



Guajolotes, Zopilotes y Paisanos

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

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FINDING McEVERS

A PARTIAL HISTORY OF LAKE VALLEY (Part 1)

By Jim Winder

Like most of the American settlers to New Mexico during the 1870s, Ruben McEvers came from somewhere else, scratched around here for a while and then left for another somewhere else. But unlike most others, McEvers played an outsized, if brief, role in southwestern New Mexico history. He gave Lake Valley its name, established a landmark ranch and grew corn in the desert. He co-discovered a silver deposit that would have enormous socio-economic impacts on the region, and he had the misfortune of experiencing the full wrath of the Chihenne Apaches during Victorio's War. He can be linked to the lives of thousands of people who followed his footsteps and to the deaths of two dozen more on a terrible September day in 1879. He was a pioneer among pioneers.



The closest thing we have to a picture of Ruben McEvers is this photo of his brother Ben. McEvers family page, ancestry.com.

But history has not been kind to Ruben McEvers. Credit for his discovery of a silver deposit has been given solely to his partner who stuck around and told his story long enough to be believed. Although his name is common to books dealing with Victorio's War, it is often misspelled, and even the location of his ranch, and the battles that were fought there, have become lost and uncertain. In order to correct these oversights, this paper seeks to shed light on Ruben McEvers the man and to establish the exact location of his ranch. A second installment will further seek to establish who actually discovered the famous Bridal Chamber mine.

Early Years

In some ways, Ruben Darwin McEvers was perfectly prepared for life in New Mexico. He was born January 25, 1846 in Glasgow, Scott County, Illinois to Betty Ann McGlasson and Henry Knapp McEvers.¹ He grew up farming as the son of an Illinois corn farmer until September 5, 1864, when at the age of 17, he joined Company U, 119th Illinois Infantry and entered the Civil War as a substitute for Ebenezer B. Leonard.² At some point he transferred to Company C, 6th Illinois Cavalry and was mustered out of the service on June 6, 1865 in Eastport, Mississippi. Although his exact military experiences are not known, it is likely that he saw significant action with his regiments in Louisiana and Alabama against Confederate troops under Nathan Bedford Forrest.

(continued on page 3 ...)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I want to extend my appreciation to all of our volunteers whose time and energy make HHS a successful organization. It never ceases to amaze me how a relatively small volunteer organization like ours thrives and succeeds in meeting the many challenges that crop up!

A case in point was the recent transitioning of our financial records and accounting methods to a new base of administration in the Research Room at the Black Range Museum. Technology is great if it works for you. To our chagrin and consternation, we found that it was more difficult to transfer, upgrade and synchronize our QuickBooks, Square and online banking than expected. But with persistence and much head scratching, many phone calls and consultations with "experts," we got it done. I say "we" because it was a team effort, but really it was to the credit of Vice President Nichole Trushell. Because of her amazing persistence, we now are able to synchronize all accounting programs, enabling us to retrieve accurate up-to-date financial reports. Val Hildreth Werker and Ewa Czarnojanczyk were also instrumental in this effort. Thanks to all three for their time and energy to get this done. Also, speaking of technology, the Museum now has high speed internet that helps with online transactions.

Additionally, I want to thank all those who helped make our Annual Membership Meeting a huge success. After our meeting at the Community Center, we greeted a significant crowd of members and guests for a tour of the Museum. I am also pleased to report that HHS was well represented at the Historical Society of New Mexico Annual History Conference in Albuquerque in April. Both Joe Britton and I gave presentations, and Garland Bills was a session moderator. HHS participation in these types of events helps to promote the Society and our community. Lastly, I thank our Board of Directors who do an amazing job of leading our organization, and our journal editor Joe Britton who, as always, does an amazing job of editing and compiling the latest issue of *GZP*. We are looking forward to another bright outlook for HHS next quarter. Thanks again for all your support for HHS and the Black Range Museum!

Best, Steve Dobrott

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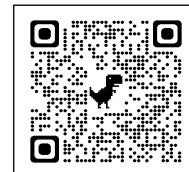
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(... continued from page 1) In 1870, the McEvers family moved to Kansas where Ruben parted ways and continued on to Colorado. There he worked initially on a survey crew and then spent two years mining for silver in the Mississippian limestone rocks around Leadville.³ In 1876 he moved to New Mexico, searched around for a while, then found the place for his ranch at the Cienega de Los Básenos on Berrenda Creek.⁴

He called the place Lake Valley Ranch, but everyone else just called it McEvers' Ranch.⁵ It was a *cienega*, a wet, marshy area in the desert that had a large amount of reliable water, enormous biodiversity, and sunflowers and sacaton grass growing taller than a man. The Mogollon Indians lived here hundreds of years before McEvers, but their pueblo was long abandoned by the time he arrived. The Chihenne Apaches, however, were still around and used the cienega as a resting place and hunting ground on their migrations through their territory—and this was going to be a problem.



Bidu-ya (Chief Victorio). This photo is commonly considered to be of Victorio but some scholars disagree. Photo Wikicommons.



McEvers Lake in 1896. This is one of two lakes that gave the valley its name. Photo Henry Schmidt, used by permission of NMSU Library.

It is unlikely that McEvers knew much about the Apache presence, but what he did know was that there was plenty of deep, tillable soil, dependable water from Berrenda Creek, and a small lake that he humbly named “McEvers Lake,” and the whole place was surrounded by the same Mississippian limestone that held the silver deposits in Leadville, Colorado.⁶ Best of all, it was free for the taking. Well, not quite; it was going to cost a lot of blood.

Homestead and Mining

unimaginable amount of hard work to carve a home, ranch, and farm out of raw nature. At some point, McEvers was joined on the ranch by the widow Mary Elizabeth Dunn and her 15-year old daughter Katherine Sarah. The exact nature of their relationship is hard to discern. Local accounts and legal records refer to Mary Elizabeth as McEvers' wife,⁹ but McEvers' obituary and copious other records indicate that he married Katherine Sarah in Mexico after he left Lake Valley and that they had 11 children together.

Around 1877, McEvers filed a 160-acre homestead claim⁷ and in 1879 a second “Desert Homestead”⁸ claim in the heart of the cienega. He now faced an



Sarah and William Washington Gibson. Gibson family page, ancestry.com.

In May 1879 McEvers convinced William Gibson to bring his family to live at the cienega.¹⁰ The Gibsons had migrated to Hillsboro in 1877 from Uvalde, Texas, where a doctor had convinced Bill that he could improve his health by living a strenuous lifestyle. Bill and his wife Sarah lost their money along the way from Uvalde and arrived in Hillsboro with seven kids and little else. He began to work hauling ore and saved his money to buy four large mules and start his own freighting business in which he employed a man by the name of George W. Lufkin.¹¹ In May 1879, Gibson met McEvers in Hillsboro and soon after, he made the move with his family and the Gibsons took up residence about a quarter of a mile east of McEvers' house.

