

AYER Y HOY en TAOS

Yesterday and Today in Taos County and
Northern New Mexico

SPRING 1997

\$3.00

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THEATER IN TAOS

PART TWO
by Elizabeth Cunningham



KKIT AM SIGNS OFF



BOOK REVIEWS



TAOS TIME CAPSULE



A PUBLICATION OF THE
TAOS COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Vern Reza played the lead in the 1991 production of
The Man of La Mancha at Taos Community Auditorium.
Photo by Deborah Ensor, courtesy of *The Taos News*.

LOCAL WRITERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO MAG.

Several local writers and artists are contributing to the first issue of "Taos: A de Luxe Magazine of the Arts," which will be released here May 1st, announces Judson C. Crews, publisher.

Included will be reproductions of paintings by Tom Benrimo, Brett, Victor Higgins, Louis Ribak, Beatrice Mandelman and Rebecca James.

- *El Crepusculo*,
April 19, 1951

CAR STRIKES POLE CITY BLACKED OUT

An irresistible force met an immovable object at about 12:30 a.m. Sunday, which resulted in sending two persons to the hospital and caused an electrical black-out in the town of Taos for approximately 11 hours.

Gary Stibling, 30, of Taos, was traveling east on State Road 40, when he missed a curve after crossing a bridge and struck and electrical pole.

- *The Taos News*,
April 16, 1964

TAOS YOUTH, 14 IN SPORTS MAGAZINE

A Taos youngster, 14 year-old, Michael Santistevan, is saluted in the April 13 issue of *Sports Illustrated*. Santistevan was a runner up in a ski marathon at Taos Ski Valley. He made 50 runs down a slope with a 1,620 foot drop, in just seven hours.

- *The Taos News*,
April 16, 1964



GO FLY A KITE - Ron Kalom takes a moment off his duties as pizza chef to catch a bit of wind in a bat-shaped kite in Guadalupe Plaza on a gusty afternoon. Taos got a brief whiff of Spring the weekend of April 5 and 6, but by Monday strong winds moved in, making kite-flying pleasant until snow began falling and blowing.

(Staff photo by Merilee Dannemann)

From *The Taos News*, April 10, 1975

QUESTA PETITION ASKS FOR "DISINCORPORATION"

A petition signed by 206 residents in the Quests vicinity was presented to the county commission urging the recently incorporated village to be "dis-incorporated."

- *The Taos News*, April 23, 1964

SCHOOL GROUND BREAKING FRIDAY

Ground will be broken Friday at 10:00 a.m. to mark the start of construction of the first unit of a new Taos High School complex on South Santa Fe Road.

- *The Taos News*,
April 28, 1966

SMITHSONIAN ARCHIVES TO INCLUDE COURT HOUSE

Taos County's court house on the plaza will soon cease to be. County offices will move to the new location on South Santa Fe Road and the old building will be converted to other use. At this point, no one knows to what use.

Likely, however, the building will change, will become something else, will lose that strange mystique which seems to be unique to the seat of county law and government everywhere.

- *The Taos News*,
May 7, 1970

LUHAN HOME BOUGHT BY STAR

The Taos picture industry took a large jump recently with the arrival of film producer-director Dennis Hopper.

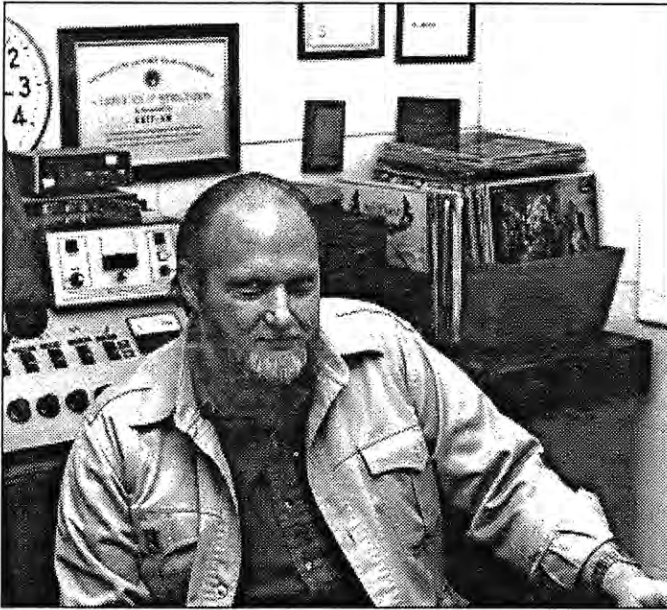
Hopper purchased the Mabel Dodge Luhan home here and is moving his production company to Taos. He said he is buying El Cortez theater in Ranchos de Taos ...

- *The Taos News*,
May 21, 1970

DOOR SWINGING OPEN AT CRUZ ALTA

Safeway, the second major chain store to open its doors in the new Cruz Alta Shopping Center, was packed Sunday (June 15) with shoppers and people just curious to take a look at the store's new 42,000 square foot home.

- *The Taos News*,
June 19, 1980



Stuart Jones of KKIT Radio in 1988. Photo by Melody Elwell (Romancito), courtesy *The Taos News*.

KKIT 1340 AM SIGNS OFF AFTER THIRTY YEARS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE TO TAOS

by Fayne Lutz

Although the radio station KKIT AM operated only during the daylight hours and its range was mostly in the Taos Valley, it broadcast local news in three languages — English, Spanish and Tiwa — three times a day. KKIT was an official weather station for the national weather service, and still is.

High school football and basket ball games were aired with Jacob Miller and others, giving play by play coverage for “at home” games and a few played “away.”

Then there was the daily “Birthday Club,” and often the mid-morning “What’s New,” an interview program which featured discussions of important community and cultural matters. KKIT also did remote broadcasts of events like the Taos County Fair, the Taos Mountain Balloon Rally, the Fiesta Parade and local election results.

New Yorkers Barbara and Steve Machcinski purchased the radio station’s license from Art Capitol Broadcasting. Art Broadcasting began the station in 1961. The Machcinski’s purchased the station in 1965 when they moved to Taos.

They hired local people for sales and broadcast, and in general, streamlined programming and created a highly professional station and staff. They were honored by the

Taos County Historical Society for their community service with a plaque in 1974.

Steve Machcinski died suddenly in 1982. Barbara’s son Stuart Jones arrived in Taos to help run the station in 1969. His mother died in 1995. Stuart has been running the station since his arrival with little or no help the last few years. He said he has not had a vacation for the last three years.

