Los Alamos Historical Society

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Total Goal
$7,000,000

Raised to Date
$3,508,189
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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

A banner unfurled from the balcony of Fuller Lodge revealed that the History is Here campaign has surpassed $3.5 million, the halfway point of a $7 million effort. Photos by Judith Stauber.

Ron Wilkins, president of the Los Alamos Historical Society, accepts a $250,000 check from Rich Marquez, executive director of Los Alamos National Laboratory, as part of the History is Here campaign.

Sharon Stover and Denny Erickson, co-chairs of the History is Here campaign, and Seth Kirshenberg, master of ceremonies for the “Now It Can Be Told,” event, listen as speakers talk about the importance of preserving Los Alamos history.

Articles provided by Los Alamos Historical Society
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Now it can be Told
By Carol Clark, Los Alamos Daily Post

A historical event called “Now it can be Told” was held Tuesday, January 27, at Fuller Lodge. It began with a remembrance of President John F. Kennedy speaking to the importance of Los Alamos and its people while on a visit here Dec. 7, 1962.

“There is no group of people in this country whose record over the last 20 years has been more pre-eminent in the service of their country than all of you here in this small community in New Mexico. We want to express our thanks to you. It is not merely what was done during the days of the second war, but what has been done since then not only in developing weapons of destruction which, by an irony of fate, help maintain the peace and freedom, but also in medicine and in space and all the other related fields, which can mean so much to mankind if we can maintain the peace and protect our freedom,” Kennedy said. “So you here in this mountain town make a direct contribution, not only to the freedom of this country but to those thousands of miles away, and therefore, I am proud, as President of the United States, to come here today and express our thanks to you, and to also tell you how much I have admired from some years ago, from reading an article about the kind of schools that you run here, the kind of boys and girls that you are bringing up. We hope from them the same kind of service that you have rendered. Thanks to you all.”

Working quietly behind the scenes for the last two years to preserve that legacy has been a dedicated group of volunteers. They have directed their efforts to propel the history of Los Alamos into the global spotlight.

At the gathering on the 27th, that group celebrated a significant milestone with a champagne toast. Hundreds of local residents received invitations marked “Declassified.” They filled the Lodge, which had been decorated with an aura of mystery, not knowing what awaited them.

Los Alamos Historical Society President Ron Wilkins kicked off the festivities, which culminated in the dramatic unveiling of the History is Here campaign results, from the largest single capital campaign ever conducted by a non-profit in Los Alamos. The long-range goal of the campaign is to raise $7 million, which will go to support several efforts:

• The collections and archives of the Historical Society.
• The Museum’s ability to enhance its visitors’ experience with new exhibits.
• Bathtub Row Press and the publications of the Historical Society.
• The preservation of historically significant buildings.
• New educational programs and technologies that can reach additional audiences.

The occasion marked the halfway point in the History is Here campaign, with $3,508,189.18 raised to date.

And why the mystery? “We wanted to be sure that we could meet our goal and make this sustainable before we went public,” Wilkins said. “The worst thing would be if we asked people to contribute and couldn’t show them results. Now we already have something to show for our efforts—things like the expanded archives, a part time curator, the Bethe House—and the confidence to move ahead with more projects.”

Sharon Stover and Denny Erickson chair the History is Here campaign.

“Two years ago, the Board of Directors of our Los Alamos Historical Society committed to a multi-year fundraising campaign to find the means to improve and extend the Society’s capabilities for the preservation and sharing of the history of Los Alamos and the stories of its people,” Erickson said. “Having achieved this significant milestone, we celebrate and are humbled by the generosity and shared commitment...
Now it can be Told (Continued)

great boom to tourism,” Bandelier Superintendent Jason Lott said. “The arrowhead (National Park symbol) creates instant recognition. With the Valles Caldera coming under the Park Service umbrella, the Manhattan Project Park, and Bandelier, we have an opportunity to attract significant numbers of visitors to Los Alamos. The Park Service looks forward to partnering with the Los Alamos Historical Society to give these visitors a great experience.”

