

CATRON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

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Save the Date—April 17 for
the Annual Meeting

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 28 — Helen Cress on Eleanor Williams

April 17 — ANNUAL MEETING with Ron Barber-
Stone Calendars of the SW

May 2 — Climb Fuji Mountain with Kelly Gatlin

May/June — Blum Ranch

July — Outing to Bob Roland's Ranch

HOW TO RENEW, OR JOIN THE CCHS



Send a check or money order to:

CCHS, PO Box 263

Quemado NM 87829

Individual Membership \$20/year

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2014/2015 CCHS OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT: Sally Blum, 575-772-2539

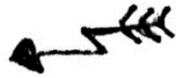
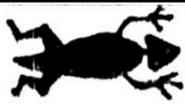
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Clymo, Nettie Carrejo,
Bonnie Armstrong



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Cchs News Alert!

WE DID IT! CCHS now has a museum building! It was a long road to owning the building ,but the deed from DIA Art Foundation to Catron County Historical Society was recorded on February 23, 2015.

The quest for a building for our museum began in earnest in 2014 with several locations investigated. Every building had good points and not so good points. Some buildings were too expensive and some did not fit our needs. Just as we were giving up, Bob Roland came to the CCHS board and told us about the Lightning Field building. From the outside I, for one, was not impressed. The building looked run-down and sure needed work. As soon as I entered the building, I knew this was the one for us. Yes, it needed work but the layout for displays, meeting room, kitchen, library and parking would meet our needs. In addition it has historical value. In October we began communicating with the Dia Art Foundation through Kathleen Shields, their representative in Albuquerque. From the beginning Kathleen was enthused and supportive in our quest to obtain title to the building. CCHS, through Kathleen, communicated with the New York office and we negotiated a donation to us with a lease back from the Lightning Field Operation. Kathleen Shields continually worked with us and New York to put this transaction together. Thank you, Kathleen, And thank you, Bob Roland, for finding the building. On February 20, Becky Bratten, Bob Roland, Helen Cress, Gary Blum, Kathleen Shields, and myself met at Security Title in Socorro and finalized the paperwork. Lisa Blessing and Ken Zimmer, who were instrumental in deciding on the building, were unable to attend the closing. Now the work begins!

Ken Zimmer previously looked at the building and gave us his evaluation of the problems we need to address. He gave us a positive spin and began even before we owned the building to obtain cost estimates. Today Ken gave us a breakdown of what needs to be done and in what order. We are so fortunate to have Ken spearheading this project. Gary Blum will assist Ken wherever needed, but we need MONEY and VOLUNTEERS to make the museum a success. See information provided in the section from the secretary about committees you can work on.

We have also formed a donation committee with volunteers to pick up items you are willing to donate. Some of the items needed are as follows: desk, chairs, tables, filing cabinets, display cases, printers, bookcases, historical manuscripts, historical pictures, family histories. In addition we are in the process of asking homesteader families to collect family history and pictures for the museum. We will also pursue local ranchers to give us the history of their ranches with historical data and pictures. Doug Fischer will help with the Archeological History of Catron County and will help put together a display of Native Americans who came before us. His expertise is greatly appreciated.

As soon as the town knew we had a museum, we obtained donations and the promise of historical items for our museum. Remember we are a 501 (c)(3) corporation and donations are tax deductible. Volunteers in your area will have receipt books to verify your donation and the estimated value. Without the help of our community, this museum cannot exist. So please help wherever you can.

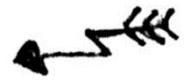
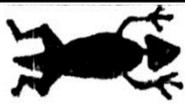
RECENT PURCHASES

Thank you to Matt Williams and Bootsie Williams who donated funds for us to purchase a laptop computer and CCHS is now the owner of a Dell Computer with a docking station, CD burner and much more. Ken Fischer researched the various computers and we were able to purchase this computer for \$400.00 with everything we will need. Thank you, Ken. We still need a portable scanner. Lisa researched various models but is not yet convinced what the best scanner is for our use. Of course, the best is out of our price range. ◆◆◆

SECRETARY REPORT

By Becky Bratten

Membership is now at 89. Please encourage your friends and neighbors to join. Ballots will go out around March 10 and will be due back by April 10, prior to the April 17 Annual Meeting. Those of you receiving the newsletter by mail, your ballots will be with your newsletter. Those receiving your newsletter via email, will receive your ballot by mail. A **list of committees** for the museum work and whom to contact to give a donation to the museum has been emailed. For those of you without email, please contact Sally at 575-772-2539 or Becky at 575-773-4790 to sign up or get more details on committees. We **NEED** you to respond! ◆◆◆



UPCOMING EVENTS

March 28 at the Senior Center in Quemado, dinner at 4 PM and program at 4:30 . We will be entertained by our very own Helen Cress who will enlighten us with stories of her famous mother, Eleanor Williams, trick rider, artist, rodeo star, writer, poet and also ran for New Mexico senate and much more. Helen gave us an excellent talk February 14, 2014 about the Coleman Murders.

