When the name Garrett is mentioned, especially in the Southwest, most people automatically think of Pat Garrett who killed Billy the Kid, an alias of notorious outlaw William Bonney, another alias that Henry McCarty used. Sheriff Pat Garrett shot the Kid while attempting to recapture him after he broke out of jail. Even though Pat Garrett is better known throughout the country as a tough lawman, his daughter Elizabeth holds the place of honor in New Mexico. Elizabeth Garrett was a talented composer, singer and musician. Given her accomplishments during a time when women were not considered equal is remarkable, but that she was also blind her entire life makes it truly amazing.

Elizabeth Garrett was the third of eight children born to Pat and Apolinaria Gutierrez Garrett. She was born on Oct. 12, 1885, at her father’s ranch in Eagle Creek, about four miles north of Ruidoso, NM. In his biography of Pat Garrett, Leon Metz wrote that there are several theories about how Elizabeth came to be blind. The two most plausible are that her blindness was due to an inappropriate medication being applied to her eyes to prevent infection as an infant or that she was simply born that way. Despite the fact that her daughter was different, the Garretts were determined to help Elizabeth become as independent as possible. She was raised to be self-sufficient and uninhibited like the other children in her family.

The Garrett family moved to a ranch in the Pecos Valley near Roswell, NM, when Elizabeth was very young. In a 1937 interview with Georgia Redfield for the federal Works Progress Administration program, Elizabeth said, “My childhood days on the ranch near Roswell were happy, neither constricted nor restricted.” Her father insisted that his daughter have a normal childhood with few limitations. Elizabeth climbed trees, rode horseback and explored her environment freely.

Ruth Hall wrote in her biography of Elizabeth Garrett entitled A Place of Her Own that her father had originally decided to refrain from mentioning her disability at all. He taught Elizabeth how to use her hands and other senses to “see” what she could not with her eyes. The Garretts were very progressive in their attitude and care of Elizabeth. At this time in history, most people with disabilities generally were not taught to be self-sufficient, although her parents appear to have been way before their time in their parenting.

Elizabeth’s father explained to her that she was visually impaired, unlike her siblings, before she left for school. Hall wrote that she cried at first as her father explained to her that she was different, the Garretts were determined to help Elizabeth become as independent as possible. She was raised to be self-sufficient and uninhibited like the other children in her family.

After graduating with honors from the Texas School for the Blind, she returned to her family, then living in El Paso. Her father had been appointed El Paso Customs Collector in late 1901. Elizabeth sang and played the piano at popular events of the El Paso Woman’s Club and at teas and concerts that were held by prominent families. She became the director of a church choir and opened a small studio where she continued teaching music with the piano that her father had lovingly purchased for her. After Pat Garrett’s appointment expired in 1905, the family returned to Las Cruces, but Elizabeth decided to stay in El Paso.

In 1908, Elizabeth moved back to New Mexico to be with her family after the murder of her father. Pat Garrett was shot twice from behind, a few miles from his ranch. Although Wayne Brazel, who had leased the Garrett ranch, confessed and was acquitted, some historians believe in a complicated conspiracy about the death of the man whom many believe brought law and order to New Mexico.

Soon after the death of her father, Elizabeth decided she would go to Chicago to study music. According to Hall, she had dreamed of studying under the famed Herbert Witherspoon, principal tenor with the New York Metropolitan Opera and voice teacher who later went on to become the General Manager of the Met. With her family’s blessing, she made the long train ride to Chicago. The El Paso’s Woman’s Club helped her pay for the trip by arranging for her to give concerts on the way.

In Chicago, she took a job at the YWCA as entertainer and director of music to pay for her room and board. Among other jobs, she sang Spanish and Mexican songs in Spanish in select restaurants during dinner hours. Always proud of her Mexican heritage on her mother’s side, Elizabeth was bilingual, as were all the other Garrett children. After two years of study with Witherspoon, she returned home to Las Cruces.

Elizabeth was extremely proud when New Mexico officially became a state in 1912. Hall quoted Elizabeth as saying, “We’ve grown up together, my New Mexico and me.” Garrett wanted to make others aware of New Mexico’s beauty. Her love for the state was reflected in many of the songs she wrote and performed. People soon dubbed her the “Songbird of the Southwest.”

Garrett turned down an attractive marriage proposal in order to continue and grow in her musical career. In 1915, Elizabeth represented New Mexico at the world’s fair, the San Diego Exposition. Not only was she the official hostess of the state’s exhibition, but she also entertained visitors daily with her singing.

She composed the official state song of New Mexico and sang all over the country. (Photo courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department)
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... appreciation of a composer’s accomplishment by granting a monthly stipend to Garrett for the duration of her lifetime.

