



**NEWSLETTER**  
of the  
EAST MOUNTAIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 106, Tijeras, NM 87059

First Quarter 2007



**Photo by Becky Schnelker**

On a field trip last fall, EMHS Archeology Chairman Chuck Van Gelder showed members part of the 480 acres now being proposed as open space.

## ***EMHS Supports Open Space Acquisition***

**By Andre Larroque**

This past year, the East Mountain Historical Society amended its mission as defined by the bylaws to include preservation of historic local landscapes. This is in addition to the preservation of historic structures and culture in the East Mountains, and follows the example set by former EMHS president, Louise Waldron, who successfully initiated the preservation of significant acreage at the magnificent Tres Pistoles in Carnuel.

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## *Open Space Supported*

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Keeping in this tradition, and in line with our mission, EMHS sent a letter supporting acquisition of 480 acres for public use as part of the existing Gutierrez Canyon Open Space. This land is located east of the Turquoise Trail Scenic Byway (North NM 14) in Cedar Crest and will be accessible by a new trailhead located next to the Cedar Crest post office.

What especially motivated the board of the historical society toward supporting this project is the extraordinary potential to develop the 2-acre trailhead lot into a small center for local cultural development. It is hoped that facilities for educating the public about local history, ecology, and culture might be eventually located at this access point just off the highway. The East Mountain Historical Society hopes to be involved in the discussion when plans are developed for the trailhead.

The major portion of the proposed expansion area itself is a beautiful example of piñon and juniper-covered ridges and meadows, explored on an EMHS field trip led by Archeology Committee Chairman Chuck Van Gelder this past autumn. Those who participated on that hike easily found evidence of historic as well as pre-historic activity (see article in last newsletter). According to John Peterson, a Sierra Vista resident and EMHS member, old trails still exist which run through the area and were used for the last couple of centuries by Indian, Spanish and Anglo travelers alike. In addition to marvelous recreational opportunities, the expansion of the Gutierrez Canyon Open Space will also provide some safe haven for the wildlife, which finds itself increasingly displaced

as more city-dwellers lay claim to this side of the mountain.

Since the window of opportunity to purchase is rapidly closing, a group of local citizens has mobilized in conjunction with the Santa Fe-based Trust for Public Land to pursue funding the expansion. The East Mountain Historical Society was well-represented at the first meeting in January of the *Turquoise Trail / Gutierrez Canyon Open Space Preservation Coalition*. In one month, the coalition secured the support of local legislators and the City of Albuquerque, which would take over the management of the additional land. Sen. Sue Wilson-Beffort and Rep. Kathy McCoy are strong supporters; both have introduced bills for state funding toward this project. These are Senate Bill 722 and House Bill 782. These bills need the full support of our membership. Please send letters of support for the open space expansion as soon as possible to Gov. Richardson, who will play an important part in funding approval. His address is:

*Governor Bill Richardson  
Office of the Governor  
490 Old Santa Fe Trail  
Room 400  
Santa Fe, NM 87501*

A letter to the Mayor of Albuquerque, Martin Chavez, will also help make this project a reality. Let him know how important this is, not only to the East Mountains, but also to the metropolitan area in terms of recreational opportunities and preservation of local culture. Many city residents have their roots in the East Mountains! His address:

*Mayor Martin J. Chavez  
Office of the Mayor  
PO Box 1293  
Albuquerque, NM 87103*

*Open Space – Continued From Page 2*

At the time of this writing, a **public meeting is scheduled for Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. at Los Vecinos Community Center in Tijeras.** It is hoped that EMHS will have many members there to show support. The effort to preserve such historic landscapes and viewsheds of the East Mountains should continue and the Society will help lead the way.

*(Editor's note: EMHS attendees at the initial meeting of the coalition were EMHS President Anabel Sanchez, Vice President Denise Tessier and Andre Larroque, who is chairman of the EMHS Historic Preservation Committee.)*

## *Letter from the President*

Each year the East Mountain Historical Society holds its annual meeting in October. An election of officers and board members is held at that time. The last meeting was held at the Escobosa Riders Hall in Escobosa, and we celebrated with storytelling, music and refreshments. Some of those in attendance shared scary stories that have been passed down from generation to generation. Throughout the years, storytelling was a favorite pastime for families in the East Mountain villages. The Board wishes to thank **Gilbert Ortiz, Raymond Ortiz, Mike Mora and Roberto Perea** for the wonderful music. We can't forget the singers who also joined in the celebration.

Outgoing president **Louise Waldron** was honored with a beautiful plaque in appreciation of her dedication and contributions to the people of the East Mountains. Thank you, Louise, from all of us.

Board members **Bay Stevens, Margaret Garcia, Dot and Pat Rich** and I participated in the annual "Breakfast with Santa" celebration at Los Vecinos during the holidays. The children visiting the EMHS booth made and colored family trees. This gave the children an opportunity to learn about their ancestors.

