



# Corner of the World

Since 1934, a lone business on an empty plain has stopped traffic with nearly all the necessities—and quite a few oddities. **BY KATE NELSON**

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY GABRIELLA MARKS



CLINES CORNERS

PHILLIPS  
66

66

FINE ACRES  
OF  
TRUCK PARKING  
RESTROOMS

Between Santa Rosa  
and Albuquerque,  
Clines Corners  
stands like a beacon  
on the prairie.

# First the oil pump broke, then the semi's electronic control unit killed the engine, and now Frank Felty and Ronald Woodruff are stuck in Clines Corners.

George Everage's family photo album includes this early iteration of Grandfather Roy Cline's compound.



**“In no marketing book does it say, ‘Get them to stop for the bathroom and they’ll spend \$20,’ but they do. And if they’re hungry, they’ll eat.”**

They don't yet know that they just joined a legion of other people in the broke-down-in-Clines-Corners club, a select group whose tales of woe haunt the arrays of John Wayne shot glasses, shelves of glitter globes, pillars covered with Route 66 magnets, and a couple of taxidermy jackalopes. A few more hours of drizzle will fall upon the high and otherwise barren plains before a tow truck can drag their rig to Albuquerque, 60 miles west.

Felty pushes around the last of his Subway breakfast on a paper plate and shrugs. “I've been driving for a lifetime. What makes a great place to stop is food and coffee. That about does it. Plus the restrooms. This is a good one. We'll pass the next few hours eating and drinking, walking around, looking at all the jewelry. After a while we'll say, ‘Oh, my daughter would like this necklace.’”

With that, he sums up all that elevates this outpost in the near middle of New Mexico into a gotta-stop cabinet of curiosities. It's a service station, convenience store, restaurant, curio shop, fudge shop, candy shop, rock shop, jewelry shop, post office, RV park, and surprisingly good place to score Ariat boots and Pendleton purses—with the bonus of clean restrooms and a Zoltar fortune-telling machine. Miles before you arrive at the intersection of US 285 and I-40, a fusillade of billboards bullet-point the many delights it can deliver. SPOONS. THIMBLES. ICE. CHILE. KEYCHAINS.

Wait—people need thimbles?

No! Let's stop anyway.

Starting in May, Clines Corners will premiere even more attractions. A full-service truck stop with a laundromat, showers, and five acres of overnight parking. Package liquor sales starring New Mexico craft beers and spirits. La Cocina, a 6 a.m.-to-10 p.m. restaurant serving enchiladas and margaritas. Fireworks, fireworks, fireworks.

As first a pioneer and now a vestige of the overblown roadside stops that once lined old Route 66 (“Live rattlesnakes!” “Stagecoach rides!”), Clines Corners has served nearly every need of the motoring public since 1934. Through four owners, countless snowstorms, and an eternity of broken-down-in-Clines-Corners stories, it stands as a fortress of goodness, unifying the lowbrow with the gourmet, the biker with the sophisticate, and me with a dizzying choice of miniature personalized license plates. I'm leaning toward REBEL when General Manager Jeff Anderson approaches me so fast he's almost a blur, braking on his way to a ceiling reconstruction crisis, part of the truck-stop project.

“The whole concept here,” he says, “is people stop to use the bathroom, and we get them to spend \$20 on rubber snakes and tomahawks. And it works. In no marketing book does it say, ‘Get them to stop for the bathroom and they'll spend \$20,’ but they do. And if they're hungry, they'll eat.”

**ROY “POPS” CLINE WAS, AT BEST, AN OPPORTUNISTIC entrepreneur.** That's according to his grandson George Everage, a retired Albuquerque accountant, who loved hearing his parents and grandparents wax on about the

COURTESY OF GEORGE EVERAGE



Fortunes, pottery, tchotchkes, and food attract customers 24 hours a day.

**From left:** Roy Cline Jr. and “Pops” Cline. Two of the Cline girls. George and Mae Lucille Everage.



Clines Corners persisted, still local and still the only business for miles and miles around, all 40,000 square feet of it standing as a beacon of human interest and corporate relief amid lonely, rolling ranchland.



olden days and can still reel off their tales. From the 1910s through the 1920s, Cline, his wife, their son, and six comely daughters flitted from California to Oklahoma, then to Rutherton, near Tierra Amarilla, where Pops ran a post office plus a nickel theater in a tent before freezing winters persuaded them to head south. He traded the post office for a chicken farm that turned out to have a dugout for a home, so he traded that for a hotel in Buford, which hadn't yet transformed into Moriarty.

The girls were a great workforce, and soon Pops could pay for a bunch of acreage out where old Highway 6 crossed Highway 2—"highway" being, in those days, a relative term. Highway 6 was little more than a dirt road bulldozed across the state's beltline. Through Tijeras Canyon, it looked more like a cow path. By 1926, westbound motorists could take the paved Route 66 north out of Santa Rosa, loop through Santa Fe, and drop down to Albuquerque. But drivers looking at maps likely thought Highway 6 would be the faster route and chose it. Pops opened not one but two service stations, a Standard and a Conoco, set across the way from each other to catch them coming or going.

On the rare occasions when the bulldozed route changed, he moved his make-shift stations. And when a political tussle in Santa Fe resulted in a complete realignment of Route 66 straight through his acreage, Pops hit the goldmine. He built a neat white box of a store emblazoned with his name: Cline's (with, yes, an apostrophe). He served 15-cent bowls of chili that drew people from miles

away. And he made more profit fixing flats than filling tanks, roads being what they were.

From 1938 to 1940, he and the family weathered some of the worst blizzards the state has ever seen. Perched above 7,000 feet, with nothing but barbed-wire fences to buffer the blasts, Clines Corners (without the apostrophe, as the maps came to call it) has always suffered Mother Nature's contrary side. Everage flips past picture after picture of snowdrifts so high they threatened to topple the outhouse. "And when the snow melts," he says, "the soil out there is nothing but caliche that turns into clay. Everybody would get stuck."

Eventually Pops sold the operation to a couple of state policemen and hauled the family to Kingman, Arizona, where he opened a similar enterprise near Hoover Dam. It went great until World War II erupted and all the nation's gasoline, food, and labor turned to the war effort. Then Pops brought the family to Vaughn ("He bounced," Everage says of the man's admirable rebound percentage), where he ran the Doxie Hotel and made the most money of his life, selling plates of food and bottles of whiskey to fellows heading out on the troop trains that rolled through every day.

In the 1950s, Pops opened Flying Cline Ranch, a competitor to his original store, about 19 miles east on Route 66, changing the name to Flying C after the new owners of Clines Corners threatened to sue him. Everage's

COURTESY OF GEORGE EVERAGE

father, also named George, had married the prettiest of the Cline girls, Mae Lucille, and sometimes helped at Flying C, which had 48 employees each summer, served lunches to 22 busloads of people a day, and illegally kept five slot machines that covered every penny of the overhead. Little George got a good look at the roadside stops then lining Route 66. “Between Clines Corners and Santa Rosa, there were 25 to 30 of these mom-and-pop places,” he says. “One would have a zoo in the most terrible conditions. One had a bear. Every place had one or two emaciated rattlesnakes.”

By then the Clines Corners cops had parted ways, one of them opening yet another Route 66 enterprise, the Longhorn Ranch, a faux Western town in Moriarty with stagecoaches, Indian dances, and “a museum with antique firearms and two-headed calves,” Everage says.

Once airplane travel became safer and more affordable, the roadside stops dried up. Remnants of the Longhorn Ranch sign are visible, but not much else. With the advent of interstates and a business shift away from freighting goods on the railroad in favor of using big rigs, the few survivors grew into sprawling truck plazas, now mostly owned by national conglomerates like Love’s, Flying J, and Travel Centers of America.

Clines Corners persisted, still local and still the only business for miles and miles around, all 40,000 square feet of it standing as a beacon of human interest and corporeal relief amid lonely, rolling ranchland.

“THERE’S SOME OLD SAYINGS IN THE business,” says current owner George Cook. “One of the most important is ‘Buy the merchandise right.’ That means volume buying. I’m the biggest buyer of souvenir merchandise in New Mexico.”

Besides Clines Corners, Cook owns the Covered Wagon, a sprawling tourist mecca on the Old Town Plaza, in Albuquerque. He’s had the Sundancer Trading Company and Thunderbird Curio shops at the Albuquerque Sunport for 32 years and operates three joints near his family’s homestead: Taos Trading, Taos Cowboy, and Taos Mercantile.

“I used to come out here when I was a kid,” he says while taking a break in a vinyl booth at Clines Corners’ Subway shop. “My dad had a jewelry display here. I got to know everybody. I saw the opportunity.”

Today he owns 1,500 acres, much of it frontage along I-40 and US 285, enabling

him to pepper the area with his Burma Shave–like billboards. “Only advertising I need,” he says. He offers employees enough trailer-park housing to handle up to 30 families, which sweetens the deal for the ones who slog through the overnight shifts or get stuck there during occasional snowstorms.

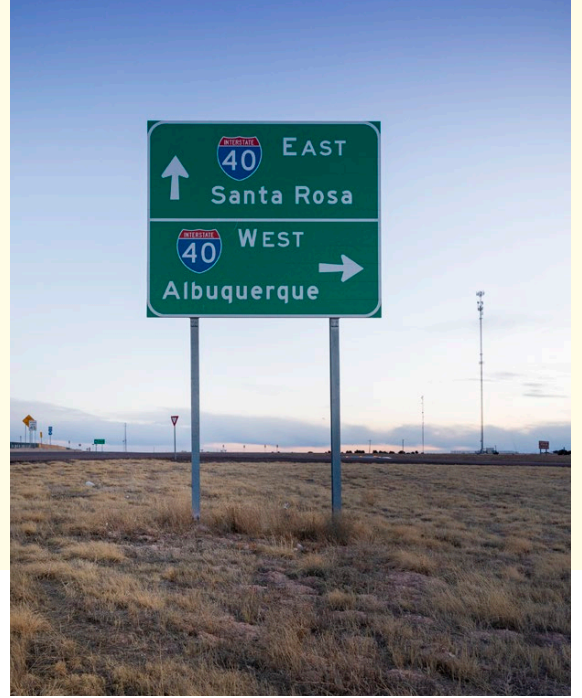
Stephanie Urioste, who helps Anderson, the general manager, with Clines Corners’ day-to-day affairs, has seen her share of the latter. “If they shut the interstate, those workers and travelers who are here stay here,” she says. “We open the restaurant, there are people everywhere, trucks everywhere. It’s chaotic.”

But last year, she recalls, when morning dawned after a monster snowstorm, one of those stranded folks, a stranger to all, grabbed a shovel and got to work digging out motorist after motorist. “Sometimes a random person, you don’t know what they’re going to do,” she says.

