



Guajolotes, Zopilotes y Paisanos

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

The Journal of the Hillsboro Historical Society

Vol. 18 No. 4

Sierra County, New Mexico

November 2025

Symbols of Community: The Churches of Hillsboro, Kingston, and Lake Valley

By Joe Britton

This is the first in a three-part series that will also include the Union Churches of Kingston and Hillsboro; the Spanish Methodist Episcopal Mission in Tavalopa (Happy Flats); Hillsboro’s Christ Church (Episcopal); and Lake Valley’s St. Columba’s Mission (Episcopal) and Christian Endeavor Fellowship. The title is taken from a brochure published in the 1980s by the New Mexico Community Foundation to support restoration of the state’s more than 1,000 adobe religious structures.

Part One: Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Mission, Hillsboro

*Almost nothing of consequence is ever accomplished alone.
--David McCullough, History Matters (2025)*

Like most aspects of local history, the stories of the various churches that have existed in Hillsboro, Kingston, and Lake Valley are full of colorful characters who inspired, built, and led their religious communities. Some of the churches are long gone, both their congregations and physical structures; some continue to exist only as abandoned buildings; yet others are still active and vital participants in the life of the community. So this account of the religious life of these three towns is driven by the stories of the diverse people who made the churches what they became— itinerant missionaries, conscientious pastors, energetic lay leaders, and determined congregants who through their churches erected symbols for us all of our common life.

(continued on page 3 ...)



¡FIESTA!

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Friday, December 12
(At the church in Hillsboro)

11 am Matachines Dancers

12 Noon Mariachi Mass

1 pm Lunch, with Mariachi Aguilas

Everyone is invited for all or any part of the celebration!

President's Message

Dear HHS Members and Friends,

Well, we did it! The long anticipated and hoped-for return of the Mountain Pride stagecoach to Sierra County has finally happened! On October 14, 2025, the coach was successfully removed from the Lincoln County Courthouse and transported to Hillsboro (see story in this issue, page 10).

The process was one of coordination, dedication and follow-through on a plan that was months and years in the making. The coach now resides in our new Coach House designed and built specifically for the purpose of housing and exhibiting the 136-year-old artifact. This remarkable accomplishment by HHS is due to the culmination of years of persistence by our membership and Board(s) of Directors, and a belief that we could make it happen. By your generous donations and support, we were successful.

The old saying, "if you build it, it will come," became a reality for all of us who believed deeply that the Mountain Pride belonged back in Hillsboro and that someday it would return.

On October 15, the coach touched ground in Hillsboro for the first time in 110 years in front of the Black Range Museum and rolled into our new Coach House. The extraordinary effort was due to careful planning and execution by contractors and people who cared greatly for the return of the Mountain Pride back to where it once operated behind four horses driven by skilled horsemen on the Lake Valley, Hillsboro and Kingston Stage Line. It ran on this line from 1889 until 1915 before being shipped to a private collection in Santa Fe (see "The story of the Mountain Pride," GZP 15/1 [February 2022]).

I remain extremely grateful to Cabinet Secretary Debra Garcia y Griego of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, the History Museum of New Mexico, and the Museum Board of Regents for the approvals needed to accomplish this historic project. I am also indebted to our contractors and volunteers who assisted in its accomplishment.

I invite you all to come see the Mountain Pride in its new home and see our developing new backyard that we call "The Stage Stop Project." The first of our two planned events celebrating the homecoming of the Mountain Pride was on November 8th. This event was specifically planned as a fundraiser for the project, and an opportunity for the surrounding community to be the first to see the coach. The second event will be sometime this spring and will encompass a much larger sphere of invitees.

Going forward, our success in sustaining the Society and caring for our new acquisition, our facilities, and their operation will depend on your continuing support and the dedication of our volunteer base. We have come a long way and I look forward to great things to come. HHS needs your help now more than ever to be sustainable and successful with our vision to provide a great museum for your enjoyment and the benefit of future generations. Please see the donation form on page 19 for information on how you can give.

Yours truly,
Steve Dobrott



Site plan by Steve Morgan for the **Stage Stop Project**, showing existing buildings plus the backyard development.

(... continued from page 1)

The Early Days of the Guadalupe Mission



The original church building, c.1890. Photo Black Range Museum.

The first church to be constructed in the area was Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Mission. Accounts vary, but some give the date as early as 1880, only three years after the discovery of gold, while others suggest it was not until the late 1880s.¹ It was built in the same location as it exists today on Main Street in the center of Hillsboro.

The original building was a small rectangular adobe chapel with a pitched roof that faced east. Twin towers were added later, with a bell hanging in the northern tower said to have come from the Kingston Union Church when it was torn down sometime in the 1920s or '30s.² At its founding, the Hillsboro church was part of the Apostolic Vicariate of Arizona, created in 1868 by Pope Pius IX and made up of territory taken from the Diocese of Santa Fe, encompassing southern New Mexico and Arizona. The second apostolic vicar, Bishop Peter Bourgade (1845-1908), is reported to have visited Hillsboro in August of 1891, and “administered confirmation to a large number at the

Catholic church.”³ Pope Leo XIII converted the Arizona Vicariate to the Diocese of Tucson in 1897, and Hillsboro remained under its jurisdiction until the organization of the Diocese of Las Cruces in 1982.

