



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

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Hillsboro Historical Society**

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**The Black Range Museum
A Tale of Daring, Imagination — and a Lot of Hard Work**

By Garland Bills

*“What the Hillsboro Historical Society has been able to accomplish since its founding is nothing short of a miracle.” — Harley Shaw**

Since the founding of Hillsboro in 1877, many individuals have labored to record bits and pieces of the history of the region. For decades the central repository for that effort has been the Black Range Museum. The Geronimo Springs Museum in Truth or Consequences, despite its claim, is not the oldest museum in Sierra County.[†] The Black Range Museum is older, by decades. In this article I attempt to describe the history of this small, but nevertheless consequential museum.

The story begins in the mid-twentieth century with a Silver City librarian and history buff who became infatuated with Hillsboro, as have many of us. This woman, Eve Simmons, was instrumental in setting up a library and museum in the abandoned elementary school up on Schoolhouse Hill on the northwest side of town. We have been unable to determine early details. After the elementary students moved to the old high school building (now Community Center) in the 1940s, the schoolhouse was used for public events such as dances. We may assume that Simmons’ venture into public cultural enrichment began during this period, before the old building was transferred to private hands.



Fig. 1: Black Range Museum and Library in building on right, late 1950s

An early photo demonstrates that Simmons’ “Black Range Museum and Library” was later moved to a more central location near the intersection of Main Street and Highway 27 (Fig. 1). It was in the house owned by Salomón Luna, which still stands between the buildings that are now Sue’s Antiques and the volunteer fire department. The vehicles in the photo suggest a date in the 1950s.

(continued on p. 4 ...)

* Harley Shaw, a founding HHS member, in an oral history with Nichole Trushell and Jeff Forbes, 19 March 2025.

* See <https://geronimospringsmuseum.org/>

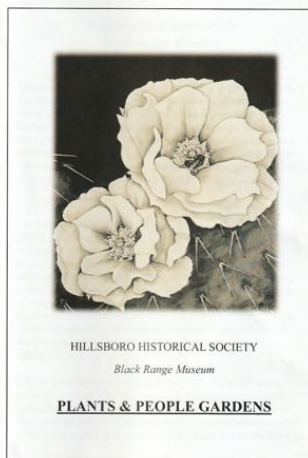
PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Members and Donors Appreciation Gathering April 25, 2026

April 25th was a joyful day that I will always remember. We had over 90 people in attendance at the Black Range Museum enjoying our new outdoor Courtyard space and the Mountain Pride exhibit.

Some highlights:

- The excellent event food and drink plus entertainment by poet Nancy Chapman Elliot and musicians Pint & A Half brought our time together alive.
- The Coach House felt complete with beautiful benches by Sean Gale and our new interpretive signage.



guidebook to the courtyard plantings. The cover image is "*Opuntia macrorhiza*," by Mara Trushell Guerrero.

- The Courtyard was close to completion, with finished elements including the patio with sun-sail shading, adobe walls providing definition to the space, and over 80 regionally native plants in place. Our *Plants & People Gardens* guidebook was available as a gift. This project was funded by a grant from the Native Plant Society of New Mexico for plant purchase and the first printing of the guide.

- More than a "backyard" – the Courtyard finished our Museum campus, linked our buildings, and provided a much needed gathering and educational space. The space worked well with a large attendance.

- Our new windmill now stands tall above the Courtyard bringing its own stories of area history, adding another fascinating element to the space.

We were very pleased to have in attendance at our celebration several New Mexico state-level Department of Cultural Affairs and museum staff, plus members of the Museum of New Mexico Board of Regents. Some of these were people that Steve Dobrott talked to and worked with for the return of the Mountain Pride. These guests noted that they were genuinely impressed and inspired to see the accomplishments of our small Museum, the Coach display, and by the development of the Museum Courtyard and planned outdoor interpretive displays.

None of this was possible without each of you, our volunteers, members and donors. As a former non-profit director, I am amazed by what can be accomplished in a very small community and an all-volunteer team. The depth of talent in our team and the community support that has created this success is remarkable.