The community was stunned when there was only static instead of the Home Town News on their radios the morning of March 24, 1997. Some thought their radios had died. Then the Albuquerque papers were delivered and they discovered that KKIT was no longer broadcasting.

Jones stated that he was “burned out.” The station was not for sale. Even though he had recently re-licensed the station, he said he was through. “Petitions would do no good.”

KKIT 1340 AM was no more. A saddened community had become so dependent on the radio station that they simply could not get over it. It was the main topic of conversation for all of Holy Week in Taos County. It was as if a good friend had passed away.



BOOK REVIEWS

Uncle Sam’s Cabins: A Visitor’s Guide to Historic Forest Service Ranger Stations of the West

by Les Joslin

Wilderness Associates, Bend, Oregon

\$15.95 Softcover

The author, Les Joslin is a retired Navy commander and former Forest Service firefighter. He has collected information on seventy-five historic USDA Forest Service ranger and guard stations throughout the West, including nine in the Southwest region of the Forest Service, two of which are on the Carson National Forest.

Some of these old stations date back to the early days of the Forest Service before 1905. Others reflect the start of the present day Forest Service under Gifford Pinchot up to the Civilian Conservation Corp in the 1930s and 1940s. The best preserved of these buildings are still in use today, although the old wood cooking ranges are gone and modern plumbing has been added. I feel very privileged to have slept and played poker by Coleman

— Continued on page 16

August 11, 1983.

21 *The Taos News*, July 26, 1984.

22 "Whaley brands TCA 'conservative,' resigns," by Billie Blair. *The Taos News*, August 16, 1984.

23 "' Taos Spectrum' blends cultures, media," *The Taos News*, January 15, 1981.

24 "' Taos Spectrum': They really pulled it off," by Steve Dishongh, *The Taos News*, January 22, 1981.

25 Interview with Bernadette Track, November 11, 1996.

26 "Tiwa Tales, rich cultural experience on Plaza," by Jean Nathan, *The Taos News*, June 25, 1987.

27 "'Mujerota,' Romolo Arellano creates two super-women," by Jean Nathan. *The Taos News*, June 18, 1987.

28 "' Poaching' (it's not about Anglo bashing)," by Rick Romancito, *The Taos News*, August 11, 1994.

29 "*Los Titiriteros* brings 'rough theater' to Taos: puppets portray history and culture of the Southwest using lively entertainment," by Rick Romancito. *The Taos News*, July 27, 1995.

30 "'Oz' is alive in Taos," by Lynzee Webb. *The Taos News*, March 10, 1988.

31 When asked by Pamela Parker, Jonathan Gordon agreed to allow Garver and the other actors to use the name of his theater company in support of their effort. Interview with Pamela Parker, April 4, 1997.

32 For a list of performers consult the TCA brochure, "TCA: 20 Years, and *The Taos News*, February 20, 1992. *Tempo of The Taos News*, gave extensive coverage of the 20th anniversary.

33 *The Taos News*, February 27, 1992.

34 For a complete listing of actors, participants and musical numbers performed, see "Wow! 'Flashback/20' is a big, big, big hit," by Deborah Ensor, *ibid.*

35 The original full-length version of *Manby* premiered on the Harwood stage in July 1977. The play, based on local history, traces the "often unscrupulous and successful attempts" of Englishman Arthur Manby to "acquire a land grant, including the Manby Springs, which he hoped to turn into an international spa." ("Parks 'Manby,' A Flavor of

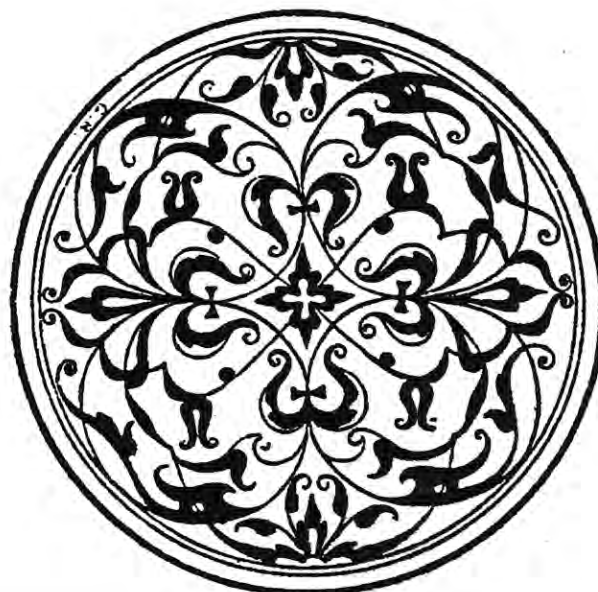
Taos Madness," by Asha Briesen, *The Taos News*, July 7, 1977.) Manby's mysterious death remains unsolved.

36 Taos Art Association Archives, *The Albuquerque Journal*, June 1992.

37 Not only production designers benefited under Nichols' guidance, long-time lighting and sound technicians Morten Nilsson and Tom Myers drew inspiration from him for stage design and technical assistance. The author and editor wish to acknowledge them for their years of hard work and for training Taos High School drama students the technical side of theater.

38 Interview with Pamela Parker, *op. cit.*, and Robert Harnesberger, April 4, 1997, "Much Ado About Nothing: SMU students to perform Shakespeare comedy," by Deborah Ensor. *The Taos News*, August 9, 1990. A past producer of Ontario's Stratford Shakespeare Festival, founder of Victory Gardens in Chicago, and former professional development director for the Equity Showcase Theater, Cecil O'Neal now heads the drama department at the Meadows School of the Arts, SMU. Patsy Rodenburg taught at London's Guildhall School of Drama and is now Head of Voice at the Royal National Theater in London.

39 Newland produced, directed and starred in the television series "One Step Beyond," and later had his own production company in Hollywood. He has directed well-known stars, among them Anthony Hopkins and Angie Dickenson. "Noises Off," THS Drama Department Takes Theater," by Deborah Ensor. *The Taos News*, February 17, 1994.



Taos Students Repertory Theater in the 1970s), director Ron Usherwood (who directed the 1984 TCA production of *Equus*) and young playwright Eliam Kraiem (who acted in and directed Taos High School dramas in the late 80s and early 90s) have moved back to Taos. These new talents bring fresh vitality to the Taos stage. As in the past, they join with veteran resident actors, directors, playwrights and technical support teams to devote their time and energy to theater. Thanks to their combined efforts, as the year 2000 approaches, theater in Taos shows every sign of remaining a vital force.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their time and access to their archives and photos, the author wishes to thank the following: Myrtle S. Rosen, Otto Pitcher, Robert D. Ray, Larry Frank, Barbara Brenner, Kathy Cordova, Jerry Padilla, Carol Kalom, Sammye Meadows, Nancy Jenkins, Tricia Hurst, Vivian Thompson, C.K. McFarland, Emily Regier, Kit Schuetze, Pamela Parker, Robert Harnesberger, Jonathan Gordon, Barbara Paul, Thom Collins, David Garver, Stephen M. Parks, David Witt, Bernadette Track, Soge Track, Anne MacNaughton, Cristina Masoliver and Ned White. Special thanks to Melody Romancito for her encouragement.

