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TRAIL TO DISASTER: JOHN C. FRÉMONT'S FOURTH EXPEDITION INTO THE SAN JUAN MOUNTAINS OF SOUTHERN COLORADO by Patricia Joy Richmond page 3

Summer 1987 $1.00

A publication of the Taos County Historical Society
SOME FEW READERS may feel that it is slightly incongruous for a publication whose announced scope is "Taos County and Northern New Mexico" to be publishing a feature article that is mostly about Colorado.

It just depends on how you look at it. The San Juan mountains were once part of that vast and largely unexplored expanse of northern New Spain. Even after American occupation brought the Southwest under U.S. rule, that part of Colorado extending north to the 38th parallel and as far west as the eastern slope of the San Juans—where Frémont’s ill-fated expedition of 1848-49 took place—was included in the Territory of New Mexico. It remained that way until 1861, when New Mexico’s northeastern panhandle was transferred to the Territory of Colorado by Congress. It may be Colorado now, but it was northern New Mexico when Frémont made his visit; this accounts for Richard Kern, expeditionary artist, placing locations like Robidoux Pass (cover illustration) in New Mexico.

All of this just goes to show that place names, boundary lines, and political entities are strictly inventions of men and women, and they cannot be counted on to stay the same!

Patricia Richmond has spent years on Frémont’s trail, using Kern’s pictures and other bits of evidence to establish the route. She is a graduate of Adams State College at Alamosa, having earned B.A. and M.A. degrees there. She is also a former student of TCHS president Dr. Herbert Dick. Pat has taught history in the Del Norte and Monte Vista schools. She served as editor of the SANTOS VALLEY HISTORIAN for six years. Many TCHS members had the chance to meet and hear her last April, when she presented a program on Frémont to the Society in Taos.

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Where have all the historians gone? We have been publishing a little over two years now, and we have yet to reject a manuscript! Not that this is a goal, but surely there must be more closet history writers among our members and subscribers. Thus far all of our feature articles have been invited, and we are extremely pleased at the quality of original material we have been able to circulate to interested readers and preserve for the record. The possible topics for articles are, of course, many. Resources for local history abound in Taos, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque. If you secretly harbor aspirations of finishing up a pet project and publishing in AYER Y HOY, please know that contributions of articles are most welcome. We pay in kind words and copies.
TRAIL TO DISASTER: JOHN C. FRÉMONT'S FOURTH EXPEDITION INTO THE SAN JUAN MOUNTAINS OF SOUTHERN COLORADO
by Patricia Joy Richmond

OCTOBER 3, 1848, JOHN C. FRÉMONT and thirty-five men left St. Louis, Missouri, bound for California. Most of the men were veterans of previous expeditions; the rest, were seeking adventure in the fabled West. The objective of the expedition was the exploration of a central railroad route to the Pacific. The goal was never achieved. Two months later men and mules struggled to survive in the snow-covered wilderness of the La Garita Mountains in southern Colorado.

Frémont had intended to follow as closely as possible an all-weather route between the 37th and 38th parallels. He had been advised that good passes through the Rocky Mountains and Sierra Nevada could be found near these latitudes. The route was feasible; the expedition well outfitted; the men eager. No one anticipated the suffering and horrors the men would endure; yet, carelessness was not the cause of the miseries that befell Frémont and his men. The ruin of the expedition resulted primarily because unusually severe early winter storms swept across mountains normally snow-free until late December and an incessant southwest wind sent temperatures plummeting below zero.

The expedition had crossed Kansas and reached Chouteau’s Island on the Arkansas River before proceeding along the Arkansas to Big Timbers, located near the present site of Lamar, Colorado. The only problems encountered en route were a prairie fire and a blizzard. Thomas “Brokenhand” Fitzpatrick, one of Frémont’s guides during the Third Expedition, was serving as Indian Agent for the 600 lodges of Apaches, Arapahos, Comanches, and Kiowas established at Big Timbers that winter. Some of the Indians informed Frémont of early snows in the mountains, but such information was not likely to deter men used to facing hardships, overcoming obstacles and achieving the impossible.

While at Big Timbers Frémont wrote to his father-in-law, Missouri’s Senator Thomas Hart Benton, that he intended to “ascend the Del Norte to its head, descend on to the Colorado, and so across the Wasatch mountains and the basin country somewhere near the 37th parallel.” This statement has caused considerable confusion in analyzing the route of the Fourth Expedition. It must be remembered that few explorers had preceded Frémont into the San Luis Valley. Only one, Juan Bautista de Anza, had mapped the area.

