



Guajolotes, Zopilotes y Paisanos

“Turkeys, vultures and roadrunners (or compatriots)” ... all inhabitants of Percha Creek.

The Journal of the Hillsboro Historical Society

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EL REFUGIO

Sir Victor Sassoon’s Hillsboro Hideaway

By Joe Britton



El Refugio on Hillsboro’s Main Street, now the Enchanted Villa Bed and Breakfast. Photo Matilde Holzwarth, courtesy Black Range Museum.

Born in 1881, Sir Victor Sassoon was the scion of a wealthy Anglo-Indian Baghdadi Sephardic Jewish family in Bombay, which had been made rich in part through the opium trade and cotton textile industry. Seeing the writing on the wall in regard to Indian independence, he made the decision in 1928 to move his own business interests to Shanghai, the “Paris of the East”—where his family already had investments dating to the 1840s. He first came to China in 1923, and by 1932 he had accomplished his move. There he built up a vast real estate empire of some sixty properties. He was a true bon vivant, known as “the playboy of the Eastern world,” “one of the world’s ten wealthiest bachelors,” and “the Rothschild [or Morgan] of the Orient.”

So the question naturally arises: how did this globe-trotting, horse-racing, empire-building socialite, with homes in China, India and England, decide in 1941 to build El Refugio, an adobe house in Hillsboro, New Mexico?

It all had to do with Margarethe Tittmann, a beautiful young woman known as Sandy, who grew up in Hillsboro and was known as a real “firecracker,” and who

was said to resemble Lana Turner. She was the daughter of Edward and Margaret Tittmann. Edward was a well-known and outspoken local lawyer, who made quite a reputation for himself as an advocate for the development of Sierra County. How their daughter and Sir Victor came to be connected, so much so that he built a house across the street from her childhood home in Hillsboro, is the story we have to tell here.



Sandy Tittmann in 1939, in her parents’ back yard in Hillsboro. Photo courtesy of Lynn Mullins.

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President's Message

Season's greetings one and all!

It's been an uncertain weather pattern in Hillsboro this fall, or is it winter, or is it fall? I think it is finally winter and we at HHS are off to a pleasant and warmer than usual holiday season. And the same back and forth scenario goes for the progress on the slow but positive conversations with the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA) for the long-anticipated acquisition of the Mountain Pride stagecoach (see Mountain Pride Update, p. 11). I am pleased to report that one of the steps in this process, the construction of our new Coach House, is moving along nicely and it looks great. Black Range Construction Co. is doing a fantastic job! I anticipate that the project will be completed within another month. Our approach supporting this build and the hopeful prospects of getting the coach is "build it and it will come."

The next item at the top of our list is the landscaping of the museum backyard, thanks to Steve Morgan and Nichole Trushell, who are developing plans for that environment. Though the acquisition of the Mountain Pride and Coach House build have been a major commitment for the Society, we still have eyes on Jail and Courthouse stabilization, interpretive signage for these sites, and the new exhibit for the coach. I also encourage you to check out the fantastic job that Nichole, Garland Bills and Barbara Lovell have done researching and developing photo guides of the Kingston, Hillsboro and Lake Valley cemeteries on line at hillsborohistoricalsociety.org (see Black Range Cemeteries, p. 12).

I want to thank members of the Board of Directors and museum volunteers who keep us up and running and helping HHS achieve its mission. Thanks also to you the membership for your continued support. I look forward to reporting further good news of our successes in the next edition of this journal. Meanwhile, enjoy the great articles that Joe Britton has compiled and edited in this issue of the *GZP*!

--Steve Dobrott

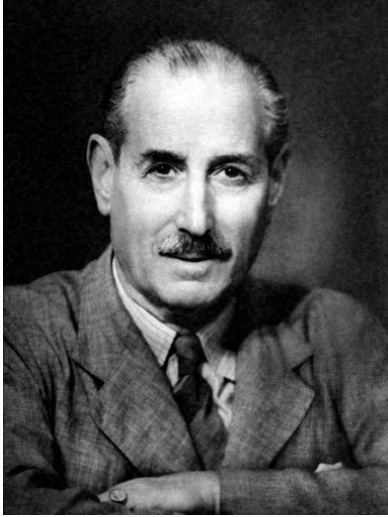


View of the Coach House from the northeast, as of November 28. The large opening is, of course, for the coach itself, fitted with prominent hand-crafted wooden doors and heavy iron hinges. The area in front of the building will be landscaped as an outdoor venue for community events.



HHS Board Members tour progress on the new Coach House, as of November 2. Left to right: Val Hildreth Werker (taking photo), Joe Britton, Robin Tuttle, Ewa Czarnojanczyk, Steve Dobrott, Nichole Trushell, Jeffrey Forbes.

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Sir Ellice Victor Elias Sassoon, Third Baronet of Bombay, GBE, 1940s. Photo CPA Media Pte Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo.



