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*J. C. B. 1882*  
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# Doña Ana County Historical Society

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The *Southern New Mexico Historical Review* (ISSN-1076-9072) is looking for original articles concerning the Southwestern Border Region for future issues. Biography, local and family histories, oral history and well-edited documents are welcome. Charts, illustrations or photographs are encouraged to accompany submissions. We are also in need of book reviewers, proofreaders, and an individual or individuals in marketing and distribution.

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Click on Article to go there.

# Table of Contents

## Articles

Tradition and Controversy: The Swastika at NMSU Nathan Brown .....	1
Intertwining Family Research and WWII History in Southern New Mexico Judy Lazarus Yellon.....	13
The Transformation of Lorenzo Torrez Paul Ward .....	19
W. E. Garrison House Designed by Henry C. Trost Eric Liefeld .....	35

### In Memoriam

Felix Pfaeffle.....	40
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### Book Reviews

<i>Imagining Geronimo: An Apache Icon in Popular Culture</i> Reviewed by Nathan Brown .....	42
<i>Pocketful of Rockets, History and Stories Behind White Sands Missile Range</i> Reviewed by Lutisha Piland .....	44
<i>Searching for Golden Empires: Epic Cultural Collisions in Sixteenth Century America</i> Reviewed by Adam Heien .....	46

## Editor's Page

Historical Societies spend a lot of time exploring what has gone before, how people lived in the past and what their responses to events were. We like to memorialize the significant events of history and try to understand the underlying reasons for and effects of decisions that everyday people make. As historians, we also love to share our research and our thoughts.

In this issue of Southern New Mexico Historical Review, Paul Ward explores the life of Lorenzo "Lencho" Torrez, a miner in Hurley, New Mexico and his effort to improve the lot of his fellow miners in his article "The Transformation of Lorenzo Torres". The struggle was a long one and immortalized the film *Salt of the Earth*, which was blackballed in Hollywood. Lencho's actions were not always popular, but they were always carefully considered. Nathan Brown investigates another controversial topic in his carefully researched study entitled "Tradition and Controversy: The *Swastika* at NMSU". Here again before there was a change, people and institutions were involved in discussions and disagreements. Eric Liefeld continues to explore architectural legacy of the Mesilla Valley with a short piece on the Garrison House, better known as the Home of the Good Shepard.

Newcomers to the Land of Enchantment often seek to learn more about their new home. Some lucky ones discover a hitherto unknown personal link. Judy Lazarus Yellon explores local history and finds that her husband's family has a link to the Army Airfield Training Center in Deming. Her paper "Intertwining Family Research and WWII History in Southern New Mexico" invites us to share her discoveries.

Three reviewers share their insights and opinions on recently published books on New Mexico. Nathan Brown's comments on *Imagining Geronimo: An Apache Icon in Popular Culture* by William M. Clements entice us to read this fascinating book about the changes that a reputation can undergo. Once Geronimo was considered an enemy by most New Mexicans. Now he is a hero and sometime role model. This review definitely encourages new readers

to explore this new view of a well-known historical figure. One of our own members, Lutisha Piland provided a review of Jim Eckles' book, *Pocketful of Rockets, History and Stories Behind White Sands Missile Range* published in 2013. Packed full of information, anecdotes and humor, Jim's book is definitely worth reading and keeping in our personal libraries. Adam Heien, Political Papers Archivist at New Mexico State University, reminds us that Spanish exploration and conquest of the North American continent remains a fertile area for historical introspection and discovery in his review of *Searching for Golden Empires: Epic Cultural Collisions in Sixteenth Century America* by William K. Hartmann.

It is difficult to follow in the editor shoes left by our State Historian Rick Hendricks. We have found it rewarding, challenging, and fun. As sisters we have developed what friends and family refer to as "the sister act." It is our hope that you find this act worth reviewing.

Becky Nell Young and Mary Kay Shannon  
Editors

## Tradition and Controversy: The Swastika at NMSU

By Nathan Brown

The *Swastika*. Many alumni and others knowledgeable of the history of New Mexico State University immediately recognize the significance of this term to the university. The name was used for nearly 80 years as the name of the university yearbook, from the time it was known as the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (New Mexico A&M) to its becoming New Mexico State University. The first yearbook was published in 1907, and the university published one every year until 1992.<sup>1</sup> The name was originally chosen in 1907 through a student contest. At the time the name and symbol were used extensively throughout the Southwest, primarily due to their affiliation with Native American groups in the area, namely the Navajo and the Hopi. The symbol has ancient beginnings, possibly dating back to over 5,000 years. The word “swastika” is derived from the Sanskrit word “svastika,” meaning good fortune or well-being, particularly a mark made on persons and things to denote auspiciousness or any piece of luck.<sup>2</sup> It has been used in civilizations and cultures all across the world, mainly as a symbol of good luck. As we all know, however, that would change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The name and symbol were adopted by the Nazi party in 1920. Within 25 years it would become a symbol of violence and hatred around the world, forever perverting its original meaning. Both name and symbol had a tradition at New Mexico A&M; not only was it the name of the yearbook, but it graced several buildings on campus and was also the symbol for the ROTC unit. Former NMSU President Gerald Thomas, president at the time the name would eventually be changed, reflected on the controversy in a 1997 article published in the *Southern New Mexico Historical*

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<sup>1</sup> Although, by 1992, it was less of a yearbook and more of a literary magazine. In 1993, the name and format changed once again, as *Echo* was introduced. *Echo*, again more of a magazine than a yearbook, was published monthly from February 1993 until April 1996.

<sup>2</sup> United States Holocaust Museum, “History of the Swastika,” Holocaust Encyclopedia. <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007453>. Accessed on June 20, 2014.

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*Review*.<sup>3</sup> Thomas' article does an excellent job of offering a brief summary of the controversy; my hope is to build on that and tell more of the story, primarily through letters and articles published in the student newspaper the *Round-Up*.

The first murmurings on campus as to whether or not the name was fitting came in December of 1938. The *Round-Up* noted that another college, Catawba College in North Carolina, also had a yearbook titled the *Swastika*, but that it had "no connection with a well-known totalitarian government"<sup>4</sup> (Catawba changed the name of their yearbook in 1941). Later that month it was noted in the *Round-Up* that business firms in New Mexico had begun discontinuing the use of the symbol because "few people realized its true origin and meaning." The call was made at this time to "preserve the true significance of the sign of the swastika as a symbol of good fortune."<sup>5</sup> As the gears of war began to turn in Europe, those at New Mexico A&M hoped to hang on to their tradition and maintain the symbol as one of good rather than evil.

After World War II broke out in September of 1939, the use of the name and symbol became somewhat of a controversy on the A&M campus. Early in 1940 Native American groups in New Mexico decided to no longer use the symbol in basket and blanket making; soon after the *Round-Up* stated: "It was because the *Swastika* was used by Indians of the Southwest that it was chosen for the name of our yearbook. Now that the Indians have abandoned its use, the question arises as to the rime or reason of using the insignia that has been made famous through its use by the propaganda agents of the Nazi party."<sup>6</sup> Students were always at the forefront of whether or not the name should be changed. A poll was taken in March 1940, asking the question "Do you believe the name of the *Swastika*

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<sup>3</sup> Gerald Thomas, "Swastika: Peace Symbol Destroyed by War," *Southern New Mexico Historical Review* 4, no. 1 (January 1997): 41-43.

<sup>4</sup> *ROUND-UP* (STATE COLLEGE, NM), DECEMBER 7, 1938.

<sup>5</sup> "Swastika," *Round-Up* (State College, NM), December 21, 1938. There was also at one time a town in New Mexico named Swastika, northwest of Raton. A company town, named for the Swastika Fuel Company, the town changed its name to Brilliant during World War II. See James E. & Barbara H. Sherman, *Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of New Mexico*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975, 202.

<sup>6</sup> Betty Jo Poe, "Nazi or Not," *Round-Up* (State College, NM), February 28, 1940.



## Tradition and Controversy: The Swastika at NMSU

should be changed because it is the emblem of the Nazi party?” Only seventy-seven students voted, and of those seventy-seven, only six favored changing the name.<sup>7</sup> This trend of supporting retention of the name would continue; however, the trend of low voter turnouts among students would continue as well. Many students seemed to be indifferent to the controversy. The hope that tradition would outlive whatever atrocities the Nazis committed still endured: “The *Swastika* will be decorating our uniforms and yearbooks long after the Nazis’ little party is over. The *Swastika* has been the name of our yearbook since 1907 and throwing it away now would be traitorous to our institution.”<sup>8</sup>



*Sgt. Thompson, Ramirez, Bonomo, Singleton, Holcomb, Henderson, Porter, Jones  
Denny, McCown, Baker, Reese, Harris, Hilley*

New Mexico A&M ROTC unit. Swastika insignia can be seen on left shoulder of uniforms. Photo by Swastika staff, *Swastika* 1939 student yearbook, New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts.

