

Guajolotes, Zopilotes y Paisanos

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

**The Journal of the
Hillsboro Historical Society**

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Ernie and Delores Springer: A Remembrance

By Craig Springer



Delores in front of the National Register plaque on the Hillsboro High School, which she saved, 1993.

I am writing in my home south of Santa Fe where I have a full expansive view of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains as they take on a crimson cast this late-winter afternoon. The moving light gives texture to the mountainsides. It is contemplative light. At the base of the Sangres, my parents Ernesto and Delores (Dees) Springer lie at rest on a local heroes' hill, Santa Fe National Cemetery.

Let me tell you a little about my parents who, as retirees, spent the last 20 years of their long lives in Hillsboro. They resided in the historic Miller house next to the Union Church.

Ernesto, or Ernie, as everyone knew him, was born in 1929 an eighth-generation Nuevomexicano having descended from the earliest Spanish colonists under Oñate. It is well-documented that his progenitor, Alonso Garcia de Noriega and wife Catalina Rivas Garcia, arrived in the New Mexico colony at Okay Yungue ca. 1602. Their great-grandson, Alonso Garcia, served as Lieutenant Governor and Captain-General of the New Mexico Colony during the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, shepherding Spanish refugees to present-day El Paso. The Garcias returned to New Mexico in the re-conquest and left paper trails in civil, church, and military matters at Santa Fe. Vicente Garcia was a soldier at the Presidio in 1780-85, qualifying Ernie's grandchildren for membership in the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution.

Vicente's great-granddaughter, Tiadora Bustos Garcia, married Moroni Lachoneus Frampton who arrived at Ft. Union, New Mexico from Missouri ca. 1865. Moroni was born to early Mormon adherents. He and Tiadora became Methodist circuit missionaries and may have preached in Hillsboro and Kingston. Their granddaughter, Josefina Narvaiz, married Lucio Springer; the two were Ernie's parents.

(continued on page 3 ...)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

To the members and supporters of the Hillsboro Historical Society,

I am writing as the new HHS Board President for 2026. I am excited this year to help us finish our key projects and plan for our future with so many new assets and opportunities. As most of you know, the HHS has a lot going on! I first joined the Board in 2017. I have enjoyed working with this group over these years of great growth and change: a remodeled Museum with professional displays, a new Coach House, the return of the Mountain Pride, and the development of our backyard into a beautiful and useful space.

If you have not already seen the Mountain Pride stagecoach in its new home at the Black Range Museum, I hope you will stop by soon for a visit. She is truly a treasure; it is fantastic to have her *home* again. The remarkable and innovative engineering features plus the stories the Coach holds are fascinating. A committee is currently working on new interpretive signage about the Coach and area transportation during the time she rolled. The more we look, the more we learn; it is great fun.

When you visit to see the Mountain Pride, you will walk through the backyard space between the Black Range Museum and the new Coach House building – and you will see that it has changed significantly. What was, just last year, a weedy, hot, uninviting, and unusable space is becoming a unique new outdoor gathering and educational space. To date we have had 67 donors to help us complete this project totaling over \$140,000 in donations! We thank *all of you* who contributed for your vision and generosity. At the time I write this, we are very close to having the project *fully funded*. There will be opportunities to help us add details like chairs, benches, more interpretive signage, more plantings, *and* to move a donated windmill into place, but we are getting very close to our goal.

Along with completion of the landscape, and creating interpretive displays and guides, we will also have new opportunities for educational presentations in our outdoor space later in 2026. **And for our members, watch for a special invitation to an Appreciation Gathering in April for the supporters of the “Stage Stop Project.”** This new gem for the HHS and for the community, funded *by* our community, is almost ready to celebrate and share!

Nichole Trushell
HHS President



(... continued from page 1) The Springers were late arrivals from Colorado, ca. 1895. T. T. Springer homesteaded in Cochiti Canyon, in the Jemez Mountains. That property became known as the Tent Rocks Ranch and remained in the family until ca. 1935.

As a boy, Ernie lived on Willow Creek north of Pecos and later in Bernalillo. He had coming-of-age moments in Albuquerque in the Saw Mill district. He played baseball as catcher with the Saw Mill Tigers and spoke of games played at the state penitentiary and other less restricted confines.

