

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

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## The Stocker Sisters in Hillsboro History

By Garland Bills and Robin Tuttle



Figure 1. Sisters Ninette and Harriet on the Miller house porch.

If you were to ask a resident of Southern New Mexico to name the most prominent woman in its history, the response would likely be Sadie Orchard. Neither of the two daughters of Henry D. and Tamazin Kimball Stocker is likely to be mentioned. Henry, a Vermonter, and Tamazin, a native of the Chicago area, were married in 1859. The 1860 U.S. Census lists Henry as a dry goods merchant living in McHenry, Illinois, just north of Chicago. In 1880 he was a lawyer residing in Lake City in southeastern Minnesota. He was a man with enterprising ambitions, commonly referred to as Judge Stocker later in his life. Tamazin may have been equally high-spirited.

The marriage seems to have endured only long enough to yield two daughters, Harriet and Ninette, and perhaps a son in between. These sisters, often referred to familiarly as Hattie and Nettie, were born in the 1860s, Harriet in McHenry, Illinois, and Ninette in Lake City, Minnesota.

But since both parents resurface in this story, we need to provide a bit more background. In the 1860 Census, Henry is listed as the head of a household with wife “Tenason”<sup>1</sup> and her older brother; Henry’s age is given as 26 and Tamazin’s as 18. We have discovered no divorce or second marriage record, and we have not been able to find either Henry or Tamazin in the 1870 Census. But the 1875 Minnesota state census lists Henry Stocker with a new wife and two young children ages 2 and 4. The 1880 Census clarifies. Henry’s wife is identified as “Heppie” (really Hepsibeth), and living with them is Hattie (that is, his daughter Harriet) at age 18, a stepson, and three younger children ages 8, 7, and 2, so Henry must have remarried by at least 1871.

In the 1880 Census for Red Wing, Minnesota, “Tamsy” appears as the wife of Wesley O. Dodge, and the only other member of the household is his 14-year-old stepdaughter Nettie (that is, Tamazine’s daughter Ninette) Stocker. It seems that Tamazin did not remain for long with Mr. Dodge either; he is listed alone in the 1895 state census in Minneapolis and as a lodger there in the 1900 federal census.

*(continued on page 3 ...)*

<sup>1</sup>Although Tamazin or Tamazine seems to be the name she used for herself, many variants appear, especially in the scribbled notes of early census takers.

## President's Message



I am pleased to announce to the membership that the Board of Directors has approved the construction of the “Carriage House” at the Black Range Museum (see *Carriage House Approved* on page 15). The project has been under consideration for some time now and is prerequisite to our request to the State Historical Museum for a long-term loan of the Concord Coach “Mountain Pride” (see article in *GZP* 15/1, February, 2022).

The prospect of having the coach back in Sierra County will fulfill the desires of our community and founding HHS members who have pursued its return for over 20 years.

Recent discussions with the NM Department of Cultural Affairs have been positive and we now have a path for possible acquisition.

I thank the Board for its careful and thoughtful discussions and the final decision to proceed with this project. I will be giving a presentation on the Mountain Pride at the Hillsboro Community Center in September. Fundraising to support the project will also be initiated soon.

On other fronts, although we are in need of volunteers, our museum continues to be praised by visitors who appreciate their time touring it with our capable docents. We sometimes forget what an impact we have on others until we receive inspiring notes of gratitude for our efforts to preserve the history of our area.

Our museum gift shop continues to be a success thanks to those volunteers who open and close its doors each week. Book sales and ball caps have been a steady source of revenue

for us thanks to Kathleen Blair and her efforts to maintain these inventories.

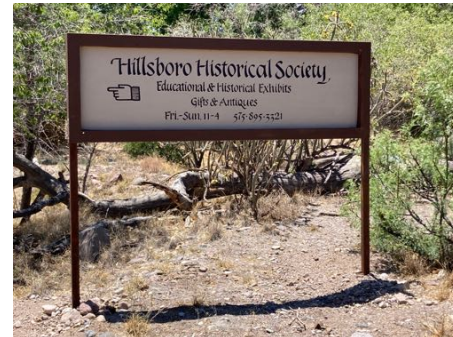
Thanks to our new Treasurer, Ewa Czarnoanczyk, we continue to be financially sustainable and functional. Nichole Trushell has been invaluable to the success of HHS and deserves much credit for her assistance and time spent with Eva sorting out our bookkeeping to our benefit.

Thanks to our Editor, Joe Britton, and a host of contributors, this journal continues to be a wonderful source of inspiring stories, recollections and important documentation of historic events and people in our area. It serves as an archive in itself for future research and further documentation of our history.

As always, thank you for your support. I hope you enjoy this issue of *GZP*.

–Steve Dobrott

## New Road Sign for the Black Range Museum



Thanks to an inquiry from the Sierra County tax assessor, who asked what “educational purpose” a small tract of land owned by the Historical Society made it worthy of being tax exempt, the HHS and Black Range Museum now have a new sign in place!

Notice the sign just across the lower bridge as you come into town along Highway 152, with a hand helpfully pointing across the street toward the museum.

The otherwise forgotten small parcel of land is now being put to good (tax-exempt) use!

To volunteer at the Black Range Museum, contact Ewa at [eva-c65@outlook.com](mailto:eva-c65@outlook.com) or Kathleen at [bluehare@citlink.net](mailto:bluehare@citlink.net). What a pleasant way to spend part of a day!