The lion’s share of the clientele comes from Texas, especially during winter. They turn north after stocking up and head to the ski areas in Santa Fe, Taos, and Colorado. Come summer, people from all over the world pack into the aisles, and with so many customers, you may not notice there’s a colossal buffalo head



Owner George Cook with his son Nicholas, who's learning the family business.



Clines Corners announces itself with miles of billboards (facing page) and welcomes customers with clean water piped in from 14 miles away, fun souvenirs, and a beloved fudge shop.

on one side of a pillar. On the other, bullwhips.

Because you never know what you might need on the road. Forgot to bring a dog dish? The convenience store can fix you up and provide collars and leashes, along with blue tarps, bungee cords, and a jack. There's a \$695 amethyst geode around the corner from some old lava lamps, near a display of novelty boxer shorts with high-larious sayings like BEWARE OF NATURAL GAS.

Sheila Foot commands the fudge counter, which for decades has sated sugar addicts with flavors like the perennial favorite, pecan praline. "I have a lot of repeat customers," she says. "One comes in every six months and buys two full slabs of lemon meringue pie fudge. And I make it just for him. He calls ahead. He comes twice a year from Arizona, because he has property in New York. He buys other things, too."

You can choose from bulk containers of saltwater taffy, mini Bit-O-Honey bars, Jelly Bellies, Lemonheads, and jawbreakers. T-shirts outsell everything, although the horn-shaped incense burners with cones of cedar, piñon, and juniper run a strong second. Pieces of "Genuine Native Made" Navajo and Zuni jewelry sit atop dried black beans in vitrine cases at the back. Cook buys it all from a dealer in Gallup. It's mass-produced, though pretty enough, and satisfies those tourists who've been told they simply *have* to come back with something shiny.

"There is no better business than the tourist trade," Cook says. "People are out to have fun. They want to learn stuff. You deal with people who are happy."

Indeed, just as I'm about to abandon my own skepticism about the merits of purchasing a coonskin cap that doesn't even fit, I spy a \$140 full-length, buttery-soft leather apron on the wall and catch myself thinking, *That'd make a great birthday present for my brother.* I know I could grab enough silly junk to fill my grandnieces' Christmas stockings, pick up a chile-print onesie for the baby shower next month, grab a birthday card for the friend I forgot, and even mail it from here. Phil Collins is crooning over the sound system, and he makes me wonder if maybe I, too, have been waiting for this moment for all my life. Other than the inflated gas prices (they sell two million gallons a year, a tally sure to rise with the truck-stop pumps), could this actually be the best place on earth?

And that's when the bad thing happens.

I notice Cook surrounded by staffers over near the candy shop. His arms are jabbing at the part of the ceiling that workers haven't started on yet. I pull closer and gather that he doesn't appreciate all the dust filtering down on his volume merchandise, shaken loose by all the

banging around. "Shut it down," he says, and he doesn't mean the new piping for the fire-suppression system.

He means the gift shop.

Like an army of ants, workers begin pulling merchandise into storage, packing T-shirts into the candy area—which will stay open, along with the convenience store—and prepping the space to be curtained off, with only a hallway open from the restrooms to the Subway shop. "For how long?" I ask, my eyes as round as the saucers on the UFO-themed T-shirts. "Sixty days," Cook answers, his words a thudding mallet on my heart.

We're in the gray grip of January. I do the math. Late March before it reopens. For a business that serves largely as a way station, a pass-through point, the place where nobody knows your name but maybe you can find it printed on the side of a \$5 pocketknife to prove that YOU WERE HERE, the interval feels like an unholy pause in the continuum. I teeter on the edge of an existential crisis, hearing from somewhere in my past a line from *Waiting for Godot*.

*We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?*

I resolve to find such meaning before it's all closed off and march to the fudge counter for not one but two boxes of their best stuff. I turn to Zoltar, who has pestered me all day. Every time I approach the women's room, he barks, "Vott are you vaiting for?" Finally I press a dollar bill into the slot, and he lurches to life, flapping his mannequin arms and speaking in a culturally inappropriate accent so painful that I don't catch the words, and then he fails to spit out a written fortune.

My fate uncertain, I leave. The sun sets in a slurry sky, and as I drive away, three billboards wink me home.

CLINES CORNERS / THANK YOU.

CLINES CORNERS / COME BACK SOON.

CLINES CORNERS / TRAVEL SAFELY. **NM**

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*Interim Editor in Chief* **Kate Nelson** harbors a secret love for midcentury ceramics, especially ones with flamingos.







# Grounds for Remembrance

In the heart of Albuquerque, a neglected graveyard tells stories of wealth, power, tragedy, and anonymity.

By **Kate Nelson**



YEAR

1881

OLDEST KNOWN BURIAL

GRAVES

12,000

ESTIMATED

BUFFALO SOLDIERS

13

MANY UNMARKED

GOVERNORS

1

EDMUND G. ROSS



**F**RANCISCO PEREA WAS SEATED IN Ford's Theatre that night, and he heard the bang of the bullet that killed his friend President Abraham Lincoln. Born in the village of Los Padillas, south of Albuquerque's core, Perea prospered from his trade network along the Santa Fe Trail before winning election as a territorial delegate to Congress in 1863. When he died, in 1913, his body joined those of other prominent citizens in the city's first community cemetery.

Today, a soldierly lineup of poplars and evergreens divides that resting place from the more recent green and orderly burials at Fairview Memorial Park, seven blocks south of the University of New Mexico. Felled logs amid the row of trees block a onetime driving entrance, requiring a couple of shimmy steps to enter Fairview's far smaller and long-neglected original portion.

At 17 and a half acres, Historic Fairview Cemetery likely holds as many tumbleweeds as it does gravesites—an estimated 12,000, half of them unmarked. Scraggles of desert scrub crop up among tilted headstones and eroded markers. But for the occasional clutch of faded plastic flowers and small flags marking military graves, its color scheme fades into tones of gray and sand.

American flags mark the graves of veterans, whose collective service begins with the Civil War and runs through the Korean War.

HERE LIE THE PEOPLE OF ALBUQUERQUE'S 1880s railroad boom, the entrepreneurs and politicians, the land barons and heroes, the Masons and Elks, the children and babies, the known and forever unknown.

"They say it takes two generations to forget somebody," says Susan Schwartz, the cemetery's historian. "There's something about being forgotten that really bothers me."

Around 2004, Schwartz says, she learned that the historic cemetery, created before the advent of perpetual care, also had some of the saddest burial records around. She volunteered to whip them into shape and spent years squinting at spidery handwriting on onionskin papers, digging through old newspapers, and becoming enthralled with the dearly departed.

There's Albert G. Simms and Ruth Hanna McCormick Simms, two congresspeople (he of New Mexico, she of Illinois) who fell in love, married, and oversaw the property now operating as Los Poblanos Historic Inn. In 1938, her son, Medill McCormick (of the *Chicago Tribune* McCormicks), died while mountain climbing on Sandia Peak. Ruth had both his body and the boulder it was found on retrieved. The rock is there today, at the head of the trio's graves.

There's Emma Albright and Eddie Cobb, women photographers who ran portrait studios that created a lasting record of Albuquerque's people, their fashions, and their passions.

There's John Braden, who drove a wagon filled with fireworks intended for the 1896

### VISITING FAIRVIEW

The main gate to Fairview Memorial Park, 700 Yale Blvd. SE, is open from 7:30 a.m. to dusk. Turn north off the main drive and park along a tree-lined lane bordering the Historic Fairview Cemetery. Wear sturdy shoes and be careful not to step on graves. The cemetery is surrounded by urban life. Bring a friend or join a group and stay alert. Keep up to date on research and activities via the Historic Fairview Cemetery Facebook page (@HistoricFairviewCemetery).



Time turns many grave markers into puzzle pieces.

Territorial Fair parade's finale. A spark from another float landed on his cargo, setting off the fireworks. Braden's horses bolted. Fearing they would tear into the crowd, he steered the team away, his clothes on fire, before falling from the wagon and asking, "Did I save the little girls and the queen of the carnival and her attendants?" The next day, he died.

"At first, I had no interest in history," Schwartz says. "But then there's Galles and Huning and all these people I could get interested in."

She knows that some consider cemeteries merely a tool for potential ghost-hunting adventures (she's a skeptic on that score) or places of profound sadness. But she, like others, sees them as troves of historical gleanings, as well as moodily atmospheric grounds

**Historic Fairview Cemetery likely holds as many tumbleweeds as it does gravesites—an estimated 12,000, half of them unmarked.**

for a mindful stroll and an opportunity to pay respect to those who are gone—and those who live on. "I felt my purpose was to help the descendants," Schwartz says. "People would call and say, 'Where's Grandma?' And I would say, 'I'll show you.'"

She led tours, spurred occasional cleanups, and curated an Albuquerque Museum exhibit about the cemetery, which is owned by the Historic Fairview Cemetery board, a non-profit run by volunteers. Schwartz now lives in Florida, but the *Where's Grandma?* calls still come.

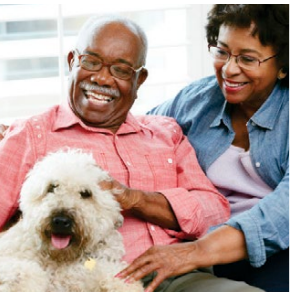
"I ask, 'Where are you standing?'" she says. "And I can tell them which row to go down."

**BORN THE OFFSPRING OF A BRIGADIER GENERAL and one of his slaves, James Price grew**



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up enslaved in Missouri. He enlisted in the military during the Civil War and, after it, served with the Buffalo Soldiers during the territorial era. His grave, along the cemetery's north end, is one of the few marked sites among the 13 Buffalo Soldiers buried here.

Beyond his grave stands an often graffitied wall and the backs of houses that grew up around Fairview. Traffic from nearby Yale Boulevard intrudes upon a hush occasionally interrupted by raucous crows and, on this June day, the hum of a weed whacker.

A dozen residents who care about history—and especially about this place—have gathered with trash bags and yard tools to lay whatever claim they can against the weeds.

