



CULTURA DE LAS MONTAÑAS

<http://eastmountainhistory.org>

EAST MOUNTAIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY Newsletter

First Quarter 2018

A Promise Kept: Locals Revive Dance Dedicated to Patron Saint of Captives



On Dec. 16, celebrants sang as they rounded the historic church in La Madera, part of the Comanchitos Dance.

Photos and text by Denise Tessier

Moises Gonzales says as a child, family and friends would gather for barbecue after Catholic Church on Sunday, and Gonzales' grandfather "always told a story I thought was fiction." The story told by his grandfather basically was this:

"I was born in La Madera and we were Indians; we were Comanche. Then we became Apaches, and we'd hunt buffalo and bring back all these captives."

Gonzales says he never understood why his grandfather said these things. "I never processed it." He has since learned that what his grandfather said was true.

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'Memories of Torreón'

Judy Alderete Garcia will share stories she collected for her book, *Memories of Torreón, New Mexico*, at a free public presentation sponsored by the East Mountain Historical Society. Join us at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 29, at the historic church in Tijeras, in the little park next to the library. See story page 5.

A Promise Kept: continued from pg. 1

The capture and enslavement of children is an aspect of New Mexico history long overlooked, ignored or disbelieved. Confirmed by scholarly research, this history is now coming out of the shadows through a number of articles, including by Gonzales, who pointedly has researched this complicated part of the state's Spanish colonial history as an assistant professor at the University of New Mexico.

But in recent years, Gonzales – with others for whom this history is truly personal – has gone beyond recounting the story to reviving a ritual dance. The Comanchitos Dance historically was performed to initiate new captives into the community, commemorating them to Santo Niño, the patron saint of captives.

For two years in a row, just before Christmas,

Gonzales and others performed have the Comanchitos Dance in the East Mountain community of La Madera, dancing while their cohorts drummed and sang words of prayer to the “*niño precioso*” (precious child), honoring the spirit of grandparents and others who were captives and slaves. In doing this, Gonzales kept a promise to his great aunt: that he would revive the dance in La Madera, where his grandfather was born.

In 2016, dancers performed on a cold wintry December day near the former plaza of La Madera. This past December, the day was sunny and the dancers had permission to dance and circle around a now-private home that was once the village church.

Some who danced, and a few of the observers (including several EMHS members), later described the experience as, at times, profound. Some attributed this to being on the historic church grounds. Some, including this writer, noticed that at the end of the hour-long ceremony, as participants took turns asking remembrance of specific family members, a hawk circled continuously overhead, dark against the bright blue sky. As the last remembrance was voiced, the hawk departed.

The last time the dance was done in La Madera was probably in the 1940s or '50s, Gonzales said. Its practice was fading and, according to Dorela Perea of San Antonito, the Comanchitos was incorporated at this time into one step of the Matachines dances, Gonzales said.



Before dancing by the church, those in the procession that started on the main highway stopped to dance on La Madera's original plaza. Gonzales is at left, in white headband.

A Promise Kept: continued from pg. 2

On Dec. 10, six days before the 2017 dance, Gonzales spoke to a large group of EMHS members and friends at the Carnuel Land Grant Hall to explain the history of the ceremony they would be seeing the following weekend.



After circling the historic village church several times, dancers stopped by its south wall to conclude the dance.

He said his grandmother and great aunt used to sing songs of the Comanchitos Dance, and his great aunt instilled in her nieces and nephews the importance of honoring Santo Niño – the saint of captives. His great aunt said to him, “You know the songs. Promise me you will dance to Santo Niño.”

Gonzales moved to Boston and back before he was able to

fulfill his promise. Earlier, when he and his cousins had gotten together to sing, his aunt had said they were “singing it wrong.” After that, Gonzales put much effort into getting the songs and steps right, and those sung at La Madera are a coming together of what Gonzales and his cousins learned as children with what his distant cousins in Placitas perform every year. “Placitas is where (the dance is) strongest in its current form.”

