

Engineer and Editor Juan Hart Moved El Paso Forward

By Juana Black, Charles Gabriel and Kevin Guerrero

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

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

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

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

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

At the height of the silver boom in 1878, Hart traveled to Leadville, CO, where he began his career in engineering with former schoolmate, J. C. Carrera. The death of one of his sisters brought Hart home. Because there were no railroads to El Paso yet, Hart purchased a horse and buggy in Leadville and set out alone, traveling over mountains and across deserts in Indian country. It took him 40 days to get home. Like his father, Hart held family foremost in importance.

Hart’s next engineering ventures took place in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, where he surveyed several large haciendas, including the Corralitos property, one of the largest land holdings in the entire country. Once his surveying was complete, Hart took the position of manager for a large gold mining property at Ocampo, Chihuahua, owned by his old friend, Sen. Horace Tabor of Colorado.

Throughout this time, Hart returned to El Paso often, and in the early 1880s, decided to stay to run his father’s estate. He continued his engineering career and was appointed city engineer, at which time he began drafting the first official map of El

Paso. Known as “Hart’s Map,” it was officially adopted in 1881.

According to *The Texas Handbook Online*, it was also in 1881, after Joseph Magoffin was elected mayor, that Hart joined one of the city’s first two baseball teams, playing both first and second base. So named because of the color of their socks, belts, shirts and stripes on their caps, the El Paso Browns took the Southwest Championship in 1886, with Percy Williams on the pitcher’s mound and Hart on second base.

In 1881, three newspapers began publishing in the city – the *El Paso Times*, the *El Paso Herald* and the *El Paso Independent*. More by accident than by design, Hart found himself following in his father’s footsteps when he joined the newspaper business after coming to the assistance of Mrs. Horace W.

campaign eventually materialized as the Elephant Butte Dam, completed in 1916.

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

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

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

In 1885, Hart used his engineering knowledge to investigate the new courthouse being built, and finding faulty construction, used the *Times* to publish his findings, ultimately leading to a correction of all wrongdoings and restitution of misspent taxpayer money.

Not only did Hart promote reform and uncover corruption, but on more than one occasion, he used the *Times* to prevent social violence. In 1886, A. K. Cutting, an American living across the border, was arrested then convicted of libel after his Paso del Norte (today’s Ciudad Juárez) newspaper accused Emigdio Medina, who had circulated a prospectus of a competing

newspaper, of fraud and swindling. The American Consul, the State Department and the Mexican government were soon all involved.

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

According to W. W. Bridgers’ article, “Bread and Bullets,” Hart again quieted local hotheads in 1894. A contingent of the first march to Washington, DC, of the unemployed and hungry during the country’s worst depression to that point in history, known as



Juan Hart used his education to help El Paso grow and prosper. He served in the Spanish-American War. (Photo courtesy of the University of Texas at El Paso Library, Special Collections Department)

Kelly, whose husband owned the *Independent*. On Jan. 2, 1882, the Kelly’s newspaper changed names to the *El Paso Link*, with Hart as editor.

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

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

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Coxey's Army, was scheduled to arrive in El Paso. Fiery orators easily turned residents against these protestors, who wanted the federal government to provide jobs for them. The sheriff and town marshal called for armed volunteers to repulse the marchers and keep them out of El Paso.

Bridgers stated that Hart, known for his own skills in oration, shamed the townsfolk for attempting to shoot "defenseless men whose only crime was that they were ragged and hungry." Instead of violence, Hart said, "let us greet them with bread." Marchers were met not with guns, but with food. This was an example of the compassion Hart displayed throughout his life.

According to Roderick, Hart developed a reputation "as a fearless writer and an honest, incorruptible newspaper man." This reputation led Hart to be elected the 11th President of the Texas Press Association in 1890. In 1896, Hart was also selected the Democratic candidate for Congress for the 13th District, but he lost by a narrow margin to J. H. Stephens.