(... continued from page 1)

As was typical of the time, the statuses of these two sisters—Harriet and Ninette—and indeed their identities to a great extent, were associated with the men they married. They were to become prominent citizens of Hillsboro as Mrs. Nicholas Galles and Mrs. George T. Miller.

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**Harriet Estella Stocker**, born on May 18, 1862, was the older and perhaps more traditional daughter. Her husband-to-be, Nicholas Galles, was born four years earlier, in 1858, in Chicago, the first child born in the U.S. of immigrant parents from Luxembourg. But he grew up in Minnesota, first in New Ulm, and he was then sent for education to Lake City. Harriet probably met him in Lake City where the two may have even attended the same school.

It appears that Harriet elected to live with her father after his remarriage. And the man she accepted as her husband shared many characteristics with him. Nicholas Galles was adventurous, industrious, ambitious, and hard-charging. After finishing his schooling, he struck off for southern New Mexico as a teenager in 1875. He may have been a schoolteacher in Socorro, then became postmaster in Alemán in 1876, and in 1877 studied law in Mesilla under the guidance of the well-known Albert Jennings Fountain. By 1878 he was in early Hillsboro where he established a general mercantile store with George O. Perrault.<sup>2</sup> The following year he was appointed Hillsboro's first postmaster and even led a militia against the Apaches. By the fall of 1880, at the age of 22, he was a candidate for the Doña Ana County Commission – and he won.

He was also an earnest young man who didn't forget his sweetheart in Minnesota. Although Harriet's father seems to have left the family not long after younger sister Ninette's birth, both parents had now remarried. Harriet, who may have been named after her father's mother, was living with her father and stepmother in Wabasha, just south of Lake City.



Nicholas apparently kept tabs on these familial rearrangements, and he felt compelled to exhibit the proper behavior of the times. He wrote a letter in August of 1880 to Harriet's biological father, Henry Stocker, asking permission for Hattie's hand [Fig. 2].

Five months later, on January 5, 1881, Harriet and Nicholas were married in Chicago. She was 18 and he was 22. And Hattie, a teenager accustomed to a comfortable Upper Midwest life, was suddenly carried off to the remote village of Hillsboro and the challenges of setting up a household and dealing with the whirlwind of her husband's social and political life. According to the family history written by Joan Galles Oellion (p. 583), Harriet was fond of telling about that trip to Hillsboro: "We came to Lamy junction in a passenger coach [sic, coach], from there to Rincon in a freight caboose, and from there to Hillsboro in a buggy."

Nicholas probably had a solid adobe home waiting for Harriet on Broadway Street (now NM Highway 27), a half block off Main Street. Given Nicholas' already well-established stature in the community, she must have been warmly welcomed. A professional photo shows Harriet at about the time of her marriage [Fig. 3].

Figure 2. Nicholas Galles' letter to Henry Stocker asking for permission to marry his daughter Harriet (Hattie).

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<sup>2</sup> See Catalina Claussen, "The Perrault Family," *GZP* 16/2 (May 2023).



Figure 3. Harriet Stocker Galles.

Galles & 2 children Dora Lowell [a friend or nanny] and my wife Ninette and baby) left Minneapolis for Hillsboro, N.M.” Their baby daughter Margaret was eight months old and the center of everyone’s attention during the trip. They were joined by “Nic” Galles at Nutt and continued to Lake Valley where they “had an excellent dinner at the Chinese restaurant” and then transferred to the stage, reaching Hillsboro before nightfall on Thursday the 23rd.

Initially housed by Harriet and Nicholas, George and Ninette right away built one of the most distinctive homes of Hillsboro. Ninette was instrumental in acquiring the lot next to the Union Church on Elenora Street in April 1894, and then George handled the construction. Slag from the smelter run by Nicholas Galles was poured into forms to make huge bricks, and Peter Galles, one of Nicholas’ brothers who had followed him to Hillsboro, built their Victorian-style home as shown in a photo with Ninette sitting on the porch [Fig. 5].<sup>4</sup>



Figure 5. Ninette on porch of the Miller home on Elenora Street, built of black slag blocks.

Younger sister **Ninette Stocker**, born in 1866, seems to have been endowed with a vigorous and adventuresome spirit, perhaps more so than the sedate and proper Harriet. Ninette had displayed early talent as an artist and had traveled “back east” from Chicago to advance her skills. A photo probably taken by husband George shows a later Ninette in her Hillsboro home studying her painting of a tiger, casually holding a cigarette in her left hand [Fig. 4].<sup>3</sup>

Ninette may well have met her future husband, George Tambling Miller, in Minnesota before her family’s transition from Lake City to Red Wing, 15 miles closer to Minneapolis. George was the son of a prominent Minneapolis hardware businessman. He had been born in Chicago in the same year as Ninette, 1866. He was a graduate of Colton College in Northfield, Minnesota. At the time of his marriage, he was working for his father at A. R. Miller & Sons hardware dealers. Ninette and George were married in Minneapolis on June 4, 1891, both in their mid-twenties.

Ninette and George soon followed her sister and husband to Hillsboro, traveling by train. George wrote in his travel diary (photocopy in the Black Range Museum): “Monday Feb 20 1893. This bright cold day. We (Mrs N.



Figure 4. Ninette and her painting of a tiger.

