Engineer and Editor Juan Hart Moved El Paso Forward
By Juana Black, Charles Gabriel and Kevin Guerrero

There are few individuals who have played a bigger role in the development of El Paso from a lawless, dusty town into a thriving metropolis than this native. Not only did he have a claim to many "firsts," including being the first American born in El Paso, but he also helped to combat city corruption and even averting a war. Although he was a captain in the US Infantry, his accomplishments came not from military might, but from his education and the power of the spoken and written word. The name of El Paso’s pioneering editor and engineer? Juan Siqueiros Hart.

Hart, born July 24, 1856, was the oldest of seven children born to El Paso’s industrial pioneer and first newspaper publisher, Simeon Hart, and his wife, Jesuita Siqueiros (see Borderlands vol. 28). Although Juan Hart spent his early childhood at the Hart homestead (what is known to El Pasoans as the old Hacienda Café), he traveled with his family to San Antonio in 1862, where the Hart family remained during the Civil War.

According to Dorrance D. Roderick’s article in Password, journal of the El Paso County Historical Society, when Hart was 10, he traveled to New York to further his education. Two years later, Hart was sent to his father’s home state of Missouri, where he was enrolled at Christian Brothers College of St. Louis. In 1874, Hart graduated with degrees in civil and mining engineering, with honors.

That same year, Hart’s father died, and with his mother’s death just the year before, the young man found himself responsible for not only his younger siblings, but his father’s vast estate and business, Hart’s Mill. He was 18 years old.

Hart took on the responsibility of educating his younger sisters and enrolled them in one of the foremost girls’ schools in America, the Academy of the Sacred Heart, in St. Charles, MO, founded in 1818. To support his education, Hart took a position at his alma mater teaching mathematics and Greek, even writing several plays that were performed by the students, for which Hart acquired considerable acclaim.

At the height of the silver boom in 1878, Hart traveled to Leadville, CO, where he began his career in engineering with former schoolmate, J. C. Carrera. The death of one of his sisters brought Hart home. Because there were no railroads to El Paso yet, Hart purchased a horse and buggy in Leadville and set out alone, traveling over mountains and across deserts in Indian country. It took him 40 days to get home. Like his father, Hart held family business, riding with his family to San Antonio in 1875, then to other states, including Missouri, Texas, and finally to New York City to attend law school.

In 1881, three newspapers began publishing in the city—the El Paso Times, the El Paso Herald and the El Paso Independent. More by accident than by design, Hart found himself following in his father’s footsteps when he joined the newspaper business after coming to the assistance of Mrs. Horace W. Kelly, whose husband owned the Independent. On Jan. 2, 1882, the Kelly’s newspaper changed names to the El Paso Link, with Hart as editor.

Hart brought in substantial citizens as backers for the newly developed Link, and according to Roderick, Hart and his partner, H. D. Potter, a printer, made the Link a “leading force” in promoting law and order, responsible government and enterprises that would improve the city. Competition between the three local newspapers was fierce, and following the old adage, “If you can’t beat them, join them,” the weekly Times bought the Link from Hart to become the El Paso Daily Times.

In 1884, Hart found himself principal owner and editor of the Times when he and J. H. Bate purchased Sherman C. Slade’s shares of the company, with Hart doing most of the writing. With his extensive knowledge in engineering, Hart understood the absolute necessity of an irrigation system for the growth of El Paso, and right after joining the Times, he began editorializing for an irrigation system for the entire El Paso valley. After many years, his campaign eventually materialized as the Elephant Butte Dam, completed in 1916.

As the new owner and editor, Hart traveled to New York City to see M. E. Stone, general manager of the Associated Press, to try to negotiate bringing an Associated Press wire to El Paso. Hart knew that if El Paso were to progress, it needed to be in contact with other cities throughout America and the world.

According to the Times article, “Captain Hart Brought First A.P. Wire News to People of El Paso,” Stone laughed at Hart’s idea of stringing the wire approximately 1,000 miles from Denver to El Paso. When finally convinced that Hart was not only serious but could pay the heavy leasing charges (since only the Times would be served by the wire), Stone reluctantly agreed to the massive undertaking, officially connecting El Paso with the news of the world.

Throughout his editorial career, Hart used the Times as a podium for progressive social change, as well as to fight against corruption. He led the campaign to move the county seat from Ysleta to El Paso. In 1884, he editorialized against con artists who swindled El Paso citizens with Mexican games of chance, “games which, while Mexican in origin, are likely were corrupted by some delinquent American sharper who found it easier to fleece his victims out of sight of the El Paso police,” according to John Middagh in Frontier Newspaper: The El Paso Times.

