

PASSWORD



THE EL PASO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Downtown El Paso in the 1990s.

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Joseph E. Morgan and His Four Sons: Master Builders of the American Southwest

By Mark Cioc-Ortega



Joseph Edward Morgan (1871-1942) was one of the most celebrated building contractors in the American Southwest during the first half of the twentieth century. His firm is best known in El Paso for constructing the Abdou Building (1909), Banner Building (1910), El Paso High School (1915), State National Bank (1921), Loretto Academy (1922), and the Farah Manufacturing plants (1953-1961); and outside El Paso for the Wichita Falls State Hospital (1928), the Texas State Highway Department Building in Austin (1932), the Albuquerque Hilton (1938), and Dallas's Temple Emanuel (1957).

Remarkably little is known about Joseph Morgan's early life. He was born on September 6, 1871, in Black Creek, Florida, near St. Augustine. He attended the New York Trade School, where presumably he learned the art of brick laying and perhaps also brick manufacturing. He moved to El Paso in 1893 at the urging of his uncle, Levi D. Whitmore, a carpenter and builder who operated a shop at the corner of Stanton and St. Louis (now Mills) streets. Morgan's first contract was a small addition to the home of attorney Zeno B. Clardy at 700 Mesa Ave. The job took a month to complete and netted him a scant \$21.¹

The El Paso city directory for 1898-1899 listed Morgan as a "brick and stone contractor" residing at 811 Texas. By 1900, he had formed a partnership with one of El Paso's pioneer builders, John Sorenson, under the name Sorenson & Morgan. The 1900 city directory identified Sorenson & Morgan as "general contractors and



Joseph and Margaret Morgan. Courtesy of Ann Morgan Lilly.

brick manufacturers" with a business location at 320 Texas St. The firm's brick manufacturing plant was in the Cotton Addition near the Rio Grande, but its exact location is no longer known. The partnership dissolved around 1912 when Sorenson retired from the construction business. In 1913, Sorenson ran unsuccessfully for City Alderman (as City Representatives were then called) and in 1915 he became the City Street Commissioner. Morgan stayed in the construction business, but devoted much of his time from 1913 to 1915 to serving as the President of the El Paso School Board, a voluntary position. The 1913 city directory listed him as a brick manufacturer, the 1914 directory as a brick manufacturer and contractor, and the 1915 directory as a general contractor at a new business address, 209 No. Kansas. In 1914, he began advertising under the firm name J.E. Morgan. After 1931, it became J.E. Morgan & Sons. By the time the sons shut down the construction business in 1965, the Morgan dynasty had completed over 5000 large and small building projects throughout the American Southwest.²

Joseph Morgan was a devout Catholic of Irish descent. He married Margaret McCarthy (1876-1917), who was born in New York and raised in Kansas and who moved to El Paso as a teenager. Joseph and Margaret were married for 21 years and had eight children before her premature death at age 41. Six of their children survived infancy: Bernard C. Morgan (1899-1972), William D. Morgan (1902-1972), Agnes M. Wittman (1904-1974), J. Francis Morgan (1906-1980), Leo P. Morgan (1911-1981), and Margaret M. Halloran (1914-1996). All four sons joined the family business after finishing their college education. Bernard attended Notre Dame and majored in electrical engineering. William attended

Marquette University and majored in civil engineering. Francis and Leo went to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where Francis majored in civil engineering and Leo in architectural engineering. Bernard, who had a knack for invention, designed Hotel Dieu's first incubator for premature babies. Francis was the most politically active member of the family, serving as a City Alderman from 1939 to 1942 before resigning his position to join the U.S. Army during World War Two. Leo, who also served in the war, was the most adventuresome: he opened up a branch of J.E. Morgan & Sons in Dallas in 1946, which in some years generated nearly as much business as the El Paso office; and he served a term as the President of the Dallas Chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America. Among the grandchildren, Ann Morgan Lilly is best known to El Pasoans: she is currently serving her third term as El Paso's City Representative from District 1.



The Abdou Building under construction in 1909-1910. Joseph Morgan is left center, sitting cross-legged on a stack of bricks, holding a sign that reads "Rio Grande Valley Bank and Trust" (the original name of the building). Henry Trost is standing in the foreground to the right of Morgan, with his right hand in his pocket. John Sorenson is sitting in the background to the right of Morgan and Trost, his head slightly to the right of the sign. They were on the second or third floor of the building and the photographer was looking northeast; the white building in the background on the right is the R.B. Stevens Building, located on the corner of Mesa Ave. and Texas St. The sign on the bricks reads "This floor is carrying a dead load of 250 lbs. per square foot." The Morgan firm often tested materials as it built, especially when constructing innovative designs with new materials. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

The Collaborative Years with Trost & Trost

The Sorenson & Morgan partnership was formed at an auspicious moment. El Paso's economy was booming in 1900, thanks to the influx of railroad companies, copper smelters, cattle brokerages, and many other enterprises, all of which created a demand for more commercial structures. El Paso's major banks—the Rio Grande Valley Bank & Trust, First National Bank, State National Bank, and American National Bank—were awash in investment capital and eager to finance new downtown buildings. Equally important, Henry Trost, along with his brothers Gustavus and Adolphus and their nephew George, established the architectural firm Trost & Trost in 1903. Trost & Trost pioneered in the use of reinforced concrete as a construction technique and introduced Chicago Style skyscrapers to El Paso and the rest of the American Southwest. Sorenson & Morgan was one of the only local firms that had the expertise to turn Trost blueprints into reality.

Sorenson & Morgan (and thereafter J.E. Morgan) built four Chicago Style structures for Trost & Trost, all in downtown El Paso:



The Banner Building under construction in 1910-1911. Signs for "Sorenson & Morgan, General Contractors" and "Trost & Trost, Architects" are visible on the building. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.



The American Furniture Company Building on the northwest corner of Oregon and San Antonio Streets before its façade was modified. The Texas Tower can be seen in the background. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

the Abdou Building (known as the Rio Valley Bank & Trust Building until 1925), the Banner Building (originally called the Roberts-Banner Building), the American Furniture Company (originally called the American National Bank Building and then the First National Bank Building), and the International Building (originally known as the Two Republics Life Insurance Building).³

The seven-story Abdou Building (115 No. Mesa St.) was El Paso's tallest building at the time of its completion in 1910. It has a trapezoidal shape, owing to the irregularity of its plot on the corner of Mesa St. and Texas Ave. The Banner Building (215 No. Mesa St.) was commissioned by Martin Roberts and William Banner, two prominent New Mexican cattlemen. Situated on the southeast corner of San Jacinto Plaza, it was El Paso's largest office building when it opened in 1911. It has a regular rectangular shape and is five stories high, but its exterior design is otherwise similar to the nearby Abdou Building. The American Furniture Company, located on the northwest corner of San Antonio and Oregon streets, is seven stories high and has terra cotta ornamen-



El Paso High School under construction in 1915. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

tation on the outside and a marble lobby inside. It was built in two stages, the first dating from 1909-1911 (by Sorenson & Morgan) and the second in 1913 (by J.E. Morgan), which helps explain why it has two addresses: 109-117 E. San Antonio Ave. and 105 No. Oregon St. The International Building (119 No. Stanton St.), built by J.E. Morgan in 1919, is an eight-story brick structure with a terra cotta exterior, bays on the lower floors (later infilled with glass), and an elaborate stucco cornice.

All four of these buildings reveal the strong influence of Louis Sullivan, one of America's most renowned early 20th century architects and Henry Trost's former mentor in Chicago. The Abdou and Banner buildings have been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1980, as important examples of early 20th-century skyscrapers in the Sullivanesque style. Unfortunately, the exterior facades of the American Furniture Company and International Building have been modified too much over the years to qualify for national protection.

J.E. Morgan also collaborated with Trost & Trost on three Neo-Classical designs, an architectural style that paid homage to ancient Greek and Roman buildings and was especially popular for government and education buildings. In 1914, Morgan built

the foundation and outer shell of the El Paso High School at 800 E. Schuster Ave. (the finishing contract went to the American Construction Company of Houston), a classically symmetric structure with Greco-Roman columns and arches. In 1916-1917, the firm constructed the El Paso County Courthouse (on San Antonio St. between Kansas and Campbell, no longer extant), featuring twelve mammoth Greco-Roman columns. Then, in 1921, came the State National Bank (114 E. San Antonio St.), designed like the others with many Greco-Roman features. Both the El Paso High School and the State National Bank were placed on the National Register in 1980. The County Courthouse was modified so much during the 1950s that it lost most of its Neo-Classical look and it was torn down after the new County Courthouse was completed in 1991.

Several other Trost-Morgan collaborations deserve mentioning. The first is the El Paso County Hospital (4815 Alameda St.) in 1914, the nucleus of R. E. Thomason Hospital and the forerunner of the University Medical Center. Morgan undertook many remodels and additions to this hospital over the next decades, the last one being the Tuberculosis Wing in 1940. The second is the W. S. Hills Commercial Building (215-219 E. San Antonio Ave.), which Morgan constructed in 1926. It is a two-story Neo-Classical design with a long trapezoidal shape that fronts both San Antonio and Texas avenues. The third is Loretto Academy (1300 Hardaway St.), designed by Gustavus Trost and built in stages between 1922



State National Bank in the 1970s. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

and 1936 in the Spanish Renaissance style, featuring sober clean lines and Moorish ornamentation. Loretto was on the eastern edge of El Paso when it was built, but is now one of the great gems of the Austin Terrace neighborhood.

