding members of the El Paso Historical Society who served for many years as an officer and on many committees. She was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and graduated from Wheaton College in Massachusetts. In El Paso, she was actively involved with the Girl Scout Council, served as a deacon and elder in the First Presbyterian Church, and was an active supporter of the Art Museum and YWCA. She was the director of the Mary L. Peyton Foundation and Activities Director at White Acres. Monica Hunter was a past president of her P.E.O. chapter and a member of the Pan American Round Table.

SOURCES

1. Picture of Indian markings at Hueco tanks referenced.
2. Pioneer minutes in the custody of Charles Auer.
3. Minutes of Historical Society April 26, 1954.
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5. Minutes of Historical Society November 11, 1954.
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New Senior Citizen in Town:

*The El Paso County Historical Society
Reaches Its Fiftieth Year*



hat a difference new decor can make! Paint in the "new" colors, wall pieces, and new furniture transformed one of the older elegant homes in El Paso into a showplace. It was all done by a large group of local decorators.

In commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the El Paso County Historical Society, the Burges House was given a new interior as part of the Decorator ShowHouse. In 1986 Jane Burges Perrenot bequeathed her home at 603 West Yandell, which was built in 1912, to the Historical Society. It now houses a Research Center in which are stored the Society archives and from which many researchers gather material for their research. It is also the scene of small meetings and of many fashionable weddings.

In order to maintain its status as a Texas Historical Landmark, the exterior should not be altered. The interior has, however, received a sorely needed update. Although the decorators used much of the furniture that is a part of the Burges House, they also added furniture, rugs, and wall decorations from their studios. All the rooms received new coats of paint and the beautiful hardwood floors were cleaned and polished and the carpeting cleaned.

Approaching the house, one first stepped into the vestibule. DeAnna Carpenter, of DeAnna's Designs, designed this area with her "permanent botanicals" which are her hallmark. The entry appeared to be filled with gorgeous blooms which had just been cut in the garden!

Walking from the vestibule into the parlor one is struck by the use of shades of bronzed green on the walls and woodwork. Anne Steele of Anne Steele Custom Interiors used magnificently muted

colors that seem to glow, a welcome change from the old 1950s white. In this room now hangs a tapestry that had been in the archives. It previously hung on the walls of the old Westerner Hotel, first known as the Ranchotel, located off of North Mesa Street. At that time the Westerner was completely surrounded by desert and was, it is reputed, a place where movie stars and other famous people stayed while they were negotiating Juárez "quickie" divorces.

The kitchen is a marvel! It is astonishing to see what Roberto F. De La Vega of Ethan Allen's and his wife Petra accomplished in this small and usually unglamorous and utilitarian room. An impressive piece of woodwork which was designed, installed, and donated by Mr. De La Vega, now adorns the entire area between the windows above the sink and cabinets, a perfect foil for the milk-chocolate walls. It is surprising to learn that he used the original cabinets, which now look new, having been given an antiqued pickled finish. Petra constructed a most unusual ceramic container and filled it with a floral arrangement which is most impressive!

The two bright and cheerful restrooms on the first floor, tastefully and charmingly decorated by Sherry Lambert of Designs Unlimited of New Mexico, brought to light one restroom which many did not even know existed. Both are now light and airy and one is even fitted with a small settee in case a lady needs to rest or feels faint. In the other restroom there is a mural done by Stephanie Conroy, The English Artist.

The Perrenot library, refurbished by Fran Timbrook and Graciela Moye of Charlotte's Fine Furnishings, is a quiet, dignified, and very inviting place in which to work, and it is in this room that most of the researchers will work. The walls in tones of deep copper are a wonderful foil for the muted smokey green bookshelves which occupy three sides of the room. These bookshelves will house city directories, the collections of *Password*, and other reference materials. There will also be at least two computers which can be used by researchers. On the wall here is a framed list of the charter members of the Society as well as a most impressive collage

The kitchen is a marvel! It is surprising to learn that he used the original cabinets, which now look new, having been given an antiqued pickled finish. Petra constructed a most unusual ceramic container and filled it with a floral arrangement which is most impressive!

containing pictures of the Burges family. This collage was designed and assembled by Louis McKee.

Leaving the library, one can look into the Resource Center where staff and volunteers will work and from which they will retrieve materials from the archives that are located in this room. The contents of the archives are now on a database which can be found on the web site of the Historical Society—www.elpaso.history.com—and can be easily requested for use in the work areas.

A small but most inviting study with its Louisbourg green walls will serve as an area where researchers can work quietly and comfortably. This room will house two very up-to-date computers which were provided by a grant from the McKee Foundation.

Making our way back to the parlor, the eye is drawn to the famed stairway on which most of the Burges brides have posed for their bridal picture. At the top of the stairway there is a charming suite of rooms which serves as quarters for the caretaker.

A small but most inviting study with its Louisbourg green walls will serve as an area where researchers can work quietly and comfortably. This room will house two very up-to-date computers which were provided by a grant from the McKee Foundation. This room, and the office below, was decorated by Val Brown, Rosa Lopez, and Kate Alvarez of

Harrison Brown Interior Solutions. The office below was fitted with a floor to ceiling credenza and hutch, a neat and inviting work space and an attractive place in which the executive director, the president, and other officers can conduct the business of the Society. It is the hope of the Society that members and interested parties will purchase some of the furniture and Persian rugs that have been placed there for the ShowHouse and contribute them to the Society.

The "bride's room and bath" beautified by Candy's Interiors, fits its purpose very well. It is calm, serene, and restful, a perfect place for a nervous bride to gather her thoughts and to rest before the ceremony. The bridal lounge, adjacent to the bride's room, is a bright and cheerful "sitting room" where one can almost hear the happy twittering of the bridal attendants as they arrange each other's dresses and hair and make those unending "adjustments." Lorraine Huit from Cardel Homes is responsible for this charming area.

The sunroom, situated at the center of the second floor, is indeed a cozy and inviting place where one is almost compelled to sit and enjoy reading a good book. The windows open onto a breathtaking view of the cities of El Paso and Juárez—one can see from the heart of El Paso to the Sierra Madres which form a backdrop for Juárez. This room, done by Shelley Saab of Shelly Saab Custom Interiors, features a balcony where one can enjoy the breeze and, with a little imagination, one can see the inhabitants of the house as they sit on the balcony watching the two cities settle for the night while twilight enfolds them.

