

Guajolotes, Zopilotes y Paisanos

Vol. 12 No. 4 Hillsboro Historical Society November, 2019



**HHS BOARD ELECTION**

**THE MUSEUM IS OPEN**

**A PERIPATETIC ENTERTAINER WITH LINKS  
TO TOMBSTONE**

**KINGSTON-BLACK RANGE USFS RANGERS**

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



What a year for HHS! Not only did we restore the Black Range Museum, but we are “up and running,” due to our remarkable Board of Directors, volunteers, and members. This has been a team effort that demonstrates what we can do with the support and enthusiasm of our community. The BRM will be one of the finest small town museums in the southwest, and it is becoming a must-see destination for visitors.

In review of our accomplishments, it seems incredible that we have been able to do so much. The “Renovation Celebration” on Labor Day weekend was a huge success with an estimated 200 visitors to the museum. We did well with donations and shop sales. Visitation and subsequent shop sales have been up since opening.

Now that we have a functioning and attractive museum, it is time to implement a plan for its operation. We are learning what it takes to run a museum. How do we archive artifacts appropriately? How do we decide which artifacts to display in our limited space? How should we staff the museum? Who is responsible for what? How do we attract visitors? How do we sustain ourselves? These questions and more have been on my mind. I am pleased to report that steps are being taken by the Board to answer these questions by implementing a set of standard operating procedures (SOP) for all HHS properties.

But, is the tail wagging the dog? The board understands that the Society must drive the museum and not the other way around. With a huge attraction like the museum, it is easy to forget that as an organization we are also responsible for the courthouse/jail property and other aspects of our mission. Therefore, the SOP was adopted to guide us in the management of all our operations with initial emphasis on the museum.

I am grateful for all who gave their time to the development of the museum and courthouse properties. We now need volunteers interested in becoming trained docents, shop workers, janitors, and maintenance workers for the museum. We also need committee members. You will soon receive ballots by mail to vote for four board members (see page 3). Please vote and do not forget to renew your membership when you vote.

So thanks to our community and our membership, especially those who have given so much time and money to HHS. A special thanks to the Farm and Ranch Museum for its guidance and to the building contractors and vendors who have donated time and provided cost-breaks. We could not have done this without you!

Proudly yours,  
Steve Dobrott



*Guajolotes, Zopilotes y Paisanos*  
is the quarterly newsletter of the:

### **Hillsboro Historical Society**

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

***hillsboronmhistory.info***

The mission of Hillsboro Historical Society is to preserve, collect, and protect the history of Hillsboro, Kingston and the surrounding area. We are an all-volunteer, non-profit organization. All donations are tax deductible.

#### **Board of Directors**

President: Steve Dobrott

Vice President: Nichole Trushell

Treasurer: Joe Ficklin

Secretary: Sandy Ficklin

Directors: Garland Bills, Harley Shaw, Leah Tookey, Penny McCauley, Steve Elam, Skip Bennett

**Advisors:** Karl Laumbach, Chris Adams, Craig Springer, Patricia Woodruff, Mark Thompson, John Tittmann, Lynn Mullins, Margie Gibson, Sonja Franklin, Robin Tuttle, Larry Cosper, Barbara Lovell.

**Newsletter Editor:** Harley Shaw

#### **Working Committees**

**Museum construction:** Garland Bills, Steve Morgan, and Steve Dobrott

**Publications:** Harley Shaw, Robert Barnes, and Garland Bills.

**Courthouse Committee:** Nichole Trushell, Steve Elam, Steve Morgan, Steve Dobrott.

**Museum exhibits:** Robin Tuttle, Barbara Lovell, Garland Bills, Leah Tookey

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

## Hillsboro Historical Society News

Every time I attend a monthly meeting, I'm amazed at the quality of our Board of Directors. I'm not sure where else you might find a small town that could gather such a core of talented and accomplished individuals. We have some braggin' rights, I think, as well as cause for appreciation. Terms expire this year for three of our board members. All three have agreed to run again. Joe Ficklin, our current treasurer will stay on the Board, but has decided he's crunched enough numbers and written enough checks to last a lifetime. We must thank Joe for the incredible job he has done in keeping us informed, in the black, and in the IRS's good graces.

