



NEWSLETTER

May 2025

Rocket Pioneer Subject of Last Speaker Talk of the Season



Photos courtesy of NMSU Library Archives and Special Collections.

Sean Schifano, an MA candidate at New Mexico State University, will present “Making Space for Dominance: James B. Edson between Army, Astronomy, and Rocketry” at the DACHS monthly meeting. Please join us on Thursday, May 15 at 7 p.m. at Las Cruces Village’s Social Center (3011 Buena Vista Circle).

James Brown Edson (1908–2001) is perhaps best known for his invention of the ballistic tracking telescope at White Sands Proving Ground (now Missile Range) in 1946, and for his connection to brother-in-law Clyde Tombaugh, the astronomer who discovered Pluto. Yet Edson has become something of an “invisible man.” Despite his involvement with numerous pivotal events, persons, institutions, and scientific projects across the U.S. over his career, Edson figures in histories of them either passingly or not at all.

Yet his archives held at NMSU reveal that in Edson and Tombaugh’s early work on the new tracking telescope, it was Edson who laid most of the conceptual and empirical groundwork for its early refinement. We also find him in a remarkable number of connected

roles throughout his working life: astronomer, meteorologist, and inventor of photo-optical instruments, U.S. Army ordnance physicist and engineer, scientific project manager, science policy advisor and planner, administrator at NASA during its first decade, Cold War theoretician of human progress, public lecturer, idea wizard, and more.

Almost from the beginning, his career stood at the forefront of a decisive shift toward U.S. hegemony and bureaucratized “Big Science” as the norm of the postwar global order. Expansion of the military-industrial complex over the first half of the twentieth century not only set the tenor for Edson’s scientific work, but also, through its sheer scale and complexity, largely obscured from view his individual part in it.

Sean’s presentation will examine Edson’s professional life largely through an exploration of his papers, which were donated by Bill Godby and Edson’s children and are currently held at the NMSU Archives and Special Collections.

Work on Amador Hotel Restoration Continues



Left: The Amador Hotel in the 1930s, showing the Territorial-style portico.

Right: The ongoing renovation seeks to restore the façade to roughly this time period, as shown in the conceptual illustration.

The Las Cruces Historic Preservation Committee received an update in April on the status of the work being done at the historic Amador Hotel – in short, while a whole lot has been done, much work remains.

The scope of work already completed is staggering, from the replacement of all the old stucco to the tearing down of the eastside addition, among many other things. The city has allocated \$7 million to the project – prior to 2021, work was funded through private donations and capital outlay funding secured by the Amador Hotel Foundation.

Dr. Deborah Dennis of the Amador Hotel Foundation said the next phases will include restoring the Pueblo Revival-style entry portico on the south side with the Territorial-style portico of the hotel's historically significant period (between 1910 and 1945). Other work will involve replacing the roof, removing the last of the bank drive-up portion, and extensive work on the interior, including installing an elevator, kitchen, and bathrooms, and restoring the staircase and upper floor walkway. The city's architectural firm estimates it may take \$11 million to finish the job.

Dennis said great effort has been put into getting the Amador on the National Historic Register, which would help in securing outside funding. She acknowledged challenges with meeting demands from the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division.

"They have said we need to do more work on the building," Dennis said. "I'm confident it will get on the register at some point. It's just going to be a while."

The Amador Hotel is the city's oldest public building. Martin Amador acquired the original adobe structure likely in the late 1870s and added a second floor in 1885. The Amador-Campbell family ran the hotel until the mid-1960s. Citizens' Bank of Las Cruces acquired it in 1970 and used it until 1983, and then Doña Ana County housed its manager's offices there until moving to its new location in 2006 and selling the building to the city for \$1.

The Las Cruces Historic Preservation Committee has three openings that need to be filled.

HPC membership applications may be obtained at <https://onboard.las-cruces.org/board/2648>. For more information, contact the city clerk's office at 575-541-2115 and crivera@lascruces.gov.



New Watchlist of Properties

A new watchlist developed by the Las Cruces Historic Preservation Commission seeks to highlight historically and culturally important Las Cruces area buildings.

HSC and DACHS board member Jerry Wallace said the intent of the watchlist is to be more "proactive rather than reactive" by making city planners aware of these buildings and how development plans may impact them (particularly their demolition). Wallace said more properties can and will be added to the list – these buildings are not on the National Historic Register, which perhaps makes them more vulnerable to future urban development.

This watchlist the HPC approved in April includes the properties listed to the right.