The Shanghai Bund (Riverfront), 1930. The pointed tower of Sassoon's Cathay Hotel is visible in the distance. Photo public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Sir Victor's real estate holdings in Shanghai included buildings that he developed along the Bund, the city's riverfront. The structures included the Metropole Hotel, and the luxury apartment buildings Hamilton House and Embankment House. But the greatest among them was the Cathay Hotel (built in 1929 as Sassoon House, and now known as the Fairmont Peace Hotel). It was a lavish eleven-story art-deco structure that included his own penthouse apartment (now known as the "Sassoon Presidential Suite"). He hosted many a party here, and was at the center of the very sociable ex-patriate circle of Shanghai's International Settlement. The hotel was regarded as "one of the half dozen or so most luxurious hotels in the world."¹ *Fortune* magazine enthusiastically celebrated Sassoon's fame. He was, it said:

... a Bagdad [sic] Jew by race, though technically an Englishman by birth. Now Shanghai's No. 1 realtor, he lives in the tower of his Cathay Hotel, gives wild, luxurious, and astonishing parties, possesses the only social secretary in the city, and strays away to England or India for no more than the few months the British income-tax laws permit him. ... He has left his imprint on Shanghai in the towering bulk of his buildings, he has found a sanctuary for his wealth, and he is great.²

Sir Victor's lifestyle earned him quite a reputation as a ladies' man. When Baron Robert Rothschild paid him a visit, for instance, he asked Sir Victor why there were two bathtubs in his penthouse bathroom. Sir Victor responded, "I may like to share my bed, but never my bath."³ One commentator observed that "Victor enjoyed the company of beautiful, glamorous women, seemingly for their beauty and glamour alone."⁴

Yet Sir Victor also remained aware of his ancestral roots, and when in 1938 Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe started to show up in the city in great numbers, he became involved in their resettlement. Between 1938 and 1939, some 20,000 Jews relocated to Shanghai, in part because it became a port of last resort, since it was one of the few in the world still open and not requiring visas.



The Cathay Hotel, Shanghai, 1933. Photo Wikimedia Commons, CC Attribution 4.0.

¹ Taras Grescoe, *Shanghai Grand* (New York: St. Martin's, 2016), 77.

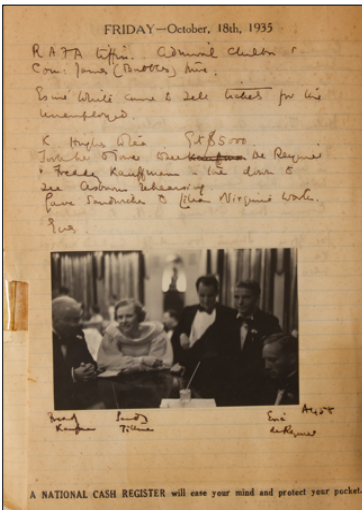
² Grescoe, 83, quoting "The Shanghai Boom," *Fortune*, January 1935, 38.

³ Grescoe, 109. See also Ned Kelly, "Sir Victor Sassoon: Shanghai's Playboy of the Eastern World," *that's* magazine, January 28, 2020, <https://www.thatsmags.com/china/post/28809/sir-victor-sassoon-shanghai-s-playboy-of-the-eastern-world>

⁴ Joseph Sassoon, *The Sassoons: The Great Global Merchants and the Making of an Empire* (London: Pantheon Books, 2022), 249. For more about the Sassoons, see also Stanley Jackson, *The Sassoons* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1968) and Rosemary Wakeman, *The Worlds of Victor Sassoon: Bombay, London, Shanghai, 1918-1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024).

Into this intense milieu came Sandy Tittmann in 1935, a young debutante 25 years old, ready to explore the world. She was born in 1910, and although her early years were spent in Hillsboro, according to her niece Lynn Mullins she did not particularly like the town, finding it beneath her ambitions. So when she was 12 she enrolled in the El Paso School for Girls, and then went on to study at Bennett College in Millbrook, New York.

Sandy went to Shanghai to visit her aunt Mildred, the youngest sister of her mother Margaret Tittmann. She was married to Milton J. Helmick (originally from Socorro, and later a District Judge in Albuquerque and New Mexico Attorney General). In 1934, Helmick was appointed the judge for the US Extraterritorial Judicial District of Shanghai by Franklin Roosevelt. He quickly developed a reputation for being a “courageous, liberal jurist.”⁵ Sandy’s coming to China was for the purpose of visiting them both, “Uncle and Tante Micky.”



Sandy in a Shanghai nightclub, as pictured in Sir Victor’s diary, October 18, 1935. Photo DeGolyer Library, SMU, Sir Ellice Victor Elias Sassoon Papers and Photographs. Used by permission.

When Sandy arrived in Shanghai, she quickly joined the social circles of the International Settlement. Most likely through her aunt and uncle, she met Sir Victor, and became involved in his resettlement efforts.⁶ A photo in his diary from October 18, 1935, shows Sandy at a Shanghai nightclub, in a stylish dress and surrounded by men in tuxedos. Sir Victor and Sandy apparently bonded over the fact that they both walked with a limp: he from an airplane crash in 1915 when he was a pilot for the Royal Air Force in World War I, which left him with one leg shorter than the other, and she from childhood polio.

A newspaper clipping in Sir Victor’s diary from November 18 includes Sandy’s name as one of the guests at a dinner honoring the wife of the Chinese ambassador to the United States. Then her name appears as “Miss M. Tittmann” in Sir Victor’s diary on his dinner guest list for November 19, and he remarks, “Best evening we have had.” At that point, he was 54, or 29 years older than she.

Over the next few months, her name is frequently included in his guest lists for luncheons, dinners, and outings. Referring to their mutual disability, Taras Grescoe writes in *Shanghai Grand* (an account of Shanghai in the ‘30s), “Sir Victor had been charmed by her conversation and beauty one evening ... at the Tower Night Club [a bar in the tower of the Cathay Hotel]; it was only when she had risen and walked away with a pronounced limp, the result of her struggle with polio as a child, that he had realized how much they had in common.”⁷ Grescoe even goes so far as to say that Sandy was the woman Sir Victor “thought he loved.”⁸ Whether they actually became romantically involved is uncertain, though it is not unlikely, and certainly some of her friends and family assumed that they did.

