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By
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New Light On The Nestor Armijo House

By Eric Liefeld

Introduction and Background

John B. (Jack) Colligan published a series of articles in three parts in the *Southern New Mexico Historical Review*, titled “Early Owners of the Nestor Armijo Home.” Married to Dolores (Gallagher) Colligan (great granddaughter of Don Nestor Armijo [1831-1911]), Jack was in an ideal position to understand and document much of the history related to the house and family. While the articles provide invaluable information and identify most of the early people involved with the property, they stopped short of identifying specifically who built the house and when.

Recent extensive stabilization and rehabilitation work on the Nestor Armijo House has afforded the opportunity to closely examine and investigate the structure of the house while revisiting its history. This work and research with original source documents has shed new light on the early history of this venerable and iconic building. Evidence now points to the house having been constructed in a single phase between 1865 and 1868 by John D. Barncastle and his wife, Josefa (Melendres) Barncastle — making it one of the earliest surviving buildings in Las Cruces, and firmly connecting it to the area’s pioneering families.

John D. Barncastle (Figure 1) was a Civil War veteran who came to the valley

with the famed California Column (First California Infantry) in 1862. Josefa Melendres was the daughter of Don Pablo Melendres, a pioneer of the village of Doña Ana and the town’s Justice of the Peace. Don Pablo Melendres is credited with petitioning the U.S. Government to lay out the town that eventually became Las Cruces, named for a number of gravesites marked by simple crosses.

“Susan Magoffin the young wife of Santa Fe trader Sam Magoffin, recalled the site’s dark history in her January 1847 diary entry. ‘Yesterday we passed over the spot where a few years since a party of the Apaches attacked Gen. [Manuel] Armijo as he returned from the Pass [El Paso del Norte, current-day Juarez, Mexico] with a party of



Figure 1. California Column veterans John D. Barncastle, Joseph F. Bennet, Albert J. Fountain Sr., and Captain Thomas Branigan. Photo courtesy of the Branigan Cultural Center.

troops, and killed some fourteen of his men, the graves of whom, marked by a rude cross, are now seen...”¹

A Tale of Survival

That the Nestor Armijo House (Figure 2) stands today with so much architectural integrity is something of a miracle. It has witnessed many births and deaths within its walls. It has housed multiple generations of Armijos over their 100-year tenancy, as well as the Daily and Barncastle



Figure 2. The earliest known photo of the Armijo House circa 1880. Courtesy of Harold Oliver.

families before them. It has undergone significant structural modifications, fallen into disuse, and been at risk of demolition and collapse. It has always been saved by people who cared.

People have long rallied around the Armijo House and its history. First listed as a “Building Worthy of Preservation” by the fledgling Doña Ana County Historical Society at its first awards banquet in 1967, the house was named to the New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties on May 23, 1969. It was subsequently named to the National Register of Historic Places on December 12, 1976 (reference #: 76001195).

Importantly, the house survived Las Cruces’ self-

destructive Urban Renewal era, and the raft of building demolitions that took down everything around it. Though the Nestor Armijo House now stands alone surrounded by broad swaths of asphalt and concrete, it once had many neighbors.

The Academy of the Visitation (the Loretto Academy) once stood immediately to the west of the Armijo House, terminating south Main Street with its elegant Mission Revival wings designed by renowned architect Henry Trost (Figure 3).

The fortified adobe “Mesón” stood across Convent Street (originally South Street, now Lohman Avenue), housing mule trains, teamsters, and goods for the Daily and Armijo freighting operations (Figure 4).

The Jacob Schaublin mill (El Molino) stood to the west, powered by the Acequia Genevieve, helping to feed a hungry town (Figure 5).

The Prevailing Narrative

The Nestor Armijo House is certainly one of the best documented buildings in Las Cruces. This is due in large part to extensive research conducted by Jack Colligan. Jack wrote extensively about the family and house in an unpublished manuscript titled “The Life and Times of Nestor Armijo.”² He also published articles in the first three issues of the *Southern New Mexico Histori-*



Figure 3. The Loretto Academy once stood directly to the west, dwarfing the Armijo House (Photo postcard from the author’s collection).



Figure 4. Photographed from the roof of the Loretto Academy some time after 1914, the Mesón once stood across Convent Street (now Lohman Avenue) from the Nestor Armijo House (Photo from private collection).

cal Review which were titled as follows:

*The Early Owners of the Nestor Armijo Home: Part 1: The Samaniegos of Sonora³

*The Early Owners of the Nestor Armijo Home: Part 2: Benjamin Harrover and John D. Barncastle⁴

*The Early Owners of the Nestor Armijo Home: Part 3: Maria Osita Carreón and Bradford Daily⁵

Noted architectural historian Bainbridge Bunting also visited the house circa 1963, making detailed architectural drawings and photographs, and publishing them in a 1972 article in *New Mexico Architecture*.^{6, 18} An authority on historic New Mexico architecture, Bunting called the



Figure 5. The Jacob Schaublin Mill was originally powered by the hydraulic power of the Acequia Genevieve (Photo from the author's collection).

Armijo House “The finest house of the 19th century in Southern New Mexico.” Bunting visited while Josefa (Armijo) Gallagher still lived in the house with all of the family furnishings and artifacts, writing that “there is nothing like it in all New Mexico.”

While all of these resources are thoroughly researched and provide significant historical information,

they do not ultimately resolve a builder and build date for the Nestor Armijo House. Like other accounts before them and since, they posit that the house was built in stages. This narrative comes in several variations, but it generally claims that Nestor Armijo added the two-story portion of the house and the wrap-around porch to an existing one-story (four-room) adobe building. Here is a typical example from the article by Bainbridge Bunting (though he seems to hedge a little by crediting family tradition):

“Family tradition says that Mr. Armijo enlarged the house and added a second story, an explanation that seems quite likely in view of the building’s structural arrangement.”

Though the phased construction narrative could certainly fit any number of historic adobe buildings in the valley, it does not fit the Nestor Armijo House. The most recent rehabilitation has been extensive, and has allowed contractors, engineers, and preservation specialists to explore structural details closely. Targeted examination by multiple professionals has yielded no evidence whatsoever of a phased construction.

*No seams are evident anywhere in the building: not in the adobe walls, footings, or ceiling.

*All of the adobes are consistent throughout (measuring 20x11x4 and weighing approximately 50 pounds each).

*A consistent spread adobe foundation/footing is present throughout.

*The roof structure is consistent throughout (on both first and second stories).

*The ground-floor hallway ceiling runs the length of the building and is consistent and seamless throughout.

*Ornate divided-lite transoms on the exterior doorways are consistent (south and north, upper and lower).

Moreover, it is quite clear that specific structural aspects of the house were intentional and purpose-built:

*Adobe walls are a robust three-foot thick where they support the adobe second story, and narrower elsewhere.

*A concealed system of ganged vigas supports the second-floor adobe wall where it flies over the open 10-foot-wide open hallway below.

*The remarkable two-story porch and veranda on the north and east of the house is clearly quite old and integral to the building—with intricate post and beam construction.

Taken together, these observations lead to the inescapable conclusions that the house was built in a single phase, that it stands in its original footprint, and that it appears today very much as it did when it was originally constructed—complete with existing porches and pitched rooflines.

A Store and Dwelling House

In trying to reconcile the evidence of a single-phase construction with the suspect narrative, it is useful to examine the deeds for the property. As detailed by Jack Colligan, John D. Barncastle purchased two parcels of land that eventually comprised the property in question:

*One lot was purchased from Benjamin Franklin Harrover on August 17, 1866 for \$150. The deed specifically mentions “a house and tract or parcel of land.”⁷

*Another lot was purchased six months later from Marriano Samaniego on February 9, 1867 for \$160. That deed mentions “an adobe house containing four rooms.”⁸

The “adobe house containing four rooms” on the Samaniego lot seems to be the genesis of the

notion that the Nestor Armijo House was built in phases, with the idea that this four-room house formed the basis of what became the Armijo House. However, subsequent research has made clear that the Samaniego property is not relevant to the house.

In 2012, John C. (Bud) Colligan (son of Jack Colligan) sponsored an in-depth survey and study related to the house.⁹ As a part of that study, the contracted Architectural Resources Group (ARG) carefully compared the legal descriptions in the deeds with early detailed scale maps of Las Cruces drawn by the Sanborn Fire Insurance company (1893-1948). That analysis showed conclusively that the Nestor Armijo House sits on the lot that John D. Barncastle purchased from Benjamin Franklin Harrover, and not the lot previously owned by Marriano Samaniego. As such, the four-room adobe house on the Samaniego lot is irrelevant to the construction of the Nestor Armijo House.

A renewed focus on the lot Barncastle purchased from Benjamin Franklin Harrover provides several insights. A summary of a partial chain of title related to the parcel is below, with purchase prices where known:

*1864: Jesus Alvares and Maria Sema to **Marshall St. John** (\$230)

*1865: Marshall St. John to **Henry C. Haring** (\$175)

*1865: Henry C. Haring to **Benjamin Franklin Harrover** (\$0, witnessed by John D. Barncastle)

*1866: Benjamin Franklin Harrover to **John D. Barncastle** (\$150)

*1868: John D. Barncastle to Maria Osita (Mariosita) Daily (\$2,000 for both lots, mentions a “store and dwelling house”)

*1877: Maria Osita Daily (Rea) to Nestor Armijo (\$4,050)

*1911: Don Nestor Armijo to Josefa Armijo (estate)

*1977: Josefa (Armijo) Gallagher to the Catholic Archdiocese as a life estate

*1977: Catholic Archdiocese to real estate developers

The parcel changed hands frequently from 1864 to 1866, moving between the four individuals highlighted and underlined above. These particular gentlemen have something else in common. They were all members of the California Column, consisting of ten companies of the First California Infantry.

The Column came to New Mexico in 1862 during the Civil War, mustering out in Mesilla in 1864.¹⁰ As has been well documented, many of the veterans remained in the Mesilla Valley, marrying into local families, and starting businesses. The men buying and selling this particular parcel would almost certainly have known each other as they had been to war together. They were likely participating in booming post-war real estate speculation and investment in the still young community of Las Cruces.

The prices of the various transactions can be informative. For the first few transactions, prices seem to be depreciating slightly. The no-cost deed transfer from Henry C. Haring to Harrover is interesting, especially since it is witnessed by none other than John D. Barncastle, who would shortly purchase the property from Harrover.

The involvement of Haring is perhaps telling. As Jack Colligan describes, Haring would later be in Barncastle's employ in 1883, sent on a paid (and armed!) errand by Barncastle to chase down men who had robbed the Barncastle store in Doña Ana. Sale prices for the property rise dramatically for the later transactions (Barncastle-to-Daily and Daily-to-Armijo).

The involvement of Benjamin Franklin Harrover is potentially important. Harrover was a Captain in the Union Army, but he was a carpenter by profession. As Jack Colligan points out, Harrover is listed as a carpenter in the 1870 census (Los Mimbres, Grant County, New Mexico). The 1850 Federal census finds Harrover in Illinois be-

fore the war, and it also lists his profession as carpenter. The large two-story Armijo House with its spectacular wooden porches would have required professional skilled carpentry and advanced construction skills. Though it is built of native adobe, the architectural style and the construction of the house is definitely distinct from typical vernacular adobe houses in the Mesilla Valley, implying strong influence from outside the region.

Though speculative, holding the property in Harrover's name could possibly represent a type of security for the construction of the house. These kinds of arrangements are common today, where a builder may hold title to a property until he is paid by the client. The deed from Harrover to Barncastle does indeed mention a house on the property, though there is no way of knowing if it is the house we know today as the Nestor Armijo House.

By far the most important transaction, however, is that between John D. Barncastle and Mariosita Daily, dated July 24, 1868.¹¹ Though the document is extremely difficult to read due to damage and staining, the deed clearly states that the property in question includes "a store and dwelling house erected by the parties of the first part." Those parties are John D. Barncastle and Josefa (Melendres) Barncastle. That this detail seems to have been earlier overlooked may be due to the fact that the deed is so difficult to read.

By the time of both the circa 1880 photo (Figure 2) as well as the first Las Cruces Sanborn Fire Insurance map of 1893 (Figure 6), a "store and dwelling house" are indeed still in place on the property.

The dwelling house is the Nestor Armijo House itself, in its current footprint. The store building fronts Convent Street and bears all of the hallmarks of a typical territorial mercantile. A nine-foot-high adobe wall extends behind the store building for security. A passageway (or zaguan) is wide enough to allow carts and wagons to enter from the street. A carriage house is in the yard. It is simplest to assume that these are

the same “store and dwelling house” that were built by John D. Barncastle and Josefa Melendres prior to the deed of 1868. The cost of the property has also dramatically increased by the time of the 1868 sale to Mariosita Daily. This would be

was widened, according to photos and an account from J. Paul Taylor. The building was eventually demolished during the Pioneer Savings and Trust renovation circa 1982.

Revised Building Chronology

Together, the evidence that the building was built in a single phase combined with the deeds related to John D. Barncastle presents a more compelling building chronology. Far from discrediting Nestor Armijo’s efforts, the most recent rehabilitation found evidence that he likely made modifications to the two-story portion of the house, rather than building it outright. Accounts of these modifications may well have evolved into the story that Nestor built the two-story portion of the house.

The sections that follow describe a revised building chronology, informed by physical and historical evidence:

***1865-1868: John D. Barncastle and Josefa Melendres.** Based on the strong evidence in the Barncastle/Daily deed declaring Barncastle as the builder of the “store and dwelling house,” the house itself was likely constructed circa 1866-1867. That date could be as early as 1865 since professional carpenter Benjamin Franklin Harrover was involved with the property. Harrover may well have had something to do with building the structure and its spectacular porches—perhaps as a builder or contractor hired by John Barncastle. The house gives every appearance of having been built in a single phase, complete with one-story and two-story portions and porches in its current footprint.

Importantly, Jack Colligan reports that during the 1982 Pioneer Savings and Loan renovation, “two brass Confederate soldier uniform buttons were found in the remains of the old privy.” However, he then goes on to describe the buttons as clearly being buttons from Union Army uniforms rather than those of Confederates. In a footnote, Colligan describes them as “a common U.S. Army uniform button,” and a second button with “the initials ‘HC’ on it... indicating that it belonged to

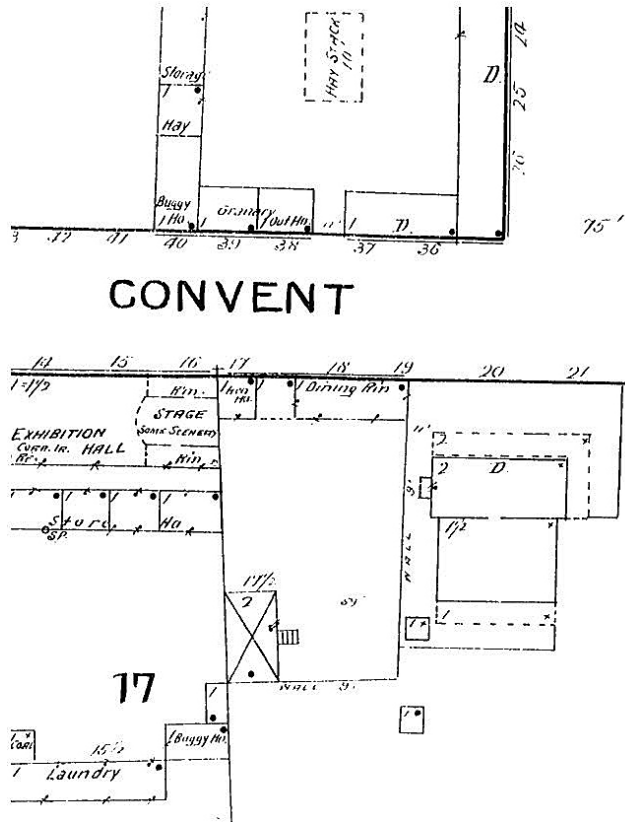


Figure 6. A store and dwelling house are shown on the 1893 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. The dwelling house is the Nestor Armijo House as it stands today.

consistent with the inclusion of both the additional Samaniego lot as well as the addition of the “store and dwelling house” erected by the Barncastles (from \$310.00 paid for both parcels in 1866/1867 to \$2,000.00 in 1868).

The store ultimately became a kitchen and dining room in Nestor Armijo’s time (labeled as such on the 1893 Sanborn map and shown converted in the circa 1880 photo). The building was later extended and adapted into a house for Nestor’s granddaughter Gertrude (Armijo) Ascarate (also known to the family as Nina) after the death of her husband in 1912. The store building was eventually narrowed when Lohman Avenue

one of the Highland Cadets of Worcester, Massachusetts.” This observation clearly places Union Civil War veterans in the house, or at least the privy!¹²

The Barncastles would only own the house for a short period of time, selling the property to Mariosita Daily on July 24, 1868. This short tenure is perhaps explained by life-changing events for the Barncastles during the very month of the sale to Mariosita Daily. Don Pablo Melendres died on July 7, 1868, leaving a vast north valley estate to his daughter Josefa. Moreover, Josefa would give birth to her daughter Emily D. Barncastle on July 16, 1868. With the death of Don Pablo Melendres, the Barncastles had inherited significant assets and responsibilities in Doña Ana, where they would live out the rest of their lives.

**1868-1877: Bradford and Mariosita (Carréon) Daily.* The land holdings related to the house expanded significantly during the Daily’s tenancy. The Dailys purchased an adjacent lot to the east from Samuel G. Bean in 1869,¹³ as well as the Mesón property across Convent Street in 18705. These additional properties were conveyed to Nestor Armijo with the 1877 transaction, helping to explain why the value of the property more than doubled during the Daily’s tenure (\$2000 to \$4050).¹⁴ It is not known if the Dailys constructed the massive adobe Mesón building, but it certainly would have served them well as a place to secure and house their teams, drivers, and goods in support of their freighting business.

Bradford Daily died in May of 1875, leaving Mariosita with several children, freighting losses, and unsettled Indian depredation claims. Mariosita’s apparently dubious second marriage (to D.B. Rea) and estate entanglements with Bradford’s former business partner (who was married to her sister!) contributed to significant economic difficulties, to the point that Mariosita took out a mortgage on the main house parcel in 1877.¹⁵ She ultimately settled the mortgage by selling the property to Nestor Armijo. Mariosita Daily remained close with Nestor. In fact, the 1880 Federal Census records show two of the Daily children

(Bradford, age 8, and Duran, age 12) living as “boarders” in the Nestor Armijo household, along with Don Nestor’s adopted son Frederico. Mariosita eventually relocated her family to Tucson, Arizona, where many Daily descendants still live.

**1877-1911: Nestor Armijo and Josefa (Yrissari) Armijo.* By the time Nestor purchased the house in 1877, it was already 20 years old. In the most recent rehabilitation, preservationists and contractors indeed found evidence that the second-floor bedroom ceilings had been converted to wooden cloister vaults from an original flat ceiling design. The “Juliette Balcony” (as it has come to be called) on the second-story west façade was also added during this time period, since it is not present in the circa 1880 photo (Figure 2). In keeping with family accounts, it seems very likely that these alterations were made during Nestor Armijo’s tenure in the house.

**1911-1977: Josefa (Armijo) Gallagher and Gertrude (Armijo) Ascarate.* Upon Nestor Armijo’s death in 1911, much of his estate passed directly to his grandchildren. Nestor’s wife, Josefa Yrissari, son Carlos (Charles) Armijo, and daughter-in-law Beatriz Otero had all preceded him in death. His granddaughter Josefa Armijo had already been living in the house with Nestor for some time after the passing of her parents, and she inherited the house. Her sister Gertrude (Armijo) Ascarate inherited the Mesón property. Around 1914, Josefa conducted major modernization and interior remodeling to bring the kitchen, dining room, and bathroom into the house. She would remove two interior adobe walls and add a wooden room divider, a butler’s pantry, and add two new window openings in the west facade of the building. She also added a screened porch under the western half of the south porch, directly outside of her new kitchen. The old Barncastle store was once again transformed, this time into a home for Josefa’s sister Gertrude (Armijo) Ascarate after the death of her husband in 1912.

**1977-1997: Catholic Archdiocese, real estate developers, and Pioneer Savings and Trust.* After Josefa’s death in 1977, the property entered a state

of uncertainty and peril. Josefa had sold the property to the Catholic Archdiocese with a life estate that allowed her to live out her final days in the house. Shortly after making the agreement, however, the Archdiocese sold the property to a real estate development company that was in the process of building the Loretto Mall.² After a lengthy public discussion about the future of the house, Pioneer Savings and Trust ultimately stepped in to acquire and renovate the Nestor Armijo House for their Las Cruces branch, completing it in 1982. They too made significant structural changes to the building. Pioneer removed an original window, door, and much of the south wall to accommodate their drive-through teller window. They expanded openings in the hallway to accommodate their teller lobby and bathrooms.

**1997-2012: Citizen's Bank / Amador Bancshares.* Citizen's Bank purchased the building from Pioneer Savings and Trust on December 31, 1997, renting the space variously as a law office and commercial office space over the next several years. Citizen's made only minor interior modifications, adding a few frame and sheetrock walls to divide the space. Citizen's ultimately donated the building to the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce in 2012.

Supporting Evidence And Architectural Details

The Nestor Armijo House survives with considerable integrity. A careful examination of architectural details supports the single-phased construction and the proposed building chronology.

