

# Socorro County Historical Society

Post Office Box 921  
Socorro, New Mexico 87801

## MEMBERSHIP NEWS • AUGUST 2014

Printed periodically

Renew your \$20 SCHS membership to:  
Socorro County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 921 • Socorro, NM 87801

## SCHS Annual Meeting

**T**he SCHS Annual Meeting was held on Friday evening, June 13, at the Cottonwood Charter School. President Robert Eveleth presided over the business meeting with a report to the membership of activities within the Society over the past year, the generally good condition of the Hamel Museum, the treasurer's report, and other matters.

### Bob Eveleth Steps Down as President.

Bob Eveleth had informed the Board several months ago his intent to step down as President and as a Board member of SCHS. Though recently retired from New Mexico Tech, he has numerous ongoing obligations to complete several extensive historical research projects for NMT that has evolved into almost a full time job.

Bob has been president of SCHS for eight years and oversaw numerous projects. The most notable was the building repair following the collapse of the Hamel Brewery rock wall. Original repair estimates were about \$35,000, which would have left the Society insolvent. Under Bob's leadership and clever workmanship by Accurate Construction Co., repair costs were lowered to about \$20,000.

Bob made it very clear that he will continue to help with the Open House and where needed.



**Past President Bob Eveleth in his familiar pose at Oktoberfest. Many thanks for your years of service to SCHS.**

### Board of Director Changes

With a quorum of Board members at the meeting, Prescilla Mauldin was nominated and elected to fill the seat on the Board vacated by Bob.

Nominations for SCHS officers were put forward and voted upon by the membership in attendance. SCHS officers and Board of Directors for the 2014–2015 term are:

<b>President</b>	Charles "Chuck" Zimmerly
<b>Vice President</b>	Dr. Peggy Hardman
<b>Treasurer</b>	Prescilla Mauldin
<b>Secretary</b>	Paul Harden

### Board of Directors:

Jon Spargo	Roy Heatwole
Kay Krehbiel	Valerie Kimble
Peter Romero	

### Guest Speaker:

Our guest speaker for the public talk was **Vernon Glover**, a well known railroad historian. He has authored numerous articles and books on western railroading, including "The Cumbres and Toltec Railroad," which he co-authored with former SCHS President and Socorro resident Spencer Wilson.

Glover's presentation was on the varied history of the AT & SF (now BNSF) railroad in New Mexico, part of a talk he recently presented at the state Historical Society annual symposium in Las Vegas, NM.

### In this Issue . . .



Socorro's "Owl Cigar" sign gets a facelift . . . . .	2
100 & 50 years ago . . . . .	4
The Carthage Depot . . . . .	5
Carthage, Tokay, Fraley . . . . .	6

# Socorro's "Owl" Gets a Facelift

One of Our Town's Famous Icons



**Y**ou have probably noticed the famous "Owl Cigar" landmark, on Manzanares Street, getting a facelift. Ken Hines, a professional sign painter, restores such historic painted signs, and has given our Owl a fresh coat of paint to preserve the historic hand-painted advertisement. There's plenty of history behind that sign.

There have been numerous short articles about our Owl Cigar sign and when it was painted – citing everything from around 1900 to the 1930s Depression era. A look at the history of Owl Cigars answers when this iconic advertisement likely first appeared in Socorro – and why.

## Owl Cigar Company

Throughout much of the 1800s, cigars were regional brands and hand-rolled locally by small manufacturers or tobacco stores. One of these was a cigar manufacturer in Queens, NY, started in 1861 by John Straiton and Frederick Storm. The Straiton & Storm Co. grew into one of the largest cigar manufacturers in the U.S., becoming a national brand. When the company was reorganized as the Owl Cigar Company in 1890, they produced 1,500,000 cigars per week - all hand rolled by over 1,500 employees - "rollers" as they were called.

To grow their national market beyond New York, they launched the now legendary program of painting their advertising, "Owl Cigar - Just 5 cents," on buildings across the country. Beginning around 1880, the signs were usually painted by a crew of two, called "wall dogs," and paid \$5-10 per sign. Most crews completed one sign per day. It is not known how many tens of thousands of signs were painted across America. Few records survive.

Most signs were painted on barns, to be easily seen by passengers on passing trains, or on the sides of multi-story buildings to be seen by the early motorists and downtown traffic.

