



# La Vista de la Frontera

Newsletter of the Center for Big Bend Studies

Earl H. Elam, Editor

Karen Kimball, Assistant Editor

## Volume V

## Fall 1992

## Number 1

This issue is being printed at the beginning of the sixth year of formal operations of the Center for Big Bend Studies. The issue will focus on projects that are underway and planned. All contribute to the Center's primary objective to support and promote research, instruction, public programming, and publications that enhance an understanding of the culture and history of the Trans-Pecos, Big Bend region of Texas and adjacent areas along the border in Mexico.

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### ADVISORY COUNCIL

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The council meets at least twice a year and provides advice on administrative and operational policies. The members for the period September - August 1993 are as follows:

- Tom Alex, Archeologist, Big Bend National Park, Texas
- Abelardo Baeza, Professor of Literature and Languages, Sul Ross State University (SRSU)
- Jim Case, Associate Professor of Political Science and Chair, Department of Behavioral & Social Sciences, SRSU
- Frank Daugherty, Professor of Geology (ret.), West Texas State University
- Earl H. Elam, Professor of History and Director, CBBS, SRSU
- Monroe Elms, County Judge, Presidio County, Marfa, Texas
- Russell Gardiner, Colonel, USAF (ret.), Fort Davis, Texas
- Dudley Harrison, business man and former state legislator, Sanderson, Texas
- J. Charles Kelley, Professor of Archeology and Anthropology (ret.), Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
- Bill Leftwich, artist and historian, Fort Davis, Texas
- Miriam Lowrance, Associate Professor of Art (ret.), SRSU
- Enrique Madrid, archeologist and historian, Redford, Texas
- Mr. and Mrs. Clay Miller, ranchers, Presidio County, Texas
- Elton Miles, Professor Emeritus of Literature and Languages (ret.), SRSU
- Glenn Nichols, Dean of Arts and Sciences, SRSU

Robert Overfelt, Professor of History, SRSU Uvalde Center, Del Rio, Texas

Larry Sechrest, Assistant Professor of Business Administration, SRSU

Albert B. Tucker, Associate Professor of Education, SRSU  
Mr. & Mrs. Charles Warnock, retired Pecos County Judge (he) and County Auditor (she), Fort Stockton, Texas

William A. Webb, Deputy Commissioner, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (ret.), Alpine, Texas

Keith Yarbrough, Chief Scientist, Big Bend National Park  
Ex Officio members are:

R. Vic Morgan, President, SRSU

David Cockrum, Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, SRSU

The Fall 1992 meeting of the Advisory Council is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. December 9 at Kokernot Lodge on the SRSU campus. The agenda will include presentations by project directors involved in research sponsored by the Center and consideration of recommendations of an ad hoc committee on resource development. Members of the committee are Jim Case, Frank Daugherty, and Bill Webb.

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### JOURNAL OF BIG BEND STUDIES

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Publication of the journal is a major function of the Center. The journal is published annually in January. The first issue (volume) was published in 1989. Volume 5 will be off the press early in 1993. A form at the end of this newsletter may be used for ordering copies of Volume 5 and available back issues.

This is a non-refereed journal aimed at general as well as scholarly audiences. Its purpose is to print articles that will enhance understanding of the culture and history of the Southwestern United States; emphasis is given the Trans-Pecos, Big

Bend region. The following articles will appear in Volume 5:

"The Jumanos and the Tarahumares," by Carolyn Ohl

"The Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts in the Big Bend," by Thomas A. Britten

"Sketches of Ruins in the Castolon-Santa Elena Canyon Area of Big Bend National Park," by Susan Tanner

"The Founding of San José del Polvo and the Life of Lucia Rede Madrid," by Earl H. Elam

"J. C. Bird: A Big Bend Pioneer," by Tommy R. Woodward

"The Death of the Hero in Modern Drama in the American West," by Patricia Gordon

"Health Services Accessibility in Rural Environments," by Jim Case

"The Influenza Epidemic in Far West Texas in 1918," by Karen Green

"Lawrence Sullivan Ross, Educator," by Kip Sullivan

"An Interview with Hallie Stillwell, Pioneer Rancher," by Betty Dillard

"The U. S. Army in the Big Bend: 'Random Recollections' and 'Mules Can be Mulish'," by Lieutenant General Samuel L. Myers

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### RESEARCH

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The following projects are sponsored in whole or in part by the Center:

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**The Sanderson Flood of 1965** -- This is an in-depth investigation of environmental and human situations on the fateful day of June 11, 1965 when a wall of water, following heavy rains, swept through and destroyed much of Sanderson, Texas. When it subsided, 24 persons had died and 2 were missing. Russell Scogin, graduate research assistant, is interviewing people who were there on that day and others who were involved in the cleanup.

