

AYER Y HOY en TAOS

Yesterday and Today in Taos County and
Northern New Mexico

WINTER 1996

\$3.00

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THEATER IN TAOS

PART ONE

by Elizabeth Cunningham



DOC MARTIN'S LOCOMOBILE

by Robert White



BOOK REVIEWS



TAOS TIME CAPSULE



A PUBLICATION OF THE
TAOS COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Otto Pitcher, Taos' venerable thespian,
photographed by Rick Romancito, courtesy *The Taos News*.

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The Taos County Historical Society's publication, *AYER Y HOY en Taos County and Northern New Mexico*, is published semi-annually by the Historical Society.

We invite articles of a scholarly nature, as well as book reviews of recent publications pertinent to the Taos and northern New Mexico area. We are open to publishing occasional reminiscences, folklore, oral history and poetry that are of lasting historical interest.

The Taos County Historical Society endeavors to maintain high standards of quality in *AYER Y HOY*, and we seek to make improvements as we go along. Readers' comments and suggestions are welcome.

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The Taos County Historical Society is a New Mexico non-profit organization dedicated to the study and preservation of the historical resources of Taos County and northern New Mexico. Membership is open to any interested person, regardless of residence.

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FROM THE EDITOR

When I asked Liz Cunningham to write a brief history of theater in Taos, neither of us had any idea how rich the traditions ran. Of course, we knew about the liturgical dramas of the colonial days and how they're celebrated today, but neither of us knew how much was there.

As a result, Liz and I decided to divide the article into two parts, with Part Two being published in the spring 1997 issue. While Part One covers the early period up through the late 70s, Part Two takes up with what is referred to as "The Golden Age," when The Magic Mirror Players, Taos Plaza Theater Company, Kline, and others, tread the boards.

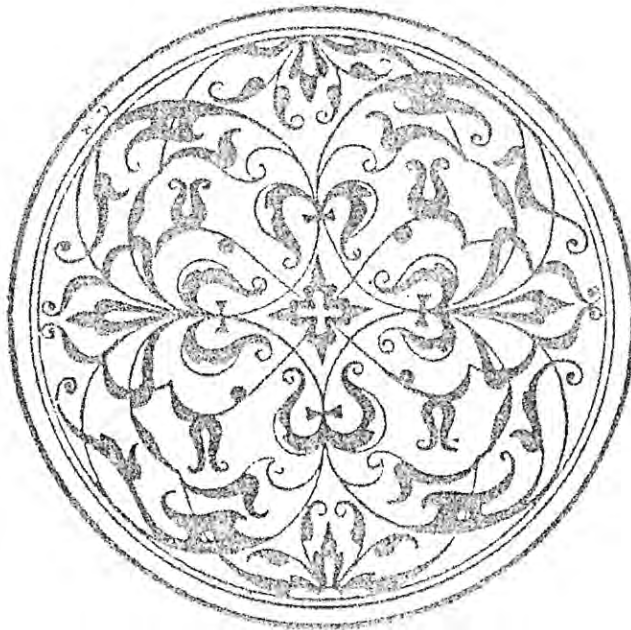
Liz and I wish to thank everyone who was kind enough to be interviewed, and also for the loan of the many wonderful photos. The article's epigram by Nancy Jenkins is most apt. Thank you for your time and keen memories.

Also in this issue is an excellent article by Robert White about the first automobile in Taos. As was true in a lot of frontier towns, the medical doctor was the first citizen with the means and the best reasons to have one.

A new addition is "Taos Time Capsule," where a random sampling of snippets, excerpts and headlines, from Taos publications and journals are reprinted.

I would like to thank Doug Luchetti and all the folks at The Idea Center for all their help in putting this issue together, and to Merle Kout of Taos Advertising and Design for the use of her scanner and Macintosh system over the Thanksgiving Holidays. Also, thanks go to Sadie O. Knight for her help with proofing the final version.

Happy Holidays,
Melody Romancito, editor





Los Pastores, performed by the Sangre de Cristo Liturgies, San Francisco de Asis, Ranchos de Taos, 1994.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THEATER IN TAOS PART ONE

by Elizabeth Cunningham

"The history of small-town theater is really the history of its people."
— Nancy Jenkins, Taos High School Drama Teacher

The beginnings of the European theater tradition in Taos came up the *Camino Real* (Royal Road) with Oñate in 1598 in the form of mystery and morality plays and pageantry. When the Spanish colonizers got safe passage through the desert from Chihuahua, they gave thanks by producing a pageant. The religious play, called the auto, then popular in Europe, presented a means of communicating the Spanish culture and ideology to the native people living in the territory of New Spain. Based on Biblical stories, these dramatizations were designed to teach and explain the process of salvation. Two cycles: one drawn from the Old Testament, like Adam and Eve or Cain and Abel, and the other from the New Testament and the life of Christ. Among the early autos presented in Mexico was

Adan y Eva (Adam and Eve), enacted in 1532 in Mexico City.¹

In addition to the biblical stories, the Spanish also imported secular plays as *Los Moros y Cristianos* (The Moors and the Christians). Oñate gave an account of enacting this play in New Mexico during a two-day stopover at the pueblo of San Juan.² Secular pieces have also come out of Mexico or grown out of historical events in New Mexico. *Las Cuarto Apariciones de la Virgen de Guadalupe* (The Four Appearances of the Virgin of Guadalupe) descends from a play written by a priest of Mexico to keep the legend of the appearances of the Virgin to the Indian youth, Juan Diego, before the people. This play was often enacted to introduce the *Pastorela* dramas around Christmas.

Los Comanches, written in the late 1700s, has its roots in New Mexican history. The play portrays New Mexicans



Raphael Guerra and Deborah Hunt of *Los Nuevos Maromeros*, from the play *Toporojo*.

led by Don Carlos Fernandez, who defeated Cuerno Verde, the fierce chief of a band of Comanche. The drama was staged in the open on the mesas around Taos, where the players could enact a battle on horseback. The following account gives the reaction of the audience in the 1920s:

When the summer tourists visiting Taos in 1929 witnessed the drama on the mesa between Taos village and Ranchos de Taos to the south, hundreds of warriors and soldiers took part on both sides. They presented such a realistic scene, to the accompaniment of rifle shots and arrows, that the visitors took cover, thinking that real warfare had broken out.³

Among the religious plays written around 1700, those based on the Christ Child in the New Testament are performed most often. The most beloved and popular of these are *Los Pastores* (The Shepherds' Dialogue), a dramatization in two parts of the shepherds receiving news of the Savior's birth, and their journey to pay homage to Him, and *Las Posadas* (The Inns), the story of Mary and Joseph's unsuccessful attempts to find room in the inns of Bethlehem.⁴

Up to World War II, troupes of *maromeros*, troupes of performing artists (actors, singers, clowns, puppeteers, trapeze artists, troubadours), would travel up the *Camino Real* in New Mexico making stops in every village to perform. The *maromas* would present plays, and the *cuadernos* (scripts) would later be adopted by each village into its own folk play.⁵ Every village had its own resident troupe — dancers, musicians, and actors — who entertained for feast days, performing *autos* (plays) and *danzas* (dances)

for church and village fiestas. The whole village came to rehearsal and so the performance became community property.