But back to the election. Candidates appearing on the ballot are:

\_\_\_ **Garland Bills.** Garland is a retired professor of Linguistics from the University of New Mexico and an expert on Latin American languages. He moved to his retirement home on Lake Valley Ranch 12 miles of Hillsboro in 2007 and quickly fell in love with the area and its people. His first big volunteer effort was writing and directing the play about the 1899 Fountain Murder Trial that entertained standing room only crowds for a couple of years. He was elected to the Society in 2014 and has spearheaded acquisition, restoration, and management of the Black Range Museum. He also authored our latest book: *Sadie Orchard: Madam of New Mexico's Black Range*.

\_\_\_ **Steve Dobrott**

Steve is a retired wildlife biologist and has been living in the area since 1992. Steve is part of southwestern history, starting as a young biologist at an isolated line camp on the NM Bootheel's Gray Ranch, he moved on to become a biologist at the Buenos Aires Wildlife Refuge. He was fundamental in efforts to save and restore the rare masked bobwhite quail, until Ted Turner recruited him to manage the historic Ladder Ranch. At the Ladder, he became an expert on managing and restoring the American Bison--a historic job if one ever existed. He has served on the HHS Board since 2013. He is currently the Board President. He has been alongside Garland in restoring the museum, where his ranch management experience has been invaluable in contacting and directing the various contractors.

\_\_\_ **Sandy Ficklin**

Sandy grew up in Wyoming, attending the U. of Wyoming with a major in American Studies (History & Literature), a minor in Secretarial Science. She worked as a secretary in the legal and mining/engineering fields for many years. Changing course, she formed a Pet & Property Care business while also boarding and training horses and dogs. Volunteer work consisted of humane societies and community organizations. Volunteering for the Hillsboro Historical Society is a perfect fit. Sandy is our board secretary and tender of the bylaws.

\_\_\_ **Linda King**

Linda retired from a long career in medical technology to Kingston in 2014, after having spent quite a bit of time here prior to retirement. She has been fascinated by many aspects of this area, especially the mining and natural history. She has participated in multiple volunteer organizations in the past, including stints as president, secretary and treasurer of several of them. She notes, "I am impressed with the progress that has been made with the Black Range Museum and am particularly interested in the upcoming restoration efforts for the courthouse/jail property."

And, of course, there'll be space for write-ins on the ballot, so if someone wants to throw their hat in the ring, please do. Speaking of which, we want to reemphasize the pitch Steve made in the President's Column for volunteers. Garland estimates that the number to keep the museum going is about 14. The ideal is to have a shop tender and a History Docent present at all times. Word will be coming out soon about docent training. And if dealing with the public isn't your bag, we could use a volunteer janitor.

We'll also be seeking people to serve on various committees. As the Standard Operating Procedures are completed we'll be forming committees to serve specific needs. Committees are formed, because there are more jobs than the board can handle. We hope to fill the committees from the membership at large. Stay tuned.

**Hillsboro Historical Society board meets on the second Sunday of each month at 2PM at the Black Range Museum. HHS members are encouraged to attend.**

## Black Range Museum Report



When we re-opened the Black Range Museum on August 31, the public was able to visit all eight rooms. Meeting that Labor Day weekend deadline was harrowing and some rooms had scanty exhibits. We continue to enhance the displays with added items and better displays. If you visited in September, keep coming back to see the updates. If you haven't yet been able to visit, following is a brief explanation of what's in the museum.

The first room on entry is our Gift Shop, which contains no museum artifacts other than some furniture. Next to the Gift Shop is our Research and Education Center, which we continue to organize in order to make as many documents as possible available for use by researchers and other interested persons.