Joining McEvers and Gibson around this time was another family from Texas: Powhatan B. Irvin, along with his wife Mary Williamson Irvin, his son Nathaniel Hunt Irvin and daughter-in-law Lavina Ricketson Irvin, and their child Thomas. P. B. Irvin was born in Georgia in 1835 and moved with his

family to Texas when he was a child. It was there that he and his younger brother, Absalom Daniel Irvin, learned farming and stock raising, and then joined the Confederate Army during the Civil War.¹² P. B. and his family built a jacal house in a meadow about a mile southeast of McEvers' house,¹³ and Absalom brought his family to the area a couple of years later.



Stanton claim, c. 1882.
Photo Black Range Museum.

In addition to his ranching and farming work, McEvers was spending time prospecting with George Lufkin, and in August of 1878, they found what they were looking for in the Mississippian limestone about three miles southwest of his homestead. There they claimed the Lincoln and Stanton mines which were destined to have a big impact on New Mexico.¹⁴ Gibson and the Irvins were also out prospecting, and Gibson claimed the Columbia Mine on June 9, 1879.¹⁵ P. B. Irvin claimed the Babe Mine on August 7, 1879,¹⁶ the first of many claims that he and his son Nat would make over the next few years. All four men seemed to have found what they had been searching for, and as Sarah Gibson remembered, “everything was peace and contentment” on the cienega—but things were about to change.

Victorio's War

By the time Ruben McEvers arrived at the cienega the Chihennes had been at war for centuries—first against neighboring tribes, then the Spanish, then the Mexicans, and now the Americans. The U. S. Army was tasked with protecting the settlers and implementing the Indian Bureau's new policy of concentrating all the Apaches on a single reservation at San Carlos, Arizona. The Chihennes, who detested San Carlos, took exception to this policy and fought back. Victorio (Bidu-ya), with Loco and about 300 followers, broke out of San Carlos in September 1877, and for the next two years practiced a policy which alternated between raiding and nominally surrendering.

During this “phony war,”¹⁷ the primary purpose of the Chihenne raids was to steal horses and weapons. Sometime in the spring of 1879, they raided McEvers' Lake Valley Ranch, and two Apaches were killed in the fight.¹⁸ McEvers may have been successful in fending off this attack, but the strict Apache requirements for revenge were going to cause him much more grief.¹⁹ On the bright side, the 9th Cavalry needed forage for their horses to pursue the Apaches, and this created an economic opportunity for McEvers who became a forage agent for the Army on July 21, 1879.²⁰

Then on September 11, 1879, the Chihennes came killing. About noon, they laid siege to Lake Valley Ranch, trapping the McEvers, Gibson and Irvin families in the house along with a ranch hand named Frank Coffee. Pinned down in the sunflowers nearby were Manuel Stapleton and a “Mexican” assistant. Frank Coffee was seriously wounded in the breast²¹ and Stapleton was shot in the leg,²² but everyone made it out alive. However, two groups of miners who came to their aid were not so lucky, and nine of them were ambushed and killed just as they entered the cienega from Dry Draw. After breaking off from the engagement at McEvers' Ranch that evening, the Chihennes traveled up Jaralosa Creek where they killed ten more people at a cienega and then moved up into the Black Range to lay an ambush for the cavalry who would establish a base at the ranch and then follow in pursuit.

A month later, Victorio circled back to McEvers' Ranch, burning his house and stealing all his livestock. McEvers and Jacob Arnett were working in a corn field at the time of the attack but were able to escape by hiding in the thick sunflowers.²³ McEvers rebuilt with the help of the Army but then the following January, Apaches raided the cienega again, taking shots at Irvin's home and firing on the soldiers camped at McEvers' place.²⁴

Enough

The stress of four Apache raids and the constant threat of more battles must have weighed heavily on McEvers, and by July 1880, he had had enough. He sold his ranch and his share in the mines to John A. Miller for \$3,635 and the forgiveness of a store debt.²⁵ He moved to Mexico where tried his luck at mining near Hermosillo for a while until the Yaqui drove him out,²⁶ and then he moved to Oregon and Washington where he mined and became a county commissioner.

Finally, he moved to Idaho where he died in 1917.²⁷ The Army continued to use McEvers' Ranch as a supply post through 1881, and it was here that the first Lake Valley townsite was established. After the October fight, Bill Gibson took his family to Hillsboro, got drunk and sold his mine to E. B. Learned for \$50.²⁸ Then he moved to Yavapai County, Arizona where Sarah and he had six more children and spent the rest of their lives.²⁹ P. B. and Mary Irvin moved up the road about two miles and claimed a new homestead,³⁰ while Nathaniel Irvin filed a desert homestead claim at their first home.³¹ Absalom Irvin and his family joined the clan the next year and P. B., Nat and Absalom would all go on to contribute to the history of Lake Valley in their own unique way.

So, Where Is McEvers' Ranch?

This has been a rather brisk overview of the history of Ruben McEvers and his ranch, but we still haven't established exactly where all these events occurred. Our next goal is to accurately determine the location of McEvers' house, which was the focal point of so much history. This will require that we dig about in some dusty old books, boxes, and file cabinets.



Figure 1: Portion of Army Corps of Engineers map showing McEvers' Ranch.

Berrenda Creek, about 13 miles south of Hillsboro along the road to Old Ft. Cummings, at an elevation of 5,086 feet (Figure 1). While this gives us a very good approximation of the location of the ranch, the Wheeler survey was not accurate enough for our needs, so we shall have to dig deeper to find more specificity.

In McEvers' time, settlers gained ownership of their land by filing a homestead claim with the General Land Office and then "proving up" the homestead for a few years until they received a patent from the government. There were two types of homesteads available to McEvers: those allowed under the Homestead Act of 1862, and "Desert Entries" allowed under the Desert Land Act of March 3, 1877. Both types of homestead entries in southwestern New Mexico were administered by the General Land Office located in La Mesilla until 1883 when the office was moved to Las Cruces. Today these records are maintained by the Bureau of Land Management.

Normally, a six mile by six mile area called a "township" would have been surveyed by men working under the Surveyor General and a plat would then have been produced for that township. Homesteaders would file their claims at the nearest Land Office and their "entry" would be entered in a tract book for the township where the claim was located. Unfortunately, the township where the cienega is located, Township 18 South, Range 7 West, NMPM, was not surveyed until 1882, several years after McEvers filed his claims, thus his entries were never written in the tract book. It is likely because of this that no official records of McEvers' homestead have been located in the Mesilla tract books. However, it is possible to locate the claim using McEvers' 1880 deed to John A. Miller,³³ which includes a crude map (Figure 2) and the following metes and bounds legal description:



Natchez, son of Cochise. He was with Victorio at McEvers' Ranch. Ben Whittick Collection, Palace of the Governors photo archives.