The Comanchitos dance is experiencing a resurgence, attracting new communities and thriving where it has traditionally been performed, according to Gonzales. This past year, a group from the historic Atrisco neighborhood in Albuquerque asked to join Gonzales’ group so they could learn the dance, and they performed it the day before Gonzales’ talk. Bernalillo residents say the dance has protected them since the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, Gonzales said.

He showed a slide from Ranchos de Taos, where on New Year’s Day participants dressed as Comanche to do the dance. Kiowa and Comanche captives who came of age and settled in Abiquiu are credited with keeping the dance alive in that village, which has two plazas – Moque (Hopi) and *Plaza de Genizaros*. The Abiquiu dance is a hybrid of “Hopi mixed with Utes,” Gonzales said. “Because it integrated Spanish elements,” the Matachines Dance is the only indigenous dance allowed by the Catholic Church, he said.

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A Promise Kept: continued from pg. 3

During Gonzales' talk at the land grant hall, EMHS board member Marie Herrera Dresser said she used to sing some of the Comanchitos songs Gonzales had described. She said they were part of the Catholic rosary she heard at Tecolote, a village south of Sedillo.

The Comanchitos Dance was first done before Christmas, attached to the centuries-old Las Posadas tradition as a way of initiating new captives into the Spanish colonial community. Most of these captives worked as house servants or in the field. Their Spanish "hosts" were responsible for educating, Christening and then freeing them to marry when they became adults. These captives raised in Spanish homes are known as *genizaros*.



Marie Herrera Dresser (third from left) tells Moises Gonzales she sang some of his Comanchitos songs as part of the Catholic rosary.

Gonzales noted that in colonial times, the men of San Antonio, N.M., the East Mountain village where Gonzales' mother was born, had to leave for months at a time in order to economically survive, hunting buffalo and trading on colonial New Mexico's staked eastern plains – the *llano estacado*. He said the men would return with meat and products from buffalo hides – and slaves.

"A lot of captives were brought into families in the East Mountains," Gonzales said. Spain allowed trade fairs in Taos and Palo Verde (Amarillo, Texas), where Comanche, Ute, Pawnee, Shoshone, pueblo Indians and New Mexico families came together, and "it was actually a slave trade market." Metal, chile, bread and horses were traded, Gonzales said, and "a young captive was equal (in value) to a mule."

"We don't want to talk about Native American slavery in our families" but it is the reality, Gonzales said. Mestizos, *genizaros*, Spanish conquerors and Native Americans make up this *comancheria* – an ethnic melting pot, he said.

The East Mountain area has its share of this melting pot, where all descendants of the Carnuel and Las Huertas (Placitas) Land Grants who have been tested and have shared that knowledge with each other have been shown to have Native American DNA, Gonzales said.

This is what Gonzales' grandfather was talking about at those Sunday barbecues. Comanche captives became part of the story during the early 1800s, when East Mountain villagers hunted buffalo on the plains; Apache became part of the picture in the late 1800s, when Apache raids of East Mountain villages like San Antonio occurred, "before the forced removal of the Apache in the 1860s."

Gonzales said his father was proud of his Native American ancestry. In talking about "we" being Comanche, and "we" becoming Apache, he was speaking not only of his family, but the East Mountain land grant communities as a whole.

'Memories of Torreón' To Be Shared at April Public Event

Judy Alderete Garcia will share stories she collected for her book, *Memories of Torreón, New Mexico*, at a free public presentation sponsored by the East Mountain Historical Society in April. The talk will begin at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 29, at the historic church in Tijeras, in the little park next to the library in Tijeras.

Garcia describes her book as a collection of stories about the people of Torreón, written "to preserve the unique culture, history and traditions of the people of the Manzano Mountains." She says it is also "a way to educate others about the ever-changing culture of New Mexicans."

Garcia was born and raised in Albuquerque, but spent many weekends in Torreón as a child visiting her grandparents. Garcia holds a bachelor's degree from the University of New Mexico with a double major in Spanish and Women's Studies and a minor in Chicano Studies. She plays New Mexico music on Thursday nights on 89.1 KANW.

Her book will be available for sale at her talk. EMHS will also be selling our 2018 photo calendar, "*East Mountains: Then and Now*", our vanishing historic sites map, Route 66 postcards and EMHS T-shirts sized Small to XXXL. Refreshments will be served.

