



Hands Across History



A joint newsletter for the White Sands Historical Foundation and the White Sands Pioneer Group.

Volume XV, Letter I

February 2019

WSMR Breaks Ground For New Museum Exhibit Hall!

This piece is a fusion of stories by Miriam Rodriguez, WSMR Public Affairs Office, and Jim Eckles

It was nearly 25 years in the making but on Tuesday, January 15, officials at White Sands Missile Range broke ground for a new permanent Museum exhibit hall. Up until now, the Museum exhibit hall has been a

jury-rigged system of small temporary buildings joined together to make a large space.

This small step begins a process that members of the White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation have been striving toward for a quarter of a century.

See Top Goal Is Accomplished, page 4



Jon Gibson, left, WSMR Historical Foundation treasurer, and Frances Williams, the Foundation's president, present Brig. Gen. Gregory Brady with a symbolic check for the construction of the new Museum building. Photo by Jim Eckles

White Sands Now Accepting Hall Of Fame Nominations

White Sands Missile Range is now accepting nominations from all sources until the end of March for its Hall of Fame.

The Hall of Fame was established in 1980, and the purpose is to give appropriate and perpetual recognition to those members of the WSMR workforce, military and civilian, who have made singularly significant contributions to the mission on the Range and to the surrounding communities. It is the highest award the missile range can bestow on one of its own.

Six individuals were inducted into the Hall of Fame on July 4, 1980. They were: Colonel Harold Turner, first range commander; Dr. Werhner von Braun, rocket scientist; Clyde Tombaugh, chief of optical measurements; Benjamin Billups, chief of plans; Frank Hemingway, technical director of the national range; and Gabriel Brillante, public affairs officer.

The hall of fame includes 53 members. It contains both men and women, both civilian and military personnel, both government and contractor employees and

a huge mix of professions - everything from chaplain to missile flight safety to public affairs to professional engineer to equal employment opportunity to "mover and shaker." It is the embodiment of "Team WSMR," the phrase missile range leaders have thrown around for decades.

For information on nomination procedures or to request an updated copy of the White Sands Hall of Fame Guide, call the WSMR Public Affairs Office, (575) 678-1134. The guide contains the forms, guidelines and procedures for nomination.

To get into the hall of fame a nominee must have been responsible for significant and lasting deeds or achievements during their career at WSMR. The contributions may be in various areas such as research, innovations, cost savings, technological advances, safety, public relations, equal opportunity or heroic deeds.

All former military, civilian and contractor personnel who served at WSMR are eligible for nomination. No one currently working at the range is eligible.

Honor Donations To The White Sands Historical Foundation

In Honor of Jon Gibson
from Arthur and Rebecca Berkson

In Honor of Frances Williams
from Elbe Burke

In Memory of Bruce Galloway
from Jon Gibson and Patrick Quinlan

In Memory of Austin Vick
from John and Donna Van Buecken

Statement of Purpose and Membership

The "Hands Across History" newsletter is published by the White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation and the White Sands Pioneer Group (WSPG). Both nonprofit organizations aim to preserve the accomplishments of White Sands Missile Range.

The newsletter is intended to keep members of both groups informed about current events and share information of common interest. The edi-

tor is Jim Eckles. He can be contacted by email at nebraska1950@comcast.net or at either address below.

Membership to either organization is open to anyone who shares their goals. However, details of membership (dues, etc.) differ between the two groups. For more information, please contact the appropriate organization and we will send it via the Post Office or email.

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Gene Rhodes Hits The Screen At Pat Garrett Festival

By Jim Eckles, Editor *HAAH*

On February 2, members of the Dona Ana County Historical Society, in conjunction with the Rio Grande Theater in Las Cruces, put on the Pat Garrett Western Heritage Festival. The event featured a live performance of western songs featuring such Old West characters as Pat Garrett, Billy the Kid and Jesse James; a reading of letters from Pat Garrett to his wife Apolonaria; a talk on Pat Garrett's last days; a dramatic reenactment of the March 8, 1908 courtroom examination of Wayne Brazel for killing Garrett using nothing but the words from the official transcription; and the showing of two movies that featured Pat Garrett as a main character - *Bill The Kid* (1930) and *Four Faces West* (1948).

Of course, the territory that now makes up White Sands Missile Range is home to some of the history portrayed during the event. When Pat Garrett first captured Billy the Kid (BTK) in December 1880, he took him to Mesilla for trial. After BTK was found guilty in a Mesilla courtroom in April 1881 he was sentenced to hang in May. Garrett transported BTK through what is now the missile range. Dave Thomas, a local historian and author thinks they may have come down San Nicholas Canyon stopping at the Dave Wood ranch - Wood was one of the guards during the move.