Itinerant troupes, like the Baca family in the late 1800s and early 1900s, also helped preserve the culture. Around the turn of the century, the men from households in Taos and other villages of northern New Mexico, left the area to find work in other states: Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, California.⁶ Prospero Baca, with members of his traveling troupe, presented *Adan y Eva* to people in Las Vegas at the turn of the century, and in Mora and Taos in the winter of 1903-1904. In the tradition of de Vargas, who reintroduced Spanish religious drama during resettlement of New Mexico at the turn of the 18th century, these troupes helped revive tradition two hundred years later.⁷

A part of the tradition involved the handing down of acting parts from father to son. A fine example of this came from the 1941 July fiesta performance of Judge Samuel Martinez y Labadie. His father, considered the Grand Old Man of Spanish religious folk theater, had passed on to the judge a version of the 17th century mystery play, *Los Tres Reyes* (The Three Kings). This was performed on a raised platform in the Taos Plaza with Martinez y Labadie directing. The other players inherited their traditional roles from their families, and in addition to their own lines, had committed the entire play to memory.⁸

In the last decade the annual re-enactment of the *pastorelas* (shepherds plays) has experienced a resurgence. World War II caused one of the biggest disruptions to the community as men between the ages of 16 and 20 left their villages and didn't return. Some were killed in the war, others saw the bigger world and moved to other places. With this loss both the foundation and the continuity of the dramas was threatened because the roles were traditionally handed down from father to son. Due to the lack of men, women played some roles usually delegated to men. In recent decades children literally grow up with the *pastorelas*: as they mature they grow out of one part into another.

The popularity of the Christmas plays reached into the entire community of Taos. In 1968, dance instructor Betty Winslow staged *Las Posadas*, *Los Pastores* at the First Presbyterian Church. One year later, Mrs. Lupe Vaughn and Mrs. Josephine Cordova, under the auspices of the Taos County Historical Society, directed *Las Posadas* and *The Miracle of Guadalupe*. In 1973 the elementary school 6th graders presented *Las Posadas*; in 1974 the Taos Middle School played *Los Pastores*.

Today, groups like Sangre de Cristo Liturgies, headed by Arsenio Cordova, devote their efforts to the presentation of religious dramas like *Las Cuarto Apariciones de la Virgen de Guadalupe*, *Las Posadas*, *Los Pastores*, *Los Tres Reyes Magos*, and *El Nino Perdido* (presented at Easter time).

Inspired by his mother, Josephine, Cordova continues the family's interest in preserving northern New Mexico's Hispanic heritage and its songs, dances and religious dramas. Numerous members of the greater Taos community, like writers and actors Larry Torres and Jerry Padilla, join him in this effort, and the centuries old tradition of teaching religion through the dramas continues.

Sangre de Cristo Liturgies play same role today in keeping the folk dramas alive as the itinerant troupes who preceded them. Cordova and his players travel as far north as San Luis and Trinidad, Colorado, to Questa, Arroyo Hondo, Arroyo Seco, and on south to Santa Fe and Albuquerque to perform. In addition to the religious folk dramas, the troupe also performs contemporary secular plays like *El Santero de Cordova*, written by Denise Chavez.

The current resurgence of interest in Hispanic religious drama reaches beyond Taos. On the national level, PBS has aired a production of the *pastorela* done around 1990 that is based on a Mexican script. The show stars prominent Hispanic entertainers like singer Linda Ronstadt, and actors Cheech Marin and Robert Beltrane. On a more local level, four representatives of the *Crisol/Bufons* (or Crucible Jesters) from Spain settled in Chimayo in 1993. The group, consisting of musicians, actors and troubadours, performs Gregorian chants, music and some plays that stem from the same medieval tradition in Spain that the New Mexican dramas originated from. In the tradition of the early itinerant troubadours, *Crisol* members travel to Taos to give performances. Like Sangre de Cristo Liturgies, *Crisol/Bufons* also recognize the importance of the Hispanic culture in northern New Mexico; and through song, dance, drama and lectures, dedicate their work to its preservation.

The American theater tradition in Taos didn't take firm hold until the incorporation of the Little Theater of Taos around 1946. Until after World War Two, public theater performances were sporadic and limited to occasional stage showings at the Montaner [movie] Theater, to productions held at various locations in Taos, like the Don Fernando Tavern, and school plays at the old Taos High School and at the Taos Pueblo Day School. The earliest group to produce plays on a regular basis was the Taos Drama Club, formed sometime around 1934.⁹ The following spring *The Taos Valley News* announced two of the drama club's productions: one in English by Dunsany and the other in Spanish entitled *Night at the Inn*.¹⁰ A later review praised the Spanish thespians' performance, adding that "the English players lacked the easy presence of the Spanish players."¹¹

When the Harwood library and art museum built a stage in 1937 as part of a renovation project, it created a "home" for the performing arts and eventually opened the way to the presentation of standard plays. The Little



Scene from *El Santero de Cordova*. Among those identified in the photo are Annette Quintana, Viola Garcia, Michelle Pena, Arsenio Cordova, Theresa Cordova, and Adelaida Romero. Taken about 1984, courtesy of *The Taos News*.

Theater began in a round-about way: it grew out of boredom. Art students in Emil Bisttram's summer school, looking for something to do, staged a play in the latter 1940s that involved the community. The production had been so much fun that afterwards Taos residents with an interest in theater – Dixie and John Yaple, Dr. Al and Myrtle Rosen, and the Ilfelds – met and established the Little Theater of Taos, Inc.¹²

The early productions drew on directors and actors from the local community. Performances took place on the Harwood stage, the old Taos high school gym (which had no seats!) and the high school auditorium.