NOTES

1 "Curtain rises on local talent," by Anthony Branch. *The Taos News*, September 6, 1979.

2 McFarland received her B.A. from Mills College's drama department, which worked with the San Francisco Actor's Conservatory Theater, the "daddy" of theater in the Bay area. Her mentor trained at London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.

3 Interview with C.K. McFarland, October 28, 1996.

4 "Review lacks timing," by Tom Sharpe. *The Taos News*, August 9, 1979.

5 "MM Players find a home," by Emily Enson. *The Taos News*, July 3, 1980.

6 The play had direct connections with Taos. In the late 1930s Tennessee Williams came to Taos and visited Frieda Lawrence. Following his visit he wrote the one-act play, *I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix*. Williams returned to Taos in 1943 to procure the rights to one of Lawrence's stories, *You touched Me*, from Mabel Dodge Luhan. In 1945 Williams' adaptation opened on Broadway. "Taos and the American Theater: Three Giants of the Stage Found Inspiration Here,"

by Eric Richards. *Taos Magazine*, April 1973, p. 35.

7 "Taos Theater Company comes of age," by Judith Soucek Ritter. *The Taos News*, October 4, 1979.

8 "Acting superb in one-act plays," by John Nichols. *The Taos News*, February 9, 1978.

9 "Winnie sings Beckett's song - magnificently," by Joanne Forman. *The Taos News*, January 28, 1982.

10 The brainchild of TCA producer Carol Kalom, Backstage/TCA set up actors and audience both on stage with the curtains closed. This allowed for smaller plays to be produced and resulted in more of an intimate rapport between the actors and audience.

11 Gordon took *The Maids* on tour to play at the Center for Contemporary Art in Santa Fe. Interview with Barbara Paul, November 8, 1996. Also, "The Maids' opens new Backstage/TCA space," by Joanne Forman. *The Taos News*, June 10, 1982.

12 Barbara Paul and Thom Collins said they felt they learned more from Jonathan Gordon in two years than they could have gleaned from any graduate theater program. Paul interview, op. cit., interview with Thom Collins, November 8, 1996).

13 "*Antigone* polished, poised, professional," by Joanne Forman. *The Taos News*, August 9, 1984.

14 Bill Whaley and Elizabeth Perrigo handled the production, Pam Parker assisted with the directing, Perrigo designed the production, Erin Solari did the lighting, and Klein, Ted Dimond and Andrew Crooker, along with Phil's Electric, took care of the other technical chores. *The Taos News*, August 9, 1984, *ibid*.

15 *Ibid*.

16 Interview with Barbara Paul, November 8, 1996.

17 "Nothing dated or boring about Kroetz play," by Phillip Bareiss. *The Taos News*, February 28, 1985.

18 *Ibid*.

19 "Two plays to open this weekend," *The Taos News*, June 30, 1983. "Repertory Company to opens," *The Taos News*, July 28, 1983. "Repertory helps Taos pockets," by Don Thompson, *The Taos News*, August 18, 1983.

20 "Insult to town," by Randy Raiser. *The Taos News*,

of his play, *Manby*, to a live radio audience.³⁵

On the heels of the TCA's 20th anniversary, Taos theater received regional recognition, A review acknowledged the efforts of the various theatrical companies dating from the "Golden Age" of Taos theater:

For over a decade now Taos has been, if not a hot-bed at least a warm-bed in New Mexico. Productions of David Mamet, Sam Shepard and Beckett, Jean Genet, Pinter and Shakespeare, not to mention musicals and various original works, have been presented ably, if not brilliantly by almost any standard, in the small burgh. Actors and actresses, directors, tech people, even the prop managers ... come out of the sagebrush to pool talents and pull off everything from *West Side Story* and *Hamlet*, to *Guy and Dolls*, *American Buffalo*, *Betrayal*, *The Road to Mecca*, and smallroom revues and sketches. ³⁶ — *The Albuquerque Journal*

In the 1990s Taos theater benefited from an influx of directors and other long-time professionals who helped raise the quality of productions to new levels. Beginning



David Garver and Dominica Cameron in *The Petrified Forest*, a 1994 production at the TCA. Photograph by Rick Romancito, courtesy of *The Taos News*.

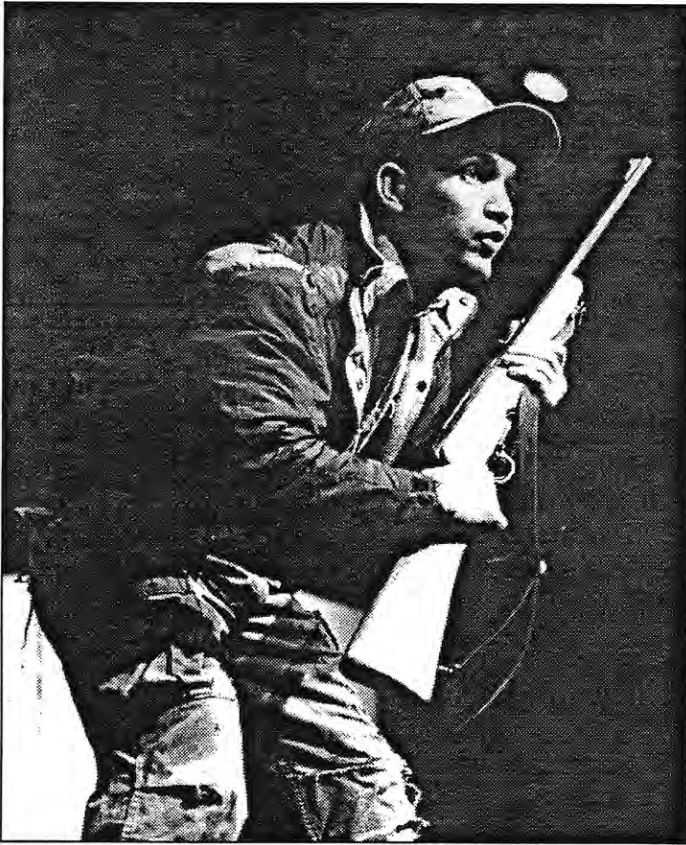


Tym Thurston, Judith Rane and Carleene Christie in *Riders to the Sea*, a 1990 production. Photograph by Deborah Ensor, courtesy of *The Taos News*.