Chalk Hill, where prominent Las Cruces lawyer Albert Fountain and his son Albert disappeared on Feb. 1, 1896, is just beside U.S. Highway 70 near the Dona Ana/Otero County line. Their bodies were never found but there was enough blood at the scene to assume the worst. Pat Garrett was called to Las Cruces and made sheriff of Dona Ana County to bring the killers to justice.

Later, Pat Garrett established a ranch on the east side of the Organ Mountains, just north of U.S. Highway 70. The spot where the house once stood is just west of EMRE in the White Sands Hazardous Test Area. This is where Garrett was living with Apolonaria and his many children when he was gunned down east of Las Cruces in

the Alameda Arroyo on Feb. 29, 1908. Wayne Brazel surrendered to deputy sheriff Felipe Lucero in Las Cruces claiming self defense. Many don't believe he did it. Garrett's ranch house is long gone.

Felipe and Jose Lucero traded off being sheriff and deputy sheriff of Dona Ana County for the first few decades of the 20th century. Their ranches are along Range Road 7 near Lake Lucero on the missile range.

Another connection to the Garrett Festival is the fact that *Four Faces West* was based on a short novel by Eugene Manlove Rhodes called *Paso Por Aqui*. The book first appeared serialized in the Saturday Evening Post in February 1926 and was put between hard covers after that.

Gene Rhodes still has a large presence on the missile range's geography. Rhodes Canyon and Rhodes Pass in the San Andres Mountains are named after him. Range Road 6 follows the old New Mexico State Route 52 through the canyon and pass. Deep in the canyon is Rhodes spring where water still trickles into a concrete springbox. This is where Rhodes had his ranch headquarters at the end of the 19th century.

Rhodes, who died on June 27, 1934, is buried in Rhodes Pass on the north side of RR6, near the WSMR west boundary. At the time, the Hardin family donated the plot of ground for his grave. It is marked with a large red sandstone boulder bearing a bronze plaque

See Rhodes Canyon Range Camp, page 6



Top Goal Is Accomplished — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The money for the new structure (\$858,433) was donated to the Army by the Historical Foundation, a non-profit organization created to support the Museum. During the ceremony, Frances Williams, current president of the Foundation, and Jon Gibson, its treasurer, presented WSMR Commander Brig. Gen. Greg Brady with a symbolic check for the construction costs.

The foundation's number one goal has always been to build a permanent structure for the museum. It started small with a contribution to help build the current permanent structure that today serves as the museum's entrance and offices.

Over the past two decades, foundation members have been fund raising and collecting donations from local companies, offices and individuals interested in preserving the unique history at WSMR. Frances Williams thanked all the donors, large and small. She joked she has spent a lot of time assembling and selling fajita pitas for this cause.

In 1992, the commanding general of WSMR

at the time, Brig. Gen. Richard W. Wharton, Jr., was interested in starting a museum at WSMR. Up until then, the missile range had a "visitors center" that was housed in the old Public Affairs structure – Bldg. 122. The old building was one of the original WSMR buildings and served as an officer's mess and then the first officers club. It was a crude, uninsulated, World War II, temporary building resting on a foundation of stones. Wharton wanted something better.

So he called on three civilian employees and told them to start a museum. Wharton had a small portable building from HELSTF moved to an empty lot where the permanent museum now stands. WSMR employees Ed Townley and Irving Rubenstein then wrote a grant requesting the seed money to start a museum foundation, which would be the fund raising arm for the museum. The White Sands Missile Range museum was founded in 1994.

Ed Townley was at the ceremony and said, "This

See Offered A Job That Day, page 5



Manning golden shovels and protected by hard hats, this group broke ground for the new building. They are, from the left: Command Sergeant Major William Wofford, WSMR Commander Brig. Gen. Gregory Brady, Test Center Commander Colonel David Cheney, Garrison Commander Colonel Christopher Ward, Garrison Command Sergeant Major Robert Parker, WSMR Historical Foundation president Frances Williams, WSMR Historical Foundation treasurer Jon Gibson, Field Representative for Senator Martin Heinrich Ms. Dara Parker, Field Representative for Senator Tom Udall Mr. Rene Romo and head of the WSMR Directorate of Public Works Jose Gallegos. Photo by Jim Eckles

Museum Is WSMR's Front Porch — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

is gratifying. It is great. When we first started we thought we were going to have a small gift shop, a small temporary museum.”

Townley said it is overwhelming to see what has happened over the last 20 years. He added that the moving of the missile park was visionary. “It was about to deteriorate in front of Headquarters where it used to be, especially the V-2, and through donations and volunteers they got behind that and got the V-2 refurbished and rebuilt and built a permanent home for it.”

Brig. Gen. Brady opened his remarks by stating the Museum was the front porch for the missile range. It sits at the main gate and is a portal to all the great things that have been accomplished at White Sands. He then thanked the Foundation members for their dedication and hard work in getting to this point.

