

# T• Museum Times



NEW MEXICO HISTORY MUSEUM | PALACE OF THE GOVERNORS | HISTORY LIBRARY | PHOTO ARCHIVES | PALACE PRESS | PORTAL PROGRAM



## It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas

In 1982, the Palace of the Governors paired with the Bank of Santa Fe to create a three-day holiday extravaganza dubbed "Christmas at the Palace." Storyteller Joe Hayes was among the inaugural performers, along with various musical groups. A Santa Fe Opera seamstress whipped up Santa's elaborate coat, San Juan Pueblo dancers performed in the courtyard, and a tradition was born.

A few years later, Las Posadas joined the museum's festivities. The symbolic search by Joseph and Mary for an inn was borrowed from a nearby neighborhood, where the little celebration had grown too large for the residents' narrow lanes.

This year's events kick off at 5:30 pm on Friday, December 11. We're stocking up: 60 gallons of hot apple cider, 1,500 cookies, countless candy canes, firewood for bonfires, and materials for making crafts. The Palace Press is folding printer's hats, the devils are buffing up their costumes, and we hear a jolly old elf has made plans to appear with the ever-lovely Mrs. Claus.

Join us also for the Young Native Artists Winter Show that weekend, and you may be able to fill up the stockings of all your significant others.

An army of staffers and volunteers make our holiday events happen, and everything is free to the public. Should you feel inclined, bring nonperishable food to spread the spirit of giving to those less fortunate.



History Museum security officers include (first row, left to right) Tina Salazar, Phillip Montoya, and Orlando Martinez Jr.; (second row) Sgt. Jason Tapia, Joseph Lujan, and Paul Pacheco; (back row) Marvin Romero, Joshua Montoya, Orlando Martinez Sr., and David Gallegos. Other officers are pictured on page 2.

## We're in Good Hands

**F**rom 6 am until 5:30 pm—and often later—the New Mexico History Museum and Palace of the Governors fall into the capable hands of our security staff.

Currently 14 people strong, the crew does everything from ensuring precious artifacts are safe to dealing with customer complaints, helping fix broken toilets, finding lost children, explaining portions of exhibits to visitors—and then some.

"A lot of things happen in a day that most people don't see," said Steve Baca, the museum's security captain. "Most people don't even realize how many things we have going on."

Security shifts start at 6 am, when that day's early-bird officer opens the museum to let the cleaning crew in. Other officers arrive at 8 am, unless it's a Free Friday Evening day, when a third shift is delayed until 11 am. Those days last until 8:30 pm, but typically, officers are locking up the buildings at 5:30 pm.

If we have special events, then we're looking at overtime hours and sometimes borrowing officers from our sister museums. When staffing is critically short, all museum workers may be asked to keep an eye on parts of the museum.

While on duty, officers rotate among seven posts that include the front desks, the Washington Avenue doors, and exhibition galleries throughout both buildings.

"I always tell them," Baca said, "that we take a lot of things for granted because we're around it all the time. 'Oh, it's just a painting.' But you forget that the *continued* ▶

# Calendar

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2

### Brainpower & Brownbags Lecture, noon, Meem Community Room

Author Lesley Poling-Kempes speaks on her newest book, *Ladies of the Canyons: A League of Extraordinary Women and Their Adventures in the American Southwest*. Enter for free through the museum's Washington Avenue doors.

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4

### "Treasures from a Trunk: The Costumes of Los Pastores," 5:30 pm

Get a peek at costumes and props found in an old steamer trunk and learn about the traditional Nativity play, *Los Pastores* ("The Shepherds"). A Free First Friday Evening event. Free admission 5–8 pm.

## FRIDAY–SUNDAY, DECEMBER 4–6

### Museum shops sale for employees and volunteers

Show your badge for a 30 percent discount on all items at each of the museum shops. Start your holiday shopping—and maybe finish it, too.

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5

### Los Compadres holiday meeting, 10 am, Meem Community Room

Members of this important support group toast the end of a successful year with a brunch meeting and election of new officers for 2016.



## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6

### Wool and Weaving Day, 1:30–4 pm

In collaboration with the Española Valley Fiber Arts Center, we offer the premiere of a new 20-minute film, *An Unbroken Thread: Wool & Weaving in Northern New Mexico*, at 1:30 and 2:30 pm in the auditorium. All afternoon, weavers and museum educators will showcase finished textiles, offer demonstrations and let you try your hand at weaving. Free with admission. Sundays free to NM residents; children 16 and under free daily.

## We're in Good Hands *continued*



Other security officers are (above, from left) Jason Crawford, Grace Duran, John Lopez and Ernie Rodriguez. Security Captain Steve Baca (right) perches on the Palace of the Governors roof.



gallery is worth \$3.5 million. Or that you can lose a kid in the building. Big things are going to happen, but if we pay attention to the small things, it all goes better."

Officer training include annual CPR classes and an active-shooter course in case of an attack.

"People like working here because of its history," Security Sgt. Jason Tapia said. "You get to meet people from all over the world. And for the younger guards, it's a good steppingstone for them."

Every officer brings different talents to the job, and Baca said the trick is finding out what they are and matching them to specific tasks. Who's good at fixing things? Who's good at getting unruly schoolchildren to line up? Who's good at defusing a tense situation with humor?

"Some people work here because they like their culture, they like being downtown, being a part of history," he said. "Some people just need a job. And there are people who enjoy history and are people persons, so they like talking to visitors."

During the off-season, when the museums are closed on Mondays, guards pitch in on major cleaning chores, groundskeeping and building maintenance. Before an exhibition opens, you'll often find one or several of them repairing and painting gallery walls.

For all that, the most common complaint they face from the public is this: Why doesn't the Palace look like a PALACE? What we lack in splendor we make up for in history, and for most of the guards, that translates into something very personal.

"They take the buildings on as theirs, as their home," Baca said. "They're all working as hard as they can on a daily basis, trying to make it the best experience for someone who's coming in. They're the front line, 365 days a year, and they're there for everything. They put up the best front whether they're in a good mood or not to get people to come back. It blows my mind sometimes how well they do that."

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9**

**Creative Mornings, 9 am**

Join Los Alamos astrophysicist Ed Fenimore as he explores the theme of “time” at this month’s event. Enjoy a little networking with other creative professionals, along with pastries and coffee from the Santa Fe Baking Co. Free.



**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11**

**Christmas at the Palace, 5:30–8 pm**

Join the community for an evening of hot cider, cookies, live music, piñatas, craft-making activities, a chance to operate an antique printing press and the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Claus—all in the legendary magic of the Palace of the Governors and its courtyard. (Dress warmly!) A free, family event. (Donations of non-perishable food welcomed.)



**SATURDAY–SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12–13**

**Young Native Artists Show & Sale, 9 am–3pm, Meem Community Room**

Begin collecting art, jewelry, pottery and more from the next generation of Native American artists and craftspeople as children and grandchildren of artists associated with the Palace of the Governors’ Portal Program demonstrate and sell their own creations. Free.

## A House Made of Mud ... and Bricks ... and Stones .. and Mysteries

**A**fter 45 years under a perilous coat of cement stucco, the Palace of the Governors finally showed off the inner workings of its walls this fall. The long-awaited re-stucco project generously funded by New Mexico legislators, Governor Susana Martinez and the Department of Cultural Affairs began with a lot of us holding our breath.

What would we find beneath? Crumbling walls? Dangers to the public? A price-prohibitive repair bill? The answer so far: None of the above.

Longhorn Construction and Southwest Plastering made fast work of stripping the stucco in the courtyard, starting at the west end. While they found numerous pockets of deteriorated adobes, only one was big enough to require consultations with architect Conron & Woods and our historic-preservation experts.