The first year in Hillsboro, Ninette managed the home and cared for the baby. George took a position with the Standard Gold Mining Company managed by brother-in-law Nicholas, but he soon became head clerk for the Hillsboro branch of the Keller-Miller store (the co-owner, Dan S. Miller of Lake Valley, was not related). Seeking independence, in the late 1890s he gradually began taking over the town’s principal drug store owned by C. C. Miller (also unrelated to George), completing

<sup>3</sup> Joe Britton’s story of Hillsboro eating places in the August 2023 issue of the *GZP* contains a color photo of this painting as it hangs to this day in the General Store Café (as do two other of Ninette’s artworks – a different tiger painting and an exotic scene).

<sup>4</sup> See Garland Bills, “Hillsboro’s Black Slag Buildings,” *GZP* 13/4 (November 2020). For an architectural description of the house, see its registration with the National Register of Historic Places from 1995: [https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/95000465\\_text](https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/95000465_text)



Figure 6. G. T. Miller Drugs on Main Street.



Figure 7. Harriet Galles on horseback in front of her home on Broadway (now Highway 27).

Harriet devoted herself to her handicapped first child. Indeed, she spent most of her adult life taking good care of her. Yet we have uncovered no photo of Gertrude and little commentary about her life. She died in 1921 at about 38 years of age.

Harriet's second child, Edith Georgia, was born on June 18, 1886. A photo by famed Kingston photographer J. C. Burge shows Georgia as a vibrant three-year-old [Fig. 8]. She married in 1903 and had a daughter, Edith Sue Mayes, who would later be adopted by Georgia's second husband and grow up with Thompson as her surname. Georgia had several more children with her second husband, Mark Thompson (a grandson of whom is the Mark Thompson in our references).



Figure 8. Georgia Galles as a child.

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Figure 9. George Albion Miller as a child.

Also on that 1893 train trip to Hillsboro was **Ninette** and George's first child, a girl of eight months they named Margaret. Yet the tragedy of infant mortality was not uncommon at the time. Hillsboro's newspaper, the *Sierra County Advocate*, carried a note in its edition of October 6, 1893: "The baby girl of Mr. and Mrs. George Miller is dangerously ill." Margaret soon died at just 16 months old.

It was not until a decade later, in 1904, that a second child was born to Ninette and George. This coveted boy was named George Albion, uniting the first names of his father and paternal grandfather [Fig. 9]. George Albion was pampered and coddled and grew into a successful and productive adulthood. He never married and did not have children.

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**Harriet's** supremely successful husband, Nicholas Galles, gave her a high-profile life. But many of the events in Nicholas' life were unexpected, sometimes astonishing, and probably always stressful for Harriet. For instance, eight months after their wedding, the Hillsboro militia commanded by Nicholas was caught in the Warm Springs Apache ambush led by Nana at Gavilán Canyon west of Lake Valley. And an erroneous report initially spread all the way to Minnesota that Nicholas was missing!

Then, just a year after their marriage Nicholas was elected to the Territorial House of Representatives. In that position off in Santa Fe he was instrumental in creating a new county in 1884, with Hillsboro as the county seat, thus earning his reputation as "the father of Sierra County." One of the early acts of the commissioners of the new county was to appoint him as Justice of the Peace for Hillsboro.

Nicholas was involved in local mining from the beginning and with others acquired several mines, including the Rattlesnake Mine, often called simply the Snake Mine. His properties became the basis for the Standard Gold Mining and Milling Company, incorporated in 1890 with Nicholas on the Board of Directors as a "heavy stockholder" and also serving as General Manager. This company was a Minneapolis-based corporation for which Henry D. Stocker, Harriet's father, served as vice president. Among Nicholas' many other business and political accomplishments, he spent time at the end of the century on mining activities in Arizona.

In 1889 Nicholas was elected to the New Mexico Constitutional Convention; in 1895 was elected a delegate to the Republican National Convention held in Cleveland, Ohio; and in 1902 was appointed as register for the U.S. land office in Las Cruces (leading him to move the family there). In 1906 he joined with others (including his son-in-law Robert Mayes) to found the First National Bank of Las Cruces, for which he served as director and first president.

All of this activity may have been overwhelming for Harriet. While partnered with her active, prominent, and often absent husband, Harriet alone was largely responsible for the care of her household and two children, one significantly incapacitated.

Perhaps as a result, Harriet seems to have suffered from general health issues of her own (Thompson, p. 40). For a time she sought refuge in Minneapolis where she is listed in the 1895 and 1900 censuses (Thompson, p. 40). The Galles couple even bought a home in Minneapolis so that she could be near Nicholas' family when visiting there. After her return to New Mexico, the family moved to Las Cruces. In 1904 their Hillsboro home was consumed by the same fire that destroyed the Union Hotel next door.

The many successes of her husband made Harriet a respected citizen of both Hillsboro and Las Cruces, as well as of Minneapolis. But she was to mourn the early death of her husband. Nicholas was diagnosed with skin cancer that seems to have developed quickly and severely. Nicholas Galles, the father of Sierra County, died at the young age of 53, on December 5, 1911, in Las Cruces. He is buried there in the International Order of Odd Fellows cemetery.

For much of her adult life, Harriet Stocker Galles lived in the shadow of her husband. Fortunately, her husband's array of business activities left her with some financial security. For the next decade she appears to have devoted her life to taking care of her invalid daughter, until Gertrude's death. Then after the lifting of this burden, she seems to have spent the remaining nine years of her life in Las Cruces close to daughter Georgia's family. She died in the Masonic Hospital in El Paso on January 7, 1930, at the age of 67, and is buried beside her husband and daughter Gertrude.