The *Sierra County Advocate* began to carry stories about the Catholic community in the early 1890s. One of the first recorded priests was a certain Father Genescio, who in 1891 was succeeded by Rev. Father J. Montfort of Hatch. He commuted to Hillsboro by coach and became “one of the most popular priests who has ever visited.”⁴ In 1895, because Rev. Montfort could not be present on Easter, the service was moved to a week later. Nevertheless, an ambitious choir of 6 members, under the direction of Mrs. John Winram, promised to provide “an exceptionally fine program both morning and evening.” The altar was to be decorated “with a profusion of flowers,” and extra chairs had to be set up to accommodate the congregation from Kingston as well as other places in the vicinity. A cordial invitation was extended to “the members of other denominations.”⁵

Clergy came and went. In November of 1898, the *Advocate* reported that Rev. Father Durand (evidently Montfort’s successor) was soon to leave the community, having been transferred to Yuma. He was to be succeeded by Rev. Father Albrecht—who was coming from Yuma. “During his short stay in our midst,” the paper remarked, “Rev. Father Durand became very popular with our people, and his departure is generally regretted.”⁶

A particularly dynamic priest, Fr. Cyp. Vabre, arrived in the late 1890s. Under his leadership, Sunday services included English mass at 9:00 am; Rosary and sermon in Spanish at 3:00 pm; and Rosary and sermon in English followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at 8:00 pm. In 1899, he celebrated



The church with the two towers added, 1963. Photo Black Range Museum.

¹ A painting in the apartment of the current church gives the date as 1880, but the *Albuquerque Journal*, in a note from Hillsboro in 1889 on its religious life, remarked “A Catholic church has recently been organized here, which is also meeting with great success.” “Hillsboro Happenings,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 29 October 1889 (newspapers.com)

² Barbara Lovell, of the Kingston Ghost Town Museum, gives the date as 1934; a painting of the church in the priest’s apartment at Our Lady of Guadalupe has written on the back that it was in 1924-25.

³ *Sierra County Advocate*, 7 August 1891 (UNM Digital Repository)

⁴ *Sierra County Advocate*, 15 July 1892 (UNM Digital Repository)

⁵ “No Easter Service,” *Sierra County Advocate*, 12 April 1895 (newspapers.com)

⁶ “Local Items,” *Sierra County Advocate*, 25 November 1898 (newspapers.com)

the first ever Christmas midnight mass in Hillsboro. A “Hillsboro Letter” in the *Albuquerque Journal* warmly described the event: “The decorations and beautifully colored illuminations, helped to make the services so impressive that they will long remain in the minds of those who attended.” The letter went on to note that unfortunately the church nearly burned as a result, when “a careless attendant and lighted candle, next day, almost caused a conflagration, but the fire was put out, by heroic efforts in its incipency.”⁷ (This was not the only time the church nearly burned: in December 1909 the roof of the priest’s room caught fire from a defective chimney. It “had a good start when discovered, but the blaze was promptly extinguished by a well-organized bucket brigade.”⁸)

In August of 1900, Hillsboro’s Catholic church—by then apparently quite a lively congregation—offered an “entertainment” for the whole community in Galles Hall. The evening included both instrumental and vocal music (of course with the Ave Maria), recitations and readings, and following an intermission, a performance of “Who Is Who, or All in a Fog,’ a farce in one act,” a drama by the comic playwright Thomas John Williams, written in 1869.⁹ Perhaps with proceeds from the entertainment, the congregation acquired new seats for the church in September of that year, which the *Advocate* noted “adds much to the appearance of the church and the comfort of the people.”¹⁰

Father Vabre was replaced as pastor in the fall of 1900 by Rev. P. Jos. Immel, who seems to have followed his predecessor’s example of inspiring an active church life. He continued the tradition of midnight mass for Christmas, giving the “Sermon in English and Spanish.” The choir was directed by Mrs. Nelson, and it sang the Mass Rattmann [sic] in E Flat.¹¹ The following spring, the choir gave “a fine concert on Easter Monday, assisted by some of the best talent to be had.”¹² The women of the church were also an active group: in April 1902 they served “refreshments at Fred Misters market,” including “chicken pies, boiled ham cold, boiled tongue cold, potato salad, stuffed potatoes, rolls, plum pudding, etc.”¹³ A month later, a sale organized by the women “cleared over \$31,” or the equivalent of about \$1,200 today.¹⁴ And so it went.

Information about the church becomes harder to come by as the twentieth century wore on. As the fortunes of Hillsboro declined, so too did those of the church. No longer served by resident clergy, it was staffed by a series of priests who came from a variety of places. Curiously, several clergy of Lithuanian descent served in southern New Mexico, including at Hillsboro.

Among them were Fr. Anthony Bertasius in the 1950s,¹⁵ and much later in the 1970s Fr. Jonas “John” Burkus, who had immigrated to the United States in 1949 after being ordained in 1940, just as the Soviet army invaded Lithuania. Fr. Burkus recalled that at his ordination in Panevezys, which happened the day following the Russian invasion, only 8 people attended the mass, and there was no choir or organist. Even though he spoke only Lithuanian when he emigrated, he served as a missionary priest in the Diocese of El Paso after his arrival in America, conducting services in both English and Spanish.¹⁶ He later wrote a memoir in Lithuanian, called in English *In the Southwest*, about his joy in being able to fulfill his childhood dream of being a mission priest.



Boys on Main Street in front of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, date unknown. Photo Black Range Museum.

⁷ “Hillsboro Letter,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 4 January 1900 (newspapers.com).