This student’s prediction would prove only to be half-right: the ROTC unit disbanded use of the symbol within the next year. In a letter to the *Round-Up* in September 1941, Colonel A. W. Chilton, at the request of *Swastika* editor Grace Berry, explained the reasoning

<sup>7</sup> “Pro and Con of Swastika Usage,” *Round-Up* (State College, NM), March 6, 1940.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

for dropping the swastika as the ROTC symbol. He pointed out that in the summer of 1940, two men of the A&M unit, both wearing the swastika on their uniforms, received “unfavorable and unpleasant” comments from those they encountered. In meeting to discuss this issue, Chilton notes, “the thought was expressed that an honorable emblem had been so dishonored in its use by unscrupulous men that it had come to symbolize a ruthlessness and cruelty which are abhorrent to our citizens.” The decision was made to abandon the symbol “rather than risk any implication the continued use of the emblem might be a condoning of such savagery...and substitute therefore a device which would not have to run the gauntlet of the world’s disfavor.”<sup>9</sup>

The name of the yearbook, however, lived on. In a September 1940 vote, the name was retained, although only fourteen votes were cast, twelve in favor of keeping the name.<sup>10</sup> One year later, another vote was held, this time with a slightly better turnout. Once again, students voted to retain the name, despite its negative connotations.<sup>11</sup> After this, there is very little mention of the name for several years; this is surprising given the entry of the United States into the war and the discovery of the extent of Nazi atrocities. It is, however, important to keep in mind that students on campus most certainly had other things on their minds as the war raged on, and by fall 1943 there weren’t many students on campus anyway – only 160 civilian students, three quarters of them female.<sup>12</sup> The 1944 edition of the *Swastika* notes that “the staff had to defend the name of the book for the benefit of those who didn’t know that the Swastika is an ancient Indian symbol of peace and good luck and that after all we have had it for nearly forty years.”<sup>13</sup> In April 1947 there was a call to combine the *Swastika* and the *Rio Grande Writer* (a

<sup>9</sup> Col. A. W. Chilton, letter to the editor, *Round-Up* (State College, NM), September 25, 1941.

<sup>10</sup> “Swastika Poll Stirs No Interest,” *Round-Up* (State College, NM), September 18, 1940.

<sup>11</sup> “Students Vote to Retain Swastika,” *Round-Up* (State College, NM), October 2, 1941.

<sup>12</sup> Martha Shipman Andrews, “They Moved in and Took Over: The Army Specialized Training Program Invades New Mexico State College,” in *Sunshine and Shadows in New Mexico’s Past: The Statehood Period, 1912-Present*, edited by Richard Melzer. Los Ranchos, NM: Rio Grande Books, 2010, 131-132.

<sup>13</sup> *Swastika*, 1944 student yearbook, New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 15.

campus literary magazine) and essentially dissolve the *Swastika* as a yearbook. It is noted that it might be easier to secure advertising for such a publication, as “advertisers dislike selling ads to a yearbook, because they feel that there are no consistent readers and that annual publications do not allow for timely advertisements.”<sup>14</sup> This attempt at creating a combined yearbook and magazine may have been an attempt to eliminate the *Swastika* name without creating too much of a controversy. However, there seems to be little evidence of any interest in this endeavor and it never came to fruition.

Fifteen years would pass before further mention of the issue would arise. In the spring of 1962 a Marine recruiter visited the NMSU campus and noticed the sign above the door to the *Swastika* office, which displayed the name of the yearbook in red lettering. Sticking his head in the door, he asked the *Swastika* photographer: “Is this the headquarters of the Nazi movement on campus?”<sup>15</sup> This anecdote, appearing in a *Round-Up* editorial, was a way of questioning once again whether or not the name should stay. The editor finishes by noting that “the name of our yearbook is good, it’s original, but connotations from across the Atlantic have shaded its meaning so much that it becomes a matter that needs to be considered seriously.”<sup>16</sup>

Once again, however, the issue didn’t get the attention that some may have wanted. Another year and a half would pass before the spotlight was once again on the validity of retaining the name. The Publications Board discussed the idea of changing the name in November of 1963, supported by the editor of the *Swastika*, Gene Michals, who felt that the name did not indicate what the yearbook or the university really were.<sup>17</sup> The invitation was made for name change suggestions. Whether or not they received many suggestions isn’t known; there were, however, a short string of letters sent to the *Round-Up* regarding the issue following this call. Several supported retaining the name, both among current students and alumni. One letter calls for immediate abandonment of

<sup>14</sup> “Shall We Change?,” *Round-Up* (State College, NM), April 9, 1947.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Thayer, Jr., “Connotations Cast Shadows on Yearbook,” *Round-Up* (University Park, NM), April 6, 1962.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> “Yearbook Change Proposed,” *Round-Up* (University Park, NM), November 12, 1963.

this “gammadion symbol;” although it’s likely this letter is cloaked in sarcasm rather than an actual call to eliminate the name.<sup>18</sup> One student expressed simple apathy, asking the question “Do you really care?”<sup>19</sup> Apparently, this seemed to be the general opinion of most of the campus community. It should be mentioned that ten days after Michals’ words were published, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. This may have drawn attention away from issues like the *Swastika*, as they may have seemed trivial for some time after. Whatever the reason, the issue yet again went dormant; only several brief mentions of the name and controversy appear in the student newspaper over the next twenty years, along with a failed attempt by the Anti-Defamation League to end the use of the name in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> Gerald Thomas, who became NMSU president in 1970, was also advised by outgoing NMSU president Roger B. Corbett that he would receive complaints about the symbol from time to time; Thomas notes in his article that as time went on, they began receiving more letters and phone calls, including some from out-of-state.<sup>21</sup> However, it seems that very little mention of the issue was made publicly.

So, for twenty years, it’s likely that many students and other members of the NMSU community assumed the issue was dead. Not so. In a letter to the editor from February 9, 1983, David A. Belcher brought up the swastika symbol over the door to Foster Hall. Built in 1930, the building pre-dated the rise of the Nazi regime, and as has been pointed out, the symbol had a long-standing tradition at the university, so it’s not surprising to think that the symbol resided on a campus building. Belcher felt that change was needed, pointing out that the symbol “undoubtedly represents a name that NMSU has used since 1897, but the Swastika is a name that, to me represents evil, death, torture, ruin and misery for millions of people throughout the world in recent history. It disturbs me to think that NMSU would continue to use this name for its yearbook and for a shield symbol on one of its most historical and beautiful buildings.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> B. J. Frankfather, letter to the editor, *Round-Up* (University Park, NM), December 10, 1963.

<sup>19</sup> A. N. Brown, letter to the editor, *Round-Up* (University Park, NM), December 17, 1963.

<sup>20</sup> Henry J. Tobias, *Jews in New Mexico Since World War II*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2008, 193.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas, 42.

<sup>22</sup> David A. Belcher, letter to the editor, *Round-Up* (University

This letter was the catalyst for a controversy that would play out on campus over the next several months, even gaining national recognition. One of those responsible for helping gain that national attention was Paula Steinbach, who was the *Round-Up* news editor at the time. Communication with members of the Anti-Defamation League, including the director of the Mountain States Chapter, Saul Rosenthal, helped take the issue outside New Mexico. Steinbach also reflected on the issue in an article she wrote for the magazine *The Jewish Veteran*. Steinbach, a Jewish student and president of the National Hillel Foundation student group at NMSU, points out that Belcher, while not Jewish, was a member of Hillel and had decided to write a letter to the *Round-Up*. Other members of the group felt it was a good idea, but thought Steinbach should write the letter. Considering her position as news editor, however, she felt it would be a conflict of interest and decided she needed to appear neutral on the issue.<sup>23</sup> Even in the face of anti-Semitic letters being printed in the *Round-Up*, Steinbach “let this go without comment,” noting that she did not write a single article or editorial on the topic. She did, however, assign other reporters to cover the issue, including meetings of the task force appointed to address the yearbook issue. Steinbach sums up her feelings on how she addressed the issue: “I was satisfied with how I handled the reporting on the swastika and I was convinced that my Jewishness had not interfered with or influenced the news coverage of the event.”<sup>24</sup> Others, however, including other newspaper personnel and student government leaders, did not agree, feeling that a Jewish editor could not be neutral on a Jewish issue. Steinbach was fired from the *Round-Up* in March of 1983, just over a month after the controversy began. The reason cited for firing Steinbach stemmed from a Passover article she wrote without running an Easter story as well – even though it was “an exact reprint of the article I had printed a year before (without reprimand) or that Easter was still a week away. What did matter was that I was Jewish and the article was about Jews.”<sup>25</sup>

While Belcher’s letter renewed the controversy, it’s surprising it

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Park, NM), February 9, 1983.

<sup>23</sup> Paula Steinbach, “Fighting the Swastika,” *The Jewish Veteran* January/February/March 1984, 10. The article also gives valuable insight into some of the anti-Semitism present at NMSU at the time.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*. Steinbach was later reinstated – due to a “technicality” – her editor not giving her sufficient notice.

didn't begin earlier. A picture published in the 1982 edition of the *Swastika* depicted students dressed in Nazi uniforms carrying a Nazi flag.<sup>26</sup> There was no description of the picture, no explanation as to who the students were or why they were dressed in Nazi uniforms, other than the picture was included in a section of other photographs of the NMSU Pride Band. No mention of this photo was made until after Belcher's letter and the controversy had hit full steam. In the April 11, 1983 issue of the *Round Up*, Merrel Godshalk points the picture out, noting that "it doesn't matter why students are dressed as Nazi soldiers...because there is no explanation of the photo in the yearbook."<sup>27</sup> Godshalk makes the argument that those not familiar with the picture, especially people from other campuses and other states who might see it, would likely get the wrong idea, and the call to abandon the name and symbol are made.