Other J.E. Morgan Constructions in the Southwest

Joseph Morgan continued to collaborate with Trost & Trost until Henry Trost's death in 1933, but not all of J.E. Morgan's major projects during this period were Trost designs. In the downtown area alone, there are four Morgan constructions that continue to play a vital role the city's economic and political life: the Empire Bottling Works, built in 1917 at the corner of Mills and Florence (originally 400-402 Mills Ave., now 211 No. Florence St.), an elegant three-story structure in the government district that has recently been remodeled for office space; the Tri-State Grocery (801-809 Texas Ave.), built in 1919 as a three-story warehouse, which the City of El Paso recently acquired to house some of its governmental agencies; the Gardner Hotel (311 Franklin St.), designed by Otto Thorman and built in 1921, which is still in use



The back side of the newly completed El Paso County Courthouse, 1917. As can be seen in this photo, J.E. Morgan built a new courthouse around the original one, which had been constructed in 1885. Morgan then razed the old courthouse and replaced it with Liberty Hall. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.



Loretto Academy circa 1924. Most of the original buildings have been completed, but there is still some construction taking place to the left of the chapel. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

today as a hotel and youth hostel; and the Momsen-Dunnegan-Ryan Warehouse (800 E. Overland St.), a four-story fortress built in 1929, which now houses the El Paso County Archives. Other important Morgan constructions have been razed, most notably the Army YMCA building (300 So. San Francisco St.), where the Civic Center now stands.

Although headquartered in El Paso, J.E. Morgan was always willing to bid on projects elsewhere in the Southwest, with hospitals, hotels, and schools being the mainstays of the firm's contracts. He built the Holy Cross Sanitarium in Deming, New Mexico, in 1922, a private tuberculosis hospital run by the Sisters of the Holy Cross; the Training School for Nurses at the John Sealy Hospital in Galveston, Texas, in 1931; the Silver City Hospital in New Mexico in 1936; and the Gallup Hospital in New Mexico in 1937. His best known hotel constructions include the Blue Bonnet Hotel (originally called the H. B. Allen Hotel) in Sweetwater, Texas, in 1927; the Murray Hotel in Silver City, New Mexico, in 1938; and the Hilton Hotel (now called the Hotel Andaluz), in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1938. The firm also built schools in Eastland, Texas (1927), San Antonio, Texas (1932), Clovis, New Mexico (1936), and Ysleta, Texas (1939).

Also worth mentioning are two major industrial contracts, both undertaken in 1929, that were outside the normal scope of J.E. Morgan projects: the Phelps-Dodge Copper Refinery (originally known as Nichols Copper) on the eastern outskirts of El Paso; and the Nevada Consolidated Mining plant in McGill, Nevada, which is now part of the Kennecott Minerals Company.

Projects With City, State, and National Governments

The vast majority of J.E. Morgan's contracts in the years before the Great Depression (1929-1939) were with private firms, banks, and investors, but there were some notable exceptions. The biggest federal project was a \$1.5 million contract in 1919 to construct the barracks and general hospital at Fort Whipple, near Prescott, Arizona. This was followed by a series of contracts with the City of El Paso to install a new sewage treatment plant (1922), downtown street lights (1925), and the Kern Place reservoir (1926). These were followed by a city contract to build the City Hall and Municipal Auditorium in Wichita Fall, Texas, in 1927; a state contract to build the Wichita Falls State Hospital (1927-1930); and another state contract for the Gregory Gymnasium (1929) at The University of Texas, Austin.

After the Great Depression brought most private construction to a standstill, J.E. Morgan & Sons (as the firm was called after 1931) came to rely more and more on city, county, and state contracts to keep its workers employed. Between 1930 and 1936, the State of Texas contracted for five large buildings on the campus of The University of Texas, Austin—the Chemistry Building (1930), Medical Laboratory (1931), Children's Hospital (1936), Negro Hospital (1936), and Men's Dormitory Unit 2 (1936)—as well as the Texas State Highway Building (1932) in Austin and the McDonald Observatory in Fort Davis (1935). J.E. Morgan & Sons also constructed many county buildings inside and outside Texas,



An advertisement for the Empire Bottling Works on the corner of Mills and Florence in the 1918 El Paso City Directory.

including the Grayson County Courthouse in Sherman, Texas (1935), the Curry County Courthouse and Jail in Clovis, New Mexico (1936), and the Doña Ana County Courthouse in Las Cruces, New Mexico (1937). Nearly all of these structures were designed in a Neo-Renaissance style, which was similar



The Army YMCA in downtown El Paso in 1924. This building, no longer extant, was located at 300 San Francisco Street, where the Civic Center now stands. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

to the Neo-Classical buildings that Joseph Morgan constructed for Trost & Trost back in the early 1900s.

During the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945), J.E. Morgan & Sons relied more on federal projects than on state and county contracts. Initially, the firm concentrated on the construction of power and transmission structures for the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), a government agency that Roosevelt established in 1935 to provide electricity for America's under-served rural regions. Between 1935 and 1942, the Morgan firm completed 29 major REA projects, mostly in the rural counties of New Mexico and Texas, including Lime Stone County Electric, Deaf Smith County Electric, Farmers Electric Coop of Greenville, Central Valley Electric Coop in Artesia, Navarro County Electric, the City of Liberty Power Plant, Otero County Electric Coop, Nueces Electric Coop, and Comanche County Electric Coop. In 1938 alone, REA projects accounted for around \$830,000 of the firm's \$1.75 million in contracts, nearly half its annual business.

With the onset of World War Two in Europe in 1939, the Roosevelt administration began to ramp up the nation's military preparedness, which included the construction and expansion of federal military posts, target ranges, and hospitals. El Paso's congressman at the time was R. Ewing Thomason, a New Deal Democrat and the ranking member of the House Committee on Military Affairs (forerunner of the House Committee on Armed Services).

Thomason pushed successfully for the expansion of Fort Bliss, Biggs Airfield, White Sands, and William Beaumont Hospital, all military installations in and around El Paso.

J.E. Morgan & Sons was one of the most successful local firms bidding on these federal projects. An initial contract for over \$1.7 million came through in 1939 and more contracts totaling nearly \$5 million followed in 1942, all for the expansion of the army base at Fort Bliss. In 1942, the Morgan firm also secured a \$2 million contract to build the Harlingen Army Gunnery School near Harlingen, Texas, and a \$6 million contract to construct Camp Swift in Bastrop, Texas. Military contracts slowed thereafter, but as late as 1944-1945, the Morgan firm secured \$1.6 million for a variety of military-related projects in Texas and New Mexico, including the construction of war housing, airplane hangars, and military hospitals. J.E. Morgan & Sons was involved in various ways with the Manhattan Project—for instance, in the construction of the detonation tower at the Trinity Site (White Sands Missile Range) in New Mexico where the A-bomb was tested on July 16, 1945—but references to these contracts in the company records are too sparse and cryptic to determine how deeply involved the firm actually was.⁴

Joseph Morgan's boundless energy and reputation for honesty made him a highly successful contractor; and yet he never



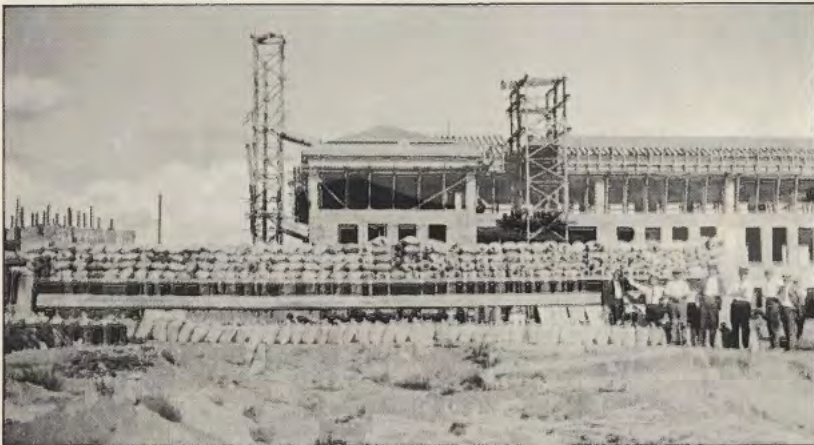
The Albuquerque Hilton in the 1930s. This historic hotel, renamed La Posada de Albuquerque in 1984 and Hotel Andaluz in 2008, is located on the corner of Second and Copper streets in downtown Albuquerque. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

lost touch with his working-class roots, even as he climbed the economic ladder and acquired much wealth. There were, of course, some rough patches. In 1915, Morgan was criticized for bidding on the El Paso High School project while serving as President of the El Paso School Board (actually, he resigned from this position before he bid on the project). He was occasionally criticized for hiring Mexican laborers instead of unionized American workers, and his projects sometimes experienced strikes and work stoppages. Overall, however, his firm had a reputation for paying high wages, avoiding layoffs, and cooperating with organized labor.

Joseph Morgan and the Catholic Church

Joseph Morgan arrived in El Paso in an era when Father Carlos Pinto (the "Apostle of El Paso") and Bishop Anthony Schuler (El Paso's first Diocesan Bishop) were busy building new churches, parochial schools, and other religious facilities to serve the city's fast-expanding Catholic community. Deeply devout, Morgan became one of the Church's most generous benefactors, giving his time, energy, and money to promote these constructions. He was also a founding member and a driving force behind the El Paso Catholic Welfare Association.

Morgan's first in-kind contribution was a donation of 10,000 bricks in 1899 to add a second story to Sacred Heart Parochial



The Clovis Jr. High School in Clovis, New Mexico, under construction in the 1930s. This photo shows J.E. Morgan & Sons undertaking a test to see whether this beam can withstand the weight of the sand bags. The beam failed the test, forcing a slight redesign of the structure before it was completed. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.