⁸ “Catholic Church Almost Burned,” *Sierra County Advocate*, 10 December 1909 (BRM)

⁹ “R. C. Church Entertainment,” *Sierra County Advocate*, 3 August 1900 (BRM)

¹⁰ “Local News,” *Sierra County Advocate*, 14 September 1900 (newspapers.com)

¹¹ “Local News,” *Sierra County Advocate*, 21 December 1900 (newspapers.com)

¹² *Sierra County Advocate*, 15 March 1901 (newspapers.com)

¹³ “Local News,” *Sierra County Advocate*, 25 April 1902 (newspapers.com)

¹⁴ “Local News,” *Sierra County Advocate*, 2 May 1902 (newspapers.com)

¹⁵ *Deming Sun*, 13 February 1958, p. 9 (newspapers.com)

¹⁶ “Priest Still Serves Native Lithuanians 60 Years after Leaving,” *Arkansas Catholic*, 25 August 2007, arkansas-catholic.org

Disaster Strikes



The destroyed church after the 1972 flood. Photo courtesy of Gloria Spellman.

by hand. To raise funds, Ann also helped organize “Las Amigas Gift Shop,” an art consignment shop in the ground floor of the Masonic Building, which was provided rent-free. The cornerstone of the new church, inscribed with the date 1973, is clearly visible on the front porch. While its orientation was turned toward the south, to face Main Street, the builders kept the same basic plan, including the central doorway with two flanking towers.



One of two windows in memory of Margaret Tittmann. Photo Joe Britton.

The pews are the only remnants of the original building in the church as it now stands (presumably the pews acquired in 1900). But it includes several notable new fixtures. Two stained glass windows on the west side memorialize Margaret Tittmann, who was a staunch Catholic and wife of the well-known local attorney Edward Tittmann. A third window on the east side is in memory of Patricia Lynn Miller, a high school student who was tragically killed in an automobile accident.

The fourteen Stations of the Cross that adorn the walls of the church were painted by Inez Barratt, an El Paso painter who had a studio in Kingston. The woodworking for the stations was done by her husband. In the 1960s and '70s, Inez conducted workshops at her studio under the auspices of the Black Range Artists. She also organized an annual juried art show in the old Percha Bank building, considered one of the best shows in the Southwest and drawing artists from California, Arizona, Texas, Oregon, Nebraska, and New Mexico.¹⁸ One of these artists was Louis Krupp, a relatively well-known painter from El Paso who had immigrated from Bavaria.¹⁹ He taught a workshop in Kingston, and won a number of awards at the annual show. One of his paintings, a large image of the crucifixion entitled “Consummatum Est” (It is finished), now hangs on the back wall of the church, probably acquired through his connection to Inez. A prominent mural of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego, done by local artist Sue Bason, adorns the front porch.



The first of the fourteen Stations of the Cross by Inez Barratt. Photo Joe Britton.

¹⁷ Maree Westland conversation with the author, 4 November 2025.

¹⁸ “Local Briefs,” *The Deming Headlight*, 17 August 1987 (newspapers.com)

¹⁹ Interview with Louis Krupp by John H. McNeely, 1973, “Interview no. 77,” Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.



(Left) Church reconstruction, 1973; (Center) Interior of new church, with pews from original building; (Right) Mural on porch by Sue Bason of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego. Construction photo courtesy Gloria Spellman, other photos Joe Britton.

A String of Pastoral Characters

Since the rebuilding of the church, it has had a string of lively pastors whose stories are worth retelling. Maree Westland remembers a Jesuit priest from Canada who was on sabbatical, and at the bishop's suggestion he took up residence in the small apartment at the rear of the church. The year of his residency, as well as his name, are now forgotten, but some people still remember that he called on every person in town, introducing himself and asking how he could be of service. Given his rule of life, he said mass every day in the church, whether anyone else was there or not. Maree also recalls a priest from Garfield who came from a wealthy family. He owned his own airplane and flew up to Hillsboro to take services, setting down on the old landing strip near the cemetery. Maree's brother Barry met him there and brought him into town.

In the 1990s, Sister Marie-Paule Willem, FMM, started to come up to Hillsboro from Garfield, where she was stationed at San Isidro Church. She grew up in Bruges, Belgium during the Second World War, and having seen what the Nazis did to the Jews, she decided at a young age to devote her life to the relief of the poor and refugees. At age 23, she entered the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, "who serve where the need is greatest and where no one else wants to go, among the poorest and most forgotten." When in 2018 she received the Lumen Christi Award, the highest honor given to a Catholic missionary in the United States, the *Deming Headlight* carried the story, where it noted that "She ministered in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay in the 1970's during times of military dictatorships and political upheaval. She was part of the Church's advocacy and social justice efforts to help the condemned, who were put in outdoor 'corrals' and left to starve. For her mission, she risked her life, received death threats and was ousted from the region."²⁰ Having been expelled from Latin America, she came to the Rio Grande Valley, and began serving migrant workers and immigrants to help keep families safe and together.