According to Hall, Garrett joined the Red Cross in 1917 after the United States entered World War I. She entertained soldiers at hospitals and training camps, including Fort Bliss. She ended up moving to New York to further help the Red Cross. During her time in New York, Elizabeth met and became good friends with Helen Keller, the deaf and blind author, speaker and social activist. They worked together for the Red Cross, making appearances at hospitals and visiting wounded soldiers. Garrett also worked with the New York Commission for the Blind and for women’s suffrage.

People from all over came to listen to Elizabeth sing and play the piano. She even played for prisoners. After one such appearance at Sing Sing Prison, one of the prisoners wrote a poem in tribute to her. In part it said:

They call her blind, yet she could lead
A thousand soul-sick men.

And show the message all could read
Of love and peace and hope.

While in New York, Garrett attended the opera, hearing the great Caruso several times.

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... on May 8, 1961. Elliot had died two weeks before from a heart attack on April 24. Not only had he greatly increased Josephine’s wealth, but he and his wife had been great friends to Josephine Clardy Fox. Burns noted that in 1956, Josephine donated land to the Board of Trustees of the El Paso Independent School District for a school to be located at 5508 Delta street. This school would be named in honor of her mother, Allie D. Clardy. In 1961, she gave land on Lincoln Street for a branch library named in her honor.

Josephine was also active in the social scene of El Paso and assisted many organizations throughout the city. She was a member of the El Paso County Historical Society, the National Society of Arts and Letters and other clubs. She supported the El Paso Museum of Art, the El Paso Symphony Orchestra, the El Paso Community Concert Association, the Dallas Civic Opera and other groups. She often bought blocks of concert tickets and gave them to friends and students. In 1953, she was named to the Advisory Committee of the National Arts Foundation.

In 1959, while dining at the Statler-Hilton Hotel in El Paso, Josephine slipped and broke a hip. Then in December 1964, she broke the same hip and spent the rest of her remaining years at Providence Memorial Hospital. On occasion, she left the hospital to enjoy herself at dinner and shows with friends at clubs in Juarez. While in the hospital she surrounded herself with her prized possessions, paintings, jewelry and hats. In a July 28, 1970, interview, Joe Moreno, who worked for the El Paso National Bank, told historian Leon Metz that hats and jewelry were Josephine’s greatest extravagances. She had loved her diamond bracelets in particular.

Josephine Clardy Fox died on May 11, 1970, at Providence Memorial Hospital, having converted to Catholicism, her husband’s faith. She was buried next to Eugene and her parents at Evergreen Cemetery in El Paso. After her death, it was discovered that she had left the majority of her estate, valued at over three million dollars, to the El Paso Independent School District for a school to be located at 5508 Delta street. This school would be named in honor of her mother, Allie D. Clardy. In 1961, she gave land on Lincoln Street for a branch library named in her honor.

The Gentleman’s and Citizen’s Almanack, compiled by Samuel Watson and published in Dublin in 1786, shows that one of the 13 is a rare double fore-edged painting. The Gentleman’s and Citizen’s Almanack, compiled by Samuel Watson and published in Dublin in 1786, shows that one of the 13 is a rare double fore-edged painting.

Cohen continued from page 10

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Ingram wrote in *Baseball: From Browns to Diablos* that the Cohen brothers are now considered “the most respected and revered names in El Paso baseball.”

... with the death of Syd on April 9, 1988, followed by Andy’s death six months later, on Oct. 29, 1988, the El Paso baseball community and the city itself lost two of the greatest baseball players and gentlemen that have called El Paso home. Not many El Pasosians know about the history behind the naming of Cohen Stadium which was built for the El Paso Diablos. Marina Lee, Andy’s daughter, went as far as getting letters from Tommy Lasorda, who was manager for the Los Angeles Dodgers, and penned numerous songs about the Southwest, including one about El Paso written in 1927. At a time where there were no amenities for the handicapped and women were still considered the weaker sex, Garrett overcame her obstacles and proved that anything was possible with determination.

She had the ability to portray beauty in her music even though she could not physically see it and had courage and strength comparable to that of her father. Elizabeth Garrett, the “Songbird of the Southwest,” conquered her world on her own terms. In the interview with Redfield, Elizabeth said, “Quite frequently my father had to bring harmony with a gun. I always have tried to do so by carrying a tune.”

Northeast El Paso on the Diana Exit off Highway 54 just before Transmountain Road.

In her letter to City Council, Lee wrote: “It [Cohen] is a name that would bring pride and honor to the stadium, to El Paso and the sport and/or business of baseball. It will always be meaningful.” The meaning behind a name is not the number of friends left behind or the money generated or the number of sports jerseys sold at the end of the day. A name is the mark that one leaves in history and the memories that are left for others to enjoy once that person is gone. Andy and Syd Cohen were a definite example of this. In El Paso, the name Cohen means baseball and the long history of the sport in the city.