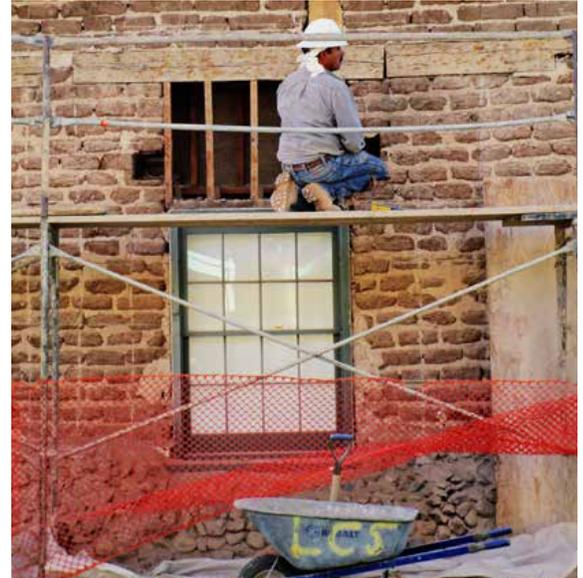
“It’s a lot better than I expected,” said Henry Avilar, Conron’s project manager. “It’s in fairly good shape.”

Workers made it nearly to the east door of the Palace before winter arrived. They repaired deteriorated areas with adobe mud as they went along, then skim-coated the exposed walls with lime plaster until work resumes next spring. (Mud won’t cure properly in freezing temperatures, so you’ll notice blankets and plastic holding in as much heat as possible.)

What workers did find sometimes baffled us. Sections were clearly built in different eras, often with different materials, including fire bricks, regular bricks, and cobblestones. “There’s a great number of discontinuities in the wall from previous repairs,” said Jake Barrow of Cornerstones Community Partnership, which is consulting on the project. “Each one seems to reflect its own historical context, whatever the building philosophy of the day was. And many of those aren’t necessarily respectful of adobe construction.”

The discovery of a square nail and a small key stuck parallel to one another in the wall escaped explanation, as did the open spaces that were left above windows. At some point, the windows were clearly reduced from a startlingly tall size, but workers failed to construct proper lintels and fill in the resulting gaps. Longhorn built the lintels and stacked adobe bricks above them—changes that should also reduce our winter heating bill.

Archaeologist Stephen Post has kept track of what the exposed walls reveal and is preparing a report on his findings that will prove a boon to preservationists in decades to come.



A worker repairs a window lintel (above). This nail and key were found in the wall (below).



**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13**

**Las Posadas, 5:30–7 pm**

The annual candle-lit procession travels around the Santa Fe Plaza and concludes in the Palace Courtyard, recreating Mary and Joseph’s search for a place to give birth to the Baby Jesus. (Plus your chance to heckle rooftop devils.) Stay for carols, cookies and hot cider in the courtyard. Free.

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 14**

**Museum guides meeting, 10 am**

Holiday brunch at Lauren Prescott’s home.

**FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25**

**Closed for Christmas**

We extend warm holiday greetings to everyone and look forward to seeing you when we reopen at 10 am on Saturday, December 26.

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 1**

**Closed for New Year’s Day**

Happy New Year. Enjoy time with friends and family, then come see us when we reopen at 10 am on Saturday, January 2.

**MONDAY, JANUARY 11**

**Museum guides meeting; 9 am, coffee and business meeting, 10 am, program**

Maurice Crandall (Yavapai-Apache) speaks on “Citizens or Wards: Pueblo Indian Political Status During the Territorial Period.” Crandall works as the historical projects specialist at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center.

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13**

**Brainpower & Brownbags Lecture, noon, Meem Community Room**

François-Marie Patorni speaks on “The French in New Mexico,” part of his research into 500 years of French, French-Canadian and other French-speaking people in the Land of Enchantment.