⁵ “Judge Helmick Making Reputation in China as Courageous, Liberal Jurist,” *The Albuquerque Tribune*, June 26, 1935, 2.

⁶ Several documentaries tell the story of the Jewish resettlement in Shanghai:

“An Unlikely Refuge,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-O6azjNxogg>

“Harbor from the Holocaust,” <https://www.pbs.org/show/harbor-holocaust/>

“Survival in Shanghai,” <https://www.amazon.com/Survival-in-Shanghai/dp/Bo7HKR2LWT>

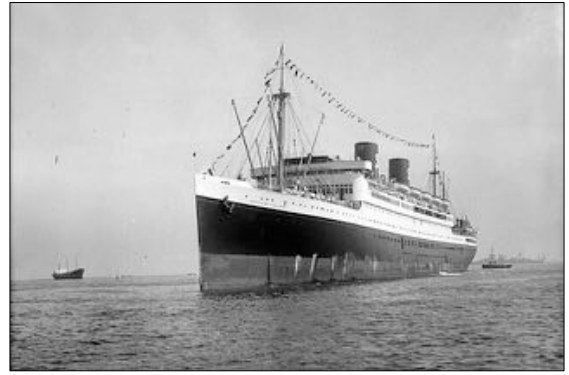
“Port of Last Resort,” https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/amzn1.dv.gti.d486b920-9fb6-4ba9-be9b-9938a5d137e3?ref=imdbref_tt_wbr_pvs_piv&tag=imdbtag_tt_wbr_pvs_piv-20

“Shanghai Ghetto,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai_Ghetto_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanghai_Ghetto_(film))

⁷ Grescoe, 282.

⁸ Grescoe, 330.

For instance, when Sir Victor returned to Shanghai from an extended trip to India on March 22, 1936, he saw Sandy the very first night he was back, and her name appears repeatedly in his diary throughout her stay. Sir Victor was an avid amateur photographer, and he carried a camera with him almost everywhere he went. Many of these photos were pasted into his diaries as a visual record of his daily activities—and Sandy is frequently included, including cruises in the Shanghai harbor. When she left China on May 19, 1936, aboard the S.S. President Coolidge to return home for a kidney operation, Sir Victor was on board as well, on his way to London via San Francisco and New York. (Other notable passengers included Charlie Chaplin and Jean Cocteau.) Sandy’s name is underlined in the passenger list in his diary, and a photograph is included on May 22 that appears to have been taken by Sir Victor of her in a Japanese tearoom in Yokohama when the boat docked there en route to Honolulu.



S.S. President Coolidge at sea, 1930s. Photo Wikimedia Commons, CC Attribution 4.0.

After returning from Shanghai, Sandy began a modeling career, first in El Paso and then during 1939 in New York, working for the John Robert Powers Agency, then the largest modeling agency in the world. After a successful year, however, she made a second trip to Shanghai (her obituary says she “gave up a fledgling New York modeling career” to return to China to help resettle Jewish refugees⁹). During the next few months, Sir Victor’s diaries are full of entries regarding Sandy. Many days’ entry will end with the somewhat suggestive note, “Sandy to dine.” Soon, however, the military situation in Shanghai became untenable, and she and her aunt had to be evacuated in early 1941 from the city because of the increasing danger to foreign nationals. Her uncle was interned in December by the invading Japanese, and was released only in August 1942 in a diplomatic exchange for several Japanese officials and nationals.

So by 1941, Sir Victor’s world was starting to close in on him. The Japanese had been in China since 1937, and the Communist revolutionary fervor was already surging. Moreover, Sandy announced in the fall of 1940 that she was engaged to John Morris, a far-eastern correspondent for the United Press. Despite Sandy’s engagement to Morris, however, she and Sir Victor met up with another companion in Albuquerque in April 1941 for a car tour of Santa Fe and Taos, and then they drove all the way to California. Sandy and John were married on July 30, 1941, honeymooning in Los Angeles before he returned to the Far East. (He was deeply affected by the war, however, and came back from it “in bad shape,” and tragically committed suicide in 1944.)

Sir Victor’s first visit to Hillsboro was on the heels of his tour of New Mexico with Sandy, in May 1941. He stayed with the Tittmanns in their home, and Edward seems to have taken a quick liking to him; he almost immediately offered Sir Victor a piece of land across the street from the Tittmann residence upon which to build a home as a refuge from his troubles.



A panorama of Hillsboro’s Main Street, showing the Tittmann house on left (the brown adobe) and El Refugio across the street.

⁹ “Margarethe Greene Lewis” (obituary), *The Arizona Republic*, February 3, 2005.

Edward and Sandy designed the house themselves. It was built of adobe bricks by Mexican laborers (or as Sir Victor mistakenly called it, “a dobe” house). Construction began in late 1941 and was finished in 1942. The furnishing was done by Harriet Shellenberger Dorsey (for whom Sandy later worked after her husband died), a well-known Los Angeles interior decorator who had many famous clients in Beverly Hills and frequently collaborated with the African American modernist architect Paul Revere Williams. Harriet was afraid to drive all the way from California to Hillsboro by herself, and she asked her niece, Ann Westland, to make the trip with her in her pink Ford Thunderbird.