Lead gifts were received from Clay and Dorothy Perkins, the Delle Foundation (created by George and Satch Cowan) and Los Alamos National Laboratory, which was represented at the celebration by Executive Director Rich Marquez. Bill Enloe presented the Delle Foundation’s contribution and spoke of the importance of the Historical Society to the community.

Erickson and Stover have been aided in their fundraising efforts by a committee comprised of Ron Wilkins, John and Nancy Bartlit, Lee D’Anna, Mike Wheeler, Katy Korkos, Todd Urbatsch, John Ruminer, the late Fred Roach and his widow, Susan Roach, and Liz Martineau. Honorary chairs of the campaign include former Lab directors Sig Hecker and John Browne as well as Bill Enloe, Jennet Conant, and John Hopkins.

Seth Kirshenberg, whose firm Kutac Rock LLP sponsored the event in Fuller Lodge, served as master of ceremonies. Kirshenberg is the Executive Director of the Energy Communities Alliance. Also in attendance were Michelle Jacquez-Ortiz, field representative from U.S. Sen. Tom Udall’s office; Mike Sullivan from Sen. Martin Heinrich’s office; Atomic Heritage Foundation President Cynthia Kelly; and Reid Griffith, attorney for the Zenas and Irene Boone estate.

Helene Suydam, former Los Alamos Historical Museum docent and, along with her late husband, Jerry, donor of the Oppenheimer House, was not able to attend nor were Clay and Dorothy Perkins, the donors of the Hans Bethe House. John Ruminer, Historic Properties chair for the Historical Society, read a statement from the Perkins.

With 600 members and member families from 21 states and two European countries, the Los Alamos Historical Society is the largest historical society in New Mexico. The organization manages the Los Alamos Historical Museum and an extensive archive, produces educational programs for children and adults, publishes books on area history, and owns significant historical buildings for preservation purposes.

Anyone interested in joining the History is Here effort can contact the Historical Society, info@losalamoshistory.org, or any of the committee members. More information is available on the Historical Society’s website, www.losalamoshistory.org.

This article was first published in the Los Alamos Daily Post (ladailypost.com) on Wednesday, Jan. 28. It is used here by permission, (with minor edits) from the publisher.
After more than a decade of working with our partners in Oak Ridge, Hanford, and Washington, DC, the Los Alamos Historical Society is pleased to announce that in December the Manhattan Project National Historical Park passed Congress and was signed into law by the president.

The non-contiguous park with sites in Los Alamos, Oak Ridge, and Hanford, will preserve significant buildings from the Manhattan Project, such as the B Reactor in Hanford where the plutonium for the “gadget” and the Fat Man bomb was produced, the Gun Site in Los Alamos where significant work on Little Boy was done, and some of the industrial and home sites in Oak Ridge where the uranium was purified for use in the Hiroshima bomb.

While it is not yet clear what the park will look like, the Department of Energy and the National Park Service are both working on plans for what buildings to include and—especially for those “behind the fence”—how to make them accessible to the public. The park legislation calls for the DOE and the Department of Interior (National Park Service) to come to an agreement on those issues within a year. The Park Service will need time to develop a park management plan, a 2- to 3-year process, as well.

In making a recommendation to establish the Manhattan Project park, the National Park Service proposed a central visitors’ center in Los Alamos that would provide broad interpretation on the Manhattan Project. Visitors would then be encouraged to visit related sites such as the Historical Museum, the Bradbury Science Museum, 109 East Palace in Santa Fe, and, eventually, the Oppenheimer House. The location of the visitors center is unknown. In 2014, Los Alamos County Manager Harry Burgess appointed an ad hoc committee to investigate the county’s logistical interfaces with the park, including issues such as transportation, parking, pedestrian access, and the best location for a visitors center. The ad hoc committee will report to the Los Alamos County Council at a work session on its ideas.

On Saturday, Feb. 14, the Los Alamos Historical Society and Mesa Public Library hosted retired Sen. Jeff Bingman, U.S. Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich, and Congressman Ben Ray Lujan for a communitywide celebration of the park’s passage.