with the performance of *The Road to Mecca*, the Minimum Security Players worked with David Nichols, a film and theater production designer and director, who first appeared on the Taos scene in the 1970s. ³⁷ Additionally, Nichols underwrote some of the productions. When Cecil O'Neal, a 20 year veteran of U.S. and Canadian theater, and Patsy Rodenburg, "one of the leading teachers of voice and text in the English-speaking world," came to Ft. Burgwin to conduct a five-week Shakespearean seminar for Southern Methodist University students, they invited members of Minimum Security Theater and other Taos professionals to join them in workshops.³⁸

In 1992, John Newland, a 50-year veteran of stage and television, moved to Taos. He began working with Taos High School drama teacher, Nancy Jenkins, and coached her students in 1993. In February 1994 he directed them in *Noises Off* at the TCA. ³⁹ The following April Newland directed the TCA's production of Robert Sherwood's *The Petrified Forest*, and in October, he directed University of New Mexico - Taos acting class students in *Two Nights Only*. Not only the high school students and adults reaped the benefits of professional directors. Children in the elementary schools began to have a venue for theater experience in 1992 when Karen Thibodeau created Taos Children's Theater. In July 1992 the children gave an inaugural performance at the TCA with an adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In the past year or so, new groups, such as the Taos Reader's Theater, have sprung up, which support emerging playwrights and experimental theater. Additionally, people who were involved in theater in past years, such as actor James Oliver (formerly Nat Simmons, who directed



Pedro Garcia in the 1994 production of Marcos Martinez' play "Poaching," at the TCA. Photo by Rick Romancito, courtesy of *The Taos News*.

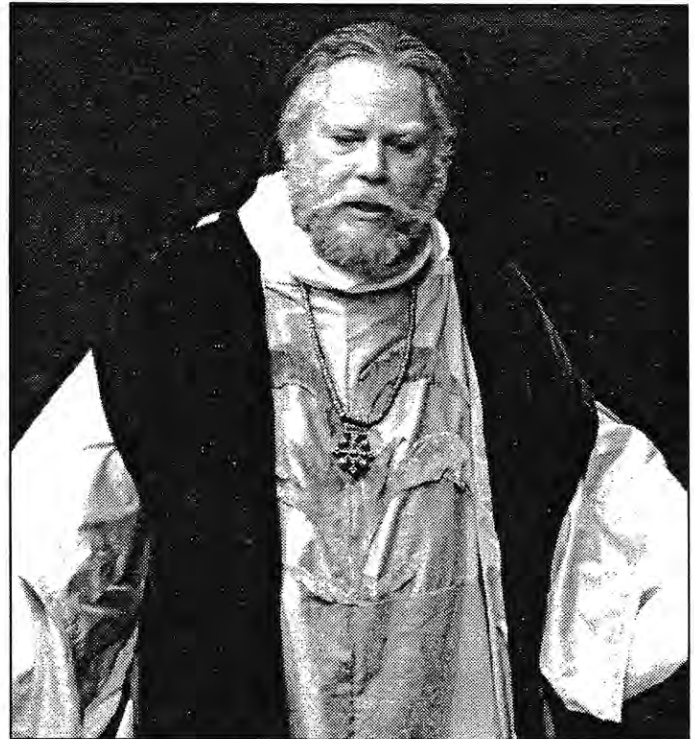
working scripts for actors, directors and writers. Robbins further assisted professional development when he directed local actors in *The Madwoman of Chailot* the following April.

In the early 1990s the TCA prepared for its twentieth anniversary. As a tribute to local community-based theatrical endeavors, Carol Kalom, envisioned "Flashback 20" for the 1992 anniversary celebration. Intending to highlight past TCA musical productions for "Flashback/20," Kalom and her committee, along with Sammie Meadows, the new executive director of the TAA, decided to highlight combined excerpts from the various musicals performed at the TCA beginning in the 1970s. For the event they planned to bring back some of the original cast members and feature them with new talent in an evening of musical comedy. However, "Flashback/20" escalated into a six-week showcase of the performing arts, as indicated in a TCA brochure. "In February, 1992, the Taos Community Auditorium will mark 20 years of the finest theater, dance and music in New Mexico, and we intend to celebrate." Taos composers, actors, musicians, playwrights, dancers and writers pulled out the stops to bring diverse entertainment to the

audience at the TCA. The roster echoed the one-night extravaganza produced by Prism Productions in 1981, and featured some of the same people as well as new talents.³²

"Flashback/20" inaugurated the festival with a gala opening night performance which drew rave reviews: "Wow! 'Flashback/20' is a big, big hit." The show drew a standing ovation from the enthusiastic audience as "old-timers came back to relive their experiences on the stage — to re-portray characters they did 12, 15 or 20 years ago."³³ Producer Kalom, director/choreographer Robert Raye and musical directors Kip Pond and Bob Draper received kudos for their hard work. Veteran TCA actors from 10 past musical performances, like Ron Kalom, Cindy Valerio, Carlos Martinez, Ana Chavez, Isabella and Bob Draper, Jonathan Pederson, Robert Harnesberger, Nanette Van Wie, John Flaherty and Maureen Montclair brought back the memories with songs from *West Side Story*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Kismet* and *Godspell*. Another generation of Taos High School drama students, led by Nancy Jenkins, performed "I'd Do Anything," from *Oliver!* For the finale, the entire cast gathered to sing "To Dream," from *The Man of La Mancha*, and the soul-stirring rendition brought the audience out of their seats.³⁴

In addition to "Flashback/20," theatrical performances included presentations of *Daughters of the Mother*, one-act plays, and performances by Chamisa Mesa Alternative School, along with The Taos High School Story Theater. Taos playwright and actor Steve Parks presented a portion



Robert Harnesberger as Polonius in the 1990 production of *Hamlet* at the TCA. Photograph by Rick Romancito, courtesy of *The Taos News*.

various puppetry techniques, along with masks and actors, *Los Titoriteros* recall the *Maromeros* and puppeteers who came up the *Camino Real* into northern New Mexico beginning with the Spanish *entrada*. In the age-old tradition, Masoliver has written plays like *Los Matachines*, *Don Quijote*, and *New Mexico History* which allow her hand-crafted marionettes to tell the truth while looking (and laughing) at the human condition. The universal appeal of puppetry combined with Spanish and New Mexican themes caused one reviewer to remark that "Rough theater is the theater of salt, sweat, noise, and smell. It is theater that doesn't have to happen in a theater. It can happen anywhere: barns, gardens, courtyards, all are acceptable venues."²⁹