Construction of the General Hospital at Fort Whipple, near Prescott, Arizona. This was the first of many J.E. Morgan contracts with the U.S. Army. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

School, next to Sacred Heart Church (602 So. Oregon St.), when the school became overcrowded from the influx of immigrants from Mexico. In 1903, he oversaw the construction of St. Mary Parochial School (900 Myrtle Ave.), which was built for the children who worshipped at nearby Immaculate Conception Church. In 1914, he laid the stone foundation for the construction of St. Patrick's Church (118 No. Mesa St.). In 1917, he built a new chapel at Hotel Dieu. In 1918, he constructed the Knights of Columbus Hut at Fort Bliss. In 1916, he financed and built St. Joseph Church (1315 Travis St.), then built St. Joseph School (a Trost & Trost design) next to the church in 1923, and finally St. Joseph's rectory in 1939.⁵

In 1919, Morgan purchased 11 acres of land and built St. Margaret's Orphanage at his own expense; located in the Mission Valley area of El Paso, it was named in honor of his recently deceased wife. In 1923, he oversaw the expansion and remodeling of Sacred Heart Church, a mammoth undertaking that for all intents and purposes entailed the construction of a wholly new structure surrounding the existing one. In 1925-1926, he built the Jesuit College in Ysleta. In 1927, he donated materials and time for the construction of new facilities at St. Joseph's Orphanage (3119 Pera St.). In 1939, he purchased property at 1003 E. San Antonio St. and donated \$30,000 for the construction of the San Jose Clinic, a medical facility for low-income families. And in 1942,

he oversaw the construction of the St. Joseph's Maternity Ward at Hotel Dieu.⁶

Morgan always donated anonymously and kept his charitable actions a secret, but in 1939 Pope Pius XII named him a Knight in the Order of St. Gregory, a very public honor. Typically, this honor is initiated by a Diocesan Bishop (in this case Bishop Schuler) and is bestowed on a parishioner who has rendered extraordinary service to the local Catholic community. Morgan was only the second El Pasoan ever to receive this honor. Initially he declined the title, stating that he did not deserve it. But Bishop Schuler tried again in 1942, as Morgan lay on his deathbed at Hotel Dieu, this time bringing Morgan's daughter, Agnes, with him to the hospital. "We were admitted to my father's room," Agnes recalled, "and Bishop Schuler sat down very quietly beside my father's bed. He told him that he had something there with him which he very much wanted him to accept for the sake of the Diocese of El Paso, for the sake of his children and their children. Then he quietly unwrapped the certificate which named him a Knight of St. Gregory, which Bishop Schuler, himself, had framed. It was dated June 23, 1939. Then he read in translation the content of the certificate and then they discussed the matter a little. My father



New street lighting in downtown El Paso. J.E. Morgan installed many street lights in downtown El Paso during the 1920s. The photographer is looking east on the 500 or 600 block of Texas Avenue. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

argued that he had done nothing to merit such an honor and that he preferred to let the little he had done be known only to God. Bishop Schuler stressed that it was for the sake of the Diocese of El Paso and his children that he was asking him to accept the long delayed honor. Finally, my Dad accepted it in a humble manner and promised to have it hung in the Morgan home. He thanked Bishop Schuler and there was almost an evident tear of gratitude in his eye as the Bishop left the room that day. Death came for Dad on July 25, 1942.”⁷



Two-Republics Building

BUILT BY

JOSEPH E. MORGAN

319 TEXAS STREET

GENERAL CONTRACTORThe Following are Among the Many Other Buildings
— to Our Credit —

El Paso County Court House	Roberts-Banner Bldg.
American Bank Bldg.	State Natl. Bank Bldg.
White House Bldg.	Loretto College

An advertisement for J.E. Morgan in the 1925 El Paso City Directory. For many years, the Morgan firm used a sketch of the International Building (originally known as the Two Republics Life Insurance Building) in all of its advertisements. This ad also lists other Morgan constructions, including the American Bank Building and the White House. The American Bank Building is now better known as the American Furniture Company. J.E. Morgan did not build the front half of the White House (now better known as the Centre Building) on Pioneer Plaza. Morgan constructed the back addition to the White House around 1917, based on the blueprints

of Trost & Trost. The addition gave the building greater depth, making it an ideal location for the White House Department Store.

J. E. MORGAN & SONS

GENERAL CONTRACTORS

The following are among the many buildings to our credit

El Paso County Court House	White House Bldg.	State Natl. Bank Bldg.
Abdou Bldg.	Roberts-Banner Bldg.	Loretto Academy & College

Some recent out of Town construction State Highway Building, Austin, Texas
Chemistry and Gregory Gymnasium Buildings, University of Texas

EL PASO OFFICE

319 Texas St. Phone Main 1950

SAN ANTONIO OFFICE

746 Milam Bldg. Phone Fannin 0621

An advertisement for J.E. Morgan & Sons in the 1934 El Paso City Directory. This is the first time that the firm began to highlight some of its projects outside El Paso. Note that it has opened up a branch in San Antonio. The San Antonio branch was short-lived.

Morgan & Sons: El Paso and Dallas, 1946 to 1965

Government contracts for Fort Bliss expansion helped keep J.E. Morgan & Sons profitable during the immediate postwar era. The largest was the \$7.5 million Van Horne Housing Project (1949-1951), a joint undertaking with another El Paso contractor, Leavell & Ponder, for the erection of 800 family units on the east side of Fort Bliss. Other Fort Bliss projects include the Officers Club (1948), Regimental Gymnasium (1949), Hospital Annex (1952), Lab and Shop Building (1952), and Training Facilities (1953). Gradually, however, the military contracts dried up and the firm began to rely almost entirely on private developers and investors, much as it had when it operated under the names Sorenson & Morgan and J.E. Morgan.

El Paso, however, was not the same booming frontier town of yesteryear. Once heralded as the "Queen of the Southwest," the city was no longer keeping pace with the economic growth of its closest competitors. Phoenix and Dallas attracted a wide variety of firms that specialized in military and non-military electronics in the 1950s and 1960s. Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, and Denver were all becoming major airline hubs. Dallas took advantage of the Texas oil boom, while Houston profited from the growth of the



The Chemistry Building at the University of Texas, Austin. J.E. Morgan & Sons completed many similar buildings on the Austin campus during the 1930s, almost all in the Neo-Renaissance architectural style. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.



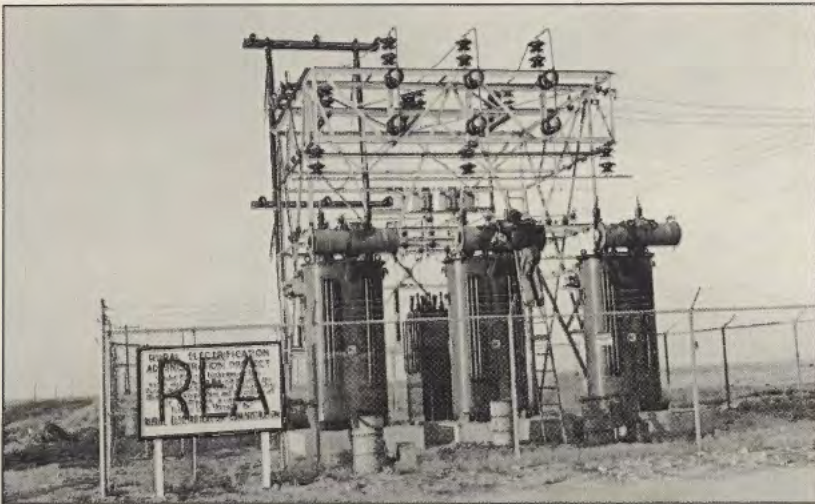
The Grayson County Courthouse under construction in 1935. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

petrochemical and energy industries. Meanwhile, El Paso stuck with the more traditional industries of the American West—copper smelting, cattle dealing, cotton, and railroads—all of which were in a gradual decline. As a result, commercial investment dried up and El Paso began to stagnate.

One El Paso bright spot of the postwar era was the growth of the clothing industry, led by Farah Manufacturing. Mansour Farah began producing pants and shirts in El Paso in 1920, but it was not until World War Two that the Farah brand became world famous. In 1953, J.E. Morgan & Sons constructed a 116,000-square-foot Farah plant on East Third and Cotton streets capable of producing 24,000 pants per day. The firm subsequently built two additional plants for Farah, one in 1959 and the other in 1961. Strip malls offered another growth opportunity. The Morgan firm built the Fox Plaza Shopping Center (5559 Alameda Ave.) in 1960, which is still in use today; and the Northgate Shopping Center (9350 Dyer St.), which was El Paso's largest and most upscale mall when it opened in 1961, but which closed several years ago and is now undergoing demolition and renovation. Three Morgan projects for the City of El Paso also deserve mentioning: the expansion of the Municipal Airport in 1947, the renovation of the

El Paso County Coliseum in 1949, and the remodeling of Liberty Hall in 1949.

Otherwise, J.E. Morgan & Sons relied primarily on its mainstays—local businesses, schools, and churches—to keep itself in the black. Some of the most important private constructions and renovations include Price's Dairy (1948), the S.S. Newberry Building (1951), the James A. Dick Warehouse (1955), the El Paso Pipe and Supply (1960), and the Popular Dry Goods Store (1961-1962). Projects for the El Paso school district include the construction or renovation of Zavala (1948), Burleson (1949), Rusk (1952), Ranchland Hills (1955), Putnam (1959), and Father Yermo (1964) schools. The firm also built or renovated buildings for the nearby Ysleta school district in the 1950s, including Ysleta High School and a half dozen Ysleta elementary schools. Its most prominent university construction was the Cotton Memorial Building (1948) at Texas Western College (now UTEP). Its most prominent education-related project outside Texas was the expansion of the New Mexico School for the Blind in Alamogordo in 1950. Church constructions and renovations include the First Baptist Church (1949), St. Pius X Catholic Church and Parochial School (1955-1956), St. Joseph's (1958), Nazareth Hall (1962), and Our Lady of the Light Catholic Church (1965).