Theater progressed to a more professional level when Otto Mears Pitcher, an experienced actor, stage manager and director who was a charter member of Actors Equity in California, joined the Little Theater shortly after moving to Taos in 1952. The theater was looking for good directors, and anyone who wished to direct, according to the by-laws, had to first give a workshop "to prove that you could do it."¹³ Following his successful workshop production of Neil Simon's *Fumed Oak*, Pitcher chose to direct Witter Bynner's *Cake*. In selecting this play, he faced numerous challenges. Salon queen Mabel Dodge Luhan lived in Taos, and had problems with the play which parodied the lavish ways of wealthy women. Although "The Lady" was never named, Luhan recognized herself as the lead nonetheless, and "didn't speak to Bynner, who had been a very close friend, for many years after the first production of the play in Santa Fe in the late twenties."¹⁴

Additionally, Pitcher had to contend with the Harwood



The Little Theater of Taos staged the melodrama, *The Life and Death of Sneaky Fitch*, on the Harwood Stage in the 1960s.

stage which horrified him. The minuscule proscenium measured 22 feet wide and 24 feet deep, the stage had oak floors which could have nothing nailed or screwed into them, and the only lighting came from a variety of colored 40-watt bulbs from a row of floodlights which emerged from the floor. Given the confines of the small space, Pitcher proved his skills as a director, moving 15 people around so well that he created the impression of its being a full-size proscenium.¹⁵

The 3,000 props in *Cake* presented another problem which set designer Bob Raye solved in making them all two-dimensional, out of cardboard. He called on the Taos community twice for assistance: once to help make the props, the second time to remake them after the janitor had thrown out the originals two days before the performance.¹⁶ The generosity of the community extended to giving materials for building sets. Art Kay of the Emporium dry goods store donated the material to make a cyclorama, and other merchants and townsfolk lent furniture and other props as needed.¹⁷

The 1928 Chickering grand piano presented the biggest

obstacle. A permanent fixture, it couldn't be removed and often became part of the set. For *Cake*, Bob Raye built a platform over the piano from which a grand staircase descended. It took a seasoned actress like Liz Budlong, playing the Lady, to negotiate the treacherous steps. When not in use, the piano became a different kind of hazard: an actor making an entrance from stage left had to crawl under it!

In the 1950s and 1960s the Little Theater presented plays like *The Women*, *Ghosts*, *Winterset*, *The Chalk Garden*, *Wozzek*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, *Anastasia* and *Spoon River Anthology*, and melodramas like *The Life and Death of Sneaky Fitch*, *The Villain's Last Stand* and *The Curse of an Aching Heart* or *Caught in the Spider's Web*. Directors during this time included Otto Pitcher, Myrtle Rosen, Liz Budlong, Larry Frank, Ben Hazard and Sue McCleery.

Among the players were Spud Johnson, editor of *The Horse Fly* and *Laughing Horse*, Winnie (Mrs. Oscar) Berninghaus, artists Becky James, Eric Gibberd, Earl Stroh and Jonathan Scott, writer Tricia Hurst, Reggie Cantu, Tony Valdez, Larry Sanchez, Dick and Margo Grainger,

Dixie and John Yapple, Dr. Al and Myrtle Rosen, Otto Pitcher, Ben Hazard, Betty Anderson, Phoebe Cottam, Karen Kilgore, Carmela Sanchez, Stan Aiello, Stephanie Pacheco, Marc Trujillo, Alicya Lansing, Ashley Pond, Charles and Jean Brooks, Chilton Anderson, Vern Matheny and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Dicus.

Members of the arts community who provided technical support were: Bette Winslow, Dance Director: Robert Raye, Sets; Jenny Vincent, Music; and Larry Crowley, Guitar.¹⁸

In 1954 the Little Theater, in collaboration with the Taos Art Association, built an outdoor theater located behind the Manby-Thorne building, presently the Stables Gallery. Originally a large open-sided amphitheater with a tin roof, "The Barn" later had wooden slats added to the sides. The structure challenged performers who had to project over the rain drumming on the tin roof, and the audience who staunchly endured sitting on hard benches with no backs, or the wind stirring up the dust in the aisles or chilling them on a cool summer night.¹⁹ This "summer housing" allowed the Little Theater to perform for larger audiences as well as sponsor entertainment brought in from other cities like the Pacific Repertory Company and the Kaleidoscope Players.²⁰

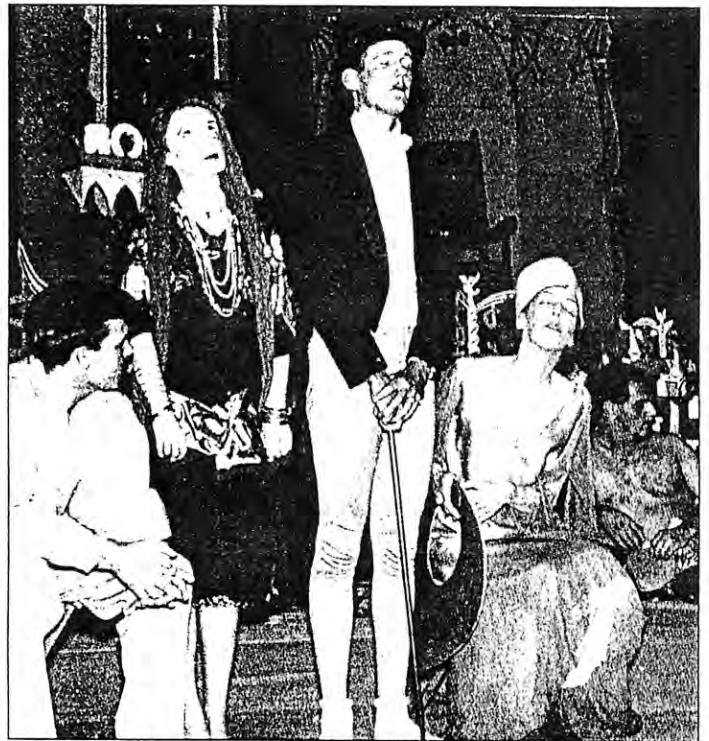
Disaster struck on Thanksgiving Day, 1969, when the outdoor theater burned to the ground, taking all the sets, properties, lighting and a precious collection of costumes with it.²¹

After The Barn burned, Sue McCleery, then director of the Taos Art Association, thought Taos should have a proper theater, with lights, stage, and proscenium arch, and went to Taos residents for help.