The other six rooms of the museum have themed exhibits. The last resident of the building was Tom Ying. He died in 1959, leaving most of his belongings as the core for the museum that Lydia Key opened just over a

year later. The Gift Shop was once Ying's dining room and visitors see some of those furnishings there. The first exhibit room is then Tom Ying's kitchen that has always been the main attraction.

The next room is dedicated to the other famous person long associated with the building, Sadie Orchard. We decided to also display in Orchard's room a few items of prominent persons representative of the law (with which she had numerous interactions). Thus, we display a small selection from our collection concerning Nicholas Galles, the legislator who created Sierra County, Thomas Murphy, first sheriff of the county, Francisco Bojórquez, another famous sheriff, and lawyer Edward Tittmann, who fought to prevent Hillsboro's losing the county seat.

The adjacent exhibit room is devoted to Ranching. It will be a revolving exhibit featuring different ranches but at present is devoted to the history of the Ladder Ranch. Among the most popular components is a listing of the cowboys who once worked there.

The next room will also have rotating exhibits focusing on businesses and individuals. The present exhibit is titled "Early Medicine – and Its Limits." The medicine side includes items from the Miller Drugstore (now the General Store Café). The "Limits" part includes the 1918 casket made by Luz Madrid accompanied by an old parlor organ.

The seventh room is devoted to the other major line of work in the Black Range, Mining. Here we display not only many artifacts of the industry but also documentation of the claims and other activities of individual miners.

Finally, the last exhibit documents the presence of the Native Americans of the area, from the early Mimbres civilization to the later Warm Springs Apache, including the famous Nana.

**Editor's note:** Feature article. In our May, 2019 issue of Guajolotes, Zopilotes, y Paisanos, Barb Lovell contributed an article about Frank and Lottie Thurston, who briefly became part of Kingston's early night life. The couple, professional gamblers by trade, provided linkages of Hillsboro with both Silver City and Deming. At that time, Barb was researching another important couple from night life of Kingston, Joe and Tillie Bignon. While the Joe and Tillie's tenure in Kingston was short, they provided a linkage between Kingston and Tombstone. Kingston never developed the hell-raising reputation of Tombstone.

Somewhere in the midst of her research's Barb was contacted by Mike Milhaljevich, a photographer and Tombstone scholar living in Scottsdale, Arizona. Mike happened to be passing through the area and stopped to visit Barb. Turned out he was a tombstone scholar and an expert on the Bisogni couple. Mike has kindly provided us with the following well-researched article on Joe Bignon. Joe was a peripetetic entertainer in the Southwest, and Kingston, like many places, figured only shortly in his life. Nonetheless, Mike's article provides us with a clear view of the kind of individuals who were attracted to our area and provided entertainment in the midst of the New Mexico Wilderness of the 1880s.

You can view Mike Milhaljevich's photography on his web page: <https://www.instagram.com/michaelpaul-photoworks/>, and some of his fine documentation of Tombstone on U-Tube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxeTwhzQswo>. Our thanks to Mr. Milhaljevich for allowing us to use his article.

# Pioneer's Spirit and the Showman's Flair of Joe Bignon

by Mike Mihaljevich

The story of frontier America endures for its endless opportunity never before seen in human history. Driven by the promise of prosperity, even those with comfortable lives gambled health and life for the chance at something more. Towns populated by these spirited hopefuls would rival the heightened excitement in a room full of lottery ticket holders, each with the first four numbers matching, abuzz with anticipation as the last two are called. This atmosphere became the addictive comfort zone for the true “boomer”. Once that “snap” was gone, so was the boomer, guided by rumors, past failures and gut instinct to the next field of hope. Perhaps no better specimen of these energetic wave riders exists than Kingston, New Mexico's one time resident, Joe Bignon.