The brass bed

No story about the Nestor Armijo House would be complete without a mention of the brass bed that once stood in the westernmost upstairs bedroom. The bed is now held in the Armijo family collection at the Branigan Cultural Center. Family history states that the bed originally came from Manchester, England, given to Nestor as a gift from his brother. It was first shipped to Mex-

ico, and then made the arduous trip north when Nestor returned to Las Cruces. Beyond its beauty, the bed is central to the building chronology of the house, likely inspiring the vaulted ceilings in the upstairs bedrooms in order to allow the 10-11-foot-tall bed to physically fit into the house (as mentioned above).

The date of the ceiling modifications can be narrowed based on public accounts. The bed was already in place in the upstairs bedroom when



Figure 7. Armijo family friend B.C. Broome photographed the bed in 1911, featuring it in his photo album. B.C. Broome photo courtesy of Jane Mickelson.

a reporter for *Rio Grande Republican* walked through the house in 1882.¹⁶ As such, it is clear that Nestor had the ceilings vaulted during the first five years that he owned the property. A remarkable photo dated to 1911 has recently come to light that shows the bed with the caption “The \$1,000.00 bed,” a possible comment on the expense and trouble needed to fit the bed into the house. They were still talking about the bed in 1911, and we are still telling its story today!

The north/east porch

Several factors point to the north/east porch being original to the house, with some later modifications. The post and beam structure is integral to the adobe house. The appearance of the porch today is extremely close to that shown in the circa 1880 photo (Figure 2), including at least the second-story porch ornament. By that time, very mature trees and greenery already surrounded the building, all but obscuring the porch itself—an indication that the house and porch had already been there for some time.

Adding to this evidence is a well-known early photo of Nestor Armijo in the collections of the Branigan Cultural Center. The photo (Figure 8) shows Nestor in his late 40s or early 50s, likely shortly after he purchased the property. The background of the photo clearly shows ground-floor balusters and railing identical to those now surviving on the second-floor of the porch. This same ground-

floor porch baluster is visible in the circa 1880 photo (Figure 2), confirming that it once was present on both the upper and lower porches. The ground floor box columns appear to be in place in the circa 1880 photo, though the photo is not conclusive due to ample vegetation.¹⁷

Windows and trim

Windows and trim are one of the more potentially confusing aspects of the house. Preservationists sought to understand what was original, what was changed, and what the trim may mean for the building chronology. Though the house is most often approached from the south, west, or east today, it is important to remember that these facades would historically have been mostly hidden from view. The south facade faced an open

agricultural field. The west facade was hidden by the store building and a nine-foot adobe wall. Only the north side and parts of the east side would have been publicly visible from Convent Street.

- *Windows.* With few exceptions, virtually all the original windows are intact. In the original configuration, elegant casements were featured on the west, north, and east facades, with two 9-lite over 6-lite (9/6) single-hung windows and two doors on the utilitarian south side of the building. As mentioned, the westernmost 9/6 window in the south facade had been removed during Pioneer’s tenure, in favor of the large teller window. Through a remarkable series of events, the

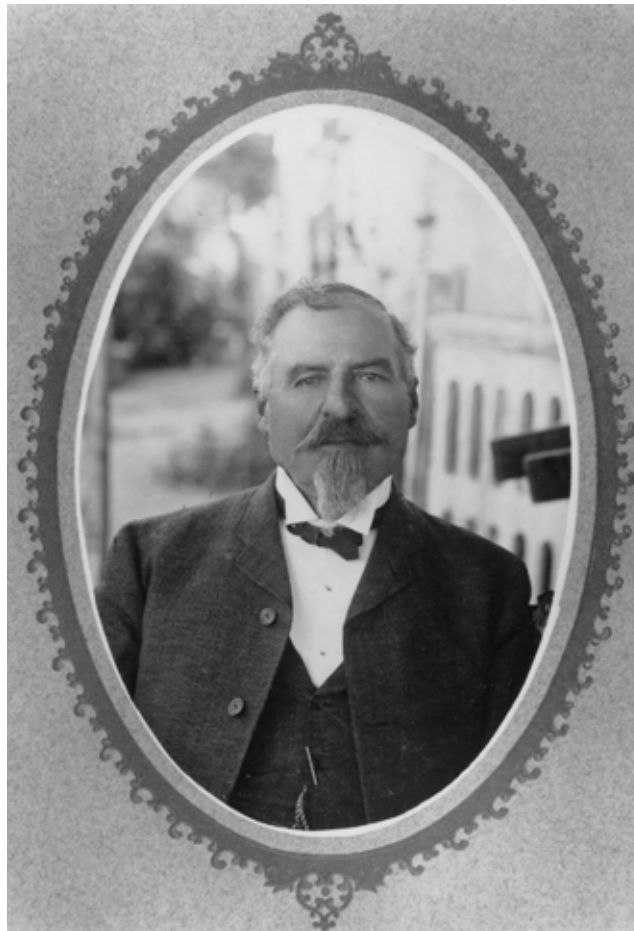


Figure 8. In the background of an early photo, ground-floor balusters and railing appear identical to those on the second story veranda, indicating later removal by Nestor Armijo.

missing original 9/6 window was inadvertently discovered by Mesilla Valley Preservation, Inc., and donated back to the project. The restored window has been replaced in its exact original location, informed both by evidence in the building, and detailed drawings drawn by Bainbridge Bunting.¹⁸

A casement window on each of the one-story portions of the east and west facades was smaller than those on the two-story portion of the building. Unfortunately, neither original window survives. The western casement was replaced by a 2/2 double-hung window with Josefa's 1914 kitchen and dining room renovation (matching two new windows/openings that she added for her dining room and butler's pantry respectively). Hinge mortises in the original window jamb confirm that the western opening originally held a casement window. This opening was also clearly shortened from the bottom to fit the 2/2 window. The casement in the eastern one-story facade is likely a replacement from the Pioneer renovation, though the opening is original in size and location.

-Window and door trim. Analysis has confirmed that window and door openings under the north/east porch all had squared trim with a special moulding, while the rest of the windows all had peaked Classical-Revival (Territorial) pediments. This original trim difference and later modifications circa 1914 likely contributed to the now-discredited notion that the building was built in two distinct phases. Close examination of several early photos reveals a Classical Revival (peaked, or "Territorial") pediment over the western ground-floor window in the two-story portion of the west facade. A plaster scar revealed when the later "Juliet balcony" porch roof was removed distinctly showed the mark of a Classical Revival pediment over the second-story western window as well.

As such, both styles of trim are likely original to the house, and differing window and door trim is not an indicator of phased additions to the building. Rather, the flat molded trim was

installed under the fancy publicly-visible porch. Arched Classical Revival trim is also highly functional, providing water-shedding capabilities. This functionality would have been useful for those windows not covered by porch roofs, especially given the building's very shallow eaves. As a part of the most recent renovation, the windows on the west side of the building were trimmed with plain flat trim to match historical photos from Josefa (Armijo) Gallagher's tenure in the house (our chosen Period of Significance).

Conclusion

The most recent rehabilitation of the Nestor Armijo house has been an enormous and highly complex undertaking, but it has added to our understanding of the history of this magnificent house and some of the prominent early citizens of the valley. That the house was built in a single phase, and appears today much as it did in the middle of the 19th century is inspiring, when so much around the house has been lost. The revelation that Civil War veteran John D. Barncastle and Josefa (Melendres) Barncastle are the likely builders with fellow veteran Benjamin Franklin Harrover possibly involved as a carpenter/builder adds to the deep history of this proud building.

After a substantial effort on the part of many diverse people and organizations, the house is now thoroughly stabilized and rehabilitated, with long-standing structural issues finally addressed.

The process has employed traditional adobe preservation methods utilizing similar materials to the originals, combined with best-practice preservation methodologies. The informed rehabilitation has been able to actually build on the historical integrity of the house, restoring the dimensions of several original openings, returning an original window to the house, and carefully restoring woodwork to a state that the building hasn't seen in 60 years.¹⁹ Hopefully the Nestor Armijo House can be its own historical record for a few decades to come.

Eric Liefeld is founder and current President of Mesilla Valley Preservation, Inc.— a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the architectural legacy of the Mesilla Valley. Eric is active in preservation advocacy, regional architectural research and attribution, and adobe technology and preservation best practices. As a native of Las Cruces, a graduate of New Mexico State University, and a resident of Mesilla, Eric is passionate about preserving our local history and cultural touchstones. When he's not playing with mud, Eric works as a freelance writer in the technology industry.

Eric has been closely involved with the rehabilitation of the Nestor Armijo House since early 2009, acting as an informal preservation advisor and raising considerable financial support for the project. When work began on the the most recent rehabilitation, preservationists started with one of the most thoroughly documented buildings in Las Cruces. Surprisingly, a string of discoveries has enriched our understanding of the history and evolution of this remarkable building and its pioneering owners.

Endnotes

1. Linda G. Harris. *Las Cruces, an Illustrated History*, Arroyo Press. 1993, p. 37.
2. John B. (Jack) Colligan. "The Life and Times of Nestor Armijo," unpublished manuscript in possession of the Colligan family.
3. *Southern New Mexico Historical Review*: Volume I, Number 1, January 1994. pp. 11-17.
4. *Southern New Mexico Historical Review*: Volume II, Number 1, January 1995. pp. 41-45.
5. *Southern New Mexico Historical Review*: Volume III. Number 1, January 1996. pp. 19-28.
6. Bainbridge Bunting. "The Nestor Armijo House, Las Cruces, New Mexico," *New Mexico Architecture*, July-August 1972.
7. *Doña Ana County Deed Book E*, pp. 63-65.
8. *Doña Ana County Deed Book E*, pp. 217-218.
9. Architectural Resources Group. "Armijo-Gallagher House Architectural Documentation and Investigation," February 21, 2012.
10. Darlis A. Miller. *The California Column in New Mexico*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1982.
11. *Doña Ana County Book of Deeds E*, pp. 9-10.
12. John B. (Jack) Colligan. "The Life and Times of Nestor Armijo," unpublished manuscript, in possession of the Colligan family. pp. 141.
13. *Doña Ana County Book of Deeds E*, pp. 6-7.
14. *Doña Ana County Book of Deeds E*, pp. 433.
15. *Doña Ana County Book of Mortgages I*, pp. 137-140.
16. "The House of Nestor Armijo," *Rio Grande Republican*, May 6, 1882, p. 3.
17. Preserved inside one of the lower boxed columns, contractors discovered an old chamfered post that seems to have been purposely left by the Pioneer Savings and Trust renovators. Though the old post somewhat matches original chamfered second-floor porch posts, as well as original porch posts on the south side of the building, it's precise importance is not yet well understood. It may represent an earlier style of ground-floor porch post that predated the boxed columns. Alternatively, it may simply may have been salvaged as structural support for the boxed columns.
18. Armijo House drawings by Bainbridge Bunting, 10 sheets, UNM School of Architecture Collections.
19. Funded in part by a generous grant to Mesilla Valley Preservation, Inc. from the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division and based on careful photographic analysis.

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A Relic From The Past

By Olivia Lerma McDonald

On Saturday, May 31, 2008, a group of parishioners volunteered to help clean out the bell tower storage areas of the Basilica of San Albino in the town of Mesilla, New Mexico (at that time, the small church had not yet been elevated to minor basilica status by the Vatican). While completing their cleaning task, to their pleasant surprise, in the dusty areas where seasonal items and old statuary is stored, they discovered an old altar stone with saintly relics attached.

It was wrapped in a worn, stained, cotton cloth stitched to enclose the marble slab. No doubt it had been placed there since the church building was renovated in the 1960s, but more than likely has been part of the church inventory since its founding in 1852.

From the *Catholic Encyclopedia*: “An altar stone is a solid piece of natural stone, consecrated

by a bishop, large enough to hold the Sacred Host and chalice. It is inserted into or placed on the surface of a structure which answers the purpose of an altar, when the whole altar is not consecrated. Sometimes the whole table (mensa) takes the place of the smaller altar-stone. It is called a portable altar.”

The two-inch thick, approximately 11-by-11-inch square marble stone bore faded ink writing defining its origin. Ronny Limón showed the altar stone to several parishioners and to Pastor Msgr. Robert Getz, who hoped to get the writing deciphered and translated. While some words were clear, others were completely faded, barely visible, or missing altogether — making the message vague.

Prior to the Saturday evening Mass, Ronald and Olivia McDonald were invited by Ronny Limón to see the outstanding find. They had recently completed year-long research on San Albino history and prepared documentation to the Vatican to elevate the church to the title of minor basilica. Ronald took a quick cell phone picture and texted the photo to their home computer.

Intrigued by this puzzle, Olivia enhanced the photo on the computer to enhance the writing and help decipher it. By late that evening she was able to translate the faded message, which was written in Spanish and Latin. It was



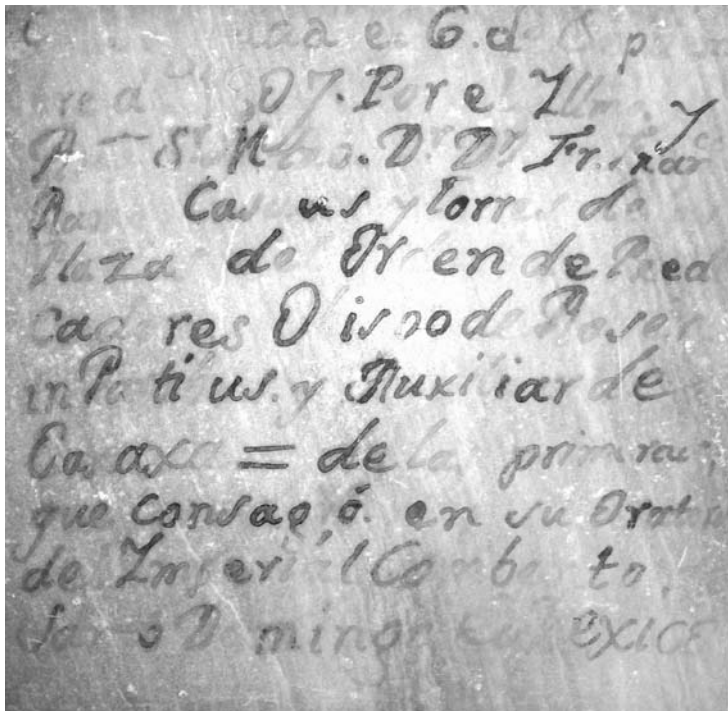
Basilica of San Albino on the Mesilla Square. Courtesy photo.

a true anachronism — solving the puzzle of the 201-year-old stone with computer enhancement and instant internet research.

The reddish-brown ink had faded to the lightest transparent yellow, hiding many words and letters, including the given name of the bishop, and had several antiquated abbreviations. After hours of deciphering, the text on the altar stone read as follows:

“Consagrada el 6 de Septiembre 1807 por el Yllmo. y R(evenderísimo)—Sr. Ntro., Dr., Dr., Fr. Francisco Ramón Causus y Torres de Plazas del Orden de Predicadores Obispo de Rhosus in Partibus y Auxiliar de Oaxaca – de la primera que consagró en su oratorio de Imperial Conbento Santo Domingo, México.”

In English this translates to “Consecrated the 6th of September 1807 by the most Illustrious and Most Revered, Sr., Dr., Dr., Fray Francisco Ramón Causus y Torres de Plazas of the Order of Preachers Bishop of Rhosus in partibus and Auxiliary of Oaxaca – the first that he consecrated in his oratory in the Imperial Convent Santo Domingo Mexico.”



The author’s enhanced image of the stone’s message.

The Order of Friars Preachers was founded by St. Dominic, but after the 15th century was known as the Dominican Order. The “in partibus” refers to teaching unbelievers. “Rhosus” is used in episcopal titular designation referring to a Greek location. The “Yllmo.” is a variation of “Illmo.” meaning “most illustrious” and the single R with a dash left out the total spelling of reverendísimo, most revered, both terms of respect. The repetitive “Dr. Dr.” indicates multiple degrees such as our modern, M.D., PhD, would.

With instant cyber research, Olivia learned the full name (which was illegible) of the bishop who had consecrated this altar stone. She found his date and place of birth in Spain, parents, and his remarkable erudition with two doctorate degrees, plus his appointment by the king, assignments as bishop in several locales and in the Catholic hierarchy information on his religious career, controversy, and death. Considerably more data was available on his prominence and significant political impact in Central American issues.

This in an era steeped in the intrigue of hard-fought search for independence from the Old World.

Finding each piece of information increased the excitement to learn more history and about altar stones in general. For example, Wikipedia Free states: “The privilege of using a portable altar was not automatically conferred on any priest. Cardinals and bishops normally had such rights under canon law, but other priests had to be given specific permission, which was obtained and used. Before the Second Vatican Council, Mass could only lawfully be celebrated on a properly consecrated altar. This consecration was carried out by a bishop, and involved specially blessed “Gregorian Water,” anointings and ceremonies. The relics of at least two saints, at least one of which had to be a martyr, were inserted in a cavity in the altar which was then sealed, a practice that was meant to recall the use of martyrs’ tombs as places of

Eucharistic celebration during the persecutions

of the Church in the first through third centuries.”

Despite the fascination of each droplet of data, it would have meant many more hours of research without the internet.

The stone’s Oaxacan location, so far from tiny Mesilla, New Mexico, (nearly 1,500 miles) emphasized the long distances traveled by the clergy in their quest to evangelize in partibus infidelium the largely uninhabited regions of the New World, New Spain, Mexico, New Mexico Territory, and finally what was to become the State of New Mexico. These far-reaching quests made it necessary to have altar stones to be used when no church and no altar was available in order to say Mass, especially in the furthest regions. It can be likened to placing a “traveling” or “portable” altar stone on a jeep hood to say Mass, as was done in battlegrounds in more modern times.

This altar stone showing 6 September 1807 dates from the period of time when New Spain was transitioning from Spanish sovereignty and an era of viceroyalty to the incoming reign of Napoleon Bonaparte’s brother Joseph. In the far north, it was the time of the equally arduous explorations of Lewis and Clark. And it was a time when the ties of church and monarchy decidedly intertwined.

San Albino, along with other Southwestern churches of New Spain, were part of the Diocese of Durango, Mexico, which had been in existence since 1620, and where it remained listed even when that region of New Mexico changed into American hands after the Mexican American War 1846-48. Later it was part of the Vicariate Apostolic of New Mexico (Santa Fe) and Vicariate Apostolic of Arizona (later Diocese of Tucson) which included four counties of New Mexico, to Diocese of El Paso, Texas, and finally the present Diocese of Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The sparkle of this important find adds to the historic treasure that is the Basilica of San Albino with its rich spiritual foundation and its charming structure. One mystery yet unsolved is exactly who brought the stone and how the altar stone came to be in a church established some

forty years later in the Durango Diocese rather than the Oaxaca Diocese. One could speculate that it came with a traveling missionary before a church was established.

So, with permission of Bishop Emeritus Ricardo Ramírez, CSB, Pastor Msgr. Robert Getz opened the back of the altar stone, but no clue was found to indicate whose relics have resided firmly attached to the stone for over 200 years. The altar stone remains safely kept at the parish.

Olivia Lerma McDonald is a freelance writer/translator. Her books include: Co-author of *The Heart Of Las Cruces, St. Genevieve’s Church; The Making Of A Basilica; God’s Gift’s Are For Sharing; Saints & Feast Days Of San Albino; Translated Santos Y Dias De Fiestas De San Albino; Haciendome Cargo De Mi Vida (Taking Charge Of My Life)*. Her history article and photographs were included in *Las Cruces Bulletin’s 2012 New Mexico Centennial Book, LAS CRUCES, A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY*.

McDonald is a former member of the National League of American Pen Women (Letters), a professional organization of artists, writers, and composers. She received the Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest Women of Distinction award, (West Texas and New Mexico); and the Doña Ana County Historical Society Heritage Award. She and her husband, Ronald, live in Las Cruces, NM, where they are active in the community.

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Serving Country: The Mechem Brothers of Las Cruces during World War II

By Judith Messal

On a hot day in August of 1941, when the Great Depression had begun receding and the nation could be optimistic again, young couples in southern New Mexico took a day to be carefree and have fun. Their outing was organized by the Twenty-Thirty Anns of Las Cruces, an auxiliary of a civic club for young men.

The Second World War was raging in Europe and Asia, but the United States was not yet in combat. In that wedge of time between economic upturn and global war, the Anns created an itinerary of Mesilla Valley delights to share with the men in their lives: swimming at Radium Springs in the north valley, a picnic and watermelon feast after that, then a night of dancing at El Patio in Mesilla.¹

Edwin and Dorothy Mechem and their sister-in-law, Ruth, were part of the day. One can imagine them driving to their destinations on rural roads, the Rio Grande gleaming in the sun and the fields green with corn and cotton. Beyond the farmland, the desert swept up to the Organs, the Doña Anas, and the Robledos.

In that Mesilla Valley panorama in the summer of 1941, the couples' lives must have seemed remote from the conflicts in the eastern hemisphere, but Edwin Mechem's brothers and others already had left Las Cruces to prepare for war. On May 27, President Franklin Roosevelt had declared a state of "unlimited national emergency" in response to Axis aggression.² For some time, the U.S. had been building military capacity. In the process, it needed soldiers, property, natural resources, and citizen buy-in.