NMSU Pride Band reenacting a scene from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Photo by R. Sterling Trantham, *Swastika* 1982 student yearbook, New Mexico State University.

Two days later, a response to Godshalk's letter is printed, written by several of the Pride Band members involved in the photograph. They explain that it was part of a Pride band halftime show at a football game, and that they were recreating a scene from the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The band members note that as they came onto the field, they were booed and that some in the crowd began throwing bottles at them, to the point where they began to fear for their safety. The lesson learned, according to the band members, was that the symbol was obviously reviled and associated with extremely negative connotations. So why was it still the name of the NMSU yearbook? The authors of the letter suggest that "perhaps a change is in order for our yearbook."<sup>28</sup> That same issue

<sup>26</sup> *Swastika*, 1982 student yearbook, New Mexico State University, p. 71.

<sup>27</sup> Merrel Godshalk, letter to the editor, *Round-Up* (University Park, NM), April 11, 1983.

<sup>28</sup> Jim Amend and Jeff Moots, letter to the editor, *Round-Up*

contained eight separate letters to the editor regarding the controversy, most calling for a change, and letters continued to be published over the next several weeks.

Near the end of April, after a non-binding student body vote elected to keep *Swastika* as the name of the yearbook, the Associated Students of New Mexico State University (ASNMSU) Senate voted as well to retain the yearbook name.<sup>29</sup> Senator Lori Hand stated that “I, personally, don’t think we should keep the symbol, but...we are bound to accept the will of the students.” The *Round-Up* seemed to think that most senators felt the same way.<sup>30</sup> For a short time, then, it seemed like the issue had once again become dormant. However, the same day this headline ran in the school newspaper, the ASNMSU Publications and Communications Board decided to disregard the recommendations of the *Swastika* task force and the ASNMSU Senate, urging NMSU president Gerald Thomas to use his power to change the yearbook name.<sup>31</sup> Bill Williamson, a member of the Publications and Communications Board, and the university’s Activities Director, led the charge for getting President Thomas involved. Williamson felt that if something wasn’t changed soon, there was a very real possibility of violence in the near future.<sup>32</sup> Whether or not there was any potential for violence is debatable; but the board also agreed that the well-being of the university, the student body and the yearbook took precedence over other considerations.<sup>33</sup> The board also drafted a resolution proposing that the name of the yearbook be changed and that a search be conducted for a name to reflect “the rich cultural heritage of New Mexico.”<sup>34</sup> Williamson summed up his own feelings on the matter, and perhaps the feelings of others, with this quip: “Pardon my language, but it’s time we rose above the stink of this shit. You can quote me on that.”<sup>35</sup>

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(University Park, NM), April 13, 1983.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas S. Wright, “Senate Votes on Name,” *Round-Up* (University Park, NM), April 22, 1983.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> “Swastika Flares Anew,” *Round-Up* (University Park, NM), April 25, 1983.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* Williamson later apologized for this statement. The apology can be seen in the April 27 issue of the *Round-Up*.

This simply added more fuel to the fire. Questions of whether or not the Publications Board had the right or authority to go straight to the President began to arise. Letters continued to come into the *Round-Up*, including the history honor society, Phi Alpha Theta, disassociating itself with the name and symbol, and deciding to no longer have group pictures taken for the yearbook.<sup>36</sup> Other letters continued to offer support for the yearbook name, and berated the Publications and Communications Board for effectively making the students' voice "irrelevant."<sup>37</sup> The Student Senate voiced its disapproval of the Publications and Communications Board as well, including the passing of a resolution showing the Senate's displeasure with the Board's actions; they also passed a bill amending the Publications Board Act, removing a clause they felt the Board had used to go over the Senate.<sup>38</sup>

Regardless of the efforts of the Student Senate, the students who supported retaining the name, and the alumni who wanted to hold fast to tradition, the Board of Regents decided in May 1983 to change the name.<sup>39</sup> Many believed the Board of Regents may have been heavily influenced by the Governor, Toney Anaya, as it was reported that he sent letters to each member of the Board of Regents urging the name to be dropped.<sup>40</sup> The Governor's disapproval of the issue is apparent in a letter he wrote to Delbert B. Freeman, who spearheaded the alumni's disapproval of the name change: ... "The historical usage of this symbol was weighed with its present day interpretation, and I felt that to continue to use the swastika would show a lack of sensitivity to those who find its present connotation and usage extremely offensive."<sup>41</sup> Freeman's papers showcase a strong resentment towards the situation and he, along with others, made sure their voices were heard. Freeman's papers

<sup>36</sup> Wes Brownfield, letter to the editor, *Round-Up* (University Park, NM), April 27, 1983.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Peter Kramer, "Senate Winds Up Year," *Round-Up* (University Park, NM), April 29, 1983.

<sup>39</sup> Irma Maynez Glover, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Regents of New Mexico State University," (Board of Regents of New Mexico State University, University Park, NM, May 6, 1983), 2231-2232.

<sup>40</sup> DesGeorges, Doug. "Official: 'Swastika' Squabble Hasn't Hurt NMSU Pocketbook," *El Paso Times*, July 27, 1983.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Gov. Toney Anaya to Delbert B. Freeman, May 19, 1983. Delbert B. Freeman Papers, Ms 356, Rio Grande Historical Collections, New Mexico State University Library, Box 3.



even contain a list of lawyers – did he think of potentially taking the issue to court? Interestingly enough, many of the alumni that supported retaining the name, including Freeman, were veterans of World War II. President Thomas, himself a WWII veteran, reflected in his article “Swastika: Peace Symbol Destroyed by War” that he had “reluctantly recommended to the Board of Regents the action to change the name of the yearbook.”<sup>42</sup> He noted that he had fought the Nazis and “detested the banner they waved. But, as a member of the NMSU team, I also understood why the Aggies would select and keep the Indian symbol, which meant ‘good fortune,’ for their yearbook.”<sup>43</sup> Despite the efforts of Freeman and others, the name change was not reversed.

Published during fall semester, the 1983 edition was the last to bear the name *Swastika*; production was too far along to change the name for that edition. A contest was held that fall among NMSU students to pick a new name. Richard Garcia, at the time a sophomore from Las Cruces, won the contest with his submittal of *The Phoenix*.<sup>44</sup> Garcia felt that the name symbolized the rebirth of the NMSU yearbook, and yearbook editor Steve Pierce echoed those sentiments, noting that the name reflected a positive change in attitudes regarding the publication.<sup>45</sup> The first edition of *The Phoenix*, from 1984, briefly summarized how the new name came to be, and offered these sentiments:

The name is an appropriate one for this yearbook. The phoenix is often associated with the sun, which is of vital importance to research being conducted here on campus as well as throughout the Southwest. Colors of the phoenix included red, gold, and crimson, which happens to be one of NMSU’s school colors. And perhaps most importantly, the death and subsequent rebirth of the phoenix signified the end of one way of life and beginning of a new one.<sup>46</sup>

The controversy had finally been laid to rest, despite many still supportive of the old name. The yearbook, with its new name, “one

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> April Nichols, “The Phoenix Replaces the Swastika,” *Round-Up* (University Park, NM), October 12, 1983.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *The Phoenix*, 1984 student yearbook, New Mexico State University, Introduction insert.

Nathan Brown

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that, according to legend, should last for at least 500 years,” moved forward.<sup>47</sup> However, the name didn’t last 500 years. It didn’t even last ten. In the fall of 1988, the format changed to look more like a magazine, and was published bi-annually, in the fall and spring. By fall 1992, *The Phoenix* hardly resembled a yearbook; it had evolved into more of a literary magazine. The November 1992 edition would be the last – the NMSU yearbook was no more. It’s likely that few university yearbooks stirred so much controversy and acquired such an interesting history.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 51.

[Click for Table of Contents](#)

[Click for Previous Article](#)

## **Intertwining Family Research and WWII History in Southern New Mexico**

**by Judy Lazarus Yellon**

**S**hortly after my husband, Fred, and I retired to Las Cruces in May 2007, we began exploring our new city and state, learning what we could about the land, culture, and history. In addition I decided to focus on my husband's Yellon family tree research. Little did I know that my search for Fred's relatives would intertwine with southern New Mexico history and connect with the uncovering of a local mystery.

The first link came with news that Steven Spielberg was shooting scenes for "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull" in Deming in June 2007. He was using hangars at what had been an army-air force base there during WWII.



WWII Hangers at Bombadier School in Deming. The author visited site with cousins from New York after learning the family conection to the site.

A few years later I found one of Fred's distant cousins Linda Harris Sicular who was living in Brooklyn NY. When Linda and her husband visited us in August 2011, we took them to the hangars in Deming because her father had been stationed there during WWII.

In February 2013 Fred and I went on a Southwest Environmental Center's "Back by Noon" hike to what is considered the best of 24 practice bomb target sites from WWII that are spread out in the desert between Deming and Las Cruces – Target #22. The hike was led by David Soules who had learned about these sites a couple of years earlier first via Google Earth and then from friends and co-workers, the Drexler brothers.