El Refugio under construction, 1942. Photo courtesy of Lynn Mullins.

Harriet fell in love with Hillsboro, and with Ann bought the “Casita del Bosque” on Main Street next to the Tittmanns’ home, which she proceeded to renovate as a getaway for herself and her friends. She found, she said, everything she needed in Hot Springs. Ann also loved Hillsboro, and she and her husband Duke eventually bought Harriet’s share of Casita del Bosque to make it their own home.



El Refugio in the 1950s. Note the flower boxes along the terrace.
Sir Victor’s bedroom was on the upper level.
Photo courtesy of Lynn Mullins.

Unfortunately, Sir Victor doesn’t seem to have taken many photos of the house, although a few exterior shots exist. To get an idea of the building’s grandeur, one has to turn to this account given by Ollie P. Lansden in the *El Paso Times* on September 6, 1942, soon after the house was completed:

The Sassoon house is built on lines of simple dignity; one of its most alluring features being a sun deck entirely canopied by the trees for which Hillsboro is famous.

Around the top of the house run flower boxes of dark wood, and in the boxes are to be planted bright hued flowers and vines which will drip over the walls to meet the flower beds below.

Inside the house are bright, luscious colors of rose, turquoise blue, soft gold and green.

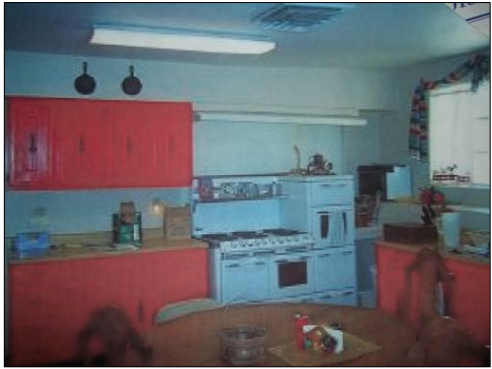
There is a great living room with wide windows and from it opens the cocktail room where windows look on the rock gardens arranged on the side of a hill.

The decorating was done by a famous young interior decorator from California. Sandy and her parents planned the house.

Walls of Sir Victor's room are of chocolate brown, while curtains to match are flowered with great creamed magnolias. Furniture is a reproduction of French antique.

Each guest room is an individual picture of daintiness. There are five bedrooms and baths; two of the bedrooms in the servants' apartment.

There is a wine cellar and a big garage, in fact every feature of modern comfort is to be found.



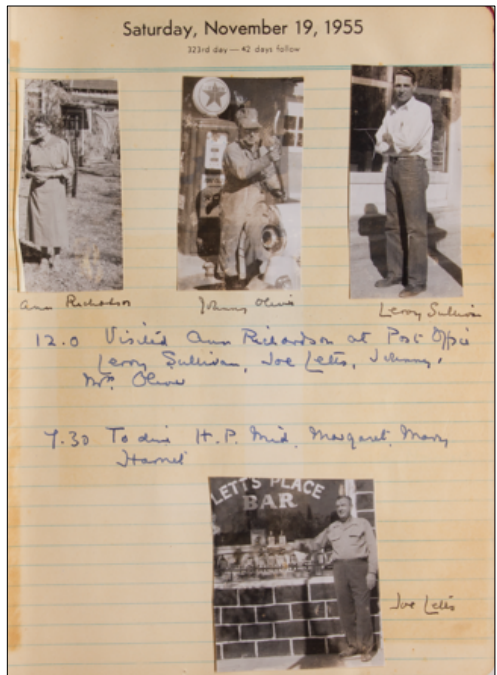
The O'Keefe & Merritt stove originally in the El Refugio kitchen. It was later moved to Jerry Henry's restaurant, and now belongs to Dietmar Schneider and Gayle Hector. Photo courtesy of Gayle Hector.

The house had a generator to provide electricity (located in the small shack on the west side), and was equipped with its own telegraph. Sir Victor's bedroom was on the south side, on the second floor above the dining room, opening out onto the shaded terrace. On the back side, there was a wooden stair and walkway to give access from the ground to the other bedrooms. Above all, the house was designed for entertaining. The kitchen was equipped with a state-of-the-art O'Keefe & Merritt stove, with 6 burners, 3 ovens and 2 broilers. The great living room was big enough for dancing and featured a grand piano. The "cocktail room" on the north side of the living room had a half-moon mahogany bar, where Sir Victor loved to play the role of bartender during the ritual cocktail hour.¹⁰ One recipe, written into his diary on June 16, 1943, above a photo of Sidney Metzger, the visiting Bishop of El Paso, was the "Hotchkiss Cocktail":

- 4 oz. scotch
- 4 oz. grapefruit juice
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- white of one egg

When Sir Victor needed assistance, he could ring for the maids with a button either at the bar or under the dining room table. The dinner table had to be set perfectly with china plates, crystal glasses, and silver serving dishes. Despite the grandeur of the house, which is rather out of proportion to everything else in town, Sir Victor was warmly welcomed by the Hillsboro locals, as reflected in this account:

According to townsfolk, he came to know everyone in the village by their first name. The town came to know Sir Victor and found him a ready participant in any town project needing ready cash. Idling away the days visiting along Main Street, Hillsboroians came to know the names and races won by Sir Victor's racing horses from one of Britain's finest stables. They also became interested in the dozens of gadgets which the monocled Englishman fancied and bought by the score. [He loved mechanical things like can openers.] They were unimpressed by the unestimated [sic] wealth and distinguished honors of the man He was simply a neighbor who came and went at intervals and minded his own business."¹¹



A page from Sir Victor's diary for November 19, 1955, with photos he took of Hillsboro residents Ann Richards, Johnny Oliver, Leroy Sullivan, and Joe Letts. Photo DeGolyer Library, SMU, Sir Ellice Victor Elias Sassoon Papers and Photographs. Used by permission.

