



Doña Ana County Historical Society

Newsletter
October 2025

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DACHS PREZ DENNIS DAILY PRAISES SUCCESSFUL HISTORY CONFERENCE

The Doña Ana County Historical Society was happy to be a co-sponsor of the New Mexico-Arizona History Conference last month here in Las Cruces. The conference featured 30 sessions and nearly 90 individual presentations focusing on New Mexico, Arizona, and borderlands history. Several DACHS members gave presentations at the conference, representing our society well. The Historical Society of New Mexico, principal organizer of the conference, reported attendance was about 250 people, with folks coming in from all over our state, as well as Arizona, Texas, and places further afield. I have heard nothing but enthusiastic and positive feedback about the conference. I was able to hear about 18 presentations and learned something new about our region's history in every one of them.

One of the highlights of the conference for me was the history tour of Doña Ana Village, led by DeAngelo Nieves of the Doña Ana Historic Preservation Committee. DeAngelo gave a great presentation about the fascinating history of Doña Ana, then led about 30 of us on a tour to the incredible Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria church, down the historic main street of Doña Ana, and to the cemetery where he talked about the lives of some of the people buried there. Other tours were given at the Mesilla Plaza and at Fort Selden.

Board member Sal Patricolo set up a DACHS table in the vendor and exhibitors' space, with other DACHS members lending a hand. I really appreciate the effort that Sal put into promoting DACHS at the conference. He was able to recruit new members, sell books and copies of our own publication the Southern New Mexico Historical Review, and bring awareness of our society to a wide audience of history enthusiasts.

If you've never attended one of these annual New Mexico History Conferences before, I highly encourage it. While it may be a while before the conference is held in Las Cruces again, it's always fun traveling to other communities in our state to attend. The 2026 conference will be held at the Philmont Scout Ranch near Cimarron, New Mexico. It's going to be a fantastic location for a history conference.

WESTERN HISTORIAN TO TALK BRAZITO BATTLE

DACHS Speaker Series talk Thursday, October 16

The legendary Battle of Brazito is the focus of the next DACHS Speaker Series talk Thursday, October 16 at 7:00 pm at Las Cruces Village's Social Center (3011 Buena Vista Circle). Western historian Dr. Albert Burnham will discuss events surrounding the short but pivotal battle that took place south of Las Cruces at the beginning of the Mexican-American War. Burnham is a professor of history at El Paso Community College and a former assistant professor of history at the University of Minnesota in Duluth. He's a member of an Old West re-enactment group and a historian with the Concordia Heritage Association, which works to preserve and research Concordia Cemetery in El Paso.

The Battle of Brazito took place on December 25, 1846 south of Las Cruces in the Vado-Brazito area between Col. Alexander Doniphan's 1st U.S. Dragoons and a larger Mexican volunteer force coming up from El Paso. With superior marksmanship and a strong defensive position, Doniphan's Dragoons defeated the Mexican force in about 30 minutes, with only seven Americans wounded. Doniphan's troops would ultimately capture El Paso and then Chihuahua City the following year. For years, historians have debated the specific location where the battle took place, although some insist they've nailed down the spot.

UNIQUE HISTORICAL TREASURES FEATURED AT THE BORDER ARCHIVES BAZAAR

Saturday, October 18, 10am-4pm, at the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum

The Border Archives Bazaar is a fun, educational event that showcases unique and historic archival materials from the border region. The event will be held Saturday, October 18, 10am-4pm, at the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum (1400 Dripping Springs Road). Cost of admission \$3.

Organized by the Border Regional Archives Group (BRAG), the bazaar features rare documents, photographs, maps, publications, and more from libraries, archives, museums and historical societies from all around southern New Mexico and west Texas. Archivists, librarians, and museum curators will be on hand to discuss and answer questions about archives, regional history, and preservation of original documents. The theme of the bazaar, *Voices through Time/Voces a través del Tiempo*, highlights the role archives play in preserving the stories and legacies of the diverse communities found throughout the border region.

