

HISTORY LESSONS

History Notes Lecture Series — The monthly program is 1 p.m. the second Thursday of each month at the Branigan Cultural Center, 501 N. Main, north end of the Downtown Mall in Las Cruces. The **June 8** topic is "Sober by Statute: The Prohibition Experiment in New Mexico" by Jeff Schwen. Admission is free. Information: (575) 541-2154 or las-cruces.org/museums.

El Paso Archaeological Society — The society's monthly meeting is 2 p.m. Saturday, **June 17**, at El Paso Museum of Archaeology, 4301 Transmountain. Dr. Kendra Moore, Community Outreach Interpreter at Hueco Tanks State Park and Historic Site, speaks on "Interpreting the Past to Inspire the Future: The History of Interpretation at Hueco Tanks." Admission is free; the public is invited. Seating is limited. Information: 449-9075 or epas.com.

Paso Del Norte Paranormal Society and Haunted History — The nonprofit organization offers a variety of "ghost tours."

Age 13 and older welcome, unless otherwise listed. All children must be accompanied by an adult age 21 or older. Private ghost tours of Downtown El Paso available with advance reservation. Information, reservations: 274-9531 or help@ghosts915.com.

Harvey Girls of El Paso — The Harvey Girls of El Paso Texas meet 2 to 4 p.m. the Monday, **June 5**, at Union Depot Passenger Station, 700 San Francisco. The program is "Timeline of Fred Harvey's Business Expansion" with Pres Dehrkoop. Visitors welcome. Admission is free. Information: 591-2326 or harveygirlselfaso.weebly.com.

Southwest Chapter of Railway & Locomotive Historical Society — The society meets 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, **June 14**, at Las Cruces Railroad Museum, 351 N. Mesilla in Las Cruces. This month's program is "El Paso and Northeastern Rail lines" by Ron Leiman. Cost: \$10 for program and dinner. Information: 540-9660.

Fort Bayard tours — Fort Bayard Historic Preservation Society hosts walking tours of the historic fort 9:30 a.m. every Saturday through October at Fort Bayard National Historic Landmark, six miles east of Silver City, N.M. Meet at the 1910 Commanding Officer's Quarter and museum (House 26); opens at 9:15 a.m. Tour takes about 90 minutes. Admission is free, but donations appreciated. Information, group tours: (575) 388-4477, (575) 574-8779, or (575) 388-4862.

Fort Selden State Monument — The monument, 1280 Fort Selden Road in Radium Springs, 13 miles north of Las Cruces, is open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Monday (closed Tuesday). Admission is \$3; (ages 16 and under free). Sunday admission for New Mexico residents is \$1. Information: (575)

526-8911 or nmmonuments.org.

Fort Selden was a 19th-century adobe fort established to protect early settlers from Indian raids. The monument seeks to preserve the remaining ruins and has a visitor's center with exhibits of military life at the post. From Las Cruces, take I-25 north to Exit 19.

Fort Stanton — The fort was established and built in 1855 to serve as a base of operations against the Mescalero Apache Indians. The fort's museum building was originally a soldier's barracks converted to serve as an Administration Building for the Public Health Service. Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 4 p.m. Sunday. Living history tours offered the third Saturday of each month. Admission is free. Information: (575) 354-0341, fortstanton.org

Pioneering woman bank president earned respect

Women have long been active in the growth of Texas. They not only raised families and supported their husbands' pioneering efforts but often were trailblazers in their own right. One such lady was Anna Mebus Martin of Mason County, Texas.

Anna Martin came from Bremerhaven, Germany, landing at Galveston as a child with her family in 1858. She eventually became not just the first bank president in Texas, but one of the most respected as well. Asked how she did it, she replied, "I heard men say that she is only a woman, but I showed them what a woman could do."

Martin passed away in 1925 at age 81. Her work ethic carried on in Mason County with her bank, the Commercial Bank of Mason, which remained in the family until 1958. In 2011 she was inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame in Fort Worth, recognizing her independence and courage.

Martin's early years were loaded with hardship and loneliness. But they gave way to a life filled with comfort and companionship. Spending time with grandchildren and her sons, she would often be seen buzzing around in her black Cadillac going from bank conferences to visiting ranches.

Life was much lonelier growing up on the Texas frontier with her nearest neighbor miles away. Her only companions were family members and her cousin Charles Martin, who managed his uncle's store. When a farm was available, the Mebus family and Charles Martin bought it and became partners.

Anna married her cousin and they worked hard on the farm doing everything to hold on and make a living: butchering, milking, plowing and planting. They did it all that while running the store where they sold meat to the soldiers and other families around Fort Mason.

Anna gave birth to sons Charles and Max. The family thrived for a time on the frontier until the coming of the Civil War. The Martins sided with the Union, which did not set well with their Confederate neighbors.

At the same time Anna became the support of her family. Anna's husband was laid up in bed requiring constant care

Taking a Look Back

by John McVey Middagh



Anna Mebus Martin

and young Charles had also become ill, which added to the family's hardship and poverty. They were penniless because the Confederate money they accepted during the war became worthless at war's end. They were looted twice, causing them to have to sell the store. Her husband eventually became the postmaster in Mason but died a few years later, in 1879.

Anna took over as postmaster and also operated a stagecoach station in Mason, where her house was located along the main route from El Paso to San Antonio. Business was brisk; she boarded travelers and built a new store selling groceries to people passing through.

With strong resolve Anna made up her mind that she would become someone or die trying. Growing the business with her older son, the store flourished, adding on the new goods she took in on commission. Cash was scarce so patrons paid her with whatever they had; oats, lumber, cattle, labor.

As the store grew so did Martin's fortune. She built a large stone home, obtaining many acres of land and a large herd of cattle. She listed 217 people on her credit books. With this success and her background of managing her neighbor's money through her store, it was only natural for her to open a bank.

On July 1, 1901, Martin — who was 58 by then — opened the Commercial Bank of Mason with the help of her two sons. She wasn't the first banker in Mason County but quickly drew all the business because of her fair practices and trustworthiness. She took down the First National Bank that had preceded her by 10 years. Martin ran her many holdings until her death.

John McVey Middagh is a former saddle shop owner and amateur local historian. You can reach him at jmiddagh@yahoo.com.

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