Los Alamos Historical Society Newsletter

IN THIS ISSUE

3  PIEROTTI’S CLOWNS
5  IN PROFILE
7  OBITUARIES
9  CURATORS CORNER
10 TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS
11 LEAVE A LEGACY

MISSION
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.

VISION
Los Alamos Historical Society is respected worldwide as the source and repository for the compelling history of Los Alamos and its people from prehistory to contemporary times.

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ON THE COVER

On a summer’s night in 1960, Pierotti’s Clowns defeated a team of all-stars in Las Vegas, NM. Of the game the local paper wrote, “Their record is amazing in view of their zaniness on the field. But this very zaniness is what has endeared them to thousands of softball fans.” The Clowns era ended recently with the deaths of Bun Ryan and Lou Pierotti, but the story lives on.

Helene and the Time Traveler

Helene Suydam enjoyed time with Brian Unger of the Travel Channel recently. His new program, “Time Traveling with Brian Unger,” takes viewers “where ordinary travelers can’t go, using eye-popping CGI to visually travel back in time and tell stories you won’t find in guidebooks.” Brian serves as the ultimate tour guide, “taking locals to iconic landmarks and revealing histories we never knew.” The show filmed at the Oppenheimer House is slated to run on the Travel Channel later this summer. Helene and her late husband, Bergan “Jerry” Suydam, donated the Oppenheimer House to the Historical Society through an agreement that allows her to continue to live in the her home.

— Photo by John Ruminer

Tinwork for Romero Cabin

Tinwork artist Fred Lopez, whose work was featured in our March and April changing exhibit, has donated a custom frame for one of the plaques in the Romero Cabin. Fred has a shop called Spanish Colonial Tinworks on Don Gaspar in Santa Fe. Stop by and visit him if you’re in the area.

— Photo by John Ruminer

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE

www.losalamoshistory.org

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Pierotti’s Clowns

Our community lost two legends within just a few months when Bernard “Bun” Ryan and Lou Pierotti passed away recently. Both men were Los Alamos Living Treasures, both had long and significant histories in Los Alamos, and both will be forever linked as part of the legendary five-man softball team, Pierotti’s Clowns.

Recently, Bun’s family donated his Clowns uniform and other memorabilia from the team to the Los Alamos Historical Society.

Discussions are under way with Lou Pierotti’s family to do the same so that the Los Alamos Historical Museum can create a permanent exhibit about this extraordinary segment of our history.

As many of you remember, the Historical Museum mounted a significant exhibition about Pierotti’s Clowns from August 1998 through January 1999. Most of the artifacts in the exhibit belonged to Lou, who then left them in storage in the Los Alamos Historical Museum Archives and Collections for more than a year. Unfortunately Lou picked up the artifacts in the spring of 2000, only weeks before his home burned in the Cerro Grande fire that May. Most of the items were destroyed.

In the following years, residents and fans gave Lou items to revamp his collection, and he created a sort of museum to the Clowns in his basement. Other artifacts are out there. If you have any Pierotti’s Clowns items—programs, photographs, or other memorabilia—that you would like to donate to the Historical Society, please contact Registrar Stephanie Yeamans at 505-695-5253 or registrar@losalamoshistory.org.


Pierotti’s Clowns — Fast Pitch Softball Legends

The year 1977 marked the 25th and final year of play for the fabulous Pierotti’s Clowns softball team. The idea of the Clowns was conceived by Lou Pierotti in 1953. He reasoned that only five men were needed to control the play in fast-pitch softball after observing the percentage of balls that were hit out of the infield in regulation nine-man, seven inning games. The problem was locating and convincing...
four other outstanding softball players that the idea was sound. To win, Lou figured, the team would have to “field like vacuum cleaners, run like gazelles, knock the seams off the softball at the plate, and, most important of all, have a pitcher of world class.” After much discussion, four members of the S-Site softball team, New Mexico state champions in two successive years, agreed to give it a try.

Lou selected as his first team the infielders Bun Ryan, Stan Ewing, Ted Godwin, and Walt Garcia, with Robbie Robinson as utility pitcher. The name “Clowns” came about as a “face-saving” gimmick in case of the potential rare loss of a game. In the spring of 1953, dressed in outlandish costumes of baggy pants, sloppy hats, and pounds of makeup, the Clowns took the field for their first game against a nine-man regulation team, Tiano’s Sporting Goods. Clowning all the way, the team clobbered Tiano’s 16 to 1. During their first two years, the Clowns played 25 games against some of the best nine-man teams in the Southwest, losing only one. From the beginning, the team did well and earned a quick and deserved reputation locally and nationally.