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 17**

**“Uncovered: The Discovery of a Confederate Mass Grave at Glorieta,” 2 pm**

In 1987, homeowner Kip Siler discovered human remains that proved to belong to a mass grave of Civil War soldiers. Archaeologist Matthew Barbour talks about the excavation and what the remains tell us about the decisive 1862 battle of Glorieta Pass. Part of *Fading Memories: Echoes of the Civil War*. Free with admission; Sundays free to NM residents.

**VOLUNTEER PROFILE**

**Kathy Longinaker**

**A** California photographer who once documented New Mexico ranch women, Kathy Longinaker never dreamed she would end up actually working on a ranch for 14 years. Nor did she dream how hard it would be.

As the injuries mounted for her and her partner, who owned the Hooser Ranch near Raton, the pair decided to high-tail it for retirement in Eldorado. Longinaker then found herself looking for ways to build a new community for herself.

Terry Bumpass, a friend in Raton and former curator of the Governor’s Gallery, told her about a new project at the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives. The Raton Museum had delivered boxes upon boxes of early 20th-century glass-plate negatives. Archives staff and volunteers were cleaning and cataloging them and, in return, obtaining digitized copies of the choicest images. The negatives and our findings will go back to the museum, which hopes residents can then help identify the people and events pictured.

“I was interested in seeing what they had,” Longinaker said. Soon, she was one of the volunteers elbow deep in the project. “The biggest collection is a re-enactment of an 1849 silver strike in the mines,” she said. “There are parades and costumes. Mostly, these are things that families gave to the museum. Some were water-damaged. They’ve aged and, because homes were heated with coal, there’s dirt.”

On the non-emulsion side, she uses water and a dust-free rag to clean each slide. A gentle brushing is all the negative side gets. “We’re handling them as delicately as we can,” she said.

The archives has scanned about 300, with a few more hundred to go. All that effort will help fill a gap in our collections. “We don’t have as much documentary stuff on northeastern New Mexico,” said Digital Imaging Specialist Hannah Abelbeck. “It’s really a valuable piece of history about that place in that time. You get a much deeper sense of their lives.”

Longinaker likes what the archives does so much that she and her partner made a donation to the Photo Legacy Project, which collects the work of contemporary photographers. For her volunteer effort, she puts in about six hours every Wednesday.

“It’s so interesting,” she said. “I love being here and talking with everyone. They’ve usually found some new project, so it’s always sparking my interest.”



Volunteer Kathy Longinaker (top) has been helping catalog and digitize images from the Raton Museum (above).



**SUNDAY, JANUARY 17**

**Family Fun Day, 1:30–3:30 pm**

Learn more about hide paintings, like the legendary Segesser Hides in the Palace, and in *Painting the Divine*. Then come to the classroom to make your own take-home hide painting. Free with admission. Sundays free to NM residents; children 16 and under free daily.

**MONDAY, JANUARY 18**

**Martin Luther King Jr. holiday**

The museum is closed, and staffers have the day off.

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 19**

**New Mexico Legislature convenes**

The 30-day budget session ends at noon on Thursday, February 18.



**LOOKING AHEAD:  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 1**

**Culture Day at the Capitol**

Come support our many partners within the Department of Cultural Affairs and enjoy a noontime presentation on the importance of art, history, books and culture in our state. Free.



While *Little Miss Sunshine* exposes its images of the Palace, volunteer helpers check out the Santa Fe Plaza through box-sized camera obscuras.

## Seeing the Palace Through a Pinhole

During the 2012 Worldwide Pinhole Photography Day, Heather Oelklaus, a photographer and print workshop supervisor at Colorado College, was talking with some friends about the wonders of capturing the world the old-fashioned way. One of them asked her about the largest pinhole camera she'd ever used. At that point, it was an aluminum trash can that required two pieces of 16 x 20-inch photo paper for film. But the question made her want to go even bigger.

"I proclaimed that by next year's pinhole day, I would be shooting with a truck," she said.

