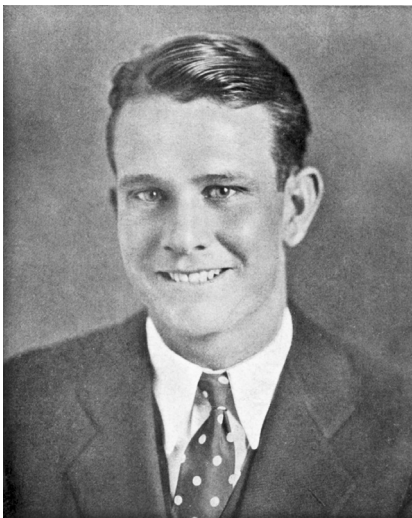

DOÑA ANA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

In Memoriam

KEITH J. HUMPHRIES, ARTIST/ HISTORIAN

Daniel D. Aranda

The Doña Ana County Historical Society awarded its 2010 Heritage Award to Mr. Keith J. Humphries for his contributions in painting, writing and recording local history. The author of this article was very pleased to make the posthumous award on January 29, 2011 to his grandson, Keith “Gig” Griffith. I felt that it was unfortunate that many of Keith’s friends have crossed over the Great Divide and that many in attendance did not have the good fortune to have known him. I will attempt to fill in that gap.



Keith J. Humphries

Keith James Humphries was born in Retrop, Oklahoma on June 19, 1907 to Eugene A. and Lucy Ann Harris Humphries. Upon his birth, the delivering Doctor Murphy, commented that the newborn baby resembled a fine Irishman. As a result, Keith became known sometimes as “Irishman” and at other times “Irish.”

Keith was the second of four children

In 1910, the family left Oklahoma and moved to Toyah, Texas. At first they lived at Billingsely Ranch and then at 9-Mile Ranch, where Keith began forming some of his most unforgettable memories. Their mail was often brought to them by passing neighbors, cowboys or by fruit and vegetable peddlers coming up from the Davis Mountains making their rounds. These people,

many who were of Mexican decent, were always welcome at the 9-Mile Ranch because they brought in news of the outside and because they shared their stories of old. These passers-by also looked forward to a short stay where they could catch a breather, perhaps a meal and, of course, have a drink of precious water. The water was brackish and smelled of sulfur, but then, water is water and indeed precious in much of West Texas. This is where Keith first met rough grizzled old men such as Evaristo, Calanche, “Burro” Mendoza and an old German simply known as Jo-Bob.

Keith remembered that his father would sometimes leave on long trips to St. Louis and Kansas City to purchase supplies needed on the ranch and in a store that he soon operated in the town of Toyah. Sometime in 1912 the family moved to town and Keith’s father operated the largest combination hardware, hay and grain, dry-goods and grocery store in town known as the Reeves County Mercantile Co. Keith’s uncle, W.B. Humphries soon joined in as a partner in the business. Toyah was a small railroad town where visitors were welcomed for the news they carried. The store provided young Keith with plenty of old-timers who were glad to recall their past

Keith attended New Mexico A&M (Today’s NMSU) earning a degree in engineering in 1931. He was also quite an athlete. He starred in basketball and baseball, which earned him the title of “Greatest Aggie” in 1931 and was offered a chance to play in the minor league farm club for the St. Louis Cardinals. He was also a captain in the ROTC. Keith also took all of the courses available in aeronautics that would later come in handy. During his tenure, A @ M registrar, Era Rentfrow, convinced Keith to use his given name, Keith James Humphries, instead of “Irishman” as it would look much better on his diploma.

Soon after graduation in 1931, Keith married Gertrude Hallick Loomis, who eventually bore their only child, Lois Carol, who he nicknamed “Bunkie” after a friend whom he played basketball with. During this time, Keith made his living by working for the Texas and

New Mexico Highway Departments, sometimes with surveying crews, which gave him time to visit with old-timers in remote places. He also found time to submit his first articles for publication in the 1930's and he finished his flying lessons, receiving his flying license as World War II was just beginning.

Keith served honorably during World War II. He joined the army in 1942 and served with the Corps of Engineers in the Pacific. Keith didn't talk much about the war years, but a few tidbits were related to friends and family. He remembered some close calls when Japanese planes bombed the airfield that they were building and where he was nearly struck, several times, by hot shrapnel caused by their phosphorus explosives.

In August of 1945, while on a flight from Okinawa to Saipan and Guam, the pilot, who Keith described as not old enough to shave, asked if anyone there had any flying experience. When he volunteered that he did, he was asked to step into the pilot's seat and take over. To his disgust, the young officer went to the back to start a dice game in which he soon had wounded soldiers dropping their crutches and nurses in baggy overalls down on the floor immersed in their game. Keith guided the plane, listening to Tokyo Rose when all of a sudden excited Japanese voices disrupted the program. "If I had known what was happening," Keith said, "I could have turned the plane forty-five degrees and the gamblers might have looked out to see the world's first mushroom cloud." He also remembered that when on a Jeep ride, several Japanese volunteered to surrender to him.