The story of Joseph U. Bignon (pronounced BEAN-yōn) starts in Montreal, Quebec, Canada in 1851 where he was born to French migrant parents. From an early age, Joe proved a willingness to take on every inconvenience for survival and prosperity. By age 12 he left home leaning on a native ability to act, sing, and dance. In an era when live entertainment was the only entertainment, these skills not only provided means for survival but ultimately enabled the wanderings that shaped his life. Leveraging his theatrical aptitude, ambition and natural business savvy, Joe rose from the ranks of a simple minstrel troupe performer to proprietor of Chicago's Miller's Hall while still a teenager. Barely into his 20s, he started his own small scale theater in the port towns of Ludington and Mainstee, Michigan. Humblings from these experiences lead Joe to tour with two different circuses before rolling the dice again on a place of his own in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.

By 1878 Joe trekked further west to Bismarck, Dakota Territory continuing his performance career under the management Charles Keene. Charles was 32, a Civil War vet who after the war changed his name, and, like Joe, was highly adept in both business and performance entertainment. Charles' management in Bismarck was praised as “having developed a versatility of talent surprising to the most ardent of admirers” in front of “crowded houses every night.”<sup>1</sup> Sharing an on stage chemistry, Joe and Charles would often collaborate becoming “too well known to need special mention” by the local paper.<sup>2</sup> Though Joe would move on from Bismarck in 1879, he and Charles built a trusting friendship, one that would resurface years later in Arizona. For now, Joe bundled up his clogs and headed in search of his piece of the pie in the



**Joe Bignon**

prospering mining towns west of the Rockies.

The next five years would see Joe again flexing his ambition and resilience. He formed a traveling minstrel troupe with experienced showman Billy Brewster in sparsely populated Arizona Territory. Here, Joe's heritage and accent would have stood out given early French immigrants accounted for less than 2% of the population. By the fall of 1880, Joe and Billy traveled to Tombstone, Arizona for a short season of nightly performances at the Sixth Street Opera House. More prosperous than the average mining camp, Tombstone still hadn't shaken its uncivilized adolescence when Joe first arrived. The streets were lined with canvas and





**Tombstone, Arizona - May, 1880. Carleton Watkins**

frame buildings, miners in great numbers were still living in tents, and businesses had not yet been assigned street numbers. Undeveloped and remotely located, it lacked the foundation a thriving theatrical business could be built on. Tombstone didn't lack money, but it did lack formal entertainment. This helps explain the success of Joe's short season there, culminating in a benefit thrown in his honor on November 27, 1880.<sup>3</sup> Though Joe was to again move on, Tombstone hadn't seen the last of him or his spirited enthusiasm.

Having left Tombstone, Billy and Joe continued their wanderings to Prescott, Arizona to the mountain mining communities outside San Francisco, then New Mexico, and back to Arizona again. They settled in Tucson in November of 1882 finding steady work in Levin's Park, a sort of adult entertainment center that featured target shooting, bowling lanes, a brewery, dance hall for numerous social functions, and of course a theater all nestled in a pleasant grove of trees. Joe was hired on to oversee the coordination of nightly acts, a position known as stage manager where he was instantly praised for "doing all he can to make the theater attractive and succeeds very well."<sup>4</sup> He would also fill the bill as a nightly performer "in his excellent clog, which in itself would attract numbers."<sup>5</sup> One performance inspired the observation that "it is a wonder that Joe does not break his neck at some of his reckless jumps."<sup>6</sup> Improvements in the theater's upkeep, the orchestra and the performances were all hallmarks of Joe's tenure as stage manager "which he fills to perfection."<sup>7</sup> Tucson lived and died on the influx of mining activities in the surrounding country and from 1880 to 1890 its population decreased nearly 30%, assisted by a decrease in the price of silver. This trend contributed to Joe's decision to move on yet again this time with another traveling troupe, the Golden State Combination in 1884. This series of travels exposed him to mining camps of Nevada, as far

north as Tuscarora as well as those into California. Despite covering thousands of miles and seeing dozens of communities none excited him enough to set roots and make a bigger play, and the call to southern Arizona came once again.