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**Ninette** apparently played a larger role in her husband's business affairs than did Harriet, particularly with regard to the drugstore. For example, in 1899 she handled payment of fixtures for the post office, and in 1900 she paid Manuel Aragón for show cases and counters intended for the drugstore. In 1906 she officially registered a cattle brand, a lightly modified "RX," no doubt used for horses; there is no evidence they owned cattle.

Ninette and George made the drugstore an up-to-date Hillsboro business. "Geo. T. Miller has installed a new gasolie [sic] lighting plant in the postoffice and drug store. It is a great improvement

over the old coal oil lamp proposition,” crowed the *Sierra County Advocate* of 23 February 1906. And the 24 July 1908 issue practically swooned,

These summer evenings Miller's Post Office Drug Store is the popular place and the Soda Fountain the principal attraction. Under the bright lights, listening to the music of the Edison Gramophone, with fresh cut flowers on fountain and tables, one sits and revels in the delights of the sundae and numerous tempting concoctions. Out here in our little western town we are indeed fortunate in having this resort which is the mecca of so many.

While Ninette was a talented artist, George was a photography aficionado, bringing his camera with him on the train from Minnesota to record the sights. When the well-known photographer J. C. Burge decided to move on from Kingston, George bought his equipment and captured important early images of Hillsboro, many of the photos taken from his front yard on Elenora Street. The archives of the Black Range Museum include numerous images taken by him.

Although Ninette was 4 years younger than her sister Harriet, and her husband was 8 years younger than Harriet's spouse, she was the first to become a widow. George T. Miller died suddenly of an appendicitis attack in May of 1909 at the age of 42. The attending doctor, Frank I. Given – who happened to have his office in the Miller drugstore – had come to Hillsboro ten years earlier after graduating from Bellevue Medical College in New York City in 1886. Nevertheless, like many homeopathic doctors, Given felt unsure of treating the problem and called in a doctor from Deming. The doctor performed surgery, but George died just hours later.

The sudden death of her husband was devastating for Ninette. Her mother, Tamazin Dodge, came to help, apparently to stay, abandoning her second husband. The 1910 Census gives Ninette as the head of the household with son and mother as members. Adding to her turmoil just months after her husband's death, little five year-old George and three other boys were playing with dynamite caps when one exploded and injured the other boys while little George “received a shock that rendered him unconscious” (*Sierra County Advocate*, October 8, 1909), though he soon recovered.

Immediately following her husband's death, Ninette dove into the business to rescue her life and that of her son. She assumed full control of the drugstore, changing its name from G. T. Miller Drugs to N. S. Miller Drugs. By the end of the year she received her official appointment to the postmaster position. In addition, prior to his death George had been appointed as the special master assigned to handle the bankruptcy debts of the Sierra Consolidated Gold Mining Company; Ninette took over and completed the task to the court's satisfaction.

It seems that a suitor for Ninette's hand promptly appeared: Asbury Lafayette Bird, generally known by his initials A. L. (perhaps for obvious reasons). Asbury was a local miner who happened to have divorced his wife on grounds of abandonment a few months before George's death. His courtship of Ninette included a curious move. He sold Ninette fifteen tons of ore he had extracted from the Garfield mine – for one dollar. His campaign apparently worked. Ninette married him on June 28, 1913, in El Paso, Texas.

The newlyweds lived in Ninette's slag home where she continued to raise her son. In 1920, the household consisted of Asbury as head, with Ninette, little George, and Tamazin (who would die in Hillsboro in 1927). Ninette also continued to run the N. S. Miller drugstore, though she was now known as Ninette S. Bird or Mrs. A. L. Bird. Furthermore, Asbury seems to have switched careers at some point, becoming “druggist” on the medical labels for N. S. Miller Drugs.

Hillsboro's worst natural disaster occurred a year after Ninette's marriage to Asbury. The flood of Wednesday evening June 10, 1914 roared down Main Street causing extensive property damage and killing Thomas Murphy, the first sheriff of Sierra County. A photo reveals the flood's impact on the drugstore, destroying the post office addition, ripping off the brick front of the building, and wreaking major damage to the interior [Fig. 10]. The figure inside the building in the photo is probably Asbury, assessing the extent of the damages.



Figure 10. Miller's Drugstore after the June 1914 flood.

Once the also heavily damaged *Sierra County Advocate* was able to resume publication, the issue of July 10 carried this tragicomic note: "The person having in their possession the Spatulas belonging to the prescription department will oblige me by returning them. Mrs. A. L. Bird."

In addition to her business activities, Ninette became exceedingly active in community affairs as evidenced by documents in the Black Range Museum. She served as a principal administrator for the Sierra County chapter of the American Red Cross from at least 1917 to 1927. During the Great Depression, as attested by documents from 1934, she managed the New Mexico Relief Administration funds for Sierra County. And from 1938 to 1940 she kept the records of the Hillsboro Woman's Club. (It is of interest to note that the membership of this club appears to have been exclusively Anglo-surnamed.)

It comes as a surprise to us to see that the 1940 Census shows only Ninette and son George in the home on Elenora Street. We have uncovered no indication of divorce or separation, but we find Asbury living elsewhere in this census. He is, in fact, listed as living next door to the woman who would become his third wife, Romelia "Romey" Chávez Luna.

