

AYER Y HOY en TAOS

Yesterday and Today in Taos County and Northern New Mexico

Fall 2015

Issue #39

Bataan and Its Aftermath: Taosenos Helped Hold the Line



Memorias de

San Francisco de Asis:

The Restoration of a Sacred Place



A Bouquet of Christmas Fra- grance from the Past



A publication of the Taos County Historical Society

CONTENTS

Memorias de San Francisco de Asis:

The Restoration of a Sacred Place 3
by Michael Miller

Bataan and Its Aftermath:

Taoseños Helped Hold the Line 6
by Jerry Padilla

A Bouquet Of Christmas Fragrance 9
by Corina Aurora Santistevan

AYER Y HOY en TAOS

Yesterday and Today in Taos County
and Northern New Mexico

Fall 2015

Issue No. 39

ISSN 1088-5285

© 2015 Taos County Historical Society

Taos County Historical Society's publication, Ayer y Hoy en Taos - 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 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.

All articles, maps, photographs, drawings, etc., are the property of the contributors and may not be used or reproduced in any way without permission from the Society and/or the contributor.

AYER Y HOY is distributed to all members of the Taos County Historical Society as a benefit of membership.

Editor

Dave Cordova

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.

Board of Directors

Ernestina Cordova - President

Benton Bond - Vice-president

Judy Weinrobe - Secretary

Darren Bond - Treasurer

P.O. Box 2447 • Taos, New Mexico 87571

A Message from the TCHS President

Dear Members,

The coming Christmas season prompts us to reminisce about the past. 2015 was an awesome year. The Taos Historical Society (TCHS) has enjoyed participating in the celebrations of the 100 years of The Taos Society of Artists, the 300 years of the acequia systems and the 200 years of San Francisco de Asis Church. Our field trips and lectures were outstanding and, proud to say, that they were successful.



This year, we have received a collection of research material from one of our "Taos, a Topical History" authors, Father Juan Romero and are also expecting a donation of 700 New Mexico historic books that have found a home with us here in Taos. The collection will soon come to us when the TCHS receives additional space in the Old Taos County Court House. The Society is very grateful to be working with our County Manager, Deputy and Commissioners to realize a project to house and maintain the first ever, Taos County Museum. Our hopes are to open a Research Room to give everyone an opportunity to read and use the books and research material that we have acquired, and to have space to display artifacts that are being donated to the TCHS. The Society is most anxious to manage a museum for Taos County. At this time we have a few archives that have been donated to us and we have several items that will be loaned to us that we can display in one of the rooms in the additional space.

In our Spring 2015 issue of Ayer y Hoy we have some great stories and articles with the hope that these stories of the past will be enjoyed by future generations. Like the paper says, "Ayer y Hoy," "Yesterday and Today," so we can preserve the culture and history to make sure that our youth can learn of the community's great history and the contributions of those that came before us.

We invite you to join us for our monthly lectures on the first Saturday of every month at the Kit Carson Electric Coop Board Room, 218 Cruz Alta Road at 2:00pm. Visit our website: www.taoscountyhistoricalsociety.org and follow us on Facebook. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Board Members of Taos County Historical Society and invite each of you to become more involved with the Society.

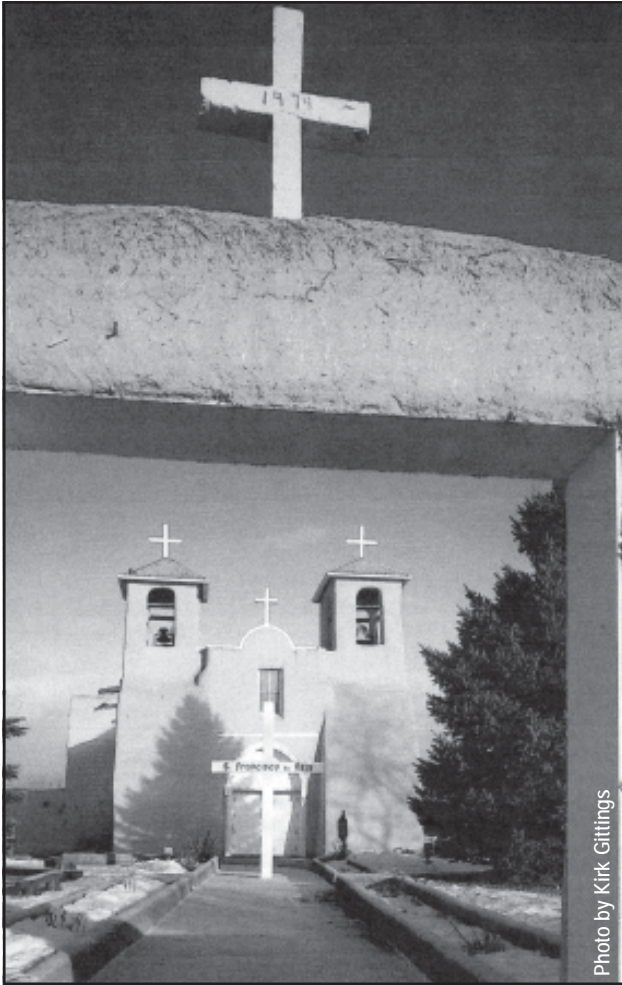
In the peace of this season our spirits are joyful
and I wish everyone Love, Joy and Peace!