Manhattan Project Memory
By Jim Johnson

In 1945, I was working at the Naval Ordnance Testing Station (NOTS) at China Lake, California, in the Mojave Desert. NOTS had a similar relationship with the California Institute of Technology as Los Alamos had with the University of California at Berkeley. Also, Robert Oppenheimer was a full professor at Caltech and for several years had divided his time between there and the University of California.

At that time, Los Alamos did not have a firing site capable of handling the full explosive load of the Fat Man, so Oppenheimer asked NOTS to provide one. A firing site was built in the extreme southeastern section of NOTS, comprising at least one fifty-pound firing chamber and an underground firing site capable of handling several tons of high explosives.

Early one August morning, I found myself behind the wheel of a 6x6 truck, pulling a large flatbed trailer with a complete Fat Man on it except for a non-fissionable pit. I proceeded to give it a “Rough Handling” test by towing it for twenty miles over washboard desert roads to the firing site. The site was in a valley and was surrounded by loose sand. I was able to tow the trailer to within a hundred yards of the concrete pad but could not get any closer because of the sand. The only tracked vehicle that we had was a Sherman Tank that we used for a portable barricade, so I used that to tow the trailer the rest of the way. Once I got the trailer on the pad, everything was taken over by a crew from Los Alamos.

The bomb was hoisted on an A-frame because part of the test involved dropping it six feet onto a concrete pad. I watched the rest of the test from a mountain top approximately a mile away. The crew working on the bomb didn’t fire it until midnight, and I watched from the tank. There was a brilliant white flash that lit up the sky and seemed to persist for hours, although it could have been only a few seconds. The pyroclastic material started brush fires for several hundred yards all around, and we spent the rest of the night putting them out.

A visiting professor from Caltech later told me that it was an atomic bomb, but it wasn’t until 1953 and I saw one in Nevada that I realized the energy involved in a nuclear explosion.

Curator’s Corner
By Don Cavness

I am honored and delighted to have been asked to write a quarterly column about artifact collections management for the Los Alamos Historical Society newsletter.

When thinking about how to approach The Curator’s Corner, I decided that the column should be informative as well as fun and engaging. In each column we will consider concepts employed in collections management, think about obscure fun facts, and ask you, the reader, to answer the nagging question, “What is it?” The answers will appear in the next issue of The Curator’s Corner. Our question for this issue is “What does FIC mean?” Find the answer hidden elsewhere in this issue. We’ll explore FIC in a future column.

For our “What is it?” puzzler, identify the hunting rifle shown in the Los Alamos Ranch School 1922 Senior Hunting Trip photo. Are all the hunters holding similar, or even identical rifles? Earn extra credit if you can name the people in the photo. Earn extra, extra credit if you can arrange for one of the rifles to be donated to the LAHS!

Finally, I want to share with you the LAHS mission statement. It is the fundamental standard concept employed in collections management and is central to all we do at the museum.

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.

In coming issues, we will more closely examine the criteria used to determine whether a proposed donation matches the museum’s mission statement.

Send your answers, comments, and questions to curator@losalamoshistory.org. I love to hear from you.
White Rock, the energetic Los Alamos suburb on the rim of the Rio Grande, like the fabled Phoenix, literally was reborn from its own ashes. The town’s present life is a rebirth after an annihilation and an interlude as a ghost town.

In its first life, White Rock was an Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) construction town, established in 1949 at a cost of $4.5 million to provide housing for families of construction workers engaged in transforming Los Alamos, “The Hill,” from a military base to a permanent, first-class national science center and an attractive town site.

The original White Rock was designated as “temporary,” with an estimated five-year life span. Built entirely of prefabricated materials, it included 411 homes, 197 trailer spaces, 21 dormitories, two schools, food market, barbershop, beauty salon, clothing store, liquor store, service station, post office, hardware store, fire and police station, and eventually a youth center and cafeteria.