The advertising campaign was very successful, keeping the five cent Owl Cigar the most popular cigar in America. In fact, maybe too popular. In 1904, for example, a company in Ft. Worth, TX began marketing cigars under the "Owl Club Brand," which was quickly challenged in court. A restraining order was issued, preventing any use of the name "Owl" except by the Owl Cigar Company.

To keep up with demand, the company was one of the first to replace the thousands of workers hand rolling cigars with automatic machinery in 1918.

## Run of Bad Luck

Machine made cigars did not go over well at first with cigar smokers, who believed the only good cigar was a hand-rolled cigar. Competitors attacked Owl's machine made cigars as being inferior, packed too tight, bad aroma, and a bad smoke. They even criticized that "the ash doesn't look right." Sales began to slump.

If that unforeseen disaster wasn't bad enough, then came the 1920s and Prohibition. Newspapers were filled with images of the mobsters, bootleggers and the smoke filled speak-easy crowds – all smoking cigars. Soon, it seemed if you smoked a cigar, you were a dirty little mobster. This seriously damaged the reputation of cigars, and a boost for cigarettes, as people wanted to change their image.

## White Owl Cigars

To counteract the negative stigma of machine made cigars, and the dirty mobster image, the Owl Cigar Company changed their name to "White Owl" to give their cigars a more "clean" image. Surprisingly, the slightly new name and image worked well. Sales began to recover.

Then came the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression. In 1929 alone, 375 cigar companies, making the more expensive hand-rolled



Al Capone (Chicago)



Fred Burke, St. Valentine's Day massacre triggerman



Carlos Gambino (Cosa Nostra)

cigars, closed their doors. Sales were dismal.

The new White Owl Cigar Co. jumped on the bandwagon. With tens of thousands of Owl Cigar signs across the nation, all saying “Just 5¢,” they lowered their price back to five cents (from 3 for 20 cents), exploiting the fact their quality machine made cigars could be produced cheaper.

Continuing to address the dirty mobster image, they hired squeaky clean notables, such as George and Gracie Burns, and Babe Ruth, for their advertising campaigns. Sales quickly climbed. By the mid-1930s, the old Owl Cigars, now the White Owl Cigars, were again on top.

### Ghost Signs

From about 1880–1920s, advertisements were painted on barns and buildings by hand in vivid colors. The most prolific of these signs was that of the Straiton & Storm Owl Cigar brand, known by their iconic owl on every display. Bull Durham, Crown Flour and Coca-Cola were among others that used hand-painted building signs to promote their products.

These once colorful signs have been left to the elements and have faded over time. Many are now long gone; only a few survive. Today, these surviving iconic signs of yesteryear are called “ghost signs” for two reasons. First, the faded signs on masonry walls seem to appear and disappear with the changing light like an apparition. Secondly, many of these signs were covered up with new building construction. Years later, when these buildings were razed, these long forgotten advertisements on a nearby building suddenly came into view like ghosts from the past.

This was the case recently in Ft. Collins, CO when several old buildings were razed for a parking lot, revealing the adjoining building was adorned with several hand painted advertisements. One is a Straiton & Storm Owl Cigar sign, very similar to the one in Socorro. See photos below.

There are websites where enthusiasts place photos of the handful of surviving signs still in existence. Socorro’s Owl Cigar and Bull Durham signs always makes the list for their well preserved appearance. Many are so faded, photography is difficult. Not so

### Surviving Owls Elsewhere . . .



Pittsburg, Pennsylvania



Aurora, Nebraska



New Kensington, PA



Fort Collins, Colorado

with Socorro’s signs. They are well photographed.

### So When Was It Painted?

There seems to be no definitive date of when the Owl Cigar signs were painted on the Knights of Pythias building in Socorro. However, using SCHS photos, and the previous company history, a general date can be determined.



K of P building, built 1883-1886. SCHS photo when bottom floor was the identified as 1890 with no Owl Cigar sign.



SCHS photo circa. 1913 when bottom floor was the telephone company. Owl Cigar sign is present.

We know the K&P building was erected between 1883 and 1886. One SCHS photo, dated “circa. 1890,” shows no painted signage on the K&P building. The photo also shows a military train passing along Manzanara Street. Fort Craig was closed in 1887, suggesting the photo may be nearer to 1887.

The second SCHS photo is dated 1913, when the newly established phone company offices were on the ground floor of the K&P building. The Owl Cigar sign on the west side of the building is clearly seen, and presumably on the east side as well.