By the latter 1980s, productions at the TCA experienced a renaissance. TAA executive director, Judith Fritz, who trained at New York's Carnegie Hall Dramatic Workshop and acted and directed in Mexico, Israel and Taos (from 1978 to the mid-80s, she directed the Taos High School drama program as Judith Crooker) championed theater in Taos. She revitalized the TCA's mission of supporting local, community-based productions using local and professionally trained talent. Following the tradition set by Bill Whaley in the 1970s, Fritz directed several of the community efforts herself. Assisted by Marjorie Malone and musical director, Melanie DeMore, Fritz directed *Grease* in 1985 and *The Wizard of Oz* in 1988. The latter production involved more than 200 Taoseños, including artists Larry Bell, Maya Torres, Jim Wagner, Ginger Mongiello, Denise Spranger, Reina and Gus Foster, who created sets and Elizabeth Perrigo and Ellen Brown, who made costumes. Sixty to eighty, five to thirteen year-olds portrayed the munchkins, and young actors, like junior high school student Amanda Heekin Sargent and seven-year-old Rachel Brown, joined seasoned professionals like Robert Harnesberger, Robert Raye and Donna Stevens, along with members from the Taos business community like Postmaster John Flaherty and dentist Roy Sharfin. The presentation won accolades and the statement: "Community theater is a unifying experience because it requires a lot of give from everyone, and that's what is happening here ... And it's really beautiful."³⁰

In 1990, Fritz directed Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, and personalized the presentation for Taoseños using the play as a forum to look at quality-of-life issues.

Professional local playwrights and actors also received Fritz' encouragement and support. Dixon playwright Rose Mary Crawford's fifth children's play, *Tales of Taos, or The Mad King of Tostada* highlighted the Spring Arts Celebration in 1988, and Taos composer/playwright Joanne Forman's musical, *Jonah!*, played the following November.

Taos High School students continued their traditional presentations with such plays as *Auntie Mame* and *The*



Rose Mary Crawford played the lead in *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, at the TCA. Photo by Melody Elwell (Romancito), courtesy of *The Taos News*.

Skin of Our Teeth. Actor David Garver co-directed (with Bob Harness) and played the lead in his 1990 production of *Hamlet*. His wish to establish an annual Shakespeare festival in Taos gave way to a resurrection that same year of Minimum Security Theater.³¹

Together with Bob Harness and Carlene Christie, Garver created a company dedicated, as in Jonathan Gordon's days, to performing "high-risk" plays. In October 1990 Minimum Security Theater presented three one-act plays at the TCA: *Riders to the Sea* by J.M. Synge, directed by Pam Parker, *Hughie* by Eugene O'Neill, directed by Robert Harnesberger, and *Coyote Blues*, written and directed by Taoseño Oscar Lewis. The actors included other long-time Taos professionals, among them Christie, Harnesberger, Lewis, Garver, Judith Rane, Tym Thurston, Michael Simon, Bob Mongiello, Carmen LeDoux, and Burton Jespersion. Other productions at the TCA followed, including Athol Fugard's *The Road to Mecca* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1991, and Michael McCormick and Jeffrey Hudson's *A Museum Peace*, and Sam Shepard's *The Tooth of the Crime* in 1992.

Judith Fritz showed additional support to the local community in the fall of 1988 when she brought in professional directors, Dennis Robbins and Ned Bobkoff, from New York to conduct workshops in scene study and



Taos Pueblo Children's Theater performing "Coyote and Two White Eagles," of *Tiwa Tales* in 1987. Nolan Gomez played Coyote and White-headed Eagles were played by Shawn Lujan and Justin Cordova. Masks were created by Carpio Bernal. Photo courtesy of Anne MacNaughton, World Poetry Bout Association.

annual Poetry Circus. Using masks to portray the characters, the cast of nine children performed in *Tiwa* and the narrator, Carpio Bernal, translated the stories into English for the audience.²⁶

That summer and the following year Taos Pueblo Children's Theater played in various locations in Taos, including schools and the Millicent Rogers Museum, and toured to Santa Fe and Albuquerque, performing at schools, the Wheelwright Museum and the New Mexico State Fair.

Along with the Taos Pueblo Children's Theater, other new voices received an audience when bilingual plays by Taos area playwrights hit the stage in the late 80s. Playwright Romolo Aragon from Arroyo Hondo created *Mujerota* (Superwoman), after reading hundreds of case studies on battered women. His play portrayed the lives of two Hispanic women whose friendship helped battle, then overcome, the destructive violence in their lives. While set in northern New Mexico, the issues raised in the play represent the plight of women on a broader scale. Directed by Larry Frank, *Mujerota* opened at the TCA in June 1987, and played to a wider audience at Albuquerque's South Broadway Cultural Center the following October.²⁷

Jerry Mondragon, from Llano Quemado, wrote *Tu y Yo*, which opened at the TCA, August 20, 1992. Mondragon played the male lead opposite co-producer, Elena Avila, an actress from El Paso, whom he knew from their previous acting days with Albuquerque's *La Compania de Teatro*. In the two-person play, Mondragon and Avila portrayed a Chicano couple confronting such modern issues as the men's movement and women's challenges of balancing marriage and career. *Tu y Yo* also touched on a more universal theme: the struggle of individuals to retain their identities within the context of a relationship.

Dealing with more local issues, Marcos Martinez of Cañon wrote and directed *Poaching*, on the TCA stage in August of 1994. Using humor, the play satirized encounters between "Taos locals and second-home newcomers," trapped together during a snowstorm.²⁸ The play raises issues of identity and validation among Taos' three dominant cultures, as well as illustrating the barriers, often self-imposed, that make cross-cultural communication difficult.

Another new entity, *Los Titiriteros*, provides an additional venue for bi-lingual, multicultural theater. Cristina Masoliver, of Barcelona, Spain, formed a marionette troupe in 1992, four years after moving to Taos. Mixing

mony to the wounds the theater community had suffered from the "wars." Bill Whaley, former director of the TCA, resigned from the performing arts committee when it declined to give Klein free auditorium use for a children's production. Whaley charged the executive director of the TAA, Jim Levy, and TCA director, Carol Kalom, with being too conservative, and stated, "They're favoring mediocre out-of-town talent over productions that would draw local people into the theater, like children's shows and musicals." Levy responded positively to the charge of being conservative, adding that he was "trying to overcome a deficit incurred during the first year of the Taos Repertory Company."²²

According to the local contingent, Yeager, his repertory company, and other outsiders left the TCA with a substantial indebtedness. The local companies suffered perhaps the greater damage. They felt that the TCA had betrayed them by giving paid jobs to outsiders, when they had worked so hard to create a theatrical environment for experimental and alternative professional theater with little financial reward. Taos suffered the loss of talent and a vital theater community, as one company after another dispersed in the mid-1980s and many theater people left to pursue careers elsewhere.

