



NEWSLETTER

November 2021

Doña Ana County Historical Society

How Military Aviation Was Born In Our Backyard

DACHS Vice-President and current Las Cruces Museums Administrator Garland Courts has recently finished work on a new exhibit at the Branigan Cultural Center called *Cleared for Takeoff: Aviation in Southern New Mexico*, an in depth look at aviation in the area from the early aviation pioneers to recent space flight centered in our area.

While helping to curate the exhibit, Courts came across fascinating facts about the start of military aviation that began in our own backyard of southern New Mexico. Courts will be sharing his findings and provide photographs and details about the First Aero Squadron at our next meeting on **November 18 at 7 p.m.** in the **Good Samaritan Auditorium** at 3011 Buena Vida Cir. The presentation will **also be streamed live via Zoom.**

The 1st Aero Squadron is the oldest U.S. military flying unit, formed March 5, 1913. Its formation by General John J. Pershing was a reaction to increasing political unrest in Mexico. Three years later the political unrest would cross into the United States when Mexican rebel leader Francisco "Pancho" Villa and 484 supporters crossed the border at

Columbus, NM, and raided the town on March 14, 1916. President Woodrow Wilson ordered a "Punitive Expedition" to be commanded by General Pershing to "pursue and disperse" Villa's forces in Mexico.

After taking command, Pershing ordered the 1st Aero Squadron to leave their base at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, and to set up operations in Columbus, NM, with plans to use the aircraft for observation and support of the ground troops. During the five months that the squadron was active, they flew 346 hours over the course of 540 flights and covered more than 19,300 miles. Their experiences would help refine the military's use of aircraft and these refinements were used in World War I.

As in October, if you cannot attend or do not feel safe yet, you can attend via the Zoom platform. We will send out the Zoom invite a few days before by email. The only requirement for those attending at Good Sam is that you must wear a mask inside their facility.

Coincidentally, we have an article for the upcoming *Review* about the Army's use of pigeons in Mexico - different kind of aviation.



Army airplanes in Mexico being prepared to support Pershing's "Punitive Expedition." While they never found Villa, the use of airplanes paved the way for their use in WWI. Courtesy Fort Sam Houston Museum

DACHS Board and Officer Elections To Be Held November 18

Every fall, we have elections for some of the DACHS officers and some of the at-large board members. Terms are for two years and are staggered so not every position needs to be filled annually.

We have no more than one nominee for each position, so here is the slate you will be voting during the monthly presentation on Nov. 18.

President - Dennis Daily Historian - Jose Aranda At-Large Members - Jerry Wallace, Luis Rios, Sally Kading, and Sim Middleton.
--

DACHS Awards Banquet Will Be January 29 At Double Eagle

By Susan Krueger

Yes, it will be a new year and the Doña Ana County Historical Society will celebrate its Annual Awards Luncheon live, in person, on Saturday, January 29, 2022.

Mark the date on your calendar, and note the luncheon will be held at the Double Eagle Restaurant on the Mesilla Plaza. Registration will begin at 11:30 a.m., and seating will start at noon with the buffet lunch to be served at 12:15 p.m. The installation of Board Members and the Awards program will take place following lunch.

The awards for 2022 include:

☞ *Old Timer's Award* to be given to recognize the boundary markers between Mexico and the United States in Doña Ana County;

☞ *Historically Significant Building Worthy of Preservation* to be given to St. James Episcopal Church, completed in 1912;

☞ *Hall of Fame Award* to be given to David Soules;

☞ *Heritage Award* to be given to Evan Davies;

☞ *Pasajero Del Camino Real Award* to be given to David Thomas for *The Trial of Billy the Kid*, 2021.

It is so good to be back in person at the Double Eagle to celebrate the Society's annual awards.

Any questions or comments contact me, Susan Krueger, at skrueger575@msn.com or 575 640-4266, and please leave a message if I don't pick up. See you on the 29th.

FindAGrave Lecture Offered By Doña Ana County Genealogical Society

On November 10 Peter Drinkwater, the General Manager of Find A Grave, will discuss what this free-to-use website is and how to effectively use it for genealogical research.

FindAGrave.com houses nearly 200 million memorials of famous and "not so famous" people from around the world.

The Zoom meeting will start at 2 p.m. Mountain

Time. There will be a very brief business meeting prior to Drinkwater's presentation.

For Non-DACGS members: Please send an email request, including your telephone number, to: dacgslc@gmail.com requesting Zoom instructions to attend the meeting. The request, with phone number, must be received two (2) days prior to the meeting.

Do You Want To Do A Field Trip To TorC To Visit 2 Museums & Eat?

It has been suggested that the DACHS take a field trip to Truth or Consequences to visit the Geronimo Springs Museum and the Diane Hamilton Military Museum. Because of the length of the drive and museum hours, we'd probably want to do lunch somewhere in TorC or, maybe try to hit Sparky's in Hatch on the way back for a late lunch/early dinner.

For those of you unfamiliar with these museums, the Geronimo Springs facility "constructs a comprehensive history of the county and its inhabitants. Collections include everything from fossils to

a world-class pottery exhibit to historic Hispanic and Apache artifacts. Permanent exhibits include the Southwestern pottery collection, mostly in the famous Mimbres and Tularosa style."