When duty called at age 22, he served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, where he earned a Purple Heart on Heartbreak Ridge in 1951.*

Dad was fluent in Spanish and I enjoyed his conversations with my wife, Felicia. She descends from *los comprados* (the purchased ones), Mexican citizens who moved south to Mesilla following the Mexican War to get away from Americans but then became citizens themselves through the Gadsden Purchase. Their conversations were punctuated by words not well understood by each other, an artifact of northern New Mexico's antiquity.

While the Santa Fe Trail and El Camino Real brought Ernie's ancestors to Santa Fe over the centuries, the Santa Fe Railway carried Delores Dees, a young single mother with two children who sought to remake herself in Albuquerque.

Delores was born in Indiana in 1924 and came from Scots-Irish Appalachian stock. Emmanuel Dees left Scotland's River Dee for the Carolina colony. His grandson served on the winning team in the American Revolution and survived the battle at King's Mountain in South Carolina. Delores's parents were part of the diaspora of Kentuckians who fled to the industrial north for work as memorialized in J. D. Vance's family in the memoir, *Hillbilly Elegy*. Mom had a little leftover twang in her spoken words.



Ernest Springer in Korea, 1952.



Delores Dees, age 18

Delores joined a sister in Albuquerque who landed there as a consequence of WWII. She met Ernie some months later. Dad delivered beer to a restaurant where mom waited tables. The two married in 1953. I came along a decade later. We moved from Los Alamos to near Cincinnati, Ohio in the 1970s for work. Ernie was an ironworker and construction jobs had played out in the Atomic town. I returned to New Mexico to attend NMSU in 1988, and Ernie and Delores soon returned home to retire. They considered Rio Rancho (where they had bought land in the 1960s), Las Cruces and Albuquerque, all too large for their liking. They visited smaller communities such as Reserve, Glenwood, Silver City, and T or C, but the quaintness of Hillsboro hooked them. There were two houses for sale then, and they chose the Miller House—mom loved that house!

Delores was a bookish person, and not overly outgoing. She fancied being a writer and educated herself in the craft. She immersed herself in the Famous Writers School, co-founded by writer Rod Serling of Twilight Zone fame. I inherited her textbooks and manuscripts. She wrote fiction and non-fiction, with stories on a strained relationship with an alcoholic father; his passing from cancer; a muse on Raton Pass; Santa Fe antiquities; the failure of doctors to treat menopause; and diamond hunting which was published in *True Treasure*. She published profusely on family histories in genealogy newsletters.

She took some interest in politics and activism that would come to serve Hillsboro well.

* You can read about his war experience at: <https://www.theoutdoorwire.com/features/58ce4e8a-9014-440e-8b54-d51ee37ceb32/>.

Delores was on the ground floor of the Libertarian Party in the early 1970s. I recall bearded men with long hair carrying books and papers into meetings at our house. Mom corresponded with and maybe met with Karl Hess who owned a farm in southwest Ohio. Hess was a famous anarchist and speech writer for Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona. In an uncanny coincidence his son, Karl Hess, Jr., was a professor of range science at NMSU and later he and I were colleagues with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington, D.C.



Delores and Ernie with James Brolin during the filming of Paper Hearts in Hillsboro, 1993.

The historic Miller house was perfect for Mom and Dad. They both enjoyed old things, relished history, and loved being American. Not long after settling in Hillsboro in 1989, they set about restoration work that would expand beyond their house.