Although official exploration of the area surrounding the headwaters of the Rio Grande del Norte had been limited, mountain men, trappers and prospectors, traversing the San Luis Valley and surrounding mountains, had passed along descriptions of what they had seen and encountered. Three such men resided in Taos—Antoine Robidoux, Antoine Leroux, and Kit Carson, Frémont’s close friend and guide during the first three expeditions. During Fremont’s Third Expedition Carson had examined the Cochetopa complex and Poncha Pass while the rest of the expedition explored the upper Arkansas Valley. There can be little doubt that Fremont was knowledgeable of the characteristics of the passes through the mountains surrounding the San Luis Valley or that he intended to use the most open and easily accessible, the Cochetopa.

Leaving Big Timbers, the expedition continued to Bent’s Fort. The men first viewed Pike’s Peak and the Spanish Peaks, once used as landmarks to identify what had been Spanish territory. From the fort Fremont could have headed for Huerfano Butte, followed a frequently traveled route up the Huerfano River and entered the San Luis Valley by way of either the Taos Trail over Sangre de Cristo Pass or Robidoux’s Road over Mosca Pass. Instead, the men traveled along the Arkansas River until they reached Mormontown at the mouth of the Fountain River.

Bill Williams, who had been with Frémont for a short time during the Third Expedition, came to Frémont’s camp from the mountain man fortress, El Pueblo de San Carlos, located across the river from Mormontown, and offered his services as a guide for the expedition. Williams claimed that he knew the country well and that there would be little snow if they crossed the mountains before Christmas. Normally Williams’ statement would have been correct, but the winter of 1848-1849 did not follow the weather pattern typical to the San Luis Valley.

With Williams as guide the expedition moved to Hardscrabble, a mountain man farming settlement located between the present towns of Florence and Wetmore. Here the men sacked 130 bushels of shelled corn, which were to be used as feed for the 120 animals of the expedition if snow was encountered while crossing the San Juan Mountains. During their brief stay in this frontier community Frémont and his men enjoyed the simple comforts of table and stools while eating chicken and pumpkin.

November 25, 1848, the expedition left Hardscrabble and proceeded toward the mountains along Hardscrabble Creek. After passing parallel walls of rock, located just west of present Wetmore, Colorado, the men entered the canyon of North Hardscrabble Creek, with its huge outcroppings of red and green rocks. Williams led the expedition over hills and through valleys. Camps were made in deep snow. There was no water—a situation which, as noted by George Frederic Clarke during his journey through the San Luis Valley in January, 1847, could be more debilitating to the mules than a lack of food. The corn intended for hard times in the San Juans, sustained the weakening animals as the expedition moved through the Wet Mountains. Crossing from the drainage of North Hardscrabble Creek onto Williams Creek, a tributary of the
Huerfano River, the men found themselves near the Gardner Butte, standing like a "bastion" at the gap of the Huerfano. Across the river were the "little Spanish Peaks," Sheep and Little Sheep mountains.

Moving west along the Huerfano, the expedition followed Antoine Robidoux's road over pignon-covered hills that were almost as high as the mountains. Crossing Mosca or Robidoux Pass and descending the narrow, timber-choked canyon of Mosca Creek, the expedition entered the San Luis Valley, "the valley of Rio del Norte." The western mountains were hidden by clouds, but below the men lay sand hills matching Zebulon Pike's description. Finding little snow at the south end of the sand dunes, the men camped in a grove of trees by Médano Creek.

Bitter cold temperatures came with the night. The next morning icicles hung from beards and hair as the men attempted to cross to the north end of the sand hills. Frémont examined Médano or Sand Hill Pass. Charles Preuss considered it odd that Williams had avoided using this pass, sometimes identified by the old mountainer's name. Had the expedition followed North Hardscrabble Creek into the Wet Mountain Valley, the men would have reached Médano Pass in approximately two days. The route over Mosca Pass had taken over a week, had depleted the supplies, and had taxed the energies of men and animals.

The third day after entering the San Luis Valley, the expedition, led by Alexis Godey, finally cleared the sand hills and camped by a small stream heavily forested with cottonwoods before moving west-northwest to the "Rio Grande." When Frémont returned to the San Luis Valley in 1853, he entered through Médano Pass, joined the line of the Fourth Expedition, and camped on the Rio de Tres Tetonas [sic], later renamed Crestone Creek. Moving from the camp on Rio de Tres Tetonas, the Fifth Expedition in 1853 also "travelled up the San Louis [sic] Valley, crossing the Rio Grande del Norte," and entered the Sarawatch [sic] Valley." The river described as the Rio Grande is actually the Saguache.

