

**Of Interest:**

- Let's Have a Party! 2009 is the 60th Anniversary of Los Alamos County.
- aj Melnick's new photo show on New Mexico women opens this month at the Historical Museum
- Check our website at [www.losalamoshistory.org](http://www.losalamoshistory.org) for the latest information on Historical Society events.

**Inside this issue:**

<i>Quarterly Calendar</i>	2
<i>Public Benefit of a New Archives Facility</i>	6
<i>First Brown Bag With the Curator a Success</i>	8
<i>60th Anniversary of Los Alamos County</i>	10
<i>Restoration of "Oppie's Limo" in Albuquerque</i>	11

## Los Alamos County and Historical Society Apply For Study of New Archives & Records Facility

In conjunction with Los Alamos County, the Historical Society has applied for \$200,000 in the upcoming county budget for location and design studies for an archives and records center. This facility, whether new or designed using an existing building, will house the collection of the Los Alamos Historical Society as well as the consolidated records for the county government.

"We are the record keepers of one of the most significant events in history," said Hedy Dunn, director of the Historical Museum. "As caretakers, we need to ensure that these documents, artifacts, and photographs are preserved for the future, and that is just not possible in our current location. If the Cerro Grande Fire had consumed the Lodge and its contents, the community's loss would have been tragic in terms of historical heritage."

The collection of the Los Alamos Historical Society is much more than what visitors see in the museum. It includes thousands of documents and photographs as well as hundreds of objects that are stored in Fuller Lodge. As members of the Greatest Generation and others with connections to the history of Los Alamos pass away, they, their



**Artifacts from the Los Alamos Historical Museum collection are stored on the third floor of Fuller Lodge, where they are in danger from environmental exposure. Read more in from a recent conservation report on Page 7. Photo by Christine Brown**

children and grandchildren donate more and more items, each of which has a unique story.

However, these wonderful objects are also in peril. A recent survey of the collection, funded in part by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services concluded the collection is in danger because of inadequate storage conditions in 80-year-old Fuller Lodge. Everything from dust to a potential fire in the log building poses hazards.

For more information on the archives, please see our package of articles beginning on the next page.

## Archives Study at Beginning of Rigorous Process

This fall, Los Alamos County instituted a new process for its Capital Improvement Projects budget. Designed to increase public input on major county projects, the process requires county departments or civic groups to apply for funds through a rigorous process. Applicants must submit a proposal that meets eight criteria, from public support to the impact on the county's operating budget.

In cooperation with Anne Laurent, facilities and projects director for the county, the Historical Society put together a 78-page application to make its case for a study of a new archival facility. The package included more than two dozen letters of support from the community, historians, and others who believe in the importance of the Historical Society's mission. Because of concern for the safety and preservation of Fuller Lodge itself, the Fuller Lodge/Historic Districts Advisory Board also supported the application.