¹⁰ Other than the stove, no one seems to know what happened to the other El Refugio fixtures and furnishings.
¹¹ "Sir Victor Dies, Was Richest Man in the Black Range," *The Southwesterner* (Columbus), October 1, 1961, 17.

Sir Victor was known to be a frequent bar-hopper (which in Hillsboro simply meant going from one bar to the other). To get around town he purchased a Piaggio “Ape” (meaning “bee”), a scooter which became a favorite with the village children. Every Saturday he was in town, Sir Victor would give the children a ride and then take them to the General Store for ice cream. (Once Sir Victor gave up coming to Hillsboro in 1955, the Ape was given to one of his friends in Texas.)

Hillsboro Children riding in the Piaggio Ape, c. 1950. From left to right, back row: Sevida Torres, Narcisa Garcia, Gloria Garcia (Spellman); Front row: Katherine Garcia, Nasha Torres, Molly Garcia; Driver: Corky Torres. Photo courtesy of Gloria Spellman.



Corky Torres driving the Piaggio Ape. Photo courtesy of Gloria Spellman.

Gloria Spellman (née Garcia), who still lives in Hillsboro, remembers that as a child she acted as an interpreter for Sir Victor, since his maid and cook spoke no English and he spoke no Spanish. (They were from Cananea, Sonora, Mexico: Deana the youngest, who did the cleaning, and Velma who was the cook. Sir Victor also drew on the services of the Tittmanns’ “houseboy,” Alberto Maurujo.) Gloria and her sister Katherine helped to prepare the house for parties, and then danced and sang Mexican songs for the entertainment of the guests.



Edward and Margaret Tittmann in their well-appointed home. Note the lit candelabras on the piano and china tea service on the sofa table. Photo Black Range Museum.

While in town, Sir Victor spent time with a circle of friends who represented a kind of local aristocracy: the Tittmanns, of course, but also Anne Bucher (who lived in the house to the east of the Tittmanns), Pat Riley and his sister Mary Jane Riley (who lived two doors to the west), the occasional visiting Catholic bishop or priest, and Mildred Helmick, who often stayed with the Tittmanns. Gloria remembers that they all dressed for dinner every night (which meant cocktail jackets for the men and gowns, long gloves and fine jewelry for the women), unless they went out on a picnic somewhere in the surrounding country.

After motoring up to Hillsboro, he would stay for a few days, and then move on. He and Sandy sometimes dined alone: at one luncheon they shared “Liver spread on crackers, cold chicken (canned), with bean and pea salad,” ending with “Crème Brulée” (October 28, 1942).

Sir Victor came to town from time to time, usually on his way to New York, or London, or Bombay. He often came through El Paso, where he stayed with Anne Bucher, and sometimes gave lectures on India or the world situation. Sir Victor left Shanghai for the last time in November 1948, carrying his twenty leather-bound diaries going back to 1927.¹² After another accident in 1953 left him still more crippled, forcing him into a wheelchair, he became impressed by a nurse from Dallas named Evelyn Barnes (known as Barnsie), who was 38 years younger than himself. They married in 1959. She was evidently quite protective of him; Gloria Spellman remembers that on a visit to Hillsboro in 1955 with Sir Victor—his last—Barnsie met her at the door and coldly announced that he was “unavailable.” “I never saw him again,” Gloria

¹² The diaries are now available online at <https://www.smu.edu/libraries/digitalcollections/vsp>.

said, “but I had been so close to him that it was almost as if we were related. He always called me and my sister his granddaughters.”

As for Sandy, while working for Harriet Dorsey in Los Angeles she met Charles Greene. He was part of the Greene ranching family, and became the “love of her life.”¹³ They were married in 1947 in a civil ceremony in Shanghai, and then had the marriage blessed a few years later at the Vatican. (The Tittmanns were devout Catholics; Margaret is memorialized by two windows in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church). After living for a while in LA, in 1951 they moved to Prescott, Arizona to the Greene Cattle Company ORO Ranch on the Baca Float. Sandy became an accomplished ranch woman, and presided over the “gracious living” which marked every evening. As her obituary later said, “During her years on the ranch she learned as much as she could about the rocks, plants and creatures who shared the wild landscape with her. She was an excellent markswoman, a savvy ranch business woman, a gentle nurse, a considerate hostess.” Sir Victor visited the Greens at their ranch in November 1955, and became very devoted to their daughter, Terry. When Charles died in 1974, Sandy moved to Phoenix and was active in supporting a variety of educational and cultural organizations such as the Orme School, Phoenix Art Museum, and the Arizona Historical Foundation. In 1987, she married attorney Orme Lewis, who died only three years later in 1990. She died January 29, 2005, age 94.

Victor and Evelyn Sassoon settled in Nassau, the Bahamas, and although he had lost much of his fortune with the Communist takeover of Shanghai in 1949, they lived a comfortable life there. He continued in the business of insurance, banking, construction, and property and trust management. He died August 13, 1961, at age 79. In his memory, Barnsie established the Sassoon (Bahamas) Heart Foundation. She outlived him by 36 years, dying in 1997. Their portraits were given by the Sassoons’ closest family, including nephew Roy Barnes, to the Fairmont Peace Hotel (the former Cathay Hotel) in 2004, where they now hang in the Presidential Suite.