Our first stop is with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers who conducted an ambitious project in the 1870s called the Wheeler Expedition, named for its leader, 1st Lieutenant George Wheeler, to survey and map the western United States. In 1881, the expedition produced a map of southwestern New Mexico which was based upon surveys of the area conducted between 1873 and 1878.³² This map locates McEvers' Ranch as being just south of a small lake on

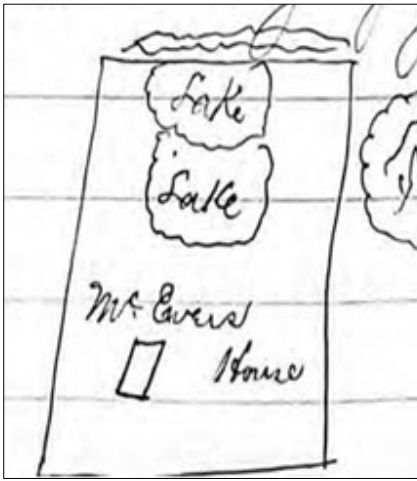


Figure 2: Map from McEvers' 1880 deed to John A. Miller.

Commencing at a monument situated about ten rods from the North Eastern edge of the McEvers Lake and running thence eighty rods in a southerly direction to a similar monument thence one mile down the Valley to a monument, thence North Easterly eighty rods to a monument thence on(e) mile to the place of beginning, embracing one hundred and sixty (160) acres.

At first glance, this description is problematic because it does not appear to coordinate with the map. However, a mound of stones of sufficient antiquity can still be found about 10 rods (165 feet) from the northeastern highwater mark of McEvers Lake. A second mound of stone was then found 86 rods (1421 feet) southwest of the first. A third

mound of stone was found 310 rods (5115 feet) south of the second. And a fourth was found 85 rods (1411 feet) northeast of the third and 309 rods (5103 feet) from the point of beginning. Plotting the locations of these monuments produces the parallelogram that contains about 115 acres (Figure 4). Although the acreage and dimensions of the parallelogram do not exactly match McEvers' description, they are close and are reasonable given the primitive tools he had to survey with. Additionally, the found rock corners were pristine, the boundaries are parallel, and the inaccuracy is consistent with other homestead descriptions of that era. The odd shape might be explained by the presence of two mine "diggings" in the Mississippian limestone deposit on the south end of the claim; perhaps McEvers wished to capture the opportunities provided by the lake, farmland and mineral deposits all in one claim. Thus, this seems to be an accurate depiction of McEvers' homestead.

We are more fortunate with McEvers' desert entry because homestead entries that were cancelled for some reason are now housed at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and it is there that the file for McEvers' Desert Land Entry #27 is located.³⁴ The file contains an application, hand drawn map (Figure 3), and a general metes and bounds description of the claim as follows:

Beginning on the east line of the tract at a cedar post marked R.D.McE. about forty (40) rods west of the westernmost bank of the lake on the Cienega de los Paseños [sic] and running north sixty (60) rods to a post at the northeast corner of the tract marked NE; thence south three hundred and twenty (320) rods to a post marked SW; thence east eighty (80) rods to a post marked SE; thence north two hundred and sixty (260) rods to the place of beginning, and containing one hundred and sixty (160) acres.

The cedar posts have long since rotted away, however we know the westernmost bank of the lake, and it may be used for a reference point to establish the eastern and western lines of the claim with reasonable accuracy. The north and south lines are more difficult because of the loss of the reference posts. The southern line can be estimated based on McEvers' map in that it appears to cross the intersection of the roads to Silver City/Ft. Cummings and to Ft. Thorn which is approximately located in the Wheeler and 1882 General Land Office survey maps. Based on these legal descriptions, the locations of McEvers' two homestead claims are plotted in Figure 4.

The National Archives also holds a desert entry file for Nathaniel Irvin which includes a map (Figure 5) depicting his claim in relation to the McEvers' desert claim and the cienega and showing the location of the Irvin home.³⁵ It also contains the following metes and bounds description:

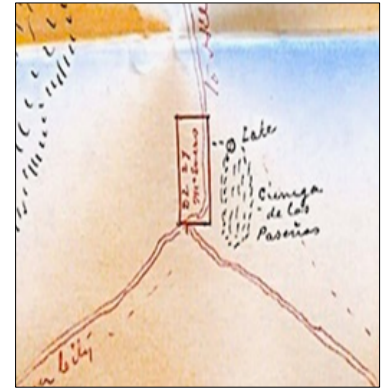


Figure 3: The map McEvers drew for his desert entry.

Commencing at a cedar post erected in a pile of stones at a point in the Cienega de los Paseños [sic], about one mile southeast of the lake which is the source of said cienega, and running south 160 rods to a pile of stones at the southwest corner of the claim; thence 160 rods east to a pile of stones, the southeast corner of this claim, thence 80 rods north to a pile of stones; thence west 80 rods to a pile of stones; thence north 80 rods; thence west 80 rods to the place of beginning, containing 120 acres.

Three of the four original rock monuments have been located; the others however were destroyed by farming or road building activities over the decades. The ruins of a house, barn and corral are at a place which matched the house location shown on Irvin's map. Therefore, the location of Irvin's desert claim can also be accurately produced and is also presented in Figure 4.

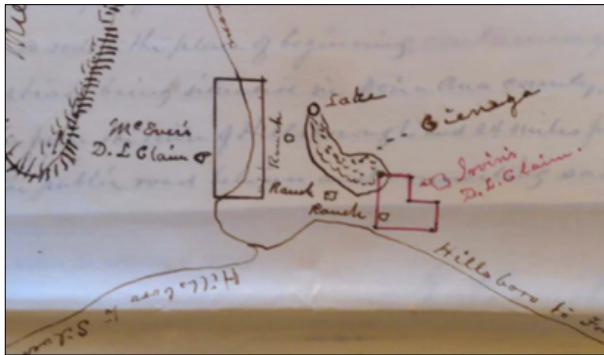


Figure 5: Map from Irvin's desert entry showing its proximity to McEvers' desert entry (National Archives).

We have come a long way, but we still need to determine the exact location of McEvers' home which is a historical focal point. Although the home is depicted in the maps from the Wheeler Expedition, McEvers to Miller deed, and the Irvin claim, these locations are not accurate enough for our purposes. We are fortunate though because the General Land Office's 1882 survey of the relevant township gives us a solid clue. Although the plat of Township 18 South, Range 7 West was completed after McEvers had sold his ranch to Miller,³⁶ it does show the location "Miller's Ranch" in the northwest quarter of Section 11. If we go to page 26 of the surveyor's field notes we find a note saying that "Miller's Ranch bears N20°E dist about 13 chs" from the quarter corner between Sections 10 and 11. The location of the quarter corner is known today, and starting at this point and moving 585 feet (13 chains) from the corner on a line bearing North 20° East places it at Latitude 32.759261° North, Longitude -107.538826° East.



Artifacts from surveyed location of Miller's house.

However, the question still remains: "Is the surveyed location of Miller's house the location of McEvers' house?" To answer this question we first need to find artifact evidence that a ranch house existed at the surveyed site of Miller's Ranch and then to find evidence that the house had once belonged to McEvers. This requires an inspection of the location to see if there is artifact evidence consistent with the presence of both a 1879 ranch and battle site.