Next, Brady focused on the professional and financial contributions of former White Sands employees



Current WSMR Commander Brig. Gen. Gregory Brady thanks the WSMR Historical Foundation and all of the missile range personnel who, over the past quarter century made the new building possible. Photo by Jim Eckles

Paul and Joy Arthur. The Arthurs, both engineers, had long careers at White Sands. According to the general it was a combined 101 years of service to the country. They are the only husband and wife ever inducted into the missile range's Hall of Fame.

After the Arthurs died, their estate donated \$337,000 to the Historical Foundation to be used for the Museum. According to Williams it was the donation that finally made the contract for a new building possible.

Also present were field representative for U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich, Dara Parker, and field representative for U.S. Senator Tom Udall, Rene Romo.

“The WSMR museum is key to preserving this part of history and paying tribute to the individuals, military and civilian, working in service to our nation. I commend and thank all of those who helped make this new museum building possible. It has been a many years long effort by those who understand the immense value of the installation and its people,” Heinrich said in a letter read by Parker at the ceremony.

“This 4,000 square foot renovation would not be on the verge of becoming a reality without the determination of Museum Director Darren Court, the White Sands Missile Range Historical Foundation, and its President Francis Williams, WSMR Commander Brig. Gen. Greg Brady, and the many volunteers here today who have worked so hard on this project,” said Udall in a letter read by Romo at the ceremony

The new building can be described as a large box, covering 4,000 square feet, and will be equipped with the Army-required heating, cooling, humidity control and security systems. The large empty space will give exhibit builders from U.S. Army Center of Military History the freedom they need to put together informative displays about WSMR.

The structure is scheduled to be completed this summer but it will be some time before new displays will be available for public viewing. The Center of Military History fabricators will be working from a story line written by Darren Court, the Museum Director. They will use the current Museum collection of artifacts and data from its Archives to tell that historical story.

In an organizational move late last year, the Museum went from the operational control of WSMR to the control of the Army Center of Military History. That is why the Center of Military History will be funding and building the displays. Also, it means the Museum will now be a tenant activity at White Sands.

Rhodes Canyon Range Camp — CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

that says, “Paso Por Aqui, Eugene Manlove Rhodes.” The translation is “He Passed By Here.” An annual tour to the gravesite is sponsored by NMSU at Alamogordo and is usually held in October.



The White Sands Rhodes Range Camp at the intersection of Range Roads 6 and 7, was named after him. The range camp was once a busy hub of activity in the center of WSMR. Facilities Engineering, Logistics and Communications were all active there with personnel working regular shifts at the range camp. When I first got to WSMR in 1977, my motor pool truck had a blowout on Range Road 7 as I headed into the mountains. I didn't want to go without a spare so I stopped at the Rhodes Canyon Logistics shop and they found a new tire for my rim. I was on my way in less than an hour. Now you are on your own.

Gene Rhodes came to southern New Mexico as a boy in 1881. Rhodes wasn't much of a student in his teenage years. Instead he wanted to be a cowboy and probably spent as much time working for various cattle outfits as he did attending school.

That doesn't mean he wasn't educated. Rhodes loved to read and people who knew him said he always had a book going of essays, poetry or a novel – even while performing ranch chores. Apparently when riding from one place to another, he would swing one leg up and around his saddle horn, get comfortable and proceed to read. On one occasion he and two other cowboys were travelling through a canyon in the San Andres Mountains. Gene was at the back so he could just let his horse follow the others. On a steep slope, the horse stumbled and went crashing down the hill. When all the moving parts had stopped, the two friends shouted down to Rhodes – Gene are you OK??? After a moment, an irritated Rhodes shouted back, “Yes, but I lost my place.”

He was very proud of his cowboying skills. Later in life after he had established himself as a successful writer of western material, he complained that no one ever asked about his riding skills. He felt he could pretty much ride anything with four legs.

In *Paso Por Aqui* and the movie version, the hero Ross Ewen rides a steer when his horse plays out. Rhodes later commented that he knew how to describe that scene because he'd actually done it.

Also, he thought of himself as a tough wrestler but that might have been wishful thinking. Supposedly he was in Las Cruces one day and heard that a new student at New Mexico State A and M was a champion wrestler. Gene rode over to campus and looked up the young man. When he found him, he said, “They say you're a good wrestler.” The student said, “That's what they say.” Rhodes took off his coat and said, “let's have at it.” After the student quickly threw Gene to the ground three times, Gene got up, retrieved his coat and walked away saying, “They're right.”

In 1899 Rhodes met May Davison Purple, a widow from New York with two sons. They were soon married but quickly moved east to Apalachin, N.Y. Missing the deserts, the mountains, the people and events in New Mexico, Rhodes took to writing about it.