The Owl Cigar company began their painted sign campaign about 1880. The name “Straiton & Storm” was dropped by mid-1890s when reorganized as the Owl Cigar Company. Thus, it appears the Owl Cigar signs were painted on the K&P building somewhere between 1887 and the early 1890s. This is long before the 1930s Depression era “barn storer” painters that some sources cite as the original painting, though this may be the source of an earlier face lift.

Socorro’s Owl Cigar icon is at least 120 years old. Thanks to Holm Bursum III, who owns the building and paid for the restoration, hopefully it will survive another 100 years.

## 100 YEARS AGO ...

What happened 100 years ago, in 1914, according to the *Socorro Chieftain* newspaper?

Actually, not much. At least that we know of. There are **no known copies** of the *Chieftain* for most of the years of 1912 through 1916, with sporadic coverage into 1918. No copies at the Chieftain offices; not at the State Archives, not even on microfilm. Just a few scattered copies during this period are known to exist.

This is a real shame, for much happened in Socorro from 1912 statehood through World War I, including no record of the devastating Spanish Influenza in Socorro County. When the Chieftain record resumes, Socorro had electricity, telephone service, and automobiles.

Paul Harden continues to go through the official microfilm archives of the *Chieftain*, transcribing the major news stories of the day.

The last issue on microfilm is June 29, 1912. Interestingly, the “big” news story in that issue states, “After this issue the *Chieftain* passes into the sole ownership of Mr. and Mrs. Anton Mayer, who will pay all outstanding bills against the Socorro County Publishing company and collect all bills due the company. B. A. Drake, Editor.”

For most of the *Chieftain*'s existence, it has been the “paper of record” for Socorro County. This is where legal notices are published for the public record. The paper-of-record is required by law to archive issues as proof of legal notices being published and future reference. Is it possible the Mayers, as the new owners, were unaware of this legal requirement, and as a result, issues from 1912–1917 were not archived?

The Mayer family operated the *Chieftain* from June 1912 through October 1934 – the longest private ownership in the paper's history. Mr. Anton Mayer died on April 27, 1934 at age 68. Running the newspaper single-handedly proved to be too much for the aging Annie Mayer, who sold the *Chieftain* to Rose Lyon in October 1934.

Following 1912, the next issue on microfilm is September 23, 1916, though much of 1917–1918 is under-exposed and unreadable. This huge gap of



A newspaper photo of Mrs. Anton (Annie) Mayer, the former owner and editor of the *Socorro Chieftain*.

missing *Chieftains* has baffled historians for years.

One of the first readable issues is March 31, 1917, reporting that thieves broke into the Rio Grande Store (about where First State Bank is today) and stole 26 bags of flour, beans, corn and coffee. In their late night haste, they must have torn some of the bags, as the sheriff followed the trail of flour to the home of Marcos Mora, who was quickly arrested for the crime and “most of the flour recovered.”

## 50 YEARS AGO ...

Fifty years ago is a little more memorable. There is absolutely no doubt what the biggest news story was in Socorro 50 years ago – which lingers on to this day.

Here's a few hints:

1. It happened on April 24, 1964.
2. It put Socorro on the map.
3. Does Officer Lonnie Zamora ring a bell?

The famous Socorro UFO landing, on April 24, 1964, remains one of the top 10 unexplained UFO cases in history to this day. One of the reasons is due to Socorro policeman Lonnie Zamora's candor in reporting what he saw, and the fact that his story was published in *El Defensor Chieftain* the day before Dr. Allen Hynek, and Operation Blue Book, arrived in Socorro. If Dr. Hynek's real job was to “hush” the witnesses and keep UFO reports quiet (as many entertain), it sure didn't work in Socorro. Due to the *Chieftain*'s published articles and photos, it also remains one of the best documented UFO cases.

The story quickly appeared in newspapers across the country – and the world. Before long, virtually unknown Socorro, NM became a house-hold word. It still is, thanks to Officer Zamora.

If you've lived in Socorro for any length of time, you have probably made up your mind long ago as to what to believe about this now world famous UFO story. We won't try to change it!

Nobody knows for certain what Lonnie Zamora saw that day, but most believe he reported what he thought he saw with honesty. He never changed or recanted his story, in spite of the interference and grief it brought to his life. Nor, did he ever attempt to profit or capitalize on his sighting.

Lonnie Zamora died in November 2009. His wife, Mary, still lives in Socorro.



