



NEWSLETTER

May 2021

Doña Ana County Historical Society

Dr. Timothy Nelson To Talk About Blackdom, N.M.

Our May presentation will feature Dr. Timothy Nelson lecturing about Blackdom, N.M., a community founded in eastern New Mexico by African Americans seeking a free and safe life for themselves. The talk will be on May 20 at 7 p.m. and will be via Zoom like our past events. The Zoom link will be sent to members via email a couple of days before the 20th. Non-members can request the link by emailing the secretary at: 19dachs63@gmail.com.

Blackdom was founded at the beginning of the 20th century by 13 black men led by Frank Boyer and Isaac Jones. It lasted about 30 years and is now a ghost town. It was 18 miles south of Roswell and eight miles west of Dexter.

The town was founded to be entirely self-

sufficient and was intended to be wholly black. Thus the name. Established to be a dry-land farming community, they struck oil in 1919.



Dr. Nelson was born in Los Angeles and went to Santa Monica Community College. From there he jumped to New Mexico State University where he earned a bachelor's degree in U.S. history. He then earned a master's degree in black history at the University of Northern Iowa where he also received a commission as an Army officer.

From there Dr. Nelson went to the University of Texas at El Paso where he earned his Ph.D. While at UTEP, he wrote a 200-page dissertation on the rise and fall of Blackdom. He currently lives in Santa Fe.

Congratulations To Our Group - The DACHS

Every year the Historical Society of New Mexico gives awards for publications and service to the state. The organization just announced that the Dona Ana County Historical Society is receiving the L. Bradford Prince Award which recognizes significant work in the field of historic preservation in New Mexico. We are being honored "for work to preserve the physical site and document the cultural history of the Picacho Cemetery in Doña Ana County."

Ironically we will share the award with Susan Drake-Green Schwartz for her "cemetery work." She spent many years documenting and recording information about burials in the

historic Fairview Cemetery in Albuquerque. It was started in 1881 and has 12,000 graves.

Another service award went to Dawn Santiago - the Paul A.F. Walter Award for service to the NM Historical Society itself. Dawn should be familiar as she is a local historian and author.

Dawn is being recognized "for the enormous amount of work undertaken for HSNM during the past several years coordinating, editing, producing and distributing publications, preparing annual conference programs, transitioning the society's website, managing social media, handling email inquiries, and other service."



Local Scientist, Historian And Author Leaves A Legacy

The DACHS and the Las Cruces community lost a kind member on April 22 when James "Pete" Drexler died. Pete may be familiar to many of you because of his contributions to recording local history in the form of his many books. Some of his titles include *A Place Called Dona Ana*, *Coronada's Journey To The Seven Cities Of Gold*, and *The Route And Ordeal Of Cabeza De Vaca*.

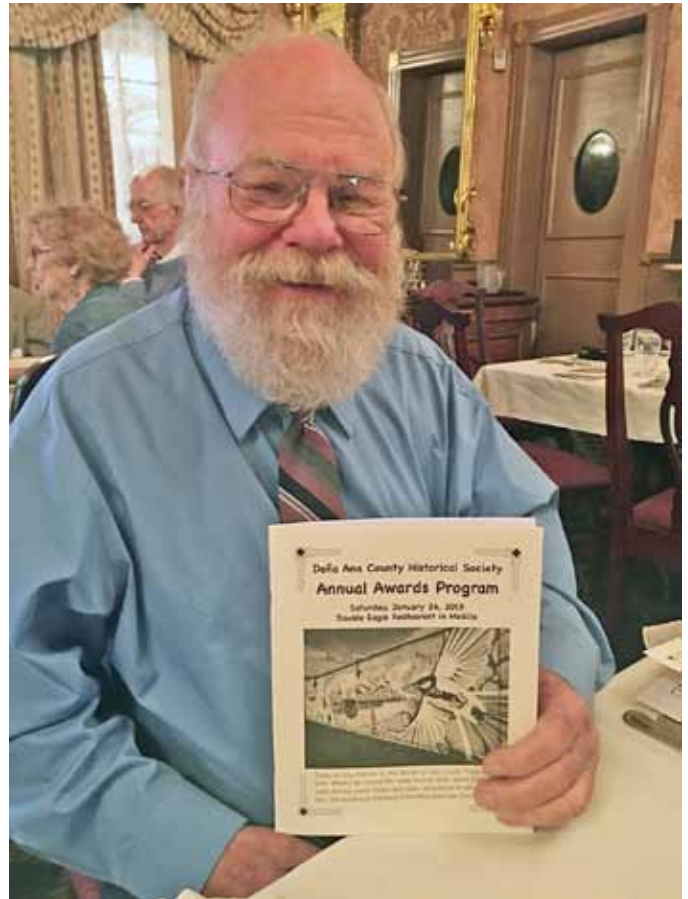
Twice, the DACHS awarded Pete the Pasajero Del Camino Real Award for his books. His books can be found locally and online at Amazon.

