

# NEWSLETTER

## September 2021

Doña Ana County Historical Society

### Dr. Selfa Chew To Speak On Japanese Internment

On September 16, Dr. Selfa Chew will be our first fall presenter with a Zoom talk titled “Memory and internment: Japanese Americans and War World II.” Instead of the risk of returning to in-person talks too soon, we will begin the new season using the Zoom platform again at 7 p.m. on the 16th. For more information about the decision, see Dennis Daily’s article starting below.

Remembered as a necessary armed conflict and a “good war,” WWII resulted in the massive incarceration of persons of Japanese descent in the United States. Although their uprooting is often recalled as an isolated event in the history of the United States, the Japanese Relocation Program represented a continuation of anti-Asian policies and laws. This lecture will discuss the imprisonment of ethnic Japanese during War World II and the



construction of a collective memory of their internment in concentration camps.

Dr. Selfa A. Chew holds a PhD in Borderlands History from The University of Texas at El Paso. Dr. Chew’s research focuses on racial relations, the Asian and African diasporas, and WWII. She is currently an Associate Professor of Instruction at the Department of History, and the African American Studies Program. Her latest publication Uprooting Community:

Japanese Mexicans, World War II and the U.S. - Mexico Borderlands, was awarded an International Latino Book Award, and the Southwest Book Award, in 2017.

The Zoom link will be sent out via email a couple of days before the 16th. Non-members can request the link by emailing the secretary at: 19dachs63@gmail.com.

### Welcome Back But We Are Still On The Defensive

By Dennis Daily, President of DAHCS

I hope everyone has enjoyed their summer, and the brief respite we had from the virus mayhem. It certainly was nice to be in some public spaces without a mask, to be able to eat out again, and to see complete faces again. I had the unusual experience of working extensively with several researchers here in the NMSU Archives during the pandemic, then finally seeing their faces for the first time when masks came off during the summer.

The DACHS Board met in July and was excited to discuss the potential for in-person meetings again for the fall. Well, we all know

what has happened since. Cases are booming.

Given the current substantial rise in COVID cases once again, we feel the best course, for our September meeting at least, is to remain virtual and meet via Zoom. We sincerely hope this is a temporary situation and that face-to-face meetings may resume sometime this fall. In the meantime, please tune in to the September 16 meeting to hear UTEP Professor Dr. Selfa A. Chew-Smithart’s presentation “Memory and internment: Japanese Americans and War World II.”

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## Mesilla Riot Was 150 Years Ago In August - Blood Shed Over Politics

On a historical note, August 2021 marked a tragic commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Mesilla Riot, a partisan political melee between the Republican and Democratic parties of Dona Ana County. You've probably heard something of this fight, which cost the lives of an estimated eight persons, including prominent Mesilla businessman and politician John Lemon. Newspaper reports at the time of the incident claim more than 500 shots were fired. A detachment from Fort Selden was sent in to establish and maintain order. In addition to the dead and wounded, the event had long-lasting effects for residents, as many Republicans (who ended up on the losing end of the election) left the area for good.

Among these were about 40 Mexican families with Republican sympathies who left for good, crossing the international border and establishing the town of Ascension in northern Chihuahua. Today, Ascension and Mesilla are sister cities.

Thankfully, politics today are much more civilized, and extreme partisanship is a thing of the past! You can read more about the Mesilla Riot in an excellent article, "Shootout in La Mesilla," written by the FAT Boys (a.k.a. Eric Fuller, Daniel D. Aranda, Emilio Tapia, Joe Lopez, and Mary Kay Shannon) and published in the 2013 edition of DACHS' journal the *Southern New Mexico Historical Review*. It can be viewed on line at our website.

## More Detail On The Riot From The NMSU Historical Archives

*Editor's Note: Dennis Daily posted the following story on the NMSU Library's blog site called "Open Stacks" on August 24. You can visit at <https://openstacks.nmsu.edu/mesilla-riot/> to see more of the images.*

When it comes to extreme partisan politics, our modern times are not unique. While it's tempting to think back to some former time when political differences were resolved through civil debate, cooperation, and compromise, this just doesn't ever appear to have been the case. One of our area's most notorious incidents of partisan politics occurred 150 years ago this month, on August 27, 1871, when Republicans and Democrats clashed on the Mesilla Plaza. An estimated eight people were killed in the riot and about 20 more wounded. The first to fall in the melee was prominent Mesilla businessman and Doña Ana County Republican politician John Lemon, whose family papers are now held in our collection.

John Lemon was born in Pittsburgh in 1831 but orphaned at a young age. In 1848, following the conclusion of the Mexican-American War and the discovery of gold at John Sutter's sawmill on the South Fork American River, Lemon traveled in a wagon train to California. There he married Luciana Pope, daughter of an American father and Mexican mother, in 1849. After a decade in California, they sold the hotel they were operating in San Bernardino and in 1860 settled in Mesilla. Lemon established himself

in business in southern New Mexico, operating a mercantile store and securing contracts to supply essential goods to area military forts, such as Fort Selden, Fort Craig, Fort Cummings, and Fort Bayard. He opposed the Confederates during the Civil War when they occupied Mesilla in 1861, despite general local support for the rebel cause, resulting in imprisonment and confiscation of his property. His vindication came with the Second Battle of Mesilla, July 1, 1862, when a pro-Union New Mexico militia forced the Confederates to withdraw.

