



GUAJALOTES, ZOPILOTES, Y PAISANOS

Newsletter of the Hillsboro Historical Society

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Edited by: Harley Shaw

QUARTERLY REPORT/MINUTES

HILLSBORO HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

February 2, 2010

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM by Harley Shaw. Present were Shaw, Matti Nunn Harrison and Patti Nunn, Stretch Luna, Larry Cosper, Ike Wilton, Sonja Rutledge, and Patty Woodruff. Bob Cunningham joined us about half way through the meeting. The meeting took place in the Betty Reynolds conference and reading room at the Hillsboro Community Center.

Patty Woodruff read the minutes of the November meeting. Larry moved we accept them as read; Stretch seconded. Minutes were unanimously approved.

Stretch distributed the financial report, including the annual finances. Patti moved we accept the financial report. Larry seconded. The financial report was unanimously approved.

Three board members were elected to three year terms. These were Stretch Luna, Ike Wilton, and Bob Cunningham. Stretch and Ike are continuing in the board positions they already held; Bob Cunningham is new to the board and fills a position that had been empty for some time. These board members were elected by acclimation. We now have a full board of nine members.

Pattie moved that the board continue with the same officers as last year, with the exception that Sonja will assume the role of recording secretary. Stretch seconded the motion, and the officers were elected by acclimation.

Harley gave a brief report on the courthouse, saying that no progress had occurred since the November meeting. We are waiting for word from Alan Bojorquez and Jim Sullivan regarding our offer to take on a lease with purchase option. Harley will query Alan for news. Harley noted that the Historical Society had scheduled the Community Center for use over the Labor Day weekend. The True West people have been notified of this in hope that they might help organize a fundraiser at that time. We have had one large piece of carved ironwood sculpture donated to be sold or auctioned to raise money for the courthouse.

The cemetery committee reported no action, but Sonja noted that plans were afoot for construction of a new gate at the entrance to the cemetery. The high school alumni had voted to use funds remaining in their account to pay for the gate. However, when Sonja went to the bank to check on the funds, she discovered that the bank had eliminated the account and dispersed the money to the state. The alumni are nonetheless going ahead with the gate.

Larry reported that the weather had been too cold to allow any work on the fire truck. He has discussed rebuilding the flat head engine with Bill Harrison and discovered that a shop in Las Cruces specializes in rebuilding these old engines. He hopes to have a metal building available soon where he can begin work on the truck.

Harley noted that we had been approached by a grant writer offering help on fundraising. However, until we have legal ownership of the courthouse, or at least a lease, grants for signage and stabilization will probably not be available.

Harley noted that Stretch had submitted another story for the Newsletter, on the subject of murder trials at the courthouse.

The board concluded that it would not attempt to hold a music festival this year. No one in the community has offered to organize it. Ike suggested that a large, multi-day event was not feasible in Hillsboro, simply because we had no place to hold it outdoors, nor do we have lodging and food facilities to handle the large crowd.

A discussion regarding a suitable event for the Historical Society ensued. Sonja said she would like to pursue the idea of holding a reenactment of the Fountain murder trial.

Several ideas for programs to be sponsored by the Historical Society were proposed. Karl Laumbach has offered to do a program on Frank Bojorquez, and Harley agreed to get with him to set a date. Other ideas included a Swiss researcher who has studied various battles with Apaches, and historian Larry Ludwig, who lives at Fort Bowie in Arizona. Also suggested was a power point presentation of the photographs we have on disk, with possibility of publishing a photographic history of the town. Larry and Harley agreed to serve as a program committee.

Sonja moved the meeting adjourn. Larry seconded. The meeting adjourned at 8PM.

LOCAL HISTORY

In the November Newsletter, I listed several questions related to the courthouse, hoping someone would respond with a letter or article. Stretch Luna came forth with the following story of three murders that occurred in Hillsboro, only two of which were ever tried and only one of which resulted in convictions. Below is Stretch's story as written.

First and Only Women Ever Sentenced To Death in New Mexico [Lover Given Life]

In 1884, during the New Mexico Territorial Legislative session, a bill was approved forming Sierra County, in S.W. central New Mexico from the eastern part of Grant County, southern half of Socorro County, to the northern part of Dona Ana County. Hillsboro had the most population and was centrally located, so it was designated as the county seat. During the next 31 years, there were three high profile murder cases in the area.

The trial in 1899 of Oliver Lee for the murder of Col. Albert Fountain and his 10 year old son, Henry. The trial lasted two weeks and the accused were acquitted. The bodies were never found. A telegraph line was extended from Lake Valley, 17 miles south of Hillsboro for reporters to get their stories out to their papers on a daily basis.