We learned that a Bombardier School had been established in 1942 at what became the Army Air Field in Deming.



WWII Army Airfield at Deming



1940s practice run over bombing target. Notice the wood pyramid structure in the center of the target.

This was a massive undertaking involving taxiways, buildings, and roads at the base in addition to the construction of bomb target sites.

Students participated in ground simulator training for 12-18 weeks and also dropped approximately 160 practice bombs. Planes took off from Deming every 10 minutes, 24/7. The first class of bombardiers



Not only are the bombing targets still visible, remnants of the bombs and pyramid structures are found at the sites. Photo by author on a hike with SWEC in February 2013.

graduated on 6 March 1943. In the next three years an estimated 12,000 cadets passed through the school.



Bomb casing at Deming Bombing Target #22.  
Photo by author.

Every plane carried ten 100 pound bombs. These were metal shells with 97 pounds of sand and 3 pounds of black powder to show where bombs exploded. In the back of the plane were 2 seats for students. While one student

dropped the bombs, the other had to film the drops. Each trainee had to drop 5 bombs per flight and fill out a report, estimating how many feet from the target these landed.

With the end of World War II, the bombardier training program at Deming ended. When the Air Field closed, the facility became the Deming Municipal Airport. The civilian operation mostly moved to the North side of the field, with the South side becoming somewhat of a ghost town.

Since the mid-1960s aviators from Las Cruces and nearby cities began reporting mysterious bull's eye-looking ring systems in the desert. By 1997 brothers Morrie & Pete Drexler were able to use GPS systems to track directions from the air and then explore these by foot. What they found led to the cracking of what had been a mystery, and further study uncovered history that had been mostly forgotten and lost in the desert. There are now people who have learned that what they saw from the air were remains of the 24 practice, bomb target sites. Much can be found at the sites, including bomb casings, crosshairs, wooden posts used to light the way to the

Intertwining Family Research and WWII History in Southern New Mexico  
target for night training, buildings, and oil cans.

In November 2013 during Marty & Linda Harris Sicular's second visit with us, we arranged a full day with David Soules, and brothers Morrie and Pete Drexler. These three men have been accumulating and documenting local history. In addition to meeting in our house to exchange information, we went to Practice Target Site #22.

During the time that Linda's father Leon Harris was in the military, he sent over 400 pages of letters home. A DVD copy of these was given to both David Soules and me. From these I learned that while in Deming, Leon's assignments were with the Administrative offices. He did the payroll and eventually became the chief clerk. He also was assigned to be director of Jewish activities.

Leon wrote repeatedly about the weather – dust, winds, rain, and the rotation of the seasons. In December 1942 he wrote, "This past week has seen several terrific DUST STORMS here. Everything one touches is dust. You type and find dust has found its way into the paper. The desk is continually covered in dust and the Barracks, well, there is DUST there too."

Leon wrote in July 1943 about the Squadron's first anniversary. He was one of eight who helped prepare a "real western barbecue and picnic." On a Saturday they traveled 25 miles north of Deming to an area with many trees, where they built tables and benches and dug a pit which they used to cook a steer for 12 hours. They received help from a nearby rancher. That night the men slept on the tables they had built. The remainder of the squad arrived on Sunday for the celebration.

On 23 July 1944 Leon wrote about a 9 mile night hike. Each man carried a 27 pound pack. Leon had participated

in a similar hike three week before. While hiking they were attacked by low flying planes which dropped bombs made of sacks of flour.

In a letter dated 11 November 1944 Leon wrote that he responded to a request for Administrative men to ship out overseas. He was accepted. By 16 November 1944 his next letter was written from Greensboro, North Carolina. He had left Deming and was preparing for the next phase of his military career overseas.

Leon's new station lead him to new adventures and experiences in different parts of the world. Fred and I appreciated the adventure of unexpectedly discovering his previous life ties to our new home.

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Judy Lazarus Yellon spent her earliest years in Phoenix and the bulk of her adult life in the suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio where she was a high school English teacher. As the opportunity to retire approached she wanted to return to the desert southwest. Judy and her husband identified Las Cruces as the best fit for them, and moved here in 2007. Her joy of learning has focused on local history, culture and geography. Judy is also fascinated with genealogy having spent several years researching both her family tree and her husband's ancestry. Judy is pleasantly surprised to find that her family research intertwined with southern New Mexico history.



## The Transformation of Lorenzo Torrez

By Paul Ward

The Empire Zinc Mine strike on October 17, 1950, in Hanover, New Mexico, radicalized local miner Lorenzo Torrez, provoking him to devote the remainder of his life advocating for civil rights. The events of the strike set the stage for his future contributions, which impacted Mexican Americans throughout the Southwest, and redirected him onto a fearless path to Communism. Lorenzo, also known as Lencho, used the film *Salt of the Earth* to bring awareness to the issues that surrounded workers' rights. Although Cold War politics made Communist Party membership in the United States challenging, he dedicated decades to spreading his views and never wavered in his belief in the Party. He immersed himself, as a Mexican American, into the Communist Party USA, bringing the ethnic struggle of the Latino community with him. Perhaps more than anything else, Lorenzo Torrez' career revealed the shifting and complex interplay between race, class, and gender in the fight for workers' rights in American history.



Lorenzo Torrez, leader of the Communist Party, a staunch yet quiet spoken fighter for union rights and Mexican American equality. Torrez was born in Gila, N.M., May 18, 1927; died January 1, 2012 in Tucson.

### History of Oppression

On the day before the strike, contract negotiations broke down. The miners' union, Local 890 of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (Mine-Mill), and Empire Zinc were unable to reach an agreement. According to historian Ellen R. Baker, author of *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America*, Empire Zinc rejected ". . . union demands for collar-to-collar pay, paid holidays, wages

matching the district's standards, and a reduction in the number of job classifications."<sup>1</sup> The workers' last demand contested the pay structure that allowed employers to pay Mexican American workers significantly less than their Anglo counterparts. The miners wanted to get rid of the dual-wage system that had been very much at the root of the Mexican American struggle, forcing them to live unequal lives alongside Anglo workers.

Seeing the manipulation of his fellow workers opened Torrez's eyes. He understood that throughout history, most Mexican Americans were often given difficult jobs with rough conditions, and promotions were virtually nonexistent. According to Lencho, "Great



Employees in 1951 strike against Empire Zinc Mine in protest of working and living conditions. (Silver City Sun-News file)

power chauvinism, racism, discrimination, terror and deportation have been the main weapons used by capitalism to block the advance of the Chicano workers...Historically, Chicanos have been among the last hired and first fired."<sup>2</sup> He recognized that Mexican Americans were seen as a source of cheap labor since their inclusion into the workforce helped to maximize profits for employers. He noted that

many of the racist schemes used by companies echoed tactics used against Black slaves and the Native Americans, and he often preached that such oppression went back to the Mexican American War. Describing their history of Latino oppression, Lorenzo wrote:

After the 1846-1848 Mexican-American War, the

<sup>1</sup> Ellen R. Baker, *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Lorenzo Torrez, "Short History of Chicano Workers," *Political Affairs: Monthly Journal of Marxist Thought and Analysis* (1973): 2.

Anglo-Saxon population became dominant. The influx of Anglos from the east and southern slave states led to discrimination and racism that continued well into the 1950s. It was the struggle against segregated housing and inferior sanitation imposed by the mining corporation that was depicted in the film *Salt of the Earth*. This practice was widespread, but this discrimination was more than simple “racism by custom.” Paying lower wages to the Mexican and Native American Indian workers forced down wages for all miners. Further, the wage differential between Anglo workers and their Mexican and Native fellow workers amounted to millions in added profit for the mining corporations. This policy of racism against Mexican Americans was supported by the life of Sam Houston, president of the Old Republic of Texas—and often referred to in high school textbooks as the “Father of Texas.”<sup>3</sup>

He saw Sam Houston, best known for bringing Texas into the United States, as the person who had instigated the persecution of Mexican Americans. Lencho believed that “The National Guard, vigilante groups, hangings, kidnappings, the police, the Immigration Service, court injunctions, peace bonds and all sorts of other devices—legal and illegal—have been used to keep the Chicano worker in his place, that is, at the lowest economic level.”<sup>4</sup> His arguments were bold and extreme, and he stood behind every word.

### **A Fight for Mexican Americans and Gender Equality**

He saw the miners’ strike as a turning point in the history of their oppression. Whenever Lencho discussed the oppression of the Mexican American people, he pointed out how they had managed to survive. Nevertheless, workers needed to fight back, and the picket lines in New Mexico showed that they were ready. To Lencho, pushback was necessary to overcome the struggles they had endured, which were likely to continue if they did not rise up. According to Baker, the strike “. . . quickly became not just a test

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<sup>3</sup> Lorenzo Torrez, “Juan Chacon: Quintero in the Film *Salt of the Earth*,” *Salt of the Earth Labor College Publication* (n.d.): 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Torrez, “Short History of Chicano Workers,” 2.

of Mine-Mill Local 890's strength but also a conflict in which the union's recent achievements in advancing Mexican American civil, as well as labor, rights were at stake."<sup>5</sup> The miners' fight meant much more than just equal rights in the workplace; their fight was a part of the struggle for equality throughout the United States.