(Left to right) Pictured are Gary Asteak, Garland Bills, and Steve Dobrott of the Hillsboro Historical Society; Jane Egan, Fred Barraza, Anne McCudden, Deputy Secretary Michelle Gallagher Roberts, Secretary Debra Garcia y Griego and Matthew Barbour of the Department of Cultural Affairs

Where will we go from here? To keep a museum vibrant, we must keep changing. We are planning more outdoor interpretation with the *Plants & People Gardens*, a new *Geology Time Walk*, *Second Saturday* morning programs in the Courtyard (see page 15), and will be expanding information in our existing exhibits. Our visitation is definitely up, and we believe that these new opportunities will bring still more visitors. We will need more volunteers – so *now* is a great time to join us!

The comment we frequently hear at the Black Range Museum is, “I have been to a lot of small museums, and this is one of the best ones I have experienced.” We have reached a critical and memorable marker in time for the Hillsboro Historical Society. I offer a grateful *thank you* to all who have played a part.

Nichole Trushell
HHS Board President



(Left to right) Steve Morgan, designer of the Stage Stop Project Courtyard, and HHS President Nichole Trushell; HHS past president Steve Dobrott and Janie Dobrott by the Mountain Pride; musicians Pint & A Half (Duke and Tami Sheppard, joined by Jeff Forbes) provide music for the occasion.



(Left) Guests enjoy the BBQ and music—in the background at left is Sadie Orchard in the hat and black dress (aka Susan Roebuck). (Right) The nearly completed Stage Stop Project Courtyard, with newly installed sun-sail, windmill and plantings

Photos by Val Hildreth-Werker

***A complete list recognizing all the donors to the Stage Stop Project
will be published in a later edition of the GZP.***

(... *Black Range Museum, continued from p. 1*)

The museum's second operator was Lydia Key, who reported coming to Hillsboro in 1952, so it's possible that she learned about and even became involved with the museum at this location (interview in the *Albuquerque Journal Magazine*, 26 August 1966). Key apparently transferred the contents of the museum-library to the present Black Range Museum building in 1961, locating the library part in a back room. We don't know what arrangement Key made with the building owner, Marie Disinger, who lived in the frame house next door. But when Disinger was killed in a flash flood on the Ladder Ranch in 1969, Key bought the property from Disinger's estate. When Key died in 1992, the museum property was inherited by her niece, Gloria June Anders.



Fig. 2: Photos of Lydia Key (top) and June Anders, which hang in the BRM Gift Shop

By 2016, after 55 years of private ownership, the Black Range Museum (BRM) was rarely open and the building had fallen into disrepair. The Hillsboro Historical Society (HHS), which had been formally organized in 2008, was anxious to save the historic building and its important collection. It carried out a successful fundraising effort to buy the BRM from June Anders. This money came exclusively from local supporters and the HHS membership. The Society has never received government support (neither county nor state nor federal), nor grants from any private or public entity. Exceptional gifts have been a \$1,000 grant from the Historical Society of New Mexico in 2021 for the purchase of computer equipment, the return of the Mountain Pride stagecoach from the Museum of New Mexico in 2025, and a grant in 2026 from the Native Plant Society of New Mexico for plantings in the new Courtyard.

With the purchase of the BRM in March 2016 (Fig. 3), the HHS immediately faced three major tasks: (1) mending the many troubles in this old, too little attended adobe building, (2) identifying and cataloging the historic artifacts contained in the museum, and (3) documenting the building's history.

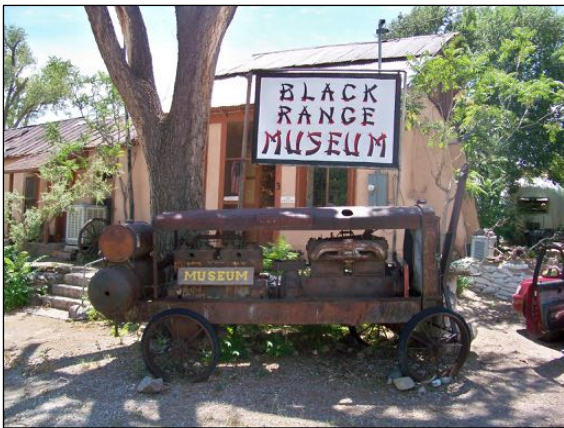


Fig. 3: The Black Range Museum as it appeared in 2016 at the time of its purchase by HHS

EMERGENCY REPAIRS

Those of us on the HHS board knew before buying it that the BRM building needed significant repairs. Inside were water-damaged ceilings, falling plaster, and infestations of rodents.