Approved In April

- The former Doña Ana Courthouse, 251 W. Amador Ave.
- Mesilla Valley Mall
- The cluster of houses between 1225 and 1255 University Ave.
- The Club, 1290 Foster Road
- The Old Golden Bull/Burger Chef, 1495 S. Solano Dr.
- Boba Café, 1900 S. Espina St.
- La Nueva Casita Restaurant, 195 N. Mesquite St.
- Tommy's Roller Rink/sign, 100 E. Willoughby Ave.
- Las Cruces Municipal Court, 135 E. Griggs St.
- The strip mall at 110 W. Picacho and the old gas station across the street, at 887 N. Main St.
- The First National Bank Tower (currently owned by Electronic Caregiver Inc.), 506 S. Main St.
- Cluster of shops and the Mesilla Park train station building at 3200 S. Main Street

Strong Consideration

- Tombaugh Family Home, Mesilla Park
- Beck's Café, Mesquite Street Historic Townsite neighborhood
- St. James Episcopal Church and Hall, Mesilla Park
- Papen Community Center, Mesilla Park
- Loretto Town Center (the old Loretto Shopping Mall)
- Lamar's Bar off Solano Dr.

Walking Tours This Month

The Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site Museum is offering several free walking tours in May.

Join Ranger Daniel May 7 from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Reynolds Store Visitor Center (2350 Calle Principal, on the plaza) for a tour along the Acequia Madre, or “Mother Ditch,” and to learn about the historic canals and irrigation systems of New Mexico.

In addition, Ranger Daniel will also lead hour-long tours of the historic Mesilla plaza on May 10 and May 22. Tours are free, but space is limited. Tickets must be reserved ahead of time. Call 575-202-1638 for more information.

The Las Cruces Railroad Museum, will offer two walking tours of the historic Alameda-Depot neighborhood, on May 24 at noon and June 28 at 9 a.m.

The “History and Houses” tours explore the neighborhood that sprang up by the Las Cruces Railroad Depot, with a focus on the people who designed, built, or lived in a few of the houses in the neighborhood. The walks cover about 1 mile with several stops, starting at the Railroad Museum. Please bring water, sunscreen or a hat, and anything else you might want to stay comfortable. Free with no registration required.

DACHS Tours San Jose Cemetery

DACHS members braved the high winds last month for a tour of San Jose Cemetery led by historian Rosemary Leyva. The city’s oldest cemetery contains the graves of many of Las Cruces’ oldest names, including the Martin Amador family. Leyva has led successful efforts over the years to identify unmarked or forgotten graves. The group put together a pamphlet about the cemetery tour – contact DACHS board member Sal Patricolo for a copy.



Tis the Season! The Blessing of the Fields

New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum

Friday, May 16, 2025
10 a.m. to 11 a.m.



A cherished tradition returns as the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum hosts its 25th Annual Blessing of the Fields on Friday, May 16, from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.

The heart of the celebration includes a vibrant procession that winds through the museum grounds to honor the land, water, animals, and plants. Visitors can participate in the procession, witness blessings of the acequia, and enjoy bread that has also been blessed.

Admission is free for anyone participating in the procession. The day’s festivities will also include a plant sale from the museum’s greenhouse, and the procession will feature a handcrafted bulto of San Ysidro created by local artist Virginia Maria Romero. Everyone is invited to be a part of this meaningful celebration where culture, tradition, and community flourish.

Las Esperanzas Holds Big Event at Klein Park

In recognition of Historic Preservation Month, the Mesquite Street-Original Townsite neighborhood group Las Esperanzas is inviting one and all to its “Celebrating Our Community” event Saturday May 10, from 2 pm to 4 pm in Klein Park. Organizers say it will celebrate the history, art and culture of the city’s oldest neighborhood with a walking tour, food, and various arts and crafts projects.

Las Esperanzas is also working with New Mexico Aging Services and its “Talk to Me: Conversations on Life” oral history project which will be conducting oral histories at Munson Senior Center May 8, from 9 am to 3 pm (for more info, see www.talktomenm.org/). The group has its own oral history project as well, collecting interviews of those with connections or memories of the Mesquite Street neighborhood (see www.las-esperanzas.com).

Branigan Seeking Exhibit Proposals

Branigan Cultural Center will be accepting proposals until May 16 for exhibitions focusing on themes of cultural and historical significance related to the Borderlands and the U.S. Southwest. Selected exhibits will be displayed in 2026.

The cultural center is particularly interested in submissions that explore the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, which is next year, aligning with themes set by the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH).

Branigan will accept submissions from scholars, cultural heritage organizations, individuals and artists, solo or group. All details for submissions can be found on the city museums website.

**Cemetery Fence
Project Needs Funds**
Contributions accepted
at [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-protect-dona-anas-historic-cemetery)



The Doña Ana Village Historic Preservation Committee is raising money to build a protective fence around the village's oldest cemetery, which in recent years has experienced vandalism and other damage to the fragile site. The cemetery is the resting place of some of Doña Ana's first residents, including several veterans of the Mexican-American War, the Civil War, and other regional conflicts. Here's a link to the GoFundMe page:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-protect-dona-anas-historic-cemetery>

In addition, the Disabled American Veterans welcomes volunteers to help place flags in honor of Memorial Day on the tombstones of veterans buried at the village's main cemetery. The group will meet Saturday May 24 at 8 a.m. at the old Kmart on Bataan Memorial West before heading out to the cemetery. Contact DACHS board member Sal Patricolo at salpatricolo@yahoo.com

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