*El Defensor Chieftain*'s front page article of the Socorro UFO landing.

# CARTHAGE DEPOT

by Robert Eveleth

What at first glance looks like a typical late-19th century photo of a short passenger train stopped at a remote depot is actually of great historical significance. The reason for this is two-fold. First, the depot in this view is at Carthage, NM, ca. 1884. Railroad historians have argued for years about the very existence of this depot. Most have concluded there was none, but the above photo is clearly marked in period handwriting that extends into the image on the lower right margin, to wit: *“Depot at Carthage, NM.”*

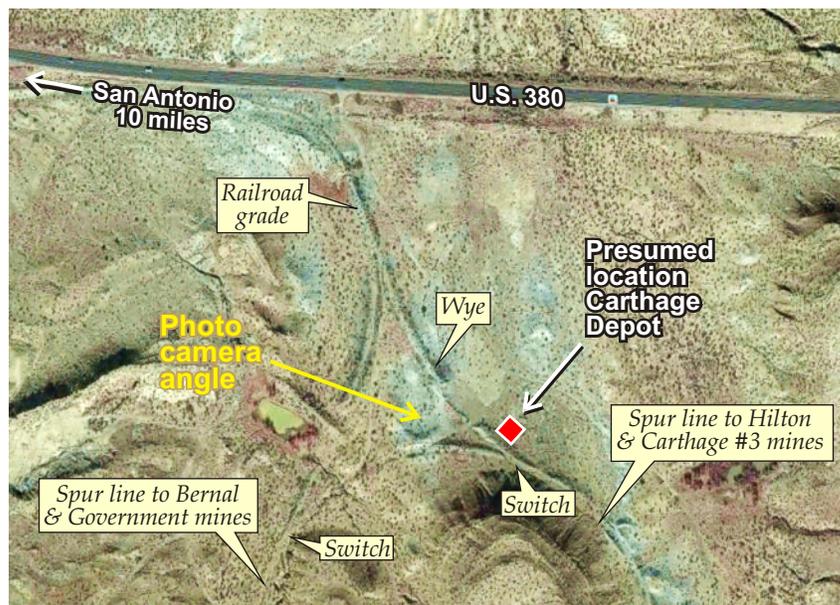
In addition, a handwritten manuscript in the archives of the Kansas State Historical Archives at Topeka, dated 1884, not only verifies the existence of such a depot (and gives the dimensions at 16' X 32') but also indicates the existence of a nearby 54' turntable and other amenities which are long-forgotten today. The AT&SF depot at La Joya, photos of which have been published, was identical, but until the discovery of this image, there was no way to compare the two.

The Carthage depot was doubtlessly located in the railyards near the “upper end” of the camp, but the exact location has never been pinned down. However, the photo contains a strong clue. The train and depot is located on a straight section of track, with a switch and curved track leading off from the fireman’s side of engine. Examining the Carthage “Y” (or “wye”), there is only one location that matches this track arrangement – shown on the GoogleEarth image of today’s Carthage remnants.

The second historical feature is the provenance of the locomotive that is equally remarkable and harks back to the “wars” fought between the Denver & Rio Grande RR (D&RG) and the Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe (AT&SF) for the rights-of-way through the Royal Gorge and over Raton Pass. After two years of armed skirmishes the railroads, in 1880, reached an out of court settlement known as the Treaty of Boston. The treaty granted the D&RG access to the Royal Gorge (Raton pass went to the AT&SF) but the “victory” came at great expense to the Rio Grande:



The only known period photo of the Carthage depot and train – engine no. 108. The track leading off to the right is part of the wye. SCHS is now co-owner of this rare photo.



The GoogleEarth image of today’s remnants of Carthage, showing the “Y,” where the trains were turned around for their return to San Antonio – and the likely location of the depot based on the photo.

since the first twenty miles of the Royal Gorge Route had been constructed by the AT&SF, the Rio Grande forked over a whopping \$1.4 million for this and other improvements.

AT&SF also took possession of five locomotives, four of which were 2-8-0 “Consolidations” (2 lead wheels, 8 drivers), plus many freight cars and passenger coaches. The four Consolidations were renumbered AT&SF 107 – 110 and rebuilt/converted to standard gauge probably at the Topeka shops. At least two of these, No’s 108 and 109, were assigned to light branch line service in New Mexico and that is how Engine No. 108 was caught by the photographer at the Carthage depot so long ago.