The patio areas were adorned with gorgeous floral displays of spring flowers and trees by Karen Stafford of Flowercare.

Those of us who went to the Burges House while it was in the throes of preparation were amazed to see what emerged when it was “finished.” With walls and woodwork showing signs of having had the old paint removed, bookshelves emptied and stacks of books covered by plastic on all the floors, all the cabinets emptied, all the furniture moved and removed to “sheltered” quarters, the walls littered with test patches of paint, and general chaos reigning, it appeared that the target date of April 30 was only a dream. All of the decorators who worked had to be “arranged,” given their “space,” and differences smoothed. This miraculous deed was accomplished by Lynn Russell, executive director, and her staff of volunteers—a Herculean task accomplished.

The Decorator ShowHouse opened with a reception for the charter members and special guests on Friday, April 30, 2004. It continued on May 1 and 2 and from May 5 through May 9. The Burges House is open on its regular schedule each Tuesday and Thursday. Although there may not be any research you need to do, stop in and see the changes made in this beautiful old home.



Idus Gillett— Organic Farmer: Employer of Unpaid Workers

By Ruth E. Gillett



All Texans know of the noted Texas Ranger, James B. Gillett who is celebrated for his colorful exploits as a Ranger, his stint as an El Paso city marshal, a rancher, and president of the Bloys Camp Meeting. There is however, another Gillett who should also be acknowl-

edged. This Gillett did not carry a gun or chase outlaws, rather he used his knowledge of the land, and what he could do with it.

In the early 1900s organic farming was the non-conventional way of farming. The majority of farmers at that time used sprays and commercial fertilizer to rid their fields of pests and to keep the land fertile. One of the pioneers of organic farming in the El Paso area was Idus Gillett who employed millions of unpaid workers on his farm.

Born in Silver City, New Mexico in 1894 to Sam and Ruth Phelps Gillett, Idus Gillett was one of five children, who, in 1912, began his farming career on a farm near Canutillo, just north of El Paso. When he started farming he noticed a "creeping paralysis" in the Upper Valley. Humus, the organic material in soil which is essential to the fertility, was no longer present, and salt in the ground-water was stunting growth.¹ Adding to the difficulty was the practice of planting the same crop—cotton—year after year.

To restore humus to the soil Idus developed compost piles which were made from manure obtained from his farm and livestock cars.² He added trash from the cotton gin, hay, stalks, and weeds. He watered the pile down until the green manure decayed and created humus. When the compost piles were ready, Idus

distributed the much needed humus in irrigation ditches from which the water would carry the humus to the planted crops. During the winter he used a compost spreader which was attached to the front of a tractor and was used to distribute the compost onto the field. The soil would then be turned by a tractor to feed the soil during the winter. 300 tons of humus were applied yearly on the farm or about three tons per acre.³

Idus then brought in his "unpaid workers"—earthworms—to enrich the soil even more. Angleworms eat humus. Angleworms not only work the soil, but their castings provide the much-needed fertilizer. Soil with angleworms has "300 percent more manganese, 500 percent more nitrogen, and 700 percent more phosphate, than was in the ground before."⁴

One visitor bet Idus that earth worms or their castings could not be found anywhere on the farm. The bet amounted to \$50. The visitor and Idus went out with a shovel and dug all over the farm. Much to the disgust of Idus' friend, earthworms or castings were found everywhere. Dad won the bet.

In the 1920s one of the highest yearly awards in farming was to be named a "Master Farmer" by the *Progressive Farmer*. Out of the entire state only fifteen master farmers were selected. The award was based on soil fertility, crop rotation, and the yield of crops per acre. Idus won the award at the age of thirty-five.⁵



Idus Gillett



The compost spreader at work.

One of the criteria for the selection was the high yield of crops. Today a farmer is lucky to get one and one half bales of cotton per acre: Idus got four and one half bales to the acre. He also harvested twenty-two tons of silage per acre and 300 crates of cantaloupes.⁶

H. L. Akins, editor of *Progressive Farmer*, stated that part of the reason for the selection of Idus as a Master Farmer was his successful use of crop rotation.⁷ For example, Idus would first grow alfalfa and graze it for three years. The field was then planted to cotton for the next three years. The next cycle was to plant the field to corn for silage or to plant it with wheat. Crop rotation added to the soil fertility. The magazine *Organic Gardening and Farming* selected the Gillett farm as one of the fifty places to visit in the United States where one could learn about improved farming techniques.⁸

Organic farming like all farming was not without risks. Getting the crop to market, the risk of a hail storm, and the problem with stock were all part of problems of farming The major challenge was the fording of the Rio Grande.

Organic farming, like all farming, was not without risks. Getting the crop to market, the risk of a hail storm, and the problem with stock were all part of problems of farming. For example, Idus periodically planted wheat as part of the crop

rotation. The wheat was gathered into bundles or shocks and the bundles placed on horse drawn wagons. The harvest was taken to Hart's Mill where the wheat was ground into flour and sold to a variety of customers. The major challenge was the fording of the Rio Grande. Idus recalled that on one occasion he placed the shocks of wheat on a wagon. However, when they attempted to ford the river, one of the wagon wheels hit quicksand and the entire crop was lost. Idus saw the wheat shocks float down the Rio Grande.

Another of the risks of farming was met in 1959 when Idus had planted the entire farm in cotton. As a student at the University of Texas in Austin, I needed a car in order to do student teaching. We went to town and purchased a car. Returning to the farm we found that the entire cotton crop had been completely destroyed. After an insurance adjustment, Idus planted the entire farm to corn and got a bumper crop of twenty-two tons per acre.

Producing beef was also not without risk. One morning Idus placed a steer in a stock wagon which was right behind the truck.

He got on Doniphan and headed for the slaughter house, Blount's Market. All of a sudden he felt a sudden lunge, and the steer broke out of the stock wagon, crossed Doniphan, and went into the Rio Grande. When the steer got into the water he refused to come ashore. The solution was to go home to get one of his horses, and a farm worker with a lasso. Eventually, the steer was lassoed and kept his date at Blount's Market.