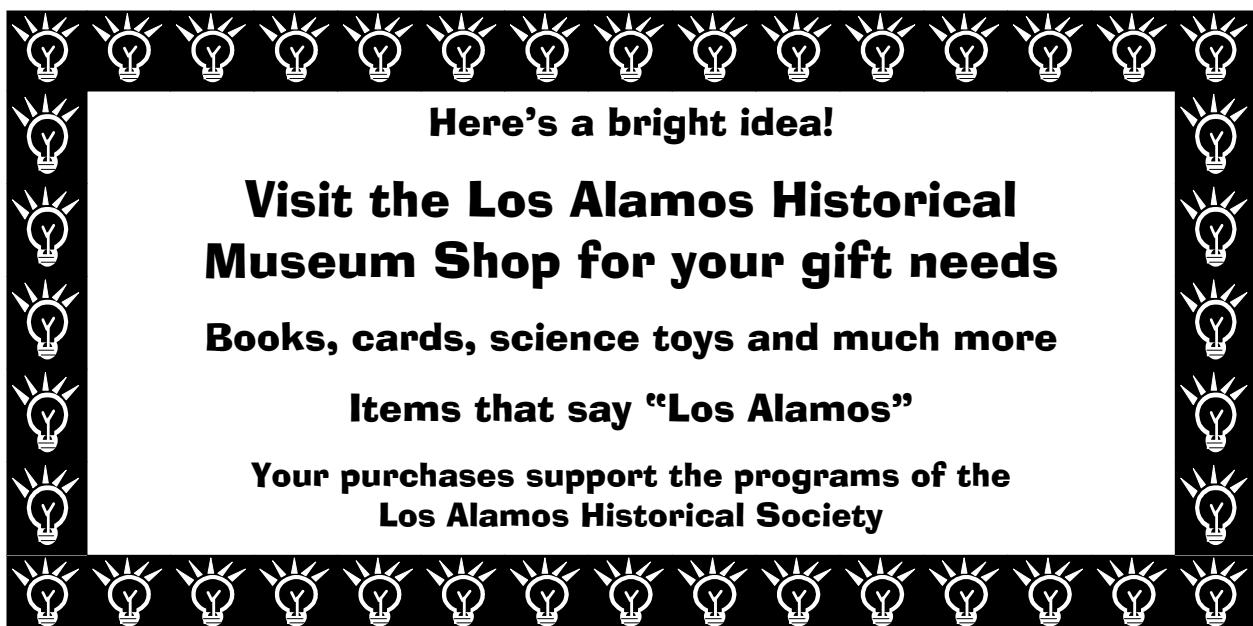
In January, a committee of senior county staff and citizens met to score the applications. Of the 23 projects, the archives and records center scored 11th, with 18.83 out

of 36 possible points. (The highest scoring project, a study to make improvements to State Road 4 in White Rock, received 22.67 points.) To see all of the projects and their scores, please visit the Los Alamos County website at <http://www.losalamosnm.us>, or e-mail us at [historicalsociety@losalamoshistory.org](mailto:historicalsociety@losalamoshistory.org) and we will send you a copy of the rankings.

These scores will now be passed on to County Administrator Max Baker, who will make recommendations to the County Council. Council members will determine which projects get funded in the 2009-2010 capital improvements budget.

The process is not final until the council approves its budget. Budget hearings are scheduled for the last two weeks in April, beginning April 20.

Public input is still welcome on the CIP process and projects. If you are interested in showing your support for a new archives and records center study, please contact the county councilors by e-mail at [countycouncil@lacnm.us](mailto:countycouncil@lacnm.us), by phone 505-663-1750, or by mail at PO Box 30, Los Alamos, NM 87544.



**Here's a bright idea!**

**Visit the Los Alamos Historical  
Museum Shop for your gift needs**

**Books, cards, science toys and much more**

**Items that say "Los Alamos"**

**Your purchases support the programs of the  
Los Alamos Historical Society**

## These Are A Few of Our Favorite Things

The collection of the Los Alamos Historical Museum contains many special objects. Here are a few of the staff's favorites.

**Museum Director Hedy Dunn:** My favorite artifact is the Manhattan-era license plate that the late Dick Watts donated in the mid-1980s, when he was president of our Historical Society. After his term expired, he continued to be an ardent supporter and donated many valuable artifacts including a Maria Martinez bowl and the dress his wife wore at their war-time wedding. While these are wonderful artifacts too, I am partial to the license plate because it is documented by a photograph of the license itself attached to the car that the Watts owned and drove in Los Alamos in the mid-1940s. The license appears to be nothing special as it has only black numbers on an orange background: no date, no state, no county or other identifying marks appear. However, I have never seen another license like this. It truly speaks of the unique and secret circumstances surrounding daily life on the mesa in Manhattan-era times.

**Assistant Director Heather McClenan:** My favorite object in the collection is the original letter from Secretary of War Henry Stimson to A.J. Connell, claiming the Ranch School for war work. Holding this letter is holding history in your hands. It is the beginning of the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos. How many lives were affected by this one piece of paper? It is so simple and straightforward yet so significant. I get excited every time I see the real thing. (A copy is on display in the Historical Museum.)

