Oppenheimer House

**Symposium Charts Home’s Future**

The Los Alamos Historical Society convened scholars, historic preservationists, historic house museum experts, and community members at a symposium in September to begin planning for public uses of the wartime home of J. Robert Oppenheimer. Sponsored by the New Mexico Humanities Council, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Los Alamos Historical Society, the symposium surveyed a broad range of questions, from how to tell

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A party at the wartime home of Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer. (Photo from the Los Alamos Historical Museum Archives)

Two-Year Planning Process On Hold

**Archives & Records Center Project Undecided**

We held off sending this newsletter to the printer until the last moment, but the fate of the proposed new Los Alamos Historical Archives and County Records Center was still up in the air as of press time.

In January, the County Council voted to put a new municipal building on Central Avenue at the former site of the Los Alamos Apartments. The preferred alternative for the new archives was as an addition to the municipal building at that site. However, a citizens’ initiative to rebuild the municipal building at Ashley Pond was approved by the Council in October. Voters were being asked to decide, “Shall the Incorporated County of Los Alamos adopt the following: That the original Los Alamos County Municipal Building, as dedicated June 24, 1967, shall be fully rebuilt and restored to

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

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 observed 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, code name for the secret city.

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 a former New Mexico state senator, 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.

WinterFest and Fuller Lodge Open House, Saturday, Dec. 4: “The Sounds of Music.” Please see a complete list of events on page 4.

Brown Bag with the Collection for Heritage Partners and Life Members

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

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


March 16, 2011 NHD Farmington Regional

April 29, 2011 NHD State Contest, National Hispanic Cultural Center
the stories of a complicated man like Oppenheimer to what preservation issues need to be addressed with the house. The participants developed a list of short-term goals for the Historical Society to begin work on the house as well as a list of longer-term goals that will help the Society create a sustainable future that includes vibrant public uses for the Oppenheimer House.

A report could not capture the excitement and enthusiasm generated during a gathering as lively as this one. However, the symposium report, available on our website at http://www.losalamoshistory.org/oppiehousereport.2.pdf, seeks to offer the Historical Society board, staff, and other stakeholders a concrete list of goals and ideas as they begin taking the next steps to make the Oppenheimer House a public history institution. Mindful of the fact that the current residents may live in the house as long as they choose to do so under a life trust agreement, symposium participants still believed groundwork could be laid toward that end.

One of short-term goals is the development of a historic structures report, which provides documentary, graphic, and physical information about a property’s history and existing condition. Broadly recognized as an effective part of preservation planning, a historic structure report also addresses goals for the use of the property. The Historic Properties Committee has already begun work on the report.

Hand-in-hand with the historic structures report, the Society will embark upon a broad engagement program to hear from the public about ideas for the house becoming an integral part of the community. This will serve as the beginning of an interpretive plan, a process museums use to determine what stories will be told, for whom, and why.

The consensus of symposium participants is that the “period of significance” for the house—that is, the years to which preservation efforts should be focused—is 1943-1945, the Manhattan Project years. They also agreed that the house should be used to tell the story of Oppenheimer in the broad context of his social and political times. The house should be a place where Oppenheimer’s own words are used to capture his spirit of leadership and intellectualism. His love for and connections to New Mexico should be prominent. While the thrust of the conversations focused on developing a historic house museum, more entrepreneurial options such as the creation of a retreat center or a combination of uses should be considered. The group also brainstormed several dynamic programming options that would convey the aura of Oppenheimer’s powerful intellect, such as a monthly salon that might be used as a fundraiser. Finally, a significant element that came out of the discussions was the need for cultural service providers in the Jemez Mountain region to work together more closely and to create a point of common contact for visitors.

We will continue to keep our members updated with developments.
WINTERFEST, DEC. 4, 2010
THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Join in the community-wide celebration of WinterFest at the Fuller Lodge Open House, sponsored by the Los Alamos Arts Council and the Los Alamos Historical Society. A full day of fun, entertainment, and food is planned. It’s also a great time to get gifts and stocking stuffers for everyone on your list while supporting local, non-profit organizations.

The Chamisa Elementary School “Singsations” choir, right, has become a traditional part of the Fuller Lodge Open House celebration.

WinterFest Schedule (subject to change)

10:00 a.m. Chamisa Singsations
11:15 a.m. Voices of Praise Home School Choir
11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Posole lunch
11:30 a.m. Living Treasures
12:00 noon-1:00 p.m. Holiday Music with Frances Meir
1:00 p.m. New Mexico Dance Theater "The Night Before Christmas"
1:00-3:00 p.m. Los Alamos Arts Council Cookies and punch
2:00 p.m. Los Alamos High School Jazz Band

The Los Alamos Historical Society will have gift items, books, and stocking stuffers for sale throughout the day. Boy Scout Troop 71 will sell Christmas wreaths, and the Los Alamos High School Band Boosters will sell poinsettias.