Throughout their 25-year history, the Clowns remained amateurs. Their goal from the beginning was to raise money for charity. Their dedication to fulfilling this mission was supported by their superb playing, talking, and clowning expertise. The rewards the team enjoyed came from the huge numbers of worthy causes they supported and the thousands of fans they entertained throughout a quarter of a century.

The team changed personnel through the years, but three original Clowns stayed with the team until the end: Bun Ryan, Lou Pierotti, and Bat Boy Michael Pierotti. Late the first season, Henry Filip joined the team, and the next year James Hutchison and Verdie Raper were added. A year later, Bill Cramer came on as catcher, and Mel Trampe joined as a relief pitcher for Bun Ryan.
Some of Pierotti’s Clowns in Profile

“Bullet” Bun Ryan, known nationally as one of the fastest softball pitchers in the country, was clocked at approximately 100 mph, faster than 90 percent of the big league baseball pitchers. His record of 13 strikeouts per game was remarkable, and he struck out at least one man per game while pitching blindfolded! Almost as amazing, he allowed only two hits in 38 innings when he would pitch from second base! In a five-inning game with the Albuquerque Dukes, Ryan struck out 14 of 15 men who faced him as the Clowns played this professional baseball team to a 0-0 tie. His strikeout record was 476 batters in 231 innings. In tournament play he pitched two no-hitters and regularly hit over .350 with the Clowns. He participated in five world softball tournaments, and at one time in his career Bun Ryan held the lowest ERA in the nation!

Henry “Pete” Filip was one of the biggest and fastest men on the Clowns team. He was known for his gymnastics. After hitting a home run, Filip would sometimes walk from third base to home on his hands, finishing up at home plate with a back flip. A former teacher of gymnastics, he graduated from Illinois Wesleyan where he starred in football and soccer. Playing as a utility infielder and catcher for the Clowns, he hit .395 his first year.

James Hutchison was a long ball hitter who played second base and center field. He was known for his giant bat act and excelled at
hitting and bunting on the end of the bat. His batting average for the Clowns in one season was .317.

“Pretty Boy” Verdie Raper was the youngest player on the Clown roster. He played first, second, and third base and was a member of the Los Alamos Bombers baseball team for six years. He became famous for his ability to bunt with the end of the bat behind his back and to catch fly balls behind his back. He participated in one world tournament and hit .300 for the Clowns in one season.

“Wild Bill” Cramer was described as one of those natural athletes who come along only once in every 10,000 men. He played almost every sport well, a fine golfer and basketball player in addition to being an asset to the Clowns. He was known also as a home run hitter, scoring three homers in one game, along with a triple and a double! He was an outstanding hitter for the Clowns with an average of .431, and he participated in one world tournament.

Melvin “Mel” Trampe served as a utility pitcher. He won several championships and pitched two years for the U.S. Navy, beating the championship Pearl Harbor team. Trampe played double A independent ball in Southeastern Illinois and won the regional tournament for three straight years. He earned the nickname “the Satchel Page of softball” because of his 21 years of pitching. He had many one hit games and earned five no-hitters in the fast pitch leagues during his career.

“Goat-herder Lou” Pierotti was not only founder of the team but also its manager. He played third base, spun a top as a signal, played a concertina on the field, and, among other antics, regularly “fell asleep” while his pitcher was on the mound. Having 20 years of previous experience in baseball and softball, he was a natural to found and manage the Clowns. Not only did he have the opportunity to try out with the Dodgers and the St. Louis Browns, he played professional ball in the U.S. Army for the Balboa Brewers of Panama. He once ran a mile in an international track meet in Cornwall, Canada. As part of his clown act, Lou had a batting average of better than .400 while batting on his knees and was known for hitting home runs and triples from that position!

Lou Pierotti’s son, Michael, was the youngest member of the team, starting at age 7 as bat boy. At 10 he gave the club pepper drills, occasionally played clowning of his own.