A Rural Electrification Administration Project for the Central Valley Electric Coop in Artesia, New Mexico. J.E. Morgan & Sons completed 29 REA projects during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

It was fortunate that Leo Morgan, the youngest son, opened up a branch of Morgan & Sons in Dallas shortly after the end of World War Two. Unlike El Paso, Dallas was growing at a fast clip during the 1950s and building contractors were in high demand. The first sizable Dallas contract was for an addition to the Mayfair Franklin Store (1946-1947), followed by contracts for the University Park Methodist Church (1949), Great American Reserve Insurance (1950), and the Baker Hotel (1952). By 1954, the Dallas branch was securing some of the firm's biggest projects, including Irving Jr. High School (1954-1955), Hexter School (1955), Graham Brown Shoe Company (1955), Christ the King Church (1956), Temple Emanuel (1957), the Dallas Country Club (1957), the Utilities Exchange (1957), Lovers Lane Methodist Church (1959), Preston State Bank (1959), American Airlines (1959), Kraft Foods (1959-1961), Foremost Dairies (1960), Highland Park Methodist Church (1962), Neuhoff Meat Packing Plant (1962), Bishop Lynch High School (1964), and Southwest National Bank (1964).

The Morgan Financial Ledger did not keep separate accounts for the El Paso and Dallas branches, so it is all but impossible to



Fort Bliss expansion prior to 1950. J.E. Morgan & Sons won many government contracts during the 1940s to expand Fort Bliss. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

determine the relative size of each branch from year-to-year with any real precision. A few things, however, can be discerned. The number of El Paso projects vastly outnumbered the Dallas ones, but the Dallas projects were on average much larger than the El Paso ones. Many of the El Paso projects were renovations, remodels, and additions, whereas nearly all the Dallas ones were new constructions, some of them quite challenging technologically. Overall, the Dallas branch accounted for approximately one-third of the firm's annual business for



The tower used to test the first atomic bomb at the Trinity Test Site in New Mexico. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

most of the postwar era, even more during the period from 1955 to 1960. Leo Morgan always jokingly claimed that he had moved to Dallas "because there were too many Morgans in El Paso."⁸ Maybe so. But it was also a shrewd business move.

In 1965, Bernard, William, Francis, and Leo decided to sell the construction business (but not the firm's name) to ATA Builders and to transform J.E. Morgan & Sons into an investment and real estate company. There were a variety of reasons why the sons wanted to get out of construction. For one, the two oldest were at or approaching retirement age: Bernard turned 66 and William 63 in 1965. Also, the construction business had changed over the decades, becoming both more competitive and less profitable. Most of the big construction projects—massive skyscrapers in downtown Dallas, for instance—were going to large national and international firms that possessed the personnel and expertise to undertake them at an economy of scale beyond the capability of family-owned construction businesses. Meanwhile, many of the smaller projects were being won by fly-by-night construction companies who bid at cut-rate prices. The State of Texas required plumbers, electricians, and construction-related specialists to be certified and licensed, but there were no such requirements

for building contractors at the time (“Anyone with a hammer,” Bernard Morgan used to lament, “could go into construction and become a low bidder”).⁹ Over time, J.E. Morgan & Sons grew tired of being asked to redo the botched jobs of others. Moreover, the Morgans—individually and collectively—possessed an enormous amount of knowledge about real estate and investment issues from their decades in the construction business. William and Leo profited from some timely investments in IBM and Dallas-based University Computing Company (now UCCEL Corporation), while Bernard and Francis were adept at securing oil and gas royalty rights from federal land lotteries. Like their father and mother, they were generous with the wealth they accrued, believing that they had a moral responsibility to help those less fortunate than themselves. Bernard even received the same papal honor, Knight in the Order of St. Gregory, as his father.

It was fitting that J.E. Morgan & Sons’ final construction project was Our Lady of the Light Catholic Church (4700 Delta Drive) in El Paso. The devout Joseph Morgan would have approved.



Christ the King Church in Dallas in 1956. The Dallas branch of J.E. Morgan & Sons helped keep the firm profitable after World War II. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.

The Major Construction Projects of the Morgan Firm: A Chronological Inventory

Note: All constructions are in El Paso, Texas, unless otherwise indicated.

Sorenson & Morgan

- 1909 Abdou Building
1910 Banner Building
1911 American Furniture
Company (Phase 1)

J.E. Morgan

- 1913 American Furniture
Company (Phase 2)
1914 El Paso County Hospital
1915 El Paso High School
1916 El Paso County Courthouse;
St. Joseph's Church
1917 Empire Bottling Works; Bray
and Company; Liberty Hall;
White House Addition
1918 Knights of Columbus
Building, Fort Bliss
1919 Tri-State Grocery Building;
International Building;
Fort Whipple Barracks
and General Hospital
(Prescott, AZ)
1921 State National Bank
Gardner Hotel
1922 Loretto Academy; Holy Cross
Sanitarium (Deming, NM)
1923 St. Joseph's School; Sacred
Heart Church Expansion
1924 Army YMCA
1925 Jesuit College (Ysleta, TX)
1926 W. S. Hills Building;
Kern Place Reservoir
1927 City Hall and Municipal Audi-
torium (Wichita Falls, TX);
Blue Bonnet Hotel (Sweetwater,
TX); Wichita Falls State
Hospital (Wichita Falls, TX)
1928 Momsen Dunnegan Ryan
Building

1929 Nevada Consolidated Mining
Company; Phelps Dodge
Copper Refinery

1930 Chemistry Building, Univer-
sity of Texas (Austin, TX)

1931 Medical Laboratory, Univer-
sity of Texas (Austin, TX);
Training School for Nurses,
John Sealy Hospital
(Galveston, TX)

J.E. Morgan & Sons

- 1932 Texas State Highway Depart-
ment Building (Austin, TX)
1933 Duncan Field (Kelly Air Force
Base, San Antonio, TX)
1934 Fort Bliss Expansion
1935 El Paso County Hospital
Expansion; Grayson County
Courthouse (Sherman, TX);
McDonald Observatory
(Fort Davis, TX)
1936 Belfalls Light and Power
Company (Belfalls, TX);
Silver City Hospital (Silver
City, NM); Children's Hospital,
University of Texas (Austin,
TX); Negro Hospital, Universi-
ty of Texas (Austin, TX); Men's
Dormitory Unit 2, University
of Texas (Austin, TX); Clovis
Junior High School (Clovis,
NM); Curry County Court-
house and Jail (Clovis, NM)
1937 Doña Ana County Courthouse
(Las Cruces, NM); Gallup
Hospital (Gallup, NM);
Lime Stone County Electric
(Lime Stone County, TX)
1938 Murray Hotel (Silver City, NM);
Hilton Hotel (Albuquerque, NM);
Farmers Electric Cooperative
(Greenville, TX); Deaf Smith
County Electric (Hereford, TX)

continued on next page

- 1939 Coca Cola Bottling Company (Clovis, NM); Ysleta High School (Ysleta, NM); Fort Worth Housing Authority (Fort Worth, TX)
- 1940 El Paso County Hospital Tuberculosis Ward
- 1941 Fort Bliss Expansion
- 1942 Fort Bliss Expansion; Harlingen Gunnery School (Harlingen, TX); Camp Swift (Bastrop, TX)
- 1943 Fort Bliss Expansion; Los Alamos Housing Project (Los Alamos, NM)
- 1944 Fort Bliss and Biggs Field Expansion; War Housing Project (Pecos, TX); Los Alamos Projects (Los Alamos, NM); Phelps Dodge Refinery Expansion
- 1945 Fort Bliss and Biggs Field Expansion
- 1946 Mayfair Franklin Store Expansion (Dallas, TX)
- 1947 Southwest National Bank (Dallas, TX); Mayfair Franklin Store Expansion (Dallas, TX); El Paso Municipal Airport Expansion; El Paso National Bank Expansion
- 1948 Lorch-Westway Manufacturing Building (Dallas, TX); Baker Hotel (Dallas, TX); Zavala School; Price's Dairy; Cotton Memorial Building on UTEP Campus
- 1949 University Park Methodist Church (Dallas, TX); El Paso County Coliseum; Fort Bliss Regimental Gymnasium; Van Park Housing Project at Fort Bliss
- 1950 Trinity Presbyterian Church (Dallas, TX); Great American Reserve; Insurance Company (Dallas, TX)
- 1951 S.S. Newberry Building Renovation
- 1952 Baker Hotel Expansion (Dallas, TX); Fort Bliss Expansion; Ysleta High School Expansion; Rusk School Expansion
- 1953 Fort Bliss Expansion; Farah Manufacturing Plant
- 1954 Irving Jr. High School (Dallas, TX); J. L. Case Wholesale (Dallas, TX)
- 1955 Basic Science Building (Dallas, TX); Irving Jr. High School Expansion (Dallas, TX); St. Pius X Catholic Church
- 1956 Christ the King Church (Dallas, TX); St. Pius X Parochial School; St. Patrick's School and Rectory; Texas Western College (University of Texas at El Paso) Expansion
- 1957 Temple Emanuel (Dallas, TX); Dallas Country Club (Dallas, TX); Utilities Exchange (Dallas, TX); Ursuline Academy (Dallas, TX)
- 1959 Lovers Lane Methodist Church (Dallas, TX); Preston State Bank (Dallas, TX); American Airline Hangars (Dallas, TX); Kraft Food Corporation (Dallas, TX); Farah Manufacturing Plant Expansion
- 1960 Foremost Dairies (Dallas, TX); Fox Plaza Shopping Center
- 1961 Kraft Foods Expansion (Dallas, TX); Farah Manufacturing Expansion; Northgate Shopping Center
- 1962 Highland Park Methodist Church (Dallas, TX); Christ the King Rectory (Dallas, TX); Neuhoff Meat Packing Plant (Dallas, TX); Highland Park Methodist Church (Dallas, TX); Nazareth Hall
- 1964 Bishop Lynch High School (Dallas, TX); Southwest National Bank (Dallas, TX)
- 1965 Our Lady of the Light Church



Temple Emanuel under construction in Dallas in 1957. J.E. Morgan & Sons possessed the technical expertise to construct unusual and difficult designs, such as this round dome. Courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department, J.E. Morgan & Sons photographs, PH020.