Left, Marlane Hamilton, director of the Los Alamos Arts Council, confers with Museum Director Hedy Dunn at the 2009 WinterFest. A gingerbread version of Fuller Lodge added to the festive air of the celebration. (Photos by Heather McClenahan)
Assistant director of the 1922 summer camp, Lawrence S. Hitchcock (Yale 1919, graduating with English major and minor in Greek) was enlisted by his college friend, Fayette Curtis (Yale 1918) to teach mathematics and physics at Los Alamos Ranch School and generally be half the faculty for the school of which Curtis had been the whole faculty the preceding year. Notes from the Hitchcock family correspondence are excerpted here.

* * *

[Mr. Connell and I] put our heads together over the summer camp. We mapped out a tentative route for the big trip the last three weeks of the season.

I now have before me the job of designing a first-aid kit. We have at last succeeded in getting some bottles of the sort for which we were looking—glass-stoppered, with a screw-on metal cap to hold the stopper in place. That kit is to hold about half a dozen of these bottles, of which iodine, aromatic ammonia, and permanganate are the principal. [The potassium permanganate was in powder, for a water solution for snake bite, never, so far as Hitchcock recalls, ever required. The glass-stoppered iodine bottle was later replaced by one with rubber stopper with attached applicator brush, and afterwards iodine gave way to mercurochrome similarly bottled.]

We were under way with our outfit at eleven Saturday morning (June 24) and made camp about four thirty at our favorite first-stage camp on Rito del Indio, at the point where the stream enters the Valle Toledo; that is, Hap [Horgan, younger brother of writer Paul Horgan] and I made camp while Neal Rennehan, step-son of the Santa Fe attorney, fished for our supper, quite successfully, as he came back at 6:30 with 29, the biggest (seventeen inches) so far as I know ever taken from this stream. We had fish for supper and fish for breakfast and

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swapped the big one the next day with a sheepherder for some fresh meat.

We had hoped for an early start on our second day, which was to be a long one, but Hap, designated wrangler, came back after an hour with no horses, illustrating the point that if you don’t find your animals between daylight, when they start to move and jangle their bells, and sunrise, when they are apt to stand still and bask in the first rays, you are in for trouble. Neal and I went out after breakfast and finally found our animals almost four miles from camp in a lovely, from a horse’s point of view, little pocket in the woods on the side of the Valle.

We started up the canyon about 1:30 and had a surprisingly easy time of it, making camp in a spot I considered suitable also for the larger summer camp outfit, the pleasantest of our entire trip, about one mile south of San Pedro summit, in a beautiful green meadow, with a fine stream right in front of the tents, and passable fire-wood handy. The next day was not as easy; we spent the morning hunting and verifying a trail, and it was 1:30 before we were leaving the mountain, and darkness caught us and we had to make a dry camp [no spring or stream] in the rain that had started. As always, the rain stopped after I had the fire built, and we made quite a comfortable night of it...

A week ago today, Monday July 10\textsuperscript{th}, we set out on our first pack trip, four nights at our cow camp in Rincon Bonito, eight miles up Los Alamos Canyon, against the ridge immediately to the west of the school. As expected it took all morning to get the outfit ready to move. The boys had gained some acquaintance with their own mounts and equipment in the few days on the ranch after returning from the Cowboys’ Reunion but weren’t of much assistance in saddling and loading the six pack horses. There were sixteen of us on this trip: ten boy-campers, Mr. Connell, Mr. Fuller, Wally Kieselhorst, Bences Gonzales, our cook, Bill Rose, and myself. [Sources are silent, but there normally would have been, on any Los Alamos summer camp pack trip, a dog or two, strictly disciplined as to permitted locations in the camps and a foal or two would not have been unusual on the first trips of the season.]

At the cow camp on Tuesday the 11\textsuperscript{th}, we were busy with our round-up, driving in cattle in the morning and branding calves in the afternoon, which left us a well tired bunch of boys. Wednesday we all went fishing … and had two meals of fish and yet brought back to the ranch a few over a hundred when we returned to home-base on Friday.

Saturday we had quite a houseful of Forest Service men… On this visit, there was a forest fire (fortunately not too serious though our foreman had, with others, been fighting it all day Friday) for them to inspect, and there came in reports of several others, none serious, while the Forest Service men were on the ranch. We have had no rain to amount to anything since March, so the fire situation is very bad. Old-timers hereabouts are saying they can’t remember any equal to this year for lack of rain...