It took some scouting around before she found a 14-foot 1977 Chevy box truck with an uncanny resemblance to a yellow Kodak film box. She tackled drilling, painting, designing and light-tighting it while her imagination reeled out possible photo opps. In 2013, the newly designed pinhole truck, dubbed *Little Miss Sunshine*, took to the open road, shooting enough images to stage a show this year at the Sangre de Cristo Arts Center in Pueblo, Colo.

By then, Oelklaus had fallen in love with our exhibit, *Poetics of Light: Pinhole Photography*. "When I saw it the first time, I wept," she said. "It sounds melodramatic, but to know there were people and a museum that understood what I loved about pinhole photography overwhelmed me."

Photo Curator Daniel Kosharek and Palace Press Curator Tom Leech found out about her big truck and hatched a plot to shoot our beloved Palace of the Governors.

This fall, Oelklaus arrived on a beautiful morning and recruited nine people to place 84 pieces of black-and-white darkroom paper on the truck's walls, using tiny magnets. The Palace was exposed for 60 minutes, then the sheets were taken into a darkroom to develop.

"As the prints were coming out of the darkroom, many of the participants enjoyed putting the large-scale puzzle together so we could see the fruit of our labor," she said.

We're now looking for the perfect place to display the 5 x 20-foot image, a grand celebration of pinhole artistry.

"The outside world squeezing through this tiny aperture and being projected on the inside of my camera truck inspires me," Oelklaus said. "Recording the world differently and over long periods of time is a main theme for my recent work."



A young artist works on a miniature hide painting during an art event at the museum earlier this year.

## A New Monthly Play (and Learning) Date at the Museum

Debuting this January, our education team's Family Fun Days will take over the museum the third Sunday of each month. Featuring drop-in, hands-on activities—like hide painting, colcha embroidery, traditional indigenous seed balls, calligraphy, kite-making and more—the 1:30–3:30 pm events are open to all ages. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

“The family programs we’ve done on First Friday Evenings and in conjunction with our changing exhibits have been very successful,” said Education Programs Manager René Harris. “People of all ages enjoy getting their hands—and clothes—dirty as they learn new skills and build a new appreciation for traditional pastimes, arts and activities.”

Best of all, the activities don't require a steep time commitment, and you can test out a skill before investing in your own crafts materials.

Each event is free with admission. Sundays are free to New Mexico residents; children 16 and under are free every day. Family Fun Days join a robust set of educational programs geared toward youths that include Hands on History, Head Start classes, and classroom curricula guides.

“We hope to bring more families into the museum,” Harris said. “Most activities will be appropriate for children five or six years old and up. Of course, adults can always bring their inner child.”

### STAFF PROFILE

## Vickie Ortega

The History Museum was delighted to (finally) welcome Executive Secretary and Administrative Assistant Vickie Ortega in late October, after a long vacancy in a critical post. Get to know her.

### Tell us a bit about yourself:

I'm a native Santa Fean, born and raised. My family dates back to the 1800s and originates from Spain and Wales. I attended Santa Fe High School (Go, Demons!) and Santa Fe Community College.

I was at my previous job for 15 years at the State Land Office as an administrative assistant to an assistant commissioner, division director and deputy director. I enjoyed my job and made many friends there. Some of us literally watched each other's children grow up over the years.

### What made you want to come to the History Museum?

I'd been to the museum as a guest before and have always thought it's a beautiful place. People here seem warm, friendly and helpful. I'd never worked in a museum before so it brought an opportunity for something new and different.

### What do you like about it?

The portal where the local Native Americans sell their jewelry has always been a favorite of mine, ever since I was a child. I also love the open-air feeling and all the sunlight you can see and feel walking through the main parts of the museum. I'm truly a sunlight person. If it was up to me, there wouldn't be a single building anywhere without lots of windows and skylights.

### Do you have a favorite exhibit?

*Painting the Divine* is currently my favorite.

### What interests you about history?

I started to appreciate it a little later in life. I guess New Mexico history, especially Santa Fe, is what I'm most interested in. But I like English history (those royals are an interesting bunch). I also have a fascination with Viking history.

