

# *Borderlands*

*Volume 28*

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*A Little Bit of This,  
A Little Bit of That*



*Produced by the Students of El Paso Community College*

*The Best Place To Start*

## A Little Bit of This, a Little Bit of That

There is no one theme for this issue of *Borderlands*; rather we include articles on topics that



I have always wanted to include but which took years for students to choose, topics like the Texas Blue Laws, Stahmann Farms and the Toltec Building.

Before the advent of the big box and discount stores, almost every store was closed on Sunday. Then I learned that the Texas blue laws governed what stores opened, what they could sell and when.

I used to come to El Paso from Southern New Mexico through what is now Highway 28, passing the Stahmann Farms property with the beautiful canopy of shade that their pecan trees formed above the road. I had eaten many a Stahmann pecan and more than a few of their eggs and wondered who the Stahmanns were. I now know, and their pecans taste even better with that knowledge!

When I first moved to El Paso, I was fascinated with that strange triangular building at the intersection of San Antonio and Magoffin Streets. I wondered about its name and its original purpose. Along came Heather Coons and made the Toltec Building her research project and voila! I had my answers.

We also have followed up on last year's theme of Strong Women in El Paso. When I found out what LULAC was, I always heard the names Lucy Acosta and Belen Robles, two energetic, smart Latina women, wonderful role models for young women. Articles on them detail just a small part of what they have done for El Paso, Texas and the nation.

Early on, I heard the name Maud Sullivan associated with the El Paso Public Library. When I discovered that she was not the stereotypical plain bookworm, I was delighted. Then I read that she had spent five years living in a tent in the Gila Wilderness, not too far from my home town, with her mining engineer husband while still maintaining cherished elements of civilization. I found out how much she loved our public library and its patrons and how much she did with so little. From Sullivan it was an easy leap to her friend Betty Mary Goetting, another woman far ahead of her time, with her work in bringing birth control to El Paso.

While reading about the Mexican Revolution in David D. Romo's book *Ringside Seat to a Revolution*, I came across the name Teresa Urrea. She became a popular topic in my class, but one student, Armando Rosales, became engrossed with her as the subject of his research and went far beyond requirements in his quest to learn as much as possible about her.

Other student research taught me about the Shalam Colony in Mesilla, a utopian community on the Rio Grande, and I wondered why so little had been written about it. Finally, our articles on pioneer El Pasoans Simeon Hart and Felix Martinez discuss some of their important contributions to our wonderful city.

So we offer you a little bit of this, a little bit of that. These articles all started as research papers on local history in my English 1302 classes. Student researchers cannot help but learn a great deal about the area in which they live, and that is my purpose.

This issue is dedicated to my friend and mentor, the late John O. West, who so loved the Southwest and who helped me choose the direction that *Borderlands* has taken these many years.

Ruth Vise, Faculty Advisor & Editor



Heather Y. Coons, Student Editor

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## From The Editor

Open the doors and come on in. Welcome to the 2010-2011 edition of EPCC's *Borderlands*. In some respects, this issue is a continuation of our last publication. In the previous issue, we featured women trailblazers of the El Paso area, but, because of a lack of space, not all the women chosen for research had their stories told. So it has been an honor and pleasure to finally give a voice to these incredible women who often defied social traditions in an effort to bring positive changes to our area. I hope that as you read these pages, you are as moved by their dedication as I was.

Herein are also stories of some of the area's trailblazing men: a farmer, a miller, a spiritual leader and a real-estate entrepreneur. While their talents may have varied, all were ingenious in helping to develop the borderland into what it is today.

We also have a comprehensive piece on the Texas Blue Laws. We discuss its effects on El Paso's economic development, as well as the battle for the law's repeal that took place in stores and courtrooms across El Paso and Texas.

To round off such a potpourri of topics, we have an article on El Paso's Toltec Club, which served as the meeting place of the city's early social elite. I have to say I'm pleased to finally see it in print, as it is the result of my time as a student in Ms. Vise's research and writing class. It was this story, and the excitement I felt while uncovering history, that led me to accept the position of *Borderlands* editor, something I've truly enjoyed.

This issue, with its wide variety of information, is the culmination of many different people's hard work, and without them, *Borderlands* wouldn't be possible. Special thanks goes out to those who were willing to do what no one had done, and in the process, make history. And we cannot forget to thank those who took the time to document history while it happened. The students who gathered the research deserve great praise for their hard work, as do the teachers and librarians who tirelessly assisted them.

But the biggest thanks go to the families who have graciously shared their stories. *Borderlands* extends our thanks to Kurt Goetting, who took the time to speak with student researchers and provided us with some wonderful photographs. I would like to personally thank Alex Acosta Jr. for being so charming and gracious, and allowing me to get to know the incredible woman that he was blessed to call "Mom."

I would also like to thank Laura Hollingsed at UTEP Library's Special Collections Department for her assistance, as well as Marta Estrada, Border Heritage Librarian at the El Paso Public Library, and Dean Wilkey at NMSU Library.

My family, Robert, Joshua and Amanda, also deserve my thanks for being so supportive and understanding. But it is to Ms. Vise that my deepest gratitude goes. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to expand my horizons through researching and writing about the great history of our region and the incredible people who lived here.

It is my prayer that you, the reader, also are enriched by the articles within. These stories can give you not only a sense of pride in the area, but encouragement to face the struggles that we all have in this adventure called "life." You can also learn about success and realize that it is perhaps not destiny that decides the path you take, but the willingness to take the road less traveled.

Whatever road you are on, may God bless you and keep you safe. Happy reading!

Heather Coons, Editor

# Chasin' Away the Blues: Texas Sunday Legislation

By Russell Folk and Heather Coons

**W**hat are you planning to do this Sunday? Go to church? Go to a movie? Do a little shopping at a mall?

At one time, all but going to church would have been illegal, and, as few as 25 years ago, punishable by up to six months in jail and/or a \$500 fine for violating Texas legislation on Sunday activities, known as "blue laws."

The origin of the term "blue law" is somewhat controversial. Professor David J. Hanson explained in his Internet article on the subject that there is no evidence to support the claim that the laws were originally printed on blue paper, thus the name. He wrote that the term "blue" was a derogatory way of describing those of "rigid moral codes" during the 18th century, but Sunday legislation has been around a lot longer than that.

The book *Critical History of Sunday Legislation from 321 to 1888* by Abram Herbert Lewis stated that the first Sunday law was enacted by the Roman emperor Constantine in 321 A.D. He ordered the "venerable day of the sun" to be a day of rest for those in cities, without placing restrictions on agriculture.

Britain continued with the practice of Sunday laws after the fall of the Roman Empire, and in 1676, Charles II adopted stricter laws that would later become the basis of laws in America.

The first Sunday legislation in America was enacted in 1617 by the London Company for Virginia, which forced colonists to attend church services. Blue laws in early colonial days prohibited work, household chores, kissing, sex and even having a baby. Punishments included loss of provisions, whipping, public placement in stocks or fines of one to 50 pounds of tobacco. A third offense was punishable by death.

Although blue laws directly violated the Constitution and the Bill of Rights once America gained her independence in 1776, the laws were upheld in the United States Supreme Court in 1885. In *Soon Hing v. Crowley*, the court ruled that a state had a "right to protect all persons from physical and moral debasement, which comes from uninterrupted labor."

Sunday laws were slow in coming to the Lone Star state. Until 1836 and Texas' fight for independence from Mexico, Roman Catholicism was the area's established religion. After the Battle of San Jacinto, Protestant missionaries came to Texas in droves, citing vast distances, few teachers and a failure to observe the Sabbath as the causes for backslidden souls.

The first Sunday law in Texas was a city ordinance passed by Houston in 1839. In response to the city's many saloons and the resulting drunk and disorderly conduct, the new ordinance prohibited the sale of malt liquor on Sundays.

The Texas State Legislature debated Sunday legislation from the beginning. In 1853, Sen. Sam

Houston gave an address in which he staunchly opposed blue laws and prohibition. However, in 1867, the Texas Supreme Court upheld the ordinance in *Gabel v. City of Houston*, stating that cities had a right to promote "good order and tranquility."

In his book *Texas Blue Laws*, William Harper wrote that the first state law, titled "An Act to Punish Certain Offenses Committed on Sunday," was passed Dec. 16, 1863, by the 10th State Legislature. The bill was in two parts. First, it made it a misdemeanor to "compel a slave, child or apprentice" to work on Sunday, while exempting household duties, charity work, and whatever may be "needed to save a crop." The second part targeted

In *Turning Points in El Paso, Texas*, Leon Metz wrote that moralist reformers demanded Sheriff J. H. Boone force saloons, prostitutes and gamblers to abide by Sunday blue laws. In response, Sheriff Boone stated that he was "going to reform the reformers, too." On Nov. 19, Boone shut down the city by closing everything from grocery stores to gambling houses; even ASARCO employees were arrested. On the next Sunday, almost 5,000 people crossed the border into Mexico, with signs on the doors of businesses stating, "We are spending our money in Juárez."

Prohibition helped reformers, and soon their attention turned from intoxicating liquors to Sunday movies, baseball games, concerts and amusement parks. State courts ruled that amusements which charged a fee on Sundays were in violation of blue laws.

In 1961, the U.S. Supreme Court revisited blue laws for the first time since the turn of the century. Speaking for the court, Chief Justice Warren stated that Sunday laws did not violate the First Amendment because "the air of the day is one of relaxation, rather than religion."

But Justice Douglas gave a dissenting view. He questioned the authority of a state to make "protesting citizens refrain from doing innocent acts ... because the doing of those acts ... offends their Christian neighbors."

With blue laws a hot topic in the courts, state legislatures soon found themselves immersed in the debate, and Texas was no different. Texas Sen. William T. Moore introduced a new bill in an attempt to modernize blue laws. After numerous debates and amendments, Senate Bill No. 35 passed the House in 1961.

The updated law banned 42 types of items from being sold on consecutive Saturdays and Sundays. Enacted because of the rising popularity of discount stores, this law prohibited the sale of automobiles, clothing, appliances,

kitchenware, linens, toys and baby products, to name a few. Items exempted included food, newspapers, ice, sporting goods and beer.

On Nov. 15, 1961, an *El Paso Times* editorial said, "We think the whole law is stupid." Most consumers agreed. In another article, El Paso grocery store manager Jim Gunn stated, "A lot of customers think it is the most asinine law on the books." Gunn also revealed that some customers became quite belligerent when denied goods.

Local merchants' opinions differed. The *El Paso Times* reported that Silva Super Market manager Joe Silva Jr. felt the blue laws impeded business. Not only did stores lose potential sales to Juárez, but employees had to be trained and signs posted for Sunday shoppers.

Herbert Schwartz, then-president of the Popular Department Stores, head of the Downtown



Car dealerships are still required to operate under Texas Blue Laws. (Photo by Heather Coons)

certain recreations. It became a misdemeanor to participate in a horse race or a shooting match, sell liquor, or operate a bowling alley or a billiards parlor.

During Reconstruction, A. J. Hamilton became the provisional governor of Texas, and all laws not in conflict with the United States were declared valid. As a result, Sunday laws were neither repealed nor amended, but in 1866 for the first time, exemptions were made for those whose Sabbath was not on Sunday.

The Texas Reconstruction Convention of 1868 repealed the state's blue laws, but that was overturned by the 12th State Legislature in 1871. The new Sunday law had basically the same provisions as the previous one, but it prohibited sales between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., except for medicine and drugs. Most of the early charges for violating blue laws were against saloon keepers and merchants.

In El Paso, early blue laws were pretty much ignored and business went on as usual until 1904.

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# Simeon Hart Pioneered Local Industry

By Cadyn Crawford, Luis Gavan, Amanda Rodriguez and Dakota Scheller

Soldier, adventurer, miller, pioneer, entrepreneur, editor. He fought against Mexico but married a Mexican woman and learned his trade from her father. Establishing a home in the desert, he became known for his hospitality to all, stranger and friend. Simeon Hart led an extraordinary life, and his home continued to welcome those looking for good food and drink as the Hacienda Café.

Hart was born March 28, 1816, in Highland, N.Y. While he was a young child, his family relocated to St. Louis, Mo., where he studied civil engineering. Hart came to the Southwest in 1847 as adjutant to Col. John Ralls who commanded the 3rd Regiment of Missouri Mounted Volunteers.

Not knowing that the war with Mexico had ended on Feb. 2, 1848, Gen. Sterling Price, military governor of New Mexico, ordered Hart's company and several others to invade Mexico. The Americans defeated the forces of Gen. Angel Trias in Santa Cruz de Rosales, Chihuahua, on March 16, 1848, six days after the United States had ratified the Treaty of Guadalupe. Hart was recognized for having fought with distinction but suffered injuries in the battle.

Hart recovered at the home of Don Leonardo Siqueiros, a wealthy Chihuahuan who owned a well known *molino*, or mill. Hart fell in love with Jesusita, the oldest of Don Leonardo's five daughters, but her parents rejected his initial marriage proposal. He returned for Jesusita and the two were married in 1849, when she was 17. The last battle of the Mexican War not only brought Hart a military commendation but a young, beautiful wife.

Immediately following their marriage, the Harts settled in Franklin, as El Paso was then known. Hart purchased more than 600 acres along the north side of the Rio Grande from the present-day site of the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) to the corner of Oregon Street and Franklin Avenue for 50 cents an acre. Hart had prime property to set up his homestead and a prime location to give birth to El Paso's very first industry: milling.

Hart's flour mill was constructed with three-foot thick adobe walls. Sycamore beams and willow branches were fashioned to support another four inches of adobe on the roof. Power for the wheel was supplied by a dam made of timber, brush and earth, located half a mile north of the mill on the Rio Grande. Although the dam was owned by the Mexican government, Hart had permission to use the water. After torrential floods washed away the original earthen dam, in a joint effort with the Mexican government, "Hart's Dam" was reconstructed using stone and cement.