We Apologize for the Glitch!
Whether we blame it on a computer glitch or human error, we apologize to those of you who received incorrect membership expiration dates on the labels for your Annual Meeting Call. Those of you whose membership is due this July will be receiving your letter and remittance envelope soon. Thank you for your support of the Los Alamos Historical Society!
BERNARD “BUN” RYAN
Dec. 23, 1923 – Sept. 29, 2014

Reprinted from the Los Alamos Daily Post, October 2, 2014

Used with permission

Bernard “Bun” Ryan, 90, of Los Alamos, passed away on September 29, 2014. He had been a resident of Los Alamos since 1949.

Bun was born on December 23, 1923, in Leadville, CO, the youngest son of James and Bridget Ryan. Following graduation from Leadville High School in 1941, he worked for the JC Penney Corporation.

In 1943, he was drafted into the U.S. Army. He served in Field Artillery during the Pacific campaign of World War II until his discharge in 1946 and was awarded the Bronze Star for his service and promoted to the rank of Master Sergeant.

After World War II, Bun returned to Leadville to again work for JC Penney. He met his wife, Alberta “Jean” Ryan, in Climax, CO, where she was employed as a nurse. They were married September 10, 1949, and moved to Los Alamos that same year.

Ryan was employed at Los Alamos National Laboratory from 1949 until his retirement in 1990.

During the later part of his laboratory career he received a Distinguished Performance Award for his work in establishing the Employee Assistance Program, which focused on recovery from substance abuse.

Mr. Ryan was also known for his career in fast-pitch softball. He was nicknamed “Bullet Bun” and became famous nationally as one of the fastest softball pitchers in the country, able to throw at more than 100 mph. During his softball career, he pitched in seven World Softball Tournaments, every State Tournament in New Mexico from 1949 to 1988, and played in 12 different states.

In 1953 he became a pitcher for Pierrotti’s Clowns, a five-man exhibition all-star fast-pitch team created by Lou Pierotti. The clown antics, performed during regulation softball games became a favorite form of entertainment in the community. The Clowns, sponsored by the Los Alamos Kiwanis Club, raised more than $200,000 for charity and were goodwill ambassadors for Los Alamos and the state of New Mexico. The team was featured in six national magazines including the first issue of Sports Illustrated published in 1954.

Throughout 25 years the Clowns won 177 games and lost only 23. The success of the team was due in part to Bun’s exceptional pitching. A tribute to the Clowns is featured in a mosaic located in front of Mesa Public Library. Los Alamos County named a softball field in Bun’s honor in 1984. He was inducted into the New Mexico Softball Hall of Fame and the Sports Hall of Fame in his hometown of Leadville, CO.

Mr. Ryan joined
Alcoholics Anonymous in February 1966. He served as a substance abuse counselor and public speaker throughout his life and was dedicated to assisting others on their road to sobriety.

He was an active member of the Democratic Party and played a pivotal role in bringing President John F. Kennedy and President Bill Clinton to visit and speak in Los Alamos. Ryan was the Democratic candidate for State Representative in 1994.

Bun spent most of his adult life in the community that he loved and was very proud and honored to have been named a Los Alamos Living Treasure in September of 1999.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Jean, and his beloved cat, Big-a-Boy. He is survived by his daughter, Susan Ryan of Santa Fe, and his son, Michael Ryan, and life partner Darlene Rich of Los Alamos; grandchildren Jonathan and Lori Ryan of Phoenix, AZ, and Jennifer Jones of Albuquerque. He is also survived by many beloved nieces, nephews, and close friends in the community.

Lou Pierotti, age 94, longtime resident and Living Treasure of Los Alamos, passed away on Saturday, March 21, 2015. Lou will be remembered as the creator in 1953 of Pierotti’s Clowns, the only five-man fast-pitch softball team in the nation. This team was sponsored by the Los Alamos Kiwanis Club for the enjoyment of Los Alamos families and later became a goodwill ambassador for Los Alamos and New Mexico. The Clown Team was featured in six national magazines, including the first issue of Sports Illustrated in 1954.

Competing with nine-man teams for 25 years, the Clowns won 177 games and lost only 23, and raised more than $200,000 for charity. The Clowns never lost a game against any of the five professional teams they played, such as the Albuquerque Dukes, a Triple-A Farm Team for the Brooklyn Dodgers.