Ernestina Cordova, President
Taos County Historical Society

Memorias de San Francisco de Asis: The Restoration of a Sacred Place

by Michael Miller

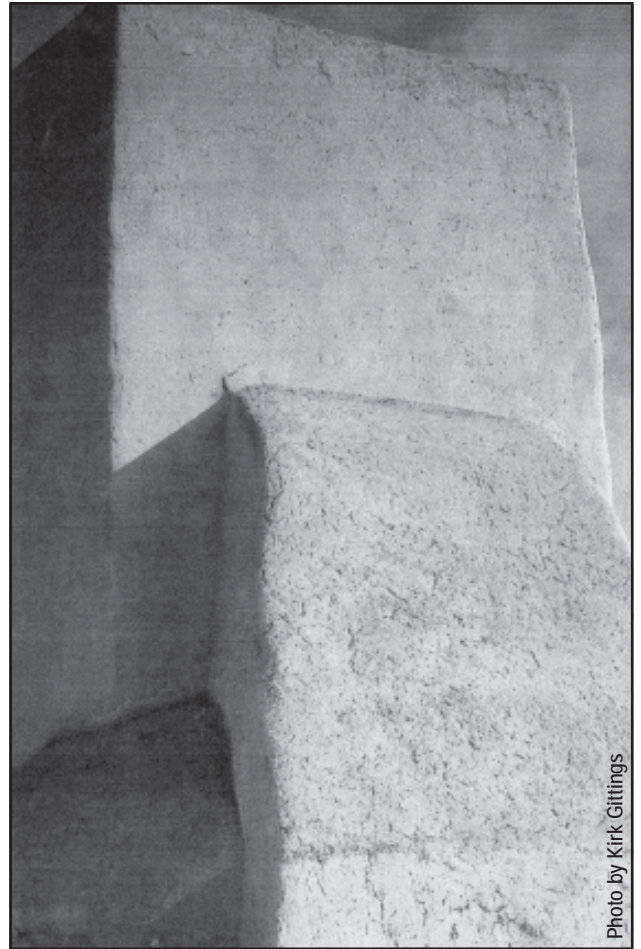
In 1980, when the people of Ranchos de Taos decided to tear off the hard plaster from the exterior walls of their church and resume traditional mud plastering, they made a statement to the world. Their message was clear. The parishioners wished



to return the church and the community to the traditions of their ancestors. The following year the same determined group of residents made another sweeping decision on the restoration of the interior of this famous church which would dramatically affect the future of traditional *Nuevomexicano* art in New Mexico. Having restored the church's exterior to its authenticity and integrity, the parishioners now wanted the artwork inside to look the way the original *santeros* had painted it. They decided to restore the main altarscreen and the largest Molleno *reredo* in the region. Instead of commissioning a professional conservationist, as had been done in the past, they chose to return to tradition for a second time, and selected two community members, Luis Tapia and Frederico Vigil, to restore the church's precious art.

It was a time of renewal for the parish at Ranchos, when Santa Fe artists Luis Tapia and Frederico Vigil accepted this exciting invitation. Tapia and Vigil had participated individually in

museum and institutional restorations but, the *reredos* project at Ranchos was by far, the most significant commission in their young careers. At a ten year personal reunion in 1990, they spoke of their experience standing together on the main altar. As they gazed at the beauty of the artwork that they had restored they were genuinely moved at the magnificent art before them. "It's a happy time," Vigil said. "It was an important project, and I am proud to have been a part of it. The community took good care of us. We became involved in everything they did. It was incredible to be here and enjoy the community."



"That's true," said Tapia. "It was a real honor and something that may occur only once in a lifetime. On other restoration projects for museums the goal was to make the piece look old. But we wanted to re-educate the professionals. Ours is a living culture. You cannot stagnate a culture that is living and treat it as a museum piece. We were making a statement to the world. We were telling them that this is our church, our culture, and our religion, and we intend to participate in it.

"When the hard plaster took the life out of the building, the people took it off and returned the church to the living and let it breathe. Inside we wanted to accomplish the same thing.

(continued on page 4)

The Restoration of a Sacred Place

(continued)



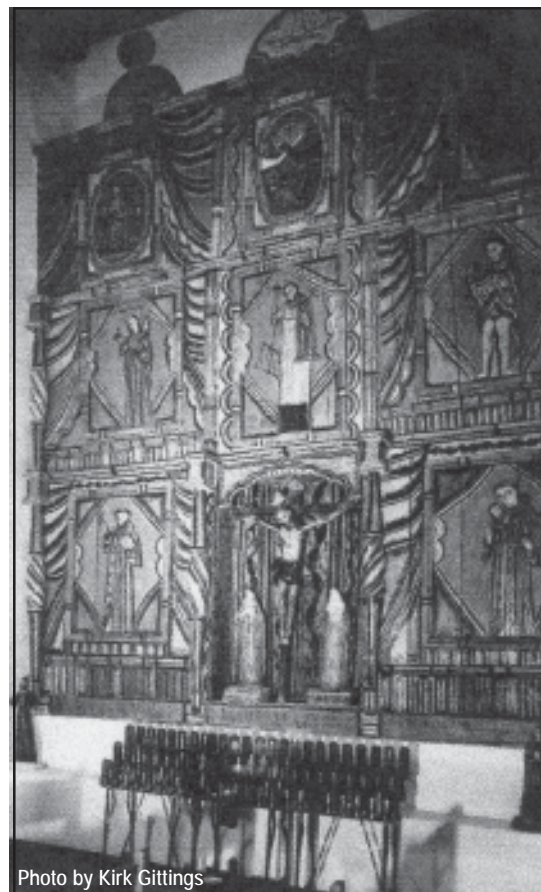
What was important to the community was that we take care of our own traditions. They felt that we could do the restoration just as well as anybody. And Fred and I felt strongly that the community had to have a big part in this. For that reason, everyone joined in the effort.”

For months the two artists painstakingly reconstructed the original design of the main altar. They researched the archives with hope of finding a clue about the original artist for the main altarscreen, but documentation was never found. “It’s our belief that the main altarscreen was the work of the Laguna Santero,” Tapia said. “The artistic ability of the artist who painted the main altar was much further along than Molleno. It is agreed that the artist Molleno was responsible for painting the east *reredo*.”

Sister Emilia Atencio, who assisted in the restoration, speculates, “Fray Benito Pereyro could have been the Laguna painter.” Pereyro was the *custos* for the Franciscan Order in *Nuevo Mexico* and lived in Taos around this time. The artists carefully documented the restoration process by taking photographs, making notes, and producing sketches of the details at various stages. Acetone was used to bring out the fading colors and designs that were hidden in the aging wood. These designs were transferred to tracing paper or sketched on the spot and were preserved for further study and research. The colors that were revealed in this process were the exact