ENDNOTES

- 1 *El Paso Herald-Post* (July 26, 1942) and *El Paso Herald-Post* (April 28, 1956, Section E-6). The newspaper accounts state that he attended "a New York trade school," but at the time there was only one trade school in New York that would have attracted out-of-state students: the New York Trade School. Founded in 1881, it was renamed the Voorhees Technical Institute in 1961 and then became part of the New York City College of Technology in 1971. Black Creek, Florida, has been incorporated into St. Augustine, Florida.
- 2 See the El Paso city directories for 1898-1899, 1900, 1912, 1913, 1914, and 1932. Some later newspaper accounts claim that J.E. Morgan became J.E. Morgan & Sons in 1930, but the new name does not appear until the 1932 city directory. The brick plant is mentioned in "John Sorenson," B. B. Paddock, *History and Biographical Record of North and West Texas* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1906), vol. 1, 467-68. All information on J.E. Morgan and J.E. Morgan & Sons projects are based on the unpublished "Morgan Financial Ledger, 1914 to 1965" in the possession of Joseph Morgan's granddaughter, Ann Morgan Lilly (El Paso, Texas). Hereafter cited as Morgan Financial Ledger.
- 3 It is not known when Sorenson & Morgan began working with Trost & Trost. The first known collaboration between the two firms was a two-story building (still extant) at 312 So. El Paso for the Howard-Ranken-O'Fallen Realty Company in 1908. The building features nineteen window bays lined in a row along the second floor, a signature of the Chicago Style.
- 4 The Morgan Financial Ledger shows multiple defense-related contracts in New Mexico between 1943 and 1945 in Deming, Lordsburg, Alamogordo, Los Alamos, and Santa Fe. Some have straightforward descriptors ("Civilian War Housing" and "Night Bombing Targets" in Deming), others have

somewhat cryptic ones ("Celestial Navigation Trainer Bldg" and "Evaporation Cooler" in Alamogordo), and still others have no useful descriptor at all (for example, "Santa Fe Job" for a \$350,000 contract). One can surmise that at least some of these projects were top secret. According to Peter Hales, J.E. Morgan & Sons assembled an entire village of prefab one, two, and three-bedroom duplexes in Los Alamos in 1943, which the federal government had purchased from the Houston Ready-Cut House Company. These prefabs were so flimsy and uninviting that residents dubbed the entire village "Morganville," a derisive reference to the Depression-era shantytowns known as Hoovervilles. Soon thereafter, R.E. McKee (another El Paso building firm) was hired to construct a second housing village, which featured paper-thin walls and flat roofs atop cement blocks. Once the residents saw the McKee housing, they began to regard Morganville as luxurious. In reality, the problem lay not with the contractors, but with Lieutenant General Leslie Groves, who cut corners on civilian constructions in Los Alamos so that he could pump more money into military installations. See Peter Bacon Hales, *Atomic Spaces: Living on the Manhattan Project* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 77-78.

- 5 Sister M. Lilliana Owens, *Carlos M. Pinto, S. J.: Apostle of El Paso* (El Paso: Revista Catolica Press, 1951), 84-85 and 95; and Sister M. Lilliana Owens, *Most Reverend Anthony J. Schuler, S.J., D.D.* (El Paso: Revista Catolica Press, 1953), 11, 143, 158-59, 164-65, 204-5. For the 1926 additions to St. Joseph's, see the Morgan Financial Ledger, 16.
- 6 Owens, *Most Reverend Anthony J. Schuler*, 208-9, 241-45, and 374-77. On the Jesuit College, see the Morgan Financial Ledger, 16-17.
- 7 Cited by Owens, *Most Reverend Anthony J. Schuler*, 361.
- 8 Author's communication with Leo Morgan's son, Leo "Mike" Morgan, on April 18, 2013.
- 9 Author's communication with Bernard Morgan's daughter, Ann Morgan Lilly, on August 12, 2013.





Remembering Playhouse, Inc.

By Nancy Hamilton



For twelve years—from 1951 to 1963—El Paso was home to a theatrical group several of whose members later enjoyed careers in TV and on Broadway.

Playhouse, Inc. began when Mr. and Mrs. Milton Kibbee and their daughter, Lois, moved to El Paso, bringing a wealth of theatrical and movie experience. They enlisted a loyal following of volunteers to present a variety of plays over the short life-span of the group.

El Paso had few proscenium stages in those days, and Playhouse chose the Scottish Rite Cathedral auditorium as its first home. They produced "Born Yesterday" and three other plays there in the opening season of 1951. The summer of 1952 brought a change of scene to La Hacienda Restaurant where melodramas were performed for seventeen weeks, providing enough income for the volunteer troupe to seek a permanent home.

The Phoenician Club had a building on the east side of the Franklin Mountains that was available for parties, large meetings, and similar activities. For Playhouse, it seemed a natural place to develop theater-in-the-round, which had been popularized by Margo Jones in Dallas, starting in 1947. Several small theaters had used this seating style from 1924 forward, but Jones's was the first professional theater in the United States to do so.

This technique for theatrical presentations, also called arena theater, is still pursued by many theaters as well as by major entertainers in settings where audiences can be seated on all side of the stage.

For Playhouse, having the audience surrounding the players resulted in some unexpected participation, sometimes as interjections of comments as a play progressed. One drama called for an



Joan Quarm & Bob Tappan in "The Importance of Being Earnest"

actor to have difficulty lighting a cigarette, which inspired a member of the audience to come forward with his lighter to help out.

Playhouse opened its first season at the Phoenician Club with "Night Must Fall." One of the memorable productions there was "Antigone" starring Lois Kibbee.

In 1956 Playhouse moved to the site it would occupy until 1963. The building, designed by El Paso's first architect, Ernest Krause, had been erected in 1899 as the original Temple Mt. Sinai on the southeast corner of Oregon and Yandell. The congregation moved in 1916 and the small building served as an Armed Services YMCA during World War I and as a teen canteen during World War II.

Once Playhouse was established in its new home, members set to work sprucing it up as best they could. From time to time art exhibits were featured in the small lobby. The 135 seats were arranged in the one large room, and an upstairs balcony was used for storage.

Over the dozen years of its existence, Playhouse developed a loyal band of volunteer actors and crew. They earned their livings in a variety of jobs and often included several from the military community. Spare time was spent in preparing for each season's plays and keeping the theater presentable. During the summers, the group presented melodramas whose popularity normally brought in enough money to keep them going for the next season. Besides paying rent to R. E. McKee, general contractor, who owned the building, they were responsible for utility bills, furniture, and royalties for use of plays. Because of the small size of the theater, it was possible to arrange for smaller royalties than larger groups had to pay.

Lois Kibbe and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Milton Kibbee, were mainstays of the theater. From time to time they participated in regular productions, such as "The Man Who Came to Dinner," which Lois directed, with her mother as Harriet and her father in another role. They were regulars in the melodramas as well, usually with Lois writing the script, her father as an actor, and her mother as intermission entertainer singing "Come Home Bill Bailey" and "A Good Man is Hard To Find." All three had turns at directing shows.

Several other families were involved in Playhouse over the years, among them Iris and Howard Baldwin, Haisie and Raul Nieto and their daughter Sylvia Halperin and her husband Ed, Captain William and Elfrieda Knapp, Estelle and Truman Fisher, Howell and Jerri Eurich, and one summer the Clarks—Bob, Chris, and Cathy. Baxter and Betty Polk co-starred in at least four productions, among them "Man Who Came to Dinner" with him as Sheridan Whiteside. In a publicity release, Lois Kibbee noted that the Polks had met when they were cast in "Delicate and the Deadly" by El Paso playwright James Cleveland in March of 1953. Baxter was head librarian at Texas Western College (now UTEP) and Betty wrote a newspaper advertising column for a business.

Howell Eurich became the prototype villain for the annual melodramas. Others who took that role included Robert Lawson, Jerry Wolf and Hector Serrano. Most of the time, these shows were



The cast of "Witness for the Prosecution" included, from left, Howard Wilcox, Joe Rey and Hoagy Elder.

at the Hacienda Restaurant near the Paisano overpass. Until an outdoor stage was built, they performed inside the building. One summer the show was held at Playhouse. In 1962 the site was briefly the Patio Lounge Outdoor Cabaret Theatre at 121 North Chihuahua, then in August returned indoors to the Hacienda.

While Lois Kibbee directed many of the productions, others who regularly took the helm were Polly Harris, who later served on the City Council; Bennett Oberstein, a drama graduate of the University of Iowa who came to El Paso in the military; Jerry Wolf, who also acted in several plays; Don Brady, who taught at Texas Western and later at Loyola in New Orleans; and Roy L. Lassiter, who first directed "A Hatful of Rain" in April 1959 and became resident director for the 1962-63 season after teaching at Sul Ross State College.

Others from the community took part in various productions. Albert Green-Field, who operated an art gallery, was promotion manager for a while. Frank Ahlgren, *Herald-Post* police reporter, brought his guitar to some of the melodramas and sang. Joe Rey, an attorney, portrayed the judge in "Witness for the Prosecution."

Joan Quarm, who was a major participant in El Paso theatrical ventures over many years, played the lead in "Five Finger Exercise" and took on other tasks including directing. She introduced Studio Nights in 1961 as director of a reading of Dylan Thomas's "Under Milk Wood." She taught English at Texas Western College. She also produced Gilbert and Sullivan operettas for many years. She died in 2011.

Anne Harmon acted in many Playhouse productions, among them a summer series of one-act plays performed at La Hacienda. She taught dance at Texas Western. Besides dancing for melodramas, she acted in a group of one-act plays for Artists' Supper Theatre at the Hacienda. Robert Tappan appeared in numerous plays over the years. He taught modern languages at TWC from 1954 to 1982. He died in March 2013.

Lois was named for her mother, who billed herself as "Mrs. Milton Kibbee" to avoid confusion over their names. Mrs. Kibbee directed "Gaslight" in November 1958 and had major and minor roles in several productions.

The group operated under a board of five to seven members, and was chartered in 1953 by the State of Texas under the name Playhouse, Inc. In the early years, the Kibbees were involved on the board as well as onstage and behind the scenes.