The water situation is as bad now as it was said to have been four months later in the year in the terribly dry 1918. The only thing that will save us from hauling water this fall is the hoped for completion before October of
the new six-inch pipe from a gasoline engine-driven pump at a small weir-retained pool in Los Alamos canyon, where there is water most, but not all, of the time. ... The water [in the Rio Grande] is lower than anyone remembers seeing it.

At this time our water system provided some unprogrammed entertainment during this week: the pump broke down on Tuesday thereby suspending our already scanty supply. When word came from the foreman that the pump would have to go into town for repairs, there was still a little water in the big wooden storage tank, enough to fill the bathtubs in the Big House as well as the cans we kept available for such emergencies, so that we didn’t need to begin hauling water until Friday morning. We might have even lasted a day or so longer except that [I], after instructing a houseboy to rinse and fill the emergency cans, did not stand over him and supervise the job. His rinsing must have been rather sketchy, so that our water Friday morning had a rather interesting taste that investigation and interrogation determined to be Dutch Cleanser. The pump came back Saturday, so that we all had much-needed baths that afternoon, as well as plenty to drink.

We got off on our second, 6-night trip on Monday 24 July to Rito Cebolla at 0915, making our first stage by about 1600. On Wednesday... we turned in at Seven Springs Ranger Station and were able to reach Los Alamos by phone [for Hitchcock to give Connell a report on the trip so far]. We were not always so successful with the telephone; it was a single wire Forest Service line to various lookouts and ranches, including Los Alamos, on the way to a Mountain States Company connection at Española, subject to large amounts of static in disturbed atmospheric conditions, and shorts when wet branches rubbed against the line or weakened posts in grassy areas let the wire touch the ground.

We had a disturbing incident on this trip.

In a perimeter walk-around one evening at Cebolla. [I] came on two boys enjoying – at least they seemed to think they were – cigarettes. Our application blank carried the normal boarding-school prohibition of smoking, for reasons of health, with threat of dismissal in cases of persistence, but we were not organized to take care of first offenses or minor infractions; we had no hierarchy of privileges of which one or more could be withdrawn as appropriate; we had to depend on admonition. [I] talked not only with the two apprehended but with the rest of the senior group, most of whom seemed to have (CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)
shared in the infraction at one time or another; [I] believed that the chances were fair that there would be no further infractions. Except for this one incident we considered the trip reasonably successful in spite of below-average fishing....

[Between trips, the school sponsored a house party that included Peggy Pond -- later to marry Ranch School master Fermor Church—and Anita Rose—later to marry Ranch School master Tom Waring.] The house party was considered a success, though our water supply, what little there was of it, had to be hauled from the bottom of Los Alamos Canyon....

Menus were written in consultation with our camp cook, Bences Gonzales, who then took over drawing necessary supplies and making up loads for packing (there was usually a second check before supplies went into the pack boxes). And we needed a chuck list not only for supplies to take with us on starting but for the two or three relays that brought supplies to us in the course of the trip, which had to be completed before we left. ....

There was never any lack of volunteers for bringing in firewood; the boys enjoyed showing their horsemanship in dragging a load of wood at the end of a rope from their saddle horn through brush and around obstacles without losing the majority of it on the way. A purely recreational activity that began at Redondo Creek was our own variety of strip poker—last garment off immediately followed by a plunge into the creek. This game had its devotees among the older group for several nights, but interest waned as we got higher into the mountains and the water got colder and colder. Socially useful as well as entertaining was hunting prairie dogs with twenty-twos; horses being ridden at high speed after cattle in the upland pastures sometimes stepped into their holes and broke their legs; and the small animals were not too easy to kill with a twenty-two at any range they permitted the hunter to approach....

On Saturday, August 25th, we moved camp to the Upper Cebolla, near Cerro Pelo... We found the stream completely dry at our usual site, but a quarter-mile up stream we found a not-quite-stagnant pool where there was room to pitch our tents; somewhat further up there was definitely running, or at least trickling, water that we carried down to our camp site for drinking....

[At this camp Hitchcock added to the accumulated Los Alamos camp lore the fact that one shouldn’t try to prepare bi-chloride...]

