



Doña Ana County Historical Society

April 2026 Newsletter and Events

Speaker Series Lecture to Explore Early Cinema in Las Cruces

The screen is set for the second to last lecture of the DACHS 2026 Speaker Series on Thursday April 16 at 7 pm in the historic Woman's Improvement Association building at 340 Reymond Street across from Pioneer Women's Park.

Historian Steve Kobs will be talking about airdome outdoor theaters which were stage and screen theaters that featured vaudeville acts and silent movies and were most popular from 1910 to 1930. Steve will talk about the four airdome stages in Las Cruces, the largest airdome in El Paso, and how airdomes eventually evolved into drive-in movie theaters.

Steve is originally from Minneapolis and has produced historical exhibits in British Columbia and Minnesota and given lectures on drive-in theaters, unusual deaths, and photography. Steve retired to Las Cruces six years ago and remains a life-long learner, volunteer, and aspiring humorist.

The speaker series will conclude in May with Steve Dobrott of the Hillsboro Historical Society who will discuss the preservation of the 136-year old Mountain Pride stagecoach that once served the mining towns of Lake Valley, Hillsboro and Kingston.

United We Stand: DACHS Wants Your Input for Upcoming America's 250th Anniversary

The Doña Ana County Historical Society is inviting everyone to come offer their two cents in a brainstorming of ideas to recognize the 250th anniversary – the semiquincentennial - of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the creation of the nation.

The planning session is set for Saturday April 25 from 10 am to 11:30 am in the Roadrunner Room at Branigan Memorial library, 200 E. Picacho Ave.

DACHS president Jon Hunner is mulling several ideas already, including field trips, lectures, and workshops on oral history. But the table is open for ideas, and all are invited to attend.

Jon will discuss all of this as well as local history in general in an appearance on Randy Harris' "Think Again" radio show on KTAL (101.5 FM) Monday April 6 from 8 to 9 am.

While there were perhaps relatively few direct connections in our area of New Mexico with the events of 1776, the impact of the Declaration of Independence extends far beyond one year, and the anniversary provides an opportunity to reflect and evaluate the promise of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..." laid out in the preamble of the Declaration. As such, communities around the country are mulling their own events in recognition of this national milestone.

For more information, contact Hunner at jonhunner6@gmail.com

Branigan Debuts the Mescalero Apache, Land of the People: Ndende bi Ke'ya exhibit

The Mescalero Apache are now the third featured group in the Branigan Cultural Center's ongoing "Land of the People" exhibit that tells the story of six Indigenous groups with historic roots and contemporary involvement in the Borderland region: Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Pueblo of Tortugas, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Piro/Manso/Tiwa Indian Tribe, Chiricahua Apache Nation, and Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico.

Located in south-central New Mexico, the Mescalero Apache Reservation is the southernmost federal reservation in the state. The Mescalero Apache Reservation - long recognized by Spanish, Mexican, and American treaties - was formally established by Executive Order of President Ulysses S. Grant on May 29, 1873.

Today, the Mescalero Apache tribe consists of three sub-tribes, Mescalero, Lipan, and Chiricahua, with over 5,000 tribal members from each band residing on the reservation.

The cultural center also has a new exhibit that opened this month, "Growing the Mesilla Valley: NMSU Extension Office Through the Years."

Using photographs and a mix of circulars, bulletins, and guides, this exhibit tells how the NMSU Extension Office serves residents through science-based publications about agriculture, food handling, and home economics. The exhibit was curated by Dr. Erin Wahl, Isabella Sanchez, and Joshua Cdebaca.

The Branigan Cultural Center is located on downtown Main Street at 501 N Main.

Women's History Writer to Receive Social Justice Recognition

Guinevere Mayse, who in January received the Gemoets Prize from DACHS for her article on Mary Daniels in the recent edition of the Southern New Mexico Historical Review, will receive the 2026 Social Justice Award for her research in local women's history.

Mayse was featured alongside fellow DACHS award recipient Hannah Augustyniak in a recent edition of the Las Cruces Bulletin. She will receive her award at the annual J. Paul Taylor Social Justice Symposium award ceremony Wednesday, April 8 at 5 pm at the Corbett Center Outdoor Stage.

The annual symposium honors the work and memory of J. Paul Taylor and this year is presented in partnership with the Office of Land Grant Inclusive Mission. This year's symposium "Ni Una Más: Standing Together Against Femicide and Gender-Based Violence" takes place April 7 and 8 at NMSU. In 2005, the College of Arts and Sciences at New Mexico State University established the J. Paul Taylor Social Justice Symposium (JPTSJS). This year will serve as the 20th anniversary of the 2006 JPTSJS "Justice for the Women of Juarez" initiative which has remained a continual focus of the symposium.

For more info or to register for the symposium see [this link](#).

Mesilla Frontier Fair: History, Outlaws and Culture

The Town of Mesilla is inviting you to step back in time at the 2026 Mesilla Frontier Fair on Saturday, April 11 from 10 am to 5 pm in the Mesilla Plaza.