Historian W. H. Timmons wrote in *Password*, journal of the El Paso County Historical Society, that on March 28, 1850, Hart signed his first contract with the Army. For 11 cents a pound, Hart supplied flour for one year to the posts of Doña Ana, the Post Opposite El Paso (later Fort Bliss) and San Elizario. Until his own operation could produce the flour required by this contract, Hart imported flour from his father-in-law in Chihuahua.

With renewed lucrative Army contracts, Hart expanded his operations. In an effort to widen his

market, Hart purchased horse teams and the mail line running from El Paso to Santa Fe. He added \$25,000 worth of machinery to the mill, and farmers on both sides of the Rio used the services *El Molino*, as his mill was known, provided.

According to an article published in the *El Paso Times* on Oct. 30, 1947, Hart's Mill boasted paying the highest cash prices for wheat and corn, as well as the lowest market prices on flour, semita, corn meal and beans. With a capacity to produce 100 barrels of flour per day, troops, stage drivers, travelers and gunfighters were all customers of Hart's Mill.

Hart held the monopoly on the milling business from San Antonio to Tucson, from Santa Fe to Santa Cruz de Rosales in Chihuahua where his closest and only competition resided, his father-in-law. In *Six Who Came To El Paso: Pioneers of the 1840's*, Rex

trail, ministers and gold miners alike were greeted like family and treated to all the comforts of home. On Jan. 13, 1952, the *El Paso Times* ran a reprint of one chapter of *El Gringo*, a book written by W. H. H. Davis, the New Mexico Territory Attorney General in the 1850s. Davis described Hart as a hospitable man, and his wife as "a lady of refinement and intelligence." After a meal eaten with gusto, Davis and Hart retired to the library and passed the time in "most agreeable conversation." Davis confessed to sleeping late the next morning, so agreeable was his stay with the Harts.

Hart's homestead was not only a respite for weary travelers, but it was often the site of social and civic gatherings. According to early historian Cleofas Calleros, Hart hosted parties that sometimes lasted all day and night, parties that "lingered in the memories of early El Pasoans." The mill was also the birthplace

of the El Paso Pioneer Association, which became the El Paso County Historical Society, and the meeting site of El Paso's first Masonic Lodge, No. 130, of which Hart was a charter member.

Although Hart never sought public office, he was persuaded to accept the seat of county judge. The only other official position Hart held, according to Strickland, was Confederate Agent for the State of Texas in El Paso.

Hart was a staunch secessionist, and according to an *El Paso Times* article in August 1887, he loaned the Confederacy large sums of money and was a good friend of Jefferson Davis. During the Civil War, Hart relocated his family to San Antonio, where they remained until Reconstruction.

After the Civil War, Hart sent his family to relatives in Mexico while he traveled to Washington to apply for presidential amnesty, which was granted by President Johnson on Nov. 6, 1865. Unfortunately, this pardon did not prevent the sequestering and sale of Hart's property. The new owner of this prime river-front home and mill

was none other than Hart's long-time nemesis, fellow El Paso pioneer, W. W. Mills.

The two men held opposing views on secession, with the rivalry between Hart and Mills becoming brutal. While acting as a Confederate Agent, Hart had Mills incarcerated at Fort Bliss. According to Strickland, it was the humiliation of incarceration that led Mills to seek vengeance on Hart through legal channels as well as "chicanery." This obsession led not only to well defined political parties in El Paso, like the anti-Mills Republicans, but it also spawned El Paso's very first newspaper, the *Sentinel*, with Hart as one of the co-founders. On May 5, 1873, after a lengthy and exhaustive judicial process, Mills released all rights to Hart's property for the miniscule sum of \$10.

Hart and his wife returned to their beloved home on the Rio Grande. But the loss of their property and the subsequent fight to regain it had taken an immense toll, and Jesusita died shortly after returning home. Hart followed her on Jan. 21, 1874.

Hart's Mill became the fourth home to Fort Bliss from 1879 until 1893, when its present location became ready for occupancy. Plots of Hart's land were split



**Simeon Hart and children. Back left to right: Leonardo S. Hart and Simeon Hart, father. Front left to right: Carolina S. Hart, Antonio S. Hart, Clara S. Hart, Paulina S. Hart, Corina S. Hart, and Juan S. Hart. (Photo courtesy of the El Paso County Historical Society)**

Strickland wrote that the true extent of Hart's success can be seen in the 1860 Census, where Hart's real and person property was valued at \$350,000, making him the richest man in the community, the equivalent of a multi-millionaire today.

In 1855, construction began on Hart's mansion. With two large fountains in the front for watering horses and evergreens, and fruit trees and mission grapes adorning the property, the house was a true "oasis in the desert." According to an article about El Paso landmarks in the *El Paso Herald-Post* in August 1935, the original Hart home, built of adobe, had 16 or 18 rooms, each with its own fireplace. Over the years, additions were made to the house, including the mission-style front and large patio.

About a year after the mansion was completed, Jesusita gave birth to her first child, Juan Siquieros Hart, on July 24, 1856. The couple would have six more children: Leonardo, Antonio, Clara, Paulina, Carolina and Corina, all bearing Siquieros as their middle name. Hart was known as a loving husband and indulgent father. He was also recognized far and wide for his legendary hospitality.

Hart's homestead was a beacon to the road-weary traveler. After an arduous journey on a rocky, dusty

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# Felix Martinez: Southwestern Renaissance Man

By *Frankie Fernandez*

Many men who became prominent in early El Paso came from the South and East. With visions of a modern metropolis, their hands molded the small, “sinful” town into a shining star on the border. However, one man who helped build the city was already a civic leader, businessman, publisher and gifted orator – from New Mexico. He was a true Renaissance man: Felix Martinez.

He is thought to have descended from Capt. Gen. Don Felix Martinez, whom the Spanish Crown appointed governor of the Province of New Mexico in 1715. The younger Martinez was born on March 29, 1857, to Felix and Maria Martinez in Peñasco, Taos County, N.M.

According to Robert Rankin White, Martinez studied for five years at St. Mary’s College, run by the Christian Brothers, in Mora, N.M. His family moved to Colorado in 1871, where he began clerking in a store in Trinidad. Martinez then studied business privately for three years in Pueblo, moving to El Moro in 1876, where he became part-owner in a mercantile.

Three years later, Martinez sold out and returned to his home state, settling in Las Vegas about the same time the Santa Fe Railway arrived. He opened his own store and went into the cattle business.

At 22, he met and fell in love with 14-year-old Virginia Buster. The two planned to marry on Sept. 24, 1880, but six days before the wedding, Martinez lost everything in a devastating fire.

“I have only myself to offer and this charred [silver] dollar,” he supposedly said to his bride-to-be, according to Martinez’s daughter, Mrs. C. P. Henry, in the *El Paso Times Sunday Magazine* on Jan. 13, 1963, recounting her parents’ courtship. Luckily for Martinez, the wedding took place as scheduled. Over the years, the couple had four sons (Felix Jr., Alejandro, Horacio and Alfonso) and three daughters (Flora, Reyes and Virginia).

After the fire, Martinez successfully rebuilt his business, selling it in 1886 to pursue a career in real estate and politics. In 1884, Martinez ran for county treasurer as a Democrat, and although he lost, he made a deep inroad in the Republican vote. He won the election for county assessor by a close margin in 1886, then went on to be elected to the Territorial House of Representatives in 1888.

In 1890, Martinez went into publishing and purchased a Santa Fe newspaper, *La Voz del Pueblo* (The Voice of the Community). As president and editor, he moved the paper to Las Vegas and used it to promote his political views. The newspaper became highly regarded with distinguished partners that included Ezequiel Cabeza de Baca, who would become the first lieutenant governor and second governor of the state of New Mexico, and Antonio Lucero, the future first New Mexico Secretary of State.

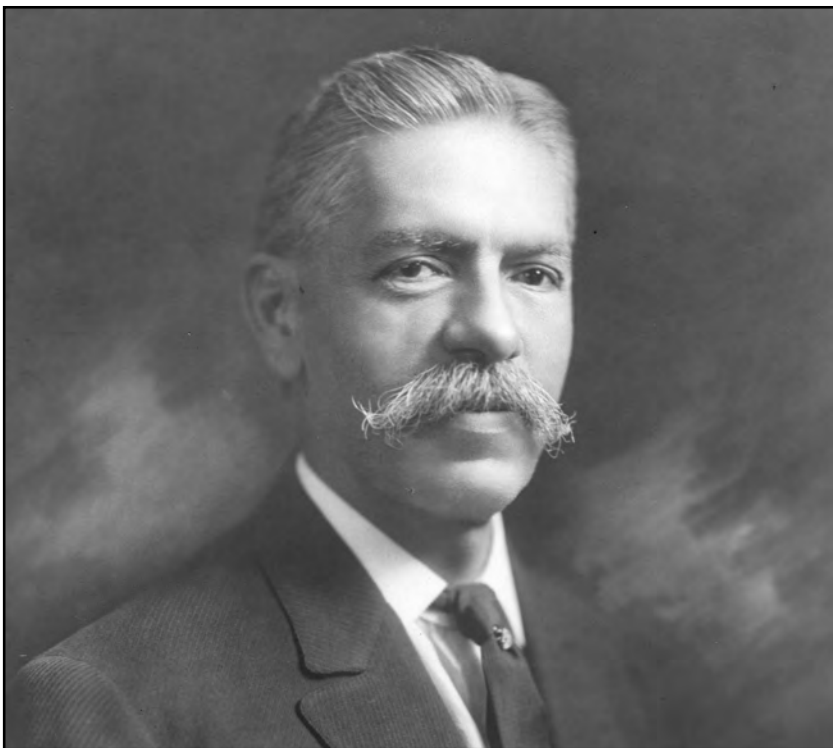
In 1890, Martinez joined the rapidly developing Populist party, and assumed leadership of El Partido del Pueblo Unido shortly thereafter. He used his influence to unite the Populists and Democrats and was elected to the Territorial Council. Martinez sponsored legislation for the creation of New Mexico Normal University, now New Mexico Highlands University, and for the state mental hospital in Las Vegas. In 1892, he became chairman of the New Mexico delegation to the Democratic National Convention, and in December 1893, Martinez became clerk of the U.S. and Territorial Courts for the 4th Judicial District of New Mexico.

In 1897, Martinez resigned that position to move to El Paso, a town that was ripe for development, whereas

Las Vegas had slowed down. Martinez packed up his family and settled first at 236 Tobin Place, then later on 21 acres occupied today by Washington Park.

In El Paso, Martinez used his extraordinary business skills to help the city grow. He owned and organized the Southwestern Portland Cement Co. and was president of the Central Building and Improvement Co., which constructed the downtown Plaza Block, including the White House building, the Paso del Norte Hotel, of which Martinez was a director, and Calisher Realty Co., which housed Everybody’s Department Store.

Martinez also owned and published the *El Paso Daily News* from 1899 to 1909. He was the founder of El Paso Realty Co., as well one of the organizers of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce. He purchased the El Paso-Juárez Railway Co. and was one of the directors of the First National Bank of El Paso, later resigning that position to become one of the first directors of the Federal Reserve



**Felix Martinez was known for helping to bring a reliable source of clean drinking water to El Paso and for helping to develop the downtown area. (Photo courtesy of the El Paso County Historical Society)**

Bank of the 11th District, headquartered in Dallas. Martinez also served on the planning committees that led to the building of El Paso Public Library and the Texas School of Mines and Metallurgy, now known as the University of Texas at El Paso.

In the early 20th century, Martinez became active in the cleanup of the “sin city.” He backed reform candidates in an attempt to close El Paso’s 162 gambling and prostitution houses, using his newspaper to fight the purveyors of vice. In so doing, Martinez made enemies and received numerous death threats, resulting in his carrying a hollow cane containing a sword and a whistle on the tip. Although the reformers were defeated in the 1903 city election, public opinion did shift. One year later, open gambling in El Paso ended.

Although Martinez had officially retired from politics, he remained active in the community. In her tribute to Martinez in *Password*, journal of the El Paso County Historical Society, Deane Miller wrote that he served as an advisor to the historic meeting between U. S. President William Howard Taft and Mexican President Porfirio Díaz in 1909, arranging meetings at the Customs House in Juárez, and at El Paso’s Toltec Club, of which Martinez was a founding member. During the Mexican Revolution, Martinez used his negotiating skills in an

attempt to reconcile Francisco Madero and Pancho Villa.

Martinez is best known for his ceaseless efforts to bring a reliable source of potable water to the El Paso area and a consistent source of irrigation to the Mesilla and El Paso valleys. El Paso’s early water supply came from the Rio Grande, whose water was often muddy and unsanitary. Those who could afford it shipped in pure water by the barrel from Deming, N.M. Martinez brought these facts before Los Angeles engineer Dr. W. J. Davis, stating that deep wells were needed to bring clean water to the growing city. As a result, in 1902, El Paso had its first reliable water supply.

Since 1899, Martinez had promoted the Rio Grande project, which supported the construction of what was known as the International Dam. In 1903, Martinez attended the Eleventh National Irrigation Congress in Ogden, Utah, bringing the Twelfth Congress to El Paso in 1904, attended by committees from Texas, New Mexico and Mexico. With Martinez as the chairman, the committees agreed a dam was needed, but the site was still undecided. Reclamation Service engineer B.M. Hall proposed a new site north of Las Cruces, and the Elephant Butte Dam project began, the largest irrigation and dam project in the world at the time, according to White. Subsequently, Martinez and others organized the El Paso Valley Water Users’ Association, which he directed until his death.

Thanks to his community service and political activity in New Mexico and Texas, as well as Martinez’s amazing talent as a bilingual orator, in 1913 President Woodrow Wilson asked him to tour South American countries to promote and negotiate what would become the Panama Canal. Martinez had been suggested for the position, with diplomatic status, of United States Commissioner General to South America and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition by his friend, Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan. Martinez left New York aboard the *USS Birmingham* and traveled across South America by train, returning to New York in January 1914. He then participated in the opening ceremonies of the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco in 1915.