In many of Gene's stories it is easy to recognize the geography and many of the actual people he remembered - some of the people are thinly disguised but if you were lucky you kept your real name. His biographers all say he loved New Mexico and missed it greatly. He is credited with coining the nickname “Land of Enchantment.”

His *Paso Por Aqui* is a simple story. Ross McEwen robs bank in Belen, New Mexico to save his father's ranch back in Texas. While escaping he rides south past Socorro and across the San Andres Mountains and into the Tularosa Basin. Rhodes does a great job describing that landscape. As I read it, I kept nodding at Chupadera Mesa, Grapevine Canyon, Salinas Peak, Cottonwood Canyon, Sulphur Canyon, and so on. At one point he rides a steer though the dunes at White Sands.

McEwen is just about to make a clean getaway when he encounters a family of four near the White Sands - all sick with diphtheria. He abandons his flight to tend to the sick. Pat Garrett comes along a few days later and quickly assesses the situation realizing McEwen is the bank robber everyone is looking for. Also,

See WSMR Hall Of Fame Induction, page 7

Two Movies With Pat Garrett

seeing what McEwen has done for the family (risking his freedom and his life), Garrett says he is a man with a “backbone all the way from his neck to the seat of his pants.” In the end he lets McEwen go.

Here’s another link to WSMR. Local Rhodes experts say the choza where the sick family lived was inspired by half dugout/adobe house on the Baird ranch. The ranch is north of U.S. Highway 70 and a few miles west of Point of Sands. When I first visited the ranch in the late 1970s a sign identifying it as the said hut was still standing. It had been placed there in 1938 by the Alamogordo Rotary Club. It is long gone now.

Four Faces West turns this simple story into a pretty typical horse opera starring Joel McCrea and his wife Frances Dee. Garrett was played by Charles Bickford. One of the most enjoyable characters is the Hispanic gambler Monte, played by Joseph Calleia. There is much humor in the picture.

Much of the movie was filmed around Gallup, New Mexico with the steer-riding scene on the sand dunes at White Sands National Monument. By the way, the film totally confuses the New Mexico geography.

The world premiere for the movie was in Santa Fe on May 15, 1948. Both McCrea and Dee were there for the festivities. It started a three-day run the next day in Alamogordo. It did not show up in Las Cruces until September 1949 when it was booked into the Organ Drive-In as a second-run show.

The other movie shown at the festival, *Billy The Kid*, was produced in 1930 and did show in Las Cruces. In fact, the world premiere was in the Rio Grande Theater on October 12, 1930. It starred John Mack Brown as BTK and Wallace Beery as Pat Garrett.

According to IMDb, it was filmed at Zion and Grand Canyon National Parks, locations in California and areas around Gallup, New Mexico. There is a scene where Garrett captures BTK that was filmed at Kit Carson’s Cave outside of Gallup.

This movie was based on the 1926 book, *The Saga Of Billy The Kid* by Walter Burns. Gene Rhodes

— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

disliked the book so much he wrote a piece for *Sunset* magazine in September 1927 called “In Defense of Pat Garrett.” He accused Burns of flipping the coin on the Garrett/BTK story by making Billy a Robin Hood like character and Garrett a vicious “man hunter” instead of a “law bringer.”

According to Rhodes, Burns says Garrett unfairly did his job as sheriff and should have let BTK go since they were friends - this is after Billy killed two of Gar-



This production still from Four Faces West shows Ross McEwen (Joel McCrea) and Monte Marquez (Joseph Calleia) at the choza of the sick Mexican family discussing the chances of McEwen getting away from Pat Garrett.

rett’s deputies making his escape. Then Rhodes says Burns gives you the impression “that it was positively discourteous and unfair that Garrett did not let Billy the Kid kill him at the last.”

Although the movie was based on Burns’ book, it portrays Pat Garrett in fairly positive terms. In the end, he lets BTK go instead of shooting him. Its a typical Hollywood ending for its time.

Although Burns has won the perception battle for now (Americans do love their sweetheart killers) the festival organizers felt their presentations might help swing the pendulum of public opinion back in favor of Pat Garrett. After all, Gene Rhodes who actually knew Pat Garrett would have certainly characterized Garrett as a “man with a backbone from his neck down to the seat of his pants.”

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The Back Page



Members of the WSMR Historical Foundation board of directors present at the Museum ground breaking ceremony. They are from the left: Randy Grunow, Sharon Reese, Jon Gibson, Bill Godby, Jim Eckles, Dolores Archuleta, Frances Williams and seated is Mary Beth Reinhart. Over the years there have been many who have served on the board.....this just happens to be most of the current batch. Missing are Debra Hathaway, Bob Lipinski and David Soules. Photo by Chuck Roberts from the WSMR Public Affairs Office.