### The most famous person I ever met was...

Emilio Estevez and Lou Diamond Phillips. Both very nice—and cute!

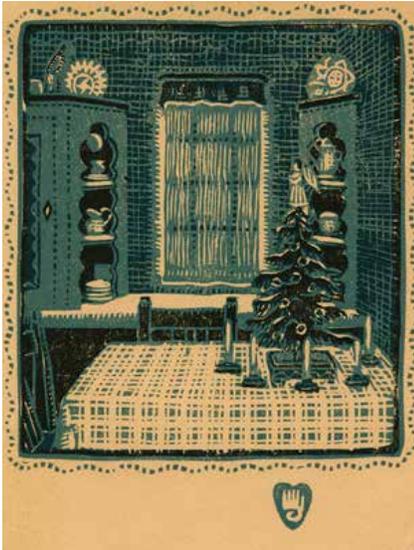
### In my spare time, I love...

Music and movies, photography, drawing and painting, being outdoors, *Calvin and Hobbs*, and just spending fun time with family and friends.

### Red or green?

I lean more toward red but, naturally, both.





## Sharing the Love with Fellow Museums

The History Museum isn't the only place to see our exhibits and artifacts.

Through January, *Gustave Baumann and Friends: Artist Cards from Holidays Past* joins *The Baumann Marionette Project* at the Carlsbad Museum & Art Center in southeastern New Mexico. The installation blends last winter's popular mezzanine show with the interactive technology that transformed the Museum of Art's marionettes into digital versions. New Mexico Highlands University's Media Arts Department—a favorite collaborator of ours—accomplished that work.

Photographer Tony O'Brien's *Light in the Desert* exhibit, which accompanied *The Saint John's Bible* in 2011–2012, finished a run in November at the Mesa Public Library in Los Alamos after stops at the Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, New Mexico State University Museum, and the Western Heritage Center in Hobbs. (Efforts are underway to share *Poetics of Light: Pinhole Photography* after it comes down in January.)

Among the artifacts you might see out and about are pre-Columbian gold pieces from Peru at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore and Guadalupe bultos by José Aragon and Santiago Matta at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. At the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana, Calif., the Museum of International Folk Art show, *The Red that Colored the World*, is on display, which includes some of our Spanish colonial paintings and a Bernardo Miera y Pacheco map.

## The Palace Press Wins a Prestigious Hewett Award

Tom Leech and James Bourland like to joke that the Press at the Palace of the Governors is Santa Fe's best-kept secret, but the New Mexico Association of Museums is out to change that. In November, the group honored the press with its prestigious Edgar L. Hewett Award, named for the founder of the Museum of New Mexico and reserved for people or organizations who exemplify leadership and service to the museum community.

The press was singled out for preserving the state's printing traditions and inviting visitors "to explore this fascinating facet of New Mexico history."

"We are a print culture," Leech said. "Most of what we think of as 'history' has been preserved and learned through print. It is important to understand earlier technologies because each technology inevitably influences how history is recorded and told. Books and newspapers reveal much about the times in which they were printed and having a working printing press fluent in the language of past technologies allows us to comprehend our past.

"At the Palace Press, what we print becomes history. Because of the words we print and our use of quality materials and fine typography, our books and broadsides turn reading into a memorable experience. I'm grateful that for almost 50 years, the museum has encouraged this creative use of history."

In 1969, the museum acquired the contents of the Estancia News-Herald Print Shop and in 1972 gave birth to its own print shop. These days, it welcomes thousands of visitors annually and serves as a vital center for the revival, stimulation, and pursuit of the book arts and frequently sponsors programs of interest to book-lovers. Award-winning, limited-edition books are published on historic presses, and a research library related to the book arts is available to the public during museum hours. It houses permanent exhibits that feature the press that printed the first-ever book of cowboy songs (1908) and a re-creation of the studio of renowned artist and printer Gustave Baumann.

