New Mexico History Museum - Railroad Wars

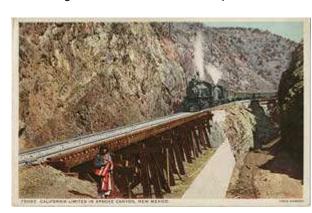
New Mexico History Museum

The Railroad Wars

Building tracks across New Mexico took money, might and a few gunslingers

Welcome to the latest installment of our media-release series, "Telling New Mexico: Stories from Then and Now." See the links below for previous releases, along with information about obtaining photographs to accompany your coverage.

On a cold and snowy morning in February of 1878, two groups of men armed with rifles and shovels glared angrily at one another across the wind-swept Raton Pass in northeastern New Mexico. W.B. Strong, the new president of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway, had hired local gunslingers and lawmen to ensure his claim to the pass, but so had Gen. W.J. Palmer from the Denver and Rio Grande Railway. Strong and his track-men had beaten Palmer to the pass by a matter of minutes, yet the two ramshackle armies still stood on the brink of all-out war. 'We got here first, and we're building the Canon City & San Juan Railroad through to the Arkansas (River),' Strong shouted. 'Anyone interfering with this work is liable to stop a bullet between the eyes!'



New Mexico's Railroad Wars are but one of many tales of culture clashes waiting to be told at The New Mexico History Museum, http://www.nmhistorymuseum.org/, opening May 24, 2009. The museum explores how the West's various cultures clashed and blended over 400 years of written and spoken memory. Starting with New Mexico's native inhabitants – the tribal Pueblos, Navajos and Apaches – the history includes Spanish conquistadors, Santa Fe Trail riders, outlaws, railroad builders, Route 66 sight-seers, artists, nuclear scientists and counter-culture revolutionaries.

An interactive, multimedia facility, the 96,000-square-foot museum, now under construction behind the Palace of the Governors on the historic Santa Fe Plaza, focuses on six time periods key to the development of New Mexico and the American West. "Becoming the Southwest" explores many of the calamitous events often referred to as "How the West was won." From the Civil War through the Lincoln County War and the Railroad Wars, New Mexico was a violent, vibrant place during its 63 years as a U.S. Territory.



As it turned out, the threatened battle for Raton Pass collapsed quietly. Gen. W.J. Palmer and his men stood down, and the Santa Fe Railway claimed the prize. But just a few months later, the two companies were at it again over a narrow gorge in Colorado. To protect his investment this time, Strong hired a few ringers: some of the Wild West's notorious gunslingers. In spite of this impressive line-up, the Rio Grande had more men. After a number of bloody battles, the Santa Fe conceded the Royal Gorge to the Rio Grande.

After the Railroad Wars, a number of the Santa Fe's gunslingers moved to Las Vegas, N.M. You've heard how rough Dodge City, Deadwood, and Tombstone were. Las Vegas, N.M., was the worst of the worst. A group of desperados including "Mysterious" Dave Mather, "Dirty" Dave Rudabaugh, and J.J. Webb set themselves up as lawmen under Justice of the Peace Hoodoo Brown. This group, known as the Dodge City Gang, participated in train and stagecoach robberies, organized cattle rustling, and were said to have been responsible for multiple lynchings and murders. They ruled Las Vegas for over two years, until the people of the town finally threw them out. As Governor Bradford Prince said, "In the old days one could rule New Mexico by coercion, threats, and bulldozing. That seemed to succeed until the railroad came."

What the railroad brought to replace them was an influx of arts and sciences, New Mexico's new future. Tuberculosis patients headed West, seeking "the cure." Physicians came along, establishing clinics and hospitals throughout the state. Artists and photographers were drawn by the glorious vistas and magical light. Melding their artistic visions with those of the Native American and Hispanic artists already here, they delivered images of the Southwest to the rest of the country and inspired new trajectories among New Mexico's traditional artists. With those images and amenities in mind, the first wave of tourists arrived on the trains, eventually becoming a major industry all on their own.

Merchants came. Schools were built. Harvey Houses cropped up, providing high-end rest stops and tours of Indian Country. The trains shipped New Mexico's coal, timber and wool to other states; other states' people rode the rails to New Mexico. New Mexico was changed forever.

With an extensive collection of artifacts, bolstered by multimedia installations and real stories of miners, cowboys, gunslingers, and railroad bosses, the New Mexico History Museum brings to life the Territorial period of New Mexico's history. Get into it! Discover and celebrate the history of the state with the opening of the New Mexico History Museum this Memorial Day weekend.

For more information about the New Mexico History Museum, including a selection of user-ready high-resolution photographs, log onto http://media.museumofnewmexico.org/nmhm. More than 8,000 additional, high-resolution photographs illustrating the history of New Mexico are available by keyword search at www.palaceofthegovernors.org (click on "Photo Archives" then on "Digitized Collections"). Most requests for scans from this site can be delivered the same day, and usage is free for publicity purposes only.

Previous releases:

The New Face of History

The Tales that Made the American West

New Mexico History Museum's Core Exhibits

Telling the People's Stories: A Message from the Director

Creating a Place for Our Past, by Dr. Frances Levine, El Palacio, Summer 2006

Media Contacts: Kate Nelson

New Mexico History Museum 505 476 1141 Kate.Nelson@state.nm.us www.nmhistorymuseum.org

Rachel Mason Ballantines PR Rachel@ballantinespr.com 505 216 0889 www.ballantinespr.com

1 of 1 4/28/2009 4:27 PM