In May 1898, Hart was asked to recruit a company of soldiers for the Spanish-American War, which he did through the *Times*. In three days, 115 men had signed up. Hart was given a commission as Captain and would be known by that title the rest of his life. The war ended before the men finished their training in Galveston. Although Hart's company never saw combat, President McKinley chose Hart as a member of the Cuba Commission to negotiate Spain's surrender, as he was fluent in Spanish, among other languages.

According to an *El Paso Herald-Post* article dated March 4, 1938, Hart acted as an interpreter for Maj. Gen. William R. Shafter after the surrender of Santiago. Hart then served on the staff of Maj. Gen. Fitzhugh Lee, who was made military governor of Havana and Pinar del Rio and was also a member of the American evacuation board.

After a year in Havana, Hart returned to El Paso. He began crusading against open gambling and brothels, helping to bring about reform through the mayoral election of Charles R. Morehead in 1902. Morehead and Hart also shared a belief that El Paso needed an adequate supply of well water from the mesas, instead of the muddy Rio Grande. This ultimately led to a municipally owned water

company in 1910, ending Hart's decade-long crusade for "Pure Mesa Water."

Hart also spent years advocating for a railway to extend north from El Paso. The line, which would eventually run all the way to Kansas City, MO, connected El Pasoans with the cool summer air of Cloudcroft, NM.

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

the largest funeral in El Paso's history, Hart's body was placed in the family tomb built on the homestead and later moved to El Paso's Evergreen Cemetery in 1936.

Hart never married, but he was considered a charming "man about town." He was a gifted orator as well as editor. He played the trombone in the McGinty Club band and baseball to entertain El Pasoans. He served his country as an interpreter, and he served his city as a volunteer



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

Legislature to establish a school to serve El Paso's extensive mining industry. This materialized in 1914 with the Texas State School of Mines and Metallurgy, today known as UTEP.

After a previously unsuccessful attempt at retirement, Hart sold the *Times* on April 22, 1910. For the first time in more than 25 years, Hart's voice was silent in the press.

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

firefighter. Hart also helped to organize the El Paso Pioneer Association and was the permanent vice president.

To honor Hart's military service, in 1938, Spanish-American war veterans formed the Juan S. Hart Camp. In 1973, Hart was inducted into the El Paso County Historical Society's Hall of Honor for being a leading voice as a pioneering editor for almost three decades in all endeavors to move El Paso forward as a city. 📖

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

True Women, published in 1993, deals with ancestors on both her mother's and father's sides, with action beginning in 1754 and ending in 1946. The title is taken from an 1868 Reconstruction Convention committee report stating that "true women" did not desire the right to vote. Windle worked all week at the foundation and then flew to Seguin on weekends to interview family members. She signed a contract with Putnam Publishing House and won a \$100,000 advance. The book sold more than 500,000 copies. *True Women* was turned into a CBS miniseries starring Dana Delany and Angelina Jolie and was made available as a DVD in 2004.

Hill Country, Windle's second novel, is about the life and political activism of her paternal grandmother,

Laura Hoge Woods. She often wrote President Lyndon Johnson, the son of her best friend, expressing her opinions, and he once called her for advice on how to end the Vietnam War. She told him his problem was that "you do not have enough Texans in your cabinet." Woods had begun to write a book about her life when she was in her 70s; she won election to public office at 87. When she died in 1966, she left a cardboard box marked "For Janice when I'm gone," providing material which Windle used in the book, published in 1998.

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

Like her grandmother, Laura Woods, Windle was always interested in politics. She worked actively on various political campaigns, including those for former president Lyndon B. Johnson and former Texas governor

Ann Richards. Known throughout the country for her foundation work, she was part of a delegation that helped Costa Rica establish the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress. In addition, she, along with 13 other delegates, was chosen to spend three weeks assisting the newly elected Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, in 1991 to establish a non-profit sector.

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

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