Martinez died from pneumonia on March 22, 1916, before the official dedication of Elephant Butte Dam. His body lay in state at the El Paso Chamber of Commerce. His request for a simple funeral went ignored, and the funeral procession included a platoon of mounted police, the 6th Infantry Army Band, officers of his various companies and city officials. He was buried at his beloved ranch Trinchera near the New Mexico-Colorado border.

White wrote that although Martinez “was probably the most prominent Hispanic in the United States at the time of his death, he would not have liked that designation. He considered himself an American, and he often spoke ... against race prejudice and race promotion of any kind.” Armed with an education, business skills and an affinity for people of all stations, Felix Martinez used his many talents for the good of others, in both New Mexico and Texas, in little towns and growing cities, nationally and internationally. White summed up this Renaissance man in these words: “He was small in stature, but he must be considered a giant in Border history.” 🇲🇪

# Teresa Urrea: La Santa de Cabora Inspired Mexican Revolution

By Armando Rosales Jr.

Home to some remarkable people, *El Segundo Barrio* is one of El Paso's oldest communities. In 1896, it was home to Teresa Urrea, one of the most important and influential women to walk the Southwestern United States and Northern Mexico. Aside from her healing knowledge as a *curandera*, she is known for her political role in the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution. David D. Romo, author of *Ringside Seat to a Revolution*, writes that "in many ways, the Mexican Revolution on the border began with her." Through physical and psychological healing and political encouragement, Teresa Urrea became an inspiration to indigenous groups of Northern Mexico, as well as to people in the United States during the reign of Mexico's dictator, Porfirio Díaz, and the years prior to the Mexican Revolution.

On Oct. 15, 1873, Niña Garcia Nona Maria Rebecca Chávez, later known as Teresa Urrea, was born in Ocoroni, Sinaloa, Mexico, on a ranch owned by her father, a wealthy liberal rancher named Tomás Urrea. Her mother, a servant on Urrea's Rancho de Santana, was Cayetana Chávez, a 14-year-old Tehueco Indian. Teresa spent her first 15 years with her mother and aunt, living in a servant's hut and working on the ranch. In 1888, Teresa's father recognized her as his daughter and sent for her to live in the main house of the ranch.

Teresa did not go to school or learn to read until she was nine years old. About this time, it appears that she began to call herself "Teresa." Others called her by the diminutive, "Teresita." She became an apprentice to a folk healer or *curandera* named Huila at this time. Overseeing the household at Rancho de Santana, Huila not only used herbs to heal the sick and injured but was also a midwife. Teresa learned about the medicinal uses of some 200 herbs and folk remedies readily, assisting Huila on her visits to expectant mothers. It appears that Teresa could put women in labor into a type of trance or hypnosis, making the birth less painful, an ability she would later use with many who came to be cured.

Luis Urrea, novelist and grandnephew of Teresa, described one of her early cures on his web site. A young Yaqui ranch hand had been kicked in the head by a mule. Teresa picked up a handful of dirt and spat into it, rubbing the mixture on the man's injury, resulting in instant healing. Word of Teresa's miraculous healings spread among the people in the region very quickly, and they soon began calling her a saint.

William Holden, author of a book-length biography of Urrea, says that as a *curandera*, Teresa Urrea unselfishly provided aid to many people and took nothing in return. The art of *curanderismo* gave Teresa influence, something a half-Indian, half-Mexican servant girl could not even hope for in those days.

Teresa lived during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico for 35 years, "modernizing" the country at a great cost to the poor and to indigenous tribes. Many natives were enslaved and sent south, notably the Yaquis. Her father was a political moderate who detested much of what the Díaz administration did to the native people. When he backed the wrong political candidate, Tomás Urrea left Sinaloa and moved his family to Cabora, Sonora, in 1880 to escape reprisal from Díaz.

Shortly after moving to Cabora, Teresa slipped into a coma. Theories suggested for the cause of this cataleptic state range from assault and attempted or completed rape by a miner who lived in the area to a form of epilepsy. This coma or trance lasted almost four months. Teresa had already been put in a coffin and was being prepared for burial when she rose up suddenly. Upon awakening,

Teresa gave off an odor of roses. Urrea believed she had been visited by the Virgin Mary during her deep sleep, being left with an even more powerful gift of healing. The ranch Teresa Urrea called home in Cabora became known as the "Lourdes de Mexico," according to Diane Telgen and Jim Kamp in their reference book *Notable Hispanic American Women*.



**Teresa Urrea, known as "Teresita," miraculously cured thousands, both in Mexico and the United States. (Photo courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections)**

Teresa cured people suffering from everyday illnesses and injuries as well as from cancer, blindness, stroke and paralysis. Soon, the news of her extraordinary healing powers spread among Mexico's Northern Indian tribes and the government her father was trying to stay away from. Not only was Teresa Urrea healing the poor and sick, but she became an inspiration to these people to rebel against the perpetrators of the injustices Díaz brought upon them. While the native tribes she helped and those who knew her looked up to Teresa, her fast rise to popularity and fame did not sit well with the Mexican government or the Catholic Church.

From early on, Teresa received many nicknames such as "The Mexican Joan of Arc," "La Niña de Cabora," and "Queen of the Yaquis." However, when natives began calling her "La Santa de Cabora" and began treating her like a folk saint, the Church became incensed. In *The Power of God Against the Guns of*

*Government*, Paul Vanderwood wrote that in October 1890 when lithographs of Teresa Urrea were presented by parishioners in Guaymas to Sonora's Bishop Herculano to be blessed, the Bishop was disgusted and shocked, throwing the lithographs to the floor. Urrea was threatened with excommunication, as were those who believed in her. Historian Max Dashu said that from the onset, Urrea was denounced by the priesthood as a heretic. It did not help that Urrea felt true believers needed no intermediary to converse with God.

For years the Mexican government had subjected the Indians of Northern Mexico to genocidal wars and land seizures. With no one to turn to, the Yaqui, Mayo, Tarahumara and Tomochiteco Indians let their fury and frustration build; the corrupt government of Porfirio Díaz did not care if they lived or died. Teresa believed that the land belonged to the native Indians and should not be stolen. Telgen and Kamp stated that Teresa Urrea told the Indian villagers, "God intended for you to have the lands, or he would not have given them to you."

In *Latin Legacies* by Vicki Ruiz and Virginia Sánchez Korrol, Marian Perales wrote that Porfirio Díaz claimed that his governmental policies were in the name of order and progress, never mind that they displaced indigenous peoples, pushed small farmers out of business, and created a disaffected, politically minded, middle class. Besides stripping these tribes of their land, Díaz sent many Indians throughout Mexico to work as slaves in mines and remote plantations and controlled national, state and local elections. Slowly the Indian villagers' patience began to wane, and they became more and more motivated by Teresa's words. Throughout her life, however, Teresa denied active participation in politics.

During the years Teresa spent in Cabora the number of people wanting to share an experience with her increased. Alex Nava stated in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* that "more and more Indian villagers would flock to Teresa's home, hoping that she would bring God's presence to the troubled and chaotic circumstances in their lives."

In one of the best known rebellions attributed to Urrea, a group of armed Yaqui, Tomochiteco, Tarahumara and Mayo Indians defeated Díaz's *federales* at the village of Tomochic, whose residents adored Urrea and had a hand-carved icon of her in their church. The Indian villagers were able to hold the *federales* off for a few weeks before the soldiers burned the village to the ground. Scores of women and children were burned to death while hiding in the town's church. After the battle of Tomochic, the Indian villagers started calling themselves "Teresitas," and their battle cry became "Viva la Santa de Cabora!"

After another small revolt against the Mexican government, Díaz ordered Teresa and her family to be deported and had 500 of his soldiers enforce the exile. Once he realized she was the "Santa de Cabora," Díaz called Teresa "the most dangerous girl in Mexico." Teresa and the rest of the Urrea family were deported to Nogales, Ariz., in 1892. The family arrived by train only to find local journalists among her followers seeking a few words with "La Santa De Cabora."

Fearing pressure from the Mexican government, the Urrea family moved to El Bosque, a small farming community outside of Nogales, and later to Solomonville, Ariz., in November 1895. By 1896, political trouble found Teresa Urrea. Solomonville briefly became the site of *El Independiente*, an anti-Díaz newspaper published by Lauro Aguirre and Flores Chapa, two Mexican liberals and associates of her father.

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Moving their paper to El Paso, Aguirre and Chapa were arrested, charged with committing “subversive acts” including the intention to “engage in revolution” as Mario T. Garcia wrote in *Desert Immigrants*. They were tried in an El Paso court. W. H. Burges, well-known El Paso lawyer, defended the men. The court didn’t find any real evidence of revolutionary activity. “I am publishing a paper against Mexico,” Aguirre told the court, “because I hope to remedy the evils by pointing out what they will lead to,” according to Garcia. The court found Aguirre and Chapa were just exercising their freedom of speech.

During the trial, attention began to focus on Teresa’s involvement in the alleged “conspiracy.” In *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History*, Teresa P. Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten wrote that Teresa Urrea did in fact help the revolutionist Lauro Aguirre in the fight against Porfirio Díaz. Aguirre had often visited the Urrea ranch and had helped educate Teresita. Some historians believe that Aguirre used her to help support his own political activities.

Professor Elisabeth Guerrero said that Teresa became more politically active once in the United States, allowing her picture to be taken and sold to raise funds for the resistance movement and even signing an anti-Porfirian constitution written by Aguirre. Aguirre also published an editorial signed by Urrea titled “Mis ideas sobre las revoluciones” in *El Independiente* on Aug. 21, 1896. She maintained her innocence and insisted she never had anything to do with the rebellions.

However, Dashu wrote that “Teresa went on with her political organizing of *El Plan de Tomochic*, which denounced the genocide of the Yaqui nation, urged restoration of the Liberal Constitution of 1857, and called for abolition of all laws or social practices that maintained ‘inequality based on gender, race, nationality, or class.’” Her support for such activities suggests Teresa was more than just a “folk saint” rendering aid to the poor.

Once again, Teresa Urrea managed to stay clear of imprisonment by making the move to El Paso, Texas, in 1896. In *Ringside Seat to a Revolution*, Romo wrote, “When she ... did arrive on June 13, 1896, about 3,000 pilgrims camped outside her home on the corner of Overland and Campbell Streets. They had traveled by foot, wagon and train from all over the U.S.-Mexican border.” In 1897, the Urreas moved to 500 S. Oregon St. in a building which now has a historical plaque describing her and the miraculous cures she effected. Many immigrants crossing into the United States made their home in *Segundo Barrio* and still do.

Teresa said that she treated up to 250 people a day in El Paso. The people who waited in lines to see Teresa included the prominent and wealthy, such as El Paso’s mayor Robert Campbell and Lauro Carrillo, the ex-governor of Chihuahua. Teresa Urrea never turned anyone away although she knew some people really didn’t have any faith in her healings and were just curious to see what all the commotion was.

Perales wrote that the El Paso press assisted Teresa by portraying her as an “apolitical spiritual healer,” allowing her to stay out of any political wrongdoing until an outbreak of border rebellions in August 1896. Frances Holden stated in an article for *The Handbook of Texas Online* that “on the morning of Aug. 12, 1896,

at least seventy armed ‘Teresitas’ attacked the Mexican customhouse in Nogales.” Perales says that these so-called “Teresitas” were made up of Yaqui, Pima and Tomochi Indians, many of whom were laborers for the Southern Pacific Railroad. The assault on the Nogales customhouse was a protest movement against anti-agrarian and anti-indigenous Mexican land policies. Similar attacks occurred at several border towns along the Texas border.

Once again, the rebels cried “Viva la Santa de Cabora!” associating Teresa Urrea with the rebellion. These confrontations gave Porfirio Díaz an insight to what the indigenous tribes thought of his “modernizing” and “urbanizing” plans for Mexico, according to Perales. Holden wrote that Díaz believed Teresa Urrea was directly involved and demanded her extradition

authorizes or at the same time interferes with these proceedings. Decidedly I am a victim ... expatriated from my country since May 19, 1892.”

A Mexican official quoted by *The New York Times* said that Teresa was responsible for the death of more than 1,000 people during the uprisings by Northern tribes. Telgen and Kamp and other historians noted that after a short time of being a tenant in El Paso’s *Segundo Barrio*, Teresa suffered harassment and even death threats from the Catholic Church and both the United States and Mexican government, forcing her to leave El Paso in search of a safer environment. In 1897, Teresa Urrea’s father moved the family to Clifton, Ariz.

Clifton was far away from political activity that lingered in cities such as El Paso. Tomás Urrea started a dairy and firewood business and Teresa continued her healing practices. On June 22, 1900, at the age of 27, she married Guadalupe Rodriguez against her father’s wishes. Her husband, a Yaqui Indian and copper mine worker, went “mad” on their honeymoon, shooting Teresa, and tried to take her back to Mexico. Although he did not injure Teresa seriously, he was sent to an insane asylum. After this disastrous marriage, a friend of the family convinced Teresa to leave Arizona for California in search of peace and quiet.

In California, Teresa joined up with a medical company based in New York that toured the United States on a “curing crusade.” Her only request was that the people she rendered aid to were not to be charged. The *San Francisco Examiner* claimed that she cured as many as 200 people a day. Teresa later found out the promoters were in fact

profiting off her patients, so she hired a lawyer to end their contract. While in New York, Teresa competed in a beauty pageant and won. On tour in St. Louis, Teresa called her friend from Clifton, Juana Van Order, to send one of her sons to be her interpreter. Her friend sent her oldest boy, John Van Order, who was 19 years old.