Lemon also was early on involved in the politics of the region, serving as Doña Ana County probate judge from 1864-1869 and U.S. Customs inspector and collector in the Mesilla area. He served on a commission in 1863 that sought to separate the southern portion of New Mexico, identified as the counties of Doña Ana and Arizona, from the territory of New Mexico. The commission complained that the southern portion of the territory had been neglected by officials in Santa Fe for years, and that it formed a distinct geographic, economic and cultural district. These were similar sentiments that prompted many in Mesilla to support the Confederate plan of dividing New Mexico along an east-west line. The commission hoped to petition the federal government for recognition as an independent state or territory, to be called the Territory of Rio Bravo, or the Territory of Montezuma.

**See Judge Lemon Clubbed on Page 2**

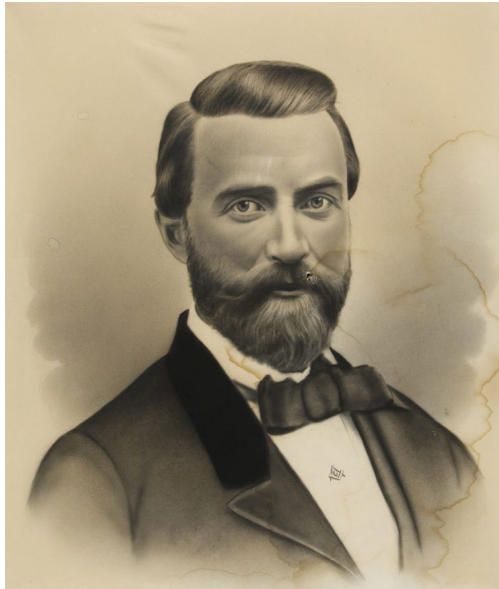
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## Judge Lemon Clubbed From Behind And Died Soon After

Election season during the summer of 1871 was contentious in Doña Ana County between Republicans and Democrats. The Republicans held their convention July 10 in Mesilla to nominate their ticket. Lemon received the nomination for probate judge, along with Atilano Baca, probate clerk, Perfecto Armijo, sheriff, John Crouch, senator, Apolonio Barela and Jacinto Armijo, representatives, and Marcelino Gallegos, treasurer. Democrats were running Pablo Melendrez, Jr. for probate judge and Mariano Barela for Sheriff. The Democrats had the support of the Mesilla newspaper, the *Borderer*. Tempers flared on several occasions, insults and threats were hurled between the parties, with violence occasionally rising to the surface. Republican supporters sent a letter to the editor of the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, published June 17, stating "Scurrilous trash, falsehood and repulsive filth as dealt out through that sheet, the "*Borderer*" and *Border* ruffians as exhibited yesterday on the corners of the streets in this place are producing their legitimate results." Following one Democratic rally in July, a violent confrontation was blamed on partisan fervor, the summer heat, and flowing whiskey.

On Sunday, August 27, 1871, a week before the election, Democrats planned a rally on the plaza in La Mesilla, to hear an address from Democratic candidate for territorial delegate to Congress, José Manuel Gallegos. The Republicans, probably not coincidentally, decided to meet on the plaza on the same day. In the afternoon, following speeches, both parties decided a march around the plaza with bands playing would be a fitting way to show their partisan

pride. Reportedly, one party marched clockwise and the other counterclockwise, and an inevitable clash



*John Lemon around 1870. His Freemasons' pin can be seen on his shirt.*

took place when they met face to face. According to reports in the *New Mexican*, I.N. Kelley, an employee of the *Borderer*, made "an unprovoked attack with a heavy club upon Judge Lemon; coming up behind the judge he dealt him a blow upon the head, fracturing his skull and causing death in a short time." Kelley was immediately shot and killed by one of Lemon's friends, then the shooting and fighting became general throughout the crowd. Reports said more than 500 shots were fired, resulting in eight people killed and 15-20 wounded. A detachment of troops from Fort

Selden was dispatched to restore and maintain order. The Democrats came out on top in the September election, with long-lasting repercussions for Republicans in the area, some of whom moved to Grant County. A group of about 40 Mexican families with Republican sympathies, left Mesilla for good to establish the town of Ascensión in northern Chihuahua. Today, Ascensión and Mesilla are sister cities.

The John Lemon family papers contain correspondence, business records, legal and financial documents, and information about John Lemon's political activities. The bulk of the materials date from 1862 to about 1913, and include items related to his widow and descendants after his death. The papers allow us a look into life in Mesilla and Doña Ana County during the 1860s and are among the earliest original materials we have on the region. Check out the finding aid at the N.M. Archives Online website.

## Human Systems Research Looking For Some Volunteers For Sept. 11

Deb Dennis says they are looking for at least 20 volunteers to help lime wash the old Civilian Conservation Corps schoolhouse that has been their headquarters since 1998. It is part of their restoration of the historic building.

Lime wash has the consistency of 2% milk, is

easy to apply and pretty quick to dry. She hopes to have two coats on the building by the end of the day. Let her know if you can help. You only need to bring your smile and enthusiasm! HSR will provide everything else. Her office number is (575) 524-9456 and email is: [ddennis@humansystemsresearch.org](mailto:ddennis@humansystemsresearch.org)



***Did Pat Garrett once sit in this large cast iron bath tub? Karla Steen demonstrates how long a six-foot tub is. According to the oral history passed down by successive owners and collected by the current owner, Carol Kay, Mrs. Garrett gave it to Mrs. Chavez for her house on Campo St. A hole had to be knocked in the wall so the tub would fit in the room. The story details that Garrett ordered an oversized tub for his long frame. When it arrived, it was too large for the house and he put it outside and bathed there. If you know something about this story, let us hear from you. Some of us are skeptical and some, not so much.***

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