The seasonal offerings usually included a balance of recent plays, among them a comedy or two and rarely a musical. The schedule for 1961-62 began in September with five weekends of "Three Men on a Horse," followed in December by five weekends of "Witness for the Prosecution." Five weekends in January-February called for "Five Finger Exercise," then in March Noel Coward's classic comedy, "Blithe Spirit." Closing the season was an early Jerome Kern-P. G. Wodehouse musical, "Leave It To Jane." Interspersed were Studio Nights and a free Easter reading at the El Paso Museum of Art.

In the late 1950s the group reached out to the community, offering special performances for soldiers at William Beaumont Army Hospital, and teaming up with the Mt. Franklin Kiwanis Club to schedule a couple of fund-raisers at Liberty Hall. Polly Harris worked with the Sisterhood of B'nai Zion to direct "Wish You Were Here," a musical at Liberty Hall in March of 1962 to attract support for charities. In May of 1963 a reading of "Murder in the Cathedral" by T. S. Eliot was given in the auditorium of the El Paso Museum of Art, then on Montana Avenue. In December a



*Bob Lawson as the villain threatens Marsha McCuen
in the 1962 melodrama "All That Glitters Ain't"*

program of madrigals was sung, with Mrs. Alvina Mottinger, author of a book of Christmas carols, introducing a group of songs.

A "hands across the border" approach was taken on November 25, 1961, when William Saroyan's "The Cave Dwellers" was presented at the Teatro Seguro Social in Ciudad Juárez under the auspices of Crossroads of the Americas. That group had sponsored art exhibits and other endeavors in which the two border cities shared cultural interests. Ed Nestor was the director of the play, assisted by Julie Eastman. Douglas Goedert, a local architect and long-time technician and board member, was technical director. (He married Rowena Collins, who acted in several Playhouse shows.)

A 1963 summer Shakespeare festival outdoors in Memorial Park was not as favorably received as the group had hoped and was not repeated.

By 1962 the likelihood of losing their lease overshadowed Playhouse. The need for community support for a theater became imperative. The group had affiliated with the Arts Council of El Paso and the Southwest Theater Conference. A membership program was setup in an effort to draw supporting funds.

Las Americas Civic Theater was organized in June 1962 with a goal of raising \$87,000 for a 350-seat building. Baxter Polk was elected executive chairman of the advisory board and Jerry Wolf was president of the executive council. With the help of two civic clubs to sell tickets, "Three Men on a Horse," directed by Polly Harris, was performed at Liberty Hall as a fund-raiser, but it did not realize a substantial income.

The final curtain fell in October 1963 when R. E. McKee sold the Playhouse building to a realtor. A play in rehearsal was cancelled. Howard Baldwin, chairman of the board, announced that the theater had to vacate by December 1. With no other location in sight, the group disbanded. Marjorie Graham outlined the history of Playhouse and its closing in the *El Paso Times* on October 17 and 20, 1963.

A meeting of local drama organizations was held in November 1963: Texas Western College, Department of Drama, Playhouse, Inc., Fort Bliss Community Theater, Hacienda Players, Troubadours, and the Theatre. They had no ready funds to help toward a building project and Playhouse went dark.

A unique aspect of the history of Playhouse was the involvement of the Kibbee family, whose first connection with El Paso had been in the 1880s when James Kibbee was an editor of the *Daily Herald*. His son, Guy Bridges Kibbee, who was to become the most famous of the clan was born in El Paso March 6, 1882. The family soon moved to Las Cruces, then to Roswell, where Milne Bryan Kibbee was born January 17, 1896. He was known as Milton Kibbee during his extensive acting career.

Guy operated a small press in his father's print shop in Roswell until he left home as a teenager to join a touring stock company. Milton worked with him in stock for a while; then both moved to Hollywood. Guy became a regular character actor in movies in 1931, Milton following him two years later. Milton appeared in 365 films over twenty years, usually as a minor character with few speaking parts but notably as Judy Garland's father in "Strike Up the Band" (MGM, 1940). Guy's record was 115 films, several of them with Shirley Temple, such as the title role in "Captain January."

In 1939 Guy visited El Paso soon after news agencies had reported that he had been killed in a car accident in Arizona. He, his wife, and another actor, Hugh O'Connell, came to see Guy's nephew, C. D. Willingham. Guy gladly denied the reports of his



Elizabeth Gaidry as "Auntie Mame" in 1963

death, then told a reporter for the *El Paso Times* of November 17 that he had met with Clarence Buddington Kelland in Phoenix, en route to El Paso. Kelland wrote stories about Scattergood Baines for *Saturday Evening Post*, and Kibbee was pegged for the title role when the series was made into a movie the following year. The popular actor died May 24, 1956, from complications of Parkinson's

disease in Long Island, New York, survived by his wife, four sons, and a daughter.

His brother's failing health in the early 1950s was among reasons Milton Kibbee decided to leave Hollywood, and his family came to El Paso. He and his wife, Lois H. Wilson, had met in a stock company and they were married May 21, 1918, in Ohio. While they lived in California, she had a few movie parts but was also busy with two sons, James and Milne, and two daughters, Lois and Elizabeth (later Mrs. Edward Zonn of Los Angeles). She came from a theatrical family. Her parents, J. Ross and Henrietta Wilson, had a stock company that specialized in Shakespeare. Her first stage venture at age three was as Little Eva in "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Mrs. Kibbe taught drama lessons at her home, an apartment at 1508 North Stanton. When "Route 66" filmed an episode in El Paso, she had a small role in it.

But it was the younger Lois who was the sparkplug for the new theater group. Like the other participants, she had a day-time job, hosting a local show at KROD-TV (now KDBC) and her father worked at a department store, the White House. Evenings and weekends were available for rehearsing and performing, and a nucleus of regulars was drawn to the group.

Lois left El Paso for New York in 1959 and her parents returned to California. She became director with an Equity stock company in Massachusetts for seventeen weeks, and would have liked to continue in directing but such jobs were not readily available to women. In 1961 she joined the American Shakespeare Festival for an eighteen-week summer season in Stratford, Connecticut. As understudy to Jessica Tandy, she stepped into the roles of Lady Macbeth and Cassandra in "Troilus and Cressida" when the star suffered a slipped disc. Summer stock occupied a couple of seasons in Columbus, Ohio, where she had major roles in "The Little Foxes," "Auntie Mame" and other contemporary plays.

Then came her first Broadway play in 1963, "A Man for All Seasons" in a company headed by Emlyn Williams. Six months in New York City at the ANTA Theatre was followed by a six-month 30,000-mile tour of 100 cities, then more stock in Columbus and Corning, New York. A second Broadway play, "Venus Is," failed but did reunite her with a former El Pasoan, Word Charles Baker, who had been in the Drama Department of Texas Western College in the 1950s. He also participated in some Playhouse activities, and



Haisie Nieto and Frank Burnett were in the 1960 melodrama at La Hacienda found success in New York as director of the original production of "Fantasticks."

One year she was in a summer stock company with Christine Jorgensen, who had won fame as the subject of a sex-change surgery. Christine asked her to look over a memoir she had written and Lois became involved in rewriting it. An agent found a publisher and arranged for movie rights by the time the project

was finished, but in those days ghost writers were not credited for their work and Lois's name appears only at the end of Acknowledgements.

Through the same literary agent, she met Joan Bennett who was interested in help on a biography of herself and her sister, Constance. Lois was impressed by the Bennett family's long history in theater, dating back five generations to the 18th century strolling players of England. "The Bennett Playbill" was published in 1970 and well received. This led to a friendship with Frances Farmer, with whom she worked on an autobiography periodically over eighteen months, but Farmer's death in 1970 ended the project. Someone else later did a book about her.

Having completed several years of theater and biographical writing, Lois next became involved in television. She joined the cast of "Edge of Night," her first experience in a daytime serial. "I loved it from the beginning, although it scared me half to death. Edge is live, and there's just no chance or margin for error," she recalled. "It's very hard work! We do the equivalent of a one-act play every day—and it is ONE day. Rehearsals start at 8 a.m., at which time we are expected to know all lines. A blocking rehearsal, rehearsal on the set, then a run-through on camera, a run-through after lunch, a dress [rehearsal]—then the performance at 2:30—and that's it. Three a week is considered a busy time—but I've done four and sometimes five in a week. All depends on the story line and how heavily you figure in it."

Lois had enormous respect for daytime soaps, whose writers must produce 260 half-hour dramas a year, and whose casts included many excellent actors. The show won an Emmy in 1973.

After eighteen months on "Edge of Night," she moved to "Somerset" in 1972-73. She then returned to "Edge" in her role as the wealthy villainess, Geraldine Whitney, for more than a year. She shared an Emmy nomination for outstanding writing in the show's 1981-82 season and received four Emmy nominations for best supporting actress. In 1986 she joined the cast of "One Life To Live" on ABC.

She died at 71 of a brain tumor in 1993.

Lois found several former El Pasoans who were successful in New York. Bob Vandergriff, who had been an actor and behind-the-scenes helper at Playhouse, became "One of the outstanding stage managers in the business and has been with some of the top-flight companies on Broadway and on tour," she said. He had



Lois Kibbee

studied at West Texas State College and performed in New Jersey and Massachusetts theater groups before coming to El Paso. During the 1970s he was production stage manager for Broadway productions including "Once a Catholic," "Knock Knock" and "The Hashish Club" and stage manager for "Hello Dolly!"

Word Baker, in addition to assignments mentioned above, won high praise for his long-running off-Broadway production of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible." "The Fantasticks" became the world's longest-running musical, starting in 1960 and still running 35 years later when he died at 72 in 1995.

George Eckstein became a top TV producer in Hollywood at Universal Studios. During his Army service (1953-55), he was stationed at Fort Bliss and became involved with Playhouse both onstage and backstage. He had already received a bachelor's degree from Stanford University and a master's from UCLA, both in theater arts, plus a law degree from USC. His television career took off in the early 1970s and included producing "The Name of the Game" series, "Banacek," and specials "Masada" and "Amelia Earhart." He wrote many episodes of "The Fugitive," as well as other series such as "The Untouchables" and "Gunsmoke." He died at age 81 in 2009.