2018 Officers, Directors Elected at Annual Meeting

Beverly Neville, who has served several years on the board of directors, the last two years on the executive committee as secretary, was elected president at our annual membership meeting in November, replacing **Denise Tessier**, who declined to run after serving as president seven years. At the meeting, the membership also elected to the executive committee these officers: Vice President, **Sandra Walton Lee**; Treasurer, **Rick Holben**; and Secretary, **Dick Brown**.

Elected to the board of directors were: **Anabel Sanchez**, **Kathy Rich**, **Kris Thacher**, **Joyce Mendel**, **Gerry Jones**, **Roland Curtis**, **Marie Herrera Dresser** and **Denise Tessier**. *See past president's 2017 annual report on page 6.*

Readers of New Mexico history might appreciate this list of Spanish measures shared by EMHS member **Ronald Lah**, who found them in an article on Henry Flipper, first black graduate of West Point. Flipper worked as a surveyor for U.S. companies holding concessions on Mexican public lands, Lah says, and from 1893 to 2001, researched Mexican archives, prepared court materials, and served as an expert witness.

1 acre = 5,645 square varas

1 chain = .48 cordel

1 sitio = 4,338 acres

1 acre = 5,645 square varas

1 cordel = 137.5 feet

1 legua ("league") = 2.6 miles

1 caballeria = 107.5 acres

The following is the immediate past president's 2017 annual report, given during the annual membership meeting in November, just before 2018 elections.

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Because this is my last report as president, this morning I looked at the minutes from my first meeting as president, just to get the date. It was Nov. 6, 2010. Seven years ago. We were in the midst of moving our materials from a room in UNM to the Visitor's Center conference room, what is now Brandy's hair salon. After our regular board meeting on that day, the board held a planning session, and during the session, I wrote up all our ideas on a white dry erase board. Frankly, I'm astounded, looking at the list that resulted, because we took off from there and literally never looked back at the list. We kept looking forward. What is astounding is that we accomplished nearly all of it. Let me read some of the goals from that meeting in 2010:

- Conduct oral histories of East Mountain residents, and get a grant to do it.
- Contract for oral history training.
- Purchase equipment for doing oral histories.
- Document the oral history process to share with other historical societies.
- Create/sell a map of East Mountain landmarks and places.
- Write up histories of villages, one at a time.
- Create a list of old/new place names.
- Create greeting cards/calendars of East Mountain landmarks.

We accomplished all these things because we have had an incredible board, and have the support of YOU, the membership. Speaking of which, one of our members yesterday brought us this fabulous new PA system. Donated it. This is another move forward, so that our members and the public can better hear our public education programs. The donor has asked not to be publicly named. We thank you.

You know, after a few years as president, every year at this time I've invited someone to take over as president, but to be clear, I have thoroughly enjoyed doing this. I love working

with and have the greatest respect for my fellow board members. These folks are always ready to tackle a new project and just get things done. I'd like to talk about some of these board members.

Chuck Van Gelder, who led our field trips and was a founding member, left a big hole when he moved to TorC, but before he left, he introduced us to **Kris Thacher**. Kris has been a power house. She spearheaded our prize-winning Centennial Oral history project, which led to creation of "Mapping Our Vanishing Past," the display map that this year traveled to the East Mountain Library, Moriarty, and the Special Collections library in Albuquerque. It's now back at East Mountain. It will go to genealogy library in Albuquerque after the winter. Kris is now heading up our Book Committee, which is putting together perhaps our most ambitious project: a companion book to the map explaining each and every place on it, plus stories and traditions and vignettes from the vast research we've done over the years. Sound familiar? (See our list of goals.)

One of my favorite days as president was when we held an open house with our photo panel exhibit about six years ago and **Rick Holben** and **Sandra Walton Lee** walked in. Not at the same time, but both joined our group that day.

