

# Los Alamos Historical Society



The wartime home of Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer is owned in a life trust by the Los Alamos Historical Society. The Society is hosting a symposium this month with scholars, preservationists, historic house experts, and community members to determine how to incorporate the home into the museum complex. The photo at left was taken in 1942 and is in the collection of the Historical Museum Archives. The top photo was taken this year.

## Annual Report September 2010

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## A GREAT YEAR FOR LAHS MUSEUM DIRECTOR'S REPORT

As we look back over the year of 2009-10, the members, board, and staff of the Los Alamos Historical Society can be pleased and proud of our accomplishments and hard work. We had overflowing attendance at our lectures, significant interest in our traveling exhibits, and thriving sales of our publications and in our Museum Shop. We continue to collect important historical artifacts, photos, and documents in our archives. Our financial picture has improved, and our membership continues to grow. Thank you for your support!

*Hedy Dunn*



One of our most significant accomplishments this year was the opening of Romero Cabin. On May 1, four generations of the Romero and Gonzales families joined in the grand opening celebration. Special thanks go to Larry Campbell, who spent years championing the restoration and to members of the Historic Properties Committee for their work in furnishing and maintaining the cabin. In addition to opening the cabin during fairs on the Fuller Lodge lawn, a group of volunteers has kept the cabin open for a few hours each week over the summer. We hope to have even more opportunities for visitation next year.

Another achievement was the completion of the Museum Assessment Program from the American Association of Museums. After a rigorous year of self-assessment, we had two museum consultants visit to tell us how we are doing and where we can improve. Their report has already resulted in some changes, including a new "photos allowed" policy in the museum and new signage, such as new wooden sign hanging over the museum's front window. The report will also serve as a

basis for our upcoming strategic plan (see Page 5).

We continue to collaborate with the Atomic Heritage Foundation and representatives from Hanford and Oak Ridge on the development of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. We anticipate the National Park Service recommendations on the park to be out at any time. Congress will write legislation for the park based on the NPS report.

Our podcasts continue to be the most visited segment of our website, which received more than 71,000 visitors last year. Our museum, meanwhile, is thriving, too, with more than 31,500 visitors to our exhibits. Our most recent changing exhibit, "Vanished: The German-American Internment" has been quite popular. The original exhibit of "Harvey Girls, Harvey Houses, and Southwest Indian Detours," was also highly enjoyable, and it attracted many visitors. That exhibit was eventually rented and displayed by the Belen Harvey House in Belen, NM.

Another point of pride for the past year

*(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)*

## News Briefs

### **Oppenheimer House Symposium**

The Los Alamos Historical Society has received grants from the New Mexico Humanities Council and the National Trust for Historic Preservation to host a symposium on the future of the Oppenheimer House. The Bathtub Row house, owned by the Society in a life trust, will be added to the museum complex when the current residents are ready to move. The symposium will feature a gathering of preservationists, scholars, historic house experts, and community members who will discuss the best uses for the house once it is open to the public.

The symposium will be held Sept. 23 at Fuller Lodge and Sept. 24 at the Best Western Hilltop House. Members of the public and members of the Historical Society, are invited to attend. For more information about times, participants, and other features of the program, please visit our website at [www.losalamoshistory.org](http://www.losalamoshistory.org).

### **Annual Campaign**

The 2010 Annual Campaign and Membership Drive was a rousing success, thanks to our wonderful members. The Los Alamos Historical Society now has nearly 600 members, 179 of whom are Heritage Partners, those who give \$100 or more. Your support has enabled us to stay "in the black" while expanding our programs.

In addition, for this year's campaign, an anonymous donor offered to match each Heritage Partnership of \$1,000 or more. That generous match came in at \$14,800.

You can read more about the Society's financial picture in the treasurer's report on page 13. The annual membership list is available beginning on page 15.

### **Archives & Records Center**

The County Council has delayed action on a new archives and records center until its Oct. 5 meeting. Council members are waiting for information on the costs and size of adding the center to the new municipal building. In the meantime, an investigation is under way by an architectural consulting firm on the feasibility of using the Community Building on Ashley Pond for expanded museum space, a community meeting place, and archives. Updated information will be sent to our members via e-mail, our website, and future newsletters.