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Affectionately dubbed the “chicken roost,” this photo was taken in 1922 during a house party at the Los Alamos Ranch School. From left, Anita Rose, Olive Allen, Kathleen Rolls, Rosemary Morgan, Florence Earnest, Josephine McManus, Helen May, and Peggy Pond. (Photo probably taken by Edward Fuller, was in an album that belong to Lawrence Hitchcock, in the collection of the Los Alamos Historical Museum Archives.)
solution in an aluminum dish, as the mercury is apt to precipitate out of solution, as it did when he was preparing an antiseptic solution for a blister he was pricking... He shifted to a boric acid solution, probably not as potent as the bi-chloride, but at least no infection later appeared.]

We must have left the mountain on Tuesday the 29th, back tracking our arrival on the high line until the fork leading down the divide between Santa Clara Canyon and Rito del Indio, then crossing the Valles probably making the last camp again at Rincon Bonito, and making it into Los Alamos in the late morning of the 30th. The 31st went to the very preliminary sorting of gear, and boys packing personal things for the homeward trek, and a final weight and height check of the boys to measure the summer’s progress (all gained weight). ...  

[Assistant director Hitchcock reported to his family in this final letter dealing with camp matters that he took off ten pounds, and that all the boys, whose opinions had won the respect of the staff over the summer, said they had a wonderful time and seemed to mean it.]

Continued from Page 1)

its original site and design for the specific purpose and original intent as the location and use of and for the Los Alamos County Council Chambers and offices and the Los Alamos County Administrator and offices.”

The all mail-in vote on the initiative was scheduled for Dec. 20, but a legal challenge to the wording of the question has been made.

For the latest developments as well as articles, letters to the editor, and other opinion pieces on the municipal building site, please visit the Los Alamos Monitor’s website, http://www.lamonitor.com. We will also try to keep the information updated on our website.

The Historical Society has a potential stake in seeing the new building go forward on the proposed Central Avenue site so that a modern, climate-controlled facility can be built to house the bulk of the museum collection. That is the preferred alternative of a two-year Capital Improvement Project that we have been working on in conjunction with Los Alamos County. The cost estimate is $2.6 million for a combined facility or $1.25 million for the archives alone.

The Ashley Pond site does not have enough room for the Archives and Record Center. An alternative option, placing the archives in the Community Building next to Ashley Pond, is estimated to cost between $2 and $6 million and may not meet national standards for archives storage.

We encourage our members and friends to become informed on the issue and to vote.

Websites in favor of the initiative to place a building of the same design on Ashley Pond:


Websites against the initiative:

The Municipal Building Site Selection Committee Alumni, http://www.lacmuni.com

The Save Our Green Coalition, http://www.saveourgreen.org

Friends of Ashley Pond Park on Facebook, http://www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Ashley-Pond-Park/

Los Alamos County Views by Greg Kendall http://losalamoscountyviews.blogspot.com/
Vision: The Los Alamos Historical Society is respected world-wide as the repository and source for the history of Los Alamos and its people.

Mission: The Los Alamos Historical Society preserves, promotes, and communicates the remarkable history and inspiring stories of Los Alamos and its people for our community, for the global audience, and for future generations.

Collaborates with local, state, and national entities to develop sustainable tourism for the region

Ensures a sustainable future for the Society

Develops an accessible museum collection and archives in accordance with best practices and standards

Preserves the integrity of the Los Alamos Historic District

Energizes our interpretive opportunities and venues

Partners in the establishment of the Manhattan Project National Park

Nourishes our publications program and recognizes it as a fundamental element of our storytelling

Los Alamos Historical Society

11-18-2010
Board Moves Ahead with New Strategic Plan

In an effort to move the Los Alamos Historical Society toward its 50th anniversary in 2010, the Board of Directors is developing a new strategic plan.

The plan includes a new mission statement: The Los Alamos Historical Society preserves, promotes, and communicates the remarkable history and inspiring story of the people of Los Alamos for our community, a global audience, and future generations.

The proposed new vision statement for the organization is: The Los Alamos Historical Society is respected worldwide as the repository and source for the history of Los Alamos and its people.

The plan also includes seven strategic directions: Create a sustainable future for the Society; develop and make accessible the museum collection and Archives in accordance with best practices standards; preserve the integrity of the Los Alamos Historic District; energize our interpretive opportunities and venues; nourish our publications program and recognize it as a fundamental element of our storytelling; partner in the establishment of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park; and collaborate with local, state, and national entities to develop sustainable tourism in the region. See the chart on Page 10 for more information.

Under each of these strategic directions will be a list of goals and objectives determined by the board, staff, volunteers, members, and community. Therefore, we need your input. Do you have ideas and suggestions on where we need to be on our 50th anniversary? Please e-mail them to historicalsociety@losalamoshistory.org or contact our offices at 505-662-6272.

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