



# NEWSLETTER

March 2021

Doña Ana County Historical Society

## Rick Hendricks Will Talk About The Spanish Flu

Dr. Rick Hendricks, former state historian for New Mexico, will present the DACHS March talk on the Spanish Flu in New Mexico, 1918-1920, on March 18, at 7 p.m. The talk will be a virtual one and will be available through the Zoom platform. Members will receive an email with the Zoom invitation a few days prior to the 18th.

The end of World War I in 1918 coincided with the onset of the Spanish Influenza, which spread across the globe and devastated populations worldwide with estimates ranging from 50 to 100 million deaths. The pandemic reached New Mexico in fall of 1918; by the end of October as many as 15,000 New Mexicans had fallen ill and perhaps a thousand died, although the exact number will never be known.

Spanish Flu has been described as an equal opportunity killer, but it preyed on people in the prime of life rather than the young and old, as is the case with a typical flu. Native Americans and Mexican Americans suffered higher mortality than other groups in New Mexico. In Mexico as many as 500,000 deaths have been attributed to Spanish Flu. Mexican laborers crossed into southern New Mexico where they lived in overcrowded conditions and were of prime age to fall victim to influenza.

In Albuquerque, with a population of around 15,000 there were 923 confirmed cases of Spanish Flu and only 167 deaths. Such a low mortality was probably a result of measures the city government took. In the city all public gatherings were prohibited, and quarantined homes were identified by signage.

The state of public health in New Mexico contributed to the impact of Spanish Flu. The pandemic arrived only six years after statehood, and New Mexico was the only state without a department of health. Instead, each

county had county health officers, which meant there was no statewide authority that could mandate disease prevention measures. County health officers' limited powers included quarantine, investigation, and the ability to appoint health inspectors. The main strategy was two-pronged: try to convince local officials to follow practical measures such as banning public gatherings and complaining when they failed to follow recommenda-



tions. The problem of dealing with infectious disease was exacerbated by the fact that some New Mexico counties had no resident physician.

Rick is currently the New Mexico state records administrator. He was state historian from 2010 until 2019. He received his BA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1977 and his PhD from the University of New Mexico in 1985. He also studied history of Spain in the Americas at the Universidad de Sevilla.

Rick is a former editor of the Vargas Project at the University of New Mexico. After the conclusion of the Vargas Project, he worked at NMSU, most notably on the Durango Micro-filming Project, helping to produce and edit a 1,400-page guide to the collection. At NMSU Rick also taught courses in colonial Latin America and Mexican history.

# Family Starts NMSU Scholarship In Pete Drexler's Name

*In January, the DACHS awarded James (Pete) Drexler another Pasajero Del Camino Real Award for his most recent book "A Place Called Dona Ana." To honor Pete, the family recently made this announcement to help NM students.*

We are officially launching the James J. ("Pete") Drexler Scholarship Fund. The scholarships will be for students in need who will attend New Mexico State University (NMSU) and who will study in the fields of science, technology, engineering, math or history of the southwest.

You may know our Dad's story and how lucky he was to have had a chance to go to college. Though he was valedictorian of his middle school and had the highest GPA in his high school, he found himself ready to graduate without intentions of pursuing a higher education. His family could not afford to send him to college, and so he was set to follow his father into the construction business.

Lucky for him and for all of us, his teachers had other plans. As a result of their initiative, he was offered scholarships in both math and physics. Though he may have slightly broken his math teacher's heart by pursuing physics, he became the first of his family to attend college and receive a college degree. His career as a physicist was incredibly rewarding.

He fathered eight children, all of whom he helped support in attending college, resulting in over twenty degrees and advanced degrees among them. If it weren't for his teachers and others who helped him, he would not have been able to contribute as much to science or provide enough resources to help all of his kids also attend college and graduate school.

We are currently working with high school counselors of two high schools in Las Cruces that Dad selected. We will work with more next year. They have helped identify students who have determination and drive, meet the merit criteria and also have financial hardships that will make attending college very difficult, if not impossible. Students will start applying for scholarships this week, and the deadline will be March 31. We are hoping our Dad can help pick these first recipients, as he has done for recipients of Full Basket Belize scholarships, to which he has donated every year since its inception.

He has been the smartest and kindest person in any room, and we are so proud of him and his legacy. This scholarship was created in his honor to help others in need to pursue an education in the fields that he has been so passionate about.

We have received advice from counselors and NMSU to determine the amount that will best ensure students can attend the first year of college. They are excited and ready to get their best students to apply for this prestigious award. The funds will be deposited into to the students' NMSU accounts. After the first year, there are additional resources for students, and most find a way to continue on after finishing the critical first year.