Though he had the highest GPA in his high school, Pete Drexler 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.

His teachers had other plans, however. As a result of their initiative, Pete 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 is also the father of eight children, all of whom he helped support in attending college, resulting in over twenty degrees and advanced degrees among them. He attributes his success to his teachers and others who enabled him to get the valuable education he deserved.

After his retirement from his career in science, Pete pursued his other passion - the history of the Southwest. He combed through historical records and did some serious sleuthing to uncover some facts that had been lost to time. Of course many people do research, but Pete put it together in his books.

Last year his family created a scholarship in his honor to continue the legacy of helping others in need to pursue an education in the fields that he



was so passionate about. The result is *The James J. ("Pete") Drexler Scholarship Fund* which provides educational scholarships for students in need who will attend New Mexico State University and pursue an education in the fields of science, technology, engineering, math or southwest history.

The first awardees for this scholarship were named just before Pete's death. The recipients are Luis Meraz who will study aerospace engineering and Ivana Melendez-Aguirre who will pursue a degree in biochemistry.

To find out more about the scholarship or to donate to help fund it, visit this URL:

<https://www.jamesjdrexlerscholarship.com/>

A Quick Note From Our Past President On The NMHS Service Award

The following note came in the other day from Jon Hunner, the DACHS past president who now lives in northwest France

"Just read that you all have received an award from the NMHS for your work on the Pichacho cemetery. Well done!

I am glad I was there for the start of it but you

all did the hard work of working with the village, doing the research, and cleaning up the place. That is a lot of sweat equity and I am happy that it is being recognized.

Keep up the good work.

Cheers

Jon

We Entered The Space Age 75 Years Ago This Month @WSMR

Seventy-five years ago this month, the first successful flight of a German V-2 took place at White Sands Proving Ground - now the missile range. At 2:13 p.m. on May 10, the V-2 blasted off with the news media and VIPs watching from sand dunes only 1,000 yards to the southwest – no room in the blockhouse. The rocket did exactly what it was supposed to do, reaching an altitude of 75 miles and crashing to the ground 39 miles north, in the heart of the proving ground. The rocket was allowed to simply burn up all of its fuel, which took 59 seconds, and continue free flight to the north. It made up for an earlier attempt on April 15 when a V-2 only attained an altitude of 3.4 miles.

Officials said it was certainly an altitude record for a man-made object sent aloft by the United States and speculated it went even higher than any German launch as they used a flatter trajectory. The event announced that America had entered the Space Age and the news reporters were excited by what they saw. Stories appeared nationwide and across much of the world.

Reporter Jack Doherty, writing for his readers back in New York City, said the sound was like “a hundred Seventh Avenue express trains converging on Times Square at once.”

Others took information from the Army briefings and wove it into their stories. William Strand, the Chicago Tribune, expanded on the fact that White Sands was going to build a bigger static test stand to handle 150-ton rockets. He hypothesized that such a rocket could deliver a warhead 2,500 miles away. He was describing what would become intercontinental ballistic missiles which were just a decade away.

White Sands also launched a WAC Corporal rocket for the viewers two hours later. WAC Corporals were an American-built rocket which could

Even Non-Genealogists May Be Interested In This One

The Dona Ana County Genealogical Society will present “DNA – The Good, the Bad and the Ugly” on May 12 at 2 p.m. via Zoom.

Professional Genealogist Cindy Barber will be the guest presenter and will discuss the benefits, pitfalls, and dangers of using DNA testing to supplement genealogical research. This presentation will start with the basics, explore some scenarios and end with a strategy. There will be a “Question & Answer” session following the presentation.