Now 34 years old, Joe returns to Tombstone, Arizona in late 1885. In this third trip to Arizona, he arrived with 20+ years of experience as a showman, a business owner, stage manager, and well versed "boomer". All of these skills culminated in the reorganization of what would become an iconic building

133 years later: The Bird Cage Theater. Deserving of a book its own, the building was erected in the fall of 1881 by Billy and Lottie Hutchinson. Their 16 month run of operation was extremely successful, having employed many of the same performers as Joe Bignon while stage manager of Tucson's Park Theater. There is evidence that Joe was in Tombstone in April of 1882 and through common associations may have even known the Hutchinsons. Nevertheless, Tombstone hit a down cycle and Billy and Lottie sold the Bird Cage to a pair of San Francisco liquor merchants and real estate and mining investors, John Sroufe and Hugh McCrum on July 2, 1883 for \$4,350.<sup>8</sup> As of 2019 and ten transactions later, that is still the highest price ever paid for the Bird Cage. It was this duo of Sroufe and McCrum that owned the building while Joe operated it, investing himself fully into the endeavor having renovated, reseated and redecorated it. His standards were high for its appearance, atmosphere and level of performances. Small scale theaters such as the Bird Cage



**Bird Cage Theater - 1920**



**The Kingston Opera house is at the far right of the photo. Bignon operated this intermittently from March, 1886 to perhaps as late as 1899. The seating capacity of the building must have been small.**

were controversial in the 1870s and 1880s as compared to the large legitimate (and far more permanent) opera houses of metropolitan areas. Shunned by those of high moral and religious standards, they were seen not as legitimate centers of art, but places that fostered the elements that undermined civilized society: drinking, showing skin, fighting, general nuisances. Some communities created taxation and licensing targeted at inhibiting their existence, with others banning them altogether. Conversely, many outwardly supported and encouraged them in part because many were run very respectably, some even welcomed families. A growing town able to support a theater spoke to its coming of age, much like a small town today necessitating a Wal-Mart. These small theaters also provided access to genuine entertainment that didn't exist in a time before radio, television, and the internet. Level of "decency" varied greatly among these small 19th century theaters, and Joe was expecting nothing but the best. Over the next six years, he operated a host of theaters alongside the Bird Cage circulating more than 200 different performers through them. He would make repeated trips to secure talent that met his demands, traveling as far as San Francisco to do it. His efforts undoubtedly contributed

positively to the spirit of these communities even when the times turned tough.

Renaming the Bird Cage to the Elite Theater, Joe had a very positive run starting January 16, 1886. He reunited with his trusted friend from his Bismarck, Dakota Territory days, Charley Keene and he also had a woman enter his life. Tillie Bouton, born Matilda Quigley was a widowed performer who immigrated from England living for many years in the St. Louis area. An untimely death of her 35 year old husband Charles Bouton in 1876 meant Tillie had to provide for herself. Its unclear how Joe and Tillie met, but during Joe's Elite Theater endeavor they were together. It was to be a start of something new for Joe: he made a home. By March of 1889 Joe bought property and a house in Tombstone and married Tillie there two months later. Tombstone was great to him, and the people loved him. "Joe has been indefatigable in his efforts to cater to the public, and his energy should meet with fitting reward."<sup>9</sup> The town threw him several well attended benefits and for the first time, Joe had roots. Tombstone hit an unfortunate downturn in the summer of 1886 creating what one diarist noted as "a great clearing out to California" and "an exodus to Kingston, New