On the day that the *Las Cruces Sun-News* published the story of the Anns' outing, it also featured seven front-page articles pointing to war.³ Germany had made a deadly push into the So-

viet Union. Japan threatened Thailand. The U.S. government sought power to seize property and control prices for national defense. From Santa Fe came news of a defense-bond campaign, and a story about the inescapable draft reminded readers the first peacetime conscription in U.S. history was under way.

Later that month, the *Sun-News* ran a series on military wives, calling them "war widows."⁴ Ruth Mechem, who had attended the Anns' picnic without her spouse, was among them. Four years earlier, she had married a young Army officer from Las Cruces who was rising through the ranks. Family life was uncertain, she said. They moved often with some stays so short that not everything got unpacked. Most recently they had come from Hawaii, but her husband had moved on to Fort Lewis, Washington. In two weeks, after nearly half a year apart, they would reunite in San Francisco.

On December 7, 1941, just months after Ruth Mechem and her daughter arrived on the West Coast, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. More men began leaving Las Cruces, among them Edwin Mechem. He and his brothers were the young generation of a family that had migrated to New Mexico early in the twentieth century and had become prominent public servants. The family held to a strong ethic of civic engagement and duty to country.

This is the story of the Mechem brothers of Las Cruces, each of whom found his way to serve during World War II: **Davenport** as a flight instructor for military pilots, **Jesse** as an Army officer, and **Edwin** as an agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Their service generated pride in their family and community, but toward the end of the war, there would be sorrow, too.

The Mechem Family's Migration To New Mexico, 1903-1910

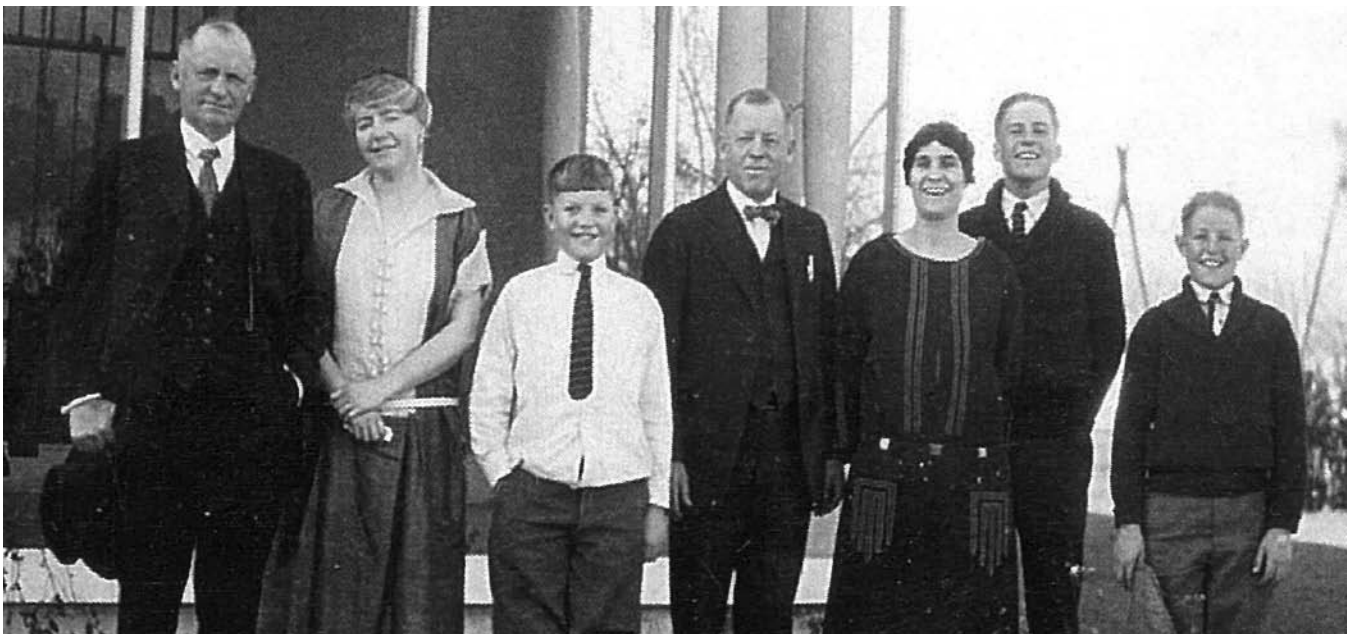
The Mechems were “Quakers from the inception,” according to one descendant.⁵ From their initial settlement in Pennsylvania in the 1700s,⁶ one branch had been migrating west for generations. Along the way, some became Methodists and joined the new Republican Party. The first of the branch to arrive in New Mexico was Merritt C. Mechem of Kansas. In 1903, Mechem, a young lawyer, settled in Tucumcari, seeking a dry climate for his asthma. There, he entered public service. He encouraged his brother Edwin Carlo, also a lawyer, to follow. Thus he helped establish a family in New Mexico whose members would serve in the territorial and state legislatures, state and federal district courts, and a mayoral office. Two Mechems would become governor, serving five terms between them.

It was 1910, near the end of New Mexico's long territorial period, when Edwin Carlo Mechem moved his wife and two sons from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to the new railroad town of

Alamogordo. In 1912, their son Edwin was born, the family's first native New Mexican. In 1918, the senior Mechem was elected as a state district judge to preside in courts as far north as Estancia and far west as Las Cruces. Most cases were in Las Cruces, and with no direct rail line from Alamogordo, getting there meant seven-hour drives on dirt roads across the Tularosa Basin. In 1924, Mechem moved his judicial offices west.⁷

The Mechem Brothers New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, 1926-1937

The Mechems devoted themselves to their new city of Las Cruces, joining St. Paul's Methodist Church and civic groups. After high school, each of the sons headed south of town to the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts. Davenport, known as Sport, enrolled in 1925 to study engineering. He served on the student commission, played football for the Aggies, and lettered. He also held an office in his Alpha Delta Theta Fraternity. Fellow students noted that Sport was “one of the best liked men on campus,” at-



The Mechem family, left to right: Gov. Merritt C. Mechem, Elizabeth O'Heir Mechem, Edwin L. Mechem, Merritt's brother Edwin C. Mechem, Eunice L. Mechem, Davenport Mechem, Jesse Mechem. Source: Side Bar, Newsletter of the District of New Mexico Court Family, U.S. District Court, February 2003, p. 5.

tributing to the handsome young man the good trait of being shy around women.⁸

His great passion, one that would define his life, evolved a result of his A&M military education. An ROTC training opportunity took him to San Antonio, Texas, where he encountered an impressive fleet of Army planes. He knew then that, more than anything else, he wanted to fly.

Davenport Mechem left school after his junior year. In 1929, he trained to be an Army pilot and graduated at Kelly Field in San Antonio in 1930. Out of a class of 135, he was one of 35 to complete the course.⁹

Under President Herbert Hoover, no new pilots were being commissioned;¹⁰ Mechem returned to Las Cruces. Back in college in 1937, he won recognition for his engineering work:

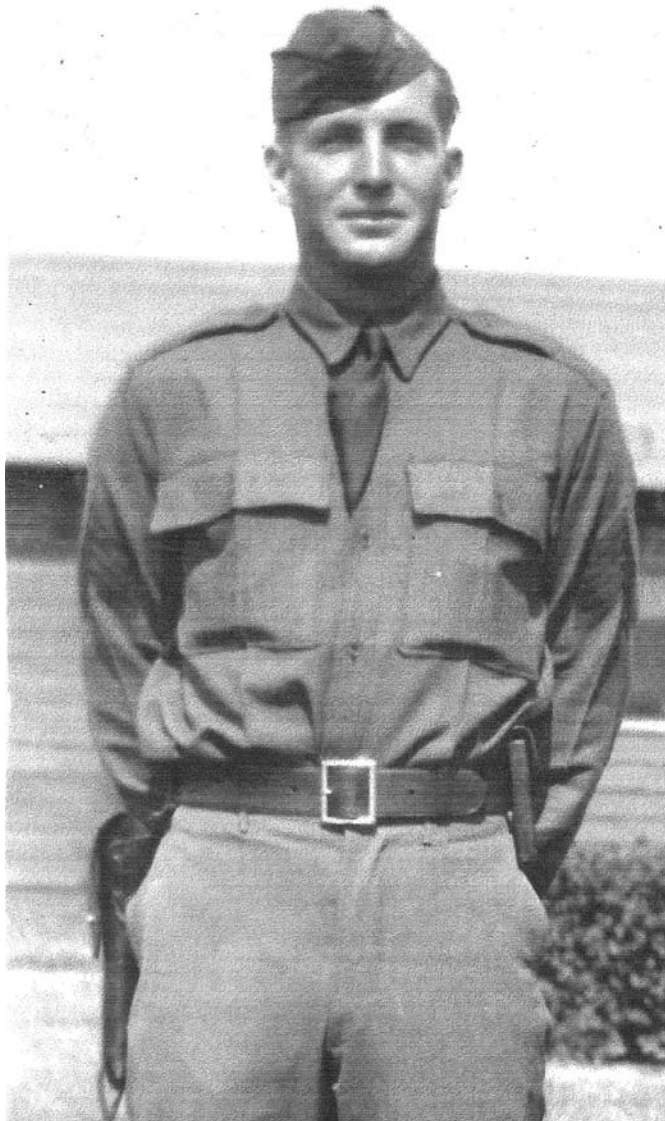
“The Inventor’s dream of building an engine that will run 60 to 75 miles per gallon of cheap distillate may be nearly reached by Davenport Mechem, senior mechanical engineer at New Mexico State College, his professors believe. . . Mechem . . . stated that he has designed an internal combustion turbine which will develop one horsepower per pound of weight. Operated on a Diesel cycle, this engine employs several radically new features. “The motoring and trucking public,” Mechem said,

“may awaken some morning to find that the gasoline combustion type of engine is obsolete. My proposed turbine unit will be a combined engine, transmission, and differential on a new axle. One man could lift the entire unit and could make the change of engines in five hours.”¹¹

Prof. J. F. Clark confirmed his student’s use of sound engineering principles. Davenport was applying for a patent and continuing to work on his model until more pressing matters intervened.

The second Mechem to enter A&M was

Jesse, known as Jay. Salutatorian of his high school class in 1928,¹² Jay was the model child, said his brother Edwin.¹³ While the other two boys were not always doing what they should have been, Jay was, he added. Jay’s mother was among his admirers. Eunice Mechem commented often on her middle son’s dedication to his studies and other good practices.¹⁴ He was good-looking, outgoing, and charming, and at New Mexico A&M, he became student body president¹⁵ and a star athlete. He played both football and basketball for the Aggies, making news with his high scores and winning performances.¹⁶ Academically, he excelled. A member of Phi Mu Tau, a science honor society, Jay majored in history and economics and graduated with



Cadet Captain Davenport Mechem poses at March Field, California in 1929. Photo courtesy of James McIntosh Mechem

honors.¹⁷ In 1934, he was one of two New Mexicans chosen to compete for a Rhodes Scholarship in San Francisco.

In 1930, Edwin L. Mechem became the family's third Aggie. Like Sport, he studied engineering, joined a fraternity, and played football, but, with no firm career plans, he left school after a semester and worked in construction.¹⁸ Then in 1931, he met Dorothy Heller from Colorado Women's College, and he, 19, began to focus differently.



Edwin L. Mechem in his football uniform.
Source: Side Bar, Newsletter of the District of New Mexico Court Family, U.S. District Court, February 2003, p. 6

Dorothy was spending the summer in Las Cruces as the houseguest of her college roommate, Jean Sexton. The elegant new girl in town was honored at several parties, and Edwin Mechem attended one of them. Dorothy, with dark hair and eyes and a sparkling presence, was striking. "I think he fell in love with her instantly," Martha Vigil said of her father.¹⁹ According to Martha's grandfather E.C. Mechem, his young son was floating on air after he met Dorothy.

Dorothy Heller transferred to New Mexico A&M that fall, and Edwin returned to campus. The next year, he became her husband. The couple worked for a time; then Edwin resumed his studies. Finding enjoyment in the liberal arts, he decided on a law career. In 1936, with no law school in state, he transferred to the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville and studied under J. William Fulbright.²⁰

Jesse and Davenport Mechem Preparations for War, 1936-1940

As war loomed for the U.S., the Mechem sons all were in careers and had young families. Edwin Carlo Mechem must have thought of his own situation at a similar stage in life. During the First World War, he, 39, with a houseful of young boys, had pursued a commission in the Army.²¹ Before he left for officers' reserve corps training in Texas, he wrote eloquently to his parents about the duty he felt to help in the struggle. It took precedence over family, yet his family's need for a secure future figured into his decision.²² He was injured in training and gave up hope of a commission, but he had tried. Now, 20 years later, a new generation faced war. One by one, his sons were finding ways to serve.

Jesse Mechem had been the first called into service. The call came early. In 1935, Congress had passed the Thomason Act, authorizing the U.S. Army to call up a thousand junior officers a year for special training. Afterward, 50 would be commissioned as second lieutenants.²³ Jesse Mechem, with his ROTC training at New Mexico A&M, was eligible and interested. Until then, he

had been teaching academic subjects and coaching sports teams in high schools in Las Cruces and Tucumcari. “Mechem stresses clean play, quick thinking, and action. These, and many other reasons, make him a favorite among the students and athletes,” noted the Las Cruces Union High yearbook.²⁴



Portrait of Jesse Mechem taken in Las Cruces. Photo courtesy of Ruth Elizabeth Consul.

In 1936, Jesse Mechem reported to Fort Huachuca in Arizona. In 1937, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant. That year, he married Ruth Burr, pretty and polished. She was in college when they met, the daughter of an Army dental officer.²⁵ She took military life in stride. By 1939, she was an officer’s wife and a new mother living in the Territory of Hawaii, her husband at Schofield Barracks.

Davenport Mechem’s commitment to the defense effort came next. By 1939, he had completed his bachelor’s degree in engineering and was an instructor for a new aviation club at NM A&M.²⁶ He also became a distributor of Standard Oil products in Las Cruces.²⁷ Some years before, he had married an attractive and stylish young woman, Ernestine McIntosh, who had grown up in Mogollon and on a ranch near Las Cruces.²⁸ In 1940, an opportunity arose for Davenport to train military pilots. He, Ernestine, and their young son, James McIntosh, moved to southern California. There Mechem became an instructor in flight schools established by Major Corliss Champion Moseley.

Corliss C. Moseley, a dashing figure in early U.S. military aviation, had flown during World War I in France. Post-war, he honed his technical and flight-school administration skills. Then, in 1924, he left the Army to pursue civilian opportunities. He established Cal-Aero Academy in Ontario and the Polaris Flight Academy in Lancaster, California.

As World War II engulfed Europe, Moseley’s schools began to train British Royal Air Force (RAF) pilots as part of the Roosevelt administration’s Lend-Lease program.²⁹ Soon, the schools began training U.S. Army Air Forces (AAF) cadets as well. It was at Cal-Aero and Polaris that Davenport Mechem used his aviation skills in the training of military pilots.

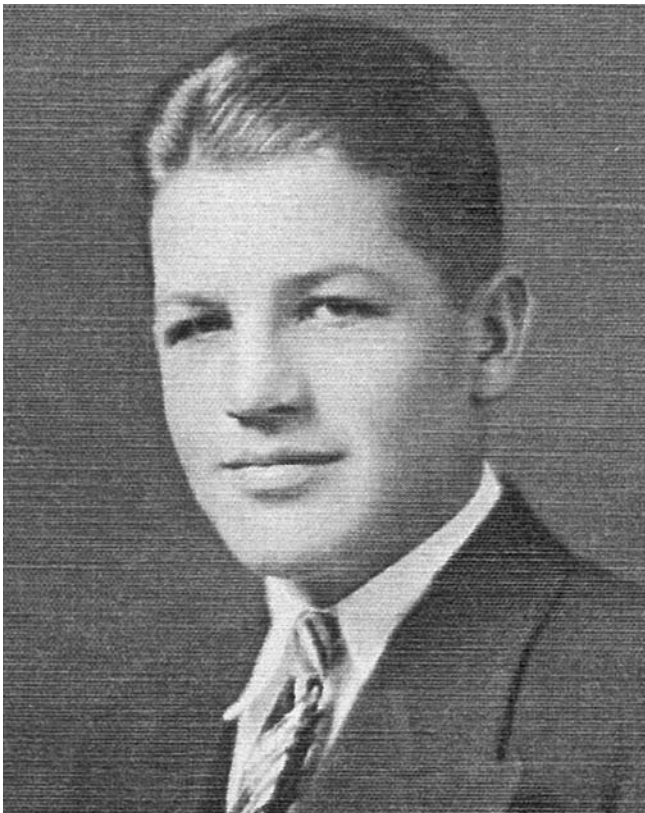
After Pearl Harbor: Edwin L. Mechem And the FBI, 1942-1945

When the U.S. entered the war in 1941, Edwin and Dorothy Mechem had been back in Las Cruces only a short time. They had had their first child, Martha, and son John was on the way. Edwin was barely two years into his law practice and busy with community service, yet he wanted to serve the country in some way also. Early in 1942, he heard Walter Winchell announce on air that the FBI was in need of agents. He drove to El Paso to apply and soon was en route to Washington, D. C. for training.

By summer, Edwin Mechem, with “a badge and a pistol and a set of manuals,” was in Texas.³⁰ “I had a road run,” Mechem said, “. . . from Longview down to Lufkin, up and down the Louisiana line. Piney woods and the oil patch. . . .” Most work was crime-related. However, he operated in the district of Democratic Congressman Martin Dies, Jr., and that entailed special duties.

Dies chaired the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, set up to probe domestic links to international fascism. In his zeal, Dies supported the internment of Japanese Americans, publicly calling them a “Fifth Column” of enemy spies.³¹

Preoccupied with espionage and sabotage, the congressman sent FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover the leads he had received. Many were in Mechem’s district. “We checked a lot of spies in East Texas that Martin Dies uncovered,” Mechem



Edwin Mechem graduation photo. Source: Side Bar, Newsletter of the District of New Mexico Court Family, U.S. District Court, February 2003.

remarked wryly.³² Some leads took him to oil fields to pursue suspects seen photographing derricks, but with no shred of identifying data to go on, Mechem rarely found culprits. Sabotage in iron foundries was another Dies concern; however, Mechem discovered disgruntled and destructive employees more often than he found foreign saboteurs.

Next, the FBI assigned Mechem to Little Rock. Then his third assignment placed him in an altogether different milieu: San Francisco in 1944 and 1945.³³ There he worked on international activities, some covert and others on the world stage.

The covert work came first. The FBI rented a multi-story house across from the Soviet consulate in upscale Pacific Heights, an area built in the late 1800s for the newly rich, whose taste ran to Victorian and Queen Anne architecture. Working nights, Mechem did surveillance on Soviet consular employees and those in contact with them. The U.S.S.R. had not used consular officials in espionage before, he said. The San Francisco operation was new. From his elevated perch, Mechem could look down on the consulate’s courtyard. He appreciated the beauty of his view. From an enclosed veranda, beyond the sparkling lights of the city, he could see the yacht harbor and the Golden Gate Bridge and could even spot naval activity on the Pacific.

Mechem’s colleagues monitored spies using devices on telephones to pick up conversations, even when the phone’s receiver sat in its cradle. When listening agents, with the help of an interpreter, learned critical information, they passed it to Mechem, who did the physical surveillance.³⁴ He had to remember license plate numbers, names, addresses, and telephone numbers without written aids, developing a memory for detail that astonished people throughout his life.

Up and down the coast, knowledge was being transferred to the Soviets. They had an appetite for scientific and technological information. Some of it they came by legitimately when their

U.S. hosts took them on tours of sites where they could stock up on brochures and other aids. "It was a joke that the leading Russian inventor was named 'Reg Usptof,'" Mechem said. It was "the acronym for the U.S. Patent Office."³⁵

Some places were off limits, however. Among them was the cyclotron laboratory at the University of California at Berkeley. There, physicist Ernest O. Lawrence was developing a particle accelerator used in nuclear physics. Avidly interested in Lawrence's research, the Soviets had to find their own access to the lab, and indeed they did, a scientist who was willing to share, Mechem said.

Back in Las Cruces, Edwin C. and Eunice Mechem were busy. Judge Mechem, long retired from the district court, sought another public office. In 1944, he ran for mayor. Sam Klein, the incumbent, was a popular businessman who had held the position for several terms. Having done his duty, he stated that was not interested in running again, but at the last minute, he was drafted.

The *Sun-News* observed that voters could not go wrong with two such high-quality candidates. Mechem won the race by fourteen votes.³⁶ While her husband served at city hall, Eunice Mechem was active in the war effort, joining community leader Carmen Freudenthal to prepare sterile surgical dressings for the military.³⁷

Jesse Mechem and the Battle for Leyte Island in the Philippines, 1944

In 1944, all three Mechem brothers were in California: Davenport at the Polaris Academy, Jesse at the Presidio, and Edwin with the FBI in San Francisco. In July, their parents went to California for a visit. It was an important time for the family given what was to transpire. Later that month, Lt. Colonel Jesse Mechem and his battalion were deployed,³⁸ and Ruth and their daughter returned to the Southwest.