Coming to Hillsboro from her post in Garfield, Sister Marie-Paule greatly enlivened the local church by her energy and pastoral attentiveness. An example: on a trip to Rome, Sister Marie-Paule acquired small wooden crosses blessed by the Pope to bring to every member of the congregation. She also introduced traditional Matachines dancers for the Feast of Guadalupe (December 12), a dance that brings together influences of Moorish Spain, Catholic Mexico, and Native America. A troupe of young dancers from Garfield performed in front of the church, spilling out onto the state highway so that traffic had to be detoured onto Elenora Street. A flyer from 1998 shows that Los Matachines were incorporated into the community Christmas celebration, now known as Christmas in the Foothills, and one of the annual posters for the event, painted by Lois Jarvis, depicts the dancers in front of the

²⁰ "Fearless Catholic Nun Honored for Lifetime of Service with Lumen Christi Award," *The Deming Headlight*, 21 December 2018 (demingheadlight.com)

Guadalupe church. The appearance of the Matachines at the annual holiday celebration continued up through the 2010s, organized by Maria Lamb.



Matachines dancers for the Feast of Guadalupe, c.1998. Photo courtesy of Rebecca Porter.

Paule has not slowed down but is the Pastoral Administrator of San José parish in Picacho (Fairacres), an old Hispanic village northwest of Las Cruces. As in Hillsboro, she has revitalized a small rural congregation through her unreserved energy and good will. Asked what her secret is, she replied “Two things: you have to be happy where you are, and you have to love the people.”²¹

Fr. Don Hyatt came to Sierra County in 2000 after retiring from a 21-year teaching position at St. Pius X School in Albuquerque. He came at the invitation of Fr. Art Roberts, C.S.B (Congregation of St. Basil), pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Truth or Consequences. Fr. Art came to T or C in 1994, after an already long career in school ministry. He was revered as a sincere and genuine priest of strong convictions, “always concerned for the person who gets no attention.” His causes were opposing the abuse of the poor, especially when war gets into the mix.²² As pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, he ministered by himself to its seven missions, until a cancer diagnosis forced him to slow down. Hence, his effort to bring Fr. Don.

Upon Fr. Don’s arrival, he took up residence in the rectory of San Ignacio Church in Monticello, and from there served in multiple capacities throughout southern New Mexico, including as priest for Our Lady of Guadalupe in Hillsboro. Having come from a large family, he is remembered for his lively sense of humor and pastoral concern for the people of Hillsboro, even after his departure. An accident in 2020 caused him to lose his eyesight, forcing his retirement from ministry, but an article that year in the *Sierra County Sentinel* captured the spirit that made him much beloved: “Sitting down with Father Don Hyatt is an experience to be savored. First of all, just catching up with him can be an accomplishment as even though he is lately a bit more confined in his mobility, he nevertheless seems to be in high energy motion all the time. Ideas and memories and plans for the future come out almost non-stop, often with humor and always with grace.”²³

Beginning in 1996, an annual community-wide holiday food drive coordinated by Barbara Pearlman and Maria Lamb specifically focused on helping Sister Marie-Paule provide food and clothing for needy families in the area. The drive’s theme was “El Pan Partido Dios lo Aumenta” (God blesses the Bread that is Shared), and the collection grew to be large enough for Sister Marie-Paule to distribute food baskets to 100 families in the valley. These were also the years when the church introduced *Recuerdos* (Memories), a communal time to recall those who died in the previous year. It is still held each year at dusk on New Year’s Eve on the sidewalk east of the Masonic building with lighted luminarias (see below, page 9).

Although she is now in her 90s, Sister Marie-

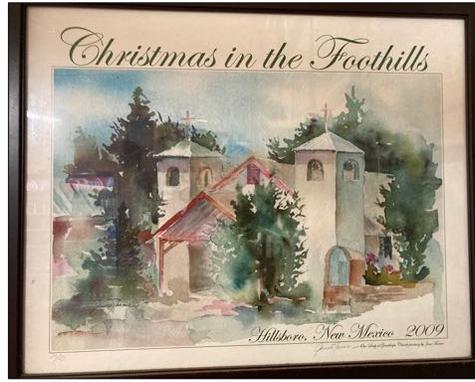


Sr. Marie-Paule Willem at work with her parishioners in Picacho, Feast of San José, 2024.

²¹ Sister Marie-Paule Willem conversation with the author, March 2023.

²² “Father Art Celebrates 50 Years of Priestly Life During Fiesta,” *Sierra County Sentinel*, 22 June 2005 (courtesy of Gloria Spellman).

²³ Jim Shiley, “Shining On: Father Don Hyatt,” *Sierra County Sentinel*, 18 September 2020 (courtesy of Gloria Spellman)



Posters for Christmas in the Foothills featuring Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (left to right): Matachines dancer, by Lois Jarvis, 1998; Church in the trees, by Jane Turner, 2009; Church in the snow with David Farrell's "Kissing Snake Gate," photo by Jan Richmond, 2023.

Closure and Rebirth



In the latter years of Fr. Don's active ministry, a deacon began to take services in Hillsboro, but several years before the pandemic the church was abruptly closed, the locks changed, and it stood abandoned and unused. Then in May 2023, aware of the blight on the town caused by the church's closure, the parishioners of Christ Church (Episcopal), an ecumenically-minded congregation that includes a number of Roman Catholics, took on the project of trying to reopen the church on behalf of the whole community. With the encouragement of Sister Marie-Paule, they approached Bishop Peter Baldacchino of the Diocese of Las Cruces with a request for a key so that the church could at least be opened for visitation, as it had been each day for years prior by Richard and Gloria Spellman or Margie Rubio. In those days, passers-by often stopped in, or townsfolk would go in to pray or just enjoy the peaceful quiet. Most evenings, a votive candle or two would be left quietly flickering in the corner.