Months before The Barn Theater burned, fund-raising efforts had been in progress to refurbish it, including



Jean Brooks in *Curse of An Aching Heart*, a melodrama performed in 1966. Photo courtesy of *The Taos News*.



Scene from *Cake*, l to r: W.R. Cunningham, II, Elizabeth Fritz, Chilton Anderson, Liz Budlong and Lucifer Veratch (on back of photo are assurances in Regina Cook's handwriting that Lucifer was his real name), courtesy *The Taos News*.

rewiring and fireproofing, and the addition of an orchestra pit, and lobby and movie projection areas. With Dorothy Brandenburg at the helm, these elements got incorporated into the plans for a new theater, and the Taos Art Association succeeded in raising enough capital to finance the new theater.

Construction began the summer of 1971, and the TCA opened February 25, 1972. The inauguration featured the last act of Neil Simon's *Plaza Suite*, presented by the Little Theater, a musical performance by classical guitarist Hector Garcia, with Jim Bowie playing the banjo, and Gil "Fingers" Corbay at the piano, and a performance by dancers from Taos Pueblo.²²

In May 1972 the Little Theater produced the TCA's first full-length play, Federico Garcia Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, directed by Larry Frank. Over the next few years, the company put on only one to two full-length plays annually: in 1974 Gore Vidal's *Visit to a Small Planet*, directed by Otto Pitcher, and Tom Taggart's *Lily the Felon's Daughter*, directed by Liz Budlong, in 1975 Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, and in 1976, two one-act plays. In 1977 the Little Theater sponsored its last performance: *Clarence Darrow*.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the population of Taos grew, and with this influx came a number of professional theater people who either joined up with new local theaters or started their own companies. At the same



Scene from Project Discovery's first production, Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, produced in 1975.

time, some of the professional theater people became interested in helping with the Taos High School's drama class, which, beginning in 1968, presented one to two plays a year at the TCA. The competition, and the fact that after thirty years of Little Theater, people were tired, resulted in no energy, time or interest in serving on the board. The final blow came in 1979 when the company's failure "to file annual reports since 1974" caused New Mexico Corporation Commission to revoke the company's certification of incorporation.²³

With the demise of Little Theater, the Taos Art Association (TAA,) which had a history of presenting the visual arts at the Stables Gallery, envisioned the TCA as a home for the performing arts in Taos, with a balance between supporting local endeavors and bringing in outside quality theater and performing arts groups.

Objectives for the local presentations provided for both a community-based experience – allowing all levels of participation – and for theater using professionally trained talent.

The TCA's mission to provide a community-based theater experience began in 1973 with the Taos High School's drama classes. Since that time students from Taos elementary and secondary schools have presented at least one or two annual plays, guided by people with professional theater experience like Sue McCleery, Ken and Nancy Jenkins and Judith Crooker. In 1968 Sue McCleery, long-time director of the TAA, worked together with the high school students, producing Edna St. Vincent Millay's *Aria de Capo* at the Harwood theater. Soon after the Taos Community Auditorium was built, in May 1973, Ken Jenkins directed 75 students in the high school's first production there, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*.

Synonymous with this production, Sue McCleery designed and got funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) through the Taos Arts Association for her brainchild, Project Discovery. The program grew out of her vision for training artists through apprenticeships. Through their participation in the creative process, students would learn every aspect of theater production: lighting, set and prop design and manufacture, choreography, musical orchestration, acting, and directing.

McCleery believed that if young people could learn the craft and discipline of theater – through working on costumes and make-up, making masks, learning about visual blocking and how to articulate, project and hit a mark on stage – that they would acquire skills that transcended the theater experience. With the training Project Discovery provided, students would discover more about themselves and about team work, and come to appreciate art. Some of the students would pursue careers in the theater or the arts, and the others would become the next generation of theater goers and art buyers.²⁴

For Project Discovery's first production, William Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1975, McCleery called on her friend, Betty Martinez, and on parents and members of the Taos community for assistance with choreography, music and art work on sets and costumes. For this initial play, she elicited the expertise of her friend, Flora Reeder, associated with the famous children's theater, the Readers School, out of Fort Worth, Texas.²⁵ McCleery acted as coordinator and asked Nancy Jenkins to assist Reeder with directing the 50 children in the play. With the help and support from parents, local businesses and individuals, the community helped launch Project Discovery's first success.

Ken and Nancy Jenkins directed the next Project Discovery production in 1976, this time a musical –

Oliver! — which featured students from the elementary and high schools, many of whom had appeared in *Midsummer Night's Dream* the previous year.

In January 1977 Sue McCleery and Nancy Jenkins co-directed the third Project Discovery play, *Thieves Carnival* by Jean Anouilh. The preview article stated that the play promised to be “a happy, entertaining romp” and predicted “another triumph for some very talented youngsters.” The article ended giving Project Discovery “another gold star.”²⁶

A review of Project Discovery’s presentation of *Sir Gwain and the Green Knight* in 1979 called the production “a tribute to its youthful performers and adult directors ... The young actors and actresses handled and projected their lines remarkably well, reflecting effectively the wide range of ages and characters in the play.”²⁷

Some of the Taos High School students who played in *Thieves Carnival*, also starred in Dale Wassermann’s musical, *Man of La Mancha* in March 1977. Ken and Nancy Jenkins directed this tragicomedy, which put more of an emotional demand on the actors than the previous musical, *Oliver!*, and the Taos High students, with several Project Discovery plays under their belts, rose to the occasion. By 1980 when Judith Crooker (who had former professional acting and directing experience in Israel and Mexico) directed *M*A*S*H*, the high school dramatizations continued to demonstrate the consistency and quality performances of the early years:

From the time the curtain went up until the final burst of energy with the entire cast on stage, the pace never lagged. Director Judith Crooker obviously succeeded where so many school productions fail, in teaching here students the importance of keeping the action sustained ... everyone did well, very well, and the quality of the acting was more evenly distributed than in many such efforts.²⁸

Like the young people growing up and into successive roles in the Spanish plays, many of these young actors grew up in the theater, graduating from role to role in the Project Discovery and Taos High School productions, to roles in musicals produced by the TCA and the Taos Students’ Repertory Theater, under the direction of Nat Simmons. They also worked with directors like Michael Smith, Peggy Klaus, Steve Parks and Klein in other plays and actors workshops, and in roles with smaller dramatic companies. With such training, as Sue McCleery hoped, some of her students — among them Augusta Allen-Jones, Justin Bailey, Carolyn Chatwin, Eliam Kriam, Noelle Kalom, Steve Espinoza, Bonnie Lucas, Louise



Kaleidoscope Players in the New Years' scene from *I Do! I Do!*

Mingenbach, Garland Cunningham and Timmy Trujillo — have careers in theater and film in Los Angeles, New York and other places across the country. Others like Calvin Hazen, Maya Crowley, Zoe Zimmerman, and Suzanne Wiggins have become successful musicians, dancers, artists and art teachers.