### **Leadership Transition**

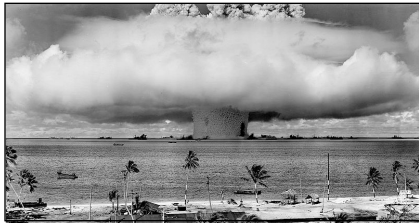
After Labor Day, Museum Director Hedy Dunn will begin working half time and Assistant Museum Director Heather McClenahan will expand her hours and responsibilities. The change over is in anticipation of Dunn's retirement in the summer of 2011. This arrangement will continue through the end of 2010, at which time the Board will evaluate and take the next steps in the transition.

### **Strategic Planning**

The Board of Directors held its annual retreat in July at the historic home of Dorothy McKibbin in Santa Fe. The extraordinary setting inspired the foundations of a strategic plan that will see the Historical Society through its 50th anniversary in July 2018. The plan will include a revised mission statement, a new vision statement, and a series of strategic goals that focused on improving our museum and programs. The input of our members will be important to the process. Please keep an eye out for more information.

# Upcoming Programs for 2010-2011 (Subject to Change)

**Los Alamos National Bank-sponsored Lecture Series.** All lectures are at 7:30 p.m. in the Pajarito Room of Fuller Lodge unless otherwise noted.



**September 14:** Albert Bartlett, "Recollections of Operation Crossroads." In the summer of 1946, the Crossroads tests

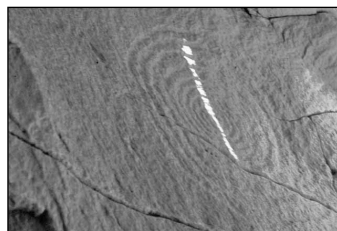
were performed to gauge the effect of nuclear weapons on naval ships. The series consisted of two detonations, each with a yield of 23 kilotons: Able was detonated at an altitude of 520 feet on July 1, 1946; Baker was detonated 90 feet underwater on July 25, 1946. A third burst, Charlie, planned for 1947, was canceled primarily because of the Navy's inability to decontaminate the target ships after the Baker test.

**October 12:** Paul Hutton, "Kit Carson: How Legend Clashes With Reality on the American Frontier." Professor Hutton's book, *Phil Sheridan and His Army* (1985), received numerous awards, including the Billington Prize from the Organization of American Historians. Hutton is a frequent contributor to PBS television's popular series, "American Experience."

**November 9:** Chick Keller, "The Changing Role of the Los Alamos Laboratory" – from the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory to the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Keller will examine non-defense related scientific research at the facilities including laser science and climate modeling.

**January 11, 2011:** Todd Urbatsch, "Bengt Carlson: Supercomputers and Apple Wine." Urbatsch fondly and respectfully tells the tale of a giant in the world of super-computing who was equally proud of his homegrown, award-winning apple wine as he was of his computational accomplishments.

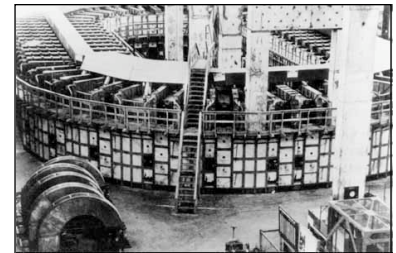
**February 8:** Ron Barber, "Stone Calendars." Learn how ancient people marked the seasons by use of petroglyphs that align



with unique shadows used to mark the time of year of the winter and summer solstices, equinoxes, cross-quarters, and other dates marked by indigenous people. Many such sites can be found on the Pajarito Plateau and far beyond. The presentation will include the regional design variations and the design evolution of Stone Calendars leading to very high precision solar measurements.

**March 8:** Panel Discussion, "Manhattan Project Memories." Several members of the scientific and technical teams that were part of the Manhattan Project will reflect on civilian, military, and scientific life at "Project Y."

**April 12:** D. Ray Smith, "Stories from the Secret City of Oak Ridge." In 2010, Y-12 National Security Complex historian Ray Smith hosted the opening of Building 9731, the Pilot Facility. It was



the first building completed at Y-12 in March 1943. Members of the public were able to see the world's only Alpha Calutron Magnets (over 20 feet tall). Smith has also lectured on Oak Ridge history at the University of Tennessee and Vanderbilt University.