Apparently Frémont had intended to head for the Saguache valley and the Cochetopa complex in 1848, but Williams argued there was a shorter route. In this assertion the old guide was correct if a traveler, coming from the New Mexican settlements, followed the Indian trail along the low terraces at the western edge of the valley floor. Wagons had to be taken to the Saguache Valley to cross into Cochetopa Park; however, a person traveling on foot or horse could save at least two days by turning up Carnero Creek. This shortcut followed the South Fork of Carnero Creek to Moon Pass, descended onto the headwaters of the Saguache, continued through Ludere's Canyon, crossed Carnero Pass, and proceeded along the south side of the Cochetopa Dome before connecting with the Cochetopa Pass road to the Lake Fork and Uncompahgre River. By the 1870s, as wagon travel increased, settlers approached both Carnero and Cochetopa passes from the Saguache Valley.

Had Frémont followed either the Carnero or the Saguache route, the expedition would have been in the usually snow-free Cochetopa Park on its way to California as Williams had promised; instead, the men found themselves on the ridges of Mesa Mountain, thousands of feet above their destination. The Cochetopa was so near and yet so inaccessible.

After the discussion on the plain, Godey and Preuss recommended that Frémont take Williams' advice. The expedition, seeing the cottonwoods of a river seven miles away, turned south. The men moved to the southwest as they followed this frozen river toward the mountains. Carnero Creek, like its parallel neighbor to the south, La Garita Creek, flows to the northeast after reaching the seemingly level floor of the San Luis Valley. Euphemistically the Saguache River and Rio Grande flow southeast across the same plain to oxbows; thence, south.

After following Carnero Creek through its heavily wooded bottomland, Frémont and his men approached the canyon of Carnero, approximately twelve miles north of the main branch of the Rio Grande del Norte. Ahead of them lay the steep cliffs of the Hell Gate. The turbulence of the river had cut a passage through the great volcanic wall, but the expedition was forced to take to the hills south of the gap as was Winn's Harris Head when he traveled the Carnero route in 1853. After crossing these hills, forested with Ponderosa or yellow pine, Frémont and his men should have returned to the canyon of Carnero Creek; however, they found themselves in the steep-sided, narrow valley of Coolbrook Canyon, which led them toward Cave Creek.

Cave Creek, a tributary of the South Fork of the Carnero, heads on the slopes of twin-peaked Boot Mountain located just to the east of Mesa Mountain. After struggling through deep snow, Frémont's men reached what they thought would be the dividing ridge, the bald 12,400-foot summit of Boot Mountain; but ahead of them lay a shallow depression, which they again mistakenly assumed was the Continental Divide. Looking back, the men had a spectacular view of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the sand hills framed by Médano and Mosca Passes.

The expedition dropped quickly into a small valley, the head of La Garita Creek, and made camp. The next day, with considerable effort, men and mules moved up the steep sides of this little valley onto the tableland at the head of Perry's Creek. Travel was easier as the winds keep this high park and the surrounding ridges almost snow-free. After approaching Mesa Mountain from the east along the ridge that separates some of the tributaries of the Saguache from the tributaries of La Garita Creek, the expedition camped one quarter mile below Mesa Mountain's summit in a cluster of trees at the head of West Benino Creek. At the head of East Benino Creek, where the trail left the ridge, someone built a low stone shelter against a volcanic outcropping for protection against the wind and upon the smooth surface of that great rock inscribed the year—1848.
Now seven or eight mules perished each day. The bleached, honeycombed, lichen-covered bones still jut along the base of Rincon Mountain at the head of Groundhog Creek and across the ridge that divides Embargo and Rincon creeks from the waters of Wannamaker Creek. Upon this ridge the men faced the severest weather. Bill Williams almost froze while seated on his horse.

The next day the expedition moved directly over El Bole de Hilda, the dome-shaped summit of the ridge. Although the men assumed they had reached a tributary of the Colorado River, actually they had crossed to the headwaters of Wannamaker Creek, a tributary of the Saguache. Camp was made in a small pine grove in four and a half feet of snow. Using handmade mauls to pack a trail for the remaining mules, the men beat a channel through the deep drifts described by Thomas Martin as being eighteen feet deep. The first stumps encountered in the Wannamaker camp are sixteen to thirty feet high. Stumps farther down the slope in the protection of the grove are four to eight feet high. As one of the Fremont camps, the ax marks are short and irregular, indicating that the trees were hacked rather than chopped.