Sandra is a treasure, willing to do whatever is needed. She's helped us with research. Her homemade cookies are on the table in back. She's great at selling – our products and our organization. She sold our postcards to the Owl Café and once sold a membership to a stranger on a plane, she was so excited to talk about our group. She's on the book committee, has served on the board several years and is running for VP.

Rick is the reason we've been able to create our postcards and photo calendars – shooting "Now" photos to complement the "Then," providing photos from his own collection and captions. He has become our chief researcher, producing many of the timelines that will appear in our

book. He is also our treasurer and handles all the mailing of orders placed on our web site, no small task. (Note: Purchases made at the annual meeting put the treasury over \$5,000 for the first time in our history, an annual increase we've seen because of sales of calendars, maps, postcards and books, including one by Rick.)

Kathy Rich, the daughter of founding member **Pat Rich**, is the reason we have been able to produce these calendars, maps, postcards, and now T-shirts. As printer and owner of East Mountain Graphics, she's produced or brokered deals for the printing of these items and the printing of our six by six display map. She created our letterhead and business cards. She also took over from me maintenance of our web site, and in 2018 will be changing the framework of our site so it complies with Google standards. She added the PayPal feature to the web site and added the page that is our online store.

Gerry Jones stepped in as an experienced treasurer when Pat unexpectedly died, and to our added benefit he is, like Sandra, and **Marie Herrera Dresser** and **Anabel Sanchez** and **Margaret Garcia**, a native child of the mountains, who provides us with history about the area on the spot during discussions.

Andre Larroque, while no longer on the board, has continued to support us as our preservation consultant. It's because of Andre that the North 14 Sector Development Plan written in 2011 includes mention of us and the possibility of locating a history museum at the trailhead of the Gutierrez Canyon/Milne Open Space, which we actively supported.

Marie, like Anabel, is a past president. She's a founding member, who's led panels and field trips and is our resident expert on all kinds of history – places, songs, families. She's another powerhouse, always ready to lead and to help.

Joyce Mendel has been coming to our board meetings for years, providing valuable input. She's co-founder of the society, a past president, and conducted most of our early oral histories.

She will formally come back to the board with today's elections.

Anabel has always been there for us. She is doing membership now, but she's the one who as treasurer got our 501c3 status and she still fills out our annual tax and corporate forms. She's on our book committee and like the rest of the board, provides valuable input and perspective.

Beverly Neville joined our group when Andre was president and she shared her knowledge of camel trail history at one of our public talks. She's currently secretary and is another who's been there to do whatever needs to be done, working on the map committee and now the book committee. She's our candidate for president. She's also hosting our holiday party at her home Dec. 9. Anabel is sending invitations with your annual dues renewal notices.

Running to replace Bev as secretary is **Dick Brown** – a writer who has joined our book committee and who will be giving a public lecture for us next year. Dick wrote the article in our recent newsletter about the Japanese submarine that went through Tijeras Canyon, and he's also agreed to regularly proofread the newsletter for me. Thank you, Dick.

Roland Curtis, our program director, just led our incredible field trip to the Ojito Wilderness and, in addition to the Comanchitos talk at Grant Brewing on Dec. 10, is already lining up programs for next year, including a talk on Little Beaver Town by another Roland, Roland Pentilla, who has agreed to accompany us on a field trip to the site at the mouth of the canyon right after the talk, weather permitting. These dates will be in the newsletter.

Speaking of which, I will continue writing the newsletter and taking care of publicity. I am on the book committee and will continue to be heavily involved in this group. I'm not going away. . . .

Denise Tessier

The Rise and Fall of ‘Little Beaver Town’

On July 16, 1961, more than 5,000 showed up at the mouth of Tijeras Canyon for the opening of Little Beaver Town, site of a mercantile, daily gunfights, stagecoaches, a steam train, horse and burro rides and a Red Bull Saloon featuring can-can dancers, live music, a balcony and a bar (but no alcohol). By October 1963, however, the place was abandoned, its expenses far surpassing ticket sales.



Historic Photo courtesy Roland Penttila

Roland Penttila described Little Beaver Town’s rise and fall Feb. 11 during a free public talk sponsored by EMHS. Afterward, he led a car caravan to the site, where we imagined the white plaster teepees that marked each end of the entrance (and saw some of their chicken-wire/plaster remains). Then he held a picture of the amusement park up along the skyline across I-40 and we could envision how the “town” had looked (see photo below).