DACHS and the NMSU Archives will have tables set up and historian David Thomas will deliver a talk on the Mesilla Riot of 1871. The day also includes re-enactments by Enchantment Productions, a costume and salsa contest, performances by La Academia Dolores Huerta, and line dancing with the Boot Boogie Babes. Visitors can also enjoy interactive booths, and an old-fashioned hoedown featuring Crow and Karla.

The event is free and open to all.

Taylor Talks: Religious Conflict in the Mesilla Valley in the 1870s

The Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site presents former New Mexico State Historian Rick Hendricks and his talk "Religious Conflict in the Mesilla Valley in the 1870s" Saturday April 18 from 2-3 pm at the Taylor Mesilla Historic Site off the Mesilla Plaza.

Hendricks will discuss the dramatic conflict that arose between Father Jose de Jesus Baca, the priest of San Albino in Mesilla, and Vicar Apostolic Jean Baptiste Salpointe of Tucson. The struggle came about because ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Mesilla Valley and El Paso regions was being transferred from Santa Fe to Tucson. For New Mexico's Catholic leaders, it wasn't just about church governance; at stake was the very way Catholics in the region had lived their faith for generations as French clergy replaced local Hispanic priests.

Hendricks is the New Mexico State Records Administrator and served for nine years as state historian. He received his PhD from the University of New Mexico in 1985 and worked at the University of New Mexico and New Mexico State University for a total of 27 years. He has published extensively on the history of New Mexico and Mexico.

“The Business of Killing Indians” the Subject of Upcoming Lecture

NMSU history grad and Texas A&M University professor William S. Kiser will discuss the subject of his recent book in his lecture “The Business of Killing Indians: Scalp Warfare in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands” as part of the NMSU Library's Borderland History Lecture Series.

Kiser's talk takes place Thursday April 23 from 3-5 pm at Branson Library 4th floor.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Sonora implemented a bounty system to monetize the killing and scalping of Apaches as a strategy for conquest. As a result, civilians contracted with local governments to carry out a series of massacres that yielded windfall profits for the perpetrators. These events in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands reflected a broader 300-year trend across North America, wherein civilians were encouraged to kill Indians through lucrative scalp bounties.

A native of Las Cruces, Kiser is professor of history and department chair at Texas A&M University-San Antonio, where he teaches classes on the Civil War and Reconstruction, the American West, Native American History, and U.S. foreign policy. He is the author of six books and numerous articles on the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands and the American West. His book, *The Business of Killing Indians: Scalp Warfare and the Violent Conquest of North America*, was published in 2025 by Yale University Press.

Legendary Cowgirl Subject of New Farm and Ranch Museum Exhibit

The New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum continues its ongoing “Her Land: Women in Agriculture” exhibit with a spotlight on Cowgirl Hall of Famer Fern Sawyer.

Sawyer blazed trails in the New Mexico horse-riding and rodeo circuit in the 1930s and 1940s, often competing against men, in several cases coming in first place. She was the first woman named to the New Mexico State Fair board and received numerous awards and recognitions for her groundbreaking influence on New Mexico rodeo. The Las Cruces Bulletin has a story on Sawyer in its recent edition.

“Her Land: Women in Agriculture” is a rotating exhibit that runs through June and features different women who have made significant impacts on the world of farming and ranching in New Mexico.

In other museum news, the Friends of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum's “Get to Know Your Museum” series continues this month on Thursday April 16 with exhibit designer Eric Kirker.

The monthly series gives Friends members and the public an opportunity to meet museum employees and ask questions about one of Southern New Mexico's most valuable cultural assets. The day begins with coffee and socializing at 9:30 a.m. followed by Kirker's discussion.

The museum is also gearing up for its 26th annual Blessing of the Fields next month (Friday May 15). The event begins with a colorful procession around the museum grounds and the blessing of animals, plants, and acequia in recognition of San Ysidro, the patron saint of farmers. All are welcome to attend.

Fort Selden Historic Site is offering a few opportunities for you to get your hands dirty.

On Saturday, April 18, from 10 a.m. – noon, Ranger Mike will present Foodways Garden: Preparation and Planting, a conversation about how to create your own garden at home. You can also chip in helping plant various fruits and vegetables for Fort Selden's Foodways Garden. This year's garden will be focused on Indigenous agriculture, specifically, corn, squash, and beans grown together, known as the Three Sisters, as well as the chile garden which will be used to continue telling the story of New Mexican agriculture.

Admission \$5 for adults and free for children 16 and younger.

Then on Saturday April 25, from 8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Clean Up Day will take place on site at

The old fort is not only an active archeological site, it's also an active modern site as well, requiring a little late spring cleaning. If you're interested in helping, please reach out to sage.drake@dca.nm.gov or call 575-526-8911.

The Fort Selden Historic Site is located at 1280 Fort Selden Rd, Radium Springs, NM 88054.