Most of the last fifty-nine mules perished on the ridge connecting the headwaters of Wannamaker Creek with Whale Creek. In 1942, George Ward of Saguache, Colorado, piled their skeletal remains into a caisson as a tribute to Fremont's Fourth Expedition. By the following spring the bones had been hauled away, probably to a sugar factory in Montrose or Monte Vista.

While the main party waited in "Camp Dismal," Charles Preuss and a group of men attempted to find a way off the mountain. These men traveled west along the ridge toward Palmer Mesa and the headwaters of the Cochetopa River. Finding no good route, they returned. A blizzard, lasting several days, buffeted the expedition. Each morning the men used tin plates to scrape six to eight inches of fresh snow from their beds. The bitter, cold wind, which was proving fatal for the mules, threatened the survival of the men. Fremont decided the expedition could not continue without acquiring more supplies and mules. To avoid total destruction, he ordered the expedition across the mountains to the protection of the trees on the west slope of Rincon Creek. The men spent the next several days dragging the baggage three and a half miles to "Camp Hope."

Christmas Day, Fremont dispatched a rescue party. Alexis Godey accompanied these men--Thomas Breckenridge, Frederick Creutzfeldt, Henry King and Bill Williams--to the Rio Grande. The rescue party, heading toward the northern New Mexico settlements, followed the Rio Grande as instructed until they saw smoke. Fearing Indians who might be hostile toward him for past deeds, Bill Williams convinced the other members of the rescue party to leave the river. Once on the sagebrush-covered plain south of the Rio Grande, the men faced the severe cold and winds common to the San Luis Valley in January. King, leader of the group, perished. The others, suffering with frozen hands and feet, were close to death when Breckenridge, though snowblinded, succeeded in killing a deer.

Meanwhile Godey returned to the main party, which started to haul the baggage toward the Rio Grande along the same route used by the rescue party. After Godey reported that the baggage had to be moved a different way because there were steep cliffs downstream, the men abandoned two sledges they had built, dragged the baggage back uphill and worked their way across the ridge that divides Rincon Creek from Embargo Creek. A new camp was made beneath the copper-colored cliffs at the head of East Embargo Creek. Another ridge lay between the men and their route to the floor of the San Luis Valley, the gently sloping, open expanses of Groundhog and La Garita parks, which the expedition had observed while crossing Mesa Mountain's east ridge.

Fremont's mess established a camp in an isolated grove of trees at the head of Groundhog Creek and the next day moved quickly toward the valley floor by following the drainage of La Garita Creek. Anxious over the fate of the rescue party, now overdue, Fremont decided to move toward the settlements on the Rio Colorado in New Mexico.

Initially this second relief party hoped to intercept King and his men returning with fresh supplies, but Fremont soon realized that King's mission had failed and the salvation of the rest of the men depended upon securing relief as rapidly as possible.

The other members of the expedition worked their way to the Groundhog Creek Camp. Some of these men crossed the last ridge on their "elbows and knees." The Vinsonhaler mess continued moving baggage downstream toward a cache located near a large rock outcropping. The Kern mess built a shanty-type shelter at the Groundhog camp and awaited the arrival of the rescue party. Fremont had left orders for the men to finish moving the baggage to the cache near "Point of Rocks" and then to start down the Rio Grande toward the Conejos River. He may have hoped his men would find shelter at Pike's Fort, or he may have known about the summer farming settlements along the Conejos and anticipated that the men would be able to find some food and shelter.

From the La Garita camp, Fremont traveled to the oxbow of the Rio Grande. There he encountered an Indian who directed him to the survivors of the original relief party. After moving to Rio Colorado and Arroyo Hondo in New Mexico and securing supplies, Fremont, Preuss and the other men waited while Godey and some New Mexican settlers returned to rescue the members of the expedition left in the La Garita Mountains.

Godey found the men in pairs or small groups scattered along the Rio Grande. Some had just died—their bodies still warm. Discipline and morale had disintegrated after Fremont's departure. The older, experienced men, tired of delays, realized there was little chance for survival if they
Map of the Territory of New Mexico, drawn by Richard H. Kern in 1851, following his travels with Frémont.
did not receive help soon. To avoid cannibalism, these men agreed to leave anyone who could not travel farther. After building a fire for each helpless comrade who fell behind, the men of Vinsonhaler's mess continued toward salvation—the New Mexican settlements.