Gillett in tall corn.

Idus had a sense of humor. He said, "Treat everyone the same until 10 a.m. The rest of the day will take care of itself." He also said "I became a master farmer due to three bones: my backbone, my wish bone, and my jaw bone."

Part of Idus' success, it is felt, was due to his marriages. By his first marriage to Lucy Richardson, which ended in an amicable divorce, he had three children: Richard, "Dick"; Theodore, "Ted"; and Dorothy. His second marriage was to Virginia Wheeler and they had two children, Virginia, "Tita" and Ruth. He was an active member of the First Church of Christ, Scientist.

Idus held a variety of leadership roles. He was president of the Downtown Rotary, he served three terms as president of the Farm Bureau, and he was president of the Southwest Growers Association. He died in 1976 at the age of eighty-one.

Today organic farming is no longer considered unconventional. Many stores feature organic products, and "organic" is increasing in popularity. By the use of compost and crop rotation, Idus Gillett was an excellent steward of the land and was admired for his success as a farmer.

RUTH E. GILLETT, a native of El Paso, graduated from El Paso High School and received her bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree in education from the University of Texas at El Paso. She taught at Andress High School in El Paso for thirty years. She is currently a docent at the Magoffin Home and a member of Bible Study Fellowship. She is a fourth generation Gillett.

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Camp Grande Revisited

By Judy & Frank Mangan,
with Minnie Earp Travis & Robert Earp

CAMP GRANDE

AMERICA'S MOST POPULAR TOURIST COURT

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<small>Cottages and Bathrooms completely equipped with the best linens and bath towels. Hot Water, Steam Heat or Water, Electric and Radiator, Telephone, City, BICYCLE REPAIR, Laundry, etc.</small>	<small>Complimentary soap, ground, Dip, Hats, Cuffs, Soap, Towels and Beauty Cream, Club Grocery store, complete one-stop service station, one day laundry or dry-cleaning service, supply your every need.</small>
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EL PASOTEXAS



W e are all familiar with "luxury" motels—some of us became familiar by advance reservation, while some of us became familiar because we drove too late into the night! Would it surprise you to know that the first luxury motel opened its doors here? El Paso, Texas was the site of the first luxury roadside motor hotel—in the nation and the world. History was made when Camp Grande opened with a gala reception and tour on Sunday, November 10, 1923.

Frank and I were delighted recently when Minnie Earp Travis visited, carrying what to me was a veritable gold mine—a collection of twenty-two wonderful old pictures of Camp Grande, which for more than three decades, was an El Paso landmark. The Earp family once owned, operated, and lived there. Minnie knew we collected images of El Paso and the Old West and asked Frank where she might find a home for the photos. He suggested she offer them to the El Paso County Historical Society for their growing archives of early El Paso. The 8" x 10" prints were in excellent condition—some from the famous Aultman Collection, as well as some from the collection of early El Paso photographer Jim A. Alexander and others from the archives of the first owners of Camp Grande.

We decided to tape an interview, then put together an article. Minnie and her brother, Robert, who agreed wholeheartedly, dropped by again several days later and we spent an afternoon with a tape recorder.



Panorama of stores and entrance of Camp Grande. At bottom can be seen the rails that carried the Park trolley and Interurban to Ysleta for many years.

A call to Marta Estrada, Southwest librarian at the El Paso Public Library, produced some news clips about Camp Grande from the *El Paso Herald-Post* and an article by James Cleveland in *The Southwesterner*. We learned from those articles that Camp Grande was organized as Southwestern Tourist Camps, Inc. and was operated for several years by a group of prominent El Paso real estate men: William K. Marr, William R. Piper, Winchester Cooley, and James R. Moffat. Their monumental project began in 1921 and took two years to complete.

Camp Grande occupied four to five acres—the entire 3700 block of Alameda Avenue—as both a camp and a “motel” although the word motel hadn’t yet been coined. Tourists could now park their cars safely beside their tent or room. The old Park trolley and the Interurban to Ysleta came pounding along at the front of Camp Grande.

James Cleveland of *The Southwesterner* wrote:

The early motorist who set out to see the country by auto-car, or the salesman whose business took him from town to town, did not have the sweet time the same sort of individual has today. The traveler had to take camping equipment with him or expect to put up at a hotel in some small town every evening. This was not simple. Hotels in those days did not maintain garages in connection, so first you had to find a garage, then a hotel, or you had to set up a tent and rough it.



The wooden latticework and trees added a touch of class to some of the Camp Grande tents. Tourists parked their cars in front.

Camp Grande opened at a time when highways were being paved from coast to coast and through El Paso. Auto travel swelled rapidly with the assembly-line mass production of the motor-car which began in 1908 with Henry Ford's first Model T. The bitter lessons of the muddy roads of France during World War I was still on the minds of American travelers.

In the early 1920s, Texas had very few paved roads, though most of the important arteries were "graveled" or "improved." The states as well as the federal government pushed eagerly for good roads connecting cities and towns to bind the country together. Alameda Avenue, the street fronting Camp Grande, later became "U.S. Highway 80," part of the federal highway system.

Camp Grande was, as the name implies, grand in scale and features. Built in pueblo style with exposed ends of the wooden vigas extending through the white stucco, the imposing structure provided the first shops in El Paso which catered to tourists. There was a Piggly Wiggly grocery store, a Model Bakery branch, the W. K. Hill Tent and Awning, the Camp Grande Automobile Supply shop, a barber shop, the Beach Curio shop, the Camp Grande Lunch Room, the Camp Drug Store and the Camp Filling Station. In short, it was a preview of today's strip shopping centers. The meandering roads through the camp gave it the appearance of a small community. Rubberneck bus tours of El Paso and Juárez departed from Camp Grande.



Sightseeing bus in front of Camp Grande. Note the swastika in the entrance archway. By the 1930s Adolph Hitler had picked up this American Indian design and used it to represent Germany and the Nazi party. Camp Grande removed its swastika.

Tourists could rent a "bungette" and enjoy all the privacy of home, or they could drive into the "campground" at the rear and rent a tent or use their own. They could cook a hot meal by taking advantage of the community kitchen's five-cent meters. Open campfires were not allowed.