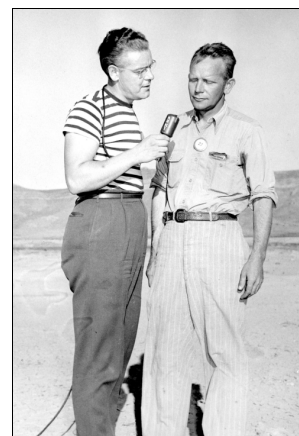
**Archivist Rebecca Collinsworth:** In 1996 the archives received a package from Kenneth T. Bainbridge, who was 92 at the time. Helped by his daughter, Margaret, he packed in a modest box the mementos and photos of his time in Los Alamos, when he was director of the Trinity Test.

Some items in the box mirror experiences shared by other Project Y families: a small stack of expense reports and correspondence details the struggle to bring the Bainbridge household to Los Alamos in 1943.

There are ID cards, mileage ration stamps, envelopes with the military censor's tape, photographs from family members fighting in Europe, a family picture at Puye.

Then there are the rare artifacts that could only be associated with the Trinity Test: a piece of the test tower, welder's glass used by Bainbridge to shield his eyes, a letter from Peg Bainbridge to her husband at Trinity (hand-carried by Emilio Segre), Fred Reines' penciled notes on the measurement of the Ground Zero test crater, Hubbard's handwritten weather report for the morning of the test, time-stamped 4:45 am.

Opening this collection was like opening a time capsule. The documents and photographs speak



**Kenneth Bainbridge is interviewed at Trinity.**

of the hardships of war, the constraints of military secrecy and government rationing, of young families moving west to an unknown destination.

These artifacts remind us of the months of preparation at Trinity, the alkaline grit and the July heat of the test site. Many Project Y people, who had subordinated their normal

You are further advised that all records pertaining to the aforesaid condemnation proceeding will be sealed, by order of the Court, and public inspection of such records will be prohibited. Accordingly, it is requested that you refrain from making the reasons for the closing of the school known to the public at large.

Sincerely yours,

*Henry L. Stimson*  
Secretary of War

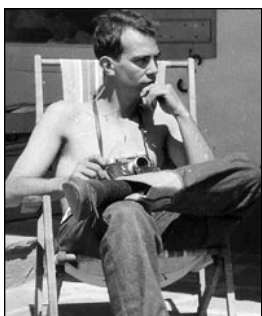
**A section of the letter from Secretary of War Henry Stimson to A.J. Connell, notifying of the U.S. government's takeover of the Los Alamos Ranch School.**

**Please See "Favorite" on Page 9**

## How the Public Will Benefit From an Archive Facility in Los Alamos

### The following article was included with the Phase 1 Capital Improvement Project application to Los Alamos County

Anyone who has cleaned out a family attic knows the importance of keeping records. From the military records of relatives to pictures of great-great grandparents on the day they became American citizens, some items are irreplaceable. Yet a museum collection is more than attic storage. It is a



**Jack Aeby took the only known color photo of Trinity.**

place where these irreplaceable items are cared for professionally and where their history is recorded and told for posterity. In Los Alamos, the Los Alamos Historical Society is tasked with preserving such irreplaceable items – items such as the camera that took the only known color picture of the world's first atomic bomb blast, as well as that color picture, and the oral history of Jack Aeby, the photographer who took it.

In a democracy, records belong to the people, and for four decades, the Los Alamos Historical Society has preserved and provided access to the documents, photographs, and artifacts of history that changed the world. These items tell important stories that belong to everyone, from extraordinary events such as the wartime closing of the Los Alamos Ranch School to the tales of ordinary farmers who homesteaded on the Pajarito Plateau.

In his 2008 presidential address, outgoing Society of American Archivists president Mark A. Greene asserted that, “archivists are professionals who shoulder the power of defining and providing access to the primary sources of history, primary sources that protect rights, educate students, inform the public, and support a primal human desire to understand our past.” By preserving and providing access to primary sources, archives also document the breadth of individual human experiences and protect collective memory. Additionally, archival records of local, state, and federal governments and public and private institutions are essential in making these organizations accountable and their actions transparent.

Beyond the idealistic goals of protecting democ-

racy and educating its citizens, there is a practical side to having a modern archival facility in Los Alamos. Each year, more than 250 student and adult researchers use the resources of the Los Alamos Historical Archives. Interest in the Manhattan Project has not waned after more than 60 years and, in fact, continues to grow as each generation explores the historic questions raised by the development and use of nuclear weapons. Many of these researchers, such as Pulitzer Prize-winning author Kai Bird, come from out of town, stay in our hotels, eat at our restaurants, and visit our shops while they are in town. This helps contribute to our tax base and benefits the entire community.