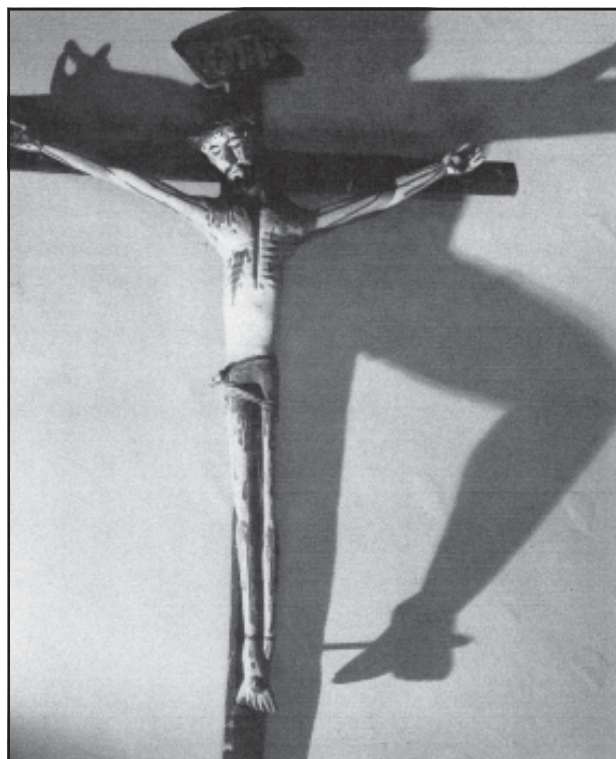
colors used to paint the original motifs. Vigil learned that the methods used by the original artist were similar to the ancient fresco process that he uses in his own contemporary work.

The time-consuming reconstruction of the altarscreen revealed many “secrets” from the past. They learned that many of the panels had been moved, throughout the generations, and were no longer in their original places. To locate the correct patterns and placement of the panels became a challenge the artists enjoyed. They are convinced that the *reredo* was built specifically for placement of the “Mexican paintings,” and they were fascinated by the genius of their predecessors. Each panel was cut at different angles and from separate pieces of wood. To keep them uniform and in their proper place, a piece of wet rawhide was tied to a wooden dowel in the back. The rawhide was kept wet during the placement of the panels which formed a *nicho*. As it dried, the leather pulled the panels together, forming a tight bond, and a perfect niche for the *bulto*.



For over eight months, Tapia and Vigil worked within the confines of New Mexico’s most famous church. During this time, these men felt the “strong presence of God” strengthened their faith. Tapia said, “One night, I was painting alone on the scaffolding high above the altar. We had moved all of the *santos* from their *nichos* and they were lined up in a row in front of the altar rail. I could feel the presence of someone watching me, but I was never afraid. It was a good feeling.”

Vigil also experienced a spiritual presence. "One day around sunset we were working late, and the people had been mud plastering all day. I went over to get some fresh air, and everyone was gone. But the church was pulsating. The walls were alive from the touch of the people's hands on the surface all day. I believe you can create miracles with your hands."



The parish chose October 3, the feast day of St. Francis, as the day for the dedication of the restored altarscreen. *Visperas* and Mass opened the celebration and a procession for St. Francis was organized to pay homage to the patron of the parish. Following the ceremony, the curtain which hid the altar was slowly removed, revealing the 19th century *reredo* in its original deep red, brilliant greens, and traditional black and white colors. "I'll never forget that day," Tapia recalled. "When the people saw the *reredo* it was total silence. Everyone was in shock. The difference from before was overwhelming. We knew it would be controversial at first because of the bold colors. But today, ten years later in 1990, hardly anyone even notices the difference. It's a great compliment to us and to the faith and unity of the parish."

The Mass and dedication ended this remarkable project on that day October 3, 1980. But for church restoration on a community level, it was the beginning of a new era for *Ranchos*. As parish archivist and dedicated parishioner, Corina Santistevan commented, "It's this Holy Place that holds us together."

SOURCES:

Oral history interviews with Luis Tapia, Frederico Vigil, Sister Emilia Atencio, and Corina Santistevan, 1990.

Michael Miller is a contributor to TAOS: A TOPICAL HISTORY. He is a writer and poet from La Puebla, NM

Christmas Recipes

Empanaditas de Carne

(contributed by Ernestina Cordova)

Prepare the Meat

- 1 lb. of boiled meat
- 1 ½ cups of raisins
- 2 cups applesauce
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ cup shelled piñon nuts
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves



Grind meat, add raisins, applesauce, sugar and mix together. Add nuts and spices. If mixture is dry add some stock from boiled meat but not sticky.

Prepare the Masa

- 1 cake of yeast (or bag ¼ oz of yeast)
- 1 ½ cups of milk or water
- 3 Tbsp of shorting or lard
- 1 ½ teaspoon of salt
- 2 Tbsp sugar

Mix yeast, warm milk, shortening, sugar and salt, add to Flour and knead adding liquids or flour for consistency.

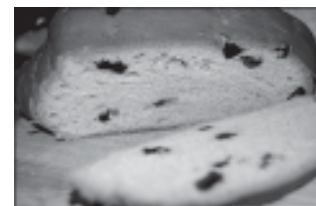
Roll dough into 6" discs, about an 1/8 inch thick, add 1 ½ Tbsp mince meat, pinch seal edges & fry in oil. Turnover for 5 minutes until browned.



Julekake (Norwegian Christmas Bread)

(contributed by Joan Pond)

- 3 Cups Milk
- 1-1/2 Sticks Butter
- 4 Eggs
- ½ Cup Sugar
- 2 tsp. Salt
- 1-1/2 tsp. Cardamon
- 10 Cups of Sifted Flour
- 1 Cup of Chopped Nuts (Walnuts or Pecans)
- 2 Dry Yeast soaked in water with a little sugar (rises better)
- Raisins and/or dry fruit (dusted with flour) (keeps raisins and fruit from sticking together)



Scald milk and let cool. Put in butter, salt and sugar. Beat eggs, add cooled milk. Add rest of ingredients and form into bread loafs. Bake in moderate oven (350) until done.

Bataan and Its Aftermath: Taosenos Helped Hold the Line

by Jerry A. Padilla

While much has been written about the World War II campaign of Bataan and the defense of the Philippine Islands, let it not ever be forgotten that many Taoseños helped hold the line. The sacrifices made by the 200th Coast Artillery, New Mexico National Guard, among other units, in the long run, helped delay and ultimately prevent a Japanese invasion of Australia. Some have said this unit of the New Mexico National Guard was assigned to the Philippine Islands, because the Taos soldiers, whether Hispano, Anglo or Native American, for the most part were fluent in Spanish and English, skills necessary for cooperation and coordination in the defense of a Spanish speaking country in the Orient. The 200th Coast Artillery evolved from the old 111th Cavalry, New Mexico National Guard, of which the Taos unit was Troop K. Early in 1939, with modernization of American military forces, the Adjutant General's Office received direction from the War Department to convert the cavalry unit to Coast Artillery, and this conversion began in 1940, according to John Pershing Jolly, former Adjutant General of New Mexico. Taos and its citizen soldiers became Battery H, and these men traded horses for anti-aircraft cannon. According to Major Jack Boyer, one of the commanders of the Taos unit said in a Taos News special section dedicated to Taoseño World War II veterans, March 25, 2005, that it was Battery Eight, and consisted of 60 men and four officers, all from the Taos area.