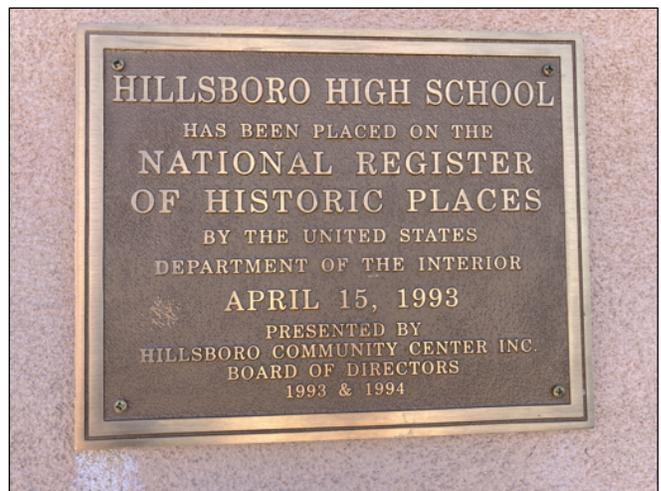
Delores endeavored to learn more about Ninette Miller and their home, drafting a nomination for it to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. [See “The Stocker Sisters in Hillsboro History,” GZP 17/3, August 2024.] She eventually encouraged or helped other property owners get their homes placed on the Register as well, or named New Mexico cultural properties.

Her greatest and perhaps most lasting contribution to Hillsboro was the preservation of the historic High School as a Community Center. As president of the Community Center she led the effort to preserve the building; she organized meetings in T or C and Santa Fe, and met Sen.

John Arthur Smith and Rep. G. X. McSherry (both of Deming), and others in state government, all to save the building. She succeeded by bulldogging the bureaucrats in getting the funding. I recall a scathing letter in the *Sierra County Herald* criticizing the County Commission for dragging its rear, and then another letter when a commissioner took credit for saving the building. She’d have none of that politicking. Delores was known for her obstinance, and it paid off for Hillsboro.

Her funeral in 2004 was held most appropriately in the Community Center. She was after all a confirmed agnostic and committed to historic preservation. The Rev. Ed Ostertag (a retired Episcopal priest in town serving as vicar of Christ Church) officiated at the affair, and he read a letter from the beloved Hillsboro resident, Helen Evans, thanking Delores for her spirited and aggressive defense of the building where she lay in repose.

The Reverend’s reading brought the attendees to their feet. A standing ovation at a funeral—think of it—there on the old gym floor. Dad and I were gratified. Reverend Ostertag was taken aback, but he read the room. He borrowed from the epitaph on the architect Cristopher Wren’s tomb in St. Paul’s Cathedral, London. “To see the monument, look around you,” Ostertag said, standing in front of the lectern, and sweeping his arm outward around the room.[†]



[†] “Si monumentum requiris circumspice.”

Delores, dear -
 I have read and re-read your report several times - each time finding more memories of the work you did to push thru the need for money for our Center.
 thru my 13 years here, several of the Community have worked toward the repair of the roof of the grounds, etc - but you are the only one who stayed

with the program you had established and later, with Nell as your side-kick, it has come into truly happening - So I end as I began: Thank You So Much.
 Sincerely, Helen A. Evans
 3/4/95
 from Helen Evans
 Ernie & Delores Springer
 Hillsboro N.M. 88042

Helen Evans' letter to Delores: "Delores, dear - I have read and re-read your report several times - each time finding more memories of the work you did to push thru the need for money for our Center. Thru my 13 years here, several of the Community have worked toward the repairs of the roof or the grounds, etc. - but you are the only one who stayed with the program you had established and later, with Nell [Thwaits] as your side-kick, it has come into truly happening. - So I end as I began: Thank You So Much. Sincerely, Helen A. Evans, 3/4/95"

Dad lived a few more years, until 2009, and was often seen walking with an obvious limp from war wounds. If not ambling about town, he sat on the porch where we had many conversations on all manner of things. Dad was observant of nature and his surroundings: he documented weather changes, tallied bats coming out of the church belfry, and watched birds. To the disbelief of the experts, he documented an Indigo Bunting on the creek.

Mom and Dad were very much at home in Hillsboro. They regretted not being able to do more restoration work on their home before Mom took ill. But their time together in Hillsboro in the sunset of life was time well spent. It was a time full of joy and color, like the beautiful light passing over the Sangres out my kitchen window this very moment.

Craig Springer is a fish biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in New Mexico. He received a bachelor's degree in Fisheries Science from New Mexico State University, and his master's degree in Fish Ecology from the University of Arizona. His work is anthologized in *Upriver & Downstream* (2007), and his *America's Bountiful Waters* (2021) won the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's 2022 Conservation History Award. As an advisor to the Hillsboro Historical Society, he co-authored *Around Hillsboro* (2011), and edited the HHS blogspot (<http://hillsborohistory.blogspot.com>). He may be reached through his website, www.craigspringer.com. Photos courtesy of the author.