At his death, Sir Victor left El Refugio to the Tittmanns, and they gave it to Sandy. Her aunt Mildred lived there for a time (Milton had died in 1954), and sometimes members of the Tittmann family. On Mildred’s death in 1976, Sandy sold the house to Duke and Ann Westland. They in turn sold it to Lee Tipton and her husband Toby from El Paso, and then the Westlands’ daughter Maree bought it back in 1988 and opened the Enchanted Villa Bed and Breakfast, which it remains to this day.¹⁴

So in the end, what can one draw from the story of Sir Victor Sassoon and Sandy Tittmann? Perhaps two things stand out. First, even though they were probably romantically involved, their relationship had enough elasticity that they were able to expand it to accommodate the diverging paths that each of them gradually followed, and to remain involved in one another’s lives. That is a rare accomplishment, and shows a real strength of character.

And secondly, it is worth noting the way that their story shows Hillsboro itself to be a very genial community that has been able to embrace and include many different kinds of people, from many walks of life, with equanimity and generosity. That too is a rare charisma, and one to be celebrated—especially in the current day.



El Refugio as depicted in a mural created for the Hillsboro Centennial in 1977, painted by Inez Barratt, Aimee Porter, and Dodie Pence. The mural series now hangs in the Community Center dining room. Photo Joe Britton.

¹³ “Margarethe Greene Lewis,” *The Arizona Republic*.

¹⁴ See <http://www.enchanted-villanm.com>

The Franklin Ore Bucket Comes to the Black Range Museum



Based on a conversation with Dennis Franklin
November 14, 2024

You may have noticed a new fixture on the old elm stump in front of the Black Range Museum: a large ore bucket. The bucket was last used at the Fabius Mine located on North Percha Creek—the head frame is still there. It was a silver and gold mine owned and operated by B. Franklin (Dennis Franklin’s father).

Before that, it was used at the Black Colt Mine east of Hillsboro. The mine was co-owned and operated by B. Franklin and Roy Tirey in the 1950s. This was a magnesium and lead mine.

And before that, the bucket was used for mining lead and silver in Kingston at the Comstock Mine. The bucket was likely fabricated at the Kingston foundry in the late 1800s.

The 1,000-pound capacity bucket was lowered and raised from mine shafts by a head frame and windless/cable system powered by steam “donkey” engines.

When the bucket was retired, it was placed on the east side of the Hillsboro Union Church by Dennis and the Franklin family. Then this year, it was moved to the Black Range Museum, on loan from the Franklin family.

HHS thanks the Franklin family for the loan of this evocative artifact!

+ + +



Kris Kristofferson, star of *Paper Hearts* (the “Hillsboro movie” filmed in 1991), died September 28, 2024. The film was directed by Rod McCall, and also starred James Brolin and Sally Kirkland. It had its “world premier” at the Lensic Theater in Santa Fe, and was released in 1993 as *Cheatin’ Hearts*. It included cameo appearances by several locals such as Helen Evans, Martha Ostertag, Ed Ostertag (as himself), and the landscape artist and sculptor Jim Magee, who died on September 14.

Kris Kristofferson plays at the S-Bar-X during filming of *Paper Hearts*. Photo courtesy of Craig Springer.

Mountain Pride Update: The Doorway to Success

By Steve Dobrott

I am pleased to report that we recently received approval from the Historic Preservation Division, New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA), to begin an “exploratory” dismantling of the door frame of the Lincoln County Courthouse, with limitations, in order to ascertain the underlying structure in hopes of gaining 6 inches of width needed for the removal of the Mountain Pride stagecoach from the building. Even with the coach dismantled, there is not enough width in the existing doorway to accommodate the width of the body of the coach without alterations. HHS will be responsible for providing a qualified contractor for the job. The approval to proceed with this action was given at the DCA Cabinet Secretary level due to the administrative protections given to this historic building.

The Lincoln County Courthouse is listed on both the National Register of Historic Properties and the State Register of Cultural Properties as part of the Lincoln Historic District. These designations add to the complexity of the job of getting the coach out the door, as one step of its relocation to Hillsboro, with minimal deconstruction of the Lincoln County building entryway. It is hoped that the original action taken to get the coach inside may have some bearing and set some precedent on future decisions for further action. What seems like a drawn-out process is actually slow but steady progress in the process of getting ownership of the coach.

Yes, I said ownership! We originally thought that a long-term loan would be all that we could hope for, but then we were informed that the History Museum of New Mexico (HMNM) prefers a permanent transfer of the coach to our Black Range Museum (BRM), pending multiple steps to be approved and accomplished—the last but not least of which is the approval of the HMNM’s Board of Regents for the transfer. Based on conversations with HMNM, we anticipate a positive outcome. And so we are moving forward towards our goal of returning the Mountain Pride to Hillsboro and remain optimistic of this eventuality. We are waiting for the assessment and final approval of the doorway project which will trigger all of the next steps, including the actual dismantling and transport of the coach to the BRM. At this time, I am optimistic that this will happen and all these steps will come together in early 2025.



Lincoln County Courthouse, Lincoln Historic Site.



The Mountain Pride as it currently is exhibited.