Torrez wanted Mexican Americans to join all other workers. He wanted them to enter the ranks of engineers, planners, and scientists. Latinos were ready to accept full responsibility for producing to the best of each person's ability, so long as they produced for the benefit of all the people, but he did not want them to do so as second-class citizens.<sup>6</sup>

The strike not only exposed the existing inequalities of workers, but also revealed gender discrimination. The strike displayed that women were also oppressed, both throughout the United States, as well as in the homes of the miners themselves. As miners fought for equality in the workplace, women fought for equality at home. In June of 1951, the Empire Zinc Company obtained a court injunction that prohibited workers from picketing.

The injunction introduced an interesting twist into the story. Miners were suddenly unable to picket and their wives insisted on taking their place. They overcame much resistance from the men, and the wives took over the picket line. With husbands forced to stay home, they resented their spouses, and as men undertook housework, gender roles became reversed. In the beginning, many saw women's participation in the strike as ludicrous. Lorenzo and his wife Anita were one exception. Unlike many of the men, he encouraged her to participate.

According to Hameed Fatimah, author of *Mexican-American Miners' Strike for Wage Justice in New Mexico, 1950-1952*, there were instances when:

Local police arrested and harassed the women protesters, sometimes jailing children who were out on the lines as well. Instances of violence also occurred.

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<sup>5</sup> Ellen R. Baker, *On Strike and on Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Torrez, "Short History of Chicano Workers," 5.

On one occasion, strikebreakers injured three women when attempting to push through the picket line. One strikebreaker shot at the picketers, wounding one. News of such confrontations spread to other nearby mining areas, leading many of the workers in other mines to join the Empire Zinc protest.<sup>7</sup>

The surrounding community became deeply involved, and men and women worked together; however, they continually struggled with questions of gender. Baker discussed how some of the women became frustrated. He repeated, “. . . their husbands refused to help at home and, more fundamentally, because men frequently forbade their wives to picket; some women came to resent that they were expected to have their husband’s permission in the first place.”<sup>8</sup> Their involvement made the strike a feminist movement just as much as a working class struggle. The Communist Party, who had influence over the union, strongly opposed the picketing by women. Baker wrote, “To Communists, feminism was, by definition, bourgeois, for it masked the real class struggle and advanced bourgeois women at the expense of working class women.”<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, questions of gender subsided as the men came to support women’s participation. Lencho experienced firsthand women’s assertiveness when Anita took to the picket line. Perhaps it was the women’s takeover of the picket line that made clear his opinion on gender equality. He went as far as to say that the women were the reason the strike had been won. He said, “The women saved the strike. They took over the picket line and carried the strike to victory in February 1952.”<sup>10</sup> Women were integral to the homes of Mexican Americans, not only by choice, but also out of necessity.

Lower wages within households meant that two incomes were necessary to survive. Lencho saw a need for Mexican Americans to have two wage earners just to make ends meet in the U.S.

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<sup>7</sup> Fatimah Hameed, “Mexican-American Miners’ Strike for Wage Justice in New Mexico, 1950-1952,” *Global Nonviolent Action Database*, [www.nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu](http://www.nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu).

<sup>8</sup> Baker, *On Strike and on Film*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Baker, 107.

<sup>10</sup> Bob Camwell, “People’s Weekly World Saturday,” *Portrait of a Communist: Lorenzo Torrez: Salt of the Earth* (1994): 11.

economic system. The earnings of Mexican American women were significantly lower than those of white women. Men's wages, regardless of race, were still higher than women's. He saw the lower wages of all women versus those of men as an indication that both white and minority group women were being used by the industry as a source of cheap labor.<sup>11</sup>

The strike appeared to transform his views; miners were not the only ones struggling. He developed an awareness of women's rights as a fundamental part of the overall oppression of workers. Although he focused primarily on Mexican Americans, Torrez fought for all workers, regardless of race or gender. The struggle then became a fight against the monopolies and government that made up the capitalist system.

### **Recognition of the Communist Party**

According to an interview with Torrez conducted by Douglas Kreutz, Lencho felt that the 1950s was a tough time to be a Communist in New Mexico; the Cold War cast a dark light on Communists worldwide. Nevertheless, he embraced the Party and became highly active within the union; he strongly supported and backed them.<sup>12</sup> Baker said, "Some Local 890 members and leaders belonged to the Communist Party, finding in it a powerful tool for pressing working-class and Mexican American claims. Significantly, the party organized married couples, thus building into its very structure a recognition of women's importance to the class struggle."<sup>13</sup> The Party sustained Lencho and Anita in return for their support for the Party.

He spent the remainder of his life working with the Communist Party. When asked if the country would ever see a transformation to socialism, he exclaimed, "Slavery was replaced with feudalism. Feudalism was replaced with capitalism. Eventually, capitalism will be replaced by socialism. It could be very rapid, or it could take a long time."<sup>14</sup> Being a Party member in the United States made him and his family a government target, and they endured harassment

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Kreutz, "Communism Evolving, Not Collapsing, Says Party Organizer Based in Tucson," *The Arizona Daily Star*, 1990.

<sup>13</sup> Baker, *On Strike and on Film*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Kreutz, "Communism Evolving," 1990.



Portion of the mural, painted on the side of the former union hall of Mine-Mill Local 890, Bayard, New Mexico. Photo by David Correia, La Jicarita Online Magazine, September 2014

and frequent investigations by those who opposed Communism.

In the decades leading up to the strike, unions became more and more influenced by Communism. Baker said that the Communist Party recognized that:

Oppression of Mexican Americans was similar to that of African Americans. Communists relied on considerations of 'the Negro Question' in interpreting Mexican American conditions. But Communists also recognized that Mexican Americans occupied a social, economic, and historical position different from that of African Americans; for this reason, there came to be a greater —albeit inconsistent—emphasis on culture and nationality as Communists connected 'Anglo chauvinism' and American imperialism to the denigration of Mexican culture. Anglo chauvinism combined national

and racial prejudices. While Anglo chauvinism possessed different historical roots from white chauvinism, the consequences were similar: appalling living conditions, poor health, few job opportunities beyond manual labor, and residential segregation.<sup>15</sup>

The Party clearly saw parallels between African Americans and Mexican Americans, and chose to become actively involved in fighting for the oppressed. Many miners made it known that they had no relation to the Party. On the other hand, Lencho embraced unionism regardless of its Communist power and leadership. While speaking about the union, he said, "I got my education through the union. That is where I learned about surplus value and working class consciousness."<sup>16</sup> He saw the strike as a political education and an opportunity to move the union and Mexican American community forward.

He saw the aid of the Party as vital to the miners' efforts. When asked what lessons he had learned, he said, "The lesson I learned was that had the Communist Party not been there, we would not have been as successful. The Communist Party USA was the glue that held everything together."<sup>17</sup> The primary reason for the existence of the party was to protect the workers.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps, without the Party's support, living conditions would likely have been much worse than they already were.

### **Terrible Living Conditions**

To Lorenzo and the Mexican Americans involved with Empire Zinc, segregation and poor living conditions were a daily part of life. The workers were isolated and lived with no running water, sewer facilities or electricity. Families were denied public accommodations and facilities such as swimming pools. The residents and miners of Grant County were frustrated with the indignities they experienced; they lived through abusive treatment, and life was

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<sup>15</sup> Baker, *On Strike and on Film*, 106.

<sup>16</sup> Bob Camwell, "People's Weekly World Saturday," *Portrait of a Communist: Lorenzo Torrez: Salt of the Earth* (1994): 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Kreutz, "Communism Evolving, Not Collapsing, Says Party Organizer Based in Tucson," *The Arizona Daily Star*, 1990.



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marred by discrimination.

Their pay and job responsibilities did not equal Anglos. On payday, lines split into two, one for the Anglos, and the other for the Mexican Americans. Even the houses were segregated, and they did not have access to sanitation, electricity, and paved streets. In his article in the Silver City Sun News, Huetotl Lopez wrote, "The swimming pools were segregated. The only day Mexicans could swim was at the end of the week when it was time to drain the pool and refill it. The movie theaters were segregated, with Mexicans on one side in the back and Anglos on the other. Mexican citizens also suffered greatly from police brutality."<sup>19</sup> These conditions harmed the health of many of the residents, including children.

Anglo miners also had rough living conditions, but they were not as bad. Few miners, regardless of race, had indoor plumbing. Residents had to bring water inside for every use. Simply heating water was difficult; it had to be heated on a wood burning stove which required chopping and hauling of wood. All of this had to be done before the family's meal could be cooked. Stoves were laborious, just as Luz Morales exclaimed in *Salt of the Earth*: "Listen, we ought to be in the wood choppers' union. Chop wood for breakfast. Chop wood to wash his clothes. Chop wood, heat the iron. Chop wood, scrub the floor. Chop wood, cook his dinner."<sup>20</sup> The wood stoves created much more work for families and became a safety concern. They were just one of the many dangers that were present in the appalling living conditions that persisted.