He will write a master's thesis on the subject. Funding for the project is provided by Texas Rural Communities, Inc., an Austin based organization; the Faculty Research Council at SRSU; the CBBS; and Sander-son citizens.

Persons with information to share are encouraged to contact Russell in the CBBS, telephone 915-837-8179, 8:00-5:00 M-F; or at his home at other times: 915-837-3128.

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**Johnson's Trading Post** -- This is a pilot study of a border trading post on the Rio Grande that operated in what is now the Big Bend National Park between 1929 and 1944. It was one of several border posts which served citizens on both sides of the border in the isolated and remote river region extending from Lajitas, Texas to Boquillas Canyon. At Johnson's, Mexican citizens from across the river brought furs, livestock, agricultural goods, and other items to trade for house-wares, staple food items, and clothing. The post also was a social gathering place for residents of the region. A large landing field served the U. S. Army Air Corps. Flyers and prominent people from across the United States visited Johnson's. Glenn Willeford, graduate research assistant, is researching the subject with funding provided by the Big Bend Natural History Association. Anyone with information and/or photographs about activities at the post are encouraged to contact Glenn or Earl Elam in the CBBS at 915-837-8179, M-F, 8:00-5:00.

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**Texas Rangers and the U. S. Army in the Big Bend, 1910-1920** -- This long range study, making use of materials in the National Archives, the Texas State Archives, the Archives of the Big Bend, and other area sources was begun in 1989. During the past year, in addition to the accumulation of additional sources, on-site investigations of former Ranger and Army posts were made. The most recent ruins visited were Camp Holland, in the Vieja Mountains in Presidio County. A group of CBBS advisory council members, including Mr. and Mrs. Frank Daugherty, Bill Webb, Al Tucker, and Earl Elam visited the site in May. Other former posts, much less well preserved, have been visited and studied: these are at Candelaria, Ruidosa, Indio, Presidio, Polvo (Redford), Lajitas, Santa Helena (Castolon), Glenn Springs, and La Noria. Articles on the subject have appeared in the *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* and *The Journal of Big Bend Studies*, and presentations have been made at meetings of civic groups. A monograph is planned. Funding to date has been provided by the Faculty Research Council at SRSU and the CBBS. Persons with photographs, letters, diaries, or other information about the Texas Rangers and

U. S. Army activities in the region during 1910 to 1920 are encouraged to contact Elam at 915-837-8179 (office) or 915-837-5228 (home).

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**Castolon, the La Harmonia Company, and Farming Communities along the Rio Grande** -- This project was undertaken in the CBBS by the director and graduate research assistant Rex Thee in 1988. A large collection of source materials has been accumulated, and many interviews have been conducted with people who lived in the area. The research centers on the region between Santa Elena Canyon, including Terlingua Abaja, and Castolon and encompasses the period from 1900 to 1961. A major source is the records of the La Harmonia Company in the Archives of the Big Bend at SRSU. Several papers have been presented on the subject. The article and sketches by Susan Tanner in Volume 5 of the *Journal of Big Bend Studies* is one of these. A monograph is planned. Financial assistance has been provided by the Big Bend Natural History Association, the SRSU Faculty Research Council, and the CBBS. Photographs, diaries, letters, and other source materials are still being solicited. Contact the CBBS office at 915-837-8179.

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**Ghost Schools of the Big Bend** -- Research began on this project in 1990. Professor Al Tucker of the SRSU Department of Education has collected photographs and documents relating to schools in Brewster, Jeff Davis, and Presidio counties from the 1880s to the 1940s. These, along with information accumulated from on site inspection of many ruins of school buildings and many interviews, will provide the nucleus of source material for his interpretative monograph on the subject. Tucker has given presentations about his work at meetings of many school and civic groups during the past year. Support has been given the project by the SRSU Faculty Research Council, the CBBS, and private sources. Persons with information about schools and teachers during the time period involved should contact Tucker at 915-837-8173.

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**The Centennial School in Alpine** -- Abelardo Baeza's article in Volume 4 of *The Journal of Big Bend Studies* was the first of a series of articles that he will write on the subject of barrio schools in Alpine. Interviews and research are continuing on the separate school for blacks, called the Morgan School, that was located near the old Centennial School in the 1940s. Baeza is also a playwright and has written a play titled "Mano" which deals with gangs of Hispanic boys at Centennial who, in the 1950s, stressed machoism in their activities. He will be grateful for any infor-

mation on the schools that persons who attended or taught there may wish to share. Contact him at 915-837-8159.