Black Range Cemeteries

Hillsboro, Kingston, and Lake Valley

By Nichole Trushell

For many years, members of the communities of Hillsboro and Kingston have been working to gather and maintain information on our local cemeteries. The Sierra County Genealogical Society (SCGS), spearheaded by Marilyn Poitras of Hillsboro, Margaret Vetter of Kingston, and many others photographed headstones and kept careful data, as well as some brief notes on families.

Recently Garland Bills took this effort to a new level, by having aerial drone photos taken of the Hillsboro and Lake Valley Cemeteries. He has painstakingly created spreadsheets of all grave information and has given each a reference number to use with the aerial photo maps. With the map and number, the graves listed on the spreadsheet can be located on the ground. I have done similar work for Kingston by taking the careful records of SCGS and of Margaret Vetter and creating a spreadsheet for Kingston graves. I am also updating Margaret Vetter's Kingston Cemetery map. Because of vegetation, aerial photography does not work well for Kingston, so this map is hand-drawn.

For some time, we have wondered how to make this information accessible to the public. We are happy to share that the Hillsboro Historical Society webpages dedicated to these three Cemeteries are now posted and accessible at www.HillsboroHistoricalSociety.com — find the three pull-downs under *Cemeteries* that can be selected for the specific locations.

On the Kingston page, I have also included a short self-guided tour (11 stops) of known people and their stories at the Kingston Cemetery. On our Kingston Cemetery page you will find photos and stories of some previous residents that go with this tour.

The cemetery mapping work and organization of data is rewarding – it brings these people and their vibrant lives back to us. I will be working with Barb Lovell and Garland Bills to bring more of these stories to our cemetery webpages as I enhance them. These pages are a work in progress. We hope you will use and enjoy them. Please watch them change over time!

If you have knowledge of additional sites, photos, information, or stories you would like me to know about for possible inclusion on the website, please contact Nichole at hillsboronmhistory@gmail.com.



An aerial photograph of the Hillsboro Cemetery, part of the HHS website's new documentation of local cemeteries.

Bonita Back in Town



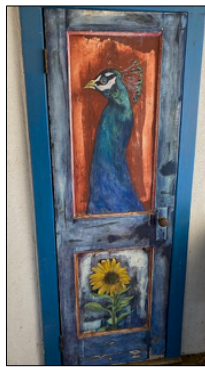
(Above) Bonita Barlow at work refreshing the General Store Cafe mural. (Below) Dogs in the Chevy.



Artist Bonita Barlow, well-known to many locals, was back in Hillsboro recently to refresh the mural she first painted on the side of the General Store Cafe in 2002. She last did a touch-up in 2012, and this time added two more animals (a cat seated by the wall and a boxer dog in the front seat of the car), memorials to cafe owners Ben and Doreen Lewis's departed pets. Her medium, rather unusually, is latex paint!

Originally from Connecticut, Bonita studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She moved to New Mexico in 1977, and at one time resided in Sierra County. A number of local houses have works by her; she is especially remembered for the many brightly colored doors she created. She now lives in Gila, New Mexico.

You can see Bonita's work at <https://bonita-barlow.pixels.com> and <https://www.bonitabarlowlight.com>.



One of Bonita's famous doors, which in this case magically leads to "La Grande Jatte," after Georges Seurat's famous pointillist painting from 1886 of a park in Paris. Dated July 25, 1995.

Gift Ideas from the Black Range Museum Bookshelf

Camping in New Mexico – Falcon Guide to over 150 public campgrounds in New Mexico. Includes maps, detailed descriptions, facilities, driving directions, wildlife tips, and things to do.

Down the Santa Fe Trail and into Mexico – Susan Shelby Magoffin's 1846-1847 journal is one of the earliest records of the first wagon trains from Independence, Missouri along the Santa Fe Trail to Santa Fe and from there down the Jornada del Muerto to Mexico. Her observations of the land and people are considered one of the most valuable, and readable, historical records available.

Last Stand: Ted Turner's Quest to Save a Troubled Planet – Todd Wilkinson's book is both a biography of one of the most influential Americans of the late 20th and 21st centuries as well as a vision by practical, practicing, conservationist. Ted Turner is our neighbor who owns the Ladder Ranch, whose history is so embedded in Hillsboro.

Black Range Tales - This is a classic southwest gathering of stories, tales, fables, and histories by James A. McKenna from the 1880s, reprinted and available once again. Cowboys, miners, Apaches, pioneers, prospectors, and outlaws all live again in *Black Range Tales*!

Field Guides – With fall in the air, wildlife are once more front and center as we see them preparing for winter. The BRM bookshelf offers a wide selection of pocket field guides to help you become acquainted with local species that share our space, both fauna and flora.

Guajolotes, Zopilotes, y Paisanos – Hillsboro Historical Society. This is a compilation of 40 articles from the first 10 years of the Hillsboro Historical Society newsletter/journal. It presents histories of people and events from Kingston, Hillsboro, and Lake Valley and the southern Black Range.