A recreation hall afforded easy chairs, writing desks, and a piano. The builders hadn't learned that tired tourists, who had wrestled with poor roads all day through the desert, understandably were not eager to dance all night. More practical, however, was the laundry where one could wash out a few items of clothing, which, in El Paso's air, would dry in minutes. Meanwhile, the city of El Paso had already opened a free municipal campground in nearby Washington Park. It was quite popular and, although travelers had to rough it, the price was right.

Naturally, Camp Grande with its success was soon imitated. The next nationally known motel to open was Grande Court in San Antonio, patterned in design somewhat after Camp Grande, and using the "Grande" portion of the prototype. An article for *The Savvy Traveler* by Rachel Anne Goodman stated "the very first motel" was opened in California. However, it was actually founded two years *after* Camp Grande.

Smaller camps sprang up along Alameda Avenue. By 1929, there were more than two dozen tourist camps in El Paso. Among

them were Camp Rock, built of rock of course, Camp Broadway, Camp Del Norte, Red Mill Tourist Camp, and other landmarks that have long since disappeared.

As time passed and tourists became more sophisticated, the campground area at Camp Grande disappeared and additional bungalows were built on the site. By 1930 roadside motels were common enough, but there were few as comfortable and luxurious as Camp Grande. During World War II, the lack of rubber tires and gasoline virtually put an end to tourist travel. In the 1950s, with the coming of coast-to-coast interstate highways, smaller tourist courts dried up, making way for the large chain motels that now beckon tourists along Interstate 10 as it slices through El Paso.

Another El Paso landmark, the Del Camino Motor Hotel and Restaurant made its appearance soon after the World War II. It was billed as the largest motel in America and was located a mile east of Camp Grande. Del Camino's handsome electric sign—a huge bullfighter representing the famous restaurant and museum—was still on the property in 2003. It was designed by Bill Kolliker, well-known El Paso artist, and was Bill's first artwork after coming to El Paso.

A motel in California challenged Del Camino by adding two more units, making it the largest in the nation. Not one to admit defeat, Del Camino's Bill Adams added two extra units to Del Camino, regaining the title. This "Battle of the Buildings" went on for several years.



*The Del Camino
Restaurant
in 1956.*



Tourists could park their cars safely beside their tent or room, a giant step from roughing it in the desert or searching out small town accommodations.

Minnie Earp Travis and Robert Earp had these recollections in our taped interview about their lives at Camp Grande.

Frank: When did your parents move to Camp Grande?

Minnie: Our uncle, Newell Hays, bought it in 1943, held it for less than a year during the War, and then sold it to my dad, Dean Earp and mother, Pina Mae Hays Earp. Dad was from Deming; Mother came to El Paso as a child from Oklahoma.

Frank: Are you related in any way to the legendary Wyatt Earp? That's not really a very common name.

Minnie: My father remembered that there was an Earp who stopped at the motel one time. When talking to Daddy, he claimed to be a nephew of Wyatt and may well have been since both sides of the Earp family came from the Georgia/Alabama border.

Robert: Our grandmother always mentioned that Wyatt pronounced it "Arp." From what we understand, nobody in the family ever pronounced it "Urp."

Frank: What do you remember about living at Camp Grande?

Robert: Well, since I'm younger by ten years than Minnie we have a different set of memories. In the 40s and early 50s, we were on the south side of what was then the Mitchell Brewery. The Zeigler stockyard was right across the railroad tracks on the north side of the brewery. The track also serviced the stock-



Detached "Bungalettes" offered tourists privacy at Camp Grande and many of the comforts of a home away from home. The cost: \$5 a night.

yard. I was twelve years old when we moved out but I liked Camp Grande because I could ride my bike around the big circle in the property. While I lived there, my folks made several changes including changing the name from Camp Grande to Grande Motel. When I graduated from The University of Texas in 1964, I asked a lot of El Paso people if they remembered Camp Grande. Most didn't. I thought everybody would know about it because I went up and down Alameda so many times and would always look at it and admire the architecture.

Frank: Was living at Camp Grande a much different experience than living in a regular neighborhood?

Minnie: I was used to living in a neighborhood situation and yes, it was really different. We were kind of isolated from our friends at first. But when we got to be teenagers and driving cars, it wasn't that hard to get around.

Frank: Were your living quarters at Camp Grande?

Robert: My mom always told me that the building we lived in on the southwest corner of the property at Stevens and Alameda had been a bar.

Minnie: Our folks just remodeled it. The kitchen and bathrooms were already there. Since it had been a bar, our living room was huge. It was great. We had a lot of friends in all the time.



The "big circle" around which Robert rode his bike.

Frank: Where did you live before you moved to Camp Grande?

Minnie: I went to El Paso High and we lived at 2323 North Mesa almost from the time my folks were married until Robert was two. After my folks bought the motel, we moved right in. I remember Robert had a little victory garden during the War. From Camp Grande, Mother would take my sister, Honey and me to El Paso High because that's where we were already enrolled. But Robert went to Austin High. In the afternoon we'd take the streetcar home right down the middle of Alameda.

Frank: How long was Camp Grande your home?

Minnie: It was home for me until I married in 1948 and Robert stayed until Camp Grande was sold to our uncles. I remember taking Dean, my second baby, to visit in 1954, so our folks must have sold it in 1955.

Frank: Well, did the buildings remain unoccupied for much longer?

Robert: Our uncles, Leslie and Newell Hays rented them as apartments after buying the motel from our parents back in 1955. But the units may have remained until the very late 50s or early 60s. After that, I think the buildings just sat for a little while. Then they were demolished to make room for a large commercial produce market. I haven't been down Alameda for the longest time so I don't know what's there now.



The old Harry Mitchell's Brewery looms upward at the north end of the road that wound through Camp Grande.

In the *El Paso Times*, Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2003 it was reported:

Work on Alameda a \$7.1 million project. . . is not expected to be completed until April. It will create water and sewer lines, change the street from asphalt to concrete and include median, sidewalk, traffic signal and light work. Alameda has not been fixed since the street was built.

While researching Camp Grande history, Frank wondered what the 3700 block of Alameda looked like in September 2003. In late August, we drove down to look. The 3700 block of Alameda was undergoing major street repair and showed not a shred of evidence that the first luxurious motel in the United States, Camp Grande, had ever been there.