By the winter of 1950, Empire Zinc enacted an attrition policy, which reduced benefits. The policy quickly began to show results, and the miners and their families felt the effects of the limited rations.<sup>21</sup> The union struggled to provide for the miners, but just as Torrez said in his *History of Oppression*, Mexican Americans somehow survived. Most everyday expenses had to be funded by the union. According to Baker:

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<sup>19</sup> Huetotl Lopez, "Their View: Film on Empire Zinc Strike 60 Years Ago Made History," [scsunnews.com](http://scsunnews.com), February 19, 2012, [www.scsun-news.com/ci\\_199971](http://www.scsun-news.com/ci_199971) (accessed February 13, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Baker, *On Strike and on Film*, 164.

<sup>21</sup> Baker, *On Strike and on Film*, 83.

The union bought beans, rice, chilies, flour, corn tortillas, cheese, oil, potatoes, milk, cereal, sugar, and soap in bulk at Southwestern Foods, a local grocery store, and gave it away at the union hall. Families found no meat, eggs, or butter in their weekly food baskets, although one man (employed at one of the other mines) brought 'a big thing of bologna' every payday to the picket line.<sup>22</sup>

The union also paid necessities such as electricity, gas, and other utilities. They covered the bill on other items such as car and furniture payments; they did not want the miners' property to be repossessed. The survival of residents meant banding together, and unity was essential.

### **A Band of Brothers**

Lorenzo and the union saw themselves as a band of brothers. "This is Your Union" was the slogan promoted by the national headquarters of the union, meaning it is not only the responsibility of all union members to help run the union, but also to protect the union."<sup>23</sup> Although the union struggled financially to aid their brothers, they still managed to take care of them as best as they could. The assistance did not go unnoticed or unappreciated by Lencho.

As the strike progressed and the strike fund became strained, some miners considered leaving the picket line in order to find work elsewhere. Lorenzo and Anita were among those that struggled, but only having one child meant that there were others who were worse off. There were others that had big families who left; they could not go on living in the conditions that the strike had brought about.<sup>24</sup> Many meetings and discussions took place over the question of looking for outside work. Lencho and the union came to an agreement that those with bigger families should go out and find work, while those like the Torrez family should continue to receive union support.

When asked how she felt about the idea to strike, Anita said that she had mixed feelings. Unlike her husband, she did not know

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>23</sup> Torrez, "Juan Chacon: 7.

<sup>24</sup> Baker, *On Strike and on Film*, 83.

the ins and outs of a strike. She only knew there would be no income while it lasted. She worried about the bills and wondered how they were going to get paid. In an interview with Ellen Baker, she discussed her concerns and the family's living situation at the time:

And so, what are we gonna do? How are we gonna eat? How are we gonna pay the rent? Thank goodness that we didn't have very many bills like a lot of people do, you know, we were just starting out. All we had to worry about was the rent, basically. I think we had one bill and that was the refrigerator that we had bought. We moved into that house and we had no refrigerator. And we managed for a while [sic], but we said, "We can't be here without a refrigerator." So we got a refrigerator and that's what we owed. Our other stuff we had paid. I mean it wasn't much: we had a stove, a table and a bed, I guess. But that was the worry, you know, now they're gonna go on strike? How are we going to manage? Little did we know that it was going to go on for months and months and months. We were just hoping that it would soon be settled.<sup>25</sup>

Although it would be difficult for the Torrez family, Anita stood behind her husband and the other miners. She worried about the bills but knew they had to sacrifice for a better cause.

Lorenzo talked about the meager amount of money that he and his family survived on. He stated, "It came to a weekly allowance. I think we went through the whole strike with something like \$12.50 a week."<sup>26</sup> Fighting against the capitalist system took hard work in addition to unity. Lencho often expressed the importance of sticking together, he said "The union was fighting against the corporations and the political system with all its tentacles. The press, the politicians, the courts, the church and the sheriff all demonstrated that they could achieve unity and mount a victorious fightback."<sup>27</sup>

The suffering that he and his family experienced only added fuel to

<sup>25</sup> Ellen Baker Interview with Anita and Lorenzo Torrez, box 2, folder 14, Torrez Papers, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>27</sup> Bob Camwell, "People's Weekly World Saturday," Portrait of a Communist: Lorenzo Torrez: Salt of the Earth (1994): 11.

Paul Ward

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the resentment he held for the Empire Zinc Company. Letters, articles, and interviews following the strike showed the profound effect that the experience had on him.

### **Lorenzo's Activism**

As a result of Torrez' newfound radicalism, he wrote many articles, conducted many interviews, and even ran for political office in his efforts to draw attention to workers' rights and issues that involved Mexican Americans. As an activist and member of the Communist Party USA, he made his voice loud and clear. After the strike, Lorenzo and the Communist Party in Southern New Mexico appeared to fall silent. In 1968, he once again established ties with fellow American Communists; amidst the Cold War. When most denied Communist Party relations, his activism resurfaced. He wrote for and promoted many weekly journals, which were used to gain support for the Party in an attempt to develop a strong working class movement.

He wrote articles for journals such as the *Daily World* which provided news on people's movements and viewpoints of the Communist Party. *People's World* was another publication and it was touted as "The West's only Marxist weekly." He also wrote articles for a monthly journal called *Political Affairs*, which had been known as a "Monthly Journal of Marxist Thought and Analysis." These pamphlets were not the only publications he used, but they provided valuable information for workers, Mexican Americans, and any person who did not agree with the capitalist system. The publications worked as a recruiting tool for the Communist Party, and they presented modern day issues that continued to plague workers and Mexican American communities. Perhaps most importantly, it gave Lencho a platform to express his voice, which he developed through his experiences.

By 1973, Lorenzo had spent twenty-three years in New Mexico and Arizona mines. Over two decades following the Mine-Mill strike, he had established an impressive resume. In addition to having been a production worker, miner, laborer, repairman and millwright, he worked as a leading rank and file member of the Mine-Mill and Smelters Workers Union, the United Steelworkers of

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America, and an AFL-federated labor local. According to Lencho, he held “several rank and union titles and served a number of times as an organizer for the Mine, Mill and Smelter workers.”<sup>28</sup> By the 1970s, no longer just a union member, he became the Chairman of the National Liberation Commission of the Communist Party, USA.

### **Supported by the Communist Party USA**

It took a dedicated and an almost fearless person to become a Chairman within the Communist Party, especially during the Cold War. In 1970 Lorenzo revealed that he was a Communist. Author Ernesto Portillo Jr. claimed that the revelation did not go over well, and stated, “His three brothers turned on him. Friends in the labor movement and Mexican-American activists shunned him.”<sup>29</sup> As a result of the strike, the radicalization within Lorenzo led him to join a party that the United States saw as their biggest enemy. He did not care; the Communist Party had been there when he and his family needed them most. When asked about his decision to become a Party member, he affirmed “Joining the Communist Party was the most important decision I’ve ever made and that decision is reconfirmed every day. What is key is that our Party has world and national cohesion ... enabling us to work and fight back as a unit.”<sup>30</sup> For him, the Party had been a brotherhood that never turned its back on him, and he reciprocated.

Having survived through the struggle against Empire Zinc, with the support of the Party, Torrez stayed true to them. Not only was he a loyal member, he truly believed and supported their ideologies. Utilizing their support and the film *Salt of the Earth*, he took a stand and made his voice heard during a time in which many Communists chose to lay low. His voice made him an FBI target and a person that the United States wanted silenced, but that did not stop him. In the early part of the 1970s, just after his official entry into the Party, he wrote an interesting article titled *Short History of Chicano Workers*.

### **Spreading the Word Through Writing**

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<sup>28</sup> Torrez, “Short History of Chicano Workers,” 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ernesto Portillo Jr., “Communist Still Believes in, Labors for His Special Cause,” *The Arizona Daily Star*, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

In his article, he touched on various topics, from the history of Chicano oppression and their exploitation and struggle, to the story of Mine-Mill and the unorganized nature of United States labor. His purpose for this article was for the reader to reach certain conclusions. He wrote that he hoped that the conclusions would serve as “guidelines for work, principally for trade union rank-and-file movements, Communists, and other democratic forces who are concerned with developing a strong, class-conscious working-class movement in the United States.”<sup>31</sup> He also wanted the article to be useful for the Chicano liberation forces. The strike spoke volumes about workers’ rights and a working-class movement, but it had long been over. He now had to use his voice as a new way to gain attention and support for his cause.

The main topic of concern in all of his writings was racism. He wrote that “racism is a cancer in U.S. society that must be eliminated.”<sup>32</sup> He whole-heartedly felt that racism had been the most troublesome weapon used by the ruling class. He wrote that his task and purpose in his writings were to “unite all democratic forces—white, Black, Yellow, Red, and Brown—against the oppression of the monopolies.”<sup>33</sup> The writings were logical and rational, but they were no match for the massive companies he fought against. “Communism” was already a bad word, and the United States government did not want people like him preaching its principles. But the government did not stop him; they just made it a little more difficult. He continued to spread his philosophies and stopped at nothing.

As his radicalization and resentment towards the capitalist system grew, he realized the importance of Mexican Americans uniting with the working class, including the whites who were the majority. He recognized that all races were affected by capitalism and the United States government. As time went on, he grew wiser. Mexican Americans were still the most affected and oppressed in the Southwest, and Communism would not work without the help of all racial groups.