The surveyed location of Miller's house has been extensively disturbed by farming and flooding and there is no visual indication of a homestead at the site. However, a survey of the field using metal detectors located a cluster of metal objects consistent with the 1879 time-period including square nails, hinges, and horseshoes centered on a point matching the surveyed location. All these objects were located within an area of about one acre and very few objects were found in the field outside of this cluster which strongly suggests that this is the location of Miller's house.

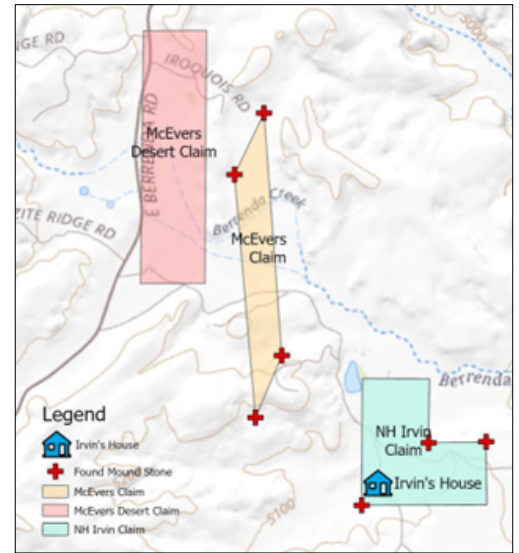


Figure 4: McEvers and Irvin homestead locations platted on modern topographical map.

The artifacts also included two .45-70 bullet casings, two .50-70 casings, three .45 casings, a whole .45-70 cartridge, and a U. S. Army infantry button. Additionally, two .45-75 slugs were found embedded in the soil in the immediate vicinity of the casings suggesting that people were shooting from the site and someone else was shooting at it. This is suggestive evidence that this is indeed the location of McEvers' homesite, since no other ranch sites in the area are known to have had gun fights during that time period.

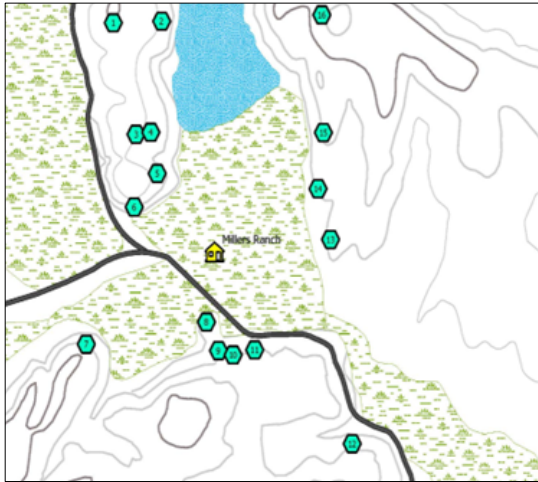


Figure 6: Apache firing positions around Miller Ranch site.

However, the fight at McEvers' Ranch was a big fight, and one would expect to find far more artifacts than have thus far been located. The Miller House site is surrounded by hills with large rock outcroppings, some with what appear to be constructed rock breastworks, which would have made ideal cover for someone wishing to fire upon it. A survey of these hills with a metal detector identified 16 elevated rocky points with direct lines of fire to the surveyed house site containing significant numbers of 1879 era bullet casings and slugs (Figure 6).

These points appear to have been used as firing positions by the Chihennes in their attacks upon the McEvers home. A summary of the artifacts found in these firing positions is presented in Table 1:

CARTRIDGES		SLUGS	
Caliber	Number	Caliber	Number
.45-70	15	.45-70	116
.50-70	2	.50-70	11
.45	2	.45	12
.44 Henry	1	Fragments	44

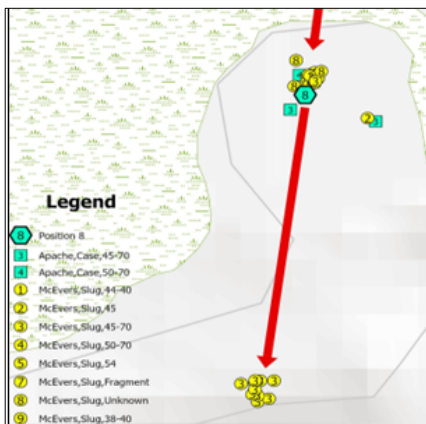


Figure 7: Trajectory of buried slugs fired toward Apache firing position #8.

These firing positions are located in an area that has seen heavy human activity over the decades and the disparity between the number of cartridges and slugs found might be attributed to people collecting cartridges over the years. Because of this and the fact that cartridges were also moved by packrats, the location of slugs is believed to be the most reliable indicator of firing locations and activity since they have remained buried in place since impact 144 years ago. This provides us with an opportunity to determine the position from which these bullets were fired.

Each of the Apache firing positions is located behind large rocks set on a hill and the slugs found at all of these positions exhibited a consistent pattern of being lodged along the slope of the hill which faces the Miller Ranch location. Some slugs were found below the rocks which either struck the rock or were fired short, and some were found above and past the rocks. Using Apache Firing Position #8 as an example (where 19 slugs were found embedded in the soil below the rock position and 10 slugs were found embedded in the hill 120 feet beyond and above the rocks), it is possible to project a horizontally and vertically straight line from the Miller House site to the cluster of slugs below the rock and then on to the cluster of slugs behind the rock (Figure 7), indicating that all these slugs were likely fired from the Miller Ranch

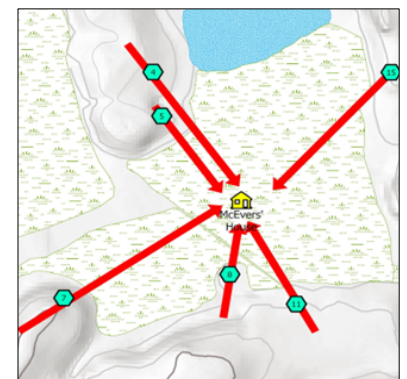


Figure 8: Reverse trajectories of bullets fired toward Apache firing positions.

site. When similar lines were projected for the slugs found at Apache Firing Positions 4, 5, 7, 11 and 15, the lines all converge at the surveyed location of the Miller Ranch (Figure 8). Clearly at least one significant battle occurred here in the 1879 time-period, when people at the surveyed house site fired at least 183 bullets towards someone else located in the rocks along the surrounding hills. Therefore, given the consistent evidence presented in the maps, homestead claims, deed, survey, and artifacts, one may reasonably conclude that McEvers' house was located at the site shown in the 1882 plat as Millers Ranch and was located at Latitude 32.759261° North, Longitude -107.538826° East.

Conclusions

We now know a little more about who Ruben McEvers was, where he came from and where he went. And we know with survey grade accuracy where his house and homesteads were located. In the next part, we will build upon this knowledge to examine who discovered the Bridal Chamber Mine, and as we examine the evidence related to the double massacres of September 11, 1879, we can attempt to name the occupants of the mass grave that sits on the ridge above McEvers' Ranch.