In the summer and fall of 1944, Lt. Col. Jesse Mechem served in the Pacific Theatre, playing a part in General Douglas MacArthur's taking back the Philippines from Japan. Control of

Southeast Asia ensured Japan's movement of oil and other raw materials to its war machine. MacArthur wanted to intervene in that movement and clear a path to Japan itself. Recovering the Philippines was key.

He began on Leyte Island, the center of the archipelago. Historian M. Hamlin Cannon recounted the story.³⁹ The Japanese, who expected the major assault to be on Luzon, had had to regroup and move more troops to the smaller island. Its terrain was difficult, with mountains, swamps, and coarse grass tall enough to hide a man. On October 17, off the east coast of the island, the U.S. launched the largest naval battle of the war. On October 20, American ground troops went ashore to secure the interior.

Major General James L. Bradley planned for the 96th Infantry Division to move inland, securing locations where the Americans could establish air and supply facilities. Beginning on October 21, the 1st and the 3rd Battalions of the 382d Infantry were to fight their way through the Catmon Hill region, a rugged terrain which the Japanese used to conceal fortifications. The goal for the U.S. battalions was Kiling, where they would join the 2nd Battalion.⁴⁰ Lt. Col. Jesse Mechem commanded the 1st Battalion.

After days of hard fighting, Mechem and his battalion had pushed beyond their train of food and water supplies, according to the Associated Press (AP).⁴¹ It had been nearly impossible for supply trucks to keep up on the muddy, rutted tracks. Mechem reported that, as they moved inland, they faced no major organized assaults but many small-scale attacks. The combat was continual, with more Japanese casualties than American ones, according to Mechem's executive officer, Major Joseph R. Lewis. On October 25, when rations and water had run very low, supply trucks finally reached the battalion. The report of supplies getting to Mechem and his troops must have heartened New Mexicans, but the AP story had been delayed for publication until November 10. It would be another 12 days before the state learned of a drastic change that had occurred be-

tween writing the AP report and its release.

On October 27, Lt. Col. Mechem and his troops, along with the 3rd Battalion, entered the small town of Tabontabon en route to Kiling and then moved out to establish night perimeters.⁴² The Japanese attacked the 1st Battalion, losing about a hundred men as the Americans defended their position. The next day, the two U.S. battalions marched together along the road to Digahongan. Encountering heavy fighting two miles out, they attacked, and the Japanese withdrew. That night, the 1st Battalion repelled more attacks. The following day, October 29, the two battalions split up. The 3rd Battalion was ordered to guard a junction of roads and patrol the Digahongan area. The 1st Battalion, on the other hand, was to proceed to Kiling.⁴³ It was the day that the 1st Battalion suffered a great loss.

At 8 a.m. on the 29th, the 1st Battalion moved out toward Kiling. Initially, they encountered some resistance from the Japanese, but at 11:30, the fighting escalated rapidly. The Americans had come upon pillboxes set up on the road. The attack was intense. Soon the enemy artillery had engaged as well. In the assault, the 1st Battalion's commanding officer, Lt. Col. Jesse W. Mechem, received a fatal wound. Aware of his condition, he gave a last order to his battalion: they were not to risk their lives to remove his body.

The order was not obeyed. Major Joseph Lewis took command of the battalion, and after dark, he and a small group of soldiers retrieved the body of their commander.⁴⁴

On the night of the 29th, the Japanese regiment withdrew from the area. Unobstructed, the 1st Battalion moved on to Kiling and joined the 2nd Battalion as planned. For three days, they consolidated what the units of the 96th Division had secured since October 25: Catmon Hill, the inland swamps, and an important road. At Tabontabon, the 96th also had taken a critical supply depot and communications facility.⁴⁵ Lt. Col. Jesse Mechem had been a part of much of the effort. The success was costly. In a little over one week, 13 officers and 132 enlisted soldiers had died. Thirty officers and 534 enlisted had been wounded. Another 90 soldiers, both officers and enlisted men, were missing in action.⁴⁶

Unaware of their loss for many days, Mayor Mechem and his wife had plans to spend Thanksgiving in El Paso with son Jesse's family. The day before the holiday, their world changed. The War Department sent a telegram to the Mechems' home on the morning of November 22.⁴⁷ It was intended for their daughter-in-law. The mayor called Ruth to tell her that her husband had been killed in action. Edwin and Eunice Mechem left for El Paso, and at city hall, the flag was lowered to half mast.



Lt. Col. Jesse Mechem (front and center) with First Battalion, 382nd Infantry Regiment at Fort Lewis, Washington before deployment to the Philippines. Photo courtesy of James MacIntosh Mechem

The people of Las Cruces joined the Mechems in their sorrow. Jesse Mechem, 34 years old, outstanding student, star athlete, teacher and coach, had been a highly-regarded member of the community. One way people found to respond to his death was to support the war effort. Doña Ana County was in the midst of a campaign to sell bonds to help finance U.S. participation in the war. The county was nearly \$300,000 short of its goal for its week-long campaign.⁴⁸ With the Thanksgiving holiday coming up, the organizers had tried to raise the money in three days and were concerned.

Then came the news that the mayor's son had been killed on Leyte Island in the Philippines. Bond salesmen redoubled their efforts [and] spread the news verbally. . . . [W]hen the Sun-News hit the streets early in the afternoon, carrying a streamer story of Col. Mechem's death, bond buyers began to come in voluntarily—either to make new purchases or increase earlier orders.⁴⁹

By 6 p.m., the campaign not only had met its goal of \$610,800; it had exceeded it by over \$4,500.

On Thanksgiving Day, the day after they learned of their son's death, the mayor and his wife received another telegram, a joyful one. Edwin Mechem in San Francisco wired them that Dorothy had just given birth to twins. Eunice Mechem, contacted by the press, spoke of her new grandsons. Her son had not given their names, she said, but she added, "I almost know what they will name one of them."⁵⁰ She also spoke of a new granddaughter, recently born to Davenport and his wife in southern California. In the midst of her grief over the death of Jesse, Eunice Mechem celebrated the new life in her family.

Edwin L. Mechem and The United Nations Conference on International Organization, 1945

In 1945, as fighting in the European and Pacific theatres continued, a U.S. government official, Alger Hiss,⁴¹ arrived in San Francisco.

Mechem was very aware of Hiss. The man who would be at the center of an engrossing espionage story in the late 1940s had, up until then, a shining record.⁵¹ A State Department officer, Hiss had graduated from Harvard Law School and clerked for Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. When he joined the Roosevelt administration, he worked on founding the United Nations.

It was on UN business that Hiss came to San Francisco in 1945. A shadow followed him, however. In 1939, Whittaker Chambers, formerly of the U.S. Communist Party, had attempted to out Hiss as a fellow party member. He talked to Assistant Secretary of State Adolph Berle. Unsure of Chambers' assertion, Berle, nevertheless, passed it on to President Roosevelt, who dismissed it, and to the FBI, who did not. Soon after Chambers had made his revelation, both the French intelligence service and a Soviet defector pointed to Hiss as a possible spy. The FBI began to watch Hiss.⁵²

When Hiss came to San Francisco, he checked on the FBI's telephone taps and other devices, requesting that some equipment be removed. Not all had been explicitly approved by the attorney general's office, a laborious process in a time when the Soviet pursuit of nuclear technology was intense.

"Before Hiss arrived, we had complete coverage of the Russian consulate, Communist party headquarters and other areas," Mechem said.⁵³ The FBI agents did step back, but continued to report on what they could. Their fear was that their intelligence was not heeded by the White House. "We remained faithful to our duty," Mechem stated, "but it was a bad time."⁵⁴

On April 25, 1945, the United Nations Conference on International Organization opened in San Francisco for two months of work on the establishment of a permanent body.⁵⁵ Delegations from 50 countries came. President Roosevelt, who was to open the conference, died just two weeks before, but the event started on schedule. The official conveners, known as the Powerful Four, sent their foreign secretaries, men in their forties or fif-

ties who were at the top of their diplomatic game. They were Edward Stettinius of the United States, Vyacheslav Molotov of the Soviet Union, Anthony Eden of the United Kingdom, and T.V. Soong of the Republic of China. Alger Hiss served as secretary-general.

Edwin L. Mechem was assigned to protect one of the Powerful Four officials, U.S. Secretary of State Edward Stettinius.⁵⁶ Stettinius, 45, was impressive-looking, with white hair setting off his blue eyes under dark brows. He had an extraordinary career.⁵⁷

Born in Chicago in 1900 to a wealthy family, he became a vice president of General Motors at 31. Throughout a decade, he alternated between public service in the Roosevelt Administration and private industrial pursuits. He chaired the War Resources Board and took other posts, including director of the Lend-Lease aid program. Rapidly advancing, he became undersecretary of state and then secretary in December 1944 after Cordell Hull became too ill to serve.

In 1944, Stettinius chaired the Dumbarton Oaks Conference to sketch out the future United Nations, and in 1945, two months before arriving in San Francisco, he had accompanied President Roosevelt to Yalta to meet with the Soviet Union Premier Joseph Stalin and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. At the UN Conference, Stettinius seemed to Mechem to be only a figurehead, one who looked “pretty with his good head of white hair.”⁵⁸ Alger Hiss and Vyacheslav Molotov, he thought, appeared to be running the conference.

That spring, 3,500 delegates, staff, and advisors helped create the United Nations.⁵⁹ More than 2,000 others came as journalists and observers. Four commissions developed parts of the UN charter. Committees held nearly four hundred meetings to determine how to relate to regional organizations, such as the Arab League, how to define the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, and much more. Edwin L. Mechem was witness to one of the great international events of the time.

Mayor and Mrs. Mechem and The End of the War, 1945.

Soon after the UN Conference began its work in San Francisco, the war in one theatre ended. On May 7, 1945, victory in Europe was declared. In Las Cruces, three thousand school children marched, and four thousand Las Cruces gathered at Pioneer Park,⁶⁰ a square of shaded green in a quiet neighborhood. Mayor Edwin C. Mechem presided, one among many bereaved. Ninety-eight individuals from Doña Ana County who had served in the war would not come home.⁶¹

The gathering was solemn. “A grave, thoughtful, and thankful Las Cruces officially marked V-E day . . .,” wrote a reporter.⁶² After prayer and the pledge of allegiance, Union High band’s played “America.” Then the somber notes of “Taps” sounded through the park on that spring morning. World War I veteran and attorney E. L. Holt spoke: “It is not fitting to say we are celebrating victory in Europe, rather that we are thankful that that terrible period starting with our sending of troops to fight overseas is now over. We are grateful and never fully can repay our armed forces who made this day possible.” He spoke of the elements that led to war, calling for an organization with the power to prevent conflicts between nations from escalating. That night, the First Presbyterian Church held an ecumenical service.

Shortly before V-E Day, Alice Wilbur of the *Las Cruces Sun-News* had interviewed the mayor’s wife.⁶³ Eunice Mechem spoke of her son who had been killed in action. His widow had received a scroll from the 1st Battalion of the 382nd Infantry honoring Lt. Colonel Jesse Mechem, she said. In it, the men had expressed their sorrow at the loss of their commanding officer and described a battle they fought near the site of his death. There they found a ridge fortified by the enemy. Under fire, they made a sign that said Mechem Ridge and planted it on the crest. Its image was on the scroll.

Eunice Mechem mentioned again her new

twin grandsons, one named Walter for Dorothy Mechem's father and the other Jesse for Edwin's brother. Then, she commended the women of the country for their strength and work: keeping up morale, managing home and family, selling bonds, making surgical dressings, and conserving scrap. She saw more work ahead as women helped returning soldiers adjust to civilian life. She declined to be photographed that day, but Wilbur described her: "[S]he is dark-haired, youthful-looking, composed and patient. . ." in a manner befitting a first lady.⁶⁴

The terrible consequences of war continued to touch the community. Millions had died; millions more now were displaced. In a personally poignant act, Mayor Edwin C. Mechem proclaimed May 30, 1945 as Memorial Day, ". . . a day sacred to the memory of those who have given their all for us."⁶⁵ On May 31, Carmen Freudenthal thanked those who had helped with a United Nations clothing drive for relief areas in the world. She had supervised prisoners of war in a facility near town as they packed a hundred cases of clothing to ship. Locals also had helped: cleaning, patching, folding, boxing. Among those she acknowledged was Eunice Mechem.⁶⁶

After the War

The three Mechem brothers who had left Las Cruces in the 1930s and '40s to serve in the war effort now were two. Davenport Mechem remained on the West Coast, working for Boeing Aircraft Company and North American Aviation. Eventually, he established a crop dusting business in central California and flew professionally until the age of 70.⁶⁷ He lived to be 91.

Perhaps from time to time, he thought about the cutting-edge engine that he had begun developing in Las Cruces in 1937. On the other side of the world, two decades after Mechem started his design, a rotary engine, similar in concept to his, was ready for testing. The German engineer Felix Wankel had been working on it for years.⁶⁸ Davenport Mechem's career path had diverged from engine development to the training

of more than 500 military pilots during a critical time in history. It is a considerable legacy.

Edwin Mechem, after the UN conference, did his final FBI work in Laredo, Texas. In late 1945, he returned to Las Cruces. He entered public office and served as a reforming governor in the 1950s and early '60s. The handsome young man was a refreshing presence in state politics, dignified, personable, and strictly honest. He came to be known for good governance.

In 1970, he was appointed to the United States District Court of the District of New Mexico where he served until his death in 2002 at age 90. His deep knowledge and love of his state were legendary, and his splendid ability to remember, by name, the many people he met over nearly a century surprised and delighted New Mexicans.⁶⁹

The potential gifts of Jesse Mechem were lost to his community and his family, but he continued to inspire people by the way had lived his 34 years. After his death, his young widow, Ruth Mechem, received her husband's Silver Star at a ceremony at Fort Bliss Army Post.⁷⁰ The medal came with a citation describing Mechem's leadership and direct action to aid his troops under intense enemy fire.

Ruth Elizabeth Consul was six when her father died. She had had little time with him; he had been away in training and on maneuvers much of her young life. A strong memory remains, however. When he was in the room, she said, people were happy.⁷¹

Jesse Mechem's life was memorialized at his alma mater, now New Mexico State University (NMSU). A building in the Alumni Avenue Residence Center was named for him and dedicated in 1961.⁷² The honor was based on his academic and athletic achievements and his service to his country. He is included in the NMSU Athletics/U.S. Bank Hall of Fame and is named as a student-athlete who excelled in two sports.⁷³ For NMSU students from the southwestern part of the state, the Lt. Col. Jesse Mechem Memorial Scholarship exists to help with educational expenses.⁷⁴

The story of the three Mechem brothers circles back to their elders who settled in New Mexico before it was a state. Merritt C. Mechem took the family's first steps into public office, serving in all three branches of government and preceding his nephew in the governorship by 30 years.

Edwin C. and Eunice Mechem had an adventurous spirit in 1910 to move with a two-year-old son and a newborn to a territory far from home. They embraced their new cities of Alamogordo and Las Cruces, and the newspapers of their time preserve stories of the many ways that they engaged with their fellow citizens: professionally, politically, religiously, educationally, socially, and in community service. In the New Mexico that their elders helped build, the three Mechem brothers grew up and learned to serve.

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Transcending History: An Interpretive Study of Mexico's Corrido (1974 – present)

By Jorge A. Hernández

The purpose of this interpretive study is to analyze the long-standing tradition of the famous Mexican *corrido* in the contemporary era (1974 to present). The *corrido* is a traditional narrative ballad of Mexico. Although the *corrido* found its birth during the Mexican Revolution,¹ for our purpose, the Mexican Revolution holds historical value, but it will not be the main corpus of this analysis. The framework of this analysis seeks to interpret the literature and narrative created by the *corrido*. As a chronological medium of Mexican history and culture, the *corrido* creates a manifestation of Mexican identities throughout time. At the same time, the *corrido* becomes a form of expression, with explicit and subjective agendas. The *corrido* creates a national narrative, a national identity, and subsequent identities indicative of specific regions within Mexico's vast landscape. Due to the interpretative nature of this analysis, the concern for this study will revolve around well-known contemporary *corridos* and narco-*corridos* written by *Los Tigres del Norte*.

Starting in the early 1970s and till present day, *Los Tigres del Norte* have embedded themselves as an institution in the composition of the *corrido*. While there are many newcomers to the *corrido* genre as it rises in popularity, it is *Los Tigres del Norte* who have transcended time with their compositions. As part of the oral literature, the *corrido* and its sub-genres represent much more than just simple ballads. As a musical genre, the *corrido* has helped to create and immortalize Mexico's historical and cultural narrative. In order to fully assess the historical and cultural value of the *corrido*, the primary objectives for this study are: firstly to contextualize the creation and early beginnings of the *corrido*, secondly to thematically analyze selected *corridos*, thirdly to contextualize the historical and cultural relevance, and fourthly to assess the importance of, arguably, Mexico's most important musical genre.

In recent memory, due to political, social and economic reasons, Mexico's narrative has become quite an alarming dilemma for both Mexico and the United States. Although *corridos* are indicative of Mexico, they transcend regions and are a transnational genre embraced by both sides of the border. For this reason, the great Mexican American folklorist, teacher, writer, and poet, Americo Paredes has stated, "Every Mexican knows that there are in fact two Mexico(s), just as he knows that there being two is not a purely metaphysical concept, although it has transcendental implications."² For Americo Paredes, there is a "real" Mexico as he describes it — the territory physically occupied by a nation, and there is the other Mexico — the one known to Mexicans as "Mexico de afuera" (Mexico of the outside), which is made up of Mexicans living throughout the United States. Within this analysis, when we refer to Mexico, the meaning will conjure the idea of Mexicans living on both sides of the border.

(El Otro México, 1994)³

El otro México
que aquí hemos construido
en este suelo que ha sido
territorio nacional
es el esfuerzo
de todos nuestros hermanos
y latinoamericanos
que han sabido progresar

The “other” Mexico
Which we have built
On this ground
That has been national territory
It is the effort
of all of our brother
and brothers from Latin-America
That have learned how to progress

To understand and comprehend the history behind the *corrido*, it is necessary to reference insurgent Mexico. The Mexican Revolution is the great inescapable truth of Mexico’s history. The Mexican Revolution was a national revolution.⁴ One of the most important causes was the tremendous disagreement among Mexican people over the dictatorship of President Porfirio Diaz (ca. 1876-1910).⁵ Porfirio Diaz’ dictatorship (Porfiriato) lasted well over three decades. During these decades of rule, power was concentrated in the hands of a select few. Ordinary people had no freedom of speech, nor were they able to select their public officials. Wealth, similarly, was concentrated into the hands of a select few and injustice covered the land, in the cities and countryside alike. The widespread loss of land, due to foreign investment, created an economic crisis across Mexico, where desperation led the people to undertake the seemingly impregnable Porfiriato. Regional agrarian movements spearheaded the overthrow of the dictatorship in 1911. This improbable rise against injustice created the historical event known as the Mexican Revolution.

Although the Mexican Revolution proved unsuccessful, modern-day Mexico and Mexicans from all walks of life live in the fragmented effects of a dead revolution. The legacy which was left behind by the Mexican Revolution is seen in the ideals that were bestowed upon Mexican society. The revolutionary ideals require the remembrance of the goals for which Mexicans struggled in the last century. The revolutionaries fought for democracy, for equality and justice, for education, for knowledge and culture, for a just and generous nation, for shared progress, and for fair and equitable order. The socio-political and economic situation present in modern-day Mexico comes from the remnants of an event that happened well over one-hundred years ago. Because of a failed revolution, Mexico has found itself once again in insurgency. One hundred years ago, it was the government which had a political grip. Now it is the government who seems powerless at the hands of narcos and the drug war. To understand Mexico’s present situation, we must look no further than *corridos*: they are the dialogue of Mexico’s past and present. To access the deep significance of *corridos* within Mexican history, it necessary to create scholarship on the subject.

For historians, history has always been a dialogue between the past and the present. The same idea holds true for the history of the *corrido*. The *corrido* is a traditional narrative ballad of Mexico. Deriving from older Spanish song-forms, the *corrido* does not fully incorporate itself into Mexican society until the late nineteenth century.⁶ It is during the early twentieth century that *corridos* begin to incorporate

themselves into Mexican society and culture. During the early 1900s, the *corrido* was used as a form of news media, through oral and written mediums the *corrido* quickly became the most popular form of disseminating information.

One *corrido* that is representative of this is “La Cucaracha” (The Cockroach). While highly comical due to the nature of the theme, the *corrido* possesses multiple underlying messages about the political oppression and exploits of the Porfirian regime.⁷ With satire this *corrido* becomes a form of popular expression and through a hidden agenda, the *corrido* undermines the political corruption and injustices of the time.

The thematic agenda of the *corrido* during this early time did not limit itself to creating a narrative of political oppressions, injustices, and inequities. The *corrido* was also used as a means of cultural expression and critique. With its romantic and robust lyrics, the *corrido* of “La Adelita” (The Camp Follower) documents the role of women in the Mexican Revolution.⁸ “La Adelita” helps illustrate the strength of female soldiers during revolutionary times. This *corrido* helps to illustrate the archetype of a warrior woman and a symbol of action and inspiration. *Corridos* are much more than ballads; they became a way of broadcasting information throughout the populous. Using *cancioneros* (broadsides), *corridos* which were printed gave the literate access to information they otherwise would not be able to attain due to the censorship of the government. Consequently, through the use of oral tradition, *corridos* were able to transmit information to those individuals who could not read or write. Colloquially speaking, by word of mouth *corridos* become an informative agent.