Participating institutions include: NMSU Library Archives and Special Collections, El Paso Public Library Border Heritage Center, the UTEP Library's C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections, Texas Tech University's Southwest Collection, San Elizario Los Portales Museum, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, Doña Ana County Clerk and Recorder's Office, El Paso County Historical Society, the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, Sul Ross State University and archives of the Big Bend, among others.

A series of film screenings throughout the day in the museum's theater will highlight historical footage and oral history interviews with long-time residents of the border region. For more information, please contact: Dennis Daily, Archives and Special Collections, New Mexico State University Library, ddaily@nmsu.edu, 575-646-4756, or Claudia Rivers, Special Collections, University of Texas at El Paso Library, crivers@utep.edu, 915-747-6725

NO NUKES? - TRINITY SITE OPEN HOUSE PUT ON HOLD

Event suspended pending further notice

If you were planning on heading out to White Sands for the missile range's Trinity Site open house, call off the countdown. Due to the federal government shutdown, White Sands Missile Range has announced it is suspending the open house for now pending further notice. WSMR urges those interested to keep up with the status of

the open house on WSMR's website, suggesting that it may still go on depending on the duration of the government shutdown.

The open house coincides with the 80th anniversary of the testing of the first atomic bomb at Trinity Site on July 16, 1945. WSMR opens Trinity Site to the public only two days a year – once in the spring and the second time in October. It is essentially a guided tour. Visitors won't see the huge crater some may be expecting, but they will see plenty of Trinitite, a glassy, green, slightly radioactive substance, scattered about the site and created after the testing of the 19-kiloton atomic bomb Jumbo, a version of which the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima just weeks later.

Trinity Site was declared a national historic landmark in 1975, and in addition to the actual testing site, Trinity includes remnants of the base camp and the Schmidt/McDonald ranch house where the plutonium core of the bomb was assembled, according to an information sheet provided by WSMR.

FRIENDS OF THE NEW MEXICO FARM AND RANCH OPEN NEW SERIES

Talks begin Thursday October 9 at the museum

Beginning in October, the Friends of the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Heritage Museum will be presenting its "Culture Series" and its "Get To Know Your Museum" talks. Both are free and open to the public. The museum is located at 4100 Dripping Springs Road. The Friends' Culture Series, which goes through March 2026, features historians speaking on a variety of regional or ag-related topics.

The first on October 9 at 7 pm in the museum theater features David Crider of Southwest Expeditions who will offer a "spine-chilling look at Southern New Mexico's ghostly sites and dark tourism tales." The Friends live-stream these talks on Facebook.

The "Get to Know Your Museum" talks take place the third Thursday of each month at 9:30 am in the museum's conference room, and offer a chance for museum fans to get a behind-the-scenes look at the exhibits and other aspects of the Farm and Ranch museum.

The talk on October 16 will feature curator supervisor Nathan Japel, and starts at 9:30 am with a coffee/social followed by Nathan's talk. See the Friends web site for a full list of events <https://friendsnmfarmandranchmuseum.com/events/>

FRONTERAS TAKES A LOOK AT ORVILLE WANZER DOCUMENTARY

Upcoming Episode of PBS series airs on KRWG Saturday October 11 at 7:30 pm

Film historian Julia Smith, who spoke last spring as part of the DACHS Speaker Series, will be featured in an upcoming episode of the PBS series Fronteras, airing on KRWG October 11 at 7:30 pm. Smith will discuss her work on her documentary "Birth of the Acid Western" about NMSU films instructor and counter-culture movie director Orville Wanzer, who established the first filmmaking program at NMSU in the 1960s.

"I'll be talking about the project's origins, the rare archives I've been uncovering, and where things are headed next," Smith said in a release. Smith said the episode will also include a first look at a new trailer for the film developed by Deadeye Post in Santa Fe. Rooted in Las Cruces, the documentary highlights Wanzer's pioneering work and his subversive, low-budget filmmaking. Through archival research and community stories, it reimagines the cultural impact of the Western and celebrates creativity from the margins, with Las Cruces as the true birthplace of the Acid Western.