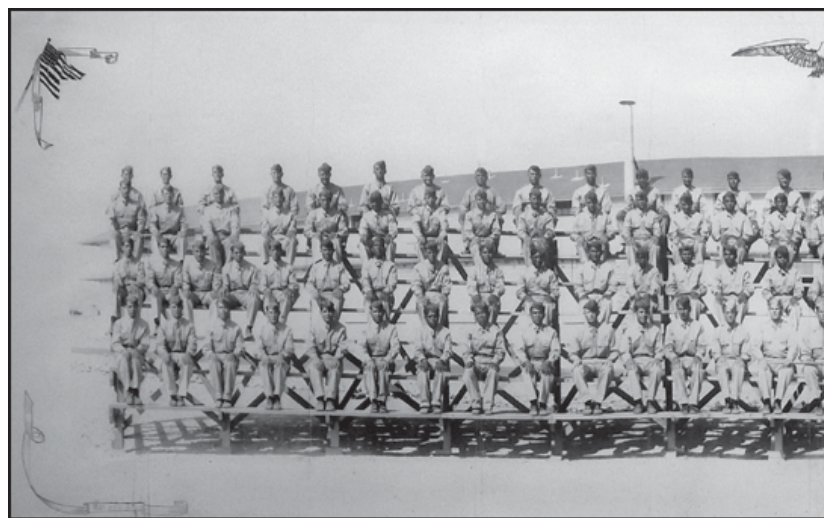
Continued Boyer, "we trained hard at Fort Bliss, without full compliment of weapons and equipment and with little or no firing of those weapons we had. Still by August 1941, the 200th had been officially named as the best AA regiment, regular army or otherwise, available for use in an area of critical importance. As the Philippines had become such an area, the 200th was then ordered there."

War looming on the horizon, the 200th readied for its overseas assignment, and after completing training at Fort Bliss, Texas arrived at Fort Stotsenberg, 75 miles north of Manila.

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, the 200 mobilized awaiting impending hostile air attacks, and although not fully equipped with the correct powder train fuses, prepared defend Manila, Clark Air Field, and continued help train Filipino forces. According to Jolly, the Japanese where also attacking the Philippines simultaneously. By the next day, during a high altitude attack by Japanese bombers, the 200th shot down five aircraft, losing two Guardsmen to the first bomb dropped, that had made a direct hit on their truck.

It was only the beginning, the American and Filipino forces were under constant air attack the next two weeks, and the Japanese invasion troops began landing on Luzon, the main

island. Battling constant attacks, the 200th and fought delaying actions without any sign of reinforcements, essentially making an orderly retreat to San Fernando, while being everywhere at the same time. The 200th and its provisional unit of Filipinos, trained and led by New Mexicans, the sis" successfully covered the evacuation of forces, equipment and supplies into Bataan where they would attempt to hold the line, American forces now under the command of Generals Wainwright, Edward P. King, Jr., and Colonel Charles Sage and Lt. Colonel Harry M. Peck.



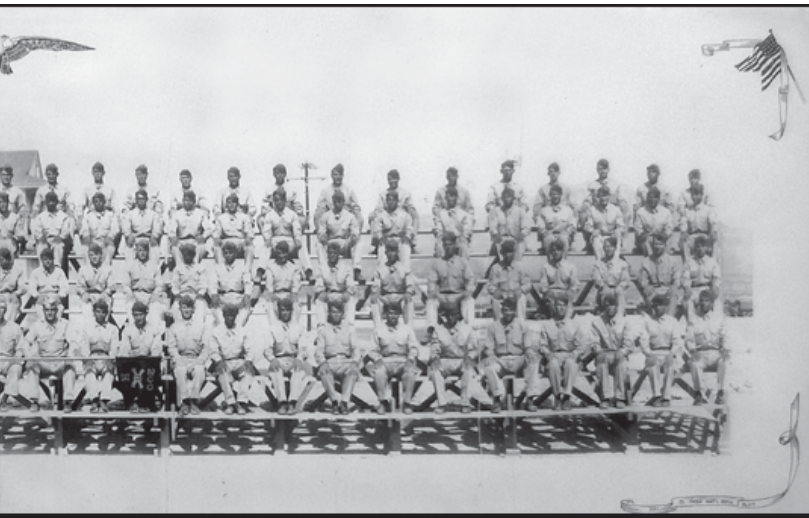
By April 3, 1942, the Japanese receiving enough reinforcements, started the final drive through the Bataan peninsula, and all told the defenders had resisted the enemy for three months. Surrounded, outnumbered and running low on food and medicines, suffering from malaria, and many casualties, General Edward P. King, Jr., reluctantly and formally surrendered 70,000 Filipino and U.S. soldiers to Japanese General Masaharu Homma, April 9, 1942.

The prisoners began a 65 mile infamous "Death March," to a prison camp at Camp O'Donnell. Enroute they were beaten randomly, denied food and water and many were tortured to death. Those who survived the march endured 40 months of incarceration in various Japanese prisoner of war camps where cruel treatment, disease and malnutrition continued to take its toll. The Americans were forced to march on the right side of the roads, while the Filipino prisoners were made to walk on the left side, so the Japanese soldiers escorting could tell the difference. Some Filipinos resembled Americans, just as some New Mexicans resembled Filipinos, and this confusion gave some of the guards an excuse to further mistreat the men.

Arriving at San Fernando some of those who survived were interned there, where they were forced into 1918 model railroad boxcars, over 100 men to a car, while others were made to continue on to Camp O'Donnell, another 10 kilometers.

It is believed that at least 1,500 Americans died, and at least 25,000 Filipinos fell victim to the battle and mistreatment while prisoners.