At the first rain, we discovered major leaks in the roof that required the addition of metal roofing by then-HHS president Larry Cospers and his brother Bruce. There were other leakage problems too. Water had been entering the building at ground level on the south side, undermining the walls, windows, a door, and the flooring – to the extent that tree-of-heaven roots and stems with leaves were growing on the inside of the adobe walls. Joe Ficklin's emergency

measures included adding cement along the foundation and installing gutters to divert precipitation to the east and west.

And there were water issues of a different kind. There was no water available inside or outside the building. There was a town water meter in front, but the line to the building had collapsed. HHS hired a Kingston plumber to run a line from the meter to a sink in a tiny room on the southeast corner. He also installed frost-free hydrants outside at the northeast and southeast corners.

But that interior water had to be protected from freezing, and the BRM in 2016 had no heating or cooling. A large, rusted-out swamp cooler was not functional, and of course there was no water available at that time anyway. A pellet stove in the front room was deemed too dangerous to use. We

purchased electric fans and space heaters, which were quite inadequate for many days in the summer and winter. Since the building's only electrical outlet was at the northwest entry, to connect a space heater in the southwest corner, we had to snake an extension cord through four rooms. Then there was the long, slow process of keeping the mice and rats out.

Such were the difficulties that the HHS had to deal with during the first year of our occupancy! Other badly needed structural repairs would have to wait. Except for one major concern.

Behind the museum is a unique 25-foot-tall round adobe water tower. As seen in the left photo below taken in 2017, this remarkable structure was in terrible condition with rotting wood and eroding adobe. We felt it was in danger of falling on the building. Our highest priority for restoration, therefore, was this unique tower. Rand Berger and Bruce Cosper took on the task, removing the metal tank and rebuilding the wooden platform, followed by strengthening, repairing, and plastering the adobe exterior. The metal tank was then put back on top, and a door and screens for the small window openings were installed (Figs. 4 and 5). This effort was completed in May of 2018.



Figs. 4 and 5: Water tower before and after repairs

CATALOGING THE CONTENTS

At the same time, we had to inventory the museum contents, guided by the advice of Toni Laumbach, then-director of the Farm and Ranch Museum in Las Cruces. For each artifact, the process consisted of “cleaning” (basically dusting off dirt, insect parts, and rodent droppings), identifying it as best we could, giving it an ID number, photographing it, deciding whether to leave it out for display or to box it up for storage, and entering everything into an Excel file on my laptop. The inventory was carried out principally by HHS Board members Barbara Lovell and me with the invaluable knowledge and guidance of Matti Nunn, Patti Nunn, Marilyn Poitras, Jody Manzara, and Matilde Holzwarth, who photographed each item with its number.

Cataloging existing museum contents along with new donations is a continuous, indeed endless, chore. In the first two years, we cataloged over 3,500 items. And it's important to point out that an “item” was not necessarily a single artifact. A set of six identical plates could be entered as a single item, and a box of closely related materials might be assigned a single number. At present the inventory file totals more than 5,200 entries.

However, after a couple of months of sorting and labelling we were able to re-open the museum, but with only three of the eight rooms accessible to the public – the two west rooms and Tom Ying's kitchen. To make coherent exhibits and use of space in the three rooms some items had to be moved out. Cataloging the contents of the other five rooms continued. The HHS soon purchased a 40-foot metal shipping container in which to store inventoried items that couldn't be exhibited. Dave Manzara volunteered to use his Bobcat to level the land on the west side of the backyard for placement of this storage container.



It didn't take long to decide that a metal container unprotected from the sun is not a good place to store historic materials. The HHS hired Bruce Cosper to build a wooden structure over the storage container, with the roof extended on the yard side to provide a covered area for outdoor exhibits (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6: The metal storage container under its new shed

DOCUMENTING THE BUILDING'S HISTORY

While these early repairs and cataloging were going on, Barb Lovell and I began research on the BRM building, exploring property records in the Doña Ana and Sierra County clerks' offices and tax records in Geronimo Springs Museum.

Sierra County was created in 1884, and county records show that our property was first claimed for the Hillsboro Hydraulic Mining Company. Yet Hillsboro had been established by prospectors and miners seven years earlier when the area was part of Doña Ana County, and records there revealed that already as early as 1881 the Hillsboro Hydraulic Mining Company was buying mining claims in the area.