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**Acculturation Processes in the Rio Grande Borderlands** -- All of the research projects sponsored by the CBBS deal in some way with the broad theme of acculturation. Focus will continue to be on specific and general subjects and will involve analysis and interpretation of cultural and historical problems relating to the assimilation and interactions of Indian, Hispanic, and Anglo-America people who have contributed to the development of this unique cultural region. The subject is regularly addressed in lectures by CBBS personnel to graduate students in multicultural education at SRSU. Also, in March, a session of the annual meeting of the Texas Historical Association in Austin was dedicated to the subject. Joe Graham of Texas A&I University presided over papers presented by Earl Elam and Al Tucker of SRSU. Glen Lich of the University of Winnipeg (Canada) provided commentary. Elam's paper was titled "Hispanic Encounters with Native Populations: The Coahuiltecan, Jumano, and Apache Experiences"; Tucker's paper was "Cross Cultural Adaptation: Ghost Schools of the Big Bend, 1900-1940." In his comments, Lich said, "These two papers introduce some promising lines of inquiry," and "remind us to think in terms of multi-regional diversity in the present and multicultural heritage in the past." The subject would be, he concluded, "a good faculty development program for Sul Ross State University. At least for a ten-year trial period."

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**The Columbian Quincentenary** -- The 500th anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to America has continued to be a priority of CBBS activities during the year. In January, the introductory article in *The Journal of Big Bend Studies* (Volume 4) by Melinda Lang Hilsenbeck is titled "The Beginning of the End: Eschatological Notions in the Discovery of the New World." In February, the director presented the introductory lecture in a course on "Comparative Colonial Frontiers of North America" at the University of New Mexico for National Park Service employees who assembled from across the United States and its territories. The title of the lecture was "The Columbus Exchange and the Significance of the Columbus Quincentennial." In April, the subject of the presidential address at the annual meeting of the West Texas Historical Association, held on the SRSU campus under CBBS sponsorship, was "Columbus and the Historical Consequences of 1492 for West Texas." The talk is published in the *WTHA Year Book* for 1992.

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**Speakers** -- Civil groups and local organizations desiring speakers on any of the research topics listed above should call the CBBS office, 915-837-8179. Usually the project directors or researchers can provide a program on short notice, but at least two weeks advance notice is preferred, particularly for meetings outside of Alpine.

There is no charge, but payment for gasoline costs for travel out of Alpine is desired, as the CBBS cannot provide funding for that purpose.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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A seminar/workshop on Genealogy will be held on January 23, 1993 at Kokernot Lodge on the SRSU campus. Sponsored by the Brewster County Historical Commission and the CBBS, the seminar will be led by Ron Bremer of Salt Lake City, Utah. He is the author of *The Compendium of Historical Sources*, a genealogical resource book. He has researched in virtually every major genealogical record center in North America.

The seminar will concentrate on "The World of Genealogy" and will involve discussion of research problems of individuals who participate. There is no charge. The seminar will begin at 10:00 a.m. and conclude at 4:00 p.m. Questions should be directed to Frank Daugherty at 915-837-2640.

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The annual Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Alpine will be held on the campus of Sul Ross State University on March 6-7, 1993. Inquiries should be directed to Nelson Sager, Box C-83, SRSU, Alpine, TX 79832, 915-837-8151.

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The 69th annual meeting of the West Texas Historical Association was held April 3-4

on the SRSU campus. Program Chairman Judith Parsons of SRSU put together an excellent meeting; thirty-three papers were presented in eleven sessions, with Kenneth Ragsdale of Austin making the banquet presentation, "Writing Contemporary History: Let the People Speak." The attendance was above average. Approximately 130 persons attended some or all of the sessions. The 70th annual meeting of the Association will be March 26-27, 1993 in Abilene. Persons who wish to present a paper should contact Paul Carlson, Department of History, Texas Tech University, or WTHA Executive Director B. W. Aston, Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, TX 79698, 915-670-1239.

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Elton Miles, Professor Emeritus of English at SRSU, recently published an article in *The Tombstone Epitaph* (Tombstone, Arizona, Sept. 1992), making use of information published in Volume 4 of *The Journal of Big Bend Studies* about the death of Ambrose Bierce. The mysteries about the death of the famous writer may never be cleared up, but Miles' article, "Hitch-Hiker May Have Told How Ambrose Bierce Died," discusses the theory that Bierce may have gone to Marfa, Texas with Mexican refugees early in 1914 and, dying there, was buried in an army cemetery that has since been moved. The theory is one of many about the last days of the eccentric and hoaxful Bierce. Other theories are summarized in another recent publication: *Ambrose Bierce is Missing and Other Historical Mysteries*, by Joe Nickell, The University Press of Kentucky, 1992.