Charles Taplin, one of the stronger, experienced men, stayed behind to help the weaker members of the expedition, who had decided to remain together through their hardships. Disregarding Frémont's orders, this group stopped at the oxbow of the Rio Grande and waited to be rescued. In spite of their weakened condition and their lack of experience, most of these men survived. After caring for the survivors, Godey and the New Mexicans attempted to retrieve the baggage. Except for the scientific instruments and one of Frémont's trunks, their efforts were unsuccessful, and the hundreds of pounds of camp gear, equipment, and personal effects were abandoned.

After recruiting Thomas Boggs and Lindsay Carson in Taos, Frémont's Fourth Expedition continued to California by following a southern route through the Gila River country. Bill Williams, the three Kern brothers, Steppenfeldt and Cathcart were left in Taos. Williams and Ben Kern were murdered when they returned to the mountains in the spring to recover some of the baggage.

The route of Frémont's Fourth Expedition as presented here is the result of eighteen years of research. Locations of the camps were determined after carefully scrutinizing the Kerns' diaries. Each camp was visited several times during different seasons to check its characteristics against written details and the known factor—the Christmas Camp. Alternative areas were visited to assure that the critical feature, the stumps, was not coincidental. The diaries, reminiscences, oral histories, deteriorating stumps, eroded date and weathered bones fit together like clues in a Sherlock Holmes mystery; however, Richard Kern's watercolors, now in the Amon Carter Museum, finally bound all the pieces together.

While the length of time spent on this research has been extensive, a desire to procrastinate—to check one more source, to climb one more hill, to ski up one more valley, to examine one more copse of trees—attests to the pleasure that has come from walking the trail of John C. Frémont and the men of the Fourth Expedition. To recognize names, dates, places is to know history; to follow the footsteps of our ancestors is to understand our heritage.

NOTES

1. As San Luis Valley historian Ruth Marie Colville of Del Norte, Colorado, has commented, the men of the Fourth Expedition "constituted a strange mixture" including mountain men, a German mapmaker, French-Canadians, a blacksmith, a Scottish captain of the Hussars, Philadelphia artists, a doctor, a freedman, a tubercular midshipman, three Indians, a Mississippi gentleman, and a teenager boy.

The narrative of Micajah McGeehee provides a complete roster of the men who accompanied Frémont into the mountains. Historians disagree on the spellings of some names, but the names as cited in this work follow the definitive edition, The Explorations of John Charles Frémont, Volume III, prepared by Mary Lee Spence, Professor of History, University of Illinois.

The ten who perished are indicated with an asterisk. Examination of the circumstances and characteristics of their deaths would indicate they were victims of hypothermia.

The men who had been with Frémont previously were Thomas E. Breckenridge, Josiah Ferguson, Alexis Godey, Edward M. Kern, Henry King*, Thomas Salathiel Martin, Antoine Morin*, Raphael Prove*, Charles Preuss, John Scott, Vincent Tabeau (Sorrel)*, Charles Van Linneus Taplin, Lorenzo D. Vinsonhaler, William Sherley Williams, and three Indians brought from California in 1847—Gregorio, Juan, and Manuel.


Two members often ignored by historians were Jackson Saunders, a free servant from Senator Benton's household, and Theodore McNabb, Alexis Godey's 14-year-old nephew.

James McDowell left the expedition at Westport; Amos Andrews, father of Elijah Andrews, started with the expedition but remained at Pueblo; Longe left the expedition at Hard-scrabble.

2. The reconstruction of the route of Frémont's Fourth Expedition has depended upon the known primary sources. The Kern brothers' diaries, which are in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, are available on microfilm. Dr. Leroy Hafen compiled most of the diaries, letters, and memoirs associated with the expedition into Frémont's Fourth Expedition, Volume II of the Far West and Rockies Series. The collection of Charles Preuss's diaries, Exploring with Frémont, edited by Erwin and Elisabeth Guilde, was published by the University of Oklahoma Press in 1958.

Expansion, Yale University Press, 1962, examine the contributions of these young artists to expeditions into the primitive West.

Other original sources by Solomon Carvalho, John W. Gunnison, Gwinn Harris Heap, and George Frederick Ruxton provide information about the attitudes, events, and people associated with the San Luis Valley in the mid-nineteenth century.

Knowledge of the geography and history of the San Luis Valley as well as the willingness and ability to cover the same ground as those intrepid explorers are essential in determining the exact route of the expedition of 1848-49.

3. As early as 1859, La Garita shepherders began finding evidence of Frémont's route. Albert Pfeiffer, Jr. discovered the Christmas and Wannamaker camps in the 1880s.