Ninette's son, George Albion Miller, grew up to attend the New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts (now NMSU) and graduated with a degree in engineering. He returned to Hillsboro to help with and eventually run the store. He installed the first telephone system in Hillsboro, with the switchboard housed in the back room of the drugstore. He died in 1973 and is buried in the Hillsboro cemetery.

Ninette Stocker Miller Bird died at the age of 80 on October 23, 1946. She and her first husband (along with her mother) were supposedly buried in the Hillsboro cemetery, but we don't know the burial sites and have no photos of their headstones.

And so ends the story of the Stocker sisters, yet two more intrepid women who made their mark in a land both new and strange to them, where they made their home and courageously lived their lives.

## References

*All photos courtesy of the Black Range Museum.*

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The Miller House in 2010. Note the mural of the Stocker sisters on the left porch. The home is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Photo AllenS, Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

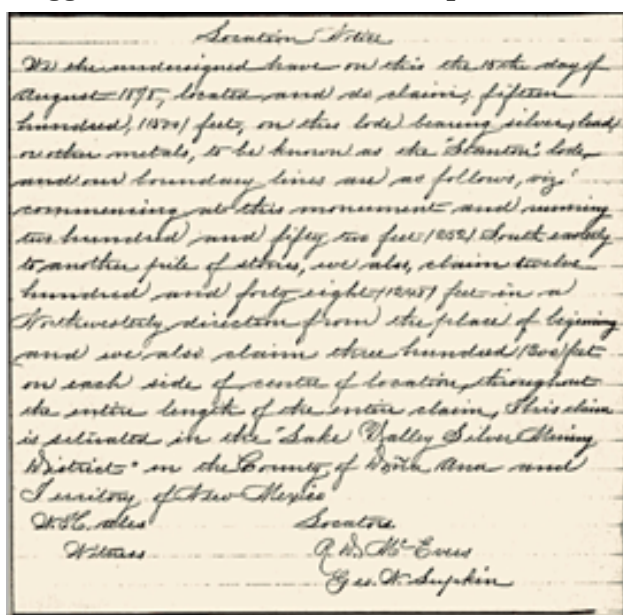


# Who Discovered the Bridal Chamber Mine?

## Part II of “Finding McEvers: A Partial History of Lake Valley”

By Jim Winder

Having told the story of locating the site of Ruben McEvers’s ranch in the May 2024 issue, we now have a chance to correct a little historical injustice. A significant number of books, letters and articles have been written about the silver mines at Lake Valley, and especially about the Bridal Chamber deposit.<sup>1</sup> Articles about the Bridal Chamber being “the world’s richest silver mine” can be found in dozens of period newspapers from across the United States and Europe. Most of the articles were exaggerations extolling the virtues of the mines with the aim of attracting people and capital to the area. And towards this aim, they were successful, for a while. People wanted to believe that there were riches to be found at Lake Valley and as such, they were easily convinced. People still want to believe, and the exaggerations continue to be the prevalent storyline for Lake Valley.



R. D. McEvers and Geo. W. Lufkin claim for the Stanton Mine as recorded in Doña Ana County, New Mexico

However, the facts are that Lake Valley never contained the world’s richest silver mine, and it never had a population of 4,000 people. But for fifteen years, it was the setting for all kinds of interesting activities and conflict, including one of the greatest mining stock scams in the history of the United States, one that had international implications.<sup>2</sup>

What we know today is that a number of mines around Lake Valley were bought up by George Daly acting as a front man for George Roberts and Whitaker Wright, two notorious mining stock promoters, and combined into four mining corporations: the Sierra Grande, Sierra Bella, Sierra Plata and Sierra Apache. These mines included the Lincoln and Stanton claimed by McEvers and George Lufkin, the Columbia claimed by William Gibson, and the Last Chance and Little Boy claimed by the Irvins, a family from Texas that moved to Lake Valley. Stock from these companies was expertly promoted and manipulated in a pyramid scheme that was the main economic engine of Lake Valley.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the mines in Lake Valley did not produce significant amounts of silver ore and what was produced was typically of a low grade, but it was enough to fuel Roberts’ and Wright’s scheme. Then, to everyone’s surprise, an especially rich, though small, deposit of cerargyrite, or horn silver, was discovered on August 19, 1881,<sup>4</sup> under the eastern portion of what had been the Stanton claim at a depth of about thirty feet.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See for example Craig Springer, “Bridal Chamber Mine: A Centennial Journey,” December 17, 2011, <http://hillsborohistory.blogspot.com/2011/12/bridal-chamber-mine-centennial-journey.html>

<sup>2</sup> Homer E. Milford, *History of the Lake Valley Mining District*, from the AML Archaeological Survey Report off Lake Valley (Moiola and Milford, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Henry B. Clifford, *Rocks in the Road to Fortune or the Unsound Side of Mining* (Gotham Press, 1908), pp. 233-235.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard MacDonald, *Comments on Genesis of the Lake Valley, New Mexico, Silver-Deposits*, Bulletin of the American Institute of Mining Engineers, No. 26 (February 1909), p. 211.

<sup>5</sup> Milford, p. 27.