So we seem to know who first owned the property (lots 2 and 3 of block 24). But when did the building actually appear on that property?

A floor plan of the building (Fig. 7) prepared for HHS in 2016 shows the eight rooms numbered. It is readily apparent in this plan that Rooms 3-8 form a perfect rectangle while the two rooms on the west (1 and 2) are non-squared and represent a later addition. Moreover, the front of the west section is aligned with Main Street as laid out in the first town plat drawn in 1884. The east section, on the other hand, lines up along Carro Lane. We must assume that the eastern section was older and that the western section was an add-on.



Fig. 7: BRM floor plan showing the eight rooms

When the BRM was later undergoing extensive renovations, we found an important dating clue around a window of Room 3. A mismatch between the window and the opening in the adobe required filling the gap with all sorts of papers. Some of these newspapers, letters, and other items carried a

legible date, the latest date being December 1883. We can be certain, then, that this room was completed no later than 1883. The off-kilter west two rooms must have been added later.

Our building appears in the following excerpt from the Sanborn-Perris insurance map prepared for central Hillsboro in 1893 (Fig. 8). But additional structures are present. Attached on the west are two long adobe buildings that are also aligned with Main Street. In addition, there is an extension to the back of the east end of our building as well as a separate adobe kitchen behind the west addition.

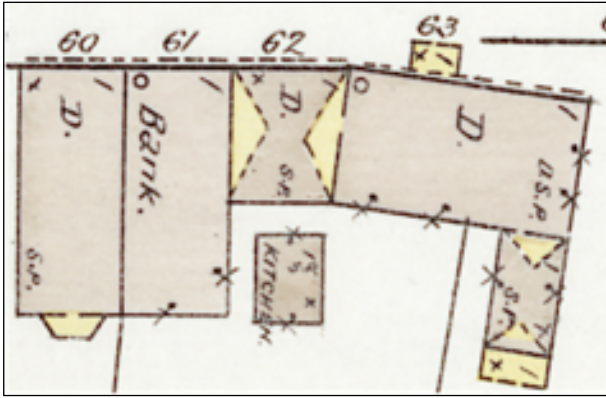


Fig. 8: Portion of 1893 Sanborn-Perris map showing BRM building

The 1898 version of the map is identical, but in the subsequent map of 1930, those two long adobes on the left as well as the kitchen and east extension are gone, resulting in the configuration of today. We've found no documentation of when they disappeared.

Research in property records and searching newspaper articles and ads document that the building with the two western extensions served many functions to the end of the 19th century – drugstore, post office, bank, boarding house, Sierra County administrative office, market, and other businesses.

Most important for the history of the BRM, however, is the fact that in 1900 the building was advertised in the local newspaper, the *Sierra County Advocate*, as the Ocean Grove Hotel under the proprietorship of Sadie Orchard. A widely published photo (Fig. 9) shows Sadie standing in front of that hotel with two other women. Though undated, judging by the women's dresses we may guess the photo was also taken around 1900. This photo depicts the front of the building basically as it looks today.

About 1915 Sadie made the momentous decision to bring in Tom Ying to run her restaurant.* In 1923 he claimed to own the property, though each of them paid half the taxes until shortly before Sadie's death in 1943. Tom lived in the building until his death in 1959, and the museum was established a year and a half later, preserving all he owned inside.



Fig. 9: Sadie Orchard's Ocean Grove Hotel, 1900

EXAMINING THE BUILDING CLOSELY

The architectural drawings whipped out for us in 2017 included sketches from each side of the building. The depiction from the north (Fig. 10) shows the building essentially unchanged from its structure in the photo of Sadie's hotel more than a hundred years earlier. Both show that the west portion is considerably taller than the eastern section. In addition, both depictions capture the fact that the west roof consists of two parts.

* See Garland Bills, "Tom Ying: The Hard Undaunted Life of an Early Chinese Immigrant to the Black Range," GZP 16/1 (February 2023).