The Prosecution Team literally camped out next to the cemetery, while the Defense Team camped out on the hill north of town, across the Percha Creek.

Long time resident, Abel Chavez, Romelia [Romie] Chavez Luna Bird's father, was one of the " Mexican " jurors, who acted as interpreter for the other Mexican jurors.

The second murder was in 1901, when " Romie " was 6 years old. The Protestant Minister and his wife owned the grocery store just four doors down from Romie's house. His wife taught school to the Mexican children in back of the store. According to Grandma Romie's recollection, two very excited women coming from uptown saw a man hanging from one of the cottonwood trees, adjacent to the Happy Flats bridge. The night before he was caught cheating at cards and was promptly taken and hanged. The body hung there two or three days until someone cut him down. The tree and most of the other cottonwood along most of the Percha Creek area through town were uprooted and washed down the creek during the June 10, 1914 flood which wiped out most of the structures in Hillsboro and [the same storm] washed out the original tent town of Lake Valley. Shortly after this the " New " Lake Valley was built where a few buildings still stand on land presently owned by B.L.M. The old grade school now features a small museum and a B.L.M. live-in caretaker will take you on a walking tour of the town.

The third murder occurred in 1906. Manuel Madrid and his wife, Valentina had gone to Mexico and returned with a mestizo by the name of Alma Lyons. She was maid, cook and housekeeper for the Madrids. Manuel Madrid was Romie's first cousin.

The Madrids were a family of high social standing in the Mexican neighborhood of Happy Flats. Valentina was a short, stocky lady, and wrote her own songs and would sing and play the guitar at local parties and other social events.

She met Fred Baca, and over time became romantically involved with him as he attended most of her recitals and parties.

During the trial of the two women, their defense was that they poisoned Valentina's husband, Manuel, with white arsenic on the urging of Mrs. Madrid's lover, Fred Baca, on threats of death from him if they refused.

Baca's counter defense was that he never conspired or threatened the women, in any way. Ultimately, the women were convicted for first degree murder and sentenced to die by hanging at the New Mexico Penitentiary. Baca pled accessory to first degree murder and was sentenced to life in the New Mexico Penitentiary.

On June 4, 1907, Secretary of State, T.W. Reynolds, signed the executive order for the Sierra County Sheriff to deliver the three convicted felons, to the New Mexico Territorial Prison in Santa Fe. Only two women have ever been sentenced to death in the history of New Mexico. Their death penalty was repealed by then-governor, Tony Anya during his last term in office.

[Note: Court transactions taken from a Spanish copy of an old clipping in my files. Author: Fred " Stretch " Luna]

A couple of comments from Patti Nunn adds a little interest to the above story:

Stretch forgot a murder. There were 4 high profile murder cases in Hillsboro. There was also the trial of Pryor Nunn in 1922 for the murder of one of the Sikes' which was written up in an article for the True West magazine in 1977. Maybe a story for next newsletter?

Manuel Madrid is buried in the Hillsboro Cemetery. His death is listed in the Death Register Sierra County " Manuel Madrid Age 35 Died Mar 30 1907 in Hillsboro, Teamster, Buried Hillsboro." Attached is a photo of a rock with M M chiseled on it which may be his grave.



Also, Matti has informed us that two books have more detail on the Madrid murder:

The Myth of the Hanging Tree: stories of crime and punishment in territorial New Mexico by Robert J. Torrez

The Way West: true stories of the American frontier by James Andrew Crutchfield, Paul Andrew Hutton

Neither of these are in the Hillsboro Library. We'll encourage them to acquire copies.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

THE 1972 LABOR DAY FLOOD

I excerpted the italicized paragraphs below from a rough draft manuscript in our archives. I believe it to be part of the longer manuscript that Bill Shaw was writing on Hillsboro history before a stroke interfered with his ability to write. It is one of several accounts and clippings on the flood in our archive, but, because it was written sometime after the event, seems to be less confusing than the various news stories that immediately followed the flood.

Barbara Wilken, who ran the Percha Café at the west end of Hillsboro remembered the night of the 1972 flood quite well. Her café was on a property bordered by Percha Creek. In 1972, the creek cut through the northern end of her property bordering the highway. Barbara awoke to the roar of the creek about Midnight on Labor Day Sunday. When she stepped outside to investigate, she plunged to her knees in rushing water. The valley is relatively wide at this point, so fortunately the water, while over the creek banks, was not deep. One reason the water had left the creek channel was Bill and Lil Debeau's [sic--Dubeau] manufactured home, which had washed down against the west end bridge, creating a dam. Bill and Lil had sought refuge in their car and somehow managed to drive through the increasingly deep water to high ground.