Mexico.”<sup>10</sup> Kingston was a little brother to Tombstone, fresh in an upward cycle of mining and prosperity, and at 225 miles away, well within reach of the abled roamer Joe Bignon. It would be the start of a pattern between Tombstone and Joe. Every time the mines and population waned, Joe would draw on his lifetime of shifting opportunity and focus his efforts on a new opportunity. By July of 1886 Joe had visited Kingston noting that “it is a good place for business.”<sup>11</sup> Moving quickly, Joe bought a lot 25 by 100 feet on August 16 with a local couple as partners, erected a wood frame building, and opened the Kingston Opera House on August 29. He employed a handful of his Elite Theater performers, a full scale band and his trusted friend Charley Keene to manage stage operations. Talent was circulated quickly just as it had been in Tombstone keeping the nightly performances fresh, and he continued to make trips to places such as El Paso to do so. As Tombstone was about to come out of its lull in 1887, Joe would temporarily close his Kingston Opera House but not before he introduced the secluded mining town to 8 months of continuous, spirited entertainment. Just like Tombstone, he would return as the highs and lows of the mines dictated, possibly owning it in whole or in part as late as 1899.

Back at home in Tombstone, Joe expended great effort and money to keep up the buzz of his theater, spreading his Kingston resources far enough to keep it going intermittently in his absence. A sword swallowing fire juggler, world traveling acrobatic brothers, walking matches, an illuminated carriage procession around town, wrestling and boxing matches, and a performing group of monkeys and gorillas all were constructs of Joe’s energetic showmanship. He continued his exhaustive two week trips to San Francisco, executed a secondary renovation, and invested all his experience and finances into the improvement and prosperity of the theater. His efforts helped carry the business through a massive earthquake in 1887, repeated summer rains washing out roads so badly, mail and even food couldn’t be transported for weeks at a time, the mercy of the mines, and winter hardships that instigated a pneumonia and influenza outbreak. Timing of these setbacks ignited Joe’s ambitions to open the “People’s Theater” in Phoenix, Arizona (population 3,100) in 1889, and again in 1891. Historic floods hit the Phoenix valley in 1891 and Joe ran a performance with some of his Elite Theater cast, raising \$122 (roughly \$3,400 today) for those suffering. Unfortunately, the untamed Salt River wasn’t done swelling, consuming hundreds of square miles including Phoenix, leaving his performers stranded and in need themselves. His theater was ruined and months later he sold the property for a measly \$100, \$22 less than what he donated to the flood sufferers.

He stuck it out in Tombstone, always returning confident that he would be positioned well for the next boom. By now he had reinvented himself, moving and resetting countless times. 1890 came and went, testing

his resolve and taking his best friend Charley Keene at the age of 44. He did what he always did, followed his instincts to the path ahead, and moved forward. He started up again in Albuquerque opening his “Horse Shoe Club” in the same manner he did countless times before. It was a first class operation opening on August 7, 1892. It’s interior featured “a gallery facing the stage, and on both sides are fourteen private boxes...a stage of good proportions, with ample dressing rooms, and has all the necessary scenery for the production of first-class variety acts.”<sup>12</sup> The extent of Joe’s preparations suggested that “Mr. Bignon has come to Albuquerque to stay.”<sup>13</sup> Early indicators were good. Then in late November, on a \$15 licensing fee technicality, Joe was arrested, thrown in jail and his theater was “closed up tight as beeswax...”<sup>14</sup> Released from jail, he returned to Tombstone, his home base. While operating in Albuquerque, enterprising Joe simultaneously leased and operated the Crystal Palace Theater, housed in what still today is the Crystal Palace at 5th and Allen in Tombstone, Arizona. To it he applied the signature Joe Bignon enthusiasm and drive that served since he left home at age 12. His lease was up in July of 1894 and he vowed to search for the next opportunity in New Mexico again, promising as he always did to return to Tombstone during the next big strike.

Another strike did happen, but not in Tombstone. Across the Dragoon Mountains 30 miles distant the new mining burg of Pearce was being formed on the success of James Pearce’s Commonwealth Mine in 1895. Everything changed for Joe here. His 30 years spent in and around western mining camps told him to act and he was right. The Commonwealth would go on to produce \$240 million worth of silver in today’s money. In the mid-June heat of 1895, Joe and Tillie anxiously disassembled the Tombstone home they were married in, loaded it on to a wagon and relocated to Pearce. They got in on the ground floor, so early in fact that he was commonly referred to as “the pioneer of Pearce, having built the first house in that camp.”<sup>15</sup> The Pearce townsite was laid out and Joe established variously a saloon, a hotel, a dry goods store, eventually a moving picture theater, but never again a live performance theater.