In 1885, Hart used his engineering knowledge to investigate the new courthouse being built. Hart used the Times to publish his findings, ultimately leading to a correction of all wrongdoings and restitution of misspent taxpayer money. Not only did Hart promote reform and uncover corruption, but on more than one occasion, he used the Times to prevent social unrest. In 1886, A. K. Cutting, an American living across the border, was arrested then convicted of libel after his Paso del Norte (today’s Ciudad Juárez) newspaper accused Emigdio Medina, who had circulated a prospectus of a competing newspaper, of fraud and swindling. The American Consul, the State Department and the Mexican government were soon all involved.

Rather than print a retraction, Cutting sat in jail and “made the matter ... between two nations,” as Middagh wrote. While the governments of the two countries examined the facts, the Times reported that townspeople had become inflamed over the idea that Mexico could hold the United States hostage. Armed troops on both sides were ready to fight, and although Cutting was eventually released from the Mexican jail, Hart was able to quiet the masses by suggesting ways to bring about peace, as well as advocating for more Fort Bliss troops to prevent border violence.

According to W. W. Bridgers’ article, “Bread and Bullets,” the State Department had circulated local hotheads in 1894. A contingent of the first march to Washington, DC, of the unemployed and hungry during the country’s worst depression to that point in history, known as continued on page 11...
Cohey’s Army, was scheduled to arrive in El Paso. Fiery orators easily turned residents against these protestors, who wanted the federal government to provide jobs for them. The sheriff and town marshal called for armed volunteers to repel the marchers and keep them out of El Paso.

In 1910, Hart was elected President of the Southwest International Miners’ Association in 1902 and shortly thereafter began writing to the Texas State company in 1910, ending Hart’s decade-long crusade for “Pure Mesa Water.” Hart also spent years advocating for a railway to extend north from El Paso. The line, which would eventually run all the way to Kansas City, MO, connected El Pasoans with the cool summer air of Cloudcroft, NM.

Hart was elected President of the Southwest International Miners’ Association in 1902 and shortly thereafter began writing to the Texas State

The El Paso Browns won the Southwest Championship in 1886. Juan Hart is seated, second row, second from the right. (Photo courtesy of El Paso County Historical Society)

For the first time in more than 25 years, Hart’svoice was silent in the press.

Although he remained an El Paso resident, Hart spent his summers in Mountain Park, NM, where he died of a heart attack on July 15, 1918. After

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in the cookbook along with a one-page summary about each of the three women, and she did just that. At the rehearsal dinner for the young couple, the reaction to this cookbook from her son’s friends made her realize that she could write more about these women and people who would be interested. She began researching what would become True Women; the cookbook would be shelved for years, finally being published in 1997, complete with updated recipes.

True Women, published in 1993, deals with ancestors on both her mother’s and father’s sides, with action beginning in 1754 and ending in 1946. The title is taken from an 1868 Reconstruction Convention committee report stating that “true women” did not desire the right to vote. Wood began to write a book about her life when she was in her 70s; she won election to public office at 87. When she died in 1966, she left a cardboard box marked “For Janice when I’m gone,” providing material which Windle used in the book, published in 1998.

Janice Windle’s third novel, Will’s War, published in 2001, is based on the trial her grandfather, Will Bergfeld, of German descent, had to endure for suspected treason during the World War I era. Windle credited her lawyer husband for helping her to re-create the trial. The story is told through Bergfeld’s wife, mother and sister, who were with him during the six-week trial. It took Winkell 17 years to complete the series of books. Windle said that without her husband’s help and encouragement, her writing career would have ended early.

Like her grandmother, Laura Woods, Windle was always interested in politics. She worked actively on various political campaigns, including those for former president Lyndon B. Johnson and former Texas governor Ann Richards. Known throughout the country for her foundation work, she was part of a delegation that helped Costa Rica establish the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress. In addition, she, along with 13 other delegates, was chosen to spend three weeks assisting the newly elected Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, in 1991 to establish a non-profit sector.

Janice Windle was named El Pasoan of the Year in 2008 by newspaper El Paso Inc. In 2010, she received the Lifetime Achievement BRAVO Award from the League of Women Voters of El Paso “in recognition of her leadership in improving the condition of mankind on both sides of the border by developing conformity of laws regulating charitable gifts…” She was also inducted into the El Paso Commission for Women’s Hall of Fame and has received numerous other awards.

In 2008, Windle became President Emeritus of the foundation, “focusing on (its) supporting organizations, donor relations and fund development,” according to El Paso Inc. Janice Windle works every day at the Community Foundation. This “true woman” still has work to do. She said to Maynez, “I think when you find something you love to do, don’t stop.”

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