The military museum is fairly new and has "rare and educational exhibits: historic war displays range from a military button collection to Buffalo Soldier memorabilia, and there's a special focus on local heroes."

If you want to go, email Jim at 19dach63@gmail.com. He'll set it up for the first Dec. Saturday.

The Dubious Art Of Collecting Artifacts For The Past Century

By Jim Eckles

In *Pocketful of Rockets* I wrote about some of the artifact collectors on the missile range in the 1950s. People living and working around the main post at White Sands have been finding evidence of early Native American people since the place was established in 1945 - sometimes right in their backyards.

In the April 9, 1952 issue of the *Wind and Sand*, the official missile range newspaper, a front-page story announced that F.W. Thompson had uncovered "the foundations of 15 Indian dwellings."

Thompson was running heavy equipment in road construction on the base and accidentally dug up the ruin. The article stated, "A well preserved skeleton, measuring almost seven feet in length, was found buried beneath a mud slab floor of one of the rectangular huts." Other bones and skeletons were supposedly found in the other ruins. A photo of Thompson ran along with the article that showed him holding the skull at the spot he found it.

Thompson described himself as an "amateur archeologist" and the newspaper simply printed what he said about the site. Apparently there was quite a bit of loot in the ruins and Thompson collected it.

In the May 31, 1957 issue of the *Wind and Sand*, photos and an article showed off the huge Indian artifact collection of Mr. and Mrs. A.G. Devirian.

The article stated the couple came to White Sands in 1952, and early in their residency they found an arrowhead in the main post area. They were bitten by the collecting bug and started gathering everything they could find.

It appears from the article that some of their "relics" were collected from other areas, but most of it came from White Sands. The Devirians said their oldest pieces were Sandia points. Next they said they had eight Folsom points, around 10,000 years old, that they found within 10 miles of the main post.

They found pottery bowls and dishes, in pieces, that they glued together to make them whole. One photo of the couple's collection points out "a pottery dish found in the Wherry Housing area."

Other items listed in the collection were a stone pipe, weaving disks, a water olla, different colored minerals used as body paint and for pottery, clay dishes, over 1,000 arrowheads, strings of beads, carved shells, and burned ears of corn. A photo in the paper shows it laid out on a large dining table.

At the end of the article, the reporter says, "The Devirians are planning to take their artifacts with them to Pasadena when they leave the proving ground. Devirian, a field test coordinator with Jet Propulsion Laboratory, is being transferred back to the California office."

In my own experience, I went to interview one of the original White Sands employees - his backyard was lined with dozens of metates he'd collected.

Those are just a few examples of collectors that we know about. One can only guess at the thousands upon thousands of artifacts that have probably been relocated from White Sands. The sheer plenty of artifacts hints at how many people may have lived in the area centuries ago.

A large segment of today's society understands it is illegal and unethical to take away prehistoric and historical artifacts from government lands. However, during our tours out onto the missile range it was always surprising how many people still did not have a clue.

When I've talked to others about these collectors from the 1950s, most believe it was legal to pick up artifacts then. They assume the antiquities laws are fairly recent.

Actually, the first Antiquities Act was passed and signed in 1906 by President Teddy Roosevelt. The law is very short, only a half page, but gave government officials a powerful tool in trying to preserve America's heritage.

The first part of the law is pretty straight forward and states, "*That any person who shall appropriate, excavate, injure, or destroy any historic or prehistoric ruin or monument, or any object of antiquity, situated on lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States, without permission of the Secretary of the Department of the Government having jurisdiction over the lands on which said antiquities are situated, shall, upon conviction, be fined a sum of not more than five hundred dollars or be imprisoned for a period of not more than ninety days, or shall suffer both fine and imprisonment, in the discretion of the court.*"

That's pretty clear. Folks collecting artifacts on White Sands in the 1950s were clearly in violation of federal law even if the penalties were vague and unenforceable later on. The intention was still obvious and non-criminals and people who care, get it.



The "Friends of Pat Garrett" have paid for and installed a sign to mark the site in the Alameda Arroyo where Pat Garrett was killed on Feb. 29, 1908. It was recently mounted on a stone marker which sits behind the historic marker poured decades ago. Current members of the group are David Thomas, Bob Gamboa, Dan Crow, Sally Kading, Karla Steen, Susan Krueger, Dan Aranda, Buddy Ritter, Dennis Daily, Scott Davis, Roy B. Young, Vince Ory and Josh Slatten.

If you haven't visited the site before, contact Jim Eckles at 19dachs63@gmail.com and he'll take you out. It requires a 4x4 vehicle and he can accommodate 3 people at a time. Photo by Bob Gamboa.

2021 Board of Directors

President: Dennis Daily
 Vice President: Garland Courts
 Secretary, Newsletter, Review & Website: Jim Eckles
 Treasurer: Dennis Fuller
 Historian: Sally Kading
 Past President: Dr. Susan Krueger
 At-Large Board Members:
 Bob Gamboa
 Luis Rios
 Sim Middleton
 Jose Aranda
 C.W. "Buddy" Ritter
 Jim Eckman, SNMHR Editor
 Luis Rios, Education and Scholarships
 Daniel Aguilera, Farm&Ranch Heritage Museum Liaison
 Bobby Torres, MMSU History Students Liaison
www.donaanaahistoricalcountyhistorical.org

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

