



Socorro County Historical Society

Post Office Box 921
Socorro, New Mexico 87801

MEMBERSHIP NEWS • CHRISTMAS 2013

Printed periodically

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

SCHS 2013

Some Recent Happenings

The Hammel Museum has been configured for winter. The water has been turned off by the City until Spring to ensure no frozen pipes or unexpected repairs. *There will be no Open House or Board Meeting in January 2014.*

Electrical improvements have been made by Ross Electric for the reasonable cost of \$446. This included some lighting improvements, relocating some light switches for easier access, and a dedicated weather-proof outside circuit. The old circuit was only 10 amps – quickly overloaded by a small crock pot. This will allow us to offer a wider selection of *hot* beans, sauerkraut and other goodies with future Oktoberfest meals - without blowing breakers and reducing our risk of an electrical fire.

Our Investment Accounts have been a real headache recently with the merger and changes at Morgan-Stanley, our account mysteriously being sent to New York with no account representative, and getting the account transferred from the old treasurer to the current (Paul Harden). Thanks to Jon Spargo, who is also a Morgan-Stanley client, our account has finally been transferred back to Albuquerque. This money has long earned SCHS some interest in a safe money market account, which of course yields nearly nothing these days. With Board approval, this money is now in a conservative interest bearing account. This money is earmarked only for extreme emergencies, such as the 2009 wall collapse repair. Our December balance was \$13,492 with \$9,087 in our local operating account, used for the day-to-day operation of the Museum.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!
From your SCHS Board of Directors

Upcoming Events

Jan. 1, 2014 (Wednesday) – Happy New Year!

Jan. 4, 2014 (Saturday) – There is *no* Hammel Museum Open House in January.

Jan. 14, 2014 (2nd Tuesday) – There is *no* SCHS Board meeting in January.

Jan. 22, 2014 (Wednesday) at 7:00 p.m.

AAUW/SCHS Public Talk

Alice Kase Room, Socorro Public Library

“**Understanding the Balkans**” presented by Kate Padilla and Paul Krza. This public talk, with photos and images, is based on their two extensive trips to the Balkans. The Balkan Peninsula is largely the former country of Yugoslavia, today with Bosnia, Serbia and Bulgaria in the north to Greece in the south, with a dozen other countries in between. The area is rich with history, diverse cultures and ethnicities you are sure to find fascinating.

Sponsored by AAUW and the Socorro County Historical Society.

CHRISTMAS PAST

Christmases with bad traffic to fire

Searching old *Socorro Chieftain* newspapers for some past Christmas happenings revealed a few interesting historical events.

Christmas 1937

In 1937, traffic entering Socorro from US-85 traveled south along California Street, routed through the plaza via Manzanares Ave., then exited town to the south along Park Street. At that time, California St. was only a narrow two-lane “Main Street,” combined with two-way traffic around the plaza caused great congestion. Driving west on Manzanares, when you reached the plaza, you had to

Continued next page ➡

CHRISTMAS PAST (continued)

turn left across oncoming traffic from two different directions with no traffic light or yield sign.

Merchants on the plaza and along Manzanares Ave. complained the bottle-neck of traffic caused access to their stores or finding parking to be a death-defying act.

To address these concerns, in November 1937, the City Council made the bold move to convert the traffic around the Plaza to one-way traffic, at least during the holiday shopping season. This immediately controlled the traffic congestion flowing around the plaza such that the one-way traffic pattern was kept in place. This is the one-way scheme around the plaza we know today.

Safeway grocery store was located in the empty lot now just south of Los Torres Gambles Hardware Store. The width of Manzanarez Ave. has not changed since 1937. Imagine two way traffic down the street with street side parking in front of the Safeway store.

Speaking of Safeway, here's some of the 1937 Christmas specials in the Dec. 14 issue of the *Chieftain*:

Pork roast 17 cents/lb.
 Lean pork chops 21 cents each
 Baking hens 21 cents each
 Hams 24 cents/lb.
 Canned goods 10 cans for 90 cents
 Sweet potatoes 25 cents/6 lb. bag
 Sugar 54 cents/10 pound bag
 Honey 55 cents for 1/2 gal. jar
 Coffee 56 cents/lb.
 Pecans 19 cents/lb.

Makes you suddenly yearn for a 1937 Christmas dinner! Even the extravagant shopper would be hard pressed to spend much more than \$3.

1937 was deep into the Great Depression, and to bring cheer to the holidays, Christmas lights were strung along the streets and plaza. This included San Miguel, where strings of the colorful electric lights adorned the church, inside and out. The *Chieftain* reported it was a pretty sight to drive around town at night as Christmas drew near.

Then came Christmas Eve. It was standing room only as parishoners packed San Miguel church for the special midnight mass. Once the service started, the switch was flipped to surprise the worshippers with the colorful array of inside lights. It was beautiful for a few seconds, when suddenly, the main electric breaker to the church popped and the church went dark. Undaunted, Father McDonald continued mass with only the light from the alter candles.

Nobody seemed to mind the darkness. It is said the candles around the alter gave the priest a special spiritual appearance for the occasion.

Christmas 1929

It was not a good Christmas in 1929 for the folks in Magdalena. A major fire that started on Christmas day became one of the town's notorious disasters. The Dec. 28, 1929 *Socorro Chieftain* tells the story:

Magdalena Suffers Loss by Fire

A destructive fire that will run into a \$60,000 loss in property and in which the main business section was located occurred at 1:00 o'clock Christmas night at Magdalena and was still ablaze at 2 o'clock Thursday afternoon.

The fire started in the kitchen of the Magdalena Hotel and spread for nearly a block through the main business section of the town. The last building to catch fire was the Princess Theatre. Other buildings which are in ruins are the two-story Magdalena Hotel, Magdalena Cafe, two pool halls and a barber shop. The theatre was east of the other buildings and the wind carried the fire into that structure.

The Socorro fireman were called on and made a fast run of 25 miles through the cold to help their neighbors in distress, but were unable to render a great deal of assistance, other than to relieve the Magdalena men, because their hoses could not be adjusted to the mountain town's fire plugs.

Magdalena was once quite a town. Unfortunately, so much of the historic town has been leveled by several conflagrations over the years due to lack of water. Recent problems with their wells running dry shows the water problems still persist.

Much of Magdalena's business district along US-60 was destroyed by another major fire in 1956. When you drive through Magdalena today, you're seeing only a small fraction of what the once bustling mining, railroad and cattle town looked like.



The Magdalena Hotel as it appears today, still offering rooms and monthly apartments. The historic hotel has been renovated several times since the 1929 fire. Most other buildings burned in the fire were never rebuilt.