April 17 is our Annual Meeting. We may hold it at our new museum building or we may be at the Senior Center in Quemado. We will keep you posted. This will be the meeting that the budget for 2015 will be disseminated, the ballots will be counted, and we will have a silent auction. I know many think we should have something else besides a silent auction so please join the fund raising committee and help us with fund raising ideas and events. Our speaker for April will be Ron Barber who will talk about Stone Calendars of the Southwest.

May 2 is breakfast at Eagle Guest Ranch and a hike to Fuji Mountain where ashes of Agnes Cleaveland were scattered. We will have a talk by Kelly at breakfast.

May (date and time to be determined) will be our annual BBQ with maybe a cowboy poet or cowboy ballads at the Blum/Fischer Ranch. This is a **Members Only** event.

June is not yet planned.

July 10 is a visit to Bob Roland's Ranch for **Members Only**. For those who did not get to visit in 2011, this is your chance to see the house in the rocks and an Indian ruin which will be in the process of excavation. The walk to the site from the car is about twenty yards. Bring your lunch. Drinks provided by CCHS. More information later. ♦♦♦

HOMESTEADING: LIVING ONE DAY AT A TIME PART 1

by John Larson (First appeared in El Defensor Chieftain's Cowboy Country section, June 2014)

Like many other parts of the state, west-central New Mexico saw a steady influx of people following the passing by Congress of the Federal Homestead Act of 1862. From the sea of grass on the San Agustin Plains to the mountainous region of the Gila, homesteaders looking for good land on which to raise cattle and sheep began settling on the wide open spaces.

In an effort to preserve the memories of those early families who came to start their ranches in Catron and Socorro counties, the Bureau of Land Management's Socorro Field Office authorized BLM archaeologist Brenda Wilkinson to collect oral histories represented three of those families.

Wilkinson spent several hours interviewing H.B. Birmingham, Dave Farr and Evelyn Fite on separate occasions. Theirs are stories not of the well-known ranchers or cattle barons but of the hundreds of everyday, hardworking ranch families who have kept cowboying alive for well over 100 years.

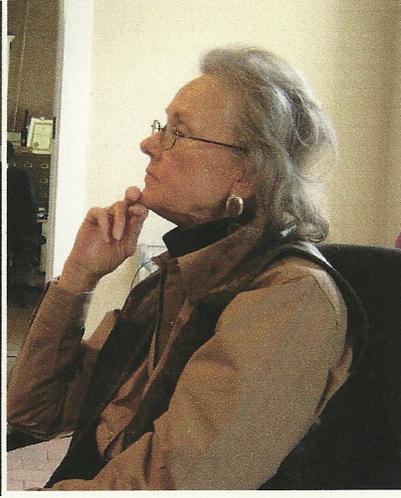
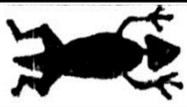
HB Birmingham was interviewed in Reserve in 2010. He had witnessed much of the history of Catron County since his birth in 1915 in Reserve. He died in 2013 at 97 years old.

HB said his father, Bela Birmingham, came to New Mexico in 1910 "in a wagon and team from Canadian, Texas. They crossed the Rio Grande down there close to Las Cruces or somewhere. Then they rented pack animals to a come out in the woods," and decided to stay.

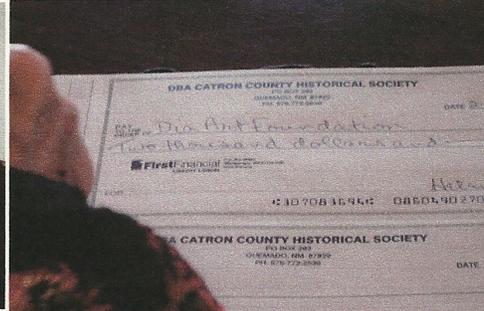
Water was always in demand in the high plains, and cowboys learned—sometimes the hard way—that one doesn't use another's water without permission, especially after an incident at Patterson Lake, south of Highway 12 on Bursum Road.