KIT CARSON GETS GRANT, PLANS TRADE FAIR

KIT CARSON FOUNDATION has received a $10,000 grant from the New Mexico Humanities Council for programming at the Martinez Hacienda.

The grant covers three main areas: Forums, Demonstrations, and Exhibits. The focus of all the activities is to create a greater, more involving and rewarding experience for all who visit the Hacienda. Forum participants include Stan Hordes, E.A. Mares, Marc Simmons, Sabine Ulibarri, Jim Sagel, Beverly Speare, Don Espinoza, Robert Romero, Bonifacio Fernandez, Charles Carrillo, Juanita Jaramillo-Lavadie, Andrew Wiget, and Boyd Pratt. Forum topics will include literature, architecture, multi-cultural interaction, and history.

Drawing on the success of the 1986 Trade Fair, there will be expanded emphasis on interpretation and demonstration of colonial traditions. A blacksmith's forge is near completion, and some exhibit areas have been renovated.

The Martinez family will continue to serve as a window to Colonial culture in general. The Humanities grant will enable curator Laurie Beth Kahl to develop exhibits on continuity and change in Spanish culture, and to oversee oral history sessions. Valuable objects of importance to the understanding of Northern New Mexico Spanish culture will be exhibited, some for the first time.

THE SECOND OLD TAOS TRADE FAIR will take place at the Martinez Hacienda Saturday and Sunday, September 26 and 27. The trade fair is a two-day celebration of Spanish Colonial tradition, as well as a re-enactment of trade fairs that occurred regularly in the early nineteenth century.

The Kit Carson Foundation's first trade fair, held at the Hacienda last year, drew several thousand visitors and was hailed as a fine addition to the community's calendar of traditional cultural events.

RESOURCES FOR LOCAL HISTORY

THIRD IN A SERIES: MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO HISTORY LIBRARY

The Museum of New Mexico History Library has one of the largest and least known manuscript and document collections in the Southwest. The core of the collection was developed by the New Mexico Historical Society beginning in 1880. Under the guidance of L. Bradford Prince, Ralph E. Twitchell, and other early leaders, the Historical Society grew and became more active in helping preserve documentary evidence pertaining to New Mexico's history. The library is particularly strong in materials relating to the Territorial and Statehood periods.

Papers and Manuscripts - The library has a large collection of primary source materials. Significant among these are manuscripts and papers of Adolph Bandelier, William Blackmore, and Edgar L. Hewett. The Tilgham Collection contains items documenting conflict between Spanish and Indian cultures, and the Wynkoop and Wetter collections give information on the impact of Anglo immigration on the Spanish and Indian cultures.

Map Collection - Some 2,500 maps show the progress of exploration in the Southwest and document many of the commercial and economic activities of the Southwest, as well as the advances of Spanish and Anglo settlement.

Rare Books - Old and rare published materials include Giovanni Rasmusio's Navigatio et Viaggio, published in 1556, and Bernal Diaz del Castillo's Verdadera historia de los sucesos de la Nueva-Espana, published in 1632. This section is strong in documents relating to the exploration of Mexico and the Southwest and legal and religious practices in New Spain.

Newspapers and Periodicals - Many back files of newspapers and historical periodicals are available for use in the library.

Neurology File - The history library maintains a file of obituaries of prominent New Mexicans and people significant in New Mexico's affairs.

Photographic Archive - There are approximately 300,000 items in the photo archives. Items are filed by subject, and are indexed for the convenience of persons wishing to consult the archives. Study copies of most items may be ordered, and the user is charged according to an established fee schedule. Use of materials for publication requires the permission of the Museum of New Mexico, as well as credit to the Museum. Commercial uses also are subject to a fee.

The History Library and photo archives are open Monday through Friday from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Readers should bring pencils, as pens are not allowed in the study areas of the library, for the protection of the documents. Users may find it helpful to call ahead to the library in advance of visiting, in order that specialized materials may be identified and located.
Edge of Taos Desert: An Escape to Reality.

ALTHOUGH NOT WRITTEN until 1937, the fourth and final volume of her autobiography, Intimate Memories, covers Mabel’s 1917 discovery of Taos, the Pueblo Indians, and Tony Luhan. It was a discovery that forever changed not only the life-style of Mabel but the lifestyle of the Taos community as it was transformed into a cultural and spiritual oasis.

Frank Waters once wrote that “Taos always has possessed the curious magic of seeming to be newly discovered by every person.” Thus it was for Mabel, who described Taos as “the dawn of the world.” She felt she was witnessing the origins of life and that the very landscape held out the promise that she could break the chains of her past and be born anew.