**Pearce, Arizona. Bird’s eye view.**



Perhaps he was motivated by the mining and real estate investment prowess of Sroufe and McCrum who owned the Bird Cage building while he operated it. Perhaps he had just run his course on the live entertainment business. Whatever his reasons were, Joe changed his entire focus. Through the Homestead Act he claimed a 160 acre parcel flanking the western edge of Pearce known as the “Bignon Addition” on early maps. He would sell some lots for the formality of \$1 with the agreement that the buyer would build and improve. Other transactions amounted to \$25 depending on the seller and location. In addition to his businesses, Joe became heavily invested in mining operations. Before he left Tombstone he started exploring the mountains of southeast Arizona, making several claims of promising outlook. By 1909 he had a formal company called “The Bignon Group” which employed as many as 100 men in the development of his mining properties. He also became director of the Courtland Copper Company (in neighboring Courtland, now a ghost town). In totality, Bignon’s mining and real estate activities are far too numerous to list. Mine ownership spread to Bisbee, Douglas, the Chiricahua Mountains and even back into Tombstone, just to name a few. Despite all of these ventures he considered himself humbly a “saloon proprietor” in the 1910 census.

Finally on the make, Joe’s life played out comfortably among the 1,500 close knit inhabitants of Pearce. But he was to be tested again. On August 4th, 1900, just as life was aligning for Joe, his Tillie died after several months of suffering through uterine tumor complications. Two days later in a casket purchased by a friend near their old home in Tombstone, he laid her to rest in Pearce. She was only 48 years old. In true Joe Bignon resilience, he picked up and moved on meeting Ellen McGrogan, an Irish dressmaker 18 years his junior who had been living in Pearce with her sister’s family. They were married in Tucson 4 month after Tillie passed. Ellen remained by his side for the rest of his life.

Joe’s last act in entertainment comes with the establishment of a moving picture house called the “Idle Hour Theater” in Pearce. At least until 1921, Joe’s theater offered an uplifting opportunity to break the monotonous banging of the mills around Pearce. It also served as a civic center hosting the funeral of local WWI hero Clay McKnight killed in France and an American Legion play in 1921.

When Joe died at 4 p.m. at his home in Pearce on December 6, 1925, an era left with him. Long gone

were the days of 19th century flavored entertainment and the old west of his adventured youth passed forever. His death found its way into the columns of papers across the country, noting an Arizona pioneer was no longer with us. Perhaps his notoriety grows more now with the sensationalized construct of his Bird Cage Theater, but he was a man of great energy, irrepressible resilience, a sense of civic contribution and character far beyond the common mythologized stories. He left the comfort of home and Canada still a boy, and found his American Dream. Alongside his Tillie and his Ellen (who passed in 1935), Joe lays to rest in the open flat of Pearce cemetery surrounded once by a vibrant town, now nearly devoid of buildings with no sounds other than those provided by the dust laden winds. Of Joe Bignon, an 1888 profile published in Tombstone may have said it best: “There are few...who are more enterprising and successful than Joe Bignon, and the fallacy of saying ‘that a rolling stone gathers no moss’ was never better shown than in his case.”<sup>16</sup>

### Citations

- <sup>1</sup> March 1, 1879 Bismarck Tribune
- <sup>2</sup> September 25, 1878 Bismarck Weekly Tribune
- <sup>3</sup> November 28, 1880 Tombstone Epitaph
- <sup>4</sup> November 21, 1882 Arizona Daily Star
- <sup>5</sup> November 14, 1882 Arizona Daily Star
- <sup>6</sup> December 14, 1882 Arizona Daily Star
- <sup>7</sup> December 2, 1882 Arizona Daily Star
- <sup>8</sup> Cochise County Deeds of Real Estate - Book 5, Page 521
- <sup>9</sup> May 17, 1886 Daily Tombstone
- <sup>10</sup> The Private Journal of George Whitwell Parsons 1882-1887, p234
- <sup>11</sup> August 5, 1886 Daily Tombstone
- <sup>12</sup> August 7, 1892 Albuquerque Journal
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> November 30, 1892 Santa Fe Daily New Mexican
- <sup>15</sup> May 28, 1905 Bisbee Daily Review
- <sup>16</sup> January 15, 1889 Weekly Tombstone Prospector