Despite difficulties and disappointments, one very special event produced a community-wide art happening that helped open the way for other new theatrical efforts. Emily Regier and Paul Lisko, who had worked with the Magic Mirror Players, formed Prism Productions in 1981. The new company wished to establish a "multi-cultural, multi-media cultural center for all the arts" in the hopes that the center would provide a platform for new artists in the performing and visual arts.²³ The event, "Spectrum," opened to great excitement at the TCA Saturday, January 17, 1981, with a champagne toast by artist R.C. Gorman. Some of Taos' most acclaimed and professional artists performed - guitarists Ben Rael and Antonio Mendoza, flutist Nancy Laupheimer, pianist Ron Hayes, Johnny Gilbert's jazz ensemble, Pat Burns, Thom Collins and John Dillon, along with Steve Parks and Bill Bolender of the Taos Theater Company, the Magic Mirror Players, Klein, singers Cynthia Freeman, Lee Ann Leonard and Consuelo Luz Arostegui, writer E. A. Mares, and Taos Mountain Shadows from Taos Pueblo. The headline in *The Taos News* the following week, "Taos Spectrum': They really pulled it off," described the four-hour long event as "one of the most thoroughly professional variety shows ... that Taos has ever seen." The event was exhilarating for participants and audience alike. "The entire production was Taos. It was what Taos is all about for most of us who live here. It was three diverse cultures working toward a common goal."²⁴

Showcasing the depth and breadth of existing successful performing arts talent also brought renewed focus on the



Chuck Perez and Barbara Paul in *Through the Leaves* by Xavier Kroetz, a Minimum Security Theater Production. Photo by Jonathan Gordon, courtesy of *The Taos News*.

necessity of supporting new artistic endeavors. In this atmosphere new groups were formed. Encouraged by the efforts of members from the writers organization the Society of the Muse of the Southwest (SOMOS) and those of Bernadette and Soge Track, the Taos Pueblo Children's Theater was born.

In the 1970s, following training in the dramatic arts at Julliard in New York, Bernadette Track became a founding member of the Native American Dance Theater. She also performed at New York's Cafe La Mama, an experimental theater club. Years later, after seeing Taos Pueblo children perform Laguna Pueblo tales written by Leslie Marmon Silko, as part of SOMOS Poetry Circus (now operating under the aegis of the World Poetry Bout Association), Bernadette and her sister, Soge, felt the children of Taos Pueblo should be working with material from their own pueblo, thus the idea for Taos Pueblo Children's Theater was born. Soge, a poet and writer, wrote down stories her grandmother had told her, adapted them to fit contemporary times, then translated them from English back into Tiwa for the children to learn.²⁵

In 1987 SOMOS received funding for *Tiwa Tales*, and in May sponsored Taos Pueblo Children's Theater's inaugural performance at the Taos Pueblo Day School. Bernadette, assisted by Robert Mirabal, directed the play, which Soge wrote and Marjorie Malone choreographed. In June the company presented three coyote tales: "The Water Spiller," "Coyote Kills His Wife," and "Coyote and the White-headed Eagles," on Taos Plaza as part of the



Hilary Fraley and David Garver rehearse *Antigone*, performed at the Taos County Courthouse in 1984.
Photo by Thom Collins, courtesy of *The Taos News*.

stage the play in the Taos County Courthouse. This setting added such a physical and emotional dimension to the drama that the reviewer felt compelled to agree "that there is such a thing as moral law, and if you have the courage, nobody can prevent you from acting upon it."¹³ The cast, which included seasoned professionals and those who had never appeared on stage, rehearsed for three and a half months. In this monumental effort, Gordon received support and assistance from nearly the entire theater community.¹⁴

Gordon himself starred in the production, translating his intensity in directing to the stage, along with the performances of the other actors. The reviewer summed up the effect the play had, stating: "it is totally absorbing, and true to 3,000 years of theatrical history, the audience is moved, taken out of itself; yes, purified ..."¹⁵ As with *The Maids*, Gordon's choice of location added to the rapport between actor and audience. Additionally, given the context of the play, by placing it in a courtroom he touched people in their daily lives where they are impacted by the real drama of contemporary times and the law.¹⁶

The following year Minimum Security Theater presented *Through the Leaves*, by Xavier Kroetz, one of Germany's most popular living playwrights, who was only then beginning to receive recognition in the United States. Gordon staged the play in a bookstore south of Guadalupe parking lot, and transformed the place into a

"Bavarian butcher shop stocked with meat including a pig's head. One passes through the set to a living room-bedroom scene to get to the seating in the back of the store ..."¹⁷

The space seated only 30 people, and here too, Gordon deliberately removed the formal boundaries between actors and audience, making theater accessible to everyone. In choosing this play, which revolves around an emotionally deficient relationship between an ordinary man and woman, he presented a work with characters and problems that established an immediacy with the audience. For their efforts, the actors received praise for their ability to honestly portray the human condition, and Gordon for his superb casting and direction. The response to *Through the Leaves* echoed the play's honest presentation. "This is successful theater; this is new and contemporary. There is nothing dated or boring ... This is a gift to Taos."¹⁸

Just as the local theater scene reached new heights, *The Taos News* reported: "Not only are local groups active, the Taos Repertory Company will open its first season on July 28, and is now offering season tickets."

In an effort to "provide sustained employment for performers," Don Thompson, executive director of TAA, hired Michael Yeager, founder of the William Shakespeare Company, a well-regarded summer theater in Camden, Maine, to head the Taos Repertory Company. Ostensibly, one-half of the personnel hired was to come from Taos, yet most of the names on the roster were not familiar ones.