FRANK and JUDY MANGAN are both native El Pasoans, graduates of Austin High School. In 1948, Judy earned a bachelor of arts degree from Texas College of Mines, now the University of Texas at El Paso, in Radio Broadcasting/Journalism and Frank graduated from the University of Missouri with a Bachelor in Journalism degree. Married in 1949, they have two children and two grandchildren. Frank and Judy formed Mangan Books in 1979 when Frank retired from El Paso Natural Gas Co. after twenty-eight years. Among the forty or more titles they have published are many varied themes: gun-fighters, corporate histories, New Age, biographies, and genealogy. Their most recent publication is Frank's "Mangan's War: A Personal View of World War II," which will be reviewed in the next *Password*.

MINNIE EARP TRAVIS, a native El Pasoan, graduated from El Paso High School and received bachelor of science and master of education degrees from the University of Texas at El Paso. For twenty-four years she taught mathematics at Ysleta Independent School District. She has four children.

ROBERT (BOB) EARP, Minnie's brother, graduated from Austin High School and received both his undergraduate and law school degrees from the University of Texas at Austin. He served as an assistant district attorney in El Paso from 1964 through 1968 and has been in private practice for thirty-five years.

SOURCES

Jack McGrath, of the El Paso County Historical Society, arranged a meeting with Minnie Travis in spring of 2002.

Marta Estrada of the Border Heritage Center of the El Paso Public Library provided much of the background material.

Interview, Minnie Earp Travis and Robert Earp, March 12, 2002.

Interview, Margo Burchell Adams, September 10, 2003.

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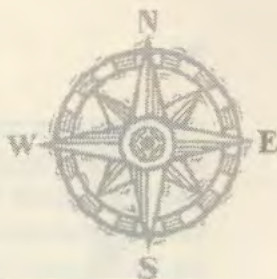
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Well-traveled Land: A History of Pioneer Park and Camp Pioneer

By Jo Tice Bloom

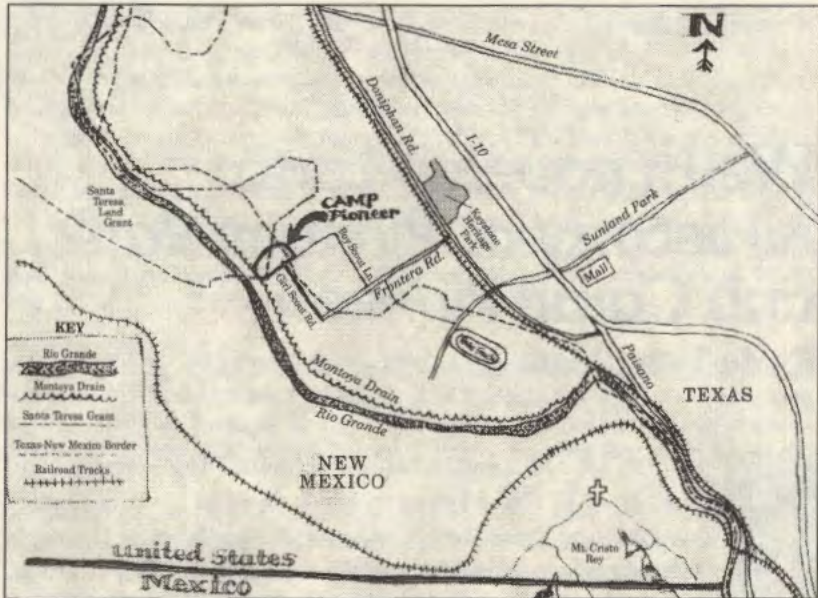


he men who had settled and established the present community of El Paso, Texas in 1880, decided that its history needed to be preserved. To this end, and to honor the early settlers, they formed the Pioneers Association in 1904.

Among the early members was Zach White, an immigrant from Virginia who was buying land along the Rio Grande where New Mexico and Texas meet. To aid the Pioneers Association and youth groups, White, in 1923, gave land to the Boy Scouts, the YMCA and the Pioneers Association. The Pioneers Association created a park used for various social gatherings and later leased the park to the Girl Scouts of El Paso. This is the story of the approximately twenty-five acres that made up Pioneer Park, now Camp Pioneer and of the people who traversed it and who lived on it.

Formed by volcanic action, lava flows, earthquakes, and wind and water erosion, the valley of the Rio Grande was a route of trade and place of settlement for thousands of years. The valley is a major flyway for migratory birds who utilize wetlands for rest and food. *The bosques, or brushy and woody areas, provide shelter for animals and hunting grounds for predators. River floods replenished the lands and increased the fertility of the soil. Drought dried the river bed and life struggled to survive, but the Rio Grande did survive and continues to nourish its many forms of life.*

The land that would become Camp Pioneer laid in the flood plain of the Rio Grande. Sometimes the small piece of land was on the west bank, sometimes on the east. At times it occupied the river bottom. Through the centuries many different groups of people would pass over or along it. Ownership of the land would be contested by violence and in the courts of law.



Three thousand years ago, people settled in the area of what is now Camp Pioneer, building a village at the Keystone site. They farmed, caught wildlife, fished in the river, and stayed for years. Eventually they moved on, leaving behind remnants of buildings and a few artifacts.

Later the Jornada Mogollon people came, building stone and adobe homes near the Franklin Mountains on the eastern edge of the valley. They made pottery and grew crops. The waters of the river provided fish and the bosque yielded animals for food. By the late 1200s the Jornada Mogollon people were abandoning their permanent homes and becoming more nomadic. We do not know why.

The Manso Indians, descendants of the Jornada Mogollon, appeared about 1350. They lived in small villages of grass and reed huts in the area north of the small gorge—the Pass of the North—through which the river passed. They were but a stop on the trading route which reached from the villages in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and San Juan basin to settlements in present-day Chihuahua. Later this route, which connected the northern Pueblo Indians with Paquimé or Casas Grandes, was named the Rio Grande Pueblo Trail. The Mansos used the trail north and south, and also moved east and west away from the trail as they traded, hunted, and changed village locations for sanitary reasons.¹

The Mansos, the Jumanos who lived farther east, and the Sumas who lived to the south greeted the first Europeans who came north along the river trail. The future site of Frontera, near present-day Camp Pioneer, had a good ford for crossing the river, and was a convenient stopping place for travelers coming through the pass of the Rio Grande or El Paso del Norte as it came to be called. Undoubtedly some European travelers camped in the vicinity. They traveled along the east bank of the river as they moved north and south.