## Carthage, Tokay, Fraley, and a Railroad

With Bob's preceding article on the Carthage depot, it seems appropriate for a thumb-nail history on the area. The historic towns of Carthage, Tokay and Fraley, and the once bustling railroad, seems to be nearly forgotten.

The Carthage coal field is located 10 miles east of San Antonio and south of US 380. The coal was first mined in 1862 by soldiers from Fort Craig. This coal was used for heating and blacksmithing needs at Forts Craig, Stanton, Bayard and Selden, though remained a relatively small operation.

### San Pedro Coal Co.

The interest in Carthage coal quickly changed in 1881 when the Santa Fe railroad extended its tracks south from Socorro. To fuel its fleet of coal-fired locomotives, the Santa Fe railroad formed the *San Pedro Coal and Coke Company* to mine the Carthage coal. The company also built extensive coke ovens at San Antonio for providing coke to Socorro area smelters. In 1882, the over worked wagon teams hauled 16,000 tons of coal to San Antonio.

### New Mexican Railroad 1883–1897

To get more coal to the main line track and coke ovens at San Antonio more efficiently, Santa Fe railroad formed another subsidiary company called the *New Mexican Railroad*. In 1883, a spur line to Carthage was built, including a bridge across the Rio Grande at San Antonio. Over the next few years, the short line railroad allowed coal shipments to increase to over 50,000 tons per year.

The mines worked two shifts per day to meet this demand. Carthage grew into a sizeable company town to house the miners and their families, railroad workers, and merchants.

About a mile north of Carthage a limestone quarry and kilns were also developed for making bricks and mortar. This small town was called Fraley – and was also serviced by the New Mexican railroad.

With about 1,000 workers and residents, Carthage was now the largest coal producing district in New Mexico.

### Panic of 1893

Manufacturing, mining, and railroading expanded greatly in the 1880-90s, mostly on borrowed money and bonds. A rash of defaults, a stock market crash, run on the banks, devaluation of silver, and a host of other factors,

crippled the U.S. economy in 1893 – including in Socorro with the closure of area mines and the Billings Smelter.

With little ore or goods moving to market, the railroads slowed to a crawl. Union Pacific, Santa Fe, and others filed for bankruptcy protection, unable to pay their loans.

Also by 1893, the “easy” coal had been extracted from the Carthage mines, leaving narrow veins that were labor intensive and expensive to mine. Combined with the faltering economy, the mines were also closed in 1893.

The Santa Fe railroad went into receivership, reorganized as the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (AT&SF). Carthage was now an AT&SF company town with no coal being mined. Furthermore, the railroad decided it would be more economical to develop the coal reserves around Cerillos and Madrid. In 1895, the company town of Carthage was moved – lock, stock, and barrel – to Madrid. Thus, many of the structures in today's Madrid were originally those in Carthage. When the town was moved, the spur line between San Antonio and Carthage was also removed. The New Mexican railroad was no more.

### New Mexico Midland Railroad 1906–1931

The *Carthage Coal Company* was immediately formed by local investors to develop new mines further to the east of old Carthage. With no railroad, coal was again shipped to San Antonio by wagons. The company sought additional investors, which resulted in the creation of the *New Mexico Midland Railroad*. The short rail line between San Antonio and Carthage was rebuilt in 1906.

Around 1915, new coal deposits were located farther to the west and the town of Tokay was established near the Fite Ranch. The New Mexico Midland built a spur line to Tokay to service the Kinney and other area mines.

The Hilton and Bernal mines at Carthage were mined out by 1918. The Government and Carthage No. 3 mines continued until 1926, when the Carthage Fuel Company ceased all operations.

The Great Depression, combined with fuel oil replacing coal to heat homes, caused the demand for coal to plummet. Though coal continued to be mined, it was insufficient to support the railroad. The last train ran from Carthage to San Antonio on August 28, 1931. The New Mexico Midland Railroad was no more.

Today, Carthage and Tokay are all but forgotten. Once the home to hundreds of miners and their families, the towns are gone – literally. The headframes and mines were leveled by the recent Desert Restoration Program. Nothing is left.



**Prior to the New Mexican railroad, Carthage coal was loaded into wagons for the ten mile trip to San Antonio.**



**Much of Carthage and Tokay are lost to history. The sites have been leveled and covered with fill dirt under the “Desert Restoration Program.”**