Fig. 10: Elevation of north side of BRM in 2017



Fig. 11: Inside the attic over the BRM west section, 2017

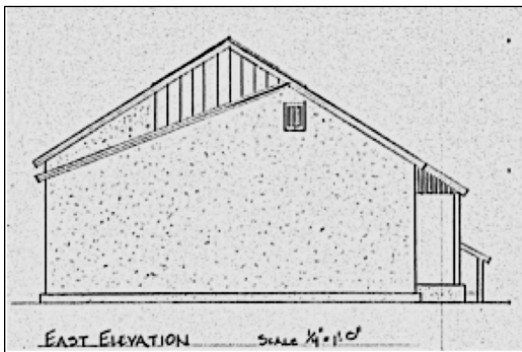


Fig. 12: East elevation showing BRM's two roofs, 2017



Fig. 13: In the attic of the east section looking north

Climbing onto the roof of the east part to enter the attic of the west part, I took a photo from just inside facing west (Fig. 11). Beneath an overarching higher roof, Rooms 1 and 2 each had its own pitched roof of wood shingles. The result of this strange construction was to create a trough in the middle, which would in effect dump half of any precipitation to the east and west sides – most significantly onto the lower roof of the east section! To correct this flaw, the higher overarching roof had been added even before the photo in Fig. 9 was taken.

The 2017 drawing of the east elevation (Fig. 12) reveals another structural oddity. The peak of the eastern part of the building is off center. Moreover, we could see that the metal of the long south pitch was much newer than the deteriorating metal roofing of the north pitch.

When the HHS bought the museum, three rooms of the eastern section had false ceilings that Anne Anders and her husband had put up in the 1980s. But now a large piece of sturdy plastic covered a gap where part of the false ceiling had fallen out in Room 4. Removing the plastic and peering around in the attic space, we were able to recognize two key features of earlier stages of the building.

First, Fig. 13 reveals that only the north half of the east section originally sported a pitched roof. And it too had wood shingles, not easily discerned under decades of dirt, dust, and grime. The newer long metal roof had been extended from that earlier peak all the way to the south side, accounting for the imbalance seen in the east elevation drawing.

Second, above the false ceilings in Rooms 4 and 6 there was another ceiling composed of pine vigas and sotol latillas (Fig. 14). The photo in Fig. 13 was taken facing east after the false ceilings were taken down. The latillas were covered with 8 to 10 inches of mud treated on the top to shed water. Indisputably, the original roof for these two rooms was almost flat and sloped to the south. Most concerning, we see the bending latillas under the weight of the mud. In fact, about a third of the latillas in Room 4 had already collapsed. This dangerous situation was one reason we could not open these two rooms to the public.



Fig. 14: Attic above Rooms 4 and 6 with latillas and mud forming original roof

In June of 2017 Steve Dobrott and I began the task of removing that original ceiling/roof, pulling off the mud chunk by chunk and taking down the latillas one by one as we freed them from their burden. It was a dirty, dusty, exhausting job. We hauled wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow of mud out the back door, dumping it along the extended foundation in yet another attempt to keep water away from those south walls. The photo below right illustrates how much mud was hauled out (Fig. 16). In the left photo we see Steve, masked way before COVID-19, at the last stage of clearing out the rooms (Fig. 15).



Figs. 15 and 16: (Left) Steve Dobrott clearing debris after removal of latillas and mud ceiling
(Right) Mud from the ceiling piled outside the building

To understand the original structure of this part of the building, it may be useful to consider Fig. 17 taken a year later of the north wall of this same Room 4. Through the doorway is Room 3, Ying's kitchen. Just above the doorway we see the level line of the plaster under the false ceiling. Above this are traces of old plaster that would have once reached up to the level of the latillas. The three big holes in the wall are where the pine vigas have been removed. Above these holes between the two layers of boards we see, not just stabilizing adobes, but the ends of three vigas that provided the original ceiling for Ying's kitchen; these vigas are of alder trunks, much smaller than the pine vigas. Finally, above the top board we see the trimmed ends of three rafters that supported the original pitched roof.



Fig. 17: North wall of Room 4, supporting the original roof

Examination of the deteriorating south walls in Rooms 4 and 6 revealed that this area must have originally been just a large patio covered by a flat roof. It appears that the space was open to the south except for being enclosed by a three-foot high rock wall. The rock wall had then served as a high foundation for the adobe wall later added above.

Thus, we surmise that the adobe above the rock wall as well as the adobe wall between the two rooms were not part of the first building illustrated in the 1893 insurance map. We see evidence on the far right of Fig.16 where the wall separating Rooms 4 and 6 abuts that north wall. Notice that the adobe bricks of the east wall are not interlaced with the adobes of the north wall, as would have been done in an original construction. It may also be noted that there is a significant gap between the two walls toward the top where a rag had been stuffed in. This indicates that the wall separating Room 4 and 6 was a later addition.