Creating a concrete and precise definition of the Mexican *corrido* is a matter of perspective and definitions. The primary scholarship on the subject can be found in the contrasting definitions of two important scholars: Americo Paredes and Merle E Simmons.⁹ While many scholars, including Americo Paredes, consider the *corrido* to be Mexico's traditional narrative ballad, it is Simmons who contests the idea of the *corrido* being an indicative genre of Mexico.¹⁰ Simmons argument boils down to two ideas: one, the *corrido* is not a highly original genre and, two, *corrido*-like songs have existed throughout certain parts of Latin America.¹¹

While Simmons' ideas may seem counterintuitive, he does affirm the need for more scholarship on the subject: this is something that both Simmons and Paredes come to a consensus. Tangled between the theoretical definitions of the two prominent scholars, more scholarship needs to be done to find a concrete definition.¹² Due to the fragmentation of primary historical evidence, both scholars have a particular point of view of the historical context of *corridos*. Like history, *corridos* are a matter of perspective and definitions. Regardless of what image and text may follow, the primacy of this analysis is to answer the following question “What is a *corrido*?” To find a true and genuine definition for the *corrido*, it is necessary to access the possibility of the definition superseding anything found within a glossary.¹³ For this reason, *corrido* scholars José Pablo Villalobos and Juan Carlos Ramirez-Pimienta define the *corrido* as a form of truth: the *corrido* is “immediately characterized as something that is

a part of real people and which appropriately speaks the pure truth,” *la pura verdad*.¹⁴ The definition provided by these two scholars, of course, can be easily contested with a comparative analysis between what a *corrido* preserves as a form of collective memory and what a *corrido* preserves in factual evidence (that can become flawed) in official histories. However, by leaving aside the academic approach that may remain tangled within intellectual circles, it is the popular definition that interests us the most because it is one that prevails. As an extension of *la voz del pueblo* (the voice of the people) the definition of the *corrido* is one which itself promotes.

To understand the *corrido* at its essential and fundamental level, it is necessary to understand the idea of the *corrido* as a complete genre in which the *corrido* manifests itself in different perspectives and definitions to everyone. This analysis is not a concrete representation of the individual perspective of every Mexican, but rather, an analysis of different perspectives of the *corrido*. The perspective of the *corrido* changes over time, from decade to decade, as the construction of the musical genre produces different perspectives of culture and society. For this reason, *corrido* scholar John H. McDowell develops the notion that *corridos* are not continuous in perspective and purpose:

A continuous line of descent does not imply that at all times, in all place, the tradition was active. Americo Paredes distinguishes between traditional ballads and a ballad tradition. The former are “survivals of a moribund tradition tentatively evolving into something else.” A ballad tradition consists of “crystallization of those survivals at one particular time and place into a whole ballad corpus, which by its very weight impresses itself on the consciousness of the people.”¹⁵

The function and formula of the *corrido* varies within its design.¹⁶ Themes enable the *corridista* (the composer of the *corrido*) to expand and develop the nucleic ideas of the *corrido*. The oral-formulaic method of *corrido* construction can be considered as poetry of epic proportions. The importance of improvisation and memorization are affected by the length of the *corrido*. For this reason, the role of improvisation more likely reflects re-creation due to limits of practical memorization and by the stanzaic poetry composed within the *corrido*.

The popularity of the *corrido* has waxed and waned with the change of time, but the *corrido* would surge again during the 1970s, headlined by *Contrabando y Traicion* (Smuggling and Betrayal).

(*Contrabando y Traicion*, 1984*)¹⁷

*Salieron de San Isidrio
Procedientes de Tijuana
Traian las llantas del carro
Repleta de yerba mala
Eran Emilio Barela
Y Camelia la tejana*

They left from San Isidrio
coming from Tijuana
They had their tires filled with
(marijuana)
They were Emilio Barrera and
Camelia the Texas

Los Tigres del Norte are widely credited for ushering in this new form of musical genre. Termed *narco-corridos*, these ballads recount treachery, high emotion, and violence surrounding the drug trade. While as highly controversial as the drug trade itself, *narco-corridos* integrate themselves into Mexican culture in both Mexico and the United States. While many condemn the genre, the themes found within *narco-corridos* are far from new. Tracing the themes of smuggling and banditry from the revolutionary era to modern-day, we can see that both *corridos* and *narco-corridos* attempt to reconcile the complex and often contradictory elements of life. Both types of *corridos* represent the true and genuine continuation of a living ballad and history.

(*Jefe de Jefes*, 1997)¹⁸

A mí me gustan los *corridos*
 porque son los hechos reales de nuestro pueblo
 Si, a mí también me gustan
 porque en ellos se canta la pura verdad
 ¡Pues, ponlos pues!
 ¡Órale hay va!

I like *corridos*
 because they are the real deeds of our people
 Yeah, I also like them too
 because they sing the pure truth
 So put them on
 Ok. Here goes...

As a true testament of the continuation of the *corrido* tradition, *Los Tigres del Norte* have created a rhetoric which addresses injustices, inequities, political corruption, and immigration issues from the early 1970s to present day. While addressing these issues, *Los Tigres del Norte* have played a major role in the composition and popularity of today's contemporary *corrido*. While there is a plethora of contemporary *corrido* artists, it is *Los Tigres del Norte* who have created a lasting effect within Mexican and Mexican-American culture.

Like *corridos*, Mexican and Mexican-American cultures manifest themselves as a beautiful and diverse mosaic of perspectives, experiences and histories. While interpretation may change positioning, it is necessary to understand the cultural diversities that exist within Mexican and Mexican-American culture. To discuss culture, it is necessary that we address cultural theory. According to Samuel Ramos, one of Mexico's most important cultural theorists, the profile of Mexican culture is defined by an organic society and by man, as a product of a peculiar history.

*Si tiene o se tendrá la cultura que determine la vocación de la raza, la fatalidad histórica. Nosotros trataremos de definir el perfil de la cultura que puede en México dada una cierta constitución orgánica de la sociedad y del hombre, producto de una historia peculiar.*¹⁹

If you have or will have a culture that determines the vocation of the race, meaning historical fatality. We will try to define the profile of the culture in Mexico with a certain organic constitution of society and man, a product of a peculiar history.

Like culture, *corridos* have also been a product of a peculiar history.²⁰ The *corrido* is uniquely important, highly distinctive, and highly creative in manifestation of Mexican and Mexican-American culture. For this reason, the different understandings and perspectives created by the *corrido* are shaped by culture. According to Renato Rosaldo, an American cultural anthropologist, our understanding is not

only conditioned by our experiences but by our own culture.²¹ Mexico needs a future in which Mexican culture — not the one we know as different from others, but rather the universal culture — that will enable us to live and express ourselves and our souls.²²

With great lyrical force, the *corrido* demands that the marginalized subject, whose struggles are not a part of the historic fabric of the national identity, have a narrative worthy of being represented.²³ From a historical perspective, understanding the current situation in Mexico can lead one to make assertions about who the Mexican is or who he/she attempts to be.²⁴ However, the historical perspective is inadequate in reconciling the persona of the drug trafficker, and the daily realities of poverty, injustice and political uncertainty.

The daily reality of both Mexican and Mexican-Americans is one which is mirrored in the *corridos* composed by *Los Tigres del Norte*. Regularly addressing the theme of immigration, *Los Tigres del Norte* have created an interesting and powerful border rhetoric between Mexico and the United States. While this theme may conjure opposing perspectives, it is important to keep in mind that these *corridos* come from a perspective of both political and economic oppressions. Not only do *corridos*, in this context, extend themselves from an oppressive standpoint, but also from a standpoint of being discriminated against due to one's nationality or immigration status. The *corridos* within these themes seek to empower those individuals who deem themselves powerless. While addressing the issues, the *corridos* expose the reality of many Mexican and Mexican-American individuals and families who are divided by a physical and metaphysical border. The following *corridos* illustrate the issues within the context of their lyrics; using an interpretive approach, the lyrics within these *corridos* will be unraveled.

(*De Paisano A Paisano*, 2000)²⁵

Muchas veces ni nos pagan, para que
sale la llaga como sale envenenada
nos hechan la inmigración, si con mi
canto pudiera derrumbaria las fronteras
para que el mundo viviera con una
sola bandera en una misma nacion

De paisano a paisano del hermano
al hermano por querer trabajar, nos
han hecho la guerra patrullando
fronteras, no nos pueden domar.

Many times “they” dont even pay us
Just like a poisoned sore
They throw immigration at us, if I could,
with my voice I would destroy the borders
so that the whole world could live
with one flag under the same nation

From countryman to countryman, from
brother to brother: for wanting to work
they cause our struggle by patrolling
borders, they cannot tame us

With a humanistic perspective, *De Paisano a Paisano* (From Countryman to Countryman) helps illustrate the inequities suffered by many undocumented individuals who try to make an honest living in the United States. Rather than retaliating against the oppressor, the *corrido* empowers the listener by letting (him/her) know that (he/she) is not alone in this situation. Rather than acting as an individual, they must act as a whole to create equity and justice.

(*La Tumba Del Mojado*, 1994)²⁶

Las rosas de Mexicali,
y la sangre en el Río Bravo,
Son dos cosas diferentes,
pero en color son hermanos
Y la línea, divisoria,
es la tumba del mojado

The roses of Mexicali
and the blood in the Rio Bravo
are two different
yet equal things.
And the dividing line
is the immigrant's tomb

While the semantics and lexicon of words vary from language to language, *La Tumba del Mojado* helps illustrate the concept of the physical and metaphysical border between Mexico and the United States. This *corrido* illustrates the bright and vivid red roses which are produced in the city of Mexicali, Baja California, in contrast — in figurative language — to the red and flowing water of the Rio Bravo, which is also known as the Rio Grande in the United States. The waters which flow from the river are treacherous. This is a fact all well too known by the immigrants who try to cross them. For this reason, the division line, the river between the United States and Mexico, becomes a death trap for those who try to cross it.

(*Somos Más Americanos*, 2001)²⁷

Ya me gritaron mil veces
que me regrese a mi tierra
Porque aquí no quepo yo
Quiero recordarle al gringo:
Yo no crucé la frontera, la frontera me cruzó.
América nació libre, el hombre la dividió.

I have been screamed at a thousand times
to return to my homeland: I don't fit here
I want to remind the gringo:
I did not cross the border, the border
crossed me.
America was born free, men divided it.

With a great lyrical force, *Somos Más Americanos*, makes an important historical argument within the lines of border rhetoric. Following history, *Los Tigres del Norte* seek to expose the history that many have left behind. America was born free and it was men who divided it. Prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, Mexicans lived on both sides of the modern border. With the treaty in place, many Mexicans found themselves in peril and were forced to choose between lands.²⁸ The argument explicitly states that Mexicans are not foreigners when crossing into the political boundary and territory of the United States, but rather it is a land which they call home. The same sentiment exists for Mexican-American who cross into Mexico as both sides of the border conjure the feeling of being at home.

(*América*, 1989)²⁹

Si el que nace en Europa es Europeo
y el que nace en el Africa Africano
yo que he nacido en America y no veo
por que no he de ser Americano

If you are born in Europe you are European
and if you are born in Africa you are African
I was born in America and I do not find the
reason why I cannot be American

Porque America es todo el continente
y el que nace aquí es Americano
el color podra ser diferente
mas como hijos de dios somos hermanos

Because, America is the whole continent
and who is born here is American
our color may be different
but as children of God we are all brothers

With strong yet thoughtful words, *Los Tigres del Norte* make a very interesting argument surround the significance of the word “America.” While the word “America” may conjure the thought of the United States, within this *corrido*, when the word “America” is used, it is not used as a reference towards the United States. Instead, “America” is used to describe the two continents, North and South. America is the cohesion between people. While the argument of political correctness may arise, it is necessary to keep in mind that *corridos* are composed by perspective. While differences may exist, respectively, from country to country, it is the differences which unite us. Like *corridos*, America is a product of a peculiar history. Our history: as countrymen and as individuals, is like a beautiful mosaic of peculiar histories. America is a beautiful and diverse mosaic of perspectives, experiences and histories.

As presented within this study, *corridos* transcend the idea of being much more than just simple ballads. As an informative agent during the Mexican Revolution, the *corrido* disseminated information through the populous, for both the literate class and those who could not read or write. The *corrido* helped undermine political injustices and inequities produced by the Porfirian regime. The legacy created by the *corrido* during this period requires the remembrance of the goals for which Mexicans struggled in the last century. *Corridos* require the acknowledgement of being Mexico’s most important genre because they stem from Mexico’s most important historical event.

While scholars contest the origins and definition of the *corrido*, it is important to note that the *corridos* definition is not one that is defined by academic means. The definition of the *corrido* lies within *la voz del pueblo* (the voice of the people). A *corrido* seeks to promote *la voz del pueblo* to expose the reality and situations experienced by people. Today Mexico finds itself in a situation in which it has been in in the past century: inequity, injustices, and political corruption are the situational trends. With Mexico finding itself once again in insurgency, the *corrido* as a transnational genre seeks to expose the truth about Mexico and the borderlands.

The realities of both Mexican and Mexican-American cultures are illustrated within the lyrics of the *corridos*. For Mexicans on both sides, *corridos* illustrate the reality of being separated by a physical and meta-physical border. When being discriminated against because of one’s nationality or immigration status, *corridos* help the individual by instilling the message that he/she is not alone in this situation. The *corrido* seeks to empower the individual who deems him/herself powerless. *Corridos* help us understand that each and every perspective matters and should be given consideration. Just as historians interpret historical documents, *corridos* interpret the reality of people.

The purpose of this study was to explore the chronology of the Mexican *corrido* to not only understand it fully but to also better understand the historical and cultural significance which it holds for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans alike. From a historical perspective, the *corrido* has created an interesting dialogue between Mexico’s past and present. While addressing the historical situations, the *corrido* has created a narrative which demands attention. Over time, the *corrido* has evolved from an informative agent to one which not only is informative, but one which seeks to expose the reality of both

sides of the border. The border rhetoric which the *corrido* develops helps us understand that the *corrido* is much more than a ballad; the *corrido* holds the truth of Mexico's past, present, and eventual future. For this reason, the *corrido* is a transcendental medium which enables us to understand the different historical and cultural perspectives of Mexico and beyond.

Our understanding is not only conditioned by our experiences but by our own culture.³⁰ For this reason, *corridos* are a matter of perspectives and definitions. Although the *corrido* has a symbiotic relationship with Mexican and Mexican-American cultures, it does not hold the same sentiment for each Mexican and Mexican-American. The cultures of both Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are intertwined, but the historical significance of the *corridos* themselves does not usually overlap

Translation or interpretation of the *corrido* is important because coming from a Mexican culture, *corridos* are a part of who you are and part of your upbringing. The *corrido* addresses historical events that pertain to Mexico. However, the interpretation of the *corrido* is unique to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. It provides access to the past of not only their country, but also their ancestors, and their individual selves. On a larger scale, the *corrido* forms a collective memory of Mexico's past. However, the *corrido* has its own perspective and definition coming from another person who has no prior knowledge of the history and how the *corrido* is sacred to Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.

For many Americans, the *corrido* holds no historical significance because American *corrido*-like songs are not a common practice in American history and music. So, not only are *corridos* part of the preservation of Mexican culture, but they are the continuation of Mexican culture. The *corridos* are composed of a corpus of a living ballad and of the living history of people. The *corrido* sends a message to people about how they feel, the current-day situation, and it seeks to fill the gaps where the truth has not been covered. *Corridos* are important on a larger context because they are a way for common people to express themselves, just as poems express situations and feelings. It takes a critical analysis to fully comprehend the truth within the lines of a *corrido*. In a larger context, the *corrido* serves to provide Mexican and Mexican Americans with a sense of cultural identity and pride. The lyrics in the *corrido* detail the past cultural and historical events for those who don't share the same cultural identity as Mexican and Mexican-Americans.

This study contributes to the foundation of scholarship and further research on the subject. While many scholars battle between terms and definitions, it is safe to say that *corrido* scholars would agree on the need for further scholarship. The foundation of this study establishes further groundwork to analyze the *corrido* tradition within Mexico and the United States; the next step towards research would be the study of the *narco-corrido* within both sides of the border and its importance among both countries and cultures.

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With his degree, Jorge hopes to combine the fields of history and literature to bring a greater understanding of the borderlands (la frontera) along with its culture and history to the American public. Upon graduation, Jorge plans to attend a doctoral program that specializes in borderlands history and literature.

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Tales of Chennault and the Flying Tigers Ties to New Mexico

By Walter G. Hines

Grandma Morris and A Gila Wilderness Junket

On Washington's Birthday, February 22, 1923, a large crowd flocked to Fort Bliss, Texas, to see Army maneuvers, weapons, vehicles, and airplanes¹. There was keen interest in viewing Army pilots perform aerial acrobatics in their two-seater DH-4 biplanes. A woman introduced as Grandma Morris was in the crowd. She was said to have traveled from afar for her first airplane ride. Decked out in a long canvas flight coat, dress, goggles, and leather aviator's cap, she was lifted into the front seat of the DH-4.



DH-4 Biplane like that used by 12th Observation Squadron (US Army photo).

The pilot, Lieutenant Ployer Hill, went to the front of the plane and cranked the propeller. Suddenly the DH-4's engine started and the plane lurched forward, knocked Hill aside, and rolled erratically down the runway. Spectators were aghast as the rogue plane rose into the air with Granny seemingly helpless at the controls, narrowly missing trees and a hanger. The plane made a circle just above the crowd, climbed, looped, and dived before pulling up at the last second. Shortly, it made a perfect three-point landing.

Crewmen ran to the plane to rescue Mrs. Morris, but the old gal needed no help. She threw a leg over the side and jumped nimbly to the ground.

Turns out, "Grandma" was none other than Claire Lee Chennault, then a Lieutenant in the 12th Observation Squadron stationed at Ft. Bliss. He would become one of the most remarkable air combat leaders in U.S. military history -- a Major General and commander of the world-famous Flying Tigers in China before and during WWII.

In his youth in Louisiana, Chennault was an avid hunter and fisherman, an obsession that led him and colleagues in the 12th into trouble not long after the Grandma Morris escapade. Chennault had heard about the high, forested Gila country some 150 air miles northwest of El Paso near Mogollon, New Mexico. The hunting and fishing prospects were alluring. Chennault wanted badly to visit the area and was successful in talking his mates into "taking a flyer."

Straying from their primary assigned duty to patrol the Mexican border for bandits and illegal immigrants, they diverted north and scouted the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Gila River southeast of present-day Snow Lake near Loco Mountain. They saw a good landing spot on a mesa above the river. The Forest Service would later build an airstrip there on what is now known as Aeroplane Mesa (see map).

An article in *True West* (July 1974) based on a story told by rancher Myrl Creel to Eve Ball documents what happened. One day in early spring 1923, two planes landed on the mesa a mile or so from the Creel Ranch. Creel and family were "as excited as people of today would be at the arrival of a UFO." Four airmen, Captain Bender, Lieutenant Chennault, and Sergeants Pearce and Johnson

landed and came to the ranch where they were welcomed “cordially.”

“They...were well equipped for both fishing and hunting and...lacked for nothing but dogs. We had some very fine hounds, and I gave them two pups. Each of the officers got a deer, and that was the first of many visits. The planes were small... just large enough for the pilot and the junior one in training. Getting a third person into one was impossible, though they did manage to squeeze the dogs in.”

“These men were stationed at Ft. Bliss and were not, as reported years later², flying a mail route,” said Creel.

“When our four flyers started for (their planes on) the mesa...I took their duffel bags on a mule. Chennault and his junior pilot got into the plane, squeezed the pups in, and attempted a take-off. The mesa was narrow and for some reason the machine did not lift as expected and taxied into a ditch and turned over. We raced to it, expecting every second it might burst into flames, but it did not. Nor was anybody hurt, though the plane was

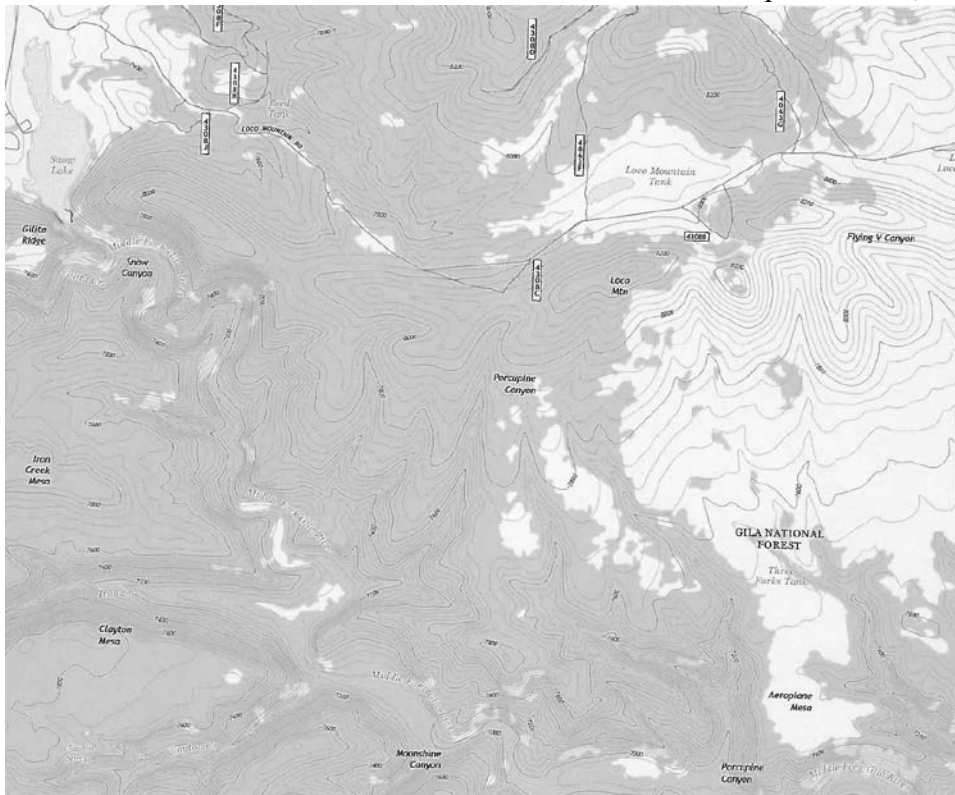
demolished. Captain Bender and his passenger left, and returned the next day with another plane which provided room for the two who had been stranded.”

