

NEW MEXICO HISTORY MUSEUM

GRAND OPENING, MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND 2009

New Mexico History: Get Into It

Interactive, Multi-Media Exhibition Design
Redefines the Modern History Museum

The Tales that Shaped the American Southwest, the West and the United States as a Nation



(Santa Fe, NM, January 29, 2009)—If you think history is boring, the New Mexico History Museum, opening in historic downtown Santa Fe on Memorial Day Weekend 2009, will have you shelving that notion right alongside the dust-covered history textbooks banished to the attic. On Sunday, May 24, 2009, the 96,000-square-foot, world-class cultural institution will open its doors to the public to unveil a state-of-the-art, immersive interactive exhibition set to cast new light on how history can be learned. It also will redefine the modern history museum. The multi-media environment will bring to life the complex, colorful and legendary stories of the 47th state in the Union, stories that began long before the Pilgrims set sail on the *Mayflower* for American shores.

Cowboys going to dinner, Mora County, New Mexico, ca. 1897.
PALACE OF THE GOVERNORS (MNM/DCA),
NEG. NO. 005324

Odds are you won't have to drag an unwilling child here for the benefit of his or her education. Adults, too—from New Mexican residents understanding their roots to first-time tourists to the most ardent Southwest history buffs—will find the museum equally compelling.

“New Mexico’s long tradition of cultural diversity is a powerful inspiration to all Americans as we work together to shape the 21st century,” said New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. “The New Mexico History Museum will be the starting place for the New Mexico cultural experience—for every New Mexican from every corner of our state and for our many guests who visit the Land of Enchantment.”

Added Secretary Stuart Ashman, New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs: “Our state’s newest museum will play a vital role in the lives of all New Mexicans by creating a place where they can see themselves and their stories reflected as an integral part of the history of our state.”

The New Mexico History Museum explores the early history of indigenous people through 400 years of Spanish colonization, the Mexican Period, and travel and commerce on the Santa Fe Trail. The museum also speaks to the flourishing of New Mexico’s world-renowned arts communities and the coming of the Atomic Age. The clash and melding of cultures—Native American, Spanish, Mexican, French and Anglo-American—and their differing perspectives are the conceptual threads weaving through the galleries. The hands-on immersive design will engage visitors in the history-making process of change, evolution, struggle, conflict and compromise that have resulted in New Mexico as it is today.

“The New Mexico History Museum will provide context to our state’s rich heritage that shaped the

American Southwest, the West, and the evolution of the United States as a nation,” noted Dr. Frances Levine, director of the New Mexico History Museum and instrumental in developing the content of the museum’s exhibitions.

Under construction since 2006, the New Mexico History Museum is located behind the venerable Palace of the Governors on the Santa Fe Plaza—the nation’s oldest continuously occupied government building since 1609—which will be incorporated into the new museum as its signature and most important artifact. Built by the Spanish, the Palace symbolizes 400 years of encounters among Native Americans, Spanish, Mexicans and Europeans. It will provide the primary historical reference point throughout the exhibitions.

The innovative exhibition treatments were created in partnership with two internationally recognized design firms: Gallagher & Associates of Bethesda, Maryland, whose past projects include the International Spy Museum and Jamestown Settlement Museum; and Second Story, a Portland, Oregon, company known for its award-winning interactive work for the Smithsonian Institution and the National Geographic Museum.

“We wanted visitors to experience the stories of New Mexico’s people, not just read a chronology or passively look at artifacts,” explained Levine. “Visitors will hear the congressional debates about New Mexico’s proposed statehood. By pressing their hands on a reproduction of a handprint left thousands of years ago on rock walls they’ll hear the words of Native people describe the world they lived in. Visitors will feel the majesty of New Mexico’s visually stunning light and landscape that form the backdrop to all its history.”

In addition to the exhibition galleries, the new museum features an auditorium; the Discovery Center, a gathering space for families to engage in hands-on, self-paced activities; and a terrace café that overlooks the Palace of the Governors Courtyard. It also includes a 12,000-square-foot, climate-controlled storage vault to house the museum’s collections and artifacts and a 2,000-square-foot gift shop.

The three-level structure was designed in collaboration by the Santa Fe firm Conron & Woods Architects, NCA Architects of Albuquerque, and SaylorGregg Architects, Philadelphia. The design reflects contemporary building materials and trends while complementing the centuries-old adobe Palace of the Governors. From the inside, windows and terraces frame views of Santa Fe’s historic downtown streetscape.

The New Mexico History Museum will serve as the anchor of a campus that encompasses existing state history museum resources—the Palace of the Governors, the Native American Artisans Program, the Palace Press, the Fray Angélico Chávez History Library and the Photo Archives.

The long-anticipated opening of the New Mexico History Museum will be the crowning event of the “Museum of New Mexico’s 100th” in 2009: <http://media.museumofnewmexico.org/100>. Funding for the New Mexico History Museum’s exhibitions was provided by the Museum of New Mexico Foundation, www.museumfoundation.org.

View of Acoma Pueblo, ca. 1885.
BEN WITTICK PHOTO,
PALACE OF THE GOVERNORS (MNM/DCA),
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For more information about the New Mexico History Museum and a selection of user-ready high-resolution photographs, log onto <http://media.museumofnewmexico.org/nmhm>. More than 8,000 additional, high-resolution photographs illustrating the history of New Mexico are available by keyword search at www.palaceofthegovernors.org (click on “Digitized Collections”). Most requests for scans from this site can be delivered the same day, and usage is free for publicity purposes only.

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