In the spring of 1598, Mansos, Sumas, and Jumanos were fascinated to see a huge caravan which arrived from the south. Word had passed through the various tribes and villages of the coming of a large number of Europeans and the Indians gathered to see the newcomers. Led by Don Juan de Oñate, the hundreds of soldiers, priests, and settlers from central Mexico arrived at the banks of the Rio Grande. They had crossed a harsh desert and quickly claimed the land drained by the Rio Grande and its tributaries for the King of Spain and gave thanks for safe delivery from the desert. For several days, they rested while the women washed clothes, and people bathed. The grassy valley south of the pass provided good forage for the thousands of cattle, sheep, and horses which the caravan had brought both for food and for establishing herds when they reached the northern pueblos. Replenished in body and spirit, the caravan moved on through the pass and north along the river. Traveling at eight to ten miles a day, the site of Camp Pioneer, about eight miles above the pass, would have been a convenient *paraje* or resting place for a night or two.

The passage of Oñate and his colonists opened *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*—the royal road of the interior—along the old Indian trade route. Now both Indians and Europeans trod the river banks. Spanish traders provided tempting targets for the Indians, especially the Comanche, Kiowa, and Apache, who were moving south and west. Over the years the "horse" Indians ambushed and raided the trading caravans which traversed El Camino Real. The land just north of the pass became overgrazed and turned into a desert of mesquite and *tornillo* (screwbean mesquite). Here and there along the river were willows and cottonwoods with grass which was quickly eaten by the oxen and mules of the traders and the horses of the Indians. Near the present day town of Vinton was a major *paraje*, *La Salineta*, where mule and wagon trains stopped for a day or more.²

The Spanish province of *Nuevo Mexico* included not only present-day New Mexico, but also El Paso and the western part of present-day Texas. They were governed from Santa Fe. Slowly the settlements in the north grew, as did the settlements south of the pass. In 1680 a great influx of people fled south from the Pueblo Revolt in the north. These new settlers, both European and Indian, added the villages of Ysleta, Socorro, and Senecú south of the original settlement El Paso del Norte, which is now Ciudad Juárez. North of the pass, open land remained for travelers moving north and south or east and west. Probably some people attempted to settle to the north along the river, but floods, Indians raids, and lack of protection sent them back to the south.

In 1768, Joaquin Mestas and his two sons received the Santa Teresa Grant from the Spanish governor in Santa Fe. The original grant covered the land where Camp Pioneer is now located. In the 1890s, as the Spanish land grants were approved by the United States government, the official survey showed that the original twelve acres of Camp Pioneer lay along the southeastern corner of the grant. As the camp expanded to include all of Pioneer Park, the camp came to include part of the old Santa Teresa Grant.³

*When the first claim for the Francisco García grant was made to United States authorities, an 1853 survey described the land as being level with second rate soil, poor grazing, and scattered "willow brush" and cottonwood.*⁵

By the 1790s Francisco García was raising livestock in the area. Eventually his family successfully claimed land that was included in the Santa Teresa Grant. García called his holdings the Santa Teresa Ranch. Its southern boundary was the *Mulero* or White's Ford, according to court testimony in the 1890s. The García family lived on the land and raised livestock at least into the 1860s.⁴

When the first claim for the Francisco García grant was made to United States authorities, an 1853 survey described the land as being level with second rate soil, poor grazing, and scattered "willow brush" and cottonwood.⁵

After the establishment of the Republic of Mexico in 1821, the character of the trade in this area had changed. Merchants from St. Louis, Missouri penetrated the northern border into Santa Fe and Taos. Very quickly their goods saturated the market there, so the traders moved south to El Paso

del Norte and Chihuahua, and the trail became known as the Santa Fe-Chihuahua Trail. American merchants took their goods south, along with Santa Fe and other Mexican traders. Chihuahua and Durango entrepreneurs headed north with returning New Mexican and American traders.

All this traffic crossed the land where Camp Pioneer would eventually be located. Even though the river often changed course, the trail along the east side, wherever it was, stayed in use. In wet weather the travelers moved farther from the flood plain onto mesa lands. In drier times, the trail followed the flood plain so the animals were closer to the river.

By the 1840s, some New Mexicans, Mexicans, and Americans began to look at the United States as a possible possessor of the Rio Grande Valley. Certainly the New Mexicans found this preferable to being taken over by the Texans who tried twice in the 1840s to conquer the province. The arrival of the United States Army in Santa Fe in 1846 was not a surprise, although not openly welcomed by many people.

The occupation of New Mexico was relatively peaceful, but the occupation of El Paso del Norte was not. Colonel Alexander F. Doniphan led the First Regiment of Missouri Mounted Volunteers south along *El Camino Real* and camped south of the town of Doña Ana in late December 1846. They were on their way to capture Chihuahua. When he received reports that Mexican defenders of El Paso del Norte were headed for his encampment, he prepared his army for battle. Mexicans and Americans fought the Battle of Brazito on Christmas Day, 1846, and the Mexicans were routed. As they fled south, some passed near the ford, soon to become known as White's Ford. The Americans followed, and occupied El Paso del Norte. It was a forgone conclusion that the area north of the river pass would remain in American hands.