NOTES

1. ancestry.com.
2. Illinois Civil War Muster and Descriptive Rolls Detail Report, Illinois State Archives. McEvers' obituary mentions that he served in the Union Army for three years, however no additional military records have been located to support this, and it does not seem likely given that he would have been 15 years old at the time he entered the Army.
3. Wallace, Alan R., *Geological Setting of the Leadville Mining District, Lake County, Colorado*, USGS Professional Paper 1644.
4. Ruben McEvers Obituary, *Clearwater Republican*, July 25, 1917.
5. Ruben McEvers vs. The United States of America and the Apache Indians, United States Court of Claims, Indian Depredation Claim #6789.
6. *Geological Investigations in the Lake Valley Area, Sierra County, New Mexico*. USGS Professional Paper 1644.
7. McEvers to Miller Deed, Dona Ana County Mining Claims Book 1, pp. 650-652, Filed on July 8, 1880.
8. Homestead Entry #27, National Archives, Washington, D.C., NAID 7787278, Canceled Desert Homestead Entries Las Cruces & La Mesilla Office, Box 200.
9. William M. Courtis, *Genesis of the Lake Valley, New Mexico Silver Deposits, Discussion of the Paper of Charles R. Keyes*, Transactions of the American Association of Mining Engineers, Vol 40, p. 946. See also McEvers to Miller Deed.
10. *Sarah Gibson Story*, from the Black Range Museum archives, Hillsboro Historical Society, February 2016, Vol. 9. No. 1, p. 5.
11. *Sierra County Advocate*, December 11, 1891.
12. Ton Scanlan, *Longhorns, Silver and Liquid Gold: the Irvin Family's Pioneer Ranching, Mining and Wildcatting in Texas and New Mexico*, privately published, 2020.
13. Nathaniel H. Irvin Desert Land Claim #35, February 20, 1880, National Archives, Washington D.C., NAID 7787278, Canceled Desert Homestead Entries Las Cruces & La Mesilla Office, Box 200.
14. Grant County, New Mexico, Mining Location Book 2, pp. 69-70; Doña Ana County, New Mexico Mining Claims Book 1, pp. 518-519.
15. Doña Ana County, New Mexico, Mining Claim Book 2, pp. 491-492.
16. Doña Ana County, New Mexico, Mining Claim Book 2, p. 491.
17. Robert N. Watt, *I Will not Surrender the Hair of a Horses Tail: The Victorio Campaign 1879*. Helion & Company Limited, West Midlands, England, 2017, Chapter 6.
18. *Grant County Herald*, September 20, 1879.
19. Eve Ball, *In the Days of Victorio: Recollections of a Warm Springs Apache*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 1970, pp. 119-120.
20. Special Order 67, par 3, July 21, 1879, NA, RG393, Part 3, entry 450.
21. *Rocky Mountain Sentinel*, October 2, 1879. See also *Sarah Gibson Story*.
22. *Thirty-Four*, Letters to Editor, January 15, 1880
23. R. D. McEvers, Letter to the *Grant County Herald*, published October 18, 1879. See also *Sarah Gibson Story*.
24. *Thirty-Four*, January 14, 1880, Letters to the Editor, January 15, 1880. See also *Sarah Gibson Story*.
25. McEvers to Miller Deed.
26. *Lewiston Tribune*, December 17, 2006.
27. *Clearwater Republican*, Orofino, Idaho, July 17, 1917.

28. Dona Ana County Deed Book 2, p. 514-515.
29. Sarah Gibson Obituary, Sarah Anne Hanes Gibson entry in myheritage.com.
30. Homestead Entry No. 338, U.S. Land Office, Las Cruces, N.M., Dec. 26th, 1882.
31. Desert Land Claim #35, February 20, 1880, National Archives, Washington, D.C., NAID 7787278, Canceled Desert Homestead Entries Las Cruces & La Mesilla Office, Entry 14W3, Box 200.
32. U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, U. S. Geographical Surveys West of the 100th Meridian, Land Classification Map of Part of South Western New Mexico Atlas Sheet No. 84. Expeditions of 1877 1878 Under the Command of 1st. Lieut. Geo. M. Wheeler, 1881.
33. McEvers to Miller Deed.
34. Desert Land Claim #27, July 15, 1879, National Archives, Washington, D.C., NAID 7787278, Canceled Desert Homestead Entries Las Cruces & La Mesilla Office, Entry 14W3, Box 200.
35. Desert Land Claim #35, February 20, 1880, National Archives, Washington, D.C., NAID 7787278, Canceled Desert Homestead Entries Las Cruces & La Mesilla Office, Entry 14W3, Box 200.
36. glorerecords.blm.gov
37. Homer E. Milford, *History of the Lake Valley Mining District*, from the AML Archaeological Survey Report of Lake Valley by Moiola and Milford, 2000.
38. Henry B. Clifford, *Rocks in the Road of Fortune; or the Unsound Side of Mining*, 1908, pp. 233-235.
39. 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.
40. Milford., p. 27.
41. *Las Vegas Daily Gazette*, October 4, 1882, October 18, 1882.
42. Grant County Mining Location Book 2, pp. 69-70, Feb 19, 1880; Dona Ana County Mining Claims Book 1 pp. 518-519, March 12, 1880.
43. C. R. Keyes, *Genesis of the Lake Valley, New Mexico Silver Deposits*, Transactions of the American Institute of Mining Engineers, Vol. 39, pp. 138-169.
44. *Boston Herald*, Public Letter Box, December 30, 1909.
45. *Sierra County Advocate*, "The Man Who Knocked on the Famous Bridal Chamber that Was Never Opened to Him," December 11, 1891.
46. 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 100th Meridian, Appendix OO of the Annual report of the Chief of Engineers for 1879*, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.
47. 1880 United States Census for Hillsboro, New Mexico.
48. *Rio Grande Republic*, December 15, 1883, p. 1.
49. Doña Ana County, New Mexico, Deed Book 1, pp. 235-235, Filed September 7, 1882.
50. *Las Vegas Gazette*, May 13, 1881.
51. *Sierra County Advocate*, May 14, 1897.

HILLSBORO CLASSIC ROAD RACE

9 March 2024, Sponsored by Ziavelo Cycling

The **42-mile course** began in Hillsboro toward Lake Valley for 13 miles; returned to Hillsboro; then finished with 16 miles up to the top of Emory Pass. The **60-mile course** started in Hillsboro toward Lake Valley then continued for 22 miles; returned to Hillsboro and finished with 16 miles to the top.



Tavalopa (Tabalopa, Tabalaopa)

Notes on a Placename

By Joe Diel



Tavalopa, looking south, c. 1880. Photo Black Range Museum.

Tavalopa was the name the original Hispanic settlers gave to the area east of what is now the eastern bridge in Hillsboro—what Anglos later called Happy Flats.¹ Among the descendants of these settlers was Fred “Stretch” Luna, whose ancestry traced back to the early years in Hillsboro. He insisted that this area was settled by Mexicans in the mid-nineteenth century, much before the discovery of gold to the east of town and the founding of the town of Hillsboro. In a letter to the Historical Society in 2011, he pointed out:

The Mexican neighborhood of “Happy Flats” dates back to the 1835-1840s. It was comprised of two stores, several families, and a wagon repair shop. Hillsboro founding date is May 20, 1877.²

He included the names of at least two people who lived in Tavalopa before Hillsboro was founded: Abel V. Chavez and his daughter Romela Chavez Luna-Bird.

