

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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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. ♀

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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. ♀

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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. ♀

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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. ♀