Delores and Ernie at Craig and Felicia's wedding reception, 1994.

Black Range Museum

February 2026 Bookshelf Notes

By Kathleen Blair

Greetings to all from the Black Range Museum Bookshelf! In our Gift Shop we carry about 100 titles to offer an interesting selection to feed your curiosity. We emphasize books relevant to the Hillsboro Historical Society's mission statement and topics developed in our museum displays. Local authors are also featured. We have many titles on the people and events that have impacted our region of the Southwest including Native Americans, mining, ranching, local community development, significant places, and historical events, as well as natural history. We also keep books on more current activities such as hiking and camping, field guides, our giftshop artist skills, and a few southwestern classics and fiction just for a good, thoughtful read! In these periodic notes, I try to keep abreast as new titles are acquired and favorites revisited. Just a note – in order to keep prices down and books out of landfills, many of the books we offer are used, though still in good condition.

We keep a nice selection of children's books, too!

Don't Call me a Pig! A Javalina Story. Conrad j. Storad. Judy Goddard Award winner.

Josefina Javelina: A Hairy Tale. Susan Lowell.

Los Tres Pequeños Jabalies/The Three Little Pigs. Susan Lowell. Bilingual telling of a classic tale!

The Very Hungry Caterpillar/La Oruga Muy Hambrieta. Eric Carle. Also a Bilingual children's classic.

The Other Way to Listen. Byrd Baylor and Peter Parnall. The story of an old man and a child learning to listen to the earth, plants, and sky.

Bedtime in the Southwest. Mona Hodgson. What does a southwest critter do when momma says time to go to bed?

Soft Child: How Rattlesnake Got its Fangs. Joe Hayes and Kay Sather. Beautifully illustrated telling of a Native American folktale.

The Story of Jumping Mouse: A Native American Legend. Retold and beautifully illustrated. John Steptoe. Caldecott Honor Book.

Ten Little Rabbits. Virginia Grossman & Sylvia Long. Many activities of the Native Americans illustrate a counting book for children, with, again, beautiful illustrations.

The Boy who Made Dragonfly: A Zuni Myth Retold. Tony Hillerman. For a bit older reader.

Stagecoach Sal. Debora Hopkinson and Carson Ellis. Inspired by a True Tale of Delia Haskett Rowson.

*Come check out these titles to share with the youngsters in your life.
Never too young to share stories that make them want to read more!*

More about Our Lady of Guadalupe Church



The December 2025 issue of GZP carried a story about the history of Hillsboro's Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church and its recent reopening. Since then, for the first time in many years, the community celebrated a Fiesta for the Feast of Guadalupe on December 12. Thanks to a team led by Linda Velarde, the church was richly decorated with paper flowers, *papel picados* (hanging cut-outs), and holiday figures of angels. Three groups of *matachines* dancers from Hatch and Garfield performed before a crowd of over 150 people. Mass in an overflowing church followed, with music provided by Mariachi Aguilas from Las Cruces. Lunch on the east side of the church featured homemade gorditas provided by the women of Our Lord of Mercy Church in Hatch.

The festivities brought out some additional stories about the church. Lonnie Rubio shared that in the old days, when a vigil was kept on the eve of the feast day, he and other men would build a bonfire on the hill above the church. At a certain moment during the service in the church, a signal was given and the men would toss small bits of dynamite into the fire "to ward off the evil spirits."

For Christmas, the congregation's crèche (nativity) adorned the front porch for the first time in many years. The figures had been feared lost, but turned up in boxes stored on a shelf in the bathroom! Newspapers in which the figures were wrapped were dated 2009, probably the last time they appeared.

Another piece of information that turned up is that the land on which the church is built was donated by the Gonzales family to the Bishop of Tucson in 1892 ("Hillsboro to Celebrate 100 Years Since Founding," *The Deming Headlight*, 19 May 1977). This information provides some concrete evidence of when the original church was built, which otherwise was uncertain.