White Rock housed not only construction workers and concessionaires, it also provided lodging for the families of AEC, Laboratory, and Zia new hires waiting for permanent housing to be completed on The Hill. The White Rock Elementary School immediately became the center of all social activity. Built on the Meadow Lane site where Chamisa Elementary now stands, it housed students in grades three through eight. The kindergarten and first/second grade students were housed in “Little Sagebrush,” a satellite school close by. Students beyond eighth grade were transported daily in parent car pools to the newly completed Los Alamos High School on Diamond Drive.

The school playground, four city blocks long, was in constant use. It accommodated basketball, tennis, baseball, and football, Intermural games were played daily, and community sponsored teams kept the playground occupied on weekends. The sheriff, always dressed in his immaculate uniform, was a visible presence in White Rock. Everyone knew him by name. There was no crime and no vandalism.

There never seemed to be any discipline problems in the White Rock School, but there was one persistent problem that bothered the teachers for whom White Rock was a first experience with life in the untamed West. The problem was creepy, crawly critters, including rattlesnakes.

The sprawling stretch of land along the Rio Grande that had just recently become home to several hundred humans had been home to all sorts of creepy, crawly critters, including rattlesnakes, for centuries. Teachers soon learned to enter a classroom cautiously each morning and to scrutinize the playground before encouraging students to mark off a ring to shoot marbles.

1949-1954 were years when schools practiced air-raid drills. Sometimes students simply took refuge under their desks. Sometimes the drill instructions were to evacuate to building. White Rock staff also learned very quickly that an arroyo was not a good place to use as a sanctuary against theoretical enemy missiles. The rattlesnakes in the arroyos were not theoretical in any sense.

By 1954, the permanent construction on The Hill was nearing completion. Large blocks of White Rock residents employed by various contractors began closing their rented homes and moving on to construction jobs elsewhere. As various housing blocks were vacated, the buildings were demolished or sold in tact and moved away.

By 1956, White Rock had taken on the appearance of a shantytown. Grass and wildflowers found homes in the cracks in the streets and paved footpaths. The remnants of the community buildings and the school disappeared in the winter of 1958. By 1959, White Rock was just a desolate expanse of land on the rim of the Rio Grande. The 2,000 people who had once lived there were gone.

But like the fabled Phoenix of yore, with the help of some very enterprising people, White Rock soon emerged from its own ashes and rubble to become, once again, not just a flourishing community, but a permanent one.
Calendar of Events

Curators Corner Answer
In this issue we asked you what does FIC mean?
Answer: Found In Collections (FIC)

Exhibits
March-April
Punched in Art with Fred Lopez

Film Festival
Regulus
Thursday, March 19, 2015 at 7 p.m.
Free in Fuller Lodge
Regulus documents a nearly-forgotten era of U.S. Navy history, the birth of a submarine capable of launching a nuclear missile. Using never-before-seen footage, Regulus: The First Nuclear Missile Submarines takes the viewer back to the days just after WWII, when the U.S. Navy began top-secret tests with modified German V-1 “buzz bombs.” The goal was to develop a submarine-launched guided missile and, eventually, to develop a missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead. The tests would lead to the development of Regulus, a nuclear capable, air-breathing cruise missile that flew like a jet aircraft. Join us for this documentary narrated by Roy Scheider (50 mins).

Lecture Series
(All Lectures are 7:30 p.m. in Fuller Lodge)
March 10, 2015
New Mexico Arts Panel Featuring
Debbie Carrillo, potter; Fred Lopez, Punch Tin artist; Andrew Ortega, weaver; with moderator Charlie Carrillo, retablo and bulto artist
April 14, 2015
President Truman with Noel Pugach
May 12, 2015
Annual Meeting, 6 p.m.
Mars Rover

The Los Alamos Historical Society and Museum

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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Please detach and return to the Historical Museum

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- Heritage Benefactor $2500+
- Heritage Contributor $500-$999
- Heritage Supporter $1000-$2499
- Heritage Friend $100-$499
- Individual $40
- Youth, 18 and under $10
- Student/Senior Individual $35
- Family $50
- Additional Contribution $ ___________________________

Total: $ ___________________________