Thus, in 1848, T. Frank White arrived at the ford, also known as Mule Ford—*Mulero Vado*—and built a trading post. Later he added a ferry at the ford. At this time, *El Camino Real* probably followed close to the route of present-day Doniphan Drive. White was well stocked to supply Santa Fe traders and the military in the area. Soon he was also supplying gold-seekers who were rushing to California. They crossed the Rio Grande at White's Ford, often stopping at his ranch before the crossing. White named his small settlement Frontera, Spanish for frontier, the name which survives on the road leading to Camp Pioneer.⁶

White was probably a Chihuahua trader himself and involved with Samuel Magoffin who tried to establish a trading post south of the pass in 1846. With the acquisition of New Mexico by the United States, many traders had opportunities for mercantile establishments along the new border with Mexico. Certainly the Magoffins, Samuel and James, and White were among those who set up trading posts. White was also appointed Prefect by the United States military commander in Santa Fe, and authorized to establish American civil government along the frontier. White forcibly established new civil governments in Socorro, Ysleta, and San Elizario. Appointed the first customs collector, he established the first United States Customs House as well as a post office at Frontera.⁷

In 1848, the United States and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the war and ceded the northern third of Mexico to the United States. Thus, New Mexico and all of Texas were recognized by Mexico as American territory. When the joint United States Mexican Boundary Commission worked through, marking the new international boundary, White offered to sell his post to the commander, John Russell Bartlett. Bartlett took a lease on the land instead, and the commission built an observatory in 1851, which they used in calculating the boundary. Frontera, shown on the maps of the time, was chosen as a site for a primary astronomical station. The construction was completed by Major William H. Emory, who made observations of latitude and longitude here. From the Frontera station, the observers were able to establish the site for Monument #1 of the boundary line.⁸ This station was abandoned when the commission moved farther west. Bartlett described the river valley above Frontera as "a broad alluvial bottom of great richness."⁹

Apaches raided the area in 1852, sending the European inhabitants fleeing. The buildings at the García ranch were burned, as were those at White's ranch. The Garcías came back the next year, but White abandoned Frontera and moved on to places unknown.

El Camino Real continued to be used and Mule Ford remained a major crossing of the Rio Grande for travel west. The Butterfield Stage came through the area in 1857 as it headed northwest to Mesilla and on to California. In 1861 Confederate troops marched through El Paso to Mesilla, claiming the land for the Confederacy and creating the new Confederate Territory of Ari-

zona. The next year, however, the defeated Confederated troops fled home to Texas.

In the 1850s, Ben Dowell, a transplanted Kentuckian, established a ranch to the north in the area now known as the Country Club. He provided Fort Bliss with beef and the American communities in the El Paso area with wood and fresh milk. Later, in 1863, he and his brother Nehemiah, known as Nim, received a Texas land grant confirming their ownership. Over the years he added more land to original 320 acres.¹⁰

Farmers and ranchers used the land, building *acequias*—irrigation ditches—and maintaining their homes. The area remained in contention between the García family and descendants of the Mestas, both claiming Spanish land grants; and also between Texas and New Mexico, whose boundary, the Rio Grande, kept changing its course in flood time.

A major flood occurred in 1885 when the Rio Grande covered most of the land

between the east and west mesas north of the pass. People were stranded on the edges of the valley and many livestock perished. Chamberino was washed away, except for one brick building.¹¹

The Frontera area underwent major changes in the 1880s as the Southern Pacific railroad came through. Zacharias Taliaferro White—Zach—no relation to Frank, bought land from the estate of Ben Dowell.¹² Because of the land ownership disputes, Zach White also purchased land from other farmers who claimed land in Texas, used land that was in the Santa Teresa Grant as well as land that had not been put up for sale by the United States government. His River Bend Farm was on the east bank of the Rio Grande. He petitioned the court to cut across a bend of the river, thereby straightening the channel, in order to improve irrigation on his land. When his petition was granted he did so, creating an “oxbow” which is still visible today.¹³ White acquired legal title to much of his land in the 20th century. Four parcels purchased in 1923 from the Santa Teresa Land Company made up part of the land he gave to the Pioneers Association later that year. In the

A major flood occurred in 1885 when the Rio Grande covered most of the land between the east and west mesas north of the pass. People were stranded on the edges of the valley and many livestock perished. Chamberino was washed away, except for one brick building.

1930s, after the final settlement of boundary issues, his estate received many acres of land from the United States General Land Office.

In the 1890s, court cases and the Public Lands Claims Court in Santa Fe settled the boundaries of the García and Santa Teresa grants. Formal U. S. Government surveys were made. The boundary between New Mexico and Texas was settled, and Section 1, Township 29 south, Range 3 east, was marked off. This was included in Zach White's Block 2, Upper Valley Tract 19. Most of Camp Pioneer, 22.5 acres, lies in Section 1, New Mexico, with 1.4 acres in Block 2, Texas. With a determination of boundaries, it was possible to establish truly legal ownership and the first patent for Section I was issued by the U.S. Government in 1891.¹⁴

The survey made in 1905, establishing and marking boundaries, described the land as level and mountainous, with sandy, third class soil, no timber, and poor grass. Mesquite bushes, four to six feet high, grew in sand hills, as did Spanish bayonet, creating dense undergrowth.¹⁵

Disputes about land ownership continued, however, eventually going to the United States Supreme Court which rendered a final decision in 1928. The Court determined the New Mexico-Texas border to be between the 32nd parallel and the international boundary. The state line followed the middle of the Rio Grande as it had flowed in September, 1850. A special commission surveyed the boundary and marker number 88 was placed on land owned by the Pioneers Association, now near the flag pole at Camp Pioneer. In 1934 the estates of Zacharias White and his wife finally received patents from the U. S. Government for land which included the present site of Camp Pioneer.¹⁶

In 1923 Zach White had purchased several parcels of land from the Santa Teresa Land Company. This land and other parcels whose legal ownership was in doubt, he gave to the Pioneers Association and to the Boy Scouts to be used for a park, a camp, and other recreational purposes. At that time the Girl Scouts were not organized in El Paso.