Seems the official report conjured up by Chennault and Bender was that the plane had lost oil pressure and was forced to land where it was heavily damaged and abandoned. None of the other 12th colleagues ratted. How could they? They had been on the unauthorized wilderness junket also!

Books on Chennault

Much has been written about Chennault. I found two books which are fine chronicles of his life and career, one by Jack Samson³ and another by military historian Martha Byrd⁴. Samson, a New Mexican, came to know and serve under Chennault while with the 309th Bomb Group of the 14th Air Force at Kunming, China. After WWII, Samson was the public relations director for the Chennault-led Civil Air Transport (CAT) enterprise which, after WWII, provided domestic travel and commercial air cargo service in China and the orient. Samson’s book, *Claire Chennault: The Flying Tiger* (1987), does not cover his earliest years. Rather, it begins at the point when Chennault was “retired” from the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1937 and his subsequent work and command in China under Chiang Kai-Shek and his wife, the beautiful and cunning American-educated Soong Mei-ling, or Madame Chiang.

Byrd’s book, *Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger* (1987), is a more complete biography that does cover Chennault’s



Aeroplane Mesa in lower right (USGS Loco Mtn., NM 7.5' Quadrangle)

childhood and early adulthood, examines his personality, foibles, and leadership qualities, his many successes, and the confrontations with superiors, especially General Joseph Stillwell — the overall U.S. commander in China, Burma, and India.

Chennault wrote a memoir with Ray Hotz, *The Way of a Fighter* (1949), a rare book with many personal remembrances and retrospective musings, and his thoughts about U.S. strategic issues and policies in China and Asia regarding the growing menace of Soviet and Chinese communism. Many of those thoughts proved prophetic.

Those seeking more details of Chennault's life and exploits may want to read all three books.

This article touches on the above material and adds new stories about two individuals that should be of particular interest to readers in New Mexico. They are New Mexico A&M alumni Lieutenant Henry Gilbert and Colonel Jesse Caleb (JC) Williams, both of whom served under Chennault in China.

Early Life and Career

Chennault was born in Commerce, Texas, in 1893⁵, but soon moved with his family to north-eastern Louisiana. He was raised in the small towns of Waterproof and Gilbert where the family owned a cotton farm. He often mused about his youth and his love for the outdoors. "My earliest recollections are of roaming the oak woods and moss-draped cypress swamps in northeast Louisiana. Life in these woods and on the bayous and lakes taught me self-confidence and reliance and forced me to make my own decisions."

After his childhood and high school years, Chennault attended LSU in Baton Rouge in 1909 and 1910. He then transferred to Louisiana State Normal College (now Northwestern State University) in Natchitoches to earn a teaching certificate. While at Normal, he attended a high school graduation ceremony in Winnsboro. There he met Nell Thompson and was smitten. Nell and Claire would be married in 1911. They later moved to West Carroll Parish where Chennault served as

principal of Kilbourne School from 1913–1915.

When WWI began in 1917, Chennault enlisted, tried to enter flight training, but was rejected. Instead, he was sent to officer's school at Ft. Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, where he was commissioned as an infantry lieutenant. After a brief stay at Gerstner Army Camp south of Lake Charles, he somehow gained placement in the Air Section of the Signal Corps and was assigned to Fort Travis and then Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas. There he was put in charge of fueling and checking training planes. Chennault took advantage of the "general confusion" and found several sympathetic instructors who took him on flights and explained flying to him from the rear cockpit of a Curtis JN-4 (the "Jenny") which was the standard trainer of the Army. He amassed nearly 100 hours of flight time.

By spring of 1920, with the war over, Chennault was discharged. After considering his likely future as a teacher or cotton farmer, he decided to return to the Army and sought a commission in the newly organized Air Service, the predecessor to the Army Air Corps. He was accepted and served at Gerstner Field near Lake Charles, Louisiana, and Ellington Field just outside of Houston, Texas. At Ellington, he was with a pursuit (i.e., fighter) squadron which trained in aerial acrobatics, dog fighting, and interception of mock enemy aircraft.

He came to love pursuit, and was disappointed when assigned to the 12th Observation squadron at Ft. Bliss. The 12th was assigned border patrol duties and often coordinated with horse-mounted cavalry along the Mexican border. Happily, Chennault was sent to Hawaii in September 1923 to be commanding officer of the 19th Pursuit Squadron at Luke Field, Pearl Harbor. He took his family and they lived in a big, open-air home near Luke. There, his sixth and last son, Robert, was born followed by a second daughter, Rosemary. He and Nell now had a family of eight children.

Chennault had a fertile mind, and was far ahead of the military strategists who had come to denigrate pursuit ("little fighter planes") in

almost blind allegiance to heavy bombardment doctrine based on the newly-developed bombers. It was reasoned, but unproven, that the big bombers could fly at high altitude and destroy enemy air bases and industries almost at will. Accepted dogma was that pursuit would be of little value as the big planes could fly higher and fast as the available fighters, and could defend themselves easily with their turreted and wing-mounted machine guns.

Chennault disagreed strongly, and wrote articles championing pursuit and training manuals with detailed tactics for attacking bombers. On Hawaii, he lamented that the islands would be impossible to defend against air attack because of the lack of adequate advance warning systems. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor would prove him to be absolutely right. Early warning came to be the hallmark of Chennault's pursuit doctrine. It would later prove critical in the Battle of Britain and during Chennault's command in China.

After Hawaii where he served until 1930, he had another stint at Kelly AFB in Texas and then Langley, Virginia. Chennault became the leader of the popular Army aerial acrobatics team, Three



Captain Chennault, 1934
(US Army photo)

Men on a Flying Trapeze, joined by Staff Sergeants Billy McDonald and J.H. Williams. They flew Boeing P-12 biplanes, quick little aircraft with 450-hp engines and a top speed of nearly 200 mph.

Despite his growing notoriety, Chennault's outspoken ideas about pursuit tactics and fighters led to controversy and dispute. He was frustrated. "Even yet in 1931," he wrote, "a World War I ace was still teaching the fighter tactics of 1918, including the dawn

patrol and dogfight tactics which were completely inadequate against the new bombers." One officer even recommended that fighters drop a ball-and-chain device from above in the hope of fouling a bomber's propellers.

He advocated more firepower for fighters. In 1936, Chennault said, "Engineers ridiculed my suggestion that four 30-caliber guns could be synchronized to fire through a propeller. They said it was impossible. But the next year I saw a Russian plane with synchronized guns in action against the Japanese in China." Army Air Corps leaders simply would not listen to Chennault.

**Chennault's Future Intelligence Officer
Jesse Williams**

Jesse Caleb (JC) Williams was born in Ft. Stockton, Texas, to a cattle ranching family in 1899. After high school, he began his college education in 1915 at Texas A&M before matriculating to New Mexico A&M in 1916. Not surprisingly, he chose agriculture as a major.

By all accounts, Williams (nicknamed "Chick" by his classmates) was a good student known for hard work and attention to detail. He played varsity football for the Aggies as a 150-pound end and distinguished himself as a leader and tough player. He was blessed with good



**Jesse 'Chick' Williams,
NM A&M, 1918**

speed, pass-catching skills, and was a hard tackler. Coach J.G. Griffith's Aggies had a fine year in 1917, including a 110-3 walloping of UNM. Williams was named team captain for the 1918 football season and chosen as business manager for the Athletic Association. He was vice president of the Ag Club, and was elected junior class president for the 1918-19 school year.

But WWI was to intervene. Williams had been in the Military Training Program (later called

ROTC) at NM A&M and was given an early commission in fall 1918 and ordered to “musketry school” at Camp Parry, Ohio. When WWI ended in November 1918, he returned to campus in spring 1919 to resume his education. His studies and upcoming football captaincy were not to be, however. He had somehow contracted malaria and was bed ridden for many days. He recovered, probably in Ft. Stockton, and returned to NM A&M in 1920 as a “special student.” Alumni records indicate he did not graduate.

Williams went home, worked on the family ranch, and at some point in 1921 or 1922 landed a job with the oil enterprise, The Texas Company — the predecessor to Texaco. The company had headquarters in Houston. The automobile had fostered an oil boom in America and the Texas Company was thriving. The company also had designs on global sales, including the potentially huge market in China. At the time, the demand in China was not so much for oil and gasoline, but for kerosene. China was overwhelmingly rural and mostly without electricity. There was a chronic need for kerosene for heating and to light the “coolie lamps” that became a boon to Chinese life. For the first time people had reliable heat and light and could comfortably read, study, and work during darkness.

Williams, was fascinated with the exotic nature of China and accepted an assignment there in 1923 to help develop the kerosene market for The Texas Company. For the next 12 years, 1923–35, he had a remarkable time. He wrote a series of letters home⁶ describing the work and his many adventures. He had to identify and establish dozens of local agents, manage delivery vehicles and storage facilities, mollify local politicians and war lords, negotiate contracts, stay on top of voluminous accounting and reporting chores, etc.

He did find time for fun and socializing. There were havens like the “American Clubs” that catered to foreigners, mostly businessmen and tourists. He became a star softball player, and dabbled in polo and hunting. At the insistence of his Chinese agents, he was sometimes carried

between small towns or in larger cities by sedan chair or rickshaw. He was able to take time off occasionally, and traveled to Burma, Thailand, and India. If romance was in the air, his letters did not reveal any details. He remained single until near the end of WWII as described later.

In 1936, Williams was given a region-wide management position by his newly merged company, Caltex, created by a partnership of the Texas and Standard Oil companies. His duties took him to markets, storage, and refinery facilities in Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and other locations in Asia.

Chennault Goes to China

By 1936, Chennault was executive officer of an AAF pursuit group at Barksdale in Shreveport, Louisiana. He liked the assignment, which included the use of newer and more powerful monoplane fighters and trainers. But his disagreements with superiors regarding pursuit warfare escalated and there were many hard feelings among AAF brass.

Chennault was passed over for promotion. With twenty years in service, the Army offered him a “health” retirement in 1937. In fact, he was plagued by bronchitis from his smoking habit, although it was not really debilitating. His hearing was also a problem. The many years of open-cockpit flying, engine and machine-gun noise, had caused a degree of deafness that would plague him for the rest of his life. After some thought, he reluctantly accepted his retirement from the Army. Happily for him, the retirement was probably a blessing for it would lead to the defining chapter of Chennault’s life and career.

“At midnight on April 30, 1937,” wrote Chennault later in *Way of a Fighter*, “with my family settled on the shores of Lake Saint John near Waterproof, I officially retired from the U.S. Army with the rank of Captain. On the morning of May 1, I was on my way to San Francisco, China bound.” Chennault had been recommended by several airplane company executives to Chiang Kai-Shek to train and command a revitalized

Chinese air force. He would receive \$1,000 per month, a princely sum at the time, plus other benefits. Chiang's existing air force was threatened by Nippon air power in Japan's ongoing conquest of Manchuria.

The Second Sino-Japanese War grew from Japan's armed invasion of Manchuria in 1931, but was officially precipitated by the "Marco Polo Bridge Incident" in July 1937 just after Chennault's arrival in China. The Generalissimo knew his army was no match for the Japanese, and his air force was in even worse shape. Thus, Chennault's job was critical to counter Japanese air forces, which could otherwise attack China's eastern cities almost at will.

Chennault was given the rank of Colonel and assigned to report to Madame Chiang, who because of corruption in the Chinese air force, was put in command by her husband. Madame Chiang was highly intelligent and spoke English with a



Chennault with Madam Chiang and the Generalissimo.

Southern drawl familiar to Chennault. He was immediately charmed and Madame and Chennault became fast friends and confidants. Upon his initial evaluation of the Chinese air forces, Chennault was deeply shocked. The Chinese had been "under the wing" of Italian instructors. Discipline was lax and tactics poor, and there was a critical shortage of airplanes. Those available were mostly a hodgepodge of Italian and Russian biplanes. One day, Chennault saw five landing crackups, and watched several fighter pilots, supposedly ready

for combat, spin-in and kill themselves during training. Because many Chinese pilots had been given token "wings" by the Italians as a face-saving gesture, they were reluctant to accept the need for further training. They considered themselves as combat ready.

Throughout the late 1930s Chennault struggled to whip his Chinese airmen into fighting shape. There were some successes, and his establishment of a ground-based observation net helped greatly in warning Chinese and Russian aviators (who were allied with China and still in country at the time) about approaching Japanese bombing raids. The warning net comprised trusted Chinese civilians and military men who used binoculars, crank telephones and a few precious radios to communicate with Chennault's headquarters.

Even with early warning of Japanese attacks, the severe shortage of aircraft, spare parts, ammunition, and the loss of many Chinese airmen gradually took its toll. By late 1939 after a series of Japanese air raids during which their bombers were escorted by new fighters, the Chinese air force was almost wiped out. Coastal and eastern China were in chaos. Chennault moved his operations to south-central China at Kunming, where his forces coordinated with British air forces that were in Burma and India.

In desperation, Chiang sent Chennault and Chinese officials to the U.S. to lobby and beg for help. After a number of meetings and high-level discussions, a plan was developed to recruit American pilots as volunteers to fight the Japanese in China and Burma. At the time, the U.S. was officially neutral, though sympathetic and providing military supplies to Chiang under the guise of a "quasi Lend-Lease" program like that which had been developed for Britain. President Roosevelt met and liked Chennault and gave the volunteer force idea his blessing, though unofficially.

The secretaries of the Army and Navy agreed to let their flyers resign from their U.S. units to fly with Chennault, with a guarantee to allow them to return to their prior jobs when their service in

China was over. This group became known as the American Volunteer Group (AVG), bolstered by the shipment of some 100 P-40D aircraft, originally intended for Great Britain. The Brits agreed in exchange for a promise to receive 200 later model P-40s at a near future date. The P-40s arrived piecemeal in Rangoon, Burma, for assembly there by the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CAMCO) under American William Pawley of the Curtis-Wright aircraft company.

There were many problems with missing parts and equipment, including radios and gun sights. Pawley and Chennault would feud royally over the problems and many other issues. Chennault considered Pawley, perhaps a bit unfairly, a money-grubbing opportunist. But Pawley proved essential to the formation of AVG and Chennault knew it.

Henry Gilbert and the AVG Pilots

Among the earliest volunteers and the youngest of the 100 AVG pilots was Henry Gilbert of Lovell, Wyoming. Gilbert had been a freshman at New Mexico A&M in 1937–38, pledged a fraternity, and was active in social events and clubs. He was also a ROTC cadet. His father, Henry Sr., had been a student at NM A&M in 1915–16 before enlisting in the Navy during WWI. The Gilberts had been a pioneer family at Hope, New Mexico, before moving to Wyoming after WWI.

Apparently, young Henry had dreams of becoming a naval aviator because he decided to transfer to Washington State University in 1938 and enroll in its Navy ROTC program. He left Washington State in spring 1940 (before graduation) and went to naval flight training at Pensacola and Miami, Florida, where he received a commission and his wings in September. He was assigned to the aircraft carrier, USS *Saratoga* at Bremerton, Washington, where he served until September 1941. There he saw an announcement for volunteers for the AVG in China. He thought about it, and signed up.

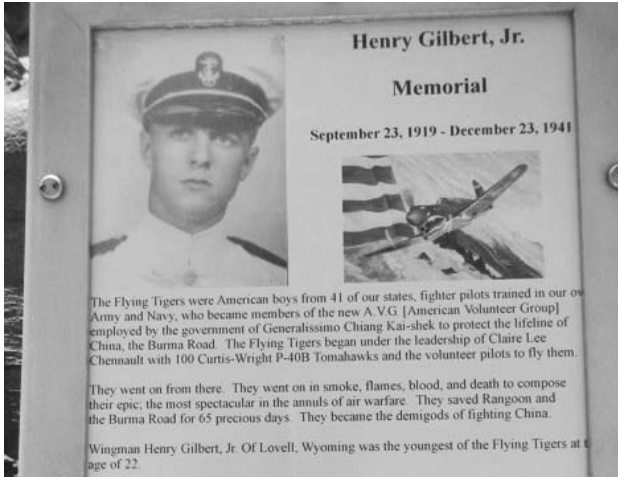
Gilbert arrived at Kunming and then went to Taungoo, Burma (north of Rangoon), in early fall

1941 where, at both bases, Chennault was training his new pilots in the art of pursuit — a daunting undertaking given their mixed backgrounds and the myriad of equipment and supply shortages. Many of the volunteers had been trained as bomber or cargo pilots, rather than in fighters. Gilbert had been trained primarily in dive bombing. Like many others, he had no background in the two-plane pursuit and attack tactics which had been mastered by Chennault — tactics that would prove deadly to the Japanese.

By late November, the AVG had made real progress. Pilots were stationed at British bases in Burma at Rangoon, Taungoo, other smaller airfields, and at the main base in Kunming. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, and then other targets in Asia and the Pacific. WWII had officially begun, and Burma and Kunming soon came under heavy Japanese bombing. On December 20, a group of Japanese Mitsubishi-K21 “Sally” bombers en route from Hanoi in French Indonesia to attack Kunming was jumped by a number of AVG P-40s. Four of the bombers were shot down and the remainder limped back to Japanese bases. Two days before Christmas, the Japanese sent 54 bombers and 20 fighters to attack Rangoon. Fifteen AVG P-40s, including Gilbert’s, rose in pursuit and shot down six Japanese aircraft with five more heavily damaged.

It was Gilbert’s first, and sadly, last air combat. His P-40 was blown apart by top turret fire from Japanese bombers. He was just 22 years old and the first and youngest AVG pilot to die in combat (see later mention of Gilbert’s Memorial in Lovell, Wyoming). Gilbert’s friend, Neil Martin of Texarkana, Arkansas, was also shot down and killed by Japanese fighters during the Rangoon encounter⁷. It was a sobering beginning for the AVG, but the situation soon improved markedly.

On Christmas Day, the Japanese sent a 60-bomber force with 18 fighters to again attack Rangoon. They were opposed by 12 AVG P-40s. Sixteen Japanese planes were shot down with no losses for the AVG. These battles became huge



A memorial to Henry Gilbert Jr.

stories in both China and the U.S. Soon, with input from T.V. Soong, the Generalissimo’s trusted diplomat to Washington, the name Flying Tigers was born. It was a public relations bonanza, much needed to counter the Japanese continuing and depressing all-conquering onslaught throughout the Pacific.

Photos and stylized likenesses of General Chennault began appearing widely. The Chinese

referred to him affectionately as “Old Leather Face.” The iconic image was a painting of Chennault with a beautiful winged tiger that later appeared on the cover of Time in December 1943.

Copying the shark-faced P-40s of the 112th Squadron of the Royal Air Force in North Africa, the AVG fighters presented a ferocious-looking appearance to the Japanese airmen. While not as maneuverable as the Japanese Ki-27 Nate fighter or the later Army Ki-43 Oscar and Navy A6M Zero, the P-40 was faster, had protective armor, self-sealing fuel tanks, and much more firepower. Typically, the P-40s would be at altitude when the Japanese planes arrived, and would avoid dog fights, or evasive twisting and turning maneuvers. Instead, they used their 500-mph diving capability to attack from above in twos, maintain their speed to escape, and climb to attack again — all tactics taught by Chennault.



Flying Tiger (AVG) P-40s. (US Army photo, courtesy R. T. Smith)

Of great help to Chennault with the AVG and later with the 14th Army Air Force (AAF) was Joseph Alsop, renowned journalist for the NY Times Herald. Chennault got Alsop commissioned and assigned him as official historian on his staff. Alsop was a master writer with many political connections in Washington, including a personal relationship with President Roosevelt. Alsop became a confidant of Chennault’s and aided him in his many confrontations with Stillwell and others over the next four years.

With the Japanese overrunning southern Bur-



ma and Rangoon, Chennault moved some AVG operations to smaller bases in northern Burma, though his main base was still at Kunming. Missions were also flown against Japanese ground forces who were trying to cut off the Burma Road, the vital (and only) land link between Burma and China. In one operation, the Japanese appeared ready to invade Yunnan Province via the Burma Road and threaten Kunming. The Flying Tigers strafed and bombed, and literally destroyed a huge Japanese convoy that was confined to a narrow portion of the road near the Salween River crossing just inside China. That was the end of the invasion threat.

