



Doña Ana County Historical Society

March 2026 Newsletter

March DACHS Speaker Series Spotlights Local Theater Pioneers

This month's speaker series will feature historian Tracie Amend who will explore the impact Hershel Zohn and Mark Medoff had on the theater scene of Las Cruces and southern New Mexico. The lecture is scheduled for March 19 at 7 pm at the Woman's Improvement Association building at 340 Reymond Street across from Pioneer Women's Park.

Amend's lecture, "Zohn and Medoff: Setting the Scene in Southern New Mexico" seeks to trace the two men's experiences as professors at NMSU and the ways they interacted with the Las Cruces dramatic community, answering the following question: How did two highly successful, east-coast thespians and their work contribute to NMSU, Las Cruces, and a New Mexican dramatic culture?

Amend is a general humanities scholar with degrees in several different fields, and served as assistant editor of the most recent edition of the Southern New Mexico Historical Review. She has taught in four different departments at NMSU, and she is currently wrapping up an MA in Public History at NMSU. She hopes to work in museum curation, education, and interpretation in the near future.

In April, the speaker series will present historian Steve Kobs and his talk about early movie theaters in Las Cruces. For the last talk of the spring series in May, Steve Dobrott of the Hillsboro Historical Society will discuss the preservation of the 136-year old Mountain Pride stagecoach that once served the mining towns of Lake Valley, Hillsboro and Kingston.

The remaining talks this season will also serve as a bit of a test run of the century-old Woman's Improvement Association building, which DACHS is considering as a new venue for the speaker series and possibly other history-related events. Though structurally sound, the old building does have some issues and is currently rarely used, but the city's Historic Preservation Committee held its recent meeting there in February and all things reportedly went well.

Initially a clubhouse for the W.I.A. (which also led the establishment of what is now Pioneer Women's Park), the building served for several years as a town library. The city acquired it in the 1990s as part of an effort to preserve historical structures.

Nakayama Family the Focus of New Branson Library Exhibit

A new exhibit at New Mexico State University brings to light the story of a Japanese American farming family whose work helped shape the agricultural and social landscape of southern New Mexico, underscoring the university's commitment to preserving underrepresented histories and advancing community-engaged scholarship.

"Land, Labor, and Community: A Japanese American Farming Family" opens from 2 to 4 p.m. Wednesday, March 11, at the Branson Library on the main campus.

The exhibit, curated by Jennifer Olguin, associate professor and Rio Grande Historical Collections archivist for the NMSU Library, Archives and Special Collections, and co-curated by Elizabeth Villa, library specialist, is located on the fourth-floor Humboldt Casad & Evangeline Smith Mandell Exhibit Gallery. It is free and open to the public.

The exhibit tells the story of the Nakayama family and their enduring impact on local agriculture and community life. Through photographs, documents and interpretive narratives, the exhibit explores how land and labor shaped the family's livelihood, identity and sense of belonging across generations.

The Nakayamas were one of several Japanese farming families who settled in the Mesilla Valley in the early 1900s and established themselves in the community and built successful farming operations - despite state laws restricting "alien" ownership of land in New Mexico. Roy Nakayama became a major researcher at New Mexico College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts (now NMSU), helping to establish pecan and chile varieties still in wide use today. Read more about Dr. Nakayama here <https://aces-heroes.nmsu.edu/heroes/nakayama.html>

The exhibit also marks the recent acquisition of the Nakayama family papers and underscores the importance of preserving family and community histories. Campus and community members are invited to reflect on themes of perseverance, community, and continuity.

Rather than focusing solely on major historical events, the exhibit centers on everyday life – working the land, supporting family and maintaining community connections – to help visitors understand how national histories affected individuals at the local level.

"I hope visitors leave understanding that land and labor are central to the formation of identity, belonging and community over time," Olguin said. "For the Nakayama family, working the land created stability, connection and a sense of purpose that carried across generations. The exhibit shows how these everyday practices shaped family bonds and community ties, and how those relationships continue to influence how we understand belonging today."