Cynthia Schaller, an elementary school

**“I’ve always loved history and how it affects our present story,” says Cynthia Schaller. “When I came to this one and saw how bad it is, it touched my heart.”**

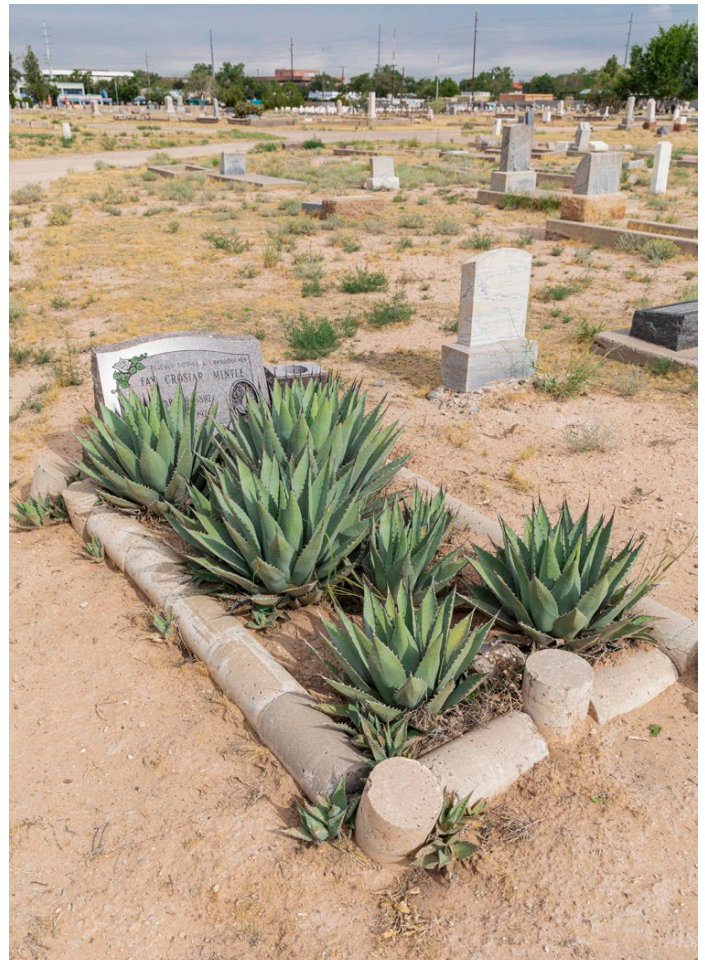
counselor, is one of them. When she moved here from Florida 18 years ago, Schaller explored old cemeteries to learn more about

her new home. “I’ve always loved history and how it affects our present story,” she says. “When I came to this one and saw how bad it is, it touched my heart.”

Anthony Gomez joined Schwartz’s earliest cleanup crews, mostly out of friendship. He had long wondered what happened after his absentee father was murdered in Belén. He had looked for a grave in Valencia County but came up empty.

Schwartz offered to look at Fairview’s records and found it—right there. “I was totally tripped out,” Gomez says.

He spends some time alone at the site during this cleanup but also pays respect to





**Top, from left:** Visitors leave flowers. A boulder at the McCormick and Simms graves. **Bottom, from facing page:** Woodmen of the World markers, made for members of a fraternal life insurance company. Desert life rises from a grave. A toy car decorates a grave. Lizzie Stauffer's scroll-like slab.



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Gail Rubin (left), president of the Historic Fairview Cemetery Board, prepares to hoist a new flag.

people like Herman Blueher, an agricultural entrepreneur whose onetime home is now the Hacienda del Río Restaurant, in Old Town. “His fields were where the Albuquerque Museum is, and Tiguex Park was his man-made lake,” Gomez says. “I admire so many of the people who are buried here.”

Not every grave holds a hallowed memory. Going by the dates, one can surmise the waves of smallpox, tuberculosis, and Spanish flu that swept the region. Kiku Honda, a Japanese woman who lived in the city’s red-light district, was murdered in 1896, presumably by a jealous lover. Nineteen-year-old Lizzie Stauffer arrived in Albuquerque in 1882, came down with smallpox, died a week later, and lies beneath an elegant slab engraved with



### OLD HAUNTS

Historic cemeteries abound in New Mexico. Many are open to visitors who act respectfully and leave no trace. Here are a few to get started.

#### FAIRVIEW CEMETERY, SANTA FE, 1884

Burials include Thomas B. Catron, a leader of the Santa Fe Ring that dominated the territory’s politics and economy; Governor Arthur Seligman; and Abraham and Julia Staab, the latter of whom is said to haunt La Posada de Santa Fe Resort and Spa. 1134 Cerrillos Road, [fairviewcemetery.santafe.org](http://fairviewcemetery.santafe.org)

#### KIT CARSON HISTORIC CEMETERY, TAOS, 1847

Burials include controversial frontiersman Kit Carson, arts maven Mabel Dodge Luhan, Padre Antonio José Martínez, and three unnamed *brujas*, or witches. 211 Paseo del Pueblo Norte, [nmmag.us/taoscemetery](http://nmmag.us/taoscemetery)

#### CEDARVALE CEMETERY, WHITE OAKS, 1880

Burials include the state’s first governor,

William C. McDonald, and cattle queen Susan McSween Barber (her name misspelled “MacSween” on her stone). On NM 349 in the village of White Oaks, near Carrizozo, [nmmag.us/cedarvalecemetery](http://nmmag.us/cedarvalecemetery)

#### MASONIC, INTERNATIONAL ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS, AND MONTEFIORE CEMETERIES, LAS VEGAS, 1880

This clustered trio includes a section for the first Jewish congregation in New Mexico, Montefiore. Burials within all three include Territorial Governor William J. Mills and Jewish merchant and philanthropist Charles Ilfeld. At Colonias and Romero streets, [nmmag.us/lasvegascemetery](http://nmmag.us/lasvegascemetery)

#### BILLY THE KID’S GRAVE, FORT SUMNER, 1881


New Mexico’s most famous boy bandit died at the hands of Sheriff Pat Garrett—or did he? Doubts aside, his marker sits next to the Fort Sumner Historic Site/Bosque Redondo Memorial, itself worth a visit to explore the tragic history of the Navajo people’s Long Walk. On Billy the Kid Drive three miles south of US 60/84, [nmmag.us/billygrave](http://nmmag.us/billygrave)

“Loved and respected by all who knew thee.”

Several sections hold children’s graves, most of them bearing what were intended as temporary markers—brick-size columns topped by metal nameplates eroding into obscurity. Some say only “Baby Boy” or “Baby Girl.” One reads “John Doe,” and the mystery of that life and death persists today.

Concrete curbs outline family plots. The desert soil besieges them, obscuring the last names stamped upon the path-side faces. Some of the plots were never used and some were barely used, and so it is that “Vernon—Asleep” sleeps alone.

Gail Rubin recently became president of the cemetery board. As part of the June cleanup, she held a small ceremony to replace a tattered flag that flew above one of the two military sections. She hopes to engineer future cleanups, restart occasional walking tours, and hold a Day of the Dead event where actors reenact the lives of some of those buried here.

“This flag-raising,” she says, “is a symbol of refreshing this cemetery and our commitment to this sacred ground.” 

*Managing Editor Kate Nelson appreciates “the delicious blend of history, nature, and melancholy” found in old cemeteries.*



## O'Keeffe from Anywhere

Connect with the Museum online and discover the many facets of Georgia O'Keeffe. Creative activities, online events, O'Keeffe's life and art, and Stories from the O'Keeffe can all be found at [gokm.org](http://gokm.org). Engage with us on Facebook and Instagram, too!

We hope to see you soon.

Tony Vaccaro. *Georgia Caring for Her Herb Seedlings*, 1960. Gelatin silver print, 19 5/8 x 13 1/4 in. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. Georgia O'Keeffe Museum. © Tony Vaccaro. [2007.3.11]

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# Art

## Relicarios



Antique *relicarios* surround a contemporary version (middle row, second from left).



# Hidden Jewels

Martha J. Egan casts new light on an intricate form of centuries-old Catholic jewelry—and encourages a new generation of makers.

By Kate Nelson

**S**MALL ENOUGH FOR HER fingers to close over it, the pendant resting on Martha J. Egan's palm demands a closer look. It bears an image of the Virgin Mary in absolute miniature. "In Copacabana," she says, referencing the art form's Brazilian artisans, "they make paintbrushes out of mouse hair, a horse's eyelash, a cat's whisker." The result is as magnificent as an Old Master's rendering, but double-sided, with an equally detailed image on the pendant's verso.

Once prominent in Spanish colonies, most especially those in South America, Mexico, and New Mexico, these *relicarios* lost favor during 19th-century independence movements. Tossed away, fashioned into something else, or relegated to jewelry boxes, they escaped the notice of art historians and antiquarians. Except for Egan.

The longtime owner of Pachamama Gallery, which specializes in Latin American masks, milagros, textiles, furniture, and jewelry, Egan stumbled across enough samples to produce a 1993 book, *Relicarios: Devotional Miniatures from the Americas*. She quickly learned how much she still needed to know.

"I realized I had made some mistakes," she says while sitting at a deeply carved wooden table at Casa Perea Art Space, a mid-19th-century hacienda in Corrales that houses the latest outpost of Pachamama. "Some that I had thought were old were modern reprints. What I had been told was silver was actually pot metal. Other people might not care, but I did."

She dedicated herself to deeper research, building relationships with far-flung artists and traders and scouring church records, colonial inventories of goods that traveled on El Camino Real, scholarly articles, even WPA-era oral histories—anything that might give a whisper of a mention to these two-sided emblems of faith.

She reveals the results in a new book, *Relicarios: The Forgotten Jewels of Latin America* (Fresco Books), a beautifully



illustrated and rigorously annotated history.

“The book is so comprehensive,” says Spanish colonial art historian Josef Diaz, who has curated exhibits at the New Mexico History Museum and the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, both in Santa Fe. “I was floored. I always knew there was religious jewelry, but it was through Martha that I started to learn about these in particular, as devotional pieces and as beautiful artworks.”

Collectively, the *relicarios*, sometimes called *medallones*, *miniaturas*, and *camafeos*, reveal a vast range of stories—the demands of obeisance to Spain’s crown and cross under the searing eye of the Inquisition, the spread of artisanship among colonists and Indigenous peoples, the souvenir desires of pilgrims to South American religious sites, and the Manila galleons weighted with so much ivory, some intended for painstakingly carved pendants, that the ships could founder and even sink.

“These were luxury items that came up from Mexico on the caravans,” Egan says. “People with money wanted Manila silk shawls and other special things. The *relicarios* were prized family heirlooms. They were

**“The relicarios were prized family heirlooms. They were passed down through the generations, especially among women, because they were so isolated here,” Martha J. Egan says.**

passed down through the generations, especially among women, because they were so isolated here. They had a real relationship with the Virgin. The *relicario* was how you showed your loyalty to La Virgen or to Saint Joseph, to your personal guardian. They were powerful amulets.”

The earliest and most precious versions bore painted images or ones that were carved in ivory, horn, mahogany, or other rare woods. The Copacabana artisans became masters at images as small as a fingernail. Sometimes a *converso*, a converted Jew, would sandwich something Hebraic between the two sides, outwardly professing the “correct” religion while hanging on to a part of Spain’s forbidden culture.

“By the late 1700s, the movement for independence in Mexico was growing, and as part of it, there was a lot of anti-church sentiment,” she says. “The *relicarios* went into grandmothers’ lockboxes and were forgotten about. All kinds of paintings show people wearing them, but the art historians skipped right past it. I started looking and asking.”