Three plays were offered that summer. James Goldman's *Lion in Winter* and Tom Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound*, were directed by Yeager while Bill Bolender was hired to direct Moliere's *School for Wives*.¹⁹

According to local lore, Yeager came to Taos with a superior attitude and didn't take pains to become familiar with the local theater enclave. As a letter to *The Taos News* testified, Yeager created a furor by firing Bolender over a difference in directing styles.²⁰

Thus, the so-called "Theater Wars" erupted, and in true *Milagro Beanfield* fashion, three local theater people registered the name "Taos Repertory Company," so that Yeager was forced to use another name the following season. The summer of 1984, under the name "The Actors Repertory of Taos," Yeager directed Shakespeare's crowd-pleasing *Twelfth Night*, Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and Langford Wilson's *Angels Fall*. A notice in the paper mentioned that roughly half of the company's personnel were from New Mexico, yet only five were familiar Taos names. With a certain irony, the announcement of Minimum Security Theater's upcoming production of *Antigone* appeared in the same notice, entitled "Drama brightens summer arts scene."²¹

A few weeks later an article in *The Taos News* bore testi-



The Magic Mirror Players in 1980. From left to right, Vivian Thompson, an unknown player, Paul Lisko, Klein, April Warner, Cindy Rea Daniell, M. Emily Einson, Cindy Mac, Rita Montez, Mollie Busby, Nancy Jane and Emily J.Regier. Photo courtesy Emily J. Regier.

Harold Pinter. Mamet's *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, a spoof on the singles scene in a big city, earned kudos for director Bill Whaley and his cast.

In 1980 Klein, an energetic and gifted mime who had appeared at the Old Taos Armory and on the Harwood stage, directed his own play, *Wet Paint*. The performance featured 43 students from Vista Grande School, and was performed again in 1981 by the Magic Mirror Players. Klein started his own drama company, Das Kleine Dramahaus. The tiny theater, situated in the basement of the Plaza Theater building, opened in December 1981 with Edward Albee's *Sandbox* and David Mamet's *Happy Days*, which was lauded as "a happy indication that this new theater is no flash in the pan, but bids fair to be an ongoing and very much needed addition to Taos cultural life." The reviewer continued, "good performances are always a joy, and a great performance, as well as being exceedingly rare, is a blessing ... Jonathan Gordon's direction of *Happy Days* was just right." In 1983 Das Kleine Dramahaus moved to a larger space, Backstage at the TCA, opening with Mamet's *Life in the Theater*.

Jonathan Gordon directed Jean Genet's *The Maids* as the

opening production of Backstage/TCA.¹⁰ Already noted for his intense energy on stage, Gordon won critical acclaim for his work on *The Maids*, "a complex play that taxes the talents of all concerned." Calling the play "One of the best productions Taos has seen in recent years," the reviewer gave highest marks "to director Jonathan Gordon, who had the discipline and sensitivity .. [and] understanding that the director's job is to serve and explicate the playwright." The critic continued with praise for Gordon's "legion service in dealing with his three actresses, achieving an evenness of ensemble that is very rare indeed."¹¹

Considered brilliant by the actors who worked with him,¹² Gordon was also known for his ability to convey the deeper meaning of theater as a sacred space, as a ritual and ceremony, in the plays he produced. Through his thoughtful, and often unusual, choice of setting, he enhanced the depth and meaning of the plays he directed.

Under the name of his theater company, Minimum Security Theater, Gordon produced *Antigone*, a rewrite of Jean Anouilh's version of the Euripides drama. He secured permission from Judge Joseph E. Caldwell to



Pam Parker and Barbara Paul in *The Gnadiges Fraulein* on the Harwood Stage. Photograph by Dick Spas, courtesy Pam Parker.

Community Auditorium (TCA), gargoyles came to life, careening out over the audience on tire swings.

The players produced cutting edge theater equivalent to that of San Francisco Mime Company.³ Magic Mirror Players also wrote their own music and presented satirical skits reminiscent of the original material of "Saturday Night Live."

In the "Roadside Review" series of 1979, the Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP) became the target of two Soviet KGB agents whose hijacking attempts are foiled when a truckstop waitress, noticing their green spots, ascertains they have contracted a nuclear disease. A reviewer commented: "The Magic Mirror Players are doing something we can't have too much of: humor."⁴

In July 1980, the Magic Mirror Players opened their own theater space on Guadalupe Plaza, next to the popular House of Taos restaurant, in what is now the Main Street Bakery. The first production in the new venue was *Perils in Paradise*. A review captured the essence of the troupe, stating that they "have been gracing the community with their diverse presences and feeding their audiences with the most divine of repasts: laughter." Their performances were appreciated for "numerous reasons, the central one being that they do original material and music [when] there is a serious lack of really good, new material in these days of plastic instant entertainment and thought."⁵

In the mid-1970s Bill Bolender, former member of Baltimore's well-respected Trinity Square Repertory Theater, founded Totaled Theater. This grew out of his long-standing dream to create a professional repertory company which focused on plays by contemporary play-

wrights. Following the production of Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, Tennessee Williams' *The Gnadiges Fraulein* and Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, on the Harwood stage, Bolender relocated the newly re-christened Taos Theatre Company to the Old Taos Armory (what is now Bataan Hall on Civic Plaza Drive).

In conjunction with the Fall 1978 Taos Festival of the Arts, Bolender produced and directed two plays with familiar themes for local residents. The first play, Tennessee Williams' *I Rise In Flame, Cried the Phoenix*, is set in 1930 Vence, France, on the last day of D.H. Lawrence's life, in the company of his wife, Frieda and friend, Dorothy Brett. The play brought known Taos personalities and relationships before the audience.⁶ The second play, *Doing a Good One for the Red Man*, by Las Cruces playwright Mark Medoff, presented a biting satire on Anglo-Indian relationships in a confrontation between two American tourists and a Native American set at Grand Canyon.

Nearly four years and eleven plays later, Bolender won high critical acclaim for his contribution to dramatic theater with his production of *American Buffalo*. The play, by David Mamet, won the Drama Circle Critics Award in 1977. A review complimented Johnny Gilbert for his "poignant and mood-evoking" music, and Bill Gersh for his "environmental assemblage" set. The critic praised Steve Parks for a directing job that shone "with clarity and truth." The reviewer went on to give high accolades to the actors: "at times the current of feeling is almost palpable and they draw you into the web of life," and remarked on the play's cohesiveness: "it is totally synchronized, perhaps the most professional Taos has ever seen."⁷ The following year, Parks directed another winner with Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class*.

In the late 1970s Bill Whaley, former director of the Taos Art Association (TAA), bought the Plaza Theater and an adjacent small room located downstairs off the south side of Taos Plaza. He created the Taos Plaza Theater Company, wishing to support contemporary, thought-provoking theater performances. These dramatizations, because they were often avant garde, drew a smaller audience, and were unlikely to fill all the seats at the TCA.