Teresa and John lived as husband and wife back in California and had two daughters, Laura in 1902 and Magdalena in 1904. Meanwhile, Teresa’s father died on Sept. 22, 1902. Teresa, John and their oldest daughter Laura moved into “Sonoratown,” a small barrio in Los Angeles, Calif., many of whose residents were from Sonora, Mexico. There she supported Mexican laborers fighting for higher pay. Teresa moved back to Clifton, Ariz., with her family after their home in Los Angeles burned down. Urrea had turned into the “darling” of Clifton’s most respected and wealthiest Anglos, having cured many residents, and in particular, the son of a wealthy banker.

Upon returning to Clifton, the “Santa de Cabora’s” health began to deteriorate and on Jan. 11, 1906, Teresa Urrea died of tuberculosis at the young age of 33. Teresa left her two daughters in the hands of her *comadre* and long time friend, Mariana Avendano, and her husband Fortunato. Many of Teresa Urrea’s believers felt she had used up all the energy and power that was given to her



**Teresa Urrea once lived in this building at 500 S. Oregon St. in El Paso. Today, the faithful burn candles at the base of a plaque placed on a wall by the El Paso County Historical Commission, which identifies her home and celebrates her life. (Photo courtesy of Armando Rosales Jr.)**

back to Mexico, a demand the United States ignored. Dashu wrote that Teresa was said to exclaim, “My poor Indians! They are the bravest and most persecuted people on earth! They will fight for their rights until they win or are wiped out. God help them! There are few of them left.”

Perales said that both the American and Mexican press wrote that copies of Lauro Aguirre’s newspaper *El Independiente* as well as photos of Teresa Urrea were found on the Mexican rebels who attacked the customhouse in Nogales. Lauro Aguirre’s *El Independiente* took the liberty of personifying Teresa as a “visionary woman” encouraging an “apocalyptic revolution.” In 1896, a statement from Teresa Urrea was printed in the *El Paso Herald*. It read:

“The press generally in these days has occupied itself with my humble person in terms unfavorable in the highest degree, since in a fashion most unjust—the fashion in the republic of Mexico; they refer to me as participating in political matters; they connect me with the events which have happened in Nogales, Sonora in Coyame and Presidio del Norte, Chihuahua where people have risen in arms against the government of Sr. General Don Porfirio Díaz... I have noticed with much pain that the persons who have taken up arms in Mexican territory have invoked my name in aid of the schemes they are carrying through. But I repeat I am not one who

# Utopia in Mesilla: The Shalam Colony

By Autumn Aguilar and Katie Roby

Inside a horseshoe bend along the Rio Grande in Mesilla, N.M., pushed by the passion of one extraordinary man, a commonwealth utopian society was born, around what it considered to be the world's most precious commodity: children. Welcome to the Land of Shalam.

On June 5, 1828, in a log cabin on a farm near Mohicanville, Ohio, John Ballou Newbrough was born. This future spiritual leader and author of world-wide renown began receiving spirit messages at a young age.

His sympathetic mother, Elisabeth Polsley, a spiritualist herself, sustained him on his long road to becoming a physician. By selling wool and eggs, his mother scraped together money to send John to high school in Cleveland.

Once there, John worked for his room and board in the home of dentist Dr. F. S. Slausen by helping to make dental plates and taking impressions for false teeth. It was during this time that he encountered the plight of the poor, including their lack of health care. After years of hardships, he graduated from Cincinnati Medical College and started his practice as a physician.

Lee Priestley, a Las Cruces historian, wrote in her book *Shalam: Utopia on the Rio Grande 1881-1907* that the constant contact with suffering and death led the soft-hearted man to become a dentist. He set up practices successively in Dayton, Cincinnati and New York City.

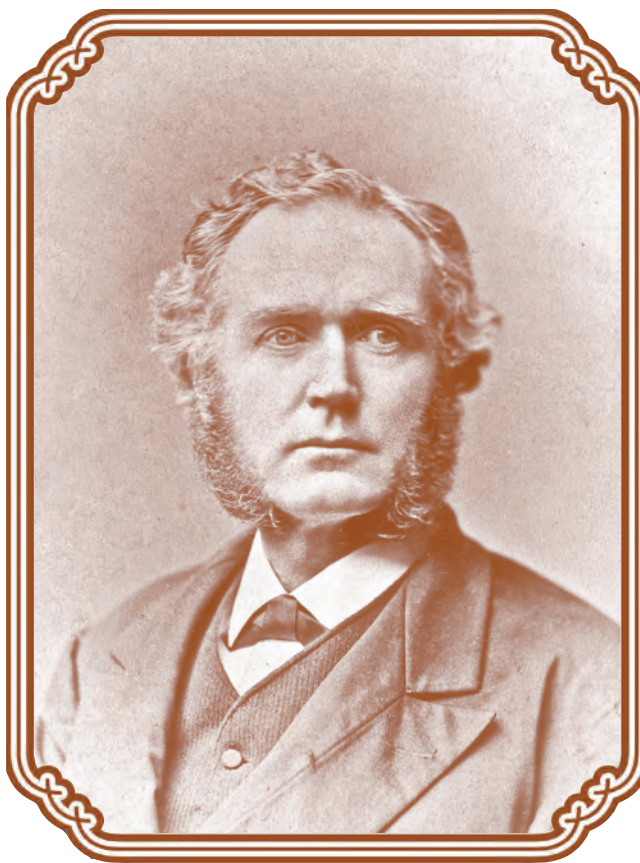
Remembering the poor and needing money to provide services for them, Dr. Newbrough left his practice and joined the California Gold Rush of 1849. He struck it rich and became business partners with another miner from Scotland, John Turnbull. The two men got lucky again off gold in Australia.

In 1857, John Turnbull's sister Rachel and Newbrough were married, setting up residence in New York City. They had three children, one dying in infancy. Little is recorded about the other two.

Newbrough never forgot the underprivileged, using his own funds to support mothers and children and to fund private charities. He was one of the first individuals to consider alcoholism a disease and established a farm where patients could be treated. Looking for an answer to society's evils, Newbrough immersed himself in self-purification. He became a strict vegetarian and carried out severe forms of chastity for both body and mind, which he epitomized by bathing and changing clothes twice daily.

Newbrough traveled extensively throughout Europe and Asia. He studied ancient religions and civilizations and received instruction from spiritualists. He returned to New York City with the intention of using his knowledge for social reform.

Linda Blazer, a researcher for NMSU archives and author of *Shalam Colony: A Utopian Experiment*, stated that it was upon Newbrough's return that he purchased a typewriter. After unsuccessful



Dr. John Ballou Newbrough chose the Mesilla Valley for his utopian community. (Photo courtesy of New Mexico State University Library, Archives and Special Collections)

attempts to use the strange contraption, he began to write under "spiritual control," with angels behind his chair, and he did so for 50 weeks. The resulting manuscript was published under the title of *Oahspe: The New Bible*.

With persuasive and eloquent public speeches, Newbrough was able to establish a group of followers, known as Faithists of the Seed of Abraham. The Faithists first gathered together in Woodside, N.J. in 1883. Newbrough was elected president. That same year members gathered in New York City in November. With 60 Faithists in attendance, the colonization society was organized.

Priestley stated that the purpose of the proposed colony was to raise children away from sin and to provide a place for members to lead "higher and purer lives." It was to be the "land of children" and a place of "peace and plenty." Timothy Miller wrote in *The Quest for Utopia in the Twentieth Century* that the Faithists had attempted two unsuccessful colonies, first in New Jersey and then in New York.

In October 1884, Newbrough and his friend and financial contributor, Andrew M. Howland, arrived in Las Cruces. Linda Harris, author of *Las Cruces: An Illustrated History*, wrote that legend states the pair were led blindfolded by spirit guides to a bend in the Rio Grande just north of town. They purchased a 1,490 acre tract for \$4,500 that was to become the Land of Shalam. Soon, 22 Faithists arrived. Among the new colonists were Newbrough's dental assistant, Frances Van de Water Sweet, and her and Newbrough's nine-month-old baby girl, Justine.

Priestley wrote that the colonists found the winter harsh; a few died of privation. With the arrival of spring and supplies coming from the east, new hope surged. Residents of the nearby village of Doña Ana introduced the colonists to local foods, such as beans, blue corn, hot red and green chiles and tortillas.

Newbrough hired 100 local laborers at an unheard of \$1 a day to build what eventually became a complex of 35 structures. The buildings included a

temple, an art studio, a children's home, barns and stables and what Newbrough called the fraternum. This was a long u-shaped building with 20 rooms on both sides and a courtyard in the middle, equipped with a steam laundry and flushing toilets.

Once the buildings were complete, receiving houses were set up in Chicago, Philadelphia, Kansas City and New Orleans to gather the orphan children Shalam was founded on. All babies were accepted regardless of race or health and brought to the desert Southwest.

Education began in infancy. By the time the children could walk, they received spiritual instruction. They could read at an early age, sing on key and were taught to be keenly aware of their five senses. Education was important, but so was play. Children rode ponies, went on picnics, learned to swim in the river and tended their own little

"miracle gardens."

Agriculture was very important to the pacifist vegetarians of Shalam. A water reservoir was built with wooden pipes for irrigation. Commercial crops included alfalfa and canaigre, a herb used for leather



The Shalam Colony built a fraternum, a u-shaped building that included modern features. (Photo courtesy of New Mexico State University Library, Archives and Special Collections)

Organized in much the same way as the Bible, the *Oahspe* declared that a new era had begun, in which the supreme deity, Jehovih, would come to all mankind. Also included was a plan for bringing about peace on earth through children raised without sin. They would become the future leaders that would usher in this new era.

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# Stahmann Farms Produce Pecans on Two Hemispheres

By Donald L. Stepp and Ruth Vise

Cabeza de Vaca, shipwrecked in an expedition to the Gulf of Mexico in 1529, lived with an Indian tribe and wrote that the natives ate nothing but pecans for two months a year and yet remained strong and healthy. Other tribes added pecans to corn cakes and used the nuts for seasoning and thickening. George Washington is said to have carried them in his pocket, and he planted several trees. Pecans are the only nut native to the United States, and they were the only fresh food taken to the moon as part of Apollo Missions 13 and 14. They are grown by many individuals in the El Paso-Las Cruces area, but one name is synonymous with pecan growing: Stahmann.

The hot and dry Southwest climate brought many people suffering from tuberculosis to this area in the early years of the 20th century when it was discovered that patients here often recovered from the lung disease instead of succumbing to the illness in wetter environments. And so it was with the Stahmann family. William John (W. J.) Stahmann, a carriage craftsman in Bruce, Wis., uprooted his family in 1909 to come west in hopes of saving his wife Hannah, who had been diagnosed with TB.

Building two barges, W. J., his wife and three children traveled down the Mississippi River, sold the barges in Arkansas and continued across Texas until they settled in Fabens, where they began raising tomatoes, onions, alfalfa, cotton and rabbits. An expert bee keeper, W. J. also set up a honey-making business with bees he brought from Wisconsin. However, because the water that irrigated their land was brackish and of low quality, W. J. feared that it might become too saline for their crops. So they packed up and moved further west to the Mesilla Valley in New Mexico, not far from the location of Elephant Butte Dam, which had been constructed in 1916, and offered better irrigation possibilities.

According to a 1982 *Las Cruces Sun* article, W. J. and his son Deane bought most of the Santo Tomás Land Grant, some 6,000 to 7,000 acres, in 1926 and began raising cotton on 200 of those acres. After his father died in 1929, Deane sold several parcels of land and kept about 2,900 acres, later acquiring the Snow Farm of 1,100 acres, for a total of 4,000 acres. When the Depression hit, farms began to fail. Mesilla Valley farmers saw cotton drop “from 29 cents a pound in 1923 to 6-1/2 cents in 1934, with some local farmers receiving as little as 4 cents a pound,” according to Linda G. Harris, author of *Las Cruces: An Illustrated History*.

Much of the land the Stahmanns purchased consisted of sand dunes covered with mesquite bushes, hardly prime farming land. However, Deane prepared the land with a “hootenanny,” a large pumping unit that he built and used to pump river water through a fire hose that sent out a jet of water about 200 feet.

Using this water force, they leveled 3,800 acres between 1930 and 1939.

Deane and his wife Joyce, known as *abuelita* by her family, had three children: Deane Jr., William John II (Bill), and Mary. They were born in El Paso where the family lived while the Mesilla farm was being

southern end of the farm, the first large-scale attempt to establish pecan trees as a money crop in the Mesilla Valley. This would be the beginning of a nursery stock business that lasted more than 40 years. It also was the beginning of the largest family-owned pecan business in the country.