Another young actor who had participated in Playhouse productions was Robert Lawson, who changed his name to Robin when he went professional. A *Herald-Post* report on February 2, 1973, advised he was cast in Gore Vidal's "Weekend" which was to open in New Haven before moving on to Broadway. He was attending Texas Western College when he participated in El Paso theatrical events, then completed a degree in speech and drama at San Francisco State. He appeared in the daytime drama "The Guiding Light" as Martin Dillman.

Mainer Patrick Hines, who was in El Paso in the early days of Playhouse, was another who found success in television and films. He was known as "Mainer" in El Paso, where he also participated in Texas Western College plays, and in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival where he played Alonso in "The Tempest" in 1952. As Patrick Hines, he became well known as a character actor on Broadway, starting in 1957 in "Measure for Measure." He was in the original cast of "Amadeus" on stage, and was in the 1984 film (for which another former El Pasoan, F. Murray Abraham, won an Oscar). Hines' TV credits included "King" (as Mayor Richard Daley) and "The Adams Chronicles." His other films included "The Brink's Job" (1978) and "1776." He died in New York in 1985 at age 55.

Some participants in Playhouse chose to stay in El Paso and enjoyed popular careers. A great favorite was Howell Eurich, who had become an actor at age seven in his hometown of Detroit. Starting at age 13, he had roles in "The Lone Ranger," "Green Hornet," and "Make Way for Youth," all radio network shows. He studied theater at Wayne State University, was in summer stock in Pennsylvania, and did camp shows while in the U.S. Air Force Special Services. Among the original actors of Playhouse, he ap-



Jerry Wolf, left, and Phil Davidson in "J.B."

peared in "Night Must Fall," "Rope," and as Stanley in "A Streetcar Named Desire," among many productions. He was best remembered, though, as the melodrama villain. At KROD-TV (now KDBC) he directed and produced many shows and gave weather reports. For some time he was the local portrayer of Bozo the Clown. He also participated in melodrama at the Turn of the Century Theater on Texas Street. He was married several times and a son, Robin, became a clown on TV in Chicago. Howell died in 1982.

Polly Harris, a mainstay throughout the Playhouse years, directed many shows and acted in others. She was a regular at the melodrama and served on the board. In the 1980s she served three terms on City Council and ran unsuccessfully for mayor. She and her husband, Paul, had been in radio after moving to El Paso; then she entered the public relations field and was with Mithoff Advertising in the final days of Playhouse. She was a graduate of the University of Kansas City and was active in a theater group there for eight years. Her directing credits for Playhouse included "Bell, Book and Candle," "Bus Stop," and "Solid Gold Cadillac."

A participant in local theater from those days, who graduated from Texas Western in 1957, is Elizabeth (Liz) Gaidry. In an

El Paso Times interview of June 30, 2013, she recalled that she had "acted and directed at just about every local theater at one time or another going back to late TV broadcaster Howell Eurich's Turn of the Century melodrama productions and the Festival Playhouse, now the El Paso Playhouse. She directed "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" for El Paso Community College Performers Studio Summer Repertory in July 2013.

Playhouse, Inc., was not, of course, the first little theater in El Paso. One group originated with the Drama Study Club of the Woman's Club of El Paso in the 1920s. Various other groups performed on the stages of the Texas Grand and Crawford movie theaters downtown and in the Little Theater building on Yandell which later became a union hall.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the most prominent successor to the theater of the 1960s, El Paso Playhouse. It was founded as the Festival Theatre in 1963 and found a home at its present location, 2501 Montana, in 1965. Ken Letner was artistic director before moving on to a film career. He died in 1993. Festival Theatre merged with another small group, Upstairs Theatre Downtown, and in 1978 took the name El Paso Playhouse. It started a children's wing, Kids-N-Co., which became its own entity in 1988. Over the fifty years, the theater has had only one part-time administrative paid position.

Just as volunteers kept Playhouse, Inc. afloat for twelve years, so the later theater companies have relied on them in order to continue bringing live drama to El Paso audiences. Love of theater has drawn participants over the generations and can be expected to continue for years to come.

NANCY MILLER HAMILTON covered Playhouse, Inc. as amusement editor of *The El Paso Times* in the late 1950s. When she moved to a media relations position with the El Paso Public Schools, she became publicity chairman and later a board member of Playhouse in its final years. In 1974 as a reporter for the *El Paso Herald-Post*, she asked Lois Kibbee, by then a television star, for biographical information for a feature story about her. Material for this *Password* article is taken from Kibbee's letters in response, dated January 24, February 2, and March 17, 1974, and from a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, playbills, publicity releases, and photos kept by Hamilton. Various Internet sites yielded dates for several of the former Playhouse personnel, as well as history of theater-in-the-round.

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El Paso County Historical Society

• EVENTS •

Officers and Board of Directors meet the first Tuesday of each month at 11:30 am at Burges House, 603 W. Yandell.

General meetings (*open to the public*) are held in February, May, August and October.

Election of officers and directors is held at the October meeting. Exact dates, times, places and other pertinent information concerning all activities are announced in our newsletter, *El Conquistador*, which is published approximately fourteen days prior to each general meeting.

Other activities:

- Hall of Honor Banquet
- Frank W. Gorman Memorial Historical Essay Contest
- Karl P. and Helen P. Goodman Memorial Awards
- Dolly Dingle's Tea Party

*For an up-to-date calendar,
please visit our website
www.elpasohistory.com*



Lecturas

Recent privately published books of interest to El Paso readers.

Much historical information remains in the hands of private individuals and families, and readers can benefit from self-published items and books from small publishers that take advantage of materials and memories not held in libraries or archives.

This issue we are highlighting four such publications.

Burgess, Glenn. ***Sierra Challenge: The Construction of the Chihuahua al Pacífico Railroad.*** Edited by Don Burgess. Taos, NM: Barranca Press, 2013. [Linguist Don Burgess has compiled articles and photographs done by his father, photo-journalist Glenn Burgess, about the construction of the railroad line that traverses the Sierra Madre Occidental and Copper Canyon in Mexico. It provides first-person accounts of the work and shows photos of those who helped complete this difficult feat of engineering. Some of the author's photographs can be found in the Archives of the Big Bend at Sul Ross State University, Alpine, TX.]

Campbell, C. E. ***Going the Extra Yard: An Army Doctor's Odyssey.*** Burbank, CA: The Endangered History Project, Inc., 2013. [Dr. Chuck Campbell wrote this book about his grandfather, Charles M. Hendricks, M.D., who was an army physician in World War I and later practiced in El Paso. The book draws heavily on the wartime journals and letters of Dr. Hendricks.]

De Wetter, Mardee. ***Watchtower on the Rio Grande: St. Clement's Church, El Paso, Texas, 1870-2005.*** Las Cruces: The Institute of Historical Survey Foundation, 2012. [A collaborative effort involving many people, this book is profusely illustrated and puts church events in a broader historical framework.]

Mendoza, Israel. ***A Brief Chronicle of Presidio del Norte: Homeland of the Jumano = Una breve crónica de Presidio del Norte: La Patria del Jumano.*** Austin, TX: La Junta Press, 2012. [Israel Mendoza (publishing this book as Israel Mendoza de Levario) has compiled this dual-language book based on the Don Francisco Colomo diary, written in the period 1775-1859 about La Junta de los Rios, now the Presidio/Ojinaga area. The original diary is missing, but the author found translations done in the 1930s and has expanded on the account in a preface, introduction, and conclusion that highlight the indigenous and Mexican-American aspects of the history.]

Hall of Honor Nominations

The El Paso County Historical Society accepts nominations from the general public as well as from Society members for the Hall of Honor. One living and one or two deceased persons will be remembered and honored at the Society's annual banquet in November. Nominations may be made for one or both categories. Nominees must be (1) outstanding men or women of character, vision, courage and creative spirit who have lived in what is presently El Paso County, (2) who have consistently done the unusual which deserves to be written or recorded, or who have created that which deserves to be read, heard, or seen, and who have made El Paso County better for their having lived in it; and (3) who have influenced over a period of years the course of history of El Paso County, or by their singular achievements have brought honor and recognition to the El Paso community, and (4) who have directed us toward worthy goals and merit being remembered by all El Pasoans as an exemplary guide to our future.

All nominations must be accompanied by a biographical resume that includes pertinent information about the nominee and the reasons for nominating him or her. Please include the nominee's address and phone number if living, date of death if deceased, date and place of birth, years of residence in El Paso County, profession, and name and address of nearest known relative(s). The person making the nomination must give his or her name and phone number and mail all information to Chairman, Hall of Honor Selection Committee, El Paso County Historical Society, P.O. Box 28, El Paso, Texas 79940 by July 1 of each year.

HALL OF HONOR NOMINATION FORM

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Address (including zip code) _____

Birthplace _____ Years Residence in El Paso _____ Profession _____

Nearest Relative _____ Address _____

DECEASED NOMINEE:

Name _____

Place and Date of Birth _____ Date and Place of Death _____

Years of Residence in El Paso County _____ Profession _____

Nearest Living Relative or Close Friend _____ Phone No. _____

Address (including zip code) _____

NOMINATOR:

Name _____

Phone No. _____ Date _____

Book Reviews

LOST ARCHITECTURE OF THE RIO GRANDE BORDERLANDS. By W. Eugene George. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press. ISBN 978-1-60344-011-0. Hardcover \$35.00.

In this work, W. Eugene George documents the lost Tejano architecture of the Lower Rio Grande and describes the social context of these fading treasures and the communities they served. Many of the settlements originated in the mid-eighteenth century when Spain shifted away from a policy of large land and labor-controlling *encomienda*, to one of small homesteads and pioneer community settlements, or *ejidos*. These agricultural hamlets dotted the northern frontier landscape and many evolved into sizable communities by the late nineteenth century on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Several were thriving regional centers and had substantial populations in the early twentieth century.