"There was about six inches in it, and a lot of these fellas used it for free, thinking it was a spring," Birmingham said. "Well anyway, this old fella's gettin' water off this spring. The fella that owned it didn't like it. They got into a fight, and one of them killed the other. And the sheriff went up there—Frank Balke. He was the second sheriff in Catron County. And he pulled up to the gate, and took his gun off, hung it up on the gate, walked up to this old boy, and he says 'I need to come and talk to ya'.' Well, the old boy says 'if you're associated with those state police out

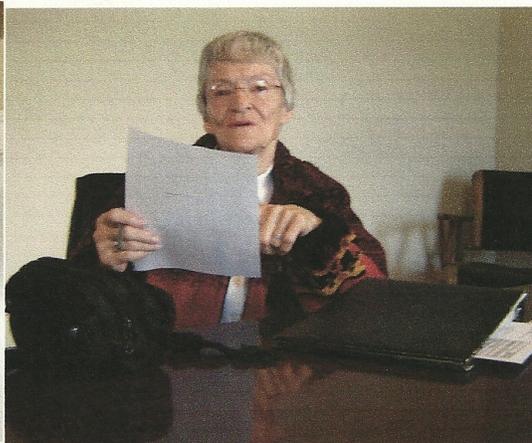
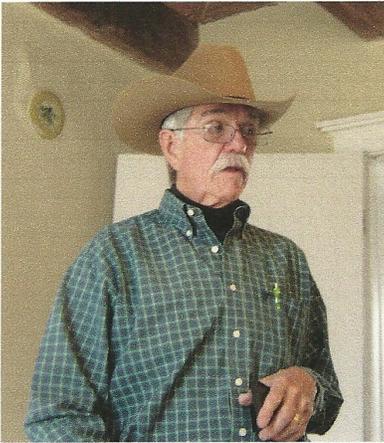
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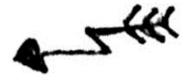
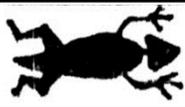


A long search, a long wait, many hours spent. The moment has finally arrived.



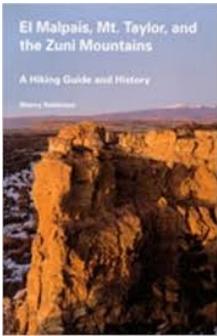
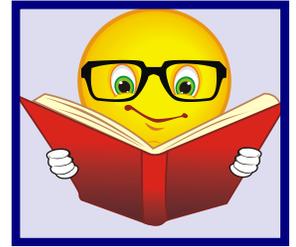
CCHS CLOSES ON MUSEUM FEB. 20, 2015





BOOK REVIEWS

El Malpais, Mt. Taylor, and the Zuni Mountains: A Hiking Guide and History by Sherry Robinson—Reviewed by Laura Brush



As the author says, “This is a different sort of hiking guide...When I hike I want to know what’s gone on in a place, who lived in that sagging cabin, what happened to the land. For that reason there’s more background and history in this book than in any similar guide I’ve seen.” And this is certainly true. For each of the three areas of the title, plus the volcanic plugs east of Mt. Taylor, the author discusses the geology, human history (and pre-history), flora, and fauna before getting to the hikes.

The section on El Malpais starts with the geology of the area—lava flows from three thousand to two hundred thousand years ago, forming one of the most significant volcanic areas in the US. The other sections also have obvious geologic backgrounds, volcanic and otherwise. The historical discussions include Indians, both pre-historic and later; Spanish soldiers, priests, and settlers; Anglo soldiers, settlers, loggers, railroad men, and miners; and the ups and downs of various cities, towns, and other settlements, past and present.

The description of each hike starts with how to get to the start, directions for hiking in an area with few marked trails (topographic maps and common sense recommended), additional history of sites along the way, a summation of how long each hike is in miles and time, and a difficulty rating. An 18-stop Zuni Mountains Historic Auto Tour is also included.

The hikes are listed in the table of contents by both area and difficulty. The book contains numerous maps (some topographic) and photos (which, being black and white do not do justice to the beauty of the area), campground appendix, bibliography, and index. However, the book is twenty-years-old, with a two-page update from ten years ago. I would recommend checking with BLM, Park Service, and other on-the-ground sources before heading out with this book and a good map in hand. With that caveat, this is a valuable resource for both the armchair hiker and the one on the trail.



(Continued from page 3)

there, there's no talkin'.' Frank says 'no, I don't know what your fighting was about, or anything about it. But you're gonna have to go to Socorro and turn yourself in.'

"And he says, 'If you don't, when I leave here, them cops, they'll set this house afire. They'll get you out.'