The first TCA production company started up four years after the theater was inaugurated. The Taos Community Theater Company presented its first play, *Deidre of the Sorrows*, by Irish playwright, John Millington Synge in May 1977.²⁹ The TCA continued its effort to showcase contemporary and local drama during the fall 1978 Taos Festival of Arts, hosting two plays by local playwrights. *Felix Clay in Concert* by Ron Kalom took its inspiration from the life of the late Taos artist, Clay Spohn, and “explores the vision of an aging man as he views youth, life, art and approaching death.” Larry Frank’s *The Free Will of Lionel Lagg* “is an irreverent spoof on man’s fallibility, on modern psychiatry and guruism.”³⁰

Beginning in 1972, the TCA began addressing another part of its mission — to bring quality outside entertainment to Taos audiences. The Kaleidoscope Players from

the State Theater of New Mexico brought *I Do, I Do* to the TCA stage during its inaugural year. Over the next decade or so the roster included the Amarillo Little Theater, the Theater Arts Corporation of Santa Fe, *La Compania de Teatro de Albuquerque*, the Chichester Theatre Festival Company, the Espanola Valley High School Students, the University of New Mexico Drama Department, and the Denver Center Theater Productions.

By producing its first musical, advocated by Bill Whaley, then executive director of the TAA, the TCA addressed its goal of involving more of the Taos arts community. In 1978 *West Side Story*, directed by Michael Smith, former actor in a New York experimental theater group and art critic for *The Village Voice* (later art critic with *The Taos News*), received enthusiastic praise in an article that began: "Sound the trumpets! No hyperbole is too good for the current production of "West Side Story" at the Taos Community Auditorium! The play, like its heroine, Maria, at one point during her lightning romance with Tony, is 12 feet above the ground and soaring!" The reviewer commended Smith and his assistant, Emily Regier, for directing with bravado, for their ability to "teach the actors how to leap from one radical mood to the next." The actors got rave reviews and the sets designed by artist Kit Schuetze were praised for being "imaginative, realistic and powerful." Rory Duval and Tori Olds, who choreographed numerous productions, were applauded for the complex and treacherous timing of the dance numbers, and Richard Crawley and Don Thompson's orchestra for mastering a difficult score. Carol Kalom got the "Sha Na Na nostalgic threads award" for her costume design.³¹

The presentation of *West Side Story*, advocated by Bill Whaley, executive director of the TAA, achieved two goals: pulling in talent from diverse aspects of the arts community, and appealing to a broader audience. Its success led to the production in the next few months of *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Godspell*. By 1979 the musicals had become enough of a recognized tradition to cause one reviewer, writing about the fall Taos Arts theatrical offerings, to remark:

"The Taos Community Auditorium offers a first-class musical program each year. The auditorium's forays into serious drama [*Deidre of the Sorrows* and *Life is a Dream*] have often been poorly received, and it may be tempting for it to take refuge in a constant succession of musicals which are safe at the box-office, but not the greatest challenges to those with artistic ability. Scheduled for later this year is the Broadway musical *Guy's and Dolls*.³²

The same reviewer cited theater companies that brought "serious" and "outrageous" theater to Taos. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, an influx of professionally trained theater people joined ranks with some of the resident professionals and formed their own companies. They created a "Golden Age" of Taos theater with experimental and contemporary productions that echoed happenings in New York and Los Angeles.

END of PART ONE



PART TWO: THE GOLDEN AGE OF TAOS THEATER

Coming in the Spring 1997 issue

NOTES:

1 *Spanish Religious Folktheater in the Spanish Southwest*, by Arthur L. Campa. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1934. University of New Mexico Bulletin, Language Series, vol. 5, no. 1, February 15, 1934, p. 8.

2 Campa, p. 11.

3 *The Lore of New Mexico*, by Marta Weigle and Peter White. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988, p. 410.

4 Weigle and White, pp. 406-407.

5 Weigle and White, p. 404.

6 This happened because the tradition of subdividing the land between heirs left such small parcels that farming was no longer profitable.

7 Interview with Jerry Padilla, October 28, 1996. White and Weigle and White, p. 494.

8 Weigle and White, p. 408.

9 "Drama Club Gets Up Steam," *Taos Valley News*, November 8, 1934.

10 *Taos Valley News*, March 14, 1935.

11 *Taos Valley News*, April 4, 1935.

12 Interview with My Rosen, October 29, 1996. Bob Raye and Otto Pitcher both remarked that theater answered the

question of what to do on a cold winter's night. Before World War II, Taos shut down after Labor Day, leaving people to create their own entertainment.

13 Interview with Otto Pitcher, October 30, 1996.

14 The Harwood Foundation of the University of New Mexico, 1923-1993: A Brief History and Collection Listing Published on the Seventieth Anniversary of the Foundation. Taos, NM: The Harwood Foundation of the University of New Mexico, 1993. "Otto Pitcher on the Ghost Stage," p. 23.

15 When Witter Bynner came to see *Cake* he remarked: "You people in Taos."

16 Interview with Robert D. Raye, October 30, 1996.

17 Interview with Otto Pitcher, July 31, 1996, and with Mertyl Rosen, October 29, 1996.

18 Past presidents included Dorothy Brandenburg, Martha Reed, Liz Budlong, Genevieve Janssen, Carl Glanz, Charlotte Graebner, Chilton Anderson and Natalie Cherry Baca. "Final curtain descends on Taos Little Theater" by Jim Levy, *The Taos News*, April 19, 1979.

19 *A Chronological Index of Theater in Taos, New Mexico, 1964 through August 1984*, compiled by R. C. Chalomsky.)

20 "Little Theater began drama," by Natalie Cherry Baca. *The Taos News*, September 5, 1973, and "Brandenburg believes in giving back to town," by Merilee Dannemann, *The Taos News*, February 25, 1982.