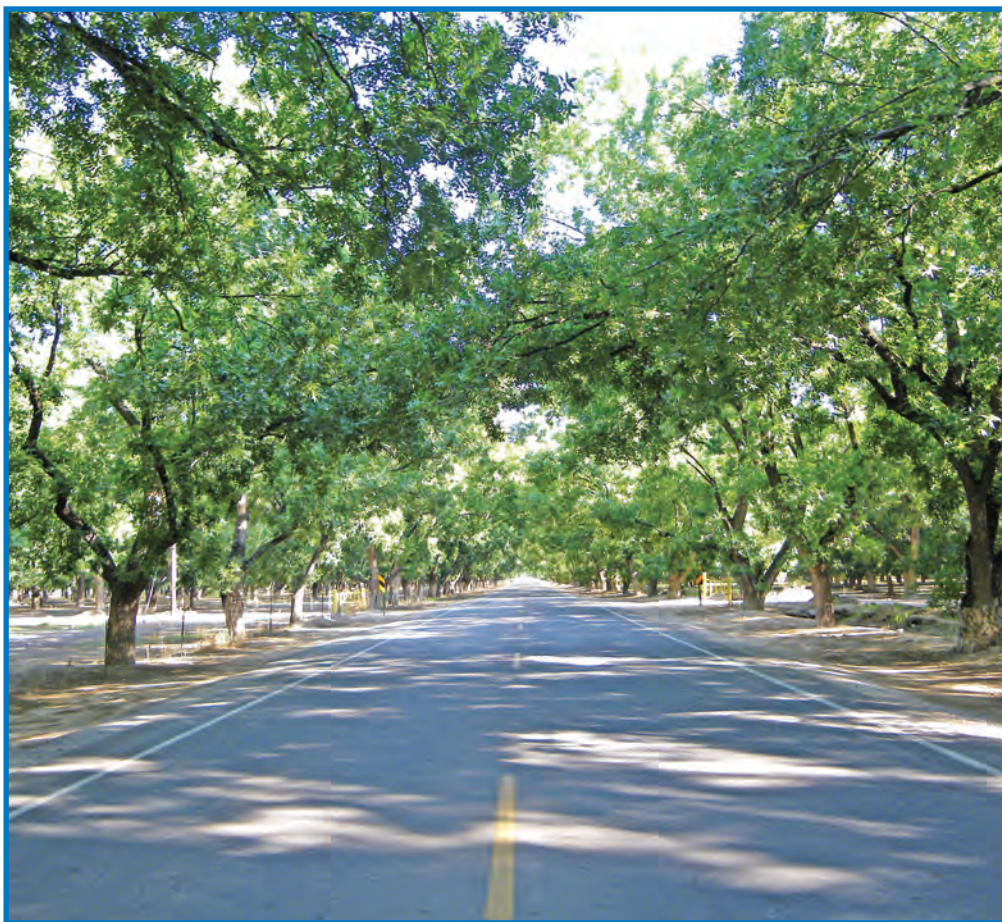
It takes five to seven years for pecan trees to produce nuts and about 25 years for a tree to mature. Therefore, the Stahmanns not only continued to grow cotton but alfalfa, lettuce and onions. Cantaloupes and cucumbers were grown between the trees. Cattle mingled in the fields to provide natural fertilizer, but when the family discovered that the cows had damaged the earth and caused drainage problems, they were no longer allowed to graze inside the orchard.

However, Deane still needed to provide a high nitrogen fertilizer. Moreover, the cotton needed to be hoed continuously to eliminate weeds and grass. Always an agricultural innovator, Deane introduced 25,000 white Chinese geese in 1953 that not only kept weeds under control but also provided the desired fertilizer. The number of geese increased when the Stahmanns noticed the birds did not damage the cotton, and the fields fed the geese. After harvesting the cotton, Deane sold up to 200,000 quick frozen adult geese yearly under the Armour Star label. He also leased geese as weeders all over the country. Later when pre-plant herbicides eliminated the need for geese, the Stahmanns replaced them with 30,000 chickens, which provided even better fertilizer and 50 cases of eggs per day sold under the Stahmann label.

Nothing went to waste at this farm. By-products became new business ventures. In 1957 a *New York Times* article wrote about the Stahmanns selling the branches and trunks of pruned pecan trees after being sorted by length and thickness for use in barbecue grills and pits. Grilling enthusiasts can still buy such tree prunings in Las Cruces.

Deane continued innovation and research on the farm both with the pecan orchards and cotton fields. He constantly tried to improve cotton strains and produced the Del Cerro (“of the hill or highlands”) strain, his “longest and strongest” cotton, which became a major crop in South Africa, according to a *Denver Post* article. Deane also established research farms in Mexico and Jamaica studying cotton strains which grew year round. Strains developed by Deane are still being grown all over the world.

By the 1950s Deane had built two shelling plants handling 8,000 pounds of pecans daily and marketed different sizes of nut kernels for ready consumption and cooking under the same Del Cerro brand. Until 1967, harvesting of the pecans was done by hand, resulting in as many as 1,000 workers at the farm. Besides the shelling plants, the business included a central office



Stahmann Farms' mature pecan trees arch over N.M. Highway 28, providing shade and a spectacular view for travelers on their way to Mesilla and Las Cruces. (Photo by Heather Coons)

established. The road to Mesilla was just a winding trail through mesquite and sand dunes, not the pleasant paved N.M. Highway 28 of today.

Although Deane kept growing cotton for more than 50 years, he did not begin planting pecan trees by design.



Stahmann's Country Store offers pecans and related treats. (Photo by Heather Coons)

In 1932, a man selling seedlings that the original buyer in El Paso could not pay for came up the valley and Deane bought the 2,000 trees. He planted them at the

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# Betty Mary Goetting Brought Birth Control to El Paso

By Kim Wilson and Jane Van Velkinburgh

**S**traightforward. Ahead of her time. These words were spoken by Kurt Goetting about a woman he knew not only as a loving mother, but one of El Paso's earliest women's activists and co-founder of Planned Parenthood of El Paso: Betty Mary Smith Goetting.

The daughter of a physician, Betty Mary Smith was born in Jefferson, Texas, in 1897. After moving with her family to El Paso in 1910, she began working at the El Paso Public Library in 1913, where she met and was befriended by Maud Durlin Sullivan, an El Paso librarian, who became like a second mother to her. In 1915, she graduated from El Paso High School and attended Riverside Library Service School in California in 1917, where she helped the Red Cross during World War I.

In 1918, Smith became involved with the women's suffrage movement spreading across America. During that time, she worked as an assistant at the New York Reference Library. In 1919 she married Charles A. Goetting, prominent El Paso contractor. Three children would be born to the couple, but only two survived.

As an avid reader and history buff, Betty Mary Goetting became a co-founder of the History Club in 1926. She also founded the first book club in El Paso and was a charter member of the El Paso County Historical Society, where she served as curator for 15 years and contributed articles to *Password*, the society's journal, on notable local women.

Goetting's interest in history led her to realize that women needed to fight for the rights of equal treatment and pay. Though working hard to preserve the past, Goetting became known as a pioneer and even a radical in the early years of advancing birth control for women in El Paso.

In 1873, the Comstock Law was passed in America prohibiting "obscene" materials from being sent in the mail, aimed at the dissemination of birth control methods and/or devices. According to "Comstockery in America," an article by Margaret Sanger, national leader of the movement to legalize birth control and founder of Planned Parenthood of New York, these laws were designed to "aid and abet" moral and religious "prejudice and persecution," preventing physicians from offering family planning because of the threat of imprisonment.

During her work in New York, Goetting became aware of the birth control movement and Margaret Sanger's work. Just before she was married, Betty Mary wrote to Sanger under a pseudonym because of family opposition, inquiring about methods of birth control. In her letter she said, "I feel that it is my right to say when my children shall be born."

Sanger, whose mother was pregnant 18 times, bore 11 children and died at 40, was a nurse who worked with poor immigrant women. She saw the effects of unchecked childbearing but also knew that obtaining information about birth control was almost impossible for poor American women. Poor women also often resorted to having illegal or self-induced abortions and many died. In 1916, Sanger, her sister and a friend opened the first birth control clinic in the country, serving some 500 women in 10 days before police raided the clinic and arrested the three women.

Out on bail, Sanger continued her work. The Crane decision in 1918 allowed physicians to prescribe birth control for their married patients "for the cure and prevention of disease." It would take 18 more years to reverse the Comstock Law's classification of birth control literature as pornography with the legal case of *United States v. One Package*.

Goetting was inspired by Sanger's fight against the Comstock Laws and expressed the wish that she could meet her. "I thought she was the greatest woman in the country," Goetting told the *El Paso Times*. Sanger had made her first trip to El Paso in 1936, but ironically,



**Betty Mary Smith (Goetting) in 1917 attended the Riverside Library Service School in California.** (Photo courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections)

she and Goetting did not meet because of the birth of Goetting's second son. In 1937, they did.

Returning to help organize an El Paso clinic, Sanger planned to speak at the Hilton Inn during her second El Paso visit. Pressure from local churches caused the hotel to revoke the reservation, so Sanger spoke to a



**Betty Mary Goetting began supporting women's causes early in life and was instrumental in establishing Planned Parenthood clinics in El Paso.** (Photo courtesy of the El Paso County Historical Society)

packed house at the Paso del Norte Hotel. According to the *Times*, it was then that Goetting and Sanger met and became fast friends, with Sanger staying at the Goetting home at least eight times.

Betty Goetting's work with the poor made her realize that El Paso was in desperate need of family planning. Women who could not pay were denied access to the services of a doctor. She met women who looked twice their age from having 16 or more children.

Goetting, along with other women volunteers, canvassed the city for donations to set up a birth control clinic, but opposition was fierce. Renting a location for the clinic was also difficult; as soon as the owners knew what the property was to be used for, prices doubled. Doctors agreeing to serve the clinics were threatened with boycotts. Goetting told the *El Paso Times* that she never would have made it through that time without the support of her husband or the six doctors who agreed to help her. "Without those six valiant men we could never have gotten off the ground."

Finally, with the slogan, "Every Child a Wanted Child," on April 27, 1937, the El Paso Mothers' Health Center opened at 1820 East Rio Grande St. with Goetting serving as president of the board. The clinic was affiliated with Sanger's Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau. According to a July 26, 1937, *El Paso Herald-Post* article, the "cheerful" and "spotlessly clean" nonprofit clinic had a registered nurse on duty 24 hours a day, with 12 doctors alternating their noon hours for patients.

The *El Paso Times* reported in April 1938 that the clinic had advised 731 patients in 11 months. Goetting told the *Times* that the future outlook was "highly gratifying," and that they hoped to open more clinics in El Paso.

In an effort to clear any misunderstandings as to the services the center provided, in 1939 the center's name changed to the El Paso Birth Control Clinic. Although abortion services were not provided, controversy continuously followed. In a 1937 letter to the *El Paso Herald-Post*, Rev. Michael Sanctics wrote that the clinic made women untrue to their natures, and thus, unhappy, by destroying "the qualities which God gave women."

In an effort to combat controversy, the clinic's first board members were all mothers. Goetting told the *El Paso Times* in 1977 that they could not risk having women without children on the board. "We were supposed to be child-haters, you see."

Even under controversy, the dream of more clinics was realized with the opening of an auxiliary clinic in South El Paso in 1940. In 1942, another clinic opened in South/Central El Paso. In 1946, the clinics affiliated with Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Then, in 1954, all three facilities consolidated in a house on Arizona Street. The clinic moved two more times before 1982 when the clinic relocated to 2817 E. Yandell Dr. and was renamed the Goetting Clinic in honor of its founder.

Goetting continued to be an advocate for birth control until she died in 1980. According to her son, Goetting carried clinic pamphlets in the glove box of her car. She offered them to pregnant women she met who had other small children in tow. Kurt Goetting also recalled his mother being very adamant with him and his fiancée about having as many children as they wanted, as long as they could take care of them, both financially and emotionally. Goetting worked with Planned Parenthood on a national level and spent three years on its national board.

*continued on page 13*

# Maud Sullivan Made El Paso Public Library a Cultural Center

By Raul Bardales Jr., Eileen Marzullo, Heather Coons and Ruth Vise

**E**rudition need not be dull,” so stated librarian Maud Durlin Sullivan, whose dedication and service for almost 30 years gave the El Paso Public Library a national reputation. Speaking to the Woman’s Club in October 1936, Sullivan said, “One of the greatest privileges we have in this country is freedom to read good books.”

Maud Durlin was born Dec. 7, 1872, in Ripon, Wis., to Fayette Durlin and Annie Root Durlin. Like her siblings and neighborhood children, she was home schooled by her father, an Episcopal rector, and by the occasional tutor. The elder Durlin owned an extensive collection of leather-bound first-edition books on which Maud “cut her teeth.”

The Durlin family moved to Madison, where her father had accepted a rectorship. Maud first experienced formal education by attending Kemper Hall, an Episcopal school, and here she first pursued art and music.

Durlin moved to New York to attend the School of Design at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. “One of the subjects I took up was heraldry, and I found it fascinating,” she recalled.

Completing her studies and returning to Wisconsin, Durlin opened an art studio in Madison. While on vacation, she was asked to assist the State Historical Library. With her knowledge of design and heraldry, Durlin provided patrons with family trees and accompanying coats of arms. “It’s a peculiar thing how we unconsciously prepare ourselves for our life work, in everything we do,” she once told the *El Paso Herald-Post*.

Knowing that a career in books was more promising than a career in art, Durlin returned to New York to study at the Pratt Library School. After graduation, she served as head librarian at the Oshkosh Public Library in Wisconsin.

In August 1908, Durlin moved to El Paso to succeed Clara Mulliken as librarian for the El Paso Public Library. While working, she met a witty Irishman by the name of John Kevin Sullivan and in 1912, the couple married at St. Clement’s Church.

According to an article by her good friend Betty Mary Goetting in *Password*, the El Paso County Historical Society’s journal, Maud’s marriage at age 40 to the Harvard-educated mining engineer was “amazingly romantic.” To be with her husband, she resigned from the library and moved to the Mogollon Mountains in New Mexico, located deep in the Gila National Wilderness.

For five years, this sophisticated, refined woman made a tent her home. Goetting described the interior of Sullivan’s tent house as quite charming, but no less rugged, with books mingled amongst sunlit wildflowers and china coffee cups and the front flaps of the tent drawn back to reveal the “majestic mountains.” The marriage would last until her husband’s death in 1943.

In 1917, the couple returned to El Paso, and Sullivan began her second tenure with the public library. Over the next 25 years she would transform it to one of the best in the nation, all on a paltry budget.

Sullivan increased the number of books and pamphlets available at the library from 17,453 in 1919 to 112,290 in 1940. Thanks to her experience in the mountains and her husband’s work, Sullivan collected mining reference materials that drew engineers from throughout the Southwest.

Sullivan built up an impressive collection of public documents published by the U. S. Government and free to any library. Goetting wrote that Sullivan

classified them just like any other library source, and they were easily available in the basement document room. Because of her innovative use of these pamphlets, Sullivan gave a talk to the American Library Association on the use of public documents.

Aware of El Paso’s relationship with Mexico and the large Spanish-speaking population in the city, she learned the language and collected more than 2,000 books in Spanish, picking each book herself. Knowing Spanish brought her and El Paso international recognition.