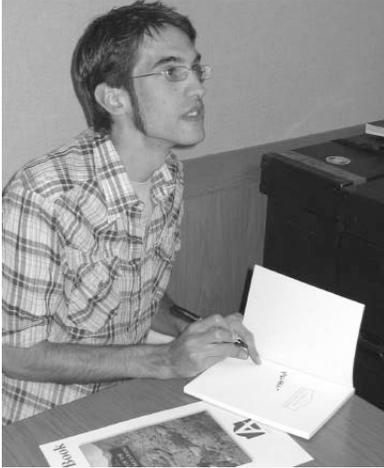
Many thanks to Vice President **Denise Tessier** and her husband **Dave** for hosting our annual holiday party at their home in Cedar Crest. Everyone had a good time and the food was wonderful.

The Board meets at 10 a.m. on the first Saturday of each month at the Library in Tijeras. Members are invited to attend. Because of our recently acquired status as a tax exempt organization, we are now able to apply for grants and do some fundraising to accomplish the many plans the Society has.

We are looking forward to some interesting and exciting events being planned for this year. Remember to renew your membership – *some events are for members only.*

*Anabel Sanchez, President*

## News and Notes . . . of the East Mountain Historical Society



**Mike Smith**, author of the book, *Towns of the Sandia Mountains*, gives the world his take on the talk we sponsored in November. Check out his blog on Amazon.com. (It's easiest to Google – "Mike Smith" Amazon blog.). Scroll down to "Friday, December 1, 2006, Book Signings and Presentations."

Our November program/book signing was Mike's first after the book's Oct. 31 publication. In the book's acknowledgements, Mike thanks EMHS for our help and has since joined us as a member. Welcome, Mike!

Check out also the list of East Mountain history-related books Mike has compiled and reviewed for Amazon. It's a great compendium of 25 titles (as of this writing) and can be accessed by going to Mike's Amazon profile page (or by Googling Mike Smith listmania). Scroll down to click on "Books About the Towns of the Sandia Mountains" under "Listmania!" on his profile page.



A hearty welcome to our other esteemed new members: **Larry Gore, Lynn and Maris Yapple, Phyllis Brock Drumheller, Diana Herrera, Melissa Howard, and Ken and Bonnie Miller.** We're glad you've joined and support EMHS.



Officers and board members for 2007 were elected at our annual meeting. They are: **Anabel Sanchez**, president; **Denise Tessier**, vice president; **Pat Rich**, treasurer; and **Anne Dacey-Lucas**, secretary. Board members are **Marie Herrera Dresser, Margaret Garcia, Andre Larroque, Dorela Perea, Dot Rich, Bay Stevens, Yolanda Stripling, Chuck VanGelder, Lowell Wagner, Louise Waldron** (immediate past president) and **Gus Winter**.



Our Web page is still under construction – just like New Mexico's roadways – but you can get a little taste of what it will be like by logging on to [eastmountainhistory.org](http://eastmountainhistory.org).



May is **Heritage Preservation Month**. The New Mexico Historic Preservation Division is accepting nominations for Heritage Preservation Awards. More information on awards and activities can be found at [nmhistoricpreservation.org](http://nmhistoricpreservation.org), or call (505) 827-6320.

# *Historic Land Grants a Contemporary Issue*

*Despite a snow storm, more than 30 – mostly from the East Mountains – came to the Tijeras Library on Jan. 20 to hear former state historian Robert Tórréz put land grants in historical context. The talk was hosted by the East Mountain Historical Society, in cooperation with the New Mexico Historical Society.*

**By Denise Tessier**

In the more than 200 years between the arrival of the Spanish and New Mexico's independence in 1821, the state's lands were homesteaded in a manner that might be considered quaint today: Land grant settlers would walk through the land of which they were to take possession, pulling up grass and declaring, "God save the King."

But this was more than a quaint custom, former state historian Robert Tórréz says; it was legally important, is well-documented, and literally sculpted New Mexico's terrain.

Land grants remain a contemporary issue some 400 years later, he added, and not just for legal reasons. "This is personal for many people because this is where their grandfather stood." In order to own land, the state's early settlers "had to stand on it, put their hands in the dirt, stay and defend it with (their) life."

The ceremony of taking possession contrasts sharply with transactions where property is bought by investors through agents, sight unseen, but it was no less legal a process, as Tórréz explained.

To apply for possession, an individual or group had to petition the governor in writing, providing a description of the land and a declaration that the land was vacant or public. If it had been granted before, they had to include a statement that it had been abandoned or the previous applicant had failed to settle it.

The governor then gave the petition to the local *alcalde*, who was somewhat like a county commissioner, with jurisdiction over a region that included several towns. The *alcalde* would review the request and make sure the land had water and could sustain the applicants, then would send the governor a report. Sometimes, he reported that the land was already taken.