The success of the five-man team was due in part to the world-class athletic skills of the five players, the exceptional pitching of Bun Ryan, and the Clown antics created and performed by Lou Pierotti, during the regulation softball game.
Clowns top 10 Highlights

Pierotti’s Clowns . . .

1. were the only five-man, amateur clown team in the nation.

2. made the first issue of Sports Illustrated in 1954 and also appeared in one of the largest merchandising magazines, Fountain and Fast Service, with a three-page spread.

3. won 38 games while losing only 2 when playing five men against nine-men regulation teams.

4. made a career total of more than a quarter of a million dollars for charity.

5. became known as the “Globetrotters of Softball,” never losing to a professional team.

6. traveled more than 3,000 miles in one year alone and played before 7,500 fans, making approximately $4,000 for charity based on 50-cent and $1 tickets.

7. drew an average of 400 to 500 fans per game away from home and played before 1,000 fans or more in a single game.

8. adhered to softball rules while clowning through all sorts of crazy softball play, including shooting dice on the field, playing a concertina, dancing, and leaving the field to go to the dugout while the pitcher was still working.

9. twice defeated the “Queen and Her Maids,” a professional four-girl softball team of national fame.

10. pitched grapefruits as well as balls on rubber bands and caught in the outfield using trash can lids!

Bethe House Update

Driveway work for handicapped parking at the Hans Bethe House was recently completed. Landscaping for the west side of the house will also be added soon. Funding for some of the landscaping came from donations made during the 2014 Gala and Experience Auction. Mark your calendars now for the 2015 Gala happening Sept. 12.
Leave a Legacy

For nearly half a century, the Los Alamos Historical Society has preserved, promoted, and communicated the remarkable history and inspiring stories of Los Alamos and its people for our community, the global audience, and future generations. Now you can help ensure this important work continues by becoming a member of the Los Alamos Legacy Society.

You have an opportunity to help with the long-term sustainability of the Historical Society through an estate gift. The Society maintains an endowment, started through a bequest by former LANL chemist Beth Plassmann, which provides stable funding for staffing, historic building maintenance, and other programs. Only income from the endowment is spent; the principle, adjusted each year for inflation, remains intact.

You can contribute to the endowment by leaving a designated gift in your will or a residual percentage of your estate. You may also make the Historical Society a beneficiary of a life insurance policy.

Please talk with your attorney about what would best suit your needs and ask board members from the Society would be happy to meet with you and your financial advisor to establish a gift. Our communications with you about planned giving will be strictly confidential.

The Historical Society provides lifetime recognition to donors who have notified us in writing about a planned gift. This recognition will include an invitation to annual events only available to members of the Los Alamos Legacy Society, such as the barbeque held this summer at the Hans Bethe House.

For more information, please contact the Historical Society’s administrative offices at 505-662-6272 or e-mail heather@losalamoshistory.org.

Artifacts Salvaged

A small team of volunteers showed up last month to salvage items of interest from the Unitarian Church, a structure that was a men’s dormitory during the Manhattan Project. The building is being torn down to make way for a new church. Despite extensive renovations through the years, many of the original fixtures can be used to restore some of the Manhattan Project-era buildings behind the LANL fence. The team—Mike Wheeler (left), Art Freed (center), Tom Sandford (right), and John Ruminer—recovered two sinks, five doors, two windows, a fire alarm box, and several towel dispensers. All are stored temporarily in the Bradbury Science Museum warehouse.
I am in awe of the always incredibly informed members of the Los Alamos Historical Society. I thought for sure I had stumped our readers with last issue’s puzzler. Almost immediately three readers identified the rifle shown in the 1922 Ranch School senior boys’ hunt photo.

John Noble, Esq., Santa Fe, Los Alamos National Laboratory Historian Alan Carr, and a Los Alamos resident who asked to remain anonymous provided remarkably clear and concise identification for the rifles in the 1922 photo. According to these experts, the rifles are most likely a Winchester Model of 1894 and could very well have been in .30-30 caliber. It is possible that the rifles were available for purchase from the Ranch School Trading Post.

I should have told you that the photo used in the column was not the original. I cropped the photo to concentrate on the rifles. In doing so I cropped and cropped most of the dead animals. I apologize for doing so without disclosure. I also cropped out a couple of senior students. The full photo revealing wide grins says it all about the seniors’ hunting trip. Because the senior hunting trip was such an important aspect
of Ranch School life, we are still hoping someone will donate a Ranch School rifle to the museum.