Chinese in California Subject of History Talk at NMSU

As part of NMSU's departments of History and Anthropology ongoing cross-discipline speaker series, University of California-Merced history professor Dr. David Rouff will discuss Chinese immigration in California Tuesday March 10 at 4:30 pm in the university's Breland Hall Room 182. It is free to attend and open to all.

In his talk "Emerging from the Rubble: Chinese Ghost Stories from Merced, California," Rouff will explore the experience of the thousands of Chinese immigrants who left China's Pearl River Delta in the late 1800s in hopes of a better life in America, only to often experience racism, violence, and segregation.

Though first-person accounts of Chinese immigrants are rarely found in historical archives, Rouff proposes that through researching tax records and fire insurance maps these seldom-heard voices emerge. According to a news release, "rather than tales of exclusion and marginalization, these ghost stories reveal a vibrant world of immigrant Chinese activism, persistence, and belonging, unsettling the past."

Winemaking and museum archives topics of Farm and Ranch events this month

The Friends of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum is inviting the public to the museum on Thursday March 19 as part of its Cultural Series and the "Getting to Know Your Museum" talks. Both events take place at the museum located at 4100 Dripping Springs Road.

"Getting to Know Your Museum" opens a window into the operations of the museum through presentations by museum staff and what they do every day to maintain the mission of the museum. In her talk that morning, museum archivist Donna Wojcik will highlight her work in the museum's archives and collections and how the museum preserves and protects valuable stories and documents from the past. Coffee is served at 9:30 am followed by Wojcik's talk at 10 am.

At 7 pm the same day at the museum, the Friends also present NMSU agriculture professor and viticulturalist Dale Ellis who will discuss the traditions, techniques and innovations that go into making wine in New Mexi-

co. Winemaking in New Mexico involves “a rich blend of science, art and agriculture,” and represents a tradition stretching back centuries. His talk will also be livestreamed on Facebook.

The Friends of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum present the Culture Series, a monthly program that brings history, culture, and storytelling to life. Each event is free and open to the public, with presentations ranging from local history to the arts, agriculture, and traditions that shape New Mexico.

Annual Bataan Memorial March Honors Historic Event

It's not too late to register as a participant or to volunteer in support of the upcoming 37th annual Bataan Memorial March to be held Saturday March 21 at White Sands Missile Range.

For more info see the event website [here](#).

The 26.2-mile Bataan Memorial March commemorates the Bataan Death March, the brutal forced march of American and Filipino prisoners of war in the early months of America's involvement in World War II. New Mexico claims a particular connection to the events, as around 1,800 New Mexicans, most of them members of the state's 200th National Guard, were on the Philippines when it was surrendered.

NMSU ROTC cadets organized the first memorial march in 1989, and today the NMSU Army ROTC is officially designated the Bataan Battalion – the cadets will offer a history talk about Bataan at the memorial march seminar on Friday March 20. WSMR began hosting the memorial march in 1992. The event grew every year, becoming the largest military-athletic event of its kind, drawing thousands of active duty, ROTC and civilian participants, including hundreds of descendants of ex-POWs.

The memorial march offers military and civilian team or individual categories, as well as both the marathon length 26.2-mile route as well as the 14.6-mile honorary category. Though heavily supported by WSMR staff and regional military assistance, the event functions largely on support from volunteers.

While not a living history event per se, the memorial march through the desert nevertheless gives participants a very small sense of the physical challenges experienced by those half-starved and diseased men who were forced on a 60-mile march after the surrender of American and Filipino forces on Bataan on April 9, 1942. Along the march, men were denied food and water, and beaten, tortured, or executed if they fell out of line, with an estimated 1,500 dead by the time the march ended at the prison camp O'Donnell, where many more thousands would die over the next two months. Although most endured and survived the forced march, at least half of the American POWs did not survive the almost three years as prisoners of war.

Bataan holds a special place in New Mexico lore, with around three dozen memorials to New Mexico's experience existing all around the state, including formal monuments like those at Las Cruces Veterans Park, Bataan Park in Albuquerque and on the capitol grounds in Santa Fe, as well as various schools, streets, and other public places named in honor of Bataan.

THANKS for your support.