This would be dubbed the Bridal Chamber. Roberts and Wright were quick to capitalize on the discovery and to milk it expertly for years. In the end, far more money was made from Lake Valley mining stocks than was ever made from actual mining. Like all scams, the Sierra Companies finally collapsed, and with them the town of Lake Valley. A majority of investors lost money on the stocks, and some were ruined. George Roberts managed to come through it all intact, but Whitaker Wright was eventually convicted of fraud in another matter and died by ingesting poison in a London courtroom. George Daly was killed by Apaches under Nana on the same day that the Bridal Chamber was found and is buried on a hill overlooking McEvers' Ranch.<sup>6</sup>

So who discovered the Bridal Chamber? We know that Ruben McEvers and George W. Lufkin jointly claimed the Lincoln and Stanton mines in August 1878,<sup>7</sup> and we can trace the ownership from them to the Sierra Plata Company. Sounds simple enough, however credit is nearly universally given to George Lufkin alone, although one source gave credit to McEvers<sup>8</sup> and a few to both.<sup>9</sup> Some accounts say George Lufkin was a cowboy working for McEvers and was riding around looking for cattle when he found an unusual rock in his horse's shoe. Others say he was tipped off by a lost Chinaman who had found the motherlode but couldn't remember how to get back to it. Lufkin gave himself full credit in an interview a decade later in a local newspaper:

I was freighting a trip or two between Mesilla and Hillsboro for a man named Gibson, and while passing through here in August 1878, became favorably impressed with the appearance of the country and concluded to prospect it for mineral. Consequently, one morning shortly afterward I threw a saddle on one of my horses, jumped on it and was soon prospecting the hill yonder. In less than three hours I was rewarded by finding several outcrops of silver ore. Knocking off some samples and putting them in my pocket I returned to Hillsboro and gave them to Joe Yankee, an assayer, to test for me. These specimens ran from \$3,000 to \$3,350 in silver to the ton. Of course, I was highly elated and returned to Lake Valley, locating the Lincoln and Stanton claims.<sup>10</sup>

Nice story but a bit murky. The early specimens from the Stanton and Lincoln claims produced ore of only marginal quality,<sup>11</sup> and he doesn't explain why McEvers' name came first on the mining claims if he had found the deposits on his own. In fact, Lufkin himself is a bit murky. Research into the history of George W. Lufkin prior to his time in Hillsboro has proven futile and it is likely that this is not his real name. Lufkin claimed to be from Portland, Maine<sup>12</sup> and to have a family in Pittsburg,<sup>13</sup> but no records of him have been found in either place. In 1882 he sold a one third interest in the Hidden Treasure Mine and the deed was signed by G.W. Lufkin and Dora Lufkin, his wife, but no other record of this marriage can be located.<sup>14</sup> Lufkin stuck around Lake Valley founding a number of unsuccessful mines and becoming a local celebrity as the "Founder of the Bridal Chamber" which bought him more than one drink at the local saloons. However, celebrity status did have its hazards. In May 1881, Chris Moesner, "in a drunken fit" fired a pistol at Lufkin in a Lake Valley saloon but missed and struck a

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<sup>6</sup> *Las Vegas Daily Gazette*, October 4, 1882 and October 18, 1882.

<sup>7</sup> Grant County Mining Location Book 2, pp. 69-70 (February 19, 1880); Dona Ana County Mining Claims Book 1, pp. 518-519 (March 12, 1880).

<sup>8</sup> C. R. Keyes, *Genesis of the Lake Valley, New Mexico Silver Deposits*, Transactions of the American Institute of Mining Engineers, vol. 39 (1909), pp. 138-169.

<sup>9</sup> *Boston Herald*, Public Letter Box, December 30, 1909.

<sup>10</sup> *Sierra County Advocate*, "The Man Who Knocked on the Famous Bridal Chamber that was Never Opened to Him," December 11, 1891.

<sup>11</sup> Rogers Birnie, Jr., Lieutenant of Ordnance, report to Captain Geo. M. Wheeler, *Annual Report upon the Geographical Surveys of the Territory of the United States West of the 100<sup>th</sup> Meridian, Appendix OO of the Annual report of the Chief of Engineers for 1879*, Government Printing Office, Washington D.C.

<sup>12</sup> 1880 United States Census for Hillsboro, New Mexico.

<sup>13</sup> *Rio Grande Republic*, December 15, 1883, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Doña Ana County, New Mexico, Deed Book 1, pp. 235-235, filed September 7, 1882.

bystander, Dr. Kallenberger, killing him instantly. Moesner then mounted his horse and escaped.<sup>15</sup> Lufkin spent the rest of his life in Lake Valley where he died of pneumonia at the age of 75 on May 9, 1897 and was buried at the local cemetery.<sup>16</sup>

Ruben McEvers, if he is mentioned at all, is most often portrayed as the naïve ranch owner who did not know silver from saliva, and with whom Lufkin generously shared his strike. But McEvers was a man who spent two years mining in Leadville, Colorado where silver deposits were found in



Bridal Chamber Mine, Lake Valley, c. 1890. Photo Black Range Museum.

Mississippian limestone very similar to the limestone where the Bridal Chamber was found. These limestone deposits are not widespread in the Black Range, and it appears reasonable to assume that McEvers chose his homestead based on the prevalence of this rock and its likelihood of holding silver. Naïve? No, McEvers was a man with the right skill set who knew what to look for and was actively seeking it.

So, who discovered the Bridal Chamber? The claims and deeds for the Lincoln and Stanton mines carried the names of both McEvers and Lufkin and other evidence points to a collaboration. Thus, it can be rightly said that they both discovered the mine that would become the Bridal Chamber.