Another indication of the later construction of Rooms 4 and 6 can be appreciated in the photo at right (Fig. 18). When we removed most of the collapsing exterior wall, an odd device was revealed. A strong piece of wire had been tied around the added wall to bind it to what had been the original wall of Room 8, and a winding board had been used to tighten the joining of the two walls. Though not shown in this photo, there was again no interlacing of the adobes of the two walls, so the binding wire had been necessary.



Fig. 18: The winding board tightening the joining of two walls

RESTORATION AND RENOVATION

By the Spring of 2017 our concerns about the structural integrity of the building and our hope to restore this significant historic property led the HHS to hire a historic preservation architect, Jean Fulton, of Las Cruces, to do an assessment which she delivered in September 2017. This careful review guided our restoration and renovation efforts.

As we discovered more and more problems with the BRM building itself, the HHS Board of Directors carried out another fundraising effort. It was successful enough that the Board decided to close the museum in August 2018 and hired Bruce Cosper and Rand Berger to restore the building as far as funds would permit.

The work dealt first with the eastern section that had suffered so much deterioration. The first task was to empty those rooms. We completely filled the storage container as well as two enclosed trailers brought onto the property. Bulkier items that could better tolerate exposure to the elements were put outside under the container cover. Other large pieces were moved into the west section. Finally, we simply had to leave in place some of the heaviest items, such as Ying's cookstove and refrigerator, covering them with heavy plastic for protection.

The next step was to disconnect and raise by several feet the entire east section's roof (see Fig. 19). This was necessary in order to work unimpeded during the monsoon season on stabilizing the building's walls. Notice the still intact parts of the east portion. And on the still covered west section you can see, just below and to the left of the Eastern Star, the attic access I entered to photograph the design flaw there. Notice too the additional mud removed through the newly uncovered east door.



Fig. 19: Literally raising the roof on the east section

With the old roof raised and securely anchored, the collapsing exterior walls of Rooms 4 and 6 were taken out, and those walls were rebuilt with new adobes on top of the cemented rock wall, as seen in the photo to the right (Fig. 20). Openings were built for one window in each room. The photo also shows the cement bond beam set at the top of the wall as would be done for all other walls. The false and original ceilings in all six rooms were removed. The vigas and latillas from Rooms 4 and 6 were placed far out in the back yard for future use.



Fig. 20: Rebuilt adobe walls

Once these solid under-pinnings were in place, the old roof of the east six rooms – along with all ceilings, rafters, and vigas – was removed. In Fig. 21, we see Asa Cosper beginning the roof removal in October of 2018. A brand-new supporting structure of beams and rafters was then constructed over the now-stabilized walls.

Unfortunately, just fifteen days later, unexpected October rains required quick placement of tarps over the new roof structure. Even more unfortunate is that the old roof had already been removed from the west section, leaving those two rooms and all the things stored there unprotected; fortunately, no significant damage occurred.



Fig. 21: Asa Cosper removing the old east section roof



Fig. 22: New bond beam on top of wall dividing rooms

A new metal roof was installed over the east section, and the building of new wooden ceilings in all rooms except one. Bruce Cosper collected the best of the old vigas and latillas to make a model historic ceiling in Room 5. Modern insulation, not mud, was then applied above all rooms.

Similar procedures were followed for the west section of the building. In this case, however, the structurally sound ceilings were retained. With the roof slightly raised, bond beams were placed on all the walls (Fig. 22). The photo to the left shows the bond beam placed on top of the wall dividing the two rooms. Finally, the multiple levels of the old roofs were completely

removed and a new metal roof was constructed. New wood gables were built on the east and west sides of this higher roof.

Constructing the higher roof of the west section proved to be quite a challenge. The trapezoidal shape of Rooms 1 and 2 (see again Fig. 7) results from the fact that the front of this section is fully six feet wider than the back. Bruce Cosper's solution to the problem was to square the north pitch and to stagger the south pitch, as seen in the photo to the right (Fig. 23).

Inside the BRM there were many more renovations to be made. All the old electrical wiring was removed and replaced with adequate electrical service running through the attics. In every room, a ceiling box for lights and four wall outlets were put in place. Lights with motion sensors were installed outside each exterior door. This work was arranged through Jon Miller's NM Water & Electric company.