While historians and genealogists are the most obvious users of archival resources, museum collections can be significant for any person whose project requires a historical perspective or dimension. Archivist Bruce Dearstyne provided these examples in his article “What is the *Use of Archives?*” (*American Archivist*, Winter 1987): “Businesses, governments, and other institutions need archival records for retrospective policy analysis and to provide continuity in administration. Government records document the responsibilities of government and the rights of its citizens. They are often essential in legal matters – to document agreements, substantiate claims, and prove contentions. Engineers use old plans, maps, sketches, reports, and specifications for information on the location, age, and physical characteristics of the infrastructure ... Environmental researchers use historical records to study land use patterns, water use, and other environmental issues. Medical researchers use patient files and other records to understand genetic and familial diseases and to trace the impact of epidemics.” Records such as these are part of the collection of the Los Alamos Historical Society.

Finally, the Los Alamos Historical Society provides a service for the people who created and share our history. The museum collection allows these pieces of history to be in the public sphere rather than hidden away or, worse, thrown away. Without adequate and environmentally-sound space to store these items, the Historical Society will not be able to fulfill its mission or meet the public trust.

A modern facility for storing these records and artifacts will show the rest of the world what many already know -- we believe our history is important.

## Grant Allows Society to Survey the Collection

The Los Alamos Historical Society has received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to assess the museum and archive collection. Bettina Raphael, a professional conservator from Santa Fe, who completed a conservation assessment for the museum in 1990, was able to return to Los Alamos in December and look over the collection that is stored in Fuller Lodge. Some excerpts from her report follow:



**The weight of documents in these boxes are causing floor loading issues in Fuller Lodge. Photo by Christine Brown.**

During my current review, I was disheartened to find the storage situation more dire than it was 18 years ago and that collecting activities have reached a crisis point. The aging building with its limited space, inadequate structural capacity, poor fire and security conditions, difficult accessibility and lack of environmental protection fails to meet basic safety and manage-

ment needs and put these valuable collections at serious risk...

The current collection storerooms and work spaces are also inconvenient and stressful for those working with the archives and objects. The division of the collections in several different, not-easily-accessed locations makes providing oversight and good management even harder for the very small and largely part-time staff of the Historical Society. The lack of reasonable, clean work spaces to examine, process and study the items; the crowding of visiting scholars into make-shift study corners; the presence of the staff lounge and kitchen inside the archives storeroom; the clutter of old supplies and "junk" amid the collections on the third floor due to lack of alternate storage space -- all of these conditions are not conducive to careful, calm, professional practices and pose a threat to the well-being of the

collections. ...

Dust and insects pose other threats to paper-based collections as well as the variety of materials like leather, wood, metals, textiles, and painted surfaces composing the wide range of artifacts held by the Historical Society. The open shelving units give little protection from accumulations of dust and dirt or from biological agents. Gaps in the old structure, especially on the neglected 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, have allowed bats to enter the storerooms and recently an infestation of moths was discovered in a costume artifact made of fur...

Finally, the sheer age of the building and years of deferred maintenance makes this inappropriate housing for the valuable and vulnerable historic materials held here. Today it is fundamental that a museum or archival repository have control over the quality of its space and the reliability of its maintenance...

The report concludes with a series of recommendations about a new or rebuilt facility, including details on lighting, storage units, and climate controls. Raphael also recommends: "A

minimum of three times the total current square footage of various storage and office spaces is needed to alleviate past overcrowding and allow for future growth. This estimate assumes that some of the storage meth-

ods would involve high-density housing in large open spaces with 10-12 ft. high shelving units and the use of some compacting storage cabinets."

These recommendations will be used in design talks with Los Alamos County and any architects or others involved in the design phase of an archives facility. For a copy of the complete report, please contact the museum offices.



**Textiles in the museum collection face environmental threats in Fuller Lodge such as bugs, dust, heating, and humidity problems. Photo by Christine Brown.**