The early warning net around Kunming was functioning well, having been developed by communications officer Major John Williams, not to be confused with Colonel Jesse Williams who would appear later. The Japanese flew many bombing and strafing missions against Kunming in the coming months, but the AVG was usually more than ready. The AVG was also on the offensive, attacking Japanese air fields in French Indochina (now North Vietnam), Burma, and Thailand.

The big problem for the AVG was the lack of a ground supply route from India or Burma into China. This meant all pilots, ground crewmen, support staff, food, supplies, gasoline, parts, ammunition, and aircraft had to be flown in over the Himalayas from India, an infamous and dangerous route known as The Hump.

After a bruising round of politics and arguments amongst American, British, and Chinese military and civilian leaders, it was decided in April 1942 to disband the AVG and form the 23rd Fighter Group as a recognized U.S. Army Air Corps unit. The AVG was officially credited with nearly 300 enemy aircraft destroyed, including some 230 in air combat. Only fourteen AVG pilots were killed in combat, bailed out or captured, or were unaccounted for. Two died in Japanese bombing raids, and six were killed in accidents.

Chennault, after much resistance from his nemesis General Stillwell, was put in charge of the 23rd and made a Brigadier General. Stillwell

lobbied General Marshall and General Arnold for the 23rd to be placed under the 10th Air Force commanded by his friend, General Clarence Bissell and headquartered in India. Stillwell won out, to Chennault's chagrin. Many of the original AVG group, who were well-paid volunteers, left for reassignment in the U.S. after encountering Bissell. Chennault did talk several into staying long enough to serve as instructors for replacement pilots and crewmen for the 23rd Fighter Group.

The 23rd would continue to successfully counter the Japanese, and in March 1943, after another round of intra-service bickering, morphed into the 14th U.S. AAF. The 14th retained the moniker the Flying Tigers. The formation of the 14th was the result of Chennault and others lobbying President Roosevelt and making their case at the expense of delaying Stillwell's plan to re-enter Burma with a ground attack. Stillwell's strategy to build the Ledo Road⁸ across Northern Burma to connect with the Burma Road, was also way behind schedule and partly to blame for the delay in retaking Burma.

To form the 14th, Chennault was promoted to Major General in charge at his headquarters in Kunming, though still technically under Bissell and Stillwell. Bissell would be relieved and leave the CBI theatre in November 1943. As mentioned below, Stillwell would also leave about one year later. The 14th soon acquired some heavy bombers, primarily B-24s and B-25s, which were used to attack Japanese shipping, locomotives, bridges, and troop concentrations in eastern China, French Indochina, Burma, and Thailand.

While the 14th was doing well, Chennault was frustrated and angry that many more planes, pilots, gasoline, spare parts, bombs, and ammunition were not being delivered across The Hump as promised. He suspected (apparently correctly) that he was being "slow walked" by the 10th Air Force, Stillwell, and General Hap Arnold, Commanding General of U.S. Army Air Forces. Stillwell wanted most supplies to go to his forces, including his Chinese divisions that he had slated for retaking Burma. General Arnold had other

plans for building up the 10th which had the same effect — pinching the supplies that the 14th desperately needed.

During his command of the AVG, the 23rd, and the 14th, Chennault was under heavy stress, which he relieved with numerous hunting trips. The Kunming area was teeming with waterfowl and Chennault had a cadre of locals and fellow officers who went with him. He was a crack shot with a shotgun and returned to base for many delicious roast duck dinners.

Jesse Williams Joins the 14th

In February 1942, Jesse Williams had been in Singapore on business for Caltex, but escaped just before it fell to the Japanese. Although the record is not clear, Williams apparently returned to the U.S., and by virtue of his reserve officer status, soon entered service as a Major in the Army Air Corps. There had been a move afoot, championed by Chennault, to station heavy bombers in eastern China to attack the Japanese mainland and shipping lanes, as well as Chinese ports used by Japanese forces and cargo ships. Because of his long experience in China, Williams was identified and he was slated for intelligence duty in China with the 98th Bombardment Group (Heavy) forming at Ft. Myers, Florida.

In June 1942, a specially-trained bomber group known as HALPRO, or Halverson Provisional detachment, commanded by Colonel Harry A. Halverson, reached the Middle East with 23 B-24Ds. One of the B-24Ds, The Arkansas Traveler, had Williams aboard. HALPRO included members of the 98th, which was heading east to be part of the 10th Air Force in China. After the 98th reached El Fayid in Egypt, however, they were kept in the Middle East to combat German forces in the Mediterranean and bomb the large Axis oil refinery facility at Ploiești in Romania.

Williams was the lead intelligence officer for HALPRO during this period. Following several

small raids in early summer 1942, the Germans emplaced a formidable array of pursuit fighters and anti-aircraft artillery at Ploiesti. After Williams went to China in late 1942, HALPRO



Arkansas Traveler Fuselage Art for B-24.

continued to attack Ploiesti, mostly unsuccessfully because of these new German defenses and the lack of fighter escorts for the bombers.

Owing to a chronic need for intelligence staff at the 14th Air Force in Kunming, Williams was released from Halpro in fall 1942 and arrived in China in December. Chennault sized him up and promoted him to Lieutenant Colonel as A-2, Chief of Intelligence. A short time later, he was made Assistant Chief of Staff to Chennault and promoted to Colonel. As described below, with the expanded bombing mission of the 14th, there was much more intelligence to gather and process than for the previous fighter/pursuit missions.

In his book, *Wandering Knights* (1990), Robert Barnett said the following about 14th Air Force intelligence operations during the initial period in late 1942 and early 1943:

I was a little surprised that the 14th Air Force seemed to admit to no requirement for “intelligence.” General Chennault personally handled that side of things, assisted by Colonel Williams, on leave from Texaco’s prewar China staff. The two of them accepted corroboration of their own local knowledge, often skeptically, from impres-



A B-24 bomber.

sionistic observations of pilots whose encounters with Japanese aircraft and hornet-like attacks on Japanese supply dumps, ship, and transportation carried them across the face of China.



Barnett Briefing Chennault and Williams (on his right) in 14th AAF War Room, 1943.

Barnett related how Williams “snatched me away” from his duties as supply officer with the 23rd Fighter Squadron (part of the 14th) to create a “War Room” to deliver daily combat intelligence briefings for Chennault’s morning staff meetings, and to prepare daily and weekly reporting telegrams to Washington, Chungking, and New Delhi.

In Chennault’s memoir, *Way of a Fighter*, he said, “Just as I was blessed with excellent tactical leaders, so was I cursed with an excess of mediocre staff officers...” He mentioned Colonel Jesse Williams as a notable exception. Chennault was impressed with William’s skills and long experience in China and the orient.

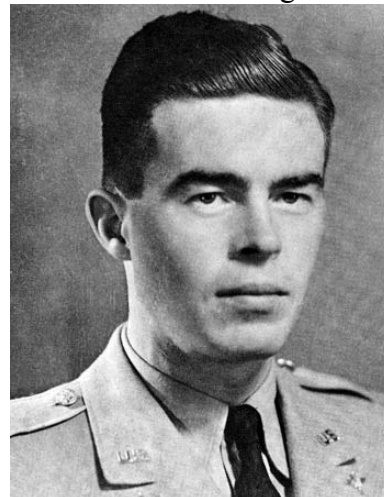
Colonel Williams’ staff gradually expanded with a number of new officers to carry out the

many complex assignments required. An aerial photographic section was developed, targets prioritized, observation nets coordinated and improved, Japanese troop, shipping and equipment movements monitored, mission reports made, and many other duties undertaken. Williams soon had a staff of about a dozen officers and men working around the clock.

An interesting sidelight was John Birch, the namesake of the future John Birch Society. Birch had been an infant with his missionary parents in India and returned to the U.S. at age two. He attended elementary and high school, and then enrolled at Mercer University in Georgia. In 1939 he graduated magna cum laude.

With a brilliant intellect, Birch was a staunch Christian who went to China to do missionary work. He spoke several Chinese dialects fluently. In April 1942, Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy Doolittle and his crew bailed out in China after their famous raid on Tokyo. Chinese civilians rescued and transported them to Zhejiang province (south of Shanghai) away from Japanese lines. There, Birch met them by accident.

When Doolittle arrived in Chunking, he told Chennault about Birch. Chennault sent for Birch and, needing a Chinese-speaking American with knowledge of China, commissioned him as a second lieutenant in July 1942. He was put to work as a field intelligence officer and soon built



John Birch, Captain 14th AAF, 1944 (US Army photo)

an excellent network of Chinese informants who supplied Williams and Chennault with information on Japanese troop movements and shipping. (See Post War Epilogue toward the end of this article for a description of how Birch was killed in China).

Political and Command Problems

In 1944, General Arnold convinced Roosevelt to base some of the new B-29s in India and China (Operation Matterhorn) under a separate command. Yet again this diverted resources and hampered the ability of the 14th to be as active or effective as Chennault desired. It was ironic, because the main stated purpose of Matterhorn was to attack and destroy the Japanese steel industry.

In actuality, Japan was by mid-1944 almost totally dependent on China for iron ore, which was shipped via river boats from the interior. The 14th had already all but destroyed the river boat traffic, negating Japan's ability to make those shipments. Consequently, Japanese steel manufacturing was running at only twenty-five percent capacity because of the ore shortage, not because of lack of industrial capacity. In the end, with the taking of the Mariana Islands, the B-29s could be operated from protected bases rather than in interior China where the Japanese had a strong presence. Operation Matterhorn was cancelled.

Meanwhile, Stillwell's foray into Burma had bogged down and the Japanese had begun a brutal attack in eastern China (Operation Ichi-Go) that captured a number of Chennault's forward air fields. The Chinese army, with a few exceptions, did not put up a strong fight against the Japanese forces. Ichi-Go was finally halted in December 1944, but not until large areas of northern and eastern China had fallen, including some key 14th Air Force airfields. The carnage wrought by Ichi-Go was unbelievable on both sides.

By October 1944, after more heated disagreements with Chennault and Chiang, Stillwell had been relieved of command by President Roosevelt. Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall was a good friend of Stillwell's and arranged for "Vinegar Joe" to command the pending invasion of Okinawa.

Marshall never forgave Chennault for his bitter confrontations with Stillwell and would gain a measure of revenge. With General Arnold's concurrence, he moved the 10th Air Force (no lon-

ger essential in India) to China in July 1945 and placed the 10th and 14th under the overall command of General Stratemeyer. Chennault was hurt by the rebuff and expressed amazement that the U.S. had not been able to supply the 14th. How would having another command in China with all its overlapping logistical needs help end the war with the Japanese, he asked. This infuriated Marshall and Arnold. Suddenly, accusations about Chennault's infidelity while in China were raised. Other rumors were circulated about him running a smuggling ring. He was furious and demanded to be court marshaled so he could clear his name.

Nothing ever came of any of the charges, but Chennault felt his power waning. Nonetheless, he drove the 14th to inflict as much damage on the Japanese as was possible given the extreme shortage of supplies, especially aviation fuel.

President Roosevelt died in April 1945 and Chennault lost a friend. For the remainder of WWII into mid-1945, the 14th was gradually supplied with more planes, ammunition, bombs, spare parts, and highly efficient pilots and crewmen. The amazing new fighter, the P-51 Mustang, had appeared in 1944, to the dread of the Japanese. With the tide of battle in the Pacific turning against Japan, its forces in China were somewhat neglected and became progressively weaker.

As the war in China wound down in 1945, true to form, Chennault was outspoken about several generals he felt had impeded his aerial operations. His comments sparked a furor, and General Marshall, no longer having to placate Roosevelt, wanted Chennault gone. A short time before the war ended, on August 1, he was asked to retire on a health disability. In fact, his health was not good — the stress and his heavy smoking had taken a toll. He now had heart palpitations as well as chronic bronchitis.

Chiang Kai-Shek and Madame Chiang were not happy about Chennault leaving China. They felt he and the Flying Tigers were the main reason China had not been completely overrun by the Japanese. Chiang arranged for a tumultuous goodbye ceremony in Chungking attended by hundreds

of thousands of grateful Chinese. Chennault was showered with awards and medals. As he left Chungking in the Generalissimo's automobile, a huge crowd surrounded him. The driver turned off the engine so the adoring Chinese could push Chennault to the airport. "Old Leather Face" was their hero and they would never forget him. Chennault was deeply touched.

Unbeknownst to Chennault and his admirers at the time, he would return to China within a year.

The U. S. Army Air Corps credited Chennault's 14th Air Force with the destruction of 2,315 Japanese aircraft, 356 bridges, thousands of locomotives and railroad cars, and millions of tons of Japanese shipping. They maintained at least a 6:1 kill ratio over Japanese aircraft. An estimated 60,000 Japanese troops were killed by 14th bombing and strafing attacks. While these figures were no doubt inflated, there is little doubt that the 14th (and the AVG) were instrumental in saving China from complete Japanese air dominance and control during WWII.

Chennault was flying home when news of the Japanese surrender on August 15, 1945, reached him via the radio on his plane. At the surrender ceremony on the battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay on September 2, it was rumored that General MacArthur had asked⁹, "Where's Chennault?" He had not been invited, a snub Chennault never forgot.

Post-War Epilogue

Chennault returned to China after the war to start Civil Air Transport (CAT) in 1946, a highly successful and sorely needed enterprise that operated under the Flying Tiger insignia. The politics, financing, and intrigue involving the formation and operation of CAT was mind numbing. The efforts of Chennault and his backers, including Tommy Corcoran, were on par with that involved with AVG before the war.

CAT carried relief supplies from Canton and Shanghai into the interior of China — tons of seeds, medicine, food, farm equipment, breeding stock, and banknotes among many other items.

CAT supported Chiang's forces in the ongoing civil war with the communists, often making dangerous landings and take-offs under fire. CAT operated until Mao's forces took over in China in late 1949, and then moved to Hong Kong and Taiwan where Chiang's forces and followers had retreated.

CAT also served French Indo-China and Thailand into the mid-1950s under clandestine operations for the CIA. The offshoot of CAT, Air America, operated into the '60s and '70s in other areas of the orient as well as flying clandestine missions for the U.S. military and CIA before and during the Vietnam War.

Chennault and wife, Nell, had agreed to divorce in 1946 about the time he decided to spearhead CAT. While in China, he met Anna Chan, who was on his staff as a publicist. Only



Chennault and Anna

23 years of age, Anna was the daughter of a Chinese diplomat, beautiful and well educated. They courted, and were married in 1947. They would have two daughters. Anna and both the Chennault daughters were still living as this article is written.

Chennault had a deep dislike for Mao and the communists and remained active in support of Chiang and the Nationalists in the early 1950s. He gave fervent testimony, wrote lengthy papers and articles, and dedicated sections of his autobiography to the emerging threats from communist Russia and China. Though generally well received in Washington, the Truman administration had tired of "the China question" and was scared of inciting a war with Russia. The U.S. essentially withdrew most of its support for the Nationalists save some monetary assistance.

Chennault was influential in U.S. politics and would continue his anti-communist crusade into the mid-1950s. He and Anna became members of the "China Lobby" that included a group of Amer-

ican businessmen and politicians that supported the Nationalist Chinese on Taiwan. According to Martha Byrd in *Giving Wings to the Tiger* (p. 360) Chennault felt that enough had been written about the Flying Tigers and himself and that he did not need a biography. However, he wanted two stories elaborated. First, the intelligence system that he and his men (i.e., Jesse Williams and staff) had instituted. The second was John Birch's death.

The intelligence system was much more than an early warning network, which was remarkable in itself considering the absence of radar in most cases. The network of spies and informants that monitored Japanese activity, potential targets, impacts of the 14th's attacks, etc. was unprecedented in WWII.

On August 25, 1945, just after the Japanese surrender, Chennault sent John Birch to northern China to meet with the Chinese communists about handing over a late-model Japanese Zero in their possession. The U. S. military was, obviously, much interested. Birch made a 10-day journey and held a meeting with the communists. They resisted the young captain, who could be hot tempered and arrogant, and in this case apparently became incensed. The story goes that a Chinese soldier was slapped by Birch in heat of the argument. A guard tried to disarm him. Birch resisted and was summarily shot and killed. Some say he was the first casualty of the Cold War. His death deeply saddened Chennault.

By the mid-1950s, Chennault had lost weight and lacked energy. He was diagnosed with lung cancer and underwent several surgeries. His health continued to decline in 1958. President Eisenhower, citing the Nation's debt and admiration, promoted Chennault to Lieutenant General nine days before his death. Madame Chiang and Chennault's family were at his bedside shortly before he died on July 27, 1958. He was laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery in a ceremony fit for a true warrior and hero.

Jesse Williams returned to work for Caltex (Texaco) after the war, and he had a new partner. While serving with the 14th, he had met Katy Groves, a talented singer-entertainer from Kentucky. She had come to China with the American Red Cross. Jesse was in his mid-40s and eighteen years older than Katy when they were married in late 1944 or early 1945. They would spend a number of years in Australia with Caltex before returning to the U.S. for an assignment as an executive at Texaco headquarters in White Plains, New York. Williams retired from Texaco in 1963 and returned to Ft. Stockton to take over the family ranching operation. He also spent time in La Grande, Oregon, where he found and purchased an 8,000-acre parcel of land. There he developed an integrated agricultural operation modeled upon the Japanese "monopoly" concept.

Daughter Sallie Williams and son John Collier Williams reside in La Grande as this is written. Second son William David Williams, a Marine Corps veteran, passed away some years ago.

Jesse Caleb Williams succumbed to cancer on December 23, 1987, and is buried in Ft. Stockton. His headstone includes the following epitaph:

Jesse Caleb Williams...Caltex Executive, Farmer, Rancher and Flying Tiger Colonel; A Beloved Father, Husband, Brother, Grandfather, and Worldly Man Who Shall Always Be Remembered

Henry Gilbert, the first and youngest Flying Tiger to die in combat, was honored by his home town of Lovell, Wyoming, as part of a war memorial (**see next page for photo**). It features a striking, colorful mural with the U.S. flag and a fierce-looking shark-faced P-40 on the attack. An annotated photo of Gilbert mounted on a rock pedestal stands in front of the mural. See the next page for the mural.

End Notes

1. John Zischang, *Life Magazine*, p. 4, August 3, 1942.
2. In Jack Samson's book, Chennault was said to have landed by the Gila River to fish while on a mail run from Ft. Bliss to Arizona. He supposedly caught the plane undercarriage on a rock while taking off. When interviewed about the incident decades later, Chennault was vague, said it was a long time ago, and talked about possibly losing oil pressure and having to land. Neither story seems credible. Creel's eye-witness account is almost certainly accurate.
3. Jack Samson was the official historian of the 14th U.S. Army Air Force Association and author of some 20 books. He knew Chennault personally from his service in China and was obviously a great admirer. Samson passed away in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 2007 at age 87.
4. Martha Byrd was a brilliant military history author who besides writing *Chennault: Giving Wings to the Tiger*, wrote *A World in Flames: A Concise History of World War II*; *Kenneth N. Walker: Airpower's Untempered Crusader*; and *Saratoga: Turning Point in the American Revolution*. She died of cancer at age 63 in 1993.
5. For decades after his death in 1958, debates have raged about Chennault's birth year. His headstone at Arlington National Cemetery has

Walter Hines was born in Las Cruces, is an NMSU graduate in Civil Engineering, '65, '67, and a frequent contributor to the *Review*. He has written a number of historical articles on NMSU and two books, *Aggies of the Pacific War: NM A&M and the War with Japan* and *Hugh Meglone Milton: A Life Beyond Duty* (co-authored by Martha S. Andrews). His dad, Jerry Hines, recruited George McCarty to NM A&M as a football player in 1937.

1893. Jack Samson claims 1890, while Martha Byrd says 1893. One story, probably true, has Chennault's father giving his birth year as 1890 to overcome LSU's restriction on taking underage freshmen. My research suggests that 1893 is the correct date, even though that would have made him 16 when he started college at LSU.
6. Jesse Williams wrote numerous letters to his parents in Ft. Stockton during his time in China from 1923 to 1935. Though not formally published, the letters were retyped and bound in a pamphlet entitled *Excerpts of Letters from China During Troubled Years, 1923–1935* (undated).
7. Some accounts have Martin as the first Flying Tiger pilot killed in action. In truth, Gilbert and Martin were shot down within minutes of one another and the sequence of their deaths is not accurately known.
8. Like the Burma Road to which it would connect, the Ledo (or Stillwell) Road was an engineering nightmare of jungles, deep ravines, streams, mountains, bogs, and switchbacks. It was not completed until early 1945 and was never a significant factor in the war against Japan.
9. Though the surrender ceremony rumor about "Where's Chennault?" is unconfirmed, Chennault and MacArthur met several times in post-war Japan and were deep admirers of one another.



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Chasing The James (Bear) Moore Story

By Donovan Swann

Around 1892 a man named James Moore of Kansas City, Missouri, tangled with a grizzly bear. The *Silver City Enterprise* on July 8, 1892, reported the following: “A chewed up patient at St. Vincent’s, James Moore, is the worst chopped up man St. Vincent’s hospital has had to care for in years. Four days ago he had a battle with a bear in the Magdalena mountains, and was brought here yesterday through the kind offices of the Priest at Socorro to have his wounds treated.”