“There was no disturbance in the scene, nothing to complicate the forms, no trees or houses, or any detail to confuse one. It was like a simple phrase in music or a single line of poetry, essential and reduced to the barest meaning.”

“Taos was nice. I couldn’t see it yet, but I could smell it, and I loved it already. It was not love at first sight, but it was love.”

Although some would accuse her of being self indulgent, Mabel revealed her own worldly flaws in this conversion narrative story and contrasted them with the virtues she valued in the Pueblo Indians’ lives. This view served as a foundation for the primitivist philosophy she outlines throughout the book. Her story is inspirational and filled with sensitivity and idealism for the new world that she claimed as her own and for the new love that grew between Tony and her.

Fifty years after its first publication, Edge of Taos Desert still has a freshness and lively quality worthy of exploration by present day readers.

Sandi Rhoten
Austin, Texas


THE CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO DE ASIS has become an American icon. As one of the two architectural treasures of Taos County (the other being Taos Pueblo), it has long received great recognition by artists. The book, based upon a Museum of New Mexico traveling exhibit curated by Sandra D’Emilio and Susan Streeper, thoroughly covers the artistic aspects of the subject. D’Emilio’s superb job in finding and selecting these images is complemented by the high caliber of the book’s visual presentation of its subject. This is the critical ingredient in a work whose appeal for most people will be more with the illustrations than with the scholarly notes.

The opening essay by D’Emilio and Suzan Campbell is not so much about the church itself as about the artists and how they painted and photographed the church. In brief backgrounds of the individual artists, the authors explain the various artistic interpretations of the church. Their claim that artists Scholder, Gersh, and Waldrum “distort” the form of the church is subject to question since any personal interpretation can be seen either as distortion or as the true path to essence. They might also have mentioned a few more art connections, such as the Cliff Harmon influence on Walter Cooper’s work. But overall, their analysis is sound. In the concluding historical essay, John Kessell has built a well-reasoned and even compelling case for establishing 1815 as the origin date of the church.

As an icon, the church has different meanings for its viewers. For the architects, painters, and art historians, the church transcends its Spanish-Catholic origins to become a premier symbol of harmony with the environment, and equally a symbol of the Southwest and of America. There is mystery in its sensuous form, continual color change, and an immense complexity of relationships operating within the deceptively simple lines of its abstract form. The church may be solid, ethereal, a manifestation of the divine, a backdrop for the mundane, or the heart of the community. Left out were the perceptions and feelings of the parishioners, but maybe that would have been an invasion of their intimacy with the church.

It cannot be quantified, but a place which has been the object of deep felt spiritual devotion for centuries takes to itself an undeniable aura of specialness. This book with its eighty-one artists is a recognition that we who live in its presence are indeed fortunate.

David L. Witt
Taos


AFTER SEVERAL YEARS of relatively quiet semi-retirement, there is activity on the Frank Waters front.

Flight From Fiesta is a previously unpublished novel apparently solicited from Waters for the second issue of Clark Kimball’s reorganized Rydal Press. Kimball published a limited, fine press edition, and Ohio University Press, purchaser of the former Swallow Press, followed up with an affordable trade edition.

In a typical Waters theme, the story juxtaposes opposites in the book’s two main characters—a young white girl whose family is visiting Santa Fe for the fiestas, and an older Pueblo Indian man she encounters under the portal of the Governors’ palace. Far apart in age, culture, and economic status, Elsie and Inocencio are loners, neither fully accepted or appreciated by their own. Elsie is a mischievous child who gets in the way of her mother and her mother’s lover. Inocencio is locked down upon by family and neighbors in the pueblo; his bottle is his friend until Elsie comes along.

The relationship begins in conflict, but Elsie and Inocencio soon become allies, taking flight from Santa Fe and the pueblo, stealing a car and driving to Gallup. On foot and by hitching rides, they continue into the open country north and east of Gallup. As their friendship grows, they achieve a partial unity of spirit that transcends their differences, and Inocencio retreats from a modern world he finds painful to seek his origins in ancient pueblo sites at Chaco Canyon and, apparently, in the cliff dwellings of the Jemez Mountains.

The book does not contain ethnographic or philosophical materials comparable in significance to those of the author’s other fine New Mexico novels. It would also have benefited from a stronger editorial hand. However, at this stage of Waters’ distinguished career, virtually any new insight is of interest.