After receiving a discharge in 1946, Keith worked in Alaska with the Federal Aviation Agency, often in Kodiak, and in 1949 he moved to Las Cruces and began work at the White Sands Proving Grounds. (The facility later became the White Sands Missile Range or WSMR) In the mid 1950's, while employed as a civil engineer at White Sands Missile Range, Keith was awarded a patent for his invention of the tri-axial missile tracking camera mount. The device allowed for cameras to track missiles by rotating on three different axes without shifting positions. This was a tremendous improvement that not only saved the government time and money, but also reduced the chance for errors.

Keith continued writing and had articles published in New Mexico Magazine, Saturday Evening Post, True West, Old West and newspapers in the Southwest that included the Las Cruces Sun News, Las Cruces Bulletin,

El Paso Times and El Paso Herald Post, Silver City Southwest and several others in West Texas.

Keith retired in 1972 and took up painting. Like everything he did, he went at it with a passion. He now transferred the incidents from his writings to canvas. He wanted everything to be right so he revisited the sites that he wrote about and even flew over them for a better perspective. He usually took along his trusty companion, a poodle named Bowser. Although not a Charles M. Russell or Frederick Remington, his artwork indeed has merit. This is because Keith painted incidents of local historical significance. Even Keith understood this and stated so in an interview with El Paso Times writer, Ramon Renteria, "It isn't the quality that I'd like to have my name on. My illustrative quality is poor but most of these paintings have a good story behind it. All these characters ought to be remembered." Amen to that. This was around the time that I met Keith.

One day in early 1972, my wife and I were awaiting our hamburgers at the old Burger Time on El Paseo Blvd. when a cheerful older man approached our vehicle.

"That's a pretty good book, isn't it?"

The man was Keith Humphries and the book he was referring to was a brown cloth-covered copy of Dan L. Thrapp's "Conquest of Apacheria". I agreed since at the time it was my favorite book. I also, gladly volunteered that I knew Dan Thrapp. This was the opening of our friendship. Keith also admired Dan, but didn't know him. He did, however know Eve Ball, another well-versed writer on the Apaches. As we continued to converse, much to his surprise, Keith learned that I knew of characters such as Burro Mendoza and Ramon Calanche from the Big Bend country of Texas. My wife's grandparents who resided in Marfa had known these men. Keith also learned that my wife was a descendent of Diedrick Dutchover, also a well-known name in west Texas history. This short visit also was the opening for our introductions to our mutual friends, Keith soon met Dan and I met Eve.

Keith was glad to talk to anyone who knew and understood his passion for history and I spent many hours at his house discussing this and his artwork. On our first visit to his home on Hadley Street, Keith even gave us a newspaper clipping of my wife's mother and father-in-law's wedding picture that had appeared in a West Texas newspaper. He also offered to give us one of his original paintings that hung in his living room. My

heart raced, but my wife, undoubtedly matching colors with our décor, didn't feel right about taking it. After all, we didn't have room in our modest home to hang it.

On subsequent visits, Keith showed me the pictures in his "vault" and gladly showed me how he sometimes changed them. He could go on for hours, but anyone who is so immersed as we were, can truly understand.

As mentioned above, Keith met Dan Thrapp and even flew him over some historical sites along the old Butterfield Trail. This is a trip that Keith had offered to take me on many times, but that I never took because my family was afraid that we might crash. Even Keith recognized this and said "I wouldn't want this to be on my conscience anyway. Dan (Thrapp) and me have already lived our lives, but you're still a young man." I really think that he meant it, and to this day I really feel that he was sincere and not putting me off. My wife summed it nicely when appeasing me with, "I think that it was awfully nice and considerate of him."

Keith Humphries' work did not go unnoticed and in 1979, he received the Hall of Fame Award from the Dona Ana County Historical Society for his contributions in recording the history of the Mesilla Valley.

In the year 2000, Keith finally published the book that he had labored on. It was appropriately titled [Apache Land From Those Who Lived It](#). It consists of the stories that he gathered with the artwork to illustrate them. It is a gem for historians.

Keith passed away on Sunday, July 21, 2002 at La Posada Hospice Facility and was survived by a sister, Anita Oliver of San Angelo, daughter Carol "Bunkie" H. Griffith, three grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Keith Humphries collection of paintings, photographs and notes were eventually donated to the Geronimo Springs Museum and I was fortunate to be given permission by the museum to sort and catalog the collection. The work was tedious because most of it was misfiled and because much of it was infected with fungus. Apparently the collection had been exposed to water and much humidity, thus ruining a portion which had to be disposed. With the help of Doug Hamilton of Tucson, Arizona, Berndt Kuhn of Stockholm, Sweden, Frank Brito of Pleasant Hill, California, and fellow Fat Boys Historical Research Group members, Emilio Tapia and Eric Fuller of Las Cruces, we were able to make only a cursory cataloging with the intent to refine it some day.