A New Mexico scribe found Mr. Moore stretched out on a comfortable cot in the second floor ward at St. Vincent’s. His right jawbone was broken. His teeth were loose. Two four-inch wounds on the right side of his face left little of the cheek save a mass of raw flesh, cut to the bone. The right eye was closed and the lid cut in twain. The mouth could not be closed, and a gash one inch below it made it impossible to give the patient liquid nourishment without forcing it down the throat. The left cheek was slit. Half a dozen cuts appeared on the scalp. On the left side, at the base of the neck, was a wound two inches long and an inch deep. In a word the man was simply “chewed up.”

Months later, when Moore had recovered from his injuries, which were substantial enough to have killed many lesser men, Moore decided never to

return to his family or former way of life, for his face was scarred and misshapened so badly he felt he could never again be accepted into the society from which he came. The most serious injury James Moore received however, was in the core of the man: a never-dying hate for the animal which had disfigured him for life, the American Grizzly Bear.

Perhaps “Bear” Moore, as he later became known, swore a personal oath to forever rid the Gila country of this beast. No one knows if he did utter an oath or not, however we do know he reduced the number of grizzlies in the Gila substantially up to the time of his death. The last grizzly was killed in the Gila sometime in the 1940s.

Moore was a sensitive, yet powerful person. The size of the timber used to build his cabin and bear traps suggest great strength. Moore lived alone, avoided persons except of necessity and grew a beard which partially covered his scars. He wore a cloth over the lower half of his face when

he went to Pinos Altos for supplies. He first set up his living quarters well up the West Fork of the Gila River, a place that is still in the heart of the primitive area about 14 miles from the visitors center.

He built a cabin of great logs in a glen of pine trees near the river. Moore built an irrigation system and



The cave Moore lived in on Turkey Creek. Nearby, there was once a weathered Forest Service sign identifying it.

had a large garden. The ditch he dug could also be used to trap fish. Deer were plentiful. It is notable that Moore began his stay in the Gila attempting to live much as a normal civilized person. However, his dark side took over as he began building bear traps that could entrap a grizzly alive.

Doc Campbell of Gila Hot Springs remarked, "I never believed the stories of Bear Moore torturing trapped Grizzlies until a few years ago when I discovered the remains of a large log trap, with the trigger pole still in place." It is said that Moore carried two long iron rods and that he would build a fire and heat the rods and then prod the poor beasts to death.



One of two bear traps the author's group observed circa 1964 on the way back to Gila Hot Springs.

After a few years on the West Fork, Moore abandoned his cabin and moved to a cave on Turkey Creek.

Why did he move? Were there more grizzlies there? Or did Moore make a significant gold strike in the area? Several theories are available, however in Elizabeth McFarland's book "Wilderness of the Gila" there are a half dozen stories of people over the years who had found rich gold in and about Turkey Creek and Sycamore Canyon. That is also the area where Captain Mike Cooney was found dead while on his last prospecting trip.

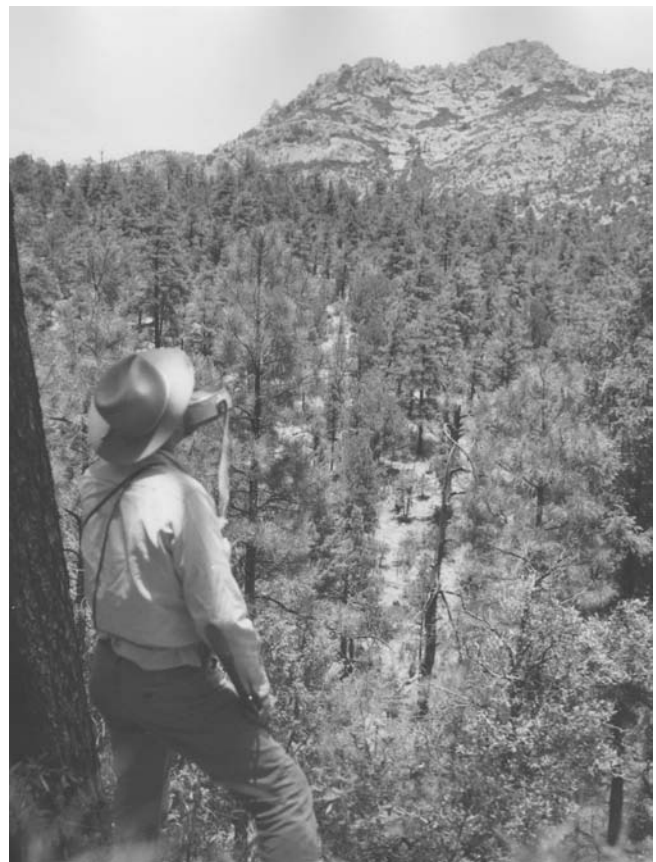
In James Moore's declining years, he became even less civilized. He moved and set up a campsite high up on the side of Brushy Mountain. Moore's last camp was not far from Little Turkey

Park and approximately two miles from water. A strange location you say? Strange indeed, what with all the sheltered locations along the running trout streams in the Gila.

Around 1964, with Doc Campbell furnishing the horses and pack animals, this author, and eleven other Las Cruces made a wilderness trail ride into the past, to the scenes of the tragic Bear Moore story. Doc Campbell of the Gila Hot Springs ranch, a man who is legend to the hunters, fishermen, and hikers, guided this party over the faint trails to Moore's cave on Turkey Creek, to the bear traps and to Moore's last resting place on Brushy Mountain.

It took a second trip later in the summer to visit Moore's cabin on the West Fork.

In January 1924, Bear Moore's body was found by mountain man Nat Straw. It was identi-



The author spent a day on the divide between Turkey Creek and Sycamore Canyon searching for blazed trees and a grave site. He found neither.

fied by Forest Ranger Jack Stockbridge. He was buried where he was found by some cowboys from the Heart Bar Ranch. It was reported at the time that clutched tight in his hands, under his chest, was a baking powder can half filled with flour gold (very fine gold particles) and a large nugget.

Interestingly, while poking around in Moore's last camp, one of our party asked Doc if the old mountain men carried single bit or double bit axes. Doc replied they always carried double bit axes. Then someone poking around in the deep pine needles found Moore's axe. It was a single bit axe with great damage to the steel on the butt end. Damage in that area that could only be caused by using it to break rock. Doc quickly put the axe head in his saddle bag and as far as I know it is probably in his belongings at the Gila Hot Springs.



Items found at Bear Moore's last campsite near his grave.



The 1964 search party in camp on Turkey Creek. from L, Fred Huff squatting, Jerry Woodward, John Curry Sr., Tom Mannon, Doc Campbell and the author over the cook pot, Dave Twitchell, an unidentified and Doc's horse wrangler.

It was a wonderful trip with good company. Perhaps someday the gold will be found and put a conclusion to the many stories surrounding Turkey Creek.

Donovan Swann arrived in Las Cruces on July 6, 1956, a young GI assigned to the Signal Company at what was then White Sands Proving Ground, now White Sands Missile Range. He became an avid prospector of the Victorio Peak area and its famed Doc Noss treasure trove. Also, he chased after The Lost Dutchman Mine and the Lost Adams Diggings. He has long held an interest in New Mexico history.

Some sources include:

First-hand accounts from Doc Campbell

Silver City Enterprise

New Mexico Magazine

Wilderness of the Gila by Elizabeth McFarland

Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver by J. Frank Dobie

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Age Matters Little If You Thrive! Holy Cross School Celebrates 90 Years And Is Still Going Strong

By Olivia Lerma McDonald

South-central New Mexico is steeped in blended traditions. The earliest came from indigenous people, Spanish conquistadores, and Mexicans. Other traditions would come later by way of immigrants traveling to the West, including Japanese, Italians, Germans, Greeks, and African Americans. The Civil War would bring many soldiers who would decide to make New Mexico their home.

With modern history came the rocketeers, or those who worked at White Sands Missile Range and NASA. And finally, retirees would come with their own traditions from countless locations and walks of life.

Like the ingredients from a tasty stew, they have been combined to create a place unique and rich in its variety.

The earliest peoples civilized this place with hard work, religion, and education. Las Cruces (The Crosses) and the Mesilla Valley along the Rio Grande have thrived on farming, ranching, mining and, later, the technical and engineering opportunities of the Space Age.

Remarkably, even when faced with an annual influx of new people, descendants of the original families who still live in Las Cruces remember when it was much smaller and who their neighbors were. They remember how family and faith were so important and how townspeople lived, loved, worked, shared, and died — all the while contributing to the town that has become a city.

Change, of course, is inevitable. But fortunately, some of what those inhabitants built long ago continues to hold a place in their hearts and minds with richness and strength.

Such is the solid endurance of Holy Cross School, dedicated in 1927, by The Sisters of Loretto or the Loretto Community — a Catholic religious institute from Nerinx, Kentucky.

Sisters of Loretto had already established their prowess in teaching at their academy at the edge of town. But to meet the growing demand in Las Cruces, they expanded to a three-room building they called Holy Cross School and dedicated on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

It was built by Fr. Henry D. Buchanan on the north part of the property of St. Genevieve's Catholic Church on Main Street. Holy Cross School's first eighth grade class of eight students graduated in 1933. How could they know that from these humble beginnings the school would endure and



St. Genevieve's before demolition.

produce far-reaching success and fond memories in their students?

A trip down memory lane brings one right through the double iron gates of the old church. The huge mulberry trees lined the fence and dropped their purple fruit while filtering the strong New Mexico sun. A center path led up five concrete steps to the courtyard in front of three Gothic wooden doors. The center double door and the two single doors on either side offered parishioners and visitors a warm invitation to the stately St. Genevieve's Church.



The old iron gates. In the center are the initials P.L. for Father Pierre Lassaigue.

Its adobe walls and buttresses were five-foot thick and looked strong enough to last forever. Indeed, the 1859 church did survive for generations. Many people who know the history remain in the area, including descendants of Luis Barrio.

Barrio, with Henry Cuniff, on January 12, 1855, went to probate court to donate the land for the original church named in honor of St. Genevieve. "...in consideration of the interest they feel in the Roman Catholic Church in the town of Las Cruces...all rights, title, and interest...to certain lots and parcel of land in said town in Doña Ana County," court documents read.

The first Holy Cross School provided structure for young students. The sound of a black-handled brass bell under the portico next to the classrooms began and ended the students' school day. The

tiniest first graders and tallest eighth graders attended daily mass, accompanied by teachers and often members of the community. The Angelus, a prayer of devotion to the incarnation, was prayed daily at noon. And each day children recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

There were sports as well and a playground with a well-used merry-go-round and a metal slide. Even children who did not attend the school remember that slide. After school, non-parochial school students received catechism instruction.

Ten bishops and 65 priests shepherded and served St. Genevieve's and Holy Cross School. Alumni and families share fond memories of St. Genevieve's and Holy Cross' religious traditions honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary. The month of May brought special activities to honor the Blessed Mother with a daily evening rosary. Little girls, dressed in their First Communion white dresses and veils, brought offerings of flowers to honor their Queen, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Their fresh-cut flowers came from their families' gardens or the neighbors — all of whom prided themselves on not only their vegetable and herb gardens, but their flower gardens as well. There were roses, lilacs, irises, calla lilies, gladiolas, and zinnias. Fragrant honeysuckle was sometimes placed there, too. The colorful bouquets were carefully prepared and offered up between decades (ten beads) of the rosary while the organ played hymns. Older girls, in Sodality uniforms (blue and white capes with beanies), cautiously gathered the flowers, including some bunches with prickly rose stems, and placed them in vases. Our Lady was crowned the Queen!

How sweet was the gentle melody and lyrics coming from the organ in the choir loft....

"On this day, O beautiful Mother, on this day we give thee our love. Near thee, Madonna, fondly we hover, trusting thy gentle care to prove..."

Also heard: "¡Oh María! ¡Madre mía! ¡Oh consuelo del mortal! Amparame y llevarme a la patria celestial."

It was commonplace to hear multiple languages intermingling during services — Spanish

in the early days, English later as more settlers came, and Latin, which was the official language of church services until Vatican II (Oct. 1962 – Dec. 1965). All seemed to fit at St. Genevieve's, or Santa Genoveva. Many little girls were named after the French saint, patroness of Paris, whose beautiful image still graces the newer St. Genevieve's church. Some were called Genevieve, Gen, Genny, or Genoveva.



Holy Cross School Altar boys in cassocks and surplices process to the cemetery. (Circa 1954) Photo J. M. Flanagan Special Collections

There were many school and parish activities: velorios (vigils) for Holy Thursday — all night adoration and velorios, for the dead. There were novenas, rosaries, and benediction and processions. The people came, rain or shine, lured by the ringing bells. They came when there were French priests, Spanish priests, Mexican priests, and American. There were nuns in heavy black habits with crisp white collars and caps beneath veils. Laywomen attended also. The school provided education for all people. Non-Catholics sent their children to be taught with assured discipline and success. They, too, participated in the many activities.

Palmer Lodge, behind the rectory, was an all-purpose hall that held dances (for adults and students), dinners, meetings and get-togethers.

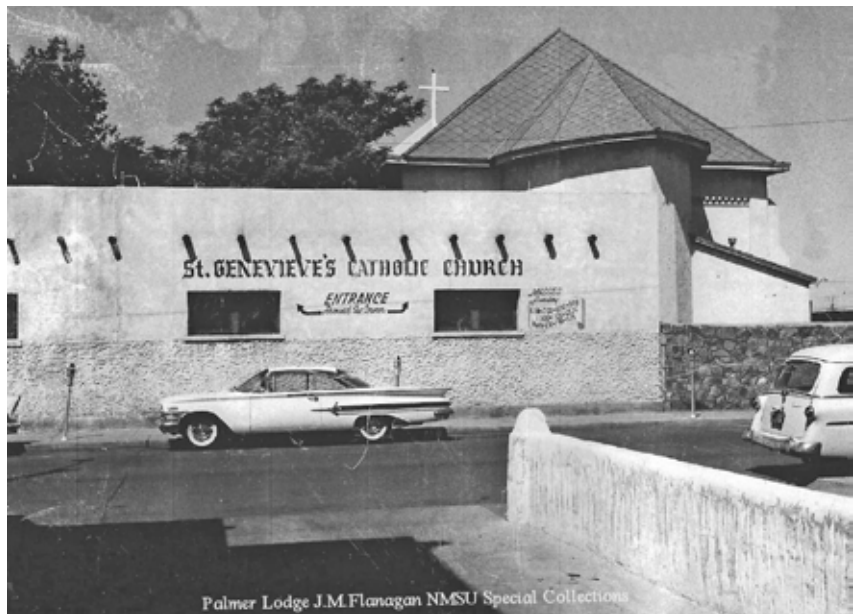
In the church, there were bouquets to honor the Virgin. After cleaning the cemetery, flowers were placed at gravesites, often marigolds and chrysanthemums, whichever

was in season. Processions on All Souls Day from the church to the oldest cemetery were traditional. From its beginning in the heart of a small town, the church laid the foundation for families for a whole lifetime, from birth to death attending the same church, attending the school and catechism. And its central location allowed it to become the heart of the city. It was the heart that beat in townspeople so diverse in culture and so unified in faith.

Today those who were school children of that time will remember the traditions. Ladies wore hats, chalinas, scarves, and mantillas. Nuns even affixed tissue to students' hair as coverings for Mass. When the church was full, the men simply stood or knelt,

sometimes on one knee in the back. Men who wore hats, held them in their hands — Stetsons or straw. There were no crying rooms, so moms or dads or older sisters or brothers simply took the babies outside or to the back and no one seemed disturbed.

The cultures intermingled. Others will recall



Palmer Lodge from Church Street with the church cross behind it. J.M. Flanagan Special Collections

the men who spent afternoons seated in front of the church mulling over the latest happenings, sharing conversations, and watching folks pass by on Main Street. The Holy Cross students would run to the fence and watch college, high school, and holiday parades as they marched past. And who could forget the devout Indian man, a Native American by appearance and dress, walking on his knees up the stairs into church with arms outstretched praying fervently, or how the bells rang incessantly when WWII ended. Some may remember nuns lining up the children at the Rio Grande Theater across the street for a private viewing of “The Song of Bernadette.”

Vivid memories of St. Genevieve’s remain emotionally etched in the minds and hearts of thousands who worshipped there over the decades and were educated at the school. Faded photographs and historic sacramental documents that have survived tell not only the church’s history but also the history of families whose lives began and ended with the church and school. Families claimed St. Genevieve’s as their own not because they were Roman Catholics — even non-Catholics attended — but rather because they saw its

vitality as well as its place in the community as the heart of the city.

In 1967, the Catholic Diocese, unable or unwilling to repair St. Genevieve’s, sold the old beloved church and school. And to the disappointment of the community at large, the old church and school were cut from the heart of the city. Its demolition began Oct. 1, 1967. A bank building now stands where the structures were. And new churches were built.

But as in all things, the old gives way to the new. The school’s steady growth from 1927 was evident. By 1958, there were 300 students attending, and classrooms were added. To accommodate the growing parochial student population, a second school, Immaculate Heart of Mary School, was founded. In 1962, Holy Cross School moved to its new and present facility on Miranda Street.

On a westside property on Miranda Street, Holy Cross Church and Holy Cross School were built. On the east side of town, a new St. Genevieve’s was built in the old Mesquite Historic District, which is included the original town site of the city of Las Cruces and close to the community’s oldest cemetery, San Jose Cemetery.



Present day St. Genevieve's.

Since the mid 1980s, there was discussion of consolidating the two schools in order to promote growth, unity of purpose, and better utilization of resources. So in 1995, a single administrative team was hired to oversee the two schools and facilitate their consolidation. In January 1996, the two school boards merged under one constitution.

The two schools then became the Las Cruces Area Catholic School with two sites, Holy Cross Campus and Immaculate Heart of Mary Campus. In the spring of 2001, the Las Cruces Area Catholic School was reorganized as Las Cruces Catholic School.

All prudence and planning cannot anticipate the hellish deed that beset the school on late Sunday night, June 16, 2002. Five engine companies were dispatched to a fire at the school. Investigators deemed the cause to be arson. They estimated loss at well over half a million dollars in school property: classrooms, hallways, equipment, furnishings, and supplies destroyed or heavily smoke damaged. Newspaper reporters noted that there was an apparent break-in since equipment was taken.

The community at large was truly saddened. For alumni and current students and faculty, it was not just because of the meanness of a senseless act of destruction, they hurt because this attack was on their beloved school. They held and hold cherished memories of their time at the school. To their dismay, they learned precious school memorabilia which was housed in that wing of the building was obliterated — deepening the reality of the loss. Years later, a collage of clippings of the devastation hangs on the wall, a grim reminder of the destructive and criminal deed they sustained. With great effort the school was restored, survived the setback, rose out of the ashes, and came back to life.

Ninety years have passed, but the rich history and traditions of Holy Cross School and St. Mary's remain. Gone are the adobe structures



Present day Holy Cross School.

of the old school and church; now Holy Cross School stands proudly on the Las Cruces Catholic Schools campus near Holy Cross Catholic Church. They serve students from preschool to 12th grade and although a Catholic institution, accept student from all other religions as well as those who are nonreligious.

They continue to employ nuns from the convent of Our Lady of Sorrows and lay teachers who teach with the same consistency of high academic standards and sharing of spiritual training as they have for decades. Now led by energetic Principal Connie Limon, whose genuine zeal for her school infects everyone with her vision and enthusiasm, the schools continue to grow and thrive.

The products of Holy Cross School's instruction include alumni who succeeded as governor of New Mexico, mayors, commissioners, city councilors, lawyers, doctors, military officers, authors, teachers, principals, professors, businessmen and businesswomen, playwrights, novelists, engineers, and success in numerous other professions.

Their families continue to attend Holy Cross, and generations of teachers teach there as well. All of these have contributed to the long, rich history of the community and the State of New Mexico.

In the present day, now in a new century from its beginnings in 1927, Holy Cross School and St.

Mary's continue to be rooted in Roman Catholic tradition to promote excellence in education and foster Christian spiritual, intellectual, and moral virtues in their students.

From the days of the little three-room school that has grown into a campus with many buildings, the school still offers a curriculum of core

studies and innovative programs dedicated to learning.

Time has marched on, at a maddening pace, especially as the City of Las Cruces has grown to be the second largest in the state, but this institution has managed to keep step maintaining the tradition of excellence as is has for 90 years.

References

- *Las Cruces Catholic Schools website
- *Excerpts from THE HEART OF LAS CRUCES, ST. GENEVIEVE'S CHURCH, with permission Chapter 10 by Olivia Lerma McDonald
- *Photos, J. M. Flanagan Special Collections, NM State University
- *Photos Morris Drexler

Olivia Lerma McDonald is a freelance writer/translator. Her books include: Co-author of *The Heart Of Las Cruces, St. Genevieve's Church; The Making Of A Basilica; God's Gift's Are For Sharing; Saints & Feast Days Of San Albino; Translated Santos Y Dias De Fiestas De San Albino; Haciendome Cargo De Mi Vida (Taking Charge Of My Life)*. Her history article and photographs were included in *Las Cruces Bulletin's* 2012 New Mexico Centennial Book, *LAS CRUCES, A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY*.

McDonald is a former member of the National League of American Pen Women (Letters), a professional organization of artists, writers, and composers. She received the Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest Women of Distinction award, (West Texas and New Mexico); and the Doña Ana County Historical Society Heritage Award. She and her husband, Ronald, live in Las Cruces, NM, where they are active in the community.

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