The governor would look at the *alcalde's* report and, if approving an application, would instruct the *alcalde* to "place these people in possession." Then, the *alcalde* presided over a possession ceremony. All the families who were to take possession would be present to hear the *alcalde* explain the conditions to which they must agree to take possession – that the land would be used in common by them and future people who might join them, that they had a right to bear arms, that they must construct a *plaza*.

Then, the people would walk the property and literally take possession of it by pulling its grass and putting their hands in the dirt. Such a ceremony was conducted in Carnuel on Feb. 12, 1773.

After the act of possession, the land would be distributed. Tórréz said the requirement of a permanent source of water served to place many of New Mexico's land grants in irrigable mountain valleys. Land was divided up in lengths between the river and an *acequia* that was dug parallel to the river, which allowed every individual equal access to irrigation water. "You don't 'own' the water," Tórréz said.

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### ***Land Grant History -- Continued From Page 5***

Using a *vara*, which was an actual metal stick of about 33 inches and a well-defined standard of measurement at the time, each person or family was given his land. Tórrez said he doesn't know how it was determined how much each family got. "My impression is (it was determined) by where they stood in line or who their *primos* (cousins) were." Acequia associations now manage these river-fed lands.

Like the American Homesteader's Act, land grants were a way of encouraging Spanish, and later Mexican, citizens to homestead in New Mexico, except that they were signed by the king of Spain instead of the president of the United States. Similar land grants appeared a century later in California and Texas, Tórrez said.

In New Mexico, there were three types:

*Private land grants.* These were granted to an individual or family. After residency requirements had been met, the land could be sold or disposed of as the grantee wished. Private land grants in New Mexico ranged in size from a city lot in Santa Fe to the massive Maxwell grant that covered most of Colfax County.

*Pueblo land grants.* The Spanish "basically handed the pueblo a paper saying, here, your land is your land," but this paper "allowed the pueblos to survive as cultural entities," Tórrez said. These papers gave each pueblo readily identifiable boundaries that allowed them to withstand incursions by Spanish and Mexican governments, individuals, mining companies or anyone else who tried to encroach. Many tried to take lands the pueblos weren't using, but "the only place they took was Pecos because it was abandoned," Tórrez said.

*Community land grants.* The most common type, these were given to groups of individuals who agreed to establish a community and cultivate it.

In 1853, the U.S. government established the Office of Surveyor General, who decided those with land grants had to "adjudicate their lands." At this point, numerous "interests" got involved, including attorneys, some of whom represented the government and the grantee at the same time. Over the years, many community land grants were completely privatized through this process. Much of the land was lost as attorneys took land as part of their fee. "There was a lot of fishy stuff going on," Tórrez said.

The Tierra Amarilla Land Grant, for example, was a private land grant, but was adjudicated as a community grant and was sold.

Land grants provided "an incentive for people to go out and risk (their) life and raise a family. It's the way governments expand," Tórrez said.

*Robert J. Tórrez z served as New Mexico's State Historian from 1987 to 2000. "Land Records of New Mexico" can be viewed on microfilm at the State Archives, the Special Collections Library at Edith and Central, the University of New Mexico and the National Hispanic Cultural Center.*

**Dues Reminder:** *If your newsletter has arrived addressed to you in red, that means you haven't paid your dues for 2007. Please send your dues to Pat Rich, EMHS Treasurer, P.O. Box 106, Tijeras, NM 87059. If your address is lettered in black, thanks for renewing!*

# Archeology Field Trip: *Come to the Shores of Ancient Salt Lake*

Here's a Mother's Day weekend adventure that will get you out of town, but back in time to spend Mother's Day at home.

Archeology Chairman Chuck VanGelder will take us on a tour of a site excavated by famed University of New Mexico archeologist Frank Hibben on the shores of a Pleistocene salt lake near Willard. The one-day tour takes place Saturday, May. 12.

Known as the Lucy site, the dig "verified the existence of a pre-Clovis culture after Sandia Man Cave," Chuck says. It's located on the shores of the vestigial remnant of Lake Estancia, in the middle of a working ranch near Willard. We have permission to go on the ranch for this archeological tour, which is *open only to members and prospective members*.

We'll meet at 8 a.m. at the Tijeras Library and carpool because we need to take 4-wheel-drives and as few vehicles as possible. Bring water, sun protection and whatever the weather dictates. Plan on lunch at the Willard Cantina before we head back, returning by mid-afternoon.

**The newsletter of the East Mountain Historical Society, published quarterly, aims to inform members and prospective members of EMHS events and endeavors, including committee work, and to serve as a record of society activities. It is also a forum for stories about the area. Please send your ideas for future newsletter items to Denise Tessier at P.O. Box 379, Cedar Crest, NM 87008, or contact her by email at [newsletter@eastmountainhistory.org](mailto:newsletter@eastmountainhistory.org).**



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