Lencho’s participation in the strike against the Empire Zinc

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<sup>31</sup> Torrez, “Short History of Chicano Workers,” 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

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made him bitter and resentful toward the capitalist system. Seeing how Mexican Americans were severely oppressed and discriminated against, he took on an activist lifestyle. The Empire Zinc strike radicalized him and his life would never be the same. Torrez, alongside the Communist Party USA, made many positive contributions to labor rights for Mexican Americans and the working class in the Southwest. The strike motivated him to dedicate the remainder of his life to fearlessly fighting for civil rights. Being a Communist in the United States was difficult, but he still committed decades to spreading his opinions, and remained an active member of the Communist Party USA until his passing in 2012.

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El Pasoan Paul Ward is a graduate student at New Mexico State University. This spring he will receive his M.A. in history; adding to his B.A. in elementary education. During his time at New Mexico State he became a member of the national honor society Phi Alpha Theta and has dedicated time to travelling throughout the Southwest conducting research for his thesis, which is based on the film *Salt of the Earth*, and focuses on the life of New Mexican Lorenzo Torrez. As an educator at heart, Paul also teaches in El Paso area schools. After he completes his M.A. he plans on continuing his education by pursuing a doctoral degree.



[Click for Table of Contents](#)

[Click for Previous Article](#)

## W. E. Garrison House Designed by Henry C. Trost

By Eric Liefeld

**T**hrough ongoing research into the architectural legacy of the area, the Mesilla Valley Preservation Inc. (MVP) has confirmed that the 1909 W. E. Garrison House in Mesilla Park was designed by renowned southwestern architect Henry C. Trost.

In 1908, W. E. Garrison became President of the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, a post he held until 1913. Garrison had initially come out west for his health, as he suffered from tuberculosis in his youth. After he purchased 13.7 acres of land in Mesilla Park from the Bowman family, letters show that Garrison began plans for a large home in 1908, corresponding with Henry C. Trost on its design. The campus plan and several campus buildings designed by Trost were already under way at the time; so the men already had a working relationship. Contemporary news-



Massive exterior adobe walls give way to second-story arches all the way around the 1909 Garrison House. Photos courtesy of Steinborn & Associates Real Estate

Eric Liefeld

papers indicate that the house was occupied and in use by 1909, hosting a variety of campus parties and functions.

The Rio Grande Republican correctly described the house as a “mansion”, and it features a grand two-story design around a central courtyard that was initially open to the sky. Though it may seem unique and a little out of place in the Mesilla Park area, the house is strikingly consistent with the “Spanish Renaissance” architectural style that Henry Trost developed for the early College buildings of the early twentieth century. Massive exterior adobe walls give way to second-story arches all the way around the building. Arches overlook the interior courtyard as well. The arches may have once allowed for air circulation in a very large sleeping porch, as was popular at the time. Original multi-lite windows and doors, as was popular at the time. Original multi-lite windows and doors



The interior is accented by four sets of French doors with sidelights and transoms

survive intact to this day. No less than four sets of identical multi-lite French doors with sidelights and transoms line up through the home.

In 1928 the house and its grounds became home to the Sis-

## W. E. Garrison House Designed by Henry C. Trost



In 1928 the house and its grounds became home to the Sisters of Charity of the Good Shepherd, for which the property is best known today

ters of Charity of the Good Shepherd, for which the property is best known today. The sisters had been sent here from the Mother House in Mexico to establish a convent for the Magdalenas, and a home for unadoptable and/or wayward girls. The Child Jesus of Prague Elementary School was later built nearby, and in the 1950s a high school was opened to the public as Madonna High School. The property is now cherished as a private residence with condominiums on much of Garrison's original acreage.

design executed in our native adobe is extremely exciting, and a dream come true." The building is important because of its history as the home to the Convent of the Good Shepherd. The early date, the tie to the College, and the confirmed Trost & Trost attribution only adds to that valuable legacy.

MVP stated in a recent press release that "Finding and confirming an early surviving example of a Henry C. Trost

### **Trost & Trost Architectural Firm Background Information:**

For the first third of the 20th century, the acclaimed El Paso architectural firm of Trost & Trost designed most of the important buildings in the southwest. Visionary designer Henry C. Trost was a contemporary of Frank Lloyd Wright, and both worked with and

were influenced by Chicago architect Louis Sullivan—who is often referred to as the spiritual father of American architecture. Together with his brothers Gustavus and Adolphus, Henry led Trost & Trost to design an extensive and varied range of buildings across Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and other states. Henry Trost was at home in diverse architectural styles, and designed everything from brick and reinforced concrete skyscrapers and hotels, to comfortable homes, schools, and municipal buildings. Trost & Trost single-handedly established the look of the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (now NMSU), the Texas College of Mines (now UTEP), and to this day much of their iconic architecture still defines the downtown El Paso skyline.

### **MVP Trost & Trost Research Project**

Working with the Margaret Smith, the great niece of Henry C. Trost, Mesilla Valley Preservation has been active in researching both surviving and lost Trost & Trost architecture seeking proof of attribution. Unfortunately, while many communities have capitalized on their Trost & Trost architecture, many buildings by the firm in the Mesilla Valley have remained obscure or have been lost to demolition.

MVP has researched and proven several surviving Trost & Trost designs including:

- The W. E. Garrison House built in 1908/1909 (later the Good Shepherd Convent, and now a private home)
- Goddard Hall on the NMSU campus (sometimes misattributed to another architect)
- The Clubhouse at Las Cruces Country Club
- The Mesilla School (now the Mesilla Community Center). Treasured as a newly renovated community center, the Mission Revival brick building was designed by Trost & Trost and built in 1910, and in use by 1911.
- The Mesilla Park School (now the Frank O. Papen Community Center). Also in use as a vibrant community center, the original four room brick school at the heart of this expansive

building was designed by Trost & Trost in 1907.

Research done by MVP has also confirmed a number of additional Trost & Trost designs in the Mesilla Valley that have not survived, including:

- The John O. Miller House (aka The Pink House) on University Avenue, built in 1908, demolished in 2008
- The Rouault Hotel (later the Herndon Hotel) at the corner of Main St. and Griggs, built in 1913, demolished in 1971
- The Masonic Temple at the corner of Griggs and Church Street, built in 1911
- The Armory on Griggs St., just west of Alameda Boulevard
- Grandview School (later the East Ward School) between Lohman Avenue and Amador
- Lucero School (later North Ward School)

Eric Liefeld is President and Founder of Mesilla Valley Preservation, Inc. He is a native of Las Cruces, New Mexico with a Bachelor of Science from NMSU. Mesilla Valley Preservation, Inc. is dedicated to preserving the architectural legacy of the Mesilla Valley in southern New Mexico, and “Preserving the Future of our Past”.

## DOÑA ANA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### In Memoriam



Felix Pfaeffle

Former board member of the Doña Ana County Historical Society, Felix Pfaeffle passed away in Las Cruces on Oct. 12, 2014, at the age of 86.

Born in Karlsruhe, Germany in 1928, he was drafted into the Luftwaffe Flak Corps in 1944. After World War II he studied art and art history. In 1951, he immigrated to the United States where he settled in Detroit, MI and graduated from Wayne State University. He became a proud citizen of the United States in 1958 and soon moved to Denver, CO, where he was employed by Rogers Publishing Co. Later, he worked for Martin/Marietta Aerospace for five years and then accepted a position with Control Data Corporation in Europe. He retired in

1977 and settled with wife Nancy in Ouray, CO where he began an arts and crafts business alongside his wife's fashion boutique. In 1998 they moved to Las Cruces where he developed an interest in computer applications and began converting photos, slides and 8mm films into DVD's. These "photostories" have received widespread interest from people with collections of family photos and travel pictorial mementos.

In 2001 Felix met neighbor Chuck Miles and discovered that 56 years before Chuck and Felix had been fighting in the same place at the same time in World War II, just on opposing sides. They became friends and decided to write down their experiences. They both describe the horror and destructiveness of the war, their fears and anxieties. The editor of *Once Enemies, Now Friends*, Dr. Donna Eichstaedt, writes in her introduction that "this book presents a sensitive portrayal of two boys, caught up in the horror of the war, who miraculously survived to meet in Las Cruces, New

Mexico many years later--armed this time only with memories and friendship". The book is a fascinating account of two young soldiers engaged in fierce combat at the end of World War II. Their book has recently been translated and released in Germany. Felix's work was also published when he illustrated *Mountain Mysteries*; *The Ouray Odyssey* by Waldo Butler and P. David Smith written for the Ouray CO. Chamber of Commerce.

Nancy Pfaeffle passed away May 16, 2001. Felix's survivors include his love, Beatriz Lambert, of Las Cruces, his daughters Anna Kershaw of Atlanta, Georgia, and Claudia Tucker of Okemah, Oklahoma; his grandchildren, Hans Kershaw of Charleston, South Carolina, and Joy Peck of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, a great-granddaughter, Sailor Jeanne Riley of Oklahoma City; and one brother Wolf Pfaeffle of Greven, Germany.