There is some indirect support for the assertion of an earlier settlement in an article by Edward D. Tittmann in the statement: “It is not known with exactness when the town of Hillsboro was first established.”³ Tittmann came to Hillsboro in 1908. The date of his article is unknown. The same article documented the presence of Indian ruins located on the rise south of town near the cemetery that Tittmann called “pueblo ruins.” More recent observations indicate that they are more likely Mimbres pit houses.³

Since the name Tavalopa is unusual, examining the origin of the name might shed some light on the early existence of an Hispanic settlement. There are other locations in New Mexico and northern Mexico that use the same name.

Tabalopa, Chihuahua

Tabalopa, Mexico is in the Spanish province of La Nueva Vizcaya, which included the current state of Chihuahua. It was founded as the Hacienda de Santo Domingo de Tabalaopa in the 18th century.⁴ The genealogist Elisa Perez discovered traces of family roots there, and gave further history of this location:

When I first uncovered these [family] documents I inquired as to where Tabalaopa was. No one seemed to know. Finally, I found a short reference in Peter Gebhart’s “La Nueva Vizcaya.” The Hacienda Tabalaopa became a titled Hacienda at the end of the 1700s. It was then occupied by Jesuit Priests.

In 1761 it was sold to Don Bernardo Revilla, in accordance with the nationalization of clerical properties. I don't know who occupies it today.⁵

Tabalopa (or Tavalopa) is also the name of a Colonia (city district) and an Ejido (land held in common, park) located within the modern city of Chihuahua (different postal code for each).

Tavalopa, Sinaloa

There are two locations named Tavalopa in the state of Sinaloa, one in the city of Sinaloa and the other in Mocorito. The name Tavalopa as used in Sinaloa was derived from a local Indian word as stated in a Mexican place-name reference published in 1897.⁶ It does not identify the language or the speakers thereof. The entry, in full, is: “**Tavalopa.** De las lenguas indigneas del Estado de Sinaloa.”

I have found no references to the founding date of a Tavalopa in the city of Sinaloa, but if we use the example of the one in Chihuahua, since it was also a Hacienda, it was probably founded on or before the city of Sinaloa was founded. This occurred in 1599.⁷ The earliest reference to Tavalopa, Mocorito that I have found is in 1893 in an official promotional pamphlet, which contains no information other than its location.⁸

Tavalopa, New Mexico

It unclear whether the town of Tavalopa, New Mexico was near Tome, or was a previous name for that town. In notes written in 1905, John B. Ralliere mentions incidents that happened there in 1828 and 1884.⁹ He referred to the northeast section of Tome as Tavalopa. Father Ralliere served as a Catholic priest in that area from 1858 to 1911. Current streets by the name of Tavalopa are in the northwest section of Tome near the river across from Los Lunas and Belen.

In this case, Tavalopa seems to be derived from a Tewa word:¹⁰ “The Pueblo of Tome was the summer home of the people of Isleta. Its original name was Tah'pa'hloo'pah'tu'e, which is where the word Tavalopa comes from. Tavalopa is a small winding road just opposite of the Post Office in Tome. The word in Tewa means: The earth/land covered by water, because it was part of the bosque near the Rio that was marshy or swampy. So, we are of the Pueblo of Tome (Tah'pa'hloo'pah'tu'e)/Mestizo Nation.”¹¹

What the relationship between these various locations is, and how that relates to the eastern part of Hillsboro, is unclear. An obvious possible relationship would be the naming of one or more of them for the site in Chihuahua, which appears to be the oldest of the sites. It was founded long before the claimed settlement of Hillsboro's Tavalopa, so the same could have happened with it.

Another possibility is that they may have spoken the same or similar languages. The Tewa language is spoken in northern New Mexico and a single site in Arizona. The Tiwa language is spoken at the Sandia and Isleta Pueblos near Albuquerque. There is, or at least was, also a site in Texas now located

in El Paso called Ysleta, which was settled by Isleta refugees at the time of the Pueblo Rebellion (1680).¹² These two languages are members of a group of languages known as the Tenoan languages, which may be related to Aztec. This was first suggested in 1917, but is currently unconfirmed although generally considered promising. The proposed sites of location for this intermediate language include the states of Sinaloa and Chihuahua in Mexico.¹³

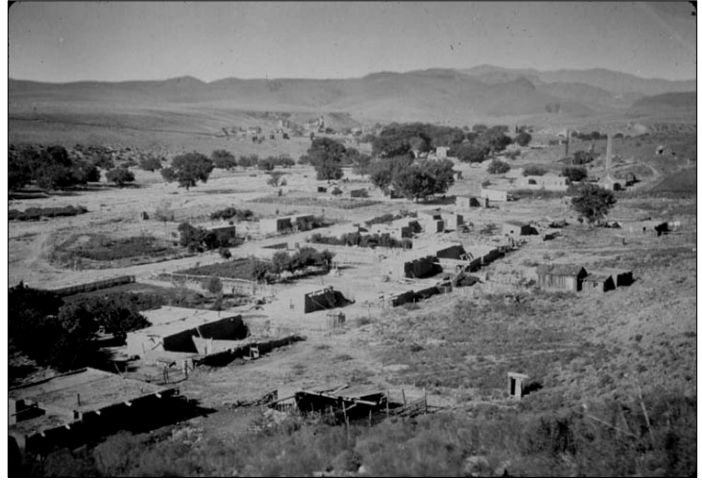
As a final comment relating to the possible settlement of the Percha Valley in the 1850s by Mexicans: New Mexico's ownership was changed from Mexico to the United States in 1848. As is normal at the end of a war, the victors availed themselves of the opportunity to take over the choicer areas of the newly acquired land. A particularly blatant example of this took place in the Rio Grande valley above El Paso when many of the resident Mexican nationals were forced to move from the area around Las Cruces to Mesilla in order to survive as an agricultural community.¹⁴ (At that time the Rio Grande flowed between Mesilla and



U.S. General Land Office Map of New Mexico, 1866, detail showing Cienega del Apache (Percha River).

Las Cruces, so Mesilla was west of the Rio Grande and still in Mexico based on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.¹⁵ They lost this protection with the Gadsden Purchase shortly thereafter.¹⁵

So this was a period when farmers, ranchers and incoming settlers had good reason to seek out new areas in unpopulated, poorly known regions which were suited to their needs. The Percha River valley was almost certainly such an area. In the 1866 U. S. General Land Office Map of New Mexico, the Percha River was labeled as Cienega del Apache, so it undoubtedly had adequate water to be of interest,¹⁶ and suggests why an influx of Mexican settlers might have been the origin of the name Tavalopa for such a settlement.