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The Big Bend Small Business Institute at Sul Ross State University has resumed publication of economic information about the Big Bend region in its *Economic Report* (Vol. I, No. 1, August, 1992). The *Economic Report* is a successor to the *Big Bend Business Report*, circulated by the Department of Business Administration at SRSU in the early 1980s. Charts on Household

Buying Power, Per Capita Income, Gross Retail Sales, Unemployment Rates, Interest Rates, and much more are included. Suggestions for future editions are sought. For information, write or call the editors, Edward Marcin or Eric Xu, Department of Business Administration, SRSU, Alpine, TX 79832, 915-837-8066.

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The 97th Annual Meeting of the Texas State Historical Association will be at the Stouffer Greenway Plaza Hotel in Houston on March 4-6, 1993. Persons desiring to present papers should contact program chair Jesús F. (Frank) de la Teja, Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, TX 78666.

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## BOOK REVIEW

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Speck, Ernest. *An Assortment of Effusions*. Hobbs, N.M.: Hawk Publications, 1989, 47 pp. \$6.00. Review by Peter Hoheisel.\* Available at Ocotillo Enterprises, Alpine, TX 79830, or from Speck, 506 Harriet, Alpine, TX 79830.

In an age when much contemporary poetry is afflicted with narcissistic blather and, under the guise of being profound, is barely comprehensible to the ordinary reader, it is refreshing to read a recent work which expresses in clear English the experience of being alive.

Modestly titled *An Assortment of Effusions*, the work was written by Ernest Speck, of Alpine, Texas, a retired English professor from Sul Ross State University.

Generally, the poems are about places and people whom the author has known. It is divided into three parts: "Memories of Dreary Hollow," "Potpourri," and "A Handful of Haiku."

A number of the poems are about characters whom Speck knew, such as "Cousin Jim," "Edward," and the author's

## THE JOURNAL OF BIG BEND STUDIES

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grandfather. As portrait poems should, they capture the essence of the person as the writer sees him.

"Salesman," which is too long to quote in its entirety, is a moving profile of a peddler's visit to Speck's home when he was a boy. Perhaps I am reading into it, but the narrative of the poem implies that it is autobiographical--one cannot ever be certain, since poets feel free (as they should), to manipulate facts for artistic purposes. To me, this poem is the finest in the book because of its sharp, crisp images, and heartfelt story. Its concluding line, "What fueled the human spirit to carry such odds into the struggle?" is perfectly justified.

I like poetry which has abstract and philosophical considerations in it, but it is a risky enterprise, because poor poetry generally dwells almost completely in abstractions. Strong poetry needs sharp imagery and a realistic physical base to be properly grounded. For example, "Salesman" begins:

He descended from his over-heated Model A  
Ford

Placing on the seat the towel he'd had  
Upon his mountainous stomach to keep the  
black

Steering wheel from marring his rumpled khaki  
shirt.

And it continues in a similar vein with the reader being able to clearly visualize and follow the story of the poem.

What is most memorable about the collection is that we end up caring about the people and the Southwestern places in it. We have experienced them with the author. He has "shown, not told" and thereby obeyed the first commandment of the writer--to lead us, as far as possible, *into an experience*, not words *about an experience*. As a former teacher of writing, Speck practices what he no doubt preached for many years.

Purchasers of Speck's book will want to experience it, and to keep it close at hand. In more instances than not, he has found "The word so right it sings what you would say." I hope that in the future the author will produce a more substantial volume and thereby allow his gift for narrative, imagery, and the "right word" full rein.

\*Hoheisel taught English at SRSU, 1991-92.

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**ARCHIVES OF THE BIG BEND**  
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The Archives of the Big Bend is located in the Bryan Wildenthal Library on the SRSU campus. As part of the library's automation project, the Archives' records are undergoing conversion to machine readable format. This will enable the Archives' entries to be accessible through OCLC, a

nationwide bibliographic data base, as well as through the local system when the project is completed.

New acquisitions include:

-- 1920 U. S. Census on microfilm. 87 reels now available for use in the Archives.

-- Copies of National Archives microfilm records documenting the location and staffing of post offices in Jeff Davis County for the years ca. 1883-1935.

-- Photostatic copies of about 90 photographs relating to the Big Bend region taken in 1899 by the USGS survey team headed by R. T. Hill; ranching as well as survey team activities are included. Copies provided, courtesy of the USGS Library in Denver, CO, from which prints may be obtained.

-- Some 1,000 additional positive prints in the Skaggs, Livingston, and general photograph collections are now available for use. These are mainly of Big Bend subjects in various 20th century time periods.

For information on other holdings of the Archives and how they may be used, contact archivist Mellela Bell, Archives of the Big Bend, Box C-149, SRSU, Alpine, TX 79832, 915-837-8127.

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