21 The Little Theater's costume collection included period costumes donated by Helena (Mrs. Howard) Wurlitzer. They included "opening dresses" that Eve Young-Hunter had made for each of her artist husband's opening, clothes from Mrs. Imhof, and others. Interview with Otto Pitcher, July 7, 1996, with Myrtle Rosen, October 29, 1996.

22 "The TCA: An Integral Part of Taos Arts for 20 Years," by Rick Romancito, *The Taos News*, February 20, 1992.

23 Interview with Otto Pitcher, July 31 and October 30, 1996, and with Myrtle Rosen, October 29, 1996. "Final curtain descends on Taos Little Theater," by Jim Levy. *The Taos News*, April 19, 1979.

24 The NEH liked this idea enough to fund the program for nearly a decade. Interview with Nancy Jenkins, October 22, 1996.

25 McCleery's husband, Albert, had been director of the famed Pasadena Playhouse for many years, and so McCleery had a wide acquaintanceship with theater professionals.

26 "Discovery youngsters romp in 'Carnival,'" by Merilee Dannemann, *The Taos News*, January 27, 1977.

27 "Discovery plays regal," by John Bachman, *The Taos News*, July 26, 1979.

28 *The Taos News*

29 The production, directed by Larry Frank, received state-wide recognition when it was later filmed and aired in August of 1979 on New Mexico's Public Broadcasting System.

30 "Festival plays planned," *The Taos News*, September 21, 1978.

31 Author's note: Many of these same and other behind-the-scenes talents created and produced sets, music, choreography, and costumes over the next few years for TCA musicals and other performances. "West Side Story": 12 feet high and soaring," *The Taos News*, April 13, 1978.

32 "Curtain rises on local talent," by Anthony Branch. *The Taos News*, September 6, 1979.



DOC MARTIN'S LOCOMOBILE

by Robert White

Thomas Paul Martin was a medical doctor in Taos at the beginning of the twentieth century. Originally from Pennsylvania, he arrived in Taos in January 1890 and was a prominent figure in town until his death in 1935. Ironically, he has an important place in the history of the Taos art colony because his sister, Rose Martin, was visiting him in the autumn of 1898 when artists Bert G. Phillips and Ernest L. Blumenschein first arrived in town. Rose and Bert quickly fell in love, and Bert stayed in Taos to be near Rose, which led to the founding of the art colony.¹

Doctor Martin was frequently mentioned in the Taos newspapers for various reasons, one of which was that he owned the first automobile in Taos. Doc went to Denver in April 1900 and underwent surgery at St. Joseph's Hospital. After he had recovered somewhat, he apparently did some shopping in Denver and decided to buy a horseless carriage.²

Doc arrived back in Taos on April 27, but his vehicle did not reach Taos until the middle of July 1900. Shipped from Colorado on the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, it was unloaded at Tres Piedras, west of the Rio Grande. Doc went to Tres Piedras, and on Saturday, July 14, supervised the towing of his new possession to Taos by a team of horses or mules. The newspaper editor was somewhat mystified as to what to call the horseless carriage and referred to it as "Dr. T.P. Martin's locomobile, or automobile, whichever it is," and then added that "we are not up on mobilology and we can't give the exact species, chronology and gender."³

Doc's new motor vehicle was steam powered, with gasoline used to heat the boiler. It took awhile for him to get it running but on the Sunday morning after it was towed into Taos, he was driving around the plaza by the time people were getting out of church. Things went well at first, but he was seen later in the day pushing it home. After he had done some repairs, someone asked him if he had been careful not to lose any of the parts. "Not lose any of the parts," replied Doc, "Why! Man I had a dozen pieces left over! Sabel!"⁴

The editor of *The Taos Cresset*, Frank Staplin, stated that Doc's locomobile was the first horseless carriage in the territory, adding with pride, "Taos, as usual, taking the lead in progressive improvements and acquisitions." The claim was not correct, however, as Albuquerque bicycle dealer J.L. Dodson bought a locomobile in Colorado in November 1897; he spent five days driving it from Denver to Albuquerque.⁵

During the autumn of 1900, Doc found his motor vehicle to be sufficiently dependable that in December he drove it over the mountains to Las Vegas. The editor of

the Las Vegas newspaper noted that the local residents showed considerable interest "in this new-fangled road vehicle that almost takes fright at the sight of a horse."⁶

Photographs of Doc Martin in his locomobile have not been located, but several photos exist of him in a later vehicle, which he probably purchased in April 1908. By this time, automobiles were becoming fairly common in cities (the Galles Chevrolet dealership opened in Albuquerque in that year), but they were still rather rare in Taos. Even by the summer of 1917, a motion picture filmed in Taos shows almost all the vehicles around the plaza to be horse-drawn wagons.⁷

NOTES

1 A biographical sketch of Doctor Martin may be found in Ralph Emerson Twitchell, *The Leading Facts of New Mexico History*, The Torch Press, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1917, Volume IV, p. 463. Bert Phillips' courtship of Rose Martin is covered in great detail in Julie Schimmel and Robert R. White, *Bert Geer Phillips and the Taos Art Colony*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1994, pp. 41-52.

2 *The Taos Cresset*, April 26, 1900. Established as the *Labelle Cresset* in 1894, this newspaper was moved to Taos in October 1898 and, after a name change, was published until June 1902. The university of New Mexico library has microfilm copies through December 1900; the Museum of New Mexico has bound copies for January 1901 to June 1902.

3 *The Taos Cresset*, July 12 and 19, 1900.

4 *The Taos Cresset*, July 19, 1900.

5 Marc Simmons, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1982, p. 335.

6 *The Las Vegas Daily Optic*, December 13, 1900. This article was reprinted in *The Taos Cresset*, December 20, 1900.

7 In the collections of the Kit Carson Historic Museums are two photos of Doc Martin sitting in an automobile; the photos were both sent to relatives on April 24, 1908, which suggests that the automobile was a new acquisition. The motion picture showing Taos in 1917 is entitled "Adventures in Kit Carson Land"; the original film is at the State Records Center and Archives in Santa Fe.





BOOK REVIEWS:

The Worlds of P'otsunu:
Geronima Cruz Montoya of San Juan Pueblo
 by Jeanne Shutes and Jill Mellick
 University of New Mexico Press,
 Albuquerque, 1996

For an older generation of Pueblo Indians, the virtues of selflessness were ingrained from an early age. Geronima Montoya of San Juan Pueblo, for instance, grew up in an environment where those virtues placed individuality and personal needs behind obligations to tribal traditions and sense of duty toward employers.