Sullivan also began the library’s comprehensive Southwest Collection, containing a wide variety of materials on the history and culture of the border region. The materials include original manuscripts, like J. Frank Dobie’s *Apache Gold and Yaqui Silver*. Besides books, other materials include drawings, maps, clippings, periodicals, monographs and photographs.



**This photograph of Maud Durlin (Sullivan) at age 20 shows her in her first formal ball gown of pink satin. (Photo courtesy of El Paso Public Library)**

Never losing her love of art, Sullivan made the library a cultural center. Mary A. Sarber, herself a librarian, wrote that Sullivan brought art exhibits to the library through agreements with New York galleries and acquired an impressive collection of art books, prints and musical scores.

Not only did Sullivan fill the library with some of the best collections in the country, but she made it feel like home. With flowers in spring and evergreens in winter, the lobby was inviting, with displays of books, prints and paintings.

Maud Sullivan encouraged local and regional aspiring artists such as Freemont Ellis, Peter Hurd, Tom Lea and José Cisneros. In his tribute to Sullivan presented to the University of California School of Library Service, Lea stated that Sullivan’s “kindness encouraged and stimulated” him. With her sparkling “merry eyes” and “extraordinary grace,” Sullivan sponsored Lea’s first public exhibition at the library while he was still in high school. When he attended the Art Institute of Chicago, he realized that few of his peers were as fortunate to have perused the extensive selection of books on painting as he had in the El Paso library.

She introduced Lea to Carl Hertzog, typographer and book designer, and the two together would produce “the finest books printed in and about the Southwest,” according to Sarber. Sullivan also staged the first exhibit of Cisneros’ work, and he illustrated many books that Hertzog designed.

In 1935 because of her efforts in building the art collection, the El Paso library received the Carnegie Art Reference Set consisting of 1,400 prints and 127 art books, worth thousands of dollars, according to Goetting. It was one of two Texas libraries to receive the honor and one of only 30 in the nation.

From 1923 to 1925, Sullivan served as president of the Texas Library Association, the first El Pasoan to do so. Founding the association’s bulletin, she served as editor for three years. In 1925, the Library of Congress recognized the El Paso library as one of the country’s best.

That same year, Sullivan used her knowledge of Spanish to study libraries in Mexico City. In May 1928, she represented the Carnegie Foundation of International Peace in conducting tours of major U.S. libraries for six Mexican librarians. Sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation in 1932, she went to Puerto Rico to survey their libraries and to teach them to develop small libraries efficiently. The Carnegie Corporation in May 1935 sent Sullivan to the International Congress of Libraries and Bibliography in Spain, where she addressed the Congress in Spanish.

Sullivan also traveled to Rome during this time and visited the Vatican Library, including the Barbarini collection, giving her “one of the greatest of the intellectual thrills ... in Europe,” according to an *El Paso Herald-Post* article. Language was no barrier during Sullivan’s travels, as she spoke French as well as English and Spanish.

Kurt Goetting, Sullivan’s godson, recalled in an interview with a student writer that she was “a tall woman who was quiet and direct when you talked with her.” Not surprisingly, Sullivan liked everything done correctly the first time, said Goetting. His mother, Betty Mary Goetting, and Sullivan became great friends, sharing a love of books and motivating children as well as working for women’s rights.

Sullivan often spoke on a wide range of topics at functions and clubs, including the El Paso chapter of the American Association of Engineers. She belonged to the Auxiliary to the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers and was a charter and life member of the Archaeological Society which she singlehandedly kept going during the Depression. The Society honored her posthumously in 1974. She was an honorary member of the Woman’s Club and its auxiliary Art Department.

On Dec. 28, 1943, just eight months after the death of her beloved husband, Sullivan died from complications she developed after breaking her ankle. The library closed for two days in her honor. *El Paso Herald-Post* editor Edward M. Pooley wrote, “The library was outstanding because she made it so. It was her library and for it she poured out her love, her energy and her life.”

The Maud Sullivan room at the library is still used for important gatherings. She believed that any question that arose could be answered by information contained in the public library. Sullivan told the *Herald-Post* in 1937, “They [librarians] don’t have to know the answers. The secret is to know where the answers may be found.” ■

# Lucy Acosta's Legacy Continues in LULAC

By Laura Condon, Claribel Beltran, Krystal Duchene, David Maese and Heather Coons

A local discussion concerning the League of United Latin American Citizens, or LULAC, is inevitably followed by the name Lucy Acosta. Dubbed the "Iron Lady of El Paso" by LULAC legal counsel, this diminutive powerhouse is known for co-founding and spearheading Project Amistad, transforming it into a multimillion dollar non-profit organization that aids the elderly and disabled. In a March 2010 interview with the *Borderlands* student editor, her son Alejandro Acosta Jr. revealed another side of one of El Paso's most distinguished civil activists. "They [people] saw her as this hard charger... we saw her as mom."

Maria Angela Socorro Grijalva was born in the small copper mining town of Miami, Ariz., in 1926. According to a 1982 oral history interview with Mario T. Garcia, history and Chicano studies professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, her father began calling her "Lucy," a form of his mother's name, Luciana, because he did not like any of her given names.

When she was three, a mining accident claimed the life of her father. The Depression closed the mines and families were forced to find jobs elsewhere. Acosta told Garcia in the interview that when she was six, her family moved to an apartment on the corner of Sixth and El Paso Streets, where she lived until she married. The family was better off than most. The pension received from the death of her father allowed the family to survive the Depression and enabled Lucy to attend school full-time, unlike many of her friends and neighbors.

According to her son, it was during her years at Bowie High School that Lucy was first "bitten" by the public service bug. She knew that higher educational opportunities were not possible for most of her fellow students, many of whom had to drop out to help support their families. Lucy became heavily involved in coordinating student activities and events in an effort to make high school a positive, memorable experience for all Bowie Bears. Her dedication to her classmates earned her the nickname "Mama Bear."

Excelling in academics, Acosta graduated from Bowie High School in 1943 in the top ten percent of her class and began a relationship with her friend and childhood playmate, Alejandro Acosta. Prospects for higher education were slim for Alejandro, an orphan raised by his older brother, and the Selective Service Board quickly drafted him to fight in World War II.

According to *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*, while Alejandro completed his tour of duty, Lucy Grijalva attended International Business College, from which she graduated in 1945. Following graduation, she held clerical positions, and in 1947, the love of her life returned and the couple married in 1948. Only a few days after the birth of their first son, the draft returned to claim Acosta's husband for duty in Korea.

After Korea and with the aid of the GI Bill, the Acostas purchased their first and only home at 4402 Leeds Ave. Life wasn't always easy with both parents working and sharing one car, but they managed well with the aid of an extended family living within a three-block radius. With an unwavering united front, the Acostas taught their sons, Alex Jr. and Daniel, the power of an education. The two learned that their parents expected them to be successful, but to be remarkable, they had to aid those less fortunate in the community.

"They rode us hard," Alex Jr. stated. His mother was known for her iron will, "but what they [people in the

community] couldn't possibly have experienced was her compassion and the love ... her ability to pick you up and dust you off, and to send you back in there." The boys were taught never to give up and not to use excuses for failures.

Although life was busy, Acosta still managed to devote her time to others by staying active with her alma mater. Then, in 1957, the catalyst for Acosta's career came when she officially joined LULAC.

The first item on the agenda for Acosta was to help organize and co-found LULAC Ladies Council No. 335. Designed to increase membership of women in their 30s to represent the younger Hispanic community, the council began programs to provide holiday dinners and baskets for the Home for Aged Women and gifts



**Lucy Acosta, with the support of her husband, Alex Acosta Sr., developed programs to assist the elderly and disabled. (Photo courtesy of Alex Acosta Jr.)**

for needy children, as well as to hold clothing drives and offer scholarships to deserving students. This group of women also started another project that would ultimately become a powerful voice throughout the Hispanic community: voter registration drives.

Coinciding with the birth of Ladies Council No. 335 was the mayoral election of Raymond Telles. Inspired by the possibility of El Paso's first Hispanic mayor, Acosta and the ladies council went door to door registering voters in South El Paso. As most could not afford to pay the poll tax, Acosta and other members held fundraisers in front of department stores.

The effort was an enormous success, and in recognition of her efforts, Acosta was appointed a liaison to Telles' administration. Thus began Acosta's 29 years of leadership as a liaison to every subsequent mayor of El Paso.

Although the door was open for her to enter politics, according to her son Alex, that was never a temptation. Being filled with compassion for the plight of the less fortunate and having a belief that doing good was its own reward, Acosta stayed active with LULAC and developed a very long and distinguished career.

Over the decades, Acosta held every office in the local chapter including five times as president of Ladies Council No. 335 and chairman of the scholarship committee. She served as National Director of Youth Activities and went to the top as National Vice President. Acosta was responsible for organizing and

co-founding many organizations, including LULAC Youth Council 26, but it was co-founding and working as executive director of Project Amistad that developed her reputation as a lady with an iron will.

As Acosta's parents began to age and were unable to drive, simple chores like grocery shopping and paying the bills became impossible. According to her son, Acosta was driven to help meet the needs of those with no family to assist, and in 1976, Project Amistad (based on the Spanish word meaning "friendship") was born. With Acosta at the helm for 25 years, what began as a few women using their personal cars grew into a region-wide assistance program providing transportation, financial management and even guardianship for the elderly.

With the steadfast support of her husband, which, according to her son, was a secret to Acosta's success, this amazing woman managed to serve the community through working with organizations such as the Bowie Alumni Board of Directors, El Paso County Child Welfare Board, El Paso County General Assistance Agency, El Paso Electric Company Consumer Advisory Council, El Paso Del Norte Food Bank, El Paso Parks and Recreation Board, El Paso Women's Political Caucus, LULAC's Fiesta de las Flores, Leadership El Paso, National Hispanic Council on Aging, Parent Teacher Association, Paso del Norte Development Corp., Project Bravo, Society of Professionals on Aging, St. Joseph's Catholic Parish, Sun Carnival Association, United Way, Visiting Nurses Association and many others.

Acosta's concern and compassion also led her down the road of many firsts. In 1972, she was the first woman in El Paso appointed Civil Service Commissioner. Acosta was the first woman inducted into the national LULAC Hall of Fame (1979), and she was the first woman and layperson to be appointed to the 17th District Bar Association of Law Examiners. She was also the first recipient of the J. C. Machuca Award as President of the Year for LULAC District Four in 1980, and in 1982, she was the first recipient of the United Way Annual Volunteer Service Award. She became the first Hispanic woman to serve on the El Paso Community College Board of Trustees, and when her husband returned to school and graduated from El Paso Community College, Acosta presented his diploma to him.

If Acosta's list of contributions seems endless, so does a list of her awards. Some of her more prestigious awards include: Outstanding LULAC Woman in the Nation for 1963 and 1973; 1972 Gold Medallion for outstanding civic participation in El Paso; 1972 LULAC Outstanding Citizen; 1972 Outstanding Ex-student of Bowie High; 1977 LULAC Council 335 Woman of the Year; 1978 LULAC Outstanding President of Texas; Texas Women's Hall of Fame 1987; and El Paso Commission on Women's Hall of Fame. Lucy Acosta Way, a street on the east side of El Paso, is also named for her.

On March 8, 2008, El Paso lost one of its greatest humanitarians. In an *El Paso Times* article, former El Paso County Democratic Party Chairwoman Queta Fierro spoke of Acosta's accomplishments. "She was always so dedicated ... I loved her to pieces."

Acosta's memory is honored by the annual LULAC Lucy G. Acosta Humanitarian Awards, as well as by the hundreds of elderly and disabled that are assisted every day by Project Amistad. With Acosta's granddaughter Andrea now on the board, the project continues the legacy of "El Paso's Iron Lady." ♥

*Blues continued from page 3*

Development Association and director of the Texas Retailers Association, disagreed.

In Schwartz's opinion, a seven-day retail week would increase business costs without increasing sales because the number of shoppers would remain fairly constant. Not only would that lead to rising inflation and energy usage, Schwartz stated, but small business owners would be the most affected because of a lack of resources, such as a smaller number of employees to work more hours.

One thing was certain: Texas blue laws were confusing. In an *El Paso Times* article titled "Texas' Blue Law: What Can You Buy Sunday?" district attorneys from 31 counties were contacted for assistance in interpreting the law. Ten replied, all with conflicting answers.

Because the law was so difficult to decipher, it made enforcement almost impossible for local agencies. Investigations and policing came from the most unlikely sources: fellow merchants.

Here in El Paso, enforcement was financially backed by the Downtown Development Association (DDA). The DDA hired private investigators and attorneys to ensure compliance with Sunday legislation. Violators were contacted in writing, requesting compliance. If that failed, a civil injunction would be filed.

Several major court cases resulted from injunctions against El Paso's rebellious retailers. The owners of Malooly's Furniture Store, Gibson's Discount Stores, Michelle's Clothing, K-Mart and several automobile dealerships, as well as many others, found themselves before a judge.

In 1971, a civil court injunction was requested by the DDA against George and Eddy Malooly, owners of Malooly's Furniture Store, for selling prohibited items on consecutive Saturdays and Sundays.

"We are only trying to serve the people," the Malooly brothers stated in an article published in the *El Paso Herald-Post* on Dec. 4. "Many, many people have called us from outlying areas, saying they are unable to travel so far during the week."

Judge Hans Brockmoller, 120th District Court, granted the injunction, which barred any Sunday openings by Malooly's Furniture, according to an *El Paso Times* article on Dec. 17. The Maloolys did not file an appeal.

The DDA also requested a civil court injunction against Gibson's Discount Stores, with criminal charges pending. Brockmoller issued the injunction, and Gibson's appealed. In 1973, the appeal was denied, and Gibson's took the case to the Texas Supreme Court, which upheld the state's blue law in a 5-4 decision against Gibson's.

Justice Thomas M. Reavley stated that it was the court's opinion that blue laws were a legislative question, not a constitutional one. Justice Ross E. Doughty disagreed, questioning the legislature's right to prohibit the sale of certain merchandise one day a weekend.