According to an NMSU press release, Wanzer was hired by the college as an English professor in 1959. He also

taught photography and film history. Wanzer died in 2019 at the age of 88.

TAYLOR TALKS TAKES ON STATEHOOD

Saturday October 18 from 2 pm to 3 pm at the Mesilla Community Center Auditorium

As part of its ongoing “Taylor Talks” speaker series, the Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site will present Ranger Daniel Webb in a talk about New Mexico and the Mesilla Valley prior to New Mexico statehood. The talk takes place Saturday, October 18 from 2 pm to 3 pm at the Mesilla Community Center Auditorium, 2251 Calle de Santiago in Mesilla. It’s free and open to all.

Webb’s presentation, “From the Territory of Montezuma to the Garden Spot of the Southwest: Visions of the Mesilla Valley Before Statehood,” explores the long path it took New Mexico to become the 47th state, which it finally did in 1912 along with Arizona. Sometimes the victim of national and territorial politics, New Mexico had to also overcome a significant anti-Hispanic and anti-Catholic sentiment in Congress. New Mexico leaders, especially those from our area, often extolled the Mesilla Valley and its agricultural productivity as part of the collective plea for statehood.

Taylor Talks is presented by New Mexico Historic Sites and the Friends of Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site, which also has a walking tour of the plaza scheduled for October 11 from 10 am to 11 am beginning in front of the Reynolds Store visitors’ center in the plaza.

TAYLOR MUSEUM GRAND OPENING IN NOVEMBER

Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site event on November 8

Mark your calendars on November 8 for the grand opening of the Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site. The big event will include a ribbon-cutting and live, festive music on the Mesilla Plaza, and will represent the culmination of more than 20 years of dreams, planning and community support. With its opening, the Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site will become the state’s eighth designated historic site.

“Through tremendous dedication and care from a team of staff, museum and preservation experts, volunteers, and consultants, we are proud to now share this cultural gem with New Mexicans and visitors alike,” said Anne McCudden, executive director of New Mexico Historic Sites, in a N.M. Cultural Affairs news release. The former home of J. Paul and Mary Taylor – both were icons of southern New Mexico civic activity, history and education – the site includes three buildings listed on the National Historic Register of Historic Places.

The Taylors lived there for more than 70 years, amassing a vast collection of fine art and regional/folk art. They donated their home and collections to the state of New Mexico with the intent it would become a museum and a showcase of New Mexico history. N.M. Cultural Affairs Secretary Debra Garcia y Griego said the Taylor-Mesilla Site is a significant addition to the telling of our collective history, adding it will offer a “truly authentic experience for both community members and visitors to learn about the history of Mesilla as a center of political, commercial, and social activity through time.”

The New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, New Mexico Historic Sites, and the Friends of Taylor-Mesilla Historic Site, as well as the Town of Mesilla, will host the grand opening, which is free and open to all.

BRANIGAN’S CONTINUING EXHIBITS

Traveling Civil Rights Exhibit Until October 20, Land of The People Exhibit Continues

If you didn’t get a chance, you still have a few more weeks to catch the traveling photographic exhibit I AM A

MAN: Photographs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1960-1970 which runs to October 20. The exhibit includes a wide range of photographs taken in the heat of the civil rights movement, by activists, local news photographers, and internationally known photographers who documented history taking place before their eyes. Hosted by Branigan, the exhibit was created by ExhibitsUSA, a national division of Mid-America Arts Alliance and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Branigan is also the proud host of the Land of the People exhibit, which 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.

A secondary gallery changes every 12 weeks and allows each Indigenous group to go deeper into their own unique stories, traditions, and perspectives. The Ysleta del Sur Pueblo is first on the schedule, followed in December by the Tortugas Pueblo (see the Branigan Cultural Center web site for a complete schedule).

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Contact DACHS at

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