It wasn’t easy. Beyond getting locked up, such pieces sometimes broke, Diaz notes.



Pachamama Gallery carries Latin American imports (dog not included). **Above:** Martha J. Egan holds a large *relicario*.



“Things wear out,” he says, “or they come apart, and maybe you melt them down to make a different piece of jewelry.” Some antique dealers realized they could turn one pendant into two by mounting each image on its own one-sided setting.

Egan was well suited to the hunt, Díaz says. “She’s built relationships with people all over Mexico and South America,” he says. Few could have predicted that career for a lapsed Catholic raised in small-town Wisconsin, but Egan fell in love with Latin American history during college, obtained a degree in it, and immersed herself in further studies, including working with Jesuit Basques during a Peace Corps stint in Venezuela. When her sister and brother-in-law, Polly and John Arango, started Pachamama in Albuquerque, she set out to find imports for them and eventually bought the business.

“One thing that was immediately popular were the milagros,” she says of the small metal amulets of arms, legs, hearts, and anything else in need of healing. “I must have been asked 5,000 times, ‘What’s a milagro?’” So she wrote a book about it. *Milagros: Votive Offerings from the Americas* remains in print, and as Egan likes to say, at the store today, “milagros are us.”



**Relicarios: The Forgotten Jewels of Latin America**

can be purchased at the Pachamama Gallery, along with other books by Martha J. Egan. The store is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., or by appointment. Pachamama nestles inside the elegant Casa Perea Art Space, which will again host concerts, weddings, and other events when it’s safe. 4829 Corrales Road; 505-503-7936, [casapereaartspace.com](http://casapereaartspace.com)



As she renewed her research into *relicarios*, Egan slowly amassed pristine colonial examples from South America and Mexico, particularly in Mexico City, which she proclaims has “the best flea market of anywhere.” Along the way, she found 19th-century versions with photographed images replacing the handmade ones, and a few latter-day fakes.

“I’ve been had,” she admits. “But I kept asking wherever I went, and someone would open a drawer and pull out a couple.”

She uncovered evidence of an early-20th-century artisan in Peña Blanca, a village south of Santa Fe, who placed two-inch rectangular prints into his handmade tin frames. She also began encouraging contemporary New Mexico santeros like Charlie Carrillo and Ramón José López to render new ones.

Bernadette Caraveo, a Spanish Market santera who has also worked with Egan for years at Pachamama, first in Albuquerque, then in Santa Fe, and now in Corrales, was surprised when she recalled her grandfather having kept a *relicario* in his pocket.

“I never knew that’s what it was,” she says. She then began working with Arturo Olivares on new versions: He painted the images; she crafted the silver casings.

Egan’s favorite source of information was Jerónimo Quero Sosa, a Zapotec weaver and muleteer, whose many trading missions to remote villages high in the mountains made him a cultural interpreter of the significance a small pendant could hold among the faithful.

“He had the information I couldn’t get from anyone else,” she says. “Why it was still important there, which women were allowed to wear one. There’s no shopping up there, so when a girl got married, she was given a family relic.”

With her knowledge, along with the *relicarios*—some of which are for sale at Pachamama—Egan hopes to mount a museum exhibit exploring the jewelry’s importance as a marker of history, religion, and culture.

“In a way, these are like icons for getting into the cultural history of Latin America,” she says. “They came out of a medieval tradition and they reveal the ivory trade, the teaching of silversmithing skills, a host of craftsmanship that is dying out.” **NM**

**“In a way, these are like icons for getting into the cultural history of Latin America,” Martha J. Egan says of the relicarios.**

*Managing Editor* **Kate Nelson** turns cartwheels for any story that involves New Mexico history.



Martha J. Egan in the *sala* of the Casa Perea Art Space, which holds a bounty of antique furniture and textiles. **Facing page:** Pachamama Gallery.



# Q U I N T E S S E N

# NEW

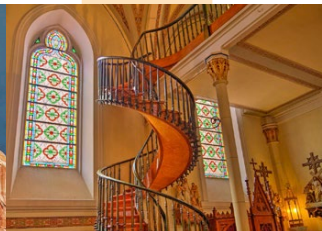
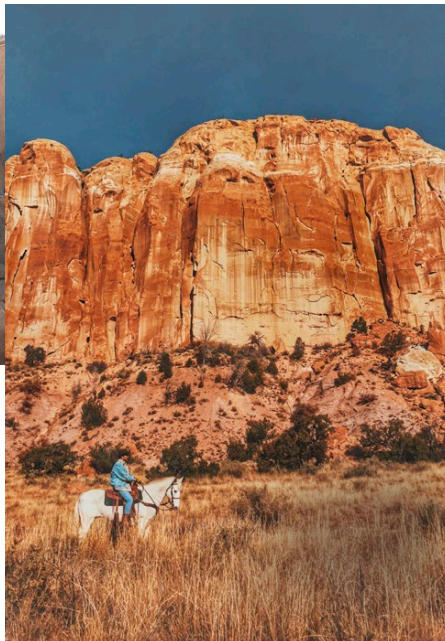




# T I A L L Y M E X I C O

Our geology rocks. Our food pops. Even our architecture stands out. Throw in the Wild West, ancient art, and a few UFOs. A celebration of what makes us unique in the nation.

BY KATE NELSON



Illustrations by  
Chris Philpot







An aerial view  
of the Valles  
Caldera National  
Preserve.

## Lands Alive

*Geological forces conspired to craft every landscape in New Mexico, from alpine peaks to cavernous depths. Feel that rumble? They're still at work.*

In the beginning, the earth was without form. Really. Right here in New Mexico. As in no mountains, canyons, mesas, hoodoos, petrified wood, fossils, or volcanoes. “It was pretty boring, actually,” says geologist Kirt Kempter. “Through most of our geologic past, New Mexico had a very flat landscape.”

Hard to believe in a state that boasts all of the above features, plus rolling grasslands, sprinklings of hot springs, the Estancia Basin’s salt flats, Carlsbad’s incredible cave system, and the gypsum dunes of White Sands National Park. Thanks to successive periods of mountain building, erosion, ice ages, and droughts, our 1.8-billion-

year-old past today attracts the kinds of people who don’t just hunt for rocks but become enraptured by them.

“You can see the rocks here, and it’s such a dramatic landscape,” says State Geologist Nelia Dunbar, who leads the Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources at New Mexico Tech, in Socorro. “Sandía granite rocks are 1.45 billion years old, and they’re exposed at the surface. Volcanoes in New Mexico are all over, beautifully exposed, and some of them very young. My absolute favorite landscape in New Mexico is the Valles Caldera, in the Jemez Mountains. The crater is so beautiful, and I would argue that the underlying geology is what makes

it so beautiful.”

While we claim this diversity of landscape among our most defining features, credit goes to the Pacific Ocean’s Farallon Plate, which rammed into the coast of California around 75 million years ago. Like someone skidding on a throw rug, it buckled the crust of Nevada, then Arizona, and eventually New Mexico, where it pushed the land higher and higher, draining an inland sea and fracturing the earth from north to south along the Río Grande Rift.

That rifting opened a path for magma, which built up rumbling beasts with explosive bellies. Two Jemez-area eruptions, 1.6 million and 1.2 million years ago, spewed

300 cubic kilometers of still-visible material onto the landscape. (The 1980 Mount St. Helens eruption, in Washington, delivered a mere 1 cubic kilometer.) “In the southwestern part of the state, in the Datil-Mogollon area,” Dunbar says, “there were single eruptions that were 1,000 cubic kilometers. There were many big, big eruptions.”

Geologists divide our landscape into five major regions: the Great Plains, in the east; the southern Rocky Mountains, from Colorado to the bottom of the Sangre de Cristos; the Colorado Plateau, in the northwest; the Río Grande Rift; and the Datil-Mogollon volcanic field, in the southwest. Arizona, Utah, and Colorado share many of our attributes, but, says Virgil Lueth, director of the Mineral Museum at New Mexico Tech, we’re the new kid on the rock. “We have some of the youngest lava flows in the U.S., not counting Hawaii and Alaska,” he says. The McCartys lava flow, which created El Malpais National Monument, near Grants, happened 3,900 years ago. In geologic terms? That’s so last year.

And it’s still happening—the crust scrunching and stretching, rivers scouring canyon walls, our tallest mountains rising. Even so, Lueth says, “if you came back a million years from now, you probably wouldn’t notice a difference.”

Except for one thing. New Mexico is due for a volcanic eruption, and the Socorro magma body is the likeliest suspect. Kempter, who leads geology tours all over the world, including in New Mexico, can’t wait. “Some of us,” he says, “are really hoping for an eruption in our lifetimes.”



## Hit the Road

### Capulin Volcano National Monument

From the 8,200-foot-high rim of this extinct volcano, east of Ratón, you can see the remains of more than 100 volcanoes—a region that 19 tribes consider sacred. “I like to sit there and go back in time, think about the Folsom Man and other ancient humans and ancient animals roaming and the volcanoes going off,” says site manager Dale Kissner. [nps.gov/cavo](http://nps.gov/cavo)

### Bisti/De-Na-Zin Wilderness Area

The weirdly eroded hoodoos, petrified wood, and fossils of this expanse south of Farmington—once a swamp occupied by dinosaurs and humongous trees—enchants photographers, including Douglas Merriam, who leads occasional workshops there. “At times you

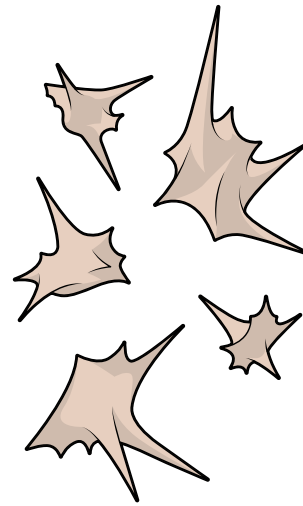
think you’re on another planet,” he says. “Sunrise and sunset cast amazing shadows. You can get close with a wide-angle lens to create a different perspective that accentuates the rock formations or use a long lens to compress them and isolate them against the landscape.” [nmmag.us/BLM-bisti](http://nmmag.us/BLM-bisti)

### Carlsbad Caverns National Park

An inland sea that covered part of New Mexico around 250 million years ago left more than 300 limestone caves in a fossil reef. Solo and guided tours of the park’s Big Room are available, and more intrepid cavers can seek backcountry permits. “The entrance of the cave is just beyond belief,” says Chad Ingram, CEO of the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce. “You walk down, the temperature drops, you see how massive it is. It’s surreal.” [nps.gov/cave](http://nps.gov/cave)

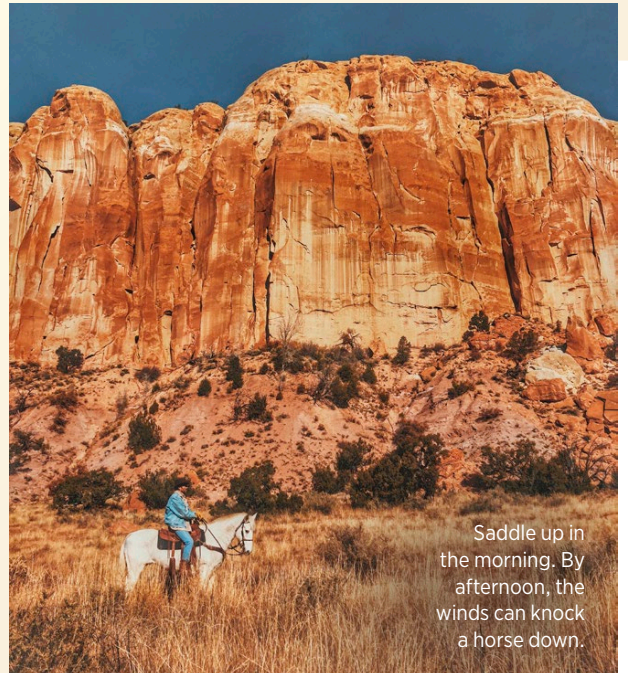
## Sky High

A true New Mexico landscape includes the sky—its crystalline turquoise color, its fantastic sunsets, its billowing storms. On a lucky day, you’ll spot a few hundred hot-air balloons, too.