Tavalopa, from the northeast, 1890s.
Photo Black Range Museum.

¹ Hillsboro Historical Society, *Around Hillsboro*, Arcadia Publishing Company, Charleston, SC, 2011, p. 106.

² *GZP*, Vol. 4, No. 3, August 2011.

³ *GZP*, Vol. 10, No. 3, August 2017.

⁴ Salvador Treviño Castro, *De Chihuahua colonial*, UACJ, Chihuahua, Mexico, 2000, p. 133.

⁵ Elisa Perez, "Razing Our Past," primalisa.wordpress.com/2011/06/14/Razing-Our-Past/

⁶ Antonio Peñafiel, *Nomenclatura geographica de Mexico (v.2)*. Mexico: Oficina Tipografica de la Secretaria de Fomento, 1897, p 243. (www.columbia.edu).

⁷ John P. Schmal, *History of Mexico – The State of Sinaloa*. Houston Institute for Culture, 2004.

⁸ *Estadística general de la Republica Mexicana a cargo de Dr. Antonio Peñafiel*. Periodico Oficial, Mexico: Oficina Tip de la Secretaria de Fomento, 1893, p. 229.

⁹ *New Mexico Historical Review*, Vol. 32 (1957), p. 28.

¹⁰ The language of the Isleta Pueblo is Tiwa, a Tenoan language closely related to Tewa. The two language names are often interchanged.

¹¹ RunningWolf, Kathleen Moya, posted August 3, 2001, www.ancestry.com/board/surnamed.moya.

¹² Max L. Moorhead, *New Mexico's Royal Road: Trade and Travel on the Chihuahua Trail*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958, p. 38.

¹³ Wikipedia/Aztec–Tanoan languages.

¹⁴ John Russell Bartlett, *Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora and Chihuahua Connected with the United States and Mexican Boundary Commission During the Years 1850, '51, '52, and '53*. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1856, pp. 212ff.

¹⁵ P. M. Baldwin, "A Short History of the Mesilla Valley." *New Mexico Historical Review* 13/3 (1938).

¹⁶ Peter L. Eidenbach, *An Atlas of Historical New Mexico Maps 1550 – 1941*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012, p. 120.

¹⁷ Wikipedia, "Hatch, New Mexico."

¹⁸ Wikipedia, "Cañada Alamosa, New Mexico."

Kingston Ghost Town Museum Grand Opening, May 4-5, 2024



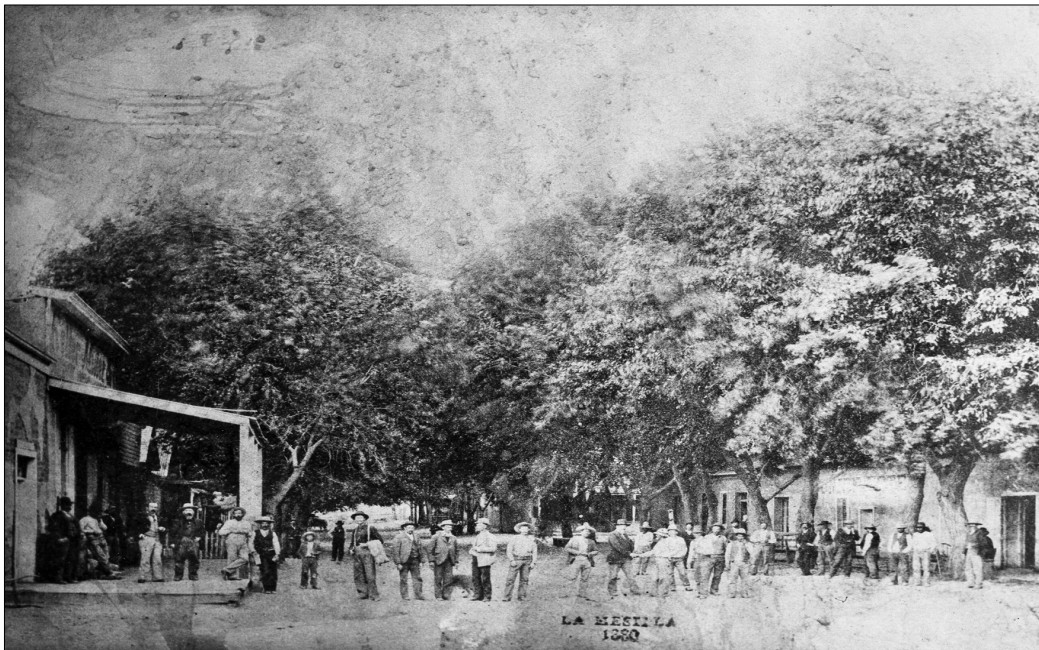
Left: Food and music on the Museum's front porch; Right: exhibits inside.

**The museum is now open on Saturdays 10:30 am – 4 pm,
Sundays from 12 noon to 4 pm, and by appointment: 575-895-5501**

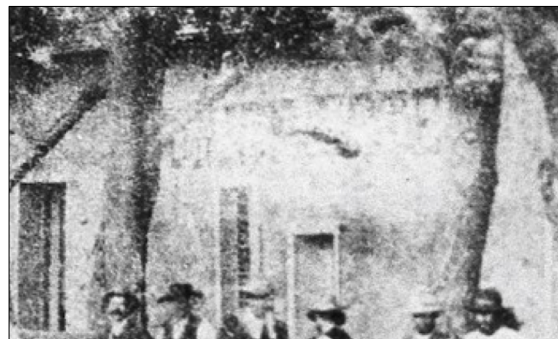
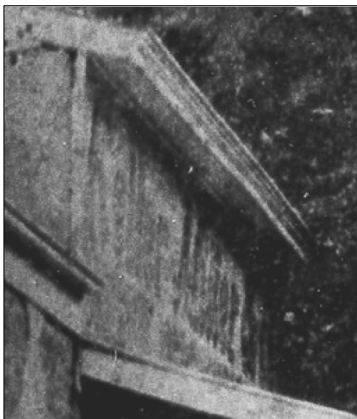
A Newly Discovered Old Photo of Hillsboro's Main Street