**May 11:** Annual Meeting and Ice Cream Social featuring Steve Stoddard. Retired LANL scientist and former NM state Sen. Stoddard was a young participant in World War II. His memories and his amazing collection of weapons and military insignia, flags, helmets, patches, photos, and diaries are a treasure that will be part of our co-sponsored exhibit in June at Mesa Public Library.

## Brown Bag With the Collection for Heritage Partners and Life Members

**November 2, 12:30 p.m.** Fine art in the collection in conjunction with the Fuller Lodge Art Center

**February 2011** (date TBA) Historic quilts in conjunction with local quilters

**May 2011** (date TBA) What's In Your Historic Collection?

## Memorials

**By Sharon Snyder  
Publications Director**

Kevin McKibbin, a life member of the Historical Society, passed away June 13 in Santa Fe. Many longtime Los Alamos residents knew Kevin from his years as chief ranger at Bandelier National Monument, but as the son of Dorothy McKibbin, the much-loved “gatekeeper to Los Alamos,” he was also connected to Manhattan Project history.

A memorial gathering on July 31 was held at Kevin’s childhood home on the Old Santa Fe Trail, a place where Manhattan Project scientists had gathered decades before to escape the stress of their work on “The Hill” and where a young boy in his early teens had formed unique friendships with world-famous people. Attending that gathering and being in that house, his family and friends could easily reflect on what it was like for young Kevin to grow up within those adobe walls that encompassed so much history.

Daughter Anne McKibbin revealed that her father enjoyed that very different childhood, with interesting people coming and going from the house, “a different group of people than most kids are around.” He just

“took it in stride.” She thought, too, that in their hours at the McKibbin house the young scientists probably enjoyed having “a little fun with a kid.” One of Kevin’s favorite stories involved Nobel laureate Ed McMillan, co-discoverer of plutonium. During the Manhattan Project, McMillan stayed at the McKibbin home one night, awaiting a bus to take him back to the Hill the next day, but instead of remembering to catch his bus, he joined Kevin in attempting to fix a problem on a ’27 Chevy. After the Lab called Dorothy’s office, searching for their missing scientist, she found them both under the hood of Kevin’s car! Anne observed, too, that these men who came and went from Kevin’s life were “perhaps father figures” as well. Kevin was born December 6, 1930, in St. Paul, MN, to Dorothy and Joseph McKibbin, but his father died the following year of Hodgkin’s Disease.

Within a few months, Dorothy had moved with her young son to Santa Fe, a place she loved but one very different from St. Paul or her Kansas City home. They rented an apartment in El Zagan, an old adobe hacienda on unpaved Canyon Road. The move placed Kevin in the environment that would foster his love of nature and the outdoors, leading eventually to his career as a national park ranger. Once the house on Old Santa Fe Trail was completed, Kevin could step out the door into wide-open surroundings, his own personal playground.



**Kevin McKibbin looks over the biography of his mother, Dorothy Scarritt McKibbin: Gatekeeper to Los Alamos, written by Nancy Steeper, right. (Photo by Sharon Snyder)**

He collected snakes and insects and had numerous pets, including the family greyhound named Peter the Great and kittens given to him by Edith Warner.

After graduating from Santa Fe High School, Kevin enlisted in the army and fought in the Korean War. Upon returning to the States, he married his childhood friend Mary Gower Thompson of Kansas City, and earned a degree in geology from the University of New Mexico. Kevin worked first for a company in

Albuquerque, surveying land on the Navajo Reservation, and later for the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory's metallurgy division before becoming a park ranger in 1964.

His first assignment was Timpanogos Cave National Monument in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah. Three stints at Arizona sites followed. At Navajo National Monument he was an "acting" chief ranger

before moving to his first chief ranger position at Canyon de Chelly. That was followed by his assignment as superintendent at Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site. From there, Kevin took a post as superintendent of Pea Ridge National Military Park in order to get his two daughters into a better school situation. In an appropriate last reassignment of his career, he returned home to New Mexico for eleven years as chief ranger at Bandelier National

Monument. He retired from the National Park Service in 1988.