Although there were some imposing structures, most buildings were examples of eclectic, vernacular architecture, created by local craftsmen who passed their skills and traditions down generation after generation as the communities grew. Abundant sandstone in the region facilitated basic construction. Stone masons made homes that met the practical, day-to-day needs of residents. Thick walls kept inside temperatures mild, tall air spaces helped with ventilation, and chimney shafts led smoke from the interiors. Solid, windowless facades, parapeted roofs and high surrounding walls served as defensive barriers. By mid-nineteenth century, traditional styles were supplemented with manufactured materials. Bricks replaced stone, windows were enlarged and glass panes appeared. Even so, traditional styles prevailed and early twentieth century observers noted a European quality to these villages.

Mid-twentieth century flood control and irrigation projects along the Lower Rio Grande dramatically changed the regional landscape and most of the area under study was submerged as the Falcón Reservoir was filled in 1953. Although several agencies, including the Smithsonian Institute and the National Park Service, attempted to document many of the settlements before they were lost, the reservoir filled quite quickly and far ahead of schedule. George entered the picture in 1961 while working with the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). He gathered extensive historical materials about these communities and spent time with many re-located residents. While working as an architect, photographer, and professor, George did extensive field work

and produced a manuscript for the Texas Historical Commission which was published in a limited edition in 1975. The project ended but in the early 1980s, the waters in the reservoir began to recede and by 1983, many of the settlements were at least partially exposed, especially Guerrero Viejo, across the river in Mexico. This gave George a rare opportunity to more carefully study the region. Many of the largest, most prominent structures had survived, especially those with extensive stonework. During recent droughts, some of these settlements have re-surfaced once again, but each cycle reveals more deterioration. Eventually, all these structures will be lost.

W. Eugene George's *Lost Architecture of the Rio Grande Borderlands* is a fine record of the region. The text is rather brief but well-written and does a good job of setting up the events and taking the reader through the region. The architectural renderings and floor plans are fine. The only disappointment with the work is the quality of many of the illustrations. Some of the maps have such small print that they are extremely difficult to read. While quite a few of the color and black and white photographs are nice, others have a pale, overexposed appearance (including the cover). This is a bit surprising considering that so much of the documentation was done with large format cameras and traditional films. Overall, this work gives readers a detailed account of a series of communities and truly does document a fascinating period of "lost architecture" in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

— *George D. Torok*

THE GODDESS OF WAR. By Dennis McCown. Santa Fe, NM: Sunstone Press. ISBN 0865-34899-5 or ISBN 978-0865-34899-8. Paperback \$26.95

Dennis McCown's biography, *The Goddess of War*, is about the life of Helen Elizabeth "Beulah" Williams Jennings Mrose Hardin. McCown attempts to present her as a tragic figure of almost Shakespearean proportions; a victim of circumstances caught up in the waning years of the Wild West. But after reading this book, I concluded she was a spoiled, conniving, opportunistic, manipulative golddigger who used her feminine wiles to leech an existence out of three men in particular. She would suck what she could out of each of them, and then, when they were no longer useful to her or a better opportunity came along, she would drop them like an anvil on Wile E. Coyote.

Helen was born on November 1, 1872, to Bill and Ann Eliza Williams in Williamson County, Texas. According to McCown, as she grew into a teenager, Helen was spoiled by her parents,

immature, a flirt, and liked sex. Her first victim was Steve Jennings who she married on March 21, 1889. Helen was sixteen and Steve nineteen. The marriage produced three children only one of whom, Laura, lived. It was not an idyllic life for Helen as the work was hard and Steve was often away on a job. Helen became bored and desperate. McCown believes there was abuse in the marriage committed by both spouses. Not getting the pampered life she wanted or thought she deserved, Helen took her three year old daughter and left her home and husband not bothering with the formalities of a divorce.

In October 1894, Helen and Laura arrived in Eddy, New Mexico broke and with no prospects so writes McCown. Desperate and needing support, Helen set her sights on her second victim, one Martin Mrose, sixteen years her senior, who was a local cowboy, prominent rancher, and investor. In November 1894, the very next month after arriving in Eddy, Helen married Martin, not informing him she was already married, thus making her a bigamist. This, obviously, did not bother Helen. Shortly after their marriage, Martin became embroiled in what would turn out to be a series of legal difficulties some not of his own making. In March 1895, he left Eddy followed shortly after by Helen and Laura. They reunited in Midland, Texas, but that town was too hot for the wanted Martin. He left there eventually ending up in Juarez, Mexico. Helen, who was now calling herself Beulah, along with her daughter, travelled to El Paso where she crossed into Juarez to, again, find her husband.

While in El Paso, Beulah retained the services of a recently arrived lawyer, the former gunfighter John Wesley Hardin, to try to get the still wanted Martin back into the United States. The relationship between the twenty-two year old Beulah and the forty-two year old Hardin evolved into just a tad more than lawyer-client. The two became "very close." Martin was now a liability to Beulah who only wanted him back in the U.S. so she could get her mitts on the considerable amount of cash he was carrying. To put it bluntly, she wanted him for his money, and wanted him out of the way as her new "mealticket," to use McCown's term, was now her third victim, John Wesley Hardin. McCown believes the theory that Martin was enticed to come back north of the Rio Grande by his wife, Helen Beulah, and lawyer, Hardin, who arranged to have him ambushed. The murderous deed was accomplished at about 11:30 PM, on June 29, 1895, by three El Paso lawmen who blasted the hapless Martin into the afterlife. Beulah now had Martin's money, and Hardin had Helen Beulah and what was now her money.

The reason McCown refers to Hardin as Helen Beulah's latest "mealticket" is because Hardin was, on and off, writing his autobiography. Early on Helen Beulah saw this as a veritable cash cow. Not only was a lot of money to be made from sales of the book itself, but also from Hardin speaking engagements and gunplay exhibitions. Helen Beulah began to help Hardin write the book and became his unofficial agent. But the relationship between these two schemers who were only after each other's money was of the love-hate variety, and, on August 16, 1895, Helen Beulah and Laura left El Paso by train to be with family in Arizona. Three days later, Hardin was shot and killed by El Paso Constable John Selman, Sr.

Still hoping to profit off of Hardin, Helen Beulah put in a claim for Hardin's estate, especially for control of the autobiography. In the end, Hardin family members paid her a cash settlement to go away.

Go away she did. Helen eventually arrived in San Francisco. With her daughter, Laura, now a liability, Helen signed Laura over to a Catholic orphanage thereby disposing of the only good thing to come out of her wretched existence. Helen then became employed in the "horizontal professions," dying in an alley on September 11, 1904, at the age of thirty-one.

Quite frankly, the life of Helen Elizabeth Williams would have faded into the bottomless black hole of historical obscurity had it not been for her association with John Wesley Hardin. Dennis McCown, in his biography, has risen Helen "Beulah" back into the limelight she enjoyed for a brief time in 1895 as she openly cavorted with the most famous pistolero of the American West. In order to piece together this drama of a life gone horribly wrong, McCown has drawn upon a variety of primary sources including county records from six states; seven state libraries and archives; federal documents and records; various collections, manuscripts, and newspapers; and interviews and correspondence with descendants of some of the players involved in the story. He also references many books, articles, and other secondary sources.

McCown's thesis for the book is that Helen's daughter, Laura Jennings, was the unifying factor for the six major families presented in the narrative. He delves into each family's background intricately painting a worded picture as to how they were all brought together at this one point in history. In doing this, McCown tends to rely heavily on family oral recollections which, in my experience, are not necessarily the most reliable of sources as such recollections often change quite dramatically with the passage of time. Also, he seems to assume too much as he con-

stantly uses words and phrases such as probably, may have, must have, certainly, undoubtedly, it is doubtful, it is unlikely, it's likely, would have had. Even though the facts might point in the direction McCown is trying to go in, by using such vague words and phrases he leaves the issue in plenty of doubt.

A minor irritant began to develop with me while reading the book and it has to do with McCown's use of ellipses. According to that goddess of writing Kate Turabian, "To indicate the omission of a word, phrase, or sentence, use ellipsis dots—three periods with spaces between them." An example from page 40: "I remember Martin Mrose well. [. . .] He impressed me as a [. . .] Swede. [. . .] He was big, light-complected [sic] fellow. [. . .] He was in the cattle business." The brackets around the ellipses are not needed and are incorrect grammatically while the brackets around "sic" are correct as that indicates the misspelled word is part of the actual quote.

Another criticism of a more personal nature, McCown, on page 167, states that Martin Mrose was buried "in a DESOLATE PLOT [emphasis mine] at the bone orchard of Concordia Cemetery." On page 263 McCown writes that John Wesley Hardin is also buried in a "DESOLATE GRAVE [emphasis mine] in El Paso's historic Concordia Cemetery. . . ." The spot in Concordia Cemetery where Mrose and Hardin are buried is hardly desolate. The two are on one of the cemetery's main roads and are, in fact, separated by two graves, one of them unmarked. The area very well could be the most travelled in Concordia.

Regarding the trial of John Selman, Sr. for the killing of Hardin, McCown, on page 210, offers a bit of a conflicting result. He reports that, according to the *El Paso Herald*, the jury was hung "eleven to one for acquittal." Yet eight lines down the page he states, without a footnote citing a source, that "the jury hung, seven for acquittal, five for conviction." Which is it? To further muddle the matter, Leon Metz, in his book *John Selman, Gunfighter*, which is listed in McCown's bibliography, has the jury voting ten to two for acquittal. Ah, the confusion.

Overall, *The Goddess of War* is a good book covering the life of a woman who should have been a minor footnote in history, but for her association with a former gunfighter. The book is a fresh addition to the history of El Paso and southeast New Mexico.

—Albert Burnham

DR. ALBERT BURNHAM is an Associate Professor of History at El Paso Community College and an aficionado of El Paso's Wild West History.

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El Paso County Historical Society

ORGANIZED MARCH 18, 1954

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