Two one-act plays, Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, and Edward Albee's *Zoo Story*, opened the new company's first season. Writer John Nichols reviewed the plays, calling the actor's performances a "theatrical treat not to be missed," and "a *tour de force*." Nichols credited the success of the plays to Michael Smith's gutsy direction, and stated that "both plays succeeded in a smoothly synchronized way that indicated real professionals were at work."⁸

The company's second and final season in 1981 featured a series of three one-act plays by Tennessee Williams and work by David Mamet, Hunter S. Thompson and



Nancy Jane and Anne Borzha are gargoyles in the 1978 Magic Mirror Players' production of *The Hunchback* at Taos Community Auditorium. Photo courtesy Emily J. Regier.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THEATER IN TAOS PART TWO

by Elizabeth Cunningham

In an article on the theatrical offerings for the Taos Fall Arts in 1979, reviewer Anthony Branch cited theater companies that brought "serious" and "outrageous" theater to Taos.¹ From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s an influx of professionally trained theater people joined ranks with some of the resident professionals and formed their own companies. They created a "Golden Age" of Taos theater with experimental and contemporary productions that echoed happenings in New York and Los Angeles.

The first of these new theater companies, Magic Mirror Players, grew out of C.K. McFarland's Melodrama Theater, which played *Robin Hood's Sherwood Sandals* at San Geronimo Lodge the summer of 1975.² Enticed away from a scholarship to London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts by the opportunity to create her own works,

McFarland returned to Taos the following summer. She provided the leadership for the Magic Mirror Players, a talented, predominantly female cast who collaborated on writing and producing plays. The group wrote and worked from original pieces – some based on fairytales with a humorous twist. For example, in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, Snow White was an African American and the dwarves were re-christened with names like Rocky. In *Funsmoke*, women played male parts: Marshall Dillon became Marsha Dillon, and with the "live animation" approach, cowboy boots took on new life as barroom doors that revolved full circle. They swung around to connect with the actor's backside and propelled her onto the stage.

In the 1978 production of *The Hunchback* at Taos

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AYER Y HOY en TAOS **Yesterday and Today in Taos County** **and Northern New Mexico**

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We invite articles of a scholarly nature, as well as book reviews of recent publications pertinent to the Taos and northern New Mexico area. We are open to publishing occasional reminiscences, folklore, oral history and poetry that are of lasting historical interest.

The Taos County Historical Society endeavors to maintain high standards of quality in *AYER Y HOY*, and we seek to make improvements as we go along. Readers' comments and suggestions are welcome.

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The Taos County Historical Society is a New Mexico non-profit organization dedicated to the study and preservation of the historical resources of Taos County and northern New Mexico. Membership is open to any interested person, regardless of residence.

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FROM THE EDITOR

This issue is special in a couple of different ways.

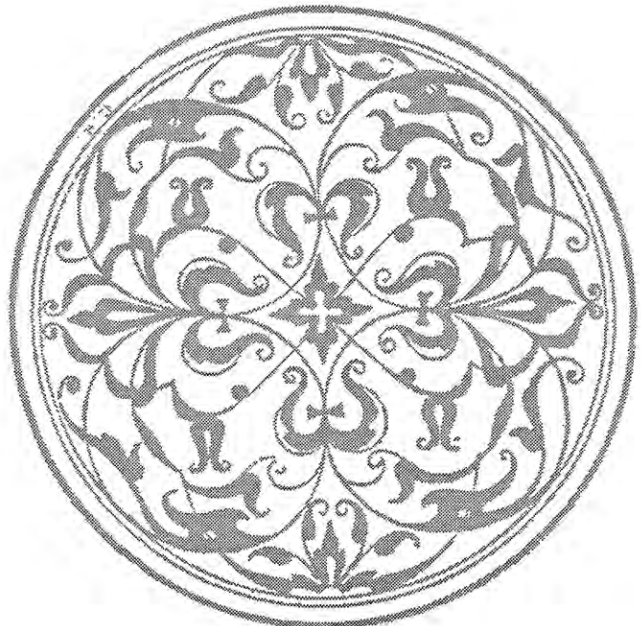
First, it represents the third issue for me, and as the saying goes: the third time is the charm. I feel I've been able to iron out some of the wrinkles in the editorial process that will help create a more professional final product. I want to apologize to anyone who might have been offended by errors in previous issues. I can't say there won't be any more errors, but hopefully they'll be reduced.

Secondly, this is the first time there has been a two-part story in *Ayer y Hoy*. It seems there's enough history out there about the theater in Taos to fill a book - which, of course, is a strong hint to Elizabeth Cunningham, seeing as how she's completed the prospectus. Now all she needs to do is find a publisher.

Something Elizabeth and I learned while putting this issue together is that theater people in Taos have given us so much. Besides a rich history of accomplishment, they have given freely of their time, energy, and sometimes, even money, in order to entertain us. Where do they come up with all that energy? Where do they find the time to learn their lines, rehearse and perform, when it seems that we regular folk barely have time to take care of all the things that life requires?

Something I personally learned is that reviewers may come and go, but the spirit of theater is strong and thriving here in Taos. And for that, I'm eternally grateful.

Melody Romancito



Continued from page 14 –

lantern light in many of the places, most inhabited by such critters as deer mice, bats, scorpions, pack rats, or chipmunks.

Joslin brings these old ranger stations to life with early day photographs that show the early rangers, their families, dogs and horses. Many of these cabins are in places still hard to reach today, and the days of pack horses and mules are still with us here and there, not yet replaced by helicopters or air-conditioned trucks. It is a pleasant surprise to see an occasional face in several of the photos that I recognize – men long since dead, but a brief acquaintance for me when I started out in my Forest Service career.

The two ranger stations from the Carson National Forest mentioned in the book are those located at Canjilon and Tres Piedras. One of the Tres Piedras buildings is now known as the Leopold House, having been constructed by Aldo Leopold, famous conservationist, who was Forest Supervisor at the time

(1912-14). See *Ayer y Hoy en Taos*, Spring 1994, for an article about this building. This house was built at a cost of \$650 using local milled lumber, and is still in use.

The Canjilon Ranger Station included a house, garage-shop, bar, and office, built in Pueblo-style adobe. It dates to 1935, and is also still in use.

These old cabins are but a part of the heritage left by the early day rangers and CCC enrollees. Someday maybe someone will chronicle more of the hundreds of other historical places, such as the Hondo Cabin on the way to Taos Ski Valley, or the Baldy Cabin at the head of Lake Fork in the Latirs which were not mentioned in this book. They deserve to be remembered and preserved too.

This book is available by writing the publishers at Wilderness Associates, P.O. Box 5822, Bend, OR 97708. The softcover price includes postage and handling.

– Andy Lindquist



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