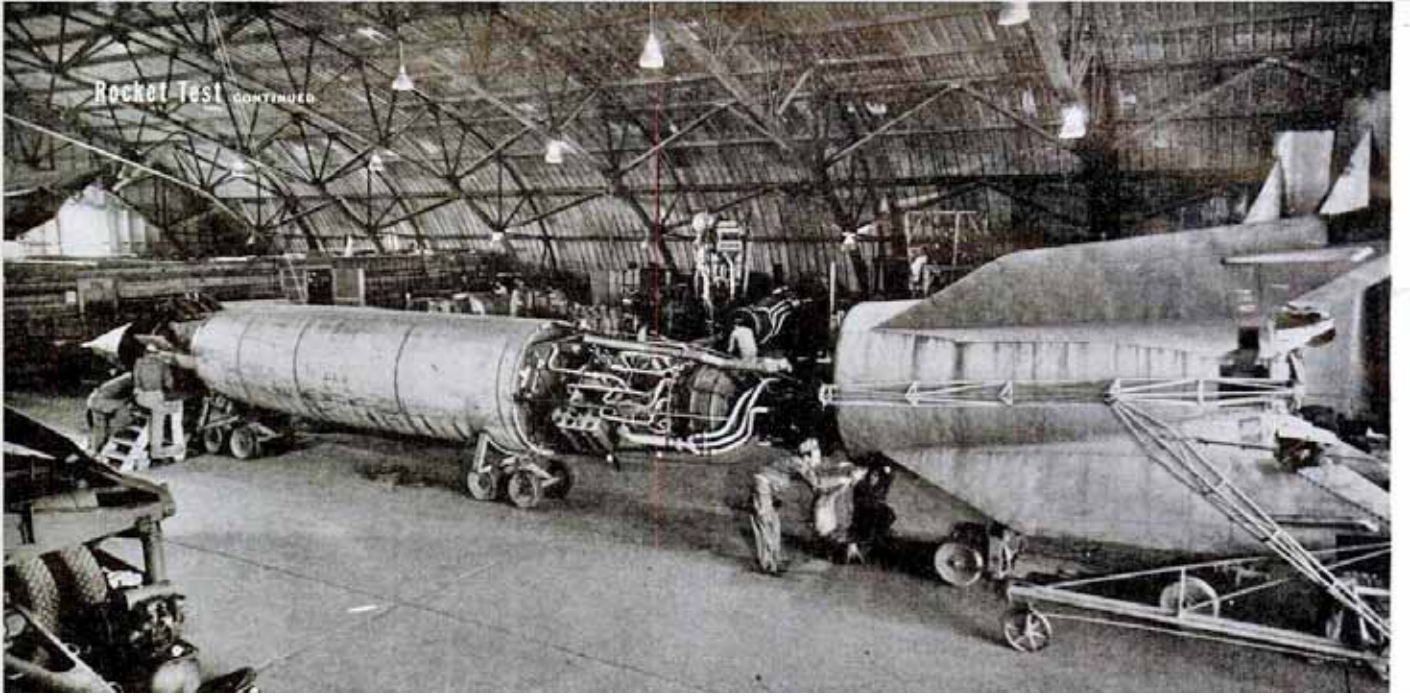
only make it to 40 miles with a 25-lb. payload. The V-2 would eventually break the 100-mile barrier and carry hundreds of pounds of instruments to study the upper atmosphere and what we now call Space.



This famous color image shows a German V-2 rocket being fueled and prepared prior to its flight on the afternoon of May 10, 1946. The four officers at the bottom left are: Britain's Field Marshal Henry Maitland Wilson, Admiral Dewitt Ramsey, LTC Harold Turner and General Joe Stilwell. WSMR Museum Archive.

Cindy Barber has held positions of leadership in several genealogy societies and has taught advanced genealogy, DNA concepts, and stories at family history fairs and libraries. Additionally, she has sponsored workshops focusing on genealogy techniques.

Non-DACGS members are invited to join this Zoom meeting by sending an email request, including your telephone number, to: dacgslc@gmail.com requesting instructions. Please email your request to attend by May 10th.



A Life Magazine image from the May 27, 1946 issue showing the buildup of a German V-2 rocket in the original assembly building at White Sands. The photo appeared in a multi-page spread about the successful launch on May 10. At the time White Sands was the "center of the rocket universe."

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www.donaanacountyhistsoc.org

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