Reopening of the church, February 18, 2024. (Above) Fr. Mike Williams, (Below) Members of the congregation. Photo Joe Britton.

After due deliberation, the Diocese proposed reinstituting a monthly mass as a first step, which brought Fr. Mike Williams, pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, to Hillsboro on the third Sunday of each month at 3:00 o'clock. The inaugural mass was held on the First Sunday of Lent, February 18, 2024, with over 30 people in attendance! The ecumenical congregation included members of Christ Church, former and long-time residents of Hillsboro, and of course the local Catholic community, who all joined in a festive reception afterward across the street at Bucher House, the home of Joe and Karla Britton (Joe is the pastor of Christ Church).



Christmas Eve, 2024.
Photo Barbara Pearlman.

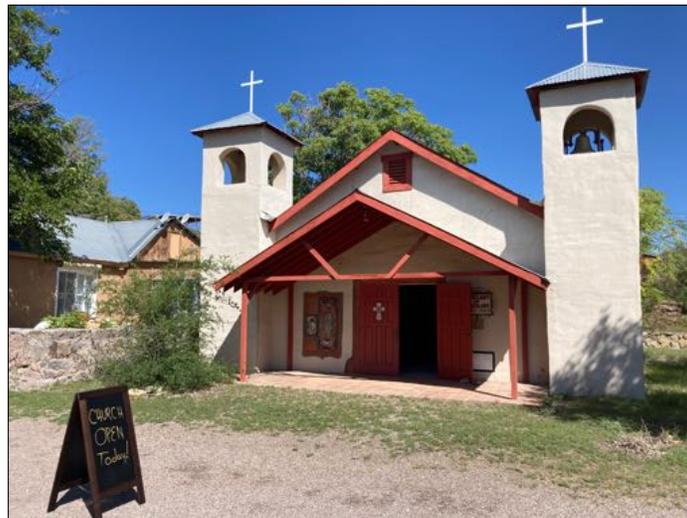


(Left) Fr. Ivan Torres and (right) Fr. Peter Okunkwo. Photos Joe Britton.

In time, responsibility for the Hillsboro church was transferred to Our Lord of Mercy Church in Hatch, with Fr. Ivan Torres as pastor and Fr. Peter Okunkwo from Nigeria as his assistant. They enthusiastically embraced the mission’s identification with Our Lady of Guadalupe, and proposed holding mass on the 12th day of each month at 12 noon (a nod toward her December 12 feast day—but if the 12th falls on a Sunday, the mass is the following day). They invited a widows group from Hatch to make a monthly pilgrimage to attend, and now the group sometimes arrives early on the appointed day to say the Rosary. The service is bilingual, and occasionally includes music by young parish interns. Lunch usually follows at Bucher House. Over time, with enough trust built

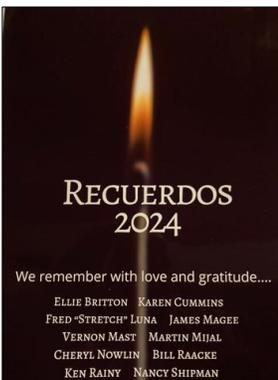
up, the local congregation received a key to the church in the summer of 2025. It is now regularly open and frequently visited every weekend.

With so much good news and new life, the congregation plans to celebrate a Fiesta on December 12 for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, for the first time in many years (see the notice on page one). Sister Marie-Paule Willem will be the special guest, and the whole community is invited for all or part of the festivities. The fact that such a celebration is possible after so many ups and downs over the years, is surely an affirmation that indeed, things of consequence cannot be done alone



Our Lady of Guadalupe Church as it appears today—open for visitation!

Recuerdos



Beginning in 1996, Maria Lamb organized an annual New Year’s Eve observance of “Recuerdos” (Memories), a time for remembering members of the community who died in the previous year. Although the initiative came from Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, the event is held at dusk beginning at 5:30 pm on the sidewalk near the Masonic Building, with lighted luminarias. Names are read from the assembled list one at a time, with opportunity for those gathered to share a memory, a tribute, or just their affection. Before Maria died, she pressed upon Barbara Pearlman the importance of keeping the tradition going, which she now does. Names for the 2025 list may be sent to Barbara for inclusion.



The Mountain Pride on its arrival at the Palace of the Governors, Santa Fe, 1935 (photographer unknown)

The Return of the Mountain Pride

By Steve Dobrott

After 110 years, the famous stagecoach Mountain Pride rolled once again on the streets of Hillsboro, yet but a short distance. The 136 year old coach had just been reassembled after being removed from the Lincoln County Courthouse and transported back to where she once rolled from 1889-1915 on the Lake Valley, Hillsboro, and Kingston Stage Line. On October 15, 2025 a small gathering of locals were on hand to witness a once in a lifetime sight: the return of the Mountain Pride.



The Mountain Pride on exhibit at the Lincoln County Courthouse, Lincoln Historic Site, where it was kept from 1982 until 2025.

The saga of the return of the Mountain Pride began years ago in 2008, when the Hillsboro History Club, destined to become the Hillsboro Historical Society (“the Society”), began to think about the possibility of getting the coach back to Sierra County. For many years, the thought of having this important artifact back in town was a dream that fell short of happening over the many failed conversations with state managers and various contacts among the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCA). The recurring conundrum was how to get it out of the historic building in Lincoln into which it was moved from the Palace of the Governors in Santa Fe in 1982.