## THE WORST

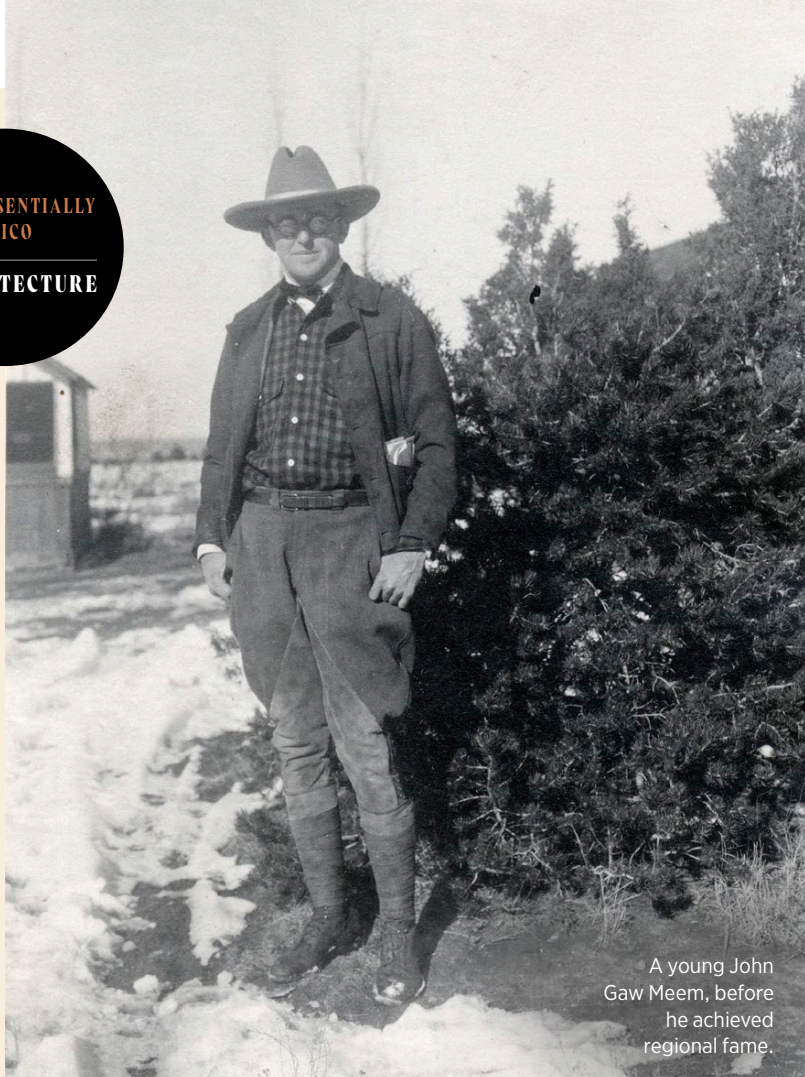
Found across New Mexico, usually under a bicycle tire or bare foot, “goatheads,” the seeds of *Tribulus terrestris*, aka puncture vine, serve as nature’s ninja weapon. Each multipronged goathead can deliver the pain equivalent of a glass shard, and they are far, far harder to control.



Saddle up in the morning. By afternoon, the winds can knock a horse down.

## THE BEST Wind

We’ve all experienced that sideways sensation. Patio furniture flying through the air. Birds at a midair standstill. New Mexico’s high elevation breeds springtime winds that can carry mounds of sediment and sculpt sandstone cliffs. Kerry Jones, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service’s Albuquerque office, says lengthening days warm the earth enough to interact with high thermals, producing gusts of up to 70 miles per hour in isolated locales. Usually they’re in the 20-to-30-mile-per-hour range, he says, but “at higher elevations, it’s worse.” The east side of the state gets battered earliest, usually in March and April, with the rest of the state witnessing wind power through April and May—at least in the afternoons. “For any outdoor activity, you’re better off planning for mornings,” he says. “And when the sun sets, the wind machine starts to shut down.”



A young John Gaw Meem, before he achieved regional fame.

## In Mud We Trust

*New Mexico's most plentiful building material defines our unique architecture—past and present—thanks in part to the “patron saint of adobe.”*

First came the hand-formed mud structures of the Pueblos. Then the adobe bricks of Spanish colonists arrived. The railroads brought milled lumber and kiln-fired bricks. Today, “faux-dobe” buildings (stuccoed wood-frame construction) crop up throughout New Mexico—the so-called Santa Fe style that embodies our architectural spirit.

Numerous architects planted the modern-day seeds, but John Gaw Meem wears the crown as the 20th century’s chief historian, preservationist, and visionary.

“Meem really studied the traditions more deeply than

anyone,” says Chris Wilson, the regents professor of landscape architecture at the University of New Mexico and author of *Facing Southwest: The Life & Houses of John Gaw Meem* (W.W. Norton, 2002). “He was trained before modernism, so he believed in historical precedent and typologies and strived to incorporate those into his work.”

In the 1930s, Meem oversaw the WPA’s Historic American Buildings Survey in the Southwest, directing architects to draw and measure buildings that featured classic Pueblo, Spanish, and Territorial styles. He dove into preservation of mission churches,

including Acoma Pueblo’s San Estevan del Rey, and designed the 1939 Cristo Rey Church, in Santa Fe.

He came to Santa Fe in 1920 as a young man suffering from tuberculosis, and when he died, in 1989, he left a legacy of iconic structures—the Museum of International Folk Art, in Santa Fe; Fuller Lodge, in Los Alamos; and 35 buildings on the UNM campus. “He brought Spanish Pueblo Revival architecture to maturity and then developed Territorial Revival in the 1932–34 period,” Wilson says. “He’s kind of the fountainhead of New Mexico regional design, history, and preservation.”

Acoma Pueblo



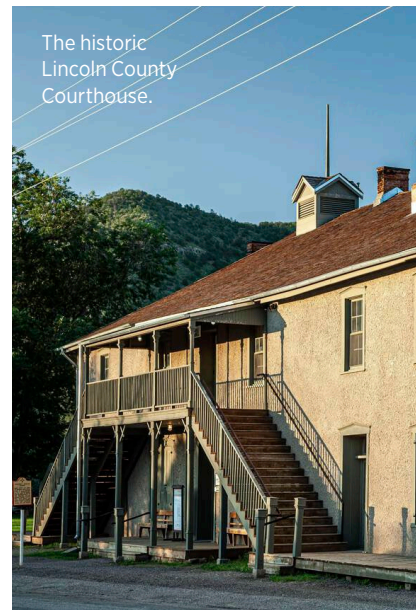
### Hit the Road

#### Acoma and Taos

For classic Puebloan architecture, these living examples of multistory adobe buildings reveal green technology that was centuries ahead of its time. Chris Wilson notes that the builders took advantage of earthen mass and L- or U-shaped designs to control interior temperatures and used a southeast orientation to honor a sacred cosmological direction. “Alfonso Ortiz [an Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo anthropologist] talked about how keyhole-shaped kivas in some Pueblo traditions were placed in front of an L-shaped building with a southeast orientation,”

ZIM CSWR PICT COLLS PICT000-675NUS GABRIELLA MARKS, EFRAIN PADRO/ALAMY

The historic Lincoln County Courthouse.



Wilson says. [acomaskycity.org](http://acomaskycity.org), [taospueblo.com](http://taospueblo.com)

### San José de Gracia Church

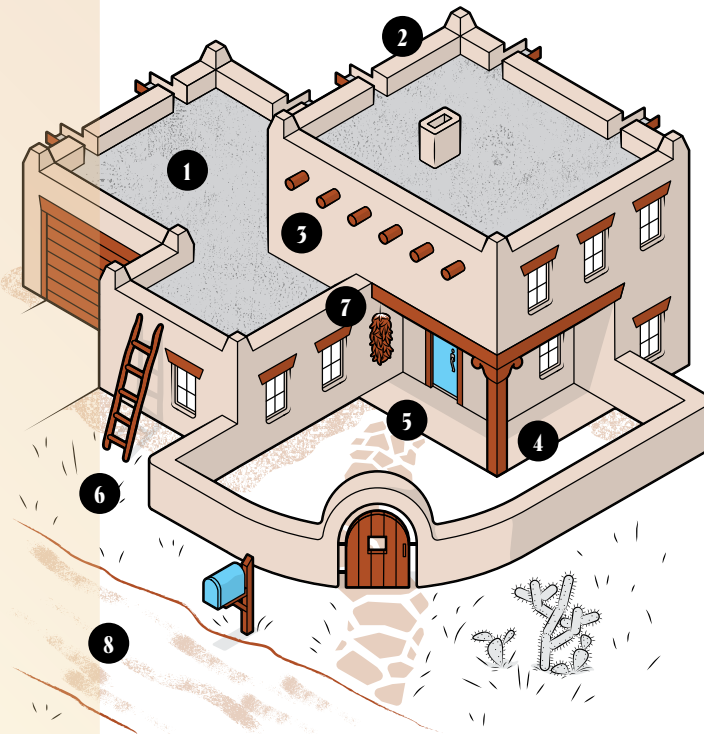
One of the finest examples of Spanish Colonial architecture in the state, this mission church in Las Trampas, on the High Road to Taos, was founded in 1751 and holds rare examples of santero artworks inside. “It was open more often than not in past summers,” Wilson says. “If you’re driving the High Road, stop and see if it’s open and, if so, that’s a real treat. Leave a donation as your thanks.”