Top row, left to right: Fr. Ivan Torres and Fr. Peter Okonkwo; Mariachi Aguilas; Matachines dancers at lunch; Bottom row: Sr. Marie-Paule Willem has some posole (about the fiesta she remarked, "It's a miracle!"); attendees enjoy the Fiesta lunch; the Christmas crèche on the decorated church porch, in front of Sue Bason's mural of Our Lady and Juan Diego.

A New Year and a New Day at the General Store Cafe



Meghan Kinney serves up lunch at the New Year's Day appreciation open house.

On New Year's Day, Meghan Kinney, new owner of the General Store Cafe, held an open house to thank the many people who contributed toward the Go Fund Me fundraiser to "Keep Hillsboro Cafe Alive for the Community." The community contributed over \$44,000 to the effort!

The new year has brought some changes at the Cafe: the trees have been trimmed, a new front porch provides additional outdoor seating, and the cafe is now fully accessible thanks to a new ramp and front door. Perhaps the biggest change is the addition of Monday to the previous opening days of Friday through Sunday.

On the Cafe's Go Fund Me page, Meghan writes:

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Meghan Kinney and I moved to Hillsboro about 4 years ago. It was supposed to be a short stay, maybe 6 months, to take a break from corporate kitchens and high stress cooking. I lasted all of two months before I decided to see what the Help Wanted sign in the cafe window was all about. After a short interview and a little trepidation on Ben's part [Ben Lewis, the previous owner], I was hired and began after the New Year.

I've spent the better part of the last 20 years helping others run their kitchens. I always had a dream of having my own small place, but didn't think it would be possible. I've fallen in love with this tiny restaurant in a tiny town, and finally made the decision that I should take on the challenge.

The GZP joins the whole community in wishing Meghan every success! And our congratulations to Ben and Doreen Lewis upon their retirement, as well as longtime staff member Dierdre Schebeck. They have been an invaluable part of our town!



Enhancements at the General Store Cafe: trimmed trees, new porch, new sign, new door ...

The Trucks of Hillsboro

After having moved around to a number of places, the old 1940 Ford Hillsboro firetruck now sits in an appropriately prominent spot in front of the Fire Station.



And speaking of old trucks in Hillsboro, how many of these do you recognize?





Villa Philmonte, Philmont Scout Ranch

**Historical Society of New Mexico
2026 Annual History Conference
“36 Hours in Philmont”
Cimarron, New Mexico, September 17-19
(Registration opening soon)**

Call for Presentation Proposals: due by April 17
<https://hsm.org/history-conference/>

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



Editor's Note

A year or two ago, Craig Springer sent me a photo of his mother in front of the National Register of Historic Places plaque at the Hillsboro Community Center, suggesting it would be a good item to include in the GZP. But from what he wrote, I could tell that there was a bigger story there—yet another of the tales of remarkable people who have been part of the community, and have made things happen for its benefit. So I asked Craig if he would expand his brief note into an article, which now forms the lead story for this month's edition. Thank you, Craig!

Meanwhile, the additional information also included herein about the resurgence of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church reminds us that this community has often been able to achieve great things, when people have collaborated together to move mountains, pushing some project forward against all odds—whether saving the High School, or reopening the church, or bringing home the Mountain Pride, or launching the new owner of the General Store into business.

Henry Ford once said, "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is a success." That thought could be applied to each of the stories in this issue of the GZP. It is a great joy as editor to be part of chronicling these examples of what can be done by a group of citizens (the "*paisanos*" of this journal's title!) who are determined to do good, and to be good for the sake of one another, even while maintaining the quirkiness and eccentricity of their individuality. What an amazing place! --Joe Britton

All photos in this issue are by the editor, except as otherwise noted.

EARTH DAY: April 22

Natural Curiosity is putting together a full slate of events in Hillsboro including yoga, arborist walks, tree planting with Tree or C, environmental lectures, and an evening swing dance. Watch for details!



Hillsboro Historical Society
Serving the Community since 2008

LAST CALL TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2026
(If you have already done so, thank you!)

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: _____

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP:	\$ 25.00
Additional contribution	\$ _____
Stage Stop Project contribution	\$ _____
Gift Membership(s): (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
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