The coach had been in the hands of the History Museum ever since it was donated by the wife of Governor Arthur Seligman after his death in 1935. Seligman had purchased the coach following a visit to Lake Valley where it stood idle after the discontinuation of the stage line in 1915.



The Mountain Pride sitting idle in Lake Valley. Mrs. Arthur (Frankie) Seligman is in rear window; her daughter Richie is on top foreground. Others are unknown. Photo was probably taken by Arthur Seligman in 1915. (Personal photo collection of Arthur Scott)



Light-weight Overland stagecoach “mud wagon” crossing Percha Creek on run from Kingston. Photo Black Range Museum.

The prospects of HHS obtaining the coach were slight considering all of the hoops and approvals that were involved in the process. And, the question of where to house the coach, if acquired, was problematic.

In 2016, the Society purchased the Black Range Museum and started a renovation project that included the stabilization of the unique adobe water tower and the 1883 building that was once owned by Sadie Orchard. She named it the Ocean Grove Hotel. Sadie and her husband J.W. Orchard were co-owners of the stage line from 1895 to 1902. Among the horse-drawn vehicles in the inventory was a Concord Coach made by the Abbott and Downing Company, Concord, New Hampshire in 1889. Sometime after its arrival by train in Lake Valley, it was named the Mountain Pride after a hotel of that name in Kingston, and it served the line for 26 years by sharing the transport of the mail and passengers with another light-weight coach called an Overland Coach, or Mud Wagon.*

By 2019, the Society began to find a pathway to acquiring the Mountain Pride from the DCA. In the meantime, it was determined that if a private organization was indeed going to get possession of the coach, either by a loan or transfer, a suitable facility would be needed first. So, in 2024, the Board of Directors made a bold move by approving the construction of a Coach House—a costly endeavor without complete assurance at the time of getting the coach. The gamble paid off.

HHS had to be persistent in the effort to find a way to get the coach. There were several steps to this goal that were recommended by the Deputy Director of New Mexico Historic Sites (Lincoln Historic Site) and the Executive Director of the New Mexico History Museum in Santa Fe. It would take time and several approvals by various divisions of DCA, ending with final approvals by Cabinet Secretary Debra Garcia y Griego and the New Mexico Museum Board of Regents. And the Hillsboro Historical Society would have to pay for it all. A tall order to be sure! Again, the Board of Directors unanimously approved going forward with the acquisition. The project would depend solely on donations from its members.

After HHS secured all of the required approvals and obtained qualified contractors to do the job as planned, the project moved on to the most important phase. The Cabinet Secretary responded positively to the project and recommended that a letter be written to the President of the Board of Regents for its consideration.

* This mud wagon was photographed mostly in Kingston, while the Concord Coach was photographed in Hillsboro and Lake Valley. This suggests that there was a preference as to which wagon would make which run. The mud wagon was lighter in weight and had a lower center of gravity suitable for the rugged terrain between Hillsboro and Kingston, while the heavier Concord Coach was better suited for travel between Lake Valley and Hillsboro.

Based largely on the Society's due diligence, persistence in acquiring all necessary DCA division approvals, and an unarguable case for acquisition, on July 31, 2025, the Board of Regents unanimously approved the deaccession the Mountain Pride from the permanent collection of the History Museum and the transfer of its ownership to the Hillsboro Historical Society. An historic action, indeed.

On October 14, 2025, a team consisting of Doug Hansen of Hansen Wheel and Wagon Shop from Letcher, South Dakota, local construction contractors, and a cadre of enthusiastic volunteers from Hillsboro arrived in Lincoln at the appointed time and under the supervision of the DCA Facility Manager, began the disassembly of the courthouse doorway while simultaneously disassembling the coach inside. The well planned and executed process took 3 hours to remove the dismembered coach while the reassembly of the doorway took a total of 25 hours to complete to the satisfaction of the DCA Facility Management Bureau.



Out the doorway of the Lincoln County Courthouse with the disassembled coach!

The next day in Hillsboro (below), with little fanfare, the coach was reassembled in the street in front of the Black Range Museum and pushed by several onlookers into the Coach House.





Doug Hansen leaving Lincoln with the Mountain Pride inside of the Hansen Wheel and Wagon Shop trailer on October 14, 2025. Photo by author.

The Mountain Pride was back home at last and all were amazed at seeing the process. Upon installation of the coach, Doug Hansen, overseer of the removal and transport of the coach, gave an impromptu presentation about the Concord Coach and how it was built. (A video of his talk will become available in due time.) It was truly an amazing end to a remarkable journey for the Mountain Pride and all who participated in the project.

On November 8, the community celebrated the homecoming of the Mountain Pride with a gathering in the backyard of the museum. Everyone was introduced to the ongoing “Stage Stop Project,” the Society’s site development plan, and then had a first look at the “Pride,” now the “Pride of Hillsboro and Kingston.”

Note: HHS is now accepting donations to help pay for the Stage Stop Project, with a campaign goal of \$160,000. Your generous donation will assure the success of our backyard development plan and the stagecoach exhibit—an investment for the benefit of the entire community!

You can help us reach our goal either by returning the pledge form available on page 19, or go to: <https://secure.givelively.org/donate/hillsboro-historical-society>



(Left to right) First viewing of the Mountain Pride; Steve Dobrott explains how the coach was loaded; Gary Gritzbaugh inspects the engineering; and Janie Dobrott moves the giving thermometer up over 50% of the goal!