By 1930 Girl Scouts had come to El Paso and Ft. Bliss. The proximity of Pioneers Association land to El Paso made it attractive to lease about twelve acres of land to the El Paso-Fort Bliss Girl Scout Council in 1937. The term of the lease was twenty-five

years at an annual rental of one dollar, with the understanding that the Girl Scouts would use the property solely for a recreation camp and park.¹⁷

The lease was finalized in July 1937 and the El Paso-Fort Bliss Girl Scout Council promptly began plans for a lodge. The girls sold cookies, gave plays, and worked to raise money for the building to supplement money raised by the Council board. On February 22, 1938, the camp was officially opened, and it was used for day camp that year. On June 4, 1939, the native fieldstone lodge was dedicated with a parade of Girl Scout flags. A Girl Scout chorus sang "Our Chalet" and "Camp Pioneer Song." The "thanks badge" was presented to Mrs. Ben Norton, who chaired the committee in charge of construction. Tea was served. During the dedication a time capsule was sealed behind a chimney rock which was carved with a trefoil. The capsule included an honor roll of donors, a picture of the building, and a history of the Girl Scouts. The new building consisted of a large living room with big fireplace, a kitchen, two bathrooms, an office, and a sleeping porch with twenty beds.¹⁸

Over the years, the Girl Scouts have held day camps, troop events, and a special Pioneer Day at the camp. The Pioneer Day was an occasion to honor the Pioneers Association, whose members were invited to join the Girl Scouts. The Pioneers Association regularly held annual picnics at the camp.¹⁹

In the 1950s the senior Girl Scouts held two or three-week camps for children handicapped by polio or cerebral palsy at Camp Pioneer. The campers were transported to the nearby Boy Scout camp for swimming. Although the camps were sponsored by the El Paso Community Service Council, the Girl Scouts provided the camp, and senior Girl Scouts provided leadership on a one-to-one basis with the campers. Various businesses in the community provided food and beverages and transportation, while doctors and nurses gave supervision and training.²⁰

By the 1950s the Girl Scout council felt the need to improve the facilities and began plans to add buildings. In 1956 the metal sign, reading "Pioneers Association Park Girl Scout Camp" was

In the 1950s the senior Girl Scouts held two or three-week camps for children handicapped by polio or cerebral palsy at Camp Pioneer. The campers were transported to the nearby Boy Scout camp for swimming.

installed over the stone gates. In 1960 two ramadas were built along with three outdoor fireplaces. Fencing was extended around the property and a large storage shed was built. That February most of the troops in the council spent a day beautifying the campgrounds: mulberry trees, halpensis pines, blue pfitzer juniper, and japonica trees were planted.²¹

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Girl Scouts envision a future for the land. Take out the salt cedars? Plant willows and cottonwood and tornillo? Rejuvenate the old river bottom? Build a new lodge? Replace an inadequate septic system? Add more camping space?

Over the years the rent paid to the Pioneers Association increased to \$300 annually. The size of the camp increased in 1955 with addition of nine more leased acres. In 1994 a new lease raised the rent to \$500 per year.²²

On June 9, 1994, Pioneer Day was again celebrated at Camp Pioneer. The Girl Scouts introduced a new Pioneer Patch to be earned by the girls. Glenn Warwick, President of the Pioneers Association, and his wife Oma, were honored for their combined hundred years of work with the Girl Scouts.²³

Eventually the Girl Scouts started to think about owning the land, instead of leasing it. Members of the Pioneers

Association had similar thoughts. However, there was a group in the Pioneers Association which opposed not only giving the land to the Girl Scouts but continuing the lease agreement. In December 2002, the Board of Directors of the Pioneers Association admitted the Girl Scouts of the Rio Grande as a member of the Association, "it being the intention of the Association that the real property held in the name of the Association shall be used and enjoyed by the Girl Scouts and its members indefinitely." In January 2003, the Pioneers Association became a member of the Girl Scouts of the Rio Grande.²⁴

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Girl Scouts envision a future for the land. Take out the salt cedars? Plant willows and cottonwood and tornillo? Rejuvenate the old river bottom? Build a new lodge? Replace an inadequate septic system? Add more camping space? The Rio Grande still flows close by, diminished in size by dams and irrigation systems. The old Indian trail still carries the traffic of a nation on Interstate 10. If you

stand in the dawn, quietly watching the world wake up, you will see those who came before across this well-traveled land—Indians fishing in the river, hawks swooping low for their prey, Spanish military clanking northward, and New Mexican traders with their mule trains heading south. In the quiet of the dusk you can watch the stars peek out, smell the mesquite cooking fires, hear the twitter of birds settling down, see the pioneers close up their barns and homes for the night, and hear the singing of girls around a campfire: "Peace, I ask of thee, O, River."

JO TICE BLOOM began the adventure of Girl Scouting in September 1940 in Los Angeles, California. Her adventures in history began in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the spring of 1943. Since then she has explored, volunteered, taught, written, and lived in nine Girl Scout councils and nine states. After receiving her doctorate in American history from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, she has taught not only basic courses in her field, but also the history of the American Frontier, and of California and New Mexico. She continues to teach New Mexico history in Las Cruces, New Mexico. As a girl, Jo received her First Class and earned her Wings as a Senior Wing Girl Scout. She has also received the Thanks II Badge. In 1952 she started serving as a troop leader for senior and cadette troops. Her training career began in 1976, as a trainer of new leaders and older girls. She was able to combine her interests in 1977 when she taught American history at Kabul university in Kabul, Afghanistan, and worked with the Afghan Girl Guides.

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Book Review

***Los Alamos: The Ranch School Years, 1917-1943.* By John D. Wirth and Linda Harvey Aldrich. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003.**

Reading this book kept bringing Teddy Roosevelt to my mind. As the United States entered the "Great War" in 1917, Ashley Pond, Jr. began this Ranch School with the idea "to combine the restorative powers of outdoor life in the New Mexico mountains with a loosely structured program of experiential learning in the Progressive mold."⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ The context to understand—and enjoy—this book is the Progressive Era, the feeling of being able to change for the good, and the energy provided by Teddy Roosevelt and his conservation [today, environmentalism] efforts.

Situated in mountains northwest of Santa Fe, for twenty five years Los Alamos was a boarding school for boys aged twelve to eighteen. With an enrollment that never exceeded forty eight at one time, it was a college prep school which provided a vigorous outdoor program—horses, sports, and community work.

The book is organized into two parts: 1) the institution, which details the story of the leadership—faculty and staff—its organization and its mission; and 2) the community, the experience of the families and the children. Throughout, the authors emphasized the experiences the people and their stories of the Los Alamos school and the community.

In its brief quarter century of operation, Los Alamos Ranch School achieved a national reputation. In the midst of World War II and the Manhattan Project, the ranch was expropriated for military purposes. Re-named Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory and headed by J. Robert Oppenheimer, it became a bomb development laboratory. What a sad commentary on human existence that a beautiful place which previously had nurtured young minds was converted into a weapons development factory. Even Oppenheimer had to admit later that, "I am responsible for ruining a beautiful place."^(viii)

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