**Editor note:** Since this seems to be a Kingston issue (not necessarily planned that way), and because I'm in need of a filler, I thought I'd throw in the following table. We're in need of some USFS stories for the newsletter.

## U. S. Forest Service Gila National Forest

### Kingston Ranger District Rangers

District Ranger	From	To
Joseph N. Reid	1909	1911
Clayton M. Howells	1912	1913
P. L. Bonebrake	1914	1916
J. A. Simmons	1916	1917
N. F. Chapman	1917	
G. H. Gage	1917	1918
Ray Painter	1918	1925
Euel R. Nave	11-7-25	4-29-37
John S. Pomeroy	4-26-37	9-1-42
John H. Mims	9-1-42	2-10-47
Randolph H. Riley	2-10-47	3-11-50
Leonard S. Dearborn	3-12-50	2-13-55
<b>Parts of Kingston and Chloride Districts combined 8-1-53 to become the Black Range District</b>		
Frank Dougherty	2-13-55	2-10-57
Warren S. Hall	2-24-57	9-21-57
Roy C. Gandy	11-3-57	1-24-60
Clarence E. Rice	1-24-60	7-21-63
John B. Downs	7-21-63	7-30-66
William L. Chapel, III	8-28-66	1-10-71
George H. Burfiend	1-10-71	8-16-75
D. Mike Howard	8-17-75	8-25-79
Charles E. Shipp	8-26-79	1-25-88
Robert W. Cordts (Acting)	7-5-87	6-5-88
James E. Paxon, Jr.	6-6-88	1-3-2003
Tammy Randall Parker	1-3-2003	July, 2006
Larry Cosper	July, 2006	December, 2015
Michael Hutchins	2015	Present

## Kingston Events



New booklet from Kingston Spit and Whittle Club and Kingston Schoolhouse Museum provides a history of cemetery, founded in 1884, along with histories of some of Kingston's early residents whose graves are marked. It also gives histories of early residents who are known to be buried there but their graves are no longer marked. Available at Kingston Antiques and Art (below).



### Kingston Schoolhouse Museum

Lots of great things are happening in our little school museum. We are in the process of installing a research center. We have a wonderful collection of early Kingston newspapers, some dating back to 1883. We also have a large collection of photos, some of which are very rare and have never been published before. We recently installed a table top unit with 30 double-sided panels which allows us to display a lot of our rare documents. And, we continue to acquire collections of photos, documents and stories from Kingston's early families.

Our museum is open the first and third Saturdays from 11-3. However, we are always happy to open it upon request. We also offer tours of "Main Street Kingston in 1888" for a \$10 fee per person. For information or reservations call 575 895-5501. Hope to see you soon.

### Kingston Antiques & Art

Located on Highway 152 at the entrance to Kingston. The store highlights the works of four local artists, and carries a variety of rare and unusual antiques and unique books on New Mexico History. For more information call 575 895-5501

HILLSBORO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Membership Application

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



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

(a) Individual or family membership \$25 ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

How would you like to receive our newsletter? \_\_\_ email \_\_\_ regular mail  
(We prefer to send by email.)

(b) Gift membership(s) at \$25 each ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide name, address, and email address for each person:

(c) Additional donation

For general operations ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

For the Black Range Museum ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

For the Hillsboro courthouse and jail site ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL CONTRIBUTION ... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail this completed Membership Form along with a check for your Total Contribution made payable to Hillsboro Historical Society to the following address:

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