(Left to right) The community pitches in for the festivities: David Farrell and Jeff Forbes of the Pickin’ Circle; Mark Edwards of Outer Edge Pizza in T or C ready to serve up a slice; Nicki and Brian O’Dell of Black Range Vineyards tend the bar. Photos Val Hildreth-Werker.



THE SAGA OF THE MOUNTAIN PRIDE

By NANCY CHAPMAN ELLIOTT

To Hillsboro with Love

October 2025

[Nancy read this poem as part of the November 8 event unveiling the Mountain Pride. As the unofficial "poet laureate" of Hillsboro, she writes that "Her experiences with horses, and as a partner in a rightstagecoach and surrey business, made this poem possible. YAHOO!!" I'm grateful for her permission to reproduce it here. -Ed.]

Take a walk with me down the trail back in history,
to a different age and a much simpler time,
when horsepower travel had four legs and a tail;
four horses pulling the short-line stage in 1889.

Abbott-Downing Company ... back East, in New Hampshire,
built a stagecoach, #560, to the specs of Charlie Gause.
The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad
brought it miles to New Mexico, without a doubt.

The train chugged to Lake Valley, booming miner's town;
steel rail spur ending there, it had no further route.
Riders paid their coins to board this Concord Coach;
three on top, six inside, luggage in the boot.

In her new-built glory Mountain Pride had arrived;
bright red, black trim and wheels yellow as the sun.
Four horses, well matched, soon harnessed and ready,
with the tugs hooked in place, they lit out at a run.

Wasn't she a dandy sight?!

A crack of the whip, wheeling out of Lake Valley,
to Hillsboro, sometimes Kingston, the coach fairly flew;
a daily round trip with stops changing out horses,
the hazards were many, mishaps but a few.

Imagine the road barely more than a trail,
the rocks and rain ditches, a challenge each trip.
Sharp corners and drop-offs so close to the wheels,
kept drivers alert to the least little slip.

The "Pride" faced unexpected perils up in those hills;
sudden storms, broken wheels, a horse losing a shoe,
a passenger ill, with no doctor to be found,
and Highwaymen looking to steal the gold too.

Riders might be jostled on rough and rocky roads,
thrown about like storm-tossed ships upon the sea.
Six inside, quite a crowd, with no room to stretch;
more “cozy” than women might expect it to be.

They couldn't do a thing about that danged ol' wind,
or constant dirt drifting down into their hair;
a bonnet, no match for this Southwestern weather,
their travelling dress somewhat worse for the wear.

Men up on top were exposed, along with the driver,
to whatever the elements offered that day.
They might just be asked to help move fallen trees;
whatever it took to get “Pride” on her way.

Mountain Pride, in her beauty, took it all in her stride ...
with her team, flying free, through this wild countryside.

Listen now, Hillsboro ...

Can you hear ... thundering hooves, the harness a jingling?
As our Mountain Pride gallops right into town.
Manes and tails blowing, the passengers cheering;
stray chickens and dogs would do best to give ground.

The driver bellows: “WHOA UP THERE ... ANDY, PRINCE, REILLY and DUDE!”

Mountain Pride brakes to a stop in a huge cloud of dust.
Folks rush out to admire, for the very first time ...
a shiny red coach with those big yellow wheels,
and the best team of four ever kept on the line.

What an adventure, a thing to inspire,
looking back down the years through history's eyes!!

1895 found a new partnership for the short-line stage ...
J. W. Orchard and his famous wife Sadie.
She was known to spin tales about driving the “Pride,”
but that job was no job for an aspiring lady.

J. W. Orchard knew the short-line through and through,
put strong men to task keeping schedules on time;
shoeing or vet work, clearing roads, bucking hay,
most important of all ... making Mountain Pride shine.

There was harness to mend and horses to feed,
stock tenders to hire and mail contracts to bid.
John Reay, the best of their drivers, aside from J. W.,
once ferried the man who caught Billy the Kid.

It was 1899. The Hillsboro Fountain trial caused quite a stir,
yet the trial wasn't all that left some kind of tally,
when Sheriff Pat Garrett and twenty-two others
climbed onto the “Pride” for return to Lake Valley.

A record, don't you know. Mostly downhill we hope.

Years passed, and the stage line changed hands a few times,
with Mountain Pride always a part of the trade,
till the Governor bought her outright for himself
and soon moved her Northward to old Santa Fe.

Gone were her mountains, and spirited horses,
the rich smell of leather and strong, hardy men.
When the Governor up and died about 1935,
the "Pride" was donated, never driven again.

For many long decades the Mountain Pride languished,
at the Palace of Governors and the Lincoln Historic Site,
where they built the door behind her to never get out,
set a plaque with her name to keep history right.

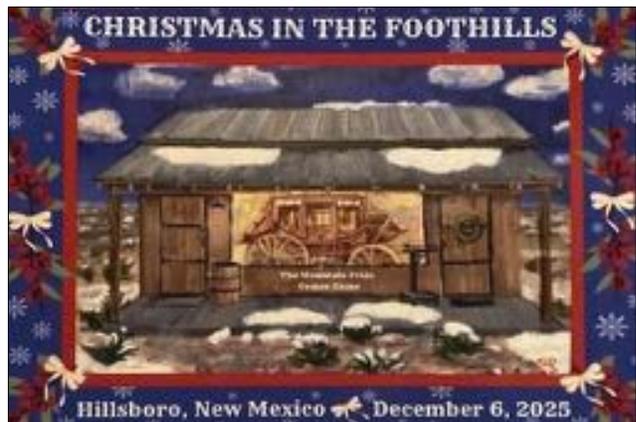
But Lincoln never counted on Hillsboro Historical Society
to show up with papers and petitions in hand,
to break down the door to "bust their Pride out of jail,"
return her to mountains, where her coach life began!