The hunters in the 1922 Ranch School Senior Hunt photo are (l-r) Earl Kieselhorst, Phil Clay, George May, Bob Lewis, Bill Regnery, and Ranch School Director A. J. Connell. Many thanks to Archivist Rebecca Collinsworth for providing the identifications.

Write, call, or email me if you have additional information about the rifles or other elements in the photo.

Our curatorial question from last issue was “What does FIC mean?” FIC is “Found in Collections,” also known as “Objects in Custody,” which are items in collections that are found, abandoned, or unclaimed. FIC is one of the challenging issues we encounter in museum work. Technically, the term means the object may belong to the museum, but documentation indicating ownership is missing. Practically, the term means there is unclear title and that the museum may not legally own the object. Therefore, the museum is providing costly care for an item that may legally belong to someone other than the museum.

We in collections management strive to follow proper and legal acquisitions procedures, which include offer, acceptance, and transfer. We ensure that proper paperwork is in order, including deed of gift and provenance, or in other words, the origin, source, and ownership history of the donation. The concept of provenance will be the topic of a future article of The Curator’s Corner.

For this issue’s “What is it?” puzzler, we are hoping you can help identify this lamp. It is in remarkably good condition but has no shade.

The lamp was found in the attic of Fuller Lodge when Archives and Collections storage moved to the Municipal Building. The lamp has no provenance; therefore, it is cataloged as FIC. Do you know its story?

Send your answers, comments, and questions to curator@losalamoshistory.org.
Calendar of Events

History Adventures Summer Children’s Program
Every Tuesday at 10 a.m and again at 11 a.m in June and July on the lawn of Fuller Lodge.

Fourth Fridays
On June 26, July 24, and August 28, the Historical Museum will be open into the evening with special programming to support a community effort encouraging people to visit downtown and engage in cultural and retail activities.

“Dawn of a New Era”
Thursday, July 16, 4:30 a.m. at the Hans Bethe House, 1350 Bathtub Row.
Join us for donuts and coffee as we live tweet from the meteorologist’s log from Trinity, listen to recorded memories of the event, and look out the window where Elsie McMillan and Lois Bradbury saw the blast.

Atomic Film Festival
Friday, July 17, in Fuller Lodge. Films at 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Save the Dates!
2015-2016 LANB Lecture Series: The 70th Anniversary of the End of WWII
Aug. 10 (please note special lecture date), Sept. 8, Oct. 13, Nov. 10, Jan. 12, Feb. 9, March 8, April 12, and May 10 (Annual Meeting)

Gala & Experience Auction
The Historical Society’s 2nd Annual Gala and Experience Auction will be Saturday, Sept. 12. Mark your calendar now for this “can’t miss it” event.

Plan for Some Family Fun With Our Summer Program
History Adventures is the Los Alamos Historical Society’s summer program for kids. On Tuesday mornings, June 2–July 21, there will be a hands-on program repeated at 10 am and again at 11 am on the lawn of Fuller Lodge. History Adventures is free and no registration is required. Activities are aimed at children in grades K–3. Contact Museum Educator Aimee Slaughter with any questions at educator@losalamoshistory.org

June 2: Fuller Lodge Art Center
June 9: Tierra Sagrada Pottery
June 16: Aparejo burro packing
June 23: Historical Society: homesteading
June 30: Historical Society: Ranch School
July 7: Jemez Historic Site
July 14: Bradbury Science Museum
21: New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum
Los Alamos Historical Society 2015 Membership Form

Please detach and return to the Historical Museum

Name: ____________________________

Address: ____________________________

City: ____________________________ State: _________ Zip: ____________________________

Email (optional): ____________________________

Check one: ____ Renewal _____ New Member ________Gift ________Donation

☐ Heritage Benefactor $2500+
☐ Heritage Supporter $1000-$2499
☐ Heritage Contributor $500-$999
☐ Heritage Friend $100-$499
☐ Family $50
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☐ Student/Senior Individual $35
☐ Youth, 18 and under $10

$ __________ Additional Contribution

Total: $ ____________________________

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Open free of charge every day except
New Year’s Day, Thanksgiving,
and Christmas.

May 1-October 15
Weekdays 9:30-4:30
Weekends 11-4

October 16-April 30
Weekdays 10-4
Weekends 11-4

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