The late Jack Boyer was a ranking officer of the Taos contingent of the 200th, with Dow Bond, and survived the war. During a speech at the dedication of the old Taos Armory as a Bataan Memorial Building, in 1987, Boyer said) “the Philippine Campaign which culminated with the fall of Bataan on 9 April, and Corregidor on 6 May, 1942 should never have happened. The whole campaign is a classic example of un-preparedness, lack of communication, lack of knowledge of the capabilities and limitations of equipment, lack of training and of equipment, and the extreme jealousy and antipathy of high ranking officers, and the decision of President Roosevelt and his staff in Washington toward the defense of the Philippine Islands.”



There are only a few Taos County Veterans of Bataan still alive in 2007. Among them are Tony Reyna of Taos Pueblo, Roberto Medina of Cañon, and Valdemar DeHerrera of Costilla.

Reyna and Medina shared some of their memories when Reyna was honored as the Taos News Citizen of the Year, 2004, and Medina was featured in the same special in the Rakes section. For Reyna, the Bataan Death March was as bad as war atrocities come. All of these veterans are modest and for the most part reluctant to talk much about their war experiences. Roberto Medina has said, “It would be like bragging,” to say much about having survived the war. Valdemar DeHerrera was not available for comment. After returning home he continued to earn a living in rural Taos County, married, and raised a family. Sometimes all three have been present for local events honoring veterans.

As the Japanese subjected surrendered American troops to the tortuous 65 mile march to a prison camp in 1942, Reyna was forced to bury his Taos Pueblo comrade Fernando Concha. Many of these prisoners who survived the march later succumbed to disease and starvation during the three years of internment. “Those who survived,” said Reyna, “were determined to survive. One man next to me just plain gave up. He quit seeing the future.”

Reyna and fellow survivors never gave up. After Russian troops set them free in August 1945, an airplane crashed into their compound. Then, the hospital ship transporting them to Okinawa hit a mine. In Okinawa, the wheel of their airplane fell off. It seemed as if the odds were against their ever coming home to Taos again.

Reyna explained that only six of eleven Guardsmen from Taos Pueblo survived. Concha, Big Jim Lujan, Jerry and Lupe Lucero, and Joe I. Lujan did not make it.

Tony Reyna weighed only 100 pounds when he returned. After recovering in a Santa Fe hospital, he returned to his life at Taos Pueblo where he has served as Taos Pueblo Governor twice, and continues to manage his own art shop on the pueblo. He has served on many boards, and was instrumental in bringing a health clinic to the Pueblo and in getting Taos Pueblo designated an official United Nations World Heritage Site. He and wife Annie Cata Reyna had four children, and he has received various honors and awards over the years. According to R. Scott Gerdes in a profile written about Medina, the Taos born native son did his best with the cards life dealt him. As many New Mexican patriots have always done, Medina volunteered for military service. Gerdes wrote that some family members believe he embellished the truth about his age, and instead of 21 was actually 17 when he enlisted in the New Mexico National Guard, assigned to Battery H of the 200th Coast Artillery.

After the war Medina came home, later married Juanita Fernandez Medina, started his concrete and sand business, and together they raised 15 children, 11 of whom are still living. Gerdes explained his oldest son Cipriano shared that his father doesn't like talking about the war, because, “some of his friends were left over there.”

In retrospect, after the war, Colonel Peck said, “New Mexicans must never forget the many hundreds of men of the 200th who did not survive on Luzon, Bataan, and in various Japanese Prisoner of War Camps and those who lost their lives at sea.” (Several of the prisoners drowned when a ship transporting them to Japan was torpedoed by an American submarine, whose captain and crew were unaware the prisoners were on board).

Continued Peck, “Somewhat less than twenty of these casualties occurred as a result of battle action, a remarkable record for units engaged in combat with the invaders several times every day for four continuous months. Those who survived this war and who had the good fortune to know the 200th and the 515th — The Brigade - will always remember their patience under adverse conditions, their uncomplaining care of each other, and the inevitable guitars which played a requiem to those who died.”

Paying tribute to the 200th Coast Artillery, General Wainwright said in December 1945, “on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese unexpectedly attacked, the first point bombed was Fort Stotsenberg. The 200th Coast Artillery, assigned to defend this Fort, was the first unit in the Philippines, under General of the Army Douglas MacArthur,



Group portrait of New Mexico POWs at Zentsuji Camp at Shikoku, Osaka, Japan. Left to right: CAPT Claude W. Stump (Deming, NM) – joined the NM National Guard (11th Cavalry) in 1921; 2LT Clinton C. Seymour (Gallup, NM) – was transferred to the 26 Cavalry (PS) as a Platoon Commander; CAPT George W. Henfling (Albuquerque, NM) – died in 1969 at 56 years; CAPT Dow G. Bond (Taos, NM) – was recommended for the Silver Star while holding the enemy at bay at Balanga while the Army engineers blew up the bridge during the retreat into Bataan; CAPT Jack K. Boyer (Taos, NM) – was appointed to the State Park and Recreation Commission by Gov. David Cargo in 1968; 1LT Jack W. Bradley (Albuquerque, NM) – was a Founding father of West Valley College, Saratoga, CA (1964). He wrote the text of the “History” columns at Bataan Memorial Park.

to go into actions and fire at the enemy, also the first one to go into action defending our flag in the Pacific. First to fire and last to lay down their arms”

Interestingly, General MacArthur was also considered a New Mexican by many of his contemporaries. He grew up on military posts in southern New Mexico his father commanded.

There is a memorial dedicated to Taos veterans in the town plaza. The original memorial is a huge bronze cross set on a concrete pedestal. The monument dedicated to the Bataan veterans was sponsored by the War Mother's Club, a group of women who had sons and daughters serving in the military during World War II. On the west side of the cross are the names of those who died at the battles at Bataan or it's aftermath during the death march and subsequent imprisonment. On the east side are the names of those who survived. They are as follows and spelled as they are still found on this memorial cross. It states and includes the following on the east side of the cross: In honor of the Taos County men, Members of Battery H, 200th Coast Artillery who served at the Battle of Bataan, 1942.