By Michael Ryan

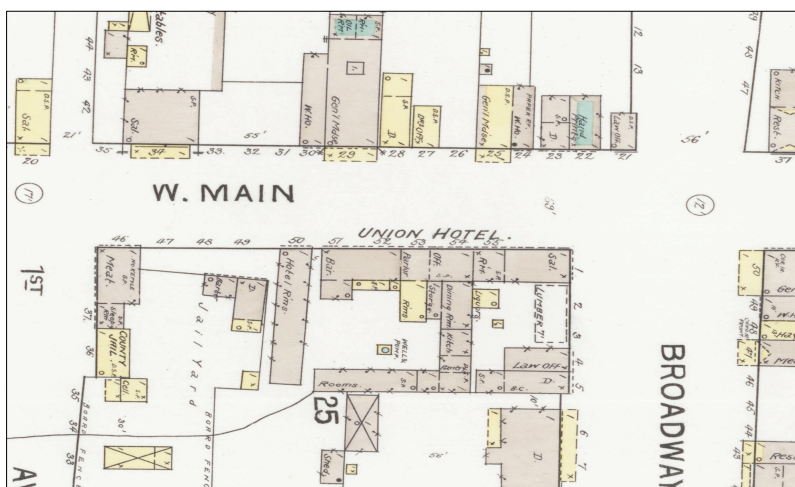
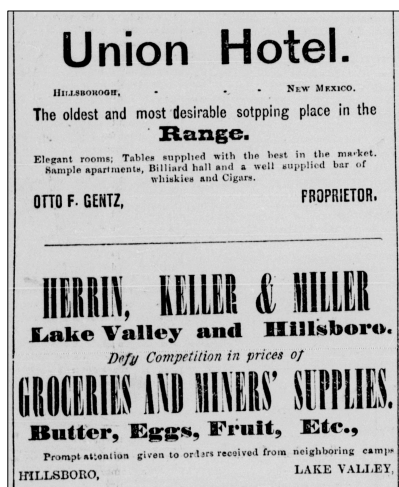
I occasionally look through digital photo collections of the NMSU Library, searching for Mesilla-related items. My mother's family goes back to the settling of Mesilla in 1850, three generations back from her. I found the photo below, labeled at the center bottom as "La Mesilla 1880" and listed as RG-84-159-008 in the Joe López Collection. I was hoping to see a family member in the crowd. I didn't recognize a relative, and I couldn't identify the Mesilla location.



I sent the photo to Eric Liefeld and Pat and Mike Taylor (Paul Taylor's sons*) and asked what part of Mesilla might be represented in the picture. That was about three or four years ago, and we all have been trying to identify the location and studying what the signs on the buildings say. Above the porch on the building on the left we were barely able to decipher "Keller" and perhaps "Miller" (see the closeup, below left), but we could make no sense of those two names in the history of Mesilla.



* Paul Taylor was a long-time resident of the Mesilla Plaza, well-known educator, and state legislator.



Sometime later Eric told me he thought he could make out what looked like “Union Hotel” on the building across the street in the space between the trees (see previous page right closeup). We were trying to make it another Mesilla business, but again with no luck.

I finally expanded my newspaper search from Doña Ana County to New Mexico in general and immediately came to two adjacent advertisements (above left) in the *Sierra County Advocate* issue of April 18, 1885, with the names we had been looking for. The only problem was that the mercantile store seemed to have three owners in 1885, though the Keller and Miller were there. All the signs now made sense to us. The photo we had been agonizing over had nothing to do with Mesilla! It was a photo taken in Hillsboro looking east along Main Street.

The Black Range Museum in Hillsboro then provided me with an excerpt from the 1893 Sanborn-Perris insurance map of Hillsboro (above right). The excerpt displayed above shows the buildings on Main Street between 1st Street and Broadway (which today is Highway 27). We see that the Union Hotel is located on the south side of Main Street and occupies about two thirds of Block 25 along Main. It was a large hotel with strings of rooms, a restaurant, offices, a bar, and a saloon. Just across the street is the long and narrow general merchandise building that was the Keller-Miller store.



The Black Range Museum was also able to provide me a clearer photo of the front of the Keller Miller & Co. building (left). Notice that this photo appears to have been taken about the same time as our mislabeled photo. This confirms that we had interpreted the names on the sign correctly.

The Black Range Museum could find in its collection only one photo that depicted the Union Hotel (next page). Unfortunately, it was taken looking west on Main Street near the intersection with Broadway, and

the mass of trees obscures the identification of the two buildings of concern to us. However, on the left just across Broadway we see the saloon that occupied the east end of the Union Hotel.

So the photo that sparked this search is clearly mislabeled. It is not Mesilla; it is Hillsboro. Moreover, it was not taken in 1880. Hillsboro was founded only in 1877. The mature trees that line Main Street in these photos look to be at least 25 years old, suggesting a minimum photo date of about 1900. There is also a maximum photo date: the entirety of the Union Hotel burned to the ground in January 1904 and was never rebuilt. We may conclude that the photo was taken in first few years of the twentieth century.



Yet even with such a firm conclusion, I (and the reader, no doubt) have wondered about the special occasion that the photo celebrated. Why are all these men scattered in a line across Main Street? And why are the two men in the middle shaking hands? That's a mystery we haven't been able to resolve. *[Readers: any ideas? --Ed.]*

Tragically, the very successful Keller-Miller enterprise, established early in the 1880s in Lake Valley by partners Foster S. Keller and Daniel S. Miller (with a third partner initially, Henry Herrin), also had its disasters. The Lake Valley store was destroyed in the calamitous 1895 fire that wiped out twenty or so buildings

in that town. The Hillsboro store was badly damaged and had its front ripped off in a 1914 flood. Both stores were nevertheless re-built and continued for years.

To conclude this story of a somehow mislabeled early photograph, Eric Liefeld has notified the Archives and Special Collections department at the NMSU Library of the mistake, and their database is supposed to be corrected to incorporate the new info.

I thank Garland Bills for his assistance in preparing this article and for supplying the photos from the Black Range Museum. –Mike Ryan

Editor's Note

This issue features the work of **three local authors** who sent in articles voluntarily, sharing the fruits of their research. **Jim Winder's** work on "finding McEvers" is an astonishingly clever bit of sleuthing, filling in many details about a place and series of events of major significance to our region.

Born in Deming, Jim has spent his life ranching in the Nutt-Lake Valley "metroplex," the fourth generation of his family to do so. He is also co-founder of the Quivira Coalition, an environmental consensus group headquartered in Santa Fe. He has been married to Katrina for 42 years, and has two grown children.

The examination of the name "Tavalopa" by **Joe Diel** reminds us that Hillsboro is more than the Main Street corridor: it also includes Hispanic and Native settlements that predated the arrival of Anglos in the 1870s.

Joe was born in Oklahoma, moving to New Mexico in 1960 to take a position at NMSU. Trained in physics and mathematics, his work included engineering, teaching, biomedical research, and computer science. He retired in 1997 and moved to Hillsboro in 2006.

And **Michael Ryan's** reclassification of an historic photograph based on his careful

observation highlights that much of what passes for "history" is in fact hearsay and rumor. Digging deeper to find the truth can be an arduous yet rewarding undertaking—and still more mysteries remain, shrouded in time!

Michael is a native New Mexican living in Elephant Butte. He worked as a millwright, erecting the mills at Quintana, where he met many of the good people of Hillsboro. His wife was Superintendent of the T or C and then Farmington Schools. They are both retired.

We should be grateful and proud that members of our community are willing to invest themselves in discovering and celebrating the rich contours of our shared story. The German writer and poet Herman Hesse once said, "*To study history means submitting yourself to chaos, but nevertheless retaining your faith in order and meaning.*" Perhaps that observation expresses what this journal is all about: finding the underlying meaning of our common lives, lived as they are in the context of a chaotic history that is still very near to the surface of our collective experience.

With much gratitude to our gifted authors,
Joe Britton