Fig. 23: Roof over the irregularly shaped rooms of the west section

Relatedly, the BRM finally got a modern HVAC system, also installed by Miller's company. A heating unit was installed in the attic above Room 4 and a cooling unit outside on the south. A duct system was added throughout the attics with a vent opening into each room.

All the interior walls required substantial and often extensive repairs. A particularly bad case was the west wall of Room 1, which in 2016 was covered with faux wood paneling. This is the wall that is supported by three buttresses on the outside. But it was still worse. The beadboard at the bottom of the wall was connected by three long bolts through the adobe to anchor boards on the outside. This bracing together with the buttresses was apparently needed to keep the wall standing.

With the walls stabilized, all interior walls throughout the building were then beautifully replastered by Rand Berger's team, with a final coat of Navajo white plaster. As final touches to the interior, many community volunteers (including Barbara Pearlman, Jan Haley, Jane Dobrott, Joe Ficklin, Nichole Trushell, Sherry Hartman, Steve Dobrott, and others) were involved in painting all interior wood surfaces in colors to match the old paint. I then cleaned and applied wood protectant to the original wood floors throughout the building. Steve Dobrott installed museum-appropriate track-lighting in all eight rooms.

Additional repairs were undertaken on the exterior of the museum. Volunteers repainted much of the exterior wood that could be reached. The wood at the entrance to Room 1 was badly rotted, so in June of 2019, Steve Dobrott used his handyman skills to remove all the damaged wood, which he then replaced with a smooth reinforced cement threshold.

These extensive repairs enabled us to re-open the renovated museum for the Labor Day weekend of 2019. However, we had to close the museum barely six months later because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, we were able to carry out more renovation work during the year and a half of being closed to the public during the pandemic. One advance was to have new gutters installed on the north and south sides of the building. In addition, new exterior stucco was applied on the entire building.

The street side of the BRM was enhanced by several efforts. First, Steve Dobrott moved to the backyard all of the large out-front metal pieces, mostly mining equipment. Fill was brought in to level the front yard, and in order to clearly bound the parking area in front, Nichole Trushell and Steve Morgan constructed an elegant curving stone wall from our driveway on the east to Sue's Antiques at the west end of our property.

At the same time, the HHS hired Bruce Cosper to construct in front of the building a raised boardwalk deck made of cedar. This 32' x 12' porch extends from the Ying kitchen door to the west end

of the building, where stairs lead down to the parking level. In addition, the boardwalk has a handicap ramp on the east side to the driveway. In connection with the outside ramp's improvement in wheelchair accessibility, Steve Dobrott installed ramps at all changes of floor level within the museum to provide visitors with still better wheelchair access.

To conclude this survey of the history of the Black Range Museum, consider the result of all these efforts as pictured in Fig. 24, taken in September of 2021:



Fig. 24: The Black Range Museum in 2021, after completion of the restoration

Of course, much more has happened over the past five years, as subscribers to this journal know well. Massive efforts by our Board of Directors, especially presidents Steve Dobrott and Nichole Trushell, and still greater fundraising have produced the new Coach House in back, now housing the 1889 Mountain Pride stagecoach, and the complete renovation and landscaping of the backyard.

All photos courtesy of the author or Black Range Museum.

“A goal that was once thought highly improbable to accomplish”

By Steve Dobrott

The following is a portion of my remarks at the event on April 25th, addressing the membership and supporters of HHS.

“We should be mindful that the accomplishments that we celebrate today represent not only the presence of the old stagecoach here behind me and all that you see around you in this amazing outdoor space and this wonderful little museum and its contents, but most importantly this all represents the hard work of a community of dedicated volunteers and donors with a common goal ... to preserve and exhibit our amazing history and to show others the importance of small town museums like this one for future generations of visitors who want to learn about our heritage, how we got here when it all happened, and why it is important to support these museums. Thanks to you the membership and this community, we proudly display our history here today on the grounds of your award-winning Black Range Museum.

“Today’s members gathering has a dual purpose: to celebrate the homecoming of the stagecoach that contributed mightily to the early development of this area, and to celebrate our nearly completed outdoor event and exhibit courtyard. But most of all, we gather to thank all those who shared the dream, trusted our resolve and commitment to accomplish great things for our organization and our community.