At the memorial in July, Rory Gautier, also a chief ranger at Bandelier, fondly looked back on Kevin McKibbin as his "first chief ranger." Reflecting on those years, Rory commented that Kevin's style was different, "but he inspired me."

Kevin had a quiet, mild-mannered personality, and though he wasn't extroverted, he loved people. In retirement,

he missed his time interacting with park visitors and giving campfire talks. "He had a way with people," Anne said. "He went quietly through the world and left smiles."

Kevin's daughter Karen added some of the wonderful stories told at the memorial during a slide show of photos from her father's life.

"When I was little, we went to the Snake Dance," she said, referring to the Hopi ceremony in

Arizona. During that dance, an ogre comes close to the onlookers and frightens children somewhat like the boogeyman does in Anglo culture. "Dad was sitting behind me," Karen continued, "and he leaned forward and whispered in my ear to explain what was going to happen so I wouldn't be scared and could continue enjoying the dance."



**Kevin McKibbin shares a moment with visitor at the Los Alamos Historical Museum during a 2003 book signing for *Gatekeeper to Los Alamos*. (Photo by Sharon Snyder)**

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 8)

Throughout the afternoon, Karen and Anne provided glimpses of a wonderful father. “I was the tomboy of the family,” Anne remembered, “and we’d hike and hunt snakes and rescue turtles off the highway.” With insight, she continued, “He was the only son of a widowed mother, and then came a wife and two daughters. He had no opportunity to learn how to be a dad. But he was a great dad!”

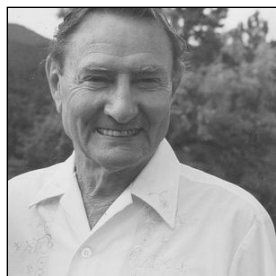
The memorial was a time of laughter, good memories, and love—for a person, a family, and a historic house. Looking out the back door of her grandmother’s home, where she had played, also, as a child, Anne commented wistfully, “It hasn’t changed much.”

Dorothy McKibbin has been described as a “powerful civilizing influence for the scientists and the families who came to Los Alamos to build the atomic bomb that ended World War II.” Kevin was incredibly proud of his mother, but she in turn, had a son of whom she could be incredibly proud.

Canyon de Chelly was one of Kevin’s favorite places. Was that because it was a quiet place of beauty? Much like Kevin McKibbin?

### Ben Diven

Benjamin Clinton Diven, age 91, died July 5. Ben was born in 1919 in Chico, California,



to Ambrose and Mary Diven. He received a bachelor's degree in physics from UC Berkeley in 1941. His master's degree was interrupted by the war when Robert

Oppenheimer recruited him to work in Los Alamos in the spring of 1943. Ben was one of the first people to arrive in Los Alamos to work on the project. After the war he worked summers at the lab and continued his education, finishing his doctorate at the University of Illinois in 1950. He returned to Los Alamos and remained

there until 2005 when his health required him to live at a lower elevation. He met the love of his life, Beckie, at Los Alamos during the war. They were married at Dorothy McKibbin's house in Santa Fe in 1951. Ben loved Los Alamos, the people he met there, and his work at P3. Ben was happiest when surrounded by his family and friends, with whom he shared many adventures around the world. He had a great love of the outdoors, was an avid hunter and fisherman, and loved to work in his flower gardens.

### Ferenc Szasz

University of New Mexico Regents' Professor of History Ferenc “Frank” Szasz died June 20, at the age of 70. Szasz joined the UNM Department of History in 1968 and earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Rochester the following year. His scholarship included American intellectual history, American religious history, religion in the American West, the early atomic age, and the “old” social and intellectual history, especially the impact of Scotland on the West.

He taught U.S. history survey courses, the history of World War II, and a number of undergraduate and graduate seminars. In 1985 Szasz received an “Outstanding Teacher of the Year” award.

A prolific and accomplished writer, Szasz’s most popular title was *The Day the Sun Rose Twice: the Story of the Trinity Site Nuclear Explosion*. He authored eight books, edited or co-edited four others, and published nearly 90 scholarly and popular articles. He served as a manuscript reviewer for a number of academic journals and presses, as well as being a member of the editorial board for *Journal of the West*.

