



NEWSLETTER

May 2018

Doña Ana County Historical Society

Dr. Yolanda Leyva Will Lecture May 17 On The WWII Bracero Worker Program

The Bracero Program brought men to the United States as part of a bilateral guest worker program between 1942-1964. In response to a reported war-time labor shortage, the Bracero Program brought men from Mexico to the United States to work in agriculture, and to a lesser extent, railroads.

Over the 22 years of the program, over five million contracts were provided to workers. Early on, the men were called “soldiers of the fields” for their contribution to the nation’s war-time efforts. Today, much of the history is forgotten although thousands of families trace their presence in the United States to fathers and grandfathers who worked as braceros.

They were called braceros because they worked with their hands. Brazo is Spanish for “arm.” They were literally men with arms.

Although the binational treaty mandated specific living conditions and wages, these standards were not always implemented and many of the men tell stories of great suffering on both sides of the border. Yet, these stories are also expressions of hope as the men often discuss their gratitude for the opportunity to be in the United States.

Dr. Yolanda Chávez Leyva is a Chicana historian and writer who was born and raised on the border. She is currently the Director of

the Institute of Oral History and an Associate Professor. She has spent her life listening to and now documenting the lives of people who live on la frontera. Her life calling is that of temachtiani, Nahuatl for teacher, and she works to learn from the huehuetlahtolli, the ancestral teachings of ancient Mexico.

Professor Leyva specializes in border history, public history, and Chicana history. She has directed various public history projects



Dr. Yolanda Leyva, Director of the Institute of Oral History at UTEP.

focusing on the U.S.-Mexico border over the past decade. Most recently, she served as Project Developer for “El Paso: The Other Side of the Mexican Revolution,” a groundbreaking museum exhibit on El Paso’s role in the Revolution. She is also co-directing the creation of Museo Urbano 2010, a museum that

emphasizes historic buildings as artifact. In the past, she has directed an oral history project with the Socorro community and a “museum for a day” project involving UTEP graduate students and high school students as well as the creation of a website, “Border Public History.”

Dr. Leyva is currently revising a manuscript titled, “Cruzando la Linea: Mexican Children on the Texas-Mexico Border,” which investigates the ways in which the presence of children has shaped the border historically.

May 17, 7 p.m. at Good Sam Auditorium.

Another DACHS Past President Leaves Us

Chuck Miles, DACHS president in 1995-96, passed away in early February. Not only was Chuck our president, he was coauthor of a fine memoir called *Once Enemies, Now Friends*. The other author was Chuck's neighbor Felix Pfaeffle.

According to their summary of the book, *It is winter of 1944/45 and World War II is coming to its end. Two teenage soldiers, one American, the other German, are caught up in its final battles. On the last Christmas of that conflict, they are within 5 miles of each other on opposite sides of the Rhine, while the Battle of the Bulge rages 100 miles to the north.*

The German was drafted into the Luftwaffe Flak (anti-aircraft) Corps at barely 16, to help protect his hometown, Karlsruhe, against bombing raids of the 8th Air Force and the British Bomber Command. In January 1945, in his country's last effort to halt the advancing Allies, his unit crosses the Rhine in the "Operation Northwind" bridgehead attempt.

The American, typified by Bill Mauldin's "doughboy" cartoons, advances with the 63rd Infantry Division through Eastern France and Southern Germany. In April 1945 he is wounded outside a small German village during one of the last, furious clashes of that war, thought by many veterans to be the "Second Battle of the Bulge".

By chance they met 56 years later, discovering that they lived only a block from each other in Las Cruces. They compared their experiences and decided to write the book. Once enemies, they were now friends.

Robert Hart wrote a tribute to Chuck Miles and had this to say about him:

"Chuck Miles was an active Society president and continued efforts begun by his predecessor, Linda Harris, to revitalize the organization. With a background in retail sales and marketing, he specifically concentrated on raising Society visibility. He repeatedly advocated joint sponsorship of public events to the Board of Directors, as well as an aggressive stance in recruiting new members.

"Two major public events were sponsored by the DACHS during 1995/1996 and both were financial successes. The first event was held on the 65th anniversary of the discovery of Pluto (April 7, 1995), at

the Las Cruces Hilton to honor astronomer Clyde W. Tombaugh and his wife, Patsy. Sponsorship of the event was shared with the Branigan Cultural Center Foundation. The guest speaker was David H. Levy, Professor Tombaugh's biographer. The audience was also treated to a litany of Tombaugh humor in the form of crow jokes and the event was a sellout.

"The second major public event was a sesquicentennial symposium commemorating New Mexico's Year of Destiny, 1846. This symposium was one of the few events held in the state to commemorate the American acquisition of New Mexico during the Mexican-American War. Held on March 30, 1996, the Doña Ana County Historical Society and the Academy for Learning in Retirement shared sponsorship. Presenters included Dr. Thomas E. Chavez, Dr. Oscar J. Martinez, Dr. Ward Alan Minge, Dr. John Porter Bloom, Dr. F. Ross Peterson, and Robert J. Torrez. Dr. G. L. Seligmann summarized the symposium presentations and historian Leon Metz presented the lunch address. An impressive 220 persons attended the symposium and prompt publication of the symposium papers followed.

"Society publication efforts continued with Southern New Mexico Historical Review volumes three and four. Editorship of the Review shifted to Christine B. Myers for volume three and Winifred Y. Jacobs for volume four. Volume four also represented a change in format size and almost doubled the content of the publication. As the financial health of the Society improved, the continued necessity for the previously established policy of selling sponsorships for the Review was repeatedly discussed by the Board of Directors, but not altered. The DACHS history publication project continued under Historian Madeleine Vessel, but was not ready for publication by the end of Chuck's term of office.

"During the Miles presidency Society membership increased by 47% and operating funds nearly doubled. Significantly, the official nonprofit status of the Society was reestablished almost single-handedly by the efforts of Society member Fred Mesenbrink. And for the first time in seventeen years (1996), new bylaws were approved and distributed to the membership. A lack of current bylaws had severely handicapped efficient Board operation."



Current DACHS president Dennis Daily (left) and past president George Helfrich pose in front of the armored car in front of the Pancho Villa State Park Visitors Center during the DACHS field trip on April 14. The vehicle was used by General Pershing in his pursuit of Villa into Mexico. Photo by Jim Eckles



Columbus field trip organizer Jim Eckles (left) poses with Ric Lambart in front of a replica Jenny airplane like the one used by Pershing in Mexico. Ric took the time to brief the group on the history of the First Aero Squadron and the fact that it is still in business. By the way, in 1916, it belonged to the Army's Signal Corps. Ric has over 13,000 flight hours as an Air Force and a commercial pilot. Photo by Dennis Daily



Dan Crow, left, started our April "Pat Garrett" presentation with two songs about Billy the Kid and Sheriff Pat Garrett. Scott Green then took the stage as Pat Garrett and talked about his life. He then answered questions as Garrett might and finished by explaining how he came to play Garrett. Note the Garrett image on Crow's t-shirt. Photo by Jim Eckles.

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