“This has all been made possible by the support of you, the members of the Hillsboro Historical Society, our donors, volunteers, and contractors. We welcomed the homecoming of the Mountain Pride after she first arrived back in Hillsboro on October 14th, 2025, with a follow-up community celebration late last year that was overwhelmingly attended. Today, at the cusp of the arrival of this nation’s 250th birthday, it is fitting that we celebrate this historic milestone for Hillsboro. Along with the Board of Directors of HHS, I am proud to honor and acknowledge all those who contributed to the success of this project. It just goes to show what can be accomplished by cooperation, dedication, and persistence to reach a goal that was once thought highly improbable to accomplish: the return of the Mountain Pride to Hillsboro.”



(Left to right) Volunteer Deirdre Schebeck serves a guest; Tom McEvoy studies the new interpretive signs in the Coach House; Val Hildreth-Werker and poet Nancy Chapman take a selfie; and food coordinator Karen Mast shows off her stagecoach-shaped cookies, flanked by Kristin Boren and Joe Britton



At the April 25 celebration, Debra Garcia y Griego, Cabinet Secretary for the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, spoke appreciatively of how “organizations like the Black Range Museum and Hillsboro Historical Society are really the heart of cultural preservation in New Mexico. They safeguard our stories that might otherwise be lost.”

Photos by Val Hildreth-Werker

SECOND SATURDAY PROGRAMS

Come join us each month in our new Courtyard as we take a journey through history.

June 13
Aldo Leopold:
Lessons the Southwest Taught Me
A Living History performance by Steve Morgan

July 11
The Perils of Progress Unchecked
An Environmental Story of Grant County
by Historian Dr. Stephen Fox

August 8
The Mimbres Peoples – A local story
They lived on the land here for over 1000 years.
A glimpse into their lives
with Steve Morgan and Lynn Curt

September 12
Family History Through Letters, Photos and Story--Why Those Stories are So Important
Genevieve and Paul Mitchell and others

October 10
A Walk Through Time
Come join us as we follow the journey of the Hillsboro region through geologic time
Rich Abitz, Jeff Forbes, Steve Morgan and others

November 14
A Day In 1890's Hillsboro
The People of Sierra County who were the grocers, the merchants, the blacksmiths, the cobblers, the teachers, the seamstresses, the ranchers, the preachers, the miners - the community members. A play about a day in 1890's Hillsboro.

Sponsored by the:
Hillsboro Historical Society
<https://hillsborohistoricalsociety.com>

Black Range Museum

3 Carro Lane
Hillsboro, NM 88042
10:00 am
2nd Saturday of the month

We hope to see you soon!

For questions about our upcoming events, please contact Steve Morgan, HHS Volunteer & Program Coordinator at:
aldoleopold1909@gmail.com





Bob Barnes Receives Conservation Award

Hillsboro resident Bob Barnes received the 2025 Conservation Champion Award from the Native Plant Society of New Mexico. With his wife Rebecca as his collaborator, Bob created the Black Range website 18 years ago (<https://blackrange.org>), later adding as a companion website the Black Range Naturalist (<https://blackrangenaturalist.org>). Material on both sites is free and available to all.

Here's the link to the NPSNM newsletter that tells on page 7 of Bob's work:

<https://www.npsnm.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/NPSNM-Newsletter-2026-01.pdf>

Editor's Note

Once again, Garland Bills has stepped up to provide our lead story, offering for this issue a comprehensive overview of the evolution of the Black Range Museum. And who better to do so? Garland has been deeply involved in developing the museum into what it has become today, so his account is not only that of an eyewitness, but of an originator and laborer in the process!

Of course, Garland's account comes at a significant moment for the Hillsboro Historical Society. The Mountain Pride has returned; it is housed in an elegant new Coach House; and the museum backyard has become an event space of which the whole community can be proud.

Gratitude is somehow too weak a word to express what we owe to everyone who has helped make all this possible. As Harley Shaw put it so neatly, it's "nothing short of a miracle!"

— Joe Britton

"36 HOURS IN PHILMONT"

The annual history conference of the
Historical Society of New Mexico

An immersive, experiential gathering at the
Philmont Scout Ranch, Cimarron, NM
September 17 – 19, 2026



Lucien Maxwell House in Rayado on the Santa Fe Trail at
Philmont Scout Ranch, est. 1848.
Photo public domain, via WikiCommons.

Registration opens in early June at:
www.hsnm.org/history-conference/

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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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