A Szasz manuscript, *Atomic Comics*, is being published by the University of Nevada Press at Reno, tentatively scheduled for release in 2011; and a feature article on the comic strip will be Red Ryder in the upcoming July issue of the *New Mexico Historical Review*.

# Annual Treasurer's Report

**By Ron Wilkins  
Treasurer**

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2010 our Society had operating income of \$207,265 and expenses of \$201,560 resulting



in a surplus of \$5,704 for the year. This result is quite a turn-around considering that when the year began we anticipated having to draw on \$10,000 of reserve funds. Although operating revenue was

slightly below budget, our operating expenses were even more under budget. Most of the savings occurred in personnel costs; some staff were unable to work as many hours as planned due to health-related issues. While it is good to have a surplus, this particular savings is not one that we want to see repeated.

A couple of bright spots are that gross sales for the Museum Shop and our publications exceeded the budget target slightly; this bodes well for the future. And, your Heritage Partner/Membership contributions exceeded our target (\$49,840

actual vs. \$46,000 budget through June 30). As always, your Board is grateful for this strong support.

Our reserve funds consist of approximately \$232,000 (June 30 market value) invested through LANB Investment Services and \$125,000 in two LANB CDs. Compared to this same time last year, we are more heavily invested in the market having moved \$125,000 of maturing CDs over to our investment account. We also have cash reserves (\$45,600) in LANB savings in addition to our normal working cash checking accounts.

At first glance it may look like we have ample reserves, but we also have significant commitments, primarily to the long-term operation of the Oppenheimer House and to archival management. In addition, there will be financial demands associated with equipping the new archival facility should that become a reality. So, while it looks like we have turned the corner on operating losses, we ask again for your continued help and support going forward.

The financial records of the society are available in the Museum Director's office. To view them, please contact Hedy Dunn at 662-6272.



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has been our growing financial stability. The Museum Shop has come into its own with merchandise that appeals to a broad variety of ages and interests and, thus, sales are showing a healthy growth. Our "experience auction" at the Annual Meeting made more than \$3,000 in its second year. The Heritage Partner Annual Campaign and Membership Drive sparked a matching contribution of

nearly \$15,000 and our banking accounts are solid with infusions of occasional donations as well as grants of one kind or another.

The new year holds much to anticipate. Soon our application for Phase II in the CIP process will be heard by the County Council. The good news is that all of the councillors favor some kind of new facility for our museum collections with only the placement and design to be determined. With your continued support many, if not most, of these dreams will come true.

## Publications Division Annual Report

**By Sharon Snyder  
Publications Director**

Since the last annual report in September of 2009, the Society has reprinted our best selling title *Beginning of an Era* (seventh printing) and issued a third article in our Nutshell Series titled "An Indecisive Meeting" by Harris Mayer. A fourth Nutshell on homesteading by Judy Machen is in progress.

Titles still out of print are *Manhattan District History*, *Plutonium Metallurgy*, *Los Alamos Place Names* (being revised), and *Quads, Shoeboxes, and Sunken Living Rooms*. For some of these, we are investigating the option of e-books, a less expensive way to bring a book back into availability.

In May, with changes to the bylaws, Publications became a division of the

Society with a Publications Director rather than a committee and a chairperson, achieving a more professional status to match our growing recognition as a respected small publisher in the Southwest.



**Members of the Historical Society's Publications staff enjoy a picnic lunch at historic Ashley Pond with staff from the museum. Left to right are JJ Mortenson, Diane Starkovich, Debbi Wersonick, Toni Gibson, Museum Director Hedy Dunn, Judy Gursky, Assistant Museum Director Heather McClenahan, and Judy Machen. (Photo by Sharon Snyder)**

**Heritage Partner Jane Sherwood tours the grounds of Ashley Pond's first ranch school near Watrous, NM. The school was destroyed just days before it was set to open in the great flood of 1904. Sherwood purchased a tour of the site in May at the Historical Society's "experience auction" and invited a few friends along for the excursion earlier this month. (Photo by Heather McClenahan)**



Our Mission: The Los Alamos Historical Society keeps alive the unique scientific, cultural, and historical legacy of Los Alamos and related regions.

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