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## Fountain Murder Trial



Hillsboro Community Center  
316 Elenora Street  
Hillsboro, New Mexico

\*\*\*Saturday, August 24, 2024\*\*\*

Co-sponsored by the Friends of Pat Garrett,  
Hillsboro Community Center, and  
Hillsboro Historical Society

### PROGRAM SCHEDULE

3:30 pm - Doors open, Hillsboro Community Center

4:00 pm – Sing the Legend: A live musical presentation by Dan Crow and Karla Steen of original western songs, including **LAWDOG LAMENT**, **THE COFFIN NOTE**, **BOB FITZZSIMMONS**, **SAM BASSO AND THE WAMPUS CAT**

5:00 pm – The Fountain Murder Trial. A newly created re-enactment by actors from Las Cruces of the 1899 courtroom trial of the persons accused of murdering Colonel Albert J. Fountain and his son Henry. The re-enactment uses the actual words of the courtroom trial.

The abduction and apparent murder of Albert J. and Henry Fountain on February 1, 1896, shocked and outraged the citizens of New Mexico. It was not the killing of Colonel Fountain, a Union Civil War veteran and prominent attorney, which aroused the physical disgust of the citizenry – after all, it was not unknown for distinguished men to be killed. It was the cold-blooded murder of his eight-year old son which provoked the public outcry and revulsion.

The evidence indicates that although Colonel Fountain was killed during the ambush, his son was taken alive and only killed the next day!

Entry – Recommended Donation  
\$10 Adult, \$5 Youth

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<sup>15</sup> *Las Vegas Gazette*, May 13, 1881.

<sup>16</sup> *Sierra County Advocate*, May 14, 1897.

# Hillsboro and Kingston Celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July





The poster announcing this year's Independence Day potluck and softball game proudly noted, "This event has been happening on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July for at least 70 years" (see photo on opposite page). I heard through the grapevine however that some passers-by had objected to that claim earlier in the week, saying they had grown up in Hillsboro and had no recollection of any such thing happening. So I set out to investigate.

One thing we know: the event has been hosted by Sarah and Bob Kotchian at their place on the west end of town for some twenty years. This year, however, the venue had to be moved at the last minute to Gary Sapp's Hillsboro Court, due to mud from the heavy rains the day before, and the ballgame cancelled. But I was still curious about the earlier provenance of the tradition, suspecting that it had been going on for a long time.

So I asked Gloria Spellman (née Garcia), who grew up in Hillsboro, if she had any memory of 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations from her childhood in the 1940s. "Oh yes!" she exclaimed. "My father was in charge of the bar-b-que. They butchered a cow and then cooked it all night in a pit dug behind the old bank building" (now Kristen Boren and Karen Mast's place).

I also remembered that a *GZP* article on "The Black Range Highway" included a photo of one particularly memorable 4<sup>th</sup> of July in 1921, when the people of Southern New Mexico gathered by the hundreds at Berenda Creek to celebrate the opening of the Dam to Dam Highway, followed by further festivities later in the day in both Hillsboro and Silver City (*GZP* 15/4, November 2022).

Then turning to the ever-intriguing *Sierra County Advocate*, I quickly found many reports of various Independence Day celebrations, including these lively snippets describing the 4<sup>th</sup> of July events of 1894 in Kingston, with the people of Hillsboro joining in:

- *The 4<sup>th</sup> was ushered in by the usual rattle and fusillade of small guns and the roar of artillery, and nearly everyone was up with the sun and on the streets, and were greeted with the prospect of a beautiful day in which there were no disappointments.*

- *The miners and ranchmen from the vallies [sic] and hills began to gather early—in fact some came the evening before—and by 10 o'clock the vehicles began to arrive from Hillsboro. By half past eleven the shaded grounds around the ice tank were filled with people, to whom the roasting beef, mutton, etc. had given an eager appetite and when the latecomers arrived they found only the bones of three beeves, empty coffee pots, pickle kegs, etc., yet all had enough.*
- *Col. J. S. Crawford made the speech of his lifetime on the 4<sup>th</sup>. So all who heard him say.*
- *It must not be forgotten that the Black Range Band added much to the dignity of the 4<sup>th</sup>.*
- *E. V. B. Hoes kept open house on the 4<sup>th</sup>, where his friends were royally entertained from early morning until the close of festivities.*
- *Hillsboro certainly did her duty in assisting Kingston to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup>, as everybody seemed to be up with their wives and sweethearts, brothers, sisters and friends. Money seemed to be no object when enjoyment was the chief end and aim, and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1894, will be a day long to be remembered. ("Kingston News," Sierra County Advocate, July 6, 1894, p. 3)*

So whatever one's memory might be, the 4<sup>th</sup> seems to have been well celebrated in both Hillsboro and Kingston, and for many years. Kudos to all who helped keep the tradition alive with this year's festive observance!

— Joe Britton

## The 1885 Kingston Census

By Barbara Lovell

The image shows a handwritten census document with a grid layout. The columns contain names, ages, and other demographic information. The handwriting is in cursive and somewhat faded. The document appears to be a list of households or individuals, with names like 'Whitham' and 'Laughlin' visible in some rows.