Authors and Historians such as Dr. Robert N. Watt of the history department at the University of Birmingham in England, Berndt Kuhn of Stockholm, Sweden, Ed Sweeney of St. Charles, Mo., Doug Hamilton of Tucson, Arizona, Karl Laumbach and Herman Weisner of Las Cruces, and the late Eve Ball of Ruidoso, N.M. have benefited from Keith's research. Eminent author, Dan L. Thrapp summed a four page letter praising Keith with "I am most impressed with your research, and your collection and the careful way in which you have accumulated and filed it, and I sincerely hope that you can bring about what you originally intended to do with it." Well done my old friend.

Vicente Leonardo Chavez 1934-2011

Vicente was born in the community of Veguita in Socorro County, New Mexico, and grew up in Los Angeles, California. While living in California, he worked as a firefighter with the Los Angeles Fire Department, married Mary Lou, and raised a family of three daughters. When he retired from the Fire Department in 1981, the family moved to Belen, New Mexico, where he built a home and began a labor of love: restoring the Belen Harvey House. Vicente was a talented person: he was skilled as a handyman, a wood carver, and a farmer; and from 1992 to 2001, he volunteered at the Belen Chamber of Commerce, helping organize local events.

In 2004, he moved to southern New Mexico, settling briefly in Las Cruces and then moving to Rodey, where he purchased an old adobe church, formerly St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church, and began a second labor of love: the continuation of restoration work on the church and outbuildings begun by the prior owners. The Church at Rodey had been named to the State Register of Cultural Properties and it wasn't long before the Chavez family and their work came to the attention of the Historical Society. Then, in September 2007, Vicente and Mary Lou invited the Historical Society to hold their annual picnic on the church grounds and to tour the site. It was an extraordinary and memorable afternoon of learning about the many details of the restoration work, walking the church grounds and visiting with Vicente and his wife, two delightful and most kind hosts.

Nelson “Dyke” Clayshulte

Nelson “Dyke” Clayshulte, a lifetime member of the Doña Ana County Historical Society, died Friday, November 16, 2012, at his home in Mesilla at the age of 95. He was born February 1, 1917, in Tucson, Arizona to Nelson and Francis Clayshulte. He moved with his parents to the Mesilla Valley in the spring of 1917 where he grew up the eldest of six children: John Keith (“Tuffy”), Zane (“Possum”), Lorna, Nolan (“Chick”), and Leslie.

After high school Dyke enrolled at New Mexico



Nelson “Dyke” Clayshulte

College of Agriculture and Mechanic arts, now New Mexico State University, graduating in the class of 1941 with a degree in mechanical engineering. That same year he joined the Naval Air Corps with hopes of becoming a fighter pilot, but the military deemed him too old. After resigning from the Navy, he worked in Los Angeles, California, as an engineer for Stoddard Aircraft Radio

Company, a position he held for almost five years. During this time, Dyke met Gloria Fountain and they married in 1943. Gloria was coincidentally a descendent of a famous Doña Ana County family, the Fountains; but she had never lived in the Mesilla Valley until moving here with Dyke just before the war ended.

Upon their return to New Mexico, Dyke worked with his father providing custom harvesting services to local farmers. By the late 1950s he and Gloria had built a home together and were raising their two daughters, Sallie and Nancy. He became a Mesilla trustee and began

working for Agricultural Products company (AGCO) in Mesquite. He worked for AGCO for a total of forty plus years, becoming a principal of the company with his brother, Leslie, before ultimately selling the business to Helena Chemical Company.

The Clayshulte family has played a prominent role in local agriculture over the years. It was in the 1960s that Dyke began farming pecans. He started with one farm of twenty acres in Mesquite before expanding with two additional farms in Mesilla to 120 acres of pecan trees. Farming was one of Dyke’s great joys in life, and he especially cherished sharing it with his daughter, Sallie. He loved the land and the open air, and he took pleasure in watching the trees grow and produce.

Among his many accomplishments, Dyke was a faithful member of the Masonic Lodge for over fifty years, becoming a thirty-second degree mason. He continued to remain involved with Mesilla politics, to include serving three terms as mayor. Although he didn’t care for typical politics, he was motivated to help his town. He never accepted any pay for the job even though it was offered. Driven, hard-working, and honest, Dyke didn’t try to pull the wool over anyone’s eyes. He was not your average politician. His daughter said he was continually reelected simply for being very honest and very fair. Dyke’s nephew, John Clayshulte, recounted his uncle often working on business for the town of Mesilla in his spare time between his regular job and farming—very characteristic of Dyke, who didn’t like to pause.

Gloria Clayshulte died in the early 1990s. Dyke later remarried and his second wife, Georgia Guy, died in 2007. True to form, Dyke continued to work actively until about the age of ninety, when symptoms of dementia began to settle in. Despite this his overall health remained good until a few months ago. His funeral services, held November 20, 2012, were provided by the Masonic Lodge. They performed the Masonic Rite in honor of this good and honest man.

The Clayshulte Family