2024 Annual Report of Gifts

As an all-volunteer, non-profit organization, the Hillsboro Historical Society relies upon annual membership dues and other gifts for most of its income. We would like to thank all those who have contributed over and above annual membership dues this year:

Members giving in addition to basic membership

Greg and Barb Andrews	Michael Farmer	Louise Ratigan
Gary and Barbara Asteak	Catherine Faulkner	Lonnie Rubio
Susan Binneweg	John and Linda Glova	Michael and Jan Ryan
Kathleen Blair and Jan Richmond	Charles and Ann Horak	Gary Sapp
Charles Britton	Scott Kennicutt	Betty and John Schaefer
Joseph and Karla Britton	Linda King	Bill Slettom
Larry Caudill	Susan L. Langner	Richard and Gloria Spellman
Harvey Chatfield	Karen L. Lattery	Robin Tuttle
Frances Chucky and Bruce Murphy	Sherry Litasi	Linda Velarde
Larry and Cami Cospers	Karen Mast	Catherine Wanek
Joseph and Michele Diel	Thomas and Diane McEvoy	Jude Warner
Steve and Janie Dobrott	Barbara Pearlman	John D. West
	Marilyn Poitras	Michael Wyatt and Karla Fraust

Monthly Donors

Shoshana Handel Nichole Trushell and Steve Morgan

Lifetime Members

Garland Bills, Alan Bojorquez*, Bruce Cospers, Joe and Sandy Ficklin, Sonja Franklin*, Gary Gritzbaugh and Jan Haley, William C. King*, Lynn H. Mullins, Harry and Ellie Nordgren*, David and Marion Salopek, Harley Shaw and Patty Woodruff, Turner Foundation

**Additional gifts in 2024*

We would also like to thank all of our members for their annual contributions!

In addition to HHS members, Guajolotes, Zopilotes y Paisanos is sent to 17 regional libraries, museums, cultural organizations and foundations, as well as the governor and our state legislative and congressional representatives.

*Gifts received as of November 15, 2024:
our sincere apology if any information is incorrect or incomplete.
Please let us know if that is the case.*

Guajolotes, Zopilotes y Paisanos (GZP)
is the quarterly journal of:

The Hillsboro Historical Society

P. O. Box 461, Hillsboro, New Mexico 88042

www.hillsborohistoricalsociety.com

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To become a member, please visit:

www.hillsborohistoricalsociety.com/contact/
or complete the form on the back cover of this issue.

The mission of the Hillsboro Historical Society is to preserve, collect, and protect the history of Hillsboro, Kingston, and the surrounding area.

HHS is a member of the Historical Society of New Mexico, and recipient of its Edgar Lee Hewett Award (2021) for outstanding service to the people of New Mexico.

We are an all-volunteer, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. All donations are tax deductible.

Board of Directors

President: Steve Dobrott

Vice President: Nichole Trushell

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Journal Editor: Joseph Britton

To offer submissions or comments, please contact:

hillsborohistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Working Committees

Building Design/HHS Sites: Steve Dobrott, Steve Morgan, Nichole Trushell

Exhibits and Collections: Garland Bills, Kathleen Blair, Nichole Trushell

Oral History: Garland Bills, Nichole Trushell

Programs: Kathleen Blair, Steve Morgan

Publications: Joe Britton

Volunteer Coordination: Kathleen Blair, Linda King



Website: Nichole Trushell

Collections: Garland Bills

Anyone who might want to serve on one of the committees, please contact any of our board members.

Editor's Note

With this issue of the *GZP*, the Hillsboro Historical Society is pleased to extend the journal's distribution not just to current members, but to the wider community as well! The HHS Board made this change as a way of broadening the Society's outreach and to strengthen the interpersonal bonds that come from a community's holding in common a shared and remembered history.

This exciting change comes with the anticipation that our members will continue to support us through their dues and other gifts (see the 2024 Report of Gifts on page 14). And it also comes with the hope that having seen the *GZP*, new readers in the community will want to become members of HHS as well! (See the 2025 Membership Form on the back cover.)

The lead article this month is based on a presentation I gave at the Hillsboro Community Center on August 3. My gratitude goes to **Lynn Mullins, Gloria Spellman, and Maree Westland** for the stories and photographs they shared as part of the process of unearthing the backstory to Sir Victor Sassoon's rather unlikely attachment to Hillsboro.

I should also mention that a ballot for officers and board members of the statewide Historical Society of New Mexico is going to be mailed soon to all HSNM members. My name appears as the sole nominee for president, so it looks like I'll be taking up that role beginning in January. New Mexico has an extraordinary number of fine local museums and historical societies—such as HHS—and I look forward to working with them in this new role!

--Joe Britton

Change in date and venue!

The 2025 History Conference
of the Historical Society of New Mexico, originally scheduled to be held in Roswell, has been relocated due to the recent floods to **Las Cruces, September 25-27.**

The new deadline for submission of paper proposals is April 4. For details, visit: <https://hnm.org/history-conference/>



Hillsboro Historical Society
Serving the Community since 2008

2025 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The Hillsboro Historical Society is an all-volunteer 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve, collect, and protect the history of the Hillsboro, Kingston, and Lake Valley region. Memberships are on a calendar year basis (January 1 to December 31). Dues are \$25 annually, and go to support the work of the HHS, including the Black Range Museum. All contributions are tax-deductible.

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Date: _____

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP:	\$ 25.00
Additional contribution:	\$ _____
Gift Membership: (Please provide name, address and email for each person.)	\$ _____
Total contribution:	\$ _____

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP: A minimum one-time donation of \$2,000 \$ _____

MONTHLY GIVING PROGRAM: As an alternative to a one-time annual membership, the monthly giving program minimum is a \$15 pledge per month. Monthly giving can be initiated through a recurring check process issued from your bank. Contact your financial institution for more information.

Please mail this completed Membership Form along with a check for your Total Contribution made payable to the Hillsboro Historical Society at the address below. **THANK YOU!**

**Hillsboro Historical Society
P. O. Box 461
Hillsboro, NM 88042**