As was typical with any new mining district, people began pouring into Kingston in 1882 as soon as word got out that silver had been discovered. At that time, Kingston was part of Grant County. In 1884, Sierra County was formed from parts of Grant, Doña Ana and Socorro Counties, with Kingston being located in the new county. A special territorial census was conducted in June 1885. I knew there were families who were living in Kingston at that time whose names did not appear in the special census, so I decided to analyze it to see if there were other inconsistencies. I was pretty surprised by what I found.

There are multiple families who were living in Kingston in 1885 who are not enumerated in the census. Two in particular are the Whithams, a family of 5, who came to Kingston in 1883 and remained there until 1895, and the Laughlins, a family of 7, who came to Kingston in 1882. Their 5 children were supposedly the first children in Kingston, and they remained there for many years.

I next tracked the businesses that were advertised in the Kingston Clipper in 1884 and compared those ads with the tax rolls in 1886. There were over 60 merchants who had advertised in 1884 that were listed in the 1886 tax rolls, but there were only 43 merchants listed in the 1885 census.

And, lastly, there are the miners. There were 160 miners listed in the census. Let's guess there were 40 mines. That gives each mine roughly 4 laborers. That is not nearly enough for those mines, like the Lady Franklin and the Iron King, that had boarding houses at the mine site to accommodate their many workers.

The census total was 378. That included Kingston and the Danville mining camp. There is no mention of the Percha City mining camp. Both of these camps were part of the Kingston mining district. There were 51 wives and 72 children enumerated. Their numbers represent 1/3 of the total census count.

So, in summary, the 1885 special census is very interesting reading and the names that are listed are an important part of Kingston's history. But, as a research document to prove population numbers, or to prove whether or not someone was in Kingston at that time, it is not very accurate.

# Carriage House Approved



The Mountain Pride in its current location in the Lincoln Historic Site.

Good news! On June 29, the HHS Board of Directors approved the construction of a new building at the Black Range Museum. The Building Committee made its recommendation to proceed with this project after much consideration and due diligence. The Board voted unanimously to move the project forward, paving the way to start by July 1st. The Board awarded the contract to Black Range Construction Company. The project is now underway (see photo below), and is planned for completion in the fall of 2024.

The building has been planned for some time in anticipation the transfer of the “Mountain Pride” stagecoach from the New Mexico History Museum to the Hillsboro Historical Society. The coach is currently on exhibit in Lincoln, New Mexico at the Lincoln County Courthouse, a New Mexico State Historic Site. The coach is owned by the History Museum of New Mexico and is part of its permanent collection. The goal of bringing the coach back to its original home has been an ambition of HHS for over 20 years. In order to qualify for the transfer of the coach, we need an appropriate space to house and exhibit it (see “The Story of the Mountain Pride: A Case for Acquisition,” *GZP* 15/1, February 2022). We remain hopeful that our request for the transfer will be approved upon completion of the building.

The building, therefore, is called “The Carriage House.” It will be fire safe, climate controlled and solar powered. The banks of solar panels atop the roof will also power the entire museum. Additionally, it will provide needed space for storing important and irreplaceable historic files and documents—giving a significant purpose to the addition even if the Mountain Pride does not return.

The addition of the new building will initiate further plans to develop the backyard of the museum by providing the impetus for the outdoor space including exhibits, native plants and a space for gatherings and presentations.

This project is a huge undertaking for HHS and will require the support of the entire membership and our donors. By its vote of approval the Board has demonstrated confidence in the fact that HHS is financially capable of paying for this project without overly impacting our financial stability. We have been saving for this project for a while now, and with the generous assistance of major donors, we are now in a position to start and complete this exciting project. The Board has approved the initiation of a fundraising drive to help support this effort, and is pursuing outside funding. Stay tuned!

–Steve Dobrott



The concrete slab for the new Carriage House, poured August 2.

## Editor's Note

Hillsboro, Kingston, and Lake Valley have so much captivating history to be researched and retold! One consequence of this richness is that this journal has several open story threads waiting to be completed. In this issue, for example, the second installment of Jim Winder's "Partial History of Lake Valley" appears, this time documenting the discovery of the famed Bridal Chamber Mine. And Jim has already sent in for a future issue Part III of his history, "Victorio's Gambit," that fills in many details about the Apache chief's resistance to his people's displacement by Anglo settlers.

But other story threads remain open as well. A series that I started several years ago, "Three Lives" on the Bucher, Zollars, and Hopewell families—all related by marriage—has much yet to be told. Likewise, a series on the bars and restaurants of Hillsboro also has a lot more ground to cover—we haven't even gotten to the legendary S-Bar-X.

In a presentation on August 3 in the Hillsboro Community Center, I had the opportunity to tell the intriguing story of how Sir Victor Sassoon, a Shanghai real estate mogul who was one of the richest men in the world in the 1930s and '40s, came to build a house in Hillsboro: El Rufugio, now the Enchanted Villa Bed and Breakfast. You couldn't make this stuff up!

All of this is to say that we are all fortunate either to live in or be associated with a part of the country where the strength of colorful personalities and the beauty and toughness of the land have conspired to leave a legacy that is always fascinating in the retelling of it. Just have a look at the account of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations in 1894 on pages 13-14 of this issue, and you'll see what I mean.

And as always, my heartfelt thanks to authors who send in their own work to add to this vivid storytelling, such as Garland Bills' and Robin Tuttle's piece beginning on page 1 about the Stocker Sisters. It is yet further evidence of the kind of people who have had the determination and strength of character to make this area their home, and to give themselves to it.

--Joe Britton

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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.

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