Barbara called her husband Lefty, who was at a rodeo in Arizona. He immediately started home, having to come around through Hatch and back from I-25 because of swollen streams across the other two routes into Hillsboro. By the time Lefty came down White Hill, the flood had created new runoff channels across the lower end of Hillsboro's valley, had caused the collapse of the two story Malloy home, located next to the east bridge. One account says the house was 108 years old in 1972, which would make it present before the 1877 founding of Hillsboro. [editor's note: anyone have information on this? Were there really houses here before Hillsboro was formed?]

On the night of the flood, Nathan Malloy was trying to lead his family to safety, when the walls of the lower floor collapsed. Nathan was carried away by the rushing waters, but managed to pull himself out downstream, badly abraded and suffering a basal skull fracture. One daughter and two sons reached the roof of the house and scrambled to higher ground. The mother, Bobbie, and her younger daughter Julie were trapped in the rubble.

The raging waters rushed down all three of Hillsboro's primary streets, and the few late-night patrons of the S-Bar-X Saloon fled. Floyd McCullough, who had been playing for a dance and musician Ed Newton headed for their cars. Both McCullough and Newton were swept away, McCullough's car with him in it. McCullough managed to grab a tree and escape, with the help of the two Malloy sons. Newton drowned, and his body was ultimately found three weeks later in his nearly-buried car, near the Percha Creek Box. The search had been called off for Newton,

because a body believed to be his had already been found some eight miles downstream, lodged in a corral at the ranch currently occupied by Ike and Mary Wilton. That badly damaged body had been mistakenly identified as Newton and buried. Disinterment allowed it to be identified as Mike Gurske.

One hero that emerged from this event was the Malloy dog, who continued pacing back and forth across the fallen roof of the Malloy house, whining and whimpering. As the flood subsided, he assumed a crouch amidst the debris of the collapsed building. Chief of the Sierra County Rescue Squad, Neil Baird, wormed himself into the rubble and heard faint cries for help. Mrs. Malloy and her 9-year old daughter, Julie, were still alive, but Mrs. Malloy's arm was pinned and she could not move. Rescuers and residents alike began a hurried excavation. Local miners pitched in, using their experience to shore up the building remains as rescuers removed debris, thereby preventing collapse of the roof on the victims. A large jack was used to lift the ruins far enough to allow Julie to climb free. Mrs. Malloy inched her way out, her arm nearly severed. She had other multiple fractures and injuries, but survived, her arm saved. Before the flood she had been a concert pianist—a skill she retained after her arm had healed.

This account seems accurate as far as it goes, but it leaves some questions unanswered, the most important being how many and who actually died in the flood. Solidly documented were Ed Newton, who died in his car, and Guadalupe Terrazas, who was crushed when the waters collapsed the adobe walls of his house. What is less clear is the identity and circumstances of death of Mike Gurske, who had initially been mistaken for Newton.

One other harrowing account tells of the couple sitting in their camp trailer at the junction of what are now highways 152 and 27 (across the street from Sue's Antiques) until the waters lifted the trailer and took it downstream. People present say that the trailer didn't go far, hung up, and the people were able to get to high ground. The original Geological Survey report of the flood, dated October 3, 1973, says that there were four deaths:

“One male resident of Hillsboro died when the raging waters collapsed the heavy walls of his adobe home, burying him in the debris [this was obviously Terrazas]. Another man drowned when floodwater swept away his vehicle as he drove along Highway 180 in Hillsboro [Newton—highway 180 is now highway 152]. A man and his wife, camping in the area, were carried into Percha Creek and drowned; their bodies were found in the creek downstream from Hillsboro.”

This latter account sounds like the couple in the trailer. Or was there another couple camping in town that were drowned? Was Mike Gurske the male of the couple? Was his wife found later? Never found? Or is the Survey report simply wrong? If so, who was Gurske and how did he drown? To add to the confusion, one local and knowledgeable history buff says that the body found later in the corral turned out to be that of a woman, perhaps the female of the couple? The Geological Survey Report was written a year after the flood, and you would think that the initial inaccuracies of the press would have been sorted out. Or did the geologist writing the Survey report get it wrong and add, once again, to the confusion?

Patti Nunn reviewed this article and then searched the Social Security Death Index online. She found three fatalities associated with the flood:

Name: Guadalupe Terrazas
Last Residence: Hillsboro, New Mexico
Born: 12 December, 1898

Name: Elbert Newton
Last Residence: Truth Or Consequences, New Mexico
Born: 7 Mar 1913

Name: Emil Gurske
Last Residence: Deming, New Mexico
Born: 30 Mar 1903

This supports the contention that only three drowned and that the couple in the trailer escaped. It all goes to show how tangled even fairly recent history can become.