A new book about Montoya tries to reflect this environment while giving the reader an intimate look into the life and times of an important figure in American Indian art and education.

However, in *The Worlds of P'otsunu: Geronima Cruz Montoya of San Juan Pueblo*, authors Jeanne Shutes and Jill Mellick have taken such a politically correct path for telling the story of Montoya's life that a true sense of the woman and her motivations barely emerges.

Montoya was born in 1915 and grew up in the Pueblo of San Juan, a community that was adjacent to the first Spanish colony established by Don Juan de Oñate in 1698. Her youth was spent during a time when American educators insisted that Indian children become "assimilated" into a so-called modern world. By taking these children from their ancestral homes and imposing strict discipline — meaning they were forbidden to speak in their native languages or to have contact with their families and traditions — these children could become productive citizens.

Although it would appear that Montoya easily moved within this system, she remained loyal to her Pueblo's ancient religion and family structure.

It was while attending the Santa Fe Indian School that she became close friends with art teacher Dorothy Dunn, a woman who has been credited with helping to create a particular style of native art. After Dunn left the school, Montoya was asked to take over teaching the art program.

Montoya used teaching methods that combined Dunn's philosophy with her own in classes she taught until the 1960s when a new wave in art education emerged. This effort resulted in the founding of the Institute of American Indian Art, in place of the old Santa Fe Indian School.

But Montoya's methods were understandably consid-

ered antiquated and contrary to an artistic philosophy that sought to combine European art foundations with Indian cultural imagery. She eventually left the school and went on to help establish the Oke Oweenge Artists Cooperative at San Juan Pueblo and to devote more time to her family and tribe.

Shutes and Mellick are psychotherapists in private practice from Palo Alto, Calif., who visited Montoya regularly from 1976 to 1994. Their research was thorough and attention to detail impressive. But their book reads like a rather sterile chronicle of Montoya's life, something the authors readily admit was part of their method in writing this book. "Too often Western storytellers in many disciplines impose heirarchical or predetermined forms on nonlinear and associative material," the authors state in their introduction. "... we neither can nor wish to treat content and structure as autonomous entities." Some of this sterile tone isn't all the fault of the authors. Montoya, when shown transcripts of conversations with the authors, apparently felt the need to rewrite them, making them sound more formal.

Despite its shortcomings, *The Worlds of P'otsunu* reveals a little-known aspect of the development of Indian art and provides the reader with a look at Indian life that dispels a number of persistent stereotypes.

— Rick Romancito



A Campaign in New Mexico with Colonel Doniphan

Frank S. Edwards
 Foreword by Mark L. Gardner
 University of New Mexico Press,
 Albuquerque, 1996
 \$18.95 Paper

A 150 year old best seller has been re-printed by University of New Mexico Press. Campaign in New Mexico with Colonel Doniphan, by Frank S. Edwards, was first released in the fall of 1847, and became an instant best-seller of its day, there being little information on the Mexican War available on the east coast. Based upon Edwards' highly readable diary, it contains the story of the Missouri Volunteers who marched across the great

plains from St. Louis to New Mexico, before continuing on to Chihuahua. On the way, the Missouri Volunteers, an army unit, visited Las Vegas, N.M., Santa Fe, and of course Albuquerque.

Edwards describes the manners and morals of the native population including their food, dress, housing and the country through which the Missouri Volunteers passed. Participating in several battles where the Mexicans were on attack, the Missouri Volunteers were able to "give a good account of themselves" in the battles of Bracito near El Paso and the Battle of Sacramento, fought more deeply in Mexico. The Missouri Volunteers returned victorious to El Paso and thence down the Rio Grande where they were mustered out in New Orleans.

Edwards often repeats local myths and other fallacious material and stories prevalent among the population of New Mexico at the time.

A delightful, slim volume with points of information about "nineteenth century soldiering and life on the Mexican far northern frontier."

This reviewer found it fascinating for the account of the citizenry on the raw New Mexican frontier. Recommended reading but you can't borrow my copy. Go get your own.

— Fayne Lutz

***Centuries of Hands,
An Architectural History of
St. Francis of Assisi Church***

by Van Dorn Hooker with Corina A. Santistevan
Sunstone Press, Santa Fe
\$18.95 paper

This turns out to be much more than "An Architectural History." It is a fascinating window into the life and history of the Taos Valley. While telling the story of its most famous church it also has details about the three existing mission chapels used by the San Francisco de Asis parishioners. Full of historic photos, illustrations, and architectural drawings, the book explains the construction and design of the Ranchos church as well as the Nuestra Senora de Talpa Church (Duran Chapel) which is now in ruins. The book also gives a carefully authenticated account of the Ranchos de Taos settlement (s) and probable construction date for the church.

During the depression era, a nationwide project called the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) was begun to make detailed architectural drawings of important historic buildings. A good account is given of the New Mexico project for 1934 which included both San Francisco de Assis and the Duran Chapel, thus creating a significant record of what was on the ground at that time.

The resulting 44 sheets of drawings are included. This is not just for architects, and these are not just "blueprints," but truly artful and detailed renderings of the buildings.

Of course, the authors have included the story of the rehabilitation and maintenance of the old church, which has also brought the people of Ranchos together in such a unique way. If you are interested in old New Mexico buildings, or in the heart and life of the Ranchos community, you will want to get this book. You can skip immediately to parts that interest you, or read every fascinating footnote.

— Andy Lindquist

***The Spanish Borderlands
A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest***

by Herbert E. Bolton,
forward by Albert L. Hurtado
University of New Mexico Press
\$22.50 Softcover

Bolton's 1921 classic, *The Spanish Borderlands*, has been reprinted by UNM press. A fascinating foreword by University of Arizona's Prof. Albert L. Hurtado explains how Boulton, a thorough researcher with a dry, academic and detailed writing style, was forced to collaborate with editors to produce what turned out to be a popular, readable classic. The book also became a major factor in changing the conventional historical perspective of the time that Spain's presence in North America was a mere prelude to Britain's ultimate domination of the continent.

The book's title became the label for a new field of study based on Bolton's emphasis on lasting Hispanic influence. Devoid of scholarly footnotes that slow down reading for many, *The Spanish Borderlands* is a broad synthesis of Spanish influences on North America. The 22 page chapter on New Mexico give the most concise summary possible of our history through the Colonial period. It belongs on every New Mexico bookshelf.