Photo by Denise Tessier

Earlier, Penttila had described how in early 1960, a group of retired Standard Oil executives sold stock at \$3/share, obtained a lease on the land along Route 66 and partnered with artist Fred Harman to create Little Beaver Town. Harman was creator of the newspaper strip “Red Ryder and Little Beaver,” whose crime-fighting characters were featured in comic books, a radio show, TV series and more than 30 movies. Harman had a studio at Little Beaver Town, where visitors could see him work.

Penttila said kids bought “Little Beaver” headbands with feathers while visiting, and an ad in 1961 even suggested parents leave their children at the park while attending the New Mexico State Fair. It was a good run at first, but attendance fell off so much that Harman mortgaged his home in Albuquerque and lost it. He stopped drawing Red Ryder comics and spent the rest of his life in Colorado, painting Western scenes in oils. After Little Beaver Town was abandoned, Penttila said, the saloon briefly became “The Palace,” used for community charity events, and later “Sage City,” where dances were held.

Penttila said it’s likely the park failed because New Mexico has plenty of authentic Wild West and Native American history, and didn’t need a fake “town.”

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The EMHS Newsletter aims to inform members and prospective members of EMHS events and endeavors, including committee work, and to serve as a record of society activities. It is also a forum for stories about the area. Please send your ideas or stories for future newsletters to the Editor, P.O. Box 379, Cedar Crest, NM 87008, or by email:
newsletter@eastmountainhistory.org

All stories and photos by Denise Tessier unless noted otherwise. Thanks to **Dick Brown** for proofing.

Mission Statement

The Mission of the East Mountain Historical Society is to identify, preserve and present to the public the history and culture of the East Mountain area. EMHS will assist in protecting historical and landscapes, artifacts, records, or any item considered to be of historical significance. EMHS will also identify, collect and archive historical material of significance to the area.

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News and Notes . . .

Welcome to our newest members: **James Hickerson** of Cedar Crest; **Richard Holben** of Albuquerque (formerly of Cedar Crest); **Rachel and Paul Fleissner** and **Vernon Willan**, all of Sandia Park; and **Phillip Ward, Dianne Rossbach**, and **Linda McDowell**, all of Albuquerque.



The Historical Society of New Mexico is hosting its annual conference April 19-21 in Alamogordo. EMHS Secretary **Dick Brown** is among the many presenters. For registration information and a list of programs, visit hsnm.org.



Many thanks to newly elected **President Bev Neville** for hosting at her lovely home our annual holiday potluck in December. Great food and conversations!



Joyce Mendel and **Anabel Sanchez** have been organizing our photo archives, and are investigating programs for managing a searchable database of those photographs.



Bernalillo County has “closed to all use” **Carlito Springs Open Space** in Tijeras Canyon, saying it needs to keep out the public while it works on fire suppression, improvements to the road leading to the spring, a potable water system, and a wastewater disposal system at the structures located at the spring. Duration of the closure of the popular historic site is “until further notice,” the county said.



Alfredo Martinez of the Chilili Land Grant Council is collecting photos, stories and data to preserve the land grant community’s history. EMHS has agreed to help him interview elders and scan photos in Chilili from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday April 22, at the Chilili gym. Martinez plans eventually to compile the information in a book.

You're Invited – *Please, Mark Your Calendars*

April 22 (Sunday) – **Alfredo Martinez**, with his cousin **Anabel Sanchez** and other members of EMHS, will scan Chilili-area family photos and memorabilia for preservation and eventual use in Martinez' book, in **Chilili**, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the Chilili gym.

April 29 (Sunday) – **Author Judy Alderete Garcia** will share stories she gathered for her book on Torreon, at 2 p.m. in the little historic church west of the Tijeras library. Free and open to the public.

Have you renewed yet? Would you like to become a member?
Please join us and support our efforts.

You may join online and pay by credit card/PayPal by visiting our website at
eastmountainhistory.org.