### Lincoln

Most of the town that Billy the Kid made famous is today a state historic site that reveals the elements of Territorial-style architecture, including a rare two-story adobe courthouse that was built as the Murphy-Dolan Store. “All these buildings haven’t changed at all,” says Tim Roberts, deputy director of New Mexico Historic Sites and co-owner of a craft brewery in Lincoln. “This is where east meets west—traditional Southwestern styles with East Coast influences.”

[nmhistoricsites.org/lincoln](http://nmhistoricsites.org/lincoln)

## Spanish Pueblo Revival Architecture



**Flat roofs (1)** have a slight tilt so water runs off via canales (or so you hope).

**Parapets (2)** add architectural interest to the roofline.

**Vigas (3)**, pine logs that support ceilings, often jut out of the roofline.

An inset **portal (4)**, or porch, creates a shady spot.

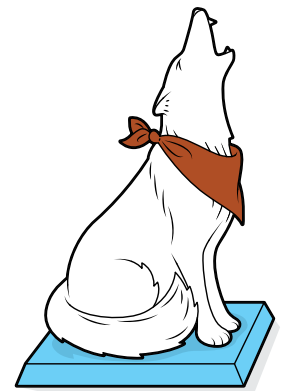
Painting your **door blue (5)** is rooted in a belief that it scares off bad spirits.

A ladder made of aspen or pine poles called **latillas (6)** makes it easier to

fix the inevitable leaks in that flat roof.

Hanging a **ristra (7)** of red chiles cheers up the entryway.

A **dirt road (8)** often drops a clue: expensive real estate ahead.



### THE WORST

Howling coyote statues by the front door became so popular in the 1980s and '90s that their persistence draws eye rolls today. Pile on the clichés by painting yours turquoise and tying a red bandanna around its neck.

NMHTD

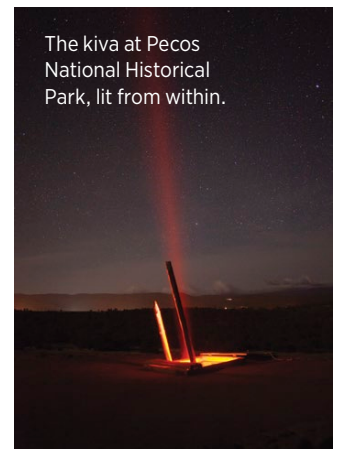


### THE BEST Kivas

For centuries, Puebloans have carried out their most sacred ceremonies inside kivas, round or square earthen structures that act as the heart chamber of the tribe. Active kivas are off-limits, but you can climb down into a historic one at Pecos National Historical Park and step into the grand kiva at Aztec Ruins National Monument, where

Chaco-era cultures once gathered. The interior walls of the kiva at Coronado Historic Site, in Bernalillo, are covered with mud paintings that serve as visual prayers. The original murals—17 layers thick—were removed and preserved during the Depression. In 1938, Zia Pueblo artist Ma Pe Wi (Velino Shije Herrera) re-created them, an homage to the Kuaua Pueblo people who once lived there.

The kiva at Pecos National Historical Park, lit from within.





You know you're New Mexican when a bushel of green chiles fills you with joy.

## We ♥ Chile

*In New Mexico, chile is more than a basic food group. It's our identity.*

**E**ric Romero asks that we start by smashing the chile war, that whose-is-best trope—Colorado or New Mexico? For one thing, until 1861, the chile-growing part of southern Colorado *was* New Mexico. For another, it largely depends on what you were raised on. “Who makes the best cookie?” he asks. “Grandma, of course. Cognitive anchoring is how our taste buds are formed and how we internalize sensations. We all go home.”

Raised in southern Colorado, Romero studies land-based culture as a professor at New Mexico Highlands

University, in Las Vegas. Chile, he says, acts as a centerpiece for that work. It claims centuries-old roots in Native, Spanish, Mestizo, and Anglo cultures, a rich brew that tends to get swallowed up by the national hype from massive chile farms in southern New Mexico.

“In the larger market, we push Hatch,” he says. “It’s emblematic. But we discount the northern areas, where we have chile varieties that are localized to regional ecosystems. There’s differences in production and taste. Some are really specific to a river system or a regional bio-area.

That’s where a really strong connoisseur will be able to say, ‘Oh, that’s Chimayó red.’”

Nonetheless, he applauds the elevation of chiles in general as a symbol for New Mexico. It helps build a sense of community, he says, just as land grants and acequia systems have for generations.

“It’s having a shared cultural behavior,” Romero says. “What’s a better indicator of that than the physical sensation of biting into a fresh chile? It creates a community of people. It’s who we are. We’re *chileros!* We *are* chile. We die for chile. We put it on pancakes.”

## THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE TASTY

In tiny San Antonio, two iconic burger joints have both been hailed as the home of the state’s best green chile cheeseburger. We put the Buckhorn Tavern and the Owl Bar & Cafe to the test.



The **Buckhorn** Burger literally beat Bobby Flay in a 2009 Food Network throwdown.

**Size:** 2¾ inches high, 5 inches wide

**Bun:** Large and fluffy; covered almost the entire burger

**Toppings:** Green chile, pickles, tomato, onion, lettuce, cheese, mustard

**Chile:** Good fresh-roasted flavor, not too spicy

**Price:** \$7.65



The **Owl** invented its Green Chile Cheeseburger at the request of atomic scientists.

**Size:** 2¾ inches high, 4¾ inches wide

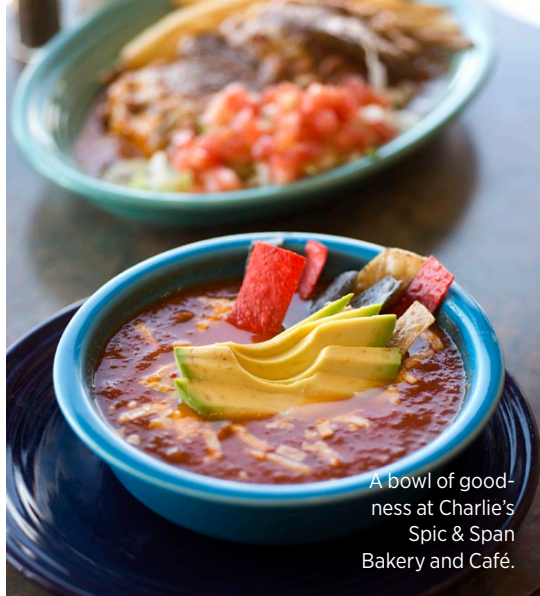
**Bun:** Smaller; smashed-down burger with toppings overflowing the bun

**Toppings:** Green chile, pickles, tomato, onion, lettuce, cheese, mayo

**Chile:** Hot! This chile is spicy!

**Price:** \$6.25

**The winner:** Me! I got to eat both. —*Mary Robnett*



A bowl of goodness at Charlie's Spic & Span Bakery and Café.

## Down-Home Faves

Where can you find homestyle New Mexican food? We asked our Facebook fans (and one ringer).

### Tia Sophia's

210 W. San Francisco St., Santa Fe

A staple off the Santa Fe Plaza since 1975. Wait for a table; it's worth it.

*"Love their simple bowl of pinto beans, ground beef, and green chiles. Breakfast is great, too."*

—Suzanne Duncan Ramsey

### Yum-Yum's

460 Central Ave., Tularosa

A true hole-in-the-wall diner with everything from yeast doughnuts to Frito pie.

*"Brisket tacos, posole, tamales, Navajo tacos—and all the other wonderful items. Everything is delicious, and the mom-and-pop atmosphere is perfect."*

—Caroline Kerley

### Zia Cafe

1155 S. Valley Dr., Las Cruces

Boasting "True New Mex Taste," this diner more than delivers on the basics.

*"The best red enchiladas I've ever had from a restaurant, and their menudo is sooo good, too."*

—Albina Yañez

### Rincon del Pollo

9129 4th St. NW, Albuquerque

As unassuming as a *Better Call Saul* set piece, this joint serves south-of-the-border flair.

*"The chile tastes just-picked all year round. Their chicken enchiladas are incredible. New Mexican soul food!"*

—Jennifer Caffrey

### Charlie's Spic & Span Bakery and Café

715 Douglas Ave., Las Vegas

Since 1950, this large eatery has sated big appetites.

*"I love their eggs and papas covered in green chile sauce. And their fresh tortillas are amazing. I also love their cinnamon rolls—you must get a couple to go!"*

—Chandra Lake Oard

### El Cafecito

820 E. Santa Fe Ave., Grants

A spacious community gathering spot with a capacious menu, set on Historic Route 66.

*"The breakfast burrito smothered in a rich red chile sauce hit all the spots after a morning hike at the Casamero Pueblo site."*

—Kate Nelson

### Michael's Kitchen Restaurant & Bakery

304-C N. Pueblo Road, Taos

Classic food served amid the architecture of a 1940s Spanish Pueblo Revival-style building.

*"Never had a bad meal—ever. I pretty much always get a sampler with Christmas chile—trying to get as many flavors before the long gap between visits."*

—Richard Cardenas

### La Fonda Restaurant

206 W. Main St., Artesia

"If you leave hungry," this restaurant proclaims, "it's your own fault."

*"I like the Southwest Combination plate when I'm craving more than one thing. It has a taco, enchiladas, chile relleno, and guacamole. When I'm in a steak mood, the carne asada is absolutely the best."*

—Karla Younger Rhoten



## THE WORST

**Canned beans.** Sure, they're easier than the soak-and-simmer methods, but that lingering tang of tin affects their flavor, you lose the aroma of beans on the bubble infusing your home, and we live in a pinto-bean-growing capital. Support local farmers!

## THE BEST Hornos

"This is how we grew up," says Norma Naranjo, owner of the Feasting Place cooking school, on Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo. She's known as "the horno queen" for her beehive-shaped, wood-fired adobe oven that can hit temperatures of 800 degrees—though she prefers a more temperate 400. Found throughout New Mexico, hornos make short work of lamb chops, roasted potatoes, and the round loaves of Pueblo bread that found new fans during the pandemic.

"I just did 60 loaves," Naranjo says. "People want something homemade to keep up their traditions with their families." She also switched to Zoom classes, where she included pizza and crostini—"fancy things we never knew before." Because it's outdoors, the horno also made for a warm gathering place. "If you have an horno in your backyard, you have a lot of alternatives for baking," says Naranjo, who particularly likes pastelitos—feast-day pastries filled with fruit.



An horno at Taos Pueblo.



A gleaming selection of turquoise bracelets.