Gibson's continued the fight all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1978 the case was dismissed due to failure to apply within a proper time frame.

In another case, Mickey Robbins, owner of Michelle's Corp., a clothing store, was held in contempt of court for violating an injunction requested by the El Paso Retailers Association. H.W. Freeman reported in the *El Paso Times* on Sept. 13, 1981, that Robbins felt he was not in violation of the law due to the law's "charity clause." Twenty-six percent of Sunday sales went

to the El Paso Rehabilitation Center where his daughter, Michelle, was being treated for cerebral palsy.

Opponents of the blue law had about as much luck with the state's legislature over the years as they had with judges. State Rep. Paul Moreno described the law in a 1971 *El Paso Times* article as "antiquated and wholly inadequate," but early repeal attempts, such as the one he introduced, regularly failed. On Feb. 12, 1975, Rep. John Hoestenbach announced a new effort at repeal. However, the bill was not even voted out of the House Business and Industry Committee.

The next major attempt to repeal blue laws was led by El Paso Rep. Robert (Bobby) Valles in 1979. Supported by Gov. Bill Clements, Valles' bill would have offered repeal on a local basis, so the will of the people could decide. Valles believed this distinction gave the bill a good chance of passage. Tri-State Associated Grocers Inc., representing 130 independent grocers, joined the fight. In an effort to get consumer feedback to the legislature, hundreds of leaflets and letters were passed out by El Paso grocers. Sam Stewart, Valles' administrative assistant, declared the bill dead on May 5. Ken Bridges, spokesman for Tri-State, vowed not to quit. "It'll come up again, no doubt about it."

The fight finally ended in June 1985. Texans For Blue Law Repeal, Inc., a group of retailers, headed up a strategy and lobbying campaign. The Texas legislative session ended with an indigent health care plan, seatbelt laws, increased arts financing – and repealed blue laws.

Today, remnants of Sunday legislation can still be seen in auto sales. Laws imposed by the Texas Department of Transportation require dealerships to close either Saturday or Sunday. The sales manager of a local automobile dealership told Russell Folk that because an automobile is such a large investment, most customers shop around for days before purchasing, so being closed one day doesn't affect business. When asked if he would open on Sundays if the law was repealed, he replied, "I don't think so ... people get tired, even the building gets tired."

Since 1863, weekends in Texas have been influenced by Sunday legislation, in one form or another. Liquor stores are still closed on Sunday. At other stores only beer and wine may be sold but only after noon. And on Christmas day, hard liquor cannot be purchased except at restaurants. But Texans and most Americans can buy almost anything else on Sunday, as most blue laws have been repealed across the country. ♀

*Hart continued from page 4*

among heirs and sold. By 1895, with competition from the railroads, *El Molino* went out of business. The millstones were sold and shipped to Mexico, the wheel taken to a ranch in Cloudcroft.

Several members of the Hart family lived in the family home after Simeon and Jesusita died, including their bachelor son Juan, who built a large monument on the grounds in 1913 to honor his father. It was believed that Simeon Hart was buried under the tomb. The bodies of Juan Hart and his sister Pauline Hart Davis were removed from the monument in 1936 and taken to El Paso's Evergreen Cemetery. The monument itself was destroyed in the early 1950s to build Paisano Drive. No one knows exactly where the elder Harts are buried. Three other bodies were excavated close to the tomb, but none has been positively identified as Simeon or Jesusita.

Reputedly haunted and with a story all its own, the Hart mansion, best known to locals since 1940 as the Hacienda Café, stands empty in 2010, awaiting another owner. For more than 50 years the café welcomed natives and tourists alike to its historical rooms, serving food and drink in the shadow of the first industry of El Paso: Hart's Mill. ♀

*Urrea continued from page 7*

by the Virgin Mary. They believed all the healings and stress built up throughout her life finally took its toll. Hundreds of people attended her funeral at Shannon Hill Catholic Cemetery, where she was buried next to her father.

Moving from one country to another, then state to state and city to city, Teresa Urrea left a permanent imprint in the minds and hearts of all the people she healed and supported. Urrea's spiritual guidance is still called upon during the harshest and most desperate times. In El Paso's *Segundo Barrio*, many people are praying and hoping Teresa Urrea's spirit is with them. Parts of this historic community are in danger of being demolished to build a "downtown district" which could include one or more "big box" stores. The building Teresa lived in happens to be part of this section in the *Segundo Barrio*.

As she did in the past, Teresa Urrea continues to unite people of all races and classes. Many of *Segundo's* residents have come together to form *Colectivo Rezizte*, a group protesting against the politicians and business owners involved with the plans to destroy their community. With the help of the *Paso del sur* group and their faith in Santa Teresita, opponents of the use of eminent domain will continue to battle to preserve this part of El Paso's history and more importantly, the homes and lives of many. Although more than 100 years have passed since "La Santa de Cabora" physically graced our world, it is clear that she will long be a source of guidance and motivation for the poor and unrepresented. ♀

*Goetting continued from page 10*

In 1966, Goetting became only the third person in the United States to receive the National Margaret Sanger Award for her work in the birth control movement. In 1968, she received the Planned Parenthood Center of El Paso Leadership Award, the Presidential Award in 1970, and the Paseña Valerosa Award in 1974. In 1977, Goetting was recognized by the El Paso Women's Political Caucus as a Pioneer in Women's Rights. She received an honorary life membership from the El Paso Library Association in 1979. In 2009, she was named to the El Paso County Historical Society's Hall of Honor.

In a surprise move in July 2009, Planned Parenthood closed six facilities in El Paso because of financial problems. According to the *El Paso Times*, more than 12,000 patients were forced to look for alternate care.

Kathleen Staudt, a political science professor at the University of Texas at El Paso, told the *El Paso Times* that she was shocked. "How could the 21st largest city in the United States – El Paso – not have Planned Parenthood clinics?"

While other providers attempt to fill the gap, Planned Parenthood in El Paso will be missed. It will take another organization, other individuals to carry on the work and pioneering spirit of Betty Mary Smith Goetting, who did so much to help El Paso women. ♀

# Belen Robles: Voice for the Latino Community

By Jessica M. Oracio and Katherine Smith

**H**er senior class at Bowie High School in El Paso, Texas, selected her “Most Likely to Succeed.” It was a title that Belen Robles took to heart in the 1950s and is still making come true.

Robles was the fifth child of a family of 10 children born to immigrants who had come to the United States from Mexico in the early 20th century, her father from the state of Chihuahua, her mother from Zacatecas. Attending parochial school at St. Mary’s, she began high school at St. Joseph’s but graduated from Bowie High School.

Like most young women in the 1950s, Belen was expected to find a good man, get married and raise a family. Three months after high school graduation, she married Ramiro Robles, and the couple began raising a family. She soon discovered that her family needed two incomes. In an interview with National Public Radio’s Michel Martin in 2008, Robles said it took about six months to convince her husband that his manhood would not suffer if she began working outside the home.

In an interview with Jose Estrada in 1976, Robles described applying in 1955 for a job at a well-known company in El Paso. She was told by a receptionist in the lobby of the building that the company did not hire Mexicans except as elevator girls or cooks. Although Robles kept her appointment to speak with the personnel manager, she knew she would not be hired. Despite being born and raised in the United States, she was seen as “Mexican.”

She did land a job as a secretary-receptionist with a real estate company, but the earlier experience opened the eyes of this young woman to the reality of the inequality that existed in her home town. Not only did she realize that women were second class citizens, but so were Latinos. If you were both, then you had two strikes against you. Robles told EPCC student Jessica Oracio that she realized the challenges Mexican Americans faced in health care and education as well as employment, and it gave her the *ganar* (“the will” or “determination”) to motivate her in her job search.

At 20, Robles took a job as a clerk with the U. S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service. Because she was fluent in English and Spanish, she often was called in to interpret for exclusion and deportation hearings. In this role she worked with a division that investigated persons who could be excluded from remaining in the United States on grounds of moral, criminal or subversive backgrounds.

Shortly after her first disappointing interview as an adult, Robles joined the League of United Latin American Citizens or LULAC, the oldest and largest Latino civil rights organization in the United States. Organized in 1929 in Corpus Christi, Texas, LULAC was led for years only by men. LULAC allowed women’s auxiliaries, but in 1933 women began to form their own councils. Ladies LULAC Council No. 9 was founded in El Paso in February 1934. (See articles on the history of LULAC and the role of women in LULAC in Volume 25 of *Borderlands*.)

At first, LULAC members banded together to protect their families and businesses as well as to help members find employment and keep children in school. Then LULAC began the fight to desegregate schools and other public facilities in Texas. After World War II, victories in California and Texas in desegregating schools would set the scene for Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, which desegregated public schools.

LULAC fought for the right of Mexican Americans to serve on juries and began voter registration drives, raising money to help pay poll taxes, which Texas maintained until 1966. Women’s councils often worked

independently of the state and national organizations and concentrated on working with women and children, the elderly, the poor and for education, realizing that it was the key to success in America.

Joining Ladies Council No. 9 in 1957, Robles quickly became active in the local projects of LULAC, eventually serving in nearly every office: president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and trustee. She and the council focused on the needs of children, teaching pre-schoolers at age five the basic 400 words in the English language so that they could handle the first grade adequately. Known as the “Little School of 400,” the statewide program was the basis of what would become the national program called Project Head Start in the Lyndon B. Johnson administration.



**The first woman national president of LULAC, Belen Robles is a leader in the El Paso community. (Photo courtesy of Belen Robles)**

She also worked within her council and with Council No. 132 to develop a lunch program in El Paso grade schools before the federal lunch program began. She and the councils provided children with eye glasses, clothing and shoes, programs which have been absorbed by federal agencies. Robles also became a big part of a program providing weekly English and citizenship classes to immigrants studying to become citizens that showed her the dedication these adults had to become naturalized Americans.

After 15 years with the federal Immigration and Naturalization Service, Robles went to work with the U. S. Customs Service as a customs inspector, one of five women who were available to inspect females. She became a senior officer and the first woman chief inspector in El Paso. As an administrative supervisor, Robles found herself in another male-dominated position. “They [male inspectors] had a hard time accepting being led by a female,” she told Oracio.

While working and raising three children, Robles remained involved with LULAC at the local and national level, being appointed national secretary in 1964 and serving in this capacity for six years under five presidents. She was the first woman to be appointed to the board of directors of SER-Jobs for Progress, the job-training program that LULAC initiated. By the 1970s, most LULAC councils were integrated and women members were also able to run for national office.

Robles told Martin that she had several mentors in LULAC, and it was Jorge Alfred Hernandez, a civil rights leader from East Texas and president of LULAC in 1969, who encouraged her to run for national president. Belen Robles became the first woman to do so in 1970 at the national convention in Laredo, Texas, in a “very macho environment,” as she explained to Oracio. She ran against four men, “so I didn’t have fun,” she told Martin. The organization was not ready for a woman president, but Robles kept running for office. In 1974, she was elected the first woman to serve as National Vice President for the Southwest.

Robles ran for the presidency again at the convention in Los Angeles and again lost to a man. The third time was the charm. In 1994 at the national convention in El Paso, Robles ran against another woman, Rosa Rosales. In a close race, Robles was the first woman to be elected national president. She was so popular that she was elected to three more terms, serving a total of four years as national president. She credits women in both the public and private sector for joining to help make Latinos more visible and successful in the United States. These women showed her how to “travel through the maze of D. C.” LULAC raised money and established an office in Washington in 1996. “This was achieved through the network of women. It was a challenge,” Robles told Oracio.

One thing, Robles said, that does bother her is that “highly successful Latinas in influential positions don’t do enough to help other Latinas. They feel they did it [succeeded] on their own, but hardly anyone does this alone. We need to have more successful Latinas help others.” When Oracio asked what priorities Latinas of this generation should have, Robles responded by saying, “You must be well-rounded and take advantage of all educational opportunities and develop *people* skills. The only barriers and obstacles you have you put there yourself. You must have passion, dedication, perseverance. You must set goals – short-term, long-term – and be flexible.”

Although Robles says she has been passionate about all areas that concern Latinos, education appears to be her primary issue. From the beginning, LULAC has provided scholarships and other financial aid for deserving students, money at the local council level coming from enchilada dinners in the early years. In 1973 during Robles’ tenure as chairperson of the board of LULAC, the organization implemented a national scholarship program focused on Latinos. Over the years, millions of dollars have been matched at the national level from corporations for students through LULAC’s National Educational Service Centers (LNEC).

Education and employment go hand in hand, said Robles. “If parents don’t have good jobs, it will impact education. If health care for the child or parents is not good, it will affect education. Everything is interwoven,” she told Oracio. Robles has never been content to let others make the decisions on these issues. “You must be at the table where these decisions are made,” she continued. “Be part of the boards of financial institutions that finance these businesses.” Robles said she believes that women in leadership positions bring more to the table than leadership skills. “We pay attention to details,” she told Oracio.

Although retired from her federal job, Robles is anything but retired. Still active in LULAC at the national and local levels, she is the marketing director for the El Paso Fiesta de las Flores held at the El Paso County Coliseum during Labor Day weekend, a money maker for LULAC scholarships. And true to her belief that one must be at the table where decisions are

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tanning. Colonists cultivated grapes, apples, pears, apricots and peaches, as well as artichokes and asparagus, some of which was taken by thieving neighbors.

But the climate was no friend to the farmers. Heat warped irrigation pipes. Floods washed away new crops. Fires destroyed farm equipment. Soon, the huge farming enterprise was overrun with debt.

The colonists also had an extensive herd of dairy cattle to provide milk for the children. High-quality cattle that filled barns and corrals gradually decreased in number as neighboring families also made off with the colony's animals.

While the external complications were plenty, it was the internal strife that brought about the colony's demise.