Major Dow Bond, Jack K. Bower, Captain Dallas P. Vinette, Sergeant Robert Boggs, Jack Fuller, Earl R. Harris, Jimmy K. Luhan (Lujan), John M. Vickery, Paul Trujillo, Luis G. Leroux, Ben Montoya, Jose A. Segura, Miguel A. Tafoya, Horacio Montoya, Tony Reyna, Felipe E. Rivera, Jose A. Medina, Corporal George Mares, Juan J. Martinez, Roberto Medina, Teodoro J. Montoya, Onofre Montoya, Santana Romero, Steve J. Sanchez, Armando E. Trujillo, Valdemar DeHerrera, Bud Garcia, Eloy Valdez, Tomas Garcia, Antonio B. Martinez, Vicente Vigil, Ray Burch, Virgilio Gomez, Gustavo Santistevan, Andres Montoya, and Eugenio Romero.

On the western side of the cross, on the same monument, it reads: Dedicated to the men of Taos County, members of Battery H, 200th Coast Artillery who died in the Battle of Bataan or its aftermath, 1942.

Reynaldo Gonzales, Lt., Sergeant Alfred E. Brink, Felipe Trejo, Jimmie Luhan (Lujan), Charles M. Mares, Thomas Santistevan, Charles A. Trujillo, Martin Trujillo, Corporal Maclovio Gonzales, Arturo Sandoval, Private Jose L. Coca, James H. Hopkins, Lupe Lucero, Jake J. Padilla, Telesfor Gonzales, Richard G. Romero, Felix Aragon, Fernando Concha, Abonais Cordova, Manuel J. Garcia, Gustavo Lucero, Jerry Lucero, Jose I. Lujan, Luciano Martinez, Ambrosio Sandoval, Marcelo Tafoya, Jose E. T. Mascareñas, Jose C. Cruz, Moises Miera, Jose L. Mascareñas.

The 200th and the 515th Regiments - The New Mexico Brigade, each brought home with them three Distinguished Unit Citations and the Philippine Presidential Citation. These awards also are personally held by each individual who was a member of the units during the periods covered by the citations. According to John P. Jolly, it is believed that no unit participating in World War II was awarded more than three Distinguished Unit Citations.

Taoseños continue to serve in our nation's military forces, a tradition that began during the American Civil War. However, no unit suffered more personal loss or sacrificed more souls than those who gave their all at Bataan. Let us never forget their contribution in order to help secure the blessings of liberty we continue to enjoy.

Resources

Gordon, Richard M. (U.S. Army, retired), internet paper, “Bataan, Corregidor and the Death March, In Retrospect,” 2002.

Jolly, John Pershing, “History of the National Guard of New Mexico 1606-1963”, 1964, State of New Mexico, Santa Fe.

Gerdes, R. Scott, Tradiciones, Nuestra Gente, Raices, “Medina Family, Life can Be Hard, But Sweet,” Special section of the Taos News, October 28, 2004, El Crepusculo Inc., Taos, New Mexico.

Staff report, Tradiciones, Nuestra Gente, “Tony Reyna, Citizen of the Year, Special section of the Taos News, El Crepusculo Inc., October 28, 2004, Taos, New Mexico.

A Bouquet of Christmas Fragrance from the Past

by Corina Aurora Santistevan

A whiff of piñon-wood smoke in the brisk night air; the scent of anise, cinnamon and cloves; the smell of roasted corn or new-mown hay-that is all it take to send my thoughts back to the Christmases of my childhood and to allow me to gather a bouquet of fragrances to share with you.

“New-mown hay?” you say. Yes, because Christmas did not begin the day after Thanksgiving as has been the commercial custom in recent years nor did it begin as it did this year with Halloween going out the door as Christmas came in the front. Christmas really started with the harvest.

The harvest began sometime in August when the corn grew firm and strong and had stored all the sweetness in its kernels. It was then that on an early morning, my sisters and I would accompany my father to the cornfield to select the best ears of corn. I remember well, opening the leaves at the top of the ear, just enough to squeeze a kernel. If the milky fluid spurted out the corn was ready and you pulled the ear downward on the stalk to break it loose. Walking through the aisles of corn we could smell the half-tart, half-sweet odor of the stalks, the leaves and the silken hair.

But the strongest corn scent associated with my Christmas memory is that of “chicos” (dried roasted corn). Unless you have roasted corn over embers on a picnic or cooked “chicos” with pigs feet or short ribs, you cannot fully appreciate the wonderful fragrance that pervaded the air the morning after our trip to the corn field. When one opened the door to the “horno” (outdoor adobe oven) Viola! There is was! The fragrance of roasted corn floating out into the valley so that all the neighbors knew that Don Alfredo, my father, had made chicos.

The corn that we picked had been brought home in tubs to store in the cool darkness of the fuerte or dispensa, (storeroom). In the late evening my father would build a fire in the outdoor oven and keep it burning until the heat of the oven was just right. Then we would sprinkle the ears of corn with water, and take off a few leaves from each ear, before we started throwing them as far back in the oven as we could. When the oven was full, we placed a cover over the door and plastered it with mud to seal it tightly. We could hear the hot adobe sizzle as we did this and sometimes a kernel of corn which had touched the hot floor gave us hint of what we would taste and smell the next morning.

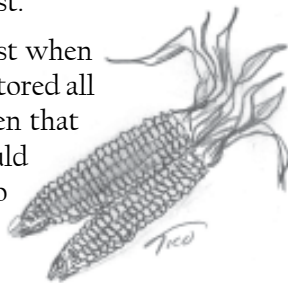
Soon after this you would find us, family and friends, gathered around the groves of wild plum bushes which had bordered fields throughout the valley, picking buckets and tubfuls of ripe red plums. How can one describe the tangy odor of the plum bark or the sweetness of the fruit itself? Perhaps some of you can remember the fragrance that spills

into the air in early spring when the plum bushes are in full bloom. Especially if you have driven through the back roads to the Pueblo because those blossoms seem to be the most fragrant of all. Even now on a winter’s day, after a rain or snow, you can break off a twig to smell and you too, will experience this woody, fruity scent. Unfortunately, the sight of children and adults, laughing and talking under a bright September sky, you will seldom see. Now only a few of us gather the wild plums to make the jams and jellies which were used as gifts of labor and love at Christmas time and for prune pies made for every fiesta.