— Andy Lindquist

Forgotten People, A Study of New Mexicans

by George I Sanchez,
Foreword by Mario T. Garcia
University of New Mexico Press,
Albuquerque, 1996
Originally published 1940
\$16.95 Paper

Forgotton People includes an 18-page foreward by Mario T. Garcia, University of California at Santa Barbara. The book, first published in 1940, was written by George I

Continued on page 16

BEAVER! BEAVER!

Mrs. Mabel Luhan was fined \$80 in Justice of the Peace Quintana's court on Tuesday, November 21st, for having in her possession four beaver pelts, untagged and apparently unlawfully killed. Mrs. Luhan stated that she had owned the hides for several years, having purchased them from a man whom she believed was licensed to kill beaver, since they were destroying his fruit trees at his ranch down the river.

The pelts were reported to the State authorities by the company to which they had been sent for tanning.

The Taos Valley News, Nov. 23, 1933

INCORPORATION!

Taos County Commissioners yesterday passed a resolution ordering the filing of incorporation petition presented to them by Taos citizens; and ordered a census to be taken. They fixed bond at \$500 and the day January 24th as the date for the final hearig (sic) on the subject.

- Taos Valley News, January 4, 1934:

DRAMA CLUB OFFICERS ANNOUNCE NEW PLANS

... At the same meeting it was decided to start work at once on another play which is to be "The Importance of Being Earnest," by Oscar Wilde, which will be directed by Victor White.

TAOS VOCATIONAL SCHOOL ROBBED OF \$300 WORTH OF BLANKETS

Theives loot weaving Department Sunday Night, Dec. 9th.
- Taos Valley News, December 6, 1934

TURTLE DANCE RECORDED

The weird chant of the San Juan turtle dance was recorded at the pueblo Monday.

Manuel Archuleta, a member of San Juan tribe and an Indian Service employee said he received permission

from the governor of the pueblo to make the recording.

This is the first time in history that the primitive dance chant has been recorded.

- El Crepusculo, December 29, 1949

OLD TAOS FLAG SENT TO OHIO

A Taos flag, together with a story of how Captain Smith H. Simpson, Kit Carson and others raised and defended the flag 99 years ago and how it has flown day and night ever since, is being sent to Wilmington, Ohio.

There it will be exhibited at the 13th International Fair at Wilmington College, after which it will be placed in a permanent collection of flags that represent notable incident in the history of the United States.

- El Crepusculo, December 17, 1959



Cover illustration from Ila McAfee's 1949 *Calendar of the Southwest*, reprinted in later years to benefit the Taos Art Association's Stables Art Center

The paper ran a pictorial memorial for Patrocinio Barela, who had perished two months earlier in a fire.

- The Taos News, December 24, 1964

Headline reads: CLOUDBURST, POWER FAILURE, ROBBERY, MAR CHRISTMAS EVE

- The Taos News, December 31, 1964

THE TAOS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY SPONSORS

SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST

The Taos County Historical Society is offering 2 prizes of \$25 for the two best historical essays - one in English, one in Spanish - written by a public high school student.

- The Taos News, January 7, 1965

LOCAL FIRM INTRODUCES HOME LOGSPLITTER

A fledgling Taos company (Taos Equipment Manufacturing, Inc.) has come out with a revolutionary new product designed to take the backbreaking labor out of woodsplitting. (Editor's note: This item ran with a photo of Eliu Romero splitting wood with the logsplitter which hooked up to an automobile wheel hub for its power.)

- The Taos News, January 8, 1970

NEW MEXICAN, GANNETT PAPERS MERGE

... An agreement in principle to merge The New Mexican, Inc., and the Gannett Company, Inc., was announced last Friday by Robert M. McKinney of *The New Mexican* and Paul Miller of Gannett ... McKinney, will retain ownership of Taos Publishing Corporation, which publishes *The Taos News*.

- The Taos News, December 25, 1975

Gunsmoke On Taos Plaza

A rootin'-tootin' reveler, Porforio Martinez Peralta, about 30, caused a good deal of excitement Saturday midnight when he fired several shots from a .22 rifle outside the Don Fernando Tavern on the plaza. No one was hit, but several pedestrians, as well as stand-by policeman Gutierrez in a police car, at whom Peralta pointed the gun, became quite uncomfortable.

Town Officer Eddie Montoya and Teddy Rivera disarmed Peralta, who was then jailed for the night. The next day he paid a \$25 fine in Judge Flores' J.P. Court, the toll required by an old ordinance for shooting firearms within the village limits.

El Crepusculo, Dec. 31, 1959

Continued from page 14 –

Sanchez, a University of New Mexico professor with funding by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, after a study he conducted of Taos County in 1938 and 1939. Sanchez paints an extreme picture of dire poverty and ignorance in the sparsely populated county and blames the government and the political system for not doing enough to alleviate the situation. The lack of funds for schools and adult educational programs and the low tax base created a hopeless situation for the mostly hispanic population.

Sanchez felt that the northern county was not receiving an adequate share of attention in relation to the southern counties with larger populations and likened the people in Taos County to “step-children of the Nation.” Because of the extreme poverty of the people many were not able to meet their taxes and this contributed to a low tax base making the per capita funding for schools and services much lower than anywhere else. More programs and greater effort should have been made in assisting the people who lacked education and were sometimes able to speak Spanish only.

After reading how the book depicted all the problems Taos County faced in health, education, economics, social and cultural sufficiency, I decided we certainly have come a long way! Our per capita income, however, is still one of the lowest in the state.

– Sadie O. Knight

Utopian Vistas
The Mabel Dodge Luhan House and the
American Counterculture

by Lois Palken Rudnick

University of New Mexico Press, 1996

\$35.00 Cloth

The author weaves a fascinating story about the many visitors and occupants of the Luhan house, beginning with its first mistress, Mabel Dodge Luhan. The book is written in three main parts: the Lujan years, The Dennis Hopper and Friends years, and finally, the George Otero years when it became Las Palomas de Taos. Also included is an interesting epilogue when the author interviewed local teacher, Larry Torres.

It is obvious to me that the author did extensive research in relating the comings and goings of the hundreds of people who have walked through the doors of this historical home. The many photographs add interest for the reader.

This is a wonderful book for historical collectors and art collectors, as well as for those with an interest in the hippie invasion of Taos in the 70s. All in all, I enjoyed it thoroughly and found it interesting as well as informative.

– Sadie O. Knight



TAOS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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