During Shalam's conception in 1884, Newbrough was still married to his first wife, Rachel. He was granted a divorce on Oct. 6, 1886. Newbrough and Frances Sweet were married in 1887, causing dissension amongst the colonists, as well as rumors of free-love and easy character.

The well publicized trial of Ellis vs. Howland and Newbrough over ownership of the land and delay of agricultural plans also played a major role in the demise of the colony. Cutting remakes made by the presiding judge, Justice A. A. Freeman, caused derogatory publicity, and recruitment of potential colonists came to a halt.

Ultimate disaster befell the colony in 1891 when Newbrough died of influenza. Frances Newbrough and Andrew Howland attempted to revive the faded dream. In 1893 they were married to quiet sordid rumors. For almost a decade, they struggled to keep the colony going.

By 1900, Shalam was destitute. The school closed, children rebelled and colonists squabbled. They officially disbanded in 1901, with the remaining children sent to orphanages in Texas and Colorado.

Andrew Howland sold Shalam in 1907 for \$60,000. He and Frances settled in El Paso, selling vegetarian snacks.

The Newbroughs' daughter, Justine, changed her name to Jone Howland, and wrote for an El Paso newspaper.

Never reaching the hundreds predicted, the 50 children of Shalam grew up, most abandoning their Faithist training. Some found relatives, others wandered.

The Faithists of Shalam scattered throughout the West. Some started their own colonies, all to be short-lived. In 1942, Faithists led by Wing Anderson bought property in Utah and Colorado for orphanages and agriculture. Today, there are about 1,500 Faithists in the United States, and the *Oahspe* is still in print and available online, but very little of Shalam can be seen. Amidst cottonwood trees stands the studio, the sole surviving building, where Newbrough painted religious art while children colored at his feet.

The history of this short-lived utopian society, laced with fact and fiction, is attracting new attention. The Shalam Colony & Oahspe Museum in Las Cruces is located at 1910 Calle de Niños. T. Robin Riley, a former NMSU professor now teaching in Minnesota, has recently produced a documentary film on the colony and curated an exhibit in 2009 at the Farm and Ranch Museum in Las Cruces. Can Hollywood be far behind? 🍿

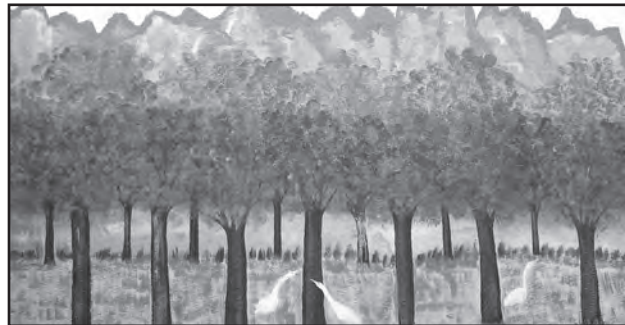
*Stahmann continued from page 9*

building, the slaughtering and freezing plants for the geese, a blacksmith shop, a machine shop, a store and a clinic with a nurse, producing the atmosphere of a little town.

Employees lived in company housing and in early days bought their food and other necessities in a commissary which became the Stahmann Country Store, the retail outlet for pecans and related products. Later a modern three-story processing plant replaced the other two plants, and mechanical shakers greatly reduced the number of employees. By 1989, the Stahmanns halted processing activities, but they worked with the New Mexico Department of Labor to retrain and find their former employees other jobs.

Deane also built an airstrip high atop a mesa on his property and acquired several aircraft, including B-26 bombers used in World War II and small jets, that he used for various activities, such as crow patrol (the birds love pecans), spraying of herbicides and fertilizer and freight and charter passenger service. At one time, he even provided commuter airline service in southern New Mexico.

In the 1960s, Deane's son, Deane Jr., worked for Barry Goldwater and announced he would leave the country if Lyndon Johnson became president. Johnson did—and so did Deane Jr. He convinced his father to buy 1,800 acres in New South Wales, Australia, to establish a branch of Stahmann Farms, and in 1965



**This mural on the side of the Country Store depicts Stahmann Farms' young trees. (Photo by Heather Coons)**

planted the first pecan trees at his farm named Las Piedras ("the rocks" or "the stones" in Spanish) at Gatton in Queensland. Soon after, he did the same at the much larger farm named Trawalla (Aboriginal for "flood waters") near Moree in New South Wales. In 1979, Deane Jr. sold 250,000 pounds of the nuts in the shell to China, opening an important market.

Deane Sr. died in 1970, and many changes occurred at the Mesilla Valley farm over the next few years. Cotton ceased to be planted, and the tree nursery was phased out. The chickens were sold and the facilities leased to a Mississippi firm with the agreement that the Stahmanns would still get the manure from the chickens. While Bill Stahmann was in charge of the American operations, Deane Jr. managed the Australian farms.

The Australian branch of Stahmann Farms funded research to find alternate ways to rid the trees of two main pests, the green vegetable bug and the Maroga or stem girdler, and introduced a native wasp and a South American parasite which all but eliminated these threats to the trees. Biological solutions are still an important part of Stahmann's operations both in Australia and New Mexico, the latter farm using ladybugs and lacewing flies, among other natural controls. The Australian farm employs a full time entomologist. In 2010, the first fully certified organic pecans are being produced at the farm near Gatton in Australia.

Stahmann trees provide a beautiful canopy of shade for travelers and tourists who take the slow rural road to Las Cruces from El Paso. Today, Stahmann's in the Mesilla Valley is still operated by the family and the 128,000 trees produce some 8,000,000 pounds of Western Schley and Bradley varieties of pecans per year. A large variety of candies, snacks and gift items are available at the Stahmann Country Store and also may be ordered online. One hundred years after the Stahmann family came to the Southwest for health reasons, the name still stands for quality pecans and innovative farming methods. 🌳

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made, Robles is the Trustee for District 3 of El Paso Community College.

When Jessica Oracio asked Robles, "What do you foresee for the Latina community?" she responded quickly, "There is no limit nowadays. It's wide open when you have Justice Sotomayor in the Supreme Court, when you see Latina women in aerospace, the military, boards of major corporations. I am a strong proponent of educating the women because you educate the family."

The senior class of Bowie High School knew what they were doing when they selected Belen Robles "Most Likely to Succeed" all those many years ago! ☺

*Toltec continued from page 16*

June Davidson, an actor with the Upstairs Theater, stated in an *El Paso Times* article written by Pat Henry entitled "Spooked Actors Insist 'Stage Fright' is No Act," that stage lights would mysteriously change colors or explode and props would fall for no reason.

Bill Logan, another thespian with the Upstairs Theater, stated in that same article that he and two others saw the image of Pancho Villa across the street and heard the jangling of his spurs on the first floor.

I had to know if the building was really haunted. Playing a hunch, I went downtown and ended up having a conversation with the law office's receptionist, Natalie Castillo, mentioned at the beginning of this story.

Not only did Castillo admit to seeing things out of the corner of her eye and feeling as if someone else were in the room, she also recalled hearing from housekeeping staff that doors rattled for no reason. Castillo was adamant that the activity was in no way negative. "It's not bad. I just know something's there."

Just a little over 100 years ago, El Paso's social elite gathered together to form an alliance in an effort to build a better city for future generations. Because of their commitment, the borderland prospered. The Toltec Building was the home for these progressive-minded individuals, and its members left us with more than the buildings and improvements they made for our area, like Elephant Butte Dam, the electric and water companies, banks, schools and the university. They left us with a legacy: working together for the prosperity of the community.

Too many important people walked the halls of the Toltec Building, and too many important events took place inside its sacred walls for it not to have left an indelible mark. Whether it's haunted or not, the building's unique shape and history make it one of El Paso's major landmarks. 🏢

# The Toltec Club: Of Ghosts and Guests

By Heather Coons

**H**ave you ever felt the hair on the back of your neck rise, but when you look around, nothing is there?

According to Natalie Castillo, a law office receptionist on the third floor of the Toltec Building, working late on Saturday nights can be an uncomfortable experience.

"I feel like I'm not alone," Castillo admitted. "I'll see something from the corner of my eye, and I'll turn and look, but nothing's there." She is not the only person to report strange happenings at the Toltec over the years.

So what went on in this El Paso building that most people do not know by name and that ghosts may still be haunting? From 1911 through 1930, the vast majority of political and business decisions affecting El Paso were made there, and every prominent guest to the area was entertained in El Paso's Toltec Club.

Historian C. L. Sonnichsen explained in his book *Pass of the North: Four Centuries on the Rio Grande* that the uproar at the turn of the 20th century over gambling, dancing, saloons and prostitution caused a group of elite members to break away from The El Paso Club and start a new club for witty, knowledgeable businessmen who could lead El Paso into a new era.

Founding members declared in an article published in the *El Paso Herald* on Feb. 3, 1902, "We shall have a club modeled along the lines of modern eastern [U. S.] clubs ... and make it worthy of the new El Paso." This article also reported on an unusual feature of the club's proposed "social hour": to discuss business and personal matters, an element that was predicted to become a "popular movement in El Paso."

Thanks to founding members W. H. Burges, T. M. Wingo, Felix Martinez, W. W. Turney, A. P. Coles, Britton Davis and brothers J. Arthur Eddy and C. B. Eddy, the Toltec (meaning "man of knowledge") Club was born. Members of the exclusive club for men signed articles of incorporation on Nov. 18, 1902. Shortly thereafter, ground broke for the \$100,000 brick five-story building to be constructed on the site of the former First Baptist Church at the intersection of San Antonio and Magoffin Streets.

The gentlemen of the Toltec Club immediately set out to build a clubhouse that was every bit as polished as they were, with the newest and best of materials and furnishings brought in from around the world via railroad. The "flatiron" shape of the building also drew interest and to this day demands second and third looks by downtown visitors.

Leon Metz wrote in his book *El Paso Chronicles* that the new Toltec Building was declared to be the "brightest spot of its time in El Paso" when the doors officially opened on Oct. 14, 1910. With a high initiation fee of \$100 and yearly dues of \$50, membership was guaranteed to remain exclusive. The membership list of the Toltec Club read like a "Who's Who" of El Paso society. Besides the

original members, some of the more prominent members included Joseph Magoffin, founder of the first bank in El Paso and civic leader, and Henry C. Trost, the Southwest's foremost architect, who arrived in El Paso in 1903.

The Toltec Club had one of the grandest ballrooms in the area, along with a dining room that claimed to have the finest cuisine in the country. The building featured a billiards room, reading rooms, lounging rooms and apartments for bachelor members. Members also gathered in the gaming room for high-stakes gambling, according to an article in *Password* by Robert M. Esch.

Members enjoyed this "civilized" gambling, but they believed that the rough-and-tumble local saloons, prostitutes and unrestricted gambling

explained in his book *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez: 1893-1923* that middle- and upper-class businessmen, politicians and intellectuals, like Mexican entrepreneur Oscar Braniff and El Paso's own Felix Martinez, carried out peace negotiations between Madero and the Díaz Administration at the Toltec Club.

President Díaz resigned after the Battle of Ciudad Juárez on May 18, 1911, and Madero, the new president of Mexico, was honored at a victory banquet held at the Toltec Club. In the very same building that had entertained former President Díaz, Madero sat alongside his only invited officer, Eduardo Hay, and the defeated, yet dignified, Gen. Juan Navarro.

From 1911 through 1917, the most important guests in the area were entertained at the Toltec Club. Former president Theodore Roosevelt visited on several occasions and on March 16, 1911, Roosevelt was in "high spirits" and "ate heartily" at a breakfast held in the Toltec dining room, according to an article in the *El Paso Times*.

Gen. John J. Pershing was also honored at the Toltec Club after pursuing Pancho Villa, who, according to Metz and Romo, rented the first floor of the Toltec Club during the Mexican Revolution as his headquarters for smuggling munitions.

However, the immense power of the Toltec Club could not withstand the blow of Prohibition during which many El Paso establishments moved across the border to Juárez. America's economic collapse during the Great Depression caused the members of the Toltec Club to close its doors in 1930.

Although lacking its original splendor both inside and out, the privately owned Toltec Building still stands in downtown El Paso across from the Federal Building. The historically significant Renaissance/Beaux Arts architectural style, engineered by J. J. Huddart, and the vastly significant social and political functions that took place inside its doors allowed it to be recorded in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

After the club disbanded, the Toltec Building became the home of several businesses: Leo's Mexican Food in the 1950s, the Upstairs Theater Downtown in the 1970s, Dominic's Italian Restaurant (now at another location) and a bail bonds company on the first floor. But aside from the law office that has remained on the third floor for more than 30 years, businesses don't stay at the Toltec. Why would such a beautiful old building stand basically empty?

Two El Paso natives, Ken Hudnall and Connie Wang, wrote in *Spirits of the Border: The History and Mystery of the El Paso Del Norte* that while the Upstairs Theater occupied the ballroom, unexplained incidents often occurred.



When the building was completed in 1910, the Toltec Club was considered the finest social gathering place in El Paso. (Photo by Heather Coons)

hindered the development of a progressive city. This group of prominent men was united in the desire to stop the political corruption that was rife throughout the area.

Although membership was exclusively male, the gentlemen of the Toltec Club held regular lavish events to entertain their wives, who wore formal evening gowns; tails and ties for men were mandatory. The annual New Year's Eve masquerade ball brought much anticipation and excitement. Sonnichsen wrote that the men took pride in their annual stag dinners that were held to elect club officers, events that also demanded tails and ties.

The Toltec Club became the headquarters for the El Paso Bar Association, and they, too, held annual voting dinners to elect club officers. El Paso's Elk Lodge 187 was also housed at the Toltec.

Not only did many of El Paso's business and political decisions and debates and glitzy socializing take place at the Toltec Club during the early 1900s, but the Toltec Club also played a prominent role in the Mexican Revolution.

In 1910, Mexico's president, Porfirio Díaz, was under pressure from Francisco I. Madero and his general, Pancho Villa, to resign. David D. Romo

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