At the same time that plums and apples were being picked and stored up, tasajos (tender green squash cut crosswise in thin slices) were being strung to dry. The air was filled with the smell of roasting green chile and the walls of our homes blossomed with strings of the red, ripe peppers drying in the sun. We dried everything then, apples, apricots, plums, squash, quelites (lamb quarters), verdolagas (purslane), and pink and yellow rose petals. We picked and dried herbs, cota, yerbabuena (mint), collaye, oregano (wild thyme), poleo (pennyroyal), mastranso (apple mint), and others to be used for winter ills. I must include at least one of these in my bouquet for although it did not have a pleasant odor but rather pungent one, the chamiso (sage brush) tea was often used around Christmas time to cure the incurable cold. Its scent invaded the house even before the leaves began to steep in the pot. It made an unpleasant tasting drink but I still like to break off a stem and carry it in my jacket when I am out walking on the ridge.

Late September found the men harvesting the years’ cop of alfalfa and hay. Again the neighbors rallied round to help each other and I, always like a puppy dog at my father’s heels, would be in the midst of the haying. I loved it all and I remember well the strong scent of the drying of the hay when a man picked up a forkful of alfalfa, carried it over his head and placed it in the wagon, I was lifted up to ride with the men all the way to the stables or to a tapeiste (a special name for a shed on which to pile hay). The scents of that day would be in my memory box until Christmas Eve when I knelt before the Creche and saw the Infant Jesus nestled in the hay.

The fragrance that I most treasure and that evokes the best of memories, is that of the gifts of the forest. As soon as the hay was harvested, the men began the task of bringing wagon loads of dry and green piñon wood for fireplace and wood stoves. True, some wood would have been gathered earlier in the fall when family and friends had gone piñon picking. We did not have a good crop of piñon every year so when we did have one, everyone took time to pick sacks full of piñon. It was a day-long affair, which sometimes really started the



evening before when the wagon was made ready and some of the food was prepared. We started out early enough in the morning that when we reached the edge of the piñon forest, the sun would be sending down its first warm rays. Picture if you will, a wagon load of people, young and old, dressed warmly to ward off the morning chill, jumping from the wagon before it even stopped and scattering like magpies to find the best yielding trees in the forest! It was a sight to see!

When it was time to eat, my father would find a branch whose cones were still green and had not yet opened. He would throw it on the coals where the lamb chops, fried potatoes, beans and chile were cooking. Soon the air was full of odors good enough to tease any palate, but the most unforgettable one came from the branch of green cones, which popped open in the heat and gave us hot roasted piñon right then and there.



That was only one of the gifts of the forest. The gift that reminds most Taos people of Christmas is the scent of ocote (pitch wood) used to make luminarias. Once you have seen the beautiful fires at the Pueblo on Christmas Eve, you cannot forget either the sight or the scent of burning pitch wood.

I was always impressed when my father and I would go for wood, as Christmas was approaching that he always knew exactly where to find the standing or fallen log which through scarring or other injury had turned into pitch wood. The forest has many scents. My brother-in-law, Polito says every kind of tree has its own distinctive aroma and he can tell blindfolded whether it is piñon, spruce, cedar, or juniper. Thus we came home with a wagon full of gifts of fragrance; green piñon for the slow burning fires; pine and juniper branches loaded with blue berries for decoration; ocote for the luminarias and bagfuls of dry pine cones to make a blaze in the fireplace.

One evening before the sixteenth of December my father would say, “Ven, hijita, vamos a cortar el ocote para la luminarias.” “Come my child, let us go chop the pitch wood for the luminarias.” We would go to the woodpile and he would start splitting the logs while I gathered all the short pieces for kindling which would be used sparingly, a few sticks at a time, to start a fire in the wood stove and the fireplaces.

On December sixteenth, nine days before Christmas, we would build and light the first of forty-five luminarias that would be lighted that year in many different homes in Cordillera. One would be lighted on the first night, two on the second, until on the ninth night nine luminarias would be burning in front of the different homes.

I don’t remember this happening every year in our home, only as long as my father was well enough to get the ocote. I do remember vividly the first time I looked upon the valley from the ridge across from my home, and saw the luminarias lighting up the whole night. We used to play cards with the Olmedo Mondragon family whose home was built on the edge of the ridge. As we walked to their home we could look northeast and see fires burning at the Jaramillo, the Corteses, the

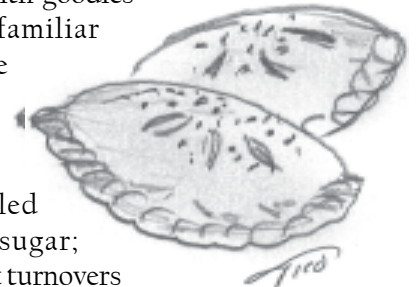
Velardes, Quintos, and Vigiles, then south to Ranchos and the Ranchos Church. From the church the eye would travel to Llano Quemado. Llano Quemado people have always observed the tradition of our culture with a little more spice and flavor. You could see mores luminarias burning there than anywhere else. What a memorable sight and memorable aroma of wood scents and sagebrush!

Then it was Christmas, La Noche Buena, (The Good Night). The first Christmas that I remember did not include a Christmas tree. That custom came in through the back door for us, influenced by our school experiences. I remember instead of getting the nacimiento, (the Creche) and my father’s anxious questions: “Is everything ready for the Abuelos? Have you stated the coffee? Where is the wine?” By the time the Abuelos came we would have everything ready and I would be anticipating their arrival with a certain degree of fear. They say that fear has a scent which do not include it in my bouquet, but I include instead the odor of my father’s blue wool plaid jacket, wet with falling snow, which I could smell as I snuggled close to him when the Abuelos arrived.

For the sake of those readers who know nothing about “Abuelos” let me deviate a little. Abuelos were a group of men, mostly young men, who dressed and wore masks of animal skins and fur and who went from house to house on Christmas Eve to dance around the Christmas fires. They had at least one drummer and as you listened for them, you listened for them; you could hear the drum beat softly in the distance and then louder as they dance in a home near yours. They were supposed to dispel the evil spirits who roamed around on Holy Night, seeking to harm the Holy Child. As part of their dance and drama they made the children of the home recite prayers and often the whole family and the Abuelos prayed the Our Father and a Hail Mary. The children, who did not know their prayers or had been disobedient throughout the year, were threatened with a whip which the Abuelos carried and which they would crack ominously on the ground. The whip had a strip of deerskin at the tip, which made it sound loud and frightening.