## True Blue

*Turquoise, New Mexico's state gem, gleams with beauty, history, and mysticism.*

Water helps copper and aluminum seep through rocks and alchemize into veins of blue stone found in mountains throughout the Southwest. Some cultures revere it as a sky stone, but among New Mexico Pueblo people, it represents the water that helped create it—"and everything that water means in the Southwest: food, abundance, survival," says Maxine McBrinn, an anthropologist who curated *Turquoise, Water, Sky*, a 2014 exhibit at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, in Santa Fe.

"That title encompasses what I find most meaningful

about turquoise," she says, "the connection between this beautiful stone and the source of life in our region."

Depending on which mine it's pulled from, as well as how deep within the mine it occurs, New Mexico's official state gem can range from deep blue to sky blue to a variety of greens. The veins that often appear within it were once shunned by jewelry makers, but those stones have come to be sought out as customers clamor for them.

"Jewelry collectors love turquoise, and they love high-end turquoise," says Michael Roanhorse, a Diné artist who caters to the gold-

and-diamonds set. "Lander blue is the new favorite. It has the matrix in it, and no one wanted it. My dad said, 'If I'd known it was going to get so expensive, I could have bought buckets of it when it came out.'"

Today, a Lander blue stone can command \$200 a carat, and that wee stone weighs about a fifth of a gram.

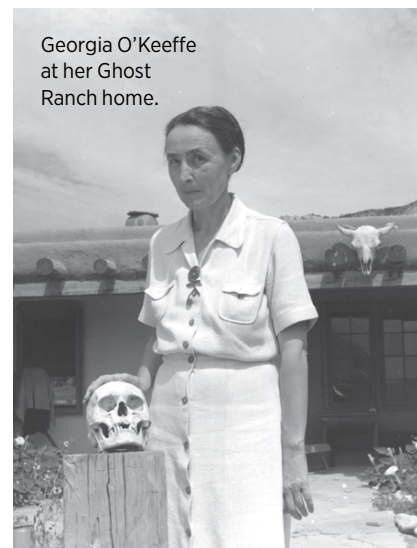
"In Navajo history, turquoise is used as a representation of the Yeibichai and the Holy People," Roanhorse says. "Turquoise represents the old way, the Navajo way. You see an old grandpa, he's always wearing his turquoise."

### THE BEST Georgia O'Keeffe

Georgia O'Keeffe settled in Abiquiú and grew into an icon, not only for her modernist interpretations of flowers and landscapes but for her fierce autonomy. Eleven years after her 1986 death, the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum opened in Santa Fe, with stunning samples of her work. "There has been a growing fascination with O'Keeffe the person," says curator Ariel Plotek. "The dual sides of her story—the life and the art—have come to interest our audience more and more."

O'Keeffe carefully crafted her own image, working with handpicked photographers (including her husband, Alfred Stieglitz) and maintaining a minimalist's flair in her clothing and home decor. Even as waves of consumerism postdated her, that commitment to austerity has won admirers.

"There's a trailblazing quality to her story that spoke directly to one generation," Plotek says, "and now there is a younger generation of mainly young women who are able to identify with O'Keeffe as a sort of prototypical badass. Her choices and independence still resonate."



Georgia O'Keeffe at her Ghost Ranch home.

## The Classics

For centuries, New Mexico artists have perfected their craft in a variety of mediums. Here are a few.



### Rock art

Ancient tribespeople left images of their beliefs pecked into basaltic rocks (petroglyphs) or painted onto cliffsides (pictographs). Head to Three Rivers Petroglyph National Monument, near Tularosa, Petroglyph National Monument, in Albuquerque, and the Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument, near Silver City.



### Pottery

From the Ancestral Puebloans forward, fantastically decorated clay serves as a trademark of identity—intricately lined Mimbres pottery and black-on-black San Ildefonso pots. Contemporary potters like Cochiti's Virgil Ortiz embed their works with political statements and humorous motifs.



### Painting

In the late 19th century, New Mexico boomed with art colonies that continue to inspire new generations. Commune with historical and contemporary works at the Harwood Museum of Art, in Taos, the New Mexico Museum of Art, in Santa Fe, and the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, in Albuquerque.



### Jewelry

Navajos became masters of silverwork. Zuni and Santo Domingo pueblos stand out for their stonework. Meet makers of many tribes at the annual Santa Fe Indian Market each August and at trading posts and galleries throughout the state.



### Santos

Spanish colonists used the materials at hand to create religious art, carving bultos (statues) from cottonwood roots and retablos (paintings) with local pigments. See them at the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, in Santa Fe, and Casa San Ysidro, in Albuquerque.



### Weaving

Navajo and Hispanic weavers turn sheep's wool into stories of beauty and place. Collectors gather at the Crownpoint Navajo Rug Auction to bid on pieces. In Chimayó, Spanish traditions prevail at Centinela Traditional Arts and Ortega's Weaving Shop.

**Clockwise from top left:** A sheep design at Three Rivers Petroglyph Site. *Gliders*, 2020, by Virgil Ortiz. *Journey to Taos*, 2019, by Tony Abeyta. Hubbell Revival weaving, 1890–1900. San Lorenzo bulto, 1830–1860. A turquoise bracelet.



## THE WORST

**Fake Native American jewelry. Mass-produced, often in overseas factories, it features cheap components so cleverly fabricated that even experts can be stumped. It robs legitimate artists of sales and drives down the prices they can ask for the real thing. Always buy directly from artists or reputable dealers.**



QUINTESSENTIALLY  
NEW MEXICO

WILD WEST



A working cowboy.

## Trails and Rails

*Cowboys and trains changed New Mexico—and still spur our dreams.*

The Spanish brought cows, sheep, and *vaquero* skills to New Mexico, but cowboying in the West really hit its stride after the Civil War. At least briefly.

“For anyone who loves New Mexico, being out in the mountains on your horse sounds very romantic,” says Leah Tookey, a curator at the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum, in Las Cruces. “Hollywood romanticized it—sleeping under the stars, eating beans around the campfire with Cookie.”

But the heyday of weeks in the saddle tending the stock on the open range, enduring

lengthy cattle drives, and engaging in a fair bit of cattle rustling lasted only about 20 years, she says. The arrival of the railroad, starting in the 1880s, along with barbed wire and windmill irrigation, changed how ranchers both moved and contained their animals.

“There’s still cowboys here because people work cattle, but as far as moving cattle, it’s this romantic time period,” says Tookey, who’s working on a new exhibit, *Riding Herd with Billy the Kid: The Rise of the Cattle Industry in New Mexico*.

Rodeos throughout the state

still celebrate the cowboy arts, including in Hobbs, where the Lea County Fair & PRCA Rodeo draws some of the nation’s hottest competitors. That said, most cowboys these days rely more on ATVs than horses, says Mary Lyle, education director at the Western Heritage Museum and Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame.

“In 2012, for the state centennial, we did a cattle drive from Jal to Carlsbad,” she says, a distance of about 70 miles. “You can only drive cattle 15 to 18 miles a day. When it was over, those cowboys were worn out. They said, ‘We don’t do that anymore.’”

## HIT THE ROAD

Each September, New Mexico Junior College, in Hobbs, invites fourth graders to the **Staked Plains Roundup**. The kids learn real skills, says Mary Lyle, but also some cowboy etiquette. “They’re the politest people,” she says of ranch hands. “They say ‘Yes, ma’am,’ ‘No, ma’am.’ Those kinds of values are what cowboy culture is trying to preserve.” [nmjc.edu/museum](http://nmjc.edu/museum)

The **Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum**, in Las Cruces, offers live demonstrations of ranch skills, including blacksmithing, milking, and the Parade of Breeds, where the museum’s hired hands present a variety of cattle in the museum’s outdoor arena. As far as being an actual cowboy? “It was a really hard life,” Leah Tookey says. “You were busy all the time, ate the same thing over and over, it was cold, and not an easy place to sleep.” [nmfarmandranchmuseum.org](http://nmfarmandranchmuseum.org)

Hop aboard the 1880 **Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad**, in Chama, for a daylong excursion across open plains and mountain passes. “You steam to the top of Cumbres Pass, over mountain streams, through rock tunnels, and across green meadows, and sometimes see cowboys on horses working to move along herds of sheep,” says interim CEO Eric Mason. [cumbrestoltec.com](http://cumbrestoltec.com)

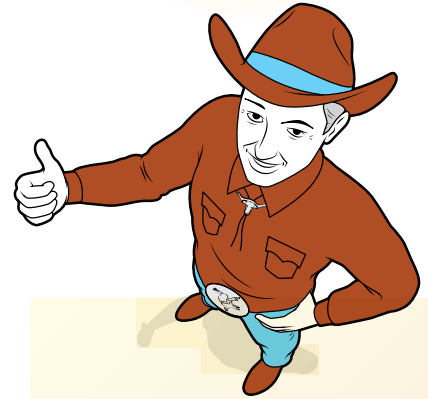
SARA MAXFELDT, JOHN MCCAULEY



The Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum

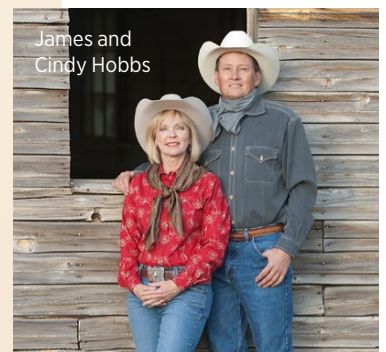
## THE WORST

The all-hat-no-cattle-over-adopter decked out in a Stetson, Lucchese boots, a rodeo-champ-size belt buckle, and a longhorn bolo tie. Sincere appreciation for the cowboy way will help smooth things over with the ranch crowd, but at least spend a day in the saddle first.



## THE BEST\_Western Culture

Gunfights, Pony Express rides, cowboy singing, and chuckwagon dinners come to life at the Flying J Ranch, near Ruidoso. Founders James and Cindy Hobbs are proud of their 40-year enterprise but have grown accustomed to a first-time visitor's skepticism. "Especially the teenagers," James says. "It's really satisfying when you see them go 'Oh, I thought this would be hokey.'" The Flying J Wranglers' excellent musicianship, top-notch grub, and an authentic, old-timey setting win folks over every time. "Our approach is to celebrate the great things about the state, from the cowboy point of view," he says. "It's like an Old West movie, from when the railroads were born." Mosey on over, but behave yourself: The sheriff might put you in jail.



The authenticated tintype of Billy the Kid.

## Picturing Billy

Billy the Kid's gravestone, in Fort Sumner, declares him "The Boy Bandit King," further burnishing a legend that alternately brands him as a freedom fighter and a homicidal punk. What no one doubts is the value of a photograph of this erstwhile cowhand, who spent most of his life in the hinterlands during an era when photographers didn't swarm the region.