Felix loved nature, music, photography, cooking, writing, painting, technology and sitting in Bea's garden. He served on the Board of Directors of the Doña Ana County Historical Society, acted as the unofficial photographer for the Society and made regular contributions to the monthly newsletter. His service with the Historical Society and other civic organizations have earned him respect and accolades in the local community.

## Book Reviews



*Imagining Geronimo: An Apache Icon in Popular Culture* by William M. Clements. Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8263-5322-1. xii and 305 pages, ill., notes, works cited, index.



Perhaps no Native American image is more recognizable than that of Geronimo. His image – both his physical appearance and the way he has been perceived by others – has woven its way into popular culture. In his book *Imagining Geronimo: An Apache Icon in Popular Culture*, William M. Clements stresses that Geronimo’s image has not been

static since the mid-1870s; but, unlike other scholars before him, emphasizes that “changes in Geronimo’s image have not followed a single-stranded line of development” (4). Clements argues that Geronimo’s image has wavered from that of a “red devil” during his lifetime and throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to that of heroic freedom fighter and patriot in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although pointing out that the negative image does still figure in the work of some historians.

Geronimo’s image has been reproduced on a myriad of items - playing cards, jerky, a board game, postage stamp, jigsaw puzzles, and even an action figure of a Chiricahua warrior, just to name a few. Throughout the book, Clements examines how his image has evolved and how it has been portrayed in different mediums and through different perspectives. During his lifetime, and for some time thereafter, Geronimo was largely viewed in a negative



light, as blood-thirsty and as a savage, but that image has somewhat changed, especially in recent years, as many now view him more positively. Clements discusses the use of his image, along with three other Chiricahua warriors, on a popular t-shirt with the phrase “Homeland Security: Fighting Terrorism Since 1492,” as well as the use of his name in conjunction with the military operation to kill Osama Bin Laden (there is debate over whether his name referred to Bin Laden or to the entire operation). The “Geronimo Story” (both printed and passed down orally) also played a large role in determining his image early on. Clements points out two dominant themes of Geronimo stories: that of the near miss, where someone recounts how he or she almost encountered him, and the many tales of atrocities attributed to Geronimo – “virtually every crime in Arizona and New Mexico Territories was laid at Geronimo’s doorstep if he happened to be off the reservation when it occurred” (58). His literary image is also examined – Clements looks at how Geronimo is portrayed in poetry, music, drama, fiction, and even comic books and graphic novels. Geronimo’s image became iconic and spread throughout our culture because of photographs taken of him – Clements looks at how Geronimo used photography and his visits to world’s fairs to re-shape public perception – with the author arguing that he did so with hopes of gaining his freedom and returning to his homeland. An examination of religion in Geronimo’s life is also included, and the book concludes with a look at portrayals of Geronimo in film and television.

Well-researched and very detailed, Clements’ work lends understanding to the popular culture treatment of one of the most iconic figures in American history; his image has been used in countless ways over the years, for differing purposes. Because of the level of detail, reading can be a little tedious at times, and at times Clements seems to repeat himself. That being said, the book is very informative and builds upon what previous scholars have accomplished, and is extremely relevant today as his name and image continue to be used for varying purposes.

Nathan Brown  
Digital Projects Librarian  
New Mexico State University Library



***Pocketful of Rockets, History and Stories Behind White Sands Missile Range*** by Jim Eckles: Published by the Fiddlebike Partnership, Las Cruces, New Mexico, 2013. ISBN-13:978-1492773504. 499 pages, ill., 145 photographs, pop-ups, contents, White Sands Chronology, White Sands Commanders, WSMR Hall of Fame Members, Sources, Index. \$21.51 paperback.

When Jim Eckles received the opportunity to work at White Sands Missile Range in 1977 with the Public Affairs office, there was no hesitation in taking the position. He arrived only a few weeks before one of the Trinity Site open houses. He now holds the record for the person who has been to the Trinity Site the most. On the 50th anniversary there were over 5,000 visitors. This was not a nine to five position. Jim loves the outdoors, and activities of investigating the history of the land. He was on call for VIP tours of the range, special interest groups, and was a go between for the ranchers' families. Travel could have been by helicopter (with Walter Cronkite), vehicles even where there were no roads, bicycles, and hiking. When he first started there was no environmental office. After it was established, he worked closely with the archaeologists and wildlife biologists on projects like the national historic landmarks on White Sands.

Jim begins with a virtual helicopter orientation – a VIP's view of White Sands Missile Range. The tour covers two mountain ranges, prehistoric lava beds, horses, oryx, forests of piñon, springs flowing in the desert sands, many ranching structures, and lots of military facilities contained in the 3,200-square mile missile range.

After the tour, Jim turns to the land which now makes up White Sands. He writes about various people who used to make

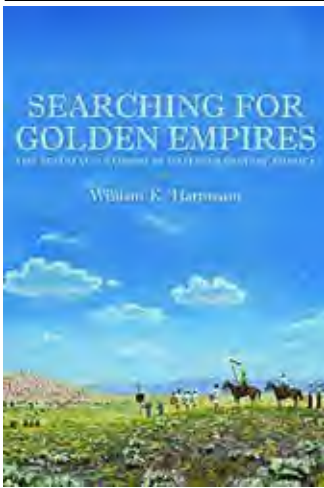
a living in this barren land – the Apache, miners, and ranchers. Jim discusses the many ranchers and their descendants whom he escorted back to their old ranches now located on a secret/off-limits landscape. He gained valuable insight into the lives of these ranchers before the early 1940s when they were displaced when the Alamogordo Bombing Range was established. Then after the war ended, White Sands Proving Ground kept them displaced and added a few more to be moved out. Special attention is given to the Cox family who currently live only a short distance from the White Sands Headquarters area and had lost much of their ranchland to the range. However they still maintained a friendly relationship with the people at the Missile Range.

He includes anecdotes about the many VIPs that have visited the Missile Range over the years. Some of the most famous are Clint Eastwood, Walter Cronkite and the most memorable, President John F. Kennedy – the only sitting president to ever visit the missile range.

Jim discusses many of the missile/rocket systems that were tested at the Range over the years. Although he doesn't discuss much detail, he does mention some things that didn't go as planned and other things of note. For instance, there were missiles/rockets that went astray. Three of them went to Mexico, one to Alamogordo, and one to Colorado. No one was killed or injured in these mishaps.

The documentation makes it easy to read the book and includes many illustrations, 145 photographs, and pop-ups to clarify things. What impressed me the most was the White Sands chronology, which explains what was happening in history not only in New Mexico, but the world. This is a great opportunity for those who are not familiar with the missile range and its mission and history to gain an appreciation for this world-class missile testing facility. It also offers a much greater insight for many of those who worked at the range and weren't privy to many of the things going on around them. The book is an interesting look into the hidden world of White Sands Missile Range.

Lutisha Piland, Retired Librarian  
Library of Congress  
American Embassy, Cairo, Egypt



***Searching for Golden Empires: Epic Cultural Collisions in Sixteenth Century America*** by William K. Hartmann. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014., 4<sup>th</sup> edition. ISBN 978-0816530878. 384 pages.

The Spanish exploration and conquest of the North American continent remains a fertile area for historical introspection and discovery. In *Searching for Golden Empires*, William K. Hartmann explores the lives and careers of several of the major figures in the early conquest period, particularly Hernan Cortes, Fray Marcos de Niza, and Francisco Coronado. Notably, Hartmann's work describes the lives of these figures after the events for which they are most chiefly noted. Of particular importance in this regard are Hartmann's description of Cortes' post-1521 life and his continued efforts to rehabilitate Fray Marcos, the "Lying Monk" who is frequently blamed by Spanish primary sources for the disappointments of the Coronado expedition. To Hartmann, Fray Marcos is merely the victim of misinterpretation and excessive optimism on the part of Coronado and his followers, rather than someone who consciously misled the other Spanish. In writing this work, Hartmann, an astronomer and novelist, revisits ground that he had previously visited for his historical novel, *Cities of Gold*, while the rehabilitation of Fray Marcos builds on work that he had done previously with Richard Flint.

Hartmann's work is fairly well researched, but there are some flaws that still bear noting. While his study of Cortes does include Cortes' interaction with Charles V, it fails to explore some of the motivations governing Charles V's responses to Cortes and his actions in Mexico. In particular, it would be important to address the fiscal strains that Charles V and the Crown of Castile were experiencing in the 1520s. While this is admittedly a tangent from the North American arena, it would be nice to acknowledge that

Charles V's apparent displeasure with Cortes was driven by factors besides pure greed. Another, related problem within his research revolves around Hartmann's use of sources. In his work, Hartmann consciously makes the point that he is using the text of the primary sources to make his conclusions and avoiding attempts to place the sources within any sort of cultural context. The critical flaw in this approach comes from the fact that he is using English translations of the primary sources. While Richard and Shelby Flint's translations are excellent and detailed, no translation can completely convey cultural idioms or meaning, and to base conclusions off of the translation leaves a historian open to error.

Regardless of those potential problems, *Searching for Golden Empires* remains a well-researched book and one that is accessible to both professional historians and amateurs who are curious about the early history of the Spanish conquest. Hartmann makes some very compelling arguments in regards to how the Coronado expedition and Fray Marcos de Niza erred, and these merit further study.

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