I don’t ever remember seeing them use the whip on any child. I do remember how happy everyone was as they danced and sang around the fire. When they finally came inside the house, they found a table filled with goodies and the air heavy with familiar scents. Bischochitos made with anise seed; baked empanaditas (turnovers) made with apples, prunes, or pumpkin and sprinkled with cinnamon sugar; empanaditas de carne (meat turnovers with a homemade mince meat filling) posole, chicos and chile cooking on the wood stove, and of course coffee, chocolate, and wine ready to drink.



After the Abuelos left, we hurried to dress for La Misa del Gallo (Midnight Mass), as called and went to early morning.

When we came out of mass the rooster would be crowing, hence the name of the Rooster's Mass which is the literal translation. It snowed much more when I was a child than it does now and we often wrapped ourselves in sarapes (the priceless Rio Grande Blankets) in order to keep warm.

Walking a mile in deep snow or over ice-covered ruts in the middle of a cold winter night may not sound much like an exciting adventure but I remember it with great pleasure. We were not alone. The road was full of groups of people with much talking and laughing as we walked under that starry sky. Some of the luminarias would still be burning in front of homes and the ocote would spill its fragrance into the night air.

Midnight Mass in our church of San Francisco de Asis, with the altar blazing with many candles was a memorable Christmas celebration. At the end of the mass, we, like the Magi of the first Christmas, knelt in adoration of the Holy-Infant and placed a humble offering at his feet. We had so little to give but it seemed like a lot and with the faith of an innocent child, I always felt that the Christ Child had smiled at me when I gazed upon his face and moved away.

By the time we arrived home, my father would have gotten up to place another piece of wood in the fireplace so that we could get warm. Then shedding our coats and overshoes we would take our gifts into his room and sit at his bedside to open them.

All of us that is, except my sister, Cleofista and my niece, Violetta, who, having hungered all day for the meat empanaditas which they could not have on a day of abstinence, chose instead to go to the kitchen, warm up some empanaditas and make hot chocolate for all the family.



Christmas day was quiet once the troops of children who came knocking at our door were bid a "Merry Christmas" and given oranges, apples, or candy. I was never allowed to go with them but it seemed like much fun! I remember once as an adult, I asked my father how that tradition had started. He told me it grew out of "Los Oremos". He remembered that as a child he would get up very early in the morning, go to the homes of his grandparents and aunts and uncles to ask for "Oremos", (prayers). The verse that he remembered saying was a very simple one.

Oremos, Oremos	Let us pray, Let us pray
Angelitos semos (somos)	We are little angels
Del cielo venimos	Coming from heaven
A pedir aguinaldos	To ask for gifts and
y oremos	prayers

It is possible that this is how the custom of children coming to the door asking for "Mis Crismes" started. We may never know if it is so. What we do know is that folklore is often changed in the process of passing from one generation to another and some things are lost while other are changed.

Christmas didn't end for us on Christmas Day. Nor did it end on New Year's Day with the groups of Comanches coming to our homes to sing "Los Días" which originated from the



Corina Aurora Santistevan

Corina's love for the history of Taos is evident in the recollections of her childhood memories, of time spent with her family and closeness of relatives and neighbors through the Christmas season. She grew up in the farming community of Cordillera, a hard-working member of the prominent Santistevan family. Corina, now in her 90s, is always ready, willing and able to entertain Taoseños with her stories - whether from her recollections or anecdotal stories she may have heard as a child or adolescent growing up in Taos.

biblical word Emanuel, a serenade to the men or women who were named Manuel or Manuelita. It really ended on the day of the Three Kings. El Dia de Los Reyes as we call it. But that's another story and another tradition that would be too long in telling.

It is time now to bring together all the fragrances that I have garnered from the Christmases of my childhood and make my bouquet. It is a mixed bouquet like a bouquet of autumn flowers. There is the scent of wood, piñon, juniper and ocote as gifts of the forest. There is the scent of hay, corn, chile, posole and beans from the field and garden. There is sugar and spice from the kitchen table and then there is the aroma of burning pinewood in the winter air. May you be able to gather a bouquet of your own from the Christmases of today.

The article, "A Bouquet of Christmas Fragrances," written by Corina Aurora Santistevan is reprinted from "Christmas In Taos," and is used here with permission from Gabriel J. Romero, Romero/Taos Publishing Group and the author.

Lectures, Field Trips & Special Events (Tentative Schedule)

February 6, 2016 - Annual Meeting
Growing Up at Taos Pueblo (panel discussion)

March 5, 2016 - Lecture
"Old Spanish Trail" - Mark Henderson

April 2, 2016 - Weston, Strand & Adams
"Photography and Modernism in the Southwest"
Katherine Ware

May 8, 2016 - Honoree Luncheon
"Tri-Culture Visionaries"

June 4, 2016 - Lecture
"Restoration of St. Anthony Church in Questa"
Esther Garcia

July 9, 2016 - Field Trip
D.H. Lawrence Ranch in San Cristobal

First Saturday of the month at 2:00 PM
Kit Carson Coop Meeting Room
118 Cruz Alta Road - Taos

Taos County Historical Society Board of Directors

President: Ernestina Cordova

Vice-president: Benton Bond

Treasurer: Darren Bond

Secretary: Judy Weinrobe

Member-at-large: Paul Figueroa

Board Members

Jennifer Felsburg • Juanita Lavadie

Nita Murphy • Dave Cordova

Programs

Paul Figueroa

Membership

Jennifer Felsburg

Publications/Website

Dave Cordova

Hospitality

Patsy Scott

Preservation

Charles Hawk

Genealogy

Nita Murphy

BECOME A MEMBER

We invite your participation and support through an annual membership, which includes subscriptions to "*Ayer Y Hoy*" and our periodic newsletters. Other activities include recordings of oral histories, maintaining archive materials and participating in community events.

Membership categories:

Student	\$10
Individual	\$20
Family	\$30
Sustaining	\$50
Business	\$75
Lifetime	\$500

To become a member send a check, along with your name and address, to:

TAOS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 2447 - TAOS, NM 87571

For more information call (575) 770-0681
or e-mail: cordova@taosnet.com



Taos County Historical Society
PO Box 2447 i Taos, NM 87571

The Taos County Historical Society was formed in 1952 for the purpose of "...preserving the history of the Taos area." This part of New Mexico has a fascinating history, full of people, events, stories and places.

If you are interested, we invite your participation in our field trips or lecture programs, or by supporting the Society by becoming a member.