Now, 136 years since the "Pride" was so skillfully crafted,
determined Hillsboro folks prevailed in persistence;
with letters and phone calls and nine years of hope,
imagined a beautiful coach house right into existence.

And The Mountain Pride is making one last journey,
in a horse van, on wheels that are not her own.
Though a bit aged, and forlorn and yes tattered,
The Mountain Pride is finally ... finally coming home.

THE END

*This writer is grateful to Steve Dobrott for all the great information,
William "Wild Bill" Lafever for giving me personal experience with a stagecoach,
Frank and Annamay Chapman for raising me in beautiful New Hampshire,
The Hillsboro Pickin' Circle for listening to my poems,
And every horse I ever rode ... just because.*



*(Left) Garland Bills celebrates the long-awaited event; (Right) Christmas in the Foothills echoes the sentiment.
(Poster by Susan Roebuck)*

2025 Annual Report of Gifts

Note: Gifts to the Stage Stop Project will be reported separately at a later date.

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

Members giving in addition to basic membership

Greg and Barb Andrews	JoAnn Hall	Gary Sapp
Gary and Barbara Asteak	Quinn Hammonds	Tom Scanlan
Joseph and Karla Britton	Ronald Hartley	Bill Slettom
Larry Caudill	Val Hildreth-Werker	Richard and Gloria
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Jeff Forbes	David Farrell	
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Monthly Donors

Shoshana Handel Nichole Trushell and Steve Morgan

Honorary Lifetime Members

Gloria June Anders, Sue Bason, Rand and Cathy Berger, Barb Lovell and Ray Reid

Lifetime Members

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

**Indicates additional gifts in 2025*

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

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

*Gifts received as of November 15, 2025 (excluding Stage Stop Project):
our sincere apology if any information is incorrect or incomplete. Please let us know if that is the case.*

Editor's Note

Amidst all the excitement about the return of the Mountain Pride, here's an amusing sidenote to share. On April 15, 1892, the *Sierra County Advocate* confidently predicted that the rail line from Lake Valley would soon be extended to Hillsboro. The Pride, put into service only three years before, might have had a rather shorter run than its actual 26 years of service! Here's the text:

CHANGE CARS FOR HILLSBORO!

Thursday morning two large delegations of representative citizens of Kingston and Hillsboro went to Lake Valley to confer with Vice-President Robinson of the Santa Fe concerning the extension of the railroad to this place [Hillsboro] the present summer. Every industry and business in either town was represented in these delegations of citizens. On arrival at Lake the executive committee took the regular passenger train for Nutt, where they met the Vice-President's special car and returned with it to Lake. Here the delegations were invited on board while Mr. Robinson addressed them on the subject of their mission. ... The size and earnestness of the delegation seemed to surprise and greatly please him. They filled his special car to the brim, these delegations of mine owners, mill men, smelter men, cattle men, merchants and editors, and were intensely interested with the popular railroad official's address. Mr. Robinson assured them that he would send his chief engineer into their section the next day to look into the matter and lay his report before the Santa Fe company, and that he felt sure if this report warranted the company to extend the road it would be extended. ... On behalf of the delegations Mr. W. S. Hopewell thanked the vice president and assured him that his chief engineer would be well cared for and shown everything. The chief engineer of the road, Mr. Bucher, is already in the district looking the situation over. THE ADVOCATE believes the extension of the road is almost assured.

So perhaps we would now have a steam engine, rather than a stagecoach? --Joe Britton

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

The Hillsboro Historical Society

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

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Inquiries: hillsboronmhistory@gmail.com

GZP is available online at:

www.hillsborohistoricalsociety.com/journal-articles/

To become a member of HHS, please visit:

www.hillsborohistoricalsociety.com/contact/

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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Programs: Kathleen Blair, Steve Morgan

Publications: Joe Britton



Website: Nichole Trushell

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



HILLSBORO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE STAGE STOP PROJECT

~~~~~  
*I understand that my donation will be used for The Stage Stop Project. The project includes moving the Mountain Pride Coach from Lincoln to Hillsboro New Mexico, and for development of the courtyard and presentation space behind the Black Range Museum.*

*I understand that gifts may be publicly recognized. In any such recognition, the Hillsboro Historical Society will list the gift as specified below, on this form.*

I (we) pledge a total of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to be paid before \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please acknowledge this gift with our name(s) as follows:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I (we) wish to have the source of our gift remain anonymous.

**Please make your check payable to *Hillsboro Historical Society* and send with this form to:**

**Hillsboro Historical Society**

**P.O. Box 461**

**Hillsboro, NM 88042**



**Hillsboro Historical Society**  
Serving the Community since 2008

**2026 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

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

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

|                                                                                  |          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP:</b>                                                        | \$ 25.00 |
| Additional contribution                                                          | \$ _____ |
| Gift Membership(s):<br>(Please provide name, address and email for each person.) | \$ _____ |
| Total contribution:                                                              | \$ _____ |

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

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

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

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