Flight From Fiesta was written around 1958, a fact not indicated in either edition. Mention of this on the jacket or in the book’s front matter might have served to forestall incorrect conclusions concerning Waters’ current interests and the direction of his thinking and writing.

The Woman at Otowi Crossing was first published in 1986. This revised edition seemingly reflects Waters’ vision for the original book. It includes about twenty pages of material cut from the original. The restored passages introduce two minor characters and more fully develop two of the four major characters through whom the story is told. The passages do not materially alter the book’s plot, thematic content, or characterizations.

The book helps document the birth of the Atomic Age through its story of Los Alamos and the development of the bomb. Waters’ view to the future is set alongside the contrasting age-old culture of San Ildefonso and the Rio Grande pueblos.

For many local residents who knew Edith Warner and her biographer, Peggy Pond Church, the book was spoiled by what they regarded as an unflattering fictional portrayal of Miss Warner in Waters’ major character, Helen Chalmers. To others who did not share these personal associations, the book was simply an engaging work of fiction that revealed much about the new era and essential connections that bind all peoples and all times.

David L. Caffey
Taos


THIS BOOK IS a revised edition of the 1961 publication. This second and revised edition has an addition of four solar adobe house plans to the text and minor editorial revision.

The book contains a total of 24 ground plans with elevations that are artfully drawn; many are reflections of historic buildings. It is a catalog of useful illustrations for the new home builder.

The main text is the Introduction, which contains a short history of adobe construction by Indians and a discussion of Spanish and American architectural elements and their influence on the distinctive Territorial style that evolved after the conquest of New Mexico by the United States.

There are several inaccuracies in the Introduction. One of those, as an example, is Mr. Lumpkins’ hypothesis concerning the chemical composition of adobe soil and its treatment. The author’s information is somewhat at odds with the ideas of soil scientists. He surmises that the burned grass and other organic ash added by the Indians to dirt, as described by the Spanish explorer Castaneda, was to neutralize the acidity of the adobe soil. According to Lumpkins, it is the acid condition of soils which is the greatest factor causing erosion of adobe. However, the one problem with such a hypothesis is that almost 95% of the soils used for adobe in New Mexico are hyperalkaline and not acidic in the slightest degree.

The book is valuable for its house plans and ideas for the new builder using adobe. It deserves a place in every adobe library.

Herbert W. Dick
Taos
SAN LUIS VALLEY SOCIETY VISITS

More than thirty members of the San Luis Valley Historical Society joined about that many members of TCHS for a tour of Taos historic sites Sunday July 26.

Charlotte Graebner led a tour through the Martinez Hacienda. Following lunch in the Dining Hall at Southern Methodist University's Fort Burgwin Research Center, Dr. James Judge briefed the group on the history and activities of Fort Burgwin and Dr. Patricia Crown gave an orientation to the Pot Creek Pueblo ruin.

Eager field trip participants arrived at the Pot Creek site in time to enjoy one of the summer's few good downpours.

The San Luis Valley group has promised to invite TCHS to see some of their own historic places in southern Colorado.

PADRE MARTINEZ SUBJECT OF M.R.M. EXHIBIT

E.A. "Tony" Martinez is guest curator for an upcoming exhibit featuring the life of Padre Martinez of Taos at the Millicent Rogers Museum. The exhibit, supported through a gift from the Robert Moody Foundation, is set for October 17 through January 31.

In the meantime, the museum is interested in locating artifacts that may have belonged to Padre Martinez or his family, or that characterized his times.

HARWOOD EXTENDS NEWSPAPER HOLDINGS

Persons doing local historical research may be interested to know that the Harwood Public Library has added early newspaper holdings to its back files. Recently added on microfilm are La Revista Popular and Taos Valley News, January 1932 through August 1986, and El Crepusculo, January 1950 through June 1955 and June 1957 through November 1960.

The added files were purchased through a grant from the Robert Moody Foundation. The library already had files of the Taos News and Taos Valley News, almost continuous from 1949.

QUISICOSA

Ralph Garcia of Alamosa, Colorado, is trying to learn any new information at all about Cosme Pacheco, who lived in the Taos area and died at Arroyo Seco in 1931. Mr. Pacheco led a sheep drive from Oregon to Taos in 1887. The crew included Mr. Garcia's relative, Don Candido Garcia.

Following the trip, Cosme Pacheco recorded his experiences in a song of thirty-three verses, "La Oreganesa."

Mr. Garcia would like to hear from anyone knowing anything about the life of Cosme Pacheco. Ralph C. Garcia may be reached at 115 McKinney Avenue, Alamosa, CO 81101.