"So the old boy said he'd go. So he got in, and Frank Balke went to Socorro. But he got three years for killin' that old boy. But being that they was fightin' over water, and that old boy owned the water - it wasn't a spring like they thought it was."

In those days most cowboys armed themselves, but not for the reason TV westerns would have one believe. "I always carried a damn pistol. I have killed as many as 65 rattlesnakes by myself one summer," Birmingham said. "My land on the Agustín Plains, in the middle of it is sawgrass. You don't find any snakes down in that sawgrass; they're all back in the grama grass. And a lot of time you couldn't find a rock to kill one of 'em. So I carried a twenty-two pistol, just to shoot rattlesnakes."

Gun play wasn't uncommon in those years, and Birmingham wasn't the only one who carried a pistol, not into a saloon at least.

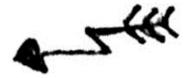
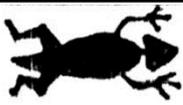
Dave Farr, 82, of Horse Springs in Catron County told of how his mother's family owned the Aragon Hotel in Magdalena, where she worked there at one time as a waitress.

"We'd go to Magdalena and rent a room and my mother would be there, demanding 'no rooms over the saloon'," he said. "This was because she'd seen too many pistol shots through the roof of their saloon."

Farr's grandfather began homesteading in 1904 at Patterson Cutoff. His father homesteaded on the Plains of San Agustín, east of Horse Springs, where Dave and Karen Farr still live. The ranching family tradition continues with Roy Farr, Dave and Karen's son who also lives on the ranch with his family, and daughter Amy, who lives on another company ranch near Crownpoint.

In the interview with Wilkinson, Farr talked about the never-ending work required year-round.

(Continued on page 6)



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CATRON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MISSION STATEMENT

The Catron County Historical Society was founded in January of 2008 and is an organization whose mission is to preserve, present, educate, and inform...by increasing the knowledge of Catron County history through outings, programs, oral history interviews, and a compilation of books pertaining to Catron County. We have recently become a non-profit corporation, and are in the process of locating a museum and visitor center, continuing with an oral history library and the book library, and constructing a website.

The future of the CCHS is in the members and volunteers who help to preserve the history of Catron County.

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(Continued from page 5)

"Well, you ride fences and fix 'em all year round. This was after the ranch was fenced in 1957 or '58. And you fix windmills, year round," he said. "And then of course, you had the spring roundup and brand, move the cattle to the mountains. And you have the fall round up and ship cattle. Winter you'd throw a lotta ice out of the water troughs."

Farr said that sometimes cattle buying and selling was much simpler and involved trust.

"I know one time my father took a bunch of cattle to Magdalena—big calves—and they were worth a nickel a pound and they were in that stockyards in Magdalena," he said. "He met Joe Swartzman, and Joe said, 'Well, I'll give ya' six cents for the calves that are worth a nickel, but I can't pay ya. You let me take 'em and, feed 'em and butcher 'em and sell the meat, and then I'll pay ya.'

"So they shook hands, and away the calves went. After all this time...he finally got paid, with just a handshake deal, and that's the way it used to be," Farr said. "Now you gotta get advanced wired deposits before the cattle leave or you liable not to get any money. That's not with all the buyers, but some of 'em," he said.

HB Birmingham confirmed that simple policy of trust, telling how his grandfather ended up inadvertently selling the ranch.

"Well, he went to drink. He was in town and Hubbell offered him fifty thousand for his holdings. Well they talked there a little bit, and Hubbell laid a silver dollar on the bar. And my grandfather picked that up. He was pretty drunk," Birmingham said. "Hubbell said, 'Mr. Mayberry, that's a down payment on your ranch.' There was three fellas with him, and they just got up and left. Well, when he sobered up, the bartender said, 'by God, you sold that ranch.' And he said, 'no, I couldn't...no.' [The bartender said] 'You picked up that silver dollar and that was a down payment.' So, he stood by what he had agreed."

Socorro County's Evelyn Fite, now 98 years old, was interviewed by Wilkinson in 2009. After years of struggle, a homestead claim eventually resulted in the development of a large ranch for Dean and Evelyn Fite. A 640-acre homestead claim under the Enlarged Stock Raising Homestead Act enabled them to develop a large ranch by establishing a basewater and gaining leasing preference on adjacent public lands after the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act. They did without a lot in the early years, saving up to buy more private land as it became available. Early on, Evelyn wanted to build a house, but Dean told her, "You can't make any money with a house." So they bought more cattle and eventually more land.

Continued in Part 2.

The complete oral histories, with photographs, are on file at the BLM Socorro Filed Office, 901 S. Highway 85.