Past winners of the Hewett Award include the New Mexico History Museum in 2009 and the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives in 2011. Other Department of Cultural Affairs winners this year were *El Palacio* magazine, the Museum of New Mexico Press, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture Curator Julia Clifton, and Ginger Moore, a volunteer at Lincoln Historic Site.

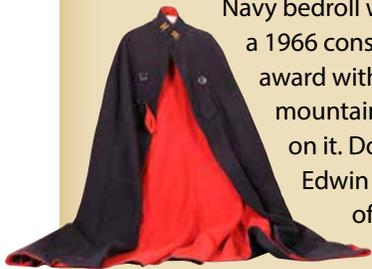


Tom Leech (left), curator and director of the Press at the Palace of the Governors, and printing specialist James Bourland stand at their workhorse press.

## Acquiring Minds

What's new in the collections vault? Here's a peek at some of what we received in September and October:

Materials that once belonged to Roy Elliot Barker and his wife, Helen Louise Blackman Barker, including a **World War II nursing cape**, a U.S.



Navy bedroll wrap, and a 1966 conservation award with a mountain lion on it. Donated by Edwin S. Barker of Santa Fe.

An **Apache woman's dress** dating from the late-19th to mid-20th centuries with fringe and painted beads. Donated by Joy Schaible of Lincoln, NM.

A pill box, milk cap and condom tin from **Zook's Pharmacy**



(1909–1963), discovered during a recent renovation and donated by Kevin McBride of Santa Fe.

A large **Jornada Mogollon storage vessel** with a red slip, decorated with black mineral paint. Donated by Ervin Aldaz of Capitan, NM.

A mourning veil, cap and shawl, Chimayo jacket, hand-crocheted dress and other items related to the **Samuel B. Watrous family**. Donated by Joan Carlson of Foster City, Calif.

Items that belonged to Dean Howard Daniel, a member of the U.S. Navy during World War II, including a **dress uniform and a bottle of wine** from Il Santo Cellars. Donated by Merideth Paxton of Albuquerque.



Abandoned building, Contreras, NM, 1976, by Robert A. Christensen. Photo Archives HP.2013.16.27.

## On the Road with an Intrepid Photographer

For nearly 40 years, Robert Christensen has driven New Mexico's blue highways, camera in hand. He's a surreptitious photographer of handmade houses and businesses, something we like to call "vernacular architecture," best typified by an apparent lack of blueprints and an abundance of passion. For years, it was his part-time hobby, bolstered by over-the-top darkroom skills, that one day led his buddy B.G. Burr to suggest he look at his archive as a professional collection.

He did, and the photographic community paid attention.

Last year, the Albuquerque Museum of Art and History featured an exhibit of his work, *Vernacular Architecture of New Mexico: Photographs by Robert Christensen*. And the Palace of the Governors Photo Archives in Santa Fe accepted nearly 300 of Christensen's images.

Most recently, Christensen reprinted and framed a clutch of those images, which now hang on the museum's administrative office walls. There are abandoned businesses, an old school, moody chapels and a Roswell auto-salvage yard that declares "O God Forgive Me When I Whine."

"People say to me, 'Oh, you've got to see this place,'" he said of his search for subjects. "I go out, and it's just a building, and I think, 'Oh, they don't get it.' I would react to places that I felt were kind of looking back at me. I saw them as portraits more than documentation. There's almost faces in them."

Christensen doesn't always know the stories behind his storefronts. In the early years, he was too shy to ask around. As he got bolder, he sometimes encountered neighborly resistance. And other times, the buildings he had shot had crumbled into dust.

"People don't trust people with cameras," he said. "So I go knocking on doors, and the first thing I say is, 'I'm not from the government and I'm not selling anything.' When they see a photograph I've taken of their place, they usually just open right up."

As for the ones that still hold question marks? Perhaps that's part of their poetry—an anonymity that allows the viewer to imagine past inhabitants, their struggles and joys, and the circumstances that drove them far from memory. Next time you wander through, stop before one of his images and try to hear yesterday's whispers speak to us today.