In 2011, Florida billionaire William Koch bought the only known tintype of the gunslinger, circa 1880, for \$2.3 million. Quicker than gun smoke, other photos of Billy were "found." Here he is dealing cards! There he is playing croquet!

Tim Roberts, deputy director of New Mexico Historic Sites, lives in Lincoln and walks the same streets Billy once did. "The best I can figure, going to as many city directories as I can find, there were only four or five traveling photographers in New Mexico in 1878, 1880," he says. "There were not a lot of opportunities to take a photo."

Still, Billy wandered through Las Vegas and Santa Fe and wasn't shy about speaking with newspaper reporters. "I can't definitively say these pictures are authentic or not," Roberts says. "I would love nothing more than to have another authenticated photo of him, but the standard has to be very, very high."



QUINTESSENTIALLY  
NEW MEXICO

OFFBEAT

Alien models at the International UFO Museum and Research Center, in Roswell.

## Weird Is Wonderful

*La Llorona. Skinwalkers. UFOs. Haunted hotels. When the world turns weird, we turn pro.*

As a kid in Corrales, Benjamin Radford relished reading about ghosts, monsters, and Russian psychics, until one day he wondered, “Why isn’t Walter Cronkite saying ‘Bigfoot is found’ on the evening news?” A skeptic was born, and today Radford serves as deputy editor of *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine and writes books in which he demystifies the inexplicable; his latest is *Big—If True: Adventures in Oddity* (Rhombus).

“New Mexico is weird,” he

says. “It’s a rural state with a fascinating mix of cultures. Some of the world’s top scientists are working on things too classified for us to know about, and only a few miles away, people are seeing La Llorona in the river.”

That specter, the ghost of a jilted woman who drowned her children in anguish and now haunts waterways seeking fresh children to steal, serves as a sensible warning to little ones and a morality tale to adults, says Ray John de Aragón, an author who

explores history and folktales in numerous books, including his most recent, *Eerie New Mexico* (History Press).

“The wailing woman could appear anywhere at any place you shouldn’t be—alleys, dives, out late at night,” he says. “If you look into history, legend, myths, and folklore, the stories had a basis in truth. There were always morals to teach you a lesson.”

In Diné culture, Skinwalkers are shape-shifting beings that can bring harm to those who stray from a righteous

path. Similar figures appear in nearly every culture throughout the world, Radford says.

One of his favorite New Mexico stories is a supposed 1948 UFO crash in Aztec. “This top-secret guy came in and found a box filled with ‘alien technology.’ He was trying to sell it as a bogus oil- and gold-detecting device that he claimed came from Mars. It was all a hoax.”

Radford has been asked to investigate hauntings, often by people who are genuinely frightened. “They’re losing sleep, a marriage is dissolving,” he says. “I’ve been thanked for explaining what’s actually happening.” Even so, he resists the “debunker” label. “That’s not my goal. My goal is to solve a mystery. If the truth is that the dirt at Chimayó can heal, then that’s wonderful to know. To this day, my position is that weird things are interesting.”

Miracles help us keep the faith, and a good scare adds zest. We thrill at tales of buried treasure, gaze at old buildings picturing the troubled spirits within, and keep an eye out for Bigfoot and Chupacabra (the latter most often a coyote with mange, Radford says).

Aragón has uncovered centuries-old spine chillers through stories told by his northern New Mexico family—leavened with a bit of science. The *bola de lumbre* that leads to either treasure or trouble is just ball lightning, a natural phenomenon, and the oft-told legend of the 16th-century martyred priest whose coffin rose inside of Isleta Pueblo’s mission church was likely due to a Río Grande flood.

“But,” says Aragón, “why did it happen during a drought? And why didn’t the other coffins rise?”

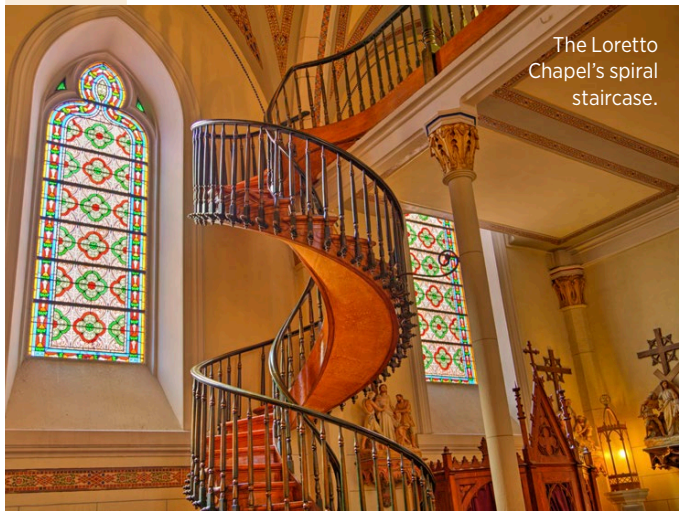
## INDEX OF ODDITIES

### We're Young

New Mexico became a state on January 6, 1912. Arizona steamed into statehood a month later, spoiling our chance to see 47-star flags atop every government building.

### We're Old

Some of our rocks date to 1.8 billion years ago. Paleo-Indians occupied New Mexico around 10,000 years ago. The first time anyone spent a night in the White House, the Palace of the Governors was already 200 years old.



The Loretto Chapel's spiral staircase.

## HIT THE ROAD

In the village of Cimarrón, the 1872 **St. James Hotel** markets its reputation for spectral sightings. Management even refuses to rent room 18, saying the spirit of T.J. Wright is just too disruptive. Benjamin Radford has interviewed a longtime Cimarrón resident who insisted the “ghosts” only showed up when the

hotel's ownership changed. Radford doubts you have anything to fear but adds, “Who wouldn't want to stay in a ghost room?”

The miraculous staircase at Santa Fe's **Loretto Chapel** has welcomed streams of faithful visitors for generations. The legend goes that it was built by the spirit of Saint Joseph, who

answered a novena by the chapel's nuns, used woods and building techniques unknown in 1878, and disappeared before he could be paid. In 2002, historian Mary Jean Straw Cook published her discovery of the real carpenter, François-Jean Rochas, along with a receipt for his work, but the legend persists. Regardless, the staircase is beautiful.

It's not just Truth or Consequences. Lots of our towns bear **quirky names**. Head to Pie Town, where they still serve pie. Spot both a roadrunner and a coyote in Acme. Add some get-up-and-go to Pep. You could imagine the massacre that occurred in Skeleton Canyon, but know that Slaughter Mesa was named after a rancher. Grab a copy of Robert Julyan's *The Place Names of New Mexico* (University of New Mexico Press) for Nutt, Weed, Floyd, Queen, Bland, and a lot more.



### Music, Music, Music

We have an official state song, march, Spanish language song, bilingual song, ballad, and cowboy song. We also have a state guitar to play them.

### Dive In

Even at our high elevation, Santa Rosa's Blue Hole attracts scuba divers. The 81-foot-deep aquatic cavern sits 4,600 feet above sea level.

### Botany Lesson

New Mexico has not one but two state vegetables: the chile, which is a fruit; and pinto beans, which are legumes.

### Up and Down

The highest point in New Mexico is Wheeler Peak, in Taos, at 13,161 feet. The lowest is the northern end of Red Bluff Reservoir, near Carlsbad, at 2,842 feet.

### Friends in Low Places

In 1852, María Gertrudis Barceló, aka La Doña Tules, the owner of a Santa Fe gambling hall and bordello, was buried in La Parroquia Church, predecessor to the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. (She left part of her estate to the church.)

### Spelling Disaster

Struggles to spell “Albuquerque” could have been worse. Named for New Spain's Duke

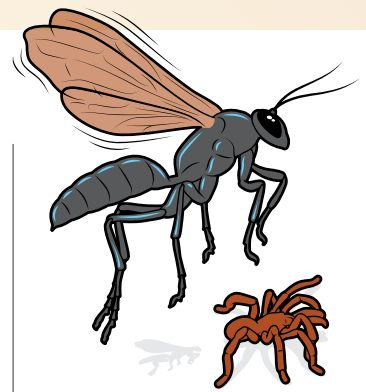
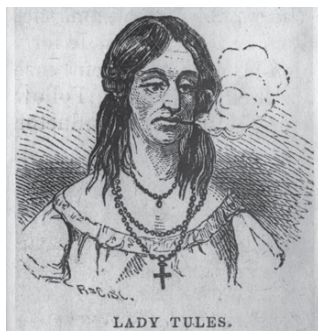
of Albuquerque (in today's Mexico), the name carried an extra “r” that some say a misguided postmaster dropped.

### Film First

Thomas Edison produced New Mexico's first motion picture. The silent *Indian Day School* (1898) featured Isleta Pueblo schoolchildren. About 40 seconds of it are preserved by the Library of Congress at [nmmag.us/edisonfilm](http://nmmag.us/edisonfilm).

### No Respect

In 1880, General William T. Sherman said in a speech to New Mexicans, “I hope ten years hence there won't be an adobe house in the territory. I want to see you learn to make them of brick, with slanting roofs. Yankees don't like flat roofs, nor roofs of dirt.”



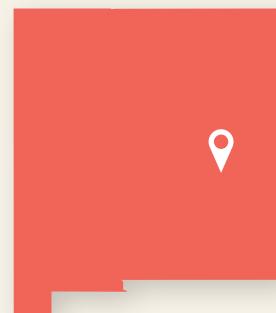
## THE WORST

**With a body that looks like it came from a Roger Corman movie and a sting that hurts like a speeding bullet, the tarantula hawk wasp only seems imaginary. Pepsis formosa is very real, and New Mexico's official state insect. Give it respect—and a wide berth.**



# Sacred Space

Joe Masters remembers pie suppers, circuit-riding preachers, and his grandma playing hymns on the baby grand. Aside from a few town reunions, the 1908 Taiban Presbyterian Church fell silent well before its 1960 sale and eventual ownership by members of Masters’s family. By then, this hamlet, founded in 1906 by homesteaders and railroad workers, had failed, kidney-punched by drought, the Depression, and the decline of the railway. For a while, bootlegging drew wealthy men from dry counties in West Texas and Oklahoma. They flew in to load up on liquor, right in front of the church. Then the bars burned down. Folks had short-lived ideas for taking the church apart and rebuilding it as an exhibit. Its bell moved to the Billy the Kid Museum, in Fort Sumner. Vandals broke its windows, sprayed graffiti, and let the elements pummel the structure, one of the most photographed landmarks in eastern New Mexico. Masters, now 80, still has the piano in his Tyler, Texas, living room. He’d donate it to a restored church, he says, but figures its time has passed. “It was a good place to live,” he says. “I enjoyed my youth.” —*Kate Nelson*



The Taiban church sits 14 miles east of Fort Sumner on US 60/84. Admire it, take pictures, but don’t enter or harm the property.

KATE NELSON

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