If you feel called to contribute to this fund, we can assure you that it will go to deserving students. Even a little bit can make all the difference, as it did with our Dad. The James J. ("Pete") Drexler Scholarship Fund is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, so all your donations are tax deductible. All administrative costs are also covered by board members. We are legally required to give away the money collected for the scholarships in a timely manner. That means every dollar of your donation goes directly to deserving students in need to support their college education within the year that you donate.

The funds we have available by March 31st will determine how many we will fund initially. We'd like to give as many as possible now so Dad can be a part of the selection.

If you can, please donate at the level that's comfortable in one of the following ways:

\*On the [www.jamesjdrexlerscholarship.com](http://www.jamesjdrexlerscholarship.com) website (go to the Donate section or click <https://www.jamesjdrexlerscholarship.com/get-involved-1>)

\*Send payments directly to the PayPal account using the email [info@jamesjdrexlerscholarship.com](mailto:info@jamesjdrexlerscholarship.com)

\*Send a check, payable to James J. "Pete" Drexler Scholarship Fund, to 24 S. Weber St.; Suite 100; Colorado Springs, CO 80903.

This will be an ongoing initiative, and we will keep you updated with reports from the Pete Drexler scholars. We hope you will be as proud as we are, and our Dad has been, to make a difference in students' lives.

If you have any questions, you can contact Kateri Drexler at (970) 596-3002.

## Historical Society Of New Mexico Offers Video Talks And New Website

Our state's historical society is starting the new year with a new look. Not only have they completely revamped their website, they have remodeled their newsletter and are now offering live or pre-recorded historical presentations - much like the DACHS does. In fact their first web presentation, a lecture by Fred Friedman on short line railroads of New Mexico, is now available on the HSNM's YouTube Channel. If you'd like to watch Fred's presentation, it is available at: <https://youtu.be/8y7NxHZFB6s>

The HSNM website was hacked over a year ago and they have been forced to rebuild. It is now

a very up-to-date site with many resources - like a speakers bureau that the DACHS will be using in the future. The website's address is: [www.hsnm.org](http://www.hsnm.org) If you are interested in joining, info is on the website.

By the way, our president Dennis Daily serves on the HSNM board of directors. He is joined by John Bloom from here in Las Cruces. As you might expect, the organization is dominated by folks from the north half of the state. Of the 22 board members, Dennis and John are joined by a rep from Hillsboro and one from Truth or Consequences. That's it. Everyone else is from Los Lunas and to the north.

## Southern New Mexico Historical Review Mailing Is Now Complete

In last month's newsletter we ran a historical piece about how the *Review* started. Here is some information about his year's production.

We printed 125 copies at ABC Printing in Las Cruces. The bill for that was about \$450. At 90

pages, it was much larger than *Reviews* at the beginning. Then we had to mail it out because there was no banquet. With envelopes, tape and the "media" mailing rate, that was \$325. That's why we ask you to help each year. THANKS for the contributions.

## Depression Era Photos By Russell Lee Are On The Web



While searching for local photos on the Library of Congress website, I found these and many others taken by Russell Lee. For years, during the Depression, he recorded life all across America for the Farm Security Administration. He left the agency with 19,000 photographs. He is mentioned along with Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans for seeing and recording "social realism" during that era. In New Mexico, he is noted for his array of images from Pie Town and there are many others on the website. I saw quite a few from Mogollon.

The wheels and tires photo was taken in Deming in August 1939. The sign is taken in Las Cruces during the same time period. Russell was a chemical engineer by education, turned painter and then photographer. The triviality of the sign must have caught his attention. The location of the sign is not in the photo's notes. **EDITOR**



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✓ The Dona Ana County Genealogical Society will feature Mr. Robert Raymond, a deputy to FamilySearch's Chief Genealogical Officer for their March 10 meeting. Raymond will discuss how to best use FamilySearch to include lesser-known tips and tricks. FamilySearch houses billions of historical records. Additionally, the FamilySearch Research Wiki provides links to genealogy databases, websites, resources, research strategies, and genealogical guidance. The Zoom meeting will start at 2 p.m.

Non-DACGS members are invited to join the

meeting by sending an email request, including your telephone number, to: [dacgslc@gmail.com](mailto:dacgslc@gmail.com) requesting instructions to attend the meeting. The request, with phone number, must be received two days prior to the meeting.

✓ The New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum is open again - at least as of press time. It is open M-Sat, from 10 to 4. Play areas for kids are closed but most things are open and face coverings are required. If in doubt, call ahead for information at: 575.522.4100. The Las Cruces museums are still closed but do offer a load of presentations and activities on their websites.

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**